

## Organisational Culture & Individual Behaviour

You don't have to spend very long talking to Quality Management professionals, Six Sigma Black Belts, Consultants, Business School lecturers, and the like, on subjects such as Six Sigma, Business Excellence and Continuous Improvement before the word Culture crops up; particularly if you are discussing the reasons for the relative success or failure of these initiatives. It is also usually agreed without too much debate that an organisation's culture is of major importance in these same initiatives and - most would say - Critical to Quality. If it is Critical to Quality then of course we have to measure it. However, not only do most people put measurement of culture in the too difficult file but also there is very little agreement about what culture actually is.

I spend most of my time working with organisations on the development of high performance teams and their leaders. Recently I have been working alongside a number of quality management professionals and in particular, those who are involved in Six Sigma initiatives. Six Sigma is another case in point of course where there is considerable debate about just how you would define it – other than statistically of course – although even then there is some confusion. Some put the emphasis on things like Cost of Quality, others on unbeatable measures, many emphasise the value of arriving at a common measure throughout the business e.g. DPMO (Defects Per Million Opportunities) with almost as many different emphases as people that you talk to. What I have found though is that all of the serious Six Sigma exponents, those who have invested heavily in the training of Black Belts and who are taking the initiative right the way through their companies, is an understanding from the start that the people issues are critical. There is also a growing awareness that having tackled the measurement and training issues that to achieve the next breakthrough probably means that the culture has to receive even more attention.

What then is culture? More importantly, from the point of view of continuous improvement initiatives, can we agree a definition that allows us to measure the culture of the company and to arrive at a common language for culture across departments and divisions? If we can, then we may be in with a chance of measuring cultural change and also be able to measure our progress towards achieving alignment between our strategy and our culture.

Whether we align our strategy with our existing culture or seek to change our culture to fit our agreed strategic plans will depend on what view we take of culture.

One view might be described as the roots/external view. It says that culture comes from a variety of roots and external factors and is largely “unchangeable”. It is seen to be influenced by factors such as beliefs brought into the workplace by all of us from outside e.g. religious beliefs, family beliefs combined with company lore passed down through the years and embedded in the values, behaviours and rituals that we meet as soon as we join the company and continue to learn throughout our time in the company. This view would say that culture can be changed only over long periods of time and in the short term we would do better to seek to modify people's behaviour to fit the culture.

A second view, the internal/behavioural view, is that the culture is the behaviour of the company's people. This view would say that the culture can be lead and changed; indeed that it is often highly desirable to do so, even in the short term, when faced with the need for major change.

In reality there is probably some truth in both positions and indeed in the myriad of more detailed views which exist as sub-sets of these. Whichever view we take we need to understand behavioural change. For example, Schein (1985) defined culture as:

“a pattern of basic assumptions – invented, discovered or developed by a given group as it learns to cope with its problems of external adaptation and internal integration – that has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think and feel in relation to these problems”

Although this fits more with the external/root view, he would not subscribe to the view that this meant culture is unchangeable; the way we perceive think and feel will have a marked effect on our behaviour.

Perhaps a simpler working definition would be:

“That set of attitudes, values and beliefs that you see being enacted on a day to day basis in the organisation”

or, more simply still,

“The way things are done around here”

Understanding people's behaviour is a necessary pre-requisite therefore whichever view we take of culture. The emphasis needs to be on action - what we do, our behaviour - that will deliver the results. For example, when we use the simple 3 Ps version of the EFQM Excellence model of People - Process – Performance, it is people acting on and in Processes, i.e. their behaviour that will deliver the Performance. Some of the advantages of adopting this behavioural approach to the cultural issues of continuous improvement are:

- There are some well proven (reliable and valid) behavioural instruments around and we don't need to re-invent the wheel
- Some excellent work has already been done in translating these across to the area of measuring culture
- The spin off benefits for individuals in the organisation are high (e.g. facilitates the individual change process, aids stress management, adds considerable value to the appraisal process, more satisfying working life)
- Common non threatening language for comparing cultural issues across departments and divisions
- Strong links between people's motivation, behaviour and consequent organisational performance

Let us have a look at two tools that have been used to great effect for measuring individual psychological preferences and behavioural needs. Then we can see how they have been modified for use in the measurement of culture.

### **The Myers Briggs Type Indicator**

The Myers-Briggs Type Indicator is a personality inventory based on the theories of Carl Jung. The indicator is non-judgmental and allows people to gain an understanding of their preferences, particularly with respect to energy source, information gathering, decision-making and lifestyle/work patterns. It is widely used to help people to understand their preferences and within organisations in the area of team building and management development. Over 40 years of research and development have demonstrated the reliability and validity of the MBTI and it continues to be well researched.

The MBTI® looks at eight possible preferences organised into four bi-polar scales. (*The letters in brackets act as a kind of shorthand to refer to the preferences*).

<i>Energy Source</i>	<b><i>Extraversion (E)</i></b> Drawing energy from the world of people, things, activities; dealing in breadth rather than depth	<b><i>Introversion (I)</i></b> Drawing energy from the internal world of thoughts, ideas; preferring depth; pausing for thought
<i>Unconscious preoccupation</i>	<i>Access to people</i>	<i>Privacy</i>
<b><i>Information gathering</i></b>	<b><i>Sensing (S)</i></b> Preferring to take in information through the five senses; liking the concrete and practical; tolerating detail	<b><i>Intuition (N)</i></b> Preferring to take in information through a sixth sense of what might be; liking the big picture; tolerating change
<i>Unconscious preoccupation</i>	<i>Evidence</i>	<i>Possibilities</i>
<b><i>Decision-making</i></b>	<b><i>Thinking (T)</i></b> Structuring decisions through objective balance; emphasising logic and reason, truth and fairness	<b><i>Feeling (F)</i></b> Structuring decisions through an emphasis on personal values, people-needs
<i>Unconscious preoccupation</i>	<i>Truth</i>	<i>Harmony with others</i>
<b><i>Lifestyle</i></b>	<b><i>Judging (J)</i></b> Preferring to live in a planned, organised way; liking to come to conclusions quickly	<b><i>Perceiving (P)</i></b> Preferring to live in a spontaneous, flexible way; adapting rather than controlling
<i>Unconscious preoccupation</i>	<i>Control</i>	<i>Keeping options open</i>

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It is important to remember that we all use all of these preferences but we gradually come to trust one side of each scale more than the other, often become more skilled at it and less skilled at the other one (that we sometimes tend to neglect). This leads to us seeing the world - and each other! – through different tinted spectacles.

When put together, the four preferences make up a four-letter Type profile, one of 16 Types, normally shown on a Type Table like this:

ISTJ	ISFJ	INFJ	INTJ
ISTP	ISFP	INFP	INTP
ESTP	ESFP	ENFP	ENTP
ESTJ	ESFJ	ENFJ	ENTJ

When members of a team share their preferences it can offer great insight into the workings of the team in areas such as:

- What works well on the team
- What doesn't work so well
- What is the team's preferred problem solving style
- What are the team's potential blind spots
- How is the team likely to handle change
- What barriers might there be to team performance
- What kind of leadership would be most productive
- How does communication take place
- What sort of things might moderate this teams effectiveness

These are just a few of the areas where teams have found benefits to performance by using the MBTI. If two teams that need to interact, two departmental or divisional teams perhaps, have looked at themselves in this way it can provide a non-threatening common language to help them work better together.

Space doesn't permit us to look at all of the individual profiles but by way of illustration lets look at the effect of different combinations of these preferences into just four groups. Keirsey and Bates divided the above profiles up into four groups based on outwardly observable behaviours and referred to the four groups as temperaments. Temperament theory has proved to be particularly useful in helping different groups to understand each other. These four groupings help us to look at individual differences but at the same time they can be considered to be Cultures; their behaviour will differ between the groups but be similar for people within the groups. (There are a number of ways of arriving at a group, or even a company temperament, it is not as simple as adding up the number of people with each preference. The combined use of questionnaires and focus groups seems

to give the best results. The preference of the leader often has a marked effect, which may or may not be desirable depending on circumstances!)

The first group, who from the descriptions and type table above share the preferences Sensing and Judging in common, can be thought of as having a *Practical and Structured Culture*. The second group, who have Sensing and Perceiving preferences in common, can be thought of as having a *Tactical and Flexible Culture*. The third group with Intuition and Feeling in common, can be thought of as having a *Creative and Empathetic Culture*. The final group, who share Intuition and Thinking preferences, can be thought of as having a *Strategic and Analytical Culture*.

Remembering that we are not trying to put people or departments into boxes here and we can all be practical, structured, creative, flexible etc. consider the effect of individuals within a team having the following preferences. (Then consider the effect of different department teams having, on balance, those same preferences on the communication, information gathering, decision making and overall approach to, say, a Six sigma initiative).

<p><b>Practical and Structured Culture (SJ)</b></p> <p>General Focus: Policy, rules, procedures, protocol, schedules, systems, follow through, logistics, practical requirements and results, getting things done in accordance with the plan – short, medium and long term.</p> <p>Six Sigma Focus: Right training, in the right place, at the right time, in the right quantity, at the right quality, to deliver the right results in alignment with existing plans and budgets</p>	<p><b>Creative and Empathetic Culture (NF)</b></p> <p>General Focus: Human values, impact of actions on people, meaning, morale, harmony and cooperation, vision, inspiration, growth and development of the person and the company.</p> <p>Six Sigma Focus: Right training for ALL the people, clarification of the deeper issues, mediation and conflict resolution, generating enthusiasm and championing the cause.</p>
<p><b>Tactical and Flexible Culture (SP)</b></p> <p>General Focus: Tactics, needs of the moment, employing any available means to accomplish an end, using tools, immediate (sensory) information, action.</p> <p>Six Sigma Focus: Pointing out the immediate needs, detecting and exploiting options, crisis management, handling the unexpected, getting the whole thing under way, improvisation, getting on with it.</p>	<p><b>Strategic and Analytical Culture (NT)</b></p> <p>General Focus: Strategy, technology, abstract analysis, searching for patterns, developing hypotheses, logical systems, change.</p> <p>Six Sigma Focus: Relating the means to the overall vision and goal, the appropriate projects for the larger perspective, developing multiple plans for meeting all possible contingencies, generating strategic options.</p>

When, in workshops, people are split into these groups and asked to describe their ideal organisation the results can be dramatic. People from the SJ and NT groups frequently view each others output with disbelief; it is as though they are from different planets. It can be more serious in the actual workplace though. In one client after such a session, a divisional team described how, three months before, they had presented their 5-year plan

for budget approval to a panel headed by the managing director and Financial Director. It was an excellent big picture of how the company would grow into new markets with restructured Sales/Marketing teams and was strong on vision. The plan was critical to the company's success but it was rejected for lack of financial data, failure to take account of present realities and for not having enough detail. It had to be re-worked and re-presented five times over a period of two months at considerable cost. During the delay two key personnel left who might otherwise have stayed in the light of the restructuring.

It turned out that the divisional team was largely composed of people with NT preferences with an NT leader. The company had a predominantly SJ culture and the budget approval panel had a strong SJ focus (in addition, both the Managing Director and the Finance Director had SJ preferences). All four temperaments were needed of course for an optimal solution but the natural strengths of the two temperaments involved, instead of being valued and used synergistically served only to irritate and alienate each other.

The following year, after all the people had come to understand the cultural issues in MBTI terms the budget review was completed in a 30-minute presentation. It also addressed far more of the cultural factors resulting in higher buy-in at the next level of management.

### **The FIRO Elements**

The MBTI measures and reports on our preferences but a deeper level we also have interpersonal needs. Some of these needs are behavioural, some are to do with feelings and all are related to our self-esteem. Indeed as Maslow pointed out the fundamental need for self-esteem is one of our higher order needs. The FIRO Elements provide excellent tools for understanding these areas. (FIRO is an abbreviation of Fundamental Interpersonal Relationship Orientation)

The FIRO Elements arose out of the earlier work of Will Schutz on the FIRO-B, a personality instrument, and more generally his FIRO theory of personality. Experience in many organisations, over many years and with thousands of individuals shows it to be much bigger than simply a descriptor of personality, good though it undoubtedly is for such purposes. The latest version of FIRO B, now titled Element B, has the merit of being very simple – it describes behaviour using just three dimensions – and yet it is profound in its implications of how we behave towards each other and explains many behavioural issues in organisations. Other instruments that he has developed – Element F (Feelings) and Element S (Self Esteem) help individuals and teams to deal in depth with those cultural issues.

The FIRO Elements are part of an overall approach to behavioural change referred to as The Human Element, which is based on the following premises:

- The first step to solving organisational and Leadership problems is self-understanding.

- The model for understanding individual and team potential assumes three dimensions. At the level of behaviour these are called Inclusion, Control and Openness.

**Inclusion** behaviour is to do with achieving the right amount of contact with people. Some people prefer a great deal of inclusion – being outgoing, going to social events, liking to do things with a group, working in teams – whereas others may prefer little inclusion – being by themselves, staying reserved, avoiding social groups and preferring to work alone. People obviously differ in this respect but we all have some desire to be with other people and some desire to be alone, sometimes to be in groups and sometimes to avoid groups.

**Control** behaviour is to do with achieving the right amount of power and influence in relation to others. Some people prefer high levels of control – being in charge, being the boss, giving orders, making decisions – whereas others may prefer lower levels of control – not having responsibility, receiving directions rather than giving them, being given a clear structure. Again we all have some desire to exert influence or to control others and some desire to be free from controlling.

**Openness** behaviour is concerned with achieving just the right amount of openness. Some people prefer high levels of openness – discussing feelings and innermost thoughts, enjoying having a few people in whom to confide – whereas others prefer to be more business like – keeping relationships impersonal and private, preferring acquaintances to a few close friends. We all have some desire for open relations and some desire to keep our relations more private.

- Corresponding to these behaviours are three feelings - significance, competence, and likeability.

Significance is to do with the feeling that people are important, meaningful, recognised or that they exist.

Competence is to do with the feeling that people can cope, handle problems, make decisions or be self-sufficient.

Likeability is to do with the feeling that people are warm, friendly and able to be confided in.

- Self-esteem is defined by applying these dimensions to the self, i.e. Aliveness (self-inclusion), Self-determination (self-control), Self-awareness, Self-significance, Self-competence and Self-like.
- When people feel low self-esteem they frequently try to avoid facing their negative feelings about themselves.
- They do this by using defence mechanisms, methods of distorting reality so that they do not have to experience these unpleasant feelings. (Note that there should be no blame attached to defensive behaviour, indeed we all live our lives to some extent

through our defences. Defences operate from an unconscious level and only by bringing them into awareness can a person choose whether or not to do anything about it). When we operate from a defensive position the behaviours described above in terms of *preference* for different levels of Inclusion, Control and Openness often become *rigidities*. Rigidities are the single biggest obstacle to teamwork and to continuous improvement and all of the behaviours are capable of being rigidities. With greater awareness behaviour can become much more flexible and appropriate to a given situation.

- Defences are insatiable. They consume large amounts of individual (and hence organisational) energy. Defences include being a denier, critic, victim, demander and a misinterpreter.
- As we become aware of our defensive behaviour - and if we choose to let it go - we achieve higher and higher levels of self-esteem, become happier people with more energy to tackle the job in hand; Six Sigma or whatever. The energy we spent working on our image and each other becomes available for more productive use.

Leaders can facilitate this process and ensure that people's interpersonal needs are met. They can do this by providing an environment that permits people to satisfy their different needs for Inclusion, Control and Openness.

Schutz found that we attend to our interpersonal needs in a specific order as we develop relationships, including the relationships we develop in teams of course. We can think of the process as an Openness Cycle. First we deal – to some extent – with our needs for inclusion. Then we move on to dealing – again only to some extent – with our needs for

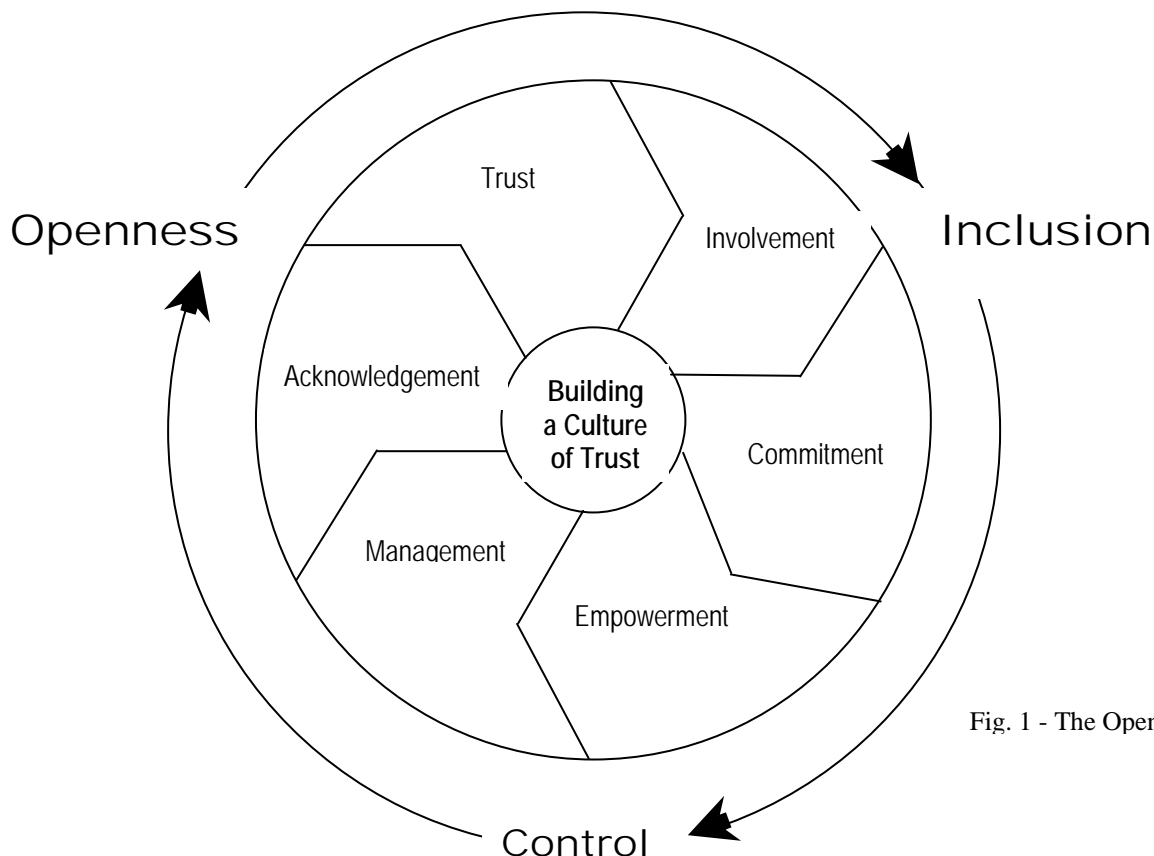


Fig. 1 - The Openness Cycle

influence and control. It is only after these areas have been dealt with that we begin to address our needs for openness, which is where trust develops. If we do not meet people's needs for inclusion and control, then it is almost certain that any trust we get will be of a very temporary nature.

In terms of continuous improvement processes, such as Six Sigma, Inclusion usually means Involving people, gaining their Involvement and then giving and receiving Commitment to what it is that we are trying to do (to some extent remember, it doesn't all happen at once). Then we need to think carefully about Empowerment. What does it mean to truly empower people? (As a definition try "Giving people the amount power to take the decisions that you are prepared to let them take"). How do we then Manage the process? If we then give appropriate Acknowledgement – what we did well as well as what we did badly – then we will start to build a culture of Trust. As trust builds people start to get more involved, become more committed, accept more empowerment.....in other words the cycle continues and deeper levels of trust develop.

How then do we as leaders and managers achieve all of this? First we need to follow the key steps to behavioural change:

- Agree a way of describing how we behave
  - Towards each other and towards ourselves
- Understand blockages to change
  - Why we behave the way we do
  - The extent to which we can change
- Make some better informed choices
  - To change
  - Not to change
  - The consequences
- Create the environment for others to do the same

The tools I have described can give us a great deal of help with not only these areas but also with measuring culture. After all, if culture is Critical to Quality, we need to start measuring our progress and so much the better if we can use tools that relate directly to what we find important as individuals. Schutz and Bridges have extended both the FIRO Elements and MBTI instruments to the measurement and description of culture and organisational climate.

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