

## Culture. Critical to Quality? So how do we measure it?

In a previous article Six Sigma – Culture and Behaviour we started to look at what culture is and said that:

..... 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”

We went on to say that understanding people’s behaviour is a necessary pre-requisite whichever view we take of culture and therefore looked at two of the world’s most widely used tools for helping people to understand behaviour – both their own and that of other people – the Myers Briggs Type Indicator<sup>®</sup> and the FIRO Elements<sup>®</sup>.

They are not the world’s most widely used tools for measuring culture though, that honour would probably have to go to the Organisational Culture Inventory from Verax<sup>®</sup>, much used by the Big 6 (or is it 5 or 4? – I lose track with all the consolidation that has been going on!) consultancy firms. The OCI is a very comprehensive instrument, has good reliability and validity data and measures culture on twelve scales.

A much simpler – but very powerful - measure that has been used to great effect by many organisations around the world is the work of Roger Harrison and Herb Stokes. Based largely on the earlier work of Charles Handy, published in his book “The Gods of Management”, their booklet “Diagnosing Organisational Culture” contains a self-scoring questionnaire, descriptions of the four scales and some limited norms. They describe culture in terms of four culture orientations that evoke different behaviours and are based on different values. Very much abbreviated descriptions of the four cultures are:

**Power:** A Power-oriented organization is based on inequality of access to resources. A resource can be anything one person controls that another person wants. Some examples of power are money, privileges, job security, working conditions, and the ability to control access of others to these resources. People in power-oriented organizations are motivated by rewards and punishments, and by the wish to be associated with a strong leader.

At its best, leadership in a power-oriented organization is based on strength, justice, and benevolence on the part of the leader.

At its worst, it tends towards rule by fear with abuse of power for personal advantage by the leaders. When organisations grow larger or when leaders struggle for dominance, it may degenerate into a hotbed of political intrigue.

**Role:** A role culture substitutes a system of structures and procedures for the naked exercise of power by the leaders. The duties and rewards of members' roles are carefully defined, usually in writing, and are the subject of an explicit or implicit contract between the organization and the individual. People perform specific functions in order to receive defined rewards.

At its best the Role culture provides stability, justice and efficient performance. A well designed system of roles (bureaucracy) in which performance is organized by structures rather than personally controlled by the leader, permits work to be reliably directed at a distance so that large complex organizations can be created and managed.

At its worst, with individual autonomy or discretion not being given to members at lower levels, it can lead to innovation being stifled. The system is designed to control and prevent people from doing things outside the rules and ends up doing just that even when operating outside the rules is the right thing to do.

**Achievement:** Whereas the power-oriented and role-oriented cultures depend upon the use of external rewards or punishments to motivate people, the achievement-oriented organisation has been called the aligned organisation because it lines people up behind a common vision or purpose. It uses mission to attract and release the personal energy of its people in the pursuit of common goals.

At its best, members make their contribution freely in response to a shared purpose, they willingly give more to the organization, and the whole organization prospers accordingly. There is often a very high commitment to achieving the task with a strong focus on innovation.

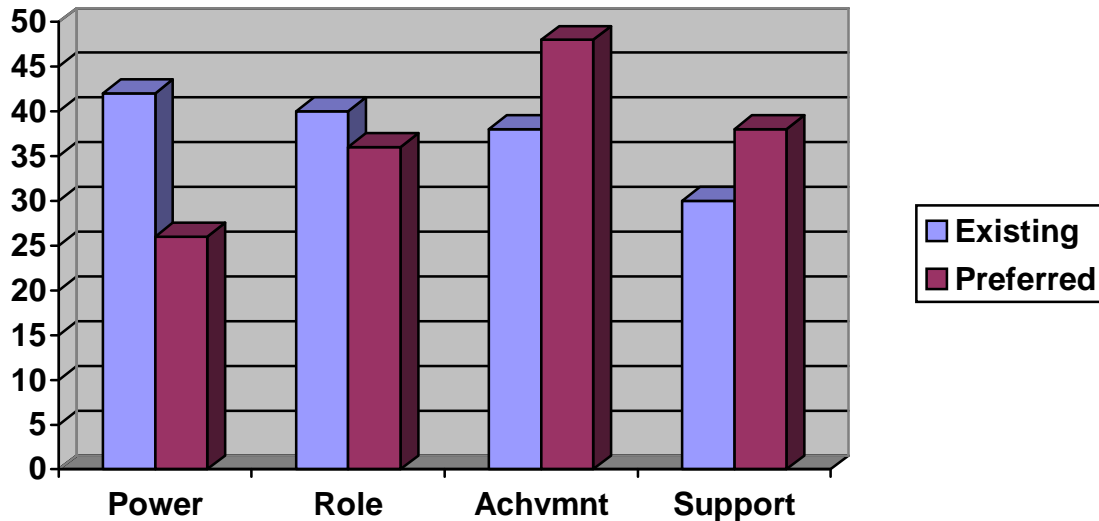
At its worst, groups may each "do their own thing", neglect systems and procedures, losing touch with the realities of competition, customer needs and the business environment

**Support:** The support culture has a climate that is based on mutual trust between the individual and the organisation. People believe that they are valued as human beings, not just as cogs in a machine or contributors to task. However, when not balanced by a thrust for success, the support culture is not results-oriented enough to enable a business to be competitive. It makes its best contribution in dynamic tension with Achievement orientation.

At its best, it releases a lot of personal energy with people coming to work not only because they like their work but also because they care for the people with whom they work. The Support culture offers its members the satisfactions that come from relationships: mutuality, belonging, and connections and can evoke extremely strong motivation in the service of the group.

At their worst, they may fail to deal effectively with conflict, overvalue consensus, lack decisiveness (particularly around poor people performance) and fail to achieve the task as a result.

**Culture Index:** The questionnaire involves ranking possible endings to 15 sentences, each of the endings being one of the culture orientations. The results are an Existing score and a Preferred score for each of the orientations. A typical result might look like this:



Existing and Preferred culture indices can also be calculated using the formula:

Existing (Achievement + Support) – Existing (Power + Role) = Existing Culture Index

Preferred (Achievement + Support) – Preferred (Power + Role) = Preferred Culture Index

It is not unusual for the Existing Culture Index to be negative. It is also observed that the scores on Power are negatively correlated with those on Achievement and Support i.e. if a group has high scores on Power it tends to have low scores on Achievement and Support. The Role scores tend to fluctuate fairly independently of the other scores. As Harrison and Stokes say:

“The Power culture has a potential for fear and manipulation. People in Power orientated cultures tend to be rather careful about what they say and to whom they say it. The Support and Achievement cultures require a fairly high degree of openness and trust to flourish. Therefore we would expect an organisation that is high on Power to be low on Achievement and Support”.

Although the process is sometimes best facilitated from someone outside the company, if you do have the necessary confidence and skills Diagnosing Organizational Culture (ISBN 0-88390-316-4), published by Jossey-Bass/Pfeiffer is available through Amazon.co.uk or possibly your usual bookseller. It contains all the necessary instructions and covers much more than I have been able to include here. Different parts of the organisation may have different views and it is the debate around the results between different groups that can be an excellent first step to moving towards the desired culture.

The next step though usually requires a bit more effort. Serious continuous improvement initiatives, such as Six Sigma, almost always mean moving to higher Achievement and Support components in the culture. This in turn requires progressively building higher levels of awareness, openness and trust. This brings us back to the MBTI and the FIRO Elements. Their primary value, as I described in the first of these two articles, is to help us to understand why our psychological preferences (in the case of the MBTI) and our interpersonal needs (FIRO Elements) often seem to get in the way of our commitment to various aspects of continuous improvement without us even realising that it is happening. They can also be used however to provide further measures of culture and climate, either on their own or in conjunction with the Harrison and Stokes instrument. The following two examples give a brief insight into some of the work that has been done to use these tools as organisational measuring instruments.

### **The MBTI**

William Bridges has used the MBTI as the basis for his Organisational Character Index (not to be confused with the Verax Organisational Culture Inventory mentioned earlier). Last time I described an example of type application to organisations using temperaments. In his book, “The Character of Organisations”, Bridges goes much further and looks at each of the MBTI scales in organisational terms and, more importantly looks at the implications for different type organisations when they encounter rapid change or are involved in major transitions. A classic example over the last decade or so has been some of the major banks. I think we would probably agree that they had strong preferences for:

Introversion – taking cues and drawing power from within, being fairly closed  
Sensing – concerned with actualities and attending to details  
Thinking – depending on impersonal procedures and principles  
Judging – liking things spelled out and definite, seeking closure

Then they decided that they wanted to sell us mortgages, insurance and a host of other products in rapidly changing markets. It took them an awfully long time – and some of them never made it - to realise that they needed to practise more:

Extroversion – focusing outward and responding to external stimuli  
Intuition – concerned with possibilities, attending to the big picture  
Feeling – reaching conclusions that took into account the values and beliefs of its customers  
Perceiving – keeping options open, being flexible and spontaneous

Would they have succeeded faster if they had understood their deeply ingrained culture and how they needed to modify it? I’m not so sure. ISTJ organisations can have a very high inertia in the face of change and need all the help they can get but seeing that is often quite difficult for them

“The Character of Organisations” by William Bridges (ISBN 0-89106-052-9) is published by Consulting Psychologists Press, Inc.

A questionnaire to arrive at the Organisational Character Index appears as an appendix.

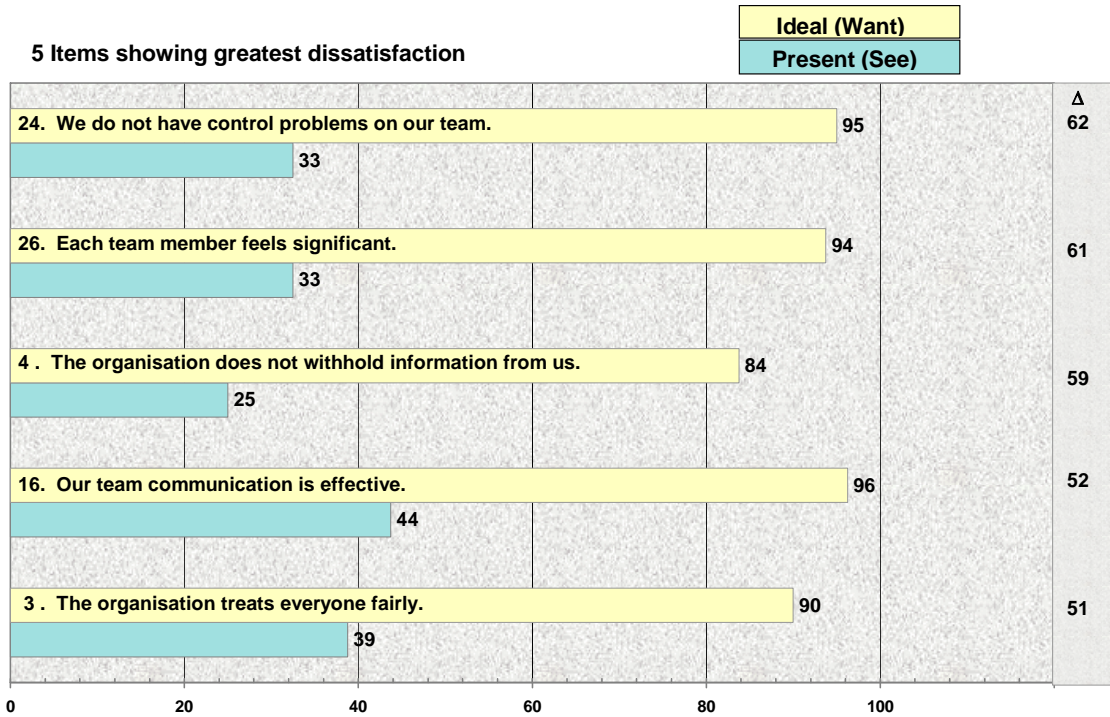
## Element O - Organisational Culture

The following data and charts are taken, with permission, from the results of a large multinational company that used Element O, an instrument to measure organisational culture in FIRO Element terms. Initially they used it as a measure of the present position at the start of a culture change initiative where gaining significantly increased levels of trust and openness was paramount. Subsequently it was used to measure change, demonstrate progress in specific targeted areas and to highlight new opportunities for improvement.

The instrument consists of a number of questions designed to measure of organisational climate using the dimensions of:

Inclusion		
Control		Organisation
Openness	in the areas of	Team
Significance		Relationships
Competence		Self
Likeability		

The instrument gathers data on both what the people **See** at present (in these work related areas) together with what they **Want** (how they would like it to be in the same areas) At the start of the programme of work the survey produced the results in Figure1 for the five items with the greatest dissatisfaction.

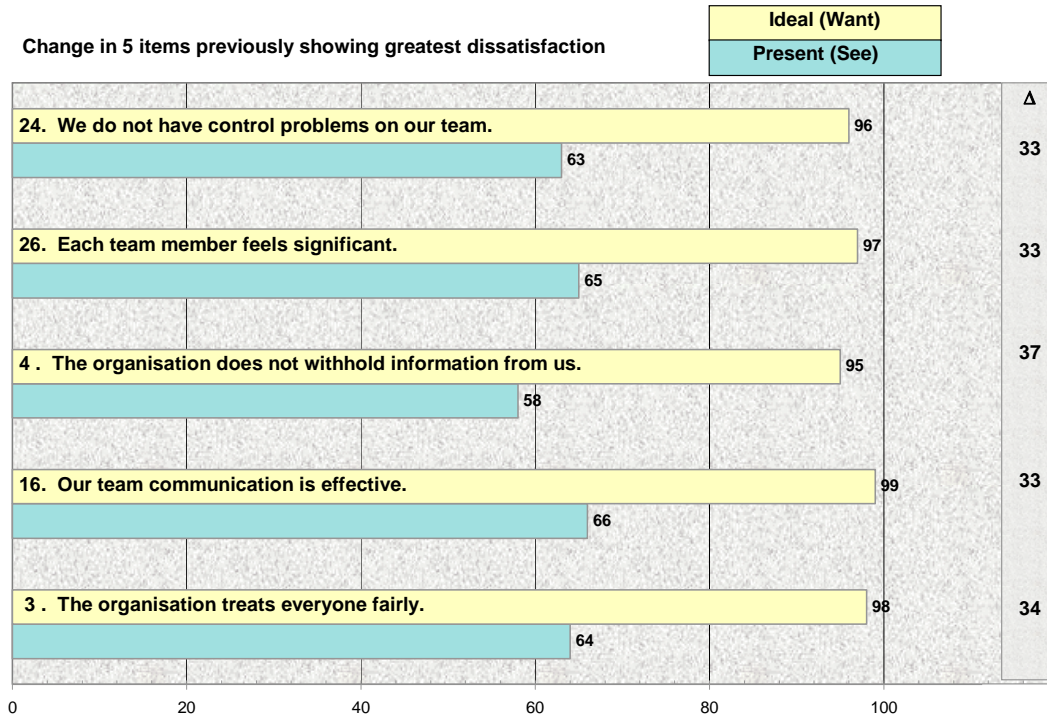


**Figure 1**

These results gave a clear indication of priority areas for action by the senior managers both globally and in more specific detail. The action areas were directly linked to the

FIRO Elements language and the model for organisational change that the company had adopted.

After the culture change initiative had been running for some time the climate survey was repeated. Figure 2 shows some of the movement that took place in the individual items that had shown the greatest amount of dissatisfaction at the start of the programme.



**Figure 2**

There was clearly a very encouraging increase in the See dimension on these items. This was generally true for the other items (Element O has 56 items in all) to varying degrees.

What can also be seen, however, is that there is also an increase in the Want dimension for these items and again this was generally true for the other items with occasional items showing a reduction in the wanted dimension. It became apparent that, having been exposed to greater involvement, empowerment and openness people became more focussed on these issues and actively sought more of the same! The second climate survey not only provided the “after” data but was also able to be used for deciding priority areas for the next phase of the culture change initiative.

The instrument is now used by the company on an occasional basis to monitor the culture.

**So can culture be measured?**

The merit it seems to me of adopting a behavioural definition – and using behavioural instruments to measure culture – is that it facilitates the process of changing behaviour and it is behaviour, what we all actually do, that will either deliver or not our required performance through our processes.

As we said last time, measurement is vital if we are 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

All of the tools we have looked at need to be used ethically and some require psychometric training. In the hands of people who are skilled in change management they can be powerful aids to business excellence and world-class performance; in less skilled hands they can do more harm than good. If you would like to discuss any of the issues raised or, for example, would like to be pointed in the right direction for training, please feel free to contact me - I would be happy help.

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*(This paper by Stephen Mathews is the second of 2 on the subject of Culture that originally appeared in the Quality Methods Association publication "Tell Me")*