

Organizational Culture

The Teacher

Welcome to the course, Organizational Culture, also known as "Congregational Culture". Your teacher for this course is John Fast, currently living in Vancouver, Canada. From 1983 until 1995 I lived in the Philippines where my wife Arlene and I were involved in church planting and pastoral training. After that we went to Vietnam where we stayed from 1996 until 2015. In Vietnam we were involved in a Business as Mission (BAM) project, church planting and pastoral training.

Now in Vancouver, we are retired but still very interested in the church in both Vietnam and the Philippines. So, I was very pleased when my son Michael asked me to teach this course on congregational culture. Along with my many experiences in churches I've also had time to reflect on the inner workings of congregations. In 1995 I completed a PhD at the University of the Philippines on the growth of culture in an organization in the Philippines. My dissertation was on the development of an organizational culture in a new business organization.

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What Is Culture?

Introduction

In this lesson we want to walk through the process of understanding what culture is and why it's important for pastors and churches. Even we as Christians and as Christian leaders need to take another look at the subject of culture. First of all it will help us in the leading our churches away from unseen but serious problems. Every congregation is like a ship travelling through shallow dangerous waters on its way to a glorious destination. Culture can become the rocks that threaten the success of the church. The study is designed to help you figure out where the rocks are and how to get around them safely. By the end of the lesson you should be able to give someone a definition of the word culture and give three ways culture can help someone in pastoring a church.

I. Culture arises as people shape their world

A. Culture comes from many, many sources.

If we think of culture as a tree then we might ask the question where are the roots of this tree? I don't have all of the answers but I have some thoughts that may help with this question. Lots and lots of culture is found in the languages that we speak. Think of the Tower of Babel story as a culture multiplication story. When the people building the tower woke up the morning after their languages had been changed they found it along with a new language they also had a new culture. This new culture fit in the new language.

Do you remember the time God led the people of Israel out of Egypt? It took them 40 years to go to their new homeland, which wasn't that far. A big part of the reason for this slow journey was that they had been disobedient. But another important part was that God was teaching them the correct way to live. He was giving them a set of beliefs but would anchor them through the challenging times ahead. Beliefs are one of the main building blocks of culture and so we could say that God was building a new culture for his people.

Today, although we may not always see it culture is all around us. We see it in books, in art and in experience. I lived in Vietnam for almost 20 years. During that time I saw lots and lots of culture. Much of it was very different from the culture of the Philippines or of Canada where I have come from. Don't make the mistake of thinking that the culture of Asia is always the same. There are many differences. No one Asian country has a better culture than the other they are simply different.

B. Culture is in all human societies

1. Culture is a way of life.

"Culture is a word for the 'way of life' of groups of people, meaning the way they do things. Different groups may have different cultures. A culture is passed on to the next generation by learning, whereas genetics are passed on by heredity. Culture is seen in people's writing, religion, music, clothes, cooking and in what they do."

2. Of course the Philippines also has a culture

Canada's Filipino communities sent \$1B to family and friends in the Philippines last year despite COVID-19 ([here](#)).

Every day, Joy Tajanlangit sees people come through the doors of her store, looking to send money to people they care for in the Philippines. "They just received their salary; they won't even see it pass through their hands. Just go straight to our store and send it back to the Philippines," said the owner of the Manila Convenience Store in Calgary.

In 2019, the Philippines saw remittances of more than \$42.8 billion from Filipinos living overseas, according to Zaldy Patron, consul general for the Government of the Philippines. *Why do Filipinos do this?*

The Philippines has had a number of scholars who researched Philippine culture. The most well known is Dr F. Landa Jocano. He was my teacher at the University of the Philippines where he was known for writing a lot of books. One of his earliest books described his life on his honeymoon. Unlike most of us who go to the beach or to the mountains on our honeymoon Dr Jocano went with his new wife to live in a slum. Here is a link to an article entitled "Eleven Things You Should Know About Filipino Culture". Please read it ([here](#)).

C. Here's how problem solving creates cultures.

People in every society make things and solve their problems. As they do that they develop assumptions about how to make things or solve problems. These assumptions soon become habitual responses to making things and solving problems. They become the automatic 'go to ways' in a culture.

Here's how it could work. Let's say you and your family moved to a small island to live. As you live there the work needs to be divided up. How are you going to divide up the work? Well you are probably going to give some jobs to the wife or mother and other jobs to the children. As time goes on this works well as the father does some things quite well and the mother does other things well. They become the "go to" people to do those things. Believe it or not a culture is being formed. Relationships are being set.

D. Cultures come in many shapes and sizes

1. There are National Cultures

Here we are thinking about the culture of nations like the Philippines and Vietnam. I think this is very obvious. People from the Philippines like to eat Filipino food. People from Vietnam love their own food. The same is true for the ways people address each other and for the language they all speak. And even for how they behave when they travel. In the end the culture of Vietnam looks quite different from the culture of the Philippines.

2. There are Ethnic Cultures

Many countries have tribal cultures, as is the case with the Philippines. As you've probably heard the Philippines has many ethnic groups. A lot of the time they live in the mountains. Although they may speak the national language they will also have their own language and food and dress and ways of celebrating. These ethnic cultures are greatly influenced by the Filipino culture but they are still different and distinct.

3. There are Organizational Cultures

Here we are thinking of business cultures, religious cultures. Modern societies are full of organizations, each of which will develop their own culture. They are actually a version or shade of their national culture.

As well they can represent sub-sub cultures. Meaning a young organization will have a slightly different culture than that same organization several years down the line. Ageing changes people and also organizations. Think of your church. If it's just new it will have certain cultural features. If it's 20 years old it will have features that are more common to older established cultures. Here in Canada and number of Filipino churches have merged with western churches. You could say that the western church has adopted a Filipino church. Together the two congregations, each with their own culture, have to create a new culture or they won't survive.

4. There are mixed cultures.

In the little building where my wife and I own a condo there are a number of Filipinos. In fact a Filipino couple lives just above us. The longer they are there in Canada they will pick up some of the cultural traits of Canadians. Meanwhile they are still retain the cultural traits they picked up in the Philippines. We could say they're bicultural. Filipinos who emigrated to Canada or the US therefore end up with two cultures. We'll say more about this later.

5. Watch the video:

"What is Culture?" ([here](#)).

E. Cultures change with difficulty

This is a very important question in this course where we are going to be spending a lot of time talking about congregational cultures. We will see that many of them are unhealthy and really should make some changes. Can congregations change their cultures? Answer, "Yes, but it's not easy."

II. What are some features of cultures?

A. Some people are multi-cultural

We live in a world where it seems as though everybody is on the move. There are contract workers, refugees and emigrants. This is certainly true in the Philippine context. Over the years millions of Filipinos have moved to places like the United States and Canada. These folks love to visit the Philippines but when they come here they are often confused with the Philippines and the Filipinos living in here are often confused with them. Why? Culture can help explain a lot of this confusion. If we can understand more about culture we can understand more about balikbayan and visitors and even the folks who come back after years of working in Saudi.

B. Cultures change with age.

Everyone knows that the culture inside of Baptist Church is very different than the culture of the Catholic Church or even of the Alliance Church. Churches of different ages have different cultures.

Established churches, new church plants, dying churches, merged churches, hot start and cold start churches all have slightly different cultures. You may be asking what's a hot start church. A hot start church is a new church plant that has been meeting for a while before a church planter arrives to take them further. A cold start church involves gathering equal group of people to help plant a church.

C. Organizational cultures often overwhelm organizational planners

Dick Clark said, "*The fact is, culture eats strategy for lunch. You can have a good strategy in place, but if you don't have the culture and the enabling systems, the culture of the organization will defeat the strategy.*" (Aubrey, p. 15) How many times have leaders sat down with their board

to plan the coming decade. The layout goals, objectives, and strategies. And then everything comes apart. Why? The answer may be, a sick culture.

D. Organizations must be ready to change.

Churches are faced with problems from their external environment that affect their very survival as a culture. What does this mean? The external environment is the world outside of the church. By contrast the internal environment is the world inside the church. Now it's obvious that the external environment around our churches is changing almost every day. And it's critical for these churches to know what's going on out there in the culture and then to respond appropriately. The congregation that is aware of and adapts well to these changes and challenges is more likely to survive. If it cannot adapt to change, it will die.

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Organizational Culture

Introduction

So far in this course we've talked about the word culture. But in this course we are not looking at culture as much as we are looking at organizational culture. So, in this lesson we want to get an understanding what organizational culture means.

Have a listen to a short video on the subject. Its entitled, "What is organizational culture? ([here](#)). By the end of the lesson you should be able to give someone a definition of organizational culture and tell me how this word can go together with the with the word church.

Cultures also form as groups work together in a company.



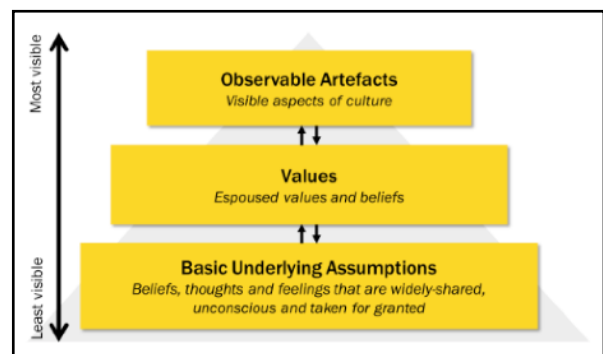
I. What does organizational culture mean?

A. Edgar Schein's says its about artefacts, values and assumptions.

Let's start with some diagrams. One of the most famous students of organizational culture today is J. Edgar Schein. He says organizational cultures have several levels. The first of these levels is above ground, we can see it. The other two levels have to be unearthed because they are under the ground. They are invisible. If you know anything about icebergs you know that a little part of the iceberg can be seen above the surface of the water. Most of the iceberg is underneath the water. What you can see he calls observable artifacts. Look at the diagram on the right and find the artefacts on top of the triangle. If you think about your church you can think about things like the pulpit, the screen on the wall, the chairs in the building. You could see these things and touch them. They are observable artifacts.

That brings us do the second layer which is under the ground. These are values. You can't really see them because they are what people believe about things. It doesn't mean you can't figure them out. But you have to dig for them. In the diagram they are in the middle. They can also be called espoused values and beliefs.

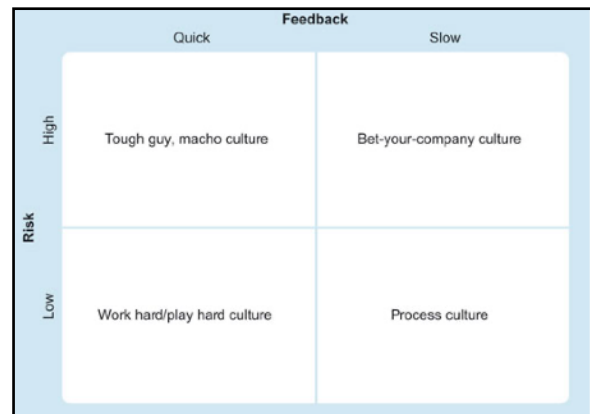
Finally we come to the bottom layer of the triangle called Basic Assumptions. Another word for these assumptions is the word beliefs. The diagram uses beliefs for assumptions and values. Keep in mind that not everything is cut and dried. It's the part of the iceberg it's very very deep. Schein calls them assumptions. They seem to



be similar to values but there are a lot less of them. They are more thoughts and feelings which are unconscious and taken for granted.

B. Here is Deal and Kennedy's answer.

Dale and Kennedy were businessmen who were very interested in the way companies operated. They said most companies have a culture of their own. Usually a company's culture can be summarized in the words, "the way things get done around here". Of course each company's culture would get things done in different ways and so there would be many different company cultures. Look at the diagram or model as you can see here. Dale and Kennedy divided these different company cultures into four kinds: the tough guy, macho cultures, the vet your company culture, work hard play hard culture and process culture. They told company owners to study their company and then put them into one of these four categories. Probably churches could also be put into their models.



C. Here is Aubrey Malphur's Apple answer

Our main resource in this course is a book by Aubrey Malphur entitled "Look Before You Lead: How To Discern and shape Your Church". Aubrey, works with churches in the United States. His model, which is really really simple, is an apple. Everybody knows that an apple has three layers or levels: the skin, the flesh, the core. He is interested in the culture of congregations especially of congregational leaders, like the pastor.

1. The skin represents outward behaviour

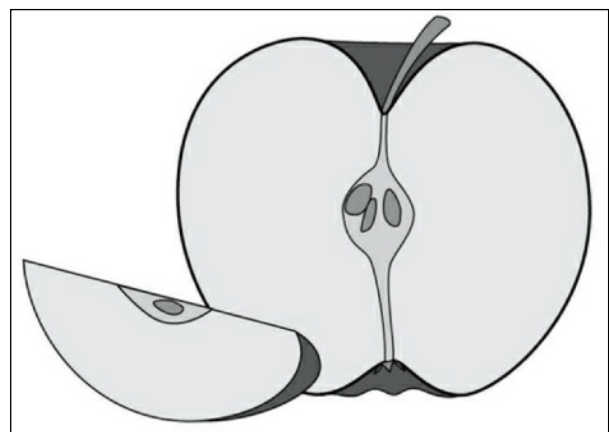
The organization's beliefs and values intermingle and are seen in the church's behavior or outward expression of itself. This is the first layer that is represented by the apple's skin. Churches express themselves through their behaviors and outward appearance. We can say that they are behavior-expressed. (Aubrey p. 20)

2. The flesh represents values.

Congregational culture includes at the second level the church's shared values, which are represented by the apple's flesh. Churches are behavior-expressed but values-driven. The inward values drive and explain the church's outward behavior. These values explain why the church does what it does at the first behavioral level and why it doesn't do what it should do. (Aubrey, p. 21)

3. The core represents beliefs.

However, the church's beliefs also include other fundamental aspects of the church's life, such as how it views time (is the church living in the past or the present?), how it views human nature (is man good or bad?), how it communicates internally and externally (the bulletin, announcements), how it handles power (who has the power and who doesn't?), what the role of tradition is, what the church believes is the proper role of women, what it believes about the use of technology (is it high-tech or low-



tech?), what it believes about the use of musical instruments in worship, and other similar views. (Aubrey, p. 22)

4. And yet each culture is unique.

These three elements of organizational culture—beliefs, values, and their expression—work together to display the church’s unique identity. Thus they answer these questions: How is our church unique? What makes us different? Because no church has the exact same beliefs, values, and behavior, each church will have its own individual, unique nature or identity. And as we probe the culture, we will discover what that unique nature is. (Aubrey, p. 22)

II. Culture: good or bad?

Since Aubrey concentrates on congregational church culture we're going to continue by looking at culture from his point of view. I should tell you that he bases a lot of his analysis on thinking of Edgar Schein. What he does is take his ideas and apply them to churches.

A. An organization’s culture is mostly good.

Here the first important things to know about congregational culture: It’s not evil, not a product of the fall, not independent of the Godhead, isn’t temporal, isn’t always good and isn’t an end in itself. (Aubrey p. 24)

B. Culture tells us if an action fits.

Fitting is really important for pastors and their congregations. If you don’t know your culture and your congregation’s culture you won’t be able to see if there’s going to be a fit. Let’s Face It - You don’t buy shoes without trying them on.

C. The Bible approves of culture.

To effectively minister to people in a culture, whether it’s a church or parachurch organization, we must understand culture in general and organizational culture in particular. We will better reach people when we understand their culture and are aware of how it is similar to or vastly different from our own. One simple example is language. If we speak English and people we’re attempting to reach only speak Spanish, we need not only to be aware of this but to make adjustments to our culture and learn Spanish. At issue here is how much we’re willing to adjust to reach others with a different culture. In 1 Corinthians 9:19–23 Paul challenges us to consider this important principle.

19 For though I am free from all, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win more of them. 20 To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though not being myself under the law) that I might win those under the law. 21 To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (not being outside the law of God but under the law of Christ) that I might win those outside the law. 22 To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some. 23 I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share with them in its blessings.

D. You can use culture to measure an organization's health.

1. There Are Many Kinds of Churches

Established older churches are as different from Church Plants as night is from day. (Aubrey p. 16)

2. Planning Often Leads nowhere.

In the magazine Executive Leadership, Dick Clark explains, *"The fact is, culture eats strategy for lunch. You can have a good strategy in place, but if you don't have the culture and the enabling systems, the culture of the organization will defeat the strategy."*

III. Cultures have an external and internal environments.

Before we dig deeper into the culture of a church there are two other ideas that we need to make clear. Every organization, including every church, has to understand the environments within which it lives. There is the external environment which is everything outside of the church congregation. Included here are things like the government and its attitude to the church, or there's the neighbourhood that includes even other church congregations. Then there is also the internal environment which includes everything inside the congregation. This includes the meetings that are held in the church, worship services, youth meetings, board meetings.