# Cultural Web Model

## Idea In Short

The first thing that comes to mind when one hears the term "Corporate Culture" is "how things are conducted around the office." The cultural web is a method for mapping an organization's culture, as well as a way of recognising and comprehending the various aspects that influence it. This tool is used to map current culture (i.e., the as-is state) as well as the culture of the future (i.e. the to-be state). The two maps can then be compared to spark conversation and show what, where, and how change can be accomplished.

The cultural web model, created by Gerry Johnson and Kevan Scholes in 1992, aids in defining the paradigm of working within a company. In brief, the cultural web is a means to investigate the various aspects of an organization and how these aspects influence people's experiences while working with them. In addition, it is also a tool that helps explore:

- Power structures that exist within a company
- The collective history of a company
- How behaviors or rituals are formed in the company

The cultural web model is a means to figure out what a company's current culture is like and what factors can help define it in the future. It is made up of the following steps:

- Where a company has been
- Where it wants to go
- How far it must go to get there

## The Cultural Web Model

The cultural paradigm is the core of the web. The paradigm is the organization's core beliefs and motivations. It is supported by six cultural influences.

1. Stories and Myths
2. Rituals and Routines
3. Symbols
4. Organization Structures
5. Power Structures
6. Control Systems

## Stories and Myths

Johnson and Scholes describe stories and myths to be those historical events of the company. Employees continually discuss these stories and keep them alive. These stories are based on famous events or personalities that are often talked about, both inside and outside the company. Essentially, they are narratives of the cultural web. Regardless whether the stories are true or not, existing employees keep the stories alive and pass them on to new employees during canteen talks, smoking areas, or corridor chats. Such stories may contain accounts of successes and failures of the company. In short, stories communicate a lot about a company''s values, culture and behaviors that the company encourages or discourages. Stories capture:

- The material events that its employees find suitable to pass on to new employees
- Company culture
- The company's beliefs and value systems
- Key personnel that are frequently referred to in these stories

## Rituals and Routines

Johnson and Scholes describe rituals and routines as those activities, actions and behaviours which are frequently undertaken in the company. They speak to the way the company likes to handle things and are often unwritten rules about the conduct of the company''s business. Rituals and routines also signify the expectations about behaviours which employees are expected to incur on a day-to-day basis. They say a lot about how the interactions take place within and outside of the company. For example, some companies encourage participation in team events, marathons, yoga sessions, or employee-led book clubs as part of their workplace culture. Others provide access to spiritual mentoring, for example through services such as Nebula, which can signal an emphasis on employee well-being, self-development, and personal fulfillment. The ritualistic practices of a company also determine the level of inclusiveness in the organization. Inclusiveness denotes the extent to

which members from all backgrounds are included in such routines. Inclusiveness also denotes the degree to which people from diverse backgrounds are represented in the process. Correspondingly, rituals and routines capture:

- The company's beliefs?
- Social interactions that take place within the organization
- How the organization promotes or deals with inequality and discrimination
- The behaviors that the company encourages and discourages

## Symbols

Johnson and Scholes describe symbols as those elements which visually represent the company. Basically, they are the recognizable expressions of the company. For example, logos, office buildings, corporate identity, dress code, advertisements, etc. Companies define symbols as part of their branding process. This includes how stakeholders within and outside the organization perceive a company through its visual elements. Correspondingly, symbols capture:

- Whether the symbols resonate with the company''s values
- The company's image or brand
- What comes to mind first when we think about the company
- How the company looks to its stakeholders (internal and external)

## Power structures

Johnson and Scholes describe power structures as those elements which hold the real power in the company. These frameworks include both formal and informal influences of the organization. The people who have decision making power in the company are ultimately the ones who influence the organization''s core beliefs, assumptions and ideas. Whether it''s one individual, one department or a group of executives holding the real power are actually the ones defining the strategic decisions and operations of the company. Correspondingly, power structures capture:

- Who holds the real power in the company
- How do they use the power in the company
- Who has the decision making power in the company
- What beliefs and ideas do influential people of the company encourage

### Organization structures

Johnson and Scholes define organizational structures as the hierarchical compositions of the company. Power structures essentially go hand in hand with organizational structures. The latter defines the roles, reporting lines and the ways through which the business flows in the organization. They also define the lines of responsibility and accountability and also determine what functions each of the roles carry out in their own capacity. Sometimes, organizational structures can be informal and unwritten especially in the context of how these structures are affecting people from marginalized groups defined by race, ethnicity, geographical location, disability, gender etc. Correspondingly, organizational structures capture:

- The lines of authority in the company
- Whether the organizational structure is flat or hierarchical
- Whether the hierarchical structures exist within clearly defined boundaries
- Mechanisms and structures that promote fairness within the company

### Control systems

Johnson and Scholes define control systems as the ways through which a company exercises its controls. For example, controls include its IT and financial systems, quality assurance systems, positive reinforcements or negative punishments etc. This is significantly related to performance management as well. Control systems shape how a company evaluates its employees on the quality and quantity of their work. Controls also help appraise whether employees are succeeding in their given roles. Correspondingly, control systems capture:

- How is a company exerts its control
- How a company evaluates its employees' performance
- The key processes that support employees'' learning and growth
- The strongest and weakest control areas within the company

## Case Study: Amazon

### Paradigm

The paradigm of Amazon is defined as Earth''s most customer-centric company.

Furthermore, Amazon strives to be A place where people can find and discover anything they might want to buy online.

## Stories

Amazon's story is intertwined with its founder's story. Due to the enormous demand for books, Amazon's founder, Jeff Bezos began his business as an online bookstore. He named his company after the world's largest river, the Amazon. At first, Bezos intended to make his bookstore the world's largest bookstore. However, after reading a report on the Internet's future, he chose a few more things to advertise online and steadily built Amazon into the largest online retailer it is today. Amazon offers everything from A to Z on its website.

## Rituals and Routines

One of Amazon's rituals that sets it apart from its competitors is the way it recruits individuals for higher-level positions. Specifically, Amazon designates some of its employees as bar raisers. They are responsible for hiring, interviewing, and even vetoing candidates. According to Amazon's philosophy, they also prefer to hire people with no prior expertise and train them.

## Symbols

Bezos wanted his company's name to begin with the letter 'A' so that it would appear first in alphabetical order. Amazon's A to Z logo is another attractive element. The logo features a smile-shaped curve arrow that leads from A to Z. This symbol conveys customer happiness and A-Z selection.

## Organizational structure

Amazon's organizational hierarchy is notable for its complexity, and the company's subsidiaries operate autonomously in different nations. The corporation is organized across seven sectors. Each sector responds to orders from above and encourages collaboration rather than competition.

## Control systems

Amazon developed important measures to maintain a high level of quality and productivity

across its distribution centers. Some of the measurements are employee performance, things picked per hour, inventory correctness, and so forth. Due to their credo of deliver at any cost, Amazon faced significant costs at first. To avoid future losses, Amazon began counting the number of hours between order confirmation and delivery.

### Power structures

Amazon's power is dispersed from the top down. In July 2021, Amazon's founder Jeff Bezos handed over the reins to Andy Jassy, who took over as CEO. Jeff Bezos currently serves as the organization's executive chairman. Outside of the group of top-level executives, few individuals are aware of Amazon's management structure. Nonetheless, some top-level executives clearly have more control than others. All things considered, the cultural web model is a great tool for tapping into the pulse of your organization, even through it is not a perfect one.

## Advantages

- The cultural web approach provides a full assessment of corporate culture
- It aids in recognizing a company's strengths and weaknesses. Hence, it aids in improving those areas
- This model aids in determining the company's course of action to achieve its objectives
- Moreover, this model is helpful in formulating a strategy for positive change
- Beneficial in developing a clear strategy for the future

## Disadvantages

- The process is time-intensive and demands attention
- Conducting objective assessments might be tough
- Furthermore, interpreting the results obtained is tough. Therefore, the company should involve expert teams or individuals to discover solutions to move forward

## Summary

The performance of an organization is influenced by its culture, no matter how big or small it is. When it comes to the organization's future, culture is extremely important. According to Johnson and Scholes' cultural web, corporate culture is linked to both how employees interact with one another and how the organisation interacts with the outside world. Even though a strong company culture promotes unity, subcultures will always exist to cause discord. The advantages of a strong organisational culture are difficult to duplicate and give the company a significant competitive edge. The cultural web model, when properly implemented, can help understand what makes a company's culture unique, as well as what can be done to improve the company's performance and success