

“I did not see that coming.”



Have you unexpectedly tripped over or full-out smacked into a facet of an organization’s culture? This can happen when you enter a new company, but also can happen when you move to another area or take an internal promotion that lands you on a new playing field. The following questions to ask and things to observe can help you to *proactively* uncover aspects of your workplace culture, so you can get things done more effectively – and minimize those brick-wall bruises!

Questions to ASK:

1. What 3 words would you use to describe the culture here?
2. Around here what's really important?
3. Around here what gets rewarded? Who gets promoted?
4. Around here who fits in and who doesn't fit in?
5. How would you describe the organization's management style?
6. What's the biggest source of frustration here?
7. In communicating, do people stick with a strict formal hierarchy? Or is it okay to go to whoever you think you need to go to? How many levels up do you need to go for approval?
8. How do you set up a meeting? How are meetings run?
9. How are decisions made? Centralized or decentralized?
10. Is there a certain person or department that you traditionally struggle with?
11. What is the key to success here?
12. How is a typical project run around here?
13. What would you say is the glue that holds things together around here?
14. Are there any on-boarding materials for new people?

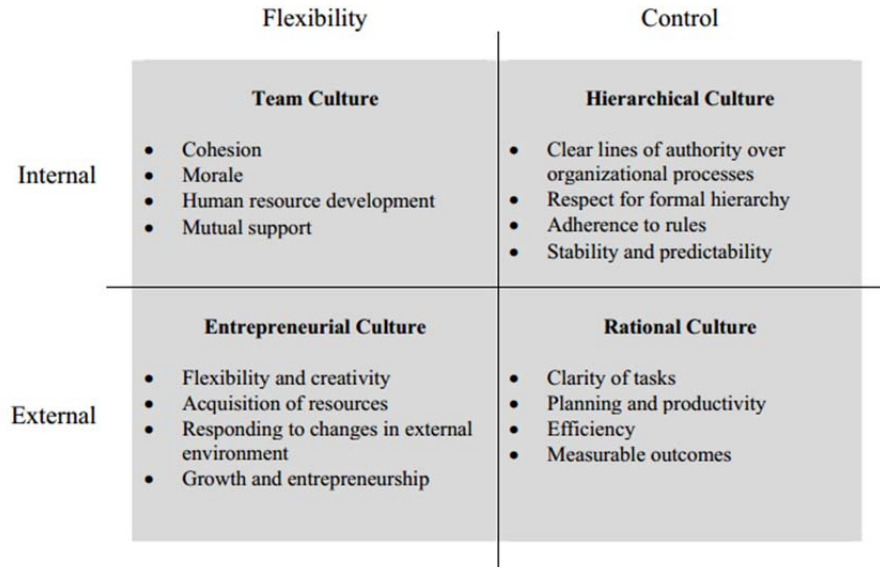
Things to OBSERVE that can clue you in to values and culture:

1. What do people do on their breaks and lunch? Socialize with each other, or not?
2. Listen to conversations, in meetings and informally – congenial? contentious? civil? How often are “customers” and “investors” brought up?
3. How is email used? For everything, or more selectively? Directive vs. collaborative tone?
4. Do people laugh?
5. Does the arrangement of furniture and allocation of space encourage collaboration?
6. Is there a dress code? Casual? Formal? Do all levels follow the same dress code?
7. What is the turnover rate (movement in and out of the group or organization)?
8. Are there open positions (in the group or organization)? If so, why is it open – or why was it created? How long has it been open? What happened to the previous person in your role?
9. Is the company or workgroup involved in community projects?
10. Is there a PMO? Did there used to be one? If so, why was it dissolved?
11. Do employees typically quote the company mission statement or is it mocked?
12. How do people deal with differences in national culture? Awkward? Insensitive? Do people ask sincere questions in an effort to understand and appreciate such differences?

Helpful source: Hagberg Consulting Group, <http://www.hagbergconsulting.com/>

The Competing Values Framework¹

This framework is the most traditional way of assessing organizational culture. It assesses culture along two dimensions: **Control** (vs. Flexibility) and **Focus** (Internal vs. External).



Entrepreneurial (Flexible, External Focus)

My facility is a very dynamic and entrepreneurial place. People are willing to stick their necks out and take risks. Managers in my facility are risk-takers. They encourage employees to take risks and be innovative. The glue that holds my facility together is commitment to innovation and development. There is an emphasis on being first. My facility emphasizes growth and acquiring new resources. Readiness to meet new challenges is important.

Hierarchical (Control, Internal Focus)

My facility is a very formalized and structured place. Bureaucratic procedures generally govern what people do. Managers in my facility are rule-enforcers. They expect employees to follow established rules, policies, and procedures. The glue that holds my facility together is formal rules and policies. People feel that following the rules is important. My facility emphasizes permanence and stability. Keeping things the same is important.

Team (Flexible, Internal Focus)

Managers in my facility are warm and caring. They seek to develop employees' full potential and act as their mentors or guides. The glue that holds my facility together is loyalty and tradition. Commitment to this facility runs high. My facility emphasizes human resources. High cohesion and morale in the organization are important.

Rational (Control, External Focus)

Managers in my facility are coordinators and coaches. They help employees meet the facility's goals and objectives. The glue that holds my facility together is the emphasis on tasks and goal accomplishment. A production orientation is commonly shared. My facility emphasizes competitive actions and achievement. Measurable goals are important.

¹ Helfrich et al. (2007) "Assessing an organizational culture instrument based on the Competing Values Framework: Exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses", *Implementation Science* (2:13).