

Assignment Help Guide Series



Examine the extent to which culture can be managed. Support your view with reference to the relevant organization theories.

This assignment help guide is offering advice and help to MBA students about how to address assignment topics.

Our intention with this guide is to offer you guidance instead of presenting you with the actual assignment.

We are able to help you with your assignments no matter at what stage you are.

Contact us to discuss your exact needs by email at support@mbawinner.com

MBA Winner

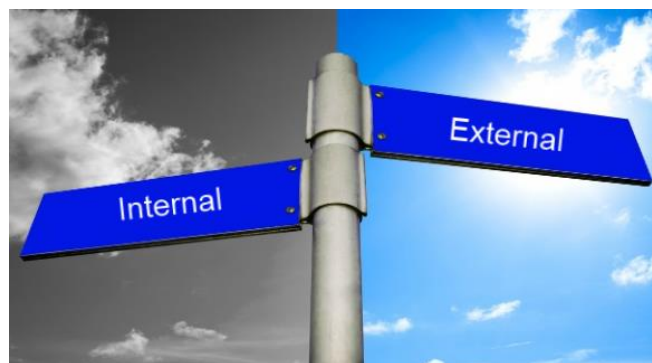
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If you have been given an assignment that resembles the one presented in this guide you will notice that it has 2 parts:

1. Examine the extent to which culture can be managed.
2. Support your view with reference to the relevant organization theories.

1. Examine the extent to which culture can be managed.

Before you start to discuss about whether culture can be managed or not it is important to start from the conceptual foundations. **You need to discuss about culture and its position within the academic literature *before* anything else.** Understanding theories about culture can become a confusing task. This is because there is no one single definition about culture used consistently between authors. This can make your task more difficult by means of identifying the specific terms that you should discuss in your work. In order to help you make a start on your work we want you to think of culture in terms of two dimensions: the *internal* dimension and the *external* dimension.



The *internal side* of culture is situated within deep seated values and views about the world. Most of the things that we consider important we do not even think of them as such in the first place. Instead, we come to consider them as important because of the way we have grown up with them. By thinking of culture in light of its 'internal' dimension you can identify the ambiguity of the term and the difficulties that researchers face when seeking to describe it. Deep seated beliefs are considered principles. We come to think of what is 'right' or 'wrong' in light of the way we have become accustomed to these principles and without question their origins.



In a similar way organizations are made up of belief systems. Such beliefs concern how people *should* work and relate to each other. They also include elements of *performance, commitment* and what to do when faced with certain challenges at the work place.

- ➔ As you work into examining those elements that make up culture but which are not explicit or detectable, start to develop brief descriptions about whether they can be *managed* or not. This activity will help you to become reflective on the topic and how best you can approach it.

The *external side* of culture is one where researchers identified as the behavioural dimension as more visible and detectable. This dimension includes how individuals ‘act’ but also what they ‘wear’ and how they ‘communicate’. The external dimension becomes easier to detect because it is visible. You can see whether people are dressed formally or informally. Some organizations have a particular dress code.

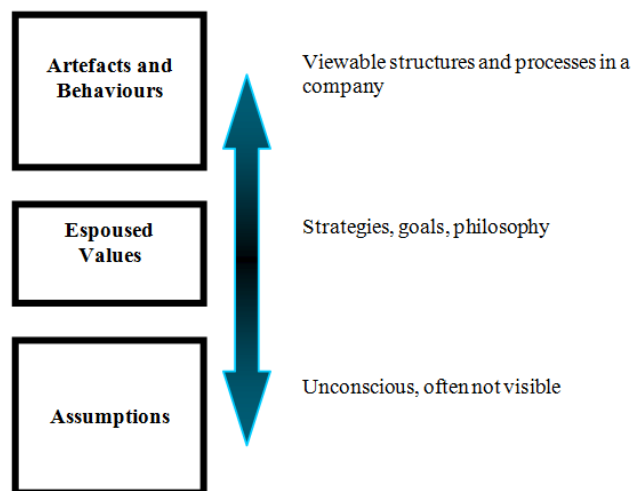


Theories of Culture

One of the more popular theories about culture and organizations is the one developed by Edgar Schein. In this theory Schein identifies with culture as having *three* separate layers that remain connected to each other. Let us look at the following diagram in order to better understand how the different layers communicate. In this simple diagram you will recognise three separate layers, namely, (a) artefacts and behaviours, (b) espoused values and (c) assumptions.



We will start from the bottom layer and we will work our way up.



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Assumptions

In discussing about assumptions you need to make reference to those ideas that become learned before someone realizes them to be so!

- Why is the study of *assumptions* important in this diagram?

It is important because everyone makes sense of the world through their experience! Beliefs start to emerge from the point when we are *not able* to understand why something happens. In organizations assumptions can concern some of the following indicative beliefs:

- If we work really hard for our customers we will achieve their loyalty and favour
- Working hard means doing anything that it takes including working long hours
- Employees need to be proactive in the way they identify with the an opportunity for generating income for the business
- The management know what is the best decision in a difficult situation
- Do not challenge your boss because you might loose your job!

The above list of statements demonstrates a set of simple ideas. Notice that in every statement there is some kind of claim. For example, 'working hard' leads onto 'customer loyalty'. The study of assumptions becomes important for understanding how culture becomes a property of an organization. Assumptions are communicated often by the people who have ownership or authority in the business. However, they can also be communicated from other members in the organization provided that they have the right and opportunity for such contribution. In discussing about the case of 'assumptions' and in the context of Schein's framework it is important to demonstrate an understanding of those invisible elements that remain hidden and yet they are important because they guide people in believing what is important or not.

Espoused Values

In discussing about 'values' Schein identifies that there is a **middle layer** that stands between 'artefacts and behaviours' and 'assumptions'. This is the middle layer. Here things get states in a more open and explicit way. Values are ways with which what is important becomes more vigorously established. The more common method of communicating a set of values in an organization is through its corporate values but also mission statement. In this part of your assignment you can easily access a number of widely available 'corporate values' by different firms and compare them.

Let's take as an example BBC's core values listed below

Try to identify which of the following core values you might be able to discuss and analyse more comfortably.

Then compare and contrast some of the values and identify what is the overall impression that they are creating in your thinking.

The BBC's values

Trust is the foundation of the BBC; we are independent, impartial and honest

We're truthful and fair in all our dealings. We make decisions based on our values, stick by them and take responsibility for them. We behave with integrity and do what we say we're going to do.

Audiences are at the heart of everything we do

We put audience needs first. We recognise that audiences are not all like us and our friends, so we make sure we know how their needs are changing. And we adapt.

We take pride in delivering quality and value for money

We are demanding of ourselves. We ask for help when we need it and know where we need to up our game. We challenge waste and spend money as if it were our own. We channel our energy into making things better and change or stop things that aren't working.

Creativity is the lifeblood of our organisation

We're brave. We innovate and demonstrate creative ambition, trying new things and embracing new technology. We seek out different perspectives, others' ideas and opinions. We seize opportunities to train ourselves, develop our careers and try new roles.

We respect each other and celebrate our diversity

We respect all our colleagues, whoever they are. We're honest, direct and always courteous. We challenge others' ideas but we respect decisions once made. We are ambassadors for our organisation; we speak out if something is not right and deal with it within the BBC.

We are one BBC; great things happen when we work together

We work across all our teams to create more for audiences, sharing ideas and involving others to improve them. We make connections inside and outside the BBC and learn from the wider industry.

Source: www.bbc.co.uk

Notice two things:

1. How intentions are articulated in the above values
2. How language is used to establish key statements within the values

As you work through the different values try to think of how they might relate to also to *key assumptions*. It is possible to see that in the case of the BBC there is a long history behind its establishment and it is strongly identified with a sense of continuation about transparency and independent reporting.



- BBC does not allow advertising in order to be independent in the course of its access and presentation of information.
- The *assumption* of not getting money and hence being 'independent' is a key feature in its journalistic existence.
- Espoused values are explicit statement. This helps us understand of what is meant by 'organizational culture' and how it actually works as a concept in action.

Artefacts and Behaviours

We come to the third aspect of our analysis which is the 'artefacts and behaviours'. Here we are interested in examining the most visible and presentable area. Artefacts include things like *space* and *materials* to mention only two.

- Some organizations have great design buildings.
- They expect their employees to be well dressed and to look professional at all times.
- Why do they do this?

Because the 'outer' layer is thought to be of manifestation of the 'middle' and 'inner' layers. Behaviours include the type of 'language' that people are allowed or not allowed to use in the workplace. Some organizations can identify the significance of an accent and how their employees make contact with customers. As you can see...artefacts and behaviours represent the most visible and evident qualities.

→The question is whether such behaviours carry within them the values and assumptions that we discussed earlier.

According to Schein organizational culture remains an entity that needs to accommodate all three elements well! Furthermore, it needs to account for how the qualities situated within each of the layers is going to travel on the next layer. Once you understand the above proposition you will be in a position to do well with managing the first part of the assignment. Let us now turn onto the second part!

PART 2

The management of organizational culture and use of relevant theories

The big question that your tutor wants you to discuss at this point is this: *can culture be managed after all that what you have discussed so far?* Explaining whether culture can be considered an 'entity' which can be 'managed' in its 'totality' becomes the more tricky part of the question. This is because the answer to this question will depend on how someone thinks of the word 'management'. *Does management mean that someone needs to exercise*

complete control over it? The ambiguity of the question should enable you to consider how well you can address this equally important part. In the following part we give you guidance so that you can make a strong start!



The management of culture

Arguments about the management of culture can take two forms.

- The *first* is to focus on the management of those beliefs and values which come to be considered significant for both management and employees. Can these beliefs be managed in the interaction between people?
- The *second* is to focus about management in more 'processual terms'. This means that the management process does not operate as a causal relationship between 'inputs and outputs'.

Change within beliefs and values will not materialize as we expect them. Hence, the management of culture is more about the management of these *ongoing conditions* that come to be considered significant in the way all elements situated in the different layers need to be managed TOGETHER.

If we survey the literature on organizational culture we will notice the premise that deeply seated beliefs contribute to those behaviours that over time become an intimate part of the person's *experience*. This means that the person is not able to unlearn such behaviours or do so easily and successfully.

As the embodiment of those beliefs remain situated at the 'unconscious level' (see the previous diagram) it can be inferred that they time to develop and they are not able to change once they materialize. The implication of this observation is that the management of an organization might want to introduce a set of beliefs onto employees. *However*, such beliefs will need to take time to develop as ideas and behaviours.



There is a greater level of ambiguity in understanding how individuals might experience and also try to integrate a set of new beliefs. This line of thinking leads us to the premise that *culture becomes difficult to manage as a single event*. Instead, we need to see it as a 'process' where **time** ↑ can play an important role with how new or/and different beliefs are going to be materialized in the experience of individuals.

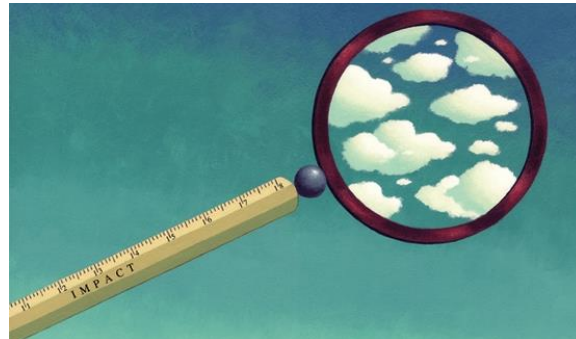
Another issue we need to address is the possibility of assumptions, beliefs and values employees are introduced into and how such activity brings them onto possible forms of tension/struggle with those beliefs that remain individual-centred. In this line of argument you can make the case of how individual and *already* existing value that operate within individuals and as part of their national cultures. This view needs to be taken into consideration *before* we can know whether the organizational culture can be managed.

In some occasions the individuals can ascribe to different religious or political ideas to the organization and as part of their country of origins. To what extent can we know whether business ideas are going to operate in 'harmony' or be found at 'conflict' with each other? The answer to this question is dependent on those personal beliefs remain subjected to the management of these 'other' behaviours. Such behaviours can involve how activities like, 'communication', 'engagement' and 'information-sharing' take places between people. Arguments that can challenge the view that culture can be managed can focus on some of the following ideas.

- Assumptions do not often change or take considerable time to change
- Values are often only written on paper
- Behaviours can be easier to change through some form of coercive action (e.g. penalties)

Artefacts - Behaviours and the outer layer

The management of culture is also situated in 'artefacts and behaviours'. This is the more **visible layers**. You can 'touch' it and 'feel' it.



The argument can be made for how culture becomes more likely to manage as an entity by influencing this 'outer layer'. A change of artefacts (e.g. dress-code, the use of open-offices, etc..) can be more manageable in terms of treating them as 'entities'. Imagine how employees are suddenly asked to dress more formally when they come to work. Why such request might be made onto them? The deeper intension might focus on the formality or the presentation of what individuals do and how they look of themselves. Going to work with a tuxedo is certainly pushing you to think very differently about what you do! In this respect the change of the outer layer can become a 'symbolic space' for influencing how people think about what they do.

Such argument would be reasonable and well received by a tutor as the different layers emphasised through Schein's diagram are not to be viewed as moving in one direction. As you noticed in the previous diagram the arrows move into both direction. This means that influences that come from the top layers cascade down to the bottom layer and vice versa.

Be Careful !

In case you happen to be new onto the study of organizational culture you might consider that you need to produce a more definitive answer for whether culture can be managed or not. *Be careful as you do not have to do this!* The question is design to probe you to think more creatively about the concept of 'management' and the elusiveness of the concept of 'culture'.



It is not your task to really suggest that culture can be managed or not!

Your main job is to discuss 'how' and 'why' culture can be managed and the EXTENT to which it can be managed. This type of answer would demonstrate to a much greater extent that you understand the different debates about this elusive concept and that you are willing to support your view and position on it.

In this guide we only touched upon ideas that you should develop in the main body of the work.

Our examples are illustrative only and aim at offering you guidance and illustrations for how you can best develop your work.

If you require further input on strengthening your assignment then email us at support@mbawinner.com