

Using the Organizational Cultural Assessment (OCAI) as a Tool for New Team Development

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The Organizational Cultural Assessment Instrument (OCAI) is a psychometric tool developed by Cameron and Quinn (2006). Its purpose is to help organizations identify their current and preferred culture. Through the use of a simple survey, participants identify their perceptions of both existing culture and their desired future culture. Organizations can then utilize these results to assess both the current cultural state and also to identify gaps between current and desired futures.

This article evaluates the use of this psychometric tool as a tool for team development for a new leader. The tool was used with a brand new organizational leader at both the start of his new job and the end of his first year. Results from the OCAI were gathered and shared with the leader and his team after both assessments in order to provide the new leader with a tool for leadership development. Based upon the results and the experience of participants, the usefulness of the OCAI as a tool for new leaders was then assessed. Its usefulness will be viewed from several perspectives: the leader, the consultant and the coach.

Purpose

The purpose of this article is to evaluate the effectiveness of the use of a psychometric tool for a new organizational leader. The tool, the Organizational Cultural Assessment Instrument (OCAI), was developed by Cameron and Quinn (2006) as a means for organizations to quantify organizational culture. More importantly, OCAI results provide a means by which organizations can navigate organizational change successfully (p. vii). While this tool has been used in over 10,000 organizations with more than 100,000 individuals, the application of the tool in this situation was unique, as it was utilized specifically with a new leader and his team. Therefore, the goal was to test its usefulness for a new leader and the development of his new team.

OCAI Background

This section will provide a basic overview of the OCAI for those unfamiliar with the instrument. Cameron and Quinn's (2006) premise is that strong organizational culture is a key to corporate

profitability (p. 2 & 5). Organizational culture “is the set of key values, beliefs, and norms shared by members of an organization. Organizational cultures serve two critically important functions—to integrate members so that they know how to relate to one another and to help the organization adapt to the external environment” (Daft, 2007). Studies show that congruence between individual and organizational culture contributes to higher levels of performance (Cameron & Quinn, 2006).

Therefore, without a corresponding shift in organizational culture, attempts to change an organization’s results will have a low chance of achieving “enduring improvement in organizational performance” (p. 11). This challenge is exacerbated by the fact that many organizations neither understand their current culture nor the preferred culture which would best help them achieve their goals. Furthermore, cultural change is vital because “when the values, orientations, definitions, and goals stay constant - even when procedures and strategies are altered - organizations [and individuals] return quickly to the status quo” (p. 11).

The OCAI instrument is built on Cameron & Quinn's competing values framework (p. 31-61). The framework is rooted in considerable research in the field of organizational culture and aligns with well-accepted cultural categorical themes – the way people think, their values, assumptions and how they process information (p. 33). The research revealed six key dimensions which formed the basis of their framework on organizational culture: dominant cultural characteristics, organizational leadership, management of employees, organizational glue, strategic emphasis and criteria for success (p. 26-28).

These categories yielded two key cultural dimensions, each with a competing value. The first dimension is determining if a company's culture is internally or externally focused (p. 34). The second dimension is whether organizations acted with flexibility or with stability (p. 34). When placed on two axes, these two dimensions form four quadrants, each representing a distinct set of organizational effectiveness indicators (p. 35). A graphical presentation of the competing values framework can be found in Figure 1.



Figure 1: Organizational Effectiveness Indicators

It is important to note that Cameron and Quinn do not endorse one ideal culture. Rather, cultural effectiveness is a byproduct of matching culture with a company's vision, values and strategy. Further definitions of each quadrant are provided in the sidebar.

Case Study Background

The OCAI was used with a new leader and his team in an academic setting in North America. The leader, a Vice President of Academics at a publically-funded college, agreed to conduct the OCAI with his team at the beginning of his term and again near the end of his first year. As someone who was hired to facilitate change in his division, he expressed interest in understanding the culture he was going to step into as well as assessing how culture changed under his leadership after a year.

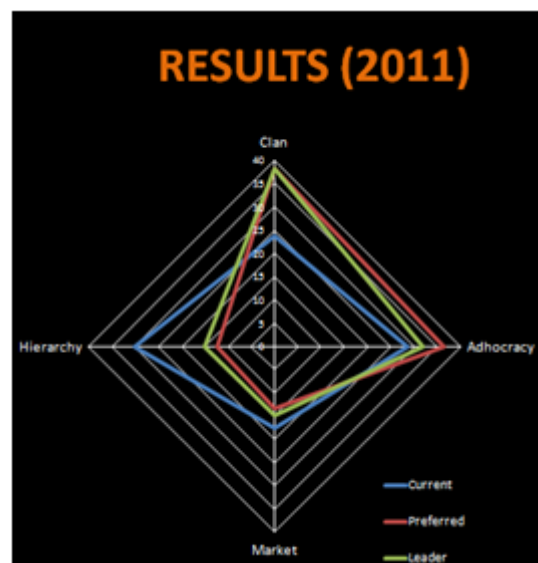
The assessment was conducted with his team in July 2011 and a results briefing was given in September to all who participated. A second assessment was conducted in April 2012 with another team results briefing in May. All participants were guaranteed anonymity and all results were presented anonymously with the exception of the Vice President, who chose to share his results for comparative and team-building purposes. While no one was required to participate, all employees chose to. In some cases, participants chose not to answer questions about "current culture" because they were too new to the organization to be able to adequately assess the state of the current culture.

Each time the instrument was used, participants completed the same OCAI survey from Cameron and Quinn (2006), which was in delivered in two parts. Part I had respondents answer 24 questions from the perspective of what the organizational culture is currently like. Part II had respondents answer the same 24 questions but from the perspective of what their preferred organizational culture would be in the future.

Findings

2011

The initial survey results revealed a overall desire to make considerable changes from the current culture (blue line vs. red line). What was remarkable was how congruent the preferred future of



Culture Definitions

Clan Culture “is characterized by a friendly place to work that feels like an extended family. Leaders are thought of as mentors and perhaps even as parent figures. The organization is held together by loyalty and tradition. Commitment is high. The organization emphasizes the long-term benefit of individual development, with high cohesion and morale being important. The organization places a premium on teamwork, participation, and consensus.”

Adhocracy Culture “is characterized by a dynamic, entrepreneurial, and creative workplace. People stick their necks out and take risks. Effective leadership is visionary, innovative, and risk-oriented. The glue that holds the organization together is commitment to experimentation and innovation. The emphasis is on being at the leading edge of new knowledge, products, and services. Readiness for change and meeting new challenges are important. The organization’s long-term emphasis is on rapid growth and acquiring new resources.”

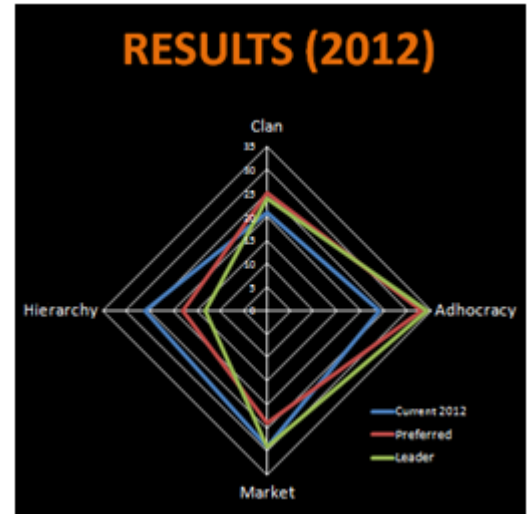
Hierarchy Culture “is characterized by a formalized and structured place to work. Procedures govern what people do. Effective leaders are good coordinators and organizers. Maintaining a smooth-running organization is important. The long-term concerns of the organization are stability, predictability, and efficiency. Formal rules and policies hold the organization together.”

Market Culture “is a results-oriented workplace. Leaders are hard-driving producers and competitors. They are tough and demanding. The glue that holds the organization together is an emphasis on winning. The long-term concern is on competitive actions and achieving stretch goals and targets. Outpacing the competition and market leadership are important.”

the new leader (green line) and his team (red line) were, despite not having worked together yet. Therefore, the initial results revealed an amenable opportunity which both the team and the new leader responded to favorably.

2012

The second survey revealed that there were still gaps between current and preferred cultures though they were less significant than a year earlier. Primarily, hierarchy culture was still more predominant than both the team and the leader wanted to achieve. However, while both the team and the leader want hierarchy to decrease further in the future, we now find the leader wanting a greater decrease in this culture than his team. The greatest preferred future shift for both the team and the leader was for an increase in adhocracy. Finally, we find the leader and the team having a mild gap in their preferred future in the area of market culture. In this cultural category the leader wanted to maintain this cultural element while his team desires a decrease in this culture.



Comparing Current and Future: 2011 vs. 2012

Finally, we will compare two additional sets of data.

First, we will compare the actual culture in 2011 with the culture achieved one year later in 2012 (Figure 2). This chart reveals that significant changes in culture were achieved over the period of one year as every category shows significant variation. Market culture showed the most marked difference. It is interesting to note that this is a category where there was a gap between desired future of the leader and his team.

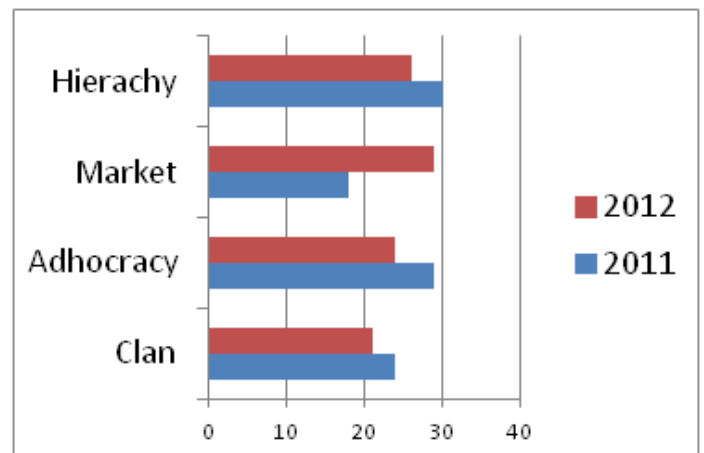


Figure 2: Current

Second, we will compare how participant views of preferred culture changed over a year (Figure 3). This was done by comparing the 2011 responses about preferred future with 2012. Here again, we find that participants expressed remarkable difference between their desired culture over a period of time. Within a period of 12 months, almost all categories showed significant differences.

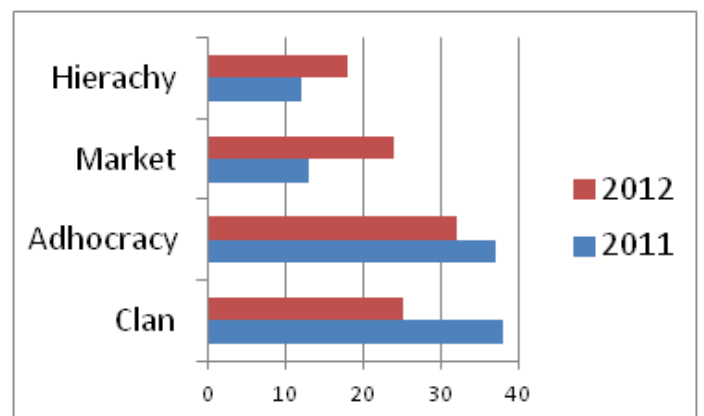


Figure 3: Future

Conclusions

While these findings are informative, the purpose of the longitudinal study was to determine the value for a new leader and new team development. To evaluate this, we will review three different perspectives.

Perspective 1: The Leader

Personal interviews with the leader revealed that the OCAI was a helpful tool in his leadership repository. The results of the survey confirmed that significant changes in culture needed to occur under his leadership. Furthermore, the initial survey revealed he had a team that was ready for change, a fortuitous situation. Given his lack of organizational experience at this institution, the results provided him with valuable insights into the past and helped prepare him for barriers he should expect. During his debrief, he noted that simply conducting the survey, apart from its results, was an effective way for him to signal to his team that changes in organizational culture were important.

While discussing the changes in culture which occurred, it was noted that the desired level of change in hierarchy was not yet realized after a year. In response, he noted that, given the large amount of cultural change which needed to occur, the change process was gradual and that "change needed to be prioritized and sequenced" in order to be realized over time. He also noted that the knowledge he gained about the OCAI framework allowed him to work with his team more effectively. For example, understanding the questionnaire allowed him to identify team members who were personally low or high in certain cultural categories. This allowed him to better manage and lead these employees as he understood their cultural preferences and biases. Overall, the new leader found that the OCAI provided useful information which helped him manage his team and lead the process of cultural change which was required.

Perspective 2: The Consultant

This project also revealed considerable potential benefit for a consultant working with a new leader and/or their team. First, the tool provided a valuable baseline measurement of corporate culture. Furthermore, data could be gathered and analyzed in ways which would reveal whether groups or sub-groups within an organization viewed current and future cultures differently (this could be particularly helpful when working with a fractious cultural situation). Second, this instrument presents results which are easily understood and can be shared with participants quickly and without in-depth background. Results can then be used to set expectations, foster discussion about desired norms or even shape future expectations together (the latter is a key recommendation for the use of this tool from Cameron and Quinn). The survey results also create accountability and can be used as a coaching tool. Finally, the instrument is easy to use while still providing a significant depth of insight. The psychometric tool presents a consultant with a myriad of ways to step into a situation (both internal and external consultants), assess the culture, and then begin to work with a leader or team to create a preferred culture.

Perspective 3: The Coach

While this consulting relationship was not of a coaching or mentoring capacity, the results revealed several ways that it could be of high value in this setting. Coaching could be applied in several different forms: coach to leader, coach to team, leader to subordinates or leader to

organization. As stated above, the simplicity, measurability, and accountability provided by the instrument make it easy to apply. Coaching goals could be developed to assist the leader in steering cultural change or working with team members to help them affect change, especially if cultural views within the organization are different. Finally, a coach could work with the leader to help him develop his team as organizational coaches to lead organizational change. This exercise demonstrated strong value as a coaching tool.

Further Research

Findings from this preliminary research demonstrate value for the OCAI for new leaders and new team development. However, continued research is needed to validate this and explore questions which this project did not answer.

First, the significant differences between preferred futures over a year revealed that new teams may not be able to set realistic cultural preferences without a context of how things will operate under a new leader. Further research could help determine if this is typical or not. Second, several employee transitions occurred under this new leader over the period of a year. As a result, studies about how the loss and addition of new employees and how this affects the assessment process could be insightful. Third, further research could take a longer timeframe snapshot (two to three years) to determine if there are normative cultural development patterns over time. Ideally, it would be helpful to do this with multiple teams in order to determine if patterns exist in different situations. Further research could also occur to assess how gender affects culture and how the specific context of higher education normalizes to other categorical segments.

Conclusion

This project revealed that the use of the OCAI with a new leader and his team provides considerable benefits. In addition to the intended benefits this tool provides, new leaders can specifically benefit from an early identification of the culture they are stepping into. Furthermore, they can then assess whether they will be encountering alignment or misalignment in the future. The tool has usefulness in coaching situations and can be an effective way for consultants to help an organization achieve changes. These conclusions would benefit by further longitudinal research, breadth of research with other new leaders, and the analysis of how accurate a new team's projections of desired culture can be. However, even without further study, Cameron and Quinn's Organizational Cultural Assessment Instrument is a useful tool for new leaders as they seek to evaluate and affect organizational culture in order to achieve desired goals.

About the Author

Jeff Suderman owns a consulting company that works with businesses and non-profit organizations. He focuses his work on diagnosing business problems and developing solutions to help achieve mission effectiveness. His specialties lie in the area of strategic planning, strategic foresight, leadership development, and enhancing team effectiveness. He is especially passionate about the need to use foresight to enhance the limitations of traditional strategic planning. Mr. Suderman has also spent over 20 years as an administrator in Post-Secondary Education industry.

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