

# IMPORTANCE OF CULTURE IN TQM

*Raghu Ananthanarayanan*

The only real source of energy in organisations Human inputs form a critical part in the conversion process i.e. conversion of input into output. The utilisation of human energy and potential in organisational processes can be seen to be determined by four factors.

Structural authority where management decisions are made.

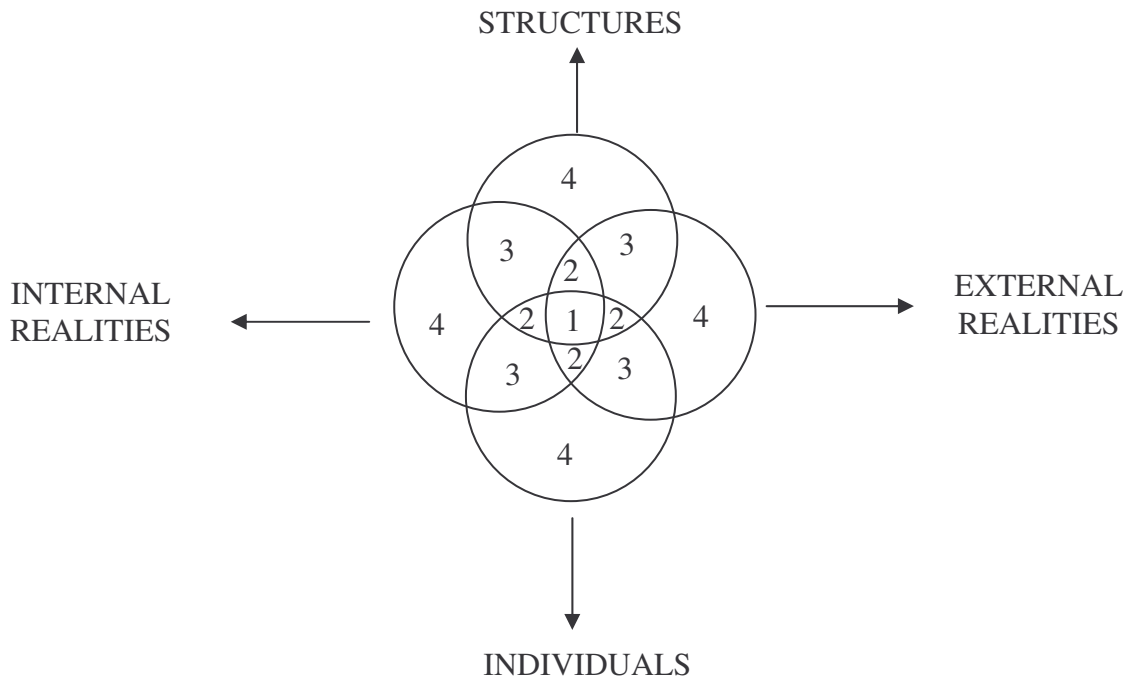
Individuals who operationalise these decisions.

External realities such as change in technology, market trends and so on.

Internal realities of the organisation – broadly its systems, practices and technology.

The nature of the overlap or convergence between these four factors determines the way in which the organisation is energised by its people. The nature of the overlap / convergence has a unique quality to it. It can be conceptualised as four envelopes each containing a specific set of processes.

Figure 1



Envelop : 1 – Area of Energy Flow

Envelop : 2 – Areas in the process of coherence and action

Envelop : 3 – Area of stress and waste of potential

Envelop : 4 – Area of waste in terms of opportunities lost

#### ENVELOP 1

Is the area, where all four factors overlap and hence alive with processes that enhance synergy and cohesiveness. Individual tasks are aligned to organisational goals and individuals understand and interpret organisation and business realities in ways that converge and create consensus. There is synergy, growth, identification, belonging, creativity and initiative at both individual and organisational levels.

#### ENVELOPS : 2,3

Are potential areas for energy and growth. Here there is waste of potential and energies not channelised into creative possibilities. The challenge is to tap this energy through creating responsive systems structures and institutions for catharsis, review and regeneration. While Area 2 is where actions and initiatives seem hopeful, Area 3 is one of stress and conflict.

#### ENVELOP : 4

Is characterised by complete lack of co-ordination and coherence resulting in operational and information blocks. Individuals experience blocked initiative, stress and lack of evocation and ownership of organisational goals.

Organisations where Envelop –1 is small and Envelop – 3 and 4 are large have a role taking context where managers experience skepticism, fall back on self interest and become mere recipients of the given realities. Increasing Area-1 means transforming these anchors of role taking. Organisation transformation, then, involves increasing boundaries of role taking and creating greater understanding of the four factors mentioned above, through developing an “appropriate culture”.

One cannot expect an employee to respect wastage, if he does not feel valued and his skills and capabilities are not recognised. The amount of waste of human potential and energy is then an index of the organisational culture. To understand the relationship between human energy and organisation culture, we need to use new biological models and discard older mechanical models.

## **What is Organisation Culture?**

Each person's experience of the organisation is like one part of a jigsaw puzzle. It contains the experience and resultant feelings that he carries from his years of working in the organisation : His experience of other people – Collective history held in people's memories; properties and expectations of others in the organisations.

His experience of the Technology – The delivery mechanisms that convert raw inputs into goods and services

His experience of the Systems – Channels through which systemic resources can be mobilised

His experience of the Structure – Authority, power and ownership

Most often this experience is an unintended consequence of managerial decisions and actions. Each part of the puzzle contains an admixture of his personal and particular context and its overlap with the organisational context.

Persons through their experience in the company develop an understanding of what :

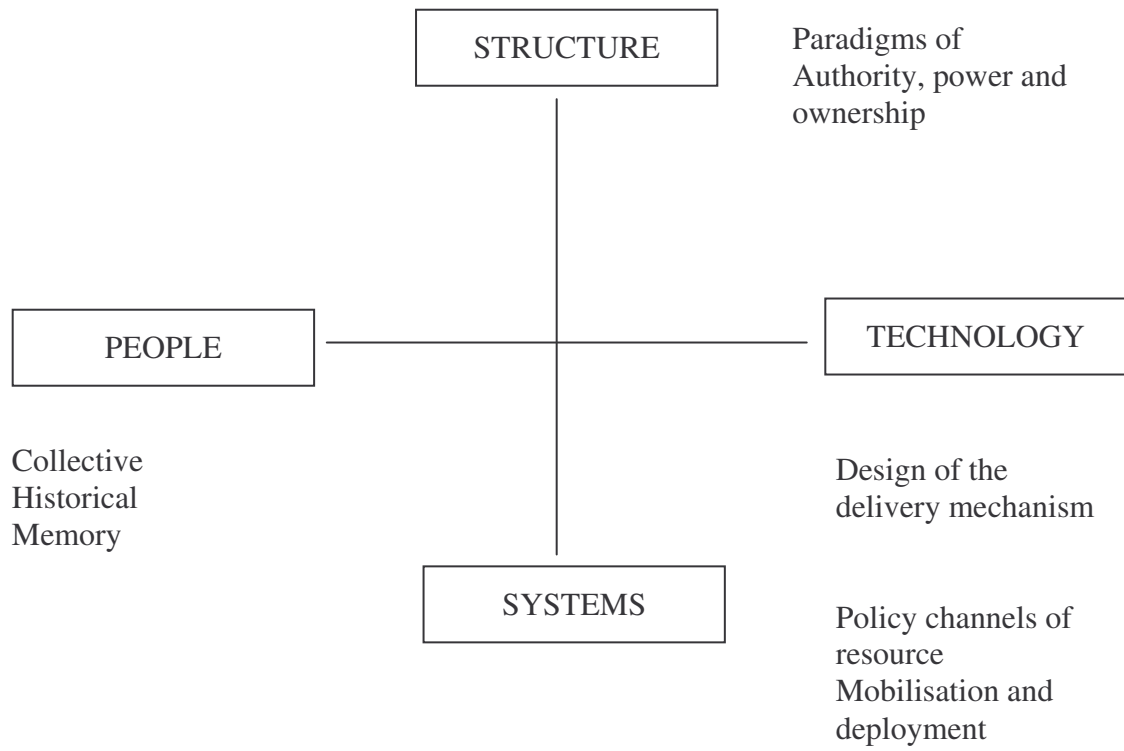
They must be blind to and what they can see

Cannot be articulated and what can be used

Cannot be owned up and what can be owned up

Cannot be acted up and what can be acted upon.

Figure 2



The envelopes 1 and 2 (Refer Fig.1) are the areas bound by the definitions “What can be seen, stated, owned up and acted upon.” Areas outside this boundary are the areas of cultural negatives.

This experience of the organisation is held within each person as strong feelings and conclusions about the nature and processes of the company. Because of the inability to bring these feelings and perceptions into the company they stay unresolved in the person and eroding his role taking processes and his feeling of partnership with the company.

In the organisational context these issues accumulate and cascade downwards. Urgency and time consciousness, decision making, quality of work, ability to confront issues, ability to listen and respond and the like get affected adversely.

This complex of each person's experience and residual feelings form the ground of the organisation culture. Organisations seldom provide psychologically secure institutions where these feelings can be shared, become a resource to the organisation, and become the basis of organisational reviews. Small pockets of "grumbling clubs" or "Crib clubs" are the only places where these feelings are vented. These clubs by their very nature become holders of negative feelings. These negative feelings and impressions have a way of filtering downward in an organisation.

They are finally articulated by the staff through the unions. The unions take up those issues that are legally defensible and on which they can take a stand. The rest of the underlying feelings become their fuel. A potentially powerful emotional energy of the organisation thus rarely finds positive expression within the organisational framework. The envelop 3 described earlier is the container of these processes.

This ground of feelings and personal interpretation becomes a major component of the working of an organisation. It holds the preoccupation and human energies of the employees. Every organisational process is mediated by this, though only the tangibles and measurable features are taken into account in the decision making. Problems that surface are a manifestation of these unexamined complex. Normal attempts at problem solving only alter the form of the problem and never its content. A steady state is then reached where a class of problems get thrown up appearing in different forms or as chronic problems all over the organisation. Only a resolution of the underlying issues will change this "state" of the organisation. This means finding a new ground and perspective from which to approach the problems.

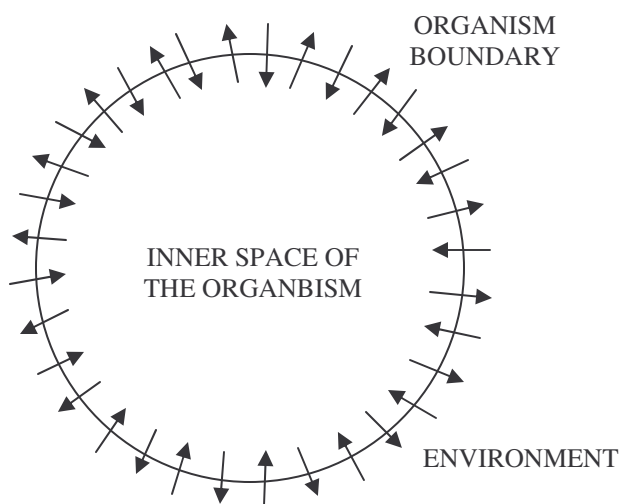
The processes by which tissue cultures are created in a lab, present a close analogy to these processes. A nutrient medium is prepared which will selectively nourish certain types of tissues or cells. A smear that contains these tissues or cells when introduced into the nutrient medium will flourish and grow. Other types of cells will die. The boundaries created in an organisation by the tacit understanding of its people of "that which is admissible and that which is not" is very much like this culture medium. Culture is best understood in the biological sense -- as a set of processes that nurture particular forms of life and are antagonistic to other forms of life.

Let us examine a biological organism in its essential features. The process of this system offers an analogy that might be better suited to our search for an Organisation system than the present models that are drawn mostly from the ‘ clock work ‘ of the system (i.e. gear wheels, cogs and drive springs).

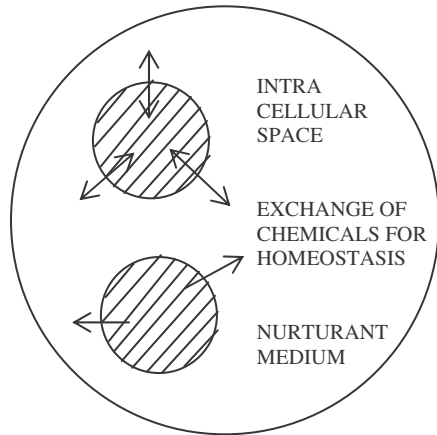
1. The system is separated from the environment by a semi permeable membrane. This membrane acts as a boundary between the “inside” and the “outside” of the entity. The boundary is able to let into the entity only some elements from the outside in order to nourish and maintain the health of the entity.
2. The inside of the organism is bathed in a medium that is not only the life supporting base for all the cells and specialised units within the biological system but which also actively rejects any perceived threat from the environment. This medium also acts as the path or link between the various cells and other units of the biological system. This medium is the life supporting, integrating base as well as the communication channel of the whole biological entity.
3. The specific abilities and functions of the organism are due to the specialised abilities of each of the cells in the system. Nerve cells differ from blood cells and these in turn from muscle cells etc. The ability of these cells to act together gives the organism its viability and strength.
4. The cells function both hierarchically and in non-hierarchical subsystems. The brain and the senses have a higher order of function, but various subsystems in the organism can function independent of the conscious decision making of the brain.

This involuntary functioning is always in harmony with the whole and interdependent with other subsystems. Applying these features to the organisation:

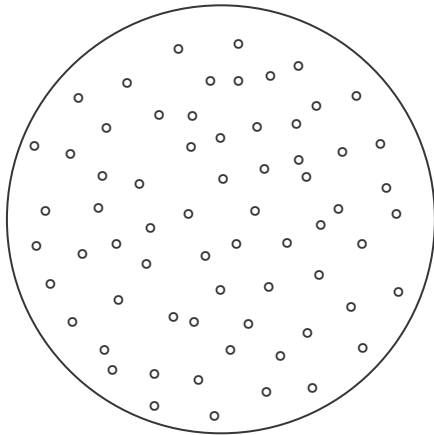
Figure 3:



There is an organisation boundary which creates distinctiveness. The maintenance of this boundary raises questions of survival and health. This entity is not an isolated fragment since the inside and the outside are in constant interaction in terms of material movements, cultural influences, political influences etc. The boundary which is a membrane and not a wall, defines the basis on which the membership to the system is determined.



The culture or nutrient medium energises the processes of homeostasis of the organisation. It is influenced by the environment and by the action of the cells. It holds the organisation's history and myths, its unwritten agendas, the inputs individuals bring in etc. This is the institutional space of the organisation and defines its human quality and culture.



Each task owner is a holon. He has separate function but retains the perspective of belonging simultaneously to a subsystem, to several subsystems and to the whole. His actions are constrained or aided by the quality of the cultural medium. The task owner ability to be relevant and harmonious makes him functional.

Each cell is analogous to a role space. The space of the organisation is not entirely filled by the subsystems, but includes much of what may be called "no mans land". Individual positions and task responsibilities can be defined but not the entirety of a task. This systemic linkage of the role spaces is the organisation process and its structure. The processes that create a feeling of belonging and commitment to the organisation are its institutional anchors of the organisation.

To summarise, the organisation has a boundary with the environment, while its internal space of the organisation is filled with its "culture". This culture is the collective implicit agreement of feelings, action choices and role modalities. It is experienced individually through people, systems structure and technology. The psychological map of the organisation carried in the minds of the people carries a strong boundary defined by "that which can be seen, that which can be talked about, that which can be owned up and that which can be acted upon". The feelings that keep this boundary alive are strong. Any attempt to change this is experienced as threatening and leads to uncertainty and anxiety. This boundary also defines the energy available to the organisation, the energy each member of the organisation will bring in to his work. Without changing this contour and its envelop an organisation can only make superficial changes. The class of problems it faces will be the same even if its form changes now and again. This envelop constrains

both the leader and the follower. The leader who threatens these boundaries will be resisted and the member who does not follow is isolated. This is the envelop (refer fig. 1) where all four factors overlap thereby enhancing synergy and cohesiveness.

Changes are brought about at this level only through working at the identity processes of individuals their role taking processes and at the group processes of the organisation. Spaces where people in the organisation can experience catharsis, rejoicing, mourning, togetherness, absolving shame, regeneration and renewal are the institutions within the organisation. They are necessary both to defuse the residual negatives that the individual (and therefore the organisation) carries and turn them into positives. These are spaces where these feelings can then become the compost that nourishes greater investment of energy and greater mobilisation of belonging in the person. Synergy can be generated and a positive loop of participation from people and convergence of their efforts become possible. The power of envelop 1 can be broken only by vibrant institutions. Where there are strong institutions envelop 2 will be vibrant. These institutions will energise and expand envelop 1.

### **NEW PARADIGM**

Approaching the issue of organisation development through designing and creating appropriate institutions is the new paradigm. These institutions through creating a space for emotional and intellectual recalibration become the anchors of a self designing organisation. An organisation where the redesigning originates from the point of action, from the holders of the actual reality.

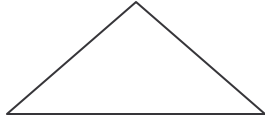
At present organisations are not designed to be a collective – cultural entity, using a technology to achieve economic well being. They are designed keeping in mind only the skills and abilities of individuals. This becomes a closed paradigm where institutions cannot be seeded and nurtured. Learning Organisations are anchored upon strong institutional and community processes.

Being human means living in interdependent groups. With the growth of technology and knowledge, each becomes specialised in one area and the areas of unknown are many. Organisations are designed on the assumption that a systematic summation of skills will happen automatically and each person with his or her specialisation will readily offer his or her best. The fact is that skills are embedded in people with hopes, aspirations, fears and anxieties. Thus each member of the organisation is not only dependent on others for task completion but also for the function of his or her aspirations. If a person enjoys well being, feels valued by the organisation, he will contribute freely and seek mutuality with others. If he feels undervalued and insecure he will create indispensability for himself, withhold information, cover up mistakes etc. He will be defensive in the interfaces. Therefore there is need for an organisation climate where a person feels a sense of community and that therefore his well being and growth are cared for. This requires appropriate models and practices to be explicitly fostered in the organisation.



Figure 4

POWER TO CONTRIBUTE



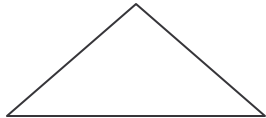
= DEFENSIVE / BARGAINING

CONTEXT OF WORK

INTERDEPENDENCE

MISTRUST

POWER TO CONTRIBUTE



= MUTUALITY / WELL BEING

CONTEXT OF WORK

INTERDEPENDENCE

TRUST

Unless the system is designed in such a way that human waste is minimal, there will be too many blocks in implementing TQM. Organisations therefore must be conceived and designed in such a way that every member has the opportunity to deploy his pride of belonging and creativity. This is TQM culture.

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