

Meyer's Management Models

48. Cultural Fabric Model

What can I do to shape the culture of my organization?

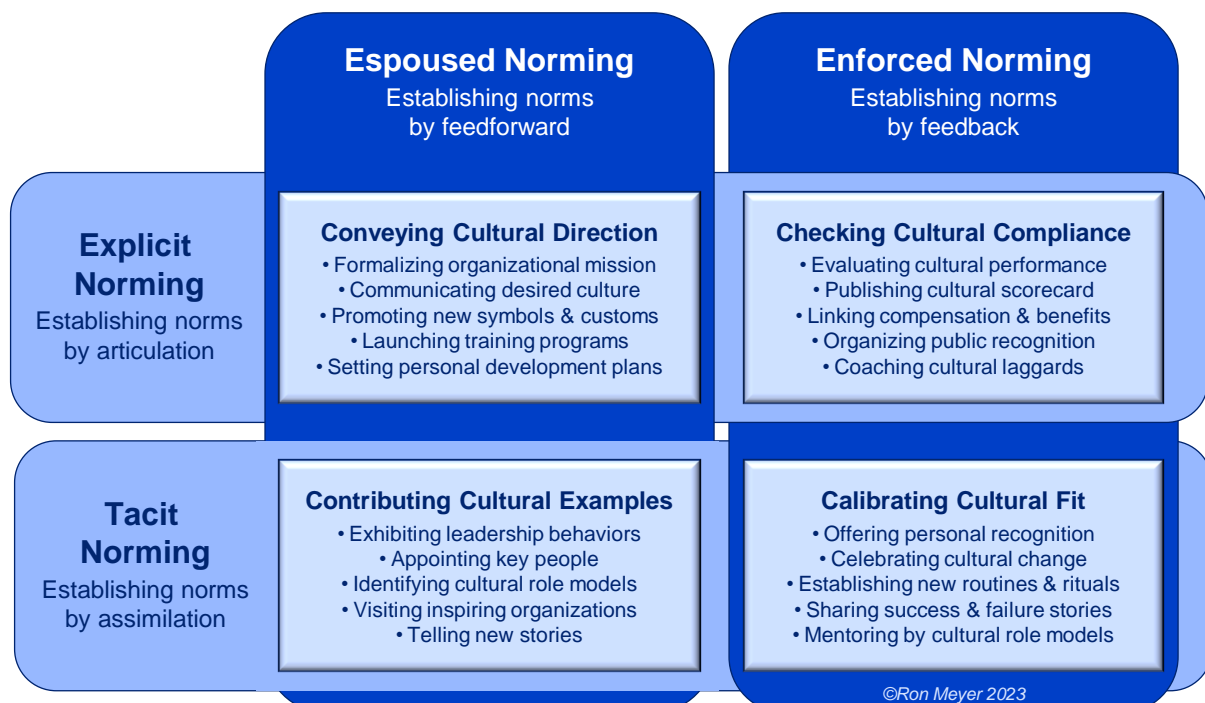
Key Definitions

A culture is the set of unwritten social rules determining how people are expected to behave – *norms* that govern how we should conduct ourselves, literally telling us what is *normal*. These norms are rooted in certain shared *beliefs* (what is true) and *values* (what is important). Any group of people can develop a culture, from a nation to an organization or even a team.

Cultures are notoriously difficult to change, as the shared beliefs and values seem self-evident to the people immersed in the culture and individuals internalize behavioral norms as part of their identity, deriving moral certainty, pride, and a sense of community from them.

Conceptual Model

The *Cultural Fabric Model* describes the four types of “threads” that can be employed to weave a renewed culture for any group of people, whether a team, department, unit, organization, industry, or nation. The metaphor of weaving a fabric is intended to convey the notion that cultures are not constructed like a machine, but delicately spun and knit together from a multitude of initiatives, none of which is strong enough by itself, but jointly create a robust and durable whole. The model suggests there are four types of culture-weaving initiatives (in the light blue rectangles), that differ along two dimensions, described in more detail below.



Key Elements

The four types of culture-weaving initiatives differ along two dimensions:

- A. ***Espoused vs. Enforced Norming.*** To reshape a culture, you need to advertise which new behaviors you expect and then check up on whether people are conducting themselves in

this new manner. The advertising upfront is called *espoused norming* – you proactively communicate which rules people should embrace (steering by feedforward). The checking along the way is called *enforced norming* – you steer people by feedback on how well they are doing, rewarding appropriate behavior, and pushing for changes where needed.

- B. ***Explicit vs. Tacit Norming.*** To reshape a culture, you need to get people to learn new behaviors. This learning can be driven by *explicit norming* – precisely articulating what it is that needs to be learned, then transferring these tangible norms to the receiver, who then needs to understand and internalize them. But people can also learn by being exposed to *tacit norming* – the new norms aren't spelled out but can be indirectly derived and copied from examples and circumstances. This is learning by assimilation, instead of articulation.

These two dimensions lead to the following four types of culture-weaving initiatives:

1. ***Conveying Cultural Direction.*** These explicitly espoused norming initiatives are all directed at communicating the desired cultural change by making the unwritten social rules more written. By making the new behavioral norms more tangible and easier to understand, it is hoped that people will more readily adopt them and change their behavior accordingly.
2. ***Checking Cultural Compliance.*** These initiatives are all directed at explicitly enforcing that people stick to the new cultural norms. They include providing tangible feedback on how well the group and the individuals are doing, as well as rewards for exhibiting the desired behavior and corrective measures where the expected conduct is found lacking.
3. ***Contributing Cultural Examples.*** Instead of explicitly *saying* what the behavioral norms should be, they can also be *shown* and speak for themselves. These initiatives are all intended to communicate the desired culture by example, so that people become inspired and start to believe that the espoused changes will truly happen.
4. ***Calibrating Cultural Fit.*** Finally, these initiatives are directed at the ongoing fine-tuning of people's behaviors by tacitly and subtly reinforcing the positive and discouraging dissonance. People can be continuously nudged in the right direction by appreciating what went well and helping them to see what they could have done better.

Key Insights

- ***Shaping culture is hard.*** To people who share a culture, their norms are normal – these unwritten rules are self-evident and have become part of people's identity. Adapting these norms, and underpinning beliefs and values, is a gradual process that can take a long time.
- ***Shaping culture requires a focus on norms.*** While culture is rooted in different beliefs and values, these are extremely difficult to change directly. Instead of focusing on changing what people think, it is easier to focus attention on changing how they should behave.
- ***Shaping culture requires many initiatives.*** To achieve cultural change, it is necessary to weave together a new cultural fabric from a large number of threads – initiatives that are mutually reinforcing and together can form a strong whole.
- ***Shaping culture requires espoused and enforced norming.*** To change a culture, you must constantly and proactively take initiatives to communicate where you intend to go (*steering by feedforward*), while at the same time checking whether course corrections are needed and/or the current direction needs to be locked in (*steering by feedback*).
- ***Shaping culture requires explicit and tacit norming.*** To change a culture, you can take initiatives to make the unwritten rules explicit and get people to consciously embrace them (*learning by articulation*), but you can also leave the social rules tacit and encourage people to copy the positive behavior of others (*learning by assimilation*).

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Insightful Tools to Kickstart Your Thinking

Publication Schedule

<i>July 2019</i>	<i>Mind the Gap Model</i>	<i>Change Management</i>
<i>August 2019</i>	<i>Digital Platform Map</i>	<i>Digital Strategy</i>
<i>September 2019</i>	<i>Interaction Pressure Gauge</i>	<i>Interpersonal Interaction</i>
<i>October 2019</i>	<i>Revenue Model Framework</i>	<i>Revenue Model Typology</i>
<i>November 2019</i>	<i>House of Engagement</i>	<i>Organizational Engagement</i>
<i>December 2019</i>	<i>Confidence Quotient</i>	<i>Trust Building</i>
<i>January 2020</i>	<i>Competition Tornado</i>	<i>Competitive Strategy</i>
<i>February 2020</i>	<i>11C Synergy Model</i>	<i>Corporate Synergy Management</i>
<i>March 2020</i>	<i>Leadership Fairness Model</i>	<i>Leader-Follower Interaction</i>
<i>April 2020</i>	<i>Strategic Agility Model</i>	<i>Strategy Process Approach</i>
<i>May 2020</i>	<i>Control Panel</i>	<i>Corporate Control Dimensions</i>
<i>June 2020</i>	<i>Rising Star Framework</i>	<i>Talent Management</i>
<i>July 2020</i>	<i>Strategy Development Cycle</i>	<i>Strategy Process Steps</i>
<i>August 2020</i>	<i>7I Corporate Center Model</i>	<i>Corporate Organization</i>
<i>September 2020</i>	<i>Storytelling Scripts</i>	<i>Leadership Communication</i>
<i>October 2020</i>	<i>Strategic Bets Framework</i>	<i>Strategic Decision-Making</i>
<i>November 2020</i>	<i>Rebound Model of Resilience</i>	<i>Organizational Resilience</i>
<i>December 2020</i>	<i>4C Leadership Capabilities</i>	<i>Leadership Competences</i>
<i>January 2021</i>	<i>Digital Product Model Dial</i>	<i>Digital Strategy</i>
<i>February 2021</i>	<i>Digital Distribution Model Dial</i>	<i>Digital Strategy</i>
<i>March 2021</i>	<i>Empowerment Cycle</i>	<i>Employee Empowerment</i>
<i>April 2021</i>	<i>Innovation Box</i>	<i>Innovation Approaches</i>
<i>May 2021</i>	<i>Knowledge Sharing Bridges</i>	<i>Best Practice Sharing</i>
<i>June 2021</i>	<i>Followership Cycle</i>	<i>Leader-Follower Interaction</i>
<i>July 2021</i>	<i>Everest Model of Change</i>	<i>Change Management</i>
<i>August 2021</i>	<i>Fruits & Nuts Matrix</i>	<i>Priority-Setting</i>
<i>September 2021</i>	<i>Powerhouse Framework</i>	<i>People & Organization Strategy</i>
<i>October 2021</i>	<i>Strategy Hourglass</i>	<i>Strategy-Making Steps</i>
<i>November 2021</i>	<i>Disciplined Dialogue Model</i>	<i>Interpersonal Communication</i>
<i>December 2021</i>	<i>Team Building Cycle</i>	<i>Team Building Process</i>
<i>January 2022</i>	<i>Market System Map</i>	<i>External Analysis Framework</i>
<i>February 2022</i>	<i>Strategic Alignment Model</i>	<i>Business Level Strategy</i>
<i>March 2022</i>	<i>Creativity X-Factor</i>	<i>Creativity Enhancement</i>
<i>April 2022</i>	<i>Organizational System Map</i>	<i>Organizational Analysis</i>
<i>May 2022</i>	<i>Corporate Value Creation Model</i>	<i>Corporate Level Strategy</i>

June 2022	Change Manager's Toolbox	Change Methodologies
July 2022	Sustainable You Model	Personal Sustainability
August 2022	Value Proposition Dial	Business Level Strategy
September 2022	The Tree of Power	Organizational Power
October 2022	Psychological Safety Compass	Team Dynamics
November 2022	Strategic Action Modes	Strategy Process
December 2022	Corporate Management Styles	HQ Management
January 2023	Thinking Directions Framework	Reasoning Skills
February 2023	5I Innovation Pipeline	Innovation Process
March 2023	Resistance to Change Typology	Change Management
April 2023	Ambition Radar Screen	Motivation Analysis
May 2023	Corporate Strategy Framework	Corporate Strategy
June 2023	Cultural Fabric Model	Organizational Culture
July 2023	New Pyramid Principle	Presentation Approaches
August 2023	Activity System Dial	Value Creation Analysis
September 2023	Customer-Centricity Circle	Organizational Design
October 2023	Status Snakes & Ladders	Leadership Branding
November 2023	Dynamic Business Paradigm	Competitive Advantage
December 2023	Dynamic Organization Paradigm	Human-centered Organization
January 2024	Interpersonal Interaction Levels	Communication Approaches
February 2024	Stakeholder Heat Map	Stakeholder Management
March 2024	Best Practice Sharing Framework	Sharing Methods
April 2024	New Learning Curve	Personal Learning
May 2024	Partnership Distance Model	Interorganizational Relations
June 2024	Embedded Identity Model	Personal Awareness