

Investigating an organisational culture conducive to project management

Lorium Mashiane

Organisations doing business in highly competitive markets where products and services are rapidly changing are under immense pressure to perform better. These organisations are frustrated by the results of their efforts to establish project management processes. Organisations with stronger hierarchical structures find it hard to put project management into practice to achieve the desired level of performance.

A study conducted in the Graduate School of Technology Management adopted the definition of culture characterised by the functional and sociological approach. It aspired to assess the perceived culture as an attribute of the organisation.

A project can be successful, but that does not mean that the project management was a success or implemented efficiently (Morrison, 2005). People are the driving force behind the accomplishment of project deliverables, and the efficient management of time, resources and costs during the course of a project. Organisational culture drives the behaviour of people in an organisation and consequently has a great influence on the project management culture.

The purpose of the study was to assess both organisational culture and project management culture in a division of Telkom called Cybernest.

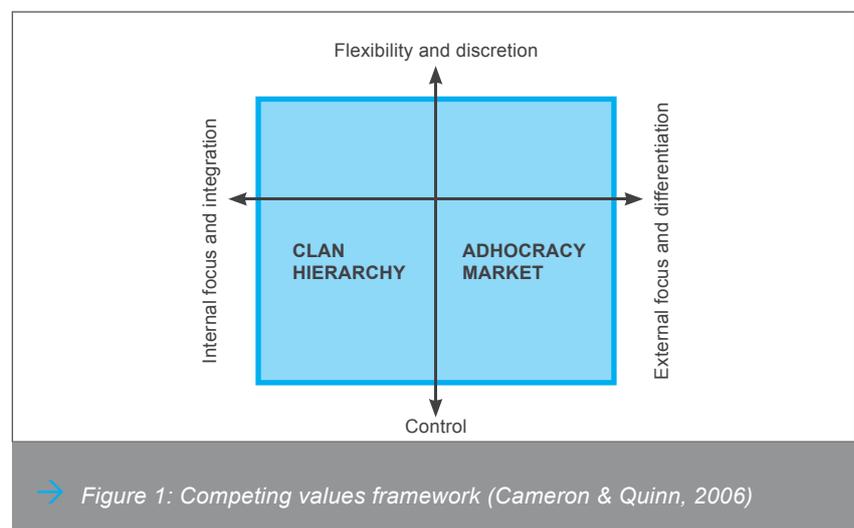
Organisational culture

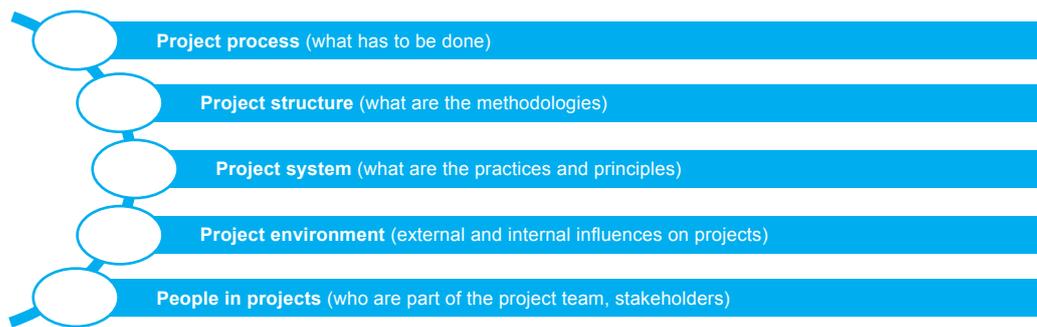
Individuals come into contact with formal procedures, norms and informal behaviour that are understood by insiders alone. Individuals who are in the

organisation for a longer period, develop assumptions about how the organisation performs tasks to meet its objectives. In essence, organisational culture is “the way we do things around here” (Du Plessis, 2003).

Figure 1 illustrates the competing values framework. It builds a theory of how various aspects of the organisation (corporate strategy, culture, leadership, communication and decision-making) function in simultaneous harmony and tension with one another (Cameron & Quinn, 2006).

These competing values are flexibility versus control, and external versus internal. The framework forms an approach for extracting values from leading constituents about how to effectively run an organisation (Morrison, 2005). The first set of competing values differentiates effectiveness criteria that emphasise flexibility, discretion and dynamism from criteria that emphasise stability, order and control. The second set of competing values differentiates effectiveness criteria that emphasise an internal orientation, integration and unity from criteria that emphasise an external orientation, differentiation and rivalry.





→ Figure 2: Dimensions of project management culture by Du Plessis (2003)

Greater flexibility is characterised by “flatter” organisational structures, decentralised decision-making, and minimal specialisation of jobs, whereas greater control is characterised by hierarchical structures, centralised decision-making, and a large number of specialised jobs with a proliferation of job titles.

External forces also shape organisational culture because organisations reflect the national, regional, industrial and occupational cultures within which they function.

Project management culture

Project management involves clear objectives that describe the project scope, and that are quality-, cost- and time-oriented. Project management also focuses on a management process that is inclusive of planning, organising, implementing and control, and addresses all the strategic goals of the organisation.

Assessing the culture that operates in Cybernest can be beneficial to organisational success.

Du Plessis (2003) developed an instrument to evaluate project management culture in the division by assessing contributing dimensions.

This study follows the competing values framework to assess the organisational culture (illustrated in Figure 1) and the project management culture. It is a theory and framework developed by Du Plessis (2003), which is illustrated in Figure 2.

The competing values framework

According to Cameron et al. (2006), many organisations note that the competing values framework allows for the valuable diagnosis and implementation of a culture change, the setting up of a competitive strategy, the administering of a quality process, as well as the development of prospective leaders.

When the division has an external focus, it focuses on external opportunities. These opportunities include acquisitions, the identification of future trends, persuasion of innovative ideas, and market share competition and growth. These can exist in the adhocracy and market quadrants. An internally focused company focuses on its internal capability. This includes systems, culture, cost reduction, continuous quality improvement and human development.

Ajmal and Koskinen (2011) believe that a competing values approach to organisational culture is made up of four core cultures. A control culture ensures certainty, predictability, safety, accuracy and dependability. A competence culture is concerned with achievement and gaining distinction through having the highest quality and unique products or services (Cameron et al., 2006). Leaders in this culture are directive, competitive, take up challenges and stretch goals. Their power and success are judged on the basis of results. A collaboration culture is concerned with affiliation and synergy in a culture of unity

and close connections (Ajmal & Koskinen, 2011). Leaders take on parent figures, and are mentors and facilitators, and they use team-building (Cameron et al., 2006). A cultivation culture deals with meaningfulness, self-actualisation and enrichment.

Leaders see compensation, nurturing employee engagement and loyalty as a key to long-term company success.

Du Plessis (2003) indicates that project management culture can be based on five highly interdependent dimensions, as illustrated in Figure 2. It is important to develop a shared set of project management values in order to build a stronger project management culture. The instrument measures the culture and aligns it with the dimensions.

Cameron et al. (2006) argue that competing values can also become complementary values. The value-enhancing activities located in quadrants diagonally across from each other appear to be diametrically opposed.

A person who performs primarily in the “compete” quadrant will typically view many activities in the “collaborate” quadrant as less meaningful (Cameron et al., 2006). There is a perception that if the organisational members who focus on the “control” quadrant behaved like people who focus on the “create” quadrant, they would be considered failures. This perception creates much friction in organisations (Cameron et al., 2006).

→ Table 1: Management style orientations arranged according to quadrants

Clan quadrant	Adhocracy quadrant
Managing teams Managing interpersonal relationships Development of others	Managing innovation Managing the future Continuous improvement
Hierarchy quadrant	Market quadrant
Managing acculturation Managing the control system Managing coordination	Managing competitiveness Energising employees Managing customer service

Project management is a complex managerial process that ensures an optimal balance between the internal organisational design of a firm and its emerging strategies (Ajmal & Koskinen, 2011).

Research paradigms on culture

Scholars in the study of culture have different views on culture when conducting research. With regard to cultural research paradigms, Smircich (1983) differentiates between three different paradigms, each pursuing different research interests and purposes. These paradigms are culture as a background factor, an internal organisational variable, and a metaphor. According to Denison (1996), culture and the individual organisational members cannot exist

independently from each other, and various scholars bring to attention the interactive and reciprocal relationship.

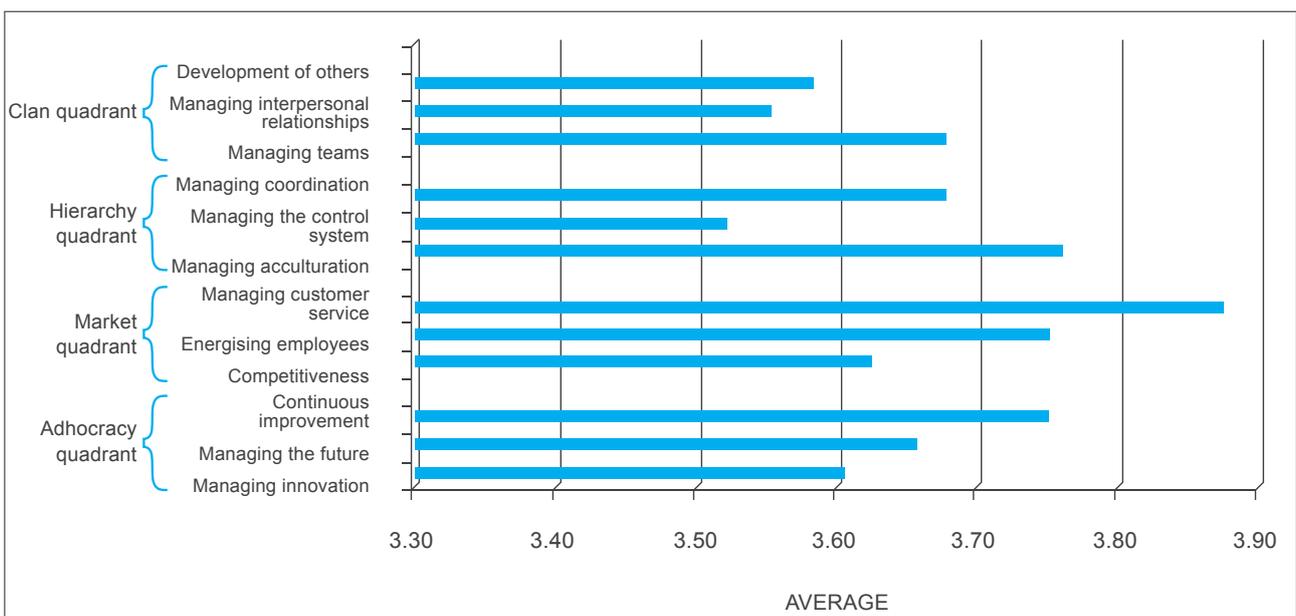
The study

Questionnaires were used to assess organisational culture and the culture in the project management environment. The questionnaire instruments are the management skills assessment instrument (MSAI), developed by Cameron and Quinn (2006), and the project management culture assessment tool (PMCAT), developed by Du Plessis (2003), which is used to distinguish whether an organisation has or does not have project management culture. The study focuses on the division Data Centre Operations (DCO), branded as Cybernest.

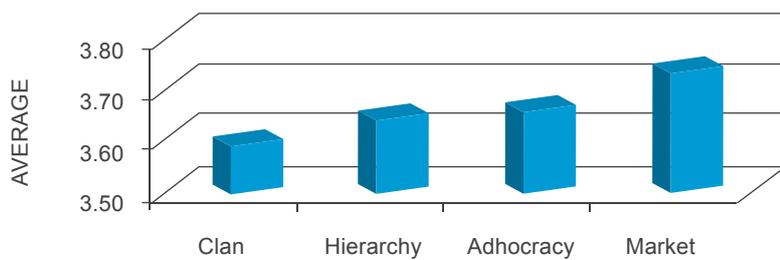
The 110 respondents from this division were divided into 15 teams, which included project managers who participate in the whole project management life cycle and implement solutions for external clients.

The MSAI assesses individual orientations towards a range of stylistic options, including the management style orientations of clan, hierarchy, market and adhocracy (Cameron & Quinn, 2006).

The outcome will guide management on critical competencies that will require more attention in order to develop into a high-performing organisation. Table 1 illustrates the components that make up the quadrants.



→ Figure 3: MSAI dimensions



→ Figure 4: Average group MSAI culture profile

The PMCAT is used to evaluate and diagnose a project management culture as the operational culture of an organisation involved in project work. This instrument measures the culture-descriptive elements of the project management culture.

Data gathered from the MSAI facilitates the investigation of culture, based on the competing values framework approach. Although it has not been adapted to focus on a particular leader in an organisation, it evaluates general leadership. The profile that results from the findings resembles the same framework as the profile for the organisational culture. The results will identify the skills and competencies required to develop some alignment with the project management culture.

Figure 3 illustrates the 12 competencies of the MSAI, which represent the four quadrants of the competing values framework. The average of the competencies is calculated to provide a mean value per quadrant. The mean values of the four quadrants are presented in Figure 4. This figure shows that the market culture is dominant, while the clan quadrant has the weakest competency.

The objective of using the management skills assessment is to measure dimensions that match the competing values framework and to determine whether the predicted relationships between the quadrants exist.

The diagonal quadrants have competing values. For example, if an organisation performs high in one quadrant, it will automatically perform lower in the diagonal quadrant.

The challenge is to eliminate the influence of bias so that the behaviour of the manager can be found.

Conclusions

The two profiles drawn from the two instruments were developed to address the research question, which sought to establish if the culture of the organisation under investigation promoted a conducive environment for project management. Culture type is important, since organisational success depends on the extent to which culture matches the demands of the industry. Figure 4 shows the MSAI culture profile of the organisation and indicates that the market quadrant is the dominant culture.

The dominant market-oriented culture in the organisation is not surprising, as it provides infrastructure hosting solutions and technical support to external clients. The strategy of the organisation and, by extension, the culture of the organisation focuses on the market or clients.

Success is defined in terms of client satisfaction and retention. In this quadrant, the competencies include managing customer service and competitiveness. The clan culture is on the opposite quadrant to the market quadrant, and is weaker. The clan culture involves managing teams, developing others and managing interpersonal relationships, as opposed to the values that predominate the market culture.

Culture strength is determined by the points awarded to a culture. The dominant quadrant is the market culture and this depends on the

competition. The organisation is in the information and communication technology (ICT) industry, which depends on innovation, flexibility, creativity and entrepreneurship, which is the adhocracy quadrant.

However, the benefits of a market culture are still very relevant to the ICT business environment. The results of the PMCAT illustrate that project systems and project processes are weighed as the most competent in the organisation of the five dimensions of project management culture.

Little attention is given to project structure and people in projects. These two dimensions need to be prioritised. The strongest dimension is project systems. Depending on the competitive environment, there is no valid reason to support the objectives of the organisation or the ones that do not achieve competitive gain over the competition. 📌

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About the author

Lorium Mashiane obtained her BSc Hons in Technology Management at the University of Pretoria in 2010, and her Master's in Project Management (MPM) at the University's Graduate School of Technology Management in 2012.

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