

# People Whose Ideas Influence Organisational Work

## Edgar Schein

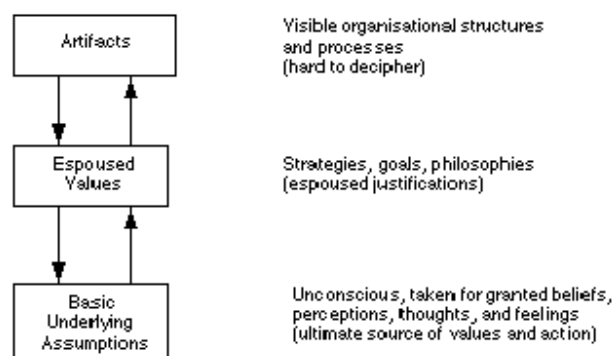


Edgar Schein is Professor of Management at M.I.T. and is considered one of the 'founders' of organisational psychology.

**Organizational Culture and Leadership**. 2nd Edition, Jossey-Bass 1992 ISBN 1-55542-487-2

Organizational Culture and Leadership is a management classic and remains one of the best analyses of organisations and their cultures. It is essential reading and understanding for any change agent. A major theme of the book is the difficulty of deciphering, changing/adapting an organisation's culture. He approaches this issue

### Levels of Culture



through his **three levels**;

He argues that the pattern of basic underlying assumptions can function as a cognitive defense mechanism for individuals and the group, as a result culture change is difficult, time consuming and anxiety provoking. Cultures are deep seated, pervasive and complex and it can be extremely difficult to bring the assumptions to the surface. He uses the classic three step approach to discuss change - unfreezing, cognitive restructuring and refreezing. (Lewin)

He has a lot to say about leadership and culture. The key issue for leaders is that they must become marginal in their own culture to a sufficient degree to recognise what may be its maladaptive assumptions and to learn some new ways of thinking themselves as a prelude to unfreezing and changing their organization.

### Quotes which give a flavour of the concept

"Organizational learning, development, and planned change cannot be understood without considering culture as the primary source of resistance to change."

"This ability to perceive the limitations of one's own culture and to develop the culture adaptively is the essence and ultimate challenge of leadership."

"The bottom line for leaders is that if they do not become conscious of the cultures in which they are embedded, those cultures will manage them. Cultural understanding is desirable for all of us, but it is essential to leaders if they are to lead."

The culture of a group is "A pattern of shared basic assumptions that the group learned as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, that has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems."

"Every group must know what its heroic and sinful behaviors are and must achieve consensus on what is a reward and what is a punishment."

"Building an effective organisation is ultimately a matter of meshing the different subcultures by encouraging the evolution of common goals, common language, and common procedures for solving problems."

"We basically do not know what the world of tomorrow will really be like except that it will be different. That means that organizations and their leaders will have to become perpetual learners."

"The most powerful signal to which subordinates respond is what catches the leaders' attention consistently, particularly what arouses them emotionally. But many of the things to which leaders respond emotionally reflect not so much their conscious intentions as their unconscious conflicts."

"It seems clear that the leaders of the future will have to be perpetual learners.

This will require

- (1) new levels of perception and insight into the realities of the world and also into themselves;
- (2) extraordinary levels of motivation to go through the inevitable pain of learning and change ...;
- (3) the emotional strength to manage their own and others' anxiety as learning and change become more and more a way of life;
- (4) new skills in analyzing and changing cultural assumptions;
- (5) the willingness and ability to involve others and elicit their participation and
- (6) the ability to learn the assumptions of a whole new organizational culture."