Architect as Anthropologist: Leveraging Cultural Knowledge to Foster Collaboration

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The Speaker

- Masters Degrees and on-going coursework in cultural studies, anthropology, human factors in technology, and information security
- PhD coursework in cultural studies, history of business and technology
- Extensive cross cultural and foreign language experience
- Focuses on major organizational change initiatives
- Actively uses the concepts in “the field”
- Fifteen years of solution experience
Introduction and Goals

Introduction:

- Anthropology provides a set of tools that can be applied to any social setting, including business and technology.
- Architects often assume the role of leading discussions between their business and technology partners with different (sub)cultures.
- Architects need to understand those elements of culture that drive or impede cross-cultural collaboration.

Goals:

- Identify the elements of culture that the architect can observe.
- Understand the use of participant observation to learn about culture.
- Understand how cultural knowledge can be used to foster collaboration within and among groups through case studies.
Outline

- Culture as Social Process
- Cultural Concepts
- Anthropological Techniques
- Cultural Frameworks
- Case Study 1: Decision Making
- Case Study 2: Loss of Control
- Case Study 3: New to Technology
- Putting Collaboration into Practice
Culture as Social Process

In order to leverage culture to foster collaboration, we need to set the context:

- **Culture varies** by country, region, company, division, department, workgroup, and family—all of which influence individuals and their behaviors.
- **Culture is learned** through a process of enculturation (or socialization)—new ideas need to be socialized for fit.
- **Culture is reinforced** both positively and negatively.
- **Culture communicates** context (low and high, verbally and non-verbally).
- **Culture is defined by both presence** as well as the **absence** of particular behaviors.
- **Culture is present** where humans live and work together for any period of time.
- **Culture is the key** to understanding and fostering collaboration.
Cultural Concepts

Fostering collaboration successfully requires an understanding the role these concepts play and how culture is manifested:

- **Social Capital** (time, knowledge, facilitation, support) = builds goodwill
- **Values** (stated and unstated) = motivates behavior
- **Language** (business/IT terminology, acronyms, references to shared experience, “a ‘Joe’ type”) = leads to communication (or not)
- **Hierarchies and decision making** (titles, formal and informal) = who’s in charge
- **Kinship** (hired by the boss, longevity, mergers, founder, family) = allegiances
- **Rituals** (town hall, new hire orientation, performance reviews, drinking after work) = acceptable socialization events
- **Rites** (trials by fire, promotion paths) = important or proving events/initiation
- **Symbols and metaphors** (logos, company as “family”) = internal/external image
- **Narratives** (stories, myths, fantasies) = how events are retold from group’s point of view
- **Customs and norms** (ideal, believed, actual) = how one should behave, how one believes one behaves, and how one does behave
- **Taboos** (“concept non grata,” voicing dissent) = what not to do or say
Applying Anthropological Techniques

- **Cultural Anthropology** is the study of human culture using participant observation (vs. books).

- “**Applied anthropology** refers to the application of the method and theory of anthropology to the analysis and solution of practical problems.”  Wikipedia

- Develop confidence in working with cultures unlike your own as a **participant observer** to see how things work “on their ground.”

- Use an approach of **cultural relativism** (no right or wrong culture—no judgment about how things are done).

- Understand situations from the perspective of your own culture (**emic** perspective) to know your starting point(s).

- Seek to understand situations from perspective of the “others” culture (**etic** perspective) to know their starting point(s).

- Use **formal research** for background (in language, business, products, and technology).

- Use **quantitative** data to understand **what** to focus on in qualitative interviews.

- Use the **ethnographic** (or **qualitative**) interview and **relationship building** techniques with multiple individuals to understand **how** the cultural concepts fit together.

- The goal is to learn how cultural “insiders” think to work within and across cultures.
Several models of organizational culture exist

- Competing Values (Cameron and Quinn 2011) is a useful starting point

- Organizations may have a dominant culture and most are a composite of several types

- Cases use just a dominant type, but leveraged shared values

- Organizations may have a mix of subcultures

- Departments listed are indicative (differ within an organization, may be teams, divisions, companies)

- Differences in values may create tension (arrows)

- Shared values and artifacts create opportunities for collaboration

- Values are manifested in cultural artifacts

Adapted from (Cameron and Quinn 2011)
## Case Study 1: Making Decisions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cultural Concept</th>
<th>Technology/Business Team (TB)</th>
<th>Enterprise Architecture (EA)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Culture Type</td>
<td>Clan Culture</td>
<td>Hierarchy Culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ritual</td>
<td>Face to face decision meetings, focus on dialog</td>
<td>Decisions happen “offline” and in writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Values</td>
<td>Business and technology sit at same table</td>
<td>Technology decides, business may overrule</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hierarchies</td>
<td>High-level opinion leaders sway decisions, group follows</td>
<td>Levels of approval, lower level decisions not overturned</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaboration Opportunity</td>
<td>TB Team controlled funding and implementation and rejected EA’s recommendation.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anthropological Techniques Applied</td>
<td>• Identified points of conflict/overlap between culture (values listed above)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Leveraged <em>emic</em> perspective from six nine months of <em>participant observation</em> and educated on <em>etic</em> perspective</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Educated EA on workings of TB’s <em>rituals</em> and <em>hierarchies</em> and <em>myths</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Results</td>
<td>EA persuaded key decision makers of business value offline, represented to TB, and obtained a favorable decision.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Case Study 2: Loss of Control

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cultural Concept</th>
<th>Technology Team (TT)</th>
<th>Release Management (RM)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Culture Type</td>
<td>Clan/Market Culture</td>
<td>Hierarchy Culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rituals</td>
<td>Monthly releases</td>
<td>Quarterly, highly structured releases</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rites</td>
<td>Risk taking makes short or long careers based on results</td>
<td>Creating value makes short or long careers, consequences for not following process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norms (believed)</td>
<td>Control enables speed and agility, trust lower levels</td>
<td>Centralized process is the key to control and results</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaboration Opportunity</td>
<td>RM was charged with implementing an enterprise tool that would require TT to give up full control and use the enterprise tool.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Anthropological Techniques Applied | • Identified points of conflict between culture (values listed above)  
• Used participant observation with team members to develop deeper emic perspective and leveraged quantitative profiles of decision makers |                                                                                         |
| Results               | Aligned with managers across both groups using shared values and cultural relativism to frame (versus conflict approach). |                                                                                         |
### Case Study 3: New to Technology

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cultural Concept</th>
<th>Business Team (BT)</th>
<th>Technology Team (TT)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Culture Type</td>
<td>Clan/Market Culture</td>
<td>Hierarchy Culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rituals</td>
<td>Do it yourself</td>
<td>Repeatable project process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rites</td>
<td>Earn your right to sit at the table by adding value</td>
<td>Assumed place at the table because part of the same group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hierarchies</td>
<td>Consensus</td>
<td>Formal levels of approval</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norm (believed)</td>
<td>Business process knowledge is critical</td>
<td>Technology knowledge is critical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaboration Opportunity</td>
<td>BT initiated a project that required TT to build an enterprise technology solutions as well as use of project process.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anthropological Techniques Applied</td>
<td>• Learned business <strong>language</strong> through <strong>formal research</strong> and <strong>participant observation</strong> (clarifying requirements) to earn a seat at the table for TT</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Presented solutions with options that TT could provide to gain consensus</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Coached TT to frame solutions based on business process <strong>norms</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Leveraged <strong>kinship</strong> of reporting structure to frame common goals</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Results</td>
<td>Fostered a collaborative working relationship between BT and TT that was self-nurturing.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Putting Anthropology Concepts into Practice

- Learn to identify the predominant culture in your company, your own group, and those of key business partners.
- Cultivate relationships
- Use participant observation (staff meetings, work area visits) and ethnographic techniques (“How does your group…?” “What is your perspective on…?”) to learn more about how your business and technology partners work in their environment.
- Understand the values behind shared cultural concepts to identify common ground.
- Understand the values behind un-shared cultural concepts that create differences and may pose obstacles to collaboration.
- Do no harm—the focus is on collaboration.
Recommended Reading