

## **Corporate Culture – The predators con.**

There are two roles in business (and Life). The first is management (predator) and the second is employee (prey). The concept of “corporate culture” is an artificial construct built by the predator to give a façade of “political correctness” to the fact that they are predators. It is linguistic camouflage to conceal the fact that they are going to bleed the prey for their own sustenance.



### **How do we define the culture of an organisation?**

Oxford dictionary describes culture as “customs and civilisation of a particular time or people”. Customs of a people. OK so far?

How do we define “corporate”? Again the Oxford dictionary defines it “as forming a corporation or a group or belonging to a group”. Still OK?

So **Corporate Culture is the customs and civilisations that belonging to the corporate group?** or

### **“The way we do things around here “**

How did people get customs originally? Why do they do the things they do the way they do them? Usually they got them because those things worked (most of the time). Take the situation of large furry animal with very large teeth confronting puny human with short fingernails. Didn't take long for the puny human to figure out that running was a good option, and running faster than the other puny human was the better option. (You know the one, you don't have to run faster than the predator, just faster than the person beside you). Some other customs were established around the safe preparation of food or even the which food was edible. The most effective way of doing this was the good old tried and true method of trial and error. Someone ate it and died ergo, don't eat it. Simple even though the cause of death was a blow to the head (not strong on cause and effect in those days). These and other customs worked for the group's survival so they gradually dictated the behaviours which described the culture (customs) of the group.

Still OK so far.

How about those things in our culture that we say are absolutes? (well for the time being anyway). Things like not taking another life, stealing, lying etc. These things are said to be driven by values we have internalised when we were young enough to be influenced by adults. We wanted approval, to belong, so we did what they told us to do. We still do them because

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every time we did them in the past they worked (Survival judgement). How do we know that they are “right” (moral judgement) though.

What happens when they stop working. At first we blame others, or the environment, or something, but not ourselves or that behaviour that has always held us in good stead. If the behaviour keeps failing to work, and if we are smart, we learn to change it to something that does work and in time our values will be affected by that change. Take lying for example, you have even thought it was right to lie. You even tried it, a little more often when you were a child (survival judgement).

When did you stop (generous generalisation here) when it stopped working for you, that’s when. Or did you stop completely? What about the big guy with the beard and red suit, who comes down the Chimney at Xmas then???? Never told that one? So there are maybe good lies and bad lies??

What is the answer to this, life, the universe, and everything, I don’t know but I believe that it is 42!

OK they way we do things around here is about what the group has learned has worked/not worked. This of course depends on your status at the time you tried it. Strutting around the lions den waving your masters degree in industrial psychology and asserting the superiority of your species, is likely to reduce our gene pool by one “fool” gene. It will also teach others that it is a dumb thing to do and will form part of our culture.

As suggested in the introduction, I think that the world is basically divide up into two classes, the predator and the prey. At any given time the way you behave is where you are in the food chain. Test this out. Go to the zoo in a pair of swimming togs. Stand in the Meercat cat enclosure, they see you as a predator. Now get in to the tiger enclosure ---- oops a change of position in the food chain (Lunch?). I wonder whether your behaviour in each instance was the same?

I would also posit that we don’t need to go between species to shift roles. Take the wolf packs after birth of cubs, cats and kittens, spiders, now there is a thing - you can go from a stud to a dud in one orgasm here! A minute though. Maybe the male was always the prey and sex was just the bait. (Draw your own analogies here as you will).

So the things that work for you depend on whether you are the predator or the prey. Still OK with this? Sort of? – Moving on.

We like to think that we give rational attention to the process of finding out the things that work for us and those that don’t. I suggest that this is not the case. The way we behave now is still largely governed by early species conditioning. The great amygdala hijack to use Kohen’s phrase. That primal brain still controls what we do. We put everything up front into the conscious brain and then try to convince ourselves (and others) that we are a rational, thinking, being – until the heat goes on. We then react – not think – react to external stimuli of a real or imagined threat. We get hijacked by our conditioning. We behave according to the rules of flight or fight. Flight being the preferred option. We avoid conflict unless we believe, with evidence or otherwise, that in avoiding the immediate conflict we will have a bigger one. Then we fight.

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Remember the old “go out and kill the heathen and win brownie points with God” model. (Taleban are still there). I few heroic punchups (wenching, drinking, and pillaging optional extras which would now attract fringe benefit tax) now is much better than having to fight the devil in hell for eternity! Show me where to make my mark!

This is one of the reasons organisations put in place systems to measure how well managers manage the performance of their staff. (After all you need to know what the buggers are doing or they will rob you blind won't they.) Managers will try to avoid doing this activity as they believe that there may be conflict and their experience suggests this belief is right. The organisation shows them that there will be a bigger conflict if they don't. “The boss will come down on you”!

Why doesn't it work then. Primarily although the threat by “the boss” exists, managers have learned that the boss is also into avoidance and will not show. You have all heard the reason that managers avoid this stuff is that they want to be liked (part of the herd).

I would therefore suggest that the reason we do things “the way we do things here” is governed more by personal expedience (survival) than any altruistic motive. We are a weak species (and getting weaker) and are a herd animal by nature. To live together and gain the protection of the herd we have to do things which we would like other members of the herd to “do unto us”. We know as individuals we are weak and that if we were to steal we would be seen as a potential thief from others of our herd. They would band together as they would see us as a threat to the group and we would be ostracised. Have to fend for ourselves – not a good outcome for something so far down the food chain. Hard to run faster than yourself!

It is not that we don't steal because stealing is inherently wrong (Moral judgement), we don't steal because of the fear of getting caught and then kicked out of the herd (Survival judgement). And before you go of on the “I have never stolen in my life” track how many people in this room can say that they have never taken anything which did not belong to someone else, full knowing that was the case, or finding out later and doing nothing about it? (Pens from work? How about that beer you acquired at a student party).

So now that I have exposed your dark and horrible secret, where does this pang of guilt you currently are experiencing coming from? I would suggest it is more to do with the fear of being seen as a thief (and therefore as a threat to the herd) by others (Survival reaction) than it is guilt about taking the firms pen (Moral reaction).

Oops there's that scale thing. Stealing big stuff is bad, but little stuff is OK. If this is the case, could that be because you would be really p^%\$ed off if someone knicked **your** beammer, but **your** bic – who gives a damn? Or maybe, did someone teach you this?

Social ostracising is done with political correctness now (Home detention, conjugal visits, forgiveness, etc) but the principle and intention is still the same in my opinion. The herd is showing it's disapproval. However as the threat to the individual lessens so does the drive to conform to the pack. If this society no longer likes what I do it will send me to jail, feed me, take care of my pack, and pay me a benefit when I get out. You will ensure my survival and that of my pack. Why? Where's the threat to you in not doing this? Hey big incentive for me to be part of the culture?

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May be I have lost you about here? Hold on I will try to get back to you.

If I can apply my argument above to an organisation it would look something like this. The culture of the organisation happens as the result of the values of the people in power. They by their directions and their behaviour (mainly the latter) dictate the way things are done around here (Corporate Culture). Just like in the herd.

Actually maybe the wolf pack is a better metaphor as we all aspire to be prime wolf, we just don't tell the current prime wolf that or we could be in big trouble. You want to survive in the organisation (pack) you do what they do, and what the prime wolf tells you to do (within reason and they will tell you where the bounds are real quick). For example they will not get into a hot sweat over you taking that bic home – they did that themselves – but just try getting a corporate card and taking a mate out to lunch. Bit too close a challenge to the prime wolf's status totem. (Scent does not work as well as it used to any more so totems are the in thing to show others and other packs you are the prime wolf of this pack. You know cell phones, car, car park, newspaper, P.A. etc. totems of power)

Now we are starting to see the influence of the predator chain within the organisation (pack). No longer are the predators outside of the pack but they have now appeared inside. So no longer is the organisation's culture dictated by the pack, but it is now that of the predator pretending to be part of the pack. (Wolf in sheep's clothing, - bad joke sorry)



This is now getting a bit messy but simply put, outside of work, the culture we are part of is dictated primarily by us, the pack – inside work it is now dictated by the predator. Remember too that pack animals can change into predators - Check out Orwell.

The workers band together for mutual protection (unions etc) against management, the predator. No longer is the predator outside the business, (the shareholder, banker, etc) but is living with them. In some cases was one of them, and may still trying to pretend to be so. When the owner was also “prey” to the external predators there was a shared threat with the staff, now this is not the case. The owner is protected from the threat by “company law” and “limited liability”.

Think about the cults around team work, industrial psychology, open plan offices, incentive pay, empowerment, shares, quality circles, and all of the other tricks of the trade. Think about what you do in selection. You provide the manager with the information which purportedly is more reliable in selecting their staff than the methods they used to use. How do you do this, well first you put all the people into a big spreadsheet and draw a bell curve. Top performers at one end bottom at the other, and the masses in the middle somewhere. You then recommend to the manager they select from the top.

I have an uncle that does that. He uses a race and drafting gates. Top performers to breed, bottom performers, dog tucker, and those in the middle will eventually make it to the works when the dollar is right.

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Who were the ones who first started talking about organisational culture, and organisational values? How about a bi-cultural organisation? Who created these then? I will put good money on that it was not the pack. I bet it was the predator or the wannabe predator who started this off. Just soporific's to quieten the prey.

The idea of squeezing just another drop of blood out of the prey must be universally attractive to the predator. All done with the best interest of the worker in mind of course. Yeah right – when the bottom line is profit and the profit is not big enough the predator is quite happy to kill off the prey (close the plant and make them all redundant, or better still write up a heap of debt and then go bankrupt. This way you maximise your kill zone whilst minimising the risk of being killed yourself) and then move onto another part of the jungle where they haven't worked out how dangerous you really are.

Think about this. Who set up this cute little scheme of corporate entities, virtual people, (and the laws which support it) in the first place. Big money on it not being the pack. Bigger money on it being the predator.

So what is “corporate culture” really? **The customs and civilisations of the corporate group?** The way we do things around here? It is reflected the statements made in the corporate plan and espoused in the values of the organisation, like honesty, loyalty trust, empowerment etc.

### **NOT !**

It is a set of unwritten rules which are signalled to the wise through observing the behaviours of the people in power. A note of caution here is that not all of the signals are clear, nor are they all meant for you. Remember you do not want to attract the attention of the predator.

What it is definitely **not** is the customs and civilisations of the corporate group. They are not necessarily civilised and they are definitely not of the group!

So the big question on everyone's mind as soon as you say you Māori or work in a Māori organisation whatever that is (apart from is this guy real) is how can we make our organisation bi-cultural?

Sorry people you can't? You can't even make it reflect the dominant culture you live in unless by pure chance the values of those few people in power are shared by them, and are the same as those shared by that dominant culture.

Your best shot is to have those with the power as Māori and then, if they behave as Māori (and the jury is still out on just what that is) and haven't become potatoes (to use the vernacular) then you will have an organisation which reflects Māori values (Culture) but bi-cultural no!

In my company (Te Maru O Tangata) I will have a culture which is based on my values. If you come and work for me and we share those values fine. If we don't I am not going to change, after all I own the company.

So what can you do?? Get on with life – accept that organisations are temporary at best and that they will come and go (and so will you and people like you) and you need to think about the sort



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of one you want to work for. One that closely matches your values, or one that will make you a lot of money quickly before you become the prey, by running faster than the rest of the people?

Or better yet run the place and be the predator!



### **What can organisations do?**

**A while back**, there were genuine efficacy differences in organisations – there was a time when Rinso actually did clean clothes better than its competitors. There were Craftsman tools that came with a lifetime guarantee – and that was a superior offer. Same for appliances, cars, clothing, and furniture. **Then**, as people lived their lives, they had lots of sources of institutional reinforcement. Authority figures were generally regarded as good people. Schools worked. Leaders were leaders; people played by the rules. Emotional, psychological, and social values were reinforced by all kinds of supporting institutions. It was a good herd (pack) to belong to.

**Fast forward to now**. Rapid technological change; general social dislocation. Mature industries; the closing of the efficiency gap. Rinso may still get your clothes cleaner than any other laundry powder, but you'd need an electron microscope to tell. Tools don't break, so the Craftsman guarantee isn't as important. Cars, more or less, have the same degree of quality. And then there's the decline of leadership, a collective failure of the institutions that reinforced people's values. The herd (pack) is failing to deliver what it's members want, it is no longer a place of "safety".

**So what about business?** In a 5000 person survey of customers in the United States it turns out that it's the *values*, not the value that the customers are looking for. Not just what you're offering the customer; it's the values of the business, reflected in the way it does 'the business'. What did people say they want? "To do business with people who are fair and honest ... who respect us as individuals. Don't give us phoney discounts. Don't give us a fake smile. Don't have a greeter at the door who's there like a zombie, pretending to welcome us, but who's really checking for shoplifters. (Kirks, the green guy in the funny green hat, The Wharehouse (at least they are up front, the guy wears a security uniform)).

**Their message:** In a world where people think that the government is corrupt, that the church is corrupt, that the schools are corrupt, show us a business that isn't corrupt, and we'll do business with you for life. They will provide you with that place of "safety" a nice herd to belong to.

### **My message.**

- If it is those in power that set the values for the organisation which determines the corporate culture, and
- it is that culture which people come to you and stay with you for,
- you better be damn sure you have got the right leaders.
- Those overt predators will probably have to go.
- With them will also have to go the neo-classical economic model belief that workers are commodities.



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- Acknowledge that staff are not going to affect the corporate culture in any meaningful way.
- Then stop pretending and get on with the mahi.

Makes you wonder about what the generation “X” ers are going to do to organisations when they get to be leaders as they are steeped in the “what’s in it for me?” model. Greed is good! Capitalism rules!

But that e hoa ma is another debate!