

SURVIVAL BY FLEXIBILITY BUILDING A NEWSROOM CULTURE THAT SUPPORTS CHANGE





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What is culture?

Edward Tylor, 1871:

The whole of knowledge, beliefs, morals, laws, and customs that people acquire as members of a society.

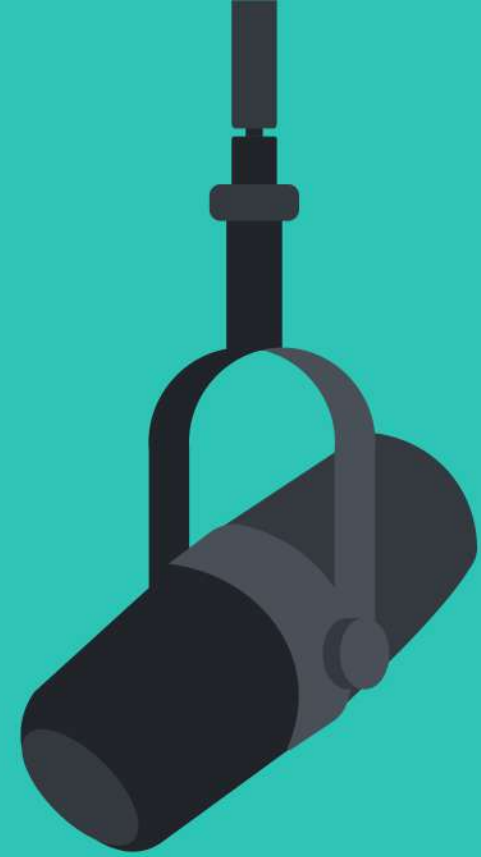




Organisational culture adapts anthropological concepts of culture to workplaces, viewing organizations as mini-societies with shared norms, values, and practices that guide behavior.

What Is Organisational Culture?

The values, behaviours, beliefs, and norms specific to an organisation.



"HOW THINGS ARE DONE AROUND HERE"

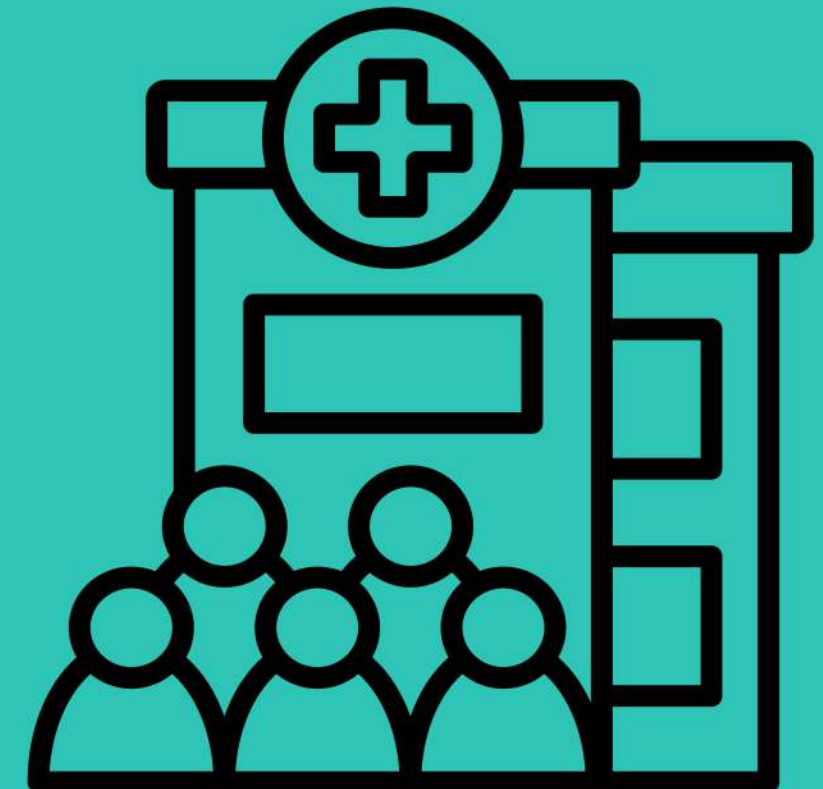
The stories people tell about their work

Shared assumptions about what matters and what doesn't

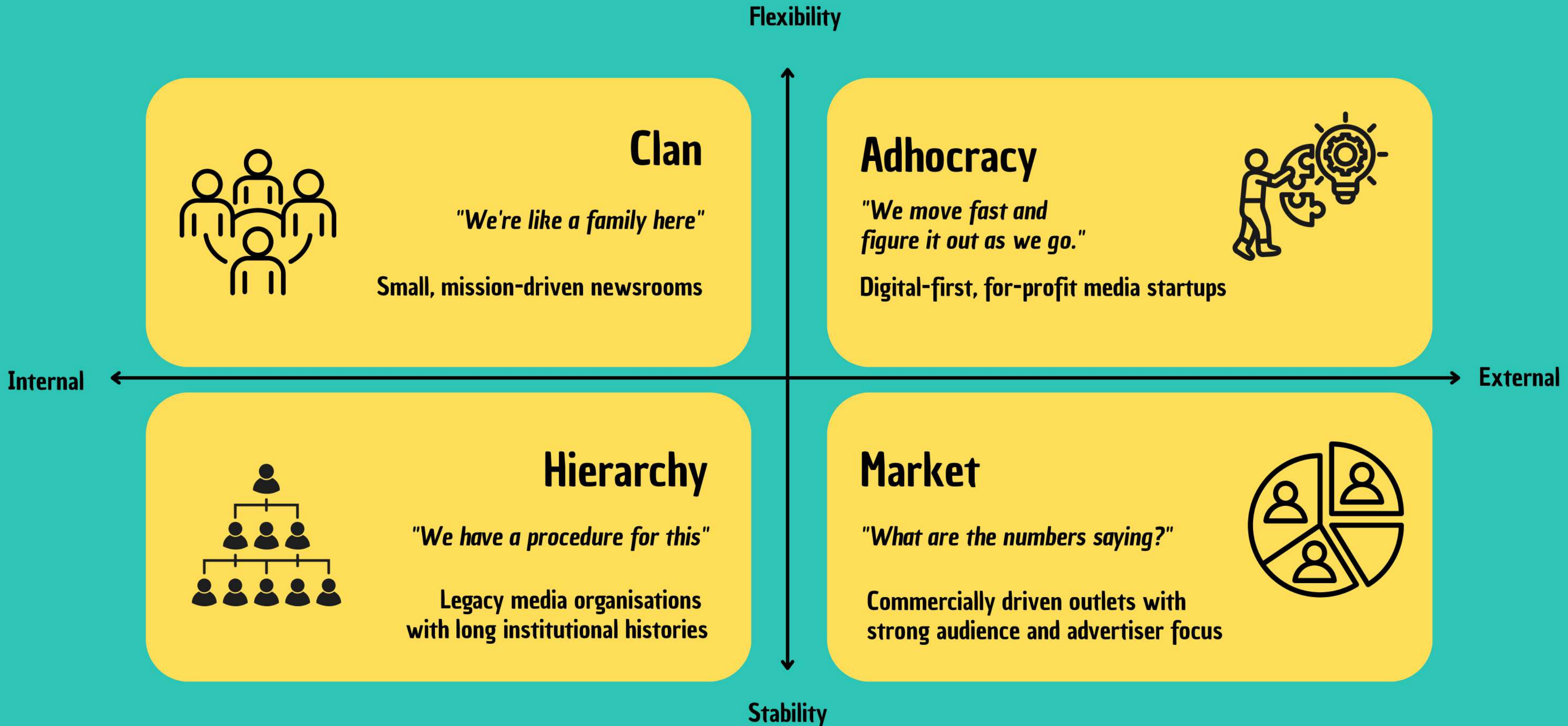
How people behave when no one is watching

What gets rewarded / what gets discouraged

"Culture eats strategy for breakfast." — Peter Drucker



Types of organisational culture



Exercise 1: What's your newsroom culture?

Time: 15 minutes



3 dominant beliefs in your newsroom right now

"We always prioritise depth over speed, even if we're last."

"We don't really talk about money or revenue."



3 stories people tell about "how things really work"

"We don't seek the spotlight: what matters is that our work speaks for itself."



3 things that get rewarded — formally or informally

"Writing long texts instead of short ones, because short ones (that basically just inform) are lazy journalism."



3 things that are discouraged

"Pitching commercially viable formats."

How to Change Culture: Practical steps for culture changes through behaviour



NAME WHAT NEEDS TO CHANGE

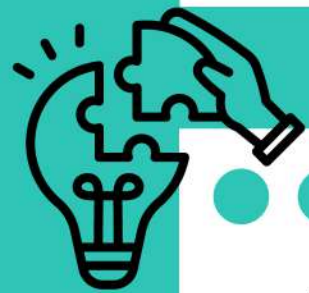
Specific, not vague ("we need to be more agile" means nothing; "we need to publish within 4 hours of a major story breaking" means something)

MODEL IT FROM THE TOP

Leadership behaviour is the loudest cultural signal.

REWARD THE NEW BEHAVIOUR EARLY AND VISIBLY

Even small examples.



CREATE STRUCTURES THAT MAKE THE NEW BEHAVIOUR EASIER

Roles, workflows, permissions

ALLOW EXPERIMENTATION WITHOUT PENALTY

Psychological safety is not a luxury, it's a prerequisite for change

BE PATIENT AND REPETITIVE

Culture doesn't shift from a single workshop or a conversation.





What Does Culture Change Actually Look Like?

When "the journalist knows best" stops being enough

The situation: Your outlet has a deeply held belief — the journalist knows what the audience should care about. It's part of your editorial identity. It's also getting in the way.

Your strategy requires increasing audience engagement. Which means you need to understand what your audience actually finds useful — without abandoning your public interest mission.

These two things are not incompatible. But your culture is treating them as if they are.

The belief that needs to shift: "We know what matters" → "We know what matters — and we also need to know what our audience needs, because that's what makes people connect with us."



**How do you actually
change the culture
in this situation?**

Don't attack the identity – extend it

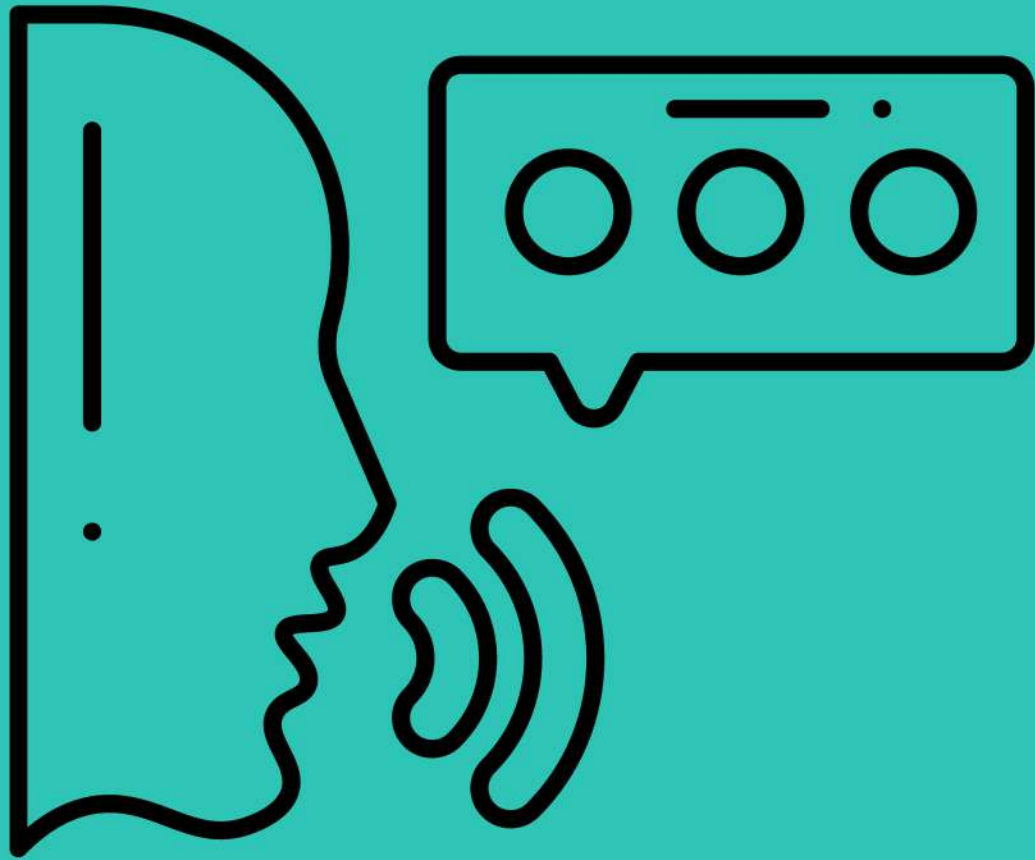
Frame audience understanding not as a concession, but as a reporting skill. Good journalists research their sources; now they also research their readers.

Make it structural, not motivational

Introduce user needs models into the commissioning process itself – so the question "what need does this story fill for the reader?" is asked before the story is assigned, not after it's published.

Show early wins

Find one story where audience-need thinking made the journalism better – more impactful, more widely read, more useful. Make that story the new internal legend.



How do you actually change the culture in this situation?

Let journalists lead

Invite a respected senior journalist — not a manager — to champion the approach. Culture changes faster through peer modelling than top-down instruction.

Be explicit about what doesn't change.

Editorial independence, public interest standards, the decision of what to investigate — none of that moves. What changes is how you think about framing and relevance, not what you cover.



The goal is not to turn journalists into audience researchers. It is to make audience awareness part of what good journalism means in your newsroom.



PressOne's cultural shift from slow long-form to a multi-speed newsroom

For years, PressOne was built around slow, deep journalism: investigations, analysis, multimedia reporting that took time. That identity was a strength. It was also a limitation.

As attention cycles shortened and the public conversation accelerated, we were often right — but we were late.

The decision: Don't abandon long-form. Expand what we can do.

- Added daily news and explainers aligned with the public agenda
- Moved aggressively into video — for a text-based newsroom, this meant rethinking storytelling entirely
- Journalists who spent weeks on a story had to learn to publish in hours when needed
- We had to accept that not every piece would be monumental — some would simply be necessary

How did our beliefs shift?



"We always prioritise depth over speed, even if we're last."

"We don't really talk about money or revenue."



"Sometimes, we need to be first, and add the depth in serial form"

"Revenue is what keeps the light on, we need to talk about it."



"We don't seek the spotlight: what matters is that our work speaks for itself."



"We understand that the audience needs to know us better in order to trust us."



"Writing long texts instead of short ones is rewarded, because short ones (that basically just inform) are just lazy journalism."



"We respect our audience's time and needs and understand that sometimes they just need the information."



"Pitching commercially viable formats is discouraged."



"Pitching commercially viable formats is rewarded, because we also need revenue in order to continue to pursue our mission."

EXERCISE 2: CAPABILITY GAP MAPPING. TIME: 10 MINUTES

Step 1: Write down your newsroom's one strategic objective for the next 12 months.

Step 2: Ask: What do we need to be exceptionally good at to achieve this?

Step 3: Assess honestly: What do we actually have?

Step 4: Identify the gap you need to fill.

Capability gap mapping

Strategy vs. Culture

1

2

3

Strategic objective

Required capability

Cultural reality

Gap



Launch a daily news format

Publishing fast,
iterating on the go

We value depth;
speed feels like
compromise

No workflow or
structure for quick
publishing



Grow paid subscriptions

Understanding
audience needs, direct
communication

We focus on the
work, not the reader
relationship

No one owns audience
development; it's no
one's job



Expand into video

Visual storytelling,
technical video
knowledge

Text-first identity;
video seen as "not
real journalism"

Skills gap +
cultural
resistance

CHANGING YOUR CULTURE DOESN'T MEAN LOSING YOUR IDENTITY.

It means building an organisation that can hold its values steady while changing how it operates.

The newsrooms that survive are not the ones with the best strategy. They are the ones that can adapt strategy – repeatedly – without losing themselves.

THANK YOU

FOR YOUR ATTENTION

