

**The (cultural) impact of the media on
society and politics**
Dr. Christiane Dithmar

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and South Africa go to the polls”, 8 - 10 March 2009

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The mission of the SABC

The goal of the SABC (=South African Broadcasting Corporation) is the complete political equality (total citizen empowerment) of its hearers and viewers. Recipients are encouraged to take part in restoring human dignity and building a common future.

The interconnections in modern societies influenced by globalisation are too complex for the individual to integrate based on his or her own direct experiences. The integration of politics, culture and society in the framework of an active civil society like South Africa takes place today in the mass media through a division of labour. For the individual this fulfils not only the task of reporting about events, but also provides education about the background and an appraisal of different interpretations. A single person could never accomplish this alone.

The SABC sees its mission in playing an active and positive role in the long-term development of society. As a responsible and corporate civic actor, SABC wishes to support and carry out its corporate vision, mission and values in this way. This is even more important in South Africa, where the first free elections took place in 1994. It is also a country with a relatively young pluralistic and multi-ethnic democracy, which, due to the special role of the ANC, still has not experienced an integrating coalition government.



How does the media reach the citizens?

The question is, how and with which methods can media organisations like SABC reach the citizens. How can the individual citizen be reached so that he sees himself as a part of an autonomous and active civil society? How can we impart an image of society in which everyone has the possibility for political participation and access to society's goods and services? A living democracy can only develop when every individual has the concrete feeling of being in the centre of political endeavours and a societal concept of government. This is all embodied in "total citizen empowerment".

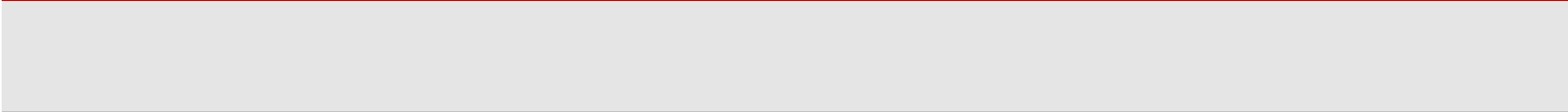
The answer to this question belongs to the wide field of media effectiveness, a discipline that is at the interface between media studies and political science. It is there that phenomena such as "agenda setting", "priming" and "videomalaise" are pondered.

Now, I am not an expert in media studies – I am a business consultant. A business consultant who has specialised in looking at corporate culture. I have accepted the friendly invitation of our host to look at the cultural effect of the media in South Africa (and elsewhere) from the perspective of my discipline.

How can that work, you may be asking. How does the effectiveness of media with citizens relate to the controllability of corporate culture?



A question of perspective



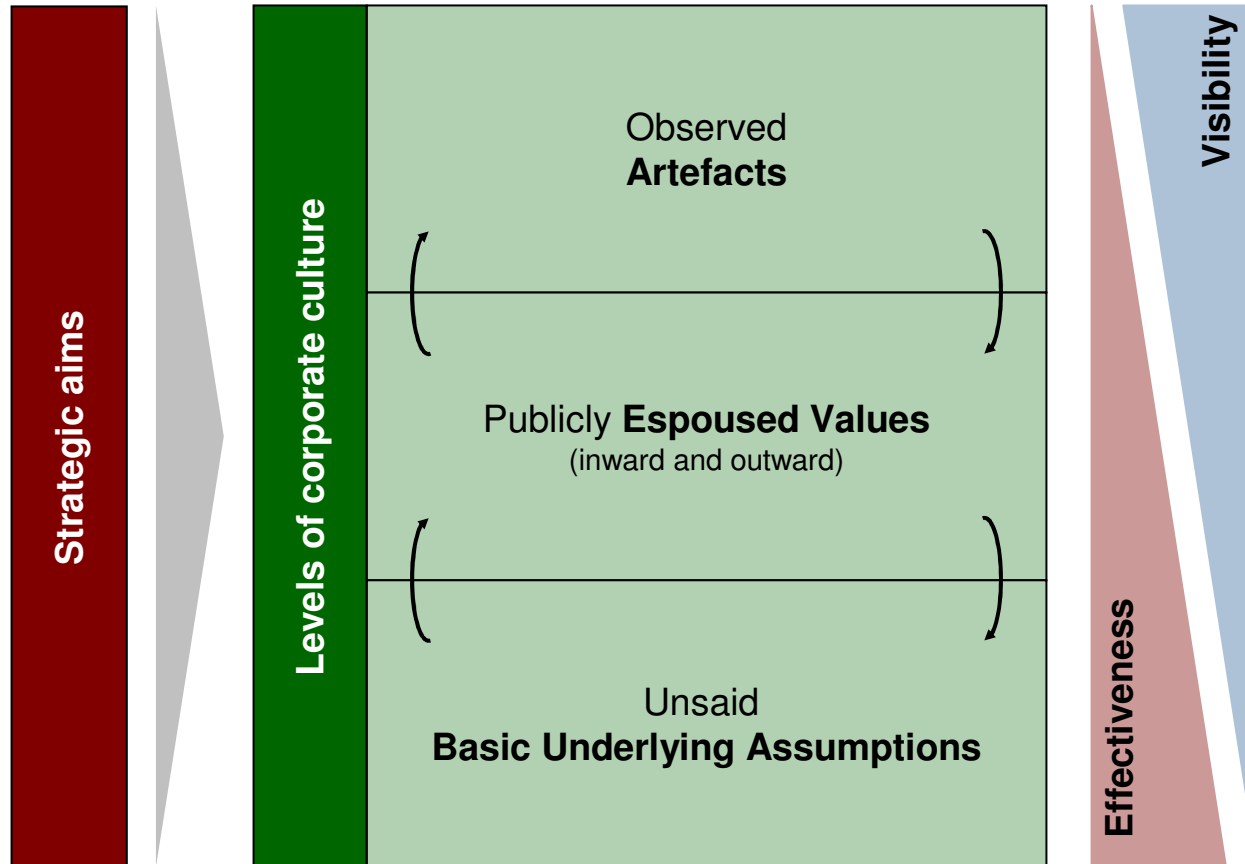
In both cases, the focus is on the individual, whether the single member of society or the employee as a part of a (diversely) large corporate actor. When it comes to the possibility of changing a culture, I see a joint dimension for both areas. If you want to motivate people, you have to start with the perspective of the individual. Only then can a change in society (whether in politics or economics) take place.

I would now like to introduce you to a concept that is currently being discussed in the literature on corporate culture—the model from Edgar Schein of MIT.

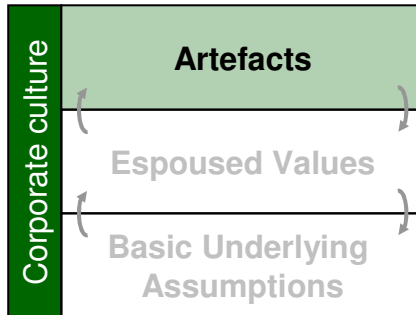


Corporate culture according to Edgar Schein

Corporate culture is focused on strategy

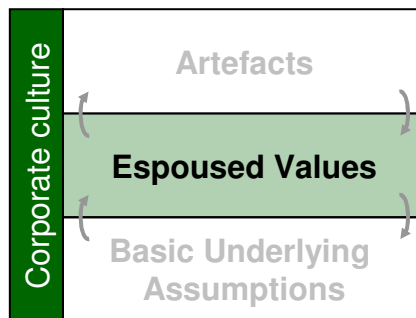


The three levels of our concept of culture



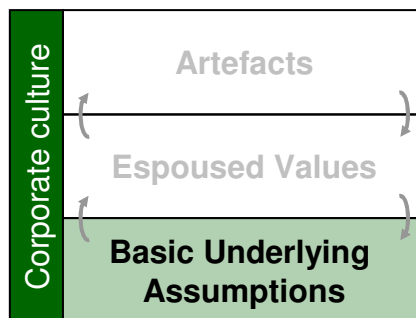
The most overt level of a corporate culture is the level of artefacts—all manifestations of a organisation that can be seen, heard and felt.

The range of artefacts extends from organisational structures to documented work processes, how management treats employees, the quality of communications up to banal things like reserved parking spaces for certain people.



Observation alone is not enough to decode culture. We have to inquire about reasons: Why do employees work as we have observed?

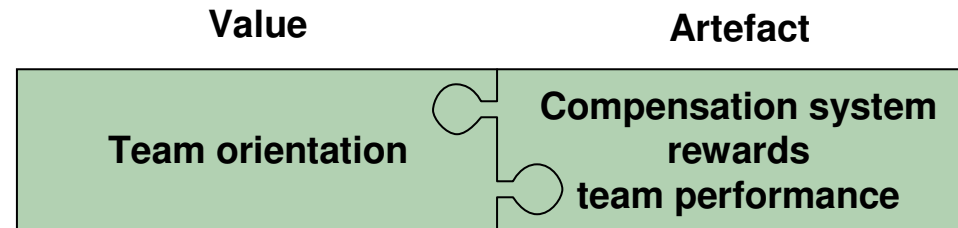
This moves us to the level of **values**, which in a company represent motivators for action.



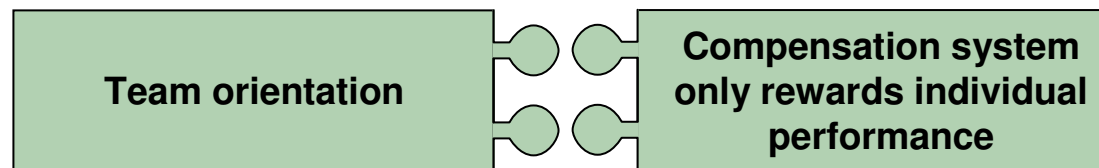
If you really want to understand corporate culture, you have to identify the assumptions and attitudes that are in effect. Employees are not constantly aware of them, since they have become a matter of fact.

These assumptions and attitudes are the real motors of culture. When these are understood, it is easier to identify why observed (behavioural) artefacts have developed.

Inference for attitudes

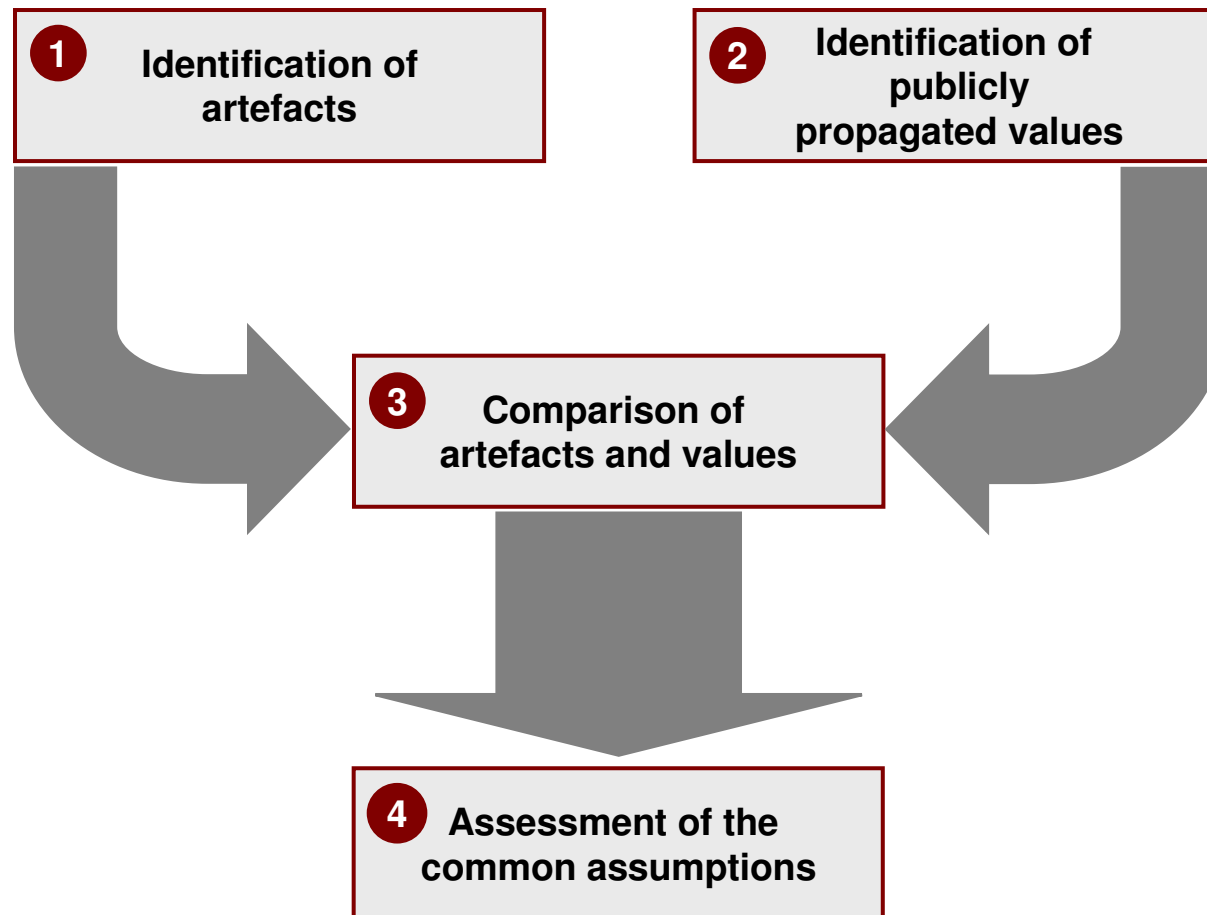


The value and artefact fit together.
Assumptions/conduct do not need to be examined further.

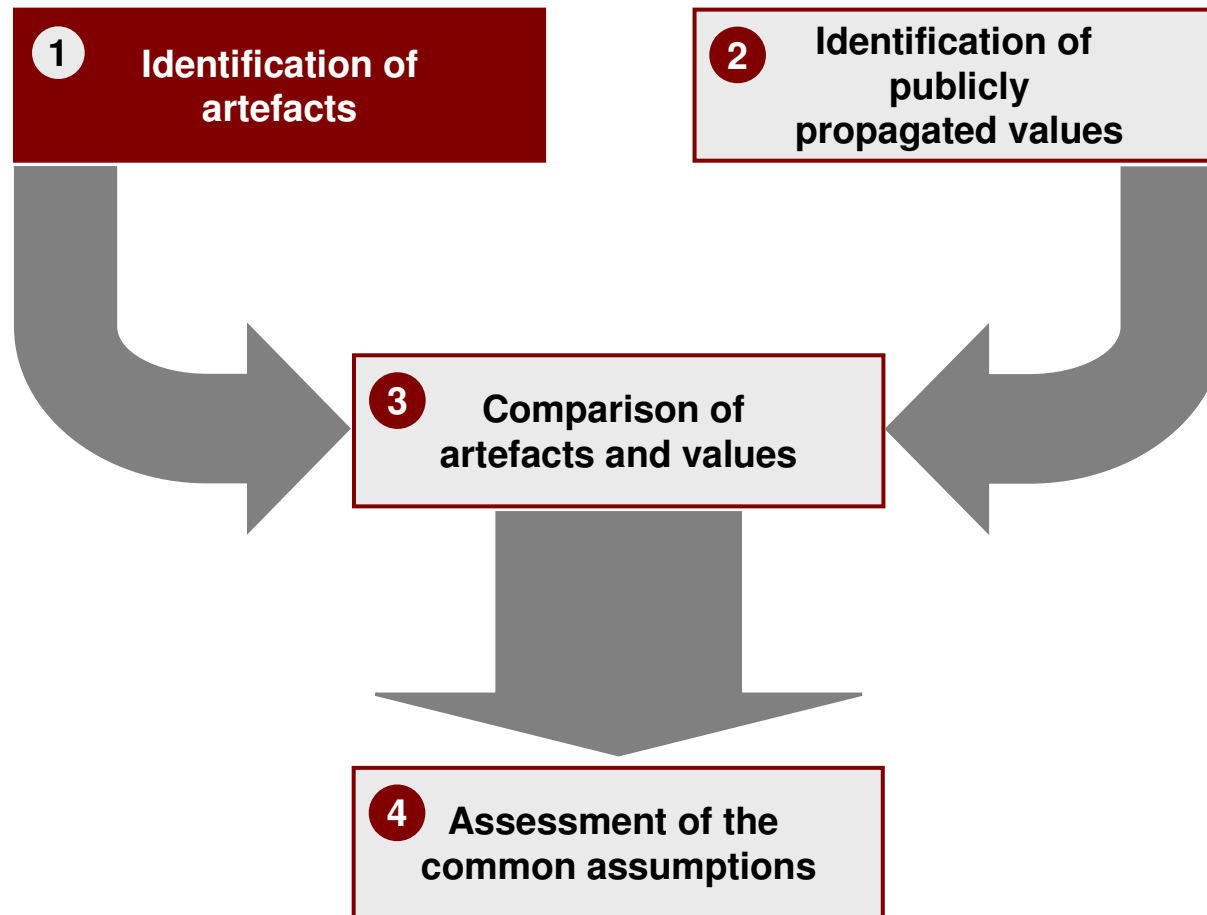


Value and artefact do not fit together. Basic assumptions at work here need to be examined and then checked against their functionality/dysfunctionality in relation to the strategy.

Four steps for the diagnosis of individual corporate culture against the background of the goals to be attained



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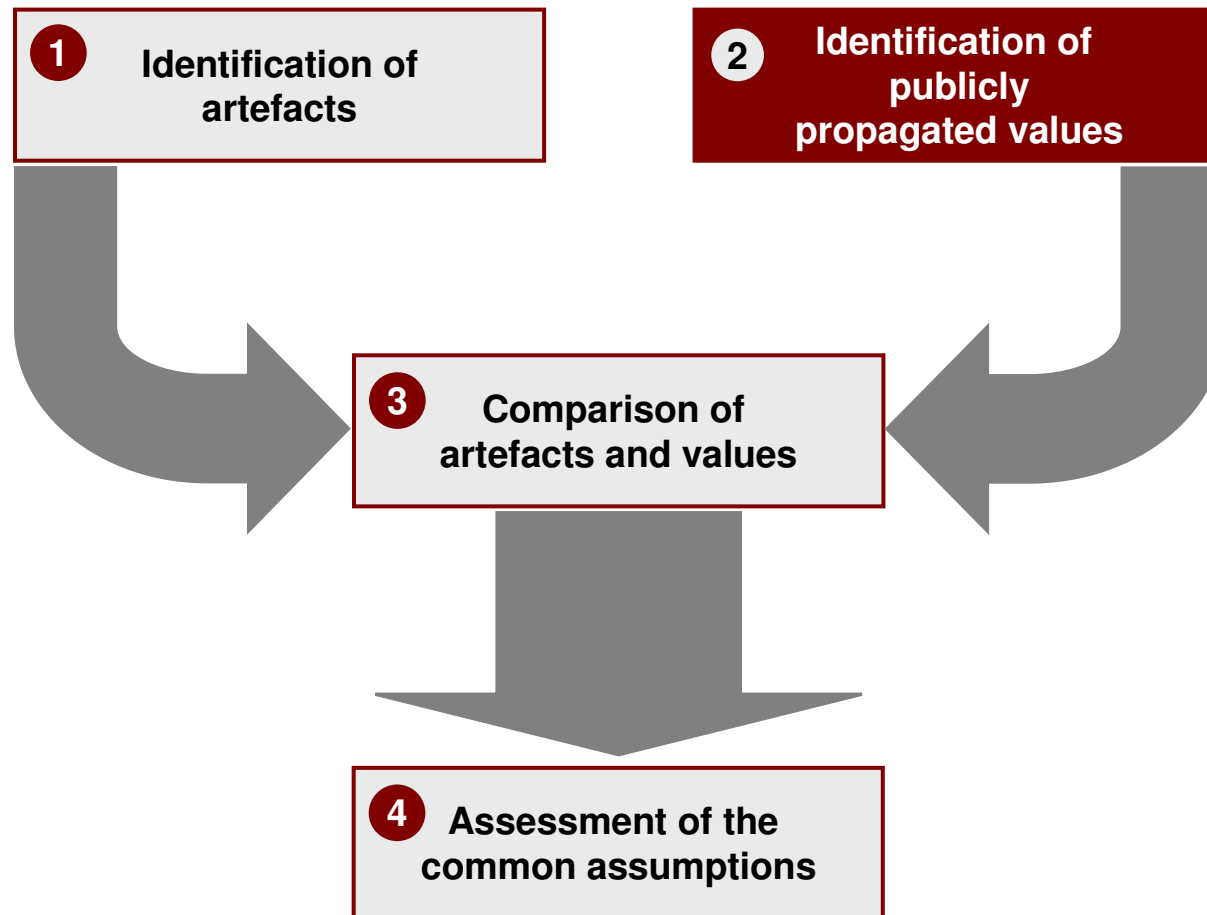


1. Identification of artefacts/symptoms

Artefacts/symptoms are all the characteristics of an organisation that can be seen, heard and felt, for example:

- Communication: How are people informed?
- How are decisions made?
- Conferences/committees/meetings: How often, how are they lead, what is the timing like?
- Relationships of authority/hierarchies: How are they lived out?
- Differences in opinion and conflicts: How is this handled?
- Traditions and rituals: Which ones exist?
- Other information

Four steps for the diagnosis of individual corporate culture against the background of the goals to be attained



Examples for corporate values

The seven most common corporate values:

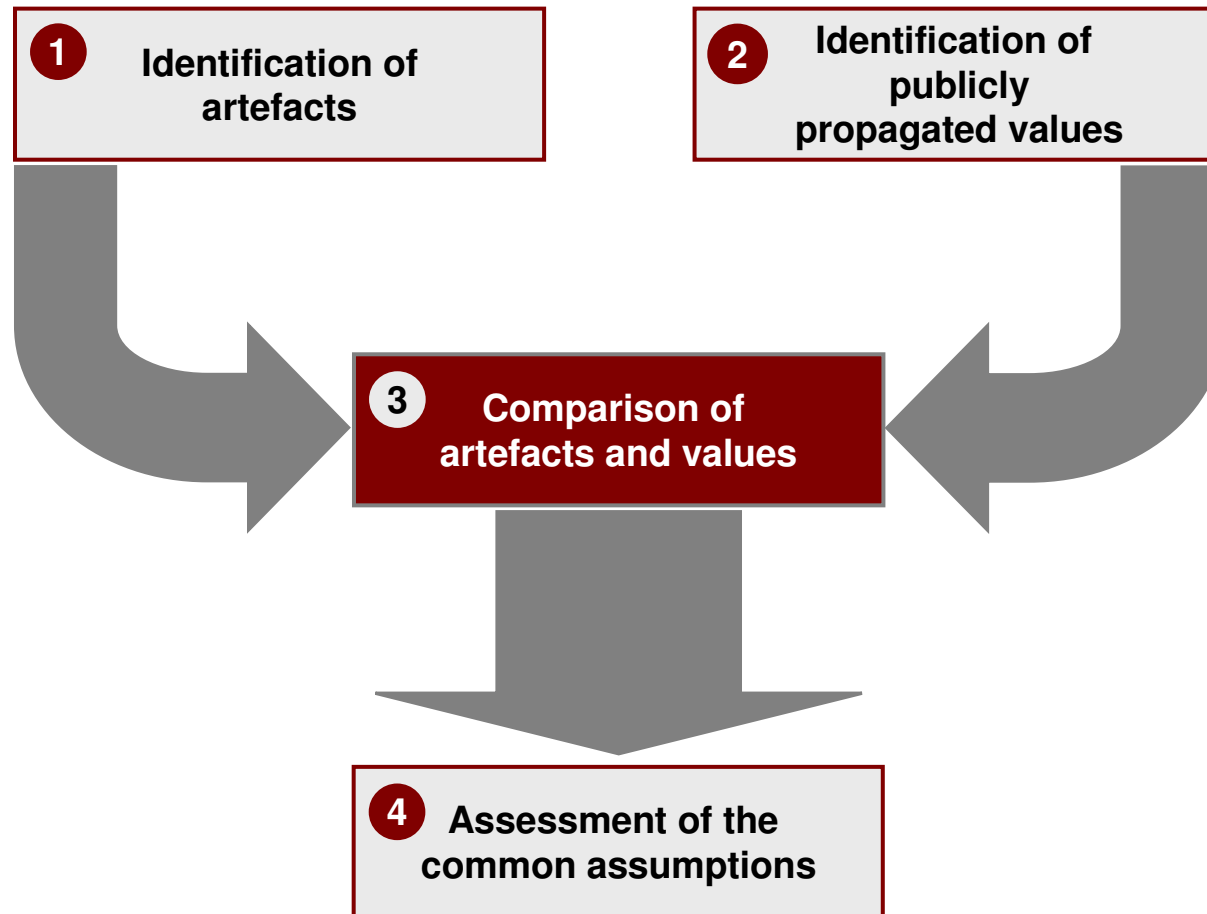
Value	Short phrase for the item*	Top 2 in %**
Tolerance	“Everyone is equally respected—multicultural”	85
Health	“When ill, get well and rest—no disadvantage”	76
Challenge	“Ability to tackle complex tasks”	72
Vision	“Vision is clearly formulated”	70
Leadership	“Agree on measurable goals”	70
Control	“Comparison of work results with goals”	70
Considerate	“Understanding for one’s personal situation”	69

* Statements from 1 “does not apply at all” to 5 “fully applies”

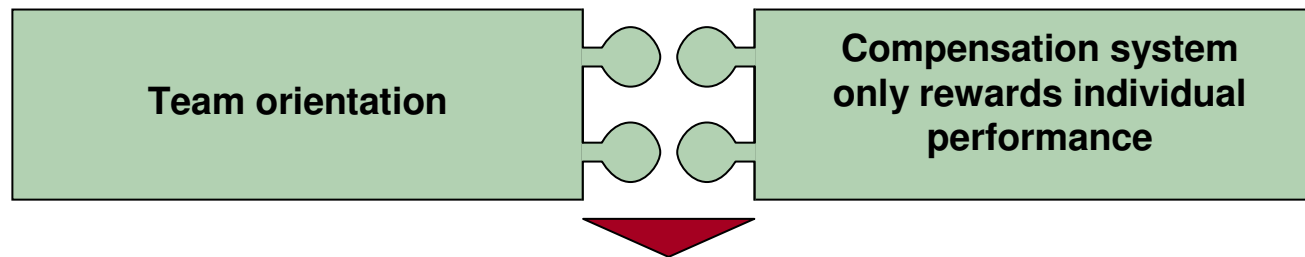
** Top 2 are the values that more than the half of all those surveyed rated with 4 or 5

Source: “Wertekultur und Unternehmenserfolg“, deep white, 2004.

Four steps for the diagnosis of an individual corporate culture against the background of the goals to be attained

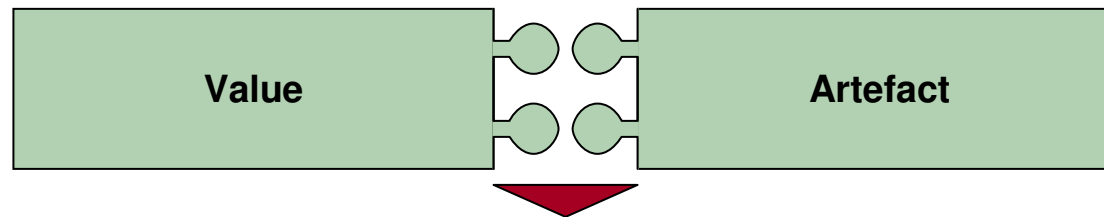


3. Discrepancies between artefacts and values



Value and artefact do not fit together. Basic assumptions are at work here that need to be examined and then checked against their functionality/dysfunctionality in relation to the strategy.

3. Discrepancies between artefacts and values – examples from other surveys



e.g., “We are one company”



Every area develops slides or letterhead with an individual logo.

e.g., “We are innovative”



Innovative thinking takes place at headquarters without involving those in the field responsible for performance.

e.g., “It is ok to make mistakes”



The first reaction when a mistake is made: Who is to blame?

»We want committed and motivated employees« (example)

Functional artefacts

- Figures for performance have risen despite employee cutbacks.

Dysfunctional artefacts

- Department heads: Upper management doesn't listen to us, doesn't take slights seriously and doesn't see us as competent business partners.
- Most managers in the medical staff are basically opposed to management/headquarters.
- Bothersome employees and voices are excluded.
- Managements views employee time burdens as a matter of course.
- There are no transparent career paths (no support of high potentials)
- There is no way to professionally deal with low performers.

Deduced basic assumptions

Management

- Employees can be happy they have a job.
- Department heads are not concerned about the big picture—they only have their own interests in mind.
- We don't want decentral designers, only decentral doers.

Department heads

- People at headquarters have no idea at all what our workday is like or the problems that we are confronted with.

Headquarter departments

- First employees have to be brought back down to earth.



Schein's model and the effect from the media

So how can Schein's model be applied to the question of cultural effectiveness from media organisations like SABC?

In order to transfer Schein's model, you only have to replace the term "corporate culture" with the more universal term of "culture" (in regard to a social system).

In this way, you arrive at the conclusion that the central prerequisite for the cultural effectiveness of the media is in matching the media to the common basic attitudes that make up the culture.

These basic attitudes are mostly unconscious and can be revealed only through the interaction between common values (freedom, democracy, equality, etc.) and tangible cultural artefacts (institutions, organisations, laws, cultural establishments, traditions).

These unconscious basic assumptions influence the cultural attitudes at the crossroads of politics and society—as well as the respective behaviour of the citizens in society. On this note, we can take the well-known one-liner from Bill Clinton and apply it to the question of effectiveness of the media in civil society: "It's the culture, stupid!"