



## Mapping UX: the Cultural Web and cultural change (UXLibsVI workshop)

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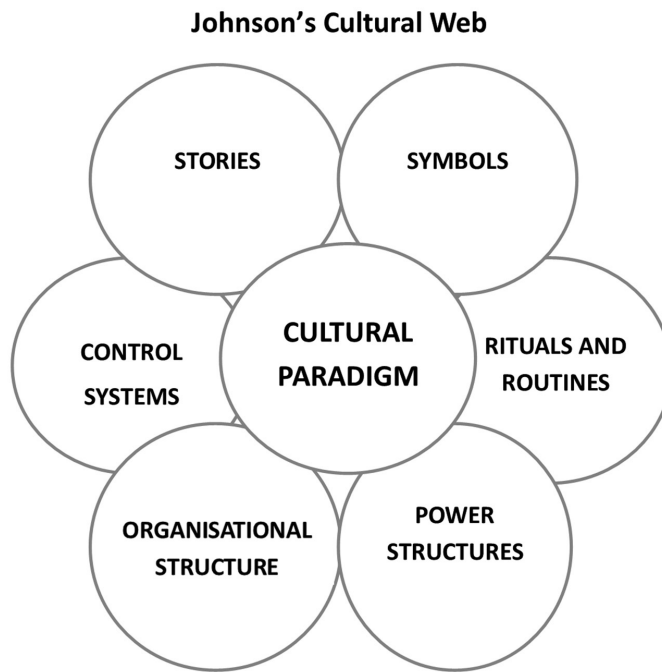
As UX and ethnographic approaches have been increasingly used in libraries in the UK and elsewhere, it seems timely to begin discussions as to how embedded these approaches are in our institutional ways of working and structures.

The adoption of UX in libraries has previously been critiqued for a project-based approach rather than an embedded way of working. Donna Lanclos and Andrew Asher (2016) have described how libraries were stuck in an ‘ethnographish’ or ‘relatively unfinished ethnographic moment,’ typified by short-term and narrowly contextualised projects. While they noted that such an approach could provide real insights into student behaviour, and actions and changes that have improved the student experience, they have not led to ‘a different way of seeing’ (Wolcott, 1999). Lanclos and Asher conclude by stating that ‘ethnography should be core to the business of the library.’ At the UXLibs conference in 2019, Carl Barrow spoke on the topic, ‘Culture eats the design process for breakfast,’ and in his reflections on the conference stated, ‘It’s clear that there needs to be a shift in organisational culture if UX in any institution is going to be truly embedded’ (Barrow, 2019).

In my workshop I wanted to explore how we could picture ethnography as core to the business of the library, or for UX to be embedded in the culture of where you work. Culture may simply be described as ‘how we do things around here’, but that is a less useful definition if you are trying to understand how culture works. A useful tool (which I have previously used in other contexts to consider organisational culture more broadly) is the Cultural Web.

The Cultural Web was initially developed by Gerry Johnson (Johnson, 1987) and has been subsequently outlined in more recent publications (Johnson, 1992; Johnson et al., 2007). It provides a means of analysing the culture of an organisation by showing the ‘behavioural, physical and symbolic manifestations of a culture that inform and are informed by the taken-for-granted assumptions, or paradigm, of

an organisation' (Johnson et al., 2007, p. 197). More simply, the Cultural Web is a tool that allows us to make visible the taken-for-granted and often invisible aspects that make up an organisational culture.



*Figure 1* Johnson's Cultural Web. Adapted from Johnson, Scholes and Whittington, 2007.

The Cultural Web identifies a number of linked elements that make up culture. In the workshop, participants mapped aspects of their organisations to the web using the following prompted questions and examples, which I had noted from my initial experience at Middlesex University.

## Stories

*What stories are told to each other, to new staff or to others, about successes and failures, heroes and mavericks?*

“When I started at Middlesex University, much was made of an emphasis on LEAN and continuous improvement – the department was active in the university-wide

Continuous Improvement Practitioner Programme and valued the work done in this area. Much was also said about collaboration and about putting the student at the centre of what we did.”

## Symbols

*Symbols are objects, events, acts or people that convey meaning over their functional purpose. They can include logos, office layouts and décor, dress codes and forms of language used. What symbols do you notice in your organisation?*

“One obvious example for me was how the furniture and carpeting, etc in the ground floor main enquiry area was dominated by red, the main corporate colour – despite my feeling that this was not the most suitable colour for a busy and sometimes stressful area.”



## Rituals and routines

*What do rituals and routines such as interview panels, training programmes and norms of behaviour tell you about the organisation and what is signalled as important?*

“There was an obvious and real emphasis on the student experience across the service. Services were very focused and obviously cared about improving the student experience. Students were less evident in decision making at that time aside from normal Student Union representation.”

## Power structures

*Where does real power and influence over decisions, operation and direction lie? Consider both formal and informal power structures.*

“Within the department, the Director was supportive of, though had limited experience and knowledge of, UX. Some key library staff who had strong informal power through length of service and expertise had attended conferences and training events and displayed an eagerness to explore UX approaches.”

## Organisational structure

*How does the organisational structure reflect power and roles and relationships? What does the organisational structure say about what is valued?*

“The library was part of a large, converged service with a focus on all aspects of student support. The library customer services team reported separately from other library teams and my impression was that it was seen as lower in the structure.”

## Control systems

*What is measured and rewarded? What Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) or other targets are in place? How are staff rewarded?*

“There were limited KPIs but, like many libraries, a lot of measurement of activity as opposed to an emphasis on student feedback. Staff pay was largely linked to length of service but there was a performance scheme that was used to reward contributions above people’s job roles.”

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After mapping the current state of their organisation, workshop participants were asked to explore the desired future culture, and identify which elements needed changing or creating, or could be used to embed UX. They were asked to think about the question: ‘What does the culture need to look like to make this change happen?’

Using my examples above, I talked about how I had changed organisational culture: I moved the customer services team alongside other library teams; included key people with informal power at all levels in our first UX projects; and planned to model a UX practitioner programme on the highly regarded and established continuous improvement programme. We talked about how we could provide recognition (if not reward) to those contributing to UX approaches and how this needed to be reported upwards and across the organisation. We discussed changes to control systems that may be a barrier and may constrain desired changes, and talked about how we could include aspects of UX in induction and job descriptions.

In a short workshop there are natural constraints to this type of exercise. With limited time, maps of both current and desired cultures were incomplete and actions plans only at an initial stage, leaving work to be done outside the workshop to



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complete them. There were advantages where there was more than one person from an organisation in the workshop and I encouraged people to take the tool and share with colleagues to develop a richer picture and to benefit from the ideas of others. It was clear though that the tool was easy to use and effective at mapping and analysing current culture as well as providing steps in order to change that culture and was therefore useful in this context. I'd certainly be interested in hearing how useful you may find it in your own organisation.

## References

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