



LEVEL 3: UNIT RESOURCES

Shape > Review and Plan > Reviewing your Unit:

Unit Culture and Practice (support document)

The culture of a Unit is “how things are done here.” It encompasses all the customs, habits and practices the Unit follows. Culture is not always easy to define but members and visitors may be very aware of its different elements. Culture can have a major impact on members’ sense of belonging and ultimately on their engagement with the Unit.

- A Unit’s culture develops over many years. Some elements may have been decided deliberately. Other elements may have developed almost unconsciously.
- Whenever someone refers to “that’s how we do things”, “because we have always done it that way”, “it’s part of our tradition”, or similar, they are referring to a deeply embedded aspect of culture.
- A Unit’s culture will have been conducive to the members’ needs when it first developed or evolved, but over time, as people and circumstances change, it can become detached from the will or best interests of the members, detrimental to the health of the Unit.
- In 2015, United Grand Lodge of England’s (UGLE’s) Membership Focus Group (MFG) found that the out-of-date cultures of some Lodges, and especially those that adopt a ‘one size fits all’ approach to their work, can result in the disaffection of members.¹
- One essential element of culture is “inclusivity.” Some Lodges and Chapters try to involve all members in discussions, plans and activities. In others, the Past Masters, Past Principals, or a small group of officers are party to these, but others are rarely consulted.
- Closely related is the issue of power, or influence, and decision making. In some Lodges or Chapters, all members have a voice, and are heard, and decisions are made in “open Lodge – or Chapter – assembled.” In others, decisions are made in committee or by the Master or Principals or some other group. In some cases, one or more senior members may effectively have the power of veto over decisions before they are put to the members.
- Communication is an integral part of culture. In open cultures, members are kept fully informed and are consulted. Informal communication channels – such as social media chats – may be used in addition to formal methods. In closed cultures, communications are kept formal and tend to happen after making decisions.
- A Unit’s practices tend to evolve over time, even if somewhat slowly in some cases. Practices can refer to how a Unit carries out the activities associated with its committees and social events as well as formal meetings and festive boards.
- Practices develop into traditions, which form important and often much-loved features of a Unit. Even so, traditions can and should evolve and develop.
- Tradition is sometimes used as an argument to resist evolutionary change in a Unit, which can result in stagnation. Adopting a “Yes, if ...” approach to change, rather than a “No, because ...” one, fosters open minded thinking, creativity and a positive mindset. It is being encouraged by UGLE & SGC and those Units which have adopted it have already benefited from doing so.

¹ John Roscoe, *Results of the analysis of the second survey of Freemasons concerned with recruitment and involvement*, report for the MFG (2015).



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- It is important that culture and practices are reviewed at intervals, to ensure that they serve the needs and interests of the current and likely future members. Otherwise, there is a danger that cultures and practices that suited one generation are maintained despite not suiting the current, to the detriment of the future health and strength of the Unit.
- The review questions at **Example questions for a review** will help a Unit to review its culture and practices.