

A PRACTICAL EVALUATION FRAMEWORK

What Is Culture? A Complete Rubric

Twenty-five dimensions, four foundational layers, six measurement indicators, and a summary scoring sheet for evaluating the depth, strength, and vitality of any culture.

25 Dimensions · 6 Indicators per Dimension · Scoring Scale 1-4 · Maximum Score: 600

INTRODUCTION

How to Use This Rubric

This rubric evaluates culture across **25 dimensions**, organized within **4 foundational layers**. Each dimension is scored using **6 indicators** on a 1–4 scale, for a maximum of 24 points per dimension and a total possible score of 600. Use this rubric to assess the current strength of a culture, to track change over time, to compare cultures, or to identify dimensions that need deliberate attention and investment.

A high score does not mean a culture is "better." It means it is *distinct, widely shared, persistent, actively transmitted, internally integrated, and capable of adapting without losing itself*. These are the conditions under which a culture survives pressure and time.

THE FOUR LAYERS

Foundation

Every cultural dimension belongs to one of four foundational layers. A robust cultural assessment examines all four rather than focusing only on visible customs.

Layer	Examples
Ideas	Beliefs, values, worldview, identity, cosmology, purpose of life
Institutions	Family, religion, government, education, economy, law, civic structure
Behaviors	Customs, rituals, language, etiquette, social norms, ceremonies
Artifacts	Food, clothing, architecture, tools, art, technology, material objects

Scoring Guide

Each of the 25 dimensions is assessed using these six indicators. Score 1–4 for each. The indicator total is the dimension's score (max 24). Record your reasoning in the Notes column.

Distinctiveness How unique is this feature compared with neighboring or dominant cultures? 1 Largely borrowed or absorbed from dominant culture; little distinguishable character 2 Some distinct features but heavily blended with outside influences 3 Clearly distinct; recognizable as belonging to this culture specifically 4 Highly distinctive; a defining marker that immediately identifies this culture
Sharedness How widely is this feature practiced or held within the group? 1 Practiced by a small minority within the culture 2 Common among some segments but not broadly adopted 3 Widely shared across most of the cultural group 4 Near-universal; foundational to group membership and participation
Persistence Has it been maintained across generations? 1 Largely lost or abandoned within recent generations 2 Significantly weakened; surviving in fragments or symbolic form only 3 Maintained through multiple generations with recognizable continuity 4 Deeply persistent; survived major disruption, displacement, or suppression
Transmission Is it actively taught to children and newcomers? 1 No active transmission; survival is accidental or passive 2 Transmitted informally or inconsistently 3 Actively taught through family, community, or institutional channels 4 Systematically transmitted; dedicated institutions or practices ensure its continuity
Integration How well does it connect with and reinforce other cultural elements? 1 Isolated; does not connect meaningfully with other cultural dimensions 2 Some connections but primarily self-contained 3 Meaningfully connected to several other cultural dimensions 4 Deeply integrated; its presence reinforces and is reinforced by multiple other dimensions
Adaptability How does it respond to new circumstances while maintaining continuity? 1 Either rigidly unchanged (brittle) or completely abandoned under pressure 2 Adapts but loses much of its original character in the process 3 Adapts while retaining core elements; change is managed rather than imposed 4 Highly adaptive; absorbs new influences and transforms them on its own terms

PART ONE · THE RUBRIC

All 25 Dimensions

Score each dimension using the six indicators on the previous page. Enter scores in the column cells and total them in the SCORE column. Add analytical notes in the NOTES column.

Column headers: *DIST.* = Distinctiveness · *SHARE* = Sharedness · *PERSIST* = Persistence · *TRANS.* = Transmission · *INTEG.* = Integration · *ADAPT.* = Adaptability · Max score per dimension: 24

LAYER 1 · IDEAS

1 Identity								
Sub-Elements	DIST.	SHARE	PERSIST	TRANS.	INTEG.	ADAPT.	SCORE	NOTES
- Ethnic identity - National identity - Tribal or clan identity - Religious identity - Historical identity - Collective memory - Shared myths of origin								

LAYER 3 · BEHAVIORS

2 Language and Communication								
Sub-Elements	DIST.	SHARE	PERSIST	TRANS.	INTEG.	ADAPT.	SCORE	NOTES
- Primary language(s) - Dialects - Writing system - Oral traditions - Storytelling - Proverbs - Communication style - Nonverbal communication - Humor								

LAYER 1 · IDEAS

3 Values								
Sub-Elements	DIST.	SHARE	PERSIST	TRANS.	INTEG.	ADAPT.	SCORE	NOTES
- Right and wrong - Justice - Honor - Freedom - Equality - Loyalty - Hospitality - Individualism vs. collectivism - Respect for elders - Responsibility								

4 Beliefs and Worldview								
Sub-Elements	DIST.	SHARE	PERSIST	TRANS.	INTEG.	ADAPT.	SCORE	NOTES
- Religion - Spiritual beliefs - Cosmology - Views of God - Afterlife beliefs - Human nature - Purpose of life - Destiny - Fate - Supernatural beliefs								

LAYER 3 · BEHAVIORS

5 Norms and Social Rules								
Sub-Elements	DIST.	SHARE	PERSIST	TRANS.	INTEG.	ADAPT.	SCORE	NOTES
- Expected behavior - Etiquette - Manners - Gender expectations - Age expectations - Privacy norms - Public behavior - Conflict resolution								

LAYER 2 · INSTITUTIONS

6 Family Structure

Sub-Elements	DIST.	SHARE	PERSIST	TRANS.	INTEG.	ADAPT.	SCORE	NOTES
• Marriage customs • Parenting • Kinship • Extended family • Household organization • Inheritance • Elder care								

7 Social Organization

Sub-Elements	DIST.	SHARE	PERSIST	TRANS.	INTEG.	ADAPT.	SCORE	NOTES
• Social classes • Leadership • Community structure • Tribal organization • Civic institutions • Associations • Networks								

8 Political Culture

Sub-Elements	DIST.	SHARE	PERSIST	TRANS.	INTEG.	ADAPT.	SCORE	NOTES
• Authority • Government • Citizenship • Civic participation • Rule of law • Leadership expectations • Political trust								

9 Economic Culture

Sub-Elements	DIST.	SHARE	PERSIST	TRANS.	INTEG.	ADAPT.	SCORE	NOTES
• Work ethic • Entrepreneurship • Trade traditions • Property ownership • Saving • Spending • Charity • Labor organization								

10 Education

Sub-Elements	DIST.	SHARE	PERSIST	TRANS.	INTEG.	ADAPT.	SCORE	NOTES
• Knowledge transmission • Formal education • Apprenticeships • Moral education • Literacy • Intellectual traditions								

LAYER 4 · ARTIFACTS

11 Arts

Sub-Elements	DIST.	SHARE	PERSIST	TRANS.	INTEG.	ADAPT.	SCORE	NOTES
• Music • Dance • Visual arts • Sculpture • Architecture • Poetry • Literature • Theater • Film								

12 Material Culture

Sub-Elements	DIST.	SHARE	PERSIST	TRANS.	INTEG.	ADAPT.	SCORE	NOTES
• Clothing • Housing • Food • Tools • Technology • Transportation • Crafts • Jewelry • Weapons								

LAYER 3 · BEHAVIORS

13 Rituals and Ceremonies

Sub-Elements	DIST.	SHARE	PERSIST	TRANS.	INTEG.	ADAPT.	SCORE	NOTES
• Birth • Coming of age • Marriage • Funeral • Religious ceremonies • National celebrations • Seasonal festivals								

LAYER 4 · ARTIFACTS

14 Food Culture

Sub-Elements	DIST.	SHARE	PERSIST	TRANS.	INTEG.	ADAPT.	SCORE	NOTES
- Cuisine - Meal structure - Table etiquette - Ingredients - Cooking methods - Food symbolism - Hospitality practices								

LAYER 1 · IDEAS

15 Time Orientation

Sub-Elements	DIST.	SHARE	PERSIST	TRANS.	INTEG.	ADAPT.	SCORE	NOTES
- Punctuality - Long-term planning - Tradition - Innovation - Attitudes toward the past, present, and future								

16 Relationship to Nature

Sub-Elements	DIST.	SHARE	PERSIST	TRANS.	INTEG.	ADAPT.	SCORE	NOTES
- Environmental beliefs - Agriculture - Hunting - Conservation - Sacred places - Land ownership								

LAYER 4 · ARTIFACTS

17 Technology

Sub-Elements	DIST.	SHARE	PERSIST	TRANS.	INTEG.	ADAPT.	SCORE	NOTES
- Technology adoption - Innovation - Digital culture - Scientific traditions - Engineering practices								

LAYER 3 · BEHAVIORS

18 Health and Medicine

Sub-Elements	DIST.	SHARE	PERSIST	TRANS.	INTEG.	ADAPT.	SCORE	NOTES
- Medical systems - Healing traditions - Hygiene - Nutrition - Mental health beliefs - Birth practices								

LAYER 2 · INSTITUTIONS

19 Law and Justice

Sub-Elements	DIST.	SHARE	PERSIST	TRANS.	INTEG.	ADAPT.	SCORE	NOTES
- Formal laws - Customary law - Dispute resolution - Punishment - Rights - Obligations								

LAYER 1 · IDEAS

20 Moral System

Sub-Elements	DIST.	SHARE	PERSIST	TRANS.	INTEG.	ADAPT.	SCORE	NOTES
- Virtues - Sin - Shame - Guilt - Forgiveness - Duty - Honor								

LAYER 4 · ARTIFACTS

21 Symbols

Sub-Elements	DIST.	SHARE	PERSIST	TRANS.	INTEG.	ADAPT.	SCORE	NOTES
• Flags • Religious symbols • National symbols • Colors • Dress • Monuments • Icons								

LAYER 1 · IDEAS

22 Collective Memory

Sub-Elements	DIST.	SHARE	PERSIST	TRANS.	INTEG.	ADAPT.	SCORE	NOTES
• Heroes • Historical events • Founding narratives • Shared victories • Shared tragedies								

LAYER 3 · BEHAVIORS

23 Cultural Transmission

Sub-Elements	DIST.	SHARE	PERSIST	TRANS.	INTEG.	ADAPT.	SCORE	NOTES
• Parenting • Schools • Religious institutions • Elders • Storytelling • Media • Socialization								

24 Adaptation and Change

Sub-Elements	DIST.	SHARE	PERSIST	TRANS.	INTEG.	ADAPT.	SCORE	NOTES
• Openness to outsiders • Innovation • Globalization • Migration • Assimilation • Cultural preservation								

LAYER 1 · IDEAS

25 Aesthetic Standards

Sub-Elements	DIST.	SHARE	PERSIST	TRANS.	INTEG.	ADAPT.	SCORE	NOTES
• Beauty • Fashion • Music preferences • Interior design • Architecture • Public art								

Master Score Sheet

Transfer each dimension's total score from the rubric pages. Use the Layer column to identify patterns across the four foundational layers. Maximum score is 600 (25 dimensions × 24 points each).

#	Dimension	Layer	DIST.	SHARE	PERSIST	TRANS.	INTEG.	ADAPT.	TOTAL
1	Identity	Ideas							
2	Language and Communication	Behaviors							
3	Values	Ideas							
4	Beliefs and Worldview	Ideas							
5	Norms and Social Rules	Behaviors							
6	Family Structure	Institutions							
7	Social Organization	Institutions							
8	Political Culture	Institutions							
9	Economic Culture	Institutions							
10	Education	Institutions							
11	Arts	Artifacts							
12	Material Culture	Artifacts							
13	Rituals and Ceremonies	Behaviors							
14	Food Culture	Artifacts							
15	Time Orientation	Ideas							
16	Relationship to Nature	Ideas							
17	Technology	Artifacts							
18	Health and Medicine	Behaviors							
19	Law and Justice	Institutions							
20	Moral System	Ideas							
21	Symbols	Artifacts							
22	Collective Memory	Ideas							
23	Cultural Transmission	Behaviors							
24	Adaptation and Change	Behaviors							
25	Aesthetic Standards	Ideas							
GRAND TOTAL (max 600)									

Interpreting the Grand Total

Score Range	Cultural Vitality Assessment
480-600 (80-100%)	Highly vital: distinct, widely shared, persistent, and actively transmitted across most dimensions
360-479 (60-79%)	Moderately vital: strong in some dimensions, showing weakness or loss in others; requires attention
240-359 (40-59%)	At risk: significant erosion across multiple dimensions; deliberate preservation effort needed
Below 240 (under 40%)	Critical: most dimensions showing suppression, abandonment, or loss; urgent intervention required