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Typologies of organisational culture – one-dimensional view

Abstract: Typologies and classifications of organisational culture can be divided into one-dimensional and multidimensional. Some of these are based on simple dichotomies, which locate organisational culture within the intensity scale of one feature. Other are more complex, two-dimensional or multidimensional classifications. The objective of the article is to describe the characteristic of typologies of organizational culture from the point of view of management.

Key words: organizational culture, typologies, one-dimensional, management.

1. Introduction

The objective of the article is to describe the characteristic of typologies of organizational culture from the point of view of management. This goal could be achieved by:

1. Description of one-dimensional typologies of organizational culture,
2. Identification of the most common one-dimensional typologies of corporate culture used by organizational researchers,
3. Analysis of the most popular dichotomic typologies of organizational culture.

2. Types of organisational culture

A number of typologies and classifications of organisational culture, which can be divided into one-dimensional and multidimensional. Some of these are based on simple dichotomies, which locate organisational

culture within the intensity scale of one feature. Others are more complex, two-dimensional or multidimensional classifications. One-dimensional models are presented by E.T. Hall, who distinguished high- and low-context cultures [Hall 1984] because of the situational conditions of a communication process (context); L. Zbiegień-Maciąg, who reviews one-dimensional models, distinguishing positive and negative, introvert and extrovert, conservative and innovative, male and female, bureaucratic and pragmatic, elite and egalitarian, weak and strong cultures [Zbiegień-Maciąg 1999, pp. 52–63]; R.R. Gesteland, who divided cultures according to the level of transaction concentration (pro-partner and pro-transactional cultures), according to the forms of desired and inappropriate behaviour (ceremonial and un-ceremonial cultures), according to the forms of behaviour applied (verbal, non-verbal and para-verbal – expressive and reserved cultures), and according to the approach to time (monochronic and polychronic cultures); R. Rutka and M. Czerska, who distinguish cultures from the point of view of praxeological criteria of assessment (pro-effective and anti-effective cultures) [Rutka, Czerska, 2002, pp. 277–288], and C. Sikorski, who presents cultures ordered according to the level of avoiding uncertainty (cultures of high and low tolerance for uncertainty) [Sikorski 1999, pp. 240–260]. It has to be emphasised that using one-dimensional classifications oversimplifies and limits typologies to only two types of culture. On the other hand, multi-dimensional classifications, which distinguish many types of culture, lead to the blurring of boundaries and the overlapping of descriptions of different cultures. The most popular typologies are two-dimensional, distinguishing four types of culture. Apart from R.E. Quinn's model, described previously, it is worth paying attention to the characteristics of the cultures of R. Harrison and C. B. Handy, T.E. Deal and A.A. Kennedy, N.H. Snyder, T.J. Peters, as well as R. Goffee and G. Jones [Sułkowski 2012, s. 83–93].

3. Main dichotomic classifications

The analysis can begin with one-dimensional classifications. Those most often found in the subject literature include the following dichotomies:

- 1) Weak culture – strong culture.
- 2) Positive culture – negative culture.
- 3) Pragmatic culture – bureaucratic culture.
- 4) Introvert culture – extrovert culture.
- 5) Conservative culture – innovative culture.
- 6) Hierarchical culture – egalitarian culture.
- 7) Individualist culture – collectivist culture.

4. Weak culture versus strong culture

The typology of weak and strong cultures is one of the most often analysed issues of the cultural current in management. The subject literature is dominated by the belief that strong organisational culture prevails. Strong organisational culture is characterised by homogeneity, which means uniformity and common agreement among employees as to key assumptions, values and norms. Strong identification with organisational values is supposed to lead to the greater involvement of employees and, in consequence, to a higher effectiveness. Internal cultural incoherence, the manifestation of which is the emergence of subcultures or even counter-cultures, could lead to a disintegration of the organisation (Table 1).

Still, the homogeneity of organisational culture has its drawbacks. V. Sathe, accepting the superiority of strong organisational cultures, proposes to assess them in organisational terms, taking into consideration their distinctiveness and the extent to which they are spread and rooted [Sathe 1983]. However, there are also numerous researchers pointing to the disadvantages of strong organisational cultures. I. Janis described the dangerous phenomenon of 'group thinking', which is a social mechanism of group integration, coercing conformity [Irving 1982].

A culture which is strong, or homogenous, distinct, spread-out and rooted in an organisation, can limit the innovativeness and rationality of

the decisions made, as well as hinder the process of introducing changes. The focus on the community of values obscures the views of non-conformists and provokes schematic thinking, which is shared by the majority. The unique, individual knowledge of some organisation members remains hidden, although it is often key to the process of innovation.

Table 1. Strong vs. weak cultures.

Features	Strong culture	Weak culture
Degree of the acceptance of organisational values and norms.	Agreement as to organisational values and norms.	Conflicts regarding organisational values and norms.
Sense of community among employees.	A strong sense of community among employees.	A sense of conflict of interests and striving for confrontation.
Degree of the formalisation of norms.	Unwritten, commonly respected norms.	Formalised rules, which are often eluded.
Employees' involvement in the issues of the enterprise.	A high level of employees' involvement.	A low level of employees' involvement.
Degree of employee loyalty to the enterprise.	A high level of employees' loyalty to the enterprise.	A low level of employees' loyalty to the enterprise.
Emotions related to being an organisation member – pride or shame.	Pride in being a part of the enterprise.	Feeling ashamed of being a part of the enterprise.
Emotions of the employees – a sense of being appreciated or humiliated.	Employees feel appreciated in the enterprise.	Employees feel humiliated in the enterprise.

Source: Own work.

A different type of criticism is made by the researchers of the critical current (CMS), who believe that the issue of strong culture is a typical example of the instrumentalisation of organisational culture, which was called 'organisational culturism' by H. Willmott, and the 'pigeonhole problem' by L. Smircich [Willmott 1993, pp. 515–552; Smircich, *Concepts of Culture and Organizational Analysis*, Administrative Science Quarterly, Volume: 28, Issue: 3]. Strong organisational culture means striving for the creation of an oppressive mechanism for employees, the aim of which

is to coerce even greater involvement and loyalty, which is supposed to increase the effectiveness. In this sense, strengthening the organisational cultures is a kind of social engineering and psychomanipulation, leading to higher indoctrination and, in consequence, to the exploitation of the employees.

5. Positive culture versus negative culture

The criterion for distinguishing positive and negative cultures is mostly their long-term influence on the effectiveness of organisational activities. Positive cultures should support the achievement of goals indicated by managers, while negative cultures can hinder the achievement of these goals. Based on research, P. Bate described a syndrome of negative organisational culture that can be juxtaposed with a positive culture (Table 2) [Bate 1984].

Table 2. Negative vs. positive cultures

Features	Negative culture	Positive culture
Emotionality	Emotional coldness – avoiding expression and feelings.	Moderate or strong emotionality – sharing emotions with others.
Personalisation of organisational bonds	Depersonalisation of interpersonal relationships – a high level of formalisation.	Personalisation of relationships in the organisation – personal, direct statements, a lower level of formalisation.
Employee activity	Subordination – expecting guidelines from superiors in order to solve problems.	Activeness – employees strive for making decisions and solving problems by themselves.
Approach to changes	Conservatism – lack of flexibility in new situations.	Flexibility – openness to changes and readiness to implement them.
Isolation	Focus on one's own duties, specialisation.	A wider perspective on the enterprise's functioning, attempts at generalisations.
Approach to other organisations	Antipathy – people are opponents, rather than supporters (individualism).	Friendliness – people are more often supporters than opponents (collectivism).

Source: Own work, based on P. Bate, 1984.

Manifestations of ‘negative cultures’ are related to the risk of passivity (subordination) and conservatism. Passivity can result from the fact that the paternalistic management style prevails. Thanks to the sense of security resulting from the subordination to organisational power, employees no longer have to make decisions. Conservatism is related to striving for the maintenance of the known, safe status quo. Nevertheless, in the case of turbulence in the organisation’s environment, both passivity and conservatism contribute to lowering the enterprise’s competitiveness.

6. Bureaucratic culture – pragmatic culture

There is much research concerning the problems of the bureaucratisation of organisational cultures, which has led to the creation of this typology [Grey 2001, pp. 229–250; Wilson 1989; Jermier, Slocum, Fry, Gaines 1991, pp. 170–194]. Bureaucratic cultures are bound by a number of formalised rules, orders and prohibitions, which standardise the organisational life in every detail. These are cultures of the written word, with limited and routine interpersonal contacts. Pragmatic cultures are characterised by a lack of detailed organisational regulations (Table 3).

Table 3. Bureaucratic vs. pragmatic cultures

Features	Bureaucratic culture	Pragmatic culture
Formalisation	High; written communication and documentation prevail.	Low; verbal communication prevails.
Approach to changes	Careful, sceptic; changes entail the creation of new regulations.	Rather positive, changes are related to striving for the improvement of the organisation.
The basis for organisational power	Formal, impersonal, described and precisely indicated prerogatives.	Prerogatives of formal and informal sources of power, personal power, often unspecified.
Integration	Around formalised rules determined in documents, i.e. mission. Striving for homogenisation.	Around people or problems. Heterogeneity, changeability and a conflict of interests of subcultures are allowed.
Values	Order, unity, clarity.	Effectiveness, speed of action, flexibility.

Source: Own work.

There is a clear orientation towards verbal communication of an interpersonal character. The dichotomy between bureaucratic and pragmatic cultures is deeply rooted in social values, which then spread to organisational cultures.

The problem of the pragmatic versus bureaucratic culture is also sometimes analysed from the perspective of the universalistic or particularistic sources of organizational culture [Sułkowski 2002].

7. Introvert culture versus extrovert culture

The analogy of introvert vs. extrovert cultures was transferred from the level of personality to the level of an organisation [Sikorski 1990]. To make it simple, we can say that an introvert personality is focused on itself and closed to other people, while an extrovert personality is oriented towards others, which means it is open. Translating it into the classification of organisational culture, introvert cultures can be described as closed, and extrovert as open (Table 4).

Table 4. Introvert vs. extrovert cultures and the organisational culture

Features	Introvert culture	Extrovert culture
Tolerance for others	Low tolerance for other views and values.	High tolerance for other views and values.
Knowledge of the problems of other employees	Good knowledge of the problems of other employees.	Poor knowledge of the problems of other employees.
Sensitivity to the feelings of other employees	High sensitivity to the problems of other employees.	Low sensitivity to the problems of other employees.
Suspicion of new employees in an organisation	High level of suspicion of new employees.	Conventional confidence in new employees.
Approach to the change of a job	Employees do not plan to, or imagine changing jobs.	Employees can plan to change job, depending on the market offers.

Source: Own work, based on: [Sikorski 1990].

In the dichotomy between extrovert and introvert cultures, especially important research problems include linking personality profiles of the management with the type of the organisational culture [Chatman 1989, pp. 333–349; White, Varadarajan, Dacin, 2003, pp. 63–79], relationships between teamwork, leadership and extroversion [Castka, Bamber, Sharp 2003, pp. 149–170; Kolb, Shepherd 1997, pp. 282–295], extroversion's influence on the relationships with the interested parties [Rosa, da Silva, Vinhas, Stuart 2004, pp. 125–146].

8. Conservative culture versus innovative culture

The issues of the influence of organisational culture on innovation are among the most significant subjects of cultural research. Most researchers believe that culture, reflected in mentality, is key to shaping the level of innovation, enterprise, flexibility and creativity. Thus, all these notions form the basis for the classification of cultures. Innovative cultures are also known in the subject literature as entrepreneurial, flexible or creative cultures. The main problems of research into such types of culture are enhancing innovation [Martins, Terblanche 2003, pp. 64–74; Chandler, Keller, Lyon 2000], relationships between innovative culture and competitiveness [Knight, Cavusgi 2004, pp. 124–141], relationships between the degree of sector innovation and culture [Chatman, Jehn 1994, pp. 522–553], links between innovative culture and organisational learning [Hurley, Hult 1998, pp. 42–54] and many others. Entrepreneurial organisational cultures were researched by S. McGuire, who proposed to add creativity and readiness to undertake challenges to the cultural model. Important characteristics of entrepreneurial cultures are an orientation towards people, empowerment and the creation of values through innovation and changes [McGuire 2003].

Organisational culture is oriented towards changes and the readiness to act in a situation where there is not enough information, as well as the tendency to take risks. Organisations with high tolerance for uncertainty do not strive for maintaining status quo, but are ready to accept internal changes and to make transformations. Usually, they adapt to changes in the environment more easily and they are flexible. They attach greater

significance to the openness of organisation, and not its stability [Sułkowski 2002, pp. 70–74].

Conservative culture usually involves striving for the reduction of uncertainty, functioning in a context of low risk, supporting the maintenance of status quo and emphasising the organisation's stabilising role. The role of tradition is also stressed in the enterprise. The variants of action and scenarios developed are of a determinist character; they assume avoiding risks, maximum limitation of the information deficit and one-option planning. In most cases, changes are treated as threats (Table 5).

Table 5. Innovative vs. conservative cultures

Features	Innovative culture	Conservative culture
Orientation towards changes	Orientation towards changes in the organisation.	Orientation towards maintaining status quo in the organisation.
Entrepreneurship	High entrepreneurship.	Low entrepreneurship and innovativeness.
Approach to tradition	Distance, tradition is treated as a burden.	Respect, tradition is treated as a model.
Respect for authorities	Undermining the value of the authorities, counting on 'fresh blood'.	High respect for the experienced employees of the organisation.
Approach to information	Accepting activities in the face of an information deficit.	Striving for action only when there is all information available.

Source: Own work.

The danger of conservatism is one of the key cultural threats in modern organisations, which function in environments undergoing constant change. The most important elements in this case include maintaining and transferring the same values, cultivating tradition and striving for action without any change to the status quo. Although conservative orientation supports the enterprise's stability, too-strong conservatism can be dangerous to each business entity. Conservative enterprises isolate themselves from information and resist changes and can be effective only if their sector is very stable, which is less and less often found.

9. Hierarchical culture versus egalitarian culture

The division according to the hierarchic criterion combines cultural and structural problems with the issues of organisational power. This classification is sometimes used in analyses of bureaucratic or power-oriented organisational cultures, for example in the public sector [Parker, Bradley 2000, pp. 125–141]. Another area of research includes the attempts to build systemic relationships between a hierarchic culture and organisational strategy and structure [Bates, Amundson, Schroeder, Morris 1995), pp. 1565–1580], as well as organisational learning [Ruppel, Harrington 2001, pp. 37–52].

Table 6. Hierarchic vs. egalitarian cultures

Features	Hierarchic culture	Egalitarian culture
Inequalities between positions	Striving for the consolidation of inequalities between different positions in an enterprise.	Striving for the levelling of differences between different positions.
The wage differential	Accepting large differences between the wages on different positions.	Striving for the limitation of the differences in wages.
Management style	Autocratic	Participatory
The level of centralisation of decisions	Centralisation of decisions	Decentralisation of decisions
The source of organisational hierarchy	Natural and objective; a belief that employees occupying lower positions in an organisation usually have fewer skills than employees on higher levels.	Social, conventional; hierarchy is related to playing different roles, determined for pragmatic purposes.
Stability of the power hierarchy	Hierarchy should be stable.	Hierarchy should be flexible and undergo changes.
Relationships between employees	Subordinates are dependent on their superiors.	Superiors and subordinates are interdependent.
Privileged position of employees on higher levels	Employees on higher levels of the organisation should have privileges.	Everyone in the organisation should have equal rights.

A concept of exercising power	The dominant concepts emphasise the significance of the superiors and the process of managing employees.	The dominant concepts emphasise the significance of employees and their involvement and participation in the managerial process.
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Source: Own work.

Favouring hierarchisation is linked with a belief that people differ, and an organisation reflects this diversity. Thus, organisations should include a number of management levels, and there should be a significant diversification of rights, privileges and benefits among different groups of employees. Special significance should be attached to maintaining discipline and strengthening the authority of power. Hierarchic organisations are dominated by the acceptance of a strong diversity of employees. They clearly prefer elitist thinking, and emphasise the significance of discipline and order created by the structure of power.

Striving for equality is a consequence of a belief that people deserve similar rights, and an organisation is a reflection of such fundamental equality. Thus, organisations should have a flat structure and limit the number of management levels as much as possible – broad diversification of employees' rights, privileges and benefits is unwelcome. Equality gives rise to the following attitudes in organisations: emphasising similarities between employees, favouring egalitarian thinking, orientation towards spontaneity and the flexibility of structures and power relationships [Sułkowski 2002, pp. 66–68].

The dimension of hierarchy vs. equality is primal in relation to the dimension defined as authoritarianism vs. democracy (participation). Authoritarianism means striving for a one-person, unquestionable way of making decisions in an organisation, while democracy means striving for a group (fully participatory) decision-making process. The dimension of hierarchy vs. equality is also primal in relation to the dimension of power centralisation [Harrison 1972].

10. Individualist culture versus collectivist culture

The dimension of individualism vs. collectivism was popularised in the cultural research into organisation by G. Hofstede, and is also used as an axis for the analysis of organisational cultures. This typology is most often used to indicate the relationships between a type of culture and a type of manager's personality [Chatman, Barsade 1995, pp. 423–443; Chatman, Polzer, Barsade, Neale 1998, pp. 749–780], but it is also linked with the level of entrepreneurship [Morris, Davis, Allen 1994, pp. 65–89], involvement [Moorman, Blakely 1995, 16: 127–142], the level of confidence and social capital [Huff, Kelley 2003), pp. 81–90], as well as many other variables.

Table 7. Individualist vs. collectivist cultures

Features	Individualist culture	Collectivist culture
Priority of interests in an organisation	Individual interests are more important than the organisation's interests.	An organisation's interests are more important than individual interests.
Organisation's essence	An organisation is a group of individuals who have different interests.	An organisation is a group of collaborating people.
Work relationships	Rivalry between employees is necessary.	Cooperation between people is necessary for the organisation.
Perspective on the significance of individuals	Organisation is based on eminent individuals.	Organisation is based on teams.
Coincidence between the interests of an organisation and its employees	Interests of the organisation and individuals are divergent.	Interests of the organisation and individuals coincide.
Approach to the freedom of individuals	Organisation functions thanks to the freedom of individuals.	Organisation functions thanks to group solidarity.
Degree of conformity	People in an organisation should have their own opinions and express them (non-conformism).	In an organisation, one should adjust to the opinion of the community (conformism).

Approach to conflict	Conflicts can contribute to the organisation's development.	In an organisation, one has to strive for harmony and avoid conflicts.
Approach to familism	Ideal interpersonal relationships in an organisation are different from the relationships in a family, as they are based on a contract guaranteeing mutual benefits.	Ideal interpersonal relationships in an organisation should remind of a family.
Significance of private life in an organisation	Professional and private lives of employees should be strictly separated in an organisation.	Professional and private lives of employees merge in an organisation.

Source: Own work.

Individualism means putting the value of an individual before the interests of a social group. This is related to striving for the freedom of individuals and a belief that individual interests are most important. According to this belief, organisations should focus on the motives and competences of individuals, rather than teams. Fulfilling individual interests can lead to an organisational success, as it favours rivalling and competitive attitudes, as well as nonconformist behaviour. Organisation is perceived as a group of individuals who have conflicting interests. The community approach (or, in other words, collectivism) is a belief that the interest of a social group is more important than individual interests, and in the case of organisations it is manifested by the orientation towards group goals, even against individuals, while the preferred attitudes are conformism and collaboration.

11. Conclusion

The dichotomous typologies of organisational cultures described here are only the examples which most often appear in literature. In reality, there are many more typologies, based on more dichotomies than just these. Other examples include a culture of risk vs. a culture of avoiding uncertainty [Rayner, Cantor 1987, 7: 3–9], flexible vs. inflexible cultures, changes vs. status quo. Different types of one-dimensional classifications

of culture could be also connected to the type of organization like f.ex. culture of SME versus big enterprises, privet versus public organizations, family versus non-family businesses [Sułkowski (red.) Toruń 2005, s. 218-230] etc. However, it seems that many of these dichotomies share common elements, which is why the analysis included seven classifications of organisational culture that are quite often used in one-dimensional research.

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