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### Levels and Patterns in the Analysis of the Organizational Culture

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**Abstract:** Knowledge and analysis of the component elements of the organizational culture helps us greatly understand the respective culture, establish the main guidelines of the company values and understand the behaviours and attitudes of the employees. **M. Thevenet** identifies two levels at which the culture manifests itself: the **external level** – the outside culture (which refers to local, regional or national culture), and **the inner level** –the internal culture (including organizational culture, professional culture, the culture of a group). Starting from this assumption, one can identify the main components of the organizational culture: founders, the organization's history, values, beliefs and symbols, the way of thinking, the standards of behaviour etc. Some of these are **visible**, forming a cultural foundation surface, while others create a less visible foundation of culture – the **hidden** level. Kotter and Heskett agree that these two levels of analysis are very connected and influence each other. Considering their importance, other authors identify three, four or more levels of culture (Denison, Hofstede, Shein), bringing forth first the values then the rituals, heroes and symbols. Different models of culture analysis help us explain the elements of culture and understand its importance by providing for the researchers a starting point in explaining specific aspects related to the organizational culture and the organizational behaviour. By understanding the organizational culture, the members of an organization are able to shape their behaviour, can recognize their rights and obligations inside the company and the style of internal communication. They can determine the style of clothing and the dominant attitude inside the company, the way in which the management defines and implements its decisions and the staff policy.

**Keywords:** organisational culture; the visible level of culture; the hidden level of culture; analytical models

#### 1. Defining Elements of the Organizational Culture

The concept of organizational culture is essential to explain certain phenomena, as the creation of hierarchy of values on which depend the strategic directions of the system, the establishment of the paradigm of the human relations, the interpretation of time and space, the configuration of the informational system, or the determination of the attitude towards the internal or external organizational environment.

Every organization, irrespective of size and scope, has its own culture, rooted in its history, in the way they carry out activities and the managerial system.

Organizational culture, similar to national culture, is rooted in history, including myths, heroes and symbols, which are growing up around the values inherited by the organization from the past

generations, and create a type of collective subconscious which has an influence on the power of changing a system.

E. Schein (1992) addresses the organizational culture in a functional manner. He perceives it as a model of learning basic assumptions discovered or developed by a particular group, a particular community, in the learning process, how to successfully solve the problems of external adaptation and internal integration, that operated well enough for a certain period to be validated, which is to be transmitted to the new members as the correct way to perceive, think and feel vis-à-vis to those issues. He also discussed the possibilities of analysis and intervention in changing the organizational culture. J. Garry (1999, 277), defines the organizational culture as “beliefs, values and shared hypotheses that exist within an organization”.

Peters and Waterman (1982), which address the culture in a rational manner, consider it “as a consistent and dominant set of shared values, transmitted by symbolic means such as tales, myths, legends, slogans, anecdotes, little stories”.

G. Hofstede (1996, p.17), one of the most important representatives of research into national and international culture, defines culture as a “collective mental programming which distinguishes the members of a particular group or social category by the members of other groups or social categories”. He points out that the thinking of common people inside of organization will be particularly influenced by the practices adopted and not necessarily by the values of the founders or managers”. Promoter of the intercultural approach, he distinguished between a narrow sense of culture, “refinement of the mind” and a wide sense corresponding to the concept of cultural anthropology.

Hofstede recognizes the limited nature of the definition, but believes that it achieves the purpose: to reflect the systems of values. The organizational culture, in his vision, is a holistic one (is more than sum of its parts), historically determined (reflects the evolution of the organization), connected to anthropological elements (symbols, rituals, rites), basic social (it is created and maintained by the group who founded the organization), and hard to change (Hofstede, 1996, pp. 207-208).

Trompenaars F. Director of the Center for International Business Studies (CIBS) from Holand sees in the culture” the way that people solve their problems” (Trompenaars, *apud* Popa & Filip 1999, p.22).

Nica P. defines the organizational culture as “the specific way of action, thinking, feeling that people have learned, as a result of the combinations of procedures developed by the managers, but also of the influence of the social environment in which they lived and were formed (Nica & Iftimescu, 2008, p.47).

## **2. Levels and Patterns of Analysis of the Elements in the Organizational Culture**

### **2.1 The Main Manifestation of the Organizational Culture**

The knowledge and the analysis of the component elements from an organizational culture greatly helps at knowing that culture, at establishing the main guidelines of the company and employees, at the knowledge of attitudes and behavior of the employees, the motivation system, performance criteria, management style and the way of life in the organization etc. The analysis of these elements can provide important information about weaknesses and strengths of an organizational culture, in a context of a cultural diagnosis; on the basis of these elements we can differentiate the organizational cultures, determine the specific features etc. Knowing the basic elements of a culture, the members of an organization can guide their behavior, may deduct their respective rights and duties within the

organization, the style and mode of internal communication, style of dress, the managerial decision, the degree of internal formality, the personnel policy or the level of creativity in the organizational culture etc. In a synthesis made by A. Burciu (A. Burciu *et. Alii*, 2008 p.128), on the main components of the organizational culture, this includes the next elements: slogans, symbols, artifacts (furniture, clothing, tools etc.), the language used in the company, myths and heroes from the past or recent history of the company, the rituals periodically present in the company activities, the values, the business relationship with the environment and the socialization of the employees deriving from formal/informal relations (which are built over time within the various teams and working groups).

Three manifestation levels of the organizational culture are identified, the first two are the fundamental assumptions and the values (considered as a part of a hidden culture of the organization) and the last level, the material culture (representing the visible area of the culture).

E. Shein included the next elements (cognitive, affective and normative) that occur at both level of the culture (visible and invisible).

1. Behavioral regularities in human interactions -language, customs, traditions, rituals and relationships applied in specific situations.
2. Group norms - standards and values working in group activities (reward according to work performance).
3. Exhibited values, principles and values made expressly for the members of the organizations (the focus is on quality or competitive prices).
4. Formal philosophy- political and ideological principles that guide the actions of the organizations members in relations with clients and beneficiaries of the products.
5. Institutional rules, formal and informal- define membership in an organization and management and regulatory relations.
6. Social-moral climate and the space architecture in the organizations – state of spirit, emotionality, spatial organization, furniture, cleaning etc.
7. Personal skills – specific skills that are expected to be applied by the members of the organizations during their activities and in the relationships with the outsiders of the organizations.
8. Metaphors and symbols – set of ideas, feelings, experiences, personal pictures or about certain events occurring within the organization.
9. Activated significances – the kind of understanding of the everyday events or the work tasks.
10. Models of thinking, mental models and paradigm of language- cognitive framework guiding the perceptions, thoughts, approaches, communications.

The table below gives a summary of the main components of organizational culture on two levels: visible and invisible. M. Thevenet (1993, pp. 54-56) believes that culture arises at two levels, namely: the external level- external culture (which refers to national, regional or local culture), the inner level- inside culture (which includes organizational culture, professional culture).

Starting from this assumption that the culture of an organization is regarded as having the main components: the founders (which come with a series of personal data, social background, and fundamental principles), organization's history (human history, structures and environment),

occupations (related to reality, appearance, the manner of implementation, etc.), values (declared, operational and manifested in attitudes), signs, symbols and beliefs, assumptions (against: external behavior, space, time use, language, rituals, etc.).

**2.2 The Visible and Invisible Cultural Manifestation of an Organization**

Schein (1985), Hofstede (1980), Denison (1990), Hall (1989), believes that cultural space preserves and hides the operational fundamental elements, rather than reveals them. It creates a cultural foundation of the hidden culture (generally accepted standards, common elements of the collective subconscious, beliefs) and one of surface as a base for expression of the culture.

Therefore, the culture of any organization is a culture of surface (language, legal regulations, of material elements) and a hidden culture (generally accepted norms and rules, beliefs and assumptions, models of behavior, etc).

Supporting this theory, Kotter și Heskett (1992) describe two cultural levels that influence themselves mutually, on the one hand the invisible level, hard to change, that includes values shared by all members of the organization and who tends to model the collective behavior and a visible one easy to change, which refers to the rules of behavior which are transmitted to new employees correlated with a system of rewards and sanctions accepted by all the members of the organization.

Another supporter of this theory Denison (1990) identifies four levels of culture presented at the most visible element of culture to the most hidden.

He begins with material culture (verbal and behavioral elements, physical elements), perspectives (rules and regulations applicable and considered solutions to everyday problems and routine behavior of an organization, etc.), values (the basis of the evaluation and trial of situations, actions and people, reflecting the goals and ideals of the organization and how to handle the problems), assumptions or predictive models (tacit beliefs about the organization's members, about human relationships at this level, about management system or about the processes and activities that take place in the organization, forming a kind of collective "subconscious").

**Table. 1. The grouping of the elements of organizational culture at visible and invisible level**

Visible level of organizational culture and elements of organizational culture that manifests on this level	Invisible level of organizational culture and elements of organizational culture that manifests on this level
-components of physical nature (material manifestation of the culture): symbols, buildings, offices, office, uniform, furniture	-common values shared by all members of the organization or employee socialization, taken and transmitted symbols for organization members, etc.
-verbal components: the language used in business, myths, metaphors that are part of folklore and through which the organization ensures circulation of messages concerning company values.	-the accepted norms of behavior by members of the organization, which derive from the values shared by the company
-behavioral components such as: habits, rituals, ceremonies, which help the organization at the manifestation of identity and provides members with a feeling of belonging to the group	-beliefs, the basic concepts, a certain ideology of the senior management capacity, coordination, foresight, training and control concentrated in knowledge, motivation and satisfaction of those members

*Adapted from: B. Bacanu (2006, p. 156).*

Hofstede (1995, p. 23-26), speaks about the culture manifestations on deep levels proposing an analysis based on the values that create rules, then continuing with the rituals (religious or social ceremonies, meetings and business meetings, etc..), heroes (people who serve as a model of conduct) and ending with the symbols (the most visible part consisting of words, gestures, faces, objects with shared only with the members of a certain cultures, etc..).

### 2.3 Analysis Models for the Elements of the Organizational Culture

Kotter and Heskett (1992) describe the visible and the invisible level of the culture as being correlated and constantly influencing each other.

Shein (1985) identifies three levels of the organization's expression of culture; firstly, the fundamental assumptions and values are considered as part of the hidden, invisible culture of the organization, and last level - material culture, representing the visible surface of the culture. Finally he analyzes all elements of culture on two levels: visible and invisible.

Hall (apud M. Elias, 2008, pp.19-20) proposes a three-dimensional model of culture, referring to the existence of the three levels simultaneously present in the cultural context of any organization:

1. formal level, which involves learning how to conduct formal activities;
2. informal level, using the change of elements of the culture through new behavioral patterns even if it breach formalities are proving their worth;
3. technical level.

Hofstede's theory (1995), follower of the multidimensional model, illustrates a central level of expression of the culture, focused on values and other peripheral levels, including rituals, heroes, symbols (summarized under the term of practice, identified by external observation). Like Schreder and Trompenaars, Hofstede tries to explain and analyze the culture by analogy with the analysis of an onion. He put it in "onion core" values and on the following layers - rituals, heroes, symbols. The table below synthetically illustrates the main models of analysis of the organizational culture elements we have previously talked about, as well as the main adepts of these models.

**Table 2. Analysis models for the elements of the organizational culture**

Analysis models of the culture	Mode of grouping of the elements	Adepts of the model
Bidimensional model	Divides cultural elements in visible and invisible	Shein, Kotter și Heskett
Tridimensional model	Divides elements of culture into three categories: formal, informal and technical level	Hall
Multidimensional model	Consider each element of organizational culture as having a certain degree of permeability / visibility seeking an explanation of the culture through an analogy with the analysis of an onion.	Handy, Trompenaars, Hofstede, Luthans.

*Adapted M. Ilie (2008, pp.19-20)*

### 3. Conclusions

The models mentioned above help analyze and proper understand the organizational culture. They consider the elements of organizational culture, which they grouped into different categories even if they are based on the same principle - the degree of visibility that the cultural elements have.

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