CULTURE AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

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Abstract: Romania is characterized by a low level of universalistic behaviour, correlated with the predominance of particularistic behaviour in all situations, including the field of management.

The culture of business organizations is the collective mental programming, based on the national culture, which includes features shaped throughout the centuries up until today, through the participation of all members of each society and period.

The particularistic culture of Romanians differs from universalistic cultures, which are however present in most multinational companies conducting their business in Romania. One of the differences regards the way in which professional achievements are treated and appreciated: Romanians praise individual results, while the achievements of the team are given less importance. For the members of universalistic organizational cultures, keeping a promise is essential, while Romanians consider deals optional rather than compulsory.

If strict planning is important for the American universalistic culture, Romanians guide themselves mainly according context and collateral aspects.

One final difference is to be found in the labour reward system. Romanians tend to be more sensitive to the pecuniary and financial aspects of the professional activity rather than others. A Romanian will generally work harder for more money than for the opportunity to be the employee of a prestigious organization.

Keywords: organizational culture, principles of organizational ethics, universalistic – particularistic, collective – individual

Introduction: The organizational Level – a Subsystem of the Social Space

Given the increasingly diverse associative life in Romania after 1989, with regard to the organizational level as well, in order to ensure the evolution, the development and management of these new structures, diversifying the financial support required for the continuity of the on-going structural reform has become a necessity.

On the background of tuning the general social interests to those of separate types of groups and persons, ***the organizational environment comes across as a subsystem of the social space and as a main way of experimenting new types of social relations.***

The concept of organization may be looked upon from the main points of analysis common to any social system, through the following dimensions:

- *logical-principal*, which reveals the rules of rationality, fundamental for the systematic activities of the human communities;
- *functional-processual*, which outlines the diachronical movement of the interaction system, through which organizations are formed, through which they develop and actively manifest themselves in communal life;
- *structural-objectual*, which expresses the stable and concrete system of interaction among the elements of the ensemble (persons, groups).

Organizational alternatives to the ***culture of power, the culture of role, the culture of task, the culture of human resource*** are not the result of subjective choice, but are created according to the system's mission. These organizational patterns are structures of a classical type, deduced from the principles that Taylor enounced for industry, Fayol for management, Mayo for human resources and Weber for state administration, mainly: hierarchy connections from leader to subordinate on every level of the structure, the specialization of functions, the centralization of decisions.

Managerial practice has proven that the most important decisions gather at the top of the pyramid, leading to the dissipation of creativity when it comes to the lower and ground levels.

This is the reason why several formulas have been tested, destined to replace the classical pyramid with structures capable to promote, instead of orders, partner-type relationships in taking fundamental decisions, details being left to the appreciation of the individual actors.

Regarding these coordinates, self-management limits decentralization to the outer edges. This organizational level has as a structural design ***the federative or participative chart***, which consists of replacing vertical reports with reports of status-role in the respective structure. Placing individuals, departments, groups, etc in the area of decisional proximity has the following advantages:

- it replaces all intermediate decision points specific to red-tape hierarchy, eliminating many serial distortions, blockades or interferences which may occur in communication
- it ensures the fluency of communication in the area of conception and projection work, in the area of action and in that of activities which look to practically put the objectives of the structure in application.

Advantages and Disadvantages of IT Development

The effect of information technology development is the occurrence of ***virtual groups and organizations***[1] on both a communal and global level.

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1 A.Carley, 1998; D. Monge, 1998; Jarvenpaa, 1998 apud Bogathy Z., Ilin C., Palos R., Popescu C., 2004, Viitorul psihologiei muncii si organizationale in perspectiva schimbărilor

The global virtual group is composed of the members of a team who have only interacted through electronic communicational means at the time when the task was accomplished and do not have expectations regarding a direct future interaction.

The local virtual group is composed of the members of a team who act in a restricted geographical space, who report themselves to the same culture and who communicate especially by e-mail, v-mail, teleconference and videoconference.

Due to IT implementation, the efficiency of organizations increases, and by changing the localization of knowledge, employees are more rapidly informed, with effects of making their work more efficient and of shifting power towards lower levels.

As a number of specialists in the field such as H.Kelly, K.Andersen, Barrel, Bort, Heller, Hibbard, Jarvenpaa, Raut, 1998[2] have discovered, ***the advantages of IT implementation*** mainly consist in:

- ✓ ***facilitating intra- and interorganizational communication*** – by significantly increasing communication speed, ensuring a common vision for all the locations of the organization, updating daily information in accordance with organizational culture, presenting general information about the organization (vision, strategies, objectives, organizational culture, achievements, contact persons etc.), the access of clients to data bases of the organization (transactions can be closed instantaneously), processing information from the external environment directly from the source, when it is generated;
- ✓ ***strengthening relations with clients, suppliers and business partners;***
- ✓ ***the significant reduction of the costs linked to human and material resources of the organization;***
- ✓ ***creating virtual groups*** – belonging to the organization, but placed outside it;
- ✓ ***decentralization by the reduction of levels in the hierarchy;***
- ✓ ***the efficient allocation of the organization's resources.***

The disadvantages of the IT revolution are usually kept silent, although they have been noticed by researchers. They are the following:

- – ***people's dependence on a technology which they do not understand*** (Kling, 1996)[3];

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socioeconomice-tehnologice din lumea muncii, in Manual de psihologia muncii si organizatională, Iasi, Ed. Polirom

2 apud Bogathy Z., Ilin C., Palos R., Popescu C., 2004, Viitorul psihologiei muncii si organizationale in perspectiva schimbărilor socioeconomice-tehnologice din lumea muncii, in Manual de psihologia muncii si organizatională, Iasi, Ed. Polirom

3 idem

- *people's maladjustment to a technology or its non-acceptance* – leading to misunderstanding, active or passive resistance, even sabotage (Northcraft, Martinko, Zmud, 1996)[4], lack of coherence and of continuity between organizational culture and the technological one (Hibbard, 1998)[5];
- *employees' overcharge with information* – generates increasing labour time consumption by reading e-mails, with the decrease of efficiency at the work place (Chlamers, 2000)[6];
- *the use of internet and of other IT equipments, at work, for solving personal problems*– it diminishes employees' productivity (Verton, 2000)[7];
- *the productivity* of several professional segments *has not increased at all* (Rudd, 2000);
- *huge expenses* – generated by not knowing the way IT equipment works (Dunn, 2000)[8],
- *the productivity paradox* – or under use of systems by not using them at their full capacity (Morris, 2000)[9],
- *systems for monitoring information* – spread by employees (Guernsey, 2000)[10],
- *the link between investments in IT and benefits of organization* – weak or even inexistent (Bharadwaj, 2000)[11].

One may easily notice that the advantages of IT implementation are counterbalanced by the disadvantages discovered by researchers a while after their introduction. Nevertheless, *organizational projection of the contemporary social space moves the stress from reliability of the structure to the reliability of the professional capacity*[12], and efficiency is determined by the competence with which professionals give an appropriate answer in due time.

The Impact of the Informational Revolution on Organizational Structures

One could conclude that both the attachment to the organization as a whole (culture, rules of action, goals, mission, strategies etc.) and the

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4 idem
5 idem
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7 idem
8 idem
9 idem
10 idem
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12 Buzărnescu St., 2003, *Sociologia Conducerii,* Timisoara, Ed. de Vest

implementation of technology as gnosis and praxis are insufficient and not well-enough outlined in reaching a high level of efficiency.

The rapid and profound impact of the informational revolution on the present social changes is incontestable (through its intrinsic features: a generalized phenomenon, an emphasized feature of permanence, a structural modification of social organisation and redistribution of authority) and it is good to be aware that such duality is inherent to any society, at any given historical moment.

The speed of change in the global social space has also determined a reaction on the level of organisational structures, which includes two aspects:

- the shortening of the life span for its components, redistributed within functional requirements of the existing structure;
- the use of organisational components that are abandoned after their service in the context of concrete functional requirements.

This way, organisational structures with a temporary role have been born, named *project teams*, created for solving problems in a short run through the process of *organisational modularism*. This modular organisation makes conflict solving possible, without the dramatic consequences of maintaining old structures at any cost, because *the interaction capacity appears to be more important than the feeling of commitment towards the team*.

The successful experimentation of the spontaneous model has revealed the increasing importance of the virtual social space as a starting point towards a new epoch: *the cyber age*. The specificity of this new epoch of institutional communication consists of *the distance-work organizational model*, in which the computer appears as a practically inexhaustible source of managerial innovation. Its motto is: "*Live locally, work globally*".

The characteristics of virtual companies have led to their definition as *temporary transcendental cooperation locations, which are specific to the informational society* and resume the essence of associative life in *the virtual social space*:

- companies are organized on the temporary relations system, the mother-company being constant, and
- clients (institutions or physical persons) composing the variables of the virtual type organizational models.

The advantages of alternative organizational models are important and consist of:

- ➤ promoting partner culture as a starting point for forming communities of new types, where professional competence is the generical value;
- ➤ individualizing responsibilities as specific objectives cut up from the objectives of the project;

> ➤ virtual social space, as an optimal environment of communication between all actors involved in the project does not require physical proximity anymore;
> ➤ consequently, the traditional image of the institution having its headquarters in a building, with employees, administrative staff, maintaining mail communication etc. disappears;
> ➤ the individual's migration within the social space takes place naturally, without expensive and useless institutional constraints.

The Organizational Culture

The business organisation may be defined as a social system, as a network of interdelegated roles, with important functions of reproducing norms and values. Starting from the open systems theory, Nadler and Tushman have elaborated the congruence model. This includes: input – resources, transformed into output – services or goods, as a result of processing – formal organizational structures, informal relations, the characteristics of the tasks to fulfil, the individuals' features[13] .

Organizational culture has been given a wide array of definitions by researchers, who have not yet reached a unitary, unanimously accepted concept. Irrespective of the subordination of the definitions to the functional or interpretative approach, culture has two extreme meanings: a personal meaning and a collective meaning[14].

Perhaps more important than the scientific definition are the manifestations of organisational culture, classified in:

- visible manifestations – environment, rituals, ceremonies, myths, heroes;
- invisible manifestations – beliefs, values, norms, conceptions, among which there are close interconditioning relations.

The transfer of management and marketing knowledge, of profitable activity from one country to another, from one culture to another implies, at least on a theoretical level, a good knowledge of cultural particularities of involved contexts, but also of their influence on management.

In fact, implications of organizational culture are found on the following levels[15]: a managerial level – by the influence on each action it undertakes, from perception and thinking to managerial decisions.

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13 Nadler, Tushman, *apud* Ionescu Gh. Gh., Toma A., 2001, *Cultura organizationalǎ si managementul tranzitiei,* Bucuresti, Ed.Economicǎ)

14 Moldoveanu M., Ioan-Franc V., 1997, *Marketing si culturǎ,* Bucuresti, Ed.Expert

15 Ionescu Gh. Gh., Toma A., 2001, *Cultura organizationalǎ si managementul tranzitiei,* Bucuresti, Ed.Economicǎ

Successful corporations have several distinct cultures, which are responsible to a certain extent for their ability to create and maintain the world leaders' positions, cultures with a strong impact on managers' behaviour and, implicitly, on the ability of the organization to change its strategical direction.

A non-managerial level – by the influence on the degree of satisfaction of non-managers towards the work place, the level and quality of their performance.

The Role of Romanian Culture in the Field of Management

Besides the meaning of *a coherent set of norms, values, attitudes, beliefs, behaviours* which are specific to any organization, organizational culture underwrites itself to the specific culture and also appears as a *specific way of answering the questions raised by daily activity, to solve problems, to react in diverse situations*[16]. People from everywhere are confronted with the same three sources of challenges, as Fons Trompenaars observed[17]: *relations between individuals*, employees, clients or directors, *attitude towards time, relations with nature.*

The particular ways of reaction of the members of each culture represent cultural features, viewed through the following dimensions: *universal – particular, collective – individual, neutral – affective, specific – dispersed, earned status – given status, attitude towards time, relationship between man and the nature*. These may be considered values which guide the specific way to run businesses or to lead.

These dimensions have also been analyzed in the Romanian context in a recent study[18] made by Eugen Burdus, part of a vast trans-cultural research, which has revealed the fact that Romania is characterized by a low degree of universalistic behaviour, correlated with particularistic behaviour in all situations, the management field included.

In a ***particularistic culture***: *the establishment of contracts* - clauses, dealings which are to be respected by both parties, may be considered as an offence which could generate the failure of the respective business, given that the conditions of business are those between partners coming from different cultures.

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16 Burdus E., 2001, *Influenta culturii asupra managementului in contextul românesc*, in Revista de Management Comparat International, Bucuresti, Editată de Academia de Studii Economice

17 *apud* Burdus E., 2001, *Influenta culturii asupra managementului in contextul românesc*, in Revista de Management Comparat International, Bucuresti, Editată de Academia de Studii Economice

18 Burdus E., 2001, *Influenta culturii asupra managementului in contextul românesc*, in Revista de Management Comparat International, Bucuresti, Editată de Academia de Studii Economice

The scheduling of business travels – takes a longer period. Romanians, in general, allocate a larger amount of time to solving several problems, because of the collateral aspects, which accompany basic activities regarding the respective business.

The role of top management - does not require the centralization of decisional power and of applying a unitary and general methodology of action in a certain field, but, on the contrary, each organisational subdivision (region, group) particularizes the work methodology, almost any person has an influence (by modification) on the initial variant.

Work evaluation and reward - not all jobs are described, not all candidates have to fulfil the same conditions stated in the job description, and performances are not evaluated strictly by comparing results with objectives and the capacity with the requirements of the respective post.

The conclusions of the study regarding Romanian culture, with numerous influences on a managerial level, can be synthesized as follows:

- ✓ orientation towards one's own person, in the Romanian society, has implications on the employees' need to get clear explanations from managers regarding their tasks, competence and responsibilities, correlated with the tendency to hide behind the staff and to run away from responsibility;
- ✓ in the field of decision-making, the tendency towards individualism causes managers from inferior levels or average levels to hesitate when taking decisions, choosing the decisional variant which represents *the big boss's* opinion;
- ✓ in the motivational process, extrinsic incentives of material nature are prevalent, such as: wages, primes etc;
- ✓ one person's status is appreciated first of all according to individual results and not according to those of the work group he belongs to;
- ✓ there exists a tendency to identify a person with the family first of all and only to a lower extent with the organization.

The culture of business organizations[19] *is the collective mental* programming[20]*,* based on the national culture which includes features formed during the last century, but also in the present, through the participation of all members of a every society and epoch.

Maybe the most important or **significant discrepancy** between the members belonging to the national culture and the representatives of another culture **is generated by the individuals' social and personal identity**. If, for instance, Americans identify themselves to a large extent with the organization they belong to and consider that the first obligation is towards it, Romanians, in

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19 Cobianu-Băcanu M., 1994, *Cultură si valori in perioada de tranzitie,* Bucuresti, Ed.Economică

20 Hofstede G., 1996, *Managementul structurilor multiculturale*, Bucuresti, Ed.Economică

an overwhelming proportion, identify themselves and self-define in reference to the status and family role and to a very little degree with the organization.

Other major differences are a result of *the importance given to the influence on the future*: Westerners consider that the individual influences his future, while Romanians move the influence in the sphere of fatality. From here, a realism or lack of it in aspirations is born, as well as the way in which personal achievements are treated and the influence that spirituality may have on an organizational behaviour.

The particularistic culture of Romanians is different from the universalistic ones, present in most multinational companies working in Romania, including in *the way professional achievements are treated and appreciated*: Romanians praise individual results, while the achievements of the team are given less importance. For the members of universalistic organizational culture, the keeping of promises is essential, while Romanians consider deals already agreed upon to be rather optional than compulsory. If planning, strict and rapid programming of activity is important for American universalistic culture, Romanians guide themselves more in reference to the context of the problems and the collateral aspects.

A final aspect is linked to *the work rewards system*: Romanians are sensitive to pecuniary, financial aspects of the professional activity, work more for money rather than for the opportunity to be the employee of a creditable organization.

Irrespective of its component elements or the criterion in accordance with which it is classified (area of coverage, intensity, character, level of participation, risk degree and speed of feedback, configuration) culture always fulfils important *functions* in an organization:

- it communicates a sense of identity to employees;
- it helps generating employees' involvement in the achievement of the goals of the organization, it contributes to the stability of the organization as a social system, it serves as a framework of reference for employees, giving them a meaning outside organizational activities and using as a guide for an appropriate behaviour[21].

Since organisational culture reflects the mission of the companies and gives a sense of identity, it becomes possible to define someone's identity by professional categorization, this identity being *a fact of culture and of language*[22]. If identification may seem, from the point of view of the organization, a social success, while from individual's perspective, the remedy of a subjectively felt deficiency, the identification process represents a part of

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21 Ionescu Gh. Gh., Toma A., 2001, *Cultura organizationalǎ si managementul tranzitiei,* Bucuresti, Ed.Economicǎ

22 Giust-Despraires, 1995, Subiectul in reprezentarea socialǎ, in Psihologia cimpului social: Reprezentǎrile sociale 1995, Bucuresti, Societatea Stiintǎ si Tehnicǎ

social representation as *the space of a partly idealising, partly conflictual proportion between a reality and a subject.*[23]

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