Chapter 3

Organisation Culture
From Systems Theory of Organisation Perspective

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ABSTRACT

The article deals with organisation culture from the viewpoint of systems theory of organisation. Organisations are presented as autopoietic systems, relations between organisation and individual are discussed as well. The author attempts to define to what extent values and rules characteristic for a given culture can and should be changed.

INTRODUCTION

Different organisation culture issues have been discussed extensively for years. Nevertheless, in spite of deep interest to this phenomenon, it is still not explored completely. Organisation culture is a complex subject that extends over the whole environment of individuals who make up organisations. The core of this culture consists of values and rules that precondition all decision-making in organisation. These are hard to define, however, it is them that shape and form the entire organisation.

These values and rules are often a “tabooed” topic to discuss in organisation, as they are hard to manage – they are too “soft” and cannot be measured (Landau, 2007, p.18). Nevertheless, this social phenomenon - organisation culture - is generally considered (together with strategy and structure of organisation) to have a decisive impact on its operation, development or failure. Thus, knowledge of organisation culture nature, basics and functioning becomes very important (Balz & Arlinghaus, 2007, p.165).

The aim of this chapter is to present the essence of organisation culture from systems theory of organisation viewpoint. Steady grounds (core) are an important condition that has to be fulfilled to allow organisation to develop and succeed, as this core would help it in keeping balance under difficult circumstances. Hence, the article attempts to answer the question of the role played by culture-related factors in organisation and to what extent values and rules, accepted in a given culture, can and should be changed.

BACKGROUND

There is a great variety of theories of organisations. These theories are part of the huge area of social sciences that cover all aspects of private and collective life of human beings (Kieser & Ebers, 2014, p. 26). Particular topics, subjects and scientific specialisations that can be singled out within this area usually do not have clearly set boundaries – they overlap and interlace. What they all do have in common is their interest to relationship of organisation as a social entity with its members. And systems theory of organisation is focused exactly on interrelations between social system and its participants. Models of organisations produced with the help of system approach enable better understanding of logic behind any organisation’s operation. On this basis it is possible to draw important conclusions and make valuable recommendations that could be applied in practice. The function of theory of organisation in relation to roles of other concepts and fields of research is often secondary. Nevertheless, taking into consideration the central role played by organisations in society, the importance of this function should not be underestimated. More and more often organisations replace family structures, tribal or ethnic links and local communities. And, whatever happens – good or bad, organisations are almost always part of this. Today they play a crucial role in the context of changes caused by increase of complexity.


W. Sitte and H. Wohlschlaegl at the same time note that system approach is not a priori better than other concepts, though it enables a fresh look, better understanding of processes and may lead to new conclusions (Sitte & Wohlschlaegl, 2006, p. 510).

System analysis makes possible to control variability and complexity thanks to knowledge and understanding of interdependencies and links existing between different elements. Thus, it is easier to notice interrelated links and influences, which is particularly important since modern organisations are tied with their environment with an infinite number of such linkages (Schiepek et al., 1998, p. 9). Organisations are becoming more and more self-regulating, unpredictable and complex systems (Malik, 2014, p. 21). For this reason, to understand the essence and functioning of these complex systems, besides “cause and effect” thinking, a broader, all-embracing approach to research of the world is needed. According to the principles of system analysis, an organisation can be viewed as a system, a network, to be precise, within which flow and exchange of information and resources take place (von Bertalanffy, 1969, p. 36). Particular parts of systems are closely related (Probst & Gomez, 1997, p. 26). The main principle of the system approach is: even a minor, insignificant change within one of the smallest subsystems may have a substantial impact on the entire system in the long-term prospective, as a number of various factors exert their influence on it simultaneously (Vester, 2008, p. 18). These factors are not isolated, they interact and influence each other across all boundaries set by sciences, and they are feedback links between factors of qualitative and quantitative character (Wilms, 2012, p. 21). System analysis is centered on multidimensional research of essential aspects of organisation as a system and its functioning (Verster, 2008, p. 19).

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