# ASPECTS OF ORGANISATIONAL CULTURE

Valentina ROBU

Abstract

This article explores the basic varieties of organisational culture and some of the influencing factors that determine a certain type of organisational structure. The analysis does not make explicit reference to the teaching profession (except for one instance) but has been carried out in the hope that professionals in the teaching area will be able to reflect more on the type of organisation they work in and define with grater accuracy their teaching environment, the relationships between them and the management of their organisation at different levels. I believe it is often taken for granted that because the teachers' work is almost the same irrespective of their institution, their organisational environment should be very similar. This paper is an invitation to challenge this view and offers some basic instruments for an analysis that can be carried out both at an individual level and at an organisational level.

Keywords: organisational culture, organisational structure, culture types, intercultural theory, cultural diversity
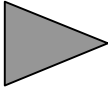
Preliminary remarks

It is an interesting fact that specialist literature in the field of cultural contributions (e.g. anthropological studies, intercultural theory and training, crosscultural management research) establishes a connection between national cultural behaviour and different types of organizational structure. The considerations below are relevant.

*In the international context, the term **culture** refers to at least two different determinants, **organisational culture**, namely the traditions, beliefs, norms of behaviour and management style that characterise a particular organization, and **national culture**, the language, codes of conduct, attitudes to human rights, ethical standards and historical influences that characterise behaviour in a particular country or region of the world. The issue of cultural diversity arises where organizations from disparate cultural backgrounds, whose cultural make-up represents a blend of national and organizational cultural influences, engage in business relationships. The issue may also arise where, within the international organization itself, there exists a blend of national cultural influences which must be managed within the context of project teams or matrix structures* (Cornelius, 1999: 204).

However, this connection does not seem to be taken for granted in management research. Two basic views seem to emerge. Geert Hofstede' work, for instance, makes a clear case for culture as the "*collective programming of the mind*" and distinguishes people from different groups or categories on the basis of several generic dimensions of culture. But there are opinions (Hickson et al, 1979) that certain factors such as size, technology, structure and the relationship between them transcend national culture. These authors claim, for instance, that a bureaucracy is a bureaucracy in all societies and bureaucratic structures are more frequent in particular sectors of the economy. This is very similar in conclusions and implications to earlier research (e.g. Kerr et al, 1973) that suggested that societies are more likely to become alike in the future as they develop along the same industrial/post-industrial lines (nowadays the same thing could be said about the technological and information societies). It is not within the scope of this paper to analyse further considerations about national culture but to explore the main varieties of organizational culture.

The next part will consider the concern of several authors on the subject for defining organizational culture.
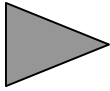
Types of organizational culture

Theoretical background and terminology

Major research dealing with organizational culture (e.g. Harrison: 1972, Handy: 1993, Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner: 1997) varies according to the terminology applied to categories of culture, but agrees on the features of the basic culture types. Thus, while aiming to define the word "culture" in an organizational environment, Handy (1993: 181) puts forward a few essential questions:

> ➤ "What are the degrees of formalization required?
> ➤ What combination of obedience and initiative is looked for in subordinates?
> ➤ Do work hours matter, or dress, or personal eccentricities?
> ➤ Do committees control, or individuals?
> ➤ Are there rules and procedures or only results?" etc.

Handy goes on to say that these are all parts of an organisation's culture; moreover, they distinguish organizations from one another so that "the mammoth teaching hospital has a culture manifestly different from a merchant bank, which is different again from an automobile plant". To him, culture conveys the feeling of a pervasive way of life, or set of norms, which are reflected in different structures and systems. Handy follows Harrison (1972) in suggesting the names of the four main types of culture (see table below).

Torrington and Hall (1995) and Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (1997) use a different terminology for similar types. In the table below the equivalent culture types are given in columns:

Author	Types of organizational culture			
Handy	power	role	task	person
Torrington & Hall	entrepreneurial	bureaucratic	matrix	independence
Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner	family	Eiffel Tower	guided missile	incubator

The characteristics of the four basic types will be further examined as they provide the main criteria for the analysis of organizational culture that I am carrying out here. Throughout this paper Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner's terminology is used as their research has been widely used in recent analysis in the field. For

them, organizational culture is "the way in which attitudes are expressed within a specific organization" (1997: 7).

All authors mentioned above agree that the types of organizational culture are not pure types, but ideal; in real life, the varieties are mixed and each of the four main varieties is to be found in different areas of an organization. However, in most cases, there will be one dominating culture which will tip the balance in favour of one type of organizational form or another.
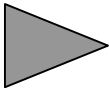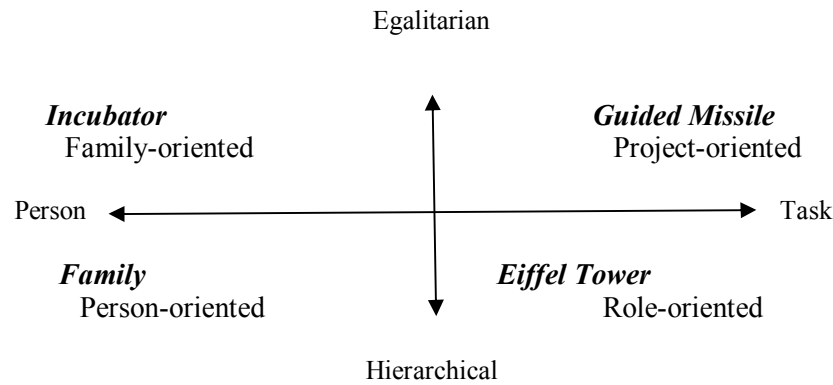
1.2 Brief description of the main culture types

This section outlines the main types of organizational culture as they are presented by Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner. In their book *Riding the Waves of Culture* they consider several main aspects that shape organizational culture (1997: 157):
1. The general relationship between employees and their organization
2. The vertical or hierarchical system of authority defining superiors and subordinates
3. The general views of employees about their organisation's destiny, purpose and goals and their place in this.

The relationship of employees to their construct of the organization is visualized in Figure 1 showing the two dimensions the authors use in order to distinguish between different corporate cultures: **equality-hierarchy** and **orientation to the person-orientation to the task**.

Thus, *the family* culture displays the high authority of the leader who knows what is best for the organization and for its employees. It is power-oriented and in many ways resembles the home. The relationships are not, however, perceived as constraining and the atmosphere inside the organization suggests long-term devotion and acceptance of authority. Since the culture depends on a central power source, the leader sets the pattern of the existing organization and models the future, making sure the organization runs on trust and empathy. This culture is characterized by few rules and little bureaucracy and what is really important is the quality of the individuals in the centre who radiate knowledge, skills and influence.

Egalitarian

Incubator	***Guided Missile***
Family-oriented	Project-oriented

Person ←   → Task

Family	***Eiffel Tower***
Person-oriented	Role-oriented

Hierarchical

**Source: Fons Trompenaars and Charles Hampden-Turner, Riding the Waves of Culture
(1997: 159)**

However, what is perceived as strength can also become a weakness if people at the centre lose the sense of direction. These organizations cannot afford to grow very large since they become difficult to manage. It is the same thing which prevents them from dealing successfully with project work, where authority is divided and this would contradict the whole structure of the organization. Japanese companies are very often used as an example to illustrate this type of culture.

The Eiffel Tower is associated with bureaucracy and a strict division of labour into roles and functions. In this culture logic and rationality are valued and a hierarchical structure ensures supervision of each layer of responsibility. Rules and procedures dictate methodology, and efficiency in this culture depends on the appropriate allocation of tasks and responsibility rather than on individual performance. Essentially, leaders represent roles and authority originates in the fulfillment of the role. This clearly differentiates this type of culture from the family type where the leader is the pulsating centre of the organization and where relationships matter a lot. The Eiffel Tower rejects personal relationships and affection between employees or between employees and management as distractions and intrusions of personal interest upon public ones. Frequent examples of companies showing these cultural features include German and Austrian organizations.

This culture thrives in a predictable and controllable environment and offers security to the individual. When it comes to dealing with change, this can only be brought about by changing the basic rules and procedures of the organization, which becomes extremely difficult and time-consuming. The tendency in this culture is to resist change and, as a consequence, many Eiffel Tower structures collapse in a changing environment.

The guided missile culture is egalitarian, thus differing from both previous types. In this type of culture work is directed towards the fulfillment of tasks or projects, therefore mainly focused on outcomes. Since projects are to be undertaken by teams and groups it follows that these would have to be unified to the purpose of achieving the desired results. The team of experts thus obscures individual styles and preference. People are judged according to their performance and contribution to the final end.

These structures tend to be temporary, lasting until the task has been completed, and this is one of the reasons for which relationships are neutral, based on respect for the expert contributions required by the task. Responsibilities are also shared, the leaders or co-ordinators are accountable for the final outcome, but their own knowledge on the subject may be more limited than that of the experts joining the team.

In this culture loyalties are directed to professions rather than companies, since groups are formed and reformed continuously, depending on the type of project they are engaged in. The wide range of specialists working with each other on a temporary basis gives this culture an individualist trend. Certain departments inside different companies reveal this kind of culture: marketing departments, consultancy groups, bank sections that deal with mergers, take-overs and new ventures, special work groups within advertising agencies.

The fourth type, *the incubator*, is regarded as an unusual form of culture. It is not widely spread since the structure of the organization is a vehicle for sustaining the individuals within it. The company serves as an incubator for self-fulfilment and individuals are encouraged towards creative activities and responding to new initiatives. This type of culture is both personal and egalitarian. It is also individualistic and people inside it are not constrained by organizational commitment. Most incubators are entrepreneurial companies founded by creative teams that usually leave larger organizations for the benefit of pursuing professional interests and ideas.

Small, innovative companies would be good examples illustrating this type of culture, along with professional groups such as doctors, legal partners, consultants, who prefer sharing resources. Two of the authors I have read on this subject mention professors. Thus, Handy (1993: 191) and Mullins (1999: 804) find that the professor fits the stereotype of a person-oriented man "operating in a role (Eiffel tower) culture", in other words, this type of professional views the organization as a base on which he can map out his career and pursue his own interests. Very often, such people are committed to the organization to the extent to which their own benefits match the benefits of the employer.

In this culture relationships between people are close and enthusiastic. People tend to associate in such ways as to benefit from working intimacy, trust, honesty and effectiveness. Finally, there is minimal hierarchy in these structures and individuals attached to this form of culture are usually difficult to manage. Being specialists they do not usually acknowledge authority and very often management or control relies on mutual consent.

Apart from these attempts at describing systematically and formalizing types of culture the research literature brings forward a number of influencing factors which have an important say in the choice of the culture and structure of an organisation. The next section deals with this briefly.
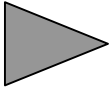
2. Influencing factors

Studies in the field (e.g. Handy, 1993) suggest that an organisation is affected by several factors such as:
1. *history and ownership*
2. *size*
3. *primary technology*
4. *goals and objectives*
5. *the environment*
6. *the people.*

By applying these key factors to the organisation's profile and activities it will be easier to identify the main culture type to which the organization belongs. A quick review of these factors will show their impact on the company culture.
1. Culture is affected by the age, the reason and the manner in which the organisation was originally created, by the philosophy and values of its owners; for instance, centralized ownership will define a family culture that has more control of the resources available.
2. Size is closely related to the degree of formalization in a company and smaller companies are more likely to take the family or the incubator forms. In general, large size drives the organisation towards an Eiffel Tower culture.
3. This factor refers to the nature of the business, the services provided, the type of customers, each of these having an impact on the organisation's culture. For instance, routine operations are more suitable to an Eiffel Tower culture than any of the others.
4. Goals and objectives are able to differentiate cultures in a decisive way. Although they are almost always difficult to define, they affect the culture and structure of a company. Goals related to product quality are better monitored by Eiffel Tower organizations, while growth goals are more

appropriate to family or guided missile cultures. It is said that goals not only influence cultures, but are influenced by them.

5. The nature of the environment in which an organization works has a vital say in determining its culture. Thus, research has shown that different nationalities prefer different organizational cultures. The well-known work of Hofstede (e.g. 1991) and other intercultural theorists has revealed how cultural behaviour can shape work relationships, procedures and mentalities within a company. A related aspect here is diversity in the environment. A guided missile culture feels more comfortable with diversity, while an Eiffel Tower structure is better defined by standardization.

6. This factor involves the degree of personal satisfaction obtained by an individual working for a certain company. The analysis of job satisfaction has revealed that, for instance, individuals with a low tolerance for ambiguity and who value security will show a preference towards the Eiffel Tower culture; the family or the guided missile culture will be attractive to people who need to establish their identity at work and these culture types will also encourage individual skills and talents. Generally speaking, company managers decide on the culture type of their organizations when they decide on the people they employ.
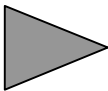
Conclusion

This article has outlined the main organizational profiles together with some of the characteristics that define their activities, mentalities and trends. In spite of the cautious approach that we need to take when claiming that a national culture is prone to fostering a certain type of corporate culture, major research (Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner, 1997) shows that there are marked distinctions between countries. Thus, guided missile companies are very frequent in the US and the UK, France and Spain score highest for family companies, Sweden for incubators, while Germany reveals a preference for Eiffel Tower cultures.

Romania is mentioned in their book (Chapter 11) as scoring high for family cultures, where the leader is seen as a father and where acceptance of subordination is correlated with relative permanence of employment. The second instance where Romania is in the top half of their list is related to the influence of *role* cultures in contrast with *personal* cultures; it seems there is a marked preference among Romanian managers for personality rather than function; in other words, a company's effectiveness tends to be more dependent on personal, face-to-face relationships rather than on subordination imposed by clear roles.

While working on this piece of research I have discovered that one single organisaton, especially a large one, can host several culture types, or at least a mixture of them, depending on the local environment and the people who impose their style of work and their personality on a certain section, department, branch, etc. A similar analysis can be carried out by individuals interested in defining their organisation's culture and their place in it.

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The author

Valentina Robu is Assistant Lecturer at the Department of English in The Bucharest Academy of Economic Studies. She has extensive experience in teaching Business English with a focus on communication skills in a professional environment. She is also a qualified teacher trainer and took part in many projects initiated by The British Council Romania in the fields of teaching and educational management. She holds a Master of Education from the University of Manchester, UK. Her professional interests include cultural studies, educational management and materials and textbook writing.