

# **PART ONE. MANIFESTATIONS OF ORGANISATIONAL CULTURE**

## **2. STUDYING THE TYPES OF ORGANISATIONAL CULTURE<sup>1</sup>**

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### **Abstract**

The article introduces R. Harrison's typology applied for the study of private and public organisations of Estonia. The results show a gradual transition from power-oriented culture to the role-oriented type of culture with further moving towards the result-oriented and achievement-based type of culture. The latter are the preferred culture types of subordinates. At the same time, managers are keeping to power-oriented values and practices. Management culture and style are thus the most conservative parts of organisational culture in Estonia.

### **Introduction**

It is only during the last two decades that the importance of organisational culture in the theory of organisation and management

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<sup>1</sup> The author is sincerely grateful to Maria Kütt, MA, and Sigrid Haage, MA, for their kind permission to use the results of their studies in the article.

has been acknowledged. When in 1972 Roger Harrison first published his article “Understanding Your Organisation’s Character”, it did not evoke much interest, as he himself confessed (Harrison, 1995: 150). May be the reason was that he was several years ahead of his time. Or perhaps the concept was too rational. Generated by Harrison, the typology of organisational culture bears comparison with Max Weber’s ideal type method, it is an ideal-type construct, “a simplified model that focuses attention on the most salient or distinctive features” (Scott, 1998: 46). Later on, in the 1980s (Hofstede, 1981) and 1990s (Goffee, Jones, 1998; Cameron, Quinn, 1999) other typologies of organisational culture were developed based on different propositions (Roots, 2002).

The aim of the present article is to summarise the results of three different studies in organisational culture carried out in 2002–2003 by Maria Kütt (Kütt, 2002), Sigrid Haage (Haage, 2002) and the author himself. All three studies were based on Roger Harrison’s typology of organisational culture and used Harrison’s questionnaire. Each study put forward specific hypotheses. Herein, generalising the results, we present only the following two:

- On the basis of earlier studies carried out in Estonian organisations (Roots, Karotom, 1996; 2002) we assume that the predominant type of culture in Estonian organisations is power-oriented, and that role-orientation strengthened slightly during the late 1990s.
- In the literature on organisational culture the managers’ role in forming and re-forming organisational culture is strongly underlined (Schein, 1999). On the other hand, the results of cultural studies in different countries indicate that the process of socialisation at the organisational level is connected more with daily practices than specific values (Hofstede *et al*, 1990). So we can assume that the way the managers act is a more important factor influencing the culture of an organisation than the values they carry in their minds.

## Methods

Roger Harrison did not limit his work to introducing a theoretical model of culture types. Having a practice as a management consultant, he proposed an appropriate method for measuring the predominant cultural type in a particular organisation. He regarded his first version of the applied method as “a quick-and-dirty little questionnaire ... to help managers to think about the culture of their own organisations” (Harrison, 1995: 150). The questionnaire comprises 15 questions. Each can be answered in four different ways. All the a) alternatives refer to an organisational culture called *power-oriented*; b) alternatives assess the *role* culture; c) alternatives describe a culture based on *achievement*; and d) alternatives describe a *support* orientation (Harrison, Stokes, 1992: 13). The respondents must choose the option twice: first marking an option corresponding to the situation existing in their organisation, identifying the so-called *existing culture*. Answering the same questions for a second time they mark an option corresponding to a desirable situation, or how the things should be. This way is identified as the so-called *preferred culture*. For measuring a scale ranged from 4 to 1 is used, where 4 is the predominant view, or the most preferred alternative, while 1 is the least dominant view, or least preferred alternative.

The first time when R. Harrison’s method was implemented in Estonia was in 2002 (Haage, 2002; Kütt, 2002). One of the studies was conducted in private and the other in public organisations of Estonia.

## Existing culture and preferred culture in organisations

Between August 2002 and March 2003 the author conducted a survey among the master students of Tallinn Pedagogical University and the Public Service Academy, using Harrison’s questionnaire. In the sample were students enrolled on public administration, organisational behaviour, IT management, education management, social work, child protection and other major courses.

The persons involved had also much in common. All of them had worked in the corresponding fields for several years. For them it was a practical task to try to understand in what type of organisation they were working. The interviews were conducted four times and 125 persons were interviewed. The first preference was measured and valued as 1 point. Therefore, unlike Harrison's version, each questionnaire gave only 15 + 15 points, not 150 + 150 points as it should be if one uses the four ranged scale. So the total amount of points made  $125 \times 15 = 1875$  votes for both the existing and preferred culture (Table 2.1).

It must be mentioned that Harrison's questionnaire was an instrument for measuring the situation in a particular organisation. In our case the respondents came from different organisations. Therefore we cannot draw any conclusions regarding a particular organisation, but the data will reveal general trends about developments in the organisational world.

**Table 2.1.** Points for the existing and preferred culture\*

Cultures	Existing		Preferred	
	Votes	%	Votes	%
(a) Power-oriented	513	27.4	40	2.1
(b) Role-oriented	684	36.5	332	17.7
(c) Achievement- or Task-oriented**	497	26.5	1160	61.9
(d) Support- or Person- oriented**	181	9.6	343	18.3
Total:	1875	100.0	1875	100.0

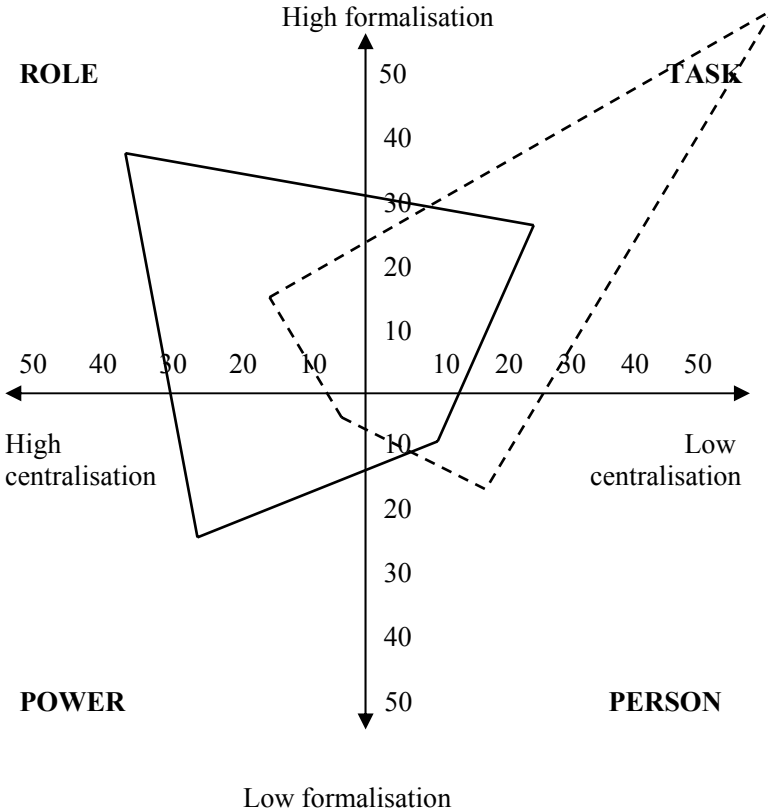
Notes:

\* First preferences, whole sample (n = 125).

\*\* The names were used by Harrison in his 1972 article.

We can see that despite the differing backgrounds of the persons studied, their intentions and preferences have much in common. It should be taken into account that in the sample dominated repre-

sentatives of the public sector, which may have affected the results. The results are graphically presented in Figure 2.1.



**Figure 2.1.** Existing and preferred culture (n = 125)

*Note:*  
———— Existing culture  
----- Preferred culture

The figure shows that the existing culture is predominantly role-oriented. It is not surprising, since a large majority comes from the public sector. Taking into account the historical background,

the results indicate that substantial changes have taken place over the recent years in Estonian public administration and public service. As we know from the earlier studies, not only in the former Soviet Union, but in all the East European countries the values and attitudes of officials used to be strongly power-oriented. The main problem was how to overcome those deeply rooted preferences (Roots, 2000: 43–44, 64–70; Roots, Karotom, 2002). In the worst cases the officials interpreted laws selectively, putting the will of their superiors higher than the law.

Such management style, enforcing this sort of attitude still prevailed in public organisations of Estonia as late as in 1996 (Roots, 2000: 93–96). In that situation it was important not to “fight bureaucracy” as rulers have always done from time to time, but implement the so-called “real bureaucracy” so that the order of solving questions would depend on the law, regulations, time-limit, but not anybody’s personal will.

Turning back to Figure 2.1 it is evident that role-oriented culture, in other words keeping to the procedures, has become more important than power orientation. Task-oriented performance, or one’s wish to achieve results in his or her job is nearly equally important. This allows us to conclude that there has been a positive shift in overcoming the type of administrative culture that was inherited from the former regime. This can very likely be the result of the emergence of a new generation of public servants in the 1990s.

In Harrison’s typology, person-oriented or support-oriented culture differs from all others, because it lacks power relations. In power-oriented culture an employee is valued according to his/her ability to please the boss. In role-oriented culture it is important how accurately one is able to follow procedures and instructions, and in task- or achievement-oriented culture it is important how effectively a person can carry out a particular task. In all three cases an employee is subordinated to his/her organisation. The only distinction is in who has the power, and who (or what) *dominates* an employee. It could be a superior, or rules and prescriptions, or it may be a task to fulfil. The situation is quite different in person-oriented culture.

Unlike the other three types, a person-oriented organisation exists primarily in order to serve the needs of its members. The organisation itself is a device through which the members can meet the needs that they could not otherwise satisfy by themselves. Just as some organisations continually evaluate the worth of individual members as tools and accept or reject them accordingly, so are person-oriented organisations evaluated as tools by their members (Harrison, [1972] 1995: 155).

Although Handy defined that culture type in a fairly different way (Handy, [1978] 1985), one thing is certain: in this culture an organisation is subordinated to an individual. However, the figure shows that this dominant is the weakest one in Estonia. At present a person's value is still lower and is subordinated to power, order and tasks.

*The existing* situation is characterised mainly by role-orientation. Power-orientation and task-orientation have somewhat weaker positions. However, as shown by the survey, the most *preferred* type is task- and achievement-oriented culture. Yet the role-oriented type cannot be totally rejected, particularly as far as the public sector is concerned. But the centrality of a person should be increased. To the majority, one thing that should be done, is minimisation of superiors' arbitrariness. This trend is strong and comparatively unanimous. Taking into account the developments in the public sector and public service, the emergence of such values and attitudes fills one with optimism. Particularly if we think that they have been introduced not only in the form of answers to the questionnaire, but exist in everyday life also.

Therefore our conclusion is that the results of the survey, on the one hand, reflect the changes that have occurred in the administrative culture of Estonia, on the other, indicate further changes and their general trends. Harrison himself was quite cautious when speaking about changes in culture.

Changing the fundamental cultural orientation of an organisation has the following drawbacks:

- It is difficult to achieve, requiring profound changes in values and management style as well as in organisation systems, structures, and reward systems.

- It takes a long time, three to five years or much more.
- It creates turmoil and stress within the organisation.
- The effort results in the organisation's suffering a decrement in performance at first, which often causes the leadership to abandon the effort before it bears fruit (Harrison, 1993: 21).

Coming back to the changes in organisational culture it is clear that only some experts are quite optimistic regarding possible changes (Cameron, Quinn, 1999). Others are much either pessimistic (Schein, 1999: 25–26), or consider that these changes could occur only with some constraints (Coffee, Jones, 2001: 14–16). Harrison proposes also to focus on ensuring the positive features of the existing type of culture, instead of replacing it with some other type (Harrison, 1993: 23–25). Desmond Graves, analysing Harrison's model, assumes that the possible direction of the movement should be centred around the central point of a matrix: "... Changes made across the model (e.g. 'power' to 'task') will create much more organisational upheaval than changes around the model (e.g. from 'power' to 'role')" (Graves, 1986: 44).

It seems that precisely such a type of movement is reflected by Figure 2.1. The first step that took place in the 1990s weakened the domination of power-oriented culture and ensured the role-oriented type, or the so-called 'real bureaucracy' culture. After that and simultaneously with that was made the next step – strengthening achievement-oriented culture. It should be kept in mind that to Harrison power- and role-oriented cultures are traditional ones. This means that they are the oldest in the history of organisations (Harrison, 1993: 53). On the other hand, this means that task- and person-oriented cultures can be considered as relatively young and modern.

Taking into account the development trends presented in Figure 2.1, we can foresee that task- and achievement-orientation will strengthen in the near future. So will all the strong and weak sides of these types of culture.

Thus one can see that compared to the existing culture, the preferences of the interviewed persons concerning how things *should*

*be*, have much in common and indicate the precise direction of developments. The ideal is results, achievement, centrality of tasks. It is possible that we are not mistaken if we consider them as a reciprocal reaction to the existing situation, where dependence on an organisation quite often dominates, be it bureaucratic attachment to orders, or arbitrariness of a superior. If the aim is introduction of achievement- and result-oriented organisational culture, then what is the preferred culture like?

Achievement-oriented organisations are places where:

- People share a sense of urgency in attaining worthwhile goals and values; they feel they are working for something bigger than themselves.
- People feel stronger and better for being a member of the group; it raises their self-esteem.
- People manage themselves, doing voluntarily what they see needs to be done.
- The rules and regulations aren't allowed to get in the way of doing the work.
- People work long hours without complaint.
- There is high morale, a sense of 'one for all', of camaraderie.
- There is a sense of being unique and different – an 'elite' with special myths and jargon (Harrison, 1993: 36).

The listed issues point to strong emotions: a strong sense of mission, feeling of belongingness and highly estimated membership in the group, heightened self-esteem, feeling of being unique, being 'the chosen one', being above the others. If we attach here symbols, rituals, and myths, we will get all the construction blocks necessary to build up a closed group, or cast. The problems which accompany this process are quite often dealt with in e.g. police psychology (Ellonen *et al*, 2002: 187–188; 211–212). The question does not concern only law enforcement organisations and their staff. It is about a specific type of culture. Taking into account that achievement-oriented organisations do have their limitations (tendency to use up, burn out members; they are inward-focused, may have narrow, parochial views; they may be ruthless, the noble end justifies ignoble means, etc), then it might be considered to be positive that preference of achievement

culture has not been absolute in our study. In several important questions (decision-making process, division of labour among employees, solving of conflicts, relation to performance environment, relation to rules and prescriptions) the interviewed persons were inclined to prefer person-oriented or role-oriented characteristics. But what was not valued at all was a power-oriented type of organisation.

Although we implemented Harrison's method in a simplified way and did not follow all the required procedures (interviewed were persons from different organisations, not from one organisation), the results provided us with important and new information. Without any doubt it will work better if one goes 'into' a particular organisation.

Contrary to our first hypothesis, we can see that power-orientation in Estonian organisations is not as strong as we presumed. It means that the processes of moving from power-oriented to role-oriented culture and further on to result-orientation have been quite fast in Estonia.

## **Managers' culture and subordinates' culture**

Up to now, rather than differences, we emphasised similarity in attitudes. Harrison and Handy show in their works that even in a unified predominant culture within different structural units of an organisation there can be different types of sub-culture (Handy, [1978] 1985: 34–39). The question is that different structural units carry different functions. Those, in their turn, set different requirements to an employee. If we take, for instance, three different functional units – research and development, marketing and sales, and accounting or finance and ask what values an employee should have in order to succeed in those departments, we shall receive, without any doubt, three different answers since the culture which supports performance varies from function to function. So the key of success lies not in unification of (sub)-cultures and in loss of their identity, but in understanding that in every unit these values, attitudes, and norms must dominate which are necessary for carrying out the tasks of this particular unit. Also it

requires that the personnel of each unit must consist of persons who value namely these very things. Such persons who feel equally well in all possible cultural environments are rare.

Cultural differences occur not only between functional units. One of the most important results introduced in the works of M. Kütt and S. Haage indicates differences by occupational structure, in the values and attitudes of superiors and subordinates. Kütt interviewed three production companies ( $n = 254$ ) and Haage conducted a survey in four state offices ( $n = 110$ ). The fact that in one instance the survey was conducted in a business organisation and in the other in a public organisation does not matter here since the indicated phenomenon occurred in both cases.

It seems that private and public sector organisations have something in common. According to the results, two out of three surveyed business organisations were role-oriented and one power-oriented. The preferred culture type was achievement-oriented in all cases. In four of the analysed public organisations there was one purely role-oriented organisation, one was role-oriented with strong features of achievement orientation and two were achievement-oriented. The preferred culture type was achievement-oriented in all cases also (in organisations where that type of culture predominated already, the requirement was to ensure and intensify it). The investigated group having been small, it is early to say that the Estonian public sector is more achievement-oriented than the private sector. But on the basis of the data we can conclude that the achievement-oriented type of culture is ensuring its position in the public sector, and this is in concordance with the data presented above. For officials achievement-orientation was an ideal no less important than for employees in the private sector. It seems that the fear of the “terror of efficiency” expressed by civil servants in 1996 (Roots, Karotom, 1996: 55) has been overcome. Then it was completely unacceptable that the values and norms of the private sector could be transferred to the public sector, especially considering that some officials saw there a chance to increase their incomes (Roots, 2000: 94). The spread of achievement-oriented values into the public sector during the

recent years should be welcomed, and Estonian public administration has only gained by it.

Coming back to differences in the understandings of managers and subordinates it has to be said that they are quite big. They reveal differences in the ways how managers and subordinates appraise themselves and their organisation, in the expectations of managers towards subordinates and the way subordinates realise these expectations, in the way managers and subordinates perceive the organisational environment. If we adopt Edgar Schein's view that its leaders form the culture of an enterprise, and their values and understandings influence the behavioural patterns of the members of the organisation (Schein, 1999), we will face serious questions concerning the existing differences of opinion. One question is what has caused such a situation. Does the main problem derive from communication difficulties between managers and subordinates or is the problem more serious? Do the communication-barriers derive from the managers' inability or from their lack of willingness to communicate their values to their subordinates? If the situation is like we have presented it, then what is the real role of leaders in forming organisational culture? Is it possible that a leader can shape organisational culture without sharing (read: concealing) own values and understandings with his/her subordinates?

It is evident that an appraisal of managers and management styles would reveal a gap with the predominant type of organisational culture. In subordinates' opinion, not only in power-oriented organisations but in role-oriented as well, the decision-making process is the privilege of a small group of strong and firm managers (Haage, 2002: 46; Kütt, 2002: 39). In organisations where achievement orientation prevails, the management style was viewed as role-oriented (Haage, 2002: 46). The differences here go "around the model" as Graves indicated above, while the management style seems to be a step behind other developments.

Considering the power- and role-oriented types of organisational culture as the oldest ones or traditional, as did Harrison, and taking into account that formation of role-oriented culture was a peculiar reaction against culture based on the personal power of

omnipotent leaders, then organisations in Estonia by their management style and culture could be regarded as old-fashioned and belonging somewhere to the early days of industrial society when autocratic rule began its transformation into role-orientated machinery. This does not mean that managers are not trying to achieve any goals. The question is in the management *methods and ways* in which they do it.

But managers see that in another way, although they agree with subordinates that decision-making takes place at the top and subordinates do not participate in this process. To them, they themselves are quite democratic and do not abuse of power. On the contrary, they appreciate initiative and proposals coming from their subordinates (Haage, 2002: 49, 59, 57, 59; Kütt, 2002: 42, 51). Subordinates, in their turn, do not see appreciation of their proposals and initiative. They think they may propose only things that please their managers (Kütt, 2002: 51). In their opinion, it is better to keep to the tasks prescribed by their job-descriptions and not surprise their bosses with new ideas.

Obviously this situation involves communication problems between managers and subordinates. *Firstly*, in power-oriented cultures information flows mainly in one way: from the top to the bottom. Feedback is weak or non-existent. This results in lack of information about the understandings and expectations of subordinates, and further – in managers' inadequate self-esteem. Managers are simply unaware of what their subordinates think of them. There are cases when employees would like their managers to be more democratic, while their managers, in their turn, would like to be even more authoritarian.

*Secondly*, the problems occur due to lack of direct contacts between top management and the rank and file. They communicate via middle-managers who simply do not pass information on (Haage, 2002: 59) or pass it on as intentionally twisted (Kütt, 2002: 43, 51, 53). This produces noise in the communication process.

*The third* reason derives from transmission of the so-called mixed messages by superiors that cause confusion and uncertainty

among subordinates. Managers declare that they value team-work and initiative coming from the bottom, but in practice they do not take these issues into account, or do not favour proposals and initiative coming from subordinates. They even heap reproaches on subordinates in a way that subordinates “will never forget” (Haage, 2002: 53). In this situation a gap between words and practices is quite evident.

In that case barriers in the communication process are not the reason, but more likely the result. The question is what causes them. A gap emerged from the contradiction between espoused values or manifested values and basic assumptions which are the real base for everyday performance. It seems that basic assumptions of managers have not changed in the last decades regardless changes in the environment and the emergence of new generation of managers. Again culture has demonstrated to be more vital than its physical carriers.

What these basic assumptions and values are should be the subject of a special study. It seems that on the basis of the presented data the main topic is the way employers see their employees. Managers think that “subordinates do not want to be responsible for anything, they are not ambitious, and therefore it is necessary to direct and control them” (Haage, 2002: 63). If this is the main attitude, then it is understandable why decision-making has passed exclusively to the top managers. Employees’ concern is to be obedient, and they are motivated by rewards and punishment.<sup>2</sup> This means that Douglas McGregor’s ‘Theory X’ still shapes the minds of the managers.

The way superiors communicate with subordinates exposes their attitudes. This is where the barriers are coming from. The reverse side of this shapes employees’ feeling that their organisation

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<sup>2</sup> The first version of the article was already sent to the editor when our assumptions got indirect proof by professor Kaarel Kilvits from Tallinn Technical University (Kilvits, 2003). According to him Estonian employers would like to have employees who are well qualified, compliant, non-ambitious, not union members, ready to work hard for the companies with questionable future and to do that in lousy working conditions and for a meagre salary.

treats them as ‘hands’ whose time and energy are at the disposal of persons at higher levels in the hierarchy. This sort of management practice generates and reproduces values and expectations which are in opposition with the main trends in contemporary organisational culture.

As for our second hypothesis, it is evident that everyday managerial practices are the main way to communicate to the staff what values are and what values are not really appreciated by the organisation. The values communicated in this way may differ from the values publicly declared by the managers.

## **Conclusions**

On the basis of the presented data we can conclude the following:

1. Private and public organisations of Estonia are moving towards the achievement-oriented type of organisational culture.
2. Constraints that can slow down this movement partly derive from power-oriented management culture.
3. In many cases the management declare democratic values, but in everyday practices they quite often act in an authoritarian way.
4. Subordinates form their understanding about the values underlying the culture of their organisation on the basis of real everyday practices, not on the basis of declarations.
5. There is a need to study more thoroughly what causes the described situation. The results we have got do not give us an answer about the reality: is the deeper reason the gap between (democratic) values that the managers bear in their mind and their actual (authoritarian) management practices, so that values are somehow separated from the practices, or is the main reason the gap between declared or espoused values and the deeper basic assumptions.
6. The explanation given in the article is one possible way of seeing things. A further study of the problem would obviously need somewhat different and more complicated study methods.

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## KOKKUVÕTE

### Organisatsioonikultuuri tüüpide uurimisest

*Harry Roots*

Roger Harrison ja tema ideede propageerija Charles Handy said 1970. aastatel tuntuks ideaaltüüpide meetodi rakendajatena organisatsioonikultuuri uurimises. Harrisoni loodud konstruktsis on neli organisatsioonikultuuri “algtüüpi”: *võimukeskne*, *rollikeskne*, *ülesande-* ehk *saavutusekeskne*, *isiku-* ehk *toetusekeskne*. Ükski tegelikult toimiv organisatsioon ei ole kunagi sajaprotsendiliselt “puhas” tüüp, kuid Harrisoni hinnangul domineerib alati mingi neist neljast.

Eesti organisatsioonide uurimisel on Harrisoni metoodikat kasutatud alates 2002. aastast. Artiklis tutvustataksegi saadud tulemusi. Ilmneb, et nii era- kui avaliku sektori organisatsioonides domineerib enamasti kas võimu- või rollikeskne kultuur, viimane sageli tugevate saavutusekesksuse elementidega. Avalikus sektoris on toimunud järk-järguline üleminek juhi isikuvõimul põhinevalt kultuurilt reeglistatud, protseduuride ja ettekirjutustega piiratud rollikesksele kultuurile. Kui aga oleks võimalus valida, eelistaksid töötajad nii era- kui avalikus sektoris sooritusele ja saavutustele orienteeritud kultuuritüüpi. Usutavasti saabki sellest organisatsioonikultuuris toimuvate nihete järgmine faas.

Lisaks sellele on uurimuste tulemusena selgunud küllaltki oluline erinevus juhtide ja alluvate väärtustes ning hoiakutes. Seegi ilmneb ühtaegu nii era- kui avalikus sektoris. Juhid näevad end alluvate algatusi toetavate demokraatidena, alluvate silmis on nad aga enamasti karmikäelised autokraadid. Juhtide sõnad ja teod läkitavad alluvatele erinevaid signaale ootustest nende suhtes. Kommunikatsioonihäirete foonil on juhtide põhihoiakud oma alluvate (keda sageli peetakse vaid algatus- ja vastutusvõimetuteks indiviidideks) suhtes: neid paneb liikuma vaid lootus saada preemiat, hirm karistuse ees ja isiklik lojaalsus juhile. Taolisest põhiveendumusest lähtudes neid reeglina valitsetaksegi.

Juhtimiskultuur ning -stiil Eesti ettevõtetes ja organisatsioonides jääb seega jätkuvalt maha organisatsioonikultuuri üldisest arengust, moodustades viimase kõige alalhoidlikuma ja konservatiivsema osa. Arvestades juhtide rolli olulisust oma organisatsioonis domineerivate väärtuste ja hoiakute kujunemisel, võib kõnealune asjaolu muutuda edasise arengu piduriks.