

4. INTERRELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN PERSONALITY TRAITS AND ORGANISATIONAL CULTURE

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Abstract

The fundamental assumption proposed is that organisational culture has an impact on many processes within organisations. Therefore it is very important to ascertain what factors would enable us to guide organisational culture in a favourable direction. One way for that is to carefully consider personality characteristics of people when selecting personnel, but also to improve communication between them, to offer employees training programmes, etc. The article presents the results of the author's study, the aim of which was to reveal the connections between Estonian school employees' personality characteristics and their estimations of organisational culture orientations. The personality traits were measured with the *Five Factor Model* of personality and the organisational culture estimations with the *Questionnaire of Organisational Culture*. The results show that individuals with high extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness and low neuroticism give higher estimations of organisational culture orientations. In this study no connection was found between openness to experience and estimations of organisational culture.

Introduction

Over the last decades, many researchers (e.g. E. H. Schein, L. Smircich, T. Peters and R. Waterman, T. Deal and A. Kennedy, J. Kotter and J. Heskett) have made attempts to define organisational culture and explain its essence. Although they have not succeeded in formulating a satisfactory general conception, all the abovementioned scientists state that organisational culture is a set of generally accepted principles, values and behaviours within an organisation (Vadi, 2000). The author of the present article interprets organisational culture from a functional perspective as an adaptation mechanism which helps an organisation to adapt and survive in a changing environment (Alas, 2003). This is consistent with the definition of organisational culture proposed by Schein (1992), according to which organisational culture is the pattern of basic assumptions that a given group has invented, discovered, or developed in learning to cope with its problems of external adaptation and integral integration (*Ibid*).

Previous research has shown that organisational culture influences organisational performance and supports decision-making, efficiency, job performance, job satisfaction, employee commitment and cooperation (Langan-Fox, Tan, 1997; O'Reilly, Chatman, Caldwell, 1991). Therefore, it is very important to find the factors that would allow us to influence organisational culture in a favourable direction.

Interrelationships of personality characteristics in various areas related to work and organisation have been studied worldwide, e.g. the relationships between personality characteristics and the person's job (Lievens, Decaestecker, Coetsier, Geirnaert, 2001), vocation (Brody, Ehrlichman, 1998), workgroup (Kichuk, Wiesnen, 1997; Thoms, Moore, Schott, 1996) and also organisational culture (Judge, Cable, 1997). The results clearly show that people with personality characteristics of a certain type are more suitable for certain jobs, vocations, workgroups and organisations than others. Consequently, if it has been made clear which characteristics of potential applicants for the vacancies of an organisation are preferable, this aspect can be taken into consideration when

selecting personnel among the available candidates. Also, if we know which personality traits are important in improving the cooperation between an individual and the organisation, this information can be used, for example, in training programmes and communication issues.

The article presents the results of the authors' study, the aim of which was to reveal the connections between Estonian school employees' personality characteristics and their estimations of organisational culture orientations. *The Five Factor Model* of personality, often called the Big Five, was used for measuring personality traits. The factors represented in the model are: extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism and openness to experience (Costa, McCrae, Kay, 1995).

Alas (2003) has found that several theorists have pointed out task-orientation and relationship-orientation (or person orientation) of organisational culture: Kilmann and Saxton (1983) focus on people versus task; Goffee and Jones (2000) separate sociability, similar to relationship-orientation, and solidarity, similar to task-orientation; Harrison (1995) distinguishes between task- and person-oriented organisational cultures. Task culture emphasises superiority of the goals of the organisation over its members' personal goals. Person-centred orientation is based on warm and harmonious interpersonal relationships (*Ibid*). Therefore the organisational culture estimations in the authors' study were measured with the *Questionnaire of Organisational Culture*, the main idea of which is that organisational culture can be characterised through task and relationship orientations. (Vadi, Allik, Realo, 2002).

Underlying idea of the present study was the assumption that people with different personality traits may perceive organisational culture in different ways. For example, neurotic people see things in darker colours than less neurotic people. Four hypotheses for empirical research were developed on the basis of previous studies.

Hypotheses Development

Extrovert people tend to be socially oriented (outgoing and gregarious), active (adventuresome and assertive), warm, but also dominant and ambitious. Extraverts are more likely to take on leadership roles and to have a greater number of close friends (Judge, Higgins, 1999).

Earlier studies show that extroverts are more successful in their professional careers than introvert people (Judge *et al*, 1999; Barrick, Mount, 1991). The results of the study carried out by Magnus, Diener, Fujita, Pavot (1993) show that extrovert people find more positive experiences in their daily life than do introverts. If we assume that a positive attitude has a favourable influence on one's professional activities, then extrovert people have a certain advantage in this area.

A high degree of extroversion has a favourable influence on one's suitability for participation in teamwork. For example, Kichuk *et al* (1997), also Thoms *et al* (1996) established that workgroups including members of high extroversion were more successful in their work. For their free time too extrovert people select such activities that allow them to be together and communicate with other people (Emmons, Diener, Larsen, 1986). For instance, they prefer team sports to individual sports. Judge *et al* (1997) have established that extrovert people prefer teamwork-oriented organisational cultures. If we analyse which professions people prefer, we find that extroverts prefer professions that allow them communication and collaboration with other people (Barrick *et al*, 1991).

Hypothesis 1: people with a high level of extroversion give higher estimations to organisational culture orientations.

Agreeable persons are cooperative (trusting others and caring of them) as well as likable (good-natured, cheerful, complaisant, and gentle), friendly, straightforward, tender-minded (Judge *et al*, 1999). Judge *et al* (1999) have shown that as well as extrovert people, also people with high agreeableness are more successful in their professional careers. Konovsky, Organ (1996), who analysed the relationships between personality properties and the

attitudes of the members of an organisation, found that higher agreeableness favours being satisfied with one's work.

As well as extrovert people, also individuals with high agreeableness prefer such vocations that involve a lot of communication and collaboration with other people (Barrick *et al*, 1991). Agreeableness is also beneficial to teamwork, as Thoms *et al* (1996) demonstrated in the above-mentioned study. The study by Judge *et al* (1997) demonstrated that people with high agreeableness prefer teamwork-oriented organisational cultures. Likewise it has been established that agreeable persons can well control their anger and other negative emotions (Graziano, Jensen-Campbell, Hair, 1996), and can avoid conflicts with others (Asendorpf, Wilpers, 1998). This feature is very important for working and communicating with other people.

Hypothesis 2: people with a high level of agreeableness give higher estimations to organisational culture orientations.

Conscientious persons are achievement-oriented (hardworking and persistent), responsible, careful, planful and organised (Judge *et al*, 1999). It has been established that a high level of conscientiousness is conducive to being satisfied with one's work (Konovsky *et al*, 1996); also, according to some earlier studies, people with a high conscientiousness are more successful in their work than people with a low conscientiousness level (Judge *et al*, 1999; Barrick *et al*, 1991). In addition, Brody *et al* (1998) point out that leaders give a high estimation to people with a high conscientiousness level for their reasonability and successful goal achievement. Conscientiousness is very important for all professions (Barrick *et al*, 1991). A high level of conscientiousness is also beneficial to the efficacy of teamwork (Thoms *et al*, 1996) and people with a high conscientiousness level prefer teamwork-oriented organisational cultures (Judge *et al*, 1997).

Hypothesis 3: people with a high level of conscientiousness give higher estimations to organisational culture orientations.

Common traits associated with *neuroticism* include being anxious, depressed, angry, embarrassed, worried, and insecure (Bar-

rick *et al.*, 1991). Neuroticism generally refers to a lack of positive psychological adjustment and emotional stability (Judge *et al.*, 1999).

If we compare neuroticism with the above-mentioned personality properties, the situation is *vice versa* in most cases. Judge *et al.* (1999) as well as Barrick *et al.* (1991) have established that high neuroticism does not help to be successful at work. The results obtained by Magnus *et al.* (1993) also show that a high level of neuroticism is related to earlier negative life experiences.

Neuroticism is not conducive to effective participation in teamwork, as has been established by both Kichuk *et al.* (1997) and by Thoms *et al.* (1996). It has been shown that the high level of neuroticism is related to stress caused by relationships with the family, friends, pastime activities or work sphere (David, Green, Martin, Duld, 1997; Bolger, Schilling, 1991). Costa *et al.* (1995) state that, as a rule, people with a high level of neuroticism are not satisfied with their jobs, whereas the character of the job does not influence the situation significantly. On the other hand, a low neuroticism level is an important positive feature for each occupation (Barrick *et al.*, 1991).

Hypothesis 4: people with a low level of neuroticism give higher estimations to organisational culture orientations.

Openness to experience is characterised by intellectance (philosophical and intellectual) and unconventionality (imaginative, autonomous, and nonconforming) (Judge *et al.*, 1999). People opened to experience prefer occupations, which demand continuous progress as a result of performed work (Barrick *et al.*, 1991). They have a thirst for continuous progress in all their activities and are not afraid of taking responsibility in risky situations, therefore not all jobs and organisations are acceptable for them. For this reason, in the study no hypothesis was set in this area. The intention was to find out if there is a connection between openness to experience and estimations of organisational culture orientations in Estonian schools or not.

Research Method

Sample

The empirical study was conducted by the author in January-February 2003 among the personnel of Estonian schools. 62 schools from 14 counties of Estonia participated in the study, including secondary schools (45%), basic education schools (42%), primary schools (8%) and schools for children with special needs (5%). The filled-in questionnaires were returned via mail, e-mail and in person. The sample included representatives of school administration (school directors, vice-directors, directors of studies, etc.), teachers and support personnel (cooks, cleaners, caretakers etc.).

All in all, 692 subjects participated in the survey. The average age of the participants was 42.5 years, ranging from 20 to 72 years. The distribution of the sample between various socio-demographic groups is presented in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1. The distribution of the sample between various socio-demographic groups

Gender	Profession	Nationality	Education level
men 13%	managers 12%	Estonians 96%	higher 68%
women 85%	white-collar workers or specialists 65%	other 1%	vocational secondary 16%
	blue-collar workers 13%		secondary 9%
			basic 3%
not answered 2%	not answered 10%	not answered 3%	not answered 4%

For statistical processing of the gathered data regression analysis was used. In data analysis the statistical data processing package SPSS was used.

Measurement

For measuring the personality traits the *Five Factor Model* of personality was selected (Costa *et al*, 1995). This model has been successfully used in Estonia and the NEO-FFI Questionnaire has been translated into Estonian. The abovementioned questionnaire consists of 81 questions and the answers can be given in a 5-point scale (from 0 – “completely disagree” to 4 – “completely agree”).

The organisational culture estimations were measured with the *Questionnaire of Organisational Culture*. This questionnaire consists of 43 statements. The respondents were asked to indicate their attitude to the items on a 10 – point scale ranging from “completely disagree” (1) to “completely agree” (10) (Vadi *et al*, 2002). The idea is that organisational culture can be characterised through task and relationship orientations. Task orientation reflects to what extent all members are willing to support their organisation. The representative statements in this orientation are: in our organisation “people are proud of their organisation”, “positive changes constantly take place” and “people’s well-being is important”. Relationship orientation indicates belongingness. The characteristic statements are: in our organisation “people know about each others’ hobbies and out-of-work activities”, “all important matters are discussed with each other” and “in tough situations there is a strong feeling of togetherness”.

Logistic regression was used for analysing the relationships between personality traits and estimations of organisational culture orientations. Logistic regression is a type of regression analysis, where the dependent variable is a dummy variable (coded 0, 1). Therefore the data must be transformed. Four different models were formed: two about task orientation of organisational culture and two about relationship orientation of organisational culture.

The dependent variables were coded as follows: *model Y1*– the task orientation estimations above the average; *model Y2* – the

high estimations of the task orientation; *model Z1* – the relationship orientation estimations above the average; *model Z2* – the high estimations of the relationship orientation.

For coding the dependent variables, the concepts of the mean and upper quartile were used. For the dependent variable Y1, the data were transformed so that the attributes with values below the average were coded with 0, and the attributes with values above the average were coded with 1. For the dependent variable Y2, the data were transformed so that the attributes with values below the upper quartile were coded with 0, and the attributes with values above the upper quartile were coded with 1. The same idea was used in modifying the dependent variables Z1 and Z2.

The independent variables were extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism and openness to experience. For coding the independent variables, the concepts of the mean and of the upper and lower quartiles were used.

For example, in case of extraversion there were three different aspects that had to be taken into account: low extraversion, high extraversion and the degree of extraversion above the average. The independent variable extraversion has been therefore added to the model in three forms: *extraversion A* (coded: 1 – values that were below the lower quartile, 0 – values that were above the lower quartile); *extraversion B* (coded 1 – values that were above the average, 0 – values that were below the average), *extraversion C* (coded 1 – values that were above the upper quartile, 0 – values that were below the upper quartile). By transforming other independent variables the same idea was used.

Results

As mentioned before, four models were formed for data analysis. At first, all independent variables were included into the models. Then the variables that were not significant were removed. The acceptable significance level was 0.05.

After the removal of insignificant variables, the four different models contained two or three independent variables (see Table 4.2). We can see that one variable (extraversion B) is uncommon in all models. The odd's ratio of variable extraversion B ranges from 1.3–1.6. Therefore we can say that the degree of extraversion above the average increases the probability of high or above-average estimations of organisational culture about one and a half times.

Table 4.2. The significant variables of four logistic regression models

Model Y1		Model Y2	
Variable	Odd's ratio	Variable	Odd's ratio
Extraversion B	1.4	Extraversion B	1.4
Agreeableness C	1.7	Agreeableness C	2.2
Neuroticism A	1.8	Conscientiousness B	1.5
Model Z1		Model Z2	
Variable	Odd's ratio	Variable	Odd's ratio
Extraversion B	1.3	Extraversion B	1.6
Agreeableness B	1.4	Agreeableness B	1.6
Neuroticism A	1.7		

A rather similar variable in all the models is agreeableness. In the task orientation models nevertheless agreeableness C and in relationship orientation models agreeableness B were significant. In task orientation models the high degree of agreeableness increases the probability of high and above-average estimations of organisational culture 1.7–2.2 times, in relationship orientation models the degree of agreeableness above the average increases the probability of high and above-average estimations of organisational culture 1.4–1.6 times.

The other variables in the models are quite different. Neuroticism A is significant in models Y1 and Z1, where the above the

average estimations of organisational culture are estimated. Low neuroticism increases the probability of above-average estimations of organisational culture in task and relationship oriented models 1.7–1.8 times.

Conscientiousness B is significant in model Y2, where the high estimations of organisational culture in task orientation model are estimated. The degree of conscientiousness above the average increases the probability of high estimations of organisational culture in the task-oriented model 1.5 times.

The success of logistic regression can be assessed by looking at the classification table showing correct classifications of the dichotomous dependent variables. The results of different models are shown by Table 4.3. Model Y1 can predict the correct values in 60% of cases, model Z1 in 62% of cases, model Y2 in 76% of cases and model Z2 in 77% of cases.

Table 4.3. The percentage of correct classifications in different models

	Model Y1	Model Z1	Model Y2	Model Z2
Lower estimates	57%	74%	97%	98%
Higher estimates	63%	50%	12%	10%
All estimates	60%	62%	76%	77%

All the presented models are quite good, but in the authors' opinion models Y1 and Z1 are the better ones. The reason is that these models can better predict the higher estimations of organisational culture orientations.

Discussion

In the following the conformity of the results of the study to the four study hypotheses is analysed. The first hypothesis states that people with a high level of extroversion give higher estimations

to organisational culture orientations. This hypothesis has been confirmed by the study.

In earlier studies it has been established that the occupations which include communicating with other people are suitable for extrovert people. Work at school gives many possibilities and even commitments for communication. Evidently, this situation is more favourable for extrovert people. In the author's opinion, this is the reason why people whose extroversion level is above the average, working in the system, tend to give higher estimations to its organisational culture orientations – they have found a suitable occupation and in consequence are more satisfied with their work as well as with their occupational environment.

The higher estimations given to organisational culture by extrovert people may also be explained by the fact that the extrovert people can adapt well (Watson, Clark, McIntyre, Hamaker, 1992), and have in their life more positive experiences than introvert people (Magnus *et al*, 1993). They are also more optimistic (Watson *et al*, 1992) and these features form a strong emotional basis for their estimations. So evidently, extrovert people give more positive answers to the questions presented in the questionnaire.

The relationship orientation part of the organisation culture questionnaire includes several questions testing how well people know each other, are informed of personal problems of colleagues and how well they get along with each other. As extroverts are very agreeable, they like being together with other people and communicate with them, extrovert people give higher estimations to the respective statements in the questionnaire compared with estimations given by less extrovert people.

The second hypothesis states that people with a high level of agreeableness give higher estimations to organisational culture orientations. This hypothesis has been also confirmed by results of the study.

On the basis of the results of earlier studies it is possible to state that for agreeable people the occupations including communicating with other people are the most suitable ones. As already

mentioned, working at school offers many possibilities for communicating with other people. This situation is evidently more acceptable for people with a higher level of agreeableness. In the author's opinion, that can be one of the reasons why agreeable people give higher estimations to organisational culture orientations – it may well be that they have found an occupation suitable for them. So they tend to be more satisfied with their work and their environment.

Another reason for agreeable people giving higher estimations to organisational culture orientations is evidently the fact that in agreeable people also positive emotions prevail, analogically to extrovert people (Graziano *et al*, 1996), so they may also tend to estimate situations more positively. Agreeable people can also adapt well to various circumstances (Lievens *et al*, 2001).

Evidently for the people with a high agreeableness level it is also easier to answer the relationship orientation part of the questionnaire, which test how well the people know each other, are informed of personal problems of colleagues, how they get along with each other. As for agreeable people good relationships with other people are very important (Judge *et al*, 1999; Konovsky *et al*, 1996), they work hard to avoid conflict situations (Asendorpf *et al*, 1998). This is evidently one of the reasons why the relationship orientation estimations of the people with a higher agreeableness level are higher than the estimations given by less agreeable people.

The third hypothesis states that people with a high conscientiousness level give higher estimations to organisational culture orientations. This hypothesis has been confirmed by one model, namely the model Y2, where the high estimates given to task orientation were analysed. The conscientious people are very task oriented (Judge *et al*, 1999; Barrick *et al*, 1991), well disciplined, practical, trustworthy and adhering to the rules (Judge *et al*, 1997), so it is no surprise that the conscientiousness level above the average is significant especially in task orientation.

The fourth hypothesis states that people with a low level of neuroticism give higher estimations to organisational culture orienta-

tions. The logistic regression models Y1 and Z1 have shown that the low level of neuroticism increases the probability that people give above-average estimations to task orientation as well as to relationship orientation.

Analysing the causes why people with a low neuroticism level give higher estimates we should keep in mind that negative emotions prevail in neurotic people (e.g. Judge *et al*, 1999), they adapt slowly (Judge *et al*, 1997), they have difficulties forbearing stress situations (e.g. Watson *et al*, 1992), etc. Therefore neurotic people may estimate the organisational culture lower than non-neurotic people.

The results of this study did not demonstrate the significance of openness to experience in any of the four models. So there was no connection between openness to experience and estimations of organisational culture by the employees of Estonian schools.

Three of the four hypotheses for the study were completely confirmed. One hypothesis was partly confirmed. The study has shown that people with the following degrees of personality traits give higher estimations to organisational culture orientations:

- the degree of extraversion above the average,
- the degree of agreeableness high or above the average,
- the degree of conscientiousness above the average (in the task orientation model),
- low level of neuroticism.

Regarding these results, the author of the article suggests that in order to improve the cooperation between individuals and organisation it is necessary to take into consideration the personality traits of individuals. For example, to encourage the process of socialisation. Extrovert, agreeable and less neurotic people can better adapt to various circumstances, but we should not forget that not all people are so good at that (for example, less extrovert and agreeable people). Another option is to minimize the number of stressful situations. Extrovert and agreeable people are optimistic and positively disposed, but others (e.g. neurotic people) can have problems in conflict and troublesome situations. There-

fore dissatisfaction with some fields of organisational culture can appear.

Likewise the communication between members of an organisation can be improved. If people associate with one another, there is a higher probability that they know one another better, discuss all important matters and help one another in job-related problems. That can help to improve organisational culture.

In training programmes the communication skills, coping with stress and adaptation competence can be trained and advanced. Also the awareness of the importance of personality traits can be explained. If people know which personality traits are important from the aspect of the organisation's better functioning, they can develop these characteristics in them or express better the already existing properties.

The results of the study can be taken into account in personnel selection, too. If it is difficult to decide which candidate to choose, it is reasonable to prefer the candidate who has achieved higher results on the scale of extraversion, agreeableness and conscientiousness and lower results on the scale of neuroticism.

When applying the results of the presented study, it should not be forgotten that the study was performed on a very specific sample. In the author's opinion, the above-mentioned connections between a school employee's personality traits and organisational culture orientations may appear in other types of organisations, too. But this statement needs to be proved by performing complementary studies in various organisations.

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KOKKUVÕTE

Isiksuseomaduste ja organisatsioonikultuuri vahelised seosed

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Varasemad uuringud on tõestanud, et organisatsioonikultuur mõjutab näiteks inimeste tööga rahulolu, pühendumist tööle, omavahelise koostöö edukust, töötamise efektiivsust, otsuste tegemist, organisatsiooni mainet ja inimeste soovi jääda samasse organisatsiooni tööle pikemaks ajaks. Sellepärast on ka väga oluline leida võimalusi, mis aitaksid organisatsioonikultuuri mõjutada ja parandada. Üheks võimaluseks on arvestada inimeste isiksuseomadusi nii personalivalikul kui ka töötajate koolitamisel ning sisekommunikatsiooni parandamisel selleks, et saavutada töötajate ja organisatsiooni võimalikult hea sobivus.

Artiklis esitati autori poolt teostatud uurimuse tulemused, mille eesmärgiks oli leida seosed Eesti üldhariduskoolide töötajate isiksuseomaduste ja organisatsioonikultuuri vahel. Oletati, et erinevate isiksuseomadustega inimesed võivad tajuda organisatsioonikultuuri erinevalt. Isiksuseomaduste mõõtmiseks kasutati nn. “suure viisiku” mudelit (*Five Factor Model*) ja organisatsioonikultuuri mõõtmiseks meetodit, mis põhineb ideel, et organisatsioonikultuuri iseloomustab ülesande ja suhete orientatsioon.

Uurimuse tulemused näitasid, et organisatsioonikultuurile annavad kõrgemaid hinnanguid keskmisest kõrgema ekstraversuse määraga, kõrge või keskmisest kõrgema sotsiaalsuse määraga, keskmisest kõrgema meelekindluse määraga (ülesande orientatsioonis) ja madala neurootilisuse määraga inimesed. Seost avatuse ja organisatsioonikultuuri hinnangute vahel käesolevas uuri-

muses ei leitud. Artikli autori arvates võivad nimetatud seosed kehtida ka teist tüüpi organisatsioonides, kuid mille kinnituseks on tarvis läbi viia täiendavaid uurimusi.