

1.3. ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE THROUGH THE CONNECTIONS BETWEEN METAPHORS AND ORIENTATIONS

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Introduction

Organizational culture (OC) is not an easily characterized phenomenon as it includes several subconscious and emotional mechanisms. Culture can be seen as a multiple phenomenon. The levels or layers in it differ from each other mainly by their visibility, or, in other words, some levels can be more easily seen, whereas others are so emotional and subconscious that it is a challenge to investigate how they are related to the consciously given judgements. Still the need to characterize these deeper levels is becoming more important. Hence it is necessary to know how the members of an organization perceive organizational culture. Here we can refer to metaphors, which are excellent auxiliaries for people to express their subconscious thoughts and perceptions about their organization. To put it differently, metaphors help us to capture the background of the estimations of organizational culture by quantitative or qualitative measurement.

This paper aims to get an in-depth understanding of organizational culture by learning about organizational members' attitudes towards organizational culture orientations and about the way they compare their organization with some other phenomenon.

The current article does not seek to prove the suitability of the methods used to characterize organizational culture.

The advantage of choosing as a sample schools for children with special needs is that the people in those schools usually work with their organization for a long time and due to that they have to think over and interpret their connectedness with the organization and its culture several times. Also the culture-specific aspects are more evident in these organizations as they are comparatively closed to their surroundings.

Having a good knowledge of organizational culture enables the administration to secure the most suitable staff and achieve the best functioning of the organization. This in turn will provide an opportunity to manage its organizational culture and develop cooperation with other interest groups.

Organizational culture and different modes of its expression

In this chapter organizational culture is defined through different paradigms and different approaches to the manifestation of organizational culture are introduced.

There are many definitions of organizational culture. It has been viewed as holistic, historically determined, and socially constructed (Rashid *et al.*, 2003). Most of the definitions are based on the idea that organizational culture incorporates organizational members with different goals, strength, responsibility and attitude (Alvesson, 1987), originates and develops at all hierarchical levels, and is founded on a broad-based history that is realized in the material aspects of the organization. Organizational culture can be perceived as a symbolic context within which interpretations of organizational identity are formed (Hatch, Schultz, 1997). The members of an organization can be characterized by cultural similarity in terms of shared understandings, beliefs, values,

norms and symbols that make them differ to some extent from other groups outside the organization (Alvesson, 1987). Cultural difference gives originality to organizations but it is equally important to understand the elements of culture and the processes combining them and also how culture and organization are related to each other.

People who are involved with an organization in one way or another have an important role in creating, developing and changing its organizational culture, because organizational culture and cultural values develop through the cooperation between individuals and organization. While creating a new organization, its members have to find solutions to two crucial problems: 1) how to survive and adapt to the external environment, 2) how to integrate the internal processes (Schultz, 1995; De Witte, van Muijen, 1999). Schein (1984) emphasizes positive reinforcement as one important learning mechanism in the development of culture. People repeat (quit) the behavior that brings them positive (negative) results (De Witte, van Muijen, 1999). Regarding this, Schein (1992) has provided one of the most detailed and comprehensive definitions for organizational culture.

Schein (1992) also describes different levels of organizational culture, but his model is static because the processes of moving from one level to another are not discussed. The description of these processes would help to see how the levels of culture are related to each other. Considering this weakness, Hatch (1993) has tried to complement Schein's theory. She adds the fourth level – symbols –, and characterizes the processes that combine the levels of culture together. Hatch offers a new model – *cultural dynamics* –, the elements of which are combined through manifestation, realization, symbolization, and interpretation processes.

Manifestation permits cultural assumptions to reveal themselves in the perceptions and emotions of organizational members. Realization permits transformation of values to artefacts and deriving values from artefacts. Symbolization and interpretation

processes help find out to what extent the artefacts are symbols or whether the organizational symbols are all artefacts.

While Schein's model focuses on which artefacts and values are derived from basic assumptions, the dynamic perspective tries to find out how culture is created from basic assumptions, values, artefacts and symbols and explains the processes that combine the elements (Hatch, 1993). So not only the elements of culture are important but also the way they interact and create the whole. According to Schein's (1992) theory, organizational culture comprises all the different aspects of an organization. However, there is also a possibility that organizational culture is itself one variable in the organization.

Smircich's (1983) paradigmatic approach brings out the very important difference between two approaches: organizations have culture and organizations are culture (Schultz, 1995) (Figure 1).

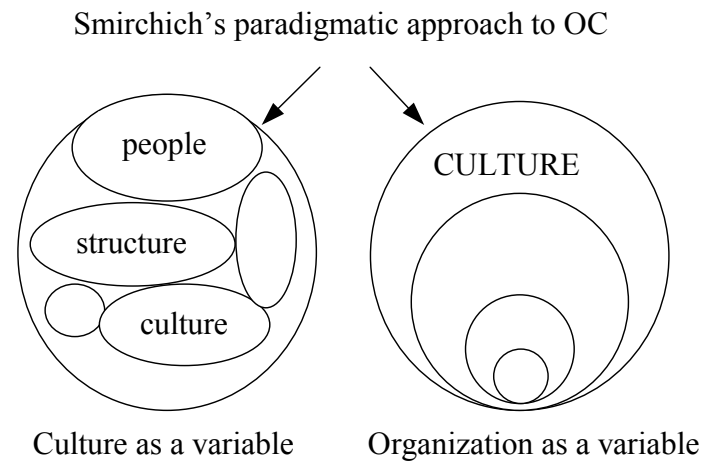


Figure 1. Smircich's paradigmatic approach to organizational culture (1983) (with the authors' modifications).

The first approach claims that culture is an independent variable itself and is just one part of the organization. The second approach

claims that culture is a root metaphor. It means that organizational culture consists of all the different aspects in the organization and the independent variable is the organization itself. Hence organizations differ not only by their culture but also by the way the culture is approached.

Different approaches to organizational culture (Smircich, 1983; Schein, 1984, 1992; Hatch, 1993) share some similarities and differences. One similarity is associating organizational culture with subconscious and emotional mechanisms, which makes the characterization of organizational culture very complicated. The greatest challenge is bringing culture to people's awareness. Culture as a root metaphor gives one an opportunity to express organizational culture the way people perceive it (Smircich, 1983).

Different approaches encourage looking at organizational culture from various perspectives, especially in order to find ways how to assemble their advantages for getting a more in-depth understanding. Here we argue that organizational culture can be either evaluated through the visible aspects in the organization or it can be characterized through using some other phenomena, for example metaphors. Our research question is: what kind of combinations of visible (i.e. attitudes towards organization) and subconscious (i.e. outcomes of perception, or metaphors) aspects of organizational culture will appear if we relate them to each other? When we are able to identify connections, we can provide explanations about organizational culture and its management in general.

Method

In this survey a combined method is used to characterize organizational culture. First, two orientations were chosen to measure organizational culture by the Questionnaire of Organizational Culture (Vadi, Allik, Realo, 2002). Task orientation shows the participants' attitude towards work and towards the aim of the organization. Relationship orientation shows the human side of

the organization and how much mutual relations are valued in the organization. (Vadi, Allik, Realo, 2002). These are two dimensions that have been differentiated between in several surveys of organizational culture (Schein, 1992; Schultz, 1995).

Second, the metaphors were chosen to be the other research method. A metaphor means that a not-so-well-known or unknown object is characterized through some well-known object or its properties (Tsoukas, 1993; Palmer, Dunford, 1996; Alvesson, 1993, 1995).

As it was said before, the aim of this survey is not to prove the suitability of the methods chosen but to concentrate on the essence of organizational culture, and therefore we will not address the methodological side of organizational culture.

Sample

The sample included 134 employees from nine Estonian schools for children with special needs. Most of the participants were teachers (82), while the rest represented other staff (principal, paramedic, secretary, accountant, etc.). In 20 cases the information about the organizational members' position was not revealed. The medium age was 45.1 (min = 21, max = 71). The sample included 110 (82%) women and 21 (16%) men; in three cases the gender was not given. Here it is important to note that traditionally most of the employees in these schools are women.

Procedure

Phase 1

The first phase was meant for collecting data about how people perceive organizational culture. The Questionnaire of Organizational Culture (Vadi, Allik, Realo, 2002) was applied to all

134 participants. It included 43 statements about the organization and the people could estimate their congruence with their organization on the scale from 1 to 10. Eight statements out of 43 form the relations orientation factor (Cronbach alpha $\alpha = .79$) and the other eight statements form the factor of task orientation (Cronbach alpha $\alpha = .83$) (see Appendix 1).

Phase 2

The second phase was carried out to see what kind of metaphors people use to characterize their organization. A structured 5-question interview (see Appendix 2) was conducted with 61 employees who were randomly chosen out of 134. This sample included 49 (80%) women and 12 (20%) men. The aim was to interview about half of the whole sample.

Statistical analysis

To perform the statistical analysis, the following groups were formed:

- Age – two groups, the first one including 21–40-year-olds ($n = 50$); the second group including 41–71-year-olds ($n = 76$). The age was not revealed in eight cases.
- Education – two groups, the first one including people with polytechnic or high school education ($n = 45$), the second one comprising people with a higher education ($n = 81$). The education was not disclosed in eight cases.
- Length of employment – two groups, the first one of those having 1–10 years of employment ($n = 62$), the second one of those with 11–47 years of employment ($n = 60$). The years of employment were not indicated in 12 cases.

Other demographic groups formed were not representative enough to be used in the analysis. Qualitative analysis was applied on the metaphors collected during the interview and as a consequence groups were formed. These groups were considered

as a variable characterizing organizational culture (see Appendix 3). The reason for using the *living being vs. machine* metaphor in the interview was that the meanings of these two opposites are easily understood by people and they represent two important measures for an organization – technocratic and organic. The differences between these two dimensions are most easily comprehensible to people.

To bring the results of the two phases together without violating the rule of confidentiality, the authors used a coding system instead of names in both the questionnaire and interview.

Results

The aim was to find out in what way the metaphors are connected to the organizational orientations and whether the age, education and years of employment elicit significant differences in estimations given to these factors.

The connection between the length of employment and task orientation showed that people with a shorter tenure (1–10 years) in their organization considered the task of the organization more important than did the people who had worked there for a longer time (over 10 years).

The *living being vs. machine* metaphor showed important connections to task orientation. The participants who characterized their organization with the *living being* metaphor also considered the task more important than did those people who used *machine* as the descriptive metaphor.

The *living being vs. machine* metaphor also had an important connection to relations orientation, where a similar tendency appeared. The participants who used the *living being* metaphor to characterize their organization considered the relations in the organization to be more important than did the people who used the *machine* metaphor (see Table 1). Due to the fact that some

interviewees did not reveal their years of employment or did not agree to choose between the living being and machine, the number of interviews analyzed is 56–57.

Table 1. Statistically significant connections to task orientation and relations orientation

			M	SD	N	p
TASK	Years of employment	1–10	5.7	1.2	25	< .05
		11–47	5.2	1.4	32	
	I metaphor (<i>living being</i> vs. <i>machine</i>)	Living being	5.7	1.3	48	< .01
		Machine	4.0	1.4	8	
RELA-TIONS	I metaphor (<i>living being</i> vs. <i>machine</i>)	Living being	7.1	1.2	48	< .05
		Machine	6.2	1.2	8	

Notes: M – medium score of the orientation, SD – standard deviation, N – number of answers, F – density distribution, P – level of significance

There also appeared one significant interaction ($F(1.47) = 4.70$; $p < .04$) between education and the *living being* vs. *machine* metaphor. The organization's task and aim were considered to be more important by the people who had a higher education and who characterized their organization as a *living being* ($M = 6.0$; $SD = 1.3$), while task orientation was considered less important by the people who had a higher education and characterized their organization with the *machine* metaphor ($M = 3.17$; $SD = 0.52$) (see Figure 2).

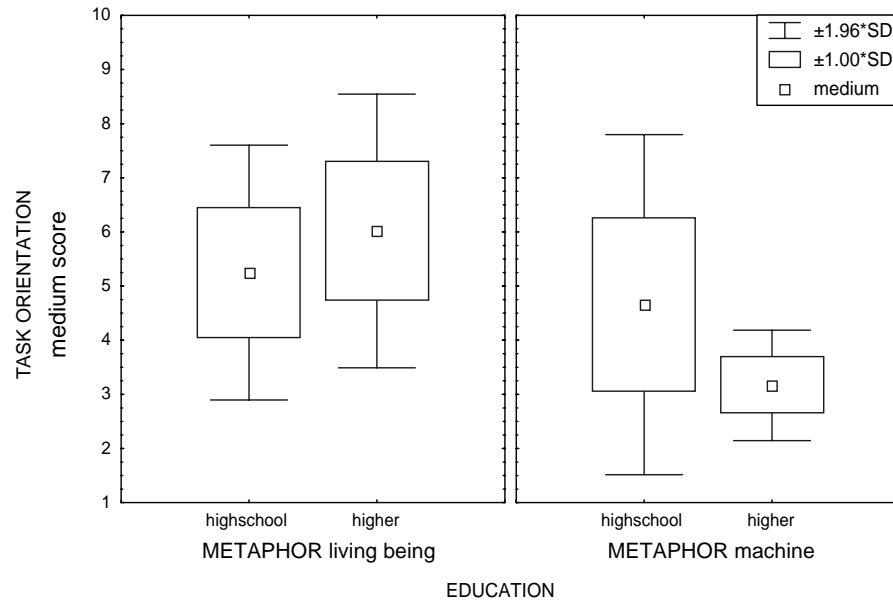


Figure 2. Interaction between education and *living being vs. machine* the metaphor in the case of task orientation.

Conclusions

This survey aimed to get a deeper understanding of organizational culture by analyzing organizational members' attitudes towards organizational culture orientations and the way in which they compare their organization with some other phenomenon. In the interpretation we followed the idea that task orientation of organizational culture is needed for an organization to function effectively and thus we tried to explain how the knowledge of subconscious assessments may benefit the management of this orientation.

The results of the empirical survey show that the metaphor *machine vs. living being* differentiated organizational members' assessment of task and relationship orientations. It seems that there is an important aspect behind the decision whether a particular organizational culture can be characterized with the *living*

being or *machine* metaphor. Based on the data, it can be said that people who characterize their organization as something living consider both relations and task to be more important than do those who compare their organization to a *machine*.

The participants who used the *machine* metaphor considered their organization emotionless and uncaring towards its employees. This shows that the way in which people perceive their organization's attitude towards themselves severely influences their estimations of task and relations.

On the other hand, the employees who used the machine metaphor to characterize their organizational culture evaluated relations more highly than task. This can be the indicator that while the work itself is routine and the attitude towards the employees is perceived to be uncaring, the communication and information exchange is considered to be important as it creates certain synergy and adds some human variety and creativity to an otherwise routine job. Considering the specifics of the work with children with special needs, it requires creativity and flexibility rather than strict rules.

The outcome that people who have worked in the organization for a shorter time consider task more important than relations can have many reasons. Visiting these schools and talking to the employees, we could see that people who have worked there for a short time are mainly young and they are interested in developing the school and bringing it closer to its goal. Young people are also more idealistic, enthusiastic and want to handle the problems more creatively. On the contrary, older people who have worked in this system for a longer time are not so eager to change the organization. One reason can be that they have different views, which date back to the Soviet time. The other reason can be that for them there is a conflict between the support extended by the government and the demands set to the schools. The support has decreased but the demands are still same that they used to be when the schools were founded.

An interesting result was also the interaction between the *living being* vs. *machine* metaphor and the educational level. It showed that having a higher education does not exactly say whether people are highly task-oriented or not, but the metaphor *living being* vs. *machine* makes a difference. It appeared that the participants who used the *living being* metaphor and had a higher education considered the task to be more important than did those who had a higher education and chose the *machine* metaphor. This result supports the above, but the difference is that here there is one additional factor – education.

If we put all these details together, we can conclude that relationships are highly valued in these schools, but the opinions differ with respect to task orientation. There can be two reasons for this if we look at the content of the statements forming task orientation. First, people in the organizations are not well enough aware of the goal of the organization or second, there is lack of resources to achieve the goal. If the administration of those schools wants to manage organizational culture, they can work out action plans, which are in accordance with these results. The combination of two approaches enabled us to open and explain some aspects of organizational culture in the schools for children with special needs.

To get a better idea about culture in an organization, it is important to survey many aspects of this organization, involving as many workers as possible.

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KOKKUVÕTE

Organisatsioonikultuur: metafooride ja organisatsiooni orientatsioonide vahelised seosed

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Organisatsioonikultuur (edaspidi OK) mõjutab inimeste käitumist organisatsioonis. Oma mitmete alateadvuslike ja emotsionaalsete mehhanismide ja aspektide tõttu on see fenomen raskesti iseloomustatav, mistõttu on vajalik leida selleks meetodeid. OK-d võib iseloomustada ülesande- ja suhteorientatsiooni kaudu või vaadelda seda läbi metafooride. Käesoleva artikli eesmärgiks on tuua välja, kuidas on seotud metafoorid ning suhte ja ülesandeorientatsioon erikoolides. Valimil rakendati (N = 134) OK küsimustikku (Vadi, Allik, Realo, 2002) ja struktureeritud intervjuud.

Empiirilise uuringu tulemused näitasid, et teatud tingimustel on metafooride kaudu võimalik leida sisulisi selgitusi kõrgele/madalale suhte- või ülesandeorientatsioonile. Hinnangud organisatsiooni orientatsioonidele eristusid ka tööstaaži ja haridusgruppide põhjal.

Suuremad teadmised OK-st annavad võimaluse viia edukamalt läbi muudatusi, tagamaks organisatsiooni efektiivseim funktsioneerimine ja sobivaimad töötajad. Antud uurimus võiks eelkõige anda infot sellest, kas ja mil määral teatakse ja teadvustatakse erikoolide eesmärki ja ülesannet ning mil määral ollakse neile orienteeritud. See omakorda annab võimaluse juhtida OK-i ning arendada erikoolide töötajate koostööd kõigi huvigruppidega.

Appendix 1. Statements from the Questionnaire of Organizational Culture (Vadi, Allik, Realo, 2002), which form the organizational orientations

Task orientation	Orientation of relations
IN OUR ORGANIZATION ...	IN OUR ORGANIZATION ...
... people are proud of their organization	... employees know one another
... people are rewarded for their good work	... accepted communication standards exist
... everyone has a big freedom of activity	... [people] know about each others' personal lives
... people are not afraid of making mistakes	... in case of mistakes one feels embarrassed in front of the other members of the organization
... positive changes constantly take place	... in tough situations there is a strong feeling of togetherness
... differences between subordinates and superiors are not accentuated	... [people] know about one another's hobbies and out-of-work activities
... people concentrate more on their own needs than on the goals of the organization	... [people] help one another in job-related problems
... people's well-being is important	... all important matters are discussed with one another

Appendix 2. Questions for the interview

1. Would you characterize your organization as a *machine or a living being*? Why?
2. If you had to compare your organization with an animal, then what animal would it be? Why?
3. If you compared your organization with a machine, then what machine would it be? Why?
4. If you had to compare your organization with a season, then which season would it be? Why?
5. If you had to compare your organization with a color, then what color would it be? Why?

Appendix 3. The results of the qualitative analysis for the *living being* vs. *machine* metaphor

Metaphor group	The essence of the group*
I metaphor group 1: living being	Led by the perception; controversies, illnesses; neg.-pos. emotions; sensibility; soul; continuous development; growing; changing; flexibility; aura
group 2: machine	Everybody must do exactly what they are told; no free will; no emotions

Notes: * 61 interviews analyzed