

2.4. ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE AND INDIVIDUAL STRATEGIES

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Introduction

The rise in market competition affects both organizations and individuals, forcing them to take steps that help them to be competitive on the markets they enter. Organizations are building up such type of culture which is effective in pursuing their organizational goals and at the same time “helps their employees understand their role in the organization” (Brown, 1995, p. 197). The studies on organizational culture stress the role of culture in forming a collectivist identity, laying special emphasis on the integrative role of culture, which is considered to be a glue that keeps together an organization (Hatch, 1997) and the way people do things round there (Deal, Kennedy, 1982). One of the main functions of culture is to integrate persons into the organization (Schein, 1999). In order to successfully do it, when hiring employees, organizations consider how they would fit in the existing organizational culture (Drummond, 2001). At the same time, organizations are influenced by the environment in which they operate. In the modern society dominates the ethic of individual self-fulfillment and achievement, and individuals are considered to be the very persons who themselves do their own biographies (Beck, Beck, Gernsheim, 2002). This means that society is mov-

ing towards more distinction and differentiation, in sum – towards individualized society where people should be able to organize their own lives more and more (*Ibid.*). In this sense Estonia is not an exception, especially, with regard to young people who consider individual achievement very important (Helemäe, Saar, Vöormann, 2000; Niit, 2004; Rüütel, Tiit, 2005).

In this light, it has been essential during the last decade for organizational culture studies to expose the importance of subjectivity (Martin, 1992; Goffee, Jones, 2001). To R. Goffee and G. Jones, sociability of a person and the extent of solidarity in social interaction within an organization may form different types of culture (Goffee, Jones, 2001). The emergence of studies of this type is very important for it shows that moving from a hierarchical to a flexible organization, to team- or project-based and task-oriented work evolve and change organizational culture.

Shifts in organizational culture with the emphasis on solidarity and task-orientated activities (Alas, Vadi, 2003; Roots, 2003) as well as changes in employees' behavior with the emphasis on individualization (Pavelson, Karotom, 2005) require a new approach to the analysis of organizational cultures. Organizations and employees are affected by new global trends in work differently, but they are both looking for adjustment of their strategies to ongoing changes. This process, in its turn, causes transformations in structures and shows interdependence between structures and actors. The analyses of organizational culture with regard to individual work strategies may provide better understanding of how to raise efficiency of an organization, reduce job mobility, and increase organizational commitment and job satisfaction of employees.

In the following article the task is to show that today interaction between an organization and an employee is more complex than in the past due to the changes in the work environment and work values. On the one hand, it depends on the growing competition between organizations and changes in work arrangements and job

hierarchies. On the other hand, it depends on growing individualization and subjectivization of work accompanied by competition between individuals. The question is whether organizational culture can keep pace with the ongoing changes and benefit from them.

The hypothesis is firstly, that the impact of organizational cultures on the formation of individual strategies is transforming and becoming smaller by comparison with the previous decades and secondly, that organizational cultures benefit from individualization.

The first section of the article introduces a conceptual framework for understanding the relationship between organizational cultures and individual strategies. In the following parts of the article some practices within organizational cultures and individual strategies are analyzed empirically. The qualitative research was conducted to identify the meaning of good work and job on the basis of in-depth interviews and work histories.

Organizational culture

Growing globalization and ongoing changes in technologies and communication have caused changes in the organizational paradigm, and today the central concern of a successful organization is its workers and processes (de Vries, 2002). Organizational cultures are shaped by each particular organization's tasks (Schein, 1999). To some degree, everybody belonging to a certain organizational culture shares its ideologies and cultural forms (Trice, Beyer, 1993). In this sense organizational culture is a medium enforcing implementation of organizational tasks. Organizations assess their employees according to the benefits they bring, how useful they are, and whether they fit in with the organization and its culture.

Well-shaped organizational culture will increase the effectiveness of the organization and its employees' satisfaction (Schein, 1985;

Alvesson, 2002). The focus is on the practices exposing the character of a particular organizational culture since they influence employees' performance and their attitudes towards work; at the same time, the employees' relationship with the organization may depend on them.

Transformations in organizational cultures affected by changes in the environment have increased the demand in employees with broad educational backgrounds and multiple specializations. Employment of such people will facilitate flexibility, at the same time providing high quality of the produced goods and services since specialists arguably form a more motivated group (Vadi, 2004). This, in its turn, will raise organizations' competitive ability.

Individual strategies

The way "how people interpret and relate to the actions" (Alvesson, 2002, p. 170) that accompany tasks and the employed strategies depends not only on the extent to which people share the existing culture, but also on their previous practices (Bourdieu, 1999). This means that a person's individual strategies in the field of work are based on her/his values, attitudes and practices. In contrast to the previous decades, when work was in the centre of a person's life and was considered to be a moral obligation, while her/his personal goals were tightly bound with organizational goals, today people look for independence, autonomy, development of own competences, cooperation, and participation in the decision-making process. This transforms the relationship between a person and an organization, and impacts on the formation of individual work strategies.

Being a member of an organization, a person communicates and cooperates with others. Taking into account that to the theory of organizational culture, relationship orientations constitute a dimension of organizational culture (Goffee, Jones, 2001; Alas, Vadi, 2003), the character of relations may either favor the reali-

zation of one's own goals or operate as constraints. The spread of team-work and horizontal relations as well as changes in hierarchies means that employees' performance does not solely depend on their own resources. It increases the need for cooperation between employees. At the same time, growing individualization and subjectivization of work raises competition between them. Subjectivization of work means that in addition to qualifications, an employee's work results depend on her/his sense of responsibility, and ability to cooperate with others, taking decisions if necessary, etc., in sum – on one's social and personal abilities.

Competition, along with employment, education and mobility inspires individualization (Beck, Beck-Gernsheim, 2002). Everybody wants to have a good, secure and well-paid job in the situation when work is not secure any more (Bauman, 2000; Rifkin, 1998). So employees, in order to pursue their own goals, try to stress their own achievements and individual abilities which distinguish them from other employees. Furthermore, they want that the employing organization would implement their abilities and value them in a proper way. Therefore employees are looking for organizations that value their resources, providing them with opportunities to convert their cultural capital into economic one, thereby achieving a desired lifestyle. In this case, they are ready for organizational commitment.

Adjustment of organizational culture and individual strategies: an empirical example

Empirical research was conducted among 523 representatives of new professions, who were predominantly under 35 years old, combining it with in-depth interviews with 30 BA or MA students in universities. The survey was conducted in Tallinn, the region where the biggest transformations have occurred due to the larger amount of investments and the entrance of foreign companies into the Estonian market. Among the representatives of new profes-

sions were managers in different fields, IT and logistics specialists, real estate agents and office workers whose educational level was quite high: 33% had a university and 19% a secondary education, while the rest had different levels of professional education. Additionally 20 middle-aged persons, predominantly over 40 years of age (Pavelson, Karotom, 2004) were interviewed.

According to our survey, the majority of the employees had a higher or secondary education. The persons who were recruited through a public competition were supposed to be fluent in at least one foreign language, be PC-literate and have good communication skills. At the same time, only 23% of the cases required a special education corresponding to the field of work. The applicant's general educational background and basic knowledge of client-oriented services were considered to be more important. However, it was personal abilities that enabled some candidates to be more successful than their competitors, and get a job.

Moving towards task-oriented work gives employees more autonomy and raises their responsibility. The existing work arrangements are quite flexible and provide autonomy on the job. This means that organizations employ such practices that favor subjectivization of work. But the work of some categories of workers, especially of office employees, depends much more on the managers. Their possibility to choose tasks and time-table is more limited, compared to sales managers, project managers, personnel managers, logistics, PR and IT specialists. The demand in communication skills indicates the importance of cooperation, although the survey showed that employees do not care very much of their co-workers' respect.

Table 1 shows that organizational environment facilitates good work results, and in this sense it is a place where employees might realize themselves. Organizations value good education and as a result prefer educated and well-qualified labor.

Table 1. Evaluation of an organizational environment by the workers (%)

	Totally agree	Agree partly	Do not agree at all	Total
I can choose my tasks	11	46	43	100
I can choose my time-table and work rate	30	45	25	100
My org. values good education	35	50	15	100
Promoted are members of own team	19	45	36	100
Good work is marked and rewarded	33	51	16	100
Conflicts with managers are quite frequent	8	50	42	100
Good relations with managers are important	43	51	6	100
To make a career, one must be in the right place at the right time	46	49	5	100
Competition between workers is high	10	50	40	100
I have non-monetary benefits	29	40	31	100

The presented data show that employees' behavior depends quite a lot on the existing organizational practices. The fact that the majority stressed the importance of "being in the right place at the right time" indicates that usually organizations do not have a formalized promotion system. Even if they have it, they may not implement it. In this case, it is not rare that quite a lot depends on the managers and their attitudes. According to our survey, in 80% of the cases the company manager was the one who established the rules in the organization. So there is nothing surprising that it is important for employees to have good relations with their man-

agers. On the other hand, the organizational structure itself may be the reason why a formalized promotion system is not implemented, or is not used. The decline of hierarchies and moving towards horizontal relations may give good chances to everybody to make a career.

The majority of the respondents admitted to having access to non-monetary benefits. The spread of non-monetary benefits in organizations helps to enhance the loyalty of employees, raise their self-esteem and as a result prevent job-mobility. However, some authors think that today it is getting more difficult to find loyalty (Reichheld, 2002). Our survey showed that despite quite high work satisfaction – 88% of the interviewed persons were satisfied or very satisfied with their job, only 39% of them thought that they would be working in the same company five years later, and only 4% among them were quite sure that they would continue in the same company.

Another issue which encourages employees' behavior in the organization regards valuation of their work. The collected data show that the organizations usually mark and reward good work. However, this raises another question concerning the changes in the meaning of work. Rewarding of achievement means that normal, regular efforts are not valued any more (Heidegren, 2004). This changes attitudes towards work. Employees who evaluate highly their own contribution (the interviewed persons did so), prefer to have such jobs where their efforts are recognized.

The data of the survey and in-depth interviews show that for the majority, their work means achievement of a desirable life-style and social position. Surely, these attitudes are more common among young employees. Older and less educated persons tend to keep to the traditional work values. To them, work must provide stability (Pavelson, Karotom, 2004). Table 2 shows that these work aspects which help to acquire different capitals, mostly economic and cultural, and provide self-development, are valued more. According to the survey data, 43 of the interviewees at-

tended university or different courses in order to raise their individual resource and be more competitive on the market.

Table 2. Valued work aspects (%)

Work values	All	Gender	
		Male	Female
Interesting and varied work	42	39	45
Competitive salary	25	28	24
Training, self-development	24	22	26
Managerial attention	5	7	3
Respect of colleagues	4	4	2
Total	100	100	100

It is clear that young people do not appreciate routine work. The in-depth interviews with students enrolled in Estonian universities showed that the young persons were oriented towards such work which “... *is economically well-paid and in a fun collective*” (M, 3rd-year student); “... *is well-paid, interesting, varied*” (M, 3rd- year student); “... *would be surely varied, not such routine*” (M, 1st-year student); “... *is interesting, must be well-paid and mobile also, to sit down on one place whole day, I am not going to do it*” (F, 1st-year student). The interviews show that the material aspects of work (salary) are very important, since a well-paid job can provide a desirable lifestyle and self-realization.

The new work individualization makes employees move from one job to another in search of a job that would correspond to their work strategy. In our survey, these employees who had changed jobs, had done it because they wanted better possibilities for self-realization, a higher salary, better career prospects and work conditions. The biggest mobility rates were among persons between 25 and 35 years of age. Among them only 8% had had one job, while 39% had changed jobs more than three times.

The interviews with the students show that they are preparing for a career. "... *I would like to manage things myself that nobody sits on my head, if I were on the lowest positions of the career ladder I think I would not like it*" (F, 2nd-year student); "... *function of top (executives) seems to be control and organizing...*" (M, 3rd-year student). However, they realize that it can be difficult, but not impossible.

Conclusions and discussion

The basic assumption that organizational cultures do not impact so much on the formation of individual strategies is partially supported by the data. A person is ready to change a workplace regardless of his/her job satisfaction and the benefits the organization provides. This means that the meaning of loyalty is also transforming. Employees are loyal to the organization as much as they can benefit from being its members. They are interested in the work which would increase their capitals. If they do not have this opportunity, they may quit. Employees are conscious that the better and broader their education, the better their prospects for getting employment. Therefore they pay much attention to increasing their individual resource. They invest into education in such a way that would allow them to work in different companies and even industries.

Organizations provide employees with greater autonomy. This helps organizations to benefit from the personal abilities of employees. At the same time, moving towards horizontal structures may reduce promotion possibilities. It seems that the promotion strategies of organizations do not favor employees. Quite much depends on chance and belonging to the "right team". It is evident that employees are looking for distinction, but lack of competitiveness between employees may reduce their work commitment. In some cases the absence of a proper formalized promotion system may favor these employees who are "in the right place at the

right time”, but for employees it is better if they know what promotion possibilities they can have. Well-educated specialists are oriented towards career and have their own plans. They may find a company where their plans can be realized.

As it was said above, employees are not very loyal to the employing organization, but the survey indicates that organizations try to enhance their employees’ organizational commitment and win their loyalty by implementing non-monetary benefits and noticing and rewarding good achievements in work. Indeed, these practices are appreciated, but this may transform the meaning of work also. It seems that routine and normal daily work is not the one that is valued by organizations, therefore young people want to be on the top, and that is why they do not want a job that cannot be considered as achievement.

Giving more autonomy to employees suggests giving them more responsibility and opportunities for self-fulfillment. At the same time, they do not always have them. Sometimes they are more educated than the work in the organization requires, that is, over-qualified. Surely a person takes individual risks investing in education and training, but the lack of possibilities to interfere in the decision-making process may reduce organizational commitment and loyalty to the organization.

The research showed that the transformation of work values and work arrangements has caused changes in the interaction of the organization and employee. Organizational cultures have good opportunities to integrate people due to the changes in organizational settings, and provide possibilities for self-realization, but they are limited in distinguishing between employees. At the stage of hiring, organizations favor a person’s abilities and achievements, but the arrangement of work in organizations and their promotion possibilities may make their employees prefer competitors.

The presented research regarded only a few aspects of organizational culture, indicating some shortcomings in the matching of organizational culture with the expectations of employees and in some way with the demands of the organizations as well. Without any doubt the situation varies by organizations as well as it varies by the strategies of different categories of employees. In this sense the presented results are only the first steps in such research. It seems that the question of loyalty, as well as understanding the importance of subjectivization of work needs much more attention.

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KOKKUVÕTE

Organisatsioonikultuur ja individuaalsed strateegiad

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Ülesanneteskne ja protsessile orienteeritud töö eeldab organisatsioonikultuuri, mis soodustaks töö autonoomsust, suurendaks töötaja vastutust ning tema pühendumist organisatsioonile. Toimunud struktuursed muutused ja töö tehnikumise koos ühiskonnas kehtivate väärtuste transformeerumisega on tinginud töö tähenduse muutumise. Tööd ei peeta enam moraalseks kohustusks, vaid seda väärtustatakse lähtuvalt sellest, kuivõrd see võimaldab realiseerida töötaja isiklike, individualistlike huve. Kasvav tööalane individualism ja töö subjektsuse suurenemine püüab leida väljundit eneseteostuse ja enesearendamise võimalustes töökohal, samas kui töö ise peab kindlustama töötaja edasijõudmise elus.

Küsitluse ja süvaintervjuude käigus saadud tulemuste põhjal võib järeldada, et organisatsioonid ühelt poolt soodustavad töötajate individuaalsete eesmärkide realiseerimist. Teiselt poolt ilmneb, et väärtustatakse pigem saavutuslikkust töös kui igapäevast, nn normaalset tööd. Töötajates tekitab see soovi teha ainult huvitavat ja mitmekesist tööd, seda aga olukorras, kus suurem osa tööst on endiselt rutiinise iseloomuga. Muutunud suhtumine töökohasse tähendab seda, et töötaja on iga hetk valmis võtma vastu iga teise töö, mis vastab senisest enam tema isiklikele eesmärkidele. Ta on panustanud haridusse, soovib karjääriredelil edasiliikumist, kuid seda piirab horisontaalsete suhete tähtsustumine tänases tööprotsessis. See kõik tõstatab aga küsimuse töötaja lojaalsusest. Tekkinud on lõhe töötajate ootuste ja organisatsioonides kehtivate praktikate vahel, mis on ühelt poolt takistuseks individuaalsete eesmärkide realiseerimisel ning võib teiselt poolt tekitada probleeme ka organisatsiooni ette seatud ülesannete täitmisel.