

ANALYSING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE VISIBLE AND INVISIBLE COMPONENTS THAT CREATE ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE

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Abstract

Recent studies have pointed to the fact that the non-financial indicators have become extremely important compared to the financial ones, consequently analyzing a company implies putting together a series of informations regarding the organizational climate. Therefore, analyzing the culture has a certain meaning because it shapes the environment where the activity takes place, but also some elements referring to the degrees of satisfaction or dissatisfaction among the employees. The present study has as a main purpose the analysis of a Romanian private company, in order to stress out the degree of correlation and overlapping between the visible and the invisible cultural elements, i.e between what can be categorized as being typical of a company and what the employees regard as being typical of it. After having concluded the study, we will determine the probable disparities between what managers would like to introduce and what they will really put into practice within the company.

Key words: organizational culture, dominant characteristics, visible elements, invisible elements.

The research methodology:

During the research we have used the questionnaire method, which has been applied to a number of 100 subjects working for the private company S.C. Softronic S.R.L., out of which 27 were women and 73 were men. After having applied the OCAI (Organizational Culture Assessment Instrument) questionnaire, we have determined the preponderant type of culture, as well as the cultural profile for 6 dimensions: the dominant characteristics, the organizational leadership, managing the human resources, the organizational glue, the key to being successful and the criteria of success. The subjects analyze the two dimensions taking into consideration the actual situation in the company and what they would like to achieve. We will focus in our research on the dimension *Dominant characteristics*, which allows us to identify the basic characteristics specific to the organization. The specialists Kim Cameron and Robert E. Quinn have come up with the questionnaire and is regarded as a highly important method of investigation. At the same time, apart from the quantitative methods of investigation, we will use qualitative methods, such as the observation method, in order to be able to identify a disparity between what we visually identify, i. e. a superficial level of analysis, and what we determine with the help of those elements which are invisible to the outside observer.

The research hypotheses:

The present study is meant for the validation/ invalidation of the following scientific hypotheses:

Hypothesis no. 1: The visible surface cultural elements do not determine the type of culture specific to that particular organization. In order to identify the type of culture specific to an organization, the invisible deep cultural elements should undergo an investigation.

Hypothesis no. 2 : There is a discrepancy between the visible and invisible elements, thus what the company would like to display as a strategical direction or type of behaviour is opposed to the real organizational environment.

Hypothesis no. 3: The building where the company has its headquarters is a decoding element and a very important cultural element when it comes to identifying the type of culture according to the prevalent characteristics.

Introduction:

In the majority of the research papers, the organizational culture has two branches, the visible elements, i. e. the ones that are easier to identify, to spot when having the first contact to that particular organization, and the invisible elements, which are the ones that will be harder to decode by requiring a greater attention in what the observers are concerned. These are the company’s values, regulations, beliefs, myths, legends, stories that introduce the organization’s history or its heroes. An appropriate display that best suits the presentation above has been proposed by various specialists, the most suitable being the image of an iceberg, where one can find the visible elements at its surface, while the deep level is actually the real image of the organization where also the invisible elements lay.

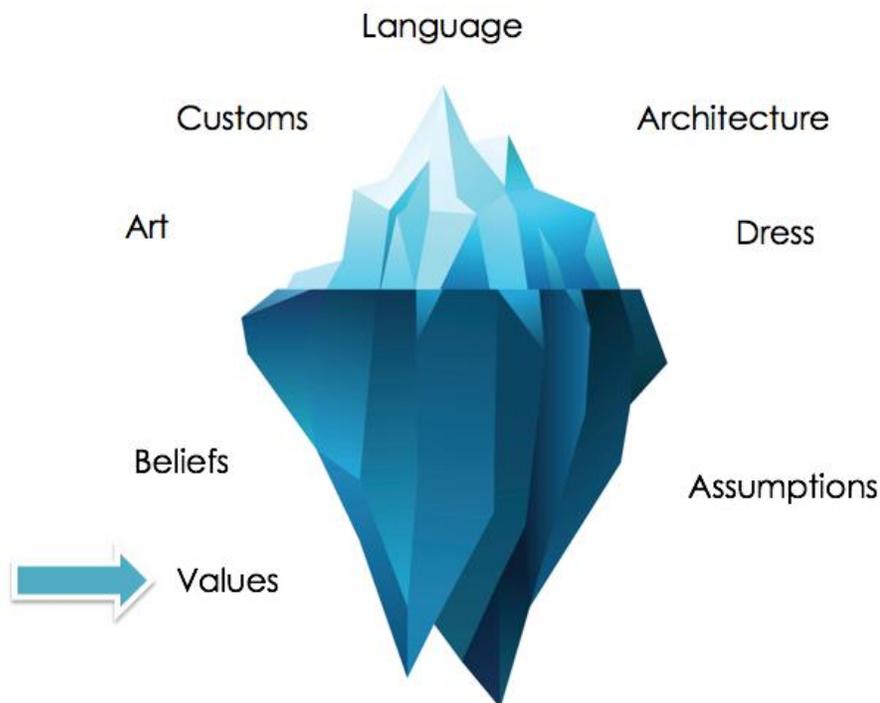


Figure No. 1. The elements of the organizational culture

Source: adaptation of Hall, Edward T, *Beyond Culture*, Anchor Books, Doubleday, New York, 1990.

Therefore, identifying the culture is a challenge, because the visible elements can be tricky elements that can lead the observer in the wrong directions. For instance, the fact that there are certain regulations and procedures can point to the idea that we are dealing with a rigid and authoritarian culture, while the employees’ casual dressing style could be related to a loose, homelike climate, where formalism is missing. The modern architecture of the work places might lead to the conclusion that the organization is a modern one, or on the contrary, an outdated one, trapped within the boundaries of traditions, customs, standardized procedures, where the organization seems to belong to the past and not to the future, or to be obsolete, therefore incapable of adapting to changes. At the same time, the way the employees speak might be an indicator of the type of culture. A formal language suggests that the relationships between the employees are distant, because there are only

labor relations, while an informal language points towards connections that go beyond the work environment.

Analyzing the Dimension Dominant Characteristics:

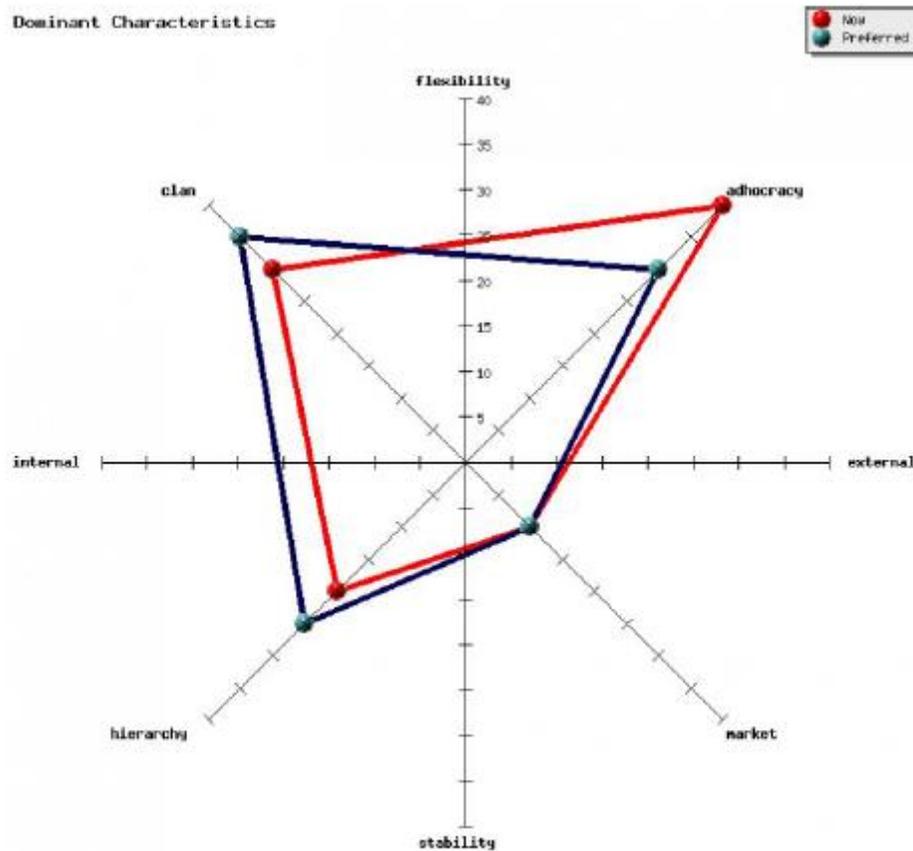


Figure No. 2. Dominant Characteristics Dimension

After having interpreted the results obtained due to the OCAI questionnaire, we have concluded the following:

When it comes to the category *dominant characteristics*, with the help of which we can obtain a sketch of the general tendencies inside the organization, it can be noticed that the adhocracy oriented culture has the highest score, 40 points. Therefore, the company has dynamism, entrepreneurial spirit, creativity, taking risks being an important factor. At the same time, the clan oriented culture has registered 30 points, consequently the organization is perceived as a family, where homogenous work teams are built, the labor relation suggesting a cohesion in what the interpersonal relationships are concerned. The hierarchy oriented culture has registered 20 points, thus tributes such as predictability, certainty or stability are not specific to the analyzed company. The market culture has an insignificant score.

In what the wanted results are concerned, it can be noticed that the adhocracy oriented culture is not wholly internalized by the employees, that is why it has registered a 10 points decrease.

The clan oriented culture has a 5 points increase, and the hierarchy oriented culture has registered a 5 points increase.

Cultural elements in what SC Softronic SRL is concerned

The visible elements of the culture and the connections established between them and the value system can be determined starting from the following aspects:

- **The company name:** the name Softronic, although it does not exactly point to the company's field of activity, it refers to engineering, by connecting the activity to the field of mechanics. What is interesting is putting together an English word *SOFT* (soft, smooth) and the final letters of the word electronic, i.e. *TRONIC*. This points to a symbiosis between the cultures, therefore the organization is at the border between Romania and America, the railway transport suggesting the intercultural connection. At the same time, the word "soft" provides us with clues regarding the personnel's perception in what the complexity of the field of activity is concerned. Although the company requires a series of resources, knowledge and experience, the field of activity counting as a true challenge, the organization stresses out rather the positive aspects, proving professionalism when it comes to its activity. Bringing together the two words also points to the existence of an organization of the future, that is capable of easily adapting itself to the present or future tendencies, thus the references to the adhocracy oriented culture, the flexible culture, the easily adaptable one, which is oriented towards the outer environment, are present at a lexical level through the name of the company Softronic. In such companies, which have the characteristics of the adhocracy oriented culture, success is guaranteed by its technology and know-how.

- **Website:** for the company's website, Softronic has received an address which is easy to access and to remember, containing the company's name: www.softronic.ro

- **The logo:** the company's logo is actually its name, proving difficult to decrypt culturally speaking. A discreet piece of information can be suggested with the help of the supporting bar that crosses the graphics and which evens the possible status differences between the employees. Consequently, it can be said that Softronic is at the border between the adhocracy oriented culture, where there are no hierarchies or authority relationships and the majority of the employees have the same status, the work teams being built ad-hoc around the project that has to be done, and the clan oriented culture, which rejects the idea of authority, inflexibility and annihilates the formalism present in the written documents, regulations, procedures or the existence of an organizational chart.



Figure No. 3 The Softronic logo
Source: <http://www.softronic.ro>

- **The logo's colors:** the Softronic logo combines 2 tones of blue, this being a color which is specific to the corporations' logos, because it is often thought to be a masculine color, typical for men and expressing the fact of being successful. Light blue stands for certainty and stability, features which are specific to the hierarchy oriented culture. By analyzing the color, one can assert that Softronic lays at the border between the adhocracy oriented culture, a success oriented one, and the hierarchy oriented culture, a stability oriented one.

- **Ceremonies:** ceremonies have a great importance in what each and every organization is concerned. Regardless of whether they are organized as a formal event or in a particular department in order to celebrate events that have less to do with the company's activity, they are important integrating rituals which are meant to stress out even more the relationships between the employees or between the employee and the employer. In what Softronic is concerned, both types of ceremonies are present, the ones that are organized to celebrate events that are important for the company, such as: inaugurations, retechnologizing, bringing new products on the market or signing new partnership

agreements, or the ones related to the employees, celebrating major events such as birthdays, retirement, both type of rituals providing us with informations regarding the organizational culture. Therefore, if the first ceremonies refer to the adhocracy or hierarchy oriented culture, the rituals which are meant to grant importance to the human resource point to the significance of the clan oriented culture.

- **The buildings:** the Softronic headquarters paves the way for the adhocracy oriented culture, with its modern headquarters, specific to influent, modern, flexible companies, capable of continuously adapting and developing future strategies. Both the building's façade, that is typical to the headquarters of the great American corporations, and the modern interior of the building, the fancy and expensive furniture, but also the large space destined for the company's activity lead to the image of a strong, success oriented culture.

- **The employees' dressing style:** the casual dressing style, both in what the employees, as well as the leaders are concerned, evens the differences between them, by eliminating the formalism and the inflexibility. Consequently, the casual, loose climate annihilates the hierarchy oriented culture and combines elements which are specific to the adhocracy and clan oriented culture, that imply an increased attention to that particular success in what the human resource is concerned.

The validation of the hypotheses of the scientific research:

Hypothesis no. 1 becomes invalid regarding the research conducted at Softronic, because most of the surface visual cultural elements refer to a company where the adhocracy oriented culture is present. Therefore, the building's modern architecture, the colors of the corporation, putting together concepts that belong to different cultures, the casual dressing style which evens the differences between the employees' status, stand for the fact that Softronic is an organization of the future, a flexible one, which is oriented towards the outer environment, thus combining significant elements that are specific to the adhocracy oriented culture.

Hypothesis no. 2 becomes invalid, the artifact elements or the visible ones noticeably reflect the organizational reality, the way it has been identified by the employees. Otherwise, the external observer is able to identify a series of cultural aspects meant to decrypt the culture of the entire organization. The observation method is thus backed up by the questionnaire method which confirms the results obtained after a surface investigation.

Hypothesis no. 3 becomes valid in what Softronic is concerned, the building suggesting that the analyzed organization is a modern one, which is influenced by the outer environment and by the elements abroad that have to do with architecture, technology, facilities and the way the offices are placed, being thus an organization capable of adapting to anything and stepping into the future.

Conclusions:

Thus it can be asserted that between the visible elements regarding the analyzed organization and the invisible ones there is a significant connection. Therefore, a significant amount of them roughly anticipates the organization's culture, overlapping with its main characteristics. In this respect, when conducting an analysis, it is advisable that the researchers grant an increased attention to these elements which are considered to be shallow and even manipulating, because, when connected to internal informations, they can be a real source of information.

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