

# MECHANISMS OF CHANGES OF ORGANISATIONAL CULTURE IN CORPORATE ENVIRONMENT

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**Abstract:** The article attempts to explain the importance of organisational culture in corporate environment. In particular, it highlights certain mechanisms of changes occurring in the organisation in the organisational culture perspective. Organisational culture offers certain standards and values, and it systematises reality, meaning that it highlights what is important and avoids what is irrelevant to the organisation and its employees. Given that, it is a tool enabling identification of opportunities and threats arising from changes as well. Many companies, for instance IBM, Procter&Gamble, Exxon, ABB or Siemens have managed to undergo the change process without changing their developed and consolidated standards and values. The purpose of this article is to diagnose the ways of conscious development of organisational culture in corporate environment, and illustrate the same with the example of selected banks. The article analyses the scientific and the literary output researching the aforementioned issue. It is an introduction to the author's own empirical studies aimed at analysing the mechanisms of changes of corporate culture.

**Keywords:** organisational culture, values, changes, human resources, corporation.

## 1. Culture in the organisation

It is not easy to refer to one, widely recognised and used definition of organisational culture (Juchniewicz, 2016). Its components are also subject to different interpretations, which further complicates standardisation of the term. The first attempt to define organisational culture was made by E. Jacque in 1951. According to him, it may be defined as a 'customary and traditional way of thinking and acting, shared more or less by all the members, which new members need to learn and at least partially accept in order that they may be accepted in the company' (Jacques, 1951, p. 251; Zbiegień-Maciąg, 2013; Galata, 2007). According to G. Hofstede, culture it is the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes one social group from others. The programming of the mind is a process partially shared by some people, and partially unique for a specific individual or a group (Hofstede, 1984).

A classic, an expert and a culture researcher, E. Schein, explains it as a set of reasonable rules of conduct, discovered, established and further developed by a group, used to solve

problems of alignment with the environment and internal integration, which, if considered legitimate, are also supposed to prepare new members of the organisation to perceive, think and feel the said problems in a consistent manner (Stoner et al., 2001). It was also Schein who divided organisational culture into three characteristic levels (Pocztowski, 2007; Sitko-Lutek, 2015).

- artifacts (visible and recognised, yet difficult to interpret elements of organisational culture (verbal, behavioural, physical),
- values, standards and behaviours (elements of organisational culture at a higher level of awareness, related to, inter alia, attitudes towards work, power, status, client, quality, profit, loyalty and standards, i.e. ways of realising values),
- main beliefs and assumptions (hidden, unrecognised, undisputed elements of organisational culture relating to, inter alia, environment, truth, human nature, nature of human activity, and social relations).

Many years after the first theory developed by E. Jacque, B. Nogalski and R. Ronkowski (2007) explain organisational culture in a similar manner; to them, it is a set of common beliefs, goals, attitudes and corporate values which does not need to be expressed, for example, in writing, but which shapes the way in which employees act and collaborate, and which strongly influences the way in which they perform work without any particular instructions.

In 1952, anthropologists A.L. Kroeber and C. Kluckhohn analysed more than 160 definitions of organisational culture, thus coming to the conclusion that most of those concepts were related to the concept of the group, i.e. organisational culture referred to the group, to what links individuals in groups, and to what they share, i.e. shared assumptions, standards, values, knowledge or beliefs (Galata, 2007; Zbiegień-Maciąg, 2013). They also divided the organisational culture definition into six types (Galata, 2007).

1. nominalistic – definitions presenting the classic form of early ethnological definitions,
2. of uniform diversity – a group of definitions trying to reconcile the unity of an object with the diversity of its manifestations,
3. normative – definitions stress human behaviours abiding by standards, patterns, values, models and other, symbolically significant, produced and delivered systems being the factors shaping human behaviours,
4. psychological – this group of definitions focuses on the psychological mechanisms of development of culture (i.e. mechanisms of learning, forming habits or internalising standards applicable within a specific population, etc.),
5. structural – definitions within this group primarily relate to the structure of a specific culture; consequently, they deal with its primary elements and their internal interrelations,
6. genetic – definitions focus on the problem of the origin of culture, and they attempt to explain that origin.

Among numerous concepts of organisational culture, one may refer to two basic approaches to understanding its essence. In the first one, it is one of the elements of a coherent system enabling smooth operation of an organisation; in the other one, it is a metaphor of the organisation, a process creating values, standards and rules that shape human behaviours, organisational behaviours included (Gassea, Tremblay, 2011, p. 303-314).

Despite the absence of a master definition of organisational culture, one may distinguish several characteristic features that most of them share. Firstly, organisational culture is historically determined, meaning it reflects the history of the organisation; secondly, it is holistic, meaning it covers a certain wholeness being more than just a sum of its components; thirdly, it is a social creation, meaning its development is affected by people within the organisation; fourth of all, it is related to the objects of anthropological research, such as symbols and rituals; fifthly, it is a so-called soft concept; and last of all, it is difficult to change (Puto et al., 2016). Summarising the above, the foregoing characteristic features might be defined in accordance with the method presented in Table 1.

**Table 1.**  
*Characteristic features of organisational culture*

Features characterising organisational culture		
Conscious and subconscious acceptance of specific group cultural patterns (symbols, rituals, standards) by people, and people abiding them;	multilevel and multidimensional nature (organisational culture is a soft concept of various types);	feedback between organisational culture and behaviour of people within the organisation (organisational culture alignment with the organisation management strategy).

Note: author's own study.

## 2. The role of organisational culture vs. changes

In the organisational culture shaping process, numerous factors affect one another, as a result of which shared ideas, applicable rules and shaping behaviours are established within a specific organisation. The environment of a specific organisation, i.e. value systems and basic cultural values prevailing within a given population, region or nation are also important.

Culture determinants also include factors inside the organisation, i.e. the authority structure, the features and the type of the organisation, the employees' personalities, their needs and value systems, their qualifications as well as professional and personal experience. And there are leaders who should identify values to be shared by the entire group, thus creating an axiological system for employees. It is quite important due to the differences between subordinates and superiors that arise from different value systems, belonging to different professional, age or gender groups.

So, before an organisations decides to radically change the way in which it operates, thus changing any element of its organisational culture, it should note the role which culture plays in the life of the organisation; in general, it is of dual nature (please refer to Table 2).

**Table 2.**  
*External and internal functions of organisational culture*

<b>Functions of organisational culture</b>	
<b>External</b>	<b>Internal</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– to facilitate the understanding of the mission and the strategy of the organisation, and identification of the primary objective of the organisation by the participants; to enable integration of the participants;</li> <li>– to enable improvement of the ways of operation and to reformulate objectives if a change is required;</li> <li>– to define the borders of the group as well as acceptance and rejection criteria, to enable the shaping of borders between groups;</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– to develop a common language and conceptual categories enabling prompt and clear communication between employees;</li> <li>– to identify the borders of a specific social group as well as acceptance or rejection criteria giving the sense of belonging and isolation;</li> <li>– to meet colleagues' emotional needs and to facilitate friendships in relation to shared beliefs and social experiences;</li> <li>– to enable integration around the centres established to implement the company's objectives, and to increase the employees' involvement;</li> <li>– to specify the rules of authority and the criteria of the status, to enable avoidance of conflicts related to authority, negative emotions and aggressive actions;</li> <li>– to determine the way in which authority may be gained;</li> <li>– to specify how and when persons in authority, their decisions and proposals may be criticised;</li> <li>– to consolidate the work ethic;</li> <li>– to reinforce the sense of duty and responsibility in general.</li> </ul>

Note: author's own study based on: Sulkowski L. (2002). *Procesy kulturowe w organizacjach*. Toruń: Dom Organizatora; Kopczewski M., Pączek B., Tobolski M. *Istota kultury organizacyjnej w zarządzaniu przedsiębiorstwem produkcyjnym*. Retrived from: [http://www.ptzp.org.pl/files/konferencje/kzz/artyk\\_pdf\\_2012/p084.pdf](http://www.ptzp.org.pl/files/konferencje/kzz/artyk_pdf_2012/p084.pdf), 2018.01.03.

Moreover, organisational culture is correlated with the structure and the leadership style; in complex organisations, for instance corporations, interpersonal relationships may be less frequent, while the formalisation may be greater, and the sense of community is reduced (Bylok, Robak, 2009). Considering some typologies of organisational culture, one may come to the conclusion that explorative and creative organisational culture is the most appropriate for corporations wishing to change (Asnoff, 1985; Stańda, 1994). Explorative culture emphasises the constant search for change, while creative culture emphasises the constant search for innovative changes. Given the foregoing, changes will also concern organisational culture itself (e.g. its previously preferred values or standards, rules or rituals), not only the management model.

### **3. Mechanisms of changes of organisational culture in corporate environment**

Corporate culture needs to be the source of its success and integration of employees, and it needs to make human resources grow stronger. Managers play an enormous role in ensuring that corporate culture does not 'eat' employees, i.e. it does not introduce any changes that are detrimental to the company and bad for the employees. An improperly implemented corporate policy may contribute to a serious crisis or even result in the collapse of the company.

Implementation of organisational changes in a corporation is usually a deliberate, structured process controlled by the manager. Changes may either be forced (e.g. due to amendments to the labour law), necessary (e.g. to improve the implementation of selected processes), or they may occur automatically (e.g. through the behaviours of new employees). Successful implementation of changes in a corporation primarily depends on appropriate identification of the need for changes, and it also requires meticulous development and implementation of the change project. The project should also cover a diagnosis of the corporate culture so that changes of its elements (values, rules, standards) are allowed for in the course of reorganisation of organisational activities. M. Czerska suggests division of the cultural change process into six steps (Czerska, 2003, p. 46):

1. Development of the company strategy.
2. Diagnosis of the current organisational culture.
3. Analysis of discrepancies between the current and the desired organisational culture.
4. Development of a project of selected methods to correct the organisational culture.
5. Control of the new culture.

It should be remembered that corporate culture develops and stabilises over many years, and it becomes deeply rooted in the organisational values, but sometimes, for various reasons, it requires change. In the opinion of S.P. Robbins (2001), a cultural change may take place when:

- there continues or arises a dramatic crisis which contests the status quo and the existing culture, e.g. a technological breakthrough, etc.,
- there is a change of leadership that will result in a change of basic values, habits and standards,
- the organisation is young and small, which facilitates the change of its organisational culture due to the incomplete or yet to be fully consolidated values,
- there is the so-called weak culture – the more prevalent the culture and the more accepted its values by its members, and the stronger the culture, the more difficult it is to implement any changes.

In the world of absolutely every corporation, cutting the coat according to the cloth and aligning the strategy with the prevailing as well as anticipated market trends is a minimum

required to achieve a certain level. In today's turbulent environment, corporate organisational culture should support the company's efficiency on the market while strengthening its position. Therefore, it is important to identify the strength and the openness of its culture. The strength of the culture depends on three factors: clarity, prevalence and rooting depth (Romanowska, 2001; Aniszewska, 2007).

1. Clarity means unambiguity and legibility of models, standards and symbols. Employees have clear views of what behaviours are desirable, what behaviours are undesirable, and what the applicable standards are.
2. The degree of prevalence means the scale in which the culture is known to and shared by employees.
3. The rooting depth refers to the degree of acquisition and application by the members of the organisation of its models and symbols, and the time of their application.

A strong culture is characterised by a high level of the foregoing aspects. It has many advantages, but it also has disadvantages (Table 3).

**Table 3.**

*Advantages and disadvantages of a strong organisational culture*

Advantages	Disadvantages
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– strong motivation,</li> <li>– loyalty,</li> <li>– better cooperation,</li> <li>– low investments in inspections,</li> <li>– low number of conflicts,</li> <li>– efficient communication,</li> <li>– fast information processing and decision making,</li> <li>– faster problem solving and plan implementation,</li> <li>– stability and reliability.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– blocking of new orientations,</li> <li>– barriers to development and change,</li> <li>– fear of change,</li> <li>– difficult to change,</li> <li>– consolidation of traditional motifs of success,</li> <li>– lack of flexibility and innovation.</li> </ul>

Note: Olszewska B. (ed.) (2004). *Podstawy zarządzania. Przedsiębiorstwo na progu XXI wieku*. Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Akademii Ekonomicznej im. Oskara Langego; Steinmann H., Schreyögg G. (1998). *Zarządzanie. Podstawy kierowania przedsiębiorstwem. Koncepcje, funkcje, przykłady*. Wrocław: Oficyna Wydawnicza Politechniki Wrocławskiej.

According to Deal and Kennedy (1982), many organisational problems arise from its weak culture; thus, it appears that a strong organisational culture is a guarantee of success, but it still may cause problems to companies, for example corporations, in terms of implementing changes. A strong culture of large companies results in the companies shutting others out, fossilization and reproduction of patterns and models, meaning striving for the status quo, or conformism. Consequently, a strong organisational culture may hinder innovation which many companies just want to implement. Thus, attention should be paid to the so-called weak (soft) cultures.

Paradoxically, they may be characterised by openness expressed in the degree of ease with which the organisation accepts new ideas or members. Open cultures facilitate innovation, while closed cultures hinder information flow.

Weak cultures are more susceptible to changes. P. Gagliardi believes that organisations that do not learn from their experiences solve problems in the traditional and routine way. When tension grows within the organisation, and efficiency decreases, there occurs the vicious circle; on the other hand, when the current system of values is changed, when manifestations of traditional attitudes and behaviours may be fought, we are dealing with a 'cultural revolution'. Gagliardi believes that such a cultural change requires a change of personnel and employment of more creative people. Slow changes of the current system of values and standards, influencing the social subsystem, take place during a cultural change implemented the 'evolutionary' way. First, the existing culture is diagnosed; then, a plan of improvement of the system of values in place is developed so that valuable elements are retained and unfavourable elements are changed (Kozłmiński, Piotrowski, 1997).

Returning to Deal and Kennedy's (1982) opinion on the superiority of the strong over the weak one, what we may ultimately find in their considerations is a statement that the company itself should choose the kind of culture that will bring the best results, which in turn will lead to implementation of difficult changes in the direction that the managers have found to be advantageous.

A cultural change is a long-lasting, even years-long process. When planning it, one should allow for difficulties and objections on the part of employees who are usually reluctant to change. Planning an organisational culture change should start with outlining a new vision, which means clarification of new strategic objectives. A new HR policy, covering a training programme or a reduction of the number of employees, is the primary tool of a cultural change (Kozłmiński, Piotrowski, 1997; Alvesson, Sveningsson, 2015).

There are many ways of conscious shaping of corporate organisational culture. One of them is to identify preferred values in the mission, and to develop catalogues of organisational values. J. Michela and W. Burke claim that in order to change the culture, we must first understand it (Michela, Burke, 2000). Such an approach makes it possible to treat corporate organisational culture as a normative binder. Another way may be to change the employee promotion or the employee development rules, leadership styles, etc. Among the tools, one should mention, inter alia, selection of the employee selection and recruitment criteria, identification of the competence profile for the purpose of the interim assessment, the motivation system and the ways of employee development, for instance mentoring or coaching (Byłok, Robak, 2009). On the other hand, H. Kraemer notes that a change of organisational cultural values should be accomplished through leadership which, on the one hand, shows the desired values, and, on the other hand, favours internalisation of those values by employees (Kraemer, 2011).

Another approach to the organisational culture change is shown by M. Essawi and O. Tilchin who focus on effective internalisation of desired organisational values by employees. (Teneta-Skwiercz, 2017, p. 350-352, cf. Essawi, Tilchin, 2012, p. 175-178).

However, the model of the organisational culture change which they present leaves many unsolved issues, just to name the absence of a diagnosis of the existing culture. Moreover,

cultural values and standards are partially visible and recognised elements which may be successfully changed; it is more difficult when it comes to basic assumptions which constitute invisible and unrecognised foundations of any organisational culture, and changing them is not quite so simple.

According to B. Fryzeł (2005), determination of employees' attitude towards corporate culture and its values are of significant importance in the implementation of changes to the organisation and its culture, and the differences in their perception often arise from employees' gender. For instance, women tend to be more conservative about changes than men. According to the research cited by the author (Fryzeł, 2005, p. 37): '(...) persons displaying an innovative attitude towards changes appreciate such values such as maturity and full of experiences more than conservative persons, but they value salvation, national security and equality less.' Revolutionary changes do not always meet with approval, especially if they involve personnel changes; in such instances, tools used to shape organisational culture in terms of human resources management become important. Radical changes are quite risky; they reject the old cultural system, and they often introduce a completely new one. One may expect significant changes of the structure, employment, separation of powers, and processes (Cameron, Quinn, 2011). Revolutionary cultural changes are justified when the situation within the company changes to the worse, and its climate and atmosphere become a burden on the employees. It is for a reason that scientists consider organisational culture to be the most significant obstacle to the creation and use of organisational knowledge resources (De Long, Fahey, 2000).

### **Organisational culture changes as exemplified by selected banks**

'In 2011, after many years of growth and dynamic acquisition of the bank loans market, the situation began to change to the detriment of Lukas Bank, then Crédit Agricole. It was caused by the increasing competitive activity and the growing number of new regulations. Until then, the company's organisational personality could be described as dynamic, full of extraordinary people whose average age was about 30. Most executives were promoted to those positions. The bank could boast of a high increase of the market share, good financial results and a rapidly growing customer base. When the situation began to worsen, more traditional rules and leadership style were implemented within the team. This made the previous entrepreneurial culture start to disappear. Soon, numerous subcultures within the organisation became visible, and the team's creativity decreased. The management of the bank knew they were not able to restore the original energy without significant organisational culture changes. First, however, they needed a reliable, research-based diagnosis of the current culture and a structured approach to change. At this point, support from the outside turned out to be of assistance. The company decided to get back to the roots. If the corporate strategy answers the question 'why?', meaning what we want to do to accomplish strategic objectives and organisational visions set, then organisational culture answers the question 'how?', meaning how people will want to act, behave, implement the strategy every day. Culture means standard behaviours prevailing within



the organisation, either supporting or hindering implementation of the strategy. And that was why Crédit Agricole decided to focus on its culture.

Over three years, two studies were carried out to compare conclusions and observe changes. The first study was carried out in 2011, at Lukas Bank, meaning before the name was changed to Crédit Agricole. The second study was carried out in 2014, meaning after the rebranding (...) It researched factors affecting the current culture to identify priority areas at the bank that demanded changing. The entire process assumed that the ideal, i.e. the target organisational culture would be determined beforehand. The first study showed a very strong passive style, negatively affecting employees' commitment and innovation. People did not accept individual goals, although the goals themselves were not considered to be difficult to accomplish, but they were not sufficiently discussed with the managers.

The most important element of further proceedings was to identify change agents among the managers to develop the leadership within the organisation. To that end, workshops and training sessions were held, and the goal and the method of achieving the desired organisational personality were developed together. (...) Unfortunately, the second study showed that passive behaviours had become even more frequent throughout the organisation. The level of self-realisation decreased. Indirect criticism increased. The rate of dangerous behaviours increased, among top managers in particular. Why did that happen?

Leaders', including the managing person's, personal commitment and involvement in the project is the key success factor of the cultural change. Partial commitment, even 'delegation' of the cultural change to lower organisation levels, may only lead to certain modifications of the culture, its improvement in individual areas, but it will not lead to broadly interpreted transformation of culture.

Inclusion of all the leaders in the process, their commitment and persuading them to implement the cultural change is one of the greatest challenges.

Crédit Agricole learns from its mistakes. Today, the management model behaviours much more effectively. A flat organisational structure has been implemented, the number of managers has been reduced, and the assumptions of free and open communication between employees have been continually implemented. However, it should be emphasised that the implementation of the foregoing changes is a long-lasting process, and culture management never ends (<https://www.hbrp.pl/...>).

L. Zbiegień-Maciąg (2013, p. 141) provides another example of creating a new culture at Bank Inicjatyw Gospodarczych S.A. The bank was established in 1989 as one of the first private banks. It undertook to restructure another bank facing bankruptcy. As of 1993, the bank developed, ultimately showing a much better condition. For many years, there were two separate legal entities, i.e. BiG S.A. and BiG Bank S.A., operating simultaneously, and having similar structures and procedures. Their specificity involved:

- relying on the experience of people from different banking institutions, supported by Western consultants, which led to the transfer to the banks of the experience of the countries operating in free market conditions for a long time,
- supplementing the personnel with people willing to take risks; they became the core personnel.

The foregoing undertakings resulted in an increase of the number of employees, from 300 in 1989 to 700 in 1995. Further changes, once the bank became listed, assumed further targeted selection of employees characterised by prompt making of frequently risky decisions, coping with stress at work, and making the right choices. They started to implement activities aimed at planning employee career paths, increasing their commitment, and annually assessing their performance to clarify all the rules applicable at the bank. This shaped the bank's own standards and cultural values which, in the years to come, would evolve as the organisation developed and the environment changed. In 2003, following a merger, the bank was transformed to Bank Millenium.

As the foregoing examples show, organisational culture creations or changes are always accompanied by certain complications which most frequently result from human nature and mentality, and which may prevent changes. Thus, it appears that all the mechanisms of organisational culture changes require complete commitment of both leaders and other members of the organisation. Only with thorough and team work, shaping of people's awareness as to the change of the cultural system within the company, may the desired community effect and understanding of the principles, values and standards setting the direction of actions and efforts be accomplished.

#### **4. Conclusions**

Culture is an extraordinary and a unique creation in every organisation; it integrates and disciplines to work through consolidated standards, rules or principles. It strengthens the sense of group unity in the face of numerous undertakings and existing threats. It is because of the threats and the changes arising for various reasons that corporate culture should offer acceptance mechanisms which enable adaptation to new conditions. Given the foregoing, culture plays a positive role in the transformation process, and it should definitely not be ignored when planning the change strategy. Still, it should be noted that without thorough commitment of the transformation leader, or even multiple leaders and all the team members, the intended purpose cannot be achieved, and the dialogue between the superiors and their subordinates will enable understanding of the importance of new standards and values, internalisation of which requires time.

The author of the article plans to make an attempt to explore several dozens of corporations in terms of their flexibility towards changes of organisational culture that adapts to the current market requirements and the multiculturalism of corporations. The aim of the study will be to develop a model (or models) of a mechanism of changes of organisational culture, shaped by a group of similar internal or external stimuli.

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