

From Reducing Uncertainty to Dealing with Uncertainty. Change of Function of Organizational Culture

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Theme of this article is change of organizational culture functions as result exchange epoch civilization from industrial to informatics. The change of understanding integration, perception and adaptation culture functions means that main cultural function in informatics epoch isn't reduction of uncertainty but the help to manage of uncertainty. The need of high tolerance of uncertainty cause that organizational leaders should force to developing competence of subordinates to managing of uncertainty buy special educational events. In the article to this competences counted: emotional intelligence, extended perception and skills of dialog conducting.

Keywords: organizational culture, perception function, adaptation function, perception function, emotional intelligence, perception widened, dialog

Introduction

The era of information technology civilization has brought about numerous changes in social life and functioning of organizations. The changes also concern organizational cultures which – regardless of a diversity caused by other factors – significantly differ from the question concerning the essence of the difference, it is necessary to consider the past and the contemporary way of understanding the role that the organizational culture plays in social environment of an organization.

The objective of the article is to analyze the effects of the way of understanding the functions of organizational culture, considering both the necessity and the method of dealing with uncertainty.

Organizational culture functions

As it is known there are three reasons for which people consciously, although most of subconsciously, aim at enhancing their common behavioral and thinking patterns. The first one is the willingness to adapt social environment so that it could be understandable and predictable. Identity or at least similarity of cultural patterns adopted by a group members makes people feel the emotion of familiarity; they feel like home as they do not shock each other with varied relations, they understand each other with no words, and communicate with each other in such a way that misunderstandings are avoided. In cultural anthropology Edward T. Hall emphasized this phenomenon, distinguishing between communications of high and low context. The latter one is a result of development of the group culture, i.e. popularizing shared patterns of thinking and behavior, which usually occurs when people stay together for a long time. The essence of high context communication is that in the communicated message the bulk of information is already internalized through suitable cultural code in the mind of a recipient and only a small proportion of the information is contained in the coded and directly communicated part of the message (Hall, 1984). In the environment of strong competition people communicate with each other monosyllabically, using single words, gestures and facial impressions. However, more difficult and complex issues to be communicated to someone, require the use of complex sentences and more advanced forms of communication. Yet, in the above case the combination of verbal communication with a gesture, a smile, an eye blink or using a word typical for the culturally programmed knowledge of a recipient generate associations leading to understanding the proper meaning of the message. The ways of communication connected with high cultural context are of large integrational importance. And that is what the integration function of culture relies on.

The second reason for which people need culture is striving for facilitating cognitive processes thanks to which it is possible to acquire understanding of and orientation in the surrounding reality. Culture creates a selective screen between a man and the external world. Through the “cultural glasses” people can see and understand what their culture let them see and understand. Thus, culture provides a man with a defined cognitive schemes, i.e. ready-made attitudes and stereotypes, thanks to which it is possible to easily and quickly formulate

judgements and opinions concerning various occurrences and situations. And this is the perception function of culture. While shaping cultural patterns linked to this function, it is considered important whether their popularization takes place through triggering the process of self-teaching, or external indoctrination. Making a distinction between teaching and indoctrination is not easy, though. E. Aronson indicates that the fact whether a person considers a message an informative one, or a propaganda one depends to a large extent on the values the person appreciates the most (Aronson, 1997). However, it can be generally assumed that the subject of teaching is a method through which occurrence and situations are assessed, and the subject of indoctrination – a determined, ready-to-use way of assessment, regardless of situational determinants.

Finally the third reason making people shape culture is the need to work out and attitude towards other social groups. Culture decides about a specificity of a group, and the group's attitude towards other cultures is determined by the extent to which the group members value their specificity. The most important, then, is to work out the ways of reaching to the cultural divergence, i.e. such situations in which people become aware of diverse ways of thinking and acting in a given case. This is the adaptation function of culture thanks to which it is easier to address a question: who should adapt. The determinant of the adaptation could be a man's powerful role and subordinated one as well as being a part of majority or minority. Moreover, the extent to which a man is prepared to change their own cultural patterns might be of significance as well. The deeper the cultural patterns are rooted in the consciousness of group members, the smaller their readiness to change them is. Thus, the attitude to man's own cultural patterns could be either autotelic, when they are treated as the value in itself, or instrumental one – when the patterns are treated as a means used to attain an objective. Therefore, it is possible to identify different degrees of cultural openness (closure).

It is not difficult to note that all the three functions – integration, perception and adaptation ones – ensure satisfying the need of certainty and the feeling of safety connected with it. Still, the superior function of culture is providing members of a group with the sense of stability and offsetting their dilemmas connected with lack of continuity, unpredictability and complexity of the realms they operate in. In organizational cultures the integration function regulates all the issues connected with relations between the organization's members; perception functions – issues connected with the way of functioning of the organization and adaptation function – issues concerning relations between the organization's members and its environment.

Causes and effects of changes of organizational culture functions

In the epoch of industrial civilization reducing uncertainty of members of an organization was the supreme function of organizational cultures. Such a function seemed possible as a result of stabilizing various aspects of the organization's life. In the time of industrial civilization the integration function was realized thanks to stability of tasks and organizational structures. That enabled a long term participation of people in relatively unchanged teams and organizational units. Therefore, the sense of certainty provided the possibility of operating in a well-known social environment. In turn, the perception function concerned creating an artificial organizational reality in which various processes were taking place in a way planned beforehand. Organizational cultures facilitated a specific approach to planning and formalization of operations. In such conditions planning was becoming a ritual resulting from the conviction of the postponed of uncertainty and the control over the unknown. A high degree of work formalization was considered to be a guarantee of efficiency, and transparent and detailed rules as well as regulations would stabilize the methods of task accomplishment. It was believed that regardless of the motives, the employees were not allowed to breach organizational norms and superiors were not allowed to change the norms too often. The adaptation function, in turn, facilitated a decline in uncertainty through emphasizing the significance of the organizational identity and promoting the need of isolation from the surrounding, perceived as a set of threats. The organizational cultures of the industrialization epoch supported all the attempts of striving for various ways of being independent of the environment such as a monopolist position on the market or clustering in the organization's own culture all the auxiliary activities and services in order to gain independency of external suppliers. The more the customers and contractors were forced to adjust to such an organization, the larger the sense of stability and certainty of functioning the organization/s members had.

Such a way of understanding of functioning of functioning of the organizational structure has changed significantly with the approach of the information technology civilization. Both the IT revolution and fast advancement of globalization have brought about equally fast growing pace of changes. This has been possible because of widening of the area of functioning thanks to the use of computerized manufacturing and electronic communication techniques. The narrow scope of functioning, limited to the organizational environment that used to provide the sense of stability has ceased to exist. The widespread web

structures, linking partners all over the world and creating temporary teams for the accomplishment of various tasks and projects, make long-term involvement in the same social environment impossible. Flexible employment, following the *just in time* rule, makes an increasingly large number of people change the organizations employing them on temporary job contract in order to provide their professional services. Complexity and unpredictability of the global market have altered the rudimentary organizational value, which no longer is work efficiency, but the pace of reaction to changes in market situations. The consistency in applying rigid procedures and standards has to be, thus, replaced by the necessity of reaching to weak market signals and fast implementation of adjustment changes in different fields of the organizational functioning. The growing internalization of companies and the necessity of working in multicultural environment make the hitherto fixed criteria of the cultural adaptation direction not binding anymore. And what cultural patterns are becoming widespread is increasingly often determined by the kind of tasks to be completed and the conditions for their completion.

All the aspects discussed above lead to the conclusion that the man of information technology civilization has been forced to a fundamental change in their attitude to uncertainty. Instability of reality the people live in makes them aware of the fact that the instability cannot be reduced. It should be accepted and coped with not only in order to be successful at work but also to be successfully protected from the contemporary illnesses of civilization, including the burn-out syndrome, depression and nervous breakdown. High tolerance of the uncertainty – one of the aspects of the organizational culture assumed by (Hofstede, 2000) – turns into the most desired feature of the contemporary organizational cultures.

Given the fact that the uncertainty cannot be reduced, coping with it should be the primary objective of the culture. The functions of the organizational culture have to be, thus, perceived in the way different from their perception in the past civilization eras. The integration function that in the culture of the industrial epoch addressed the persistent need of seeking a permanent benchmark group translates nowadays into integration with various social groups that provide the sense of belonging and identity which is reflected in the easiness of joining new social them and abandoning them. The social environment of a member of an organization is undergoing frequent changes. The members of an organization must perform their duties among constantly changing group of employees, diversified in terms of their educational background, personality qualities and preferred cultural patterns. Therefore, integration in the language of the new culture stands for the easiness of integration, and not the continuity of social trends.

Perception function is no longer associated with creating and artificial, predictable and controlled organizational reality; it starts to be understood as an

ability of functioning in a diplomatic and chaotic environment. The comfortable use of stereotypes in cognitive processes has to be, therefore, replaced with a tedious process of searching for the true significance and determinants of occurring phenomena and situations¹. The basic rule determining the acting of an employee of an organization of the information epoch is the awareness of wider context of the employee's tasks. This requires a permanent investigation into the changing expectations of the recipients of the effects of the employee's work in order to meet their needs in timely manner. In this respect the new cultural patterns come down to, first of all, the requirement of widening and not reducing the set of information coming from the surrounding environment.

Finally, the adaptation function that used to stand for striving for isolation from the environment or adjusting it to the requirement of the own culture, nowadays means either the ability of approval of eternal cultural patterns or the ability of co-creating the patterns with the representatives of various social groups. To this end it is indispensable to develop and instrumental attitude towards the employee's own organizational culture and persistently pursue the way of cultural adaptation that is called transcendental by R.E. Quinn and M.R. McGrath. The method is based on seeking paradoxes and contradictions enabling the abandonment of employee's own thinking patterns and cultural restraints (Quinn, McGrath, 1985).

Such a significant change in the way of understanding the organizational culture functions, generating the transition from low to high tolerance of uncertainty, stems from the same significant change in the attitude and expectations of members of contemporary organizations. Instead of a feeling of discomfort, caused by a cognitive divergence, it is necessary to treat the divergence as an opportunity to learn something new that may improve one's own acting. Instead of perceiving one's own cultural tradition as a permanent foundation of identity, it is necessary to approach the tradition in a pragmatic way and eliminate from it anything that impedes the accomplishment of objectives considered important.

¹ As stated by A. Maslow: "Majority of cognitive acts seems to be based on a standardized and negligent identification and categorization of stereotypes. Such a lazy classification, according to already existing categories, differs significantly from a true and realistic observation with full and not distracted attention focus on the complexity of a unique phenomenon" A. Maslow (2006, p. 288).

Improving the competence of coping with uncertainty

The significant changes in attitudes are difficult and they do not occur instantly. However, they are a prerequisite of using opportunities nowadays provided by the advancement of technology. The size of changes is now larger than the one experienced by people at the beginning of the industrial era, abandoning their work in arable land and idyllic countryside life and entering stuffy factory floors in crowded and congested cities. Still at that time it was possible to hope for reducing the amount of uncertainty. And such hope is now fading away – in the information epoch.

The culture of high tolerance of uncertainty is a major determinant of the majority of contemporary organizations and well-being of their employees. The members of organizations need support in their cultural adaptation to new working conditions. The support is indispensable, given the helplessness of many people used to different requirements if they are facing up to acting in uncertainty. Therefore, spreading the significance of the organizational culture functions should be the rudimentary task of managerial staff in human resources management with a special role attributed to training policy. It is apparent that the ability of coping with uncertainty requires acquiring defined competences such as: emotional intelligence, widened perception and the ability of being involved in a dialog. These competences, although already known for long, have never been widespread. It was also believed that having such competences depends to a larger extent on personality qualities than on systematical training. To a significant degree under the influence of behaviorism, the contemporary attitude towards training is different, and the training practices prove that the improvement in the necessary competences is possible in any case, apparently not always with the same result. In the information epoch organizations the programs of employees' training courses should – to a major extent – focus on developing the competences of coping with uncertainty.

Developing emotional intelligence

The new significance of integration function of culture is connected with the ability of social adaptation. This ability is all about quick deciphering of commonly approved rules of co-operation in a given environment and proper embedding one's own customs and behavioral norms in the social structure of a group. Social adaptation is an uneasy process of being subordinated to the culture of

a group while contributing one's own unique and individual input into the group. Social adaptation is facilitated by emotional intelligence that – according to D. Goleman – is an ability to identifying one's own emotional state and the state of emotions of the others. It is also the ability of using own emotions and coping with the state of emotions of other people. As claimed by D. Goleman emotional intelligence includes such social competences as: empathy, assertiveness and efficient communication (Goleman, 1999).

Improvement in such competences can be achieved by trainings methods initiated by K. Lewin. Training of possibilities, interpersonal training, meeting group or T group are the notions referring to the same kind of training in terms of their objectives and methods (Aronson, 1997).

Psychological training is generally aimed at improving social co-operation. More specific aims are defined by J. Mellibruda as the development of the following abilities:

- noticing and understanding other people and yourself in social contacts;
- communicating, i.e. expressing your own thoughts and feelings and listening to others attentively;
- solving interpersonal problems and conflicts;
- providing and receiving psychological support;
- learning from your own experience.

Training in sensitivity is not an insight psychotherapy aimed at reconstructing and correcting deeper layers of personality. Its purpose is to provide the trainers – during their group contacts and meetings – with experiences and emotions enhancing their self-knowledge, improving their functioning within a group and making their mutual relations better. Therefore, the most important role of such a training is its social functions that are linked to acquiring the competences of successful getting to know other people and communicating with them. These competences are all about active listening to what the others say, focusing on a partner, clear presentation of one's own opinions, proper way of expressing criticism and dissatisfaction.

On the other hand, training in assertiveness and empathy are of major importance for enhancing social adaptation. Assertiveness training is a planned program of therapeutical acting aimed at shaping readiness to assertive behaviors in various social situations. The task for the trainees is to learn how to express their own feelings, control their behaviors and defend their own rights not breaching the rights of the others (Mączyński, 1993).

In turn, in empathy training the focal point is expressing feelings and displaying attitudes. The trainees exchange their ideas, emotions and reactions to other group members. Thanks to a permanent feedback they learn how they

are perceived by other people and can compare the opinions with their own self-perception. All these aspects of the training serve the purpose of making people more sensitive to the emotions of the others and teach the people how to have an insight into and indulgence in others' needs and points of view.

E. Aronson states that the ultimate effect of improvement in both assertiveness and empathy is effective communication that enables the development of (Aronson, 1997):

- ability to communicate in a way that is clear, simple, neither evaluating nor punishing and avoiding attribution;
- sense of curiosity, willingness to analyzing one's own behavior and conducting experiments concerning one's own behavior and conducting experiments concerning one's own functioning in a group;
- ability of conflict and dispute solving based on problem solving, and not through exerting pressure of manipulation.

Mastering widened perception

The new understanding of perception function of culture is connected with widened perception, which is nothing else but inquisitiveness resulting from the eagerness and abilities to learn. The notion of widened perception is used by H.I. Ansoff to demote the ability of anticipating changes about which a person has no information at all. However, this does not mean that the information is non-existent. It is available through other channels and concerns different issues from those that the given person has dealt with so far (Ansoff, 1985). The widening of perception in solving problems regarding functioning of organizations is feasible with the application of heuristic techniques, thanks to which some associations are evoked. They can be used in order to easier abandon stereotypes and find a new, unconventional solution.

In improving the competence of coping with uncertainty in cognitive processes, cybernetic learning connected with the ability of creating is especially useful. It consists in self-exploring of new ways of understanding and investigating the significance of the rules of organizational function as well as changing them (Mikuła, 2001). The process of learning in this case of collective character and entirely reflects the specifics of learning the culture.

Within the process of spreading the patterns of organizational culture, connected with the new understanding of perception function, creating conditions for the transfer of new interpretations and expectations for the transfer of new interpretations and expectations connected with the above the individual level

is of major importance. This objective can be achieved using various techniques of information exchange and creative thinking, such as the system of suggesting ideas, “brain storming”, the Gordon synectic method, etc. In the training process, American concepts of work-out sessions and best practice case study programs can also be used. It is also important to make the employees, especially managerial staff, master the techniques enabling forecasting of the discrepancies of the hitherto course of events and identifying various aspects of the likely future. For instance, morphological maps or modeling in order to define changes in trends in the surrounding environment as well as the Delphic technique or the analysis of influences that allow to determine single occurrences disrupting the known trends.

Spreading the culture of high tolerance of uncertainty in terms of its perception function has to be combined with eliminating the impediment to the learning process of people in the organization. In the opinion of Morgan, the impediments are as follows (Morgan, 1997):

- fragmentation of thinking because of far-reaching division of work and lack of co-operation which leads to autonomy of activities of various parts of the organizational system;
- system of performance appraisals that mostly focus on the convergence of acting of employees with norms and expectations of superiors, and do not value innovativeness;
- lack of reaction to a discrepancy between formal rules and real way if acting, which impairs the application of the second loop of learning.

Training the ability of holding a dialogue

The contemporary understanding of adaptation function of culture requires from the organization’s members the ability of conducting a dialogue with representatives of other cultures. According to E. Levinas people are various and unrepeatable, and a dialog emphasizes this variety. However, the differences between people are a treasure and a value that could be easily lost isolating oneself from the other and not getting involved in a discourse with them (Levinas, 2000).

In the opinion of M. Buber a dialog is ethical interpersonal communication, based on reciprocity in a conversation. A dialog is morally appropriate when it leads to disclosing oneself to the other person, affirming his/her humanity and showing sensitivity to him/her (Buber, 1992). Inquisitiveness is a specific feature of a dialog – mutual asking and answering questions provides the conditions in which people reveal their thinking and expect the assessment from the others (Senge, 1998).

The basis of improving the ability of getting involved in a dialog is raising the importance of criticism and doubtfulness to the level of rudimentary values. According to W. Bennis, in view of uncertainty and ambiguity of our epoch it is necessary to create cultures in which questions and doubts would be fully accepted, while persistent thinking of being right will be considered dangerous madness (Kozłowski, 2004). The exchange of thought, finding shared values and objectives is possible only when the culture is shaped in a dialog, it is then when representatives of other culture are no longer the synonym of a threat and the unknown. Under such circumstances it is important to seek a consensus and to be actively involved in co-creating cultural patterns, and not to emphasize one's own works and traditions. It is also of significance not to accept external patterns without a word of criticism. Such a dialog results in cultural synergy, i.e. seeking various combinations of elements of one's own way of acting with the elements of other possible ways.

The ability of having a dialog, thus, translates into cultural creativity and is derived from a conviction that every culture is a historical phenomenon, was shaped in a defined circumstances and – as such – might be the subject of evaluation and modification, or even entire rejection without being fearful that the foundation of one's own identity is crumbling. Thanks to the dialog members of an organization are able to describe their own cultures, understand the ideas and behaviors resulting from them as well as evaluate their own usefulness in organizational problems solving.

Cultural creativity is especially indispensable while solving problems of multi-cultural teams. W.W. Burke and L.D. Goodstein present a cycle of steps to be taken in such cases (Burke, Goldstein, 1980):

1. Description of various cultural habits relevant in a particular situation.
2. Cultural interpretation of a problem from the perspective of cultural assumptions, allowing to identify differences and similarities between the cultures.
3. Cultural creativity stemming from the existing behavioral patterns or the modification of the ones already occurring.
4. Cultural synergy reflected in strengthening a new thinking or behavioral patterns considering the optimal point of view.

In the process of training both the competence of a dialog and cultural creativity the attention should be focused on developing one's cultural competences in terms of specific cultural abilities such as: an appropriate motivational system, defining the desired roles and behaviors, organizing support groups and tightening relations between culturally diversified groups.

Conclusions

It is often believed that because of flexible employment people themselves should take care of their professional development, invest in themselves and manage their own career. Such a belief would mean taking away the role in employee's training and enhancing their professional competences from their employers. There is also a widespread opinion that cultural adaptation of the staff to new organizational environment is a self-occurring process possible thanks to acquiring new experience, and that the process does not require the involvement of superiors. Not going in details of such judgements it should be stated that high tolerance of uncertainty requires the active involvement of managerial staff. The acquisition of presented in the article "soft" competences informal trainings is much faster and more efficient than by means of experience gained from cultural clashes and observations of not always appropriate behavioral patterns. The culture of high tolerance of uncertainty is much too important condition of efficient functioning of an organization in the information epoch to let the managerial staff abandon the process of building of the tolerance.

No changes in a formal organization will generate positive effects until the employees involved in the changes abandon their old habits and cultural stereotypes, and acquire new one to replace the old. It is possible to accept the opinion that young employees – of Generation Y, i.e. born in the last decade of XX century, are more successful at coping with uncertainty than the older ones. First of all, they were born too late to have accepted cultural patterns of the industrial era, and secondly because of the fact that electronic communication tools are for them something natural and apparent. Nonetheless, in the case of young generation employees, their intentional improvement in competences useful while coping with uncertainty will be of utmost importance in their professional career development.

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