RESEARCH METHODS USED IN ANALYSING ORGANISATIONAL CULTURE

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Abstract:
The success of an organisation and the achievement of long-term sustainable performance largely depend on how managers attach importance to organisational culture and how they are interested in its analysis and evaluation. This paper presents a literature review of some qualitative and quantitative instruments for exploration of organizational culture. The study`s conclusion is that there is no ideal method of assessing organizational culture. The degree to which any instrument is considered to be suitable depends on the particular reason for which it is to be used and the context within which is to be applied.

Key words: culture, assessment, analysis, techniques, observation

JEL Classification: M1, M14

1. Introduction

Practitioners are interested in the management of organizational culture and they are looking for answer and solutions: how can an organization`s culture be adjusted to meet organizational needs. The literature highlights a number of tools and methods useful in studying, analysing and assessing organisational culture. Among them we can mention: literature review, observation, interview, questionnaire, additional investigations. The instruments listed can be classified into two broad categories: qualitative and quantitative methods. Cismaru (2008, pp. 15-19) considers that the "qualitative methods have significant advantages, saving time and costs being the most frequently cited. The danger to be avoided in this case is mainly superficiality: the appeal to qualitative methods should not mean abandoning objectivity and systematic investigation (in other words, there are rules that have to be followed for the qualitative methods to produce valid results)". The quantitative methods (also called "formal methods") use systematic procedures for measurements and assessments and they are applied to representative samples, established by means of selection; they provide results with a high degree of validity and generality.

2. Methodology

This paper is based on the secondary data. The main purpose of the article is to emphasise some methods used in assessment of organizational culture and to highlight the importance for the researcher of studying their main advantages and limitations.

3. Considerations on the different methods of analysing organisational culture

A first qualitative method used in analysing organisational culture is also the **literature review.** It is based on deciphering the elements of the company by researching certain financial reports, procedures, various press releases, notoriety reports. They can be found in the enterprise, as well as outside it. They can be written as well as audio-visual; they may refer both to the past and to the present and future

activity. State (2004) considers that it is necessary to follow some rules in a documentary research.

- external information should not be neglected, as it is easy and quick to access, being often free: trade unions, economic publications, various articles or reports published about the organisation;
- it is advisable to seek information about the origin, objectives, author, purpose of the documents used; the documents presenting the organisation's history are a means of discovering certain values, highlighting certain facts and events that have strongly marked the company's activity;
- it should be noted that not all companies have archival documentation centres, but that the external relations and personnel services and the general secretariats are usually rich in such documents;
- the analysis should not be limited only to the information documents (newspapers and magazines of the enterprise, work notes); the procedures, manuals and catalogues are also very interesting.

Most organisations have a website where the activity annual reports are posted. These documents specifically designed and strategically placed highlight the company's opinions and beliefs about its own culture. Many organisations, even the non-profit ones, make publicity and create marketing documents, as well as other promotional materials. These strategic forms of communication contribute to understanding how the organisation presents its own culture to the general public.

The internal documents, especially those designed by the management, can be considered a strategic source for analysing organisational culture (Table 1.1.). The analysis of the job descriptions, magazines, newsletters, procedures manuals, various projects and strategies can contribute to identifying the organisational values, to drawing an image on the enterprise's culture.

Table 1.1. Documents studied in the analysis of organisational culture

1. History, development
- ➢ history of the company (memorial plaque, for example)
- ➢ fundamental data on the company (staff, turnover, market position, benefits)

2. Documents relating to the company policy
- ➢ the strategy, the policy made by the company, the trade policy
- ➢ annual reports
- ➢ reports and minutes of management meetings

3. Organisation
- ➢ charts
- ➢ operating diagrams
- ➢ examples of job descriptions (datasheets)

4. Personnel management
- ➢ written orders
- ➢ brochures for newcomers
- ➢ training and professional development programmes
- ➢ figures regarding staff (age, seniority, absenteeism)
- ➢ general conditions of employment (regulations regarding the type of work)

5. Planning and control system
- ➢ planning tools
- ➢ annual plans and budgets
- ➢ reports (quarterly reports, for example)

6. Internal and external communication
- ➢ inside information, company's newspapers
- ➢ promotional material
- ➢ examples of job offers published
- ➢ examples of speeches

Source: State (2004, p. 153)

When data collection is complete we can resort to a thematic or content analysis, containing the following steps:

1. A comparison of the documents according to the position or organisational hierarchical level;

2. Identifying the type of language used in the reports studied;

3. Making a distinction between internal and external approach to the organisation;

4. Identifying the principles of action arising from the documents analysis;

5. Demonstrating the different or similar ways in which the subcultures create a prominent organisational artefact.

The literature review provides sufficient data and information that can be used in making questions for the individual interviews.

Observation represents the careful and planned method of recording certain phenomena, objects, events in conjunction with a given situation. Constantinescu, etc. (2008) considers it necessary, within the organisation, to focus on observing the interaction between employees, in order to find answers to questions such as: *What is the working pace of the employees - slow, methodical, alert, spontaneous? What rituals do you notice in the enterprise? What are the values disseminated? Do the meetings generally provide revealing information? Who participates in these meetings? Who speaks? Whom do these people speak to? To what extent is sincerity situated in these meetings? How much time is devoted to different topics?* The topics which often recur and which are discussed in depth frequently represent indications of the organisational culture values. Observations are used for gathering data on the symbols which are analyzed by the qualitative analysis methods. Observations include mostly behavioural material, but also semantic symbols. Observations of behavioural symbols include monitoring and recording the organizational rituals, such as, for example, the celebration of company day as a ritual of integration.

There will also be careful attention focused on the state and architecture of the buildings, decor, billboards, staff dress code, behaviour and habits, working environment, the way in which everyone fulfils their role, employee behaviour in conflict situations. The analysis of these aspects allows knowing the reality, the working environment, both the organisation's physical components and the emotional, psychological elements, harder to decipher at first glance.

The opinion interview technique always involves oral information, having the advantage of flexibility, of the ability to get specific answers to each question. Along with the use of the questionnaire, it is one of the techniques most often used in qualitative research. The interview is, however, a complex technique that requires certain abilities and skills from the researcher, especially social, communication and self-reflection skills. The interview is used in the study of organisational culture to collect qualitative data about the cognitive elements of the culture, such as assumptions, values, norms and attitudes. Interviews may also serve to identify symbols, certain expressions, stories, anecdotes specific to the organisation. "To successfully use the interview in organisational culture research, it is important to determine the persons that will be interviewed, when, where and how the interview will be conducted, the set of questions that will be used and the method of recording it" (Janićijević, 2011 , p 85). Interviews help us perceive the consistency between what the interviewees say and the facts recorded from other sources." These perceptions are generally useful for:

- defining an updated vision of the history, the important events and its impact on the functioning of the organisation;

- establishing a system of values and its assessment based on the concrete facts recounted by the interviewees;
- defining the existing professions within the organisation, of the way in which the activities are conducted in a formal or less formal way" (State O., 2004, p 159).

Generally, the interview provides interesting qualitative data, but it is time-consuming, it has high costs and it can record errors caused by the person conducting the research.

The questionnaire represents, alongside with the interview, the most used tool and also the main quantitative method for collecting information on organisational culture analysis. Questionnaires are considered the basis of objective research for analysing the cognitive elements of the culture. Janićijević (2011) believes that the main advantages of this tool are:

- the possibility of widely using it on a large number of subjects;
- speed and easiness in collecting data and in quantifying the different elements related to culture;
- a simpler way of establishing the various relationships between culture and other components, as well as the organisation's performance;
- the possibility to compare the results.

The topics that may be talked in the questionnaire are:

- mission and core values of the organisation;
- philosophy on which it is based;
- fundamental directions of organisational culture;
- cooperation;
- communication system;
- freedom of opinion;
- the motivation / reward / penalisation system;
- the way the organisation's leader is perceived .

"In terms of form of the questionnaire, there are several types of questions: closed (allowing only the choice between two or more pre-established types of answers), mixed and open (the answer being expressed freely by the subject). The open questions are suggested in the study of complex problems, providing rich information both about the personality of the investigated and about the problem analysed" (Cismaru, 2008, p 17).

Nevertheless, the application of questionnaires has certain disadvantages:

- the possibility that the questions may not be understood by the entire population surveyed;
- the existence of multiple meanings of different concepts used in the questionnaire;
- the stiffness and inability to adjust the questions to the organisational context and to the subjects participating in the survey;
- superficiality of results;
- inability to perform historical and context analyses.

Table 1.2. is meant to capture the benefits and limitations of the quantitative and qualitative methods used in analysing and assessing organisational culture.

Table 1.2. Strengths and weaknesses of the qualitative/quantitative methods used in cultural assessment

	Strengths	Weaknesses
Qualitative approach	• the ability to check the fundamental values, the beliefs and the assumptions; • open investigation, the subjects may raise issues considered important and which "escape" the survey questionnaire or the content analysis.	• a process that takes time; • important issues could be overlooked; • the observations and results depend on the interpretation of a particular subject; • the subjective nature of the investigation conducted.
Quantitative approach	• speed in data collection and analysis; • easiness in making comparisons; • representativeness of the sample set; • the data processing is done using the standard statistical procedures.	• inability of certain respondents to read/understand the questions asked; • the interpretation of various concepts is not discussed; it is left to the respondent's choice ; • important issues could be overlooked; the investigation focuses only on certain issues and concepts; • the variables are defined arbitrarily by those who design the research.

Source: adapted from Yauch and Steudel (2003, p. 473)

Quantitative research is preferred because it is much faster to apply, and the data obtained allow comparisons between different organisations or groups; it allows the identification of certain aspects of the organisational culture at a superficial, surface level, such as the different rules and practices within the organisation, or to examine how the employees assess their current culture as compared to the preferred one (Igo and Skitmore, 2006).

Other complementary investigations

"They relate to: customer and/or supplier surveys, various tests and experiences, group interviews, etc." (State, 2004, p. 165). They can complete the research mentioned above, to create a general synopsis, with a high content of information and data necessary to carry out relevant analyses of the organisational culture. Alvesson and Billing (2009) believe that since culture draws attention to the visible aspects, that are shared, it is better described through intangible elements (beliefs and ideas) than through the tangible ones. The organisational culture analysis is characterised by a remarkable complexity and diversity of the research methodology that can be used. Keyton (2011) makes a comparison between the different research tools of the organisational culture, highlighting the strengths and weaknesses, as well as the way in which each tool can be used. Table 1.3. provides an overview of these methods used for the organisational culture analysis and assessment.

Table 1. 3. Instruments used in analysing organisational culture

Cultural instrument	It is used to identify	Advantages	Limitations	The best use of the instrument
Organisational culture pyramid	Artefacts, values and beliefs	They identify the relationships between the different cultural elements	They requires observation	It gives people outside the organisation an appropriate understanding of the culture
Organisational stories	Values and basic assumptions	The interaction with the employees is easier	They require interpreting the information received; the views obtained may be subjective	It allows understanding of the culture from many angles; it analyses the implicit assumptions
List of cultural cues	Artefacts	The analysis of the various cultural cues may be the beginning of the research	The emphasis on the cultural cues, on details can lead to losing touch with the important elements: values and basic assumptions	It allows people outside the organisation to form an adequate framework for entering into the organisation's cultural universe
The analysis of the Logos **(The organisation's symbol)**	Artefacts	The symbol or the logos promote a set of basic values and assumptions	The difficulty of interpreting the logos in the absence of further information	It can provide insight into the organisational values and into the direction of the changes, if the change of the logos is related to the organisational development
Analysis of the archive	Formal organisational artefacts, but also the existing ones on websites, online; the management values	They provide insight into the evolution of the organisational culture	They do not allow the disclosure of the employees' opinions	One way of collecting additional data needed for the research
Analysis of the organisation's mission and statement	The values promoted by the management team	This analysis can be done without going into the organisation; and once inside it, we can build the basis for validating the values analysed	Not all aspects related to the organisational culture are directly related to the company's mission and statement	One way of collecting data and information before entering the organisation; within the

				company, as a way of identifying subcultures

Source: adapted from Keyton (2011, pp.193-195)

4. Conclusions

Studying organisational culture and its reporting to the organisation's strategic objectives represent concerns that are met on an increasingly larger scale both at the level of theorists and practitioners. We consider that, in analysing and assessing organisational culture, a complete picture of this can be achieved only if the researcher contacts the organisation, interacts with the employees from all hierarchical levels, and observes their behaviour. The researcher must be deeply involved in the culture in order to be able to explore it, and research is always done only on individual cases. Since the knowledge of the culture is deeply contextual it cannot be transferred from one organization to another, and therefore there is no comparison or generalization of research results. We consider that the research methods presented in this paper generate knowledge of organizational culture which can`t be generalized and compared and which is difficult to apply in practice. The choice between objectivistic and subjectivistic methodological approaches to organizational culture research is not an easy one, because it involves significant sacrifices on the part of the researchers. So we believe that a combination of different research methods can be used in order to adapt to the goals, content and the context of the research.

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