

PBL AND THE ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE IN THE EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

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Abstract: Problem-based learning (PBL) is an approach that challenges students to learn through engagement in real problems. But it is important to take into consideration that this method assumes changing not only the teaching strategy, but the main beliefs and values from the universities. Thus in order to implement this method at the universities from the Republic of Moldova we should assure that the organizational culture from higher educational system existent now in Moldova is appropriate. The purpose of this article is to explore the concept of current organizational culture at education institutes so the effective management methods will be developed. The analysis of the organizational culture's dimensions allows observing human behavior within the universities and high lighting reality, identifying the strengths and also the weaknesses which have an impact on its functionality and development. In this paper, we try to present some models for assessing organizational culture in universities for the reason of implementing PBL.

Keywords: Problem-Based Learning, university management, organizational culture, competing values framework.

The current period of time is characterized by an exceeding development of technical science, which leads to an avalanche of information and the improvement of its quality and breadth. Thus, the Digital Era imposes new requirements for the traditional educational system. As for higher education, it is impossible for the lecturer to teach the whole information available at the given topic, as well as for the student to assimilate it entirely. Under these circumstances, it is necessary to find learning methods that would facilitate the educational process by selecting the information needed for a problem or for making an optimal decision.

Notwithstanding the fact that the current higher educational system in the Republic of Moldova was proved to be efficient on a long run, it needs to be updated. Nowadays, it is mostly focused on learning raw information instead of developing the skills one needs in order to use the acquired knowledge in practice. As a result, students lack practical habits for solving problems by themselves and are not confident in their own skills.

Problem-Based Learning (PBL) is a modern studying method centred on the student, which entails learning any particular topics by solving problems. It allows each individual student to research in order to find the answer, meanwhile developing their strategic thinking. This way, they build the habit of finding the solution in a very efficient way. Moreover, as the process assumes group work, it contributes to developing their communication and collaboration skills that are so important nowadays.

The implementation of PBL offers numerous advantages to all the stakeholders: professors, students, companies where they will be employed and so on. This method leads to a constant development of the teacher's professionalism and a closer relationship with his students. At the same time, due to the active position that students have during PBL, they change their attitude toward the learning process, are fully involved and, as a result, are motivated. Companies have the possibility to hire professionals whose qualification are

not only limited by theoretical up-to-date knowledge, but are also able to analyze and solve complex problems, showing cognitive skills of a high level.

Problem Based Learning was proved to be efficient in many countries. Its utility is not doubted. This brings up the question: to what extent is PBL compatible with the higher educational system existent now in Moldova.

It is important to take into account that this method assumes changing not only the teaching strategy, but the main beliefs and values of this process as well. To exemplify, practicing PBL requires a fault-tolerant environment willing to discover new things, which is not typical for our educational system. This way, the implementation of PBL will remain only a formality, unless we enterprise any essential adjustments.

Organizational culture is a system of shared values and assumptions that has a strong impact on the members of this organization. This concept was brought to light and has started being debated in the '70s of the last century, later becoming a key organizational factor for boosting the company's competitiveness and efficiency. Organizational culture can be used as a powerful strategic tool that connects all the branches and individuals of an organization imposing the same goals, ensuring loyalty and improving their inter-personal relationship.

Organizational culture assumes a collective mind programming, which makes the staff of any particular organization different and unique. The culture emphasizes their collective thinking standards, values, concepts, rituals, habits, ceremonies and so on. In every company some ideas and behaviours are either encouraged or disapproved depending on the main values of the company itself. The higher the level of organizational culture in an institution, the less it needs instructions, meticulously detailed schemes and indications.

A company's corporate culture consists of a multitude of elements: partially visible-artificial products, the employees' behaviour, language; as well as visible- main concepts, values, beliefs and standards. One should bear in mind that the last have a decisive role in the impact that the culture has on the organization's performance. Only if the main concepts and values are adapted to the institution's purposes it would be possible to achieve success.

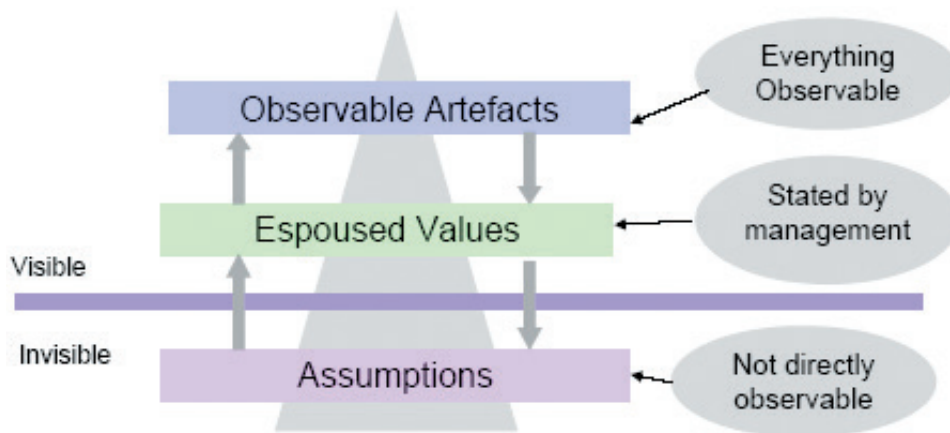
Hence, the process of implementing PBL in autochthonous educational institutions should rather start with a diagnose and analysis in terms of compatibility with this learning technique.

The process of evaluation itself allows discovering the weaknesses and fortes of human resource in an organization. The results of this research can be an informational basement for making the right decisions in order to improve the organization's activity and to avoid any future difficulties.

During the evolution of management science a few patterns were proposed that can serve as a main investigation algorithm of an organization's culture particularities.

Schein (1985) in his work "Organizational Culture and Leadership" has identified three levels of organizational culture: artefacts (physical elements, observable); values, assumptions, beliefs and main concepts.

Figure 1. Schein Model



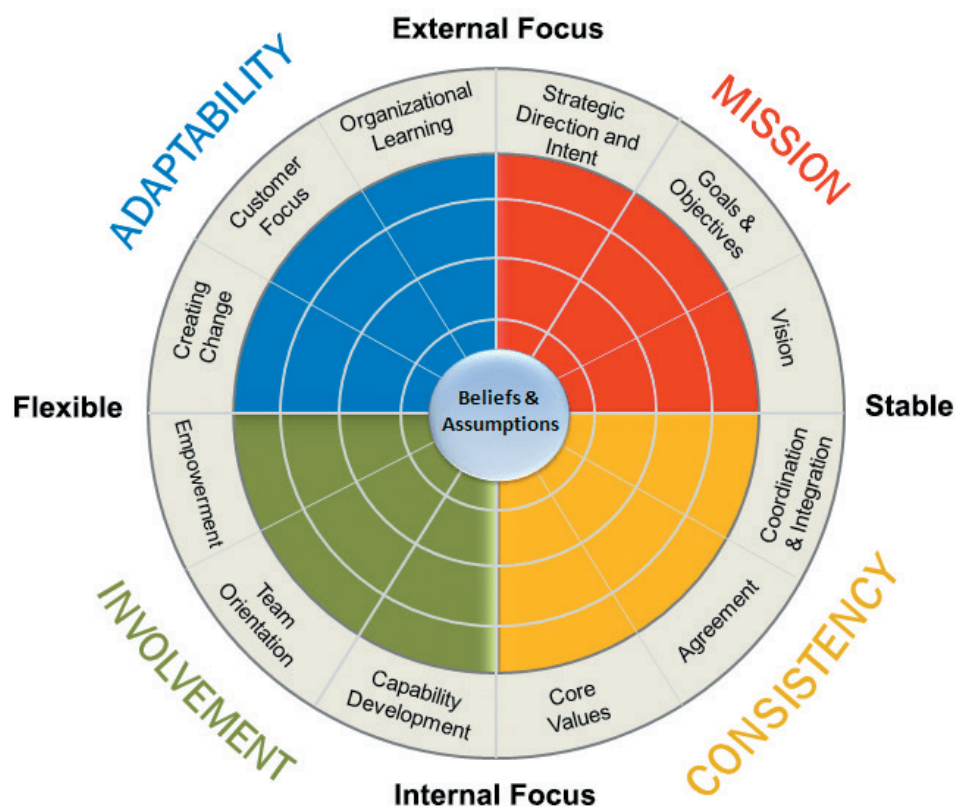
Source: http://www.valuebasedmanagement.net/methods_schein_three_levels_culture.html

Separate and system analysis of each element of an organization’s culture gives a practical foundation to evaluate the company’s particularities. By using this technique the research has a qualitative character rather than quantitative.

On the other side, Denison (1990) proposed an analysis model of organizational culture that distinguishes four dimensions: involvement, consistency, adaptability and mission. Each dimension embodies three characteristics.

This pattern is based on identification of the members’ fundamental attitude on various aspects of organizational life. Presumably, the attitude underlies some presuppositions regarding the employees’ behaviour in a company.

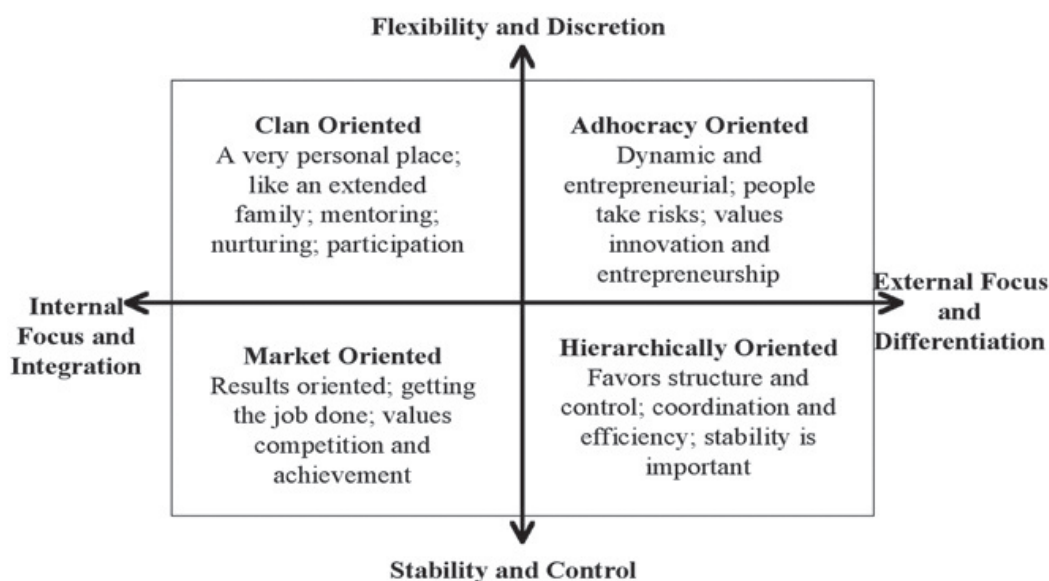
Figure 2. Danison Model



Source: <http://www.denisonconsulting.com/model/organizational-culture>

Another approach on organizational culture belongs to Kim S. Cameron and Robert E. Quinn (2011). The authors claim that a successful implementation of any strategy in order to improve the organizational environment consists of modifying the organizational culture.

Figure 3. A Model of Cultural Congruence for Organizations (Cameron & Quinn)



Source: https://www.ocai-online.com/userfiles/file/ocai_pro_example_report.pdf

The pattern was designed by establishing “39 indicators that were analysed and ended up forming two main dimensions, depending on what indicators were enrolled in four groups”. The two dimensions previously mentioned assume the existence of concurrent values like stability, flexibility, internal orientation and external orientation. The intersection of these resulted in creating four quadrants (Figure 3), each representing a set of distinctive indicators and representing a particular type of organizational culture: clan oriented, adhocracy oriented, market oriented and hierarchically oriented.³⁴

As can be noticed from Cameron and Quinn’s pattern (2011) a **hierarchically** oriented corporate culture is an example of bureaucracy, “procedures govern what people do, but the leaders are good coordinators and organizers” (Cameron and Quinn, 2011, p.42). A **market** oriented corporate culture is based on competition and achievement, both at enterprise level to ensure a better place in their field, as well as individual level in order to improve every employee’s productivity. A **clan** organizational culture is oriented towards the company’s human resource, involving group work, active participation and mutual respect on a large scale. As for **adhocracy** oriented culture, it is also mainly focused on entrepreneurial spirit, innovation, flexibility, dynamism.

This pattern results not only in an in-depth analysis of the corporate culture, but also portrays the link with the company’s leadership and human resource management. Cameron and Quinn’s model was the pattern underlying their evaluation methodology of a company’s organizational culture – “Organizational Culture Assessment Instrument” (OCAI).

The tool previously mentioned OCAI has already been used in a few studies realized at higher educational institutions level (Fralinger & Olson, 2007; Berrio, 2003; Adkinson & Mulvihill, 2005; Faeman, 2009).³⁵

³⁴ Hudrea A., *Cultura organizațională în mediul universitar românesc*, Revista Transilvană de Științe Administrative 1(36)(2015):70

³⁵ Nica, P., Constantin, T., Nestian, A.S. și Leon, R., *Cinci analize diagnostic cultural pentru cinci universități*, Iași: Editura Sedcom Libris, 2013.

Unfortunately, there was not such a research in the Republic of Moldova, however a recent investigation in this field that was led in some Romanian universities. An analysis of the results obtained would be welcomed.

The study “Five cultural diagnoses for five universities” was realized in 2013 by Panait Nica (coordinator), Ticu Constantin, Ramona Diana Leon as a part of the project “University Community for quality management in higher education”. The survey was conducted on a sample of 1165 persons from five universities (Alexandru Ioan Cuza University of Iasi, Bucharest University of Economic Studies, University of Bucharest, Babes-Bolyai University of Cluj-Napoca, and West University of Timisoara). The analysis is very ample, simultaneously involving two aspects: the current situation in the university environment, as well as the desired state of affairs.³⁶

According to the obtained results after applying “the organizational culture evaluation tool OCAI”, as for the current lie of the land, in the Romanian university environment prevails a hierarchically oriented organizational culture (28,19%). To put it differently, Romanian universities are centralized, formalized, structured and are focused on internal affairs, being concerned about economies, respecting the deadlines and other formalities. In a perfect situation, clan oriented culture has the biggest share (28,78%), having inter-personal relationships as a top priority, it encourages collaboration, involvement, group-work, cohesion, employment, communication and development.

A very important point is to analyze what the values are promoted in Romanian universities, both nowadays and in a perfect situation. Through the least important values are, in both situations, the following: “Cultural diversity”, “Consistency, tenacity, perseverance”, “Managers’ respect towards other’s opinion”, “Managers’ respect for their commitments”. The recorded differences between value hierarchies, determined based on the gap between the current situation and the desired one, reflects the fact that the responders would like to promote the following values in their organizational environment more intensely: “The satisfaction of both teaching, administrative staff and students”, “Team work and mutual trust” and “Open communication (between the academic community members). These are followed by “Transparency”, “Improvement of working environment”, “Consulting and involvement”, “Organizational excellence and improvement of personal performance” and “Passion and professionalism”.

On the other side, the values that are reputedly over appreciated are: “Respecting policies and procedures” and “Meticulous execution of managers’ dispositions”. These are followed by: “Result orientation”, “Competition”, “Aggression” and “Efficiency boosting and price-cutting”.

Another research, led by Andrian Hudrea and Loredana Andrievici in 2016 contains an organizational culture analysis of two faculties from two different universities: Electrical Engineering Faculty (EEF) of The Technical University (Cluj-Napoca) and Political, Administrative and Communication Sciences Faculty (PACSF) of Babes-Bolyai University (Cluj-Napoca).³⁷

During the investigation, they tried to identify the type, or respectively, types of culture that prevails (out of the four according to Cameron and Quinn’s theory) and to compare the two faculties and, on the other side, the departments of each. The main goal was to find out

³⁶ Nica, P., Constantin, T., Nestian, A.S. și Leon, R., *Cinci analize diagnostice culturale pentru cinci universități*, Iași: Editura Sedcom Libris, 2013.

³⁷ Hudrea A., Andrievici L., *Cultura organizațională în universități*, Revista Transilvană de Științe Administrative 1(38)(2016):64.

either if there is only one organizational culture specific for the system and faculty or, more likely, if there are different cultures in every faculty/university or even departments of the same faculty (subcultures). Consequently, the results showed that both faculties, despite being from two fundamentally different universities, are dominated by the same organizational culture (however, not by too much compared to other culture's prevalence). To define, it is a **hierarchically oriented culture** (slightly more common in TU Cluj) which is, furthermore, specific to the entire Romanian higher educational system, the statement being proved by the studies previously mentioned as well. The only notable difference between these two organizations is the fact that PACSF-BBU has a more homogenous culture than EEF-TU, the goals in all four dimensions being closer. As for favourite culture, there are also some similarities between the two organizations, they both want to ameliorate or get rid of hierarchical elements and bring more **clan or adhocracy** typical characteristics, while the attitude towards market oriented culture remains the same, the score being unchanged.

One should notice that in Romania a series of studies related to this topic were conducted.³⁸ As a whole, it can be concluded that the Romanian higher educational environment is dominated by an organizational culture that represents a mix of all four culture types, though being dominated by the hierarchic culture. It is characterized by control, formalism, predictability, stability and internal orientation.

Considering these reasons, it would be prolific to conduct a diagnosis of the organizational culture in Moldovan universities. As national culture is a crucial factor in the formation of an organization's culture, and the community environment in both countries has many similarities, we can assume with certainty that in the autochthonous higher educational institutions the hierarchically oriented culture prevails as well.

Consequently, a successful implementation of PBL would be possible only when there will be created an educational culture, promoting knowledge as a value. The underlying element would be an institutional system centred on learning, not teaching. At the same time both students and lecturers must adapt according to the new roles and responsibilities. This process would assume switching to an organizational culture prevailed by clan orientation.

The dominant attributes of this culture are: cohesiveness, participation, team work and sense of family; the leader in clan culture is like a mentor, facilitator and a parent figure; loyalty, tradition, interpersonal cohesion are important; the strategic emphases are towards developing human resources commitment and morale (Cameron & Freeman, 1991). Strong clan cultures are far and away perceived to be the most effective on performance dimensions that have been traditionally valued in the higher education community, while strong hierarchic cultures are perceived as consistently ineffective.

Switching to a different culture should start with changing the concepts and values that prevail. Afterwards, according to their organizational strategies, an institution should apply various techniques that are broadly described in speciality literature. If an organization plans to increase clan type of culture, the organization can provide team building, internal communication, and participation opportunities to its employees.

³⁸ Hudrea A., *Cultura organizațională în România. O analiză a cercetărilor în domeniu*, Revista Transilvană de Științe Administrative 2(37)(2015):120-131.

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