

MEMBERS AND CULTURE, AN INTERWOVEN DICHOTOMY IN ORGANIZATIONS

Federico de Andreis¹ 

Federico Leopardi² 

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.31410/EMAN.2021.325>

Abstract: *This thematic review discusses how Organizational Culture can develop and improve Human Resource Management strategies, procedures and tools to support and motivate new staff to meet organization, management and stakeholder expectations in a changing and competitive environment. Organizations are made by people; their value is created by the staff. Strategies involving human resources should have not only a supportive function, but definitely a central one. Organizational culture represents a phenomenon that manifests itself in the fundamental assumptions that guide an organization. It finds fulfilment in the behaviours, values and relationships that characterize the organization itself, both internally and with the external environment. In the modern organization culture represents a topical issue; it is considered an essential ingredient for the success of companies and organizations. It was in the 1980s that definitions of this concept, one of the most complex and articulated in organizational theory, were proposed as a coherent set of fundamental assumptions that a certain group has invented, discovered, or developed within an organization.*

This research aims to demonstrate how culture could influence the members of organization and, in the same way, that the latter influences culture. Particular attention will therefore be paid to the success of organizations that is also based on this fundamental cultural assumption. Organizational culture, in fact, has to be considered as a real phenomenon, cannot be taken out of context, but must always be related to the internal environment of the organization. The new human resources are in fact involved in the cultural process of the organization, which, even if not desired, develops anyway. For this reason, attention to new resources must include a continuous approach to organizational culture and the promotion and support of the one which is best suited to organizational objectives.

Keywords: *Organizational behaviour, Cultural change, Organizations, Inclusion.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Engaging and motivating employees is essential for creating an inclusive working environment and fostering business productivity and innovation. Increasingly, organisations find themselves leading teams composed of diverse individuals. Each generation grows up in a context characterised by historical events, technological advances and social behaviours that contribute to determining their specificities, preferences and expectations, which are reflected in different working styles and ways of communicating.

Understanding the differences in attitudes and behaviours of team members is a fundamental tool to stimulate their involvement in the workplace and capitalise on their strengths. Organisational behaviour and organisational culture play a fundamental role for the benefit, given the set of individual expressions that people put into place in the organisational environments where they carry out their activities and in which they work. The study of such behaviour has

¹ Università degli Studi Giustino Fortunato, Via R. Delcogliano 12, Benevento, Italy

² Università degli Studi Giustino Fortunato, Via R. Delcogliano 12, Benevento, Italy

become of great help in activities involving the Human Resource Manager, in particular in motivation, selection, development and training of organization members, conflict management, decision-making processes and teamwork.

The Human Resource Manager has to navigate in this complex environment, knowing how to translate into practical solutions the main dynamics of organisational behaviour, i.e. the environment, the person and the behaviour. Aspects of how to involve new members become of primary importance for the success of the organization and come close to the field of psychological atmosphere that was first treated by Kurt Lewin; he included this concept in his field theory with which he intended to give a scientific/statistical basis to social psychology, explaining human behaviour as resulting from the interaction between internal factors (person) and external factors (environment).

In the approaches to organizational climates we find, first of all, theories defined as structural, in which the weight of external factors (environment, structure, reward systems, organization chart) prevails over internal ones in determining human behaviour. In other theories, however, the relationship is reversed and the factors linked to the person are seen as more incisive than those linked to the environment (perceptual theories). What is therefore crucial for organizations to understand is that this environment and culture are variables, as demonstrated below, that are fundamental to the success of groups and organizations.

2. INTERDEPENDENCE AND CULTURE

The majority of today's organizations are defined as complex organizations and represent deliberately constructed and/or reconstructed social units with a structure, functional roles in to achieve certain objectives, and behaviours that allow these objectives to be reached. Complex systems are dynamic and permanently evolving societies, with a capability for self-organisation. Thus, they are composed of a large number of parts/individuals interacting with each other in non-linear ways that result in a global behaviour that cannot be explained by simple models. In these systems, the human factor and the relationships that are created play a predominant role, as does teamwork, a tool that – when operating in conditions of uncertainty – becomes useful in risk prevention and management.

The human element and the dynamics between individuals are of fundamental importance in organizational contexts for smooth operation and goals achievement. When individuals are linked by social dynamics within an organization they then constitute a group, since they become aware that, in some way, their destiny is linked to that of the group and they consider themselves members of it. It is important to point out, however, that physical proximity alone does not constitute a group, it is necessary within organizations; indeed, if we want to define it as a team, it must usually have defined tasks and activities, determined roles and a high level of commitment on the part of its members.

The team becomes effective when objectives and methods are clear and shared and when it is possible to manage time, define and respect roles, procedures and rules. Working effectively in a team is very important for the outputs (i.e. results), quality, morale, sense of responsibility and ultimately for the retention of the team, and thus of the organization. In the study of organizations, teams, and the culture of the same, presuppose the role of an important object of investigation, since they are composed of groups (understood as teams) which represent the expression of the life of relationships and which may be formalized, therefore established or created, or informal, that is, born spontaneously within an organized space.

Having said this, we can then give a further definition of organization, this time linked to social relations, and identify it as a set of relationships between individuals who, in order to make the organization efficient and effective, benefit from teamwork, i.e. an activity aimed at achieving a given objective that is achieved through the performance of a task and organized in ways such as time, resources, methods, and subject to a given climate and communication. Within organizations, and therefore within the teams composing the organization, it is fundamental to consider the bond of interdependence that is created between members, because it constitutes the perception of individuals of being connected with others, in such a way that the individual cannot succeed without being part of the team and likewise the team cannot succeed without the contribution of the individual member.

This connection with others, given by interdependence, takes on a positive value when the relationship, the link and the relationship between individuals become a fundamental condition for the achievement of a result, a goal, or a reward. Therefore, being in a condition of positive interdependence with someone means that, in order to achieve something or reach a goal, it is not possible to act alone and that others are therefore necessary and indispensable.

We can state that in the organizations, it would always be desirable to be in a condition of positive interdependence that encourages individuals to communicate, to inform each other, to ask for and give each other help, to exchange points of view and to manage conflicts in a positive way, thus determining an immediate and direct effect on the team's motivation, commitment, effort and productivity. In addition to this, interdependence promotes a greater commitment to the objective, since working with others increases the sense of responsibility towards the objective to be achieved, provided that there is an attitude of mutual esteem and care among the members.

All these conditions linked to interdependence, and therefore to the culture of respect for this bond, make it easy to understand how, from the point of view of success and objectives in organizations, both become fundamental elements. The management of group dynamics in fact assumes a fundamental role also with regard to decision-making processes, precisely because human resources represent the most critical factor. In this respect, the organizational structure is based on the principle that shared commitment to a common goal promotes positive relationships among team members, as they try to listen to each other's point of view, appreciate or criticize a position, sharing a collective experience.

3. HOW TO PERCEIVE TEAM AND CULTURE?

In the cognitive processes, which are at the basis of the decision-making process, the way the group operates must be considered very carefully, analysing all the decision-making phases and the underlying dynamics. Thus, through the culture and the collaboration with others, which must be considered as resources useful for achieving a purpose within organizations, it is possible to increase the level of this organizational belonging, so as to be able – not only as individuals but as a group – to think ahead, i.e. to project the current situations into the future, for the benefit of the organization.

The message that the organization must transmit to the members is that everyone's contribution is of equal importance and that this avoids those disagreements that would make cooperation and communication more difficult when needed. The organizational team must be subjectively

perceived to require the contribution of each team member. This can only be achieved through the organizational culture. In many work situations, in fact, the members of a group, despite having common goals, do not experience interdependent behaviour and therefore we speak of a group and not a team, causing an obstacle to organizational success.

In addition, we can state that the team must be accepted or shared by all members. The team member who does not accept the objective becomes, from being a valuable and indispensable resource for the group itself, an obstacle that can undermine the common effort. Another aspect to be promoted by the organizational culture is that the team must be complex and challenging. It must be, in fact, perceived as necessary in relation to the objective to be achieved. It should be formed around a goal for which individual strengths are deemed insufficient., because team and objective must therefore be closely related. The same is true for the organizational tasks that culture promotes, i.e. that they must not only be complex but also challenging, i.e. 'attractive and meaningful'.

4. ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE, FORMAL AND INFORMAL GROUPS

After the previous considerations, it is necessary to understand that the organizational culture represents a complex framework of national, organizational and professional attitudes and values within which groups and individuals and functions operate. But how does the culture of the group and the organization affect the success of the organizational system itself? Every organization is made of human resources who tend to be part of a group that in general terms can be divided into two broad categories: primary groups and secondary groups. Every individual joins one or more primary groups at birth, such as the family, relatives, neighbours and a group of friends.

Primary, groups are therefore the first and therefore most important socialization experiences, influencing the future ways in which individuals relate to each other. These determine the most relevant aspects of the individual's personality, such as values, attitudes and beliefs, and influence behaviour.

Secondary groups, on the other hand, are groups of people with clear objectives to achieve, which determine their roles and interpersonal relations. These involve a choice of membership, have a more rigid normative structure and are mainly implemented in adulthood, with the awareness of having to integrate them within particular cultural and social models.

From an organizational point of view, this research is interested in these, even if individuals are influenced by primary groups. Groups can be distinguished by their degree of formalization into formal and informal groups. A group is defined as formal if it is set up to organize and carry out an activity with a specific purpose and pre-established time and method. It therefore arises to fulfil organizational and individual functions, such as:

- carrying out interdependent and even complex results;
- generating new and original ideas;
- coordinating activities;
- solving problems and making decisions by means of appropriate mechanisms;
- taking care of the socialization and training of new members.

Formal groups are generally divided into working groups, project teams, committees, commissions or task forces and are characterized by visibility and recognition within the organization.

It is precisely these that can be worked on at the level of organizational culture. They can also be classified according to different criteria.

With respect to the level of integration, they are:

- structural, which includes aggregations of individuals forming organizational units;
- integrated which includes aggregations of individuals forming organizational units and integration, which includes the various forms of aggregation between individuals which, for coordination purposes, overlap the basic organizational structure.

Depending on their duration, however, they are divided into temporary and permanent.

However, within the organization many informal groups influence members' behaviour and culture, to which the members themselves unwillingly adhere. The informal group, in fact, is formed in response to the individual's need to belong and the natural mutual attraction that involves two or more people. For this reason, aggregation is voluntary and spontaneous and arises from the sharing of interests and bonds of esteem and friendship. This type of group may arise independently of the organization, such as culture, or in response to its internal pressures, responding to the primary needs of members to forge strong bonds and be autonomous in their work, often also having more control over their own tasks and duties, but still influencing the organization.

Despite the irregular nature of this type of group, informal groups have been classified into:

- horizontal groups, in which the members present the same hierarchical level within the organization, or otherwise hold homogeneous professional roles;
- vertical groups, in which members come from different hierarchical levels;
- mixed groups, in which members work in different departments or sectors within the organization, even if very far apart, but despite this they have established a link, often outside the work context, on the basis of a common interest.

It is difficult to draw clear boundaries between these three types of groups, but it is important to understand how much the human need to belong to a group influences the culture of individuals. With that said, let's go to the heart of culture. We can define corporate culture as a set of values, principles and norms, shared at all levels and aimed at creating active involvement; it is an effective mechanism for achieving objectives. Defining a solid corporate organizational culture is not insignificant; a series of variables must be set in motion that entirely condition the organizational set-up.

Therefore, addressing the subject more specifically, we can state that the culture of an organization encompasses the beliefs, norms, values and attitudes that govern all its parts, habits and written and unwritten rules that have been developed over time and are considered valid. It also has the capacity to shape organizational and decision-making processes and guide the actions and behaviour of all employees. It includes expectations, experiences, philosophy and is expressed in members' self-image, inner workings, interactions with the outside world and future expectations.

It manifests itself in the fundamental assumptions that guide an organization and is embodied in the behaviours and values that characterize the organization, both internally and externally. Models that provide stability to an organization, at the same time, may lead to the creation of a very strong culture that may build walls that are difficult to overcome and hinder competitiveness.

5. SCHEIN'S STUDIES AND SAFELY INCLUSION OF INDIVIDUALS IN THE ORGANIZATIONS

But how does corporate identity come about and how important is it for new members to be involved in it?

A culture that has been consolidated in the course of a group's experience will be regarded by that group as so valid that it will be passed on to new members who join the organization. The organizational culture becomes, therefore, an object of learning for new members. Moreover, Schein's definition shows that culture has a dual function: on the one hand, it is the glue that allows the organization to achieve internal stability, while on the other hand, it allows it to adapt to the external environment, differentiate itself and gain legitimacy with the various stakeholders.

Organizational culture is, therefore, the essence of the company's identity, as it is the set of characteristics that make the company distinctive, in which its members recognize themselves and which they express in a shared symbolic language. Schein has developed a model in which he stratifies organizational culture into three levels. At the superficial level we find the artefacts: various objects, furnishings, spaces, tools, languages, behaviours and rituals, which constitute the manifest and tangible element of the culture, but which are not immediately accessible at the level of comprehension and which must be decoded to grasp their deeper meaning.

At the intermediate level are the declared values and objectives, which are less visible than the artefacts, but which are nevertheless easily verifiable and of which the members can be aware. Finally, the deepest and most intangible level is made up of basic assumptions: deep-seated beliefs that are so ingrained and taken for granted that they are unconscious. Assumptions determine the way we perceive, think, feel and act; they constitute the fundamental core of a culture and, although not directly observable, are expressed in values and actions.

They can therefore be inferred by careful analysis from the interpretation of their outward manifestations. As we have seen, culture is the basis for the functioning of the organization, as it shapes a vision and strategic choices that enable effective solutions. However, today's scenario forces organizations to undergo structural change in order to adapt, which implies a review of their culture. The promotion of organizational change therefore requires an analysis of culture.

Awareness of the culture is necessary in order to orient it towards more adaptive solutions. It is possible to promote culture inclusion throughout the lessons learnt from mistakes, studies on the matter, webinar and sharing information and opinion about it. Indeed, culture and inclusion represent a dichotomy that rarely can be divided, referred to organizational success. However, it is necessary to define what we all mean by the necessity of avoiding not inclusive strategies. It is possible to interpret these risk terms as a threat that might harm someone or something, such as members or organizations.

Indeed, a safely inclusion of new members in teams and organizations is an ideal situation; however, it is possible to realize only in hypothetical scenarios, in the real life it is potentially unrealizable. Nonetheless, applying norms and procedures, can help in curbing and avoiding potential risks of marginalization or non-inclusivity. What organization should avoid is precisely marginalization of new people among members. To really approach inclusion and involvement – that from now on we will call it “Safe Mix” for inclusion of new members – it must be

implemented by well-planned and structured processes that can allow the protection of human resources, enterprises' capital by the use of a total quality management composed by a safe mix in terms of logical, organizational, physical activities that can all together achieve a solid governance model. Thus, building an organizational culture of the safe mix is crucial when it comes to managing an organization.

It is the same for the safe mix culture that plays a key role in making an organization reliable. Within an organization there are many forces which act on the actors; these actors must be reached successfully by a shared set of values that are part of the organizational culture, and this culture concerns the safety that Reason defined as “the capability of individuals or organization to handle small risks, in order to avoid damages, achieving their goals”. This leads people to have those values that make valuable a sub-culture, so named inclusivity and embracement of values that foster inclusion.

In order to have successful organization, the inclusivity culture must be taken as the standard approach to the reduction risk; within an organization there are the above-mentioned forces that play a crucial role, and these forces reach out all the components in the organization. For this reason, if the culture within the organization is improved, then performances in terms of security will be more effective, increasing the efficiency and overall mood of the enterprise.

6. WHAT IS INCLUSION?

Inclusion involves the possibility to lead to the achievement of successful goal by the organization. Embracing concepts such as equal opportunity to participation, acceptance, respect and open to understanding and other culture, leads us to the real meaning of inclusion. It is the equal opportunity, for everyone, to participate in social life. Within an organization, fostering an inclusive environment means that it allows people with different cultural backgrounds, experiences and capabilities to interact and have a real impact on society. Within an organization this means that the achievement of inclusive culture can effectively boost the organization's potential.

Inclusion is led by leaders that must challenge biases and unawareness of the employees. A safe space where to work is crucial and an atmosphere that eases and espouses the supportive mood and commitment that individuals put while working, is even more important. Changes within the organization can make the inclusion fluctuate and vice versa. These two realities can influence each other. For this reason, it is important to constantly improve inclusion. Inclusion, in fact, often, entails continuous research of value and aspects to fulfil, real value to unlock is to attract positive outcomes, using the lever that leaders can exploit. New members joining an organization, are by definition different from the already present workforce. However, diversity can be seen as something constantly changing. Its core involves valuing everyone in the organization as individuals.

Diversity only recognizes that everyone is unique and each individual has different needs from another. Diversity in an organization that wants to include new members must distinguish one individual from another, as well as being specific to each of them, putting it in a wider context, involving respect and appreciation. Understanding people's diversities has to entail a broader concept, instead of race, gender and ethnicity. Organizational culture must be changed and diversity strategy have to be put in practice. Strategies that must be both consistently fair but also

flexible and inclusive, as well as supporting the economics and business goals that the organization has set. Decisions about inclusion should be based on real actions in order to step up, on a higher level in terms of inclusivity.

7. POTENTIALS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Understood what are the constraints of this research, it is important to note that the potential of an inclusive organisation, mixed with a change in the organisational culture is very high. Therefore, understanding what type of organisation can unlock the highest value, in terms of higher gain, is important. It is widely known that any organisation can gain from cultural changes and valorisation of diversities, nonetheless, some type of organisations can have a higher return than others. Moreover, a further suggestion for researchers is the analysis of the level in which there might be more difficulties to apply the change, and at what level there is the real value unlocked.

8. CONCLUSION

Organizational culture is now a trend topic among managers, among consultants and among academics.

An inclusive organizational behaviour is absolutely needed if we want a change in culture and make easier the inclusion process.

The most important changes that may support organizations at any level, towards a more inclusive organizational culture are needed in all areas of the organization.

New resources must be included in a continuous approach to organizational culture and the promotion and support of the one which is best suited to organizational objectives.

The introduction of a safe space and a “safe inclusion”, understanding the differences and the diversity that characterize different individuals, must make easier the development of an advanced organizational culture throughout the appliance of behavioural changes.

REFERENCES

- Archer, D. (1999). Exploring “bullying” culture in the para-military organisation. *International Journal of Manpower*, 20(1–2), 94–105. <https://doi.org/10.1108/01437729910268687>
- Azmat, F., Fujimoto, Y., & Rentschler, R. (2015). Exploring cultural inclusion: Perspectives from a community arts organisation. *Australian Journal of Management*, 40(2), 375–396. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0312896214525180>
- Dianne, P., Manstead, A. S. R., G. Stradling, S., & Reason, J. T. (1992). *Intention to commit driving violations: an application of the theory of planned behavior*. American Psychology Association Inc.
- Dorcak, R., & Dorcak, R. (2011). School organisational culture and inclusive educational leadership. *Współczesne Zarządzanie = Contemporary Management Quarterly*, 2, 45–55.
- Economic, S., Weekly, P., & Mar, N. (1970). *Review: Organisational Behaviour Reviewed Work (s): Organisation and Administration by Ishwar Dayal and Kamini Adhikari Review by : Nita Published by : Economic and Political Weekly Stable URL : https://www.jstor.org/stable/4359727 A conspicuous lapse*. 5(11).

- Hauptman, D. (2009). "When I Hear the Word 'Culture,' I Reach for my Pun!" *Word Ways*, 40(2), 26.
- Lewin, K. (1946). Action Research and Minority Problems. *Journal of Social Issues*, 2(4), 34–46. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4560.1946.tb02295.x>
- Manstead, A. S. R., Parker, D., Stradling, S. G., Reason, J. T., & Baxter, J. S. (1992). Perceived Consensus in Estimates of the Prevalence of Driving Errors and Violations. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 22(7), 509–530. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1559-1816.1992.tb00987.x>
- Reason, J. (2004). Beyond the organisational accident: The need for "error wisdom" on the frontline. *Quality and Safety in Health Care*, 13(SUPPL. 2), 28–33. <https://doi.org/10.1136/qshc.2003.009548>
- Thompson, S. (2017). Defining and measuring 'inclusion' within an organisation. *K4D Helpdesk Report*.