

Organizational Culture

Subjects: Sociology

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Organizational culture may be considered as the shared way of being, thinking and acting in a collective of coordinated people with reciprocal expectations; it is shaped, disseminated, learned and changed over time, providing some predictability in every organization.

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Following Serpa (2016), the concept of culture reveals a certain uncertainty in its definition. Culture may be considered as the ways of feeling, thinking and doing, shared by a group of people that are apprehended, interpreted, produced and reproduced over time by the members of a collective and that ascribe certain patterns of regularity and predictability.

I 1. Introduction

Despite this diversity in the organizational culture present in the guidelines ascribed to research, work objectives, concept of organizational culture considered and its operationalization, types of research on organization studied, methodologies implemented and consequently, results (Alvesson, 2013; Dauber et al., 2012; Schein, 2010; Serpa, 2016), there are usually speaking, two orientations that pervade all of these studies: a more pragmatic and prescriptive look, focusing improving organizations productivity, effectiveness and efficiency and a guideline that interpretation and understanding of the organizational functioning.

In this context of diversity of content proposals and of attainment of organizational culture, Costa (2003), who mobilising Schein's (1985) typology and some of Ott's (1989) improvements, presents three levels of components of organizational culture:

Level 1 (artefacts): the most visible level of culture, relatively easy to observe although more difficult to interpret, composed of a wide range of manifestations: physical space, material objects, arrangements, technologies, written and spoken language, anecdotes, metaphors, stories, myths, artistic productions, rituals, ceremonies, heroes, historical remains, traditions, symbols, habits, rules and standards, patterns of behaviour;

Level 2 (values): less visible than the first but more aware than the third, encompasses a whole set of elements that seek to ascribe sense to and justify the organizational action, specifically values and beliefs, attitudes, organizational ethics, ideologies, justifications for action, knowledge, intentions, vision and mission, feelings;

Level 3 (key assumptions): set of assumptions taken as true, invisible, internalised in individuals (at a pre-conscious or even unconscious level) that are expressed in the conceptions about the relationships with the environment (domination, submission, harmonisation), of the nature of reality (real, unreal, facts) and of the truth (revealed, discovered), of human nature (good, bad, perfection), of the nature of human activity (activity, passivity, work, leisure) and of the nature of human relationships (cooperation, competition, individualism, power, love).

These three levels of meaning, from the most to the least obvious and visible as constituents of the culture of an organization, allow its apprehension.

However, researchers often value and focus their attention on one or some of these elements, rather than on them.

Schein, an unavoidable author:

Schein (2010) is one of the classic authors of organizational culture studies that have greatly influenced this issue and is currently, an unavoidable author. The author defines group culture as *"a pattern of shared basic assumptions learned by a group as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration that has worked well enough to be considered valid"* (Schein, 2010: 18). According to Schein (1985), culture as a result of accumulated learning, results from the fact that any group, when having to deal with "survival, growth and adaptation in their environment; and internal integration that permits daily functioning and the ability to adapt and learn" (p. 18), over time invents, discovers or

develops these basic assumptions. To Schein (1985; 2004; 2010), these underlying basic assumptions result from shared values and beliefs that have been, over time, empirically tested and confirmed in problem-solving of the group or tested through “social validation” with the social consensus attained by the “shared social experience of a group” in situations of values and beliefs that cannot be tested empirically such as religious and moral values.

This researcher highlights that seeking to understand organizational culture implies an analysis focused on level 3, basic assumptions as the essence of culture that underlies the other levels of organizational culture, working the basic assumptions as seven dimensions of organizational culture that enable its decoding.

In short, in this third level of key assumptions internalised in the actors issues related to autonomy and the more or less conscious role of the subjects in the internalisation of these assumptions are to be pointed out as well as the relationship between these assumptions and the remaining levels and the same assumption may be materialised in various values and artefacts.

2. Challenges

One problematic aspect of the cultural reading is the articulation between the various levels and the corresponding elements of organizational culture which complicates also the analysis and questioning of this concept. As contributions of the study the organizational culture for the analysis of organizations in time, the enhancement of symbolic and subjective aspects with greater or lesser depth in their theoretical justification is identified.

To convene organizational culture as a more or less shared way of being, thinking and acting of a collective of people in coordination with reciprocal expectations and that provides some predictability with certain specifics in each organization, involves being aware of the implications of mobilising a concept that has some delicacy in scientific terms, both at the theory and methodology levels, in order to control these factors.^{[1][2][3][4][5][6][7][8]}

Note: This text is a shortened version and is based on Serpa (2016). An Overview of the Concept of Organizational Culture. *International Business Management*, 10(1), 51-61. For further development, see this text.

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