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## ORGANIZATIONAL CLIMATE AND CULTURE IN POLISH ADMINISTRATION SYSTEM: THEORETICAL AND PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS

This article explains organizational climate and organizational culture and presents a brief history of research. The role of national culture in understanding organizational culture and climate is explained through a specific focus on the system of Polish administration. The paper presents both theoretical literature and empirical research in the field of Polish organizational culture and climate with due respect to dysfunctions. Recommendations are made for additional thinking and research. The purpose of the study is to discover the perception of the organizational climate in the Polish system of administration from the opinions of civil servants and address this perception with the scientific literature that reveals how the Polish administration institutions possess an organizational climate and culture flawed by anti-efficiency and pathological phenomena. The results of the research indicate that despite the disconnect between the more negative image of organizational climate presented in the literature and the opinions expressed by the surveyed civil servants, large improvements are necessary to make the climate more efficient according to the latest Western standards.

**Keywords:** system of administration, civil servants, organizational culture, organizational climate, Rosenstiel and Boegel questionnaire.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Scientific writings on Polish organizational culture underline problems inherited from communism. From formal point of view Poland adopted the best Western legal and organizational standards to join the European Union. In spite of this, the basic traits of the organizational culture of Polish bureaucracy inherited from communism are still discernible in Polish system of administration. As a result, anti-efficiency organizational cultures are allegedly a common phenomenon in Polish administration offices. In this

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respect, the existing problems include for example the treatment of the citizen as a petitioner, corruption, abuse of power, nepotism, bureaucratic organizational structures and hierarchical mentality<sup>4</sup>. Organizational climate is closely connected with organizational culture. The relations between them is complex. It is suggested that organizational climate is part of culture. The purpose of this study is to verify to what extent civil servants regard the organizational climate of Polish administration offices as possessing numerous negative features. The research has been carried out on the basis of the adapted Rosenstiel and Boegel questionnaire.

## **2. ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE AND CLIMATE AND THEIR INTERRELATIONSHIPS**

Nolan & Küpers (2009) write that “Organizational climate has been found to have a close, albeit ambiguous, relationship with organizational culture to the extent that the terms are sometimes used synonymously or indiscriminately”. Nevertheless, there are differences between them. In general, the term organizational culture refers to norms and values whereas the researchers dealing with organizational climate are preoccupied with psychological and communicational aspects of organizational life influencing one's experiences at work. Culture is more objective and general whereas climate can be regarded as a subjective attitude of employees towards the organization (Schneider, Ehrhart, Macey, 2013).

Research on organizational climate was initiated by psychologists as it emerged from gestalt psychology of Levin. It assumes that the social context of work influences workers' attitude to work and productivity. Research in this area started during World War II. The foundations of research was created by Douglas McGregor and Chris Argyris. At the beginnings of the 1970s first chapters on organizational climate appeared in textbooks concerning industrial psychology (Barbera, 2014). Organizational climate informs how employees experience and perceive the company. It is influenced by leadership styles, communication practices, workload pressure and employee recognition. A positive climate fosters a sense of belonging, motivation, and higher performance. This approach posits that organizational climate arises from the intersubjectivity of members as they interact within a context established by an organization's culture (Moran, Volkwein, 1992).

Research on organizational culture was initiated within the framework of sociological and anthropological thinking and thus it focuses on the collective rather than the individual. Bogale & Debela (2024) define organizational culture as:

A group attitude that evolves over time and proves resistant to modification once established. OCs significantly influence interpersonal interactions, behaviors, and communication among employees during day-to-day work. Consequently, OC emerges as a key organizational feature and situational aspect, exhibiting potential stability or flexibility that permeates all facets and activities of the organization.

The main elements of organizational culture are as follows: beliefs, ideologies, and values, symbols, language, narratives (myths, stories), and practices (rituals and taboos) which are transmitted by way of socialization to employees in the workplace (Trice, Beyer, 1993).

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<sup>4</sup> See for example: (Kieżun, 2013; Banajski, 2007; Hensel, 2011; Dolewska, 2017; Czubocho, 2022).

As regards the relationship between organizational climate and culture, the former is part of the latter. Organizational culture is part of sociological thinking about organizations. They both decide about employees' motivation, attitudes and loyalty. The organizational climate of an organization results from its culture. Therefore, researchers propose an integration of climate and culture thinking and research. (Schneider, Ehrhart, Macey, 2011).

On the other hand, one cannot underestimate individual perception of work environment for it affects employee (public servant) satisfaction and outcome. The organizational climate emphasizes the employees' perception of work environment rather than the environment itself. This subjective perception in turn is shaped by organizational culture to a substantial degree (Mikuła, 2000). Concentrating exclusively on group properties and values leads to the underestimation of human psychology. Organizational culture is positively related to organizational climate (Kasemsap, 2017).

Organizational climate is perceived through the lens of employee position in the organizational structure. For example senior employees seek professional career advancement opportunities and positive interpersonal relations in the organization. They aim at achieving their own goals which differ from the goals of the younger staff which can be motivated by simpler stimuli, such as pay raises (Wziątek-Staško, 2021).

### **3. ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE IN POLISH ADMINISTRATION INSTITUTIONS IN THE LIGHT OF SCIENTIFIC LITERATURE**

Cultural norms and values are recorded in the subconscious of the individual during childhood and adolescence and therefore changing them is practically impossible. As a result, national culture fundamentally influences the organizational culture in a given country. Makin, Cooper & Cox (2000) write that "because organizations exist within national cultures, they can be treated as subcultures". Hatch (2002) claims that "National cultural characteristics can be seen as part of the network of meanings that make up the culture of the organization". Each organization aims to shape the employee according to its own patterns. The proper organizational culture is to ensure the success of the organization. In reality, national culture always prevails over organizational culture, deciding to a large extent about the nature of the employee's behavior in the organization (national culture decides on the specific programming of the individual's mind).

Polish culture was created in circumstances involving feudalism (serfdom was abolished as late as in 1864), living under foreign rule (national uprisings and communism) and primeval fight for survival since the 1980's onwards and disobedience to the authorities regarded as oppressive and not independent. After 1989 as a result of the fall of the communist economy and widespread unemployment there were no favorable conditions for the introduction of Western standards of public administration. These factors decide about the ineffectiveness of the organizational culture of Polish system of administration (Czubocho, 2022).

Basic features of Polish national culture involve: the cult of hierarchy, seniority and power (ceremoniality), the prevalence of autocratic management patterns, formalization (rigid organizational structures), little appreciation for professionalism (employment and promotion of people not in accordance with meritocracy criteria), lack of initiative (passivity and waiting for a superior's official order), low value of work (work is an unpleasant duty), problems with teamwork skills. Differences of opinion or friendly criticism are treated as personal attacks. The organizational culture is clearly based on

Weber's bureaucratic organizational structure model. Inappropriate systems of remuneration and division of work between employees constitute another serious problem. In the practice of Polish organizations, seniority and hierarchy count, i.e. promotions and pay rises are granted not according to the employee's merits, but according to the length of service. Other non-meritorious criteria include the influence of party affiliation, family affiliations or informal connections (interest groups, cliques) on the functioning of organizations (Bąk-Grabowska, 2010).

Characteristics of Polish managers highlighted by scientific literature coincide with Polish national culture as well. Traditionally, uncritical and loyal members of the communist party apparatus without leadership skills, were promoted in Poland. After 1989, people of the old era still commonly held important positions and old traditions in terms of promotion were consolidated. A syndrome of a random and uncharismatic boss who uses repression against subordinates, eliminating subordinates who could potentially challenge him in the future, was created. According to Western standards of public administration, a manager should be a charismatic leader, i.e. a person with leadership and interpersonal skills. Employees should follow the manager's orders because they value him and not out of fear (the manager should have informal authority). The culture of an organization is determined by the management, which sets standards of behavior. Leadership skills, openness and free communication are important (Srokowski 2010).

The manager should give the subordinate a sense of strength as a leader and guide. In Polish conditions, managers often underline their authority and power over the employee's professional life requiring ceremonial treatment. Other flaws of Polish managers include a conviction of their own infallibility combined with a lack of tolerance for those who think independently, surrounding themselves with flatterers, dividing subordinates into their own and outsiders. A manager may not distinguish his own interests from the interests of the organization or identify his or her interests with the interests of the organization. Negative traits of managers are reinforced by the existence of a climate of impunity for public officials are rather rarely brought to justice. To sum up, scientific literature on the organizational climate of Polish public institutions underline its bureaucratic and authoritarian character (Czubocho, 2013).

There were also empirical research carried out on Polish organizational culture. The problems of Polish organizational culture include: the existence of informal groups in the organization which undermine the official rules promoted by organizations (40 percent of answers); underestimating the importance of the social life of the organization by the management (30 percent of answers) and not accepting common goals, values, norms and views at the individual or group level (21 percent of answers). The lack of a common language and conceptual apparatus characteristic of individual groups functioning in the organization (32 percent of answers) and the lack of clear indicators of desirable and undesirable behaviors in the organization (32 percent of answers). Employees are not motivated to work hard (42 percent of answers) and their acceptance for the system and managers is rather low (37 percent of answers). In this context Pietruszka-Ortyl (2016) writes:

Such results suggest the conclusion that organizational culture is not the subject of specific actions by managers of organizations, they do not try to shape it, identify the elements that create this core of the life of the enterprise. This may translate into a lack of employee involvement in the enterprise they are associated with, a lack of loyalty to specific groups operating in the organization,

and thus openness in sharing knowledge, limited teamwork activities, and individual interests remain paramount).

#### 4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Organizational climate of Polish system of administration was explored through the distribution of the adapted Rosenstiel and Boegel questionnaire. Adaptation of the questionnaire to Polish circumstances has already taken place in the past (Durniat, 2012). The authors used their own version of the questionnaire referring to Polish system of administration. According to Rosenstiel and Boegel the questionnaire consists of five dimensions which are as follows:

- relationships among the employees
- style of management
- work organization
- information flow and communication within the company
- representation of employee interests
- occupational development possibilities for the employees (motivation, evaluation, promotion) (Rosenstiel, Boegel 1992).

The survey was carried out in August and September 2024 in the eastern part of Podkarpackie province. The sample included civil servants employed both by local government and the state system of administration. The survey was distributed to 140 civil servant. A 94 per cent response rate yielded 132 responses.

The main research question was as follow:

- What is the perception of the organizational climate in Polish system of administration in the opinion of civil servants?

Other research questions were formulated as well:

- If the organizational climate in the opinion of employees corresponds to the scientific literature findings?
- To what extent is the rating of organizational climate influenced by the characteristics of respondents?

Table 1. Structure of the research sample

| Measure          | Item                          | Frequency | Percentage |
|------------------|-------------------------------|-----------|------------|
| Gender           | Female                        | 72        | 55%        |
|                  | Male                          | 60        | 45%        |
| Age              | Under 45                      | 82        | 62%        |
|                  | Over 45                       | 50        | 38%        |
| Rank of employee | Entry level/trainee           | 20        | 15%        |
|                  | Regular stuff/mid-level staff | 76        | 58%        |
|                  | Managerial stuff              | 36        | 27%        |

Source: Own study.

#### 5. RESEARCH RESULTS

The respondents were asked to indicate their attitude (to what degree they agreed with the statements) on a Likert scale of 1-5 where numbers corresponded to the degree the surveyed persons agreed with the statement. Option number one corresponded to the

answer “I strongly disagree”; and option number five indicated “I strongly agree”. The overall assessment was calculated as the average rating from all sections of respondents.

Table 2. General aspects of organization functioning

|   | Women | Men  | Entry level/trainee | Regular staff/mid-level staff | Managerial staff | Staff aged 45 or younger | Staff older than 45 yo |
|---|-------|------|---------------------|-------------------------------|------------------|--------------------------|------------------------|
| In our office, great importance is attached to ensuring that everything works well.   | 3,63  | 2,86 | 3,40                | 2,94                          | 3,84             | 3,68                     | 2,64                   |
| It is no wonder that people often get sick in the conditions set by our office.   | 2,55  | 3,60 | 2,60                | 2,57                          | 2,55             | 2,31                     | 2,96                   |
| There is no sense of community here, everyone thinks only about themselves.   | 2,83  | 3,0  | 3,1                 | 2,89                          | 1,33             | 2,96                     | 2,31                   |
| It is better to keep your (personal) opinion about the internal affairs of the office to yourself - you never know how someone's honest statement will be received. | 2,97  | 3,50 | 2,88                | 3,60                          | 2,38             | 3,12                     | 3,80                   |
| If someone wants to avoid intrigues, they do not speak out about certain matters.   | 2,27  | 3,51 | 2,90                | 3,47                          | 2,44             | 3,91                     | 4,80                   |
| In our office, you can only be someone if you have good connections   | 4,02  | 3,13 | 4,30                | 4,96                          | 1,88             | 2,90                     | 3,32                   |
| Sycophants are most successful  | 3,38  | 3,20 | 4,20                | 4,30                          | 2,55             | 3,31                     | 3,40                   |

Source: Own study.

Chosen results indicate that according to men and the older staff, it is better not to talk about the internal affairs of the office (grades accordingly 3,5 and 3,8). Employees are also afraid of intrigues, especially older ones (grade 4,8). It indicates that there may be a hidden dimension of organizational climate in the analyzed offices. Communication is not entirely free among the employees.

Public administration differs from business administration in that there is no need to achieve positive financial results. Pressure is not put on civil servants to be nice to customers to encourage them to show up again and spend money on goods or services. There are no objective measures of employee performance with this respect (still, civil servants are trained to adopt business standards). The organizational climate of offices theoretically should be more relaxed as managers have less freedom in the field of personnel management. The surveyed civil servants grade general working conditions rather favorably. For example they claim that you are not pushed to work constantly; you are not treated unfairly; superiors make sure that cooperation between subordinates is free from friction and conflict. At the same time employees claim that there are some problems with communication between supervisors and subordinates. One cannot talk to

managers entirely openly about problems if one is dissatisfied with something and superiors pretend to take into account the opinions of the staff but not necessarily take them into account.

Table 3. Opinions concerning the management of organization

|   | Women | Men  | Entry level/trainee | Regular staff/mid-level staff | Managerial staff | Staff aged 45 or younger | Staff older than 45 yo |
|---|-------|------|---------------------|-------------------------------|------------------|--------------------------|------------------------|
| Good work is appropriately appreciated by our superiors.  | 4,08  | 2,90 | 3,20                | 2,89                          | 3,65             | 3,02                     | 2,96                   |
| Most problems are solved through talks with superiors, during which the opinions of employees are taken into account. | 3,62  | 4,06 | 4,10                | 3,96                          | 3,58             | 3,87                     | 3,66                   |
| Our superiors make sure that cooperation between subordinates is free from friction and conflict.                     | 3,38  | 3,61 | 3,53                | 3,57                          | 3,63             | 3,78                     | 3,89                   |
| Our superiors want to give the impression that they know everything   | 3,38  | 3,63 | 3,40                | 3,65                          | 3,22             | 2,75                     | 3,32                   |
| Our superiors try to blame their mistakes on us.  | 1,43  | 3,10 | 3,70                | 3,18                          | 2,2              | 2,76                     | 3,41                   |
| Decisions are discussed with employees, but their implementation is completely different than agreed.                 | 2,58  | 3,66 | 3,50                | 3,0                           | 3,58             | 3,12                     | 2,97                   |
| Supervisors understand that situations should shaped in such way that everyone can increase their efficiency.         | 3,20  | 3,43 | 3,50                | 3,21                          | 2,55             | 2,98                     | 3,10                   |
| Supervisors understand our concerns and pains.  | 2,77  | 2,86 | 2,40                | 3,92                          | 2,84             | 2,76                     | 3,96                   |
| Supervisors treat us unfairly.  | 2,63  | 2,53 | 2,40                | 2,50                          | 2,27             | 2,48                     | 1,98                   |
| If you are dissatisfied with something, you can talk about it openly with your superior.                              | 2,97  | 3,97 | 2,10                | 3,13                          | 3,44             | 3,58                     | 3,87                   |
| In our company, you are constantly pushed to work.  | 2,61  | 2,10 | 2,60                | 2,78                          | 2,55             | 2,33                     | 2,97                   |
| When making decisions that directly concern employees, they are not asked for their opinion in advance.               | 2,25  | 3,52 | 1,70                | 2,89                          | 2,44             | 2,22                     | 3,02                   |

Source: Own study.

Table 4. Work organization and communication

|   | Women | Men  | Entry level/trainee | Regular staff/mid-level staff | Managerial staff | Staff aged 45 or younger | Staff older than 45 yo |
|---|-------|------|---------------------|-------------------------------|------------------|--------------------------|------------------------|
| Working conditions leave much to be desired.  | 2,50  | 2,14 | 2,60                | 2,55                          | 1,94             | 2,47                     | 2,50                   |
| Everyone has to fight for their own interests to be taken into account.                           | 2,61  | 1,98 | 2,80                | 2,84                          | 2,05             | 2,60                     | 2,56                   |
| Gossip takes the place of factual information.  | 2,75  | 1,84 | 3,60                | 2,39                          | 2,05             | 3,20                     | 2,03                   |
| It often happens that we are presented with faits accomplis                                       | 2,80  | 2,32 | 3,80                | 3,02                          | 2,16             | 3,18                     | 2,98                   |
| The management of our company is ready to take into account the ideas and proposals of employees. | 3,16  | 3,74 | 2,20                | 3,21                          | 3,65             | 3,10                     | 3,60                   |
| Tasks are distributed fairly.   | 3,19  | 3,56 | 3,63                | 2,49                          | 3,93             | 3,44                     | 3,11                   |

Source: Own study.

The managerial staff is not oppressive at least pretending that they intend to create good working conditions and relations among civil servants. On the other hand, the organizational climate is formalized and the main preoccupation of the superiors is acting in accordance with the law rather than creating pro-efficiency organizational climate. One can say that the rule of law is more important than creating effective team work favouring achieving goals. The obtained results demonstrate that there are problems with communication (gossip, intrigues, lack of unrestrained relations with superiors) which go against the main tenets of current management standards in business setting. No wonder that with reference to pro-efficiency conditions the grade awarded by the surveyed civil servants to their organizations is 3,13.

## 6. CONCLUSIONS

The main objective of the study was to investigate whether the organizational climate in Polish system of administration as presented in scientific literature is confirmed by the employed civil servants. The rather negative portrayal of the climate in literature was only partially confirmed by the surveyed civil servants. The rating awarded by civil servants to their organizations is average which indicates that they perceive the examined dimensions of organizational climate as fairly acceptable. The organizational climate is not as dysfunctional as it might seem. It might be that scientific literature highlights some pathological phenomena which are less widespread than one might think. On the other hand, civil servants are immersed in the culture of their institutions and therefore, they may regard it as natural whereas scientists apply the standards of Western public and business administration as the point of reference. It is necessary to look at the culture and climate of organizations from the outside to judge them impartially.



From sociological point of view grading is always a function of the initial assumptions. Therefore, in spite of the fact that the results are better than expected, the organizational culture and climate of Polish system of administration leave much room for improvements. Some data are indicative of serious problems. For instance, in terms of creating conditions for effective work employees awarded their superiors a grade of 3,13. The grade seems too low to foster a pro-efficiency organizational climate which requires stronger motivation of employees and unrestrained communication. With regard the demographic structure of respondents the results are inconclusive. In case of some questions employees older than 45 years old view the organizational climate more negatively than younger ones and men tend to rate the organizational climate lower than women. Nevertheless, general results do not differ substantially. It comes as no surprise that the managerial staff was most satisfied with the organizational climate as they contribute to its creation to a degree and benefit from it.

As far as recommendations for additional thinking and research are concerned, the vast majority of research on organizational culture and climate is made in business setting. Nevertheless, organizational culture and climate in public institutions and business setting differ to a substantial degree and therefore, the research results achieved in business setting cannot be automatically transferred to the public sphere. In the area of public administration, the elements that influence its culture and distinguish it from the business culture are as follows:

- formalized nature, hierarchy, weak connection between work results and employee remuneration;
- less autonomy of the manager in the area of personnel management, which results in lower motivation, greater aversion to risk taking;
- relations of the client with the office based on legal obligation (dependence on the official who is not interested in attracting clients) (Młodzik, 2014).

In consequence, knowledge management, and job performance play a less important role in public administration setting. Hence, low motivation of civil servants in the area of promoting the image of the office. For the above mentioned reasons it is difficult to create a pro-efficiency organizational climate in public administration. The perception of organizational climate depends on the position of employees in organizational structure. For example, senior employees seek professional career advancement opportunities and positive interpersonal relations within the organization.

As a result, civil servants call for changes in the organizational climate involving granting them greater independence and responsibility in performing tasks (Seredocha, 2013). They would like to work in accordance with the offensive employee model within the framework of a pro-efficiency culture. They postulate appreciating professionals (knowledge workers), reducing bureaucracy in offices and making the work of offices more flexible. They confirm the need for changes in the organizational culture. Unfortunately, they see certain barriers in this respect on the part of management.

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