

Bozhidara Kriviradeva

Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”, Sofia, Bulgaria

## Culture and leadership in social work organizations (Results of empirical research)

**Abstract:** In this paper are presented results of empirical research on the types of organizational culture and the influence of the leader on the efficiency of social work organizations. The empirical research was carried out on the basis of a questionnaire created for social work organizations, working within Sofia Municipality.

**Keywords:** organizational culture, social work organizations, leader, leadership

In recent years more and more scientists are trying to describe the role of the organizational culture in building an organization and maintaining its efficient functioning. Nevertheless only few of them have researched social organizations and, in particular, the social work organizations. Social work organizations have evolved significantly in last decades and are continuing to evolve as the policy in the field of social protection for vulnerable groups is changing slowly, but consistently, as it strives to satisfy the needs of the population and it is the best way to protect them with dignity. This is the reason why we find special interest to explore the place and role of the culture and leadership in the organizations for social work. Within the framework of project “Features and characteristics of organizational culture in social organizations”, funded by Research Fund at Sofia University “St. Kl. Ohridski” we have developed and tested a tool for exploring and analyzing the type of organizational culture in social organizations, namely educational institutions and organizations for social work. In the course of our

work we decided to explore the views of employees in various social work organizations, existing within the territory of Sofia Municipality. They were asked to give their opinion about the types of organizational culture and leadership within the social work organizations, they are working in.

Sofia Municipality is a provider of 30 social services in the community and of 12 specialized institutions for social services for children and adults. Sofia Municipality also funds from its budget yearly the program “Assistants for independent life” according to the Act for provision of social services.<sup>1</sup>

The questions in the questionnaire are distributed in eight major units, as it follows:

- Common questions – from 1<sup>st</sup> to 3<sup>rd</sup> question;
- A system of values and standards of behavior – from 4<sup>th</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup> question;
- Mottos, slogans, symbols – from 11<sup>th</sup> to 15<sup>th</sup> question;
- Myths, legends and characters – from 16<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup> question;
- Characteristics of manager and good employee – from 18<sup>th</sup> to 23<sup>rd</sup> question;
- Traditions in management (managerial functions) and uniqueness of the organization – from 24<sup>th</sup> to 30<sup>th</sup> question;
- Satisfaction of the functioning of the organization – from 31<sup>st</sup> to 37<sup>th</sup> question;
- Personnel policy and demographic data – from 38<sup>th</sup> to 43<sup>rd</sup> question.
- When structuring the questionnaire for employees in social organizations (educational institutions and social work organizations) we have used already existing questionnaires, such as:
  - An adapted questionnaire for exploring the type of organizational culture, developed by Tomas Harrison – questions 20, 21, 23, 25, 26 and 27 from our questionnaire;
  - Gareth R. Jones, Jennifer M. Gefrge, Contemporary management – questions 6, 8, 19 and 24 from our questionnaire. Some of the questions in our questionnaire are copied and further on adapted for the needs of our empirical research from published in Internet Questionnaire for corporate culture diagnosis<sup>2</sup>.

The empirical research was conducted from February until May 2014. 217 respondents took part in the research (aged between 24 and 65 years). 244

<sup>1</sup> [http://dsd.sofia.bg/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=32&Itemid=49](http://dsd.sofia.bg/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=32&Itemid=49), (access: 20.04.2014).

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.corpculture.ru/> (access: 20.04.2014).

respondents have started to fill the questionnaire, but only 217 have responded to all of the questions. 158 of the researched employees are working within their organization between 1 and 10 years, 36 are employed in the organization between 11 and 20 years, 16 more are employed between 21 and 30 years in the same organization and 7 persons indicate that work within the organization between 31 and 40 years.

166 of all questioned professionals indicate that they work in this position between 1 and 10 years, 36 more work between 11 and 20 years, 13 – between 21 and 30 years and only 2 respondents indicate that they occupy the same position for 35 years. 23 of all researched indicate that they currently occupy the position of Office Director, 20 are heads of Unit or Department and the other 174 indicate that are employees in social work organization. Only 35 of all respondents are male and the other 182 are female. In the empirical research were involved professionals, working in social work organizations, which provide various social services, for example, professionals working in Day care center for people with mental disorders, Social learning and professional center, different types of children homes or homes for elderly, Transitional housing, Center for public support, Saycare center for children with disabilities, Crisis Center, Center for temporary accommodation, Daycare center for social rehabilitation and integration for people with autistic spectrum disorders.

The analysis of the empirical research follows the main blocks of the questionnaire. The purpose of the analysis is to identify the types of organizational culture (strong, weak or moderate) of the social work organizations which took part in the research and to determine the impact of the manager for their functioning.

According to the *first block of the questionnaire* (General questions) we can see that 94% of all respondents believe that their organization has a specific organizational culture, and the other 6 % left, cannot determine whether there has been such organizational culture. 65.2% think that the specifics of their organizational culture consists of the rules and regulations imposed on it. 56.4% of the respondents indicate that the specific culture in their organization can be seen clearly in the way in which people interact between each other and with users of social services. 50.5% see the characteristic features of organizational culture in the positive relation between team members and users of the services and 43.1% indicate the good manners and relations between the members of the team. Respect of others and respect for other peoples opinion is important for employees in social work organizations, as stated by 36.3 % and 25.5% believe that it is important to maintain positive view in crisis situations. According to 46.5% of all respondents

the culture of the organization influences their way of communicating, 45.6% indicate that the culture of the organization helps them to be confident and have peace of mind in order to do their daily tasks in the best possible way. 39.6% of all questioned state that they work better in a team, because this is encouraged by the managers. The organizational culture helps 29.5% of the employees to be more positive and to cope with their daily tasks, 24.4% states that the culture stimulates them to be creative, because it provokes them to develop their skills, to seek for answers of new questions and another 19.8% say that they are enthusiastic to perform their tasks in better way, and consider new activities and are creative, because they are supported by the management.

From above mentioned answers of the questionnaire, it could be seen that the organizational culture is particularly important for all employees in the researched organizations. This is so, because on the organizational culture depends to what extent and how the main tasks will be implemented and whether the mission and vision about the organization will be carried out in the best possible way, affecting positively the employed specialists and the users of the provided social services.

The *second main block in the questionnaire* includes questions about the system of values and behavior adopted in the organization. 98.6% of the respondents state, that they are familiar with the mission of the organization and 94.9% state that in their organization there is a clear ethical code, moral and standards for professional practice. 85.7% of all surveyed professionals agree with the established rules and ethics in their organization, 8.3% do not find the rules and ethics sufficient enough and 6% of the respondents state that the existing rules are created only for one part of the employees; those rules empower people, who usually exceed their rights and powers; give opportunity to some people not to take responsibility and not to respect the opinion of more peaceful and humble employees; encourage the written and official communication, when actual direct communication is needed; do not encourage ethical behavior, good attitude towards service users and daily execution of professional tasks. Most of the researched professionals (71.9%) indicate that their service users do not know the specifics of the organizational culture, and another 28.1% are not aware of it. 60.4% of the employees state that they have informed about the organizational culture when applying for a job position in the organization. 40.6% of them get information from the head of the Unit or Department, 32.7% gathered information when observing the process of work and 25.3% had information about the organizational culture in advance (f.e. some of them have had training in the

organization, have used some of the services, have gathered informal information from media or other people who have had contact with the organization). 12.9% of the respondents got information about organizational culture when communicating with other staff members.

We find it important to understand whether there is an overlap of personal and organizational values for people working in social work organizations. Because of this, we tried to research which 5 values are especially important for professionals, as individuals and as experts, working in social work organizations. When creating the questionnaire we used the 18 terminal and 18 instrumental values from Milton Rokeach. According to him, the terminal values correspond to the personal conviction of the individual to reach a target and the instrumental values include personal conviction about the desired behavior or the way of behavior. The terminal values often lead to formation of norms or informal rules of behavior, or such behavior that is considered significant for a large part of the group or the organization, such as sincere or polite interaction between member staff. In order to research the most important terminal and instrumental values, we asked our respondents to answer few questions. The questions are based on the two types of values, described by M. Rokeach. On the basis of these questions we are able to see the most important personal and organizational values. The data we collected within this topic is presented in the table below, in order to get a clearer view on the issue.

**Table 1.** Important values and characteristics on personal level and for social work organizations

Values with significant importance for individuals working in social work organizations	Characteristics that are significant for employees in social work organizations
Security for the family (care for people who we love) – 68.7%	Capable (competent, effective) – 73.7%
Success (satisfaction) – 48.8%	Useful (he/she works for others wellbeing) – 50.7%
Wisdom (mature understanding of life) – 43.8%	Capable of self-control (self-discipline) – 46.5%
Inner harmony (freedom from internal conflicts) – 39.6%	Individual with imagination (proactive, creative) – 44.7%
Self-confidence (self-esteem) – 36.9%	Broad minded individual (with an open mind) – 41.5%

As can be seen from the results obtained, the answers go beyond 100%. This is because respondents were asked to choose the 5 values, which have the greatest significance according to their opinion.

Summarizing the above mentioned 2 questions it becomes visible that employees in social work organizations place their priority in the safety of their family, later on the personal satisfaction, harmony and self-respect. When an individual finds family and mental comfort significant, that may mean that this individual would put maximum effort in his/her work to stimulate positive relationship between service users and their families and would offer good examples from his/her own experience in coping with difficult life situations, especially if service users are in transition or are failing to cope with their current family situation. When an individual takes care of his/her personal and mental comfort, he/she is able to act as a positive example to service users and to assist them in reaching such comfort. Whatever our work is, or we are trying to do, we need to know our strengths and weaknesses. Only this way we could improve our current life situation, we could identify our weaknesses and work for overcoming them, so we could improve ourselves and would be able to pay attention and to help other people to develop themselves.

Social work organizations need to hire capable and ambitious people, individuals who are working for others people wellbeing, who are self-disciplined, proactive, creative and open minded. This is the way in which social work organizations will go on forward, will evolve according to the special needs of their service users. There is nothing better than developing organizations, organizations that seek to respond as quickly as possible to the arising needs of the society which is actually the main mission of each social work organization. We can summarize from this second block of questions that employees working in social work organizations are familiar with the mission of the organization. There are also rules and regulations which are known largely by employees and service users in the organization. The main values, important for the employees are also synchronized with the mission of the organization.

The *third main block of the questionnaire* includes questions about mottos, slogans and symbols in the organization. 61.8% of the respondents indicate that they do not know whether such exists, 12.9% believe that they do not exist and only 25.3% indicate that slogans, mottos and symbols are present in the organization they are working in. 59.9% of all respondents indicated that their organization has a company logo (symbol), 6% don't know whether such exists and 34.1% are not aware that the organization has its logo. 90.8% of those, who know about the

company logo, believe that this logo represents adequately the aims, tasks, philosophy and the mission of the organization, another 6.9% cannot see whether there is such connection and 2.3% are quite sure that the existing logo does not reflect at all on the aims and the mission of the organization. 98.5% of the respondents indicate that they are familiar with the meaning of the company logo and where it is used (documentation papers – 85.4%; advertisements – 51.5%; gifts and souvenirs – 32.3%; interior of the organization – 29.2%, mass media – 14.6%; official ceremonies – 13.8%). Very few of the employees do not know what the meaning of the company logo is – only 0.16%.

The results we obtain from this third block of questions indicate that there is a strong organizational culture in the surveyed social work organizations. We could state this, because most of the employees are familiar with the company logo or symbol and know where and how it is used. The company logo or symbol represents adequately the aims, goals, philosophy and mission of the organization. It is visible that there are some employees who have never heard about specific mottos or slogans, used in their organization. This should be taken into account and managers should make effort to promote these symbols among employees, in order to improve their daily performance and to affect positively the mission of the organization.

In the *fourth block of questions* 11.1% of the respondents answer, that in their organization exist myths and legends concerning its founding, but almost none of the respondents is able to indicate specific myths or legends. This contradiction could mean that the respondents did not understand properly the question or did not want to give honest answer of it, because in the theory is well known that all organizations have significant events, rituals etc. 60.8% of the respondents cannot give information who the main character in the history of their organization is. The other part believe that the main character is the manager, followed by the service users, social workers, psychologists and other staff members. These results indicate some weak points in the culture in social work organizations.

*Fifth and sixth blocks of the questionnaire* are analyzed together. As we mentioned above part of the sixth block of questions is based on the questionnaire of Thomas Harrison and those questions are consolidated in order to improve the presentation of the results of the survey.

It is interesting to note that employees have the same requirements about their immediate supervisor and the head of the organization. The results indicate clearly that there is a strong culture in social work organizations. On another hand it is visible that managers (directors, heads of units or departments)

perform their work in cooperation between each other. They are extraverts and conscientiously fulfill their work. In the following cases the first number presented correlates to the Manager of the organization and the second number is about the requirements to the direct line manager. According to 60.8% (considering the manager) and 53% (considering the direct line manager) of all the respondents the good manager have to be able to communicate effectively with people. 52.1% and 48.4% believe that good manager should provoke positive emotions in its employees and should motivate its employees to perform their tasks in the best possible way. 86% of all respondents believe that a good manager should have organizational skills and self-discipline and 61.8% give importance to original ideas of the manager, wide-ranging interests, openness to people and braveness to solve each crisis. The above described responses exceed 100% because the respondents indicated more than one possible answer.

The following questions aim to describe the good manager and the good employee. Those questions are originally from Thomas Harrison's questionnaire. The results from them show that dominating culture in social work organizations is the culture of the role (in 4 of the questions dominates the culture of the role, in 2 other questions dominates the culture of the task and one more question is with domination of the culture of the individual). Exactly the same outcomes were obtained in a previous study, conducted among lecturers, employees and students in Sofia University, particularly in Faculty of pedagogy. These results prove that the culture of the role is typical for social work organizations (educational institutions and organizations for social work). What does this type of culture means? The culture of the role is usually seen as classical, formal organization – perhaps better known as bureaucratic – it can be drawn as a temple. This kind of culture is characterized by strong functional or specialized areas, such as finance and marketing departments – those are the columns of the temple, which are coordinated by a small group of senior management. There is a high degree of formalization, the activities in the functional areas and the interactions between them are controlled by the rules and procedures governing the work and credentials, ways of communication and the settlement of disputes between functional areas. The power of the status is the main source of power in the culture of the role. The main methods of influence are the rules and procedures. The efficiency of this type of culture depends on the rationality in allocation of work and responsibilities. This type of organization is likely to be thriving in sustainable environment, stable, predictable and controllable market conditions, where the life cycle of the services provided is relatively long. The culture of the role is



difficult to adapt to changes. This type of culture usually realizes the need for change quite slowly and in the same way responds to it slowly. The power of the role is typical in organizations where economies of scale are more important than flexibility or technical expertise and depth of specialization are more important than product innovation or cost of services. The culture of the role requires such manager who prefers security and predictability, that wish to succeed by fulfilling, but not through outstanding personal contribution. Such managers would be less interested in improving their results, but would prefer to improve their specialization, by applying methodologies<sup>3</sup>. 80.2% of the respondents believe that important decisions are taken by the director of the organization, another 8.3% think that the decisions are taken by specialist, who has more information and knowledge about the problem and only 6.5% state that decisions are made by the head of the unit or department.

It was important for us to know whether each social work organization has its unique specifics, but the results from the questionnaire show that listed characteristics overlap in all organizations, but still we can state that there is a strong organizational culture. The main characteristics of the researched social work organizations are: “responsibility of employees working within the organization, teamwork, service users, expression of tolerance from employees and understanding to service users, professionalism and creativity in performing tasks”.

Our respondents ranged main criteria which they believed are important for perception and evaluation by the service users – “respect, trust, understanding, protection, support, honesty, accuracy, fast and quality service, empathy, quality of the offered services”. Above, as in the previous question, are quoted thoughts, written in the questionnaire by respondents. Generally these are the prevailing opinions and they show us unity in perception and prove once again that in the organization exists strong culture. Our empirical research data clearly indicates that researched employees feel satisfied when performing their daily duties. Respondents indicate that during the last week, before fulfilling the questionnaire, they have been active, felt strong and were aroused in the implementation of their current tasks, were also enthusiastic, energetic and have felt relaxed when performing their duties.

*The seventh block of questions* seeks to gather information about satisfaction of employees working in social work organizations. 72.4% of all respondents

---

<sup>3</sup> J. Oldman, *Разбиране на организационната култура*, кн. 8 от „Ефективният мениджър”, НБУ 1994.

indicate that it does not exist sufficient system for payment, 13.4% believe that their organization does not exploit the willingness of employees to take responsibilities, 12.4% believe that personal initiative is not supported and another 11.1% believe that management does not make use of the existing team spirit between the members in the organization. On other hand we have to mention that researched employees are fully satisfied with: director leadership style, head of the unit leadership style, the work and the functioning of the Unit/Department in which they work, the policy and management in the organization, the assessment of their work and the atmosphere in the organization as a whole. As can be seen from the obtained results, employees feel calm when they get fair assessment, the managers or line managers work effectively and the climate in the organization is good. These outcomes also leads us to one strong organizational culture. As seen above, respondents have the same expectations to the head of the unit and to the manager of the organization. With regard to typical activities in social work organizations and the need of wide range of paperwork it is not surprising that most of our respondents indicate that they used most time for paperwork during the week preceding the questionnaire. Preparing papers is the most time consuming activity, followed by validation of documents and presenting them to the managers. These data also match perfectly with the results obtained in our previous research among professionals and students in Sofia University. Large part of employees do not have time to waste in solving current procedural or administrative questions. 27.6% of the respondents indicate that once a month they have to solve unusual questions, which are not part of their official obligations and credentials. 24% more state that they have to perform unusual tasks several times a week, another 21.2% do this at least once a week and 18.4% specify that they deal daily with unusual tasks. These responses correlate with the previous question and again indicate strong organizational culture. Answers to this and the previous question overlap by 100% with the replies given by the specialists and students of Sofia University. This unequivocally states that culture in social work organizations (respectively organizations for social work and educational institutions) overlap and does have the same characteristics of strong organizational culture. One of the significant differences between the two social organizations consider the possibility for innovation. 35% of the respondents in social work organizations believe that their organization, department or unit does not encourage them to make suggestions for innovation and a greater percent – 62.8% of the researched students, lecturers and employees in the university state that they are not stimulated to make any innovations. So we could conclude that employees

in social work organizations feel stimulated to greater extent to innovate and to seek opportunities to improve the effectiveness of their work. Respondents in the current research indicate different approaches that management can obtain in order to encourage innovations “teamwork which gives the impetus for new ideas to improve the work, team buildings, inclusion in trainings, freedom to organize individual and group work with children, seeking for feedback in various issues, knowing the members of other units of the organization, responding to proposals, etc.”<sup>4</sup>80% of all respondents indicate that incentive of employees is the primary measure that can improve the performance in the organization. They define it by “dignified wages, good attitude to the team and social benefits”<sup>5</sup>.

The *eight block of questions* and the results presented lead to the conclusion that there is a strong organizational culture in social work organizations. We can draw the conclusion that the culture in organizations for social work is strong. It corresponds to the classical formal organization known as bureaucratic. The manager of the organization conscientiously performs his/ her daily tasks and is able to coordinate his/her decisions, has a responsible attitude towards his/her position and is extrovert.

On one hand the organizations possessing strong culture have a common set of values and norms that bind the members of the organization and promote their inclusion in the process of achieving the organizational goals. On other hand strong organizational culture does not create only advantages, but it is also preventing or disturbing the process of innovation. This is why changes in organization with strong culture are difficult for implementing. It is not necessary that sudden changes in social work organizations will lead to higher effectiveness. Smooth changes which follow the different needs of service users can lead to better results, because social services should firstly comply with the needs of their users. This is the reason we think that strong organizational culture does not harm social work organization, on the contrary, it leads to better outcomes.

---

<sup>4</sup> Opinion of respondents, written in the questionnaire.

<sup>5</sup> Ibidem.

**Bibliography:**

Джойс Олдман, *Разбиране на организационната култура*, кн. 8 от „Ефективният мениджър”, НБУ, 1994.

Gareth R. Jones, Jennifer M. Gefrge, *Contemporary management*, Boston 2008.

<http://www.corpculture.ru/> (access: 20.04.2014).

[http://dsd.sofia.bg/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=32&Itemid=49](http://dsd.sofia.bg/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=32&Itemid=49) (access: 20. 04. 2014).