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Problems of Quality Culture Assessment in Higher Education

Abstract: Quality culture refers to an organisational culture that intends to enhance quality. It should be seen not as a set of procedures, but as a context in which efforts are aimed to achieve broadly understood improvement of the organization. Quality culture contains a cultural/psychological element and a structural/managerial part, which are described in this article.

The purpose of the paper is to create a better understanding of quality culture in higher education, as well as to characterize the procedure of assessing quality culture and its elements. The article presents the concept of quality culture that grows out of the issues of organizational culture and quality management. It contains the definition of quality culture in higher education and the description of selected methods and instruments used for assessment of: organizational culture, quality management systems, and quality culture.

Key words: quality culture, higher education, assessment

Introduction

The concept of quality culture in higher education is closely related to the study of organizational culture and quality management. It is useful and it should be used in the analysis of management processes, however currently, the research on quality culture in higher education, particularly in Poland, is at an early stage [Seliga, Sułkowski, Woźniak 2016]. „There is a lack of a comprehensive, well-established description, model and methodology of research in the area of quality culture in higher education institutions” [Sułkowski 2016, p. 75]. The solutions which combine tangible, structural/managerial ele-

ments (e.g. quality management systems) and intangible, cultural/psychological parts (e.g. commitment, shared values) are needed to create quality culture. Quality culture in higher education institutions (HEIs) is still a challenge for the theory and practice of management, especially since it is an area of interdisciplinary research, which combines problems of cultural anthropology, sociology and pedagogy. These reasons outline the need for research described in this study.

By taking a theoretical approach to examining quality culture, starting with an examination of the concepts of organizational culture and quality management, the aim of this paper is to create a better understanding of quality culture in higher education, as well as to characterize the procedure of assessing quality culture in higher education. The research method, named by Apanowicz method of analysis and criticism of the literature, was used to answer the following research questions:

- How to assess the cultural/psychological element of quality culture?
- How to assess the structural/managerial element of quality culture?
- Are there any methods or instruments for the assessment of quality culture in higher education?

The first part of the article presents the concept of quality culture that grows out of the issues of organizational culture and quality management and might be perceived as an advanced quality management model. Next, quality culture in higher education is defined. Afterwards, selected aspects of the assessment of organizational culture and quality management systems are introduced. Based on the literature review, an assessment model of quality culture was described. The paper ends with discussion and conclusions.

Concept of quality culture

The concept of quality culture originates from the idea of organizational culture and quality management. The culture of the organization usually develops over a long period. As the organization grows, its culture is modified. Griffin [2014] indicates that the managers' role is first to learn and understand culture, and then to decide whether to maintain or change it.

Sułkowski [2008] marks that the most important cognitive problems of the organizational culture in management include among others:

- contradictions of paradigms of understanding organizational culture,
- fuzzy and diverse definitions of organizational culture,
- lack of consent of researchers regarding the model and typology of organizational culture, its dimensions, elements or levels.

The consequence of the lack of one paradigm as well as the absence of the consent of researchers in approaches to organizational culture, is the multitude of definitions of the term organizational culture and resulting from this different approach in identifying its components. The most commonly known authors of the definitions of the organizational culture are Hofstede, Schein, Schenplein and Smircich. The author of the paper, adopts the definition of Schein, according to which “the culture of a group can now be defined as a pattern of shared basic assumptions learned by a group as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, which has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems” [Schein 2010, p. 18]. Schein suggests that culture can be analyzed at different levels, depending on the degree to which the culture is visible to the observer. He points the three levels of culture [Schein 2010]:

- Artifacts (visible and feelable structures and processes).
- Espoused beliefs and values (ideals, goals, values, aspirations).
- Basic underlying assumptions (unconscious, taken-for-granted beliefs and values).

Ehlers [2009] compared the definitions of organizational culture proposed by Schein, Hofstede, Ruegg-Sturm and Morgan, and he concluded that these authors’ approaches emphasize shared values as a central element for organisational culture.

Undertaking a reflection on the subject of quality culture requires also the approximation of the concept quality management, which is defined as management with regard to quality [PN-EN ISO 9000]. Hamrol [2013] holds the view that quality management is a certain state of consciousness that can be seen as management of resources, processes and other factors directed consciously on the effects associated with quality. Among the concepts of quality management, he specifies: compliance with standards (requirements of ISO standards), Total Quality Management (TQM), Kazein, Six Sigma and Statistical Process Control.

When designing a quality management system (QMS), organizational culture should be taken into account as one of the important factors affecting the efficiency of implementation and functioning of this system. The relationship between the organizational culture and the QMS is particularly visible in the processes: communicating quality policy and objectives, improvement of the QMS and postulating changes in the procedures.

TQM is a management concept particularly closely related to quality culture. It is a management approach of an organization focused on quality, based on the participation of all its members and aiming at long term success through customer satisfaction and benefits to all members of the organisation and society [PN-EN ISO 8402]. Bright and Cooper found that TQM makes a number of assumptions about organizational culture. They point out that the QMS is shaped in the organization at the level of artifacts and behavioral rules, i.e. the most conscious ones. In the enterprises that have extensi-

ve experience in applying the principles of quality management, it is possible to shape standards and values in the long term. At the same time, the authors note that only the most advanced organizations can make effective attempts to influence selected elements of the third, unconscious level [Bright, Cooper 1993].

As the concept of quality culture emerges from the idea of organizational culture and quality management it might be defined as “a system of shared values, beliefs and norms that focuses on delighting customers and continuously improving the quality of products and services” [Malhi 2013, p. 2]. Furthermore Ehlers [2009] declares that quality cultures have tangible and intangible parts (visible and invisible) and therefore can be developed best when tangible, structural elements (e.g. quality management mechanisms) are evolving in parallel with intangible elements (e.g. commitment, values).

Quality culture in higher education

Due to the subject of research in this article, it is worth considering what organizational culture is with reference to the academic institutions. It might be defined as „persistent patterns of norms, values, practices, beliefs, and assumptions that shape the behavior of individuals and groups in a college or university and provide a frame of reference within which to interpret the meaning of events and actions on and off the campus” [Kuh, Whitt 1988, p. 6]. According to Kuh and Whitt, culture is revealed through university artifacts, such as: mission statement, architecture, academic program, language, myths, stories, symbols, rituals, and ceremonials as well as through an examination of espoused and enacted values, beliefs and assumptions shared by the academic community and other constituents.

Dill, one of the first researchers interested in the organizational culture of academic organizations, notes that „academic institutions may best be understood as value-rational organizations grounded in strong cultures described as ideologies and belief systems” [Dill 1982, p. 303]. He argues that HEIs have distinctive cultures which are developed and sustained by identifiable actions of the academic society. Among these actions he indicates two: the presentation of symbolic events (e.g. honoring a distinguished professor), which emphasize the core values of the academic institution and creating structural bonds (e.g. collective appointment of faculty authorities), which help transmit the core values of the organization [Dill 1982].

In the past three decades, the concepts of quality management, intended originally for enterprises, were broadly adopted by HEIs, what was mainly caused by the increased public demand for accountability of the higher education sector. Considering the scope of the quality management concepts, in the case of universities, two concepts may

be applied: compliance with standards – requirements of ISO 9001 and TQM. It is also advisable to develop an individual quality management model, taking into account the most appropriate elements for the university, resulting from its development strategy [Próchnicka, Tutko 2015].

A family of quality standards ISO 9000 provides guidance for all sorts of organizations who seek to ensure that their products consistently meet customer requirements. In recent years, an increasing number of educational organizations have developed a QMSs based on these standards, which was due to the growing awareness of the benefits of this doing so. On the other hand, Dumond and Johnson [2013] argue that this system is too bureaucratic, its implementation and maintenance is associated with high costs and that it is often not accepted by the academic community.

TQM is a management concept, based on the ideas by Deming and Juran. Wawak [2012] remarks, that TQM enables continuous improvement in HEIs and ensures its quick adaptation to the changing environment. On the other hand, as TQM has been applied to different academic institutions, its appropriateness and suitability are sometimes questioned. For instance, Kohn [1993] has rising concerns that TQM might be useful within industrial organizations, but not in the classroom.

The most commonly cited definition of quality culture in higher education, also adopted in this study, is the one formulated by the European University Association (EUA), according to which „quality culture refers to an organisational culture that intends to enhance quality permanently and is characterised by two distinct elements: on the one hand, a cultural/psychological element of shared values, beliefs, expectations and commitment towards quality and, on the other hand, a structural/managerial element with defined processes that enhance quality and aim at coordinating individual efforts” [EUA 2006, p. 10].

Based on the above definition, the two elements of quality culture can be identified: a cultural/psychological component and a structural/managerial part. These elements are to be considered jointly, and must be linked, through communication, discussion and participatory processes at institutional level of HEI. The above-mentioned definition refers to the idea of organizational culture and quality management, in the context of higher education.

Research methodology

The research method used in the study is the method of analysis and criticism of the literature. This method is generally exploited to demonstrate what is known and what is not, what already exists and is included in the literature and what is missing and should be proven by research [Apanowicz 2002]. In this paper the method of analysis and criti-

cism of the literature was firstly used to develop the theoretical background of the study i.e. to define the terms quality culture, and then quality culture in higher education. Secondly it was utilized to explore selected aspects of quality culture assessment in higher education.

Assuming that there are two elements of quality culture, a cultural/psychological component and a structural/managerial part, the following research questions have been posed in this study:

- How to assess the cultural/psychological element of quality culture?
- How to assess the structural/managerial element of quality culture?
- Are there any methods or instruments for the assessment of quality culture in higher education?

Assessment of quality culture

Quality culture contains a cultural/psychological element and a structural/managerial part. This division means that other methods and instruments should be used to examine each of these elements. Methodologies used to investigate the first element refer to the idea of organizational culture, and the second element refers to quality management.

Assessment of organizational culture

Researchers interested in the organizational culture refer to a rich instrumentation of cognitive and pragmatic methods and employ both, quantitative and qualitative methodologies. They might include techniques: participant observation, in-depth interviews, text analysis, focus groups, projection techniques, narrative methods, surveys and others. The results of quantitative research are descriptions of organizational cultures, that reduce the studied phenomenon merely to a few dimensions, often do not allow to fully understand the whole aspect. On the other hand, the effects of anthropological research are frequently, in turn, descriptive, dispersed and unrepresentative case studies that usually do not allow generalization [Sułkowski 2016].

Organizational culture is a complex phenomenon. Further, it is not isolated from other elements of the organization. Many parts of a cultural/psychological element of quality culture are invisible, often even subconscious, and therefore difficult to observe and measure. More complex in terms of research is the question of values that affect the behavior of members of the organization. Kostera writes, that, as a rule, research in this field is carried out using quantitative techniques, such as surveys. In her opinion, the most common way to study culture, including organizational culture, is ethnography –

qualitative research aimed at studying social processes in their natural context [Kostera, Śliwa 2010]. It is worth differentiating the methods taking into account the goal and the subject of research. If the aim is to determine what are the cultures' dimensions, the values in an organization, the characteristic patterns of behavior, quantitative research is indicated. If, however, the goal is to explain the meaning of phenomena, then qualitative research may be more effective.

There are a lot of existing qualitative and quantitative instruments for the exploration of organizational culture. Some of them are indicated in the table 1.

Table 1. Instruments for the assessment of the organizational culture

Name of the instrument	Author/source
Assessing Learning Culture Scale	Botcheva L., White C.R., Huffman L.C. (2002), <i>Learning culture and outcomes measurement practices in community agencies</i> , "The American Journal of Evaluation", 23(4), pp. 421–434.
Culture Assessment Framework	Transforming Culture and Conduct, https://www.tcc.group/solutions/protect-your-future/culture-assessment-framework-2/ .
Five Windows into Culture Assessment Framework	Levin I.M. (2000), <i>Five Windows into Culture Assessment Framework: An Assessment Framework and Approach</i> , "Organization Development Journal", 18(1), pp. 83–94.
Global Leadership and Organizational Behavior Effectiveness	GLOBE, http://globeproject.com/ .
Hofstede's Culture Measures	Hofstede G., Neuijen B., Ohayv D.D., Sanders G. (1990), <i>Measuring Organizational Cultures: A Qualitative and Quantitative Study Across Twenty Cases</i> , "Administrative Science Quarterly", 35(2), pp. 286–316.
Organizational Culture Profile (OCP)	O'Reilly C.A., Chatman J.A., Caldwell D.F. (1991), <i>People and organizational culture: A profile comparison approach to person-organization fit</i> , "Academy of Management Journal", 34(3), 487-516.
Organizational Assessment Survey	U.S. Office of Personnel Management https://www.opm.gov/policy-data-oversight/data-analysis-documentation/employee-surveys/buy-services/organizational-assessment-survey/ .
Organizational Commitment Questionnaire	Harold L.A., James L.P. (1981), <i>An Empirical Assessment of Organizational Commitment and Organizational Effectiveness</i> , "Administrative Science Quarterly", 26(1), pp. 1–14.
Organizational Culture Assessment Instrument	Cameron K., Quinn R. https://www.ocai-online.com/ .
Organizational Culture Inventory	Cooke R.A., Szumal J.L. (1993), <i>Measuring Normative Beliefs and Shared Behavioral Expectations in Organizations: The Reliability and Validity of the Organizational Culture Inventory</i> , "Psychological Reports", 72(3), pp. 1299 – 1330.
School Quality Management Culture Survey	Detert J.R., Schroeder R.G, Cudeck R. (2003), <i>The measurement of quality management culture in schools: Development and validation of the SQMCS</i> , "Journal of Operations Management", 21(3), pp. 307–328.
The Cultural Audit	Fletcher B.C., Jones F. (1992), <i>Measuring Organizational Culture: The Cultural Audit</i> , "Managerial Auditing Journal", 7(6), pp. 30–36.

Source: own elaboration.

There are certainly other instruments and approaches in the exploration of organizational culture. From the instruments presented in Table 1, it may be a good solution for higher education institutions to use School Quality Management Culture Survey (SQMCS) or Organizational Culture Assessment Instrument (OCAI).

The SQMCS is an instrument that allows to study the behavioral norms and the underlying values and beliefs, through providing verified scales for evaluating multiple aspects of a schools' quality culture.

The OCAI is a validated tool for assessing current and preferred organizational culture, developed by Quinn and Cameron. It is used to identify the organizational culture profile based on the core values, interpretations, assumptions and approaches that describe organizations. The authors generated OCAI in addition to their Competing Values Framework, based on four dominant culture types (i.e., clan, adhocracy, market, and hierarchy) [Cameron, Quinn 2015]. As an illustration, OCAI was applied to describe the organizational culture type exhibited by Ohio State University Extension personnel [Berrio 2003].

Assessment of quality management systems

The purpose of the QMS assessment is to identify and eliminate errors and hazards associated with them, and to verify if it is possible to meet the requirements of clients and organizations. Hamrol [2013] points out there are the following basic forms of QMS assessment: quality audits, management reviews, and quality awards contests.

Audit is a "systematic, independent and documented process for obtaining objective evidence and evaluating it objectively to determine the extent to which the audit criteria are fulfilled" [PN-EN ISO 9000, p. 34]. A system, process and product audit can be distinguished. The system audit allows to acquire information if the implemented QMS is effective. The process audit allows to assess the compliance of the process with the requirements specified in the procedures, etc. Whereas the product audit means an independent assessment of the product's quality.

Review is a "determination of the suitability, adequacy or effectiveness of an object to achieve established objectives" [PN-EN ISO 9000, p. 31]. The management review is realized through periodic, planned and documented meetings of the top management with persons responsible for the implementation of the quality policy objectives, and it is dedicated to the assessment of the effectiveness of QMS.

The third form of QMS assessment occurs when the organization applies for one of the quality prizes: European Quality Award, Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award, Deming Prize, The Swedish Quality Award or Canadian Framework for Business Excellence.

198 In this case, the assessment process is based on the model, appropriate for the given case.

Assessment of quality culture

The European research projects which explored quality culture problems were “Examining Quality Culture in Higher Education Institutions” conducted by the EUA and “heiQUALITY Cultures Project”, designed as a multidisciplinary cooperation project between German HEIs. The first project was aimed at identifying institutional processes and structures that support the development of an internal quality culture, while the goal of the second project was to develop a definition of the term quality culture and to develop quality culture inventory.

In the scheme of the “heiQUALITY Cultures Project” elements of quality culture were identified. These are: communication, leadership, trust, information, commitment, responsibility, and participation [Sattler, Götzen, Sonntag 2013]. Furthermore an assessment model of quality culture was developed. It is based on the basic assumptions of the EUA, regarding the two levels of quality culture: a structural-formal and an organizational-psychological level.

The structural-formal level includes different elements of quality assurance, which may be subdivided into normative (e.g. quality goals), strategic (e.g. governance structures) and operative levels (e.g. tools for evaluation). At the same time, collective and individual criteria were distinguished at the organizational-psychological level, such as commitment, responsibility, and engagement (which represent individual attitudes towards quality), and a leadership, communication, participation, and collaboration (relating to collective criteria). The mutual basis for these criteria is trust and shared values [Sattler et al. 2013].

Discussion

Mass education has led to the transition from the elite to egalitarian model of higher education, which took place at the expense of changes in the academic culture. That is why it is worth to develop quality cultures, which could replace traditional academic culture. It does not imply that universities should break with tradition. On the contrary, the quality cultures could be based on the academic tradition [Sułkowski 2016]. At the same time, they could draw on management sciences, especially from the management of the organization culture and quality management. Solutions taken from the business world should not, however, be transferred to the academic institutions without reflection. They should become a part of the created quality culture.

The present study nuances the picture of quality culture in higher education, taking into account that it is characterised by two distinct elements: a cultural/psychological

element and a structural/managerial part. The results are in line with the view, that quality culture is a complex, socially constructed phenomenon, which cannot be analyzed in isolation from the specific context in which it is embedded and cannot be transferred from one organisation to the other [Harvey, Stensaker 2008]. Ehlers [2009] also remarks that understanding of quality culture in higher education has at least two dimensions. The first one is a structural dimension, which results from quality management. The second is the dimension of values of an academic organization.

The "heiQUALITY Cultures Project" assessment model, described in this paper includes many constituents of quality culture in higher education. Ehlers [2009] shows a similar approach, and he argues that it is important to approach quality holistically and combine cultural elements, structural dimensions and competencies into one holistic framework, enabling stakeholders to develop visions and shared values. In the opinion of the author of this study, it's worth adding some elements to this model. These are customer orientation and continuous improvement.

Conclusions

The concept of quality culture is useful cognitively and should be used in the analysis of management processes in HEIs. It is also of great practical importance. In order to be able to manage quality culture, it first needs to be assessed. And this is what this paper has been devoted to. However, due to the limited size of the article, the issues of quality culture assessment were only outlined: therefore, this article may be treated as an introduction to the proper, future research.

Although in the foreign literature, many scientific publications were created in the field of quality culture in higher education, there are still only a few publications on this subject in Poland. So far, the most in-depth research was conducted by Sułkowski. It seems therefore purposeful to study quality culture with reference to the Polish higher education system.

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