

# CHANGES IN THE CULTURE OF THE ORGANIZATION OF POLISH SCHOOLS OF VARIOUS TYPES IN LIGHT OF UNDERTAKEN REFORMS

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## Abstract

The changes introduced in the system of educational of students affect the transformation of the organizational culture of Polish schools. The external values, goals and ideals imposed by the state on all members forming a school organization, can be - but are not necessarily - desirable. It depends on many factors. One of them is direct involvement in the process of transforming the educational system of all those affected by changes. Another factor is the purposefulness and suitability of the introduced changes. G. Avery (2009) emphasizes that co-creating and adapting the organizational culture to systemic changes has a positive effect on the organization's success. It is important to properly manage the elements of introducing changes in the culture of the organization in order to avoid any misunderstandings and social disappointments. School directors as educational leaders should understand how and why changes are made to the culture of Polish school organizations.

The article presents the results of quantitative research conducted in randomly selected Polish schools of various types. The aim of the study was to check knowledge among directors about who and for what purpose makes changes in the education system of students. The results show that the school heads responsible for educational processes in their schools every day knew about educational reforms, but did not take an active part in the arrangements for the directions of these changes. School heads were completely excluded from deciding on education reform. The research shows that the directors disagree about the desirability and quality of introduced changes, due to the lack of participation in their determination. Presenting proposals for introducing changes to the education system in a participatory or directive mode may affect the quality of activities undertaken in schools.

Keywords: changes in organizational culture, education, educational leadership.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Culture in organizations is a ubiquitous phenomenon. It stems from institutions such as family, society, nation, church, system of education or other organizations in which interactions between people occur. Interpersonal relations within them shape certain attitudes, behaviours and identities (Hatch, 2002, p. 204, Schein, 2004). According to Schein (2004), organizational culture can exist on three levels. The first one concerns assumptions that include ways of thinking, perceiving and experiencing. The second one is focused on values, standards and the goal. The last level is that of artifacts understood as the source of the culture's existing knowledge, visible in organizations but very often unidentified.

Schein (2004) emphasises that the culture of an organization is created and maintained by the leaders of this organization. It is undoubtedly influenced by structures, rules, norms and procedures which both stabilize and provide hierarchy to all members of the group (p. 1–2). The culture that is represented by the leader influences the style of managing the institution and the motivation of all the employees to act (Webber, 1996). Participation and involvement in reinforcing or making changes in the organization's culture are a very important factor, as, according to Schein (2004), they are ultimately the result of actions of people who try to pursue together a determined goal (p. 190). It should be emphasised that organizational culture is one of the most relevant concepts to describe and understand the functioning of school as an organization (Dorczak, 2009)

### 1.1 Organizational culture

Various types of cultures in organizations can be distinguished. Etzioni (1975) suggested that there were three types of organizations. The first one is the culture of the **coercive** organization. It manifests itself in enslaving and completely subjecting all its members to the decisions of the seniors. The employees are alienated and usually, after a while, quit such an organization. The members of an organization of this type focus on defending against the its authorities. The second type is the

**utilitarian** organization. It provides rationality, sincerity and full observance of rules and norms, where achieving goals is of utmost importance. Keeping strictly the economic norms, the employees create groups who support one another. The leaders in this type of organizational culture use motivational systems. The third type is the **normative** organization. They create space for involving their employees in co-creating their goals. They evolve in a natural way around the tasks that they are facing (p. 5–40). The organizational culture that is focused on including all its members in the actions for the good of the organization are considered the most desirable. Accepting the norms, values and behaviours of all the members of the community is beneficial for their moral involvement and identification with the organization (Schein, 2004).

It is not easy to determine the culture of a given organization and its typology. The difficulty lies in the fact that every organization can simultaneously have variations of different types of organizational cultures (Schein, 2004). However, it is important to know when and how changes in organizational culture should be introduced, as modification may influence the overall functioning of the organization (Griffin, 1998).

## 2 METHODOLOGY

The aim of the presented study was to determine the stability of school's organizational culture and to verify whether during the implementation of the educational reform (according to the Art. 117 of the Act of 14<sup>th</sup> December 2016, Implementing provisions to the Act Educational Law, Journal of Laws from 2017, items 60 and 949, as of 1<sup>st</sup> September 2017), concerning changes in the curricula and the system of schooling, any modifications in organizational culture occurred. The study was carried out among heads of schools of different types from October to the end of December 2017.

## 3 RESEARCH RESULTS

The gathered research material contains 118 answers acquired from heads of schools of different types. In the questions 2, 5, 7 and 9, the respondents had the possibility to add a comment concerning their answers. The analysis of the results presented below demonstrates the way in which systemic changes that can influence changes in school's organizational culture are implemented.

*Table 1. Answers given by heads of schools of different types to question 1.*

Question	No		Yes		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Are there any changes in the system of education of students that are currently being implemented in Poland?	4	3.4	114	96.6	118	100

Source: own elaboration.

The data presented above demonstrate that the vast majority of school heads (96.6%) know that there are changes in the system of education of students that are currently being implemented in Poland.

Only 4 of the surveyed school heads, which is 3.4% of all respondents, claim that there is no educational reform implemented in the Polish schools.

*Table 2. Answers given by heads of schools of different types to question 2.*

Question	No		Yes		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Have you had any influence on setting the goals of the changes concerning the system of education of students?	108	91.5	10	8.5	118	100

Source: own elaboration.

Analysing the results presented in Table 2, we can conclude that 108 of the surveyed school heads did not participate in setting the goals of the changes concerning the system of education of students. School heads, who in their everyday work are closest to the educational processes occurring in schools, have been mostly excluded from the process of creating the educational reform's directions.

8.5% of the respondents stated that they had influence on setting the goals of the changes concerning the system of education. However, in their comments, they did not refer to the ways in which they had influenced the changes implemented in education that have been in vigour since 1<sup>st</sup> September 2017.

**Table 3.** Answers given by heads of schools of different types to question 3.

Question	Yes		No		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Have you been informed on the plans to implement changes?	95	80.5	23	19.49	118	100

Source: own elaboration

Further analysis of the questions from the questionnaire shows that most of the heads of schools of different types (80.5%) have been informed on the plans to implement changes concerning education of students.

23 of the respondents, which is 19.49%, claim that they have not been informed about the changes that were to be introduced as of 1<sup>st</sup> September 2017. It is a significant percentage of uninformed or underinformed school heads who are responsible for the educational processes in schools. It would then be advisable to think about the correctness of the flow of information between the Ministry of Education, the regional boards of education and heads of schools of different types.

**Table 4.** Answers given by heads of schools of different types to question 4.

Question	Who, in your view, has decided on the implementation of changes in the system of education of students?	
	n	%
Parents	1	0.8
Teachers	0	0
Heads of schools and educational institutions	0	0
Municipalities and Communities	0	0
Experts in education	12	10.2
<b>Politicians connected with the Ministry of Education</b>	<b>104</b>	<b>88.1</b>
Others	1	0.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>118</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: own elaboration.

The answers given to question 4 demonstrate that 104 of the respondents (88.1%) indicate politicians connected to the Ministry of Education as those responsible for the decisions on the changes that are implemented in the system of education of students. 12 of the respondents believe that those responsible for the directions of the implemented changes are experts in education. One person indicated parents and one person said that it was others who did not qualify to any of the categories created for the purposes of this study.

According to the respondents, teachers, school heads and local authorities or communities who operate schools have no influence on the implementation of changes in the system of education of students. This is a disturbing conclusion as it is those working directly with children who have the best experience concerning the possibility of implementing educational changes.

**Table 5.** Answers given by heads of schools of different types to question 5.

Question	Yes		No		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Do you think that the changes implemented in the system of education of students are necessary?	61	51.69	57	48.31	118	100

Source: own elaboration.

The gathered information, presented in Table 5., shows that the surveyed school heads are divided almost in halves as to their opinions on the need to introduce changes in the system of education of students. 51.69% believe that the changes are necessary and 48.31% claim that they are not. The lack of a visible majority may indicate that there is a need for a common debate on the reform of education.

The information gathered in the comments to question 5 shows that the school heads point out that it would be necessary to change the system of education of future teachers. They have indicated lack of professionalism and practical knowledge of academics who prepare students for the role of teachers. All the changes should be introduced gradually after a common and deep analysis of all the problems. 6 respondents stated that those who are the closest to students, which is teachers and school heads, should participate in setting the directions of changes. One of the respondents said:

*‘What has been worked out over the past 3-4 years has been crossed out with no credit given to those who are practically connected to education. There has appeared a mess and informational chaos, teachers and school heads who prepared the documentation for the present school year (2017/2018) received the regulation in the last week (on 28<sup>th</sup> August 2017) before the beginning of the school year (1<sup>st</sup> September 2017). The need to prepare a new documentation (modification of the IPET), adapted to the new regulations, took a lot of time and energy that teachers could have devoted to work with students with special educational needs. The liquidation of middle school has caused an increase in the costs of the school’s operation by an additional grade. There was a ban to join the 7<sup>th</sup> grades of primary school with the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> grades of middle schools (...) The teachers’ salaries will not be covered by the subvention, which, by the way, does not cover the needs of class organization. It is smaller because of the new way of its calculation.’*

An important element, discussed by the school heads who answered question 5, was the need for stability, as changes can bring about chaos that discourages school heads and teachers from involving in their work. Too many changes in a too short period may disrupt the equilibrium in the didactic and educational processes. This may result in worse results of teaching and education. School heads pointed also at the lack of correlation between the vocational curricula and practical classes and at the pointlessness of creating some intra-school documents that take a lot of time and are useless. One of the respondents suggested:

*‘Changes YES but why so often? Changes in the curricula mean changes in teaching plans, changes in textbooks, changes in workbooks, changes in the tools used to measure teaching quality. How can you monitor the progress in education in the middle of all these changes? Which curricula should you refer to? After all, what do these measurements tell you, when every other year there are new curricula? I don’t remember a year that would start their schooling in primary school and end it having realized one curriculum.’*

The school heads suggested that the government should postpone the implementation of the reforms by 10 years and let schools teach and educate. After this period, it could attempt to evaluate and possibly implement some changes, not in the system itself but rather in the quality and contents of teaching.

**Table 6.** Answers given by heads of schools of different types to question 6.

Questions	What kind of teachers do you employ in your school?	
	n	%
Ambitious	72	61
Integrated	45	38.1
Improving their own skills	87	73.7
<b>Eager to work</b>	<b>89</b>	<b>75.4</b>
Creative	79	66.9
Not developing	11	9.3
Not identifying with the institution that they work in	5	4.2
Not having relations with one another	7	5.9
<b>Total</b>	<b>118 respondents gave 395 answers</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: own elaboration.

In question 6, the school heads were able to choose more than one answer. The results presented above demonstrate that the most frequently employed teachers are those who are eager to work (75.4%), those who improve their own skills (73.7%), those who are creative (66.9%) and ambitious (61%). This result proves that school heads involve their employees in their schools' work, which fosters the creation of a normative organization.

Less than half of the respondents stated that the teachers they employed were integrated (38.1%). A significant minority of the respondents indicated that the teachers they employed in their schools did not develop (9.3%), did not want to establish relations with one another (5.9%) and did not identify with the institution that they worked in (4.2%). This may result from the system of employment of teachers of particular subjects. As a result of prolonging the schooling years in primary school with simultaneous liquidation of middle school, a large group of teachers were forced to look for jobs in more than one school to work enough hours for a full-time contract (the number of hours may vary depending on the specialization).

**Table 7.** Answers given by heads of schools of different types to question 7.

Question	Yes		No		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Do you think that prolonging the schooling in primary schools to eight years is right?	59	50	59	50	118	100

Source: own elaboration.

The result concerning the rightness of prolonging the schooling in primary schools is very interesting. The surveyed school heads have divided in their opinions by halves. 50% of the respondents believe that this change was right, whereas another 50% of them stated that it was not. This result may suggest that there is a need for another round of consultations on the objectives of the implemented educational reform.

6.77% of the respondents decided to add a comment to question 7. School heads support the prolongation of the schooling in primary schools because it provides an opportunity to broaden the activities of the students' council, which fosters the development of the sense of responsibility for oneself but also for the school community in students. Classes can now be integrated more freely and cooperation between younger and older students in one school can be built. Students spent more time in one school environment which may increase their sense of personal security.

The reform has caused some dissatisfaction among the group of school heads who deal with special education. A significant change has occurred in that aspect as prolonging the schooling in primary school and the liquidation of middle school has shortened the period of special education for children with special educational needs by one year. One of the respondents said:

*'In this situation, a student with special educational needs loses a year of schooling. Until now, a student in a school for children with special educational needs had grades 1<sup>st</sup> to 3<sup>rd</sup> of primary school + 4<sup>th</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup> of primary school + 1<sup>st</sup> to 3<sup>rd</sup> of middle school + 1<sup>st</sup> to 3<sup>rd</sup> of high school = 12 years of schooling. Now it is 1<sup>st</sup> to 3<sup>rd</sup> + 4<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> + 1<sup>st</sup> to 3<sup>rd</sup> = 11 years of education for a student who needs multiple repetitions, a lot of practice in writing, reading, counting, skills concerning everyday situation, which makes the process of education significantly poorer and causes an accumulation of material in the 7<sup>th</sup> grade due to the lack of a transition period, which could allow schools to realize the curriculum in previous years.*

Therefore, we can observe that according to the school heads the reform is disadvantageous for students with special educational needs.

**Table 8.** Answers given by heads of schools of different types to question 8.

Question	Yes		No		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Do you think that the implemented changes in the system of education of students were properly thought through?	26	22	92	78	118	100

Source: own elaboration.

The results of the survey show that 92 heads of schools of different types think that the changes in the system of education of students were not properly thought through. This results proves that the vast majority of school heads did not participate in setting the directions of the improvements of educational processes that occur in schools.

22% of the respondents believe that the changes were properly thought through, though.

**Table 9.** Answers given by heads of schools of different types to question 9.

Question	In your view, what can be the reason for the resistance towards the changes in the system of education of students?	
	n	%
<b>Insecurity</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>44.1</b>
Threat for one's own interests	34	28.8
Different perception	48	40.7
Sense of loss	12	10.02
<b>Lack of participation in improving the system of education of students</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>44.1</b>
Other	24	20.03
<b>Total</b>	<b>118 respondents gave 222 answers</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: own elaboration.

The surveyed school heads were able to choose more than one answer in question 9. The gathered data presented in Table 9 shows that school heads are resistant towards the implemented changes in the system of education of students because that did not participate in its improvement, which makes them feel insecure (44.1%). 48 respondents claimed that they perceived the changes differently and 34 school heads admitted that this situation may pose a threat to their own interests. 10.02% of the respondents have a sense of loss seeing the scale of the changes and the way of their implementation. A large group of the respondents (20.03%) indicated other reasons that were not categorised.

## 4 CONCLUSIONS

In order to reinforce the organization culture of schools in the course of the reforms' implementation, all members who make up the school community should be emotionally and intellectually involved in it, as co-creation is related to the structural stability of schools (Avery, 2009). The conducted study has demonstrated that the vast majority of school heads employ teachers who are ambitious, eager to work, creative and who develop professionally. It is a perfect ground for creating a strong organizational culture that would foster employees' devotion and involvement in school's development (Avery, 2009, p. 147).

The necessity of cooperation between all the environments who make up the school community, emphasised in literature and demonstrated in a number of scientific studies, is not reflected in practise though. The conducted study presented above proves that the changes are implemented by the Polish government without proper consultations with teachers, school heads, parents and students. In the view of the respondents, Polish schools have become a weapon in a political struggle. The sense of the lack of influence over the changes proposed by the Ministry of Education may lead to frustration and discouragement among school heads. The lack of sufficient financing and well-equipped classrooms necessary for teaching 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grades in primary schools make the state of the reform of the Polish education even worse, proving that it was not thought through well enough.

Basing of the results of the conducted study, we could conclude that school heads do not participate in creating the values, goals and ideals in schools. They feel disappointed by the lack of cooperation with the government. This situation may lead to, if it has not yet, misunderstandings and social conflicts. According to Avery (2009), developing and reinforcing the organizational culture of schools with a significant participation of all interested members of school communities may also cause a disruption in the group's boundaries and in the perception of the difference between those who belong to it and those who do not. It may have a negative impact on the way of separation of powers and may disrupt the relations between employees. The lack of common acceptance for the elaborated solutions may result in an unstable organizational culture that can impede the organization's development (p. 146). We can see then that the reform of education that is implemented in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, which should introduce changes in the organizational culture adapting to the needs of the ever-developing civilization as one of its main assumption, in fact focuses on enslaving those who work in education and subjecting them to the decisions of their seniors.

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