

# TYPES OF ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE IN POLISH SCHOOLS BASED ON THE TYPOLOGY OF CH. HANDY

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## Abstract

Each school is characterized by a specific organizational culture. It deals with activities in the context of decisions taken and values, beliefs and ideologies held. Often, the type of organizational culture depends on the knowledge that its members have. The specificity of creating a culture prevailing in a particular school may be related to the awareness of norms and patterns represented by the director, who is responsible for the functioning of the institution. The role of the educational leader is very important. According to G. Avery (2009), it is essential that the system of organization is consistent. This affects the standardization of behaviors that increase the predictability of actions taken. It should be remembered that culture created in an intuitive and unpredictable way may pose a threat to the proper functioning of the school organization.

The article presents the results of research on the types of organizational culture prevailing in Polish schools of various types and their impact on activities undertaken at the facility. The author presents four types of culture proposed by Ch. Handy. The first one is focused on the authority of the director. The second concerns jointly achieved goals. The next one focuses on the role played by individual members in creating the culture of the organization. The last type focuses on the human being, where profit and competition are excluded.

Keywords: organizational culture, education, educational leadership.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Organizational culture is a complex phenomenon. It results from the processes that occur in an organization throughout many years. Kostera, Kownacki and Szumski (2000) suggested a metaphor that culture is the 'personality' of a given company (p. 372) that sets certain commonly applicable rules (Avery, 2009). It refers to behaviours, qualifications, common values, assumptions, norms, philosophies, interpretations, atmosphere in an organization, hidden rules concerning the relations within an organization, habits, thought models and certain symbols (Schein, 2004).

According to the theory by E. H. Schein (2004), culture exists on three levels. The most rooted and situated the most profoundly are assumptions and convictions. They concern what people in fact think, experience, perceive and feel. On the second level of greater awareness are located the values and norms that are socially considered desirable. They determine the goals that the members of an organization pursue. They can concern, among other things, freedom, democracy and tradition. Values are tightly connected to norms that determine unwritten rules of acceptable behaviours in an organization. The third level of culture are artifacts. They make up the core of the culture that is dominant in an organization. They are nothing but tangible, audible and visible remnants of behaviours well-rooted in an organization. The category of artifacts may include objects created by the members of the culture, language, accent, writing, rituals or ceremonies (p. 25–35).

The intensive development of the theory of organizational culture and of research in this area took place in the late 1970s and early 1980s (Kostera, Kownacki, Szumski, 2000). Many authors suggested various types of organizational cultures in their works.

R. Harrison (1972) suggested that there were four types of organizational culture. Those cultures are: the culture of power, the culture of role, the culture of task and the culture of person. Each of these types of organizational cultures was further modified by other scholars. Among others by Ch. Handy (1993) who named them with the names of gods from the Greek Mythology.

The first one, the culture of power, was named the culture of Zeus, as the organization of that type is mostly power-oriented. There is one leader, who, like Zeus, is the lord and ruler responsible for setting the goals and making decisions. The head is a strict, moody and impulsive individual. The way of exercising power depends on the leader's knowledge and on the way of thinking of those with whom

the leader is willing to cooperate. The closest co-workers of the leader are the ones who are trusted, which results in the centralization of power. The organizational culture of Zeus is strong and able to move fast among changes and threats. In his or her exercise of power, the leader uses rules, procedures and bureaucracy to a small extent. The success of the organization depends on the abilities of its heads and of the people who are the closest to him or her. The clearly determined hierarchy imposes unconditional obedience, loyalty and efficiency of the pursued goals. The strength of the culture of Zeus is based on a created network of people with whom the leader cooperates directly. Changes are introduced rarely and are usually a result of random factors or of employees' revolt. A threat for the organization's functioning may occur when the people who are the closest to the leader do not agree with his or her views and with the tasks set by him or her. In consequence, employees may give up cooperation within the organization and the efficiency of management may then be impeded (p. 184).

The next type of organization is the culture of role whose patron is Apollo. In such organizations, the most important thing is pursuing the goals in a typical and bureaucratic way, where the logic and rationality of taken actions are the bases for their functioning. The organization takes its strength from perfectly elaborated procedures, tasks, authorizations and ways of solving conflicts. Usually, a system once established is used many times. In the procedure-oriented type of culture, often it is the description of a given position that is more important than the person who takes it. Achieving the goals depends on a rational division of work and not on individual personalities. The determined character of the roles of people who are employed in the organization are more important than flexibility and innovativeness. In the culture of Apollo, tasks that could be unlawful are not undertaken. Changes occur only when the law itself changes (Handy, 1993, p. 185–189).

The third culture that was described by Ch. Handy (1993) and can be found in organizations is the culture of task. It does not have a completely equivalent guide among the mythological deities but the most relevant of them is Athena. An organization of that type is also called 'matrix' as it is task-oriented. The culture of task takes advantage of the skills of all employees to successfully achieve goals or improve the company's efficiency. Actions are taken in a flexible way, adapting easily to the current needs of the situation. Groups are created spontaneously depending on the skills of their members and tasks that have to be carried out. Employees control their work themselves and draw conclusions from the results they achieve. Cooperation and interpersonal relations are based on a mutual respect resulting from people's skills and experience. The material status or age of the employees do not impact the relations within the team. The culture of Athena develops in organizations where sensitivity, creativity and integration are more important than specialization. All the problems are solved there through dialogue and negotiations, which gives the employees the sense of co-creating the solutions. The head controls the employees only when he or she notices the need to verify the rationality of financing and employment. The organizational culture of Athena is preferred during the implementation of changes and reforms in an environment where competitiveness is highly developed. Teamwork and the effect of synergy are highly appreciated in this type of culture (p. 188–189).

The last but equally important type of culture is the person-oriented culture, whose patron according to Ch. Handy (1993) is Dionysus. It is exceptional as it serves and supports the people who are employed in it. This type of culture does not occur in many organizations. One of its characteristics is a large amount of trust granted to people who are employed in it and are allowed to take initiatives on their own. Members of the team unite when they feel that it may be useful for their own development. Profit and rivalry are usually set aside. The culture of Dionysus in an organization is difficult to manage, as the exercise of influence that can lead to changes is usually low. In such organizations, the most important thing is the satisfaction of taking actions in a friendly and supportive atmosphere. The uniting strength of the organization of this type may be a common idea or goal, bureaucracy and structures are limited to the necessary minimum (s. 189–191).

Organizational culture plays an important role. Many authors point out that it is the leader who is responsible for the development of the type of culture which is dominant in the company, as with his or her decisions he or she may influence the strategy and the structure of the organization (Avery, 2009, p. 148).

The types of organizational culture presented above were compared with the results of the conducted study, in which it was assumed that due to the on-going changes of the system of education in Poland, the most desirable organizational culture would be that of Athena, which is oriented towards flexibility and fast adaptation to the actions that need to be taken in order to implement the changes.

In 2011, R. Dorczak presented the results of the research on the culture of educational organizations in Poland. He argued that the most desirable one would be that of Athena. He emphasised that schools should appreciate teamwork that included in the decision-making processes all individuals who are interested in their functioning. This way a shared responsibility for the quality of the occurring educational processes may be built (p. 233). A teamwork-based school makes it possible to fully pursue the goals that directly influence the comprehensive education of students (Bottery, 1992).

## 2 METHODOLOGY

The aim of the study was to determine the type of organizational culture on the basis of the typology proposed by R. Harrison (1970) and modified by Ch. Handy (1993): of power – Zeus, or role – Apollo, of task – Athena and of person – Dionysus. The data used for determining the type of organizational culture were gathered from October to the end of December 2017 with a questionnaire survey that was constructed particularly for the purposes of this study.

In addition, the questionnaire allowed us to measure and compare the accordance between the existing and the desired organizational cultures in the view of school heads. A high level of accordance would prove that there is cooperation and adjustment between the existing and the desired organizational cultures. Whereas a low level of accordance may indicate a low level of integration between these two.

100 heads of randomly selected primary (54%) and middle or high (46%) schools located in Poland took part in the survey and were asked to express their own opinions on the culture of the organization that they worked in. According to the aims of the present study, the research hypotheses are as follows:

The actions of Polish school heads influence the creation of the culture of the organization that they work in.

The actions of the Polish school heads during the on-going changes of the system of education are close to the typology of the culture of Athena.

## 3 RESULTS

The gathered research material allowed us to evaluate the four cultural factors (power-Zeus, role-Apollo, task-Athena, person-Dionysus) that can be found in educational organizations according to the typology proposed by Ch. Handy (1993).

*Table 1. Evaluation of the type of organizational culture in Polish schools of different types.*

Type of organizational culture according to the typology by Handy							
Zeus (power)		Apollo (role)		Athena (task)		Dionysus (person)	
N	%	n	%	N	%	n	%
15	2,15	82	11,71	180	25,71	<b>423</b>	<b>60,43</b>

Source: own elaboration.

The data presented above demonstrates that the dominant organizational culture in Polish schools is that of Dionysus, which was selected 423 times (60.43%). The culture of Athena oriented towards tasks was selected 180 times (25.71%). Subsequently, the next most frequently selected organizational culture is that of Apollo (11.71%) and the last one is that of Zeus (2.15%).

The acquired result demonstrates that the hypothesis concerning the influence of actions taken by school heads on the creation of the dominant culture in an educational organization can be proved. Leaders of schools in most cases create an organizational culture that is oriented towards humans and broadly understood cooperation with all the members of the school community. However, there is no correlation or tight connection between the most desired organizational culture (of Athena) suggested by scholars (Harrison, 1982, Handy, 1993) and the culture of Dionysus that is currently preferred by the heads of the Polish schools that were selected for the study. The acquired result may prove that the school heads are not involved in the process of creating the direction of changes in the system of education. This element would require further studies and analyses.

In the further part of the article, detailed results of the conducted study are presented.

**Table 2.** Results concerning self-evaluation of the school head's role

What kind of a school head are you?							
Strong, strict and demanding		I precisely distinguish between the functions of employment and task division.		I am determined to pursue goals.		I am willing to cooperate with all the groups that make up the school community.	
N	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
1	1	4	4	3	3	<b>92</b>	<b>92</b>
Zeus type of culture		Apollo type of culture		Athena type of culture		<b>Dionysus type of culture</b>	

Source: own elaboration.

The data acquired in question 2 demonstrate the 92% of the surveyed school heads are willing to cooperate with all the groups that make up the school community. 4% declare that they precisely distinguish between the functions of employment and task division, whereas 3% of the respondents state that they are determined to pursue the established goals.

One of the surveyed school heads said that he was a strong, strict and demanding school head.

**Table 3.** Results concerning the employees of the schools of the surveyed school heads.

Are the employees in the school of which you are head:							
Submissive, obedient and task-oriented		Loyal and bureaucratic		Flexible and easily adapting to the needs of a given situation.		Willing to cooperate and take satisfaction from personal involvement in the school's functioning.	
N	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
2	2	4	4	32	32	<b>62</b>	<b>62</b>
Zeus type of culture		Apollo type of culture		Athena type of culture		<b>Dionysus type of culture</b>	

Source: own elaboration.

The analysis of the material gathered in question 3 demonstrates that most of the school heads (62%) employ teachers who are willing to cooperate and who take satisfaction from their personal involvement in the school's functioning. 32 school heads said that the teachers in their schools were flexible and adapted easily to the needs of a given situation.

Four of the surveyed school heads believe that the teachers employed in their schools are loyal but also bureaucratic, and 2% of the respondents say that in their schools they employ teachers who are submissive, obedient and task-oriented.

**Table 4.** Results concerning ways in which the surveyed school heads motivate their teachers.

How are the employees in your school motivated to act?							
With rewards and punishments.		With formal arrangements.		Through discussions and negotiations.		With common goals and ideals.	
N	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
6	6	9	9	22	22	<b>63</b>	<b>63</b>
Zeus type of culture		Apollo type of culture		Athena type of culture		<b>Dionysus type of culture</b>	

Source: own elaboration.

The data presented in Table 4 demonstrate that the surveyed school heads most frequently motivate their employees with common goals and ideals (63%), next, through discussions and negotiations (22%) and with formal arrangements (9%).

The least frequent way of motivation that the school heads use is with rewards and punishments (6%).

**Table 5.** Results concerning the decisiveness of the employees in the opinions of the surveyed employers.

Do the employees in your school feel:							
That they depend on your decisions.		Affiliated to the procedures of the institution.		Responsible for creating solutions that lead to a determined goal.		A strong group that is focused on established ideals.	
N	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
4	4	16	16	<b>74</b>	<b>74</b>	6	6
Zeus type of culture		Apollo type of culture		<b>Athena type of culture</b>		Dionysus type of culture	

Source: own elaboration.

Analysing the gathered data, we can observe that in the opinions of the surveyed school heads, teachers feel responsible for creating solutions that lead to a determined goal (74%). 16 school heads believe that the teachers they employ are affiliated to the procedures of the institution, whereas 6% of the respondents say that in their schools they employ teachers who feel a strong group, focused on established ideals.

4% of the respondents believe that their teachers feel that they depend on the decisions made by the school heads.

**Table 6.** Results concerning the initiatives undertaken in the schools of the surveyed school heads.

Who gives ideas for setting the goals that all the members of the your school community pursue?							
The school head.		The school head and the teachers.		A group of teachers.		A group or team of people who make up the school community (students, teachers, school head, parents, local environment)	
N	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
0	0	39	39	2	2	<b>59</b>	<b>59</b>
Zeus type of culture		Apollo type of culture		Athena type of culture		<b>Dionysus type of culture</b>	

Source: own elaboration.

The answers given to question 5 demonstrate that in the opinion of 59 of the surveyed school heads it is groups or teams of people who make up the school community that give ideas for setting the goals that their schools pursue. 39% of the respondents declare that it is the school head and the teachers.

The smallest group is that of the school heads who believe that it is the teachers who provide ideas for the goals that the school organization pursues (2%).

None of the respondents indicated him- or herself as the initiator of the goals that all the members of the school community pursue.

**Table 7.** Results concerning the ways in which the surveyed school heads achieve goals.

What do you appreciate the most while managing your institution...?							
Obedience and task fulfilment.		Acting precisely according to the determined procedures.		An achieved goal.		Cooperation.	
N	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
0	0	2	2	17	17	81	81
Zeus type of culture		Apollo type of culture		Athena type of culture		<b>Dionysus type of culture</b>	

Source: own elaboration.

The results of the study concerning the ways in which the school heads achieve their goals demonstrate that 81% of them appreciate cooperation, 17% of them appreciate an achieved goal and 2% of them appreciate acting precisely according to the determined procedures.

The surveyed school heads did not answer that obedience and task fulfilment is an important element of managing their institutions.

**Table 8.** Results concerning cooperation in the schools of the surveyed school heads.

What way of working do you, as a school head, put the most emphasis on?							
Individual work.		Teamwork in always the same established teams.		Teamwork in teams that are successful		Spontaneous teamwork in groups created depending on a given idea.	
n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
2	2	8	8	30	30	60	60
Zeus type of culture		Apollo type of culture		Athena type of culture		<b>Dionysus type of culture</b>	

Source: own elaboration.

As it can be seen in the data presented in Table 8, the surveyed school heads put the most emphasis on spontaneous teamwork in groups created depending on a given idea (60%). 30 respondents believe that teamwork in groups that are successful is the most important and 8 of them say that it is important to work always in the same established teams.

Two of the surveyed school heads state that they put the most emphasis on individual work in their institutions.

## 4 CONCLUSIONS

The main problem of this paper was to present the results of a study that concerned the types of organizational cultures which can be observed in Polish primary, middle and high schools during the on-going changes of the system of education. The material gathered during the study and the conducted analyses demonstrate that the dominant type of organization culture is that of Dionysus. School heads are willing to cooperate, open and eager to act (92%). 62 of them declare that they employ teachers who like their jobs, identify with them and get involved in the functioning of the institutions that they work in. The teachers are driven by common goals and ideals, which, again, is typical for the Dionysus type of organizational culture, but they also share the responsibility for creating the solutions that lead to those common goals, which is typical also for the culture of Athena. In 59% cases, all the people that make up the school community bring ideas for tasks and goals that are pursued in their institutions. The surveyed school heads in 81% appreciate cooperation that manifests itself in teamwork in groups that are created depending on the idea that their teachers come up with and resulting from their initiatives.

The dominant culture of Dionysus in the course of the on-going changes of the system of education may lead to stratification and frustration among teachers and heads of Polish schools of different types. The lack of orientation towards task fulfilment that uses the abilities of all the employees may result in the weakening of organizational culture. Difficulties with flexible adaptation to the new directives may lead to a situation when the development of educational organizations is inhibited. The organizational culture of Dionysus will not be appropriate in schools of different types during the implementation of educational reforms, as the members of their teams are not oriented towards implementing the changes for the good of all.

The study did not take into account the factor of the influence that the institutions that supervise Polish schools of different types may have on the creation and functioning of organizational culture in Polish schools during the implementation of the systemic changes.

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