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The Culture of Collaboration. Theoretical Aspects

1. Introduction

The impact of inter-organisational cooperation on the management process is one of poorly examined research problems. The paper attempts to study the essence of the organisational culture singled out in line with the criteria related to inter-organisational cooperation and the competence essential for this cooperation. The inferences are based on theories and concepts of cooperation, in particular the concept of collaborative advantage and an organisation's ability to cooperate.

2. Collaboration between organisations as a management instrument

Collaboration is a characteristic feature of every organised activity of Man [Kożuch 2007, pp. 206–208, 213–217]. The conditions in which modern public organisations achieve their goals (for the purpose which they have been established for), force them to enter into relationships based on collaboration. It is collaboration that in fact allows public organisations to achieve their goals. This approach is in accord with one of the rules of modern organisation management, i.e. the rule of reducing hierarchical distance between the source of a managerial problem and its solution [Nalepka, Kozina 2007, p. 58].

The analysis of collaboration as a management instrument shows that it is beneficial, regardless of its scope, form and intensity and whether it concerns informal relationships between organisations or close relations within the framework of partnership-based collaboration. However, these conditions do influence the character and scale of these benefits and the role they play in achieving the goals by the cooperating organisations.

In organisation studies, collaboration means various relationships between individuals and social groups striving for a common goal. As far as the goal of

collaboration is concerned, three types of collaboration can be distinguished [Pszczółowski 1978, p. 273]:

- collaboration, i.e. positive collaboration;
- competition, or rivalry;
- battle, i.e. negative collaboration.

The distinction of positive collaboration is unquestionable. However, certain researchers and practitioners oppose the notion of negative collaboration. It is important to understand that collaboration should not always be identified with the achievement of common goals, since the goals can be different and the conditions in which the achievement of the goals takes place are the only common elements. Moreover, an organisation's particular actions depend not only on the party that has the same goals but also on the party that has dissimilar goals, e.g. particular decisions and actions depend on the actions of competitors. Therefore, the notion of collaboration is connected with "at least two objects of activity that are jointly occupied with something" [Pszczółowski 1978, p. 273].

The collectively organised activity is connected only with positive collaboration. Collaboration is understood as the collaboration consisting of the achievement of common or similar goals, in particular coordination of ventures carried out and functions established as the result of the division of labour. As far as business collaboration is concerned, it is essentially based on horizontal relations between different business entities, resulting from concluded agreements, which enable them the achievement of jointly set goals.

For the needs of this discussion, it seems sufficient to distinguish two types of collaboration:

- collaboration, i.e. actions connected with cooperative attitude and expectation of mutuality;
- confrontation, i.e. actions consisting in rivalry or battle, which in practice take different forms of competition.

The notion of collaboration can be defined as collaboration in a narrower sense – such understanding of collaboration is adopted in the further part of the paper, where both notions are used interchangeably.

Organisations enter multiple interactions with the elements of their environment. They are examined from the point of view of them being direct or indirect; whether they mean competition, neutrality or collaboration, and moreover, whether these interactions are of a one-off or lasting character. It is also important whether they are voluntary or imposed, e.g. by the rules of law. From the point of view of collaboration, the interactions called inter-organisational relations are particularly interesting. As opposed to other relations, they are more orderly. They are of a relatively lasting character and encompass relatively lasting transactions, transfers of resources and other interactions between

organisations. The most common types of relations are trade agreements, agreements between non-profit organisations, joint ventures, joint programmes and relations of two types: organisation – financial institution and beneficiary – sponsor [Mesjasz 1995].

A particular level of an organisation's ability to cooperate, thanks to which it can achieve in a more effective and cost-efficient way the goals, the achievement of which on one's own would be impossible or would require much greater effort and sources, is an asset of every organisation.

As the level of complexity of the processes taking place in an organisation and its environment increases, not yet coercion but a need of collaboration occurs, which goes beyond the limits of the organisation, and more and more often beyond the limits of sectors. Therefore, collaboration between organisations becomes more and more important. From the point of view of an organisation's goals, this collaboration is of different significance. The subject literature examines collaboration of enterprises to the greatest extent. Competition is a characteristic feature of these entities.

As a matter of fact, the role of inter-organisational relations in enterprises has increased recently; however, their aim of collaboration within the created groups of enterprises is still to compete but against the enterprises from outside of this group.

The logic of public organisations' collaboration is totally different. Their actions are not geared towards making profit; therefore, their relations – i.e. all relationships, interrelations, and interactions – are of a totally different character. Collaboration with other organisations lies in the nature of public organisations, regardless of whether these organisations come from the same or a different sector. The situation is similar with respect to social organisations; however, the difference is that, in theory, they make decisions about collaboration with other organisation completely voluntarily and independently. In reality, collaboration is essential for the functioning of such organisations.

Therefore, both enterprises and public organisations compete against one another. However, while in the case of enterprises building collaborative advantage can be perceived as complementary to the competition models, in case of the coordination phenomena that exist between the state, enterprises and other organisations, it is cooperative conduct that should be considered as the basis of actions.

From the point of view of cooperative conduct of organisations, the typology of inter-organisational relations based on the scope of collaboration (Table 1) is more useful.

The analysis of forms of collaboration shows that collaboration is beneficial regardless of its scope, that is, it applies to both informal relationships between organisations arranged in the form of a network, and close relations within the framework of partnership-based collaboration.

The conditions in which modern organisations achieve their goals (for the purpose which they have been established for), force them to enter into relationships based on both competition and collaboration. However, as far as enterprises are concerned, competition is the primary mechanism, while collaboration takes place only when it complements or even strengthens the competitiveness of a business organisation, which is a necessary condition to remain on the market. Uncompetitive enterprises are eliminated from the market. Collaboration is a characteristic feature of the relationships between public sector entities and other organisations (regardless of which sector they come from) as it enhances the possibility of providing public services. For the same reason, competition is also justified, although competitiveness of a public organisation is not a necessary condition for its existence. However, it is very important to increase effectiveness (which is driven by the mechanism of competition) due to the necessity of a more effective use of public funds.

Differences can constitute the grounds for building collaborative advantage of those organisations that differ from one another in terms of constitutive features but that operate in similar domains. It means favourable conditions for establishing inter-organisational ties between public and non-governmental sector entities. One should emphasize here a certain similarity in their actions, namely, the orientation towards the achievement of public and social goals, which brings the logic of their actions closer to one another. The motives for and fundamental principles of a commercial organisation's activity are totally different. Therefore, the grounds for establishing ties between public and private sector entities are different. One could say that going beyond the borders of the public and private sector is more difficult than collaboration between the public and the so-called non-governmental sector.

In management studies a relatively great amount of research has been dedicated to the competition among enterprises and collaborative advantage. The competition between public and non-governmental organisations has been studied to a much lesser extent, while the collaboration between enterprises and other organisations and collaborative advantage are among the least studied issues, sporadically discussed in Polish subject literature. This means that inter-organisational collaboration can be viewed as an underestimated instrument of modern organisation management.

3. The culture of inter-organisational collaboration and its types

Since the 1970ies, regular research has been conducted in the field of culture of organisation. The initial reasons for this interest were mainly the changes that had taken place in the environment of modern enterprises and the need of finding new solutions in a more and more heated competition battle.

Defining the culture of an organisation poses many problems. The definitions of this notion vary depending on whether they are related to actions (in this

case, to the manner of doing things) or to the way of thinking, that is, lending meanings which can serve as a pattern of activity. Organisational culture can be associated with an entire organisation or it can be treated as a subsystem of an organisation [Robbins p. 233]. Therefore, it can be one of the characteristic features of an organisation; however, the organisation itself can also be a culture.

The definitions of organisational culture assume different forms and reflect various patterns of significance

depending on the concept adopted by their authors. For example, it is assumed that organisational culture is a set of values which helps its members to understand what the organisation supports, how it works and what it considers important. Culture is an immaterial notion that slips out of objective measurements and observations. However, being the basis of an organisation's internal environment, it plays a significant role in modelling managers' behaviour [Czerska 2003, pp. 9–16; Siemiński 2008, pp. 9–17].

There are as many definitions of culture as its participants as everybody has their own idea of what it is and how it manifests itself. Domestic subject literature quotes most frequently the concept by E. Schein, which treats organisational culture as a set of dominant values and norms of conduct characteristic for a given organisation, based on the assumptions that allow to understand the nature of reality and manifesting itself in the external, artificial creations, or artefacts, of a given culture. The paper considers culture as a part of an organisational system due to the fact that it allows studying interrelations between the cultural patterns of the participants of an organisation and other subsystems or features of an organisation such as technologies, structural solutions, management methods, organisation efficiency etc.

From the perspective of inter-organisational collaboration, it is important that organisational culture is a reference point for the process of goal and strategy formulation and also a pattern of evaluation, interpretation and selection of joint action programmes, and a factor that models the behaviour and actions of people not only in an organisation but also in interpersonal relations. Moreover, it plays an integrating role that leads to standardising the actions of the participants of an organisation and also an adapting role, since the people of a given organisation bring in their own patterns and norms of action, and the existent cultural patterns modify their former systems of values by influencing the culture of the environment. Understanding organisational culture allows the members of cooperating organisations to know how to act within the framework of a given organisational culture. In his characteristic of the ways of behaviour in corporations, Cz. Sikorski aptly points out that nowadays, in the changing social setups, the sense of harmony in achieving common goals becomes the main condition for an organisation's success [Sikorski 1999, pp. 180–181]. He quotes N. J. Adler's opinion that there

is a need of a shift from cultural domination to cultural collaboration, that is, to creating a new common organisational culture. In this context, three types of organisations are distinguished [Adler 1986, pp.85–86]:

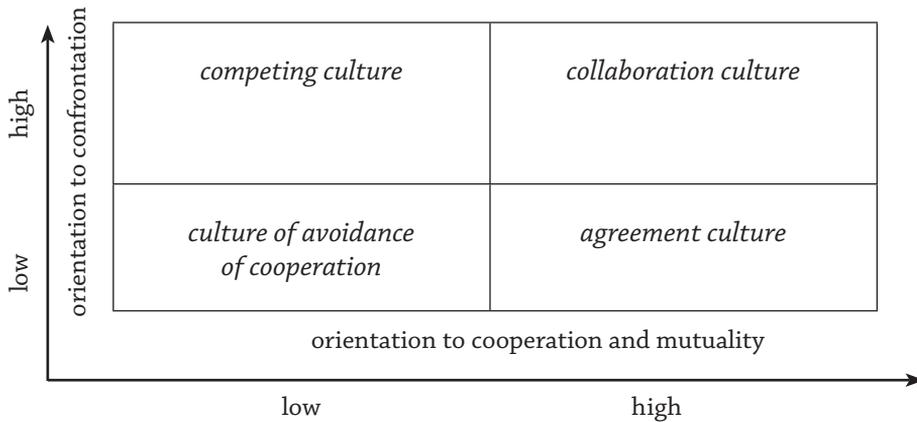
- Parochial, with the dominating opinion that the manner this organisation operates is the only possible;
- Ethnocentric, which accepts the existence of other manners of operation, but is convinced that its own manner of operations is the best;
- Synergetic with the dominance of openness to various combinations of the elements of its own manner of operation with the elements of other manners of operation.

Until the present time, the studies on organisational cultures have focused on the attempts to classify them according to given criteria [Czerska 2003, pp. 26–34; Siemiński 2008, pp. 40–68; Kożuch 2000, pp. 68–72].

T.B. Deal and H.A. Kennedy [1982] adopted the criterion of high or low level of risk that accompanies an action and the criterion of the speed of finding out about the effects of the previous action, i.e. immediate or delayed feedback. On this basis, they distinguished commonly known types of culture: tough-guy macho culture, work-hard play-hard culture, process culture and bet-your-company culture. R. Harrison [1992] and Ch. Handy [1993] adopted on the one hand the opposition of individualism–collectivism and on the other hand the opposition of external control–internal control as the criterion for diagnosing cultures, which led to distinguishing the following organisational cultures: the culture of power, role, support and success. K.S. Cameron and R.E. Quinn [2003, 2006] in turn, adopted as the basis for distinguishing between cultures the criterion of effectiveness, such as flexibility and freedom to act, stability and control and also the criterion of concentration on integration and unity, i.e. on external matters, and on rivalry and differentiation, i.e. the position in the environment. Thus, the cultures of hierarchy, market, clan and adhocracy have been distinguished. G.H. Hofstede's typology is among the most popular typologies. He proposed a model of an organisational culture of an enterprise by using the already known and slightly modified criteria, such as the distance towards power, individualism–collectivism, the extent to which uncertainty is avoided, and complementing them with masculinity–femininity and Confucian dynamism. The model comprises the following cultures: supporting individual initiatives and small groups; stabilisation and safety; fulfilling tasks and structure and routine processes. In his model, G.H. Hofstede showed orientation towards rivalry and collaboration and structure and people.

Another typology of organisational cultures can be proposed if we take into account orientation towards confrontation and expectation of collaboration and mutuality. It allows us to distinguish the following types of organisational cultures at different levels of collaboration (figure 1):

1.



2. the culture of avoidance of cooperation is characterised by concentrating on the organisation's own, usually niche domain, and on internal shareholders; typical for enterprises not oriented towards expansion;
3. the competing culture, based on the assumption that the organisation's environment is not friendly and at the same time dynamic and turbulent, which requires continuous strengthening of competitiveness; the culture characteristic for most enterprises, as defeating one's competitors is a universal goal in market economy;
4. the collaboration culture, characterised by aiming at greater efficiency thanks to collaboration with other organisations based on the principle of mutuality; the collaboration culture can have a relatively lasting character, as in case of public and non-governmental organisations managed in a modern manner; it may also have a temporary or partial character, e.g. during a strategic alliance; or it can include relationships with some organisations that collaborate in order to compete with others;
5. the agreement culture is connected with the combination of cooperative orientation with aiming at retaining *status quo*, or results from the dependence on a stronger partner, e.g. non-governmental organisations, suppliers etc.

The nature of the agreement culture is influenced by the differences between the achievement of goals (thanks to intra-organisational collaboration) and their implementation (based on inter-organisational collaboration). In the former case, the object of management is a given organisation; in the latter – the process of collaboration between two or more organisations. It means the necessity of taking systematised actions by the initiating organisation, such as, for example [Lank 2007, pp. 25–55]: conducting an audit of relations

with other organisations; building a relation of collaboration and testing it; assigning employees involved in collaboration; selecting potential partners; taking preparatory action; negotiating the organisational and legal form and the manner of management, and particularising mutual goals.

Referring to N.J. Adler's classification, one can state that the culture of collaboration is characterised by organisational synergy.

4. The culture of collaboration and the ability of inter-organisational collaboration

In Poland, organisations' ability of inter-organisational collaboration has not been studied yet by management studies. The starting point for defining what this category is, is differing between an individual and organisational ability of collaboration [Lank 2007, pp. 159–167]. The former is defined as an individual potential of a member of an organisation, which includes: knowledge, skills and attitude, enabling the achievement of particular results of collaboration. The latter includes the processes of basic activity: organisational competence and organisational culture.

E. Lank's concept shows two significant weaknesses. The first one consists in not taking into account the rule that individual competence harmonised with other components of an organisation and with the whole system is an initial condition for building an organisation's competence. All cooperating groups, that is leaders and sponsors, directly involved persons and those supporting the collaboration processes, due to sharing knowledge and the skills of using it in practice, and also due to the cooperative attitude, are able to model an organisation in such a way that its ability to cooperate with organisations becomes its attribute. Therefore, separating the individual ability of collaboration from the ability of the entire organisation seems unjustified.

Another weakness of the author's thesis is that it aggregates the components of an organisation's ability of inter-organisational collaboration to a too great extent. The ability of inter-organisational collaboration needs to be defined in greater detail and discussed from a slightly different point of view since it does not include only the processes of basic activities, i.e. organisational competence and organisational culture. This requirement concerns all mutually related components and the organisation as a whole. If they are modelled in such a way that a given organisation, due to its collaboration with other organisations, is able to achieve its goals in a more efficient way than if it was not using this instrument, than it can be stated that it has an ability of collaboration (Table 1 and 2).

No.	Collaborating groups	Knowledge	Skills	Attitudes
1.	Leaders and sponsors of collaboration	Joint understanding of the strategic meaning of collaboration.	Efficient sponsorship and support for collaboration inside the organisation.	Respect for partners, treating the cooperative relation as the organisation's capital.
2.	People directly involved in collaboration on strategic level	Joint understanding of the strategic meaning of collaboration and achieving practical effects.	Modelling the relation. Project, conflict and shareholders management.	Ambassador of collaboration inside and outside the organisation. Flexibility and ability to adapt. Tolerance towards ambiguity.
3.	People supporting collaboration on operational level	Clarity concerning the results expected from joint action. Good interpersonal relations with main shareholders.	Planning and organizing. Project and shareholders' management.	Sensitivity to the needs of different shareholders.

Source: adapted from: [Lane 2007, p. 160].

Table 2. Components of an organization's competence for inter-organizational collaboration

No.	Components	Desired state
1.	Goals and values	Depending on the motive of taking up an organised activity. Paying attention to the satisfaction of external and internal clients.
2.	Organisational structure	Flexibility, processing, downsizing.
3.	Main competence of managers	Transformational leadership for collaboration. Competence related to values and instrumental competence; task-based, professional, political and ethical competence.
4.	Competence of specialists	Knowledge, skills and attitudes that allow to act as sponsors, relationship managers, coordinators, project managers, facilitators of operations undertaken within the framework of collaboration.

5.	Organisational culture	Openness, creativity, flexibility, teamship, awareness of values, convictions and other elements of organisational culture, respecting the opinions of other people.
6.	Management process	Management based on subordination and non-subordination relationships and mutual goals and convictions. Expanding coordination and communication functions.
7.	Relationships with internal shareholders	High level of internal social responsibility.
8.	Relationships with external shareholders	High level of external social responsibility.
9.	Main management instruments	Team management, project management, trust management, benchmarking, cooperative learning, empowerment, coaching, mentoring, management through communication, managerial coordination and self-coordination.

Source: inspired by: [Lane 2007, p. 163].

Therefore, an organisation's ability to collaborate means a particular combination of its features leading to the achievement of organisational goals or contributing to their achievement to a great extent. The following components that have features related to collaboration can be distinguished: organisational goals and values, structures, competence of managers and employees, organisational culture, management functions with particular emphasis put on coordination and communication, relationships with the environment, and also instruments used in the management processes.

In the proposed definition of an organisation's ability to collaborate it is important that the two types of the ability isolated by E. Lank are combined and not treated separately. The individual potential of employees, enhanced by an interorganisational effect of synergy, should be regarded as a consistent part of the analysed notion, resulting from treating people as the most important component of an organisation, the one that influences the relationships with the environment.

Therefore, the following conclusion can be formulated: if an organisation has an ability to collaborate, this ability allows it to build collaborative advantage, which in turn leads to the organisation achieving its goals in a more efficient way.

By creating the collaboration culture, an organisation gains an ability to collaborate, which in turn results mainly in gaining collaborative advantage. Its theoretical grounds should be sought in the relational exchange theory and the relational approaches towards organisation strategy. It is based on the assumption that there exist privileged relationships established by an organisation with

selected partners from its environment. According to this approach, competition becomes a secondary mechanism while voluntary agreements, which exceed the logic of the rules of free competition, come to the fore.

In the nglo-Saxon literature, the definitions of collaborative advantage vary in respect to the degree of their particularisation and the scope of their meaning. According to some researchers, collaborative advantage is merely a propensity to be a good partner [Kanter 1994 quotation from Huxham 1996, p. 15], while according to others, it is the kind of “invisible products” of collaboration – such as shared knowledge and mutual understanding [Hickling 1994 quotation from Huxham 1996, p. 15]. Other researchers treat collaborative advantage as a complex category, however, they agree as far as its essence is concerned, that it is the output of collaboration that could not have been achieved except through collaborating efforts [Huxham 1996, pp. 15–16; Kozuch 2004 pp. 234–236; Lank 2007, pp. 7–9].

Among the external factors of gaining such an advantage there are: [Gray 1996, p. 59]:

1. rapid economic, technological, and social changes;
2. globalisation;
3. differences between public, business and non-governmental sectors are becoming blurred;
4. shrinking revenues for social programmes;
5. differing perceptions of environmental risk.

Among the internal factors of gaining collaborative advantage there are:

1. complementary competence of organisations;
2. good personal relationships with potential partners;
3. offices close to each other;
4. the partners' possibility of using good relationships with the environment, such as their relationships with clients and market credibility [Lank 2007, p. 37].

Collaborative advantage is conducive to a more efficient achievement of an organisation's goals and hence, to the development of the organisation. Knowledge is shared, resources are jointly used, the individual competence of managerial staff and employees, and also of entire organisations – participants of cooperative processes – increases.

In practice, inter-organisational collaboration as a management instrument encounters many barriers, which can be demonstrated by the example of a local government administration's ability to collaborate.

One of the reasons for insufficient use of this instrument may result from the fact that collaboration is perceived as a form of an activity imposed by the law. Therefore, certain administrative bodies treat inter-organisational collaboration

as a mere formality. Over five years, the situation has improved significantly [Kožuch 2004, pp. 239–243]; however, the orientation towards the client and collaboration is still underestimated, or not sufficiently valued.

The fact of the existence of serious barriers for inter-organisational collaboration is demonstrated by certain answers provided by the members of the top managerial staff of local government offices (LGOs) to the question if they could “enumerate 5 institutions interested in the effective operation of the office” [Kožuch 2009]: “I cannot name such institutions at the moment”, “I am not going to answer this question; it is weird”, “I am not authorised to provide such information”, “I cannot answer this question; all the institutions that we cooperate with, and there are hundreds of them – I cannot choose”, “I am not sure if I am able to speak for other external institutions or judge which of them would be actually interested in the efficient functioning of the LGO”, “I cannot name such institutions; I think that hardly anyone is interested in the efficient operation of the office”, “I do not know; we mainly provide services to the citizens and other people from outside of the commune, who have some interests here”.

The basic barrier independent of the social-economic sector is that organisations are not adequately prepared for collaboration.

The discussion about the ability of inter-organisational collaboration and the conditions of gaining collaborative advantage shows that this concept is poorly known among both management practitioners and theoreticians.

5. Conclusion

The discussion in the paper leads to the conclusion that from the perspective of the development of modern organisations it is important to have both the ability to compete and the ability to cooperate. The domination of one of them derives from the logic of their functioning, which is determined by their motives for starting an organised activity. However, the changing environment demands that this dominating ability is complemented. For enterprises, it is more important to build competitive advantage, whilst building collaborative advantage is of a complementary significance. The situation of public organisations is right the opposite. For non-governmental organisations – depending on the areas of their activity and organisational forms – the importance of both kinds of advantage may be more balanced.

Abstract

The paper attempts to study the essence of organisational culture, singled out in line with the criteria related to inter-organisational collaboration and the competence essential for this collaboration. The paper proposes a new typology of organisational culture, comprising the following: the culture of avoiding of collaboration, competing culture, collaboration culture and agreement culture. The paper also introduces the notion of an organisation's ability to collaborate and defines it as a particular combination of an organisation's features leading to

an efficient achievement of the organisation's goals or contributing to the achievement of these goals to a great extent due to inter-organisational collaboration. Building cooperative advantage is considered as the main condition for achieving this ability. The paper also shows that in practice, the use of organisational collaboration as a management instrument encounters many barriers.

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