

Barbara Kozuch
Jagiellonian University

Antoni Kozuch
Military Academy of Land Forces

The specificity of public organisation cultures

Abstract: *The aim of the paper was to enhance understanding of the specificity of culture within public organizations. The paper analyzed different typologies of public organization cultures. Then it proposes a new typology based on the main public management models and discusses chosen issues of ethics within public organizations. Provided investigations showed that the essence of the specific culture of public organizations can be explained well by analysing it in the context of various models of public management. Regardless of the specific characteristics of a given public organization, the contemporary culture of public organizations is distinguished by: the law as the primary basis of decision-making, a higher degree of formalization, greater stability-orientation, the presence of a certain degree of autonomy for internal purposes, and sensitivity to the ethical aspects of basic assumptions, norms, attitudes and organizational behavior.*

Keywords: *organizational culture, public organizations, models of public management*

Introduction

At present, increasing attention is being paid to the organizational culture in public organizations in countries that have initiated the introduction of changes to meet contemporary challenges. Furthermore, greater interest in understanding the concept of public organization culture can be observed among academic researchers and practitioners.

From a management perspective, a lack of comprehension of the organizational culture of public organizations is of concern because research

on new models of public management indicates that culture is central to the change process and to the achievement of strategic goals.

The aim of this paper is to enhance understanding of the specificity of culture within public organizations and to provide a clearer overall picture of the phenomenon. The paper analyzes different typologies of public organization cultures. Then it proposes a new typology based on the main public management models and discusses chosen issues of ethics within public organizations.

I. Understanding public organization cultures

The cultural specificity of public organizations - generally understood as the set of dominant values and norms of behavior with their origins in basic assumptions - results from the nature of these organizations, which provide citizens with public goods and services. Citizens benefit in the form of indivisible consumption available to more than one person. They also often require collective action.

Public organizations can be defined as organizations providing services to achieve superior purposes, which are of primary importance to the community of citizens. The basic eligibility criterion for whether a particular action is a public service is whether it serves the public interest.

Public organizations [Kozuch B., 2011] have been developed to meet the public interest, and are institutions operating in various spheres of public life (e.g. politics, government, science and education, health, etc.) and in the economy at the national and regional level. Furthermore, they have a role in given economic communities of countries (as well as the level of the state) as a form of political organization of society and political bloc of countries.

The approach to distinctive characteristics of public organizations changes over time, depending on the dominant model. In particular, these differences are clearly seen in the case of Weber's model, also called the internal process model [Parkey R., Bradley L., 2000, p. 125-141] and the new public management model (NPM) and public governance.

The occurrence of a relationship between the level of organizational publicness and a variety of features of public organizations can be used to identify the organizational culture in the context of public management.

Understanding organizational culture in public management has a direct impact on the following situations [Claver E., Llopis J., Gasco J.L., Molina H., Conca F.J., 1999, p. 456]:

1. predicting whether the introduction of new technologies will be accepted satisfactorily;
2. laying down guidelines for the usage of information;

3. ensuring cohesion amongst members of the public body;
4. reducing the risk in projects where a specific public body intervenes alongside with other public or private organizations;
5. allowing an increase in satisfaction in services used by citizens.

Thus, the specificity of public organization culture is determined by distinguishing the main features of these organizations and the changing expectations of society, which is reflected in the models of public management and typologies of public organization cultures.

2. Typologies of public organization cultures

Defining organizational culture creates many problems. Definitions of this notion vary depending on whether it refers to activities or relates to the way of thinking, e.g. to the transmission of meanings, which may be standard in operation. Organizational culture can be equated with the entire organization or be treated as its target. It may therefore be one of the features of the organization, but, on the other hand, the organization itself may also be thought of as a culture.

Definitions of organizational culture vary and reflect different emphases depending on the concept adopted by their respective authors. For example, it can be assumed that organizational culture is a set of values that help its members understand the organization and what it stands for, how it works and what it considers important. Culture is a concept that defies objective measurement or observation. However, it plays an important role in shaping attitudes and behaviors as a basis of the internal environment of the organization. [Deal T.A., Kennedy A.A.; 1982; Pettigrew A.M.; 1997; Hofstede G.; 1980, Robbins 2004; Schein E., 1992; *Martins N., 1987; Langfield-Smith 1995; Bate P., 1999; Cameron K.S., Quinn R. E., 2003; Sikorski C., 2006; Sułkowski Ł. 2002; Konecki K., 2002; Czerska M., 2003; Siemiński M., 2008, Jonczyk J., 2011].*

Discussions have led to culture being recognized as part of the organization due to the fact that it allows exploration of the relationship between cultural patterns of its members and between subsystems or characteristics of organizations, such as technology, structural solutions, management methods, the efficiency of the organization, etc.

Research on organizational cultures is usually carried out in enterprises. Attempts to study the culture of public organizations are present in the foreign literature [Schraeder M., Tears R.S., Jordan M.H., 2005; Parkey R., Bradley L., 2000, s. 125-141; Claver E., Llopis J., Gasco J.L., Molina H., Conca F.J., 1999; Zammuto R.F., Krakower J.Y., 1991; Schutten M., 2012; O'Donnell O, Boyle R. 2008). In Poland, these issues are covered extremely rarely, and in a fragmentary fashion [Kozuch B., 2009; Jonczyk J., 2011].

The culture of public organizations is usually considered taking into account both public management and cultural trends. There are also cases [Ramachandran S. D., Chong S.C., Ismail H., 2011] of research into the culture by directly relating organizational culture achievements to public organizations. The first approach involves typologies related only to public organizations, and other typologies developed with private firms in mind are matched with the reality of public organizations. The rationale for the second approach may be to make comparisons between organizations from different sectors, mainly business and public.

An example of a characteristic typology for the first approach is one encompassing four models of organizational culture of public administration [Claver E., Llopis J., Gasco J.L., Molina H., Conca F.J., 1999, pp. 457-458; Sinclair A., 1991, p. 457-458]:

1. A cultural control model based on the existence of only one culture, based on dominance.
2. A subculture model in which the basic hypothesis is that public administration has
 - a number of different, independent subcultures, depending on the growing incorporation of professionals and specialists sharing common features, which differ from those of others.
3. A professionals' multicultural model that recognizes the existence of subcultures, but they are grouped under a strong, homogeneous culture common to all public agencies.
4. A public interest culture model based on the existence of a common culture with orientation towards public service as its main feature.

An interesting approach to culture in the public sector is a typology based on the structure of competing values related to needs, focusing on the internal or external environment or flexible or rigid control (Quinn, Rohrbaugh, 1983; Schein, E. H. 1985; Zammuto, Krakower 1991; Zammuto R.F., Krakower J.Y., 1999; Denison D.R., Spreizer G.M., 1991; Parkey R., Bradley L., 2000). This creates a matrix of public organization culture based on a competing values model, which includes four types of cultures: hierarchical, efficiency, development, and group culture.

In light of the achievements of public management and cultural trends in management sciences, a three piece typology based on the major models of public management can be put forward, namely:

1. bureaucratic culture based on the old model of public administration;
2. culture of organizational changes derived from the model of New Public Management;
3. collaboration culture related to models of Public Governance and Public Service.

The first model is well illustrated by M. Weber's concept of the bureaucratic organization. His positive characteristics as a model of a bureaucratic institution of government apparatus include: a formal system of rules and procedures, impersonal relations in the organization, work division, a hierarchical organizational structure, a formalized system of staffing and promotion of employees and the legal nature of the power of managers. Over time, however, values of bureaucratic organizations have faded away and negative characteristics have appeared, such as disability, stability and autonomy. Thus, contemporary culture is characterized by excessive bureaucratic conformism and authoritarianism of management staff, passivity, routine, lack of new ideas and lack of interest in change. This culture is characterized by the following features [Claver E., Llopis J., Gasco J.L., Molina H., Conca F.J., 1999, pp. 459]:

1. An authoritarian management style and a high degree of control;
2. Poor one-way communication, usually top-down;
3. Individuals' preference for stability, limited scope for initiative, and orientation towards obeying orders;
4. Repetitive and centralized decision-making process;
5. Reluctance to start innovative processes;
6. High degrees of conformity;
7. Highly reluctant to change existing beliefs.

The New Public Management model and the associated culture is characterized by the dominance of organizational change as a form of economic efficiency. The public interest is articulated by citizens with the help of public managers. It includes shared values and aggregate interests of the members' society. Organizations are focused primarily on recipients of public goods and public services. The conducting of public affairs is a form of triggering possibilities inherent in the market mechanism. The objectives are achieved through the creation of mechanisms and structures that go beyond the boundaries of the public sector. A mechanism of achieving the objectives whereby special attention is paid to the use of modern management methods and techniques to support the process of change is applied.

In a culture of organizational change, the following factors are considered to be the most important: public entrepreneurship, decentralization and downsizing, a relatively high degree of freedom in achieving entrepreneurial goals, clearly defined external accountability to the recipients of goods and services, an assessment of concrete results, the prevalence of institutional control over functional control. The model of public governance and public service and their inter-organizational collaboration culture are characterized by understanding the organization as a pattern of communication and interaction within the framework of the existing groups.

The public interest includes the shared values of members of society. There is decentralization of governance and public participation in accordance with the concept of public governance. It can be called an even more advanced response to a preference for economic methods in the management of public organizations, but taking too little account of political and social contexts. This model focuses on the internal organization of the public sector and constituent institutions as well as external relations. There is an emphasis here on networking and managing public relations.

The network consists of the central, regional and local authorities, community groups and political interest groups as well as social and business organizations. Public interest is created in the process of public governance as a public value shared by the members of the network, and the conditions for its realization are negotiated with partners and stakeholders. Public management in this model is mainly based on the creation of a coalition of public, private and voluntary agencies to meet the agreed requirements. The public interest is understood as the result of social dialogue around shared values. These actions are aimed at citizens.

The organizational culture corresponding to this model is typically:

1. focus on citizens and other stakeholders, both internal and external;
2. theories and concepts of democracy, of concepts of the development of the public sphere and the knowledge economy as the fundamental assumptions of the model;
3. public service as the main role of public organizations in order to help with negotiation and mediation with citizens and social groups, and also the creation of public value;
4. multifaceted responsibility of public organizations, taking into account the law, national values, political norms, professional standards, and the interests of citizens;
5. sharing of knowledge;
6. strong focus on inter-organizational collaboration.

Observation of cultures of public organizations in Poland allows us to formulate the opinion that in the practice of public sector organizations it is difficult to identify one pure model in units of public administration. The presented considerations lead to the conclusion that in the light of the theoretical findings and expressed expectations of external stakeholders, inter-organizational collaborative culture is paramount.

3. Ethical aspects of the culture of public organizations

In practice, in the functioning of many public organizations, attitudes and organizational behaviors are observed that moral judgments can only be

negative: low-value services, the use of blackmail and threats, delays in the implementation of tasks, and corruption. Ethical behavior in the organization can be seen from several perspectives. [Kuc B.R., Moczydlowska J.M., 2009, pp. 381-382] The first one relates to the ethical aspects of vocational activity of public managers whose duty is to make decisions and act in accordance with the requirements of ethics.

This includes creating a safe working environment, proper division and organization of work, and the use of incentive systems that trigger motivation, initiative and efficiency, while ensuring a fair wage. The second perspective includes the ethical aspects of the work of employees, such as honesty, loyalty, focus on cooperation, manners in dealing with other members of the organization and the public. The third perspective refers to dealing with representatives of environmental organizations (mainly citizens and other organizations). Organizational procedures making up the culture can significantly affect the strengthening of ethical or unethical behavior of managers and employees. Factors conducive to unethical behavior are in the mind of employees: workload, financial problems of the employees, efforts to reconcile work with other needs (e.g. family), and personality disorders. Factors provoking unethical behavior are related to such attributes of the organization as a defective communication system within the organization, deficiencies in management, strong pressure for results, an organizational culture that promotes excessive competition and insufficient resources. [Kuc B.R., Moczydlowska J.M., 2009, pp. 383-385]

Changing the behavior of public managers is often difficult because of resistance to innovation. In order to create conditions for the implementation of modern management methods in public administration offices, old systems and structures first need to be overcome. One of the aforementioned conditions is to attract highly skilled staff who are focused on innovation and creativity. This requires an appropriate level of remuneration, conditions for development, entitlement to act and legal protection. [Czaputowicz J., 2008, p.268] Creating (training) modern, all-round officers, guided by ethical standards and values recognized by the organization is one of the basic conditions for carrying out effective reforms in public administration. Administrative employees must accurately interpret existing laws and legal norms, know the rules of rational finance, and possess the ability to enter into a dialogue with the public. [Przybyszewski R., 2009, p. 144]

For modernization of the public administration, the issue of human resources management is very important [Bak D., 2005]. Observation of what is happening in practice leads to the conclusion that there are a number of shortcomings in this field, which indicates irregularities associated with non-compliance with requirements for the organization of open competitions for the recruitment and competition for official positions in local government.

More specifically, the main problem in this respect is the low level of formalization of HR processes, which is reflected in the lack of or non-compliance with certain rules of conduct. All this adversely affects the efficiency of the offices, where decision-makers often make decisions based on staffing rather than substantive criteria.

Employing staff in the absence of clear rules and principles of human resource management is due to a chaotic culture, resulting in a lack of values recognized by employees, especially those related to professional ethics. Under the conditions of the new challenges facing public organizations, the new type of culture should move towards a pro-effective ethos, permitting a worker's identification with his/her workplace and specific objectives of the mission, especially regarding the quality of services. [Kuc B.R., Moczyłowska J.M., 2009, p. 351-352]

The close relationship of organizational culture is closely dependent on the way of exercising power, and accepted standards and principles. This affects relationships with employees, customers, partners, competitors, and the superior – subordinate relationship.

Organizational culture also shapes the attitudes of staff (re communication, motivation and social issues), and triggers the creative imagination, encourages intellectual independence and mobility, and also builds a spirit of cooperation and kindness.

Modern public organizations' operating conditions require consistent implementation of ethical infrastructure that includes: processes, mechanisms, institutions and conditions, incentives to behave professionally and in accordance with high standards, and the introduction of regulations restricting unwanted behavior. [Kulesza M., Niziołek M., 2010, p. 133; Bogucka I., Pietrzykowski T., 2010, p. 114-115; Perzanowska M., Rekawek-Pachwicz M., 2010]

Ethical infrastructures are diverse and encompass legal standards, codes of ethics and regulations of institutions working together with provisions allowing their enforcement, and also embrace objective methods of recruitment. The basic condition for the success of public ethics in the organization is political will. This underpins the dialogue with the public and facilitates the creation and use of appropriate procedures. Factors shaping the ethical infrastructure can be classified as follows: [Kudrycka B., Debicki M., 2000, p. 47]

- laws and codes of ethics regulating the conduct of public affairs,
- bodies responsible for the development of ethical actions in public life,
- transparency of public action,
- public officials' responsibility for unethical actions.

Ethical Codes are of utmost importance in Anglo-Saxon countries, because there is no codified administrative procedure. The earliest widely used codes of ethics were in the United States. In the U.S. the highest authority in the field public officers' ethics is the Office of Government Ethics. Ethics commissions or committees are appointed in each of the states. In the UK, the first significant ethical codification of a set of principles was developed in 1994 by the Commission for Standards of Public Life (the Nolan Committee). It put forward seven ethical principles: impartiality, independence, objectivity, accountability, openness, honesty and leadership. [Kulesza M., Niziolek M., 2010, p. 136]

In 1996, the British Administrative Code was introduced in the UK. It defines officials' and ministers' accountability to the community. British local government organizations create their own codes of ethics. In Canada, the standards of behavior of public officials are defined in several documents. Accepted standards include the following: procedures for the recruitment, hiring and promotion of employees, using public property, second jobs, and the relationship between the public and private sectors.

Polish regulations generally do not differ from international standards. However, practice has not kept pace with the postulated ethical actions of officials and public organizations. Ethics are rarely taken into account by researchers of the culture of public organizations in Poland.

4. Conclusion

The research reported in this paper has examined organizational culture in public organizations, looking at both traditional and new approaches to this field.

The essence of the specific culture of public organizations can be explained well by analysing it in the context of various models of public management. These include the internal components of the organization, relationships seen in the context of bureaucracy, the model of new public management and organizational culture change, as well as the model of public governance and public service, and also the inter-organizational culture of cooperation.

In various public organizations, the organizational culture usually has a tendency to undergo further changes caused by ambient pressure. Regardless of the specific characteristics of a given public organization, generally speaking the contemporary culture of public organizations (viewed in comparison to business and non-governmental organizations) is currently distinguished by: the law as the primary basis of decision-making, a higher degree of formalization, greater stability-orientation, the presence of a certain degree of autonomy for internal purposes, and

sensitivity to the ethical aspects of basic assumptions, norms, attitudes and organizational behavior.

Opportunities for improvement should be sought primarily through a more detailed study of cultures, including interrelations between the fundamental assumptions and the distinctive characteristics of the major models of public management and identifiable standards, organizational attitudes and behaviors.

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