

INNOVATIVE COMPANIES ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE VALUES - INTERNATIONAL COMPARATIVE STUDY

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Abstract:

Innovation is a key to success in modern competitive global economy. It is a matter of discussion what is the strength of influence of different national or organizational cultures on this ability to create innovation. Yet still in numerous countries it is possible to observe that innovative companies are few among majority that just follow the market leaders. The aim of this study is to compare organizational culture of companies from seven countries - Austria, Poland, Slovenia, Spain, Thailand, Ukraine and USA - to identify cultural values that are common for innovative companies. Basing on results from questionnaires conducted in 303 companies existing national organizational cultures of innovative companies are presented and described. The cultural dimensions used as cultural metrics are: high-context cultures vs. low-context cultures; achieved status cultures vs. ascribed status cultures; conservative cultures vs. innovative cultures; high vs. low uncertainty avoidance; internal focus vs. external focus; high vs. low power distance; individualism vs. collectivism and two dimensions on task orientation and relationship orientation of leaders. Finally existing national organizational cultures are compared internationally to identify existing key values common for innovative companies despite different national cultural background.

Keywords: innovation, organizational culture, management, organizational behaviour, comparative study, international cultural comparison, society

1. INTRODUCTION AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

There is no doubt that companies that are able to introduce innovations are in a much better market position than business that are not able to do so. Innovations are key market advantage in modern economy. Despite character of certain innovation, they are way to get ahead of competitors by lowering the costs, providing new product or satisfying consumers needs in a better way. Being innovator is also associated with risk, as being first often means that there is no previous experience to base on. But as history of successful innovators is showing - that risk can be highly profitable. In fact it seems almost impossible to build strong market position without introducing innovations. Despite crucial need for innovation as a source of development itself and stronger market position as a result it is observable that ability to introduce innovation is not evenly spread. On majority of markets innovative companies are just a few among many followers - of course their impact on those markets is much higher, but there is visible disproportion as those few companies are often introducing majority of innovations. This can lead to important question - why some companies differ that much from others operating on the same market and are able to come up with innovations, while majority is unable to do so? It is certainly not only a matter of will, as knowing numerous benefits of being innovative many companies show that will, but only some are able to introduce innovations. But it is also not a result of "accident" - as of course some innovations may be created as the effect of accident, but still innovative companies show ability to introduce innovations in semi-regular manner. One of possible factors explaining that ability is organizational culture of those companies that create proper climate and conditions for employees to come up with innovations. That would mean that innovative companies have organizational culture that either attracts innovators or allows employees to utilize their innovative potential. Identifying values and basic assumptions that characterize organizational culture of those innovative companies is first step necessary to understand how to create and spread culture that allows innovativeness to bloom. Companies that will adapt such culture should be able to improve their potential for innovation. Of course national culture influences both members of organization personal values and organizational culture itself, but as in every country there are some innovative enterprises it is possible to minimize effects of national culture by scrutinizing organizational cultures of innovative companies from countries of different national cultures.

Defining organizational culture can cause difficulties as literature provides numerous different definitions (Barney 1986) some of them even conflicting (Sułkowski 2008). Nevertheless definition of organizational culture by Schein: "pattern of basic assumptions that a given group has invented, discovered or developed in learning to cope with its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, and that have worked well enough to be considered valid, and, therefore to be taught to new members as the right way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems" (Schein 1984) explain the idea in a clear manner for the need of this paper. What is important in this model is to understand that although most important basic assumptions are most often invisible, unconscious and hardest to study. Those basic assumption affect more conscious values and patterns of behaviour and in broader aspect visible artefacts (Schein 1984). Therefore in research it is possible to observe behaviours and ask about values and on this basis make conclusions on nature of basic assumptions.

As a result of various studies there is no one agreed typology of basic assumptions or values. Among most popular typologies of elements of culture are ones proposed by Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck, Hofstede, Hall, Schein, Trompenaars, Fukuyama and Adler. Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck identified five basic value orientations: human nature, man-nature relationship, time, activity and social relations (Kluckhohn & Strodtbeck 1961). Hofstede model included for dimension: Power Distance, Uncertainty Avoidance, Individualism versus Collectivism, and Masculinity versus Femininity, with two additional dimensions added in later model development: Long- versus Short-Term Orientation and Indulgence versus Restraint (Hofstede 2010). According to Hall key cultural factors are: context, time and space (Hall 1990). Schein presents following basic underlying assumptions: organization relations to its environment, the nature of reality and truth, the nature of human nature, the nature of human activity and the nature of human relationship (Schein 1984). Trompenaars model consists of seven dimensions: universalism versus particularism, individualism versus communitarianism, neutral versus affective, specific versus diffuse, achievement versus ascription oriented, sequential time versus synchronous time and internal direction versus outer direction (Trompenaars 1998).Fukuyama pays special attention to trust as a social capital that differentiate organizations affecting how effective they can be (Fukuyama 1995). Adler model dimensions were describing human nature, human activity, relationship with nature, individualist vs. collectivist, space and time (Adler & Gundersen 2007). Apart from those models many typologies exist. In case of some typologies names of dimensions are similar

or the same, although their range and understanding may differ. In case of others different names cover the same phenomenon.

Taking into account rich variety of both values and basic assumptions it is possible to create set of cultural dimensions that would aggregate various typologies. For the need of research set of dimensions was selected that were most relevant regarding identifying values of innovative companies. This set of dimensions consist of: high-context vs. low-context; achieved status vs. ascribed status; conservative vs. innovative; high vs. low uncertainty avoidance; internal focus vs. external focus; high vs. low power distance; individualism vs. collectivism and two dimensions on task orientation and relationship orientation. Dimension of high-context vs. low-context measures communication style in line with Hall model (Hall 1990) - dividing cultures into low-context where communication is simple and direct and non-dependent on context, and high-context where communication depend on situation and main message is hidden and context dependent. Dimension of achieved status vs. ascribed status bases on Trompenaars model. Archive status cultures prefer competencies and achievements as a source of status in organization, while ascribed status culture value power coming from place in formal hierarchy or seniority. Dimension of conservative cultures vs. innovative cultures represents approach to changes that is preferred in certain organization as presented by Sułkowski (2013). Conservative cultures prefer to maintain status quo, respect tradition and experience and tent to gather as much information as possible before taking action. Innovative cultures value changes and can act while having information deficit, also undermine value of tradition or authorities. Dimension of high vs. low uncertainty avoidance is based on Hofstede model. Organizations with high uncertainty avoidance often have more rules, are more formalized and perceive nonstandard, non-regulated situations as source of potential threat. Organizations characterized by low uncertainty avoidance have fewer rules, make fewer plans and are more tolerant. Dimension of internal focus vs. external focus is in line with Cameron and Quinn Competing Values Framework (Cameron & Quinn 2011). External focus means that organization pays lot of attention to external transaction and position it held in its environment, internal focus means that organization is eager to give attention to internal matters and its employees. Dimension of high vs. low power distance bases on Hofstede model and appear in the form of acceptance to inequality, hierarchy and showing status related to position. Dimension of individualism vs. collectivism is constructed on both Hofstede and Trompenaars models. Organizational Cultures characterised by individualism value individual achievements and ability of individual to excel and create own path, while collectivistic cultures value team-play, group loyalty and tend to identify individuals by group to which they belong. Dimensions of task orientation and relationship orientation are based on Blake Mouton Managerial Grid (Blake & Mouton 1962) in which task orientation means focus on results, tasks and structures, while relationship orientation means focus on positive relationship, team well-being and communication.

2. STUDY METHODOLOGY

Questionnaire used to diagnose organizational culture of innovative companies composed of 32 items describing 8 dimensions. Respondents were rating the occurrence intensity of certain phenomenon in their companies, from 1 - meaning low intensity of occurrence to 5 - meaning strong intensity of occurrence. Following analysis is based on arithmetical mean presenting intensity of occurrence of certain cultural values. In line with this methodology it was possible to identify intensity of occurrence of values, behaviours and attitudes characteristic for both ends of each dimension. As a result in some cases businesses from one country could by characterised by high intensity of occurrence of values from both ends of dimension (e.g. could have both high level for ascribed and archived status), while in case of others no clear characteristics could be identified (both characteristics have low intensity).

In the cultural dimension of communication context intensity of occurrence of following phenomenon was measured: use of verbal and non-verbal communicates, direct vocal communication, freedom of idea expression, use of intuition by recipient and need for context analysis to understand message. Dimension of ascribed vs. archived status was researched using promotion criteria and basis of respect towards superior as a base for measurement. Occurrence of such phenomenon as reaching position in organization depending on individual achievements and other non-individual factors, importance of competences, self-development and seniority for promotion, and source of respect for superior - either expert knowledge or position in organizational hierarchy - was taken into account. For dimension of cultural conservatism vs. cultural innovativeness following aspects were used: level of employee self-initiated activity, perception of change as threat or opportunity and role of tradition in company functioning. In dimension of uncertainty avoidance measurement was based on employee

perception of importance of work in their lives, will to take risk, flexibility of actions and role of procedures in company functioning. Measurement of dimension of external vs. internal focus was based on self-identification of employees with company, acceptance for different values, and priority of for external relations over internal matters. Power distance dimension was tested by respondents answers to questions about superior-subordinate relations - their frequency and openness and subordinates feeling of submission. Dimension of collectivism vs. individualism was diagnosed on the base of following elements: preference of own good over group good, readiness to resign of own independence for need of cooperation, preference for independent work and self-responsibility or harmony and lack of conflicts. In the dimension of task orientation and relationship orientation following aspects were used for measurement: perception of good supervisor as one who provide advice and create safe atmosphere, perception of good relationship at work and good life quality as the effect of managers actions, pressure for individual tasks and results and perception of importance of financial and economical effects as most important regarding business market position and success.

Questionnaire was conducted in seven countries: Austria, Poland, Slovenia, Spain, Thailand, Ukraine and USA. Due to international character of research questionnaire was prepared and conducted in following languages: English, Polish, German, Spanish and Ukrainian. Total of 2456 employees from selected 303 innovative companies completed the survey:

- 1702 employees from 142 companies from Poland,
- 160 employees from 40 companies from Thailand,
- 144 employees from 36 companies from Ukraine,
- 152 employees from 27 companies from Austria,
- 135 employees from 15 companies from USA,
- 88 employees from 12 companies from Spain,
- 75 employees from 27 companies from Slovenia.

3. STUDY RESULTS

3.1. Organizational culture - Thailand

Organizational culture of examined enterprises from Thailand is characterized by highest values of:

- high context - 3,67
- achieved status - 3,92
- innovativeness - 3,47
- high uncertainty avoidance - 3,67
- external focus - 3,72
- low power distance - 3,77
- collectivism - 3,67
- task orientation - 3,6

Examined businesses from Thailand are characterized by coexistence of high context(3,67) and low context (3,55). It means that despite common use of direct meaning in verbal communication still ritualization and proper transformation of transmission plays more important role. It is visible that achieved status (3,92) is clearly preferred over ascribed status (3,55), which leads to conclusion that employee own achievements are regarded as important. Preference of status based on achievements is most visible characteristic of examined enterprises from Thailand and was most often appearing in the respondent answers. On cultural dimension of conservative culture (3,4) vs. innovative culture (3,47) in examined businesses it is possible to observe medium intensity of both values with slight preference toward pro-innovativeness. In dimension of cultural acceptance of uncertainty high uncertainty avoidance is more visible (3,67). Low uncertainty avoidance although present among examined businesses is slightly less popular (3,4). Businesses from Thailand are characterized by rather stronger external focus (3,72) than internal focus (3,57). Regarding dimension of individualism vs. collectivism the difference is even smaller. Among examined enterprises collectivism (3,67) slightly overweighs individualism (3,52), so both of those characteristics are co-occurring with medium intensity. Regarding managerial grid with two dimensions of task orientation and relationship orientation organizational culture of examined enterprises from Thailand can be best described as both medium rate task oriented (3,6) and medium rate relationship oriented (3,57).

3.2. Organizational culture - Ukraine

Organizational culture of examined businesses from Ukraine is characterized by highest values of:

- low context - 3,83
- achieved status - 3,79
- innovativeness - 3,79
- high uncertainty avoidance - 3,54
- external focus - 3,79
- low power distance - 3,58
- individualism - 3,62
- task orientation - 4,33

Examined enterprises from Ukraine are visibly characterized by low communication context (3,83). High communication context is characteristic that is rarely perceived by respondents (2,37). Therefore it is possible to qualify organizational culture of examined businesses as culture of low context communication in which communication is based on verbal transmission and lacking excessive ritualization. In the dimension of achieved status vs. ascribed status exists preference towards archived status (3,79), although ascribed status it is also present in their organizational culture (3,5). Examined companies in dimension of conservative culture vs. innovative culture are strongly characterized by innovative culture (3,79). Ukrainian respondents were pointing to conservative culture values most rarely from all examined characteristics (2,25). Regarding uncertainty avoidance respondents answer present small preference towards culture of high uncertainty avoidance (3,54) over culture of low uncertainty avoidance (3,42). Similarly in case of dimension of external and internal focus small difference between external focus (3,79) and internal focus (3,75) allows to describe both cultures as coexisting at examined enterprises. Visible difference is present regarding dimension of power distance - low power distance culture is clearly more popular (3,58) over high power distance culture (2,96). Organizational culture of examined businesses in dimension of individualism vs. collectivism can be qualified as individualistic (3,62), with visible collectivistic tendencies (3,33). In dimension of task and relationship orientation Ukrainian enterprises are characterized by very strong task orientation (4,33), with weaker but still important orientation for relationship (3,96). Task orientation was characteristic most often appearing in Ukrainian respondents answers among all examined characteristics of Ukrainian culture.

3.3. Organizational culture - USA

Organizational culture of examined enterprises from USA is characterized by highest values of:

- high context - 3,85
- achieved status - 4,34
- innovativeness - 3,72
- high uncertainty avoidance - 4,07
- internal focus - 4,12
- low power distance - 3,97
- individualism - 3,68
- task orientation - 3,98

In the dimension of communication context organizational culture of examined USA businesses is characterized by archiving high score both in high context (3,85) and low context (3,75). Such result implies that both types of communication context coexist in innovative enterprises organizational culture at significant degree. Research show similar results regarding status dimension. Organizational culture of USA companies is characterized by archived status (4,34), with strong presence of ascribed status (4,20). Achievement status is characteristic most often selected by respondents from all values. In the dimension of innovative cultures vs. conservative cultures examined businesses were rather characterized by innovativeness (3,72) rather than conservatism (3,56). Results also show preference toward high uncertainty avoidance (4,07) over low uncertainty avoidance (3,78). In dimension of internal vs. external focus there is strong internal focus (4,12) and weaker external focus (3,84). More significant differences are present in dimension of power distance. According to respondents answers existing organizational culture of examined USA companies was characterized by low power distance (3,97) rather than high power distance (3,28). In dimension of individualism vs. collectivism research results are near - both cultures coexist in USA enterprises with slight preference towards individualism

(3,68) over collectivism (3,63). In dimension of task and relationship orientation examined businesses were characterized by strong task orientation (3,98), but relationship orientation (3,57) was also present.

3.4. Organizational culture - Austria

Organizational culture of examined companies from Austria is characterized by highest values of:

- low context - 3,98
- achieved status - 4,26
- innovativeness - 4,31
- low uncertainty avoidance - 4,09
- internal focus - 4,36
- low power distance - 4,52
- individualism - 4,58
- equal task and relationship orientation - 4,58

Examined enterprises from Austria in dimension of communication context were characterized by visible low context (3,98), with just a little worse score for high context (3,81). More visible difference regards dimension of status - with very high score for achieved status (4,26). Low ascribed status (3,37) was characteristic pointed in least degree by respondents from Austria. In the dimension of innovative cultures vs. conservative cultures there is significant preference in respondents answers for pro-innovativeness (4,31) over conservatism (3,49). Dimension of uncertainty avoidance is much harder to characterize. Research show that strong characteristics of both culture of low uncertainty avoidance (4,09) and culture of high uncertainty avoidance (4,04) are present at the same time in the culture of examined businesses. In dimension of internal vs. external focus organizational culture of Austrian businesses is characterized by internal focus (4,36), although external focus (4,09) is present in a important, but lesser degree as well. In dimension of power distance examined companies tend to have much more characteristics of culture of low power distance (4,52) than high power distance (3,70). In dimension of individualism vs. collectivism research show slight preference for individualism (4,58) over collectivism (4,53), although both characteristics have very strong tendency to appear in examined enterprises. In dimension of task and relationship orientation Austria scored the same very high rate both for relationship orientation (4,58) and task orientation (4,58). Task orientation, relationship orientation and individualism are organizational culture characteristics that appear most often in examined enterprises in Austria.

3.5. Organizational culture - Slovenia

Organizational culture of examined businesses from Slovenia is characterized by highest values of:

- low context - 3,5
- achieved status - 3,5
- conservatism - 4,5
- low uncertainty avoidance - 3,5
- external focus - 4,0
- no clear characteristics of low or high power distance
- individualism - 4,0
- relationship orientation - 4,5

Organizational culture of examined businesses from Slovenia in communication context dimension is characterized by strong preference for low context (3,5) with high context still present (3,0). In dimension of ascribed vs. archived status archived status (3,5) clearly dominates over ascribed status (1,5). Ascribed status was characteristic chosen least often by Slovenian respondents from all available options. In dimension of innovative culture vs. conservative culture examined enterprises were characterized by conservatism (4,5) with low presence of innovative culture characteristics (2,5). Slovenian respondents preferred to describe existing organizational culture as one characterized by low uncertainty avoidance (3,5) rather than high uncertainty avoidance (3,0). In dimension of internal vs. external focus there is visible difference as external focus (4,0) is much more popular than internal focus (3,0). There is no clear characteristic regarding power distance dimension as characteristics of both low power distance (2,5) and high power distance (2,5) appear in the same middling rate. In dimension of individualism vs. collectivism organizational culture of examined companies is clearly

more individualistic (4,0) than collectivist (3,0). In dimension of task and relationship orientation there is strong orientation for relationship (4,5) with very weak task orientation (2,0). Slovenian respondents were most eager to point characteristics of conservatism culture and relationship orientation.

3.6. Organizational culture - Spain

Organizational culture of examined enterprises from Spain is characterized by highest values of:

- low context - 3,25
- achieved status - 4,0
- conservatism - 3,5
- no clear characteristics of low or high uncertainty avoidance
- internal focus - 3,75
- no clear characteristics of low or high power distance
- collectivism - 3,25
- task orientation - 3,0

Organizational culture of examined businesses from Spain in dimension of communication context is rather closer to low context (3,25) culture than high context (2,75) culture. Dimension of ascribed vs. achieved status is more distinctive characteristic. Ascribed status (4,0) is characteristic most often selected by Spanish respondents. As achieved status (2,5) is on low level it allows to qualify the organizational culture of examined companies in this dimension as culture of ascribed status. In dimension of innovative culture vs. conservative culture among Spanish respondents there is strong preference to qualify existing culture as conservatism culture (3,5) rather than innovative culture (2,5). Research provide no clear characteristic of examined businesses in dimension of uncertainty avoidance. Spanish enterprises show both elements of low uncertainty avoidance (3,5) and high uncertainty avoidance (3,5). There is small preference in organizational culture for internal focus (3,75) over external focus (3,5), but elements of both cultures appear in examined enterprises. Study result do not allow to identify clearly organizational culture in dimension of power distance - elements of both low power distance (2,75) and high power distance (2,75) coexist at low level. For dimension of collectivism vs. individualism there is slight preference for collectivism (3,25) over individualism (2,75). Spanish enterprises scored medium rates both in area of task orientation (3,0) and relationship orientation (2,75).

3.7. Organizational culture - Poland

Polish innovative enterprises organizational culture was characterised by highest values of:

- low context - 3,65
- achieved status - 3,71
- innovativeness - 3,52
- high uncertainty avoidance - 3,6
- external focus - 3,85
- low power distance - 3,54
- individualism - 3,67
- task orientation - 3,79

Businesses from Poland were characterized by moderate intensity of occurrence of all characteristics from all dimensions. Therefore clear classification of organizational culture to one of types inside dimension is not proper in case of all dimension. Although in dimension of context there is clear respondents preference towards low context (3,65) over high context (3,15). Similarly Polish companies are rather characterized by ascribed status (3,71) rather than achieved one (3,57), still ascribed status is important characteristic of Polish organizational culture. Companies tend toward innovativeness (3,52) over conservatism (3,14) and to high uncertainty avoidance (3,6) over low uncertainty avoidance (3,4). In the dimension of internal vs. external focus Polish respondents preferred to characterize organizational culture of their businesses as externally focused (3,85) rather than internally focused (3,51). There is also preference towards low power distance (3,54) although high power distance is also present (3,15). Both individualism (3,67) and collectivism (3,54) characteristics are visible in organizational culture of Polish enterprises. Relationship and task orientation are both appearing on similar, strong level. That allow to qualify Polish innovative companies as both strongly task oriented (3,79) and relationship oriented (3,78).

3.8. Comparison of organizational cultures

Among organizational cultures from examined countries in dimension of communication context the highest rate for high context was archived by organizational culture of USA enterprises (3,85) and lowest by Ukrainian (2,73). Low context in highest rate describes organizational culture of Austrian businesses (3,98), and is rarest among enterprises from Spain (2,75). In dimension of ascribed vs. archived status the archived status was most often characterizing USA companies (4,34), and least often businesses from Slovenia. What is more interesting ascribed status culture shows analogical results with highest score for USA (4,2) and lowest for Slovenia (1,5). In dimension of innovative culture vs. conservative culture highest pro-innovation characterized companies from Austria (4,31) and lowest businesses from Spain and Slovenia (2,5). High conservatism is characteristic for Slovenia (4,5), and lowest for Ukraine (2,25). In dimension of uncertainty avoidance low uncertainty avoidance was most often pointed by respondents from Austria (4,09) and least often by those from Thailand and Poland (3,4). High uncertainty avoidance was most characteristic for American organizational culture (4,07) and least to Slovenian (3,07). Regarding dimension of internal and external focus highest internal focus characterized respondents from Austria (4,36) and lowest from Slovenia (3,0). Highest external focus was shown again by Austrian respondents (4,09), and lowest by Spanish (3,5). In dimension of power distance high power distance was most often characteristic for Austrian enterprises organizational culture (3,7), and least often by Slovenian (2,5). Respondents from those countries at the same time ranked highest value for Austria (4,52) and lowest for Slovenia (2,5) for low power distance. In dimension of individualism and collectivism highest values for both collectivism (4,53) and individualism (4,58) were noted for Austrian businesses. Slovenian businesses organizational culture ranked the lowest value for collectivism (3,0), as did Spanish for individualism (2,75). Enterprises from Austria were characterized by highest values for both relationship orientation (4,58) and task orientation (4,58). The least relationship oriented organizational culture is present in Spanish companies (2,75), while least task oriented organizational culture characterize Slovenia (2,0).

4. CONCLUSIONS

Although differences in national cultures find their reflection in organizational culture of innovative companies, there is still possibility to identify traits that appear very often in their culture, despite national background. Most important trait is high level of archived status in organizational culture of all researched enterprises. Also in case of culture of all enterprises archived status ranked higher than ascribed status. Another visible traits are external focus and relationship orientation. Among less important trait, but still often appearing in organizational culture of innovative enterprises are: internal focus, individualism, high uncertainty avoidance, task orientation, low context and low power distance. According to results innovative companies are ones that value competencies and achievements, while strongly focusing on their surroundings and providing good working atmosphere. Members of organization characterized by such cultural traits perceive their development career as depending on their personal successes which can motivate them to taking action. At the same time due to high level of relationship orientation the good and supportive atmosphere at work provide good background for experimentation. Finally the external focus means that members of organization are paying attention to needs of organization environment - including customers. Presence of those cultural elements at he same time creates proper conditions that encourages employees to introduce innovations. Future research are needed in this area to clarify effects that presence of those values have on their readiness and intension to introduce innovation, and what other cultural aspects can influence their ability to innovate.

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