

MANAGING THE ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE: A TECHNOLOGICAL ISSUE

*Ludmila N. Aksenovskaja,
Takhir U. Bazarov*

*Lomonosov Moscow State University
Moscow*

Organizational culture presents an interest for research and practice of social psychology. This article is intended to discuss the problem of managing the organizational structure on two levels that contain most topical problems: general methodological level and technological level. Organizational culture is a system with its distinct features that consists of units and sub-systems with their specific features. An organizational-culture system comprises several levels: leader's personality level (as well as the personality level in general), level of executive team (as well as of a small group in general), level of organization in general (level of a large group).

Keywords: organizational culture, social psychology, team, management

Organizational culture which presents an interest for research and practice of social psychology, despite the complexity of scientific perception of "culture" phenomenon in general, is the most promising branch among interdisciplinary blends of organizational, psychological and management theories, as well as cultural studies.

In due course both research and practice in the area of organizational culture go through certain phases. Each phase empathizes its special problem and goal. A successful solution and achievement of those two, on the one hand, reveal a new topical problem to be resolved, and on the other hand, allow for a broader and deeper understanding of socio-psychological specifics of organizational culture phenomenon. From the theoretical point of view, the developmental pathway of organizational and cultural research starts from consecutively formed specific explanatory models, then proceeds towards basic explanatory models, and finally reaches the step of generating its own methodology and epistemology. Nowadays these particular theoretical matters have become exception-

ally vital. From the practical point of view of the consultants specializing in management and organizational development, it is of primary importance that the position of a consultant, which can be very well described with a straight-forward cliché “Give us the money, and we’ll do the rest”, should be reviewed. Proven records show that such an approach to organizational culture gives little result. It is not possible to achieve anything radically new if the most important condition is ignored – our executives do need thorough transformation in mindset, way of thinking and lifestyle in general. Thus, the search for an innovative and more adequate approach to practice within organizational culture becomes the top priority these days.

This article is intended to discuss the problem of managing the organizational structure on two levels that contain most topical problems: general methodological level and technological level.

Let’s briefly consider three issues: systematic understanding of organizational structure, management, and management of organizational structure. Organizational culture is a system, in other words it is a wholeness with its distinct features that consists of units and sub-systems with their specific features. In the context of social psychology an organizational-culture system comprises several levels: leader’s personality level (as well as the personality level in general), level of executive team (as well as of a small group in general), level of organization in general (level of a large group). These levels can be at the same time considered as sub-cultural sub-systems of the organizational culture system. Each one has their specific goals, assets, and their specific mindset etc.

Systematic understanding of management is closely connected with the perception of management as the type of activity that allows for the system’s (in our case it’s the organizational culture system) transformation from an existing into desirable condition.

Thus, managing the organizational culture would assume that:

- 1) we have an image of desirable condition of organizational culture, the image that has been agreed upon on all levels, and we are assigning it a goal status;
- 2) we have an image of existing condition of organizational culture, the image that has been agreed upon on all levels, and we are assigning it a “problem status” that hinders the development of organizational-culture system;

- 3) we develop an algorithm to convert the organizational culture system from the problem status to the goal status, we agree upon this program on all system levels and we teach all sub-systems the skills of a different operation manner that they lack;
- 4) and finally, we start to implement the program using a feed-back pattern for each phase and adjusting our actions up until successful achievement of the goal. Once a goal is achieved, the culture and the effectiveness of management can be considered transformed.

Is there anything wrong with the system? The problem is that organizational culture system involves people. And people do not follow the linear rules of systems theory. Today you have agreed upon a goal, but the next day this goal seems no more pleasing. They have assured you of their support looking right into your eyes, but once you left they forgot about it. Just now they were listening to you and they believed in the solutions you set forth, but the next day they believe those solutions are faulty. Why is it so that once you turn your back on something and step away, and “on its circuits the wind returns”? When comparing physics and psychology Gregory Bateson illustrated the point: “*when you kick a stone*”, he would say, “*the movement of the stone is determined by its mass, and by the energy and direction of your kick; however, when you kick a dog...*” the result can be unpredictable. A systematic approach has its limitations. A consultant can “kick the dog” of the customer. The customer can “kick” his “dog” himself. Simple decisions and actions can bring about complex consequences.

Organizational culture is an elaborate self-developing system that cannot tolerate being imposed any developmental pathways. It's of crucial importance to understand its own developmental tendencies and encourage them. Any development of organization culture system goes through the stages of instability, bifurcation, and contingency. While in stage of instability, actions of every single person can influence macro processes.

Managing organizational structure is not about the strength of impact (the power of logics and willpower) – it's all about the right organization of the impact. In this case minor but well organized (rebound) impacts produce considerable effect.

Nonlinear nature, as in strategy management for instance, is perceived solely from psychological perspective: “a special merit of non-

linear strategy management lies in its basis which is the application of intelligence and psychology. The idea of nonlinear actions itself is closely intertwined with all problems deriving from the influence of one person's reason onto another person's reason...<...>. The use of nonlinear strategy presupposes deviation from conventional stereotype thinking and application of non-typical effective management approaches" (Lemke, 2006, p. 5).

Social psychology research within our country has seen the attempts to emphasize creativity and improvisation in management (Bazarov, 2006). Thus, for instance, it was pointed out that an improvising manager should be a good timist, which is typical of people who are fond of music. An ability to perceive the management of organizational culture from non-linear prospective of a musician, e.g. a jazz orchestra conductor, allows for understanding or, better, for obtaining the sense of how a system-based scheme of managing organizational culture can be and should be filled with the improvisational ability of the key figures – the managers. Just like a piece of music, both for the audience and for the performers, the culture can emerge and elegantly and spontaneously shape up with the inspiration, letting out (instead of suppressing) emotions and creativity of participants, as well as giving them joy and pleasure.

With constant debate on how to approach the study of culture phenomenon, and the study of organizational culture in particular, we should single out those concept-based publications that put forth integration models. Ken Wilber is, no doubt, one of the brightest representatives and supporters of concept-integration approach in modern psychology (Wilber, 1996). Some of his key ideas provide a new perspective on the problem of search (or formation) of environment that encourages a relatively fast and effective change in the area of managers' "life strategy". These ideas also allow for the development of methods for such a change to take place.

Wilber considers development (evolution) the major process of the universe (Kosmos). The never ending process of development is called the Spirit. The Spirit is present and demonstrates itself at each particular stage of development. Human development, the development of separate social communities as well as specific human beings separately, is also a part of such developmental process.

Reality in general, and human reality in particular, is not a fusion of objects or processes but is instead a mixture of holons (the term A.

Koestler used to describe a whole which is self-contained, but at the same time can be identified as a sub-ordinate part of another whole). Thus, for instance, a human being can be regarded both as a whole and as a part of social group. The same vision can be applied to a small group of people (unit within an organization) which is a part of a larger group or organization etc. Hence, a human being, a group, and mankind in general are all examples of holons. All holons possess such features as organization (ability to sustain its wholeness when facing the danger of influence coming from external environment) and cooperation (being part of collaboration process regarded as a whole). Since the Spirit (the great chain of being) is a self-evolving energy of creativity, holons constantly continue to emerge. And this is not a matter of chance – it happens through creativity (it's the creativity, and not the chance, which is responsible for building the Kosmos). Holons exist in holarchies (Koestler's reference to natural hierarchy providing for more order, holism, and wholeness).

According to Wilber, *"All evolutionary and developmental patterns proceed by holarchization, by a process of increasing orders of wholeness and inclusion, which is a type of ranking by holistic capacity"* (Wilber, 1996, p. 42). To illustrate the point: atom – molecule – cell – organism – ecosystem. A unit seen as a whole in one dimension will be a composite of another unit in another dimension: *"Each emergent holon transcends but includes its predecessor(s). <...> Evolution is a process of transcend and include..."* (Ibid., p. 43-44). Every new dimension includes and transcends its predecessor revealing new features.

Wilber differentiates between natural or normal hierarchy (holarchy) and "pathological hierarchy of supremacy". The latter results from an attempt of one holon to leave its place in the holarchy and to start managing the whole (e.g. cancer cell, autocratic fascist etc).

The above mentioned Wilber's ideas let us perceive organizational culture as a holarchy, in other words as a progressing and developing mixture of holons that are all both self-containing and at the same time are parts of some other holons. If we take the physical layer, these holons are specific human beings, groups of people cooperating with each other on both formal and informal structural levels. From the psychological layer angle, these holons are moral models, knowledge, concepts and senses that specific human beings and their groups possess. And finally,

from the point of view of social psychology, holons are existing relationships and cooperation methods. Wilber calls these types of holons “aspects”, facets of self-containing holon. And depending on the level of analysis, within the context of organizational structure phenomenon any such facet is a human or a group of people.

Considering the vision set forth above, development of organizational culture, and business development itself, are not one and the same thing. Business development can be quantitative (more customers, more equipment, more production output, more money), while organizational culture development is, first and foremost, qualitative. Latter takes place as a constantly transcending process at the consciousness level, which results in deeper individual and corporate consciousness. And holons, as a number of people and groups that are capable of creative self-regulation, keep decreasing with new levels achieved.

Two questions arise: does the inner “pyramid of development” encourage achievement of private business goals, and how the holarchy concept contributes to our knowledge in connection with managing organizational culture?

When answering the first question we shall presume that a private business goal is 1) to augment the income and 2) to increase the profit. Now let's conduct an imaginary experiment. We are given a person who is determined to set up a business (for example, production and sales of dairy products) and who has a sufficient amount of money. Let's assume such a project will take place in favorable and unchanging environmental conditions. There is also an additional condition that will divide the situation into two possible developmental paths: a) the person possesses “zero” or near-zero depth of consciousness, which projects in very primitive outlook based on one or two widely known assumptions: “the morn will come and the meat with it”, “the right people will always do the right thing” etc); b) the person possesses a certain depth of consciousness and, hence, his outlook is more complex, consisting of numerous reciprocally connected parts, and such a person can see how some interference in one matter may cause consequences in another matter. We are discussing the map of business reality that has been shaped as a result of comprehensive actions, the analysis of results of such actions and, finally, the person's accumulated experience and the degree of comprehension of such experience. In this case neither self-consciousness without practice, nor practical experience that fails to be analyzed and comprehended, – none

of them “works” here. But it is still not clear if the “depth” can influence the performance and if yes, then how? The “depth” or consciousness gives a definite advantage, to which the evolution process is an evident proof. Therefore, development of organizational culture takes place through creative transcending of consciousness and activity, and entails the emergence of more profound “depth” in organizational culture system. The “depth” of the system, in its turn, is a factor that provides for the system’s potential for innovation, including new possibilities to adapt. All the above mentioned factors determine the efficiency of business and its possibility to reach its private goals.

Managing organizational culture – as seen from the angle of this approach – means managing creativity within an organization at every level. Such a perspective on the nature of managing organizational culture also requires some ideas on how to implement it, as well as some technologies that would use these ideas.

It’s common knowledge that one cannot manage the process of creation of music in Mozart’s head. But it is possible to create the environment that would encourage music creation. Such environment is the key condition to mould the musician.

Wilber’s approach allows for another angle to perceive the problems of social and psychological research of organizational culture not solely theoretically but also from the perspective of practice. According to Wilber, there are two types of great world spiritual traditions that serve the basis for the whole variety of theories and research approaches. The Spirit’s self-consciousness is based on either of these two traditions: ascending spiritual pathway (transcendence, Whole, Heaven, Emptiness), and descending spiritual pathway (profane, plural, Earth, Shape). Descending and Ascending serve the basis for corresponding contesting ideologies. Descending, in Wilber’s opinion, corresponds to the “surface”, and Ascending refers to the “depth”. Modern and postmodern worlds are reigned by the “surface” which stands for a recognition of the sensuous, empirical, material aspect of the world, in other words “*anything you can see and grab hold of*”.

The Depth and the Surface are as different as the “interior” (Left-Hand) and the “exterior” (Right-Hand) paths for all phenomena and processes. In this connection Wilber comes up with a concept of 4 types of truth that come from various fields of science. Thus, here is one of Wilber’s tables:

<u>Left-Hand path</u> Interpretation Hermeneutics Consciousness	<u>Right-Hand path</u> Monology Empirical approach, positivism Shape
Sigmund Freud Carl G. Jung Jean Piaget Aurobindo Plotinus Siddhārtha Gautama	<i>Burrhus Skinner</i> <i>John Watson</i> <i>John Locke</i> Empiricism Behavioral Science Physics, Biology, Neurology etc
<i>Thomas Samuel Kuhn</i> <i>Wilhelm Dilthey</i> Jean Gebser <i>Max Weber</i> <i>Hans-Georg Gadamer</i>	the systems theory <i>Talcott Parsons</i> <i>Auguste Comte</i> <i>Karl Marx</i> <i>Gerhard Lenski</i>

Figure 1. Some scientists and philosophers whose research can broaden outlook in regards to each sector (quot. Wilber, p. 110)

Any research falls into one of two big categories: Left-Hand path (interior) and Right-Hand path (exterior). Those approaches that recognize or incorporate both categories are scarce, but those are the ones Wilber gives preference to. The “surface” of phenomena and processes can be observed and can undergo experimental procedure, while the “depth” can be only interpreted in a dialogue through reaching mutual understanding. The first approach gives us an answer to the question “*what does it do?*”, whereas the second one responds to “*what does it mean?*”.

Wilber differentiates between the notions of culture and society in the following way: culture is interior (senses, values, beliefs), while society is exterior (matter, established structure of the society, its technical and economic basis, writing, number of population etc). In order to understand the culture and what it means it is of essential importance to know how to interpret its senses. This is not possible without submerging into the culture, and learning its language – otherwise stated, it is not possible to do it using solely “exterior” methods. The right, high-quality interpretations differ from bad ones (incompetent) by their comprehensiveness, while bad interpretations are only partial as they interpret only one sector of culture. A good interpretation is based on 4 fundamental

aspects of holon which bring about the essential distinction (including science): interior and exterior, singularity and multiplicity. Or as Wilber puts it, *the inside and the outside of the holon, in both its individual and collective forms* (or – intension, behavior, culture, society).

Thus we can draw a conclusion that the methodological mistake is that certain aspects of the reality we study are ignored. According to Wilber, the most frequent mistake consists in following the fundamental paradigm of Enlightenment, which is the framework of map-making and the one of monological vision, and which continue to be duplicated by researchers creating their theories and systems. “*Open any good book on systems theory*”, claims Wilber, “*and you will find nothing about ethical standards, intersubjective values, moral dispositions, mutual understanding, truthfulness, sincerity, depth, integrity, aesthetics, interpretation, hermeneutics, beauty, art, the sublime*” (Wilber, p. 172). This cannot be interpreted as a benign mistake since “*you have just gutted the interiors of the entire Kosmos, you have just perfectly ruined the lifeworld of all holons*” (Ibid, p. 174). And with the depth being lost, the sense disappears as well. The only solution to this problem is to pursue a comprehensive interpretation that encompasses both the “surface” and the “depth”.

An order approach to study organizational culture (Aksenovskaya, 2005, 2007) covers the “surface” (type of social community, models of managerial interaction under observation), as well as the “depth” of organizational culture (basic and functional moral senses that direct and adjust managerial interaction). This kind of approach to managing organizational culture encourages intentional development and perfection of basic aspects of culture, in this case culture being understood as social and psychological order. A fusion of *order approach* to changing organizational culture, *improvisational approach* to management psychology and, finally, *consideration of problems* in managing the development of creative abilities among members of an organization, – such fusion provides for a technology of managing organizational culture. The core spring (method) of such technology is, evidently, a method that allows for considerable improvement of managerial creative abilities (their “depth”), and thus, at the same time, for providing a rebound feedback in enlarging the “depth” of executives, but nevertheless not allowing for broadening a “cultural gap” between different levels of organizational culture holarchy which is constantly developing creatively.

Managing organizational culture is one of the most topical issues of social psychology which is expected to come up with research and practice solutions that would promote more conscious and adequate approaches to manage cultural processes within a business organization. In theory, a promising solution to such a problem would be an approach that allows to obtain quality (“good”) interpretations of cultural psychological phenomena and processes. This explains the naturally determined interest towards integrative approach, and such interest will continue to grow.

In practice, to elaborate an efficient technology of managing organizational culture we need a fusion of order technology (or any other technology) and an improvisation approach to managerial psychology, whereas the latter should be based on development of personal creative abilities of each group member and creative abilities of the group as a whole.

References

Aksenovskaya, L.N. (2005). *Ordernaja koncepcija organizacionnoj kul'tury: voprosy metodologii* [Order Perception of Organizational Culture: Methodology Issues]. Saratov: Izdatel'stvo SGU.

Aksenovskaya, L.N. (2007). *Ordernaja model' organizacionnoj kul'tury* [Order Model of Organizational Culture]. Moscow: Akademicheskij projekt.

Bazarov, T.U. (2006). Improvizacija kak osnova sovmestnogo tvorcestva v upravlenii [Improvisation as the Pillar of Collective Creativity in Management]. *Nacional'nyj psihologicheskij zhurnal*, 1(Nov.), 120-122.

Lemke, G. (2006). *Nelinejnyj strategicheskij menedzhment ili iskusstvo konkurencii* [Nonlinear Strategy Management or the Art of Rivalry]. Moscow: Delo i Servis.

Wilber, K. (1996). *A Brief History of Everything*. Boston, MA: Shambhala Publications, Inc.