

School culture perceived by Polish teachers

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Abstract

The findings presented in this article are an element of the international GLOBE research (Global Leadership and Organizational Behavior Effectiveness Research Program). The GLOBE model may be used to assess culture on many levels, including individual and regional ones. An overview of wide international research allows to indicate transnational aggregations characterized by similar organizational culture.

The purpose of the research was to obtain data on institutional culture exemplified by management practices and leadership perception in various school environments in Poland. The findings were compared with the results of the research on cultures within higher education institutions and organizational cultures from other countries. The implications coming from the research depict the perception of a leader's profile and of school culture which is a significant factor for succeeding in diversified educational environment. Furthermore, the essential objective of the research was to indicate Polish teachers' expectations regarding school culture and school leader.

The research was conducted on the group of 247 randomly selected teachers (from various educational levels as well school types) in Poland, with the GLOBE questionnaire applied.

Keywords: school culture, leadership, teachers

Introduction

The educational system reform introduced in Poland in 1999 started the process of changes in Polish education which, with various intensity, lasts until now. Even though there were significant subject, matter and financial resources invested, the results seem to be unsatisfactory. The direction of changes was significantly influenced by the fact that the changes within the educational system were included in a wider context of social changes in Poland. According to Niezgoda (2011), external and internal factors had influenced the process of forming the present educational system in Poland. Among the external factors Niezgoda mentions: political and economic transformations, as well as

changes in the set of beliefs (individualism, educational and professional career paths determined by free market). On the other hand, the author lists the following internal factors: increased importance of school education as the determinant of career path as well as establishing non-public schools on the market (Niezgoda, 2011). The last two factors brought an element of competitiveness which resulted in internal tensions within the educational system. Competitiveness in past years is even strengthened by the population decline and by the evaluation of the school performance quality. Many parents and students choose schools based on third-party recommendations.

Regardless of the above-mentioned environmental dependencies, many schools accomplish educational and upbringing success. The major characteristic to distinguish these schools is their organizational culture. School is built by individuals who, on one hand, adopt patterns of the local society, and on the other hand, bring their own competences and performance styles. This combination of features shapes a specific atmosphere for work and development. Therefore, this article aims to identify the key dimensions of organisational culture perceived by Polish teachers, representing various school types and environments. Deming (from: Senge 2012) claimed that ‘we will never change the management style if we don’t change educational system. They are so similar.’

Organizational culture and school organizational culture

Defining organizational culture may involve two approaches. The first one captures the culture’s essence by indicating the function it has in an organization (Hofstede and Hofstede, 2005). This approach is conveyed most accurately by the meaning of this word in Latin. This word derives from the Latin word ‘cultus’ (agri), which means cultivating (land, soil). In a wider sense, the Latin verb ‘colere’ indicates cultivating, caring, growing, educating (POLWEN 2003). This perspective corresponds well with the meaning of culture in the

organization of an educational institution. The major goal of school environment is to create conditions for a student’s multi-dimensional development which is directed at accomplishing it. In a school reality, this goal means a mature student who presents effective performance in physical, psychological, social, and spiritual aspects (Gaś, 2006). This approach is exemplified by the definition by Mercer, Barker, Bird (2010): *the culture of a group gives meaning to human endeavour and generates shared values, beliefs and assumptions. It helps people make sense of the world, guiding and shaping behaviour. Because culture is shared, it ensures members of a group act consistently. It also provides a sense of identity and a common purpose* (italics, as per the original).

The second definition approach focuses on extracting components – indicators of the organizational culture. Due to the complexity of organizational culture, not only is it uneasy to define the concept, but also to examine it. We can touch it by measuring its components, although even establishing the components seems to be difficult. There are various definitions of organizational culture which stress distinct aspects of what is happening within an organization. The elements recurring in definitions most frequently are: values, norm, relationships, and symbols (archetypes). Therefore, they can be considered the core of several definitions.

Organizational culture is well presented by Hill and Jones (2012) who emphasize that *organisational culture is the specific collection of values and norms that are shared by people and groups in an organisation and that control the way they interact with each other and with stakeholders outside the organization* (Hil, Jones, 2012). Values are the essence of the presented definition. They play the key role in management strategy. They help to build the mission and vision of an organization and become the source of group norms.

Hil and Jones claim that *organizational values are beliefs and ideas about what kinds of goals members of an organization should pursue and what kinds or standards of behavior employees should use to achieve these goals* (2012).

Every community which wants to accomplish their goals effectively while avoiding internal conflicts and arguments, should adopt a system of norms. This will enable the team to co-operate efficiently, without unreasonable losses of time and energy. The above-mentioned authors underline that *'from organisational values develop organizational norms, the guidelines or expectations that prescribe appropriate kinds of behaviour by employees in particular situations and control the behaviour of organisational members toward one another'* (Hil, Jones 2012).

The presented organizational culture definitions can serve when depicting an organization of business, non-profit, or educational character. It is worth mentioning though that educational institutions such as schools have a specific role to play and unique mission to accomplish. This specificity is reflected when describing their educational culture. Schein (2004) defines school culture as: *'A pattern of shared basic assumptions that was learned by group as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, that has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think and feel in relation to those problems'* (Schein 2004).

Therefore, in such organizational culture, following three levels can be identified:

- 1) Artifacts (physical environment, language, myth, stories, rituals, ceremonies and published values),
- 2) The group's original beliefs and values,
- 3) The underlying assumptions of a group.

On the contrary, Anderson (from: Łuczyński 2011) distinguishes school culture dimensions which include:

- 1) Ecological dimension (geographical location, building, equipment, interiors' look and feel, etc)
- 2) Aggregated characteristics of the school community members (teachers, parents, students). The variables in question are: gender, age, education, professional experience, intelligence, values, and personality.
- 3) Social system dimension comprising: structure (inflexible/flexible) communication styles,

conduct and decision taking procedures.

4) Normative system with rule of conduct, organizational values and system of values and their meanings shared in a school.

In the natural sequence, the specificity of school culture is that it refers to its mental elements which are common for the community members such as knowledge, beliefs, behaviour, norms, rules, rituals, symbols, and language (Fleming, Kleinhenz, 2007).

To be more precise, the concept of organizational culture embraces all human goods created within an organization. These outcomes are of material character (artifacts) or non-material character (concepts, norms, values, beliefs, knowledge). As they are common for the community members, such creations regulate people's behaviours within an organization (Łuczyński, 2011).

Consequently, it is crucial for developing school culture to use wisely the resources of the community, the features of the school personnel, their social skills, their system of norms and values. This school culture is underlying the community accomplishing the goals it has chosen.

Muhammad (2009) highlights that a positive school culture is a place where:

- *Educators have an unwavering belief in the ability of all of their students to achieve success, and they pass that belief on to others in overt and covert ways.*
- *Educators create policies and procedures and adopt practices that support their belief in the ability of every student (Muhammad, 2009).*

On the contrary, in a toxic school culture:

- *Educators believe that student success is based upon student's level of concern, attentiveness, prior knowledge, and willingness to comply with the demands of the school, and they articulate that belief in overt and covert ways.*
- *Educators create policies and procedures and adopt practices that support their belief in the impossibility of universal achievement (Muhammad, 2009).*

In the conclusion of characterizing sample organizational cultures it is worth considering

what underlies the success of a given organization. Bambrick-Santoyo (2012) proposes five strategies for successful staff culture at school:

1) **Set the vision.** *Wisely design a clear and palpable vision for the work environment in your school.*

2) **Get the right people on the bus.** *Without great people, little else matters. Ensure your vision helps drive your hiring.*

3) **Put a stake in the ground.** *Reflect your commitment to developing a strong staff culture from the first interactions of the year.*

4) **Keep your ear to the rail.** *Look and listen for negative culture warning signs that are coming down the tracks.*

5) **Lather, rinse, repeat.** *Staff culture is fragile. If you're not intentional about building, maintaining, or communicating your staff culture, someone else will define it for you (Bambrick-Santoyo, 2012).*

Features of organizational culture in an educational institution

The intensification of components within an organizational culture allows indicating diverse types of culture. According to Dorczak (2013), who adopts the classification by Charles Handy, there are four types of organisational culture: Zeus culture (power), Apollo culture (bureaucracy), Athena culture (teamwork) and Dionysus culture (freedom). Dorczak (2013) provides the circumstances and types of situations typical for each of the four cultures. Thus, the culture of power comes to life whenever:

- the school community experiences a crisis
- the school team experiences impasse in decision making
- serious problems result in lack of confidence and confusion of the school team members
- everyday routine decisions without a strategic meaning for the school community are made
- conflict situations arise

Secondly, the bureaucratic culture exposes its strengths in standard, repetitive situations, where behaviour is nearly automatic, without any deeper insight, such as:

- routine, repetitive, everyday activities

- basic, simple tasks which are elements of more complex activities
- tasks imposed by law or internal regulations to ensure safety

Another type is the culture of teamwork (Athena). It remains valid in complex, problematic situations which require group effort and the contribution of each team member is important. Dorczak (2013) lists the following:

- complex problem situations demanding group effort,
- everyday activities that we would like to make more efficient, but do not involve time or situation pressure,
- activities which require team co-operation and creativity,
- indicating new directions of work

And last but not least, the culture of freedom (Dionysus) may occur in environments lacking clearly indicated goals, where a team is not consolidated or does not have a strong leader. Such team will succeed:

- in case of dysfunctional group processes among team members,
- when there have to be found new solutions for old problems,
- experiencing team's stagnation (tiredness and burnout) – in order to release tension and encourage activity

Organizational culture in the GLOBE project

The study presented in this article was conducted with the tool constructed for the GLOBE project. The Global Leadership and Organizational Behavior Effectiveness (GLOBE) is an international research project whose purpose is to examine the values behind the organizational culture. Therefore, the research was conducted in over 60 countries worldwide. Altogether, there were 17,000 managers questioned.

The GLOBE project adopts the definition of organizational culture developed by House and Javidan. They define culture as: *'shared motives, values, beliefs, identities, and interpretations or meanings of significant events that result from common experiences of members of collectives and are transmitted across age generations'* (Chhokar, Brodbeck, House, 2007).

Cultures were operationalized in terms of

the quantitative dimensions: Assertiveness, Future Orientation, Gender Egalitarianism, Humane Orientation, Institutional Collectivism (Collectivism I), In-Group Collectivism (Collectivism II), Performance Orientation, Power Distance, and Uncertainty Avoidance.

The definitions of these dimensions adopted by GLOBE are as follows:

1) **Assertiveness** is the degree to which individuals in organizations or societies are assertive, confrontational, and aggressive in social relationships.

2) **Future Orientation** is the degree to which individuals in organizations or societies engage in future-oriented behaviours such as planning, investing in the future, and delaying individual or collective gratification.

3) **Gender Egalitarianism** is the extent to which an organization or a society minimizes gender role differences while promoting gender equity and the equality of genders.

4) **Humane Orientation** is the degree to which individuals in organizations or societies encourage and reward individuals for being fair, altruistic, friendly, generous, caring, kind to others, and exhibiting and promoting altruistic ideals.

5) **Institutional Collectivism** (Collectivism I) reflects the degree to which organizational and societal institutional practices encourage and reward collective distribution of resources and collective action.

6) **In-Group Collectivism** (Collectivism II) reflects the degree to which individuals express pride, loyalty, and cohesiveness in their organizations, families, circle of close friends, or other such small groups.

7) **Performance Orientation** refers to the extent to which high level members of organizations and societies encourage and reward group members for performance improvement and excellence.

8) **Power Distance** is the degree to which members of an organization and society encourage and reward unequal distribution of power with greater power at higher levels.

9) **Uncertainty Avoidance** is the extent to which members of an organization or society strive to avoid uncertainty by relying on established social norms, rituals, and bureaucratic practices to decrease the probability of unpredictable future events that could adversely affect the operation of an organiza-

tion or society, and also to remedy the potential adverse effects of such unpredictable future events (Chhokar, Brodbeck, House, 2007).

In the Polish research conducted with the GLOBE questionnaire, the above-mentioned dimensions of organizational culture were divided in two areas: practices and cultural values. The first ones relate to the distinctive features of the actual performance of the organization. The second ones depict a desirable profile of the organization performance – an ideal image of organizational culture.

Methodology of the research

The article focuses on exploring organizational culture of different school communities. Creating the right environment for the development of students depends on the quality of school personnel performance.

Purpose of the research

The major purpose of this study is to answer the following question: how do the teachers employed in Polish schools evaluate cultural practices and values at their workplaces?

The responses to the above-mentioned query will be facilitated by the detailed questions below:

1. Is the evaluation of school organizational culture different depending on the type of a school institution?
2. Is the evaluation of the actual school organizational culture different from the demanded (ideal) one?

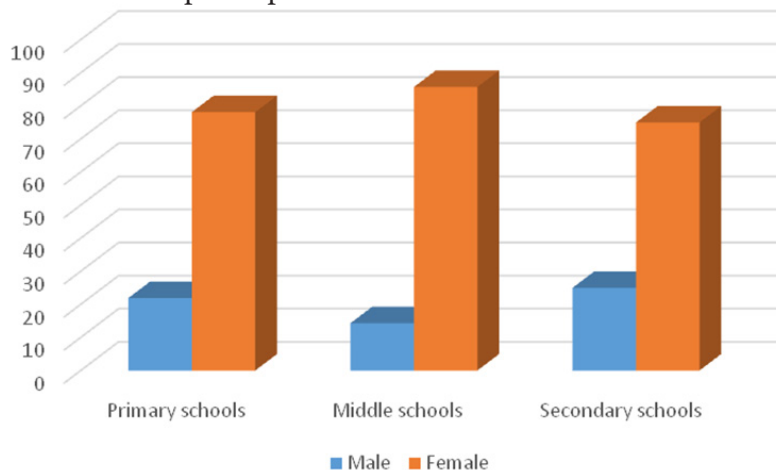
Participants

The research was conducted among randomly selected Polish teachers of various fields. The study involved primary, middle, and secondary schools. All of these were public and non-public, located in cities as well as rural areas. In total, 242 participants were engaged in the study.

Method

The study was conducted with the questionnaire of international GLOBE research project. The measure was adapted to Polish conditions by the professors of the University of Economics and Innovation in Lublin

Figure 1. Gender characteristic of the participants.



Source: Own findings

(WSEI): Porzak, Sagan, and Zub (2011).

The five parts of the questionnaire include:

- evaluation of real organizational culture
- evaluation of expected organizational culture
- evaluation of a leader’s real performance
- evaluation of a leader’s expected performance

- short description of a participant’s profile

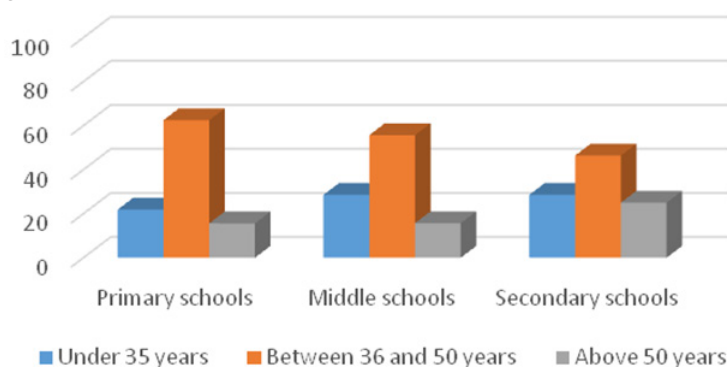
The respondents were to describe organizational school culture by selecting features on a 7-grade Likert scale. The GLOBE questionnaire allows to describe organizational culture with 9 dimensions described in the previous part of this paper and enables depicting a leader in 6 categories:

Table 1. Gender characteristic of the participants.

Variables		Primary schools (%)	Middle schools (%)	Secondary schools (%)
Gender	Male	21,9	14,3	25
	Female	78,1	85,7	75
Workplace location	Village	65,6	-	-
	Small town	28,1	32,9	92,9
	Medium town	-	7,1	-
Participants’ age	City	6,3	60,0	7,1
	Under 35 years	21,9	28,6	28,6
	Between 36 and 50 years	62,5	55,7	46,4
	Above 50 years	15,6	15,7	25

Source: Own findings

Figure 2. Participants’ age characteristic



Source: Own findings

- value-based
- team-oriented
- self-protective
- participative
- humane-oriented
- autonomous (Porzak, Sagan, Zub, 2011).

In this article, only the characteristics of organizational culture as such will be analyzed. It will present the evaluation of the perceived organizational practices as well as the evaluation of the expected organizational practices. The leader’s assessment will be covered in a further paper.

Results and discussion

The study participants were mainly female (table no.1, graph no.1). In every examined school community females outnumber males. Slightly more males work in secondary schools, whereas the least in middle schools. However, these differences are not statistically significant ($X^2=6,546$; $p=0,162$) [Figure 1.].

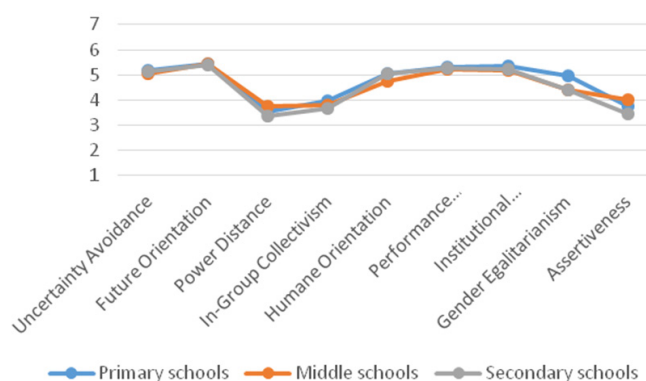
The majority of the teachers involved in the study were middle-aged (between 36 to 50 years old). The most numerous group of young

Table 2. Characteristics of the organizational culture perceived in schools of different type.

Dimensions	Primary schools		Middle schools		Secondary schools	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Uncertainty Avoidance	5,1979	0,95362	5,0571	1,06166	5,1190	1,41484
Future Orientation	5,4375	1,36636	5,4619	1,29944	5,3810	1,40755
Power Distance	3,5417	1,32997	3,7667	1,25667	3,3452	1,29412
In-Group Collectivism	3,9583	0,93422	3,7952	0,84231	3,6786	0,80371
Humane Orientation	5,0625	1,03371	4,7571	0,90387	5,0357	0,85178
Performance Orientation	5,3047	0,82973	5,2321	1,06264	5,2768	0,96066
Institutional Collectivism	5,3438	0,96551	5,1829	1,00303	5,2286	0,91200
Gender Egalitarianism	4,9792	1,08406	4,3952	0,79307	4,4048	1,05158
Assertiveness	3,7734	0,69084	3,9964	0,83784	3,4732	0,61741

Source: Own findings

Figure 3. Characteristic of the organizational culture perceived in different schools



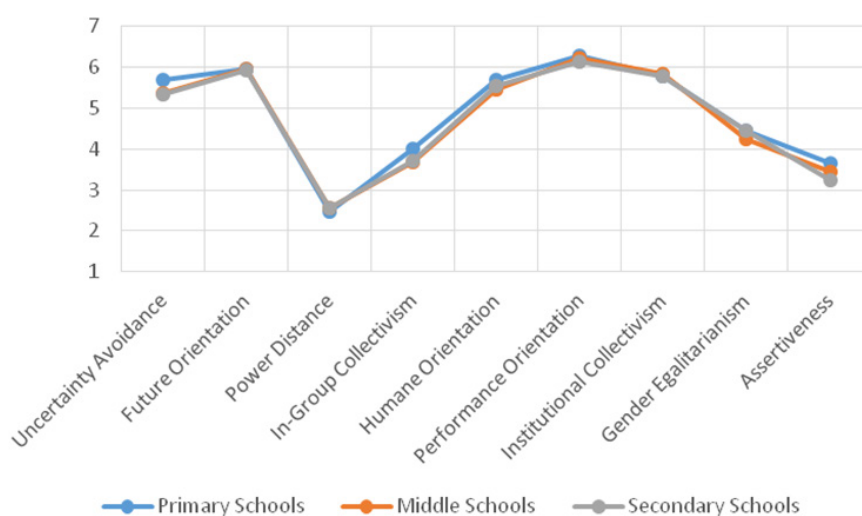
Source: Own findings

Table 3. Characteristic of expected organizational school culture in different schools

Dimensions	Primary school		Middle schools		Secondary schools	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Uncertainty Avoidance	5,1979	0,88156	5,3643	0,76339	5,3482	0,88281
Future Orientation	5,9531	0,69976	5,9643	0,72267	5,9196	0,71380
Power Distance	2,4688	0,99410	2,5476	0,85698	2,5595	0,92542
In-Group Collectivism	4,0000	0,93900	3,6952	0,85831	3,7262	0,78595
Humane Orientation	5,7031	0,74983	5,4714	0,85925	5,5536	0,91378
Performance Orientation	6,2734	0,78123	6,2286	0,69254	6,1518	0,72756
Institutional Collectivism	5,7917	0,71341	5,8452	0,67107	5,7976	0,65946
Gender Egalitarianism	4,4609	1,00022	4,2321	0,63320	4,4554	0,65636
Assertiveness	3,6563	0,91379	3,4429	0,79799	3,2262	0,70887

Source: Own findings

Figure 4. Characteristic of expected organizational school culture in different schools.



Source: Own findings

teachers (28,6% less than 35 years old) work in middle schools and secondary schools. Relatively not many older teachers are employed in middle schools, thus this environment is considered the youngest in terms of teachers' age. The differences observed are statistically significant ($X^2=192,234$; $p=0,000$).

The study participants can be differentiated by the location of workplace ($X^2=136,064$; $p=0,000$). Primary school teachers work mainly in villages (65,6%). On the other hand, middle

school teachers work in cities (60%), whereas secondary school teachers in general represent towns (table no.1 and graph).

Regardless of the school type, the teachers present a similar perception of school organizational culture (table no. 2 and graph no.2). The results indicate the highest level of future orientation, institutional collectivism, performance orientation and uncertainty avoidance. The dimensions at the lowest level included: power distance, in-group collectivism and as-

Table 4. Comparison of perceived organizational school culture in various school types

Dimensions	F	p	1-2	1-3	2-3
Uncertainty Avoidance	0,175	0,839	0,913	0,990	0,993
Future Orientation	0,037	0,964	1,000	0,998	0,990
Power Distance	1,159	0,317	0,796	0,911	0,372
In-Group Collectivism	0,817	0,444	0,754	0,505	0,315
Humane Orientation	1,619	0,202	0,329	0,999	0,449
Performance Orientation	0,064	0,938	0,980	0,999	0,996
Institutional Collectivism	0,299	0,742	0,824	0,956	0,995
Gender Egalitarianism	3,800	0,029	0,024	0,103	0,999
Assertiveness	4,841	0,009	0,431	0,340	0,008

Source: Own findings

sertiveness.

We can assume that organizational culture of the researched schools is based on the goals indicated clearly in the future. The quality of the completed tasks as well collective activities are valued. From the teachers' perspective, it is important for the school to act effectively as an institution. They avoid uncertainty by using mostly routine forms of activity based on norms

and established practices. The teachers appreciate stable and non-changing working conditions.

The teachers cope with in-group relationships built on value-based performance to a significantly smaller extent. They seem to express their needs with some difficulty and are not in favour of hierarchical form of school management. They prefer working individually to

Table 5. Comparison of expected (ideal) organizational structure in various school types

Dimensions	F	p	1-2	1-3	2-3
Uncertainty Avoidance	2,026	0,136	0,171	0,280	1,000
Future Orientation	0,039	0,962	1,000	0,997	0,989
Power Distance	1,101	0,904	0,968	0,973	1,000
In-Group Collectivism	1,427	0,244	0,272	0,529	0,996
Humane Orientation	0,835	0,441	0,489	0,871	0,963
Performance Orientation	0,216	0,806	0,988	0,886	0,951
Institutional Collectivism	0,091	0,913	0,976	1,000	0,985
Gender Egalitarianism	1,493	0,229	0,466	1,000	0,283
Assertiveness	2,120	0,129	0,522	0,121	0,549

Source: Own findings

working within a team.

The second area embraced in the study concerned teachers' expectations regarding the organizational school culture. In this aspect, the research participants tend to expect a strong focus on performance. They would like the school community to appreciate and contribute to improving the efficiency and effectiveness of undertaken actions. Other dimensions the teachers would like to work on include: future-orientation, institutional collectivism, humane orientation and uncertainty avoidance. The study participants seem to want a clear vision of objectives to be accomplished as well as precise tasks assignments. They would expect stable and predictable working conditions formed on mutual kindness and care.

The domains with the lowest scores concerned power distance, team co-operation, and assertiveness. The teachers seem to dislike organizational culture with no distance in relation to the leader. They are not eager to work as a team along basic values regulating close interpersonal relations and allowing to benefit from the team's synergy. The reason may be their unwillingness to reveal their individual needs and expectations. They would rather avoid confrontation and conflicts about problems occurring at work.

Further research undertaken on organizational school culture, among others, concerns seeking differences between various school types (table no.3).

When it comes to the perception of the actual organizational culture, in the majority of the dimensions, the teachers from various school types present a consistent evaluation. However, the differences concern just two dimensions: gender egalitarianism and assertiveness. Gender egalitarianism was ranked statistically significantly higher by primary school teachers who tend to notice more activities and care devoted to gender equality in their community. Middle school teachers seem to be less satisfied with this dimension as they clearly relate gender to a social position in a school. This distinction may result from the specificity of the problems and the age of students in institutions of this type. The middle school period involves dynamic developmental changes in a young adolescent, which contributes to more frequent behaviour problem. Perhaps this is the reason why middle school communities more

strongly present coping strategies culturally assigned to males. This explanation of differences within gender equality corresponds well with differences within assertiveness. Middle school teachers give more value to assertive behaviours than the secondary school teachers. We can conclude that in middle school environment the behaviours stressing borders as well as strongly indicating the requirements and needs are more demanded. The working conditions and student's specificity force them to present more definite actions, frequently requiring confrontation or a clear expression of needs and requirements.

Summary

The results of this study allow us to conclude that in organizational school culture Polish teachers value future orientation in a form of institution's clear objectives. To work effectively, they need a stable and predictable workplace. They focus on well-performed tasks and, despite their preference to work individually, they aim at institution's success. Their weaker sides are teamwork and performance in a dynamic environment.

In comparison to the ideal organizational culture, a paradox can be noticed. The teachers would eagerly eliminate all symptoms of power distance but at the same time they are against collective decision-making. As a result of such co-relations, decision impasse on everyday-issue level occurs. The model ideal for teachers would involve making decision having discussed a problem with every teacher. None organization would find working in such model feasible. Therefore, an answer to the research question on the differences between school types within organizational cultures posed in the beginning should be positive. Various school types differ but only the within perceived organizational structure. There are no differences, though, in the expected organizational culture. Noticeable differences concern gender egalitarianism and assertiveness.

Generalizing, we may draw the conclusion that Polish school teachers prefer an organizational culture that resembles the bureaucratic Apollo culture. They need clear, precise instructions, focus on objectives and a relatively stable, non-changing environment. However, is it possible when working with children?

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