

GENDER IMPACT ON PUBLIC ORGANIZATIONS' CULTURE

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Abstract

This study approaches the public organizations and their organizational culture by taking into account the gender factor. More specifically, it will approach women's presence in the leadership positions of public organizations, the influence of the culture of public organizations in the promotion of women in middle and top management positions, and it will finally identify the defining characteristics of the organizational culture of the institutions led by women in comparison to those led by men.

Our study is based on a research conducted in Bistrița-Năsăud County, Romania in 2008 by applying a questionnaire in 12 public organizations. The questionnaire included 16 questions, seven of which were open questions, and it was applied to 25 women occupying different middle and top management positions in public institutions. The conclusions of the research confirm the existence of some clear differences in the organizational culture of women-led and respectively men-led public institutions. At the same time, the study identifies possible causes of the low presence of women in the public top management positions in contrast to their high presence in the executive positions.

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More and more researchers agree that management cannot neglect organizational culture (Deal and Kennedy, 1982; Peters and Waterman, 1989; Hofstede, 1990), and this represents a support for managerial action. In our domestic context, characterized most of the times by a deficient management of public institutions, which are led by non-competitive managers and which provide low quality services, the issue of organizational culture and its role in institutional efficiency is a relevant one.

Organizational culture has a relatively recent history as a management subfield and its emergence is connected with the performance of the Japanese businesses – culture explaining the performance. Scholars' concerns for defining and proving the role of the organizational culture in the life of an organization (despite it is a success or a failure) started in 1957 with the work of Th. Szelnic. Since then, more and more researches and journal articles were published, in the attempt to define and mark the limits of this subfield of the management practice.

T. Peters and R. Waterman had an important contribution in the development of this field. They demonstrated in their book, "In Search of Excellence" (1989), the correlation between the characteristics of the organizational culture and the performances of a company, such as: Hewlett-Packard, IMB, Procter & Gamble, Delta Airlines, Du Pont, Eastman-Kodak and Digital Equipment.

In theory, there were many attempts to define organizational culture; so, in essence, the culture of an organization represents a profound imprint of beliefs, values and rules (norms) that define that organization. G. Morgan defines the organizational culture from a sociological approach, as "shared meanings, shared understandings and shared sense making..." (1986, p. 121). As C. Handy states, "anyone who spent a time in different organizations was surprised by different environments, different ways to perform, and different levels of energy" (1993, p. 191). Gary Johns considers that, formally, "organizational culture consists of shared beliefs, values and hypothesis that exist in an organization" (1998, p. 277).

American researcher Edgar Schein (1992) writes in his most important book about culture and leadership: "The word *culture* has many meanings and connotations. When applied to groups and organizations most positively it will create a conceptual and semantic confusion since groups and organizations are themselves hard to be defined without any ambiguity ... Discussing about the culture of an organization [...], I often observed that everybody agrees that "it" exists and "it" is important [...], but we all have different ideas about what "it" represents" (p. 8).

Schein (1992) provided a complex definition of the organizational culture concept, by referring to the following components:

- a. Rules of behavior applied to the relationships between persons, such as language and manners to express esteem and respect;
- b. Inner-teams norms;
- c. Dominant values regarding goods;
- d. The philosophy of organizational policy in relation with employees and clients;
- e. Rules for efficient work;
- f. Working environment, which exists in an organization and which is expressed through the design and the way the members of the organization interact with the outsiders.

In our opinion, *organizational culture* represents a specific and unique imprint of values, beliefs, traditions and behaviors of people from an organization, that determine its functioning and its performances. The human elements, conscious or unconscious, rational or irrational, shared or individual elements that are interconnected are the elements of the organizational culture.

G. Hofstede (1996) considers that an organizational culture has the following characteristics:

1. Holistic character: organizational culture is more than the sum of the component parts;
2. Historically determined: organizational culture reflects the evolution of the organization across time;
3. Organizational culture is also a topic for the anthropologists' study;
4. Socially constructed: it is created and maintained inside the group formed by the members of the organization;
5. Difficult to change: complex human elements are involved.

In the literature, there are some controversies regarding the relationships between the organizational culture and the organizational climate. *Organizational climate* represents the predominant state of spirit of individuals and reflects both organizational culture and the recent events that took place in the organization. Organizational climate is determined by organizational culture and has its own dynamics.

Some scholars (Williams and Walters, 1989) structured the elements of the organizational culture at the following levels:

1. Level of beliefs and principles existing in the conscience of individuals that they are not aware of;
2. Level of values and attitudes chosen and shown by employees;
3. Level of individual and group behavior;

Another scholar, D. Roberts (1986), proposed another classification of the levels of organizational culture:

1. The external level (surface level) formed by attitudes, slogans, documents, and other visible elements;
2. The second level formed by values and norms regarding what is good or bad in the organization, assuming risk, developing organization and employees; all these values and norms are reflected in the symbols and the language used inside the organization;
3. The third level (profound level) that unifies the employees' beliefs, principles and opinions regarding the organization.

G. Hofstede (1996) identified six dimensions of the organizational culture:

1. *Process-oriented versus results-oriented*. From this perspective, organizations may focus on two directions: a) on the activities themselves and on the means used; b) on achieving results, so the employees are focused on achieving the objectives.
2. *Employee-oriented versus job-oriented*. In employee-oriented cultures, the organization is concerned with the identification of personal problems of its employees, acting with care and responsibility both for themselves and for the wellbeing of their families. In job-oriented cultures, the organization is concerned only with professional activity of its employees.

3. *Intra-organizational oriented versus professional intra- and extra-organizational oriented.* The first type of organizational culture is characterized by a powerful identification of the employees with the organization, at the level of interests, expectations and attitudes, without a concern for their future, which is the responsibility of the organization (typical culture for the Nippon businesses). The second type of culture, also called “cosmopolite”, is based on the employees’ perception that their life and activity have two components:
 - a. The work inside the organization and the organization is interested in their competence;
 - b. The future that they have to prepare and to anticipate based on their competence.
4. *Open system-oriented versus closed-system oriented.* Open organizational cultures are more “hospitable” with the new employees who are adopted rapidly, compared with closed organizational cultures that are more cold and distant with the new employees whose adaptation takes more time.
5. *Loose control oriented versus tight control oriented.* In organizations with loose control, the environment is rather relaxed and, at the economical level, determination and costs are neglected. In organizations with tight control the environment is tenser, with more concern for the organization and work.
6. *Pragmatic-oriented versus normative-oriented (prescriptive).* Pragmatic cultures subordinate the entire organizational behavior to the achievement of good performances on market, meaning clients’ satisfaction with any price. In normative cultures, pre-established work procedures are respected, no matter what the market demands are.

According to Nancy Adler (1986), organizational culture has the following functions:

- To integrate the employees in the organization;
- To direct the employees to achieve the objectives of the organization;
- To protect the employees against the environment;
- To maintain and to continue the values and the traditions of the organization.

Organizational culture is less visible than other organizational components, making its identification and understanding more difficult. People join organizations with their past experiences, their ideas and values, and their beliefs and ideals. Inside the organization, they find values, rules and customs that have lasted across time, and that they will have to adopt and sometimes to influence or even to modify. If they cannot adapt, most of the times they will be isolated and finally they will have to leave the organization.

Taking into consideration the perception level, the organizational culture can be divided into two parts: a visible one that can be immediately perceived and an invisible one. The visible and accessible part of the organizational culture comprises of artificial products, actors, heroes and perspectives of the organization and of the members of the organization. The invisible part of the organizational culture has an essential role in its structure and in the alteration of the core beliefs, and it is formed of basic concepts, values, beliefs and norms promoted in the organization.

Managerial culture acts as an important component and resource of the organizational culture. It refers to the system of values, beliefs, aspirations, expectations and attitudes of the managers of an organization that are to be found in the styles and in the types of management used inside the organization, and thus determine the organizational culture.

Managerial culture aims to integrate the actions and the decisions of the employees in order to achieve the established objectives, and therefore to develop the styles of organizational behavior, increase employees' cohesion, promote managerial styles and practice a certain type of management.

Managerial culture is strongly influenced by the personality of the managers, especially those found in top management positions; thus, it is a personalized culture. The personality and the leadership of the general manager are reflected in the managerial culture and implicitly in the organizational culture through conception, potential and particularities.

Managerial culture has an important role in protecting the organization and the employees, a role difficult to see, but that is one of the causes for organizational competition. Considering its complexity and implications, managerial culture influence organizational culture and have a powerful impact over the activities and the results of the organization.

Organizational culture of public organizations is more visible because of frequent contacts citizens have with them. The type of dominant organizational culture of a public organization influence the way in which its members behave with each other, the relationships set between superior and subordinates, the working environment of the organization, and all of these will be finally transferred over the behavior of civil servants in their relationship with the customers of the public services.

In Romania and other countries of the world, women represent the overwhelming part of the employees of public institutions. The massive presence of women in public organizations is not to be found in the same proportion in the top management positions.

In the last few years, women's access to the labor market was guaranteed, including the access to the management positions, and the discrimination of women at their jobs was prohibited. Still, more progress has to be made in the appointment of women in the middle and top management positions.

In the European Union (Vinnicombe and Colwill, 1998, p. 14-16) approximately 40% of the European labor force is represented by women, while only 10% of the European managers are women. This situation is not similar in all countries of the European Union; in countries such as UK, Denmark, France and Portugal the proportion of the hired women is over 40% whereas in other countries such as Italy, Greece, Ireland and Luxemburg is only 34%-37%.

This situation cannot be found in all areas of activity because there are industrial sectors (such as mechanics, construction, transportation) and top leadership positions, which have remained dominated by men. Women are present mostly in bureaucratic jobs or in services, but also in public sector and in education. The female managers are concentrated in the medium and low levels of the management,

only few managing to break the “*glass ceiling*” (Cole, 2004, p. 106) to accede to top management positions.

Why women are so poorly represented in managerial positions and more exactly in top management positions? Several causes can be identified:

1. The beliefs of the society related to the woman’s and man’s roles;
2. Marriage and children;
3. A lack of benefits and facilities for working women;
4. Typical myths or men’s prejudices;
5. The domination of men’s values in organizational cultures;

The male dominance at the work place is not just the consequence of the male prejudices regarding the presence of women in management positions, but it is also related to the lack of real experience of the women in leadership for decades. The organizations are dominated by organizational cultures made by men for men. Researcher Marshall J. (Marshall J. quoted by Cole, 2004, p. 105) identifies two groups of values (male and female) that define the organizational cultures which are considered “as abilities accessible for both sexes ... Women and men are the same, but also different”. These values are, according to the author, the following:

Table 1. Male and female values that define organizational culture

Male values	Female values
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-assertion • Separation • Control • Competition • Focused perception • Rationality • Clarity • Discrimination • Activity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interdependence • Cooperation • Receptivity • Merging • Acceptance • Acceptance of some patterns and contexts • Emotional tonus • Intuition • Synthesis

In Western societies male values predominate, which lead to the hypothesis that women are considered inferior to men. Male values impose on the organization an autocratic and direct style, while feminine values are considered characteristics of the democratic and participative style. The management literature of the last few decades registers the proliferation in organizations of the participative management style that assures better results than the authoritarian one. How will male managers react to this pressure of the present? Will they adopt feminine values in their attitude and their behavior, or will they encourage a massive presence of women in top management of the organizations?

The researches conducted in the last years in Romania show a situation similar with the one encountered in Western countries regarding the status of woman in society and therefore its leadership position.

A research conducted by the Urban and Regional Sociology Center (CURS) (www.curs.ro/uploads/raport%20sondaj%20discriminare.pdf) for the National Council against Discrimination in December 2005 aimed to evaluate men’s and women’s situation

in Romania. The research showed that 48% of the people that were interviewed consider men's situation as being better than that of women, and 40% claimed that men and women are equal in Romania. Men's situation is perceived as being better than women's situation by 52% of the younger population, by 63% of those with graduate studies, by 55% of those from the urban area and by 51% of unmarried people. The equality between women and men is perceived by 45% of the elder population, by 45% of those that graduated maximum 8 years of school, by 43% of married people, and by 46% of people living in rural areas.

The respondents to the questionnaire defined the equality of chances between men and women as following:

- “Having equal rights” – 58%;
- “Taking the decisions in common” – 15%;
- “Equal family obligations” – 11%;
- “Understanding between partners” – 7%;
- “Access to the same jobs” – 6%;
- “Both partners having a job” – 2%;
- “Both partners having the same amount of free time” – 1%;

Almost half of the respondents (48%) recognized that there is no real equality between men and women in Romania nowadays. The main reason for the discrimination of women on the Romanian working market is that: “women work more at home” – an opinion expressed by almost half of those questioned.

The research also identified among the respondents traditional attitudes with regard to the status of men and women. These attitudes can be classified as prejudices: “women cannot practice some professions” (40%); “there are biological differences between men and women” (35%); “the Christian moral makes the difference between men and women” (24%).

The roles of men and women in a couple are seen in a traditional and stereotypical way by the majority of the respondents: 76% of them consider that “the man is the head of the family”, 67% believe that “it is more the man's duty to bring money at home” and 64% believe that “it is more a woman's duty to do the housekeeping work”.

Traditional attitudes have higher values than the average mainly in Oltenia and Crişana-Maramureş, in rural areas, among the persons with few years of education, the elders and among the men. The respondents that shown a more open attitude are residents of Transylvania and Banat, they live in urban areas and they have a college degree.

In order to study the women's presence in management positions in public organizations and to observe the impact of gender on organizational culture, in April 2008 we have conducted a survey in 12 public institutions from Bistriţa-Năşăud County, Romania, on women that occupy top and middle management positions in these organizations. Since the number of women in top management positions was small (we found that only a woman leads a public institution included in our sample), we interviewed also women occupying middle management positions. A total number of 25 women were interviewed.

The 12 public organizations analyzed have a total number of 1598 employees: 1029 of which are women (64%) and 569 are men (36%). We used a questionnaire,

structured in 16 questions, 7 being open questions and 9 being closed questions. The female managers that were interviewed were between 30 and 60 years old, 55% of them being in their 50s and 60s, followed by the group of those with ages between 40 and 50 (27%), and those with ages between 30 and 40 (18 %). There is no woman under 30 years old occupying top or middle management positions in the organizations included in our sample. The average age of the interviewed women is 49; all of them have a college degree and 36% of them attended a post-college or a master program.

70% of the questioned women are married and have children. The average longevity in a management position is 9.18 years, which means, considering the average age, that questioned women were promoted in these positions mostly after they were 40 years old. This is quite late especially if we take into consideration that they occupy middle management positions.

When asked about the chances to get a management position, 64% of the respondents consider that only sometimes women and men have equal chances, 18% of them consider that chances are seldom equal, while 9% of them consider that these chances are often equal.

When asked about the preference to work or to collaborate with men or women in management positions, an overwhelming percentage of the respondents express their preference for both men and women; these percentages show that women have no gender prejudices in managing an organization.

Still, 82% of the respondents consider that there are many prejudices against women, and 46% of them see a causal relationship between emancipation movement of Romanian women, not active enough, and the low presence of women in the management of public organizations.

A multiple choice question was included in the questionnaire in order to identify who supported them mostly. Many female managers declared that family (81%) and close friends (55%) supported them the most. These answers offer us an image about the importance of different relationships and behaviors – the family is the most important in relationship with their career and only of second importance are the formal relationships with their partners or colleagues from the organization.

With regard to the advantages and disadvantages offered by a woman when occupying a top management position, our respondents offered similar answers. The main advantages they identified are: professional recognition, trust, social recognition, self-esteem, financial and material advantages, a better understanding of the social reality, the decrease in the reticence of citizens when dealing with the public authorities, organizing skills (she organizes everything, including her private life), meticulousness, integrity (less corruptible than a man). Some of the disadvantages from occupying a management position identified by the respondents are: less spare time to spend with her family, stress, inevitable involvement in unpleasant conflicts, taking upon herself the team's failures, neglecting her resting time, a sometimes hostile environment, not enough time for the organization (like a male manager, excluding exceptional cases), she gives up more easily than a man in "battles" and sensibility.

The main obstacles faced by female managers in their activity refer to: organizational culture, an indifferent team, the demand of the superiors for obedience, duplicity, obsolete mentality, incorrect and insufficient information, legislation, (especially

regarding personnel selection), a lack of trust (sometimes not shown) from both the superiors and the subordinates, that creates an obvious discomfort and makes communication difficult, low acceptance of change in the organization, avoidance of what is new. All these obstacles identified by the respondents describe the environment of the public organizations they are members of, and offer some clues about the type of dominant organizational culture.

The respondents offered also a detailed list of the most important reasons for why they prefer to work with female or male managers. The answers received provide us with a description (from a female manager point of view) of the two types of managerial cultures: feminine and masculine. A synthesis of this description is shown in table 2.

Table 2. Elements of managerial culture

Female managerial culture	Male managerial culture
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organizing skills • Rigorousness • Dedication • Better communication • Flexibility in decision-making • Tenacity • Keep her promises • Compatibility in approaching inter-human relations • Meticulousness in tasks fulfilling • Systematic character in the achievement of long-term objectives • Analytical - attention to details • Patience • Power to listen • Empathy • Progress opportunity through discussing women's common interests • Ability in offering support by finding some positive aspects in mistakes and different experiences • Receptivity to others' needs and feelings • Politeness, elegance, prestige and safety • Respecting commitments • Practical • Deep analysis of situations • Dedicated to what they are doing • Caring • Integrity • Responsibility in approaching issues • Open mind 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Courage • Lucidity • Diplomacy • Concision • Pragmatism • Social ambition • Success and notoriety due to existent social prejudices • More hard work without being pressed by family responsibilities • Less obstacles in career development • Emotional intelligence • More ability to delegate tasks than a female manager • Assure some equilibrium in a partnership • More capable to assume higher risks • More certainty in decision-taking • More firm • More superficial in controlling • Approach issues differently than women • Have more spare time • Do not have to worry about domestic problems (everyday problems) • Supported by family • Easy to be manipulated • Good organizers • Stress resistant

As for the strengths and weaknesses of female managers compared with those of male managers, our respondents identified a list of individual characteristics that actually describe the dominant managerial styles of men and women. A synthesis of these characteristics is showed below in table 3.

Table 3. Characteristics of female management style

Strengths of female manager	Weaknesses of female manager
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intuition • Discipline in achieving objectives • Prudence • Devotion • Perseverance • Emotional intelligence • Team work • Sense of humor • Self-evaluation • Patience • Social altruism • Communication • Mind flexibility, open minded • Responsibility, integrity • Meticulousness (pay attention to details) • Organizing ability • Scrupulosity • Empathy, power to listen • Sensibility concerning others' needs and feelings • Higher preoccupation for inter-team relationships • Systematic approach in long-term objectives achievement • Hard work ability • Analyzing skills • Sense of esthetics 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Women make efforts for convincing their superiors that they are competent • Inflexibility • Negotiation • More domestic obligations • Preoccupation for details • Less refractory (tenacious) • Vulnerability in relation with unorthodox methods used sometimes both in business and politics • Can be influenced by others in everything she's doing • A lack of courage to say what she thinks • Low ability to delegate tasks • Too much care for what they are doing • Suspicious from others regarding her managerial abilities • She hardly gives enough time for the job • She does not own her spare time (family dependent) • More sensitive • Low resistance to stress • Emotiveness

We can observe that most of the characteristics identified by our respondents as strengths in the managerial activity belong to the democratic, participative style, individuals oriented, team oriented, advisory and relationships oriented. The main weaknesses identified by our respondents refer mostly to others' attitude, men or women, towards their ability to face the challenges in management, but also characteristics of the quality of being feminine, such as sensitivity, less resistance to stress, emotiveness, domestic obligations, etc.

The women admit that the environment of public organizations is made up of prejudices that influence women's management activity. Among others, the following prejudices were identified that belong to men and women:

1. Men are more competent than women.
2. Women have to play only domestic roles and less social roles as leaders.
3. Morals and religion talk too often about women as being good wives and mothers, and rarely about men as having the same role, of husbands and fathers.
4. The idea that particular activities belong exclusively to men.
5. The others' skepticism vis-à-vis their managerial abilities.
6. Many people consider the role of female manager as being rather decorative.
7. The man leads and the woman must subordinate and always follow him.
8. The woman represents the image of stability.

Our respondents were also questioned about their opinion regarding the small number of women in top management positions of public organizations. When answering to this question they referred especially to the political factor that contributed to their promotion, to the increasing obligations assumed by women in domestic life, and to a lack of interest for them for these kinds of activities. Here are some of their answers:

1. Appointments in public functions are often political, and men dominate politics.
2. They are not promoted.
3. Public organizations are directly influenced by politics, and in politics stress, contradictions and conflicts are more present than in other domains.
4. More close to their families and children, women are more cautious to become public persons.
5. They do not really want to get involved.
6. The tendency that women to be more criticized than men with regard to their external image, such as clothing, gestures, body positions, hackneyed expression.
7. Earning men's respect on professional level.
8. Mostly men run these organizations, and the promotion of women in leading positions is rather a theory.
9. They are dedicated to their families.
10. Men are decision-makers and rarely recommend a woman.
11. A lack of support from their families (most of times).
12. Misogynism
13. A lack of self-confidence
14. Men are more organized.
15. Women get involved in creating harmony and stability in their families.

This analysis and the results should be taken into account considering that only women's perception regarding this issue was studied. The male managers' opinion with regard to the presence of women in leadership positions in public organizations was not analyzed, nor if they perceive the same differences between organizational cultures. In addition, we should be quite cautious about these results, because of the structure of our sample - only one woman had a leading position and she was not married and did not have children, while the rest of our respondents were women occupying middle management positions and were married and having children.

In conclusion, this research confirmed the opinions presented in the management literature regarding the following aspects:

- There are some differences between organizational cultures in organizations led by women or led by men.
- There is a difference in the management style practiced by men compared with the management style of women.
- The presence of women in top management positions in public organizations is quite low, compared with their presence in private organizations.

- The women who “broke the glass ceiling” in public organizations are found especially in middle management and less in top management.
- There is a continuing discrepancy between the high number of women in the top management of private organizations and their presence in management of public organizations.

The main causes for this situation, confirmed also by our analysis, are the dependency of the decision-making process in public organizations on the political factor dominated by men, and the women’s skepticism regarding politics seen as an space where “stress, contradictions and conflicts are more present than in other domains”, a reason for “women’s caution when to become public persons”.

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