

DENISON'S CULTURE MODEL IN THE CONTEXT OF ROMANIAN PREFECTURES. IS THERE ROOM FOR IMPROVEMENT?

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Abstract

Organizational culture and its importance have become common knowledge over the years, but do we really understand its influence, especially on the effectiveness of public institutions? We often talk about increasing performance, transparency and involvement in the lives of citizens to improve their quality of life, sometimes without looking at how public entities function. Therefore, this study wants to understand how exactly the organizational culture affects the Romanian Prefectures and what is the perception of their employees regarding their mission, adaptability, involvement and consistency. Since it is the responsibility of the prefectures to ensure the implementation of government policies at the local level, besides their important role in verifying the legitimacy of the administrative acts issued by the local public administration, it is imperative to see what role organizational culture plays and how it influences the group dynamics, their adaptability to change and their responsiveness.

Using Denison's model, we can analyze the perceived level of performance, effectiveness and what types of synergies are formed at the group level. Understanding the main patterns in the prefectures can support our efforts to build more resilient, flexible and adaptable structures, much needed characteristics in essential structures such as these.

Keywords: organizational culture, Denison's model, Romanian prefectures, effectiveness, performance, group synergy.

1. Introduction

The pervasiveness of culture and how it influences a society's values, beliefs, and behaviors is always a topic of interest. Especially if we want to understand how individuals interact with each other and how we can change their behavior in a way that is more beneficial for them. As Schein (2010) explained, culture is an abstract concept and phenomenon, subjective and vague in its roots, yet extremely important in the way we interact and interpret the environment around us. As creatures of habit and routine, the unknown creates a sense of instability and uncertainty, so we use values, symbols, and certain rituals to try to give a sometimes-irrational interpretation to certain events to put ourselves at ease. To continue Schein's idea, culture is about integrating and creating thought patterns of our 'shared basic assumptions' that have been validated many times by a group and thus become valid and taught to new members. As we can see, culture and organizational culture is a shared concept that is built over time, giving it depth and breadth and making it difficult to change.

The definition and understanding of this concept have taken many forms since 1950, when theorists and researchers began to observe and study it, until today, but they have reached a consensus and defined organizational culture as a phenomenon that includes 'beliefs and behaviors', is pervasive and manifests itself in all corners and features of an organization (structure, control, symbols, work style, human resources, and others) (Ehrhart, Schneider and Macey, 2014, p. 130). Therefore, it can be said that culture is a guide to which behaviors are accepted and which are not and is grounded in our perception and interpretation of the world and how things interact with each other. It is 'grounded in history and tradition' (Ehrhart, Schneider and Macey, 2014, p. 132), which makes it easier to pass on from generation to generation, maintaining its stability and strengthening its core, underlying assumptions. The main issue here is when the culture has a negative impact on those who embrace it, or even oppose it (acceptance of corruption, gun control, misinformation).

In today's environment of constant change and external pressure, public institutions must develop clear tools and strategies to face adversities and unexpected events (COVID-19, Ukrainian war, potential economic recession, grain shortage) by having an organizational culture that can support the implementation of a clear mission, be adaptable and open to change, promote involvement and, most importantly, be consistent in its actions. Henceforth, it is crucial to analyze the organizational culture of public institutions, in this case Romanian Prefectures, to try to understand their level of effectiveness, performance and coordination with each other.

Public organizations have a challenging responsibility to meet the needs of citizens and provide quality services that improve their quality of life and increase their trust in the institutions. Therefore, all institutions need to follow clear regulations to maintain a certain level of performance and efficiency through the core values and beliefs of their employees (Haryadi, Setiawati and Juhandi, 2022, p. 686) and the behaviors promoted in the workplace (Hudrea and Tripon, 2016, pp. 98–99). A crucial aspect that needs to be addressed is

related to everyone's sense of belonging in their organization. Grego-Planer (2019) brings to light the concept of organizational citizenship behavior, which refers to the level of involvement and commitment of employees to keep the organization afloat through their active participation in promoting the organization's values and purpose. This is especially important when new members join the organization, as the others can show them the do's and don'ts, the unwritten rules, making the integration process easier. A clear mission, direction and sense of unity, along with the ability to create patterns that promote the values and purpose of an institution, are just some of the most important core elements that can support the maintenance and development of a strong and unified organizational culture that represents the needs and sense of the community they (the members of the institution) represent. To sum up everything that was stated thus far, the purpose of this research is to pinpoint the organizational culture trend and to offer adequate recommendations regarding the improvements needed, to strengthen the organizational glue and, indirectly, to support the prefectures in delivering their services in a more efficient and performant way.

In our study, 29 of the 42 prefectures that were invited to participate provided responses, yielding a total of 521 responses at the national level. Although the mean of all values was above average, it was not evident that the lowest score was for the item 'creating change' (3.46). This item was not considered a prevalent indicator due to the nature of the sector and their activity (clear rules and regulations, standard procedures, predictable activities). However, it can create significant issues because, in the event of adversity and due to the natural direction towards change, it can impede their acceptance and implementation of said change. As anticipated, the item 'adaptability' received the lowest score (3.51), while 'mission' (understanding and accepting it) received the highest score (3.70). The prefectures included in this study demonstrated deficiencies in three key areas: capability development (3.47), creating change (3.46), and organizational learning (3.49). Conversely, the highest scores were awarded to empowerment (3.89), a clear understanding of their goals and objectives (3.87), and core values (3.95).

It is therefore essential to gain a clear, realistic, and objective understanding of the current level of effectiveness, performance, and stability of the organizational culture. This will enable the identification of the most appropriate tools to improve the links and collaboration between the members of the organization and between the members of the organization and its customers (in this case, the citizens).

The objective of this study is to present the principal approaches to organizational culture and related studies in the field, with the aim of familiarizing the reader with the concept and the various methods through which it can be measured. In addition, the study will provide examples of other studies on organizational culture in Romanian public institutions. Subsequently, this article will provide a detailed account of the model employed in the present research. The following section will present the methodology used and the results in the context of the literature review and similar studies presented previously. The article will conclude with a discussion of the conclusions, recommendations, and future research proposals.

2. Literature review and similar studies in the field

Organizational culture (among other elements) has a great impact on the performance and delivery of public services. So, by understanding the context and the general culture within organizations we can suggest better ways to improve their effectiveness and their relationship with citizens and other relevant actors from their environment. Taking the context of public administration, ‘culture influences an individual, family, or group’s view of health, poverty, welfare, crime, and other social and human service areas, as well as the outcomes of public agency service interventions’ (Rice, 2007, p. 624), while explaining ‘why an organization focuses on certain priorities’ (Zhou *et al.*, 2011, p. 2140). Arguably, by acknowledging the limits of one’s own culture, we can set clear directions for action and solutions aimed at improving the way individuals interact with each other and their understanding of success.

However, this can only be successfully achieved if ‘managers take steps to improve the culture of the organization’ (Adeinat and Abdulfatah, 2019, p. 41). Moreover, Bukoye and Abdulrahman (2023) emphasize that ‘organizational culture influences the understanding of strategy implementation and affects its operationalization [...], presenting culture as the foundation of successful public reform’ (p. 317). This means that by having a clear picture of the way culture influences their behavior and effectiveness, we can develop mechanisms through which individuals, public servants, can develop appropriate practices to increase the quality of their results (Rice, 2007, p. 626).

In a related study, developed by Zhou *et al.* (2011), it was pointed out that ‘social responsibility, a sense of competition and sustainable development’ (p. 2155) are more prominent cultural characteristics compared to team orientation and employee empowerment, making the organization less prepared for drastic changes or other influences from the external environment. Henceforth, these are considered crucial areas for intervention, a point that is reinforced by the conclusions of Rus and Rusu (2015) in their analysis, since some cultures in public institutions do not emphasize the needs of citizens, thus tending to lose sight of their main purpose.

At the same time, Adeinat and Abdulfatah (2019) recognize the importance of analyzing the external environment, learning from it, and adapting to build a strong organizational culture that ‘crystallizes the attitudes, values, and norms of employees’ (p. 39) to be more effective and efficient in their activities. To do so, it is also recommended to conduct an evaluation in key areas such as ‘mission, human resource policies, goal planning and image building’ (Khan *et al.*, 2020, p. 6).

Assessing the organizational culture of a public institution aims to achieve several outcomes, including understanding the organizational mission, promoting organizational learning, identifying effective communication channels (Rice, 2007, pp. 628–629), and adopting a leadership style that enhances effectiveness, performance, resilience, and innovation in service delivery. Therefore, understanding organizational culture is vital (Slack and Singh, 2018, p. 362), especially in the public sector, mainly because it influences

service delivery, quality and reach, the image of the sector as a whole and the work relations between employees.

2.1. Organizational culture in Romanian public institutions.

A brief analysis of existing literature

Talking about the public sector in terms of values, missions, organizational climate and culture, one expects a certain ambiguity, rigidity and a military-like structure. In terms of Romanian public institutions, things do not differ from this description. Most studies show that public organizations tend to be more formal and hierarchical than the private or non-profit sector. This is explained by the enormous pressure to ensure the well-being of their citizens, but it is also associated with disadvantages such as resistance to change, low levels of resilience, and rigidity and monotony among their employees. These issues, if not addressed, can lead to low performance, low adaptability, and can inhibit the main purpose of their existence: satisfying the needs of their citizens.

We emphasize the importance of analyzing the role of organizational culture in the public sector due to its crucial role in shaping the administrative reform, how important it is to monitor that the right values are promoted to protect the well-being of the citizens they serve and to see where there is room for improvement (Moldovan and Macarie, 2016) and how we can change the culture in an incremental and positive way so that it promotes performance, sustainability and resilience.

Some studies (Andrianu, 2020; Hudrea and Tripon, 2016; Hudrea, 2015) have shown that the ‘predominant bureaucratic elements with a relatively short-term strategic focus’ (Andrianu, 2020, p. 354) usually lead to a hierarchical type of culture, with a very well-defined structure, clear rules and procedures, promoting stability, but at the same time making it difficult to accept change, especially in the era of digitalization and knowledge transfer-oriented behavior.

Moreover, in their study, Rus and Rusu (2015) noted that the civil servants in the city halls they analyzed do not have a tendency to adapt due to resistance to change or lack of knowledge to do so. Even if they have the desire to adapt and improve the way they currently work, they lack the skills, so there is a need to be more flexible, to learn and to receive the appropriate support to move towards a leaner organizational culture. In the same sense, Moldovan and Macarie (2016) found that Romanian civil servants have a relatively short-term orientation (this can be influenced by the political factor present in some of them), they emphasize collectivism and a meritocratic approach, thus having professionals in key positions, and they have a strong sense of hierarchy and follow rules and procedures precisely (pp. 135-136). These aspects are very common and should be present in all public institutions because they promote respect for their mission, purpose and the position of the public servant in general, but there are some aspects that should also be included: adaptability, capacity development, openness to change and participation. These are key aspects that should be promoted in our attempt to change the organizational culture to

make it more resilient and adapted to the current pressures, unknown challenges and dynamic changes that communities face both internally and externally.

Considering how extrinsically motivated (Matei and Abrudan, 2016) most Romanian civil servants are (especially in terms of uncertainty avoidance), we need to develop new, innovative ways to increase their commitment to their roles, to improve their performance and motivation through an organizational culture that can really promote these aspects. Therefore, it is imperative to continue to analyze the fluctuations in culture at an internal level, to have a better understanding of their beliefs, values and how they align at the organizational level. To gain insight into the current state of organizational culture in the prefecture and to make recommendations for improvement, if necessary, as well as adaptation to emerging needs and trends, we employed Denison's model in our analysis.

3. Denison's organizational culture model

The attitudes of the employees, along with the vision of the leader, are the main elements that create, shape and maintain the organizational culture of an institution, representing the core of its existence and constant adaptation to changes in the external environment. Moreover, the specificities of each institution in terms of system, procedures or structure represent clear indicators of performance or effectiveness (Tulcanaza-Prieto, Aguilar-Rodriguez and Artieda, 2021; Denison and Mishra, 1995; Wahyuningsih *et al.*, 2019), next to the human side. In other words, the human side of the organization is the one that has the most influence on the direction and core beliefs of the organization; therefore, recruiting, training, and evaluating employees are key aspects in maintaining a consistent culture aimed at achieving the organization's goal and mission.

'A strong organizational culture becomes behavioral standards based on ethical values that allow for the engenderment of sense of identity and positive attitude among members' (Wahyuningsih *et al.*, 2019, p. 143), creating appropriate tools to strengthen their sense of unity and motivation to achieve the organization's mission in an effective and high-performing manner.

Continuing this line of thought, human resources represent a valuable asset for an organization's success and the development of a healthy and resilient culture. This is especially true if their skills, abilities, and capabilities are valued and further developed within the organization. It is essential to create a safe environment for learning, exploring, and experimenting to develop the innovative side of the organization and to perform well. To offer high-quality services to citizens and improve the public sector's image, it is essential to possess certain traits. According to Wahyuningsih *et al.* (2019), employee engagement is built on organizational involvement, employee empowerment, incentives and reward systems, communication, training and development, and an adequate work-life balance. These factors nurture a strong and focused organizational culture. Thus, leaders must acknowledge these aspects and create tools to enhance them; they should maintain clear performance

standards that employees can follow. It is important to understand that ‘developing a strong organizational culture is essential for success’ (Remijus *et al.*, 2019, p. 85).

In this regard, Daniel R. Denison developed a model that analyses organizational culture from the perspective of effectiveness and performance, answering four main questions, based on four main traits, such as: ‘Do we know where we are going?’ (mission), ‘Are we responding to the external environment?’ (adaptability), ‘Are our people aligned and engaged?’ (involvement) and ‘Do we have the values, systems and processes in place to create leverage?’ (consistency). The *involvement* and *adaptability* represent flexible traits, being more focused on innovation and citizen satisfaction, whereas *mission* and *consistency* are considered more stable traits, focusing on performance overtime. ‘A flexible organization has the capability to change in response to the environment with a strong focus on its customers and its people’, while a stable organization is able to be more focused and predictable in terms of services, products or assets (Denison Consulting, 2023a), an important trait for public institutions, which need to offer comfort and reassurance to their citizens, acting in linearity and based on clear sets of rules and regulations.

Simultaneously, it is important to acknowledge that the model considers both internal and external factors, taking a holistic approach. The Denison Consulting (2023a) model distinguishes between external traits, which focus on growth and cooperation, and internal traits, which are oriented towards employee satisfaction, performance, and quality of work. External traits include adaptability and mission, which are present in organizations committed to change, adaptation, and diversity. Internal traits include involvement and consistency, which concentrate on integrating systems, structures, and creating tools to value employees’ skills and capabilities.

These four traits, alongside their corresponding items, are presented in Figure 1, below, and their items will be presented in the following paragraphs:

The *adaptability* trait is related to the external environment and the ability of an organization to be flexible, open to change and to promote diversity and risk-taking activities with the purpose of introducing new techniques and tools in the day-to-day activity, alongside becoming more resilient and aware of the constant demands from the external environment. Denison (1990) argues that an adaptive organizational culture should have the ability to ‘receive, interpret, and translate signals from its environment into internal behavioral changes that increase its chances for survival, growth, and development’ (Denison, 1990, pp. 11–13; p. 105).

This trait is made up of three items (as are the other traits) that underline the most important parts of each of the other traits. Thus, the *adaptability* trait is made up of ‘creating change’, ‘customer focus’ and ‘organizational learning’, each of which will be explained in the following sections.

Adaptability and *creating change* refer to the ability of an organization to embrace change, to be willing to accept different opinions, suggestions and ideas in terms of day-to-day activities, adaptive strategies and ‘new ways of doing things’. This is an essential

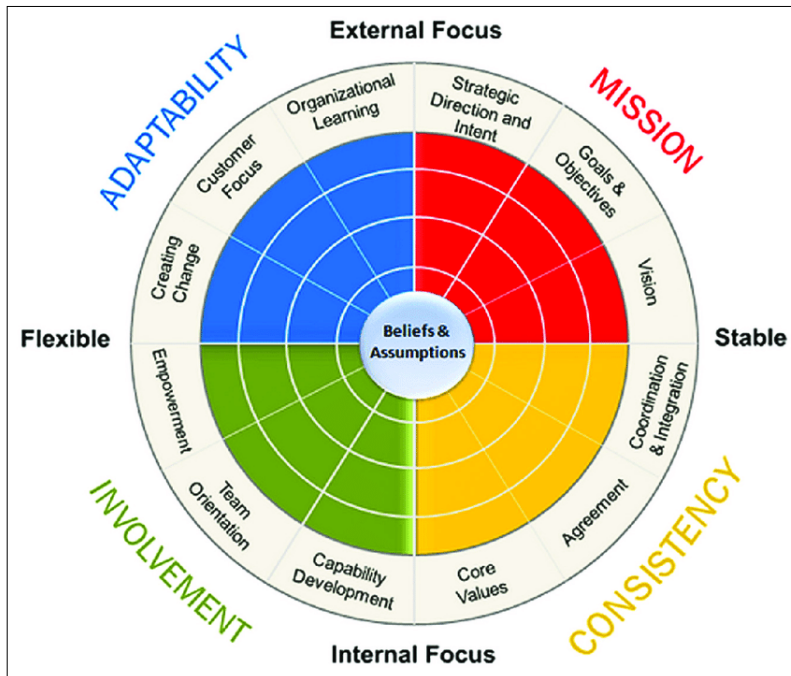


Figure 1: Denison's model

Source: <https://denisonconsulting.com>

characteristic for organizations, especially in today's rapidly changing trends, needs and demands. Organizations need to be able to develop their agile side and be proactive in the way they develop and deliver their products and services.

Adaptability and *customer focus* is also related to the ability of an organization to respond to the demands of customers (citizens) and to maintain qualitative standards that can increase the popularity and positive image of said entity. Furthermore, the impact that the organization's activity has on them is a high indicator of its performance, so it should be considered and constantly adapted to serve these needs, especially when we are talking about public institutions (Denison, 2023b).

Adaptability and *organizational learning* are essential to create a safe and comfortable workplace for employees to explore, experiment and learn new skills, capabilities and ways to improve their work in an innovative and open manner. Organizations that promote learning tend to be more transparent, innovative, agile, and open to new challenges, assets that are beneficial to their ongoing development and further adaptation to the unknown.

Therefore, this characteristic tends to support the 'risky' and exploratory side of an organization, helping it to be more open to change, new ideas and trends, and to encourage continuous learning and adaptation to external pressures, demands and technologies in a way that puts the organization in a positive light (Ahmady, Nikooravesh and Mehrpour, 2016, p. 390).

The importance of *mission* is recognized by Denison (1990), especially because ‘a sense of mission provides [...] purpose and meaning and [...] clear directions and goals that serve to define the appropriate course of action for the organization and its members’ (Denison, 1990, p. 13). Therefore, the main elements of this characteristic are goals and objectives, strategic direction, and intent and vision.

Mission, along with *goals and objectives*, maintains order and a clear direction within an organization, if aligned with its strategy and vision, help its members have a sense of direction and maintain their commitment to the cause. In terms of organizational culture, these elements help shape future desired behaviors, while establishing a common purpose and a sense of unity (Denison, 1990, pp. 13–14).

Strategic direction and intent, regarding the *mission* trait, is useful for setting common priorities that help members of the organization have a clear path and understanding of their responsibilities, creating a general alignment in the organization to bring it closer to its vision.

An organization’s *mission and vision* represent the core aspects of an organization, inspiring its members to transcend their condition and strive for something greater than themselves, creating a shared understanding of their role, and simultaneously driving motivation and a sense of worth among them.

Third, the *involvement* characteristic supports the idea of empowerment and responsibility in achieving the organization’s mission, along with a sense of belonging and commitment to the organization and its purpose (Denison, 1990, pp. 6–7), which plays a crucial role in creating a unified and strong organizational culture and connection among its members. It also shows a positive ‘association between engagement cultures and employee satisfaction and high efficiency in service delivery’ (Zhou *et al.*, 2011, p. 2145).

Involvement and skills development are designed to help individuals track their progress, learn from past mistakes, and link an organization’s short- and long-term plans and priorities. By investing in the skills, abilities and continuous learning of employees, the organization can increase its chances of becoming more prepared and resilient for future needs.

Involvement and empowerment of employees are critical elements to the performance of an organization and its evolution and development. By involving individuals in decision-making processes, we can make them understand how valuable their contribution is, thus making them more accountable and committed to achieving the organization’s goals.

Finally, *involvement and team orientation* are core aspects that need to be considered for the success of an organization. Communication, coordination, and clear statements of the team’s purpose are just a few of the key strategic actions, along with clear performance standards. Teams are the quintessential element that can make or break an organization, so management must ensure that their values are aligned.

The final characteristic, *consistency*, ‘was based on a shared perception of the needs of patients and surgeons forged through direct, frequent, and continuous contact’ (Denison, 1990, p. 104). It attempts to argue that a strong, unified culture has the ability to develop and maintain an effective organization by positively influencing the ability of members

to find common ground when faced with differing opinions. Furthermore, ‘Consistency theories have argued that shared meaning has a positive impact because the members of an organization all work from a common framework of values and beliefs’ (Denison, 1990, p. 9), therefore, agreement on the symbols can be translated into an effective organization because of well-coordinated information, communication, and direction.

Consistency and *agreement* support the idea that for an organization to thrive, conflict management is one of the most important elements that can contribute to the creation of synergies among the members, thus assessing the situations from an objective perspective and developing communication tools to reach consensus (Ahmady, Nikooravesh and Mehrpour, 2016, p. 390).

Consistency, with its *coordination and integration* indicators, focuses on creating mechanisms and processes that facilitate alignment between different departments, functions, and responsibilities. In this way, all the different components of the organization can work together in unity to achieve their common goal.

Finally, an organization’s *consistency* and *core values* are essential because they influence the accepted behavior of its members and how it can be embedded in them. Effective and high-performing organizations can articulate their mission and develop strategies that reward accepted, preferred behaviors and align them with the organization’s vision.

Denison’s model is valuable in assessing organizational culture because it looks at how the group behaves and interacts within the organization, rather than looking at them individually, allowing us to better understand the role of organizational culture and its influence (Ahmady, Nikooravesh, and Mehrpour, 2016, p. 393). Recognizing that organizational culture plays a primary role in creating a bond between employees and the institution (Khan *et al.*, 2020, p. 6), thus creating an efficient, motivated, and high-performing work environment, this approach (Denison’s model) considers all of these factors.

Consequently, organizational culture plays an essential role in the success and performance of an organization, or in its decline, proving once again the importance of analyzing the interactions between individuals and having a leader capable of guiding them in the right direction and helping them to ‘break the habit: stop old bad habits and start new ones’ (Darto *et al.*, 2015, p. 214). In addition, it is important to see the extent to which there is openness to change and flexibility in the decision-making process, the extent to which they are willing to take risks, and the extent to which they have a shared understanding of their mission, vision, and direction.

4. The Romanian institution of the Prefect

In Romania, the institution of the Prefect is organized and operates under the authority of the Prefect, in accordance with the Romanian Constitution, the Government Emergency Ordinance (G.E.O.) no. 57 of 2019 on the Administrative Code, with amendments and additions, and Government Decision no. 906/2020 for the implementation of some provisions of G.E.O. no. 57/2019 and is subordinate to the Government.

According to G.E.O. no. 57/2019, Part IV, Title I, Chapter II, Article 252, some of the main responsibilities of the Prefect are related to the local implementation of government policies and the enforcement of public order, the management of the deconcentrated public services of the Ministries and other central public administration bodies in the administrative-territorial units, the provision of guidance to the local public administration (upon request) on the implementation of legal norms and, perhaps the most important, the control of the legality of administrative acts of local public administration authorities and the challenge of administrative acts of these authorities that he considers illegal. Henceforth, the role of the institution of the Prefect is to defend the rights of citizens, enforce government policies, and reduce the abuse of services in public institutions (ANFP, 2013, p. 66).

Taking into account the transition from a traditional to a modern administrative reform, as stated in the previous section, the institution of the Prefect has taken different forms throughout the time, but one of the main changes that took place was the depoliticization of the institution, ensuring that no abuse can take place and that it can exercise its control in an objective and honest way, respecting the legislation under which it functions.

As an important pillar of democracy and transparency, we consider the analysis of its organizational culture as a relevant aspect that needs to be considered to have a better understanding of how it works, what its understanding of its mission is, how they interact within the organization and how efficient its long-term direction is. Especially because we need a high-performing, efficient and modern institution that emphasizes depoliticization and professionalization of functions (ANFP, 2013, p. 72). There is a need for coordinated, capable and flexible institutions that have and promote organizational learning, employee empowerment and a common understanding of the organization's core values. Therefore, by analyzing the organizational culture of the institution of the Prefect using Denison's model, we can have a clear picture of these aspects and offer guidelines for improvement.

To sum up everything that was mentioned thus far, assessing the organizational culture of prefectures is crucial to ensure they are serving the best interests of citizens. This is due to their purpose, activity, and importance in verifying the legality of the debated and approved legislation and official documents issued by the local public administration and representing the government in the territory. Given the global shift from a traditional to a modern (Parker and Bradley, 2000, p. 132), digitalized and efficient public administration, we expect to see this trend in our analysis of prefectures as well.

5. Research design and methodology

To analyze the organizational culture profile of the prefectures in question, we used Daniel Denison's model. The model is based on 60 statements, which are distributed into five statements for each item (customer focus, organizational learning, strategic direction and intent, goals and objectives, vision, coordination and integration, agreement, core values, capability development, team orientation, empowerment and creating change). These statements are aggregated to create the model's four main dimensions: Adaptability, Mission, Involvement and Consistency.

The statements are rated on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 indicating ‘total disagreement’ and 5 representing ‘total agreement’. This allows respondents to assess their level of alignment with the statements and to identify scenarios or situations that are perceived to be more or less prevalent within their organization. By employing this approach, we were able to gain insights into how they relate to the organizational culture and to what extent their values align with the general values of the prefectures in question.

The data was collected using Denison’s model from 29 prefectures (although we sent the survey to all 42 prefectures), resulting in a total of 521 responses at a national level. The highest response rates were in Timiș, Alba, and Iași counties, while the lowest were in Giurgiu, Maramureș, and Călărași. The gender distribution of the responders was 68.6% female and 31.4% male, with an average age between 37 and 50 years old. Regarding education, 57.3% of the respondents have a bachelor’s degree, 37.8% have a master’s degree, and 1.8% have a PhD. Therefore, most of our respondents have completed higher education studies.

Table 1: Seniority in the prefecture

Seniority	%
under 6 months	3.90%
6 months–1 year	8.50%
1–5 years	17%
6–10 years	15.30%
11–20 years	36.40%
over 20 years	19%

Source: Authors’ own contribution

In our analysis of organizational culture in prefectures, we found that respondents with seniority in the institutions provided more accurate survey responses. Longer tenure in an institution helps individuals better understand and affiliate with the culture. As shown, most individuals have been with the institution for 11 to 20 years, suggesting that some may have played a role in establishing and upholding the current organizational culture.

Table 2: Work satisfaction

Are you pleased with your current workplace?	%
To a very great extent	15.60%
To a great extent	53.30%
Neutral	28.80%
To a small extent	1.70%
To a very small extent	0.60%

Source: Authors’ own contribution

Finally, in our sample identification, we deemed it relevant to comprehend the extent to which individuals are content with their position, workplace, and work environment. This is a crucial factor because countercultures can act against the values and principles of the main organizational culture, creating vulnerabilities and deviating from the organization's primary mission. This is why leaders must ensure that these groups are identified in a timely manner and appropriate actions are taken. In this case, we can see that 15.6% of employees are very satisfied with their workplace, while 53.3% are highly satisfied.

This section concludes the presentation of the respondents and the sample that was gathered. The following section will present the analysis of the results, including the general impression at a national level, as well as the highest and lowest scores given by respondents at a county level.

6. Main findings and results

Upon examining the main results of the twelve dimensions it is evident that the scores are primarily average on a scale of one to five (1 = strong disagreement, 5 = strong agreement). However, there are some variations in terms of adaptability and mission. As shown in the figure below, 'creating change' and 'organizational learning' received the lowest scores of 3.46 and 3.49, respectively. This outcome was expected to some extent, given the nature of prefecture activities. The organization's stable environment and predictable activity may limit its ability to develop, become more flexible, and adapt to external changes. This can negatively impact on its performance and responsiveness in the long run, promoting rigidity and stagnation if proactive measures are not taken to promote a more flexible environment.

In line with the previous discussion, there is room for improvement in terms of 'capability development' (3.47) as it can negatively impact employee satisfaction in the long run, due to the previously mentioned issue of stagnation. If employees are not motivated to enhance their skills, their performance levels and motivation may decrease over time, ultimately affecting the institution's overall efficiency. This can have negative consequences, particularly when considering the primary purpose of prefectures, which is to verify the legality of local institutions' documents.

On the other hand, the results are very promising in terms of 'goals and objectives' (3.87), indicating a clear understanding of responsibilities and overall purpose within the institution, while remaining consistent with their 'core values' (3.95). These elements are essential in creating a strong and unifying organizational culture that can empower employees (3.89) and create a sense of belonging. Furthermore, 'the criteria of success must be stated very clearly' (Andrianu, 2020, p. 354) if we want to maintain the positive traits that are present in the prefectures analyzed.

It is also important to note the considerable discrepancy between the lowest and highest scores achieved by the prefectures, as well as the lowest and highest values for each variable aggregated to each item. The X-ray depicted in Table 3 provides insight into the



Figure 2: Organizational culture in Romanian prefectures

Source: Authors' own contribution

Table 3: Values of the organizational culture's indicators

Traits	Indicators	Average	MIN	MAX	MAX-MIN differences
Mission	Strategic direction and intent	3.64	3.14	4.53	1.40
	Goals and objectives	3.87	3.09	4.58	1.50
	Vision	3.59	3.02	4.33	1.32
Consistency	Coordination and integration	3.58	3.17	4.20	1.03
	Agreement	3.51	3.02	4.22	1.20
	Core values	3.95	3.35	4.55	1.20
Involvement	Capability development	3.47	2.95	4.40	1.45
	Team orientation	3.67	3.13	4.39	1.26
	Empowerment	3.89	3.19	4.40	1.21
Adaptability	Creating change	3.46	3.02	3.94	0.92
	Customer focus	3.62	3.17	4.13	0.96
	Organizational learning	3.49	3.10	4.04	0.94

Source: Authors' own contribution

requisite improvements to facilitate their activity. It is therefore evident that the most significant discrepancy pertains to the institution's stated goals and objectives. This can give rise to significant issues, particularly in view of the purpose of this institution and the potential repercussions that may result from a lack of common understanding of its mission. This is closely related to the second highest difference, capability development

(min.-max. difference of 1.45). The nature of their work is highly restricted and regulated by law. However, they must also be aware of current trends, fluctuations, needs, and potential external pressures (such as EU directives) for change. They must educate themselves constantly regarding international law and its implementation in Romania.

Table 4: The highest and lowest values by county

	Strategic direction and intent	Goals and objectives	Vision	Coordination and integration	Agreement	Core values	Capability development	Team orientation	Empowerment	Creating change	Customer focus	Organizational learning
Alba	3.67	3.91	3.53	3.52	3.47	3.79	3.44	3.95	3.89	3.39	3.70	3.41
Bacău	3.51	3.91	3.53	3.52	3.47	3.79	3.44	3.95	3.89	3.39	3.70	3.41
Bihor	3.44	3.91	3.49	3.31	3.16	3.70	2.96	3.13	3.48	3.15	3.38	3.31
Bistrița-Năsăud	3.41	3.51	3.27	3.42	3.33	3.68	3.19	3.32	3.85	3.16	3.28	3.21
Botoșani	3.93	4.13	3.84	3.74	3.56	4.31	4.06	3.99	4.27	3.64	3.92	3.56
Brăila	3.53	3.94	3.54	3.72	3.42	4.04	3.63	3.75	3.94	3.66	3.60	3.56
Caras-Severin	3.67	3.87	3.36	3.19	3.39	3.56	3.23	3.42	3.61	3.17	3.41	3.27
Călărași	4.53	4.20	4.33	4.13	4.00	4.33	4.40	4.13	4.33	3.93	4.13	4.00
Cluj	3.18	3.44	3.17	3.36	3.39	3.75	3.16	3.21	3.38	3.11	3.33	3.10
Covasna	3.78	4.14	3.85	3.74	3.64	4.18	3.75	3.74	4.08	3.28	3.51	3.44
Dolj	3.47	4.21	3.57	4.03	3.63	4.30	3.57	3.71	3.80	3.63	3.50	3.50
Galați	3.33	3.62	3.28	3.40	3.45	4.05	3.53	3.95	4.10	3.32	3.37	3.46
Giurgiu	3.32	3.09	3.11	3.36	3.19	3.40	3.02	3.21	3.82	3.02	3.20	3.27
Harghita	3.59	3.76	3.80	3.29	3.49	3.84	3.33	3.61	3.93	3.51	3.57	3.41
Hunedoara	3.26	3.62	3.52	3.35	3.28	3.74	3.21	3.51	3.66	3.27	3.17	3.34
Ialomița	3.94	4.30	4.06	4.01	3.90	4.12	3.79	4.39	4.18	3.87	3.90	3.76
Iași	3.57	3.59	3.45	3.37	3.21	3.77	3.27	3.40	3.72	3.45	3.64	3.31
Ifov	3.84	4.04	3.80	3.51	3.42	4.09	3.55	3.65	3.85	3.59	3.89	3.94
Maramureș	3.89	3.92	3.69	3.49	3.46	3.95	3.24	3.34	3.82	3.64	3.72	3.35
Mehedinți	4.26	4.58	4.30	4.20	4.22	4.55	4.07	4.14	4.40	3.94	3.97	4.04
Mureș	3.40	3.65	3.39	3.46	3.45	4.00	3.10	3.37	3.75	3.43	3.70	3.36
Neamț	3.84	4.04	3.67	3.69	3.74	4.20	3.44	3.81	3.87	3.63	3.82	3.69
Satu Mare	3.14	3.17	3.02	3.17	3.02	3.35	2.95	3.23	3.19	3.17	3.43	3.13
Sălaj	3.91	3.86	3.60	3.57	3.46	3.98	3.23	3.66	3.89	3.35	3.74	3.63
Timiș	3.67	4.00	3.78	3.61	3.61	3.96	3.55	3.90	3.93	3.47	3.67	3.64
Tulcea	4.05	4.32	3.86	3.76	3.91	4.26	3.94	4.11	4.35	3.56	3.92	3.83
Vaslui	3.69	3.96	3.54	3.67	3.59	3.99	3.57	3.82	4.07	3.54	3.67	3.51
Vâlcea	3.67	4.08	3.77	3.72	3.60	4.12	3.67	3.79	4.15	3.76	3.83	3.57
Vrancea	3.14	3.48	3.09	3.51	3.49	3.77	3.35	3.32	3.59	3.26	3.33	3.23

Source: Authors' own contribution

Another issue that requires attention is the low score obtained for adaptability, both at the minimum and maximum levels. The inability of the respondent prefectures to effect change represents a significant challenge to their capacity to absorb knowledge, improve in terms of efficiency, and even to have timely and proactive responses. It is not surprising that the score is low, given that we are talking about a public organization. However, it is concerning to observe a lack of preparedness for the unknown. Consequently, a more flexible administrative reform is required that encourages change, promotes innovation, and supports the simplification of procedures. However, this reform must also have clear, quantifiable performance indicators. A procedure can be universally applied but adapted to local needs and context. In essence, the reform should be ‘think globally, act locally’.

The data shows that the North-West and South-West counties received lower scores compared to less developed counties from the North-East region, such as Botoșani, Neamț, and Vâlcea. The level of development and complexity of tasks can impact performance, stability, and quality of work. Adequate monitoring systems, simplification, and digitalization of tasks can help improve overall quality. Therefore, it is possible that more developed counties, such as Cluj, Bihor, or Satu Mare, have greater responsibilities and, as a result, are better equipped to maintain a strong and stable organizational culture than smaller, less advanced counties.

From an optimistic perspective, it is noteworthy that nearly all prefectures included in this study demonstrated high values for their ‘core values’ indicating a robust foundation for organizational cohesion, group synergy, and unity. However, these values cannot be amplified if the creation of change is not a core belief. Resistance to change can be a

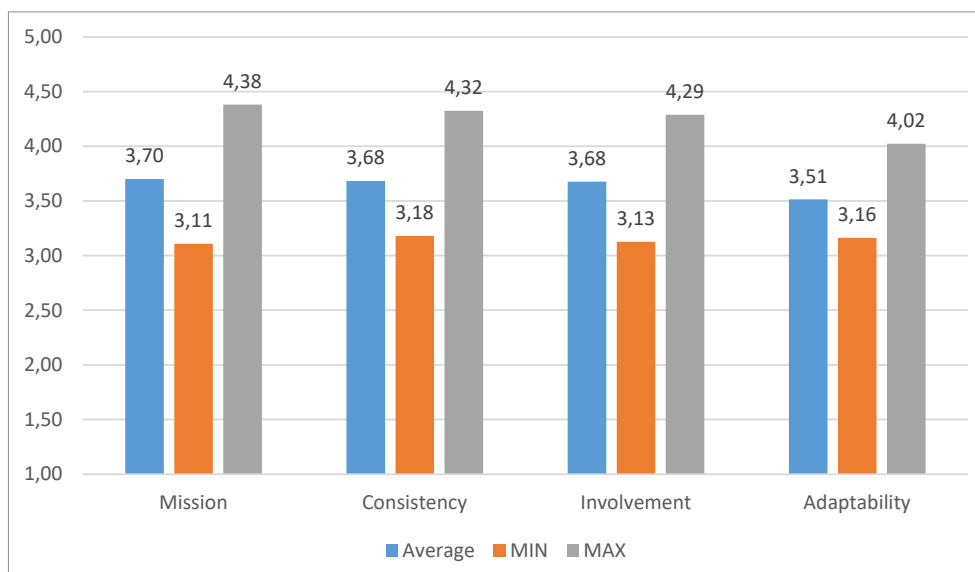


Figure 3: Organizational culture traits

Source: Authors' own contribution

significant obstacle to the success of an organization, regardless of its unity and camaraderie. This issue is prevalent at the national level and affects all types of public institutions, primarily due to the complexity and inconsistency of the legal and legislative framework.

Regarding the four traits composed of the twelve dimensions, the values appear to be average. The highest score was obtained by ‘mission’ (3.70), followed closely by ‘consistency’ and ‘involvement’ (3.68). According to Denison’s model, these scores suggest that the prefectures have an external focus while remaining stable. Considering the nature of their work and the fact that we are discussing public institutions, a certain degree of

Table 5: The highest and lowest values of the indicators by county

Counties	Mission	Consistency	Involvement	Adaptability
Alba	3.70	3.59	3.76	3.50
Bacău	3.61	3.60	3.73	3.23
Bihor	3.61	3.39	3.19	3.28
Bistrița-Năsăud	3.40	3.47	3.45	3.22
Botoșani	3.97	3.87	4.10	3.71
Brăila	3.67	3.72	3.77	3.61
Caraș-Severin	3.63	3.38	3.42	3.28
Călărași	4.36	4.16	4.29	4.02
Cluj	3.27	3.50	3.25	3.18
Covasna	3.92	3.85	3.86	3.41
Dolj	3.75	3.99	3.69	3.54
Galați	3.41	3.63	3.86	3.38
Giurgiu	3.18	3.32	3.35	3.16
Harghita	3.71	3.54	3.62	3.50
Hunedoara	3.46	3.46	3.46	3.26
Ialomița	4.10	4.01	4.12	3.84
Iași	3.54	3.45	3.46	3.47
Ifov	3.89	3.67	3.68	3.80
Maramureș	3.83	3.63	3.46	3.57
Mehedinți	4.38	4.32	4.20	3.98
Mureș	3.48	3.64	3.41	3.50
Neamț	3.85	3.88	3.71	3.71
Satu Mare	3.11	3.18	3.13	3.24
Sălaj	3.79	3.67	3.59	3.57
Timiș	3.81	3.73	3.79	3.59
Tulcea	4.08	3.98	4.13	3.77
Vaslui	3.73	3.75	3.82	3.57
Vâlcea	3.84	3.81	3.87	3.72
Vrancea	3.24	3.59	3.42	3.28

Source: Authors' own contribution

predictability and stability is expected. However, it is a pleasant surprise that the main cultural trait (mission) offers an external orientation. This is crucial for prefectures as they must be able to adapt to legislative changes, as well as the needs, trends, and challenges that may arise in the communities they serve.

When examining the highest and lowest scores obtained by prefectures at the county level, a similar trend was observed. It is noteworthy that out of the 29 prefectures included in the analysis, Satu Mare, Cluj, and Giurgiu (western region) received the lowest scores on all items, while Mehedinți, Călărași, and Ialomița (eastern region) received the highest scores. The result is intriguing, particularly considering the focus on less developed regions. However, it is important to consider the level of institutional resilience in the prefectures and its impact on the formation and maintenance of organizational culture that aligns with individual values. Specifically, lower levels of development may result in fewer responsibilities and challenges. In more developed areas, the stakes are higher because there are more interconnected elements that need to be addressed and monitored. Therefore, coherent strategies must be put in place to maintain an appropriate organizational culture that guides the organization in a clear direction while supporting the development and integration of its members.

7. Conclusions and recommendations

The study of organizational culture is a topic of interest for practitioners and simultaneously a core factor that can determine the success or failure of an organization. This is why it is crucial to study and further continue analyzing it and trying to understand how it influences the organization and more importantly, how it can be changed to be in tune with the constant changes from the external environment, to be more resilient and adaptive to change.

In our analysis, we observed that the prefectures included in this study exhibited deficiencies in three key areas: capability development (3.47), creating change (3.46), and organizational learning (3.49). These findings are cause for concern, given the nature of their activities and the high implications they have in terms of verifying the validity and legality of public documents. Consequently, a preliminary recommendation pertains to human resources. These individuals should be regarded as a valuable resource and further investments should be made in their development. Public servants and employees should have the opportunity to improve their skills, learn new ones, and have autonomy in their actions. It is acknowledged that the public sector faces specificities and legal constraints, yet it is crucial to act towards changing attitudes and developing the organization. Another factor that should be addressed is the way individuals perceive and respond to change. Resistance to change is a significant challenge to organizational development. Therefore, strategies to address this issue must be adopted. One approach is to create a sense of urgency for change, explain, communicate, and debate the changes, and, most importantly, their implications. Individuals tend to be skeptical of change because they lack understanding

of it (sometimes) and are not adequately informed about it. This can result in individuals limiting themselves to the status quo. It is of the utmost importance for the prefecture to develop new strategies, as otherwise, their capability to adapt, to learn, and to improve their procedures can be delayed, thereby weakening the organizational glue and unity of the group.

Conversely, it was a pleasant surprise to observe that the score for empowerment (3.89) was among the highest. This indicates that the capabilities, skills, and knowledge of the employees are appreciated, and delegation represents an important step in this process. However, this empowerment must be accompanied by capability development and the promotion of clear learning processes. Additionally, it is essential to create an organizational climate that fosters experimentation, diversity, and knowledge-sharing tools.

Another noteworthy aspect is the fact that nearly everyone has a clear understanding of their goals and objectives (3.87), indicating a high level of dedication, unity of direction, and expertise. However, this is particularly relevant in an organization in the public sector, where procedures, tasks, and responsibilities are highly standardized, making objectives realistic, relatively straightforward to follow, and understandable.

Finally, it is necessary to improve flexibility. For them to be more adaptable, it is essential to provide adequate tools to insert change. This is especially important in unique or abstract situations. It also increases the response and reaction rate, which in turn facilitates an organizational climate that promotes continuous development for the human resource.

In conclusion, it is crucial to analyze and understand organizational culture. However, it is important to recognize that public institutions have specific ways of functioning due to their constraints and the nature of their work. In addition, it is important to consider external pressures, legal constraints, and the fact that the outcomes produced by public institutions cannot always be quantified, making it challenging to offer performance guidelines.

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