

Exploring Aspects Creating Corporate Culture in Georgian Organizations

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Abstract

The paper presents the results of an attempt to link the definition of organizational culture to Georgian reality in companies. It explores the companies' visual artifacts to clarify traditional influences on Georgian company organizational cultures. Along with the study of culture within the organization, our study explores the reasons and thoughts behind the elements of existing culture and attempts to generate some recommendations on organizational performance indicators that define the culture of an organization in one way or another. The paper presents the grouping of company cultures in Georgia according to the frame created and gives recommendation on indicators of specific culture.

Keywords: Artifacts of Culture, Efficiency, Organizational Culture, Performance Indicator
JEL: M14

Introduction

What is Organizational Culture?

When addressing the factors that help companies become successful we generally speak about the economic factors, market opportunities and innovations that they offer to existing as well as potential customers. Little do we speak about the "spirit" of an organization that is coined as its culture. When searching the perfect definition of the term itself, there is a list containing over one hundred definitions of culture (Al Suwaidi, 2008), however we chose the most commonly referenced definition: "Culture can be defined as a set of beliefs and behaviors, historically determined, and is characterized by a wide range of features embedded in the organization" (Hofstede, Neuijen, Ohayv, & Sanders, 1990).

Many definitions of culture are stated by different scholars and they vary according to the attributes, explicit or implicit (Murawwi, Beher, Papanastassiou, & Ajmal, 2014). Some view culture as vital to creating a unique identity for an organization, as they state that "effective organizations need a common identity that distinguishes them and provides a means for attracting the right workers" (King & Demarie), while others emphasize the workplace, where culture is to employees as soil to plants (Davenport, 2015). In both corners it is obvious that culture is an inseparable part of organization's life and caring for it is in advantage to the organization and the community it serves.

When a notion like culture is being discussed, it is important to really understand what feeling and affiliations do different

workers have when mentioning or dealing with culture. As early as in 1938 the universal list was published which consisted of 79 major attributes to 637 sub-attributes related to culture, (Tharp, 2010) starting from the attributes that had the biggest importance to people and their fundamental values, and ending to the least common attributes. This gave rise to the completely different approach to realizing the importance of creating favorable conditions for employees to fit in and work efficiently.

Less emphasis, in term of academic research, was devoted to the attributes mentioned above and not until 1983, when Cameron and Rohrbough examined the attributes and created a framework of competing values that classified the organizational culture into four categories: clan, adhocracy, market, hierarchy (Davenport, 2015).

Cameron and Quin in 2006 explained the four types of culture as follows: clan culture, that can be associated to the small family-owned businesses, is a family-type that is significant with the commitment and loyalty towards each other; adhocracy culture that can be associated to small startups is a dynamic, creative, and entrepreneurial culture that stresses the value of creative innovation and leaves room for employees to take risks; market culture, that can be associated with most of businesses competing for customers on the satisfaction they deliver, emphasizes the productivity and is result-oriented and competitive for customers, contractors and regulators; the hierarchy culture, that can be associated with more "bureaucrat-

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ic" public sector institutions, is stable and controlled by rules, policy, scheduling and lowering costs.

The classification offered by Cameron and Rohrbough and later on explained by Cameron and Quin is important in terms of classifying the types of companies into the cultural characteristics they might possess, giving the possibility to define them. It is a good initial start for appreciating a notion of culture, still underestimated at that time by other scholars of management.

Everyone tends to know what a culture is but often it remains in the background or is not explicitly managed. What needs to be considered very carefully is that culture provides the background music that defines what is and what is not acceptable. It creates a mechanism for guiding employee decisions. "When culture is in tune, you have an attractive place to work, and things run smoothly with minimal direct management intervention" (King & Demarie).

We chose this model to describe because of its simplicity as well as uniqueness. According to King & Demarie in order for the culture to serve as a background music for an organization, step one is figuring out what is important – the authors underline the importance of communicating a clear message that will convey the values of the company to its employee. Letting the employees precisely know what it is that is valued is important in guiding their actions and attracting the employees who share those values. Step two is selecting for cultural fit – this involves being selective on the issue of who joins the company. Careful selection of the fit to culture is a necessary ingredient in terms of continuation of the preserved values within the culture of the company. And the final, third step is continuing to apply culture to retention and promotion decisions – the real work of the managing of the culture of organization is "rewarding employees who act in concert with company values and calling out those who do not."

Importance of Culture

The culture of an organization and how it plays out through its leaders has never been more critical to the very core of the business and the individual. Or as management consultant Peter Drucker said: "Culture eats strategy for lunch".

Culture as defined above is an inseparable part of an organization, but necessary research needs to show the benefits that are yield by the effective culture and environment in an organization. If you look at a clear evidence, a June 2014 Korn Ferry Global study of more than thousand executives found that nearly three quarter (72 percent) of respondents said culture was extremely important to organizational performance. "But sometimes the culture that got you here may not get you there, and changing culture is a daunting prospect for any organization". The aim here is to preserve what are the cornerstones of the culture and change any habit that hinders the alignment of the culture with the strategy chosen to reach a specific goal.

Effects of using corporate culture for the advantage of the company have been observed and as Rahgozar mentions, the organizational culture is the most effective factor in knowledge management and organizational learning, but can also be the main obstacle in knowledge transfer (Rahgozar, Afshangian, & Ehteshami, 2012). When speaking about the obstacle, management should address the issues like commitment of employees and helping them to buy into whole process to serve as facilitators in the culture. Culture must support the necessary attitudes and actions (Goldman, 2007).

Correct usage of culture can aid a company through the

times of change, or through the competition or an innovation and make it very successful. Authors talk about the alignment of the culture to the strategy, a culture being a conveyor of a strategy and the goals that organization wants to set as priorities.

At the same time, we need to carefully understand a culture in terms of business environment and what profit it will get to an organization. "Corporate culture is anything but soft stuff or academic theory. It is a business issue, as real and meaningful as product quality or cash flow. Corporate culture can be a significant business risk, or a valuable asset for growth and competitive advantage" (Eaton, 2015).

Finally, the importance of culture has to once again be underlined as a driving force for success and mobilization.

Importance of Correct Recruitment for Retaining Culture

Edgar Schein, leading academic theorist on corporate culture, defines culture as a pattern of shared basic assumptions that a group has learnt, as it solves problems of external pressure and internal cooperation (Davenport, 2015). According to this very definition, the key in understanding the culture is the people it revolves around. "Organizational culture evolves with the people in it as it represents the cumulative experience and learning that are shared imperfectly" (King & Demarie). In the process of sharing this experience a company can go through various stages of storming, norming and performing and eventually find the best practices that differentiate a legendary organization from an ordinary one. Combining the best physical facilities and the know-how is no longer the case when we talk about the culture, "it is, in essence, the human glue that makes the company unique" (Eaton, 2015).

Some scholars believe that not necessarily culture is a must but it is alignment of strategy with culture that is a key to success in the company (Eaton, 2015). Recruiting function of the company can be a clear example of aligning culture into the strategy. While in the process of recruitment, the possible employees are to be chosen considering the "fit with the culture" the organization has. The concept of culture is an important recruiting tool (Eaton, 2015).

With the increasingly shrinking balance between work and life and higher demand of workers to be performing various duties over their androids and the laptops from home, the choice of work and preferences have shifted to more favorable working environment. A March 2015 Future step study showed that the largest reason a Millennial would choose one job over another is visibility into the mission and vision of an organization, well above advancement opportunities and title and pay. While at the same time 2015 global Korn Ferry study found that nearly half (47 percent) of executive respondents said working for a company whose culture is aligned with their values is the single most important factor for improving their feelings about the job.

On the other hand, the negative effects of overworking and stress on work reflect the psychological well-being of a society and an organization. A study by researchers at Stanford and Harvard estimates that workplace stress contributes to at least 120 000 deaths each year and accounts for as much as \$190 billion in healthcare costs in U.S. (Davenport, 2015). Correctly communicated culture aligned with the strategy can be a solution for the problems of this kind.

Towers Watson survey on workplace stress, manager behavior and organizational culture explains that organizational culture incorporates the human side of culture, which in itself is divided into four elements: primacy of the work and people,

source of direction, locus of authority and group emphasis. As he explains those four elements should be correctly implemented. The first element should emphasize that the care should be on getting the things done and less about the people who actually do those tasks. Managers should play a key role in determining who does the job. While distributing the job, the authority should be concentrated in few places and the individuals applying their abilities and efforts is when the best results are to be yield (Davenport, 2015).

Aligning the Strategy with Culture

Many of change initiatives fail when trying to align the culture and strategy and Birkhead offered the reasons why this usually fails. The very first reason is leaders and their failure to buy into the whole process the organization goes through. Instead of treating the process like it is going on outside, they should serve as role models for their followers. The second reason of the failure according to Birkhead is the failure to operate effectively, meaning cooperation, information sharing and collective wisdom for problem-solving. The final reason for the fallback stated deals with the implementation stage, when the improvements are introduced on the basis of separate projects rather than a business management system (Birkhead, 2015).

Methodology

Research Stages

Stage 1 – Choosing a Company

Visits were made to the companies and description of the culture observed was made. The first visit included identification of the organization's "artifacts" – as Goldman defines, things that are readily observable such as the frequency and length of meetings; appearance of executive offices; existence of reserved parking spaces; and how decisions are made. The attention was paid to a. the interior – desks, tables, decorations, arrangements, colors, logo, design; b. Employee relationships – communication, interaction, asking help, asking advice, escalating problem and c. Employee-customer relationship – service.

The conditions of the initial visit were the following. The visitor should not have had any history with the organization, neither worked nor had any acquaintances working in the company. It was preferable for the visitor to make the first ever visit in the company, or at most had visited the company few times earlier without any significant experience with the company. The companies where the observers had a history of interaction or were usual customers were excluded from the study in order to make the observation more authentic.

When analyzing the companies, it was very important to categorize the companies according to their origin. Referring to the aim of the study, which was to reveal Georgian characteristics of the culture within the companies, we believed that foreign management would have certain influence and the culture would be completely or partially mixed and this would not provide us with the basis for our research (Figure 1).

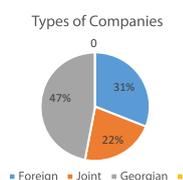


Figure 1. Types of Companies

In order to define each category, we looked for the certain characteristics. We had cases when the companies were established on the model of foreign company and the values were imposed externally from the establishers, were there was little room for creating a culture of own. In these types of companies, as it was observed, there were ready norms for regulating informal relations within the company. In particular, the code of conduct, well written internal regulations and along with those a-well-planned employee activities for establishing and developing the desired culture within the company. The joint companies as we called it were the companies that had approximately equal Georgian and foreign management and there was more room for creating own mixed elements of culture within an organization. In some cases, the management turned out to have had a western education and was a great supporter of the values imposed from the foreign side of management. Our focus group though was Georgian companies, which were free from foreign management and had built a lot of their own principles and the culture. 47% of the companies surveyed were originally Georgian with their unique way of managing the corporate spirit of the company.

During the initial visit to a company the following aspects were observed: a. visual artifacts, furnishing, color and the décor. Majority of the Georgian companies were significantly outstanding in their style, reflecting the sense of luxury by the type and the appearance of the furniture chosen and the arrangement of it in the offices. Well-organized environment once again pointed out the luxury and the places in general were aesthetically attractive. As for different symbols representing the companies, organizational logos and the colors were very well preserved and demonstrated in the companies. Georgian companies are very careful about their image of their companies and they tend to spend enough effort on symbols, logos and slogans. It should be mentioned that at that stage the logos, slogans and the décor was not discussed or analyzed with the values and the essence of the company.

An interesting observation was made on (Figure 2) b. relations between the employees, their interaction with one another and the style of their work in case of normal cases with customers as well as conflict situations or in the case of customer complaint. Again the interaction among the employees was observed according to the classification of foreign, joint and Georgian companies and according to the observation made, conclusions on three aspects: communication, team work and coordination were prepared.

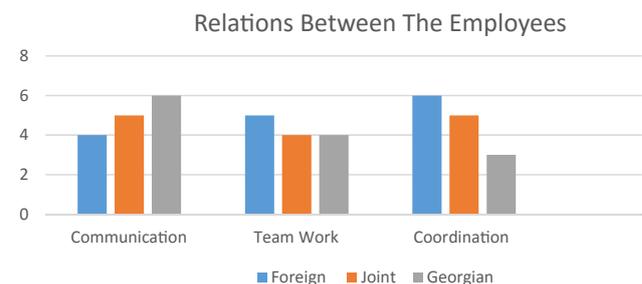


Figure 2. Relations between Employees

Communication among the employees while performing their tasks was the highest among Georgian organizations. This can be partially explained by the lack of well-defined responsibilities for each employee. Georgian organizations tend to have more common task orientation when similar line of workers do their share of work and are not separately responsible for one particular aspect of the job. The communication in general may be perceived as positive, but when it comes to taking a responsibility for the job done wrongly, the problems will probably occur. There needs to be a system of distributing

tasks to the employees and in case of the problem the system should specify the positions responsible.

Team work, as characterized by foreign companies being the champions, is another aspect that was observed at the initial visit. If we discuss the communication that was very intense in Georgian companies, the logical proposition is if there is communication, why there is no team work and spirit observed? According to the observation, when tasks are given or distributed to individual workers, they tend to work more in groups than individually. This we believe arises from the values that foreign organizations have imposed on the employees. Joint and Georgian companies tend to have relatively similar degree of team work signs.

Coordination is one of the defining factors in any organizational performance and during the observation, all three types of companies were analyzed. Foreign companies had the highest degree of coordination while the joint companies came the next. Georgian companies tend to have the least degree of coordination during the activities. This we believe can be one more problematic issue and can be linked to the distribution of the functions and the tasks among the employees. We believe that the system of well-distributed functions needs to be accompanied by coordination.

Relationship with the customers was also observed, even though it was not a primary focus of our research, which dealt specifically with the culture within the company and the interaction of the employees with one another. The observed patterns of behavior in relationship with customers were visible demonstration of customer and focus on customer's needs, human resource allocation according to the customers and the mobilization to handle the customer complaints during the working process of an organization.

Stage 2 – History, Mission, Objectives of a Company

The reasons behind the artifacts in terms of organization's values and "espoused" beliefs were an interesting aspect to look at. After having observed the company's visual artifacts the aim was to learn about the company. We started out by the mission of the company, the goals and the values. In some cases, the mission was presented in websites and brochures, in other cases it was asked as one of the interview questions. Other questions we wished to ask to a company and the respondents revolved around the following topics: recruitment, workplace opportunities, style of communication within the company and development opportunities in the company.

Dealing with the process of recruitment, questions were asked to the manager positions in order to learn the formal procedure and the same questions were validated by employees simply asking them what process of recruitment they went through before starting work.

Employees were asked about opportunities at workplace in terms of professional growth, promotion and salary distribution. Employees with possible knowledge about the salaries and their distribution gave their opinion on how fairly they feel the salary and benefits were distributed.

Dealing with the process of trainings or certificate programs or the support for further education, questions were asked separately to every level employee. The management was asked about the formal procedure of training or development program, while the employees were asked on their own involvement in the program, satisfaction level and wishes about professional development formats.

Questions directed towards the style of communication

within company addressed the employee-to-employee correspondence, the form of an address, the frequency of interaction and the ease of approaching one another. Specific questions were asked about unresolved cases or unsatisfied customers and receiving help from a peer or supervision while handling the case.

Stage 3 – Interviews with Company

Interview analysis was made and the companies were discussed according to the frame. The frame consisted of four stages, which were a. observation, b. interview, c. recommendations, d. difficulties. And the focus of analysis was on the following four aspects: a. interior, b. dress code/gender composition, c. communication style and d. relations to customers. Reexamining the explanations given on the interviews was beneficial to clearly view the culture. Recommendations to developing the culture in an organization were prepared.

Interviews were made according to the following factors: 1. Awareness of employees of the mission, goals, and values of the company; 2. Process of Recruitment, workplace opportunities; 3. Style of communication between the employees; 4. Perception of employees about the company.

It was important for us to see how involved employees were in the creation of the culture within an organization. We wanted to see whether the employees knew about the mission of the company and had in any context participated in the formulation of the goals for an organization. The following questions were asked: Are you aware of the company mission? Do you follow specific set of goals? Do you feel you share the values that your company has? Have you participated in the development of the goals or policies at your organization? The awareness of the employees of the mission was satisfactory, most of the employees could state the mission of the company if they had one, but when asked about the specific set of goals they operated in accordance to, the employees had difficulty recalling them. Also in asking whether they shared the similar values with the company, we believe that the answers were biased because if the employees do not understand the goals of the organization and do not buy into the values then how come they share the same values with the organization. We believe that in Georgian organizations there is a high sense of being within the team and not sharing values is considered as being an outsider and a subject to leaving the job. That is why the majority of the respondents replied that they shared the values similar, yet is not involved in goals formation and implementation process. Faking commitment can become a problem especially in the times of crises or harsh competition with the rivals when the only decisive resource to defeat a competitor is an employee team that organization is proud of to have.

It was significant for us to discuss about the process of recruitment and the opportunities at the workplace. We asked the following questions: whether there were a standardized vacancy procedures and applications online or through any other means; if the organization cooperated with local human resources advertising agencies; who did the actual process of recruiting or were the personnel involved in the selection process. All the interviewed organizations had a formal way of posting a vacancy on one of the online sites for vacancies and the formal process of recruitment followed with revision, interviews and selection, but the majority of the workers when asked about the process they went through when being selected denied passing through the formal procedure. Majority responded that they were recommended by third party or they directly approached the organization, introducing themselves. Usually the selection process was run by the manager itself and organizations did not have a separate unit as human resources unit that would manage the formal selection process.

When asked about the involvement of other employees in the selection process, the responses were negative, pointing out that a manager or a supervisor made a hiring decision on subjective basis and this tends to point out at the less transparent process of selection in the organizations.

Analysis of style of communication between the employees was complemented by the questions to the employees for revealing how they felt about these relations. The questions were asked about how easy it was to ask for help from a co-worker in the same line of management or from the above. To our surprise the employees felt that it was very easy for them to get help from a coworker and majority of the employees were happy with their supervisors stepping in when necessary. More specific question was asked in case of a customer complaint or a problem, what the procedure of the superior stepping in was and who took the responsibility and the blame for the wrong action or unsatisfied customer handling. Managers or superiors were perceived as responsibility bearers in these particular cases. Due to the observation made earlier, the questions about precise definition of the duties were posed to the employees and the way the tasks were shared among them. The majority of the respondents frankly answered that there were no defined borders or the lines of duties, that all did the same job for the same purpose, satisfying the customers. In some cases, the employees admitted that it would be better for the employee to have a specifically defined task. And at last the style of address was also asked to the employees, whether it was formal informal or in between. In most of the cases for Georgian organizations the address style was informal and the employees talked about their superiors as their friends. This we believe is also another problematic issue, because in case of this kind of subjective approach, the controlling function of management would simply not work.

Overall employees were asked about their general idea and understanding of the importance of an organization to them. In purely Georgian companies, the employees tend to lack the sense of advancement and promotion. There was no perceived clear promotional path, some even considering the jobs as dead-end. This can not necessarily be linked to the company culture alone. This may just be the specific industry the company operates in or the general lack of prospects in the country in terms of developing industries.

Results

Analysis of Company Cultures within Georgian Organizations and Recommendations for Improving Culture within Georgian Organizations

a. Foreign Elements observed in the foreign organizations and joint organizations:

When observing the foreign companies and comparing them to joint as well as the Georgian companies, we identified the significant factors that differentiated these organizations. We believe that if Georgian organizations achieve some degree of these characteristics, they will have created a basis for creating a valuable culture within an organization. The most important factor identified by us was well structures tasks and duties distributed among the employees that made it easy to perform the task efficiently, not wasting time and effort. The distribution was supported by the formal responsibilities which were well explained and communicated to the employees by a clear authority. The authority in foreign organizations was a separate position in the hierarchy, while in Georgian organizations the superiors were regarded as friends or people responsible for the same tasks as their subordinates. We believe this kind of approach makes the management of human resources subjective and somewhat unprofessional. Especially in the

cases of customer complaints, the crises a company or a specific unit can go through, primacy of the rules of conduct are superior in foreign organizations, while we have an absence of the reference to the rules and authority in Georgian organizations. And the last aspect which is very strong in foreign organizations and was not observed in Georgian organizations is having the Key Performance Indicators when recruiting personnel for an organization. Just having the formal process of recruitment and selection but not implementing them is not enough and this creates a sense of unfairness among the employees, which was observed during the interviews.

b. Tendencies in Georgian Organizations that make them attractive in terms of culture:

Rigid schedules that were traditional in the Georgian context are now being replaced by the possible flexible working times that allow various groups of labor get involved in the labor market. More students are given an opportunity to get involved in the labor market, having the chance to work in the evenings or weekend times. The attitude of the employees in Georgian organizations is very positive towards this style of scheduling and we believe this is a very good starting point to having a more committed employee at work. An imposed dress code and emphasis on visual artifacts was not actually observed in Georgian companies. According to our observation and later on during the interviews, it was revealed that the employees actually enjoyed the fact that they were associated with the company by the dress code or colors they wore and having the signs and symbols of their organizations and being actually proud of it. The commitment to your company often starts with the very first step of addressing company by "us" rather than "them" and talking about the company actions in the form of "we" rather than "they". We believe that this tendency is a very positive development and a huge step towards employee commitment and involvement in organizational life. One more significant aspect that was observed at the initial visits to the companies was the high sense and attention on preserving the image and exclusivity of the company. Later in the interviews it was revealed that this was highly supported by the top management of the company, well shared by the employees that were proud of it. One more pattern was also observed in Georgian companies that we believe is also a right path towards good human resources management. The pattern was that most of the employees in Georgian organizations believed that in order to advance to the top management level one needed to start from the very lowest position and raise oneself up to the upper levels in the hierarchy. We believe this is a very correct vision of the employees that support the company and its management to manage the human resources through the promotional paths in a right way. Georgian Specific Elements that can be used as a basis of creation of culture are the enthusiasm of the managers to immediately get involved in an issue and solve the customer complaint or any other issue related to customers. This is the sign of commitment on the behalf of the superiors and we believe the same spirit can also be rooted into the hearts of other employees.

c. Areas for Improvement for Georgian companies and lessons to be learnt:

Considering the elements found in foreign companies and the tendencies that we believe are positive in Georgian companies, we can recommend some areas that need immediate improvement to create a platform for cultures to develop. The aspect of clear distribution of functions was already mentioned by us and we believe that this is the first key point towards developing a possibility of having a culture of one's own. Unless the functions, duties and the responsibilities of every single employee and the position they hold are well defined, Georgian organizations will never raise themselves from a friendly get-together environment in the fun times, which will eventually turn into a deserted place once the conditions become tough. Together with proper distribution of functions we propose to

Georgian organizations to have set criteria for performance, which will be linked to promotion and advancement. The same criteria can be used in selecting the employees in the recruiting process and all will serve to making employees more committed to the work they do. Having the set of criteria for performance was an element that foreign organizations had in action and benefitted the organization. We believe that Georgian organizations should adopt the criteria in order for the recruiting process to be objective.

Conclusion

With the increased importance of open communication and the spirit of teamwork more motivational strategies should be implemented to keep the employees working together efficiently. We believe that clear functions, line of authority and the prospects of promotion following the criteria of performance will lead to motivation of the employees and their commitment. At this level sharing and involvement culture was not observed in Georgian organizations. We believe that clearer goal-setting strategies and an obvious emphasis on employee involvement need to be incorporated.

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