

Organizational Culture and Knowledge Management in the Polish Judiciary

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DOI:10.13165/VPA-16-15-4-04

Abstract. *Knowledge management is a concept that developed rapidly about 10 years ago. The literature on the subject emphasises the important role that organisational culture plays in it. Culture and knowledge management are strongly connected, as demonstrated by the literature studies in this article. The purpose of the article is to present organisational culture research using the example of Polish courts, and it details the results of the first area of research: employee satisfaction levels. A benchmarking method was used for the study. More than 1,250 questionnaires were received from 28 units. This allowed the author to favourably assess the research tool used because it enabled interesting conclusions to be drawn about the entities researched, with respondents deciding to take action leading to changes in their organisational culture. It was thus possible to use quantitative research to transition to qualitative research. The top management of courts in certain regions appointed court employees responsible for implementing solutions to improve organisational culture in a given court. Another effect of this research is mutual learning: the courts that participated in the study and achieved results that were significantly below average are trying to start discussions with courts that achieved results that were well above average. The research presented in this article thus seems to be an interesting tool for influencing organisational culture.*

Keywords: *knowledge management, organisational culture, benchmarking.*

Raktažodžiai: *žinių vadyba, organizacinė kultūra, sugretinimo metodas.*

Introduction

Knowledge management is a concept that developed rapidly about 10 years ago. At present, the concept itself is no longer so popular among practitioners, but it is still in focus: it is frequently improved on by other management ideas, such as quality management and corporate social responsibility.

The contemporary international trend is to look into the relationship between organisational culture and knowledge management. A recent article in the “Journal of Knowledge Management” deals with this subject, although the research consists of case studies rather than being quantitative (Corfield, Paton 2016).

This publication presents the concept of an original tool for researching organisational culture in the judiciary. The purpose of the tool is mainly to initiate discussions at the entities researched (the courts) about changes to organisational culture. Such changes should then strengthen knowledge management at these entities.

Courts were chosen for this research for the following reasons:

- 1) The relative ease of access to data. Courts are clearly defined public units, so there is no difficulty involved with identifying them.
- 2) Judiciary management is a current research topic both in Polish (e.g. Banasik 2015, 236-250; Rostkowski 2015) and international literature (e.g. Boland, Fowler 2000, 417-446). At the same time, the above examples are notable as exceptions rather than a rule, because management research about the judiciary is fairly limited.
- 3) The Polish judiciary is facing challenges with regard to modernisation, with a general view that society is not satisfied with the effectiveness of courts. The author’s observations thus show that Polish courts are increasingly interested in new management concepts, including “soft” aspects such as organisational culture.

Knowledge management versus the concept of knowledge management: current trends

When beginning to consider knowledge management, it is worth distinguishing two notions: “knowledge management” and the “knowledge management concept”. These ideas are treated as identical, but the author’s research shows that the terms differ significantly. The “knowledge management concept” is currently not implemented by enterprises, whereas “knowledge management” is still a key area on which organisations focus (Brdulak 2012).

The knowledge management concept was developed in the mid-1990s: a broad review of definitions formulated by authors such as Wiig and Macintosh was presented by professor Liebowitz in his textbook on knowledge management (1999). This concept was developed in three main locations:

1. In the US, where professors Davenport and Prusak (1998) published the book Working Knowledge. In this, they emphasised the importance of

knowledge in an organisation and focused, among other things, on mechanisms for sharing it.

2. In Japan, professors Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995) considered the process of knowledge management. In their proposal, they concentrated on four forms for converting tacit and explicit knowledge.
3. In Scandinavia, professor Leif Edvinsson (1997) started developing the notion of intellectual capital and worked on creating tools to measure it.

The knowledge management concept:

- emphasises the difference between the notions of data, information and knowledge (and frequently wisdom);
- the points of interdependency of tacit and explicit knowledge;
- formulates two strategies for knowledge management: codification and personalisation;
- has drawn attention to the knowledge management process of acquiring, using and storing knowledge;
- introduced the notion of the “community of practice” to the language.

At the start of the 21st century, a significant contribution to the concept of knowledge management was made by professor Tiwana (2000), who started considering how to use it to build customer relations (CRM).

It is worth noting that since about 2006, the knowledge management concept has hardly been developed. This is confirmed both by observations from research on this area (e.g. KPMG) and a very simple indicator: the number of articles dealing with the subject in journals addressed to businesspeople. For example, there was a drop in the number of articles dealing with knowledge management in the periodical “Personel i Zarządzanie” (Brdulak 2012, 62).

One could, therefore, pose a question about whether knowledge management stopped being significant for businesses. Such a question requires a diligent interpretation. In their book *Wiedza w zarządzaniu przedsiębiorstwem* (Knowledge in enterprise management), the author verified the following hypothesis: *today's enterprises pay a large amount of attention to knowledge, but the concept of knowledge management is not widespread among them*. This is also the answer to the above question: the concept of knowledge management is not attractive to businesses, but knowledge management is still within the focus of practitioners. However, the topic of knowledge in an organisation is addressed as part of other management concepts, such as quality management, building a lean culture and corporate social responsibility.

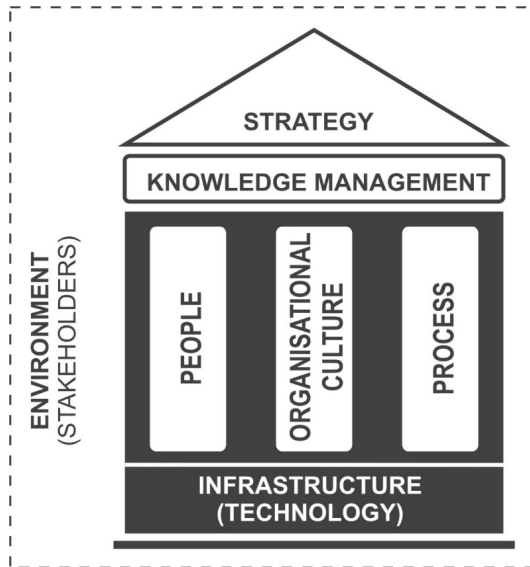
It is worth noting that certain challenges raised as part of the knowledge management concept are very current, such as:

- how to motivate employees to share their knowledge.
- how to build trust in an organisation in a way that supports information exchange between employees.
- how an organisation should learn that it gains knowledge both from its structures and its environment.

- how to store and archive knowledge, or what to do so that the organisation does not forget its errors and successes.

The above list is open. Knowledge constitutes a basic resource of organisations and, in the present time of rapid changes, will still be a focus for managers.

Figure 1. Three main pillars of knowledge management



Source: Own development (Brdulak 2012, p. 46).

The knowledge management concept does not really include considerations related directly to organisational culture, although initiating the knowledge-sharing process requires actions to be taken in this area (see e.g. Juchnowicz 2010, 28-29).

However, the author believes that when we are not talking about the concept, but about knowledge management in general, organisational culture constitutes one of its key pillars. In particular, organisational culture is strictly related to tacit knowledge (Said 2015, 164-189; Visvalingam 2011, 462-477).

Organisational culture refers to *social norms and value systems stimulating employees, the right organisational climate, the management system, shared meanings and symbols, cognitive schemes and required behaviour* (Nogalski 1998, 105).

Thus, three levels of organisational culture can be distinguished (Kostera 1995, 75):

- 1) visible and conscious: cultural artefacts and creations, visible behaviour patterns, symbols and ceremonies;
- 2) partly visible and conscious: norms and values, prohibitions and ideologies, and behavioural guidelines;

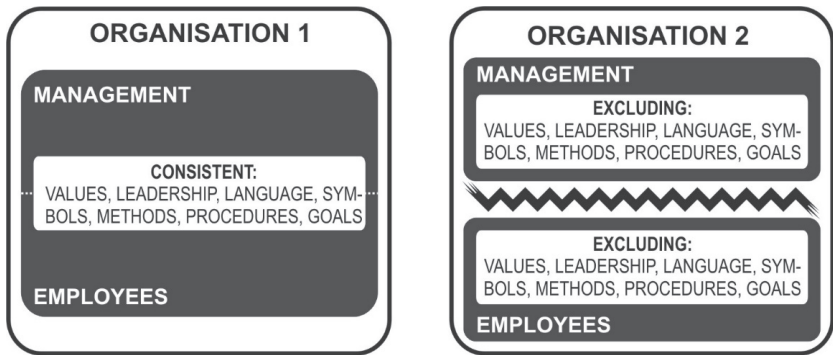
- 3) Indivisible and usually unconscious: relationship to the environment and reality, human nature, and interpersonal relations and activities.

To summarise terminological issues, the author assumes that organisational culture is a *system of shared values* (Krupski, Stańczyk 2008, 23).

The organisational culture may support an organisation in achieving its goals, or sabotage them. In particular, a large organisation cannot be seen as a single cultural model. Within larger organisations there are subcultures, and the differences between them are referred to as “cultural dissonance”. This occurs when people *realise the differences in their cultural reactions to a given matter* (Sikorski 2002, 23).

The diagram below shows the cultural dissonance between two groups of employees: managers and line employees.

Figure 2. Cultural stratification in an organisation



Source: Own development (Brdulak 2012, p. 122).

As can be seen, when there is no dissonance, both groups have consistent values (among other things), whereas if dissonance appears, these values are excluding. In other words, if there is strong cultural dissonance, the organisation may be unable to achieve its goals because individual employee groups will lead wars of attrition.

Cultural dissonances appear not only between the management of employees, but also between employees who carry out basic processes and those who carry out supporting processes in an organisation. According to the author’s research, this situation is fairly frequent and is more destructive for the community than dissonance between managers and employees. In the case of the dissonance presented in the figure, both groups present in a large organisation interact relatively rarely. In addition, this type of relationship is relatively well structured through various processes and procedures, and can be said to be fairly natural. In the relationship between employees who conduct basic and supporting processes, tensions can be much greater because both these groups interact frequently: in many cases, the employees of both groups meet every day and must cooperate. In addition, the members of both groups hold similar jobs, so one group is unable to impose a certain logic on the other. Each group must therefore enter dialogue and make certain compromises.

A lack of knowledge sharing, and thus the lack of a knowledge management process, is quite likely to lead to a strong cultural dissonance within an organisation. Relations between organisational culture and knowledge management can therefore be said to exist (Ajmal 2009, 339-352).

Research methodology

This research is exploratory and multi-stage in nature. The first stage involved conducting a survey using a questionnaire constructed on the basis of the author's experience from research carried out between 2010 and 2012, entitled: *Knowledge management process in enterprise management* (National Science Centre grant no. N N115 333338). The results of this research were presented in the publication: *Wiedza w zarządzaniu przedsiębiorstwem: Koncepcja. Filary. Dobre praktyki* (Knowledge in enterprise management: Concept. Pillars. Good practice) (Brdulak 2012).

Because of the decreased popularity of the knowledge management concept, as described in the first part of this paper, the author decided to call this research "organisational culture research" and not "knowledge management research". This research therefore deals with organisational culture, although the questions themselves also apply to knowledge management.

The main purpose of this research is to initiate a discussion about organisational culture in courts by providing them with information about their current culture compared to that of other courts. This discussion forum is the first stage of action that a given unit needs to take to change its organisational culture.

The first stage is quantitative and based on the questionnaire. Among other things, the questionnaire makes use of the author's previous achievements. It is split into four sections:

1. SECTION A: Gallup test, employee satisfaction levels (Forbringer 2002)
This part of the survey assesses levels of general satisfaction at work. The questionnaire is based on 12 questions developed by the Gallup Institute called "Gallup questions". It is assumed that an employee who is satisfied with their work cooperates better within the group and, among other things, is more willing to share their knowledge.
2. SECTION B: Group cohesion
This part of the questionnaire aims to provide data on respondents' perceptions of cooperation within the group. To what extent do the individuals identify with the group, and to what extent do they avoid working in it?
3. SECTION C: Cooperation
Section C is dedicated to information sharing between experienced individuals and those who are getting used to their jobs, addressing how willing employees are to share information. This section therefore also examines the level of trust within an organisation: it can be viewed that

the level of trust is higher in those units in which people are more willing to share information.

4. SECTION D: Management styles (perception by employees)

This part of the questionnaire is based on McGregor's X and Y theory. According to this theory, two personality types can be distinguished among employees: so-called X and Y types. Following Michael Armstrong, a leading authority on human resource management, it can be assumed that "the X theory is the traditional view according to which the average human being has an inherent dislike of work and will avoid it if he can, and so 'most people must be coerced, controlled, threatened with punishment to get them to put forth adequate effort towards the achievement of organizational objectives'. The Y theory, in turn, emphasises that man will exercise self-direction and self-control in the service of objectives to which he is committed and that the commitment to objectives is a function of the rewards associated with their achievement" (Armstrong 2009, 296). A disadvantage of the theory itself is that it is rather binary in nature (Oleksyn 2008, 220), but the purpose of using this part of the questionnaire in the study was not to get individual groups to assess management styles, but to check differences between the groups.

The research covered the employees of courts (district and regional) in four regions: Wrocław, Warsaw, Olsztyn and Gdańsk. Altogether, more than 1,310 individuals (as of March 2016) representing 28 units took part in the research. Only complete questionnaires were used to analyse the results.

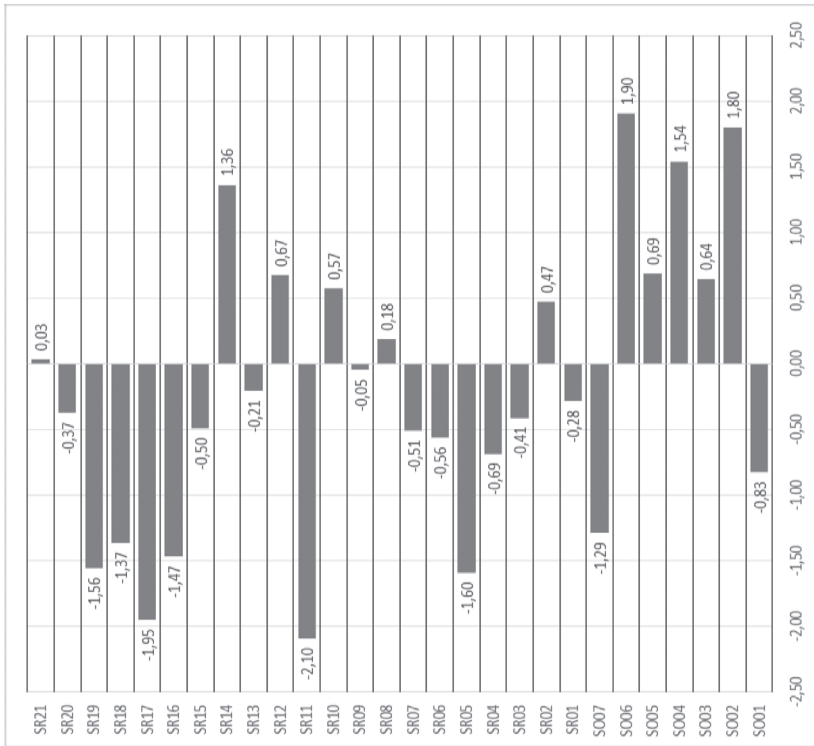
Presentation of selected results

The purpose of this research is to enable individual units to make a preliminary assessment of their organisational culture compared to that of other units, making it possible to initiate a discussion on the topic. A benchmarking method of comparing to the average was used. This means that the author is not at present assessing whether a given criterion is at a high or low level at a unit covered by the research, but comparing the results of a unit to the average and making assessments based on this. Thus, the results of a given court in section A are above or below average.

It is also important to distinguish district courts from regional courts: the research tool allows types of court to be compared, although the author has been presenting collective results so far. Results are presented in a way that is anonymised for academic purposes. Reports provided to courts participating in the research project contained names of units, but only those represented by the specific report addressee. In other words, in the case of the Warsaw region, where the research was initiated by the president of the Regional Court of Warsaw, the report for the president contained the names of district courts located in the Warsaw region.

The graph below presents the results for SECTION A, which is based on the Gallup test – a questionnaire of 12 YES/NO questions (see Appendix 1).

Figure 3. Results of section A: work satisfaction



Source: Own development, Jakub Brdulak, 2016.

The following conclusions can be drawn based on the above graph:

- The satisfaction level of employees of District Court number 14 is clearly above average.
- The satisfaction level at regional courts is higher than at district courts.
- The satisfaction level of employees of District Court 11 is clearly below average.

The above conclusions are used to initiate discussions with individual courts, during which the results are analysed. These discussions are held in the form of a seminar attended by top management of a given court. The following issues, in particular, can be discussed by reference to the above graph:

- How credible are the results obtained as part of this research?
- Do participants believe there are significant differences between District Court 14 and District Court 11?
- If so, is it worth initiating a process whereby District Court 11 would learn from District Court 14?

- If so, how should this process be conducted? And who should be responsible for it?
- Is it worth repeating the questionnaire survey in e.g. one year?

The results of sections B, C and D of the research questionnaire are presented in the same way.

A significant research assumption made by the author is that organisational culture cannot be changed from outside the organisation. In other words, if the questionnaire survey is to start a discussion of organisational culture, changes to the culture themselves must be initiated by specific employees of a given court.

This is the logic followed by the research process – in particular in the Warsaw region, where the president appointed a team at the central level of the region with the role of making changes to the organisational culture.

Such changes may be introduced based on, for example, best practice. A project like this was recently carried out by the National School of Judiciary and Public Prosecution. This is a valuable source of solutions that courts can use to improve their organisational culture, among other things. In any case, in this research, the choice of tool and the responsibility for using it belongs to the given court and not to the research author.

Discussion of results

The formula for this research seems to be attractive for courts, but is also scalable for other industries.

With regards to the results themselves, the author avoids ranking them – although the research method used does allow the entities studied to be easily ranked. However, the author believes that this action could prevent real work on organisational cultures, with a court maybe optimising itself to get the best results in the questionnaire instead of trying to change its culture. At the same time, it might reduce the risk of the action taken: in other words, it may only introduce changes guaranteed to improve its results.

The author believes that work on organisational culture is a continuous effort that can sometimes regress. It is important that a unit is able to learn from its errors and constantly seek solutions aimed at creating a culture developed by the employees at the organisation that enables them to creatively and effectively solve their own problems and those of the unit.

This publication presents the results only for Section A. However, the research also covered the remaining three sections. These sections correlate, but the correlation is not strong. It is only once a given unit ranks above or below average in all four sections that certain conclusions are formulated for it. This is an important research assumption because, in a sense, repeating the research raises the probability that the results will be more objective.

Conclusions

1. Using the research method presented to initiate discussions on organisational culture appears to be a legitimate approach. In particular, the author finds it important to motivate a given unit to take responsibility for its organisational culture. This is why it is important that an individual court appoints a person responsible for introducing changes to this culture. The author believes that the involvement of an outside person should be restricted just to measuring the current situation with regard to organisational culture and initiating a discussion on the subject in the unit. It is worth adding that even just starting the discussion contributes to the logic of a knowledge-based organisation.
2. The benchmarking method works well in this research because it offers a large amount of room for discussion. At the same time, it is important not to treat it as a method for ranking units, but only as a source of information. Primarily, this method makes it possible to initiate the learning process in organisations: through discussions, units can present their ideas for organisational culture and thus learn one from another.
3. As a further stage for this research, it can be extended to other industries and include further organisations. Regardless of its limitations – in particular related to its representativeness – this research forms a good platform for the exchange of knowledge between different organisations, and just starting any discussion – in this case on organisational culture – can be treated as the first step by a given unit towards a knowledge-based organisation.

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Appendix 1

Section A. Gallup test

A.1.	I know what is expected of me at work.	<input type="radio"/> YES	<input type="radio"/> NO
A.2.	I have the materials and equipment I need to do my work correctly.	<input type="radio"/> YES	<input type="radio"/> NO
A.3.	At work, I have the opportunity to do what I do best every day.	<input type="radio"/> YES	<input type="radio"/> NO
A.4.	In the last seven days, I have received recognition or praise for doing good work.	<input type="radio"/> YES	<input type="radio"/> NO
A.5.	My supervisor, or someone at work, seems to care about me as a person.	<input type="radio"/> YES	<input type="radio"/> NO
A.6.	There is someone at work who encourages my development.	<input type="radio"/> YES	<input type="radio"/> NO
A.7.	At work, my opinions seem to count.	<input type="radio"/> YES	<input type="radio"/> NO
A.8.	The mission or purpose of my court makes me feel my job is important.	<input type="radio"/> YES	<input type="radio"/> NO
A.9.	My associates or fellow employees are committed to doing quality work.	<input type="radio"/> YES	<input type="radio"/> NO
A.10.	I have a best friend at work.	<input type="radio"/> YES	<input type="radio"/> NO
A.11.	In the last six months, someone at work has talked to me about my progress.	<input type="radio"/> YES	<input type="radio"/> NO
A.12.	Over the last year, I have had opportunities at work to learn and grow.	<input type="radio"/> YES	<input type="radio"/> NO

Organizacinė kultūra ir žinių vadyba Lenkijos teismų sistemoje

Jakub Brdulak

Anotacija

Žinių vadyba kaip koncepcija intensyviai vystytis pradėjo maždaug prieš 10 metų. Žinių vadybos literatūroje ypač akcentuojamas organizacinės kultūros vaidmuo. Reikšmingą organizacinės kultūros ir žinių vadybos tarpusavio ryšį patvirtina tiek literatūra, tiek šis tyrimas, pateikiamas straipsnyje. Straipsnio tikslas – pristatyti organizacinės kultūros tyrimus remiantis Lenkijos teismų pavyzdžiu. Pirmojoje straipsnio dalyje pristatomi tyrimo rezultatai, susiję su darbuotojų pasitenkinimo lygiu. Tyrimui atlikti buvo naudojamas sugretinimo metodas. Sulaukta daugiau nei 1250 apklausos anketų iš 28 skyrių, o tai autoriui suteikė galimybę palankiai įvertinti panaudotas tyrimo priemones, nes jos leido padaryti vertingas išvadas, į kurias atsižvelgdami respondentai nusprendė imtis veiksmų siekdami įgyvendinti organizacinės kultūros pokyčius. Tokiu būdu tapo įmanoma pereiti nuo kiekybinių prie kokybinių tyrimų. Aukščiausio lygio vadovai tam tikruose regionuose išrinko darbuotojus, atsakingus už teismų organizacinės kultūros tobulinimo sprendimų įgyvendinimą. Kitas šio tyrimo efektas yra abipusis mokymasis: tyrime dalyvavę teismai, kurių rezultatai buvo žemesni nei vidutinio lygio, mėgina pradėti diskusijas su tais teismais, kurių rezultatai buvo aukščiau vidutinio lygmens. Vadinasi, šiame straipsnyje pristatomas tyrimas galėtų būti reikšminga priemone siekiant paveikti organizacinę kultūrą.

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Straipsnis įteiktas 2016 m. kovo–rugsėjo mėn., recenzuotas, parengtas spaudai 2016 m. gruodžio mėn.