

# Green organizational culture – its essence, elements and methods of diagnosis

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**Abstract** The analysis of papers indexed in Scopus database revealed that insufficient attention is paid to organizational culture treated as one of the crucial factors in shaping employees' appropriate behaviors towards natural environment. Taking this into account the purpose of this paper is to present green organizational culture which is an element of general organizational culture and reflects the organizational attitude towards environmental issues. In particular, the author discusses the essence of this culture, its elements – taking into account Schein's concept of cultural layers – and methods of its diagnosis used in previous studies. Since the paper is of theoretical-conceptual nature, it is based on literature studies combined with a scientific reflection. It contributes to the development of knowledge through providing synthesis of previous studies and highlighting challenges related to proper diagnosis of this culture.

**Keywords:** environmental sustainability, green HRM, employee behavior

## 1. Introduction

Organizational culture is “a system of shared values (that define what is important) and norms that define appropriate attitudes and behaviors for organizational members (how to feel and behave)” (O'Reilly and Chatman, 1996) (p. 160). The mechanism of culture impact on employees' behavior takes the form of using social control instead of traditional, formal control (O'Reilly and Chatman, 1996). Corporate culture helps employees to interact and engage with each other, motivates employees to commit to common goals, enhances their bond with the firm (Zhao et al., 2018).

As Harris and Crane (2002) stated, the transition towards environmental sustainability requires changes in the corporate culture. The concept of pro-environmental (green) organizational culture or green organizational culture has evolved.

Although according to Liu and Lin (2020), green corporate culture is one of the most discussed topics by both elite classes and the laymen, searching in Scopus database resulted in only 125 papers strictly devoted to this culture. The query used for selection of papers was: TITLE-ABS-KEY ("green corporate culture" or "pro-environmental corporate culture" or "green organizational culture" or "pro-environmental organizational culture") AND (LIMIT-TO (DOCTYPE,"ar")) AND (LIMIT-TO (LANGUAGE,"English")).

Next parts of this paper are organized as follows. The second section discusses the essence and elements of green culture whereas the third part presents methods of its diagnosis. The paper ends with conclusions and directions for further research.

## 2. The essence and elements of green organizational culture

Pro-environmental organizational culture is “a symbolic context about environmental management and protection within which interpretations guide behaviors and processes of members' sense making and set of values and norms describing how the company perceives the environmental variable” (Tepe Küçükoğlu and Pinar, 2015) (p. 80).

Schein (1990) distinguished three layers in his concept of organizational culture. They are: artifacts (symbols), norms and values, and basic assumptions. A pro-environmental culture can also be analyzed from the perspective of these layers. Artifacts represent what we can quickly notice if we have contact with a given organizational culture. Physical artifacts – in the context of green organizational culture – can include, for example, green building, plants in offices (office garden), or recycling bins. Artifacts also take the form of a language (e.g. the use of notions related to environmental issues) and visible green behaviors (e.g. functioning of “light-out” policy). Cultural values (e.g. natural environment) and norms (how to act) express guidelines for the appropriate employees' behavior. The most hidden layer are the basic assumptions which reflect whether people actually feel concern for the environment.

Corporate culture is closely related to corporate strategy, thus green culture should accompany a company's green strategy. Since there are different types of companies environmental strategies (Worthington, 2013), green corporate culture can also have different features. For example, if a company implements an indifferent green strategy people only follow the requirements imposed by the legal regulations concerning environmental protection (behavioral artifacts). In turn, companies adopting innovative green strategy will enhance employees' involvement in the creation of new environmentally-friendly processes and products. The above indicates not only that the pro-environmental culture can have different features but also levels, e.g., zero level, low level, medium

level or high level culture – as far as its greening is concerned (Piwowar-Sulej, 2020).

### 3. Methods of green culture diagnosis

Corporate culture, including pro-environmental culture, can be the subject of change in a controlled way. Therefore a diagnosis of cultural features and measuring the level of green culture allows an organization not only to assess the state-of-art, but also to implement the necessary changes.

The diagnosis of organizational culture can be carried out with the use of quantitative (survey) or qualitative (in-depth interviews) methods (Hopkins, 2006). Full diagnosis should aim at identifying all cultural layers distinguished by Schein.

The analysis of papers indexed in Scopus database revealed that the majority of articles focus on identifying the linkage between green organizational culture and organizational citizenship behaviors, green innovation, competitive advantage (Pham et al., 2018; Chang, 2015; Gürlek and Tuna, 2018; Roespinoedji et al., 2019). Organizational culture is put between different factors impacting employees' behaviors towards environment (Lasrado and Zakaria, 2020). Previous diagnoses have been directed towards the identification of either green behaviors (Asmui et al., 2015) or practices which influence the culture (Roscoe et al., 2019; da Silveira Marques Pereira et al., 2013). For the purposes of the above-presented works a survey method has been broadly used. Only one research instrument (questionnaire which allows to determine the level of green culture) with appropriate instruction has been in detail presented in the literature (Piwowar-Sulej, 2020), however, it was tested in only one company.

### 4. Conclusions

Organizational culture is an important factor of organizational performance and an under-studied area in the context of environmental issues. The presented findings revealed the lack of comprehensive studies which diagnose all layers of pro-environmental organizational culture. Therefore a field arises for the development of research tools in this area. Further research will not only contribute to the development of academic knowledge but also help practitioners in the pro-environmental transition of their companies.

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