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## Overview of Organizational Culture in Professional Emergency Services in the Timis

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### Abstract

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The cultural characteristics of today's society, with their numerous multicultural and intercultural elements, make the study of organizational culture become very tempting. Each organization has a distinct personality, determined by the values, beliefs, principles shared by its members.

The present study centres on the problem of organizational culture of professional emergency services in the Timis county, a rather recent institution, in the first line of public services, so as to bring about unavoidable changes.

The idea of a studying and identifying the characteristics of organizational culture of the professional emergency services in the Timis county is extremely useful, as long as there has been no previous research in this field targeting this type of structure inside the Ministry of Internal Affairs, and the data of this study could be a starting point for establishing the fundamentals, outlining and applying managing strategies that prove to be adequate for the existing culture and organizational environment, suggesting ways of applying the programmes of change in organizational culture.

We have considered in this study a sample of 650 members of the staff of the Emergency Inspectorate Banat in Timis county, who have been given a questionnaire in order to identify their fundamental cultural dimensions and their attitude towards change. The results show that we can clearly outline the need of undertaking certain steps towards cultural-organizational change, targeting mostly a shifting in accent from an inward orientation, conservatory views, dogmatism, rigidity, the absence of transparency toward a more open, proactive attitude, toward flexibility and association.

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**Keywords:** Management; organizational cultural changes; organizational culture; professional emergency services; S.W.O.T analysis.

## 1. Introduction

The study of organizational culture has a relatively short history. It has begun to expand only over the last five decades (with the remarkable results obtained by Japanese enterprises, which could be explained especially by their specific culture), when a big number of studies focused on this subject. However, these studies do not cover all aspects of organizational culture, and neither do they refer to all countries or all types of organizations, which encouraged me to take part in the further development of this area of study that plays an extremely important role in the functioning of an organization.

Organizational culture represents „a cognitive process of adaptation to the specific diversity of organizational contexts and of integration within this reality” (Pânișoară, 2006: 34).

By culture, we refer to those ideal components (patterns of action, norms, concepts, values) and materials (clothing, furniture items, flags) of a group, by which its members are offered numerous possibilities of adaptation to the most varied situations (Mihăilescu, 2003: 43-44).

Undertaking this research process is motivated by the actuality of the research topic (which falls within the research priority in sociology, psychology, management science, etc.), as well as by its complexity and by the influence it has on the organizational environment. The present-day organizational system of our country, while being subject to many influences of globalization, is undergoing many reforms and fast evolutions, on a technological, social and economic level, making so that organizational behavior is experiencing a continuous process of transformation and diversification; hence, tackling the matter of organizational culture tends to be of growing importance.

Since this represented a personal challenge right from the moment of my hiring within the „Banat” Inspectorate for Emergencies within the Timiș county, I decided to research the organizational culture of professional emergency services more in depth, being driven by the need and desire to know and understand this aspect of organizational system better. Starting from here, my intention is to be able to support, through this study, the managers in controlling the cultural problems of organizations, since they can identify the cultural components that slow down the development of an institution and transform them instead into values, attitudes and behaviors that favor reaching the objectives of the organization. At the same time, I would like this study to awaken the interest of the personnel that occupies leading positions with regard to the way in which the real or fictitious components of organizational culture are present in the consciousness and behavior of their staff. Last, but not least, identifying the cultural profile of the professional emergency services of the Timiș county and harmonizing the organization’s identity on an internal level with the way it is perceived from those outside of it must become of foremost interest for anybody occupying a leading position in the institution.

## 2. The purpose of this thesis

**The purpose of this thesis** is to identify the cultural portray of the professional emergency services of Timiș county, to underline the main existing traits of organizational culture with its advantages and disadvantages, the threats as well as the opportunities worth taking that are given by this profile. All

these will represent a starting point for identifying the possible changes that are both necessary and applicable, for all executive and managerial levels, with the aim of increasing performances.

### **3. The general objective**

**The general objective** of the research process that I embark on is one of scientific knowledge of the cultural profile of the professional emergency services of the Timiș county, with the aim of inquiring the practical necessity for reshaping this profile.

#### *3.1. The specific objectives:*

- outlining the cultural profile of the Inspectorate for Emergencies „Banat” of the Timiș county, by identifying all variables (internal and external) that contribute to its organizational culture, to ensure the institution’s performance on long term;
- researching the employees’ attitudes and viewpoints with regard to the critical cultural components within this organization;
- examining the differences between the existing culture and the one desired by the organization’s members;
- raising the awareness of the employees who occupy management positions with regard to the importance of organizational culture in the evolution process of the institution, as well as with regard to their extremely important role in creating and supporting the right strategies for changing the organizational culture, as a key element in the process of continuous optimization of all the activities within the institution.

### **4. The universe of population investigated**

I have selected and built a sample made up of 650 employees of the Inspectorate for Emergencies „Banat” of the Timiș County, Romania.

### **5. Research Methodology**

In order to obtain a conclusive representation of a social object, one must bind to a much appreciated principle, that of a multi-methodological approach (Iacob, Matei & Boza, 2006: 17-27). In the attempt to observe the psychological and social aspects involved in the management of organizational culture as precise and exhaustive as possible, I have used a varied range of methods, both qualitative and quantitative, in order to have a complementary approach: the questionnaire method<sup>1</sup> and complementary methods: interviews with the management team and the whole active personnel, focus-groups, direct observation, analysis of internal documents: work protocols, internal and external reports, statistical data (turnover of personnel, sanctions), articles from the mass media (Ticu, 2004; Bibu & Brancu, 2000).

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<sup>1</sup> Diagnosing Organizational Culture Instrument (Roger Harrison), The questionnaire „Job satisfaction SP1”, The questionnaire „Attitude towards change ASII” (Ticu, 2004: 269-287), The questionnaire „Rating Scale attitude towards cultural aspects of organizational life” (Bibu, & Brancu, 2000: 11-13).

Compiling this study is based on the model proposed by Carmen-Aida Hutu in her thesis „Organizational Culture and Technology Transfer” (Huțu, 1999: 113-159).

### 5.1. *Strengths:*

- the members of the organization are involved, receptive, with a high attachment to the institution;
- the management team: professional skills, resoluteness, intuition, capacity to take risks, the capacity to adapt to new and uncertain situations, the desire to achieve remarkable success;
- the existence of several examples in the collective memory with regard to the successful achievement of important modifications in the institution (creating the county Inspectorate for Emergencies on the 15th of December 2004, by merging the Timiș Firefighters’ Group and the Inspectorate of Civil Protection of Timiș County) and the positive image within the community, to which all employees have contributed (an important element of group cohesion) might represent a significant criterion for attracting and keeping quality people in the institution;
- the existence of an articulate system of values with positive character, which is communicated and accepted within the whole institution, as well as a set of moral, ethical values promoted by the commanders
- the instrumental motivation is a good motivational force. There are also internal motivational forces that have a strong impact on a part of the employed personnel, such as: the challenge they feel during every mission that they partake in, the objective feedback, the positive feelings every time they manage to be better than before and to confirm their level of competency to themselves.

### 5.2. *Weaknesses:*

- the communication system and style is predominantly a vertical one, with a descending sense, making it more difficult to successfully implement a coherent process of transformation on the cultural level;
- one can observe the existence of an informal communication system that runs along parallel to the formal one and that represents a reactive aspect, impeding the normal transmission of information within the organization;
- the general tendency is one of acting in situations of utmost emergency;
- the lack of a correlation between the degree of involvement and the effort they make, on the one hand, and the rewards offered, on the other hand, while the individual/team performance is not always fairly and systematically rewarded, from a financial point of view;
- the internal organization matches the bureaucratic type of culture;
- the low involvement in the decision making process of the employees who are at the basis of the pyramid;
- the existence of certain outdated mentalities that have a counterproductive character.

### 5.3. Opportunities:

- the image, popularity, history and tradition of the institution represent intrinsic motivational forces that are still strong enough to attract and keep people within the institution;
- the collaborations and the exchanges of experience with similar institutions from different European countries represent opportunities for exchanges of cultural models that can be used for the increase of the efficiency and efficacy of all the activities of the institution.

### 5.4. Threats:

- the policies and action strategies are influenced by the fact that this is a state institution;
- the organizational structure is rather rigid, and the mentalities that persist within the institution promote a rather conservatory and bureaucratic character;
- the increased centralization of decisions and the conflicts that arise from here;
- the cases when information is incomplete at the level of the pyramid's basis;
- the influences of exogenous variables (national culture, local culture, the economic and the juridical environment) and those of institutional elements on the organizational system of the institution are slowing down the institutional flexibility.

Presenting the research reports for managerial teams, and also for chiefs of structures becomes a mandatory obligation for situational awareness of both the current and the desired situation; regarding the finding of an optimal solution for improving the cultural organizational elements which can facilitate the decrease of occupational stress and the increase of work performance.

This paper may assist managers and *General Inspectorate for Emergency Situations* employees, organizational psychologists, helping them to get to a better understanding of the dynamics of the institutions they belong to, through the subjective experiences of the group members.

My approach to knowledge could be a major prerequisite for improving intra- and inter-organizational communication and for decision-making optimization. Knowing the cultural profile of the professional emergency services, managers can predict the degree of success of strategies designed to develop the organization and can build policies and strategies to support appropriate organization culture and environment.

Psychologists working within the professional emergency services should focus more on the "force" behind invisible readily observable and tangible things in the organization (organizational culture) because it is the social energy that determines people to act.

Also, this work could be a tool of management awareness for the military institutions, concerning the importance of continue analyzing of organizational culture.

## 6. Recommendations

In order to successfully manage the numerous transaction periods that the institution had to go through, like most other state institutions (and not only) of our country, the Inspectorate for Emergencies „Banat” of the Timiș County and first and foremost, its managerial team, should pay

much greater attention to the organizational culture. This process has been shown as absolutely necessary and is one that involves both the leading personnel, as well as the executive, in the thorough substantiation of the institution's cultural framework and, thereby, towards a long-term evolution of performance.

The process of cultural transformation also implies considerable investments, and for that reason, the institution must foresee sufficient and adequate resources aimed to finance the employees' training, for only if they agree with the change and are well prepared, from a motivational, emotional, informational and cultural perspective, can the change be successful.

One must also take into consideration several topics for the employees' training programs, that present the traits of the continuous cultural transformation process within the organizational environment. At the same time, it is important to draw up a strategy for human resources within the organization's general strategy and to ensure a coherent and adaptive organization of the institution, so that networking and communication may be those of a solid and far-sighted culture.

The personnel that occupies leading positions should dedicate time on a regular basis to self-analysis of its own attitudes, behaviors and actions, as well as to ensure a fast response on their side, whenever there is an opportunity for change, so that the effort needed for achieving the cultural modifications may be much smaller, since the social environment can undergo impairments that make the rejection of change much more categorical.

Applying the above mentioned recommendations will lead to the following positive consequences for the organization: establishing a cultural basis that may support organizational change, improving openness on the side of the management with regard to the cultural transformations that are so important in the continuous process of institutional reorganization, optimizing the work environment, improving the managerial capabilities, increasing the return on work, efficiency and efficacy of all the activities throughout the whole institution.

## **7. Conclusions**

The organizational configuration is over-centralized, causing, in certain situations, major differences between the given situation and the one desired (for example, the existing culture is perceived as being predominantly a role-centered one, while the majority of the employees prefer a task-centered culture).

The collected data showcases that the weak involvement of the employees in the decision-making process, the big power-gap, the tendency towards collectivism, the predominantly feminine character, the strong avoidance of uncertainty all represent traits of the national culture that are visibly reflected on the level of the organization.

Most employees share the idea of organizing, structuring and skilling those departments of activity which, at the moment, are managed rather intuitively within the institution. One can also remark the dawn of a need for change, and this moment needs to be fully grasped, as soon as possible, so that such a fruitful opportunity may not be missed. The dimension and the configuration of the institution, the developmental stage it goes through (its maturity), the maintenance of the status-quo and the strong relationships between the organizational culture, the management style, the efficacy and efficiency of the activities within the whole organization – all of these are aspects that show that the process of

transformation the organizational culture goes through must start with redefining the hierarchical relationships, initiating new forms of communication and approaching leadership from a transactional point of view.

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