Modifying the organisational culture in order to increase the company's level of sustainability

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Abstract. *Changing the business behaviour by prioritising sustainability was proved to be an intelligent solution to social, environmental, as well as economic issues. Adapting to the principles of sustainability must begin with modifying the visions, values and beliefs typical of the economic entities, given that these elements form its organisational culture. Therefore, the concept of sustainability can be integrated in the company's strategy by changing the organisational culture. Given these points, a study was conducted within twenty-eight organisations from the Republic of Moldova with the objective of identifying the optimal organisational culture pattern for increasing the level of sustainability. The first part of the research implies elaborating a suitable way to compute the global performance of an entity which entails economic, social and environmental performance. To realise a comparative analysis of the results obtained by the companies, was proposed a classification method in 5 performance categories, based on which their sustainability was appreciated. Quantitative research is based on the method of questionnaire, which was applied to a number of 300 employees from the same companies. The organization culture was analysed according to the Competing Values Framework (CVF) by Cameron and Quinn (2011), which is one of the most influential and extensively used models in the area of organizational culture research. The findings show that in the analysed companies dominates hierarchy type of organizational culture. However, the study emphasises the fact that companies with a higher sustainability level scored significantly higher on clan, adhocracy and, market cultures, while the hierarchical is lower. The obtained results prove that organisational culture is a factor which has a considerable impact on the company's sustainability. Adopting a sustainability-oriented organizational culture can make a major contribution in creating long term success in organization.*

Keywords: corporate sustainability, measurement of sustainability, organizational culture, cultural model, competing values framework.

Introduction

The accelerated rhythm of changes that happen in the economic, social, technological and cultural environment, as well as the complexity of these modifications require a bigger effort to maintain competitiveness than it did a few decades ago. In order to meet these new standards and reach the key business goals, namely gaining profit, maximizing efficiency and maintaining stability in relationships, companies start applying and giving credit to a social and environmental policy. Furthermore, now enterprises tend to regard and approach all the problems from a long term perspective, without neglecting the opportunities that may arise along the way.

Therefore, it emphasises the importance of company's responsible behaviour that bears in mind the fundamental ideas of "sustainable development".

As for now, discussions regarding sustainable development were out-shaded by the debates with respect to identifying integration methods of economic, social

and environmental responsibilities in the daily process of managerial decision making (Epstein & Buhovac, 2014). The authors suggest that managers should determine how companies could be more responsible towards society and how to include corporative stakeholders in a more efficient way.

In the report shared by Network for Business sustainability („NBS”) is mentioned that 93% of the top managers from more than 700 big corporations worldwide, that took part in the survey, are fully aware of the importance of sustainable development for the future of their company, but are not sure about the possible ways of implementation within the activities run by the company (Bertels, 2010).

Given these points, a study was carried within a number of companies from the Republic of Moldova, with the objective of identifying the favourable organisational culture to raise a company's sustainability level.

To highlight the extent and way in which the organisational culture influences the level of sustainability within the companies from the Republic of Moldova, the study was based on a set of objectives: assessment of the sustainability level in the economic entities from the Republic of Moldova, identifying the peculiarities of the organisational culture within the companies from our country, analysis of the correlation between the organisational culture and sustainability level within the companies taking part in the research and the determination of the most efficient ways to raise the sustainability level by adapting the organisational culture.

The study results prove that organisational culture is an element that has a considerable impact on the sustainable development of a company. To ensure that the initiatives of implementing sustainable development are led successfully, there must be in accordance with the organisational culture values.

If a company sets the objective of facilitating sustainability, which entails more complex changes, it requires starting with the organisational culture. Namely modifying the organisational culture by means of involvement and acceptance of performance through sustainability on all the organisational levels promotes a management pattern aimed at sustainable development.

Literature review

Sustainable development

Sustainability is defined as a triple bottom line, being an equation of three indicators: economic, social and environmental. Sustainable development is a concept introduced and popularized in 1987 by the World Commission on Environment and Development (Brundtland Commission), being defined "the ability to meet the needs of present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs".

For organisations, this is a challenge, which consists of a simultaneous improvement of social welfare and reducing the environmental impact as well as ensuring efficient realisation of the organisational objectives.

Often, sustainable development is assimilated by or even confused with corporate social responsibility. Actually the sustainable development policy must encompass corporate social responsibility, actions which must follow and be in

conformity with the sustainable development policy. Furthermore, according to Mironiuc (2009, p151) sustainable corporate analysis must take into consideration that the philosophy of social responsibility is not averse to the concept of efficiency because it doesn't have the goal of eliminating profit from the economy-society dynamics equation. The enterprise's contribution to sustainable development is not about what the company does to 1% of the profit, but rather how they obtain 99% of the profit.

Adapting the company to the principles of sustainable development can be triggered by internal pressure, as well as staff fluctuations caused by the reduction of organisational commitment, decreasing firm loyalty and workplace satisfaction (Linnenluecke & Griffiths, 2010). The authors emphasise internal organisational factors: top management support, human resource management, environmental training, employee empowerment, teamwork and reward system as essential for achieving corporate sustainability. Similarly, Linnenluecke and Griffiths expose as well the idea that the implementation of sustainable development is only possible by enforcing major changes in the values and concepts of the employees within the company. However, all the studies success that corporate sustainability is a multifaceted concept, that requires organisational changes on many levels.

Organisational culture

The organisational culture has a huge impact on various organisational processes, on the employees and their performance and any sustainable corporate alteration must begin with changing the underlying values and beliefs of the employees.

Hudrea & Andrievici (2016, p.63) notice that the organisational culture has implications in the most sensitive spots on the level of beliefs, values and on the behaviour patterns of the members. An organisation's culture can have a major impact on its functionality and the performance of the staff by knowing the particularities of the organisational behaviour as well as the motivation of the human resource (Gheorghita, 2016).

Edgar H. Schein (2004, p.17) being one of the promoters of organisational culture as a concept, treats it as "a pattern of shared basic assumptions that the group learned as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, that has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems".

Despite the fact that the impact of organisational culture on its performance is treated otherwise in the speciality literature, it is still overall accepted that organisational culture is one of the main factors that make a difference in terms of managerial practices performance (Denison et al., 2004).

Corporate sustainability and organisational culture

To make sustainability an everyday, enduring part of the organization, it needs to become embedded in organizational culture (Bertels, 2010). According to the author an organizational culture of sustainability "is a culture in which organizational members hold shared assumptions and beliefs about the importance of balancing economic efficiency, social equity and environmental accountability". He supports the argument with the fact that "organizations with strong cultures of sustainability

strive to support a healthy environment and improve the lives of others while operating successfully over the long term”.

On this note, sustainable development means the establishment and compliance to such values as the company’s organisational culture which, by fulfilling the organisation and controlling the risks (social, economic and environmental), at the same time protects and improves the human, environmental and natural capital for the following generations.

It is noteworthy that more studies indicate on a tight correlation between organisational culture and corporate sustainability. Thus, Classen, 2008 (in Tătărușanu & Onea, 2013) argues that a weak organisational culture hinders the company’s progress from the perspective of increasing accountability towards the environment, whereas other researchers analysing the correlation between the organisational culture and sustainability noticed that it can be a hurdle in the process of transmitting ecological information, implicating stakeholders and failure of the actions initiated in this direction. As the weaknesses in most of the organisational cultures can inhibit sustainable programs, similarly can the strengths support such initiatives. To exemplify, the organisations that encourage employee involvement in environmental actions have shown a higher success rate in diminishing the company’s impact on the environment (Ramus and Steger, 2000).

According to Hudrea (2015, p. 69) modern companies, that acknowledge the importance the organisational culture, are making considerable efforts (including financial) to build and maintain a culture that supports performance, starting with recruiting and staff selection methods (sketching a psychological profile, checking if the values of the potential employee and the company are matching etc.), to the way their working environment is organised and to what extent employees take part in the process of decision making or how the company facilitates their development, involvement in charity actions or even implementation of their own ideas and projects.

Methodology

The first objective of this study consists in the evaluation of the sustainability level within the companies from the Republic of Moldova. For this purpose was elaborated an own global performance computing pattern of economic entities, that involves financial, social and environmental performance. To conduct a comparative analysis of the obtained results was proposed a classification system of 5 performance categories (from 1 to 5, 1 being the lowest score), based on which their sustainable behaviour was evaluated.

Each company’s key performance indicators were determined based on a survey implying a structured interview as well as on the financial reports of those companies for the years 2016 and 2017. The survey took place at the headquarters of the companies during January-April 2018. The respondents were top-management representatives from those companies.

The survey was carried out in 28 companies from Moldova, randomly selected by the method of stratified sampling. The main criterion in the process of choosing respondent-companies was their membership and implication in various fields of

activity as well as different size categories. The diversity is crucial to the study's relevance because the model's applicability must be tested within more fields of activity to determine the congruency between the proposed indicators and obtained corporate performance.

Therefore, out of the total number of companies 46% are big companies, while the share of small and medium-sized businesses constitutes 54%. The analysed companies activate within 10 fields of activity, a significant number of them being from manufacturing, wholesale and retail, transport and storage, hotels and restaurants, etc.

Similarly, the geographical position was taken into account so that the companies would be from all the three territorial areas of the Republic of Moldova.

In order to identify the particularities of the organisational culture within the companies from our country was used a questionnaire based survey. The respondents were employees from the businesses where we determined the sustainability level. The questionnaires were distributed proportionally to the company's size. Initially, 340 questionnaires were given out, out of which only 300 were proved to be valid at the stage of collecting. In some regions from the Republic of Moldova the vast majority of people are Russian speakers, for example in Comrat, consequently, a Russian version of the questionnaire was proposed.

The poll was structured in two parts, the first containing questions about the respondent's personal characteristics, and the second one being based on the organisational culture evaluation methodology "Organizational Culture Assessment Instrument" (OCAI) by Kim S. Cameron and Robert E. Quinn (2011).

The mentioned method allows and facilitates identifying the six dimensions of organisational culture: dominant features, leadership, human resources management, organizational cohesion, strategy and performance criteria, as well as outlining four main types of organisational culture: hierarchical, market, clan and adhocracy. The OCAI methodology was chosen as it has been repeatedly proved to be valid and objective. All the data was processed afterwards through the statistical analysis program SPSS.

Results and discussions

A significant number of the corporate global performance evaluation patterns that can be found in speciality literature are aimed at determining the sustainability level of big companies, especially for the commercial societies listed on the Stock Exchange (Veleva & Ellenbecker, 2001; Pintea, 2011; Ganescu, 2012; Slapikaite, 2016). In this case, companies are obliged to report a number of indicators necessary for determining the mentioned patterns.

However, in smaller and middle-sized companies, which in most cases do not keep track of the mentioned indicators, the process of evaluating global performance by such methodology is hindered. In this context, the necessity of elaborating a viable, applicable model for small and middle-sized companies arises.

To apply the pattern, a company's main evaluation fields were determined: economic, social and environmental, in each of these being identified the specific criteria. For each criterion was given a specific ratio within a maximum score and

taking into account a coefficient of importance corresponding to each individual criterion.

Given the specifics and conditions of the economy of the Republic of Moldova, we used a set of performance rates and indicators based on a score grid of 6 criteria to establish the economic performance of the enterprise. The final economic performance score is a function of the average of the criteria used to calculate the indicator.

Taking into account the fact that actions in the field of sustainable development have voluntary character and can be of a wide diversity, the social indicators were structured in 5 types of responsibility towards the company's main stakeholders. In order to structure this rather wide field were selected those stakeholders that the most companies interact with, regardless of their field of activity: employees, consumers and community.

Within each type of responsibility were identified five types of actions that were conducted the most by companies, but giving respondents the possibility to customise their answer if necessary.

Based on the analysis of the answers regarding the social dimension, it was established that companies prefer to engage more in activities aimed at employees - 33,1% confirmed that they conduct such initiatives, being followed by adapting to community changes with 23,3% and health and security at the workplace with 18,8% (Figure 1).

A very small percentage of the companies mentioned that they conduct actions aimed at developing communities - 13,7% and even a smaller share selected initiatives aimed at consumer protection - 11,0%.

After summing up the obtained results, we can sketch a hierarchy of the stakeholders within the analysed companies. Therefore, economic entities seem to prioritise from a social responsibility perspective employee oriented actions, followed by community care and less attention to consumer issues.

The study shows that a very small number of companies are involved in customer-oriented services, disabled people care, prophylaxis of occupational diseases activities. Most businesses treat them as an additional cost, not taking into account that these initiatives can have a positive impact on the economic performance by gradually changing the perceptions of employees, consumers and the community towards the company as a fair and responsible entity.

Figure 1. The weight of social activities conducted by respondent companies

Source: Author's own research.

Likewise, the environmental indicators within the proposed pattern were structured in five types of corporate responsibilities regarding environmental protection. Each of these five accountability types consists of five possible ways to take action in this direction. Given that companies can conduct an unlimited number of voluntary activities, these actions could be completed at their own discretion.

The data collected within the survey indicates that companies initiate a number of environmental activities that exceed the legal requirements. Out of the five types of accountability proposed to the respondents, some tendencies were manifested in this direction. Economic entities gave the biggest share - 27,3% to efficient use of resources. One of the underlying reasons can be the economic reason as well. On a positive note, 25,3% enterprise voluntary actions aimed at protecting the environment in the community. Also, a considerable number of companies make effort in the direction of waste recycling – 24,7% (Figure 2).

Figure 2. The share of environmental activities conducted in the surveyed companies

Source: Author's own research.

However the initiatives to reduce waste and pollution are relatively low – 12,6%, as well as the analysis of environment related aspects at the stage of designing the production process or of producing the product – 10,1%.

The results of the conducted survey suggest that within the companies from the Republic of Moldova the environmental aspects receive less attention as opposed to the social direction. The most frequently organised activities are planting green spaces in the community – 67,3%, arranging the territory belonging to the company – 60,7%, efficient use of raw materials – 46,4%.

As the analysis of global performance encompasses economic, social and environmental performance of the companies taking part in the survey, it allowed outlining the current lie of the land regarding sustainable development within the companies from the Republic of Moldova (Figure 3).

Figure 3. The sustainability level manifested by the analysed companies

Source: Author's own research

Measuring performance is based on giving a number of points to each of the analysed aspects. Depending on the obtained result, each company was given a particular level of sustainability (from G1 to G5, G1 being the minimum level).

The study results indicate that there are companies – 10,7 out of the total number (3 companies), that were proved to have the lowest sustainability level. In their case, the unfavourable economic situation being in a vicious circle with the low lack of actions oriented at improving the society or the environment.

An equal number of economic entities, namely 42,9 % (12 companies), were classified as second or third level on the sustainability scale. This fact proves that autochthonous companies have started to manifest a more positive attitude toward sustainable development, but these actions are not treated appropriately, as they are not integrated in the organisational strategies.

Only 3,6% (1 company) of the analysed ones surprised with a score that allows them to be classified as level IV of sustainability. None of the companies undergoing

the survey accumulated enough points to enter highest sustainability level G5.

A subject of special interest is the correlation between a company's size and its level of sustainability. The study showed that the number of small and middle-sized companies is decreasing as the level of sustainability is increasing, whereas regarding big companies; on the contrary, 100% of the level IV, 75% of the level III and 25% of the level II of the companies are big. Also, no big company was classified as first level of sustainability.

Another objective of our study was to identify the particularities of the organisational culture within the companies from the Republic of Moldova. The methodology (OCAI) used in the process of determining the organisational culture within the examined companies allowed us to distinguish some particularities.

As can be observed in Figure 4, when it comes to the *current* culture, there is not one single type of prevailing culture type. However the data indicates that out of all the four culture types, the hierarchical type predominates (29,08 points out of 100 possible), that is characterized by formalism, control and orientation towards the internal environment. At the same time, the values typical of clan and market organisational culture are present to the same extent (24,57 out of 100) and (24,95 out of 100 possible). This proves the fact that in those companies the main emphasis is placed on cooperation, team work, efficiency and productivity.

Between the analysed companies, the most seldom met is adhocracy as an type of organisational culture, only (21,40 out of 100). This means that entrepreneurship, dynamism and creativity are less appreciated in companies.

In the companies where the key values are honesty, mutual respect, moral rectitude and integrity, all the pre-requisites are encouraging a more creative and responsible behaviour from the staff regarding the existing problems, regardless of their aspect.

Figure 4. The organisational culture within the analysed companies

Source: Author's own research.

The results of the study are presented in Figure 4 regarding the respondents'

preferences towards the existing culture. All of the culture types present discrepancies between the desired and current state. The staff would prefer to reduce the hierarchical type by 3,06 and the market type by 0,52 points. At the same time, the respondents would prefer to increase the share of clan culture by 2,36 points and adhocracy by 1,24 points. The employees reported that they would like an enhancement of family environment, employees involvement in the decision making process, actions aimed at strengthening the bond within the team, as well as the fact that they would prefer a more dynamic and creative environment at workplace.

The next stage of the proposed research consists in analysing the correlation between the organizational culture type and sustainability level within the surveyed companies. A comparative analysis of these two aspects is presented in Figure 5.

Figure 5. The correlation between the organizational culture type and sustainability level within the surveyed companies

Source: Authors' own research.

Analysing the correlation between the culture type and sustainability level, a huge discrepancy can be noticed between the elements at those companies that were classified as first type and those being labelled as fourth type on the above mentioned sustainability scale. In the last case, a significant reduction can be noticed in the presence of hierarchical culture values and an increase in the elements typical for the market, adhocracy and above all, clan organisational cultures.

The type of organisational culture where the clan and adhocracy elements prevail, contributes to the increase of organisational engagement, improvement of civic behaviour and employees' willingness to take part in solving not only the company's economic struggles, but also the ones related to society and the environment. Therefore, we can conclude that directing the company towards sustainable development is only possible by creating an organisational culture designed for such a purpose.

The next objective of the research is to determine the methods of increasing sustainability level by adjusting the company's organisational culture. Aiming at a

higher sustainability level, it is important to keep in mind that sustainable development initiatives can only be efficiently realised when they are compatible with the organisational culture's particularities. A study conducted in 2010 by Liz Abbett, Anna Goldham and Ryan Whisnant emphasised the existence of an empiric relationship between organisational culture and the company's success rate in materialising the environment protection initiatives. According to the authors, a higher similarity between the organisational culture and sustainable initiatives ensures a higher success probability. The study results confirm the fact that companies must take into account some additional aspects while designing and implementing sustainability initiatives, that at the given moment are not commonplace within the economic entity. It is paramount for the company to seize its culture type and plan initiatives that are congruent with the cultural particularities of the company.

Similarly, Linnenluecke and Griffiths (2010, p. 358) maintain that the organisational culture has influence over the implementation methods and techniques of sustainable development principles and can foresee the outcome of some changes within the company. The authors' opinion is based on the idea there is not a single type of organisational culture targeted at sustainability, while "employees from different culture types place emphasis on different aspects in their pursuit of corporate sustainability, ranging from a focus on internal staff development, resource efficiency, environmental protection or stakeholder engagement".

Applying the Competing Values Framework by Kim S. Cameron and Robert E. Quinn, Linnenluecke and Griffiths described how each type of organisational culture can have an impact on the process of implementing sustainability within economic entities. Analysing each culture type, they concluded that all four types have elements that are incompatible and contradictory, although there are situations when they coexist within the same companies, some values being dominant.

The *hierarchy type cultures* are oriented towards inside processes, promote stability and control through the decision making process, through the communication processes and informational management. Companies where such a type prevails, in the process of integrating sustainability place emphasis on the economic aspect, not taking into account how the organisation's activities influence the environmental and social system of the community where they activate.

Guterman (2017, p.12) draws attention to the idea that companies with a hierarchical culture, that are up to initiate new activities in the social or environmental field will have to face a strong resistance between the culture based on stability and control and the necessity to implement curiosity, discovery and flexibility.

The *market culture types* promote efficiency and productivity by centralizing the planning, communication and decision making process. Linnenluecke and Griffiths argue that, in such organisational environments, corporate sustainability will be mostly considered from the perspective of optimising the use of resources. At the same time, they stated that there are some operational and sustainability related advantages in the practices and policies of reducing the costs, and numerous companies have already conducted actions aimed at reducing or eliminating waste. Nevertheless, they clearly state that efficiency, when entirely defined by reducing

costs and simplifying processes and services, is insufficient in order to obtain sustainability of the economic entity.

The *clan type cultures* are dominated by the values of inter-human relationships, cohesion and morals by coaching and development, open communication and a decisional process involving all the members. Given the particularities of this culture type, Linnenluecke și Griffiths argue that in the process of implementing sustainability, the main emphasis is placed on learning and instructing the employees. They consider that organisations prioritising human relationships would accept more responsibility in the development and consolidation of the staff's capacities, promoting equal opportunities, ensuring balance between work and lifestyle, safety at workplace, as well as applying fair and reasonable practices to ensure stable growth of the staff's competences, satisfaction at workplace and organisational commitment and productivity.

The *adhocracy type cultures* that are dominated by open system values promote growth and obtaining resources through adaptability and change, open communication and flexible decision making. Keeping in mind the underlying particularities of such companies Linnenluecke and Griffiths suggest that they would give primacy to innovation in the process of implementing corporate sustainability. Not only is innovation used as a tool to minimise their detrimental effect on the ecosystem, but also to draft and conceive processes, products and services that are useful for the environment by reducing the used resources and minimising the impact on the environment. Regarding the social dimension of sustainability, it is supposed that the company would acknowledge and analyse its responsibilities towards all the stakeholders and would have a proactive approach while interacting with them.

Conclusion

In the final, analysis using the corporate sustainability evaluation pattern can offer numerous advantages, namely: comparative analysis of the performances obtained by different companies from the perspective of sustainable development, establishing a ranking of the companies based on their sustainability level, as well as identifying the weaknesses and strengths that companies have from the viewpoint of sustainable development.

Considering the arguments mentioned above arises the question how a company can change its organisational culture. Changing organizational culture can be seen as part of a complete transformation. As such there is no one single set of methods to change the organisational culture that would suit any company. In each particular case a diagnosis of the most efficient ways is only possible after an evaluation of the organisational culture.

Adapting an economic entity to the principles of sustainability must begin with an analysis of the organisational culture specifics, therefore ensuring that the durable development initiatives are congruent with the values of their organisational culture. If the company is willing to enterprise some mire complex actions in the direction of sustainability, it is necessary to modify the visions, values and beliefs shared by the staff, elements which form its organisational culture. Only by changing the organisational culture is the integration of this concept in the corporate strategies

possible.

To conclude, developing a suitable organisational culture is a must for the organisations searching for competitive advantages. The qualified and dedicated to the organisation human resource is vital for the economic entity's success. With this goal, time, effort and financial investments are necessary, but they become long-term and midterm investments.

The limitations of this research are about the number of respondents, as the primary data were collected from employees working in 28 companies from the Republic of Moldova. I intend to extend my future researches to investigate the link between sustainability management and organizational culture, in other companies of the republic. The tested and presented methodology can be easily adapted to future organizational culture research.

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