

## PROLEGOMENA FOR THE STUDY OF THE ORGANIZATIONAL QUALITY CULTURE

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**Purpose:** The aim of the study is to conceptualize the construct of an organizational quality culture and to present the instruments of its research.

**Design/methodology/approach:** The purpose execution is based on a critical literature review.

**Findings:** The organizational quality culture was defined as one of the types of organizational cultures of enterprises operating in the conditions of knowledge-based economy. The components constituting the organizational culture of quality were determined and broken down into 6 dimensions and 4 areas, with scopes. For each dimension and individual area, a set of indicators was proposed to enable the determination of the level of their development in the perspective of actions and attitudes that emanate them, broken down into rituals and practices as components of organizational culture. Thus, the instruments for studying the phase of evolution towards an organizational culture of quality were presented.

**Practical and social implications:** The paper presents useful tools to verify specific orientations building an organizational culture of quality and to identify gaps in the development of individual areas creating an organizational culture of quality, and thus providing practical directives in the field of evolution towards an organizational culture of quality, i.e. the stage of permanent quality creation.

**Originality/value:** An original measurement tool for the organizational quality culture can be helpful in reaching the stage of full and permanent quality culture stage of evolution in an organization.

**Keywords:** organizational quality culture, measurement tool, quality, organizational culture.

**Category of the paper:** Conceptual paper, General review.

### 1. Introduction

Contemporary enterprises operate basically within the framework of the knowledge-based economy. It defines their functioning in the context of two interconnected aspects: organizational culture and quality.

Organizational culture has been known as one of the enterprise's main soft assets since the 1960s, also as a result of the shift to the resource-based approach and to orientation on intangible resources. At the turn of this century, it was unequivocally recognized that organizational culture determines the main areas of operation in a modern organization (Ambekar, Prakash, and Patyal, 2019; Gorzelany, 2020) and is a factor providing the enterprise with a competitive advantage, since it directly impacts the innovativeness of its strategy (Laforet, 2016; Pietersen, 2017). It is one of those intangible resources that critically impact the enterprise's intellectual capital level and thus the value of the entire organization (Al. Saifi, 2015; Trippner-Hrabi, Stroińska, and Jazdzyk, 2020). It also determines the effectiveness of knowledge management in an enterprise (Corfield, and Paton, 2016; Paliszkiewicz, Svanadze, and Jikia, 2017) and the tendency to share knowledge (Tong, Tak and Wong, 2016). It also determines job satisfaction (Tong, Tak, and Wong, 2016; Wolniak, 2019) and the quality of work (Wyrostek, 2012). Therefore, organizational culture directly contributes to the enterprise's market success (Kane, Taylor, and Teare, 2018), in most sectors of the economy (Emond, and Taylor, 2018; Taylor, and Roston, 2018) – in the coal mining industry (Ambekar, Prakash, and Patyal, 2019), shipbuilding (Karakasnaki, Psomas, and Bouranta, 2019), hospitality (Manning, 2018), banking systems (Famiyeh, Asante-Darko, and Kwarteng, 2018), services (Khan, and Naeem, 2018) and manufacturing (Patyal, and Koilakuntla, 2018).

Currently, following the assumptions of the functionalist paradigm, organizational culture is treated as an object of management, and the concept of management through culture is being developed (Sulkowski, 2013a). It is argued that operating in the new economy requires not only adaptive but also anticipatory changes. Hence the organizational culture of modern enterprises is formed deliberately and above all, as a tool for developing the key competences of a specific business entity (Tenji, and Foley, 2019).

The new century has also seen a change in the philosophy of quality management, which has become one of the primary areas of management (Kumar, Singh, and Jain, 2019; Kaur, Singh, and Singh, 2020), especially in manufacturing and services (Lobo, Samaranayake and Laosirihongthong, 2018), with particular emphasis on the service sector. This is due to the intangible nature of the resources on which this branch is based and which it uses (Famiyeh, Asante-Darko, and Kwarteng, 2018). Therefore, the dominant orientation on quality is today's *sine qua non* for the functioning and success of the organization (Cronemyr, Bäckström, and Rönnbäck, 2017; Skotnicka, and Zasadzień, 2020) and at the same time one of the basic tasks of managers (Ali, and Musah, 2012). Its consequence is a different approach to competitiveness, customer and supplier relations or the relations between managers and employees (Troy, and Schein, 1995).

Quality management assumptions have changed recently (Kemenade, and Hardjono, 2019). There has been a reorientation from "hard" elements, i.e. tools, techniques, practices and systems towards "soft" aspects: actions and attitudes, including behaviors conditioned by organizational culture (Tenji, and Foley, 2019). A new, fourth quality paradigm has emerged; the "quality as the core value" philosophy has come into force (Gouda et al., 2019; Kemenade, and Hardjono, 2019). The synergy effect of all these transformations has therefore made the organizational culture the most significant factor determining the success or failure of any quality-related initiatives in the enterprise (Tenji, and Foley, 2019). This is also confirmed by the published results of empirical research (Patyal, and Koilakuntla, 2018; Famiyeh, Asante-Darko, and Kwarteng, 2018).

Following the results of analyzes, which emphasize that the strategy must necessarily take into account the specificity of the organizational culture of the enterprise (Kaul, 2019; Germany, 2020) as well as the need for pro-quality orientation in managing organizations, an obvious line of reasoning is apparent, in line with the fourth quality paradigm. Since the organizational culture should condition the strategy, and a modern strategy must be quality-oriented, enterprises should strive to form an organizational culture that combines these tasks, in line with the framework of the knowledge-based economy. They are therefore faced with the challenge of having an organizational culture of quality as the foundation of all activities, especially that the focus on quality at the strategic level directly influences the innovative possibilities and should therefore be related to the culture of quality applicable in a given organization (Khan, and Naeem, 2018).

Data reveal that many business activities fail because managers are not aware of the key role of organizational culture in shaping the generally applicable philosophy of quality in the enterprise and ignore the overriding role of values and attitudes in this regard (Ingelsson, Bäckström, and Snyder, 2018; Patyal, and Koilakuntla, 2018). It is assumed that effective implementation of quality improvement programs requires first and foremost, the shaping of attitudes, values and best practices in accordance with the commonly held philosophy of quality, in addition to formal tools (Markowitsch, 2018). The study meets these recommendations. Its main goal is to synthesize the subject literature and to conceptualize the construct of the organizational culture of quality, taking into account its dimensions, areas and scopes as well as recommendations for shaping it. This paper is theoretical and consists of four parts. It discusses the essence of the organizational culture of quality, its components, manifestations and areas of analysis. The paper contributes to solving the question of what actions and attitudes emanate the organizational culture of quality. Moreover, it presents an original tool for examining areas, ranges and dimensions of the organizational culture of quality.

## 2. The essence of the organizational quality culture

The current definition of organizational culture sees it as a commonly shared set of values, norms, assumptions and beliefs characteristic of members of a given organization, which affects their attitudes, way of thinking, decisions and actions. Therefore, symbols, ideas, myths and rituals that determine the way of reading, understanding and interpreting organizational life are the core of a specific organizational culture (Pietersen, 2017; Niemiec, 2020). Thus, organizational culture includes a set of norms and values common for a given enterprise, which emerge over a long period of time and define the way an organization functions (Ingelsson, Bäckström, and Snyder, 2018). Its unique role in the knowledge-based economy stems from the special importance of social communication as a platform for creating a network of interpersonal and inter-organizational cooperation in short-term projects (Bieńkowska, and Sikorski, 2016). Therefore, subject literature offers many propositions of preferred or characteristic organizational cultures for enterprises operating in the conditions of the new economy and aspiring to the name of knowledge-based organizations. The following cultures are convergent and complementary: learning (Kaul, 2019), information (Daneshmandnia, 2019) and knowledge (Glińska-Noweś, 2007; Latusek, 2008; Kucharska, 2017), cooperation (Kamińska, 2012), trust (Sankowska, 2011; Paliszkievicz, 2013), group (Patyal, and Koilakuntla, 2018), lean (Pereira Paro, and Gerolamo, 2017) and quality (Cronemyr, Bäckström, and Rönnbäck, 2017).

According to Ł. Sułkowski (2013b), many theoretical and practical studies discuss the concepts of organizational culture and quality, despite the fact that it seems methodologically quite risky to combine the concepts of organizational culture and quality. The most common assumption is that pro-quality activities fit in with cultural conditions since in the pursuit of continuous improvement and development in the area of quality, technical systems must be compatible with social systems. This necessitates the creation of a culture of quality (Molenda, 2012).

The literature on the subject is not unanimous as to the way of understanding and studying the organizational culture of quality. This is evidenced by the diversity of definitions of the analyzed phenomenon<sup>1</sup> and the relationship between organizational culture and the culture of quality. Different positions on this issue are still in force (Ehlers, 2009; Markowitsch, 2018). Some researchers argue that culture of quality is an element of organizational culture, a kind of subculture that defines the overall culture of an organization. Others, as adherents of an integrated approach, postulate that the culture of quality is synonymous with the organizational culture, as just another definition of the latter. On the other hand, representatives of the disjointed approach, recognize that the culture of quality can take into account certain

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<sup>1</sup> An overview of the organizational definition of culture of quality is presented in the study: (Pietruszka-Ortyl, 2018).

elements and dimensions of the organizational culture, but can also be based on different values that are not reflected in the general culture of the organization. Therefore, it is a construct separate from the organizational culture and cannot be characterized using models describing the organizational culture (the fragmentary approach).

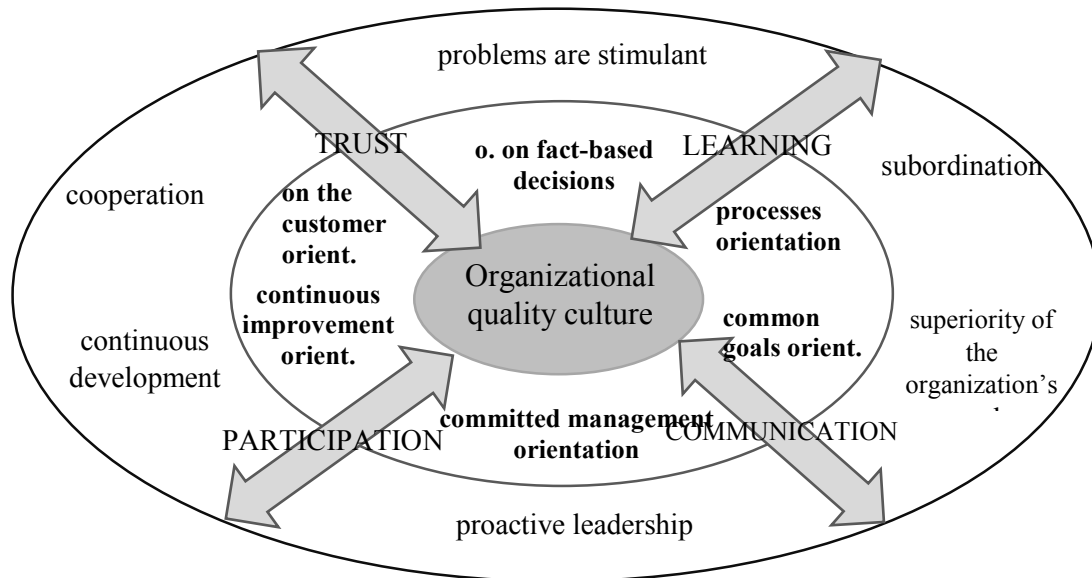
The term culture of quality directly refers to the term organizational culture and its definition, i.e. patterns, behaviors, norms and beliefs related to quality (Berry, 1997; Bugdol, 2013). Such a culture is a set of values, traditions, procedures and member-approved beliefs of the organization, which create an environment that favors shaping and continuous improvement of quality (Ali, and Musah, 2012; Gołębiowski, 2014). It is a type of organizational culture that strives for continuous quality improvement and is characterized by two elements: common values, beliefs and expectations, as well as full commitment to quality, including execution of processes that improve quality and aim to coordinate individual quality efforts into a holistic quality philosophy of the organization (Ha, and Quang, 2014; Markowitsch, 2018). The culture of quality contains three key elements – the general philosophy of quality (performing each task with the utmost care and maximum commitment, even for the first time), unwavering pursuit of continuous improvement and focus on meeting customer needs (Wu, Zhang, and Schroeder, 2011; Wu, 2014). Its products are internal and external customer satisfaction and economic results (Bugdol, 2013). The culture of quality defines an environment in which employees not only follow quality guidelines, but also consistently encourage others to take quality-oriented actions, adhering to and proclaiming a common quality philosophy (Srinivasan, and Kurney, 2014). Its manifestations include empowerment understood as an increased decision-making autonomy in an organization, especially the removal of fear and the sense of threat and fear of managers, full commitment of employees to quality, as well as quality leadership (Bugdol, 2013).

Therefore, in building a culture of quality, interpersonal relationships (Ehlers, 2009), treating employees and clients with respect, focusing on development, earning professional certificates or participation in organization management are of utmost importance. In this respect, the key importance of trust comes to the fore (Sankowska, 2011; Kucharska, 2017) not only in individual relations, but also in employee-organization or client-organization relations.

### **3. Levels, scopes and dimensions of the organizational quality culture**

Taking into account its distinguishing features, i.e. a widely shared philosophy of comprehensive quality management, the importance of people in achieving organizational success, strong values, informal rules of behavior, high business standards or acclaim for the successful employees and promoting their quality awards (Gołębiowski, 2014), the culture of quality can nowadays be a guarantee of a high competitive position of an organization.

Therefore, it should be of special interest among managers of a contemporary organizations operating in the knowledge-based economy. Since only what is measurable can be the object of well-thought-out management strategies, to operationalize the construct and propose the instruments for its research seems well justified.



**Figure 1.** Orientations building an organizational quality culture, along with their core values. Source: own study.

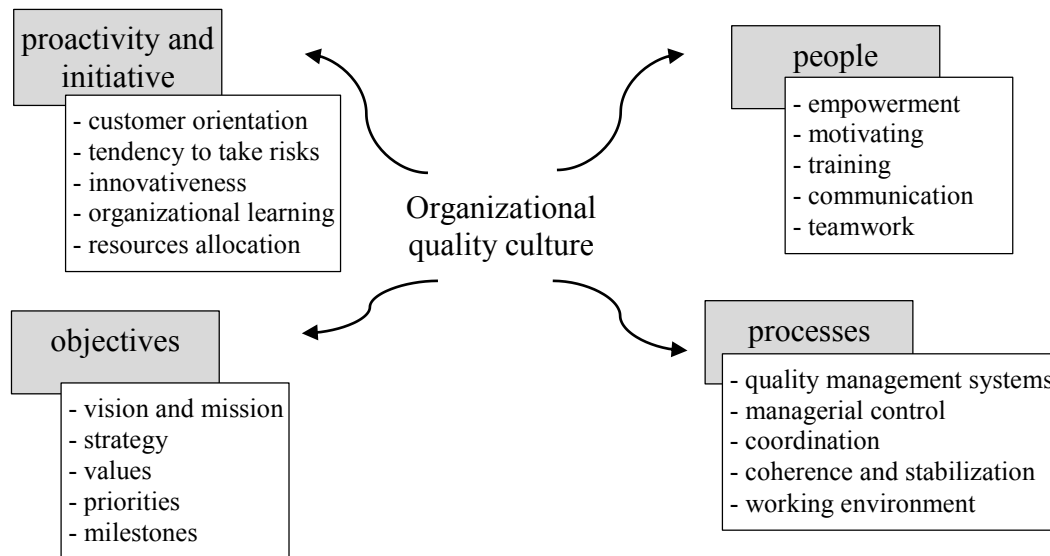
By identifying the orientations constituting the organizational culture of quality and their core values, six of its components were identified (Figure 1): customer satisfaction orientation, process orientation, group work orientation, open communication and knowledge exchange orientation, and orientation on making decisions based on facts (Adebanjo, and Kehoe, 1998; Ali, and Musah, 2012; Ingelsson, Bäckström, and Snyder, 2018). Each of these organizations was described through actions and attitudes that emanate it, assigned either to the category of practices (P) (noticeable outside the organization by outside observers) or rituals (R) (internal activities of the organization's members) (Table 1). Therefore, in order to determine the extent to which they are developed in a specific organization and at what stage of evolution towards a culture of quality the organizational culture of a given entity is, it should be decided how noticeable are the actions and attitudes emanating from individual levels.

**Table 1.**

*Six dimensions of organizational culture of quality, their core values as well as actions and attitudes that emanate from it*

<b>I. Orientation on the customer</b>	<b>P</b>	<b>R</b>
<b><i>multidimensional cooperation focused on meeting customer needs</i></b>		
– cooperation aimed at meeting customer needs	X	X
– specialized employees dedicated to solving customer problems	X	
– adjusting products and services to the constantly monitored customer needs and expectations	X	X
– offering products and services of the highest possible quality	X	X
<b>II. Orientation on the process</b>	<b>P</b>	<b>R</b>
<b><i>Subordination in terms of absolute compliance with the adopted guidelines and working method</i></b>		
– compliance with the accepted guidelines and working methods		X
– decisions about how to perform tasks taken individually		X
– cooperation between the functional units of the organization for the purpose of business development	X	X
– focus on the development of activities within the group and organizational unit	X	X
<b>III. Orientation on building commitment</b>	<b>P</b>	<b>R</b>
<b><i>Proactive leadership</i></b>		
– leaders encourage suggestions for improvement and see problems as opportunities for improvement		X
– leaders assume that employees always try to perform their tasks to the best of their abilities, from the very beginning, to avoid unnecessary mistakes and problems		X
– in decision-making situations, leaders always first pay attention to the consequences in terms of customer orientation		X
– leaders are oriented towards making effective decisions		X
– leaders take preventive actions in every possible situation		X
– leaders quickly find solutions to emerging problems		X
<b>IV. Orientation on common goals</b>	<b>P</b>	<b>R</b>
<b><i>Organization development focused on achieving business goals through individual improvement of employees and teams</i></b>		
– the development of the organization engages all employees and their competences		X
– leaders and specialists are responsible for the development of competences of all employees		X
– all employees are focused on achieving the overarching organization goals	X	X
– employees focus on achieving the goals of their teams		X
<b>V. Orientation on continuous improvement</b>	<b>P</b>	<b>R</b>
<b><i>Permanent improvement in every area of the organization's functioning</i></b>		
– working methods are systematically assessed and improved		X
– problems are solved as they arise	X	X
– improvement activities are conducted in a structured manner		X
– improvement actions are adapted to specific situations		X
<b>VI. Orientation on fact-based decisions</b>	<b>P</b>	<b>R</b>
<b><i>Since problems determine and stimulate the directions of the organization's development, they should be solved as quickly and easily as possible.</i></b>		
– when a problem occurs, its origins are first diagnosed and then solved		X
– problems are solved as quickly and easily as possible	X	X
– information and measurable results on business development are collected	X	
– business development is based on the knowledge and experience of all parties creating the organization	X	X

Adapted from: “Quality culture deployment – using behaviours to explain, diagnose and improve a quality culture” by P. Cronemyr, P. Bäckström, A. Rönnbäck, International Journal of Quality and Service Sciences 9(3/4)/2017.



**Figure 2.** Areas and scopes of the organizational culture of quality, along with the related practices and rituals. Source: own study.

In the course of a deeper analysis and diagnosis, these identified areas can also be treated as a point of reference or a benchmark for the levels and scopes of organizational culture of quality (Figure 2), shaped in the following areas: people, processes, proactivity, priorities (Table 2). Each of the indicated areas should be subject to inference, for example by analyzing the degree of its occurrence or implementation.

**Table 2.**  
*Areas and scopes of the organizational quality culture*

Areas and scopes	The essence
<b>PEOPLE</b>	
Empowerment	employee participation, employee development, trust
Motivating	how leaders recruit and select, promote and exclude employees, and award rewards
Training	individual learning, purposeful modeling of behavior, coaching and teaching
Communication	striving to eliminate language barriers, from C-level managers to employees–
Teamwork	focusing on multidimensional cooperation
<b>PROCESSES</b>	
Systems	having documented pro-quality management systems
Managerial control	the subject of measurement and control of managers, and its extent
Effective coordination	requires communication, positive relationships, understanding the essence of processes, needs and goals of other organizational units; a culture of cooperation
Stabilization	having consistent, time-stable practices for managing diverse employees and teams
Working environment	friendly working conditions, optimal comfort zone
<b>PROACTIVITY</b>	
Customer orientation	responding to the client's needs and raising awareness of their need for the offered products and services
Tendency to take risks	tendency to take risk, attitude to risk
Innovativeness	Attitude to change, degree of innovation
Organizational learning	enabling continuous improvement; ways in which leaders react to critical events and organizational crises
Investments	how leaders allocate resources



Cont. table 2.

OBJECTIVES	
Vision	formal statements of the company's vision, goals and/or values related to quality
Strategy	the need to formulate and implement a long-term quality vision, mid-term quality strategy and short-term quality-oriented goals
Values	formal philosophy of quality adopted by the organization, a binding system of values, attitudes and beliefs focused on quality
Priorities	transparency, clarity and unambiguity of the organization's goals
Milestones	clear task structure, professed values, adopted performance measures

Adapted from: "The development of a safety and quality culture assessment tool from a longitudinal, mixed-method research journey" by J.Z. Taylor, K.I. Rostron, *Worldwide Hospitality and Tourism Themes* 10(3)/2018.

Another useful research tool can also be a set of indexes designed in view of 3 categories describing and possibly verifying its condition, i.e. the perspective of the employee, supervisor and the entire organization (for more see: (Pietruszka-Ortyl, 2018)).

#### 4. Conclusions

Organizational culture is an extremely complex phenomenon. Changing it requires time and effort, especially on the part of the management of organizations (Ingelsson, Bäckström, and Snyder, 2018). Managers must be convinced that shaping its development in such a way as to achieve the state of culture of quality is worth the while.

In practice, it is possible to identify founders and managers of organizations who have adopted an orientation towards the conscious shaping of an organizational quality culture and successfully apply it in the enterprises with which they are associated. Then they unanimously confirm that customer orientation, processes orientation, cooperation, achieving common goals determined on the basis of fact-based decisions and continuous improvement are attitudes, actions and values that fit into the DNA of their companies. Such a point of view characterizes, for example, employees (founders, managers and subordinates) constituting Polish software houses – companies from the IT sector, a significant part of which has achieved a strong position in global competitive markets.

For instance, the software house action "10 Clouds" is described by the maxims: "Don't ask for permission – ask for forgiveness", "Break things, move fast" or "If you don't evolve, if you don't grow, you die" (reflecting high tolerance for making mistakes resulting from the use of innovative solutions, openness to taking risks, stimulating independence and learning from mistakes, shaping high adaptability and agility in action, including flexible market responses). The managers of the organization are strategically focused on building long-term relationships - both with customers and members of the team constituting the company. On the other hand, the operation of the software house "BinarApps" is characterized by a code of values applied simultaneously to external (clients) and internal (employees) stakeholders.

They are curiosity and enthusiasm, transparency and responsibility, humour (distance to oneself and the environment), investing in self-development and participation in designing a workplace. For comparison - the canvas of the organizational quality of the software house "Monterail" is formed by four basic values, convergent with those building the organizational culture of "BinApps" – responsibility, keeping promises, bearing the consequences of your decisions and actions, honesty and remaining modest. Parallel, the pro-quality spirit of "STX Next" is determined by the following overarching principles – team power, software craftsmanship, win-win, transparency, continuous improvement. Moreover, the quintessence of the organizational quality culture of the software house "Boldare" is its name, which is an emanation of the basic assumptions, norms and values, as well as artifacts of this organization. The pride of its functioning is the "Dare to be bold" standard, which reflects expressive, bold actions, transparency of implemented activities, as well as openness, cooperation and responsibility. People creating "Boldare" emphasize that it is a company managed according to the concept of holocracy, following the formula proposed by B.J. Robertson (2015) (for more see: (Smyrska, 2019)). This examples are therefore a contribution to the selection and confirmation of areas and scopes of the organizational quality culture.

Then, the managers of the organizations will be able to guide their enterprises through all the stages of evolution towards a culture of quality identified by K. Cameron and W. Sine: from no emphasis on quality, through error detection and prevention of quality errors to permanent quality creation (Bugdol, 2013; Pietruszka-Ortyl, 2019). The proposed tools for examining the organizational culture of quality can be used for this purpose, by adopting and setting appropriate reference levels of orientation, as well as areas and scopes for each of the indicated phases, which depend on the character of the company's business sector and the level of the industry's competitive advantage. At the same time, the values and norms defining the culture of quality constitute the second level of the analysis of organizational culture according to E. Schein, i.e. values and norms (Cronemyr, Bäckström, and Rönnbäck, 2017; Niemiec, 2020). In this case, they are associated with the following values: solidarity, integration, community, diversity, consensus, omnipresence, adaptability, commitment, consistency, mission (Tenji, and Foley, 2019).

In the evolution towards achieving the level of organizational quality culture, it must be remembered that the basic, parent organizational culture of an enterprise, which can be referred to as the foundational or indigenous culture, has a fundamental impact on the course of this process. Indigenous culture keeps the organizational culture adequate and resistant to environmental turbulence (Kaul, 2019; Pietruszka-Ortyl, 2019). Ideally, this underlying culture should be the culture of quality, or similar based on attitudes and values that are key to a culture of quality. At the same time, research proves that the culture of community is a predictor of reliability, stability, reactivity and empathy, and the innovative culture has a stronger impact on material, technical directions of pro-quality business growth (Karakasnaki, Psomas, and Bouranta, 2019). Additionally, group and development culture largely stimulate both the

technological and social aspects of quality management. Hence, managers should have extensive competences in terms of team management, interpersonal relations and searching for innovation and new resources. They should favor teamwork, help individuals improve and broaden their competences, as well as reward any and all quality improvement initiatives at all levels (Patyal, and Koilakuntla, 2019).

In conclusion, in the modern business environment, having an adequate organizational culture, especially an organizational culture of quality, is the key to success in every area of the company's operations. In order to be able to fully leverage it, activities aimed at shaping the organizational culture of quality should be operationalized. The concept of its research proposed in this paper may be helpful in achieving this goal.

It is possible due to the theoretical and practical contribution of this article to the exploration of organizational quality culture issues. Namely, firstly, it is the determination of six orientation components for building an organizational quality culture – customer satisfaction orientation, process orientation, group work orientation, open communication and knowledge exchange orientation, and orientation on making decisions based on facts – and setting them in the context of primates. values and related activities – trust, learning, participation, communication. Secondly, it is the selection of four areas and the scopes of the organizational quality culture: people (empowerment, motivation, training, communication, teamwork), processes (systems, managerial control, effective coordination, coherence and stabilization, working environment), proactivity and initiative (customer orientation, tendency to take risks, innovativeness, organizational learning, investments) and objectives (vision, strategy, values, priorities, milestones).

They, in turn, also determine the areas of further research, in particular the verification of the proposed tools in practice, i.e. checking their suitability for analysis and diagnosis, whether given organizations are focused on building an organizational quality culture, in what phase of evolution to organizational quality culture are they, or runs evenly and covers all identified orientations as well as the indicated areas and scopes. These inferences can take place in the context of specific organizations and take the form of a case study or concern analyses of specific sectors of the economy or be conducted comprehensively.

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