

THE PANDEMIC: TRANSFORMATION OF ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE AND ITS ETHICAL AND SENSING CODES

***Aksenovskaya L.N.,
Doctor of Psychological Sciences, Professor,
Chair of the Department of General and Social Psychology, Dean of the
Faculty of Psychology, Saratov State University
(Saratov, Russia)***

The article analyzes changes in organizational culture under conditions of the COVID-19 pandemic. Organizational culture is viewed at all system levels: culture of business organizations, regional culture, state culture and general planetary culture. We single out four types of business organizations functioning under conditions of the pandemic: those in contact with the infection, those interacting with the population, organizations working in the remote mode, and a group of unemployed workers. The article describes culture codes and their transformation for organizations in contact with infection and interacting with the general population. The article views ethical and sensing codes of organizational culture's basic level, which regulate top managers' behavior. We come to the conclusion that organizational culture undergoes transformation under the influence of the pandemic-dictated conditions. These changes deal with the level of sub-orders ("army", "family", "church"). The changes observed in basic ethical senses (life-death, cooperation-fight, improvement-deterioration, responsibility – irresponsibility) prove that a mistake has been made in their identification, and the new reality reveals their real state.

Key words: pandemic, organizational culture, ethical and sensing codes, transformation, organization, top manager.

Introduction

It is for the first time in the living memory of several generations, that the McLuhan's "global village" is engulfed in "viral fire". Both private and public "electronic caves" have proved to be useful. Finally, their meaning and usefulness have become fully understood, as well as the risks associated with them.

The planet-wide emergency situation has become a "natural experiment" (L. Ross, R.E. Nisbett), which has involuntarily involved all of us including organizational psychologists. We have several roles in this "experiment". We are not only "test subjects". We act as agents of change involved in the process of maintaining "normal" work processes in our organizations under changing conditions; we participate in designing new solutions for problems and tasks that occur; we provide psychological assistance and support to those, who are on the "line of fire", and to those, who work in conditions of "self-isolation", or have lost their jobs. We also help and assist those who are "on the bench" and do not have an opportunity to use their professional skills and knowledge today. We continue to collect, systematize and analyze information about a person and organization

during a pandemic in the observation and self-observation mode. Observation method has once again become the leading one for social psychologists, as Serge Moskovici suggests.

The purpose of the article is the preliminary reflection on changes that organizational cultures undergo during a pandemic, as well as analysis of transformation of organizational culture's ethical and sensing codes.

The starting question: what is “organizational culture”?

Within the context of the topic we are attempting to analyze, we are not talking about definitions, but about “where” we should now “see” organizational culture, which, judging by all indications, has gone to the periphery of researchers' attention, while completely different aspects of organizational life-related activity have come to the foreground, i.e. finance, equipment, production and supply technologies, raw materials, etc., which are definitely not “soft” (psychological and cultural) aspects.

Based on systematic understanding of organizational culture's nature, as well as on the fact that changes in living conditions have affected the entire planet, we once again see that the focus is on the structural design of this phenomenon. Business *organizations* (private, state, public organizations working in various sectors of the economy, social and cultural spheres, defense) can be found at the lower levels of the global organizational and cultural system; they traditionally act as an empirical object of research for organizational psychologists. Conventionally, the middle level is represented by *quasi-organizations* such as municipalities, regions, and territorial entities. *Mega-organizations* can be found at the highest system level; these are states, interstate institutions (the World Health Organization, the United Nations) and, the humanity itself as a planetary super-organization (in this case, “super” is not used in the sense of a compliment) can also be found at the highest system level. A new argument in favor of separating the humanity into a single organization is the pandemic situation. Since the system-forming trait of an organization is the presence of a common goal, then its current formulation for the humankind is “victory over coronavirus”.

Today it is impossible to ignore the distinct manifestation of the “digital double” of organizations at each level with its own digital culture and subcultures.

Thus, organized existence of the humankind persists during the pandemic. All levels, types and kinds of organizations have their own culture, which participates in decision-making and affects their quality; it participates in implementation of decisions that have been made, fulfilling or ignoring them (both at the level of countries and regions, as well as at the enterprise level). Right now, when almost every person is connected to different channels of information from all over the world, the Bayon's isomorphism of micro and macro levels is strikingly noticeable, i.e. social and psychological (more specifically, organizational and cultural) processes at the level of entire countries are mirrored at the level of individual institutions and enterprises as well as at the level of individual population groups and individuals.

New typological structure of organizations and their employees under conditions of the pandemic

The pandemic has “re-sorted” the humankind, its organizations and the multitude of people capable of work. Taking into consideration the wide-spread practice of discussing confrontation with coronavirus in military terms (“war”, “fight”, “the front line”, “losses”, etc.), we can place the organizations at three major lines:

- 1) The first line (“the line of fire”, “the front”) - this is super intense and excessive work in direct contact with the infection (hospitals, army units of the bacteriological and chemical defense troops);
- 2) The second line (“the unsafe rear”) - daily contact work with other people (non-infectious diseases clinics, the police, Ministry of Emergency Situations, manufacturing and agricultural enterprises, delivery services, banks, grocery stores, post offices, the mass media, etc.);
- 3) The third line (“the rear”, supplies) - continuation of regular work under unusual conditions (distance learning, working remotely/from home);
- 4) The fourth line (“the bench”) - able-bodied professionals who are forced to temporarily stop working or have lost their jobs.

Therefore, we observe violation of normal distribution of the levels of professional workload, activity, employment and the degree of threat to workers’ health and life. Familiar, well-established cultural and even professional norms and standards pass the test of strength and suitability under new conditions, organizational culture begins to transform under pressure of the new environmental factors. The “old” culture of organizations (the culture of “yesterday”) in some cases simply leaves no chance of survival (not only organizational survival, but physical survival as well).

Ethical and sensing codes of organizational culture and their transformation under conditions of the pandemic

Within order approach to social and psychological study of organizational culture, we work with two types of data: 1) *the “surface” level of culture* data (observable models of managerial interaction and the suborders/aspects of organizational culture, which they form: “family”, “army”, “church”); 2) *the “deep” level of culture* data (ethical and sensing subsystems of interaction participants).

Order diagnostics of organizational culture allows assessing the state of both levels (“surface” and “deep”). Diagnostics’ result can be generalized in the organization’s “culture code” (namely “ethical and sensing code of organizational culture”). We have singled out 6 types of “culture code”, which consists of the first letters of the organizational culture suborders’ names. The order of letters in the code signifies the degree of dominance of the suborder in the descending order: e.g. A (army) – F (family) – C (church) or “A-F-C”. Each code has its own

organizational tasks, existing risks (threats) and recommended managerial solutions [1;3;4]. Let us present this data in the table:

Table 1

Cultural codes, risks, managerial decisions for various states of organizational culture

№	Ethical-sensing culture code	Interpretation	Problem to be solved by an organization	Threats and managerial solution
1.	“A-C-F”	“army-church-family”	Breakthrough under conditions of time deficit	The threat of burnout. <i>Solution:</i> restraining activity using the “family” suborder development strategy
2.	“C-A-F”	“church-army-family”	Breakthrough without time limitations	The threat of “disappointment” due to slow achievement of ambitious goals. <i>Solution:</i> forming the value of team work and personal development.
3.	“C-F-A”	“church-family-army”	Forming “corporate religion”	The threat of losing “sprinters”. <i>Solution:</i> purposefully form micro project teams and increase the complexity of tasks
4.	“F-A-C”	“family-army-church”	Start of activity or its re-start	The threat is lack of confidence in employees. <i>Solution:</i> activate training programs.
5.	“F-C-A”	“family-church-army”	Stabilization or recovery of resources after a period of extreme activity	The threat is losing alertness/tonus. <i>Solution:</i> development of internal corporate competitiveness.
6.	“A-F-C”	“army-family-church”	Organization’s survival under complex conditions	The threat is tiredness and losing motivation (ignoring lack of achievement). <i>Solution:</i> development of ideology and strategy called “forming the conditions’ potential”.

Source: Aksenovskaya L.N. Results of diagnostics of ethical and sensing codes of organizational culture as a foundation for managerial decision-making// “Organizational psychology: people and risks”: collection of works of the 10th International Scientific and Practical Conference (November 14-15, 2019). - Saratov: Publishing Center “Nauka”, 2019. – 175 pages. - P.22-28. - P.27.

We can clearly see now that a number of organizations of the “lower” system level change their tasks and methods of work (basically, they change their

lifestyle), thus, transforming their cultural code. It is obvious that infectious diseases hospitals now have the cultural code A-C-F ("army" with a focus on the task, "church" with a focus on the value of sacrifice during service, "family" with a focus on caring for employees). A similar cultural code is observed for specialized military units involved in the fight against the spread of infection. In the previous order studies, medical organizations had a different code, i.e. "F-A-C". Transformation of the cultural code for the existing industrial enterprises with a state share of ownership, acting entrepreneurial organizations in the system of state and municipal administration is also noteworthy: their cultures make a transition from the "A-F-C" code (sometimes with difficulty and unevenly) to the "A-C-F" code (task - idea - mutual assistance).

The cultural code "A-F-C", which is a "survival" code, is generally characteristic of the state.

As we can see from the table, the main threats in such cultural situation may be the *risk of burnout* for employees of the "first line" organizations (primarily, infectious disease doctors) and, if the conditions of quarantine restrictions last longer than the population expects, the *risk of fatigue* for the country's citizens. It seems that these threats are well recognized by the management of organizations at all levels, since there is evidence of measures taken (for example, medical staff are provided with conditions for safe and comfortable stay at hotels to keep their families safe, they are provided with hot meals or free organized travel to their workplace, increase in wages, etc.).

At the same time, analysis of the state and vectors of transformation of the ethical and sensing codes of the *basic level* culture shows the existing "sore points" of the existing organizational culture as a whole. We can briefly remind you that basic ethical senses of culture in the order approach are represented by four pairs of sensing binary oppositions: life - death, cooperation - struggle, improvement - deterioration, responsibility - irresponsibility. These sensing oppositions are manifested in the behavior of organizations' managers in different ways, depending on the level of their leadership qualities' development (four of them have been singled out) [see more - 2, p. 3-13].

Thus, for cultures with the "A-C-F" and "F-A-C" codes, we can observe the following characteristic manifestation of basic ethical (cultural) codes in the behavior of their managers. Managers with a *high level* of leadership qualities' development have a cultural code that can be described as follows: orientation towards saving Life, development of Cooperation, consistent Improvement of the situation and conditions, orientation to Responsibility for the process and result. For the sake of saving people, this kind of leader can sacrifice a lot, but will be able to save people in the long term.

Managers with *lower level* of leadership qualities' development will be primarily concerned with their own survival (first personal, and then - the survival of their organization). They combine cooperation with struggle for resources for this survival, improve their own position and do not worry about the situation of those who are in their close circle. As a result, elements of responsibility are combined with elements of irresponsible decisions and behavior.

An even lower level of leadership qualities' development is characterized by willingness and ability to sacrifice lives of other people, especially for receiving reputation/career bonuses. The main method of action is merciless struggle with everyone who stands in the way. The manager creates and exploits a worsening situation with the goal of "catching fish in troubled waters", which results in the irresponsibility, which is dangerous for others.

The lowest level of development of leadership qualities of a manager is a great danger for them and people under their command. Whatever they want/plan/undertake, they destroy both their people and themselves.

Today, we have collected real cases of managers' behavior at every level during the pandemic, which confirm the analysis above. The "natural experiment" in the form of the pandemic, where managers of all organizations around the world participate, on the one hand is a test that shows the real level of leadership development for each of them, and on the other hand, provides us with evidence that some leaders show spontaneous transition to another ethical and sensing code under extraordinary conditions (there are cases of both going level up and level down). Things that they considered to be their values and beliefs under ordinary working conditions have not become such during the pandemic.

Conclusion

Having carefully tracked the development of the pandemic in the world and gathered observations and facts regarding organizations and their employees of all levels behavior in the changed reality, we can now come to the conclusion that organizational culture is a "fluid order" and is capable of transforming for an individual task like the Rubik's cube. From the position of order, this change can mean coming to the forefront of characteristics (values, methods, etc.) of either the "army", the "family, or the "church" suborder, and their rearrangement after the situation has changed. In other words, organizational culture is flexible/fluid, but within certain limits. We are not faced with the emergence of something extraordinary, which has not previously been observed in human or organization's behavior. We observe "re-combination" of familiar ways of thinking and behavior.

Flexibility and plasticity of organizational culture is manifested at the "surface" level (something that we can observe). However, the deep mechanism of organizational culture in the form of ethical and sensing codes of the basic level (life - death, cooperation - struggle, improvement - deterioration, responsibility - irresponsibility) remains unchanged. If there are changes at the deepest level, they are probably taking place for a very long time, possibly throughout the life of a person and humanity as a whole. The observed changes at this level most likely prove an erroneous opinion of people and organizations (including countries) regarding inherent values and beliefs that they convey to psychologists during diagnostic procedures (either underestimating or overestimating their qualities), and cultivate in works of art and the media.

The planet as a whole and every country today can be compared to one large laboratory where authenticity testing takes place. Ethical and sensing codes of the

culture of super organizations, mega-organizations, quasi-organizations and regular organizations and their employees are open to the observer.

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