

ELEMENTS OF ORGANISATIONAL CULTURE AS DETERMINING FACTORS IN THE SHAPING OF MODERN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

ELEMENTY KULTURY ORGANIZACYJNEJ JAKO DETERMINANTY
KSZTAŁTUJĄCE WSPÓŁCZESNE UCZELNIE WYŻSZE

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Ilona Ziemkiewicz-Gawlik¹, Monika Miętkiewicz²,
Katarzyna Brzychcy³, Karol Jaroszewski⁴

¹Poland, Stanisław Staszic State University of Applied Sciences in Piła, Department of Economics
i.ziemkiewicz@edu.ans.pila.pl, ORCID: 0000-0001-7681-6100

²Poland, WSB Merito University in Gdańsk, Faculty of Business
mmietkiewicz@wsb.gda.pl, ORCID: 0000-0002-4411-1146

³Poland, University of Szczecin, Management Institute
katarzyna.brzychcy@usz.edu.pl, ORCID: 0000-0001-9031-0368

⁴Poland, WSB Merito University in Gdańsk, Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities
kjaroszewski@wsb.gda.pl, ORCID: 0009-0000-1939-8854

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Abstract: In modern society, educators who hold specific positions are expected to display practical knowledge as well as a theoretical basis, which students acquire in the process of education. Higher education institutions in Poland offer a wide range of programmes. People who want to receive an education can choose between public and non-public higher education institutions which offer full-time, extramural, part-time as well as hybrid (a combination of traditional and distance learning) and online programmes (distance learning). It needs to be highlighted that education quality at higher education institutions depends primarily on qualified and engaged staff. Regardless of the choice they make, young people who graduate from secondary school either go to work or continue their education. This area provides the basic cognitive processes described by the authors, i.e. education, improvement and (further) training. The aim of the article is to identify the external factors determining the shaping of organisational culture at the university in the opinion of students, as well as to present recommended changes in this area. The authors focus on internal factors which shape the organisational culture of higher education institutions, and which determine education quality as well as the entire relevant system. The conducted studies refer to selected internal factors which shape the organisational culture of public and non-public higher education institutions which offer practical programmes. Recommendations for changes in the studied areas are subsequently presented.

Keywords: Quality Education, Interpersonal relations, education, relationship management, organisational culture

Streszczenie: We współczesnym społeczeństwie od osób dorosłych na zajmowanych stanowiskach pracy wymaga się wiedzy praktycznej oraz podbudowy teoretycznej, którą studium zdobywają w ramach procesu kształcenia. Oferta studiów w Polsce jest obecnie bardzo bogata. Chcący uzyskać wykształcenie mogą wybierać w ofercie zarówno w uczelniach publicznych, jak i niepublicznych, oferujących studia w systemie stacjonarnym, niestacjonarnym, wieczorowym, a także hybrydowym (połączenie studiów tradycyjnych z kształceniem na odległość) lub on-line (kształcenie na odległość). Należy zwrócić uwagę na fakt, iż odpowiednia jakość kształcenia jest możliwa przede wszystkim dzięki wykwalifikowanej i zaangażowanej w ten proces kadrze. Z tego obszaru wywodzą się podstawowe procesy poznawcze opisane przez autorów, takie jak: kształcenie, doskonalenie i doksztalcenie. W niniejszym artykule autorzy skupili się na czynnikach wewnętrznych, kształtujących kulturę organizacyjną uczelni, mających wpływ na jakość kształcenia oraz cały system z tym związany. Prowadzone badania dotyczyły wybranych czynników wewnętrznych kształtujących kulturę organizacyjną w uczelniach publicznych i niepublicznych o profilu praktycznym, a następnie przedstawiono rekomendację zmian w badanych obszarach.

Słowa kluczowe: jakość kształcenia, relacje interpersonalne, kształcenie, zarządzanie relacjami, kultura organizacyjna

Introduction

The success of an organisation depends on many factors which include human, financial, capital, technological and information resources, the amount, quality and cost of which depends on more than the processes taking place within an organisation. The educational system plays a vital role in each person's development process. Thus, the educational offer, which should primarily reflect his or her needs, should also guarantee the filling of positions offered by employers.

The changing labour market, new requirements imposed on employees and competition between companies require greater competencies. That is why those who wish to continue their education are searching for forms of learning which are best suited for them. In Pedagogy learning is usually defined as: "(...) activities and processes which enable people to become familiar with nature, society and culture and to participate in their transformation, as well as the achievement of a (possibly) comprehensive development of physical and mental abilities, skills and talents, interests, convictions and attitudes, and the acquisition of desired professional skills" (Okoń, 1984, p.164). For each interested party it is important to ensure a high quality of educational services. This is crucial for both the recipients, i.e. students, later alumni, and the providers of these services, i.e. academic staff (Piotrowska-Piątek, 2009). Each participant in this process has different needs and pays attention to different aspects, which is determined by various reasons.

The aim of the article is to identify internal factors which determine the shaping of organisational culture in higher education institutions, according to the opinions of students, and to present changes in this area.

Based on the literature review the research problem was formulated as a question: *Which internal factors have an influence on the shaping of organisational culture in higher education institutions?*

The educational process is a fundamental element of the activities of higher education institutions. Several elements have an influence on the quality of this process. One of the most important elements is the initial level of knowledge, skills and competencies presented by students who begin their education, and their active participation in the learning process.

Literature review

Organisational culture remains in the sphere of interest of those studying the issues of management, as it constitutes one of the fundamental components of an organisation's intellectual capital (Bratnicki, 2000). According to A. Williams, P. Dobson and M. Walters it is defined as "commonly held and *relatively stable* beliefs, attitudes and values that exist within an organisation" (1993, p. 35). G. Hofstede defines organisational culture as "the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes members of one group from another and constitutes the psychological asset of an organisation by which its financial resources can be predicted in five years. (2000, p. 40). M. Romanowska and M. Jarosiński suggest that the term be understood as "a pattern of thinking, feeling and reacting generated by a group, to which the members of the group submit, and which teaches them to distinguish between positive and negative attitudes and behaviours" (2001, p. 121).

Contemporary authors identify organisations with people. One such author is R. W. Griffin, according to whom an organisation is a group of people who cooperate in an ordered and coordinated manner in order to achieve a specific set of objectives (2021, p. 6). Authors who describe the phenomena listed above place a sign of equivalence between organisations and people. This means that at present emphasis is placed on human behaviour, place and significance for the functioning of an organised totality (Dyrda, 2004). 'Human resources' are an evaluative term. It stresses the important role of employees in the process of functioning of an organisation. That is because human resources impact the use of other resources of an organisation (material, financial), which is why the term replaced those used previously e.g. workforce, staff (Król, Ludwiczynski, 2006).

G. Morgan defines organisational culture as "a set of features which characterise the functioning of a given organisation which are reflected in the attitudes and behaviours of employees. Organisational culture consists in characteristic abilities and inabilities which as a result of evolution become features determining the functioning of the organisation due to the fact that they are built in the attitudes and behaviours of its members and, as such, they are no longer questioned by anyone. They become a natural, integral element of an organisation – its internal variable, which can be manipulated, managed or created by organisations as a side-product" (2022, p. 159) (TN: own translation).

M. Mycielska ascribes a significant role to the organisational culture of firms. It is one of the most important factors, which makes it possible to manage knowledge in organisations. "Culture refers to people and people's feelings" which is why it is so often overlooked, as it does not fit within the framework of thinking in strictly economic categories. Each organisational culture is unique and may be an opportunity to distinguish oneself from the competition (www.betterpeople.eu, 2023). There are as many explanations of the meaning of organisational culture as there are its participants. R. W. Griffin explains it as "set of values, beliefs, behaviors, customs and attitudes that help people in an organisation in order to better understand which of their actions are considered acceptable or not acceptable" (2021, p. 90). B. Fryzeł defines organisational culture as a "set of principles and values which apply in a given organisational group in a natural way, which describe attitudes, interpersonal relationships and the style of functioning of an organisation, created in the process of the organisation's evolution and adaptation to the environment, and which have the characteristics of both an internal variable, which legitimises the existence of the organisation through artificial modification in management processes and can determine its competitiveness, and constitutes an environment for management processes" (2004, p. 23) (TN: own translation). According to T.H. Cox and S. Blake there are some fundamental premises in favour of cultural diversity in an organisation, which (respectively) refer to (1991, p. 47):

- the financial aspect,
- the HR policy,
- marketing,
- the level of employee creativity,
- management system flexibility.

Factors which shape organisational culture, according to G. Aniszewska and I. Giełńska, include: "economic, political, legal, social, cultural and technological variables as well as variables which result from the specific character of a given industry, and the specificity of the competition" (1999, p. 44) (TN: own translation). G. Stonehouse, J. Hamill, D. Campbell and T. Purdie believe that culture "must change along with the environment" in an adequate manner (2001, p. 47). While it is important for the functioning of an organisation it is also difficult, as organisational culture is characterised by a high level of rigidity, making it difficult to shape. The shaping of specific organisational behaviours and practices takes place as a result of the mutual influence of organisational solutions

and employees' cultural preferences. As B. Fryzeł aptly point out: "it is an obvious fact that all potential changes in corporate culture will only be effective if they are intelligently planned with respect to characteristics human nature, and thus irreformable and directed towards the modification of learned traits, resulting from personality and cultural development of each human being" (2004, p. 25) (TN: own translation).

Organisational culture is usually characterised by authors as social norms and value systems which stimulate employees, the right organisational atmosphere, style of management, shared meanings and symbols as well as codes of conduct. It is one of the most important factors which allows us to manage knowledge in an organisation. Organisational culture in higher education institutions is subject to the same principles as that of each organisation. S. P. Robbins describes it as "(...) a relatively uniform perception held by the organisation, it has common characteristics, it is descriptive, it can distinguish one organisation from another" (1998, p. 595). This cultural diversity of organisations determines their attractiveness for employees, while in the case of higher education institutions it determines whether candidates and students will choose to enrol.

The factor that distinguishes universities is the quality of education. One of the fundamental aims of the didactic activities of all higher education institutions is to provide an intellectual-professional basis for alumni, allowing them to attain specific professional positions and to function in society. This basis is often referred to in source literature (Gagne, Briggs, Wager, 1992) as acquiring a certain level of utility. This term often refers to knowledge, skills and social competencies. However, in the Polish academic environment we usually speak of competencies which alumni should acquire in the course of their studies.

Higher education institutions are at the top of the process of institutionalised education. In general terms we can say that education are the "activities and processes which enable people to become familiar with nature, society and culture and to participate in their transformation, as well as the achievement of a (possibly) comprehensive development of physical and mental abilities and interests" (www.encyklopedia.pwn.pl, 2023).

Quality can be defined as a collective characteristic of a product or service, taking into account marketing, design, workmanship and maintenance, which results in the client's/customer's satisfaction with a given service or product (Hammrol, Mantura, 2002). Quality refers to both products

and services. R.W. Griffin defines quality as “the total set of features and characteristics of a product or service that bears on its ability to satisfy stated or implied needs” (2021, p. 707). Quality is also the complete fulfilment of stated identified needs of customers, while optimising own costs (Bank, 1996).

Source literature includes numerous basic perspectives of quality. According to D. Green the most important concept are (Green, 1994):

- quality as perfection;
- quality as the absence of faults;
- quality as the readiness of institutions to achieve goals;
- quality as the satisfaction of customers’ expectations and needs;
- quality as constant development.

According to B. Moss quality is a set of characteristics of products and services during purchase which contribute to customer satisfaction (Szabłowski, 2004). Quality in higher education institutions has become a priority and has resulted in a systemic approach to the management process. Consequently, quality control systems based on management models and concepts e.g. ISO 9001, EFQM, CAF were implemented.

The education process is an element of HR policy implemented in an organisation. This policy manifests itself in the human resources function, which alongside the marketing and financial function is among the basic functions realised in an institution (Pocztowski, 2007). It is also necessary to highlight the character of this function which is immensely complex and results from the approach of employees, who constitute the most important and at the same time most unreliable factor of all the resources of an institution (Listwan, 2006). W. Okoń defines the education process as “a chain of events which is ordered in time and which includes activities on the part of teachers and learners directed at a suitable selection of objectives and content as well as methods and means, that would contribute to changes in students or to the shaping and development of suitable personality traits, in accordance with the assumed learning objectives” (2003, p. 133).

As a result of the increase in the number of higher education institutions in Poland we can observe rising problems with the quality of educational services which they offer. Thus more and more of institutions are implementing systems in order to monitor and manage education quality. The fact that education quality has become a priority issue forced institutions to assume a system-based approach to the management of the educational

process. Both internal and external steps were taken in order to develop a system of ensuring quality.

As a result of globalisation, market individualisation (distinguishing oneself from the environment), client orientation (including internal clients), IT implementation, cultural diversity and changes in labour market demand organisations are now striving to create a new type of employee, characterised by the following features: knowledge worker, flexible employment, coping with stress, ability to work in a team and work-life balance (Pocztowski, 2007).

Assuming that the front-line employees responsible for providing the service are teaching staff and research and teaching staff, the quality of the learning process, and consequently the image of the institution as an organisation, are determined by the relationship between research and teaching staff and students. In the case of an educational service quality as a level of demand satisfaction concerns both sides of the relationship and can be considered separately for each of them. A. Pabian defines education quality from the point of view of marketing as a level of satisfaction of students’ needs and demands, which results from the educational and non-educational activities of institutions (Pabian, 2005).

Material and methodology

Organisational culture is an important element of Education Quality. Every higher education institution is an organisation which functions according to generally adopted principles and norms. These are listed in relevant formal documents but are also frequently referred to in traditional customs. These norms and customs are part of the general idea of the ‘Universitas’. A study of the values which are important to students can provide complex information regarding values they cherish, their identification with the institution and their level of satisfaction. Organisational culture in higher education institutions makes them more transparent, thus solidifying their role in the environment. The more the communication of values developed in academia is not confined within that environment, then the more socially coherent that environment becomes. That is why it is important to appreciate the importance of organisational culture for the functioning of alumni in the new reality outside of academia. Values instilled by the institution will determine the careers of alumni, and those values in turn are determined by organisational culture.

Higher education institutions should also take responsibility for the quality and way in which the fulfill their social roles (Drucker, 2001) therefore, the education system should be modified by introducing new technologies into the traditional education model (Ptaszek, 2019, p. 302) and thus promoting the development of media competences including the critical understanding of the media and the context in which they function and are used (Siemianicka, 2001, p. 240).

The process of shaping organisational culture includes many internal and external factors. Internal factors include personality traits of teachers, the managerial staff, organisational assumptions and cultural traditions, while external factors can be divided into three categories: economic – the economic system, market size, social – social organisations, and technical – technological advancement, introduction of innovations (Szymańska, 2012).

In order to achieve the assumed research goal the study involved the analysis of the literature, developed a research tool and made a further empirical analysis. The literature searches were conducted in renowned scientific databases, including: Scopus, Web of Science, Ebsco. The design of the study assumed the use of a quantitative method and used indirect information collection technique using a measurement tool in the form of a survey questionnaire.

The selection of the sample was purposeful and included students of economics. 424 full-time and part-time students of public universities (140 students) and private universities (284 students) took part in the research, which was conducted in

person at selected universities in the Pomeranian Voivodeship in the period from April 12, 2023 to June 20, 2023.

The studied group included students of both sexes. Women made up 72% of the group, while men made up 28%. 91% of respondents were at the age of 25 or less, 6% were aged between 26 and 35 years and 4% were over the age of 35.

The studies took into account the internal factors which shape organisational culture. In order to identify the degree to which students evaluate these factors taking place in the intuitions and education quality, the respondents were asked to respond to statements on the Likert scale – 1 (strongly agree), 2 (agree), 3 (neither agree nor disagree), 4 (disagree), 5 (strongly disagree).

Results and discussion

In universities, interpersonal relations between employees and students play a fundamental role. Interpersonal relationships extend the role of student customer service and combine it with improving the quality of education. Changes on the market determine the need to take action, and facilities focused on development should maintain permanent relationships with customers, not only by modifying the services provided and improving their quality, but also by creating the right atmosphere so that they want to return to the facility or recommend its services to others. For universities, the best recommendation is satisfied students.

Figures 1–12 present the results of the research below.

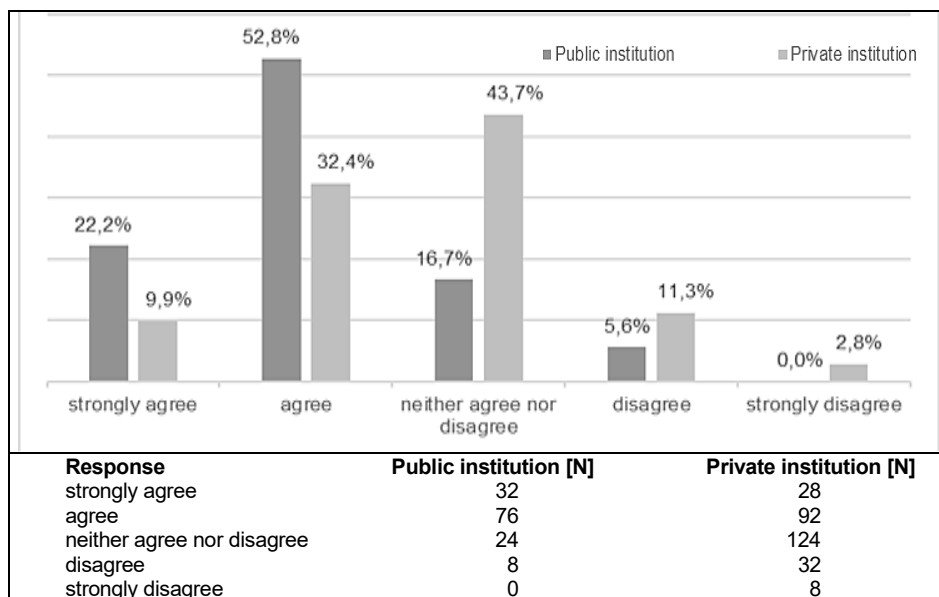


Figure 1. I am satisfied with the functioning of the institution

Source: Own calculation on the basis of research results.

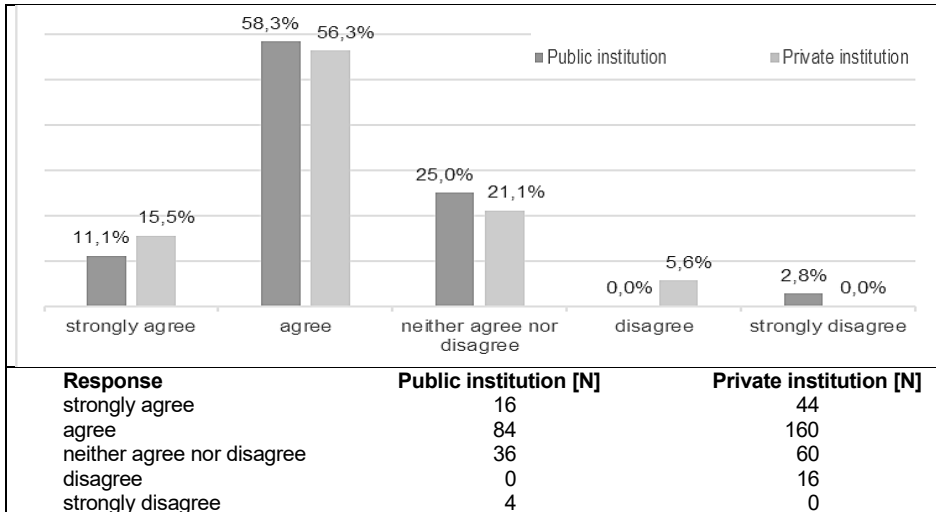


Figure 2. My institution offers very favourable conditions to learn

Source: Own calculation on the basis of research results.

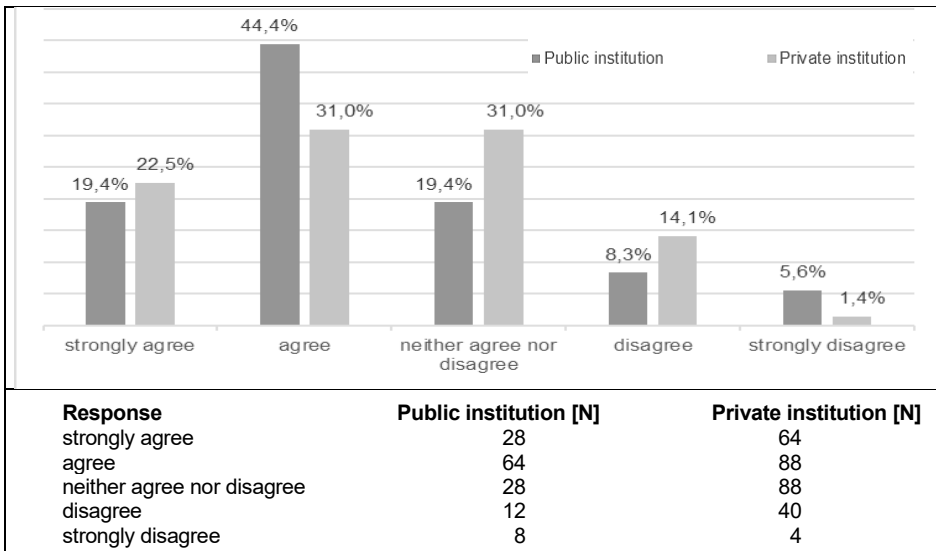


Figure 3. The institution has an organisational culture which fosters innovation and entrepreneurship

Source: Own calculation on the basis of research results.

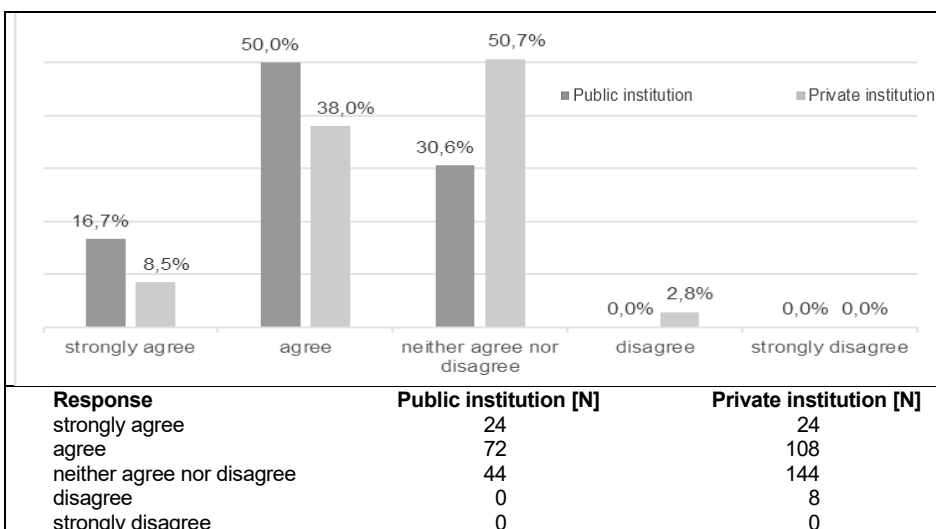


Figure 4. The institution puts emphasis on education quality improvement

Source: Own calculation on the basis of research results.

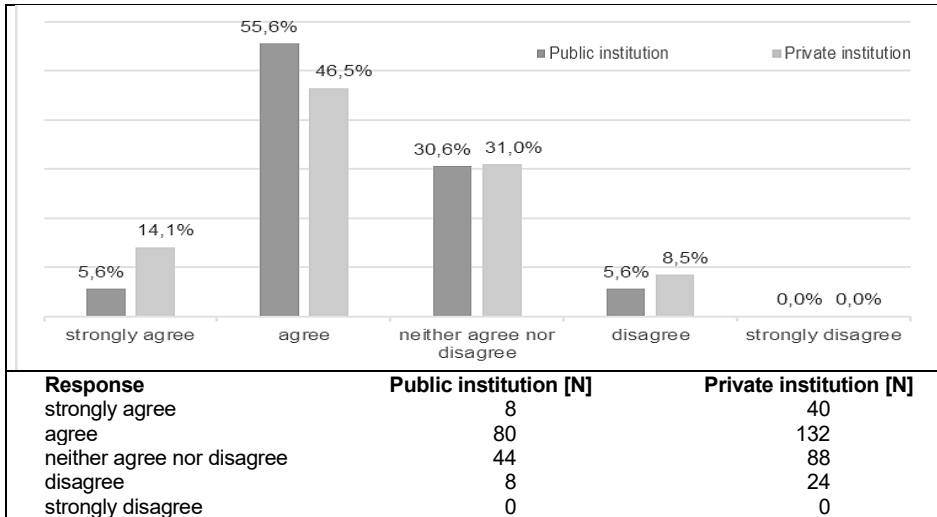


Figure 5. The lecturers at the institutions are competent

Source: Own calculation on the basis of research results

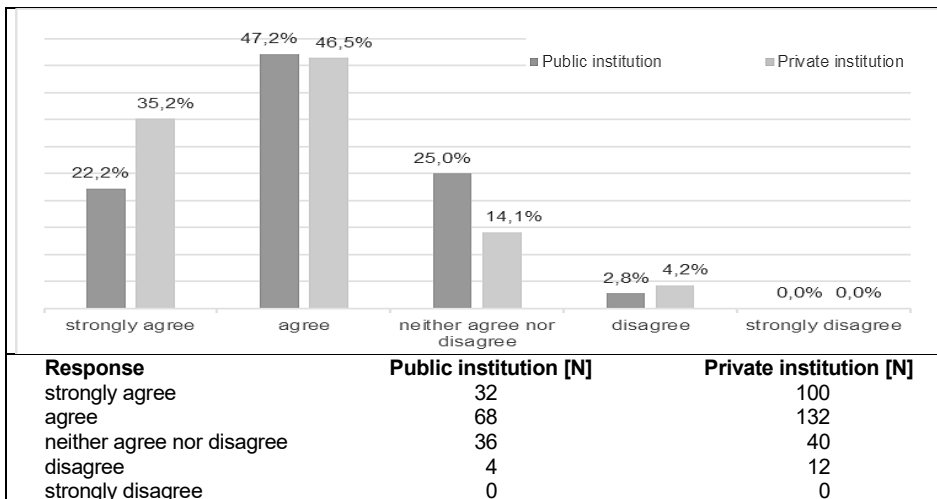


Figure 6. The lecturers and teachers display an attitude of pragmatism and sincerity

Source: Own calculation on the basis of research results

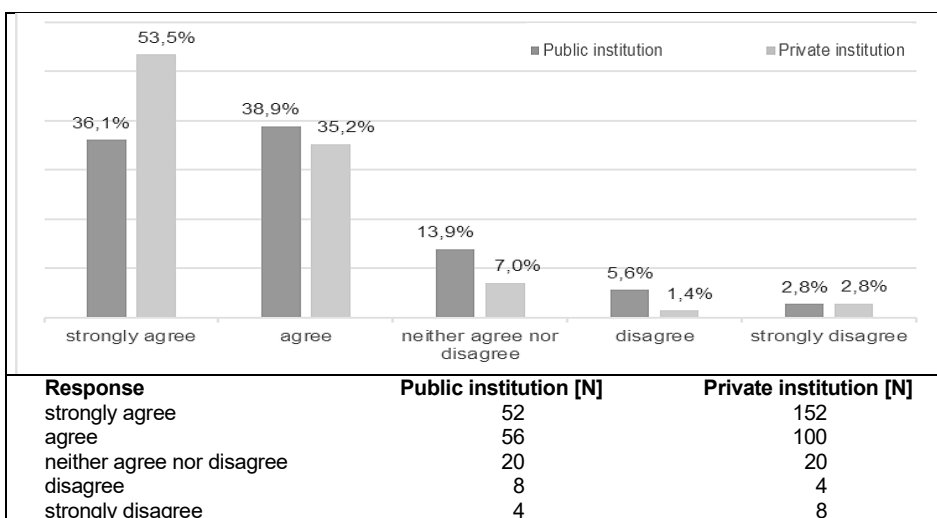


Figure 7. I believe that I am a member of a well-functioning team/group

Source: Own calculation on the basis of research results.

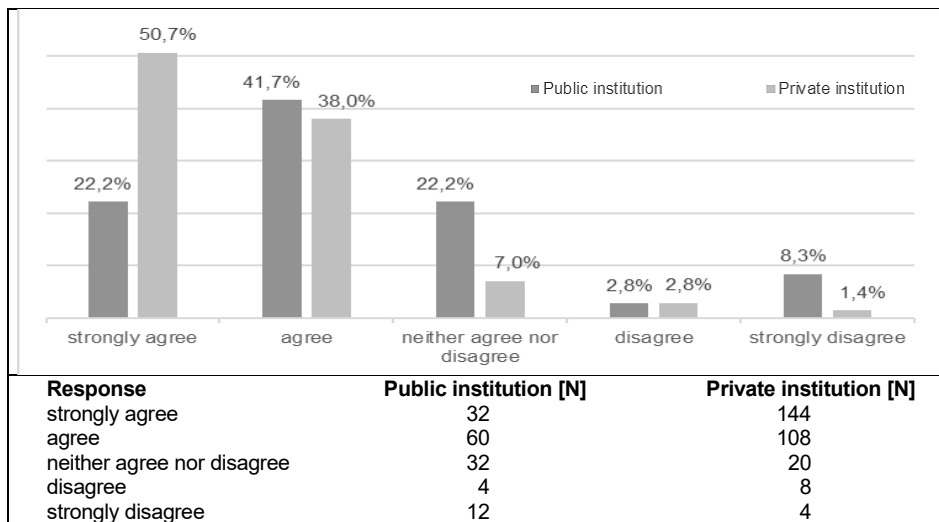


Figure 8. It is easy to form an acquaintance with other students at the institution

Source: Own calculation on the basis of research results.

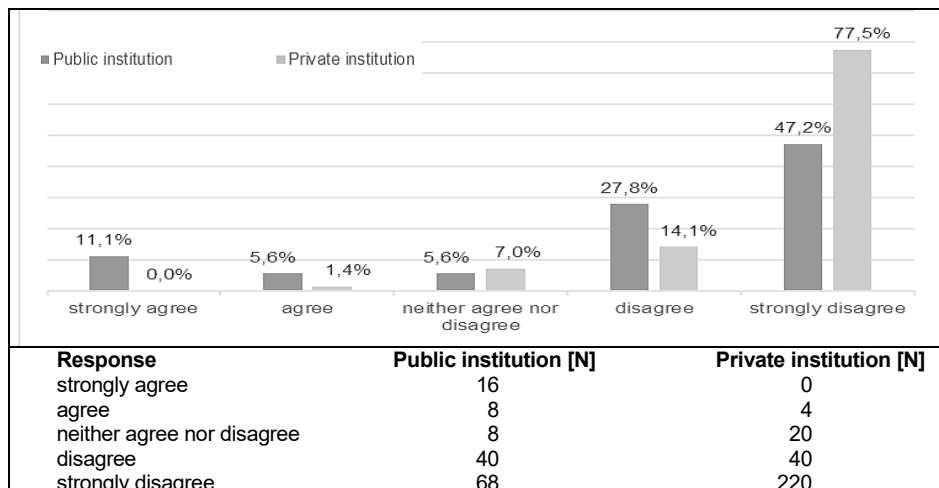


Figure 9. There are frequent conflicts between members of my student group

Source: Own calculation on the basis of research results.

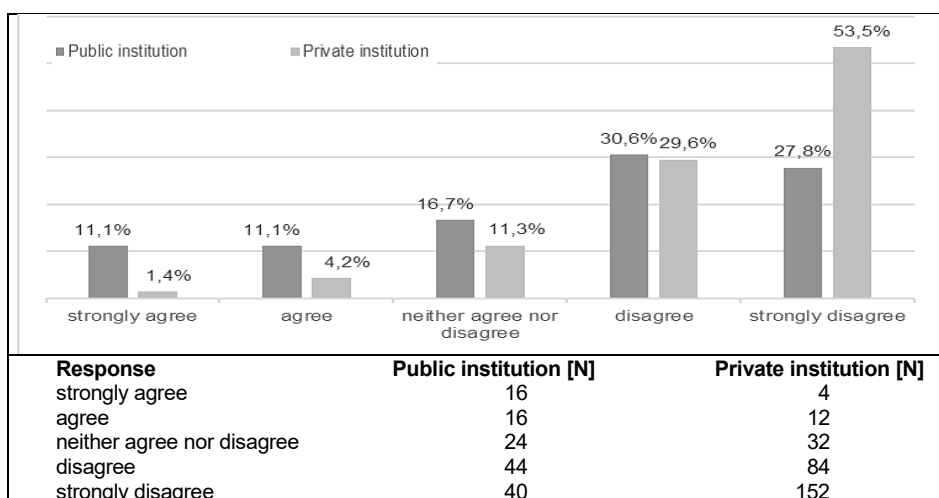


Figure 10. I take active part in the life of the institution (student festivals, research clubs, conferences, expos etc.)

Source: Own calculation on the basis of research results.

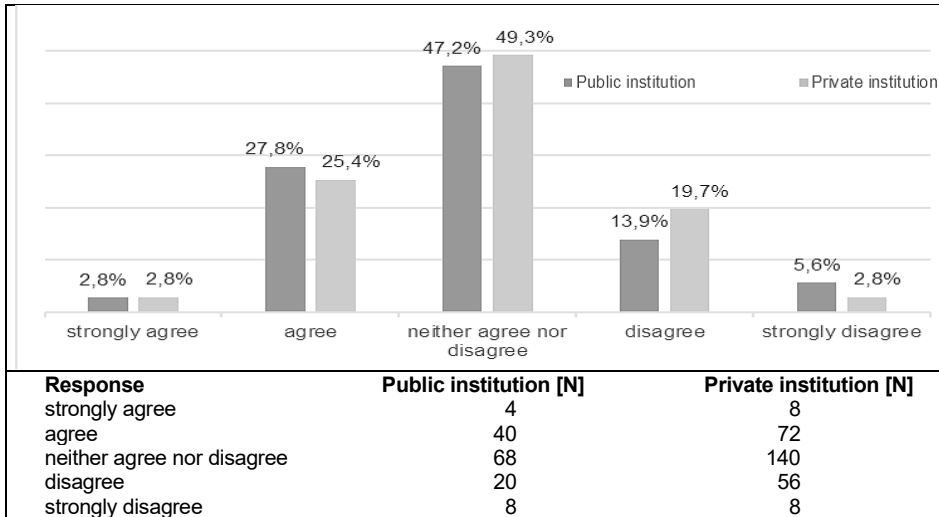


Figure 11. I identify with my institution
Source: Own calculation on the basis of research results.

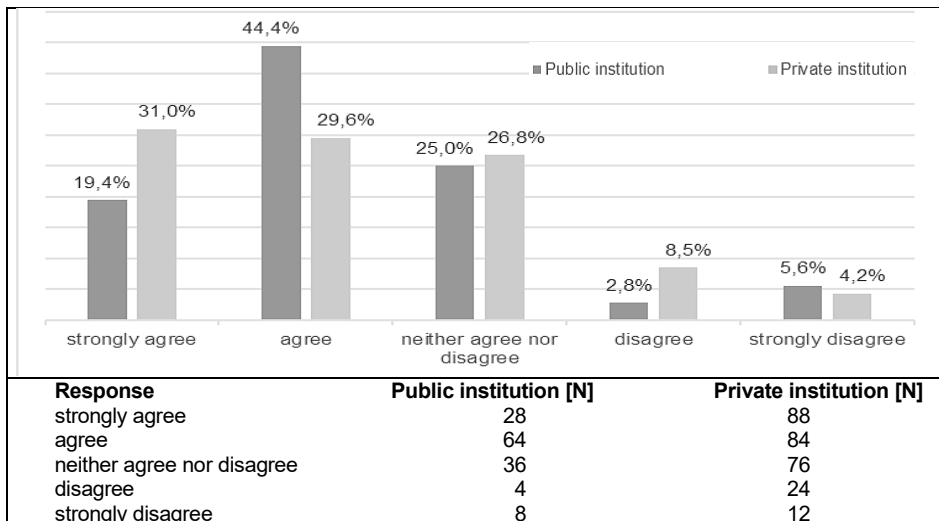


Figure 12. If I were to decide again, I would choose the same institution
Source: Own calculation on the basis of research results.

The advantage of each organisation is the positive opinion of its students. With regard to the results, the respondents stated that the institutions functioned properly. Both students of public (75%) and private institutions (42.3%) responded positively to questions regarding their functioning, which is confirmed by the evaluation of the learning conditions – 69.4% and 71.8% respectively. Given the advantages of the institutions the respondents referred to their culture with respect to innovativeness and entrepreneurship. The results show that most respondents of public (63.8%) and private (53.5%) institutions experienced innovative solutions in terms of education and organisation, as well as the influence of business in the lives of the institutions.

The study confirms that education quality is crucial for higher education institutions in order to distinguish themselves on the market. The vast majority of respondents pay attention to this aspect. Students appreciate the efforts of institutions in the process of increasing education quality (66.7% in public and 46.5% in private institutions). The aforementioned quality is provided by competent teaching staff, whose efforts are appreciated by students (61.2% in public and 60.6% in private institutions). Apart from the competence of the teaching staff, the students of public and private institutions also indicated their practical and friendly attitude (69.4% and 81.7% respectively).

The organisational climate created by the institutions which fosters making contacts (63.9% in public and 88.7% in private institutions) results in

the fact that people feel good in the groups in which they work, thus noticing their own abilities in the scope of working in groups, as confirmed by the results (75% and 88.7% respectively). The atmosphere prevents conflicts among students (75% in public and 91.6% in private institutions). Positive relations between students as well as between students and staff build a positive atmosphere in the organisation.

Meetings and events organised in the academic environment should reinforce positive relationships. However, the results do not confirm this. 63.8% of students in public and 83.1% of students in private institutions do not participate in juvenilia (TN: annual events organised for higher education students), conferences, expos or research clubs.

At the same time, 30.6% of students in public and 28.2% of students in private institutions declare affiliation with their schools, which may be surprising as 69.4% and 71.8% of respondents respectively, given the choice of selecting a higher education institution, would make the same choice.

Summary

The elements of organisational culture indicated in the article confirm its significance, which consequently projects onto the evaluation of the organisations by students. Elements of organisational culture are not and should not be regarded separately. They constitute an integral totality, which should be regarded and improved by the academic environment holistically.

In response to the research problem: which internal factors influence the formation of organisational culture at a university, research has shown

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that organisational culture has a significant impact on the functioning of the organisation, and therefore the level of services it provides; including above all the quality of education.

Therefore, based on the analysed results, we can infer that the key determining factors of organisational culture are: education quality, competency and attitude of academic staff, positive conditions for establishing contacts, conditions fostering group work, functioning of higher education institutions. The identification of these factors of organisational culture allows us to formulate the following recommendations:

- development of teaching staff through training, enhancing their knowledge and skills in the scope of using innovative educational tools, access to information on current market and educational trends, exchange of knowledge and experiences with other academics in Poland and abroad;
- creating conditions in accordance with the idea of work-life balance for both academic staff and students;
- creating attractive and effective systems of internal communication in higher education institutions, allowing access to organisational and educational information as well as information regarding cultural and academic events.

The recommendations listed above are reasonable. However, given that teaching staff and students are both creators and recipients of organisational culture, the decision-making process requires that the needs of both groups be taken into consideration.

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