Research Article

The Role of Organisational Culture on the Occurrence of Workplace Bullying: Effects on Organisational Commitment and Job Satisfaction

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Abstract

This paper focuses on workplace bullying and the relation of its occurrence with the organisational culture and values. Although a significant amount and level of research has been realised on workplace bullying, it mostly focuses on the incidence and implications of the phenomenon for the individual experiencing it (victim), or the one exercising it (bully). Based on a 364-respondent's survey, we explore the relation of the incidence of workplace bullying with the 9 dimensions of organisational culture, as developed for the Globe research project which, along with the Hofstede one, is one of the most renowned studies on organisational culture. Concurrently, the relation of the 9 organisational culture dimensions with organisational commitment and job satisfaction are explored. This work furthers the study of organisational culture on dispositional and attitudinal measures, while it is one of the first to examine the relation of the incidence of workplace bullying based on organizational culture.

Keywords: Workplace bullying, Organisational culture, Commitment, Job satisfaction, Greece, Negative acts questionnaire, Globe

INTRODUCTION

The term "workplace bullying" was introduced in the early 1990's, to represent a rather common, with very serious repercussions, yet overlooked phenomenon. At the time, it was noticed that severe stress is caused to employees by constant and repeated intimidating and demoting actions occurring in their everyday life, and to which they have difficulty to stand up to. At the time, sexual harassment was a much debated issue and the early researchers of workplace bullying noticed the similarity among the two phenomena, especially in terms of frequency and severity of impact on well-being [1].

To give a definition, "Bullying takes place when one or more persons systematically and over time feel that they have been subjected to negative treatment on the part of one or more persons, in a situation which the person(s) exposed to the treatment have difficulty in defending themselves against them. It is not bullying when two equally strong opponents are in conflict with each other" [2,3]. As Einarsen put it, workplace bullying has two main features: repeated and enduring aggressive behaviours (a) that are intended to be hostile and/or perceived as hostile (b) by the recipient [1]. The aim of the current research is to explore whether organisational traits, such as organisational culture- practiced and desired value system- is related to specific levels of workplace bullying.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature on workplace bullying could be divided in two broad sets of studies

Studies focusing on the measurement and assessment of the bullying phenomenon: Despite the many years since workplace bullying first started to be discussed, a major issue in the workplace literature still remains the assessment of bullying occurrence. Many recent papers deal and focus on the issue of how we should measure

workplace bullying (see for example Einarsen et al. [4] and Notelaers et al. [5]. In a recent work, Nielsen et al. [3] have performed a review on international studies reporting prevalence of workplace bullying and found that the percentage of bullying occurrence ranges from 1 to 55%, depending on the type of measurement used and the country in which the study was realised. A recently presented study in Greece has indicated that workplace bullying in 800 white-collar workers occurs at 13% of the sample, with the use of a very conservative measurement technique of the phenomenon [6]. Therefore, despite the differences observed in the exact occurrence level, depending on the specific study and research setting, workplace bullying is a reality and its incidence has been repeatedly documented in the past.

Studies focusing on the measurement and assessment of the bullying phenomenon: Some of the reported effects of workplace bullying are anxiety, irritability, feelings of depression, paranoia, mood swings, feelings of helplessness, lowered self-esteem, physical symptoms, social isolation and maladjustment, psychosomatic illnesses, depression, helplessness, anger, anxiety, despair, burnout, lowered job satisfaction and wellbeing [7-9]. Many researchers have focused on the long-term effects of bullying at work, notably Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) [7,10]. Apart from its direct effects, bullying also has indirect implications on long-term behaviours. One of the most characteristic, for the depth of the outcomes of bullying, is counter-aggression by the victim [11].

A somewhat different way to approach workplace bullying is from the organizational standpoint. The effects of bullying don't only restrict to the victim(s) of bullying. Much has been written about organizational or group effects, such as the quality of the working environment [2], or the intention to leave [12]. On the other hand, organizations are seen as both responsible for the incidence of bullying [13-16] and the key to reducing the frequency of the phenomenon or the severity of its impact [17-25].

The Role of Organizational Culture

Organizational culture is seen by business and organization scientists as both the key in changing things to the best and an impediment when attempting to alter negative behaviours. To put it in simple terms, culture is "the way we do things around here", so it both makes members of a group identify with each other and allows them to make

apart from non-members. organizational culture may either support or obstruct workplace bullying. For example, one of the early studies on workplace bullying focused on the military culture, as fostering the occurrence of the phenomenon [26]. On the other hand, a "culture of respect" is proposed as a way to diminish the probability of workplace bullying occurrence [25]. However, there has not been any significant research relating recognized organizational culture dimensions with workplace bullying occurrence.

One of the most recognised studies on organisational culture globally is the Globe project, under the direction of the late Robert House. This methodology is based largely on Hofstede's work and is one of the most well-known global initiatives to study organisational culture [27,28]. The nine cultural dimensions measured under the Globe methodology are:

- Uncertainty Avoidance: Practices adopted to avoid the uncertainty existing among societal members

- Future Orientation: The degree to which individuals in organizations or societies engage in future-oriented behaviors (e.g. Planning, investing in the future, delaying gratification).

- Power Distance: Centralization and the gap in power between different hierarchical levels of society

- Institutional Collectivism: The extent to which society favors cooperative, vs individualistic behaviour

- Humane Orientation: Support of human beings including generosity, concern and friendliness

- Performance Orientation: The extent to which an organization or society encourages and rewards group members for performance improvement and excellence.

- Family Collectivism: Family/internal group emphasis. Strength of the family/friends bond.

- Gender Egalitarianism: The extent to which society tries to minimize the different roles of the two sexes

- Assertiveness: The degree to which individuals are encouraged to be dominant and aggressive.

### The role of Organizational Commitment and Job Satisfaction

Two focal employee attitudes that have been traditionally studied in conjunction with personal and organizational effectiveness and results are organizational commitment and job satisfaction. However, these two attitudinal traits, though studied in-depth and in relation with multiple effectiveness indicators [29], have not been studied in relation with workplace bullying. In fact, the study of workplace bullying effects mostly focuses on effects on behaviors (such as for example, depression, productivity or counter-agression), rather than on attitudes. The sole such research that we identified is one focusing on the "intention to leave" [12], which again is not purely an attitude, but rather an intention for a specific behavior.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The current paper tackles with three major questions:

1. Does organisational culture and values have an impact on the frequency of occurrence or intensity of workplace bullying? Which culture dimensions are mostly related with the incidence of workplace bullying and how should organisations with a culture "friendly" to bullying phenomena could shield themselves from its occurrence?

2. How does workplace bullying affect the overall organisational commitment?

3. How does workplace bullying affect job satisfaction?

The above questions and relations that we attempt to test are graphically depicted in Graph 1 that follows:

Graph 1: Research relations examined.
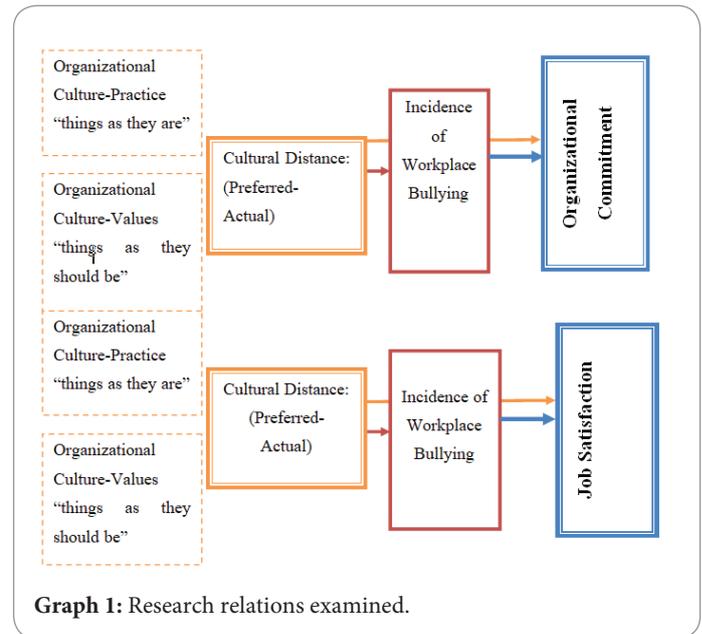
As Graph 1 shows, we are going to examine whether cultural distance (The dissonance between actual and desired culture of the firm) is connected with the incidence of workplace bullying on the one hand and with job satisfaction and organizational commitment on the other. The connection of workplace bullying and job satisfaction and organizational commitment are also going to be examined.

Research Methodology

Sample and data

A survey to 364 white-collar workers from different companies of diverse sectors was conducted in spring and autumn 2011. Convenience sampling was used: we gathered 4-10 employees with at least 2-years working experience from each organisation that we visited and we asked each of them to complete a questionnaire.

Measurement and scales

Organisational Culture: Organisational culture was measured and assessed with the use of the Globe questionnaire on Organisational culture. This instrument has been used extensively as a way to evaluate 9 major cultural dimensions of an organisation and is considered as one of the most reliable scales for the measurement of organisational culture, globally [27,30]. It measures, through a 7-point Likert-type scale, 9 cultural dimensions through 34 questions on the organisational culture "as it is" and 41 questions on organisational culture "as it should be", therefore identifying two organisational cultures/ value systems: the actual and the ideal.

The nine cultural dimensions measured through the questionnaire were explained above and are the following:

- Uncertainty Avoidance
- Future Orientation
- Power Distance
- Institutional Collectivism
- Humane Orientation
- Performance Orientation
- Family Collectivism

	Mean	Minimum	Maximum	Std. Deviation
Age	38.70	20	65	9.489
Years in education	15.73	6	23	2.877
Working Experience	15.02	2	36	9.391
Working Experience with current Employer	10.18	2	36	8.762
Number of subordinates	5.89	0	140	16.775
Organizational levels to the top	2.54	0	10	1.736
Organizational levels to the bottom	1.81	0	7	1.699
	Frequency			
Traits of respondent:	Male	51.4%		
	Female	48.6%		
	Married	55.2%		
	With children	50.8%		
Traits of his/her Department:	Management	32.4%		
	Procurement	2.8%		
	Engineering, production	3.1%		
	R & D	1.4%		
	Sales	17.9%		
	HR or personnel mgt	6.7%		
	Trade	3.1%		
	Design	1.4%		
	Support services	9.2%		
	Other	22%		

Table 1: Descriptives for the sample of the 364 respondents.

	Mean	Std. Deviation
Culture "As Is"		
Uncertainty Avoidance "As Is"	4.4696	1.21895
Future Orientation "As Is"	4.267	1.47449
Power Distance "As Is"	3.7366	1.14648
Institutional Collectivism "As Is"	4.1473	1.34886
Humane Orientation "As Is"	4.5205	1.16987
Performance Orientation "As Is"	4.1793	1.25703
Family Collectivism "As Is"	4.6751	1.18162
Gender Egalitarialism "As Is"	3.3867	1.05222
Assertiveness "As Is"	4.0983	0.72576
Culture as things "Should be"		
Uncertainty Avoidance "Should Be"	5.3161	0.79575
Future Orientation "Should Be"	5.4349	0.95303
Power Distance "Should Be"	2.9042	0.9247
Reverse Institutional Collectivism "Should Be"	5.0801	0.80818
Humane Orientation "Should Be"	5.1017	0.75584
Performance Orientation "Should Be"	5.3957	81579
Family Collectivism "Should be"	5.4282	0.89186
Gender Egalitarialism "Should be"	4.5674	0.86166
Assertiveness "Should be"	4.9194	1.08816
Difference of Culture "Should Be"- "As Is"		
Difference Should/Is: Uncertainty Avoidance	0.8465	1.36606
Difference Should/Is: Future Orientation	1.1678	1.58874
Difference Should/Is: Power Distance	-0.832	1.48844
Difference Should/Is: Humane Orientation	0.5813	1.28999
Difference Should/Is: Performance Orientation	1.2164	1.38244
Difference Should/Is: Institutional Collectivism	0.9328	1.60316
Difference Should/Is: Family Collectivism	0.405	1.4811
Difference Should/Is: Gender Egalitarianism	1.1807	1.19908
Difference Should/Is: Assertiveness	0.8211	1.07607

Table 2: Descriptives for the 9 dimensions of organizational culture.

- Gender Egalitarianism
- Assertiveness

Workplace bullying: The authors of the present paper measured the occurrence of bullying with the operational method. The Negative Acts Questionnaire (NAQ) was used, with 21 types of Negative Acts, which may arise within the working environment, such as intimidation, constant critique of work and efforts, rumours, false allegations and others. This instrument is one of the most widely recognised and accepted ways of measuring workplace bullying [4]. The statements describing the different negative acts were followed by a scale from 1= Never, 2= Yes, occasionally, 3= Yes, at least once a month, 4= Yes, at least once a week, 5=yes, every day.

If a respondent answered receiving at least 3 Negative Acts from the list every week or more frequently, we treated this person as a bullying victim. Therefore, the variable of workplace bullying was treated as a dichotomous one of yes/no.

Organisational Commitment: Organisational Commitment was measured with the Meyer and Allen commitment questionnaire [31]. This questionnaire measures, through a 5-point Likert-type scale, 3 dimensions of organisational commitment, i.e. affective, normative and continuance commitment through 27 questions (9 for each dimension) and is most probably the most well-known and widely accepted instrument for the measurement of organisational commitment [29].

Job Satisfaction: Job Satisfaction was measured with the overall job satisfaction questionnaire [32:5]. This questionnaire measures job satisfaction with 3 questions, at a 5-point Likert-type scale, and has been widely used in organisational research, with alpha coefficients ranging from 0.67 to 0.95.

Findings

Profile of the 364 respondents, Table 1, gives a rough image of the sample collected.

Description of the answers that were given

As a way to present the findings on each of the major variables examined here, Table 2 presents the Descriptive for each of the 9 organizational culture dimensions while Table 3 presents the descriptive for workplace bullying occurrence, organizational commitment and job satisfaction.

Relations between the answers received

As a way to examine the relations that we set to test, as in Graph 1, we run a set of correlation analyses between all the organizational culture dimensions, workplace bullying, organizational commitment and job satisfaction. This analysis is depicted in Table 4, as follows:

Having observed the existence of significant correlations between specific cultural dimensions, commitment, satisfaction and the occurrence of workplace bullying, it was deemed necessary to run a test of difference of means between victims and non-victims of workplace bullying, for all the culture dimensions of cultural dissonance (Difference of culture as is and as should be), for organizational commitment (affective, continuance and normative) and for job satisfaction. This analysis is depicted in Table 5 that follows.

	Mean	Std. Deviation
Affective Commitment (1-5)	**3.42**	0.75
Continuance Commitment (1-5)	**3.45**	0.59
Normative Commitment (1-5)	**3.21**	0.64
Job Satisfaction (1-5)	**3.97**	0.70
Victims of Workplace Bullying (suffering at least 3 negative acts once a week – dichotomous variable)	**13.3%** of respondents	

Table 3: Descriptives for organizational commitment, job satisfaction and workplace bullying.

	Affective Commitment	Continuance Commitment	Normative Commitment	Job Satisfaction	Bullying Victim**
Difference Should/Is: Uncertainty Avoidance	-0.262		-0.193		
Difference Should/Is: Future Orientation	-0.258		-0.190		0.151
Difference Should/Is: Power Distance	0.458		0.301		
Difference Should/Is: Humane Orientation	-0.352	+0.143	-0.196		0.156
Difference Should/Is: Performance Orientation	-0.261		-0.246		
Difference Should/Is: Institutional Collectivism	-0.320	+0.184	-0.198		0.143
Difference Should/Is: Family Collectivism	-0.471	+0.163	-0.281		0.180
Difference Should/Is: Gender Egalitarianism					
Difference Should/Is: Assertiveness	-0.139				
Affective Commitment	1.00	0.159	0.668	0.543	-0.150
Continuance Commitment	0.159	1.00	0.241	0.343	
Normative Commitment	0.668	0.241	1.00	0.449	-0.166
Job Satisfaction	0.543	0.343	0.449	1.00	-0.150
Bullying Victim**	-0.150		-0.166	-0.150	1.00

Table 4: Correlations (Only statistically significant, at the 0.05 level, Correlations are depicted).

**Being a bullying victim or not is a dichotomous variable, therefore, for only for this variable, the correlations depicted are Spearman's Rho.

		F	Sig.	Mean	Std. Deviation
Difference Should/Is: Uncertainty Avoidance	No bullying	2.338	0.127	0.8036	1.34788
	Bullying			1.1267	1.46350
Difference Should/Is: *Future Orientation*	No bullying	8.419	**0.004**	1.0740	1.57479
	Bullying			1.7813	1.55842
Difference Should/Is: Power Distance	No bullying	6.633	0.010	-0.7542	1.41554
	Bullying			-1.3438	1.83427
Difference Should/Is: Humane Orientation	No bullying	14.724	**0.000**	0.4814	1.19196
	Bullying			1.2344	1.67856
Difference Should/Is: Performance Orientation	No bullying	8.247	**0.004**	1.1356	1.30208
	Bullying			1.7448	1.74923
Difference Should/Is: Institutional Collectivism	No bullying	10.159	**0.002**	0.8291	1.52885
	Bullying			1.6111	1.90599
Difference Should/Is: Family Collectivism	No bullying	15.502	**0.000**	0.2875	1.42070
	Bullying			1.1736	1.64682
Difference Should/Is: Gender Egalitarianism	No bullying	0.151	0.698	1.1903	1.17738
	Bullying			1.1181	1.34435
Difference Should/Is: Assertiveness	No bullying	1.653	0.199	0.7927	1.00381
	Bullying			1.0069	1.46379
Affective Commitment	No bullying	12.301	**0.001**	3.4705	0.72841
	Bullying			3.0666	0.83481
Continuance Commitment	No bullying	0.381	0.537	3.4435	0.57231
	Bullying			3.5000	0.69669
Normative Commitment	No bullying	14.599	**0.000**	3.2647	0.61451
	Bullying			2.8906	0.73641
Job Satisfaction	No bullying	13.538	**0.000**	4.0265	0.65890
	Bullying			3.6319	0.88122

Table 5: Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) for victims and non victims of workplace bullying.

DISCUSSION

Graph 2, bellow, depicts the main relations found through our analyses. Each arrow represents a significant and meaningful relation between the two variables that it connects.

It should be underlined that, as expected, all the 3 dimensions of commitment are positively and significantly correlated with each other. Graph 2 does not show these correlations for reasons of presentation cleanness.

Graph 1: Confirmation of Research relations that were tested.

Effects on Job Satisfaction

From the relations depicted in Graph 2, the first that asks for attention is the fact that organisational cultural distance (desired-practiced values), although significantly correlated with specific dimensions of commitment, is not related with job satisfaction. So, it seems that respondents are not affected by organisational culture and value dissonance, when they express how much their job satisfies them. However, as one would expect, the victims of workplace bullying reported significantly lower job satisfaction than non-victims.

Effects on different facets of organisational commitment: three groups of cultural dimensions

Another important finding was that continuance commitment appears to relate with organisational culture, in a much differentiated way, if compared to the other two organisational commitment dimensions (Affective and normative). For example, people who find that humane orientation should be higher in their firm are more committed to the firm from concern on what their employment alternatives are (continuance commitment), while they are less affectively or normatively committed. The same is true for in-group (1) and out-group (2) Collectivism, so we named these three cultural dimensions (Humane orientation and the two collectivisms) "Group 1 Cultural Dimensions". All these dimensions are related with the occurrence of workplace bullying in a positive way, so people reporting being bullied would also wish for a higher value practice of the specific culture dimension (More humane orientation, more collectivism). This is a very meaningful and useful result, as it shows that companies with higher collectivism and humane orientation values are less nurturing for bullying behaviours.
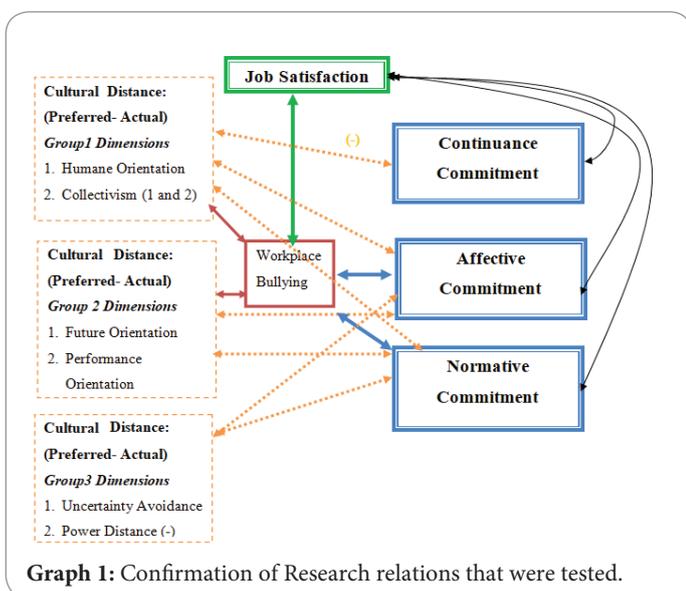
We also identified a second group of cultural dimensions, which also had a significant correlation with the occurrence of workplace bullying, as was also confirmed through ANOVA. These two cultural dimensions are Future Orientation and Performance Orientation. Bullying victims wished for a higher practice of these cultural dimensions, than non-bullying victims did. It makes sense that none of these dimensions showed any relation with the level of continuance commitment, but they were significantly correlated with affective and normative commitment. Therefore, in organisations with less dissonance (Values-practice) in future orientation and performance orientation culture, commitment (Affective and normative) is higher and bullying more scarce.

The third group of cultural dimensions gathers two dimensions, i.e. uncertainty avoidance and power distance. Both of them are related with affective and normative commitment, as the people wishing for higher future orientation and lower power distance are prone to be less affectively and normatively committed to the organisation. This discrepancy, however, is not related with the occurrence of workplace bullying. So, bullying victims do not wish for a different practice of these cultural dimensions than non-victims. This is very important and actually striking. One would expect that power distance is something that people who receive bullying would like to be diminished. It should be kept in mind that the most common bully for employees still proves to be the supervisor. A lower power distance might allow for the bullying victims to stand up against their persecutor, but this is not expressed through our research findings.

CONCLUSIONS

This study confirmed previous studies' findings on the occurrence of workplace bullying in Greece [6], positioning it at 13% of the sample. This underlines the critical importance of studying and taking measures against this quite common phenomenon within organisations. Bullying was also found to correlate highly with organisational culture dissonance, therefore underlying from another perspective the need for organisations to monitor cultural dissonance and the conflict in personal and organisational values. On this, we should stress that organisations, being responsible for a safe working environment for their employees, have a particular interest to help reduce to the minimum the incidence of bullying phenomena. This does not simply emanate from a social responsibility and ethical stance of the employer. It is a pragmatic and realistic requirement, in order to provide the necessary conditions for good performance and excellence to occur.

In relation with the three research questions that this paper sought to answer:

1.   "Does organisational culture and values have an impact on the frequency of occurrence or intensity of workplace bullying? Which culture dimensions are most related with the incidence of workplace bullying and how should organisations with a culture "friendly" to bullying phenomena could shield themselves from its occurrence?"

Our findings depicted that indeed organisational culture and specifically the difference between desired and manifest organisational culture is significantly related with the occurrence of workplace bullying. This is true for the "Humane Orientation", "Collectivism", "Future Orientation" and "Performance Orientation" cultural dimensions. Therefore, organisations in which individuals feel that humane orientation, collectivism, future and performance orientation are lower than they should are most probable to experience workplace bullying of their members. So, these organisations should focus on adopting practices that diminish this gap between expected values and actions. This also underlines the importance for organisations to align their values and practices to the values of the society in which they operate, as a way to diminish cultural distance.

2.   How does workplace bullying affect organisational commitment?

Our data revealed that bullying is related in a negative way with organisational commitment. Although we are not able to check for the direction of this relation, it is rational to expect that where there is bullying, the commitment is lower (in other words, that the independent variable should be bullying and the dependent, commitment). So, workplace bullying victims are less committed to their organisation, which proves unable to protect them from a very negative experience. On the other hand, continuance commitment, or commitment from concern for the employment alternatives was not found to relate in any way with workplace bullying, as this should be dependent more on the external employment market circumstances, than on experiences with the current employer.

3.   How does workplace bullying affect job satisfaction?

Our findings reveal, as one would expect, that indeed job satisfaction is lower where bullying occurs. Again, the direction of this relation is not known, but it is rather rational to expect that bullying makes people less satisfied with their work.

Limitations and suggestions for future research

This study was exploratory in nature, therefore suffers from the most common weaknesses of exploratory works. Results mostly focus on the existence of relations, and causality is hard, if not impossible to sustain. Another obvious limitation has to do with the sample size (n= 364), which is quite small for a study with a large number of studied variables. Another limitation has to do with the level of analysis, which here was the employee/person. For more meaningful results, it would be useful to focus on the organisational level, with more individuals answering from each organisation, so that comparisons are done at the organisational level.

A suggestion for future research, therefore, has to do with a more large-scale research that would allow both for comparisons within the organisation and across organisations with different organisational culture. If, in addition, this were realised at the international level, it would also allow to better control the effect of national culture on the difference between desired and manifest organisational culture, which would be of most value especially to multinationals, where the discrepancy between desired and actual culture is most pronounced due to different national backgrounds of the individuals involved.

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