

Michał Piotr Missan

The concept regarding organizational culture of units of the State Emergency Medical Services in the conditions of functioning of the health care system in Poland

(abstract of the doctoral dissertation)

The reason for undertaking the research included in the dissertation was the gap connected with the lack of studies regarding organizational culture of units of the State Emergency Medical Services. According to many authors organizational culture is important for the efficiency of emergency medical services. Meanwhile, the system of State Emergency Medical Services was established in 2007 through the transformation of the former Ambulance Service. Interesting and important are questions – what organizational culture has evolved within new organizational framework, to what extent is it consistent across the country and (ultimately) whether it supports the actions of SEMS units in the conditions of the health care system in Poland.

The author set three main research goals:

- verification – to what extent the actual organizational culture of units in the SEMS system is adapted to its conditions,
- creation of a concept for adapting organizational culture to the conditions of functioning of SEMS system units,
- development of a methodology for designing organizational culture adjusted to the conditions of the functioning of SEMS system units.

The implementation of the cognitive and application goals was aimed at achieving the methodological goal. The study covered units of the SEMS system understood as medical rescue teams operating within health care facilities (doctors, paramedics, nurses and drivers). Due to the different nature of the conducted activities, the scope of the study did not include medical air rescue teams, hospital emergency wards and administrative units included in the SEMS system.

The research methodology was assigned to the set goals. When designing the research methodology, the author used methodological triangulation via the use of many research techniques: analysis of the source literature and legal acts, analysis of documentation of the

examined units, individual interviews, group interviews, as well as analysis of survey questionnaires. Research tools – scenarios of individual and group interviews, questionnaires – are important parts of the methodology. In the opinion of the author of the dissertation, the methodology (after slight adaptation changes) can be used in various industries. A wide group of participants of the SEMS system operating at its various levels took part in the research: from the national consultant in the field of emergency medicine, through managers of medical rescue units to individual members of emergency medical teams.

In his approach to the identification, evaluation and designing of organizational culture, the author used typologies of organizational culture based on the following dimensions:

- individualism - collectivism,
- conservatism - innovation,
- low tolerance of uncertainty – high tolerance of uncertainty.

Additionally, the research on the characteristics of the desired and actual culture used standards and values, as well as basic assumptions (the second and third levels of culture proposed in the Schein's model). The M. Czerska's approach was used in the identification of requirements towards culture. It determines the selection of culture with a type of strategy (perfect strategy in the case of the analyzed organization) and requirements resulting from the analysis of organizational culture's determinants. On this basis, research tools were developed. They made it possible, with the participation of a wide group of participants of the SEMS system, to identify the actual (current) organizational culture and determine the desired organizational culture. Comparison of these two cultures made it possible to understand the size and characteristics of the "cultural gap". The identified gap became the starting point for the design of the concept of adapting the organizational culture to the conditions of functioning of SEMS system units.

On the basis of the conducted research, it can be stated that there is a certain discrepancy between the existing (real) culture and the requirements resulting from its conditions, including the perfect strategy. The desired culture, i. e. the culture resulting from the existing conditions, should be characterized by a low level of uncertainty tolerance, a high level of collectivism and an average level of innovation. Meanwhile, the actual culture is characterized by an average level of the analyzed three dimensions. Therefore, there is a "cultural gap" – particularly, in terms of collectivism and tolerance of uncertainty. Furthermore, the author analyzed the perception of real culture by comparing independent emergency medical stations with emergency medical units in hospitals. No significant differences were identified between these two groups. The perception of culture in various groups of professions was also analyzed. A higher level of collectivism was observed in the group of drivers that in the overall results. In

the group of nurses, the culture with a lower level of uncertainty tolerance, a higher level of collectivism and a higher level of innovation (compared to the overall results) was noted. It is worth adding that such functions of organizational culture as integration, adaptation, identification with the organization and a sense of community, which seem to be very important in the examined units, are only fulfilled to an average degree.

The author has identified a number of possible effects of the “cultural gap”. The key effects include:

- unsatisfactory level of teamwork and employee involvement,
- non-use of the best practices while saving health and life,
- reluctance of employees to change (focusing on existing solutions).

According to the author, the indicated effects limit the possibility of implementing the mission of the SEMS system, which is defined as providing assistance to every person in a state of sudden health emergency.

In order to minimize the “cultural gap” and make an adjustment towards a desired culture that matches the conditions of functioning of SEMS system units, a program of changes has been suggested. The starting point for the work was to define the target of change and the direction of changes in attitudes and behaviors of employees in SEMS system units. When developing the concept of changes, an evolutionary approach was applied. Many models described in the literature were used.

The changes were planned at two organizational levels: in units of the SEMS system and separate at the level of the SEMS system (common to system’s units). Within the framework of changes at the level of SEMS system units, a number of actions were proposed, grouped into three stages:

- stage 1: Building foundations for the change,
- stage 2: Changing behavior and thinking,
- stage 3: Development of organizational culture.

Within the framework of activities at the level of the entire SEMS system (common for system units), over a dozen activities undertaken by, among others, the Parliament, the Ministry of Health, the National Health Fund, Province Governors and industry organizations were proposed. Central activities will increase the effectiveness of cultural change and (simultaneously) ensure the maintenance of a coherent organizational culture in the whole SEMS system.

The culmination of the concept is a proposal for the organizational of cultural change. An approach, according to which cultural change should be treated as a project and therefore managed in accordance with the rules of project management, was adopted. It was proposed to establish teams for culture at the level of individual units of the SEMS system, at the level of each voivodeship, as well as a nationwide team. The program of changes concerns a delicate area – attitudes and behaviors of employees that can have a significant impact on the health and life of patients. For this reason, the concept was subject to consultations in a group of industry experts and with the participation of the national consultant in the field of emergency medicine. The consultations confirmed the accuracy of the suggested concept.

The implementation of the first and second goals made it possible to achieve the last, methodological target of the dissertation. The author prepared the methodology of designing culture, from the stage of analyzing the conditions of culture and diagnosis of the existing culture, through the identification of the desired culture to the design of implementation actions.

Keywords: organizational culture, units of the State Medical Emergency Services system, strategy, “cultural gap”, cultural change.