

Organizational Culture within Romanian Private Universities. Case Study: “Danubius” University of Galați

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Abstract

Within the pervasive situational context of crisis, Romanian universities seem to go through a twofold change: on the one hand, a paradigmatic metamorphosis into supermarkets of academic services, on the other hand, a shift from the place of knowledge into the perfect place of corruption. Having as theoretical background K.S. Cameron and R.E. Quinn’s Competing Values Map and G. Hofstede, G.J. Hofstede’s cultural dimensions, we aim at analyzing the organizational culture profile of a private university (Danubius University of Galati), based on a hierarchy of the culture type for the current and preferred situations and on the prominence of cultural dimensions.

Keywords: organizational culture profile, OCAI, VSM, culture types, cultural dimensions

Introduction

The university today finds itself in a quite novel position in society. It faces a new role with few precedents to fall back on ... we are just now perceiving that the university’s invisible project, knowledge, may be the most powerful single element of our culture, affecting the rise and fall of professions and even of social classes, of regions, and even of nations.” (C. Kerr, 1963, in Lester, 2005, p. 5) Through knowledge, identified with an invisible product by Clark Kerr, universities become „mechanisms that enable a direct valorization (...) of people’s ability to create trust, affect and shared meanings” (Arvidsson, 2005, p. 236). These three effects are obtained through education, a significant contribution that universities bring to a country’s social stability. Beyond this role, there persists the idea that universities are public spaces where there is a permanent dialogue between the local communities regarding the future direction of markets and technologies (Lester, 2005).

Alongside local industries, universities are involved into an innovative process of reciprocal influence among its main stakeholders, namely teachers and students. In order for these outcomes to be achieved, universities should be focused on what Adam Arvidsson (2005, p. 237) labels as „an ethical surplus”, namely a social relationship, a shared meaning and an emotional involvement of the stakeholders. Universities, more than any other organization, offer for “a symbolic consumption”, those [+human] products that will never be out of fashion, namely the persons that are supposed to help the society through knowledge. We consider that this is the main reason why universities might be considered the best embodiment of the six elements of the organizational culture mentioned by S. Beugelsdijk, C. I. Koen, N. G. Noorderhaven (2006, p. 833): results, employees, innovation, team, stability and communication.

1. Universities and the paradigmatic turn in the age of organizational crisis

Characterized by a rapid flow of events, a lack of information and a limited control of the organization (Coman, 2001; Marconi, 2007), a crisis brings besides the financial and public safety losses (Coombs, 2007), another important threat, namely the loss of reputation. Thus there is a twofold aspect that every organization should take into account:

- on the one hand, managers should consider the syntagm, “Think negatively”, mentioned by Kathleen Fearn-Banks (2002), as their guiding slogan and envisage any type of crisis, provoked either by acts of nature or by (un)intentional acts, having violent or nonviolent outcomes (Newsom, Turk & Kruckeberg, 1996);
- on the other hand, managers should take into account the fact that the best solution to go through a crisis is to be aware of its fivefold stage (Fearn-Banks, 2002, p. 8): detection, prevention, containment, recovery and learning.

The 20th century brought a new insight on organizational relations which should not involve only the clients and consumers, but the internal stakeholder as well. The importance of the employees is highlighted by Alan T. Belasen (2008, p. 28) in the competing values framework for organizational communication, where besides three types of relations (media, investor and government), there are also mentioned the employee relations.

Thus, there is assigned a significant role to internal communication within the process of building and preserving the organizational credibility and legitimacy especially during crisis situations. The basic activities within this competing values framework focus on aligning identity with external image, on assimilating, integrating and motivating the employees. This focus on employees determined Simon Barrow to introduce in 1990 the syntagm “employer brand”. Denying the fact that this concept is related to the truth distortion, Barrow claims that the employer brand implies “the reality of every work aspect within an organization”, which is based not only on the financial rewarding, but rather on a change within the management of the employee. The metamorphosis of this organizational reality will have as outcome the attaining of a level of concentration, coherence and involvement expected from every employee, considered by Simon Barrow (in Ionescu, 2008, p. 20), “the most valuable client” of the organization.

The reality of the employer brand relies on the organizational culture (Ionescu, 2008, p. 56). The elements¹ that form the organizational identity presented in the conceptual metaphor (employer brand = a house) could be related to what Geert Hofstede and Gert Jan Hofstede (2005, p. 282) identify as features of organizational culture: *holism* (the part-whole paradigm is overtaken by the organic paradigm where there is a constant interweaving between elements); *historical determinance* (the future of an organization feeds on the past), *anthropologically bound* (rituals or heroes become indices of the employees’ participation and performance), *socially constructed* (the employees play an important role in the shaping of culture), *softness* (the employees’ hearts and minds seem to prevail more than their behavior²), *resistant to change* (corporate cultures need time to be implemented within the publics’ mental maps).

“A result of a collective experience” (Hofstede, Hofstede, 2005, p. 7), organizational culture, a syntagm introduced by Pettigrew in 1979, is “the integrated pattern of human behavior that includes through, speech, and artifacts (...)” (Deal, Kennedy, 2000, p. 4). The fact that culture has been considered the core element for every organization is supported by John M.T. Balmer (2001, p. 263), who provides the representation of the corporate identity mix as two overlapped triangles whose center is culture. Around this backbone there lie corporate elements, such as communication, strategy and structure (within the first triangle), and environment, publics and reputation (within the second triangle). As every postmodern organization, universities have suffered a paradigmatic metamorphosis: from the fortress of light or the door open to knowledge to the space of an academic supermarket of services within the new age of consumerism.

The Romanian academic environment constitutes the situational context where there could be noticed a tight bond between the organizational culture and the process of change. This dependence could be approached through the fourfold aspects of the organizational discourse, mentioned by Norman Fairclough (2005, p. 932), namely emergence (the new discourses are caused by other existing discourses); hegemony (the dominance of a new type of discourse and its influence upon organizational strategies); recontextualization (the dissemination of emergently hegemonic discourses across scalar boundaries, at the local, regional, national, and international scale); operationalization (the enactment of a new identity by an emphasis laid on different styles of interaction). We will correlate these elements of organizational change with the results of the Barometer of Quality on the state of quality of higher education in Romania (Vlăsceanu, Hânceanu, Voicu & Tufiş, 2009):

- *emergence*. After 1990, Romania had gone through a double change at the discursive level: a) at the micro-level: the emergence of private universities, the self-financing of public universities, facts that led to a number of 115 universities in 2009 (*Focus on Higher Education in Europe 2010: The Impact of the Bologna Process*); b) at the macro-level: the impact of the Bologna process. The elements within the indicators regarding the state of quality of Romanian higher education (Vlăsceanu, Hânceanu, Voicu & Tufiş, 2009), that were perceived as positive, mainly focused on the implementation of a new study cycle, on the access to further university cycles, or to the international participation into the process of quality assurance. But unfortunately, the student mobilities, the participation in life-long-learning programmes, or transparency of educational offers provided by universities have been perceived weak points.

¹ M.A. Ionescu (2008, 75) considers that “to build an employer brand means to build a house”. Using Van Gool’s story (*Three Little Pigs*) as the source-concept, M.A. Ionescu makes visible one important compositional element of a house, namely the texture (the stone house being more resistant than the straw and the wooden houses).

² This statement belongs to Thomas Peters and Richard Waterman (1982: xvii), who make a plea for “excellent companies” whose main objective should be “the conquest of the employees’ hearts and minds” through a managing of their thoughts and feelings.

- *hegemony*. The implementation of the Bologna process has determined a uniformization at the European level of the academic structure and of the credit assignment. On the other hand, the self-financing caused the dominance of an academic discourse focused on organizational strategies whose outcome is a financial profit which is desired, in many cases, to be associated with an intellectual profit. This twofold profit could be linked to the problem of corruption. 68% of the students who took part in the survey on the state of quality of higher education in Romania consider that corruption is a more pervasive phenomenon in private universities than in public universities.
- *recontextualization*. The Romanian academic practices are disseminated both at the local and the national and international levels, through conferences, Erasmus, Leonardo da Vinci and Jean Monet agreements or (inter)national projects. Despite the fact that these types of mobility have been perceived as weak points in the Barometer of Quality on Romanian higher education (2009), we consider that both the student and teacher flow and the cognitive flow bear a double dependence: on the one hand, they are closely related to the European academic hegemonic discourse, and on the other hand, they survive due to the diversity that resides within this unity.
- *operationalization*. Diversity depends on the embodiment of a new identity through the choice of different interaction styles. Within the academic environment, there should be placed an emphasis not only on the student, a dynamic stakeholder, but also on teachers, a stable stakeholder, which provides the cohesion and coherence of a university throughout time. This type of discursive operationalization will be analysed at the microlevel, within a Romanian private university.

2. Beyond the organizational culture in a private university

The operationalization of a new discourse within the hegemonic context of Europeanization could be visible especially in private universities. Our choice for a private university as empirical data has a twofold aspect:

- on the one hand, private universities are often accused of “a struggle for survival”, namely of using any means in order to attain their ends, hence there lies the problem of cohesion among employees who might suspect each other of attaining more financial benefits than his/ her colleague;
- on the other hand, private universities have mainly been built on a migration process from public universities, hence the organizational cultural profile of a private university (in our case, “Danubius” University of Galati) is strongly dependent on the employees’ previous academic experiences in the public sector.

2.1. Objectives

Having as theoretical background, K.S. Cameron and R.E. Quinn’s Competing Values Map (clan, adhocracy, hierarchy, market) and G. Hofstede, G.J. Hofstede’s cultural dimensions (power distance index, individualism, masculinity, avoidance index, long term orientation), our analysis focuses on the aim of achieving the culture profile of a Romanian private university. Our research study was guided by the following objectives:

- to describe the dominant cultural type of Danubius University of Galati (DUG) as perceived by its employees. This objective was subdivided into: a) to establish a hierarchy of culture types in both current and preferred situations; b) to compare the culture type in current and preferred situations.
- to establish the prominence of cultural dimensions in Danubius University of Galati.

2.2. Hypotheses

Our study was based on three hypotheses:

H1. A private university (DUG) promotes the following hierarchy of dominant culture types: clan, market, adhocracy and hierarchy.

H2. The employees of a private university (DUG) prefer to work in an organization where the dominant culture types are clan and market than in an organization based on hierarchy.

H3. In a private university (DUG) the predominant cultural dimensions are: low power distance index, individualism, masculinity, a low avoidance index, long term orientation.

2.3. Methodology

To test the three hypotheses, there were used two research instruments:

- *OCAI* (the Organizational Culture Assessment Instrument, Cameron, Quinn, 1999). The questionnaire³ is formed of six categories of organizational culture: dominant organizational characteristics, leadership style, management of employees, organizational glue, strategic emphasis, criteria for success.

³ The coefficients of internal consistency using Crombach’s Alpha methodology were the following:

The scoring provided by the respondents for the six categories according to the actual and preferred situations is summed up across the four given answers. The axis scores are plotted on a chart which will show the differences between the present and the preferred situations.

- VSM 94 (Values Survey Module 1994 questionnaire). This quantitative instrument uses the 5-point Likert scale and it is based on the following aspects: a) features of an ideal job; b) important aspects of personal life; c) important aspects at work.

In order to find out the reasons which motivated the respondents' choice for a particular hierarchy of culture types and dimensions, we used a semi-structured interview, run in May, 2010. A sample of 70 respondents was drawn from the DUG employees (N=165), composed of academic staff (n=41) and auxiliary staff (n=29), thus preserving the percentage of 37% - auxiliary staff and 63% academic staff.

2.4. Findings

In order to test the first two hypotheses (**H1**. A private university (DUG) promotes the following hierarchy of dominant culture types: clan, market, adhocracy and hierarchy. **H2**. The employees of a private university (DUG) prefer to work in an organization where the dominant culture types are clan and market than in an organization based on hierarchy), we used the OCAI questionnaire which allows the pinpointing of the dominant culture type according to the positioning of organization on two dimensions: internal/ external focus or integration and flexibility and discretion/ stability and control. Table 1 illustrates a descriptive statistics of the four culture types:

Culture Type	N	Minimum Score	Maximum Score	Mean Score	Std.deviation
A (C)	70	50.00	68.33	31.23	70.45783
A (P)	70	0	68.33	34.00	81.72772
B (C)	70	11.5	50.00	24.54	42.19250
B (P)	70	0	50.00	23.76	50.12118
C (C)	70	0	41.66	22.26	49.89222
C (P)	70	0	28.33	18.97	40.45190
D (C)	70	0	35	20.71	40.34530
D (P)	70	0	35	19.92	48.86200

A = clan; B = adhocracy; C = market; D = hierarchy

(C) – current situation; (P) – preferred situation.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics – culture types – “Danubius” University of Galati

Figure 1 shows a graphical representation of the mean scores obtained in each of the four culture types for both the current and preferred situations of DUG employees using the competing values framework axis.

Culture Type	Reliability Coefficients for Current Situation	Reliability Coefficients for Preferred Situation	Comparison Reliability Coefficients*
Clan	.80	.77	.82
Adhocracy	.75	.72	.83
Market	.90	.84	.67
Hierarchy	.62	.79	.78

* Reliability coefficients reported by Cameron & Quinn (1999).

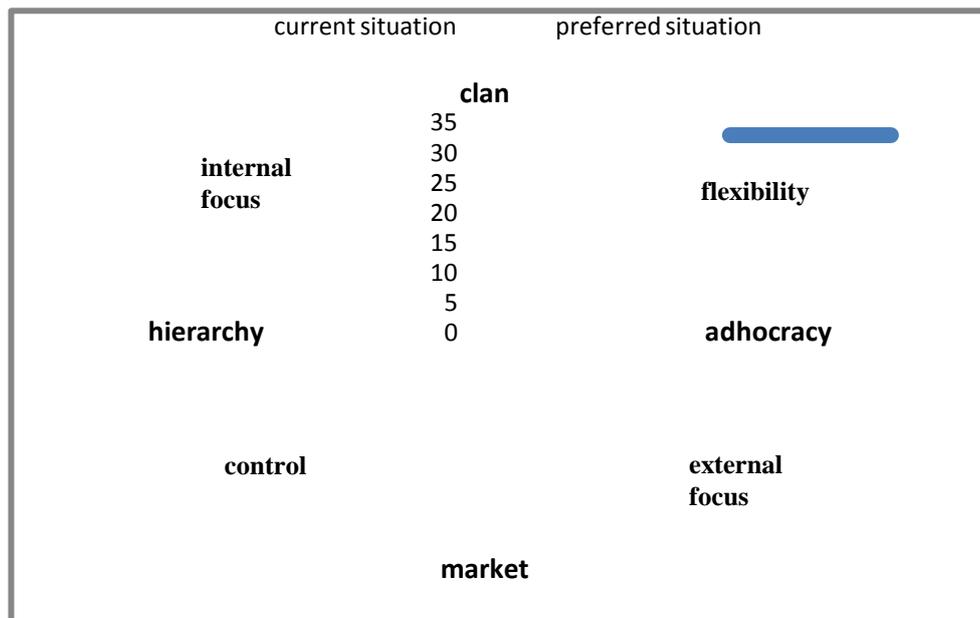


Figure 1. Graphical representation of the highest mean scores in the four culture types for both actual and preferred situations of DUG employees

The strength of the dominant culture exhibited by the DUG employees is related to the number of points assigned to a specific culture type. Table 2 illustrates the mean scores obtained for the current situation:

Culture types	Current situation	Preferred situation
Clan	31.23	34
Adhocracy	24.54	23.76
Market	22.26	18.97
Hierarchy	20.71	19.92

Table 2 – The current situation of culture types (Danubius University of Galati)

The scores for the four culture types partially confirm the first hypothesis, namely Danubius University of Galati promotes a hierarchy where the most dominant culture type is the clan, followed by adhocracy, market and hierarchy cultures. There could be observed a dominance of Clan culture types (31.23), focused on family, where the paternal figure has a twofold embodiment: at the macrolevel, the rector, at the microlevel, the dean or the head of the department. The analysis of the semi-structured interviews highlighted the fact that there are some relational rituals (of celebrating: Christmas or New Year’s Eve parties; of helping colleagues: moral or financial support) which might constitute signs of a group cohesion.

As we have mentioned, the first hypothesis is partially confirmed because there could be noticed a downplay of the Market Culture Type whose mean score (22.26) is less strong than the score assigned to the Adhocracy Culture Type (24.54). The reason for which the second and the third dominant culture types are oriented, in the current situation, on innovation (Adhocracy) and means (Market) lies in the social migration from the public universities, where employees’ initiatives were mainly stifled. Once the academic environment has changed, they were provided the freedom of forming teams to face new challenges. But this social phenomenon of migration from public universities has a twofold consequence in the hierarchy of the dominant culture types:

- on the one hand, the Market culture type is downplayed by the Adhocracy culture type because the employees may still bear the fear of a greater speed of adaptability.
- on the other hand, the mean score (20.71) of the Hierarchy culture type, focused on control and centralized structure, is very close to the ones for Market and Adhocracy culture type. There could be mentioned a perpetuation of the mentality from the public sector that risks should not be taken at an individual level and that the employee has a superior who should provide new strategies.

The second hypothesis (H2. The employees of a private university (DUG) prefer to work in an organization where the dominant culture types are clan and market than in an organization based on hierarchy), is partially confirmed. As Table 2 illustrates, there is a significant difference between the Adhocracy culture type (23.76) and the Market culture type (18.97), the latter having actually a less strong score than the Hierarchy culture type (19.92).

Thus the dominance of culture types in the preferred situation at the DUG has the following form: clan, adhocracy, hierarchy and market. The preference for the Adhocracy culture type (23.76) instead of the Hierarchy culture type lies in the fact that the majority of employees come from public universities where bureaucracy or envy among colleagues prevail. They consider that in private universities bureaucracy is less visible than in the public sector. Even if the Market culture type is based on ends, the DUG employees labelled it with the syntagm “the ends justify the means”, which presupposes a certain violence in order to succeed. Thus they rather preferred achievements through creativity, a sign of the Adhocracy culture type (23.76) which promotes new challenges.

Comparing the mean scores in both the current and preferred situations, there could be noticed that the Clan and the Adhocracy culture types are placed on the first two positions in both situations. There could be observed a significant discrepancy in the current and preferred situations between the mean scores of the Market culture types (22.26 versus 18.97) and of the Hierarchy culture types (20.71 versus 19.92). Thus the DUG employees prefer an organizational culture less oriented on formalism, rules and gain, and more oriented on an innovative spirit promoted through cohesion.

If we compare the mean results obtained for the DUG academic staff and the auxiliary staff, there could be noticed the same hierarchy of the four culture types.

Culture types	Current situation		Preferred situation	
	Academic staff	Auxiliary staff	Academic staff	Auxiliary staff
Clan	32.35	29.31	33	35.25
Adhocracy	23.55	26.46	23.55	24.02
Market	23.13	21.20	20.44	17.41
Hierarchy	20.71	20.37	19.04	21.92

Table 3 Comparative mean scores – Culture types – DUG academic staff versus auxiliary staff

The explanation for the downplaying of the Market culture type (17.41) by the Hierarchy culture type (21.92) in the preferred situation, lies in the mean scores obtained for the auxiliary staff. The distance between the preferences of the academic staff and those of the auxiliary staff could be visible within the last two culture types (Market and Hierarchy). This discrepancy could be explained by the fact that the academic staff is more open to the challenges imposed by the competition with other universities, whereas the auxiliary staff prefers to work according to some established rules that should be preserved throughout time. If we compare the mean scores for Danubius University of Galati and those for the Romanian educational field, presented in the study of A.D. Budean, H.D. Pitariu (2008, 197-221), there could be noticed some similarities both at level of the current and preferred situations:

	Clan		Adhocracy		Market		Hierarchy	
	C	P	C	P	C	P	C	P
Romanian educational field	31	34	22	24	23	25	24	17
“Danubius” University of Galati	31.23	34	24.54	23.76	22.26	18.97	20.71	19.92

Table 4 – Comparative mean scores of the dominant culture types

Table 4 illustrates some discrepancies among the mean results:

- for the current situations for the Market and Hierarchy culture types. Within the Romanian educational field, the Hierarchy culture type (24) is more exhibited than the Market culture type (23), whereas at DUG, a private university, the Market culture type (22.26) is more exhibited than the Hierarchy culture type (20.71).
- for the preferred situations for the Market and Hierarchy culture types. If in the educational field, there is a preference for the Market culture type (25) to the expense of the Hierarchy culture type (17), in the case of the private university under study, this order is inverted (Hierarchy culture type – 19.92 versus Market culture type – 18.97). As we have explained above, the DUG respondents associated the Market culture type with the syntagm “the ends justify the means”. This aggressivity, which stereotypically could be found in Romanian private universities, has determined a preference for the Hierarchy culture type.

In order to test the third hypothesis (**H3**. In a private university (DUG) the predominant cultural dimensions are: low power distance index, individualism, masculinity, a low avoidance index, long term orientation.),

we used the VSM 94 instrument in order to establish the cultural dimensions⁴ for the Danubius University of Galati. Tabel 5 illustrates the comparative results for DUG, for Romania (Hofstede, Hofstede 2005) and for a national sample (N=455, Spectator *et al.*, 2001, in Gavreliuc, 2008, 242):

Cultural dimensions	PDI	IDV	MAS	UAI	LTO
“Danubius” University of Galati (N=70)	12.5	78.2	76.7	26.6	56
România – (Hofstede, Hofstede 2005)	90	30	42	90	-
National sample for Romania (N = 455, Spectator <i>et al.</i> 2001)	26	47	23	50	55

Table 5.

The power distance index scored a low distance towards power at the Danubius University of Galati, which implies decentralization and consulting the employees. These aspects have also been highlighted in the interviews with the DUG employees: “Compared to the public university where I worked, here at “Danubius”, I have been asked to express my opinion about some decisions, such as the types of seminars, the schedule or the editing and publishing of materials for students” (T.F., 29 years). Another characteristic of this cultural dimension lies in the facts that manager focus on their own experience and on their employees (Hofstede, Hofstede, 2005, 59). “When we work on something for the department, we do work as a team. I like working together with my young colleagues and with my colleagues who have more experience” (B.I., 63 years). As one can notice in Table 5, there is a great discrepancy between the results of Hofstede and Hofstede’s study and the results of our research or the one run by Spectator *et al.* This distance shows that the generalization of one cultural dimension at the macrolevel is not relevant unless there is a study at the microlevel.

Table 5 illustrates a great distance within the cultural dimension individualism/ collectivism, between the Danubius University of Galati (78.2) and the other studies (30.47). This tendency towards individualism could be explained if we take into account the features of this cultural dimension (Hofstede, Hofstede, 2005, 104): employees are “economic people” who will work for the employer’s interests if and only if they coincide with their own’s; the employment and promotion decisions are based on competences and rules; the dominance of an individual type of management. These features could also be traced in the DUG employees’ answers: “I like that the salaries are different for the same academic rank. Each lecturer, associate professor and professor receives his/ her minimum or maximum salary according to his/ her research activities” (M.C., 36 years); “In the research team I am a member of, an emphasis is laid on the way in which the individual becomes a part of the respective group. We do work as a team.” (A.C., 41 years).

We do not consider that there is a discrepancy between this tendency towards individualism and the Clan culture type exhibited at the DUG because, as it can be noticed in the above statement, the university family is seen as a whole where each part/ individual has his/ her well established role. Actually, this is an instance of individualism promoted in a competitive environment and not an individualism against “the other” (Gavriliuc, 2008, 243). The score for the third cultural dimension (masculinity/ femininity – 76.7) could be linked to the cultural dimension of individualism. Thus the DUG employees prefer features of masculinity (Hofstede, Hofstede, 2005, 147), such as a management focused on the power of decision and loyal competitive aggressivity (“I like the fact that we meet in order to take part in constructive debates on research topics or decisions”, M.A., 53 years), the rewards are granted on the principle of equity and career evolution (“During the interview, when I was hired, I was asked where I could see myself in five or ten years from now on”, L.M., 25 years). The uncertainty avoidance index (26.6) is low at the Danubius University of Galati.

This implies that the employees are not afraid of ambiguity and chaos which could be generated by novelty (Hofstede, Hofstede, 2005, 189). This tendency towards risk could be associated to elements belonging to the Adhocracy culture type (24.54), the second culture type exhibited by the DUG employees. One respondent’s answer (“I like that we are encouraged to experiment new teaching methods and that we are asked that our papers should include a study case”, D.P. 28 years) highlights the fact that there are promoted more innovative employees and that the motivation is focused on achievement, esteem or belonging to an academic group or association. The score of the last cultural dimension (long-term orientation) is 56. There could be noticed a preserving of the tendency in East European countries on the middle scale, but with a long-term orientation, whose characteristics (Hofstede, Hofstede, 2005, 225) are the following: the values at the workplace include learning, adaptability and self-discipline (“I like to be a professor at this university because I want to escape from monotony”, M.G. 41 years), the importance of the long-term profit (“Our academic staff is young because

⁴ The internal consistence (Crombach’s Alpha methodology) for the VSM94 dimensions in the research carried out at the Danubius University of Galati was the following: PDI (.614), IDV (.684), MAS (.682), UAI (.622) and LTO (.709), thus surpassing the most liberal scale (.600) (Gavreliuc, 2008, 242).

I believe in the transfer of knowledge from one generation to another”, D.T. 61 years), an investment in long-term networks (“We are provided different options for promotion and team work”, O.D. 26 years).

3. Conclusions

In our study, we aimed at shaping the organizational culture profile of a Romanian private university (Danubius University of Galati) within the context of a threefold crisis: a) a paradigmatic shift from the fortress of light or the door open to knowledge to the space of an academic supermarket; b) the loss of reputation due to corruption that academic staff is accused of; c) a social migration process from the public universities to private universities. As a conclusion, there could be mentioned the following elements of this private university organizational profile:

- the DUG organizational family, a sign of the Clan culture type (both in the current and preferred situations) is a modular structure where the parts, signs of individualism, help each other and actively take part into the academic and managerial decision process, signs of low power distance index.
- the team work that is found at the Danubius University of Galati, a sign of the Adhocracy culture type, on the one hand, goes beyond the Romanian stereotype of “working by oneself” and the feeling of envy that prevails in the public universities, and on the other hand, is based on a creative competition among colleagues, a sign of the Market culture type.
- the positioning of the Market culture type on a higher level within the DUG employees’ preferences could be achieved by nourishing the idea among the employees that every competition, in order to have a positive outcome, presupposes the assumption of a long-term orientation and consequently, some risks.

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