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**THE REFLECTION OF NATIONAL CULTURES
IN THE ORGANISATIONAL CULTURE
OF THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION**

The present article introduces an empirical research conducted at the European Commission, analysing its organisational culture and how that reflects national cultural diversity. Organisational culture in general received increasing attention since interest arose in humanities in the 1960s, followed by several cross-national organisational studies that linked differently managed organisational cultures with different corporate efficiency. (CINI, 2001) Few studies have however analysed the organisational culture of political institutions (CINI, 2001, SHORE, 2000, HOOGHE, 2001, etc) where problems are more complex as decision makers take more and different factors into considerations compared to the business world. In the present analysis of the European Commission the research project was particularly interested how a supranational institution representing the whole community's interest manages to create a common working culture for its employees coming from a diverse national cultural background and how it takes these national cultural forces into account when creating its human resource policies.

1. INTRODUCTION

The article introduces an empirical research which aimed to describe and analyse the present organisational culture of the European Commission, focusing on its relation with national cultures. The academic importance of this analysis is given by the fact that academic literature is very limited about the reflection of national cul-

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tures in the Commission's organisational culture following the accomplishment of the KINNOCK-reforms in 2000¹. As these reforms have seriously changed the organisational culture and climate, the research outcomes carry added value to the academic literature and present an up-to-date description of the organisation's human resource policies. The detailed description of the project, as well as the database of the empirical research is available on request.

The article introduces first a brief presentation of those organisational theories, anthropological views and studies about the Commission's organisational life that provided theoretical background for the empirical research. Then the methodology of the research will be discussed and a detailed presentation of the outcomes will be given. Finally, the most important findings will be highlighted.

2. THE THEORETICAL BACKGROUND OF THE RESEARCH – THEORIES ON ORGANISATIONAL CULTURE

The history of organisational culture research started in the 1960s, when interest arose in humanities. Several disciplines analysed and discussed the new concept, however the major debate arose between anthropologists and organisation theory approaches. (CINI, 2001) Anthropologists understand organisational culture as a metaphor for the organisation itself. They hold that the emergence of organisational culture is a natural process which cannot be influenced by single persons. Therefore anthropological studies focus on the description and analysis of organisational cultures.

Business studies on the other hand do not think that organisations *are* cultures but they state that organisations *have* cultures. They agree that organisational cultures can develop naturally out of the day-to-day interaction of employees; however they consider organisational culture as an asset that can be manipulated; and if successfully managed, it can largely contribute to the efficiency of the organisations. (CAMERON and QUINN, 2006) In the 1970s the first empirical results have been published by cultural theorists, proving the causal link between differently managed organisational cultures and differences in corporate effectiveness, (HOFSTEDE, 2000) and they became particularly important because their quantitative character enabled cross-national comparison. These findings gave another rise to the development of cross-cultural management theories and to the rising importance of international human resource management.

2.1. Institutionalism and Culturalism

The most significant division in cross-national comparative research is probably the one between institutionalists and culturalists. (SORGE, 2004) Culturalists explain differences in behaviour of persons belonging to different communities by different values and beliefs – as SORGE says: "*A practice is sustained because people find it repulsive, unethical or unappealing to do otherwise*". (2004, pp. 118.) This approach holds that members of certain communities receive information

¹ The Vice-President of Romano Prodi, Neil Kinnock initiated an extensive reform process in the Commission, outlined in the White Paper of March 2000. The reforms targeted three main areas: the decision-making mechanism; the financial management system and the Commission's human resources policy. (Cini, 2001)

about values (defining what is good or bad; expected and accepted forms of behaviour, etc.) from their early childhood on and they reflect on them during their entire life. HOFSTEDE (2000) calls this “*the programming of the mind*”. Individuals may not act accordingly, but they are aware of the norms and also of the consequences of the deviation.

Institutionalist on the other hand explain the differences by different systems of institutions that set rules what people have to follow. Compared to culturalist theories, this approach holds that the decisions and behaviour of individuals are determined “externally” and not “internally”. “*People comply with norms because a wider formal system of laws, agreements, standards and codes exist.*” (SORGE, 2004, pp. 118.) Importantly however SORGE also points out that there can be no clear cut between the two approaches since individual behaviour and social structures are reciprocally constructed.

2.2. Interpretations of Culture

Both anthropologists and organisational theorists agree that it is very difficult to define the concept of culture. This is partly attributable to its taken-for-granted character – people usually do not recognise their own culture until “*it is challenged, until they experience a new culture, or until it is made overt and explicit through ... a framework or model.*” (QUINN and CAMERON, 2006, pp. 16.) Probably the most wide-spread presentation of culture is the SCHEIN-model (SCHEIN, 1992), illustrating its layered nature as an ice-berg, where only the tip is visible for the observer. The tip, the artefacts are easily observable but do not show those values, beliefs, assumptions that have created them.

Culture however is layered another way as well. Individuals at the same time belong to different (sometimes imagined) communities that interact, sometimes contradict with each other in the value setting process. VAN NISPEN and FAZILI (2006) in their model distinguished among four theoretical levels: individual; family or working group; organisational and national level. The individual takes different roles in these communities and faces different expectations. The final behaviour or the final decision taken will be the sum of these different values. This model is particularly relevant to the research because it clearly shows that not only the national level determines a person’s behaviour, neither fully explains his or her reaction in a given situation. Every person takes a set of values into account when acting. Analysing a great number of nation states of the world, empirical studies however still have found that internal variations within national samples are much less significant than the external variations among national samples. (ROMANI, 2004, pp. 143.) In organisational terms, employees from different organisations but in the same nation may share the same values, norms and beliefs; and these are distinct from those of other nations. This cultural coherence gives significance to the effect of national culture on individual decisions and so justifies cross-national comparative research.

2.3. Organisational Culture – the New Competitive Advantage

Organisational culture started to receive increasing attention from the business world when international competition became more intense in the 1980s. After years of research business companies found that a strong, unique culture reduces collective uncertainties by facilitating a common interpretation system for mem-

bers; it creates social order; ensures the continuity of values; establishes a collective identity and elucidates a vision of the future. (CAMERON and QUINN, 2006, pp. 5.) A well-managed organisational culture also contributes to the success on individual level: it increases physical and emotional well-being, employee moral, commitment and thus productivity. (CAMERON and QUINN, 2006)

Every organisation has its subunits; those however very often show very different characteristics. As small communities, these subunits develop their own cultures based on their own underlying values. Importantly however all subunits also contain common elements that are characteristic for the entire organisation. This is the glue that binds the pieces together, and this is what business literature calls corporate culture. (CAMERON and QUINN, 2006) This argument is very important with regards to the empirical research, since research outcomes also showed that different Directorate Generals, despite of their diversity (and the diversity of their units – that is the subunits of the subunits) show typical elements that characterise the entire European Commission.

2.4. Cross-National Organisational Studies

The relationship between organisational and national culture has been largely discussed by scholars from very different scientific areas and continues being so. HOFSTEDE emphasises that a person's socialisation is much more deeply shaped by its society's culture than by the culture of the organisation for which the person works. (HOFSTEDE and PETERSON, 2000, pp. 404.) He explains that people face national cultural values already during their early childhood socialisation process, usually before the age of 12, and they confirm these values continuously in their actions later on. According to his theory, business leaders can create and manage a "strong" organisational culture, where underlying values, norms and expected behaviour are well known by all employees, but this can never compete with the strength of the early socialisation process. These views are sharply in contrast with those of OUCHI (1981)¹ who holds that managers are able to establish strong cultures that are different – or even opposing the national ones.

HOFSTEDE and PETERSON (2000) solve the contradiction by arguing that national cultures affect values, whereas organisational cultures affect practices. (pp. 412.) Therefore foreign employees may comply with company practices but do not give up their own, original values.

This discussion line raised the attention to the case of multinational environments – such as the European Commission – where people coming from different national backgrounds may carry different values with themselves. The culture of the organisation for which they work imposes an independent set of values upon them, which may coincide or contradict with the original national values. In the case of contradicting values, the employees have to separate their behaviour in the working place from that of their private lives, taking on double roles in order to meet the expectations of both communities. This may lead to role conflicts. The research project was particularly interested how employees deal with this situation: whether they identify themselves with the organisation's culture; whether they reflect on their national cultures even in work situations; or is their commitment to the origi-

¹ Cited by Hofstede and Peterson, 2000, pp. 412

nal national values decreasing also outside of the working atmosphere, because of the different environment where they live and work. And finally, the project intended to investigate whether the DG Personnel and Administration – the Human Resource Management department of the European Commission – takes these forces into account when creating personnel policies.

2.5. The Process of Assimilation

When analysing an organisation culture, it is also important to see how the assimilation process of newcomers happens in the organisation. That means how the organisational culture is communicated to the employees. When an organisation culture is well-managed, norms and – to the possible extent – values are made explicit to the new workforce in order to avoid future misunderstandings. Clear job descriptions, behavioural norms, motivational factors can speed up the assimilation process and thus contribute to the effectiveness of the new employee.

In organisational theory, most scholars recognise the importance of anticipatory adjustment of newcomers; especially when they are working in an international environment. HARZING (2004) finds that the more accurate the newcomers' expectations are; the lower is the level of uncertainty, the fewer the surprises and the lower the level of culture shock. (pp. 271.) She also found that role clarity – the extent to which what is expected from the new employee is clear and unambiguous); role discretion (flexibility in the execution of the job), as well as support from co-workers and logistical support are positively related to work adjustment. The research has tried to find out more about the existence of these practices in the European Commission.

2.6. Cross-National Organisation Research Projects - HOFSTEDE

The pioneer of cross-national quantitative research was GEERT HOFSTEDE who carried out an international study, analysing basic values at the IBM Corporation, two times, in 1968 and 1972. He distributed company attitude surveys in 50 countries, among 41,000 employees. The basic idea of his study was to identify universal dimensions that are present in all cultures and to compare cultures accordingly. HOFSTEDE identified five dimensions: power distance; individualism versus collectivism; masculinity versus femininity; uncertainty avoidance and long-term versus short term orientation.

Power distance, as ROMANI (2004) describes, “refers to the relationship between supervisors and subordinates”, reflecting “the extent to which the less powerful members of organisations expect and accept that power is distributed unequally”. (pp. 144.) Uncertainty avoidance defines the extent to which the members of a culture feel threatened by unknown situations and try to avoid them by strictly regulating all work processes. Individualism versus collectivism refers to the extent to which the employee defines him/herself independent from the organisation and they prefer “to be managed as individuals with acknowledgement of their individual achievements” (ROMANI, pp. 146.), or they consider themselves as members of a group and take responsibility for their work also collectively. The dimension masculinity versus femininity originally was called ego goals versus social goals in HOFSTEDE'S study until he linked it with gender studies, popular in social science literature in the 1970s. As ROMANI says, “A masculine environment is generally presented as a place where career success is an important motivation. Feminine

environments are seen as valuing the well-being and satisfaction of employees and tending to foster intuitive and consensus-oriented styles of management." (pp. 147.) And finally, long term versus short term orientation reflects to the decision making process of the organisation – whether it favours strategic planning, considering outcomes on an extended time frame, or on the contrary, it favours fast results and immediate achievements.

HOFSTEDE'S work has received intense critique. ROMANI mentions the most common concerns: some scholars questioned the appropriateness of HOFSTEDE'S methodology, using questionnaires; others disliked the idea of studying nations as representatives of culture (disrespecting multicultural nations); and others criticised the obsolescence of the data, collected between 1967 and 1973. Despite of these criticisms, even ROMANI acknowledges HOFSTEDE'S contribution to management studies. After years when culture was perceived as "intangible", "soft" component that cannot be measured, HOFSTEDE was the first to combine cultural dimensions with quantitative analysis, make cross-national comparisons and show culture's consequences on managerial behaviour. (ROMANI, pp. 148.)

2.7. Further Research on Cultural Dimensions

Following HOFSTEDE'S path, TROMPENAARS and HAMPDEN-TURNER also compared national cultures, basing their studies on the same assumption as HOFSTEDE did; i. e. national cultures carry universal characteristics. They distinguished seven dilemmas in their research: neutral versus affective; individualism versus communitarism; universalism versus particularism; achievement versus ascription; specificity versus diffuseness; sequential versus synchronic time and inner versus outer directedness.

The dimension neutral versus affective describes the extent to which emotions are shown explicitly in work issues, together with rational arguments. Universalism vs. particularism defines whether employees always have to obey rules, or it is more the given situation that determines whether to apply them. The dimension achievement vs. ascription refers to the extent to which social status will be based on individual performance or more on the individual's background and experience. Specificity vs. diffuseness measures whether various spheres of life (work, leisure time) are integrated (e.g. colleagues get to know the families of each other) or they keep these spheres of life rather separated. Sequential vs. synchronic time analyses the time orientation of cultures: whether they act in a monochronic way (dealing with one task at the same time) or in a polychronic way (doing several things at the same time); and it also examines whether the given culture orients itself more to the past, the present or to the future. And finally, inner vs. outer directedness reflects to the relation of the individual to its environment: in organisational terms it examines whether individuals believe that personal efforts matter for success, or they hold that personal relationships, networks do more for it. (ROMANI, 2004)

ROMANI (2004) points out that there is a major difference between HOFSTEDE'S and TROMPENAARS and HAMPDEN-TURNER'S approach – while HOFSTEDE placed values into the core of cultures, TROMPENAARS and HAMPDEN-TURNER hold that meanings, the interpretation of values are in the centre. TROMPENAARS and HAMPDEN-TURNER state different values carry different meanings with themselves, but sometimes the same values do not conclude in the same interpretations. Therefore, they consider meanings as a more precise means to measure cultural differences.

Cultural differences have further been analysed by HALL (1990) who presented a new orientation to communication by introducing the dimension high versus low context communication. He holds, low context cultures focus on the word spoken and they code all information they want to transmit. On the other hand, high context cultures do not need to explicitly express everything they want to say because the larger part of the message is already in the person – in the shared past, experience, cultural background. Therefore high context culture often tend to be more homogenous than low context ones.

A number of studies have followed HOFSTEDE's and TROMPENAARS and HAMPDEN-TURNER's path. (LANE, DiSTEFANO and MAZNEVSKI, 1995; ROMANI, 2004; SAGIV and SCHWARTZ, 2000; the GLOBE research programme - DICKSON, ADITYA and CHHOKAR, 2000; ROSE, KAHLE and SHOHAM, 2000 are just a few of them.) In the author's perspective however they have not really presented any dimension that would have essentially extended the existing model of describing cultures by HOFSTEDE, HALL and TROMPENAARS and HAMPDEN-TURNER.

Before concluding this section of cross-cultural analysis, it is important to discuss the limitation of this methodology. National comparisons on cultural level can lead to stereotypes that create the image of an "average" citizen which usually does not fit any single individual. This phenomenon is called the fallacy of averages. (VAN NISPEN and FAZILI, 2006, pp. 10.) The scores on cultural dimensions therefore should always be used as indicators of probable behaviour patterns. Cultural dimensions can never describe fully a culture, but they are still meaningful because – as ROMANI (2004, pp. 163) mentions –, they raise implicit cultural differences on a conscious level. And when they are already explicit, international leaders can carefully deal with them, thus avoiding conflict situations.

3. THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION

The cultural characteristics of the European Commission have been investigated by a number of researchers.¹ Few have dealt however with the influence of national cultures on the organisational culture of the Commission, and they conducted their research before the accomplishment of the reforms of the year 2000. These studies reported about a lack of a coherent organisational culture that would be managed by human resource policies and that would give an identity and universal guidelines for those working in this multicultural environment. These facts gave ground to the research interest to describe today's European Commission in terms of its organisational culture and how that reflects national cultural diversity.

3.1. Different Views about Civil Servants' Attitudes in the European Commission

Prior to the KINNOCK-reforms, the European Commission's organisational life has been investigated by SHORE (2000), HOOGHE (2001) and EGEBERG (1996).

SHORE (2000) tried to find evidence for the emergence of a "European identity" inside of the Commission's institution. He calls the process of shifting employees' loyalty gradually to supranational ideals "engrenage". He also points out however,

¹ Cini (2001) cites Abélés (1993), Bellier (1995), McDonald (2000) and Shore (2000), pp. 4.

that this process is not without difficulties at all, taking into account “the heterogeneous and traditionally fiercely nationalistic” (pp. 17.) character of Europeans, which is due to the lack of a common culture that usually unites nationstates. The task of creating “unity in diversity” does not seem to be easy, considering that the cultural Europeanisation of civil servants should happen in a way where national cultures can still flourish. When analysing integrational processes in EU institutions, (or “the ‘colonisation’ of Europe by itself” as SHORE calls it, pp. 27.) SHORE holds that these administrators working at the European Commission and adapting a new European, supranational identity may be the model how citizens of Europe will be. Therefore he gives a very important role to the European Commission’s staff in constructing a European consciousness in the entire imagined community of the European Union.

HOOGHE (2001) however is not so certain about whether Commission civil servants take a supranational identity or work on an intergovernmental basis. Taking into account that both studies have been conducted more or less at the same time (SHORE published his results in 2000 while HOOGHE did so in 2001), these contradictions gave ground to the analysis of these tendencies in the present research.

3.2. A Supranational European Identity versus Corporate Loyalty

SHORE (2000), when talking about supranationalism, mentions that the term traditionally refers to three different concepts. “*First, it was a legal concept concerning questions of sovereignty and levels of authority; second, for those Europeans who shared MONNET’s and SCHUMAN’s aspirations, it embodied a federalist political agenda and neofunctionalist assumptions about advancing the integration process through incremental spillover; and third, the concept itself functioned as an instrument for achieving the first two elements.*” (SHORE, pp. 136.)

SHORE further describes that the European Commission, since its creation in the 1950s carries a supranational character, being more than an intergovernmental organisation, it “*came to see itself as the principal agent of European integration and European consciousness*”.(pp. 151.) This affects its staff policy as well – civil servants working in the Commission are required to build up their primary loyalty to the European Union and not to the member states from which they come. How much however employees’ commitment and sense of community is the result of their commitment to European issues or to the organisation itself, is not so clearly defined by SHORE.

SHORE acknowledges that the strong sense of community among Commission civil servants is partly the result of a natural process, shared by employees who all have to deal with work issues of the same organisation and most of them deal with difficulties emerging from living in a foreign environment. He cites an official who, having worked for twenty-five years for the Commission, commented this issue in the following way:

We do not necessarily feel that we’re ‘Europeans’, but we do identify with our employer. It’s like someone who works for a multinational company: I suppose it’s a corporate identity of sorts. ... But remember, people have chosen to work here. You shouldn’t underestimate the problems of expatriation involved. Most people here do identify with the aims of the Commission. They wouldn’t work for it they didn’t ... [though] there is less Euro-idealism in the new generation than in the past. (cited by SHORE, 2000, pp. 140-141.)

The last sentence is remarkably in accordance with EGEBERG's view. He cites WESSELS (1985), holding that the first-generation of bureaucrats tended to be more committed to European ideals than newcomers do, due to the war experiences they share. Newcomers, he mentions, are more career-oriented and emphasise more salaries and promotion prospects than ideas. (EGEBERG, 1996, pp .726.) Still EGEBERG concludes that civil servants in the Commission tend to be more Europe-oriented than those who go for career opportunities in national governments.

SHORE holds, the same conditions under which civil servants live and the same problems of living abroad, naturally create a community among Commission employees. Interestingly however, SHORE also found that while work relationships are extremely multinational in the Commission, social networks outside of work tend to follow along the lines of common nationality and language. This observation raises again the question how much influence national cultures exercise on organisational cultures and individuals.

Important is also to recognise that the European Commission consists of several Directorate Generals and subunits; and these have their own, unique cultures that may unite persons and that may do not completely coincide with the general culture of the European Commission. Still SHORE finds that the existence of a general culture of the Commission, orienting people to European values, can result in an emerging European identity shared by the employees.

Interestingly, HOOGHE is not so much convinced of the supranational character of the Commission's workforce. She cites responses of officials both in favour and against this hypothesis. Some of her interviewees hold that an official should give priority to the unity of the European civil service rather than to his own ideas and this should also mean that he has to step out of his nationality to become transnational. (pp. 85.)

It is of course wrong to say that one does not have anymore a passport, a nationality ... But it is also true that one should try to lose one's national identity – no, not to lose it, but to make abstraction of it. I have many links with [my country], but my thinking is not anymore like a [countryman] (official #70, in HOOGHE, 2001, pp. 85.)

As a contrast, HOOGHE cites other officials, emphasising the cultural diversity in the Commission:

I like my service to be a microcosm of the Community. I like my colleagues to reflect the diversity within the Community ... There is some wonderment in that. There is a certain mystery as to how people with such different backgrounds can work together. (official #30 in HOOGHE, 2001, pp. 85.)

In a sense, you have to be naturally more accessible for other nationalities than for your own. You can take it for granted that you have some comprehension of the values and interests of your own member state because you come from there. And you presumably obtained your job because you understood your country rather well. Some of my compatriots say: 'I do not have any contact wit the UK anymore.' I sometimes meet Danish officials saying: 'I do not want to go back to Denmark. I do not want to think about Denmark.' But in fact, if they do not know their country, they are less valuable to this institution. They have to reflect; they are here to reflect their national cultures and values ... Local conditions are often not known except by nationals. (official #39 in HOOGHE, 2001, pp. 91)

Contrary to some of my colleagues, I believe that the Union is made of member states, whether you like it or not, of country nationals who are very attached to their nationality. We have to respect and work with this reality. (official #150 in HOOGHE, 2001, pp. 91.)

Considering these very different attitudes towards the issue of different nationalities in work relations, the research also aimed to find out more about these tendencies.

3.3. Administrative Cultures and National Diversity

Some of the respondents in the empirical research have clearly rejected the idea that there could be any kind of conflict situations among people working together with different national backgrounds in the European Commission. This is an interesting phenomenon, since both HOOGHE and SHORE mention issues that could give grounds to conflicts. HOOGHE for example observed negative stereotypes, based on one's nationality. One of her interviewees said:

I once said that for a Greek to prove that he is not stupid, he has to work very hard; but for another nationality to prove that he is not stupid, he has to work very little. ... Nationality in the sense of saying "the Greeks do this", "the Italians do this", "the Germans do that" is very much ingrained in the Commission. One should judge a person on merit irrespective of sex or nationality. (official #63 in HOOGHE, 2001, pp. 169.)

HOOGHE gives no indication of how characteristic this phenomenon could be; therefore the research tried to test it both during the interviews and in the questionnaires.

HOOGHE holds, linguistic issues can also contribute to conflict situations. Despite the Commission is a multilinguistic environment, HOOGHE states, to be French or British/Irish is an obvious advantage because French and English are the Commission's working languages. (pp. 169.) She illustrates her argument by quoting an official:

It is not the same thing, when, in a meeting of directors or heads of cabinet, you negotiate in French and English with people for whom this is their first language, their mother tongue ... It is a serious handicap, which should not be underestimated. If say, a Frenchman throws a joke in French, he can grab the attention, and at the same time, by altering a nuance, he can then give the sentence a totally different meaning. A non-French-speaking person simply cannot achieve this in the way a native speaker can ... I think the best solution is what DAVID WILLIAMSON [then secretary-general of the Commission, and British] does. DAVID WILLIAMSON ... never speaks English to a non-English. For example, he knows that I speak better English than French but, when I see him on a bilateral basis, he speaks French to me. He does that because he wants to have the same handicap. And I find it a very nice thing to do. (official #61 in Hooghe, 2001, pp. 169-170.)

There is an intense discussion – reflected in SHORE's, in EGEBERG's and in HOOGHE's work – also about the character of the bureaucracy in the Commission. HOOGHE argues that the organisation of the Commission has reflected consociational principles over two decades until the reforms of NEIL KINNOCK in 2000 turned the administration again to a Weberian one. In a consociational administration, HOOGHE states, nationality is central. The Commission reflects national diversity and officials have to represent their nationalities. (pp. 191.) HOOGHE holds, over

two decades proportionality prevailed in the Commission and senior posts were divided among nationalities according to quotas, respecting a “geographical balance”. SHORE also mentions in his study of 2000 that national quotas – even if publicly denied – do play an important role in recruitment and promotion, especially where the post is considered to be of particular political sensitivity or of importance of national interests. (SHORE, pp. 141.)

Considering the Commission as a whole, HOOGHE in her study of 2001 argues that the administration turns again on taking a Weberian character due to the ongoing reforms, where nationality does not count much and officials reflect the general European interest.

SHORE mentions one more unique feature that characterised the Commission prior to the reforms: the coexistence of extremely strict, bureaucratic and legalistic rules on one hand; and flexible and informal practices on the other. He cites MOLE (1992) when describing it: “*Rules and procedures are rarely broken but they are constantly distorted, manipulated and ignored if they do not serve the purpose for which they were intended.*” (SHORE, 2000, pp. 181.) These characteristics are said to follow the French bureaucracy model. And these characteristics are sharply in contrast with the Anglo-Saxon administrative cultures that emphasise “*civil service neutrality, the formal absence of nepotism, a high degree of delegation and the principle of sharing information with colleagues*”. (SPENCE, 1994, cited by SHORE, pp. 216.) Respondents in the present research underlined that these major differences in administrative cultures do cause conflicts. Officials often mentioned the case of Swedish administrators who found the administrative culture of the Commission so inflexible that they could not cope with it and this largely contributed to their decision to return to their national administrations.

3.4. Human Resource Management in the European Commission

SHORE found that the Commission completely lacks a coherent personnel policy. Many of his respondents stated that once they were recruited, usually they were left to their own devices. SHORE cites an official, stating: “*There is no personnel policy. Or rather, the policy is to have no policy. What we have instead are the ‘Staff Regulations’.*” (cited by SHORE, pp. 198.) Several employees complained in SHORE’s study that they have not received any kind of career development, training, induction, support or guidance. These issues have obviously changed since then; today the European Commission employs a unit for career guidance and human resource management development in the DG Personnel and Administration.

SHORE’s conclusion was that the absence of a proper personnel policy resulted in extreme individualism and empire-building on one hand; and in disillusionment of the employees on the other. SHORE holds that the lack of the coherent personnel policy encourages officials to act as individualists, if they were to survive in the Commission. This includes intensive networking practices. A former official in the Personnel directorate commented this as follows:

To survive you need to see where you work and who you work with; you need a clientele; you need to know if he’s a ‘NOEL man’ or a ‘DE KOSTER man’. Yes, there is a French Mafia in the Commission. But there is also an English Mafia. You have Mafiosi everywhere ... The important thing is that they neutralise each other – that was my aim when I worked in DG IX. (cited by SHORE, pp. 199.)

The empirical research tried to find out whether these practices are still so central to the Commission's functioning and whether nationalities (including Nordic countries and Britain, famous of their anti-patronage cultures) can take equal advantages of these networking practices.

3.5. Towards The Framework of the Research

The above mentioned discussions all raised the attention to the Commission's internal life. The research questions examined the existence or not of the Commission's organisation culture and its perception by employees; career development practices and guidance in the assimilation process; the character of the administrative culture; the influence of national cultures on individual decisions and on the organisation as a whole; networking practices; and last but not least, how employees see their way in the debate between SHORE and HOOGHE: whether they act in a supranational way and embody the model of European citizens, or they lean on their national cultures to bring added value in their work. The next chapter describes the empirical research and its underlying methodology in further details.

4. THE METHODOLOGY OF THE EMPIRICAL RESEARCH

4.1. Designing the Field Research

The research posed questions to the two sides of human resource policies: the DG Personnel and Administration that may influence the organisational culture; and employees on the other hand, that "consume" and create the organisational culture. Because of time constraints it was only possible to select two Directorate Generals from which the research gathered employees' responses. An extensive research is however highly recommended, including all Directorate Generals, as it could provide more sophisticated data and deeper levels of understanding.

The selected DGs of the research were DG External Relations and DG Internal Market. When selecting the Directorate Generals, primarily the character of the policy areas they work with was considered – the research tried to include both external and internal policy areas. The target group among employees became the group of administrators, from rank A8 upwards – this group was expected to be multicultural and at the same time close to policy making, so that the research could test national influences on decision making processes.

In order to get the maximum amount of responses, standardised questionnaires were used, the same questionnaire being used in both DGs.

Qualitative measures however can increase the understanding of culture. Therefore, the quantitative analysis was combined with qualitative data: when analysing the human resource policy development, two in-depth interviews were made in the DG Personnel and Administration with persons having an overview of the human resource policy making process.

4.2. Designing the Questionnaire

The questionnaire had a "profile survey" character – it intended to describe the culture of the organisation by using multiple dimensions which measure the

strengths or weaknesses of organisational members' beliefs and values, without being necessarily mutually exclusive. (ASKANASY, BROADFOOT and FALKUS, pp. 135.)

Thus however, an important issue was the careful selection of the dimensions. Therefore the aim was to create a set of dimensions which are clearly distinguishable from one another; which are valid (actually measuring those characteristics of culture what is important in the research) and reliable (they are measuring culture consistently). Importantly, cultural dimensions were also only one part of the questionnaire: the discovery of employees' perception of the organisational culture continued by several closed and open-ended questions.

Concerning cultural dimensions, the author considered HOFSTEDE's, TROMPENAARS and HAMPDEN-TURNER's and HALL's dimensions as novel ones; and found other approaches that emerged after them somehow reflecting the same dimensions in different ways. Therefore, for the analysis, a combination of these dimensions was chosen, selecting those that make sense in a European environment.

The final list of the cultural dimensions in the research is as follows:

- 1) Low versus high power distance
- 2) Individualism versus collectivism
- 3) Low versus high uncertainty avoidance
- 4) Masculinity versus femininity
- 5) Short versus long term orientation of the organisation
- 6) Low versus high context communication
- 7) Neutral versus affective culture
- 8) Universalism versus particularism
- 9) Achievement versus ascription
- 10) Specificity versus diffuseness
- 11) Inner versus outer directedness

This list includes HOFSTEDE's five dimensions, extended with TROMPENAARS and HAMPDEN-TURNER's five dimensions – excluding from the originally seven dimensions the one about individualism vs. communitarism, as already being part in HOFSTEDE's set; and monochronic vs. polichronic time orientation because it was not found relevant in the European context – and adding HALL's dimension on low versus high context communication with special interest in analysing the existence or not of a "eurojargon".

The first part of the questionnaire shortly described the meaning of the dimensions and asked respondents to indicate their perceptions of them, using a scale between 1 and 10. The second part of the questionnaire consisted of closed and open-ended questions. Some of them deal with the perception of human resource policies and the guidance of the organisational culture, while others discover more the employees' attitude to cultural diversity and conflict situations and their attitudes toward the European Commission.

4.3. Designing the Interview

Both interviews took place in the Commission's offices in Brussels, and both interviews lasted more than an hour. Both officials agreed to the use of a tape recorder prior to the interviews and were willing and attentive subjects.

The draft of the interview questions coincides largely with the questionnaire distributed among civil servants in order to see whether the perception of the DG

Admin about the organisational culture and human resource policies differs from that of the employees in other DGs. Additionally, several questions were included that analyse more the human resource strategies.

The next chapter summarises the outcomes of the surveys and the interviews, and presents the answers to the research questions.

5. THE RESEARCH OUTCOMES

Before getting into details, it needs to be underlined that the outcomes of the project are not representative because of the limitations of the empirical research. They may however be considered as indicators of certain tendencies which will be discussed below.

5.1. Statistics on the Survey Respondents

Altogether, 26 questionnaires were received, more questionnaires being returned by employees of the DG Internal Market than by those of the DG External Relations (17 compared to five). On four questionnaires, respondents did not mark the DG for which they work – presumably in order to preserve their anonymity – this limits somewhat their interpretations. One respondent who e-mailed his/her answers asked the author once again to respect his/her anonymity. This sign of insecurity shows that 18% of the respondents consider the topic of the research as a sensitive issue area.

The national division among the respondents is large – 14 nationalities are represented in the 26 answers.

Concerning the age of the civil servants, the average for all respondents falls on 39.4 years. Generally speaking, respondents from DG External Relations are elder than those from DG Internal Market and Services. The entry dates to the Commission vary among all respondents from 1981 until 2006; the average of the years spent at the Commission civil service is 18.6 years in DG External Relations, 6.5 years in DG Internal Market and 9.2 in data of unknown origin, correlating with the age division. The average number of years spent in the Commission for all respondents is 9.3 years.

5.2. Organisational Culture in the Viewpoint of the DG Personnel and Administration

SHORE (2000) in his research mentions that employees did not see any kind of personnel policy and they felt, once they were recruited, they were usually left to their own devices. Since then – mostly thanks to the KINNOCK-reforms – this has changed and employees are offered several services, trainings and career guidance. Interestingly however, when the interviewees were asked about the management of the organisational culture, both of them have denied its existence.

According to the DG Personnel and Administration, the organisational culture as such still does not receive much attention, despite the recent reforms. This is a very interesting phenomenon since organisational theory holds that organisational change and human resources reforms cannot be successfully accomplished without the careful analysis and planning of the organisational culture. The KINNOCK-reforms brought management perspectives into to previously very rigid and hierar-

chical organisation of the Commission; still the transformation does not seem to have been accomplished completely. As one of the officials commented; only the artefacts seemed to have changed but not the underlying assumptions.

In the following sections the organisational culture will be discussed in details, presenting the questions posed for both interviewees and questionnaire respondents.

5.3. The Perception of the Organisational Culture based on the 11 Dimensions

The first dimension is *low versus high power distance*.

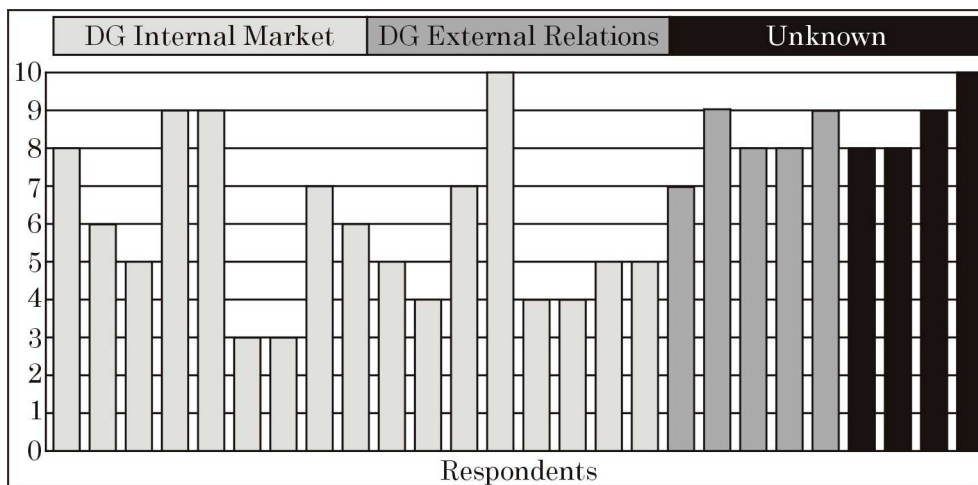


Figure 1
Respondents' perception of power distance

The average of the perception of power distance in the DG External Relations is 8.2; in the data of unknown origin 8.7 – both values are rather high, and the standard deviation among responses is low. The DG Internal Market shows somewhat different characteristics: here the average is 5.8 and the standard deviation among responses is high. The overall average for all responses is 6.7. This means, respondents in the DG External Relations agree that high power distance would characterise the organisational culture; while respondents in the DG Internal Market are not homogenous in their opinions. These differences might be caused by the fact that the perception of power distance is not only determined by the hierarchical character of the European Commission, but also by the atmosphere that characterises single DGs and units. *The relative high number in most respondents' answer shows that the European Commission functions in a hierarchical way.* This is an overall feature that probably characterises every DG to some extent. The difference between the two DGs and the high standard deviation in DG Internal Market shows however that DGs and their units create their own working environments that may deter from the overall picture. The interviewees confirmed this phenomenon.

The second dimension is *individualism versus collectivism*.

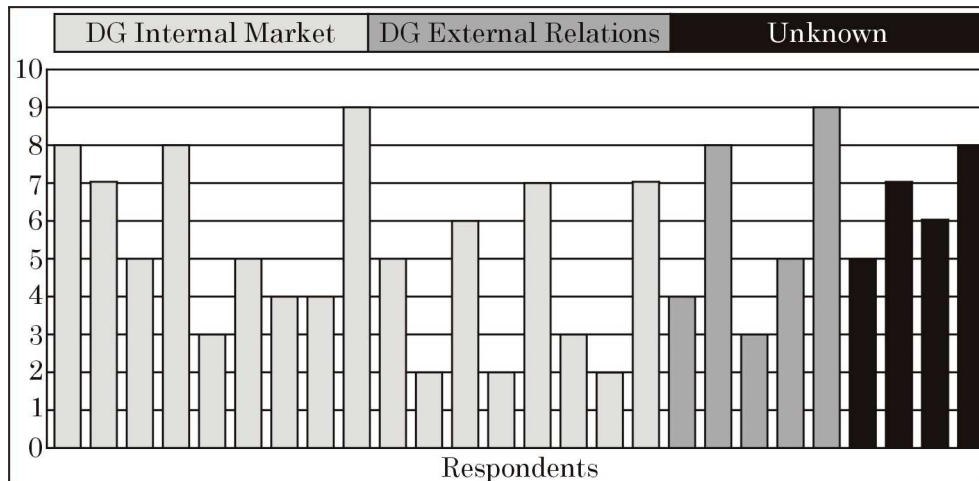


Figure 2
Respondents' perception of individualism vs collectivism

The average in DG External Relations is 5.8; in DG Internal Market 5.1 and in the data of unknown origin, 6.5. The overall average is 5.4. The standard deviation is high in both DGs. The mid-range value given several times by *respondents* means that they could not clearly distinguish whether the Commission carries more individualistic or more collectivistic characteristics. Differences among units can also be significant. My two interviewees pointed out that the KINNOCK-reforms brought probably more individualistic approaches – thus the differences may be caused by how deep the reforms have reached in single units. Therefore the repetition of the evaluation of this dimension is recommended later, when the units had more time to “digest” the changes.

The third dimension is *uncertainty avoidance* (see Figure 3).

The average in DG External Relations is 7.4; in DG Internal Market 6.8 and in the data of unknown origin, 8.5. These values are very close to each other. The overall average is 7.2. The standard deviation among the variables is moderate, and it seems to be higher in DG Internal Market than in DG External Relations. *Respondents generally tend to perceive the Commission as uncertainty avoidant*. This is in line with the interviewees' opinion.

The fourth dimension is *masculinity versus femininity* (see Figure 4).

The average in DG External Relations is 4.8; in DG Internal Market 5.4, and in the data of unknown origin, 6.7. The overall average is 5.5. The standard deviation among the variables is high, in both DGs. That shows that *respondents perceived quite differently, whether high earnings, challenging work and recognition are more emphasised in the organisation or more the interpersonal aspects of work, e.g. cooperation and good work relations*. This may be caused by the differences among the units and may be by the attempt of the organisation to promote both approaches at the same time, as expressed by the interviewees.

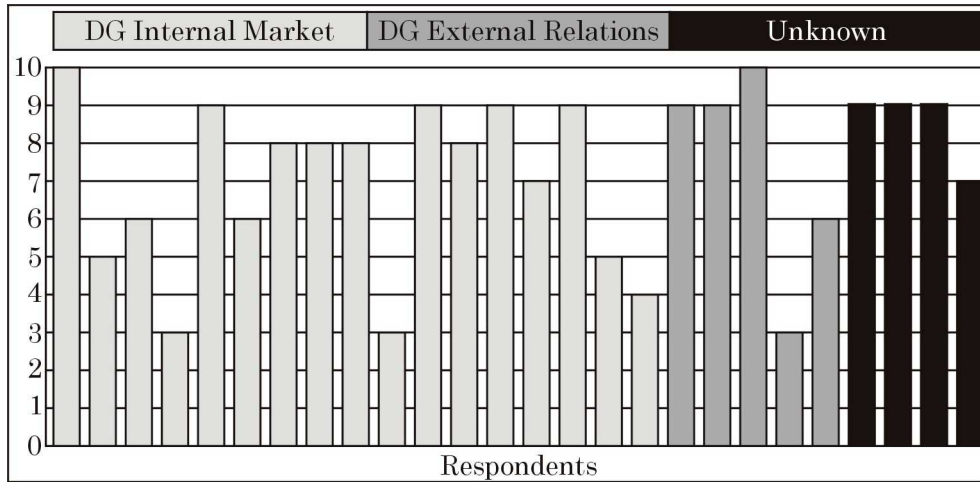


Figure 3
 Respondents' perception of uncertainty avoidance

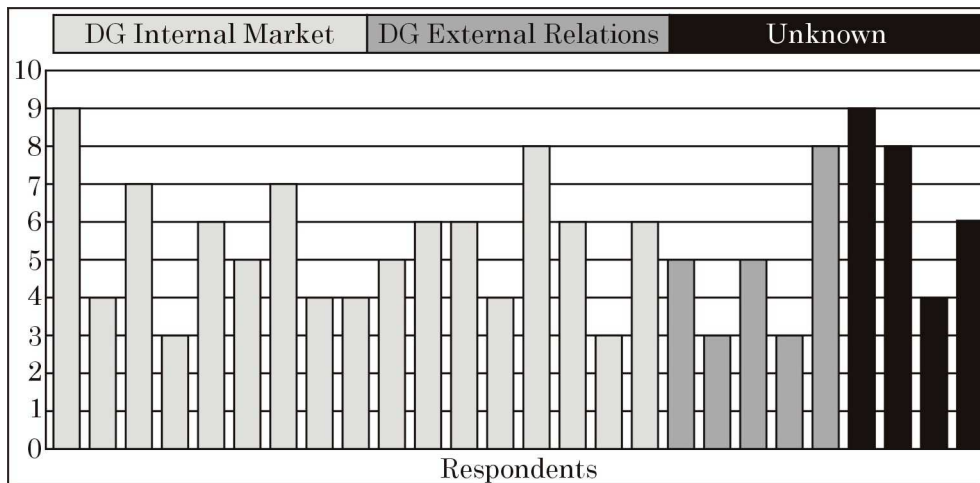


Figure 4
 Respondents' perception of masculinity vs femininity

The fifth dimension is *short term versus long term orientation of the organisation.*

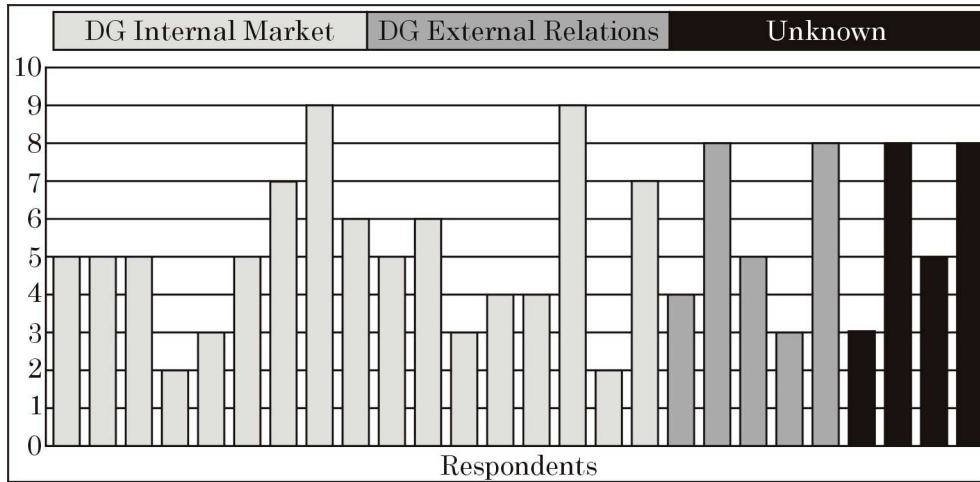


Figure 5

Respondents' perception of short vs long term orientation of the organisation

The average in DG External Relations is 5.6; in DG Internal Market 5.1; and in the data of unknown origin, 6. The overall average is 5.3. The standard deviation in data is high. The results show that *respondents perceive the time orientation of the organisation differently, but mostly they characterise it in medium or short terms.*

The sixth dimension is *low versus high context communication in the organisation.*

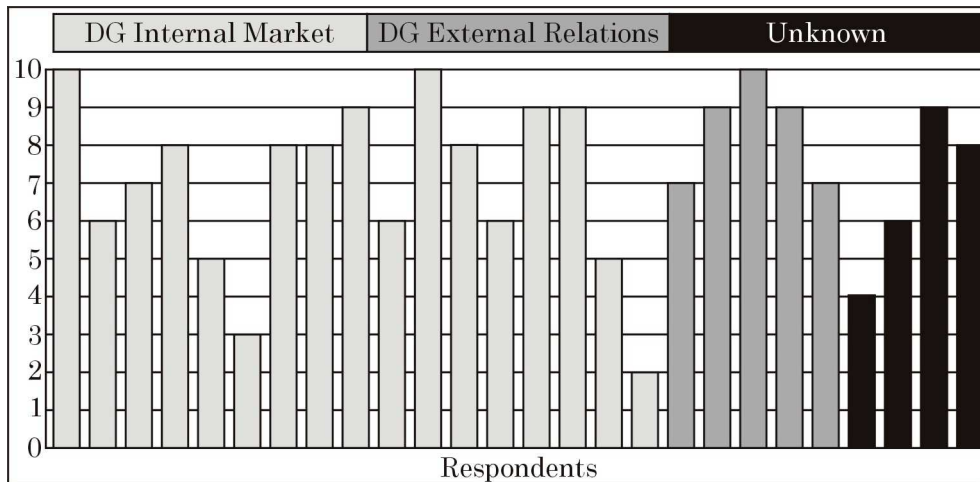


Figure 6

Respondents' perception of low vs high context communication

The average in DG External Relations is 8.4; in DG Internal Market 6.9 and in the data of unknown origin, 6.7. The overall average is 7. The standard deviation among data is high. The DG External Relations generally gave higher values and more homogenous answers than the DG Internal Market. Given the relatively high overall average, *there seems to be a tendency of high context communication in the Commission*: the variance in responses may also be caused by the differences of time spent at the organisation – newcomers probably do not share the “eurojargon” yet at the same extent as other employees do. This hypothesis is in line with the distribution between the two DGs – the DG External Relations, where respondents have been working for a longer time, gave higher values to this dimension than the DG Internal Market.

The seventh dimension is *neutral versus affective culture*.

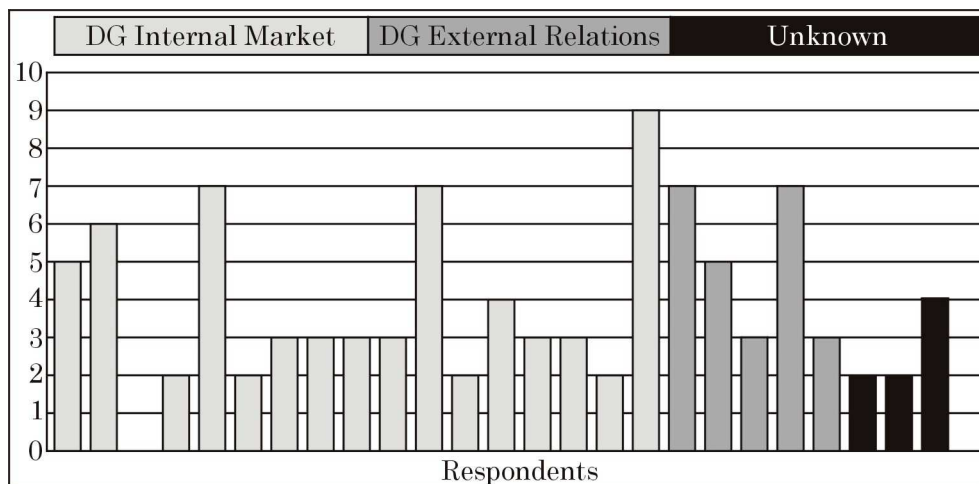


Figure 7
Respondents' perception of neutral vs affective culture

Two of the respondents have not answered the question – one in DG Internal Market, the other in the Unknown group; explaining that they think, this question could rather be answered by personalities and not by the organisational culture. The average in DG External Relations is 5; in DG Internal Market, 4; and in the data of unknown origin, 2.6. The overall average is 4. The values in general are very low (meaning that *respondents think, emotions are not shown in work relations*); and the standard deviation is moderate – most employees share the same view. The slight differences may be explained - similarly to the power distance dimension - by differences among the units. The two DGs show similarity in standard deviation; therefore the difference between them does not seem to be significant. As far as the interviewees are concerned, one official considers the working atmosphere in the Commission as rather rational, without showing emotions; while the other one emphasises the diversity of units in this issue.

The eighth dimension is *universalism versus particularism*.

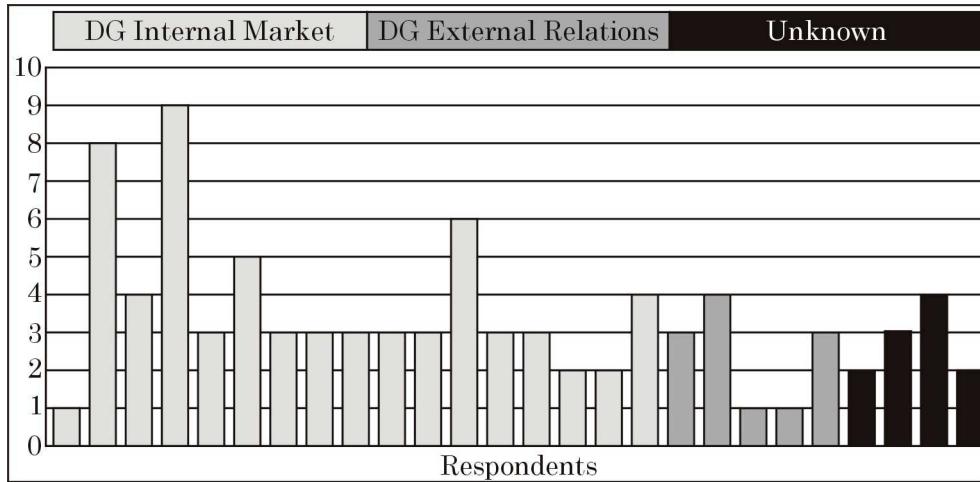


Figure 8
 Respondents' perception of universalism vs particularism

The average in DG External Relations is 2.4; in DG Internal Market, 3.8; and in the data of unknown origin, 2.7. The overall average is 3.3. These values are low, and the standard deviation among variables is low as well. This means, *most employees think, they have to follow the rules, irrespective of the given situation*. There is no significant difference between the two DGs.

The ninth dimension is *achievement versus ascription orientation*.

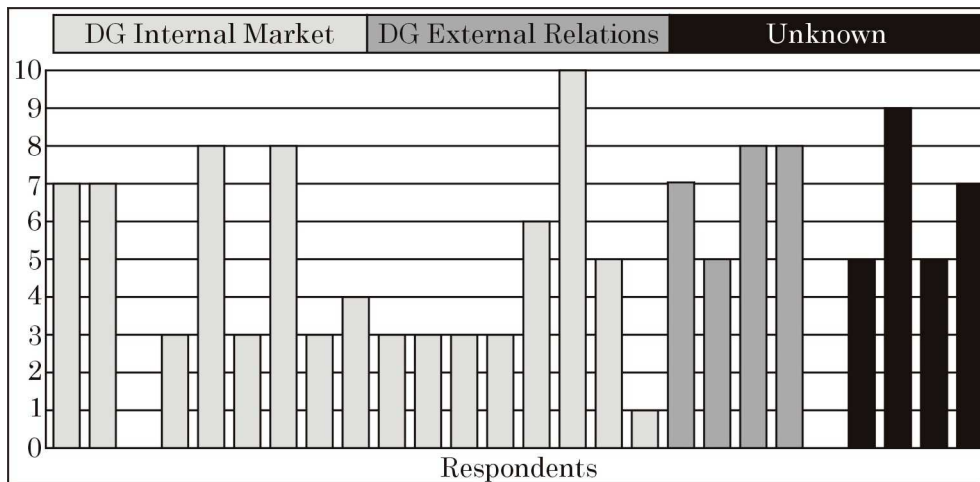


Figure 9
 Respondents' perception of achievement vs ascription orientation of the organisation

One respondent in DG External Relations and another in DG Internal Market did not respond to the question – the latter explained this by not having experience with promotion issues yet. The average in DG External Relations is 7; in DG Internal Market, 4.8; and in the data of unknown origin, 6.5. The overall average is 5.4. There is a significant difference between the values of the two DGs – employees in DG External Relations (who, generally speaking, have been employed by the Commission for a longer period than respondents in DG Internal Market) tend to think that promotion is based on the employees' background and former experience, rather than on his/her performance. (They gave higher values and they are also more homogenous.) The DG Internal Market gave lower values and the standard deviation in the group is high – representing that they perceive individual performance as more important but not all employees share the same view. The reason behind the differences may be caused by the entry date of the officials – *several employees who joined the Commission's civil service after the reforms of 2000 got to know a more performance oriented institution*. The DG Internal Market presented several respondents who arrived at the Commission after 2000.

The tenth dimension is *specifity versus diffuseness*.

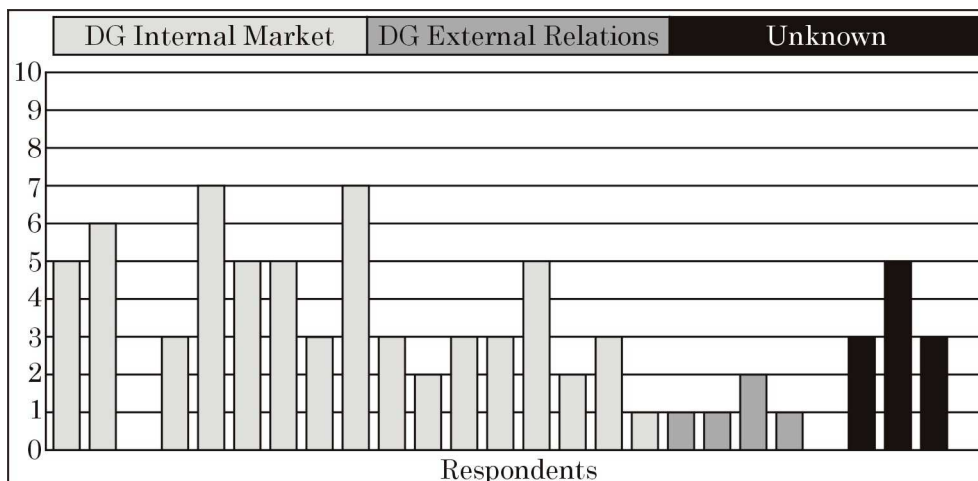


Figure 10
Respondents' perception of specifity vs diffuseness

Three respondents did not answer the question (each of the groups presenting one); one of them explained that he/she thinks, this issue is more influenced by individual personalities. The average in DG External Relations is 1.2; in DG Internal Market, 4; and in the data of unknown origin, 3.6. The overall average is 3.5. The standard deviation is low. These numbers are really low, expressing that *respondents tend to separate their private lives from their working sphere*. The DG Internal Market shows somewhat higher numbers and its variance is slightly higher than that of the other DG – this phenomenon might mean that younger civil servants at the beginning of their career tend to socialise more with their colleagues. The interviewees underlined the specific character of the organisation.

The eleventh – and last – dimension is *inner versus outer directedness*.

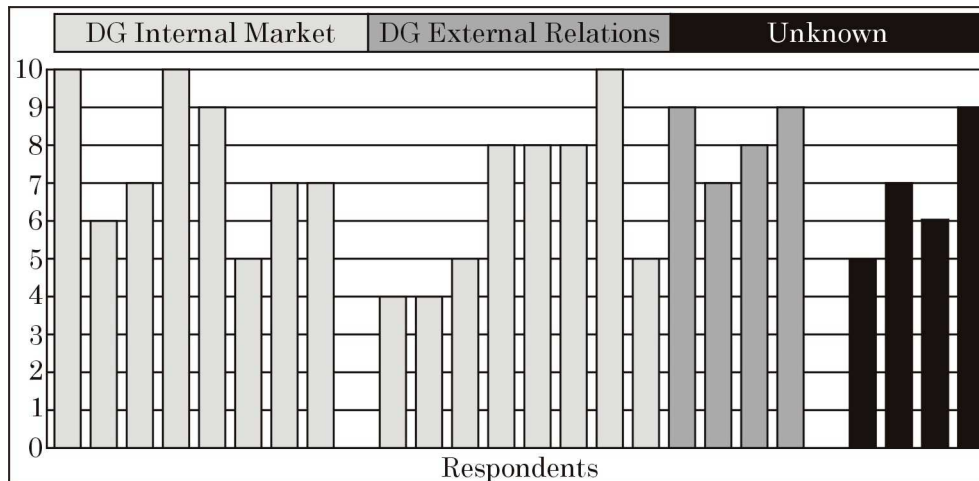


Figure 11

Respondents' perception of inner vs outer directedness

The average in DG External Relations is 8.2; in DG Internal Market it is 7; in the data of unknown origin, 6.7. The overall average is 7.2, the standard deviation is low. These high numbers and the relative homogeneity of the values express that *employees consider personal relationships, networks and political conditions as more important assets for success than personal efforts*. There is some difference again between the two DGs: the DG External Relations underlines more the personal relationships aspect than the DG Internal Market. These differences might be caused again by the time the respondents have spent at the Commission: those from DG External Relations probably had more time to build up and experience networks; and are also less used to the new, performance-oriented style of the Commission that followed the KINNOCK-reforms, compared to newcomers.

5.4. Further Questions on Organisational Culture

The second part of the questionnaire distributed in the two DGs consisted of closed and open-ended questions. They examined several aspects of the organisational culture: the assimilation process; commitment to the organisation of and to the case for Europe; intercultural conflicts and the debate between intergovernmentalism and supranationalism. The two interviewees also commented on these issues.

Question 2 in the survey investigated *whether respondents think the organisational culture of the Commission is well communicated to civil servants*. Respondents were asked to use a scale between 1 and 10 to demonstrate their perception (see Figure 12).

The average in DG External Relations is 3.6; in DG Internal Market, 5.5 and in the data of unknown origin, 3.5. The overall average is 4.8. The standard deviation is moderate in both DGs, but there seems to be a tendency of lower values in DG

External Relations compared to the DG Internal Market. In general, *respondents valued the communication of the organisational culture fair*. One official, who rated the communication with the score of 5, expressed that he/she finds the communication of the organisational culture good, but it mostly appears in lengthy documents. These views are in contrast with the DG Administration's approaches – both of the interviewees mentioned several ways how they try to communicate culture in the organisation.

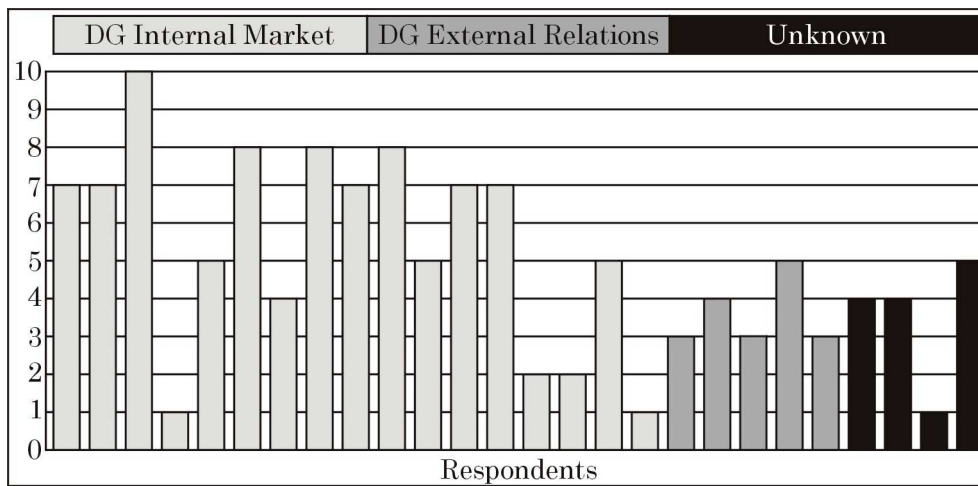


Figure 12

Respondents' perception of the communication of the organisational culture

The following four questions (*questions 3 through 6*) examined civil servants' assimilation process. The first posed the question *whether civil servants faced difficulties in fitting in to the organisational culture* of the Commission when they entered the organisation. Four officials out five in DG External Relations faced difficulties, four out of 17 in DG Internal Market did similarly; and two out of four in the data of unknown origin did so. Considering all responses, *38.4% of the respondents faced difficulties*. The difference between the two DGs is remarkable: *while in DG External Relations 80% of the respondents encountered difficulties; in the DG Internal Market only 23.5% did so*. The reason behind it can lay again in the fact that a number of respondents in DG Internal Market are freshly recruited officials. They joined an organisation with a clear focus on training – which was not the strength of the Commission decades ago.

Question 4 investigates whether officials received *adequate training* in order to understand the purpose of their assignment and the organisational norms when they entered the Commission.

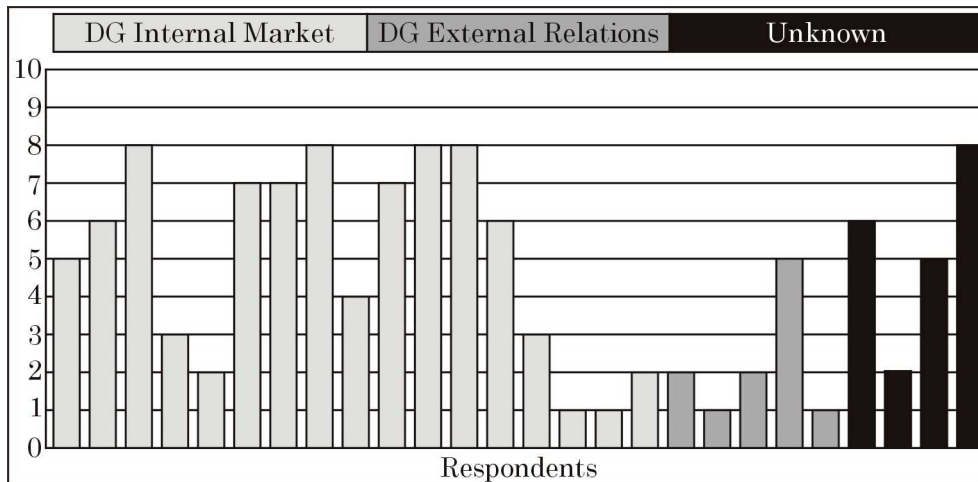


Figure 13
Respondents' perception of the quality of training upon entrance

The average in DG External Relations is 2.2; in DG Internal Market, 5; and in the data of unknown origin, 5.2. The overall average is 4.5. This means, generally, *respondents perceived the training they received upon their entrance to the organisation as fair*. The standard deviation is significantly larger in the DG Internal Market compared to the DG External Relations, and value scores are higher as well. When combining these data with the entry dates of officials, the correlation seems to be significant - the reason behind these differences is probably again the different character the organisation had before and after the reforms.

Question 5 examined *whether officials received support from their co-workers* during their assimilation process to the organisational culture. In DG External Relations, four respondents out of five answered with 'yes'; in DG Internal Market 14 out of 17 did so; and in the data of unknown origin three out of four did similarly. This rate of *support* (80% - 82.3% - 75%) is *very positive* and there seems to be (almost) no difference between the two DGs.

Question 6 analysed whether respondents have received *adequate career development guidance* during the time they have been working at the Commission. Respondents were asked again to indicate the quality of the career development guidance on a scale from 1 to 10.

The average in DG External Relations is 1.4; in DG Internal Market and Services, 4.3; and in the data of unknown origin, 6. The overall average is 4. Altogether, these values are low in both DGs, reflecting that *respondents perceived the quality of career development guidance as rather low*. The DG Internal Market shows again higher values and higher standard deviation, probably this can be caused by the different entry dates again.

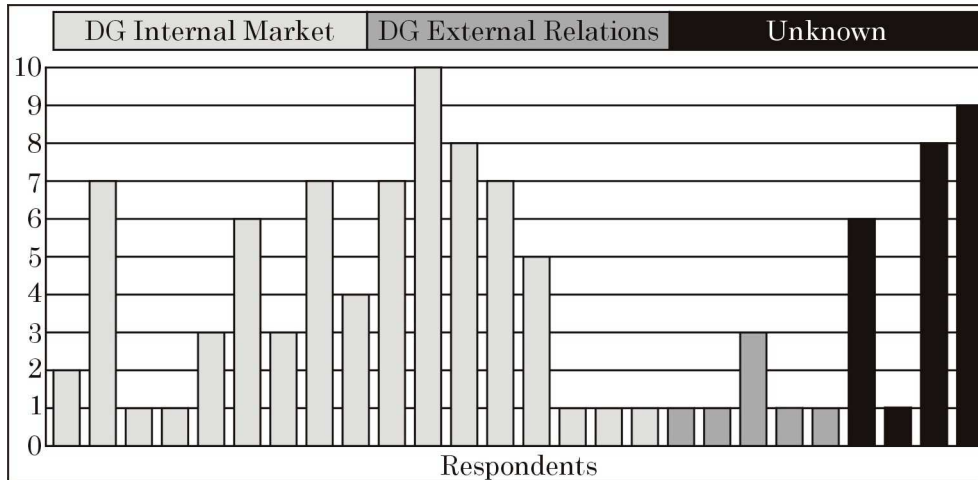


Figure 14
Respondents' perception of the quality of career guidance

The survey responses made it clear that the *effects of the reforms on training and career guidance have been significant*. The interviewees also acknowledged that these areas have fundamentally changed during the KINNOCK-reforms.

Question 7 examined whether employees feel free to undertake initiatives in their work, measuring how encouraged they are by using a scale between 1 and 10.

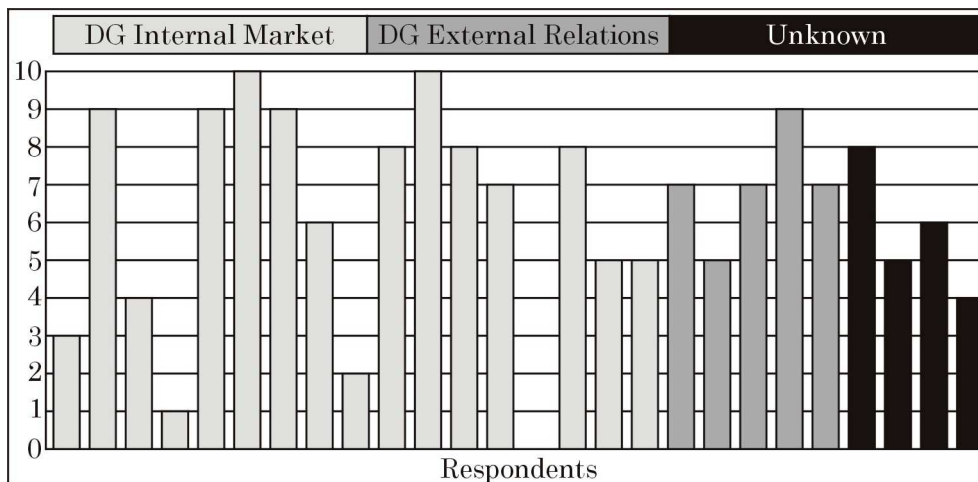


Figure 15
Respondents' perception of how free they are to undertake initiatives

One respondent in DG Internal Market did not answer the question. The average in DG External Relations is 7; in DG Internal Market, 6.5; and in the data of unknown origin, 5.7. The overall average is 6.4. This value is in the *higher medium*

rank. The DG External Relations presents higher values and more homogenous data – respondents here feel more encouraged to undertake initiatives, which might be explained by the longer time they spent at the Commission. The standard deviation in DG Internal Market is higher than in the other DG – that may be explained by the higher number of newcomers who may not (yet) be encouraged to undertake initiatives. One of the interviewees holds, employees are encouraged to undertake initiatives, but due to the bureaucratic character of the organisation, the process of getting through an idea in higher levels is long.

Question 8 asked respondents *whether they feel committed to the European Commission; and in case they are, is it because they have a special interest in European issues or because they feel loyal to the organisation* (or both of them). There were only three persons among all respondents who stated that they do not feel committed to the Commission – all of them came from the DG Internal Market and Services. Interestingly, they have been working already for several years at the Commission. *88.4% of the respondents felt committed to the Commission*, but not all respondents marked, to what extent they can explain this by the two factors mentioned above. Among those who did so, there are significant differences, in both DGs' responses. Out of the 14 answers, three persons ranked both factors at a generally "high" level, expressing that both of those motivate them to the same extent.

Europe is the best realistic way of achieving peace, welfare, friendship, economic success. It is also the best way to fight backward nationalisms. Besides my European ideals, I also feel obliged to be loyal to any decent employer, like the European Commission which offers the best working conditions in the world. (official#3)

Two respondents marked that both factors motivate them to the same extent (without mentioning the intensity). Three employees said, the impact of Europe versus corporate loyalty is like 60% against 40%; while one employee ranked this as 70% against 30%. Two officials marked this relation as 100% for Europe against 0% for corporate loyalty to the Commission; and one official stand for the contrary: 0% for Europe and 100% for loyalty to the organisation. One respondent voted "more" commitment to Europe; and one did so for the organisation of the Commission. The following quotations cite these two latter persons.

If I did not have a special interest in European issues, I would not work for an EU institution; loyalty is also important to me, but to a certain extent - which is defined by my personal values - I would not surpass it on account of loyalty. (official#12)

Probably [I feel] more loyalty to [the] employer, but European issues are nevertheless important. (official#18)

Question 9 touched upon the issue whether there are *conflict situations caused by different national cultures*. Eight respondents stated that there are no conflict situations that would be caused by different national cultures. Five of them came from the DG Internal Market and three of them from the data of unknown origin. Interestingly, all respondents from DG External Relations approved this kind of conflict situations.

One of these eight respondents commented his/her views in the following way:

I disagree with the implication that working with different nationalities gives rise to conflict situations. Nationalities seem to play relatively (surprisingly) small part in the organisational culture. (official#7)

69.2% of the respondents – who acknowledged the existence of *conflict situations based on different national cultures* – mentioned several issues that can give rise to problems.

Problems: Dutch directness versus the French more roundabout ways; Mediterranean penchant for informal networks as opposed to Dutch/German more “Weberian” views on organisation and communication/information sharing. Many clichés about national cultures turn out to be true here, even though there are numerous exceptions. (official#1)

On an individual level, I have never felt that problems have occurred because of differences in national culture. On the contrary, I feel that this is an enriching factor in the institution. However, different communication styles may on occasion give rise to difficulty. In meetings, some nationalities may tend to monopolize the speaking time and go into great and elaborate detail whereas some nationalities tend to be brief and to the point and at peril of being ignored. The Commission is often criticised for being too much based on the French administrative model. This is less true now than in the past but is a factor that sometimes creates difficulty for those who do not come from a French administrative model. (official#2)

Spaniards feel free to say what they really think, whereas the French or the Germans tend to regard disagreement with superiors as a personal betrayal. The British seem to hide their feelings and private lives, whereas Spaniards are not afraid of showing their human side. Greeks often seem to be unable to behave with pragmatism and efficiency. Northerners come from a different world but are usually efficient, kind and respectful. Spaniards usually get along quite well with Belgians, Italians and Portuguese - they tend to like each other and share their views and feelings. (official#3)

Very often linguistic issues cause offence, as well as stereotypical assumptions about each other. As a British person I tend to use irony all the time (it is for us a reflex), but it is not always appropriate! (official#4)

South-North differences are prevailing: Commission culture emphasizes “Northern” values: sticking to the rules/deadlines, doing things as fast as possible, punctuality better than quality, low attention on interpersonal aspects, highly hierarchic roles. We Southerners tend to have a more relaxed approach to these things and we survive pretty well. (official#5)

Expected social behaviour within work is different in Northern and Southern countries. (official#8)

Yes, of course, problems might appear - as people have different cultural, personal, etc backgrounds... (e.g. different cooperation habits, different apprehension of deadlines, etc.) - but this is, when perceived and understood in a good will, rather enrichment of the working environment. (official#12)

Yes - misunderstanding, working habits do not match, [there may be] nationalism and xenophobia. (official #13)

[There are] different expectations concerning the level of politeness and small talk (e.g. Italians versus Finns): colleagues from the South often complain about the “rudeness” of people from the North, although this is often a matter of culture than individual behaviour. (official#14)

Different communication traditions may lead to misunderstandings, different thinking on role of public authorities etc, different backgrounds on working envi-

ronment. *But the multicultural working environment also implies many benefits!* (official#18)

People communicate in very diverse ways (a shouting Greek is not an angry Greek, whereas a Scandinavian never raises his/her voice, etc.) which often leads to misunderstandings. People with different nationalities [also] tend to perceive and treat the issue in different ways (e.g. more formally vs. less formally). (official #21)

Problems: communication problems (language, expression); different backgrounds and expectations as to realities and deliverables. [There may be] problems in integrating in a longstanding international organisation with unwritten organisational rules and objectives and motivation drivers. (official#23)

Interpretation of the term loyalty; body language reading; ... So many! (official#26)

Employees emphasised remarkable North-South differences that often lead to misunderstandings, but at the same time they mentioned, this diversity enriches their working environment.

Question 10 investigated whether civil servants see ways how the organisational culture of the Commission tries to prevent conflict situations that arise of national cultural differences. Five respondents did not answer this question; nine respondents stated they receive adequate guidance; 12 respondents however – 57.1% of all the respondents – have not seen any ways how the organisation would support employees in dealing with these situations. There is a higher tendency of stating the absence of support in the DG External Relations (four respondents out of five) than in the DG Internal Market (five out of 17). One of these respondents commented this the following way:

Perhaps in training [there is support] but staff are really left to their own devices on this. Usually commonsense prevails. (official#2)

Those who confirmed the organisation's support described it in the following ways:

A culture aiming, sometimes excessively, for compromise and the middle ground, even where a clear choice would often be better. (official#1)

I would say you are "trained" for that - to accept, in a good way, differences. (official#12)

Avoiding. (official#13)

Multicultural organization with culture of multinationalism and multilingualism. (official#15)

Attempt to create common culture/approaches. (official#19)

People [are] used to work with strict procedures, etc. to organize work. (official#20)

Training on cultural differences. (official#21)

Awareness raising through training, language courses to overcome the language barrier, etc. (official#22)

The interviewees underlined the support from the organisation in the form of recently introduced trainings that deal with cultural differences.

Question 11 reflects on HOOGHE's (2001) observation, i.e. Commission officials tend to socialise with their own nationalities - thus presenting that national links are still strong and the cosmopolitan character of civil servants does not emerge so easily. The research tried to check this phenomenon among respondents, asking them *whether they think Commission officials generally prefer to socialise with*

colleagues of their own nationalities. Respondents were asked to choose among the answers agree with/without reservations or disagree with/without reservations. Twelve respondents (48%) agreed with the statement with reservations, three respondents (12%) agreed without reservations. Seven respondents (28%) disagreed with it with reservations and four (16%) disagreed without reservations. There is no significant difference between the DGs. *The high number of respondents in the “with reservations” areas shows that respondents are not certain about this issue, but the higher number to agreement than to disagreement shows a tendency that confirms HOOGHE’s statement.*

Question 12 investigates whether people face prejudices in their working environment because of their nationalities. This question again builds on Hooghe’s (2001) surprising observation, quoting an official who claimed to have disadvantages because of his/her nationality. The research tried to examine how representative this perception can be. Two respondents in DG External Relations approved the existence of prejudices; six in DG Internal Market did so (one respondent did not answer the question here) and one gave a positive answer in the data of unknown origin. *Altogether 36% of the respondents have faced prejudices in their working environment because of their nationalities.*

Question 13 examined whether civil servants are influenced by their nationalities when taking decisions – this question approaches the area of intergovernmentalism – supranationalism, in which some officials hold, civil servants have to reflect on their nationalities in order to give added value to their work. In the research responses were very diverse, there was however no significant difference between the DGs. Eleven respondents (44%) answered the question with “yes”; some of them reasoning: *“I think it is just natural, everybody is [influenced by nationality]...”* (official#12) One official mentioned: *“People tend to reason from the knowledge they have, and a lot of knowledge (e.g. in the field of legislation) is based on experiences in the respective member state.”* (official#20) *The majority, 13 respondents however rejected the idea of national influence in their work.*

The following two questions (*question 14 and 15*) continued to further discover this issue. They explicitly asked employees *whether they think civil servants working for the Commission should ‘limit’ their national identities and take a new, Eurofunctionnaire identity in their work, or they think preserving fully national identities brings added value for their work.* Respondents were asked again to choose between agree with/without reservations and disagree with/without reservations. Results show an interesting picture again. There were no significant differences between the two DGs. *Most of the respondents (eleven persons; 44%) agreed without reservations to the idea that they should limit their national identities and take a new, Eurofunctionnaire identity in their work.* Eight respondents (32%) agreed to this with reservations; five (20%) disagreed with reservations and one (4%) disagreed without reservations. This shows that Shore’s view of Eurofunctionnaires, who – at least in their work – limit their national identities and may become the model of European identity, is somewhat true. Interesting is however to combine these outcomes with the other question – whether civil servants reflect on their national values during work. Here most people (eight persons; 32%) disagreed with reservations; seven respondents (28%) disagreed without reservations – and the same number, seven persons agreed with reservations, while two persons (8%)

agreed without reservations. Apart from the high number of persons who agreed with reservations, interesting is also that several respondents who agreed to the previous statement, agreed to this one, too. This shows that *in respondents' perspective, the Eurofunctionnaire and national identities are not mutually exclusive*. One respondent articulated his/her opinion this way:

The preservation of national identity is natural and useful insofar as it helps to better understand the situation in a given member state. EU officials need to take decisions absolutely independently, but that is better founded and connected to reality if taken by someone who has a national identity. The lack of that leads to what is often described as technocracy. (official#22)

Question 16 asked employees *whether they think that the European Commission is promoting any of the two previous tendencies*. Here the results show an interesting picture again – the twenty employees who responded to this question are *equally divided*. Ten of them hold that the *European Commission is promoting a Eurofunctionnaire identity*; the other ten hold that the *European Commission is not influencing them in this respect*.

The Commission helps to "limit" national identity because very little emphasis is put in everyday life on the nationality to civil servants. (official#23)

I think [the Commission] is quite neutral in this sense. (official#12)

Signal given by high hierarchy staff are quite contradictory. (official#8)

The interviewees took a viewpoint similar to the survey respondents. They do talk about the emergence of a Eurofunctionnaire identity – even if they say, it is not influenced by the Commission – on the other hand, they also underline how important the information is for the Commission that employees carry about their national cultures.

Question 17 examined *whether employees think the organisational culture of the European Commission encourages individuals to seek their own interest*. This question refers to Shore's observation (2000) which stated the lack of a coherent personnel policy would lead to individualism and empire-building in the Commission. 14 officials (63.6% of those who answered this question) *denied the existence of this tendency* and only 8 respondents (36.3%) found that they are encouraged to seek their own interest. This significant change (the high number of "no" answers compared to Shore's statement) is probably due to the recent reforms and the stronger human resource policies.

Question 18 asked respondents *whether they think networking is an organic part of the Commission's life*, and question 19 examined *whether they think all nationalities are able to take equal advantage of the networking possibilities*. These questions also reflect on Shore's (2000) thoughts that were questioning whether persons coming from anti-patronage cultures (like the Danes, Brits and Swedes) are able to grasp the networking dynamics of the Commission. (pp. 200) Respondents in the survey found that *networking – both internal and external - is an organic part of the Commission's life* – 22 respondents (88%) answered with "yes" and only three persons (12%) with "no". On the other hand, 16 respondents (72.7%) found that *different nationalities do not take equal advantages of the networking possibilities*, while only six persons (27.2%) thought, they do so.

5.5. Summary of the Findings

The research project has concluded with several interesting findings. Probably the most surprising is that the interviewees in DG Personnel and Administration made it plain at the beginning of the interviews that there exists no management or guidance of the organisational culture as such, despite the major changes that took place in human resource management. When they started to analyse the dimensions and the further questions about the organisation, it turned out however, the DG Admin employs several policies and practices that – even if implicitly – strongly influence the organisational culture, including national diversity and conflict situations. So it seems, after the KINNOCK-reforms, the organisation and employees are not left alone to their own devices, as Shore observed it prior 2000. Employees, survey respondents have also confirmed this. *The KINNOCK-reforms seem to have brought radical changes in several areas of personnel policy and the result is a more coherent and coordinated organisation.* There are however certain areas where probably more attention and better communication is needed.

When describing the organisation, survey respondents have found it hierarchical, uncertainty avoidant, universalist, neutral, medium time oriented, high context communicative, specific and outer directed. They did not take clear position on the dimensions individualism/collectivism, masculinity/femininity and achievement/ascription. The variance in the data may be explained by personal differences and by differences among the DGs and units, as well as by the effects of the reforms. In case of certain questions there was remarkable difference between newcomers and respondents who have been employed for a longer period at the Commission – probably newcomers benefited most of the reforms and got used to a different organisation than what the Commission had been before, for decades. Generally, newcomers gave high values to trainings and faced less difficulties upon arrival compared to their colleagues who entered the organisation earlier. Both of these groups received great support from co-workers.

The communication of the organisational culture only proved to be fair – this may be explained by the relatively recent reforms and the still too bureaucratic character of the organisation – as one respondent said, the communication could be good but it always comes in lengthy documents. Career guidance also proved to be fair but recently recruited employees gave generally higher values as their elder colleagues – that may suggest some improvement. Interesting is to compare the findings with the responses of the DG Admin – they seem to put a lot of emphasis on training and career guidance, so the problem can be in the novelty of these services and in poor communication.

Employees feel moderately encouraged to take initiatives. Most respondents feel loyal to the Commission; the majority of them explain it more as a commitment to European issues, but there were also a number of responses expressing strong corporate loyalty. Most respondents also acknowledge the existence of conflict situations that are caused by different national cultures – they recognised differences in communication styles, linguistics, networking practices, humour, social behaviour, cooperation habits and attitudes to deadlines. Several respondents underlined significant South-North differences that can cause problems, but no one mentioned differences between Eastern and Western countries. Several respondents admitted

that diversity enriches their environment; a high number of them however marked, they do not receive help from the organisation for solving these conflict situations.

The majority of respondents think, employees tend to socialise with their own nationalities and surprisingly, quite a high number faced prejudices because of their nationalities.

Concerning the contradiction between SHORE's and HOOGHE's studies, respondents emphasised, they do take on a Eurofunctionnaire identity in their work and they rather embody supranationality in their decisions. This is in line with Shore's argument. On the other hand they also underlined that, at the same time, they reflect on their national values in their work and they consider it as a useful tool to apply. So they do not see a clear division between European and national identity – this idea is reflected in HOOGHE's work.

Employees do not feel “encouraged” by the organisation to seek their own interest only – this is an important change again compared to SHORE's observations. And finally, respondents think, networking is a crucial part of the Commission's life, and the majority of them hold, not all nationalities take equal advantages of the networking possibilities.

Coming back to the main research questions, it seems, the DG Personnel and Administration is strongly influencing – even if not consciously guiding - the organisational culture of the Commission. There is an overall Commission culture that sets basic values for the entire organisation, at the same time however DGs and units set their own values in their territories. There is a clear change in the organisation due to the recent reforms and employees and personnel issues in general receive now much more attention. The efficiency of human resource policies however did not prove to be good: even though the DG Admin mentions methods how they try to help people, respondents do not always approve them in their answers. The main focus of research – how national cultures are reflected in the organisational culture – has been investigated, and survey respondents acknowledged the existence of conflict situations, being caused by national cultural differences. The reaction of the HR department to this is not completely clear – some respondents mentioned a neutralising guiding, but the majority of respondents stated they did not receive help. There seems to be a clear tendency of an emerging Eurofunctionnaire elite - respondents do feel committed to Europe, and do think - at least in their work - they have to take a “European” identity. On the other hand, they still lean on their national values, so they see no clear division line between the two identities.

6. FINDINGS

The study presented in this paper analysed the reflection of national cultures in the organisational culture of the European Commission. The research was partly based on desk research – analysing the existing literature in the area of organisational theories and anthropological studies; and partly based on an empirical research conducted at the European Commission. The necessity for the empirical study arose by the fact that only limited academic literature has been presented about the organisational culture of the Commission following the accomplishment of the KINNOCK-reforms.

The empirical research has targeted civil servants and human resource policy creators. Due to time limits, only two Directorate Generals could participate in the project; and because of the low number of responses, the research outcomes are not representative, neither for the Commission, nor for the selected DGs. Officials were targeted by questionnaires in the DG External Relations and the DG Internal Market and Services, asking for their opinions about the organisational culture of the Commission. At the same time, two interviews have been conducted at the DG Personnel and Administration to learn more about their perception of organisational culture and about the human resource policies they implement on the organisation. The main research question was how national cultures are reflected in the organisational culture of the European Commission; the analysis however further investigated other characteristics of the organisational culture; conflict situations in the working environment of civil servants and human resource policy developments.

The main conclusion of the project is that the KINNOCK-reforms managed to change efficiently the organisational culture of the Commission. The description of the organisational culture gained through this analysis is very different from previous studies. (see SHORE, 2000; HOOGHE, 2001 for example) The traditionally rigid and bureaucratic organisation turned to be more performance oriented; the changes however have not been accomplished everywhere successfully and they were not efficiently accompanied by human resource strategies. An interesting phenomenon is that the organisational culture is not consciously guided – both interviewees denied the existence of conscious management of the organisational culture -, on the other hand, most of the human resource policies, trainings and career guidance are indirectly influencing that. Bringing the overall image of the organisational culture (that is targeted at by several trainings and programmes) to conscious level and communicating it well to employees could be a key to increase the efficiency of human resource tools.

The reforms have probably influenced more the recently recruited employees – they faced fewer problems in the assimilation process, benefit more from the trainings and career guidance and get to know an organisation that is more flexible and performance oriented. The integration of other employees to the reform process may still remain a task.

Concerning the main research question, the reflection of national cultures in the organisational culture of the Commission, most respondents acknowledged the existence of conflict situations arising from national diversity. The majority of them emphasised remarkable North-South differences in working styles, on the other hand emphasising that these differences enrich their working ambient. Interestingly they did not find the help of the organisation to solve these problems efficient enough – comparing this perception with the training programmes of the DG Admin, the problem can be in the communication process. The communication of the organisational culture has generally been considered as rather poor, thus this may be an area that needs further development.

Finally, concluding the academic debate between SHORE and HOOGHE about the emergence or not of a European identity both hypothesis proved to be true – officials in the Commission tend to receive a European, supranational identity; on the other hand they preserve their national identities and lean upon them to bring added value in their work.

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