

INDIVIDUALISM *VERSUS* COLLECTIVISM IN ECONOMIC ORGANIZATIONS FROM SOUTH-WEST OLTENIA REGION

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Abstract:

Starting from the major impact the organizational culture exerts over long-term performance of organizations and on the competitive advantage, in the theory and practice of management the concerns for understanding its multiple facets have intensified worldwide. This is highlighted by the numerous intercultural studies that emphasize the "invisible force" of each nation's culture and each organization's culture, which constitutes irrefutable arguments for enhancing the knowledge in this area. In this context, this study highlights how the cultural dimension "individualism-collectivism" influences the behavior of employees, in general, but especially that of managers from South-West Oltenia Region. The study results are based on the responses of 1086 respondents from 70 organizations in various fields of economic activity, whose opinions were investigated in two perspectives: current practice and desired practice. This paper presents some of the findings resulted from the research COMOR-Managerial Behavior in the Organizations in Romania, initiated and carried out throughout the country since 2009 by the Management Scientific Society of Romania (SSMAR) in collaboration with the Association of Faculties of Economics in Romania (AFER).

Keywords: organizational behavior, managerial behavior, variables, individualism, collectivism

1. Introduction

According to Geert Hofstede, the cultural dimension "individualism-collectivism" refers to the relationships established between the individual and the entity of origin (nation, community, family, organization), reflecting how strong - higher or lower - is the

interdependence that the entity promotes among its members (Hofstede, 1996, pp. 86-92). Since the two contrary features of this cultural dimensions coexist in the same social entity, to varying degrees, in practice can be identified organizations that are mainly collectivist, defining their self-image by vocable "us" or dominantly individualistic, being defined by vocable

"I" (Goleman et al., 2005, p. 394). Moreover, even within the same organization there are individuals with a duplicitous attitude, who, in different contexts, relate to two cultures: in some cases are individualistic, and in others collectivist. As such, in social life, individualism and collectivism coexist in management relations, but also in the behavior of individuals and groups, so that by their manifestation they emphasize the dominant feature of the values that characterize an entity for a longer or shorter period of time, determining a system of relations that evolve towards individualism or collectivism.

Each of the diametrically opposed features of individualism-collectivism has advantages and disadvantages so that, in different situational contexts, the predominance of one or other of the two sides defines the type of dominant culture: individualistic or collectivist.

Where individualism is high, the bonds between people are poor (temporary, confusing, superficial), each person for himself, while collectivism focuses on the group, the proper confidence in the team and the decisions made by the group, in other words on the devotion to the entity.

Independence and interdependence are cultural features that are manifested in a very complex manner for individuals (Goleman et al., 2005, p. 394), which makes the interests arising from economic, social or personal necessities to be imprinted by egocentric (individualism) or selfless (collectivism) traits.

Taking into account the relations between the individuals and institutional entity where they work, both individualistic organization and collectivist one are socially integrated entities. The difference between them is

given by the nature of these relationships through which the integration is achieved, which is assessed using calculated scores and the significance of these scores' numerical expression.

As for the interpretation of the practical usefulness of one of the two opposite characteristics of this organizational culture dimension, it is worth noting that some organizations consider individualism a positive thing, relying on policies, practices and procedures that allow individuals to have initiative, make decisions, work on your own terms and create. In this type of culture, relations between employers and employees appear only as labor relations based on mutual benefit and evaluated on economic criteria, and decisions can be made favoring personal relationships, while the focus is on individual freedom in the use of time that is causing competition and labor disputes arise as a direct confrontation between the protagonists (Hofstede, 1996, p. 101).

Other organizations disapprove individualism, considering it destroyer of the group's harmony and cooperation and preferring collectivism. In this type of culture, relations between employers and employees are more important than the work task, being characterized by interpersonal relationships perceived as family relationships. They are based on group decisions made by consensus and collaboration, on common activities and teamwork, while paying attention to physical and psychosocial environment conditions in which work is carried out, the training of personnel and the optimal use of qualifications.

Therefore, preponderance of individualism or collectivism is a strategic choice of the management of each organizational entity that defines its existential identity in the context of

size and intensity of the market relationships they cultivate.

2. Contextual framework of COMOR research

Concern of specialists for studying the strengths of organizational culture and its implications on the behavior of employees, particularly managers, is highlighted by numerous studies and researches in the field. Thus, since the 30s of the twentieth century, Mayo and Barnard (State, 2004, p. 21) used in their works some terms similar to the concept of organizational culture, such as informal organization, organizational development, organizational climate, management style. Subsequently, interest in this "invisible force" of organizations has grown almost exponentially, so that in 1952, Kluckhohn and Kroeber identified 164 definitions of organizational culture (Kluckhohn and Kroeber 1952, p. 35), to which were added many others, specific to the new thinking trends, without being formulated a uniform definition universally recognized by specialists. This shows once again the increased complexity and numerous manifestations of organizational culture, as a consequence of reconsidering the major role human resources play in any organization.

In management science, the concept of organizational culture has recently appeared in the '70s and '80s of the twentieth century, due to the contribution of renowned researchers, such as M.S. Davis, J. Child, A. Kieser, G. Hofstede, T.J. Peters, R. H. Waterman, W. Ouchi, E. Miller, M. Thévenet, R. Nath, E. Shein and many others.

The most comprehensive and in-depth study on the organizational culture was conducted by Dutch scientist Geert Hofstede, which was based on analysis of the following cultural dimensions: individualism-collectivism, distance to

power, uncertainty avoidance, masculinity / femininity, orientation on short / long term (originally called "Confucian dynamism"), the latter being a continuation of his research along researcher Michael Bond (Hofstede, 1996, pp. 91-163).

Hofstede's model was the benchmark for the researches conducted by Romanian specialists for the identification of specific cultural dimensions in Romanian space, the most notable due to the extent of research and the results being

- Research carried out by CEMAT SA in the period 1997-1998, whose findings have been published in Caesar Mereuță paper entitled "*Organizational Culture in the Romanian space. Dominant Values and Profiles*"

- Olympia State's study on a sample of 105 subjects from a hotel unit in 2004, published in the paper "*Organizational Culture and Management*";

- The study conducted by Interact Training Company from Bucharest and Gallup Organization, in 2005;

- GLOBE (Global Leadership and Organisational Behaviour Effectiveness) Research in 2006-2007, carried out in three sectors: telecommunications, financial services and agri-food industry.

In line with the concerns and outstanding results of Romanian specialists, Management Scientific Society of Romania (SSMAR) initiated and conducted during 2009-2013 a broad and complex research at national level in all fields of economic activity, called "*Managerial Behavior in the Organizations from Romania*" (COMOR).

3. Research Methodology

The complexity and diversity of objectives and extent of research required the design of a rigorous research methodology, which is based on the statistical sampling method. Relying on firm compliance with the scientific research requirements, COMOR research was conducted by proceeding sequentially through the following steps: defining the sample, development of questionnaires, data collection, data processing, analysis and interpretation of results (Roşca et al., 2011, pp. 353-363).

Regarding the **structure of the questionnaire** used for data collection, it includes questions that provide information that can be grouped into two categories:

a) *introductory information* (*questionnaire 1*), which presents:

- observation unit (organization): name, address, date of establishment, CAEN code, legal form, the main economic and financial indicators etc.;

- survey unit (respondents): gender, age, marital status, hierarchical level, level of education ş.a.

b) *content information* (*questionnaire 2*), which describes: the managerial and organizational behavior (80 questions), using a Likert type scale with five levels of value judgments (strong agreement - *at*, partial agreement - *ap*, indecision - *i*, partial disagreement - *dp*, disagreement - *dt*), referring to two scenarios: current practice - *Pa* (as reality is perceived) and desired practice - *Pd* (as it should be).

The answers provided by respondents were subsequently quantified with the help of the processing data program in a number of specific statistical indicators, underlying the performance of a comprehensive

analysis, namely (Sîrbu, Roşca et al., 2011, pp. 452-458):

- *Descriptive (quantitative) analysis*: the share of judgment values on each grouping variable (sex, age, education, management training, hierarchical position) and the share of grouping variables on each judgment value (total agreement, partial agreement, indecision, partial disagreement, strong disagreement).

- *Factorial (qualitative) analysis of factual judgements* : calculated scores, standard deviation, the module and the median.

In the research questionnaire 3 can be found questions by which are identified the personality traits (37 questions) and behavior traits (39 questions) of the effective manager on a rating scale from 1 to 5 as well as 20 behaviors / characteristics; their interpretation might outline the profile of the leader of excellence in Romanian organizations.

4. Organizational behavior variables of "individualism-collectivism" in the COMOR research

In COMOR research, the cultural dimension "individualism-collectivism" was analyzed by the following variables of organizational behavior: affirmation - aspirations, attachment, attitude, behavior, motivation, freedom of opinion, privileges, managerial bodies and subordination (Roşca, 2013).

As a reflection of the people's desire, but also of their efforts to achieve a noble purpose and a goal in their professional careers, **the assertion - aspirations** represent the organizational behavior variable that reflects how employees participate - individually or in a team - to the realization of projects for the achievement of organizational goals and

the importance given by respondents to the organization's public resonance, i.e. the image created and reinforced that it has in the business and societal environment thanks to the quality of its products and/or services and its relations with stakeholders.

Attachment of people, as a strong and sustainable affection reflected by their behavior and attitude in interpersonal relations within the social group of membership (family, community, workplace), shows very different feelings such as: the spirit of understanding and solidarity with various affective emotions of peers (joys and tribulations); sharing or not parental feelings (pride of parents for children's success, respectively the pride of children for their parents' achievements); managers' assessment of their employees' performance and employees' evaluation of their managers' success and the organization's performances; feelings of condescendence or infatuation, appreciation, support, encouragement or rejection, minimization or marginalization in relation to/ about the successes or failures of other men. All these influence the work group cohesion by the intensity (strong or weak) of interpersonal relations, with direct effects on the comfort and satisfaction of employees and the results of the work performed.

Attitude of managers, as positive or negative externalization of their behavior, is determined by specific and concrete organizational contexts of ongoing activities, such as, for example: the mood before certain positive or negative values (optimism-pessimism, firmness-hesitation, modesty-conceit); their interest in exercising or not the duties of their function at the preset quality parameters; decisional options (favorable or unfavorable, effective or ineffective). In other words, the attitude

represents the behavioral variable that brings together the position of managers towards the group's achievements or contractors' mistakes, their dominance in labor relations with employees, friendly and communicative behavior of people, safety and firmness in action, mediation of latent or overt conflict etc.

Demeanor of managers, as the set of actions necessary to adapt to certain situations caused by the contextual conditions of activities in an organization, expresses their determination and perseverance to overcome some obstacles and difficulties in problem solving, the priority of company's interests or personal ones, the modesty of managers, the manner of assuming responsibility for failures.

Motivation of employees, as an assembly of dynamic factors of adaptation to changing organizational contexts, is reflected in: the role that remuneration and reward granting system has in maximizing the individual and group interests; the role of quality criteria and standards in fostering the professional performances; stimulation of creativity (inventions, innovations, rationalizations); attention paid by managers to preparing successors at various levels of the organizational hierarchy.

Freedom of opinion, in its capacity of knowledge starting point and a possible initiation of a debate or dialogue on different aspects of the organization, is expressed both by the attitude of managers to encourage / discourage the employees to communicate their views on the entrusted problems, tasks or works, and the manner in which they support and encourage the exchange of opinions.

Privileges are favors or benefits enjoyed by some people within the organization, being identified either by the positions or functions held by in-

laws, friends, etc., or the unethical and discriminatory practices underlying the provision of rewards (kinship, political, sympathetic or business relations etc.).

Managerial bodies, as structures empowered to take important decisions concerning the activity of organization (the general shareholders meeting, board of directors, steering committee, managers found in different positions in the organizational hierarchy - top manager, middle manager, supervisors), the manner in which managerial bodies, respectively managers exercise their stated powers.

Obedience, as an attitude of submission and listening, is reflected by the acceptance or non-acceptance of the manager's methods or views by the executors of decisions, even if his variant or point of view is not the most appropriate.

5. Results of the study

To characterize the cultural dimension "individualism-collectivism" in the South-West Oltenia Region were interviewed 1086 respondents (14.2 % of the total 7655 respondents) from 70 economic organizations (out of 594 units, with a share of 11.8 %).

As can be seen in Figure no. 1, the sample structure of observation units depending on the legal form of organization is the following:

- 44.3 % are joint stock companies (31 units);
- 50.0 % are limited liability companies (35 units);
- 5.5 % are autonomous administrations (4 units).

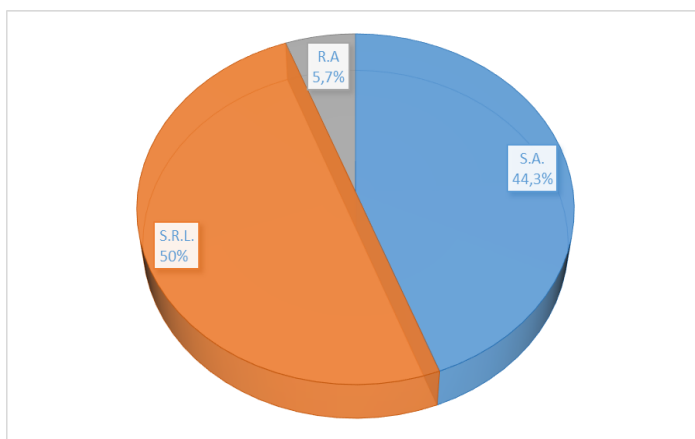


Figure 1. Sample structure of observation units depending on the legal form of organization

The size of organizations, analyzed based on the number of employees, confers to the sample of investigated units the following structure (figure no. 2):

- 35 organizations have between 50-200 employees (50 %);

- 13 organizations have between 201-500 employees (18.6 %);
- 10 organizations have between 501-1000 employees (14.3 %);
- 12 organizations have over 1000 employees (17.1 %).

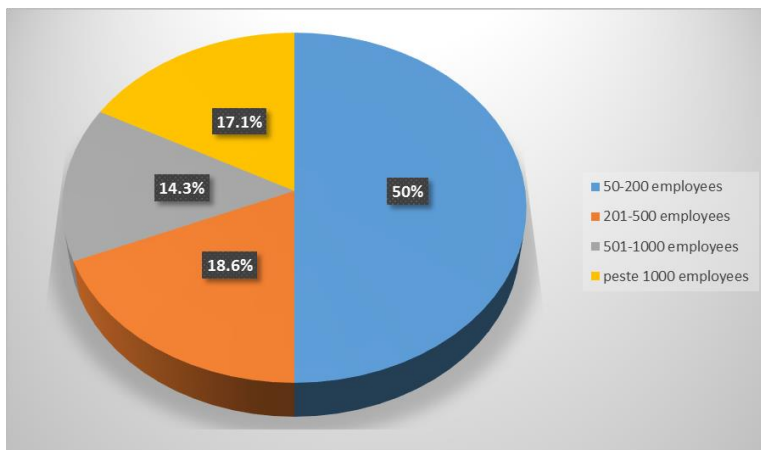


Figure 2. Structure of units surveyed in the South-West Oltenia Region by number of employees

On areas of economic activity, the distribution of research units and respondents is presented suggestively in Table no. 1.

Table 1

Distribution on fields of activity of research units and respondents from South-West Oltenia Region

Nr	Field of economic activity	Research Unit		Respondents		The average number of respondents per research unit
		Number	Percentage -%-	Number	Percentage -%-	
1	Agriculture	4	5,7	30	2,8	7,5
2	Industry and energy	28	40,0	542	49,9	19,3
3	Constructions	12	17,1	194	17,9	16,2
4	Commerce	10	14,3	99	9,1	9,9
5	Transports	1	1,4	10	0,9	10,0
6	Tourism	2	2,9	18	1,6	9,0
7	Services	13	18,6	193	17,8	14,8
TOTAL		70	100	1086	100	15,5

Data from the table reveals that, on areas of economic activity, the participation of respondents from South-West Oltenia Region in the COMOR research is reflected, in descending order, as follows: industry and energy, construction, services, trade, agriculture, tourism, transport. Thus, there is an

average of 15.5 % of the number of respondents per each statistical observation unit in the region. Detailed analysis of the sample of respondents, on the main grouping variables of research, is shown in Table. 2.

Table 2

**Distribution of respondents from the South-West Oltenia Region
on grouping variables**

Nr. crt.	Grouping Variables		Respondents	
			Number	%
1.	Gender	Male	531	48,9
		Female	555	51,1
		Total	1086	100,0
2.	Age	Under 30 years	204	18,8
		Between 30-44 years	496	45,7
		Over 44 years	386	35,5
		Total	1086	100,0
3.	Education	Secondary education	255	23,5
		Higher education	831	76,5
		Total	1086	100,0
4.	Employment Status	Managers	515	47,4
		Executants/Performers	571	52,6
		Total	1086	100,0

Structure of respondents by their gender and level of education and is outlined in Fig. 3 where it is observed that women hold a higher share than

men both in higher education (50.3 %) and among respondents with secondary education (53.7 %).

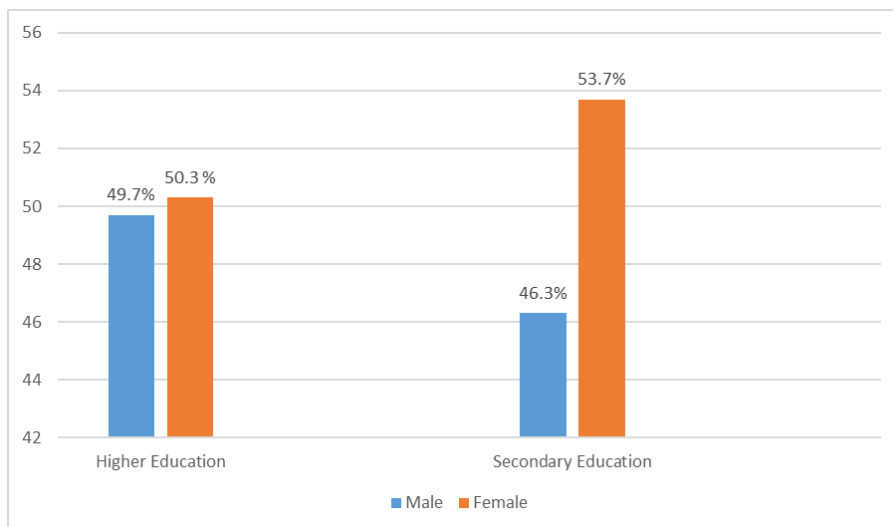


Figure 3 Distribution of respondents from the South-West Oltenia Region on education level and gender

A suggestive image of the respondents' structure depending on their gender and employment status (Manager / Executive) is shown in the graph from Figure no. 4, which emphasizes that the share of male managers (51.7 %) is higher

than that of female managers (48.3 %). In the case of respondents who are performers/executants the situation is reversed, in that the largest share is held by women (53.6 %).

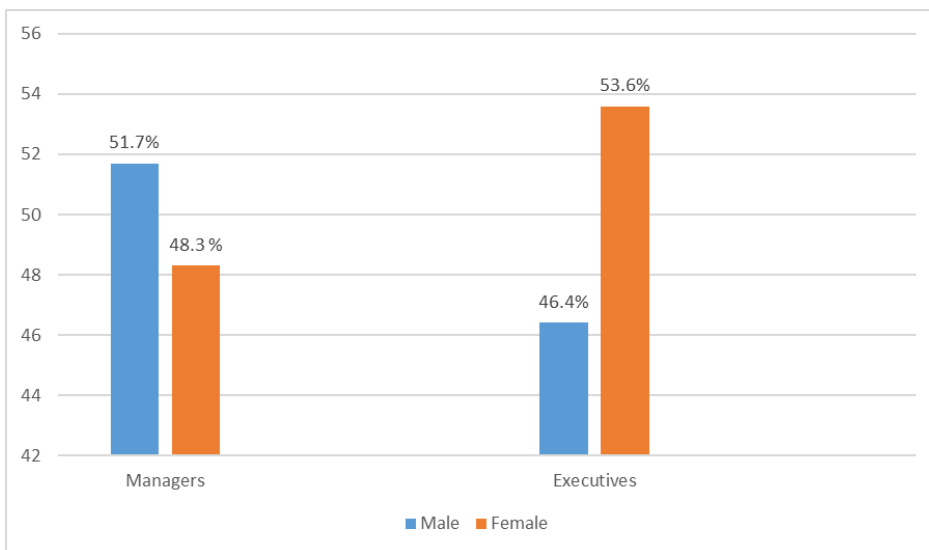


Figure 4. Distribution of respondents from South-West Oltenia Region on gender and employment hierarchy

To outline as completely as possible the sample structure, it is necessary to analyze the sample of 515 managers depending on the level of organizational hierarchy at which they range (Figure no. 4), namely:

- 50.9 % are lower hierarchy managers (a total of 262 people);
- 33.2 % are middle hierarchy managers (a total of 171 people);
- 15.9 % are top-level managers (with a total of 82 people).

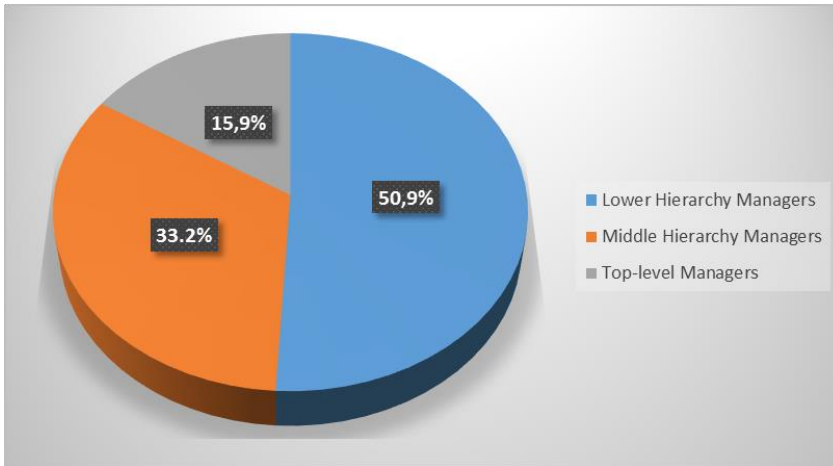


Figure 5. Structure of managers on the level of organizational hierarchy

The participation of 1086 respondents from South West Oltenia Region to defining the two adverse characteristics of individualism-collectivism is dependent on the value judgments expressed by them depending on how they perceived realities with the help of which are identified the main cultural components (diagnosis of current practice) and how the respondents consider the behavior of employees should be shaped, foreshadowing the projection of a behavior able to ensure more effective and sustainable results for organizations' activity(organizational behavior prognosis).

According to COMOR research methodology, **the respondents' degree of participation** is calculated using the formula:

$$G_p = \frac{N_p + N_c}{N} \cdot 100,$$

where:

N_p represents the number of respondents pro/for;

N_c – represents the number of respondents contra/against;

N – represents total number of respondents pro, against and abstentions.

The results obtained are evaluated based on the following qualifiers: excellent, with a degree of participation between 90-100 %; very good, between 80 to 89.9%; good between 65 to 79.9 %; satisfactory between 51 to 64.9 %.

Synthesis of options pro, against or abstentions shown in table no. 3 shows that in order to characterize individualism-collectivism in the two situational aspects, is recorded a very high degree of participation of respondents (92.9 % for the current practice and 97 % for the desired projection), which proves their major interest for the acknowledgement of existing behaviors, but also their contribution - through the expressed opinions - to the improvement of the employees' behaviors in general, and of managers in particular, in a future more or less close.

Table 3

Participation of respondents to defining individualism-collectivism on behavioral variables in economic organizations from South-West Oltenia Region

Nr. crt.	Behavioral variables	Number of respondents							Degree of participation - % -	
		Total, of which:	Individualism		Collectivism		Abstentions		Pa	Pd
			Pa	Pd	Pa	Pd	Pa	Pd		
1	Affirmation - aspirations	1086	-	-	512	569	574	517	47,1	52,4
2	Attachment	1086	-	-	883	954	203	132	81,3	87,8
3	Attitude	1086	241	121	718	856	127	109	88,3	90,0
4	Demeanor	1086	138	122	817	865	131	99	87,9	90,9
5	Motivation	1086	362	456	603	621	121	9	88,9	99,2
6	Freedom of opinion and privileges	1086	-	-	814	850	272	236	75,0	78,3
7	Managerial bodies and subordination	1086	533	508	486	543	67	35	93,8	96,8
Total South-West Oltenia Region		1086	319	302	690	751	77	33	92,9	97,0

In order to determine the dominant characteristic of each cultural dimension investigated in the research, average scores were calculated - \bar{x} - of specific behavioral variables, based on the relation (Roşca and colab, 2011):

$$\bar{x} = \frac{\sum x_i f_j}{\sum f_j}$$

where:

\bar{x} – average value

x_i – spectrum of of opinions expressed on the scale of values from 1 to 5

f_i – number of respondents

The correlative analysis of the number of respondents and the scores calculated for each behavioral variable that characterize individualism-collectivism in the units investigated in South-West Oltenia Region, both for the current situation (Pa) and projection desired (Pd) is presented in Table no.4.

Table 4

Number of respondents and scores of individualism-collectivism behavioral variables in economic organizations from South-West Oltenia

Nr. crt.	Behavioral variables	Current Practice				Desired Practice			
		Individualism		Collectivism		Individualism		Collectivism	
		Number	Score	Number	Score	Number	Score	Number	Score
1	Affirmation - aspirations	-	-	512	4,12	-	-	569	4,26
2	Attachment	-	-	883	3,98	-	-	954	4,13
3	Attitude	241	3,73	718	3,93	121	3,95	856	4,22
4	Demeanor	138	4,07	817	4,06	122	4,18	865	4,25
5	Motivation	362	4,03	603	4,31	456	4,48	621	4,68
6	Freedom of opinion and privileges	-	-	814	3,60	-	-	850	3,69
7	Managerial bodies and subordination	533	3,81	486	3,80	508	4,07	543	3,91
Total South-West Oltenia Region		319	3,88	690	3,94	302	4,22	751	4,15

The values of medium calculated scores confirms that, in the whole South-West Oltenia Region, collectivism is the dominant feature in *the current situation* (3.94 medium score for collectivism versus that of 3.88 for individualism), recording slightly elevated values for five behavioral variables and approximately equal for two of them (with differences of almost 0.2 %).

For *the future projection*, although collectivism records an increase of 5.3% (from 3.94 medium score in Pa to 4.15 in Pd), it slightly outpaced the individualism by 1.68 %, whose score is 4.22 being higher by 8.8 % compared to the current situation. Detailed analysis of the organizational behavior variables' scores highlights the fact that just for one of them, namely managerial bodies and subordination, the average score calculated for

collectivism (3.91) is lower than that for individualism (4.07), with a percentage of 9.6 %.

6. Conclusions

Considering the in-depth analysis of results of the survey conducted to investigate the dominant trend for individualism-collectivism cultural dimension in organizations from South-West Oltenia Region, the main conclusions drawn are:

a) From the point of view of *the sample*, it can be noted its good representativeness, which can be approached in two ways, namely:

- of investigated units (70), representing 11.8 % of total number nationwide (594), from all fields of economic activity and the categories of size taken into account (based on number of employees) with various legal forms of organization;

- of respondents, in number of 1086 persons, with an average number of 15.5 per research unit, compared to the value of 12.9 calculated for the entire research. At the same time, it can be observed an appropriate structure of the sample group of respondents on the following grouping variables: gender, age, education and occupational status.

b) *The very high degree of respondents' participation to defining individualism-collectivism*: 92.9 % for current practice (1009 respondents), increasing to 97% for desirable practice (1053 respondents), which shows the interest shown in the behavioral variables of this cultural dimension.

c) *Respondents' preference for collectivism*, especially in current practice, where the average score calculated (3.94) surpasses that of individualism (3.88). In the desirable practice, by the decrease with 9.6 % of the average score for "managerial bodies and subordination" behavioral variable, the individualism has an average score higher than the 8.8% for collectivism. This decrease indicates the

respondents' state of dissatisfaction towards the way in which managerial bodies exercise their prerogatives of management, towards the methods and techniques of management used by hierarchical leaders, which is reflected implicitly in the poor quality of management decisions and in a tense, confrontational working environment.

The study's results confirm the obvious preoccupation of employees for collectivism, teamwork and an attitude of encouraging the behavioral variables that contribute to the enhancement of knowledge, skills, qualities and experiences in the field and to harmonizing the interests of organization with those of individuals. Therefore, under the management policies adopted within the investigated organization, the group's interests must be promoted and maximized through the professional performance evaluation and reward system and the continuous preoccupation for training their employees, creating an organizational climate characterized by creativity, innovation and self-improvement.

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