

The relationship between organizational culture and an organization's performance in the Austrian private sector

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Abstract: This study aims to investigate the connection and impact of organizational culture on a company's performance in the private sector in Austria. After having reviewed the relevant literature, I have collected the data with the help of a Likert-Scale questionnaire whereby employees and their superiors in the Austrian private sector were questioned. 171 completed questionnaires were collected and analysed using the software SPSS 22. The results suggest that there is a connection between organizational culture and performance. This study contributes to the existing literature of organizational studies with a new study in the Austrian private sector.

Keywords: *organisational culture, organisational performance, Austria, private sector.*

Introduction

In order to remain competitive, a company has to optimize many different factors and processes within the organization. A crucial factor that can influence a company's performance in a positive manner is organizational culture (DeMers, 2017; Pontefract, 2018). The better the understanding and the deeper the knowledge of the interaction and relationship of these components, the more a company can adapt its management and therefore enhance its performance.

This study focuses on small, medium and large companies in the Austrian private sector. Assumably due to Austria's size and comparatively low international economic influence, there is a relatively small amount of studies in this particular country regarding its organizational culture. The research question for this study is:

What is the impact of organizational culture on an organization's performance in the Austrian private sector?

Over the past couple of years, the awareness concerning the importance of organizational culture and its impact on the performance of an organization has grown and this topic has become more and more important (Janićijević, 2013). Studies and surveys have shown that organizational culture has an impact on performance (Ahmed & Shafiq, 2014; Shahzad *et al.*, 2012; Sokro, 2012). It is considered a key factor contributing to successful performance (Ahmad, 2012; Ashworth, 2015; Daulatram, 2003; Peters and Waterman 1982).

Examining the relationship of organizational culture and its influence on a company's performance is important due to several reasons. Firstly, if one can understand how different factors within an organisation are connected and how they influence each other, one can then improve and optimise these factors for the future. This knowledge can lead to a significantly better performance, which is every company's goal (Civelek *et al.*, 2015; Kotter International, 2011). Secondly, in the highly competitive modern business world, any factor that can give an organization a potentially competitive advantage is important (Aja, 2015; Dans, 2017; Madu, 2007). Thirdly, having a stable, well-established and strong organizational culture can help a company become more durable and outlive challenging times and situations more successfully, which is crucial for a company's longevity (Denning,

2011). The answers were collected with questionnaires, which were distributed via email. The respondents were CEOs, managers as well as employees from small to large companies.

Literature Review

Organizational culture

The term culture is sophisticated and difficult to capture due to the fact that it is vast, complex and multi-layered (Humphrey, 2002; Witte 2014). More than 170 different ways of defining culture have been created but up until today still no universal definition exists (Kroeber and Kuckhohn, 1952). Over the past decades, various theories for approaching organizational culture have been developed. The most important of these for this thesis are mentioned below.

Schein's organizational culture model

Edgar Schein (2004) has defined three different levels of organizational culture in his model: Artefacts (visible), espoused beliefs and values and lastly, basic underlying assumptions, which are unconsciously taken for granted beliefs and perceptions (not visible).

Denison's theory

In the 1990s Denison (1995) introduced four central cultural traits in a company regarding organizational effectiveness: Involvement, consistency, adaptability and mission. These traits create a framework of culture in a company.

The Competing Value Framework from Cameron and Quinn

The Competing Values Framework (CVF) was designed to help organizations to make changes in their culture in order to improve the execution of a new direction for the whole company (Cameron and Quinn, 2006).

The CVF identifies 39 indicators of effectiveness. Quinn and Rohrbaugh (1983) analysed these indicators and created a model with two axes which produced a quadrant. The first, vertical axis, ranges from flexibility and discretion to stability and control. It shows the extent to which a company is control-oriented (Cameron and Quinn, 2006). The second, horizontal axis, measures the importance of internal focus and integration or external focus and differentiation in a company. It shows the extent to which a company either focuses on the well-being within the organization or on the development of the company itself (Cameron and Quinn, 2006).

Moreover, Quinn and Rohrbaugh (1983) defined four major quadrants (created by the model with the two axes), which represent opposite and competing assumptions. These quadrants have been given a different nomenclature. The most common names for the four quadrants are: Clan culture, adhocracy culture, hierarchy culture and market culture.

Hofstede's six dimensions

In order to clearly distinguish national culture from organizational culture, Hofstede developed six dimensions of organizational culture: Means-oriented versus goal-oriented, internally driven versus externally driven, easy going work discipline versus strict work discipline, local versus professional, open system versus closed system and employee-oriented versus work-oriented.

Defining organizational performance

Performance is one of the key variables in a company. Due to the various meanings this term carries and its complexity, no universally accepted definition exists, and researchers have different opinions of performance (Sudnickas, 2016). Cameron (1986) states that there is no sufficient understanding and clarification of the definition and concept of performance. Jenatabadi (2015) argues that this lack of understanding and agreement is due to the fact that not enough attempts to actually define performance have been made.

The following lines present some of the current definitions of organizational performance. Lebas and Euske (2006) developed a couple of definitions in order to describe and clarify the concept of organizational performance: First of all, they stated that organizational performance contains financial and non-financial factors, which show how successful the company is in terms of achieving objectives and results. Second of all, they found performance is a dynamic variable and therefore needs interpretation and personal judgement. And lastly, they argue that performance models of the current actions can be used to make predictions on how these actions may affect the future.

Perotti and Javier (2002) define performance by stating that it is tantamount to the 3Es (economy, efficiency and effectiveness) of a certain activity, which is widely accepted by most experts (Zsido and Fenyves, 2015).

Zsido and Fenyves, (2015: 52) further state that 'performance itself does not exist' but that 'there has to be always something to be benchmarked' and interpreted relative to the organisation's own goals and strategies. Jenatabadi (2015:2) defines performance as 'the evaluation of the constituents that try to assess the capability and ability of a company in achieving the constituents' aspiration levels using efficiency, effectiveness, or social referent criteria'.

Whereas Mayne (2007) has a different approach, agreeing with Wholey (1999) who stated that performance is socially constructed and not an objective measure. Nevertheless, it should be defined in a constructive way in order to cover all key dimensions of performance that are important for a business' stakeholders.

Theory of organizational performance

The most relevant theory of organizational performance for this study is the Balanced Scorecard (BSC) by Kaplan and Norton (1996). The BSC is a performance management tool and introduced four new management perspectives in order to translate vision and strategy (Kaplan and Norton, 1996): The financial, the international business process, the customer and the learning and growth perspective.

Kaplan and Norton's (1996) approach also includes analysing a company and later introducing a new management strategy with four new processes in order to translate the new visions (Kaplan and Norton, 1996): The first step is translating the vision, which is then followed by communicating and linking business planning, and finally providing feedback and learning based on this feedback.

The connection between organizational culture and performance

In the 1980s, Peters and Waterman (1982) conducted a survey and stated that organizations with high performance possess certain cultural traits, which create a strong culture within the organization. Deal and Kennedy's (1982) concept, which agrees with Peters and Waterman's (1982), claims that a company's performance can be improved by strong shared values. Kandula (2006) also states that a crucial factor for good performance in an organization is a strong and stable culture. This concept was criticized however by other researches such as Saffold (1988) or Reynolds (1986).

Schein (2010) explains that organizational culture is the key to solving most corporate problems that occur. He emphasizes the importance of educating employees about company culture so that they are able to participate in the problem-solving-process, which will eventually result in a better overall performance.

Babel'ová and Vaňová (2014) add that certain kinds of organizational culture have the potential to enhance the long-term performance of a company. They also highlight the challenge to measure success (performance) in the context of organizational culture and to carve out the nature of the relationship between those two factors.

In 1992 Kotter and Heskett conducted one of the most extensive studies on the connection between culture and performance. 207 firms were observed over a 5-year-period. The results

have shown that organizations with cultures that fit their market environment have a better performance than organizations with a non-fitting culture.

Hence, the following hypotheses for this work are proposed:

H₀₁: There is a relationship between organizational culture and performance

H_{01a}: There is a positive relationship between clan culture and organizational performance.

H_{01b}: There is a positive relationship between market culture and organizational performance.

H_{01c}: There is a positive relationship between adhocracy culture and organizational performance.

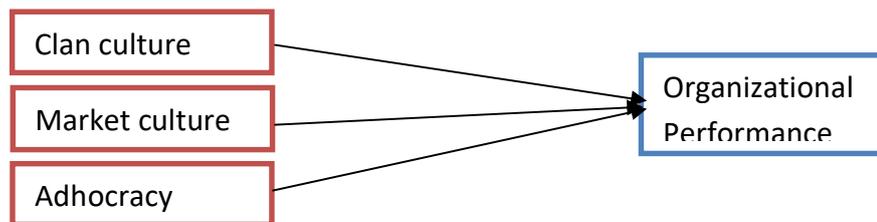
After having closely investigated the literature, it must be emphasized that discussions are still continuing. For both, organizational culture as well as performance does not exist a general and acknowledged definition and researchers are even discordant about the relationship between the two. It seems particularly important to conduct some further research in this area to get a better understanding.

Methodology

Conceptual framework

The conceptual framework (see figure 1) describes the relationships between the variables in question (organizational culture and performance) (Nazarian, 2013).

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework



Despite criticism, a wide range of studies all around the globe have shown that there is a connection between a company's culture and organizational performance (e.g., Kotter and Heskett, 1992).

Olanipekun *et al.* (2013) conducted a survey in Nigeria on Quantity Surveying Firms (QSF). The results suggested that the different types of corporate culture have a strong influence on the firm's performance. They further state that some types of culture have a direct impact, whereas other types have an indirect influence.

Another study, conducted by Gavera *et al.* (2011) in Romania, identified several components contributing to a successful organizational performance. They also stress the significance of the performance measurement process and the necessity to enhance this measure in order to improve the corporations' success.

Nazarian *et al.* (2015) confirm the existence of a connection between organizational culture and organizational effectiveness in organizations that are small and medium-sized. Hence, this study emphasizes the relevance of the company's size on the culture-effectiveness relationship.

Murphy *et al.* (2013) speak about the link between external factors, internal work and performance in their study. They have investigated the larger context and emphasize the importance of external factors, which influence internal operations and consequently the performance.

Sharma and Sharma (2010) conducted a survey in the north of India and point out the importance of the mutual influence of leadership and organizational culture and their positive impact on performance if they are aligned.

Hao *et al.* (2012), who conducted a survey in Austrian firms, state that managers in Austrian companies pay a lot of attention to organizational structure and innovation, which are believed to be the main factors for improving performance. This necessity was predicted by Avery *et al.* (1999), who examined the challenges for management in German-speaking nations at the end of the 1990s.

Research Design

The adopted research philosophy for this proposal is positivism, which can be justified through the investigation of demographic and cultural factors. The majority of researchers in the field of organizational studies chose a positivist approach (Nazarian, 2013). In addition, hypotheses are developed out of existing theories in order to test and confirm or, if necessary, refute them. A deductive approach is therefore adopted. The used ontology is objectivism because this study fits the assumption ‘that social entities exist in reality external to social actors’ (Saunders *et al.*, 2012:110).

Due to the question and its nature, the methodology for this research is quantitative (survey research). A quantitative approach represents a bridge between factors of which we are already aware and new knowledge, acquired through research (Soiferman, 2010). Using questionnaires best fits the research due to cost, time and accessibility. The development of several hypotheses (as mentioned above), which are testable and measurable further support the necessity for a quantifiable approach. These hypotheses will later be proven or disproven in order to answer the research question.

Data collection and sampling

Primary data was collected through a survey questionnaire. The access to the data was mostly granted by the author’s personal connections to the Austrian private sector. The rest of the answered questionnaires were gained by contacting businesses via e-mail with a request to be part of this study and the self-administered questionnaire. The collected quantitative data was mainly based on the OCAI as well as the BSC. The questionnaire comprises of 29 questions plus four questions seeking demographic data. 171 answered questionnaires were filled out and submitted by the respondents, which equals a response rate of approximately 25%.

The adopted sampling technique for this research is non-probability sampling, to be more exact, purposive or judgmental sampling. Non-probability sampling was chosen for this work due to two main reasons - timing and data-access. In order to be accurately representative, the acquired sample size is 150 to 200 answered questionnaires.

Instrumentation

The questionnaire to assess organizational culture is provided by the ‘Organizational Culture Assessment Instrument’ (OCAI), which is a validated research method, specifically designed to assess this area of study. The OCAI was adopted in combination with a Likert-Scale. The questionnaire for organizational culture contains 18 questions and the questionnaires for performance are based on Kaplan and Norton (1996) and were developed from their BSC and contain eleven more questions for this study.

Measuring organizational culture

Culture can never be completely measured or quantified and therefore discrepancies will inevitably occur on a regular basis (Waisfisz, 2011). In the field of organizational culture studies, various dimensions of corporate culture exist. Both qualitative and quantitative methods can be used to measure organisational culture.

Xenikou and Furnham (1996) examined four key scales to measure organizational culture: The Organizational Culture Inventory (OCI), the Culture Gap Survey (CGS), the Organizational Beliefs Questionnaire (OBQ) and the Corporate Culture Survey (CCS), which were all developed between 1980 and 1990. Results suggest that measurements related to behaviour are more reliable than the ones related to organizational values. The method used for this survey is the OCAI, which is based on the CVF.

Data collection procedure

The process of data collection was divided into two separate sections. 50 filled in questionnaires were collected and tested in terms of the data's reliability (pilot study). After small adaptations, the data collection process was continued by sending the revised questionnaire in order to collect sufficient data (main study).

Data analysis method

In order to analyse the collected (primary) quantitative data from the questionnaires, the statistical analysis software SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) in the English version 22.0 was applied (Greasley, 2008). Descriptive statistics, graphs and nonparametric inferential statistics were used to present the analysed data. The most important aspect concerning the collected data is consistency. The technique used for assessing the reliability is called Cronbach's Alpha. The coefficient should be greater than 0.7 in order to be acceptable (Hashim, 2010).

Results and Discussion

Descriptive Analysis

Demographic data

Table 1: Demographic Data.

<i>Variable</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>
Gender		
Male	102	59.6
Female	69	40.4
Age		
under 25	15	8.8
25-34	59	34.5
35-44	33	19.3
45-54	33	19.3
55-64	23	13.5
65 and older	8	4.7
Size of organization		
Micro (0-10)	51	29.8
Small (10-49)	36	21.1
Medium (50-249)	35	20.5
Large (250 +)	49	28.7
Position		
CEO	52	30.4
Senior Manager	8	4.7
Middle Manager	36	21.1
Employee	75	43.9

102 male and 69 female respondents contributed to the survey, which equals 59.6% and 40.4%. It can be seen that in general 33% more males than females answered the questionnaire which could be due to several reasons. In Austria it is generally acknowledged that fewer women work in positions of management than men. Only 11% of positions in a company are occupied by women. In addition, the female employment rate is lower than the male and maternity leave could also be a contributing factor for the one-third of more male respondents (European Commission, 2012).

All in all, 37.5% of the respondents were 45 and older. This group of people has presumably, more experience and has been working for a longer period of time than the younger respondents. It could be argued that their answers are more reliable due to their experience

and knowledge and therefore perspective. The majority of respondents were between 25 and 44 years old and represents the current generation of employees.

In this survey, 51 micro companies participated which equals 29.8%, 36 small- and 35 medium-sized companies contributed, which represents 21.1% and 20.5% and finally, 49 large companies participated, which equals 28.7%. The results show that the sizes of the companies which took part in the survey are well-balanced with a slight emphasis on larger organizations. A study suggests that employees in micro and small companies (containing fewer than 50 employees) in Austria have a higher influence within the company than employees in larger organizations (Eurofound, 2014). This fact might change their perception of management and leadership of the company.

The participation of CEOs was comparatively high (with 30.4%). Finally, 75 employees responded to the questions, which equal 43.9%. This high figure might be explained by the fact that there are considerably more employees than managers or CEOs in a company.

Hypothesis Testing

The two most important data analysis figures, in order to test hypotheses, are correlation and regression. A correlation expresses the connection between variables and how strongly these variables are linked, by a single value between -1 and +1 (correlation coefficient) (Statistics Solutions, 2016). Linear regression in SPSS is used to make predictions, to describe data and to explain the connection between independent and dependent variables (Statistics Solutions, 2016). Both figures were applied in this survey.

Reliability deals with the ability of an instrument to measure consistency (Tavakol *et al.*, 2008). Cronbach's Alpha was adopted for this study in order to test the collected data's reliability. Looking at Cronbach Alpha's numbers in Table 2, it can be seen that three types of culture and performance were reliable. Their values scored the recommended 0.7. Hence, performance (0.805), clan culture (0.881), adhocracy culture (0.861) and market culture (0.826) are considered reliable and are therefore further analysed (see Table 2). Hierarchy culture on the other hand, scored under 0.7 which is why it was excluded from further analysis.

The values of the Pearson Correlation for the three types of organisational culture (clan, adhocracy and market) in connection with performance, suggest that all three types impact performance positively. Adhocracy culture shows the strongest correlation (0.550), followed by clan culture (0.501) and market culture (0.305) (see Table 2).

Table 2: Reliability and Correlation analysis.

Construct	Dimensions	Number of items	Reliability	Pearson Correlation
Organizational Performance	Clan Culture	5	.881	.501**
	Adhocracy Culture	6	.861	.550**
	Market Culture	6	.826	.305**

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

In order to test the hypotheses, a number of regressions were adopted. To be more precise, the interactions and connections between the three types of organisational culture and performance were investigated. Table 3 presents all three types of culture together as the independent variable with performance being the dependent variable. The results, shown in the table below, predict the performance level and the standardized beta coefficient (β) between the dependent variable (performance) and the independent variables (organizational culture types).

The results of the regression analysis indicate that there is a strong statistically significant positive relationship between market culture and performance ($B=.329$, $p< 0.01$). Clan culture and performance ($B=.279$, $p< 0.05$) have a mediocre statistically significant positive correlation. The relationship between organisational performance and adhocracy culture is positive but statistically insignificant ($B=.106$, $p>0.05$). Hence, market culture and clan culture are significant predictors for performance.

The table below confirms all three hypotheses. There is a positive relationship between performance and the three types of organisational culture, even though it is statistically insignificant in the case of adhocracy culture.

Table 3: Regression results for the relationship between organisational performance and the three types of organisational culture.

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Beta</i>	<i>Sig.</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>Decision</i>
Clan culture	.279	.001	3.470	H _{01a} supported
Market Culture	.329	.000	3.682	H _{01b} supported
Adhocracy Culture	.106	.137	1.495	H _{01c} supported

a. Dependent Variable: performance

Discussion and Findings

The research question of this study was: What is the impact of organizational culture on an organization's performance in the Austrian private sector?

With Pearson correlation values of 0.305, 0.501 and 0.550 (see Table 2), it can now be confirmed that positive and statistically significant correlations were found between market culture, clan culture and performance. These results are aligned with previous literature, which states that organizational culture is positively connected to an organization's performance (Ul *et al.*, 2011; Shahzad *et al.*, 2012; Cameron and Quinn, 2011; Denison, 1990; Daulatram, 2003). Even though all three types of organizational culture have a positive relationship with performance, adhocracy culture has the strongest connection whereas market cultures tend to have the weakest connection. Market culture having the weakest connection to performance could be explained by the fact that it creates a highly competitive, demanding and goal-oriented environment. This often has a negative impact on the employees and as a consequence, the overall performance (Khuong and Hoang, 2015; Bhatti *et al.*, 2012). Other authors like Gallagher *et al.*, (2008), Fekete and Böcskei (2011) or Zhang and Zhu (2012) on the other hand, found that market culture can be a booster for a higher performance (in particular financial performance). This hypothesis could not however be supported to that end, since the relationship between market culture and performance was identified as being the weakest in this study.

Adhocracy culture did not show a significant connection with performance in this study, which could be due to a number of factors like participants, the data collection or the companies which participated in this survey (Nazarian *et al.*, 2015).

Adhocracy culture is dominated by flexibility, innovation and risk taking, which helps an organisation develop and flourish. Tseng (2010) as well as Ogbonna and Harris (2000) found that this creative and flexible environment promotes a high corporate performance. Tseng, 2010 even states that adhocracy culture is better for a company's performance than clan culture. Khurosani (2013) emphasises the importance of cohesive freedom value and creative competition. The results of this survey support their statements. In this study, adhocracy culture has the strongest relationship with performance and this could possibly be explained

by the fact that smaller- and medium-sized companies rely more on innovation in order to survive (Kobie, 2017). A possible downside of adhocracy culture is the fact that there is no clear line of authority and no clear rules (due to the inherent flexibility of the model), which can lead to employees becoming involved in 'political games' to get what they want. Also, the rapidly, ever changing work environment can have a negative impact on individuals who are not stress-resistant (Slack and Parent, 2006:102).

Clan culture has a moderate connection to performance in this study. A clan culture is characterized by a friendly, family-like environment. Fekete and Böcskei (2011) state that clan culture's advantage and its positive impact on performance is the aspect of participation and shared values which is confirmed by Deal and Kennedy (1982), Peter and Waterman (1982) or Kotter and Heskett (1992). According to Tseng (2010) however, clan culture does not have the best impact on performance, compared to the other types of culture, which can also be partly confirmed by the outcomes of this study.

According to the Hofstede model, Austria has, from a global point of view, the lowest Power-Distance Index (11) (Dunay *et al.*, 2017). This usually implies that employees and their superiors are interdependent, have an open communication with each other and have a low level of hierarchy. Austria is a hybrid. In Austrian companies, the participation in decision making processes and the communication between subordinates and their superiors is to be expected, on the other hand, status symbols and titles are strictly respected in the workplace. A reason for this inconsistency could lie in Austrian history (Chhokar *et al.*, 2008). The outcomes of this study show that market culture, which is the most competitive and is arguably the type of culture with the lowest amount of communication between employees and subordinates, has the weakest connection to performance. This would also support Chhokar's *et al.*, (2008) observations.

Brück (2001) found that Austrians avoid open criticism and prefer an indirect style of communication. Their culture has a limited emphasis on performance and a stronger one on relationship and solidarity. These findings complement the results of this study, since market culture has a high emphasis on performance and competitiveness and is therefore not as popular amongst employees, which again, influences overall performance.

Adhocracy culture had the strongest connection with performance, which could be explained by the fact that this survey was conducted in the private sector. Innovation and flexibility are two of the key factors in the private sector in terms of competitiveness and business success (Cankar and Petkovšek, 2013).

Following the results of this study, it can be argued that the kind of culture chosen for a company can have a positive or negative impact on the employees and the work environment and consequentially, on performance. It is also important to mention that different kinds of culture impact performance differently and should therefore be chosen carefully. In addition to this, other factors like size, stakeholders, environment etc. need to be considered regarding a company's performance and success (Kotter and Heskett, 1992).

This study has also shown that a company's sector and its environment influence the type of culture chosen for the business in order to increase performance and success.

Conclusion

The main goal of this study is to show how organizational culture and performance are connected, how these variables influence each other in the private sector in an Austrian setting and to contribute to the knowledge about this topic.

While taking the findings of this study into account, it is also important to mention its limitations. The data was only collected in one country and in one sector. The results can therefore not be generalized and applied to other countries and sectors. A logical recommendation would be to conduct further research in other countries, sectors and in alternative settings in order to compare and validate the results of this study.

Furthermore, using questionnaires as a data collection method can incur bias (Kelley *et al.*, 2003) and the researcher has no control over who answers the questionnaires, which can also result in biased outcomes. Finally, the quantity of answered questionnaires (171) in this study is comparatively low. The more respondents the more significant are the results.

Future researchers could adopt a qualitative method in order to research the topic in more depth which would not solely relying on questionnaires. This could, for instance, be achieved by conducting interviews and posing open-ended questions (Nazarian, 2013). Furthermore, future research should focus on whether the results of this study are applicable or similar in the public sector as well as in other countries in Europe or not. Since the questionnaire for this study was designed for companies in the private sector, it should be slightly modified if used for studies in the public sector (Nazarian, 2013).

Suggestions for further research could take other factors and challenges like innovation, ethical issues, fears, risks or resistance of change into account. Also, external factors in a broader context, such as industry, society or history, in combination with the topic of organizational culture and performance could be investigated in order to get an even better understanding of the subject.

The findings can help practitioners in the private sector to get an overview of the relationship between the organizational culture and performance, how they are linked and how they impact each other. Thus, the results can be used as suggestions for future management decisions and improvements within the company and its culture. This study has shown in particular that organizational culture does influence an organization's performance. As a consequence, managers should adopt and maintain a culture that fits and supports the organization's size and goals. By optimizing this factor, a higher performance and more success can be achieved. This study furthermore contributes to the debate about the link between organizational culture, and performance and can serve as a basis or starting point for further research and further debate of the topic.

The gap, this study addresses is the examination of the two variables (culture and performance) in combination with the Austrian private sector. This particularity was chosen, due to the author's interest and not much existing literature in this area.

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