Organizational culture of the department of construction management and economics, Faculty of Civil Engeeniring, University of Zagreb

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SINCE 1981, WHEN PETERS AND WATERMAN INTRODUCED TERM ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE IN ORGANIZATIONAL SCIENCE, organizational culture has become a very important field of investigation. The reason why organizational culture became so popular is connection between appropriate cultures and efficiency and productivity of organizations. However, there is no universal organizational culture applicable to all types of organizations. Hence, this paper analyzes organizational culture of the Faculty of Civil Engineering (FoCE), University of Zagreb, focusing on the Department of construction management and economics (DoCME) and it tries to investigate whether this culture enables optimal fulfillment of FoCE' goals. According to survey of members of the FoCE, presented in this paper, lecturers are moderately satisfied with interpersonal relationship, with selection of new employees, with the opportunity for professional promotion and with the ceremonies at the FoCE. Nevertheless, lecturers are not satisfied with the value system. In addition, a high percentage of members of FoCE think that clear rules of behavior for students should be established. Members of the DoCME (lecturers, assistants and students) are relatively satisfied with the organizational culture in general, but they are not satisfied with the hierarchy of values at the faculty level.

Keywords

Organizational culture, University, Faculty, Civil engineering

INTRODUCTION

Antić and Cerić (2008) analyzed organizational culture of the FoCE, University of Zagreb, and concluded that it would be important, in future research, "to compare students' perception of organizational culture with the perception of lecturers at the FoCE." This paper does exactly this: it compares FoCE's perception of organizational culture with the perception of assistants' and students' at the DoCME. In addition, the paper analyzes a subculture of the FoCE and investigates how position inside organizational hierarchy influences perception of organizational culture. In order to

do it, the authors of this paper conducted a survey in the DoCME, which included 26 members (10 lecturers, 9 assistants and administrative stuff and 7 students). However, before presenting the results of this survey, this paper provides a literature review about organizational culture in general and about organizational culture of universities. After that, organizational culture of the FoCE, University of Zagreb, is presented and, then, compared with the culture in the DoCME.

What is organizational culture?

Only 30 years ago, term organizational culture was almost unknown in organizational theory. Peters and Waterman, in their seminal book "In search of excellence (1982)," were the first to introduce this term in organizational science, and first scientific works about organizational culture appeared at the beginning of 1980s. Since than organizational culture become a very important field of investigation which is evident by the fact that modern business schools regularly have a course about organizational culture. Today, it is almost impossible to analyze modern organizations without mentioning their organizational cultures.

However, analyses of organizational cultures face many challenges. First, it is not easy to define this term. It is out of the scope of this paper to provide many different definitions of organizational culture. Therefore, this paper will only quote the most frequent type of definition. According to Jones, organizational culture is "the set of shared values and norms that controls organizational members' interactions with each other and with people outside the organization (Jones, 2004, 195)" *[1]*. There are many different norms that define

organizational culture of a firm. According to Shein (2004, 12-3), the following categories are the most important in defining certain organizational culture: behavioral regularities, group norms, espoused values, rules of the game, linguistic paradigms, symbols, formal rituals and celebrations etc.

The reason why organizational culture became so popular is connection between appropriate cultures and efficiency and productivity of organizations. According to Jones, "organizational culture affects organizational effectiveness because it can (a) provide an organization with a competitive advantage, (b) improve the way an organizational structure works, and (c) increase the motivation of employees to pursue organizational interests (Jones, 2004, 222)." However, there is no universal organizational culture applicable to all types of organizations. Different types of organizations demand different cultures. For example, an efficient organizational culture of a firm that produces software for computers can be completely inefficient in a civil engineering firm. Therefore, each organization should try to find a culture that is the most suitable for this firm. However, organizations that produce similar types of products or services usually do have reasons to learn one from each other. For example, for a period of time, organizational culture of Microsoft became a model for other firms in informatics industry. Hence, this paper will analyze organizational culture of the FoCE, University of Zagreb, and it will try to investigate whether this culture enables optimal fulfillment of FoCE' goals. This is especially important since, according to Kovač (2006, 5-6), "the university organizational culture can be recognized, evaluated and interpreted, but what is even more important is that it can be modified and changed to the desired way of functioning."

Organizational cultures of universities

If Jones' definition of organizational culture is applied to universities than it can be concluded that university organizational culture is the set of shared values and norms that controls university members' interactions with each other and with people outside the university. In university settings it is especially important to investigate interactions between member of faculty and between faculty and students. There are many different ways how university culture can be assessed. For example, Becher (1989) differentiate four types of culture (collegial, hierarchical, anarchical and political) on the basis of the type of authority. Fjortoft and Smart (1994) differentiate university organizational cultures on the basics of dynamism and externalism. So, certain universities prefer stability more than dynamism and vice versa. Also, universities could prefer either external or internal orientation. However, for this paper, the most important classification is one proposed by Sporn (1996). She differentiates two types of university organizational cultures: strong and weak. Strong university culture is characterized by shared values, strong norms of behavior and willingness of faculty to obey these norms. In contrast, a weak culture is characterized by disagreement about main values, absence of norms, and violation of written and unwritten norms of behavior at university. In addition, weak university culture frequently produces many subcultures inside universities. Following Sporn's classification, the main purpose of this paper is to investigate whether organizational culture of the FoCE, University of Zagreb, should be classified as strong or as a weak one. In other words, this paper investigates whether FoCE has clearly defined values and norms shared by the mem-

bers of the FoCE and whether subcultures of departments differ from the FoCE as whole.

Description of organizational culture of faculty of civil engineering

There are not many works that analyze organizational cultures of Croatian Universities. The most comprehensive one is *Understanding University Organizational Culture: The Croatian Example* by Kovač et al. (2006). This book examines organizational culture of all Croatian Universities. The main conclusion of the book is that departments at faculties in Croatia are predominantly collegial types of organization (emphasis on common values and goals, participation, consensus, connection and family atmosphere). In contrast, faculties and universities are principally bureaucratic types of organization (emphasis on rules, regulations and hierarchy) Kovač (2006, 69-70). However, this book is focused on type of governance of Croatian Universities and does not get to details concerning norms, patterns of behavior, rituals, language and other important elements of organizational culture. Therefore, this paper investigates these neglected elements in their investigation. In other words, topics of investigation are values, norms, ceremonies, rites, myths, etc. Since all three authors of this paper are employees of the FoCE, they had an opportunity to analyze the culture as insiders, following Schein's observation (in Vecchio, 2000, 343) that "achieving and understanding of an organization's culture can be aided by locating a motivated insider within the organization, someone who is capable of deciphering the organization's culture and is motivated to discuss it."

In order to do it, it is necessary to define key terms used in this investigation. Values are "general criteria, standards, or guiding principles that people use to determine which types of behaviors, events, situations, and outcomes are desirable or undesirable (Jones, 2004, 195)." Furthermore, norms are "standards or styles of behavior that are considered acceptable for a group of people (Jones, 2004, 197)." Important elements of organizational culture are also customs, ceremonies and rites being defined as "regular behaviors that stimulate identification of individuals with an organization (Bahtijarević-Šiber, 1993, 596)."

So, what is the main value at the FoCE? It is important to note that many universities in the world face dilemmas concerning values they should focus on. Dill (1995) and Clark (1998 and 2004) concluded that the main trend in American and European universities is commercialization of research results. In other words, the main value has become profit, rather than teaching quality and research excellence (although these three elements are not necessarily in conflict). One of the purposes of this research is to investigate whether the same process has happened at the FoCE. Lecturers at FoCE assessed the hierarchy of values at FoCE (profit, research excellence, teaching excellence).

Concerning norms, FoCE does have a statute with written norms about duties of lecturers, other employees and students. However, the FoCE is a prime example for Jones (2004, 197) assessment that "many of the most powerful and crucial values of an organization are not written down. They exist only in the shared norms, beliefs, assumptions, and ways of thinking and acting that people within an organization use to relate each other…" For example, in DoCME there is an unwritten norm that people should celebrate at work not only events connected with their professional promotion but also their personal events (birthday, birth of a child or grandchild, wedding, etc.). Furthermore, members of DoCME meet each other in their spare time celebrating, for example, Christmas, end of a school year and other events. Such a habit has, for sure, a positive effect on interpersonal relations at the department. These meetings are a way of "team building," and they are an effective way of improving personal relations. It is important to note that people in the department follow these unwritten norms that constitute a subculture of the department inside an organizational culture of the FoCE.

Like many others organizations, FoCE has regular ceremonies. The most important are graduate ceremonies (for students), Christmas party, opening of a new school year, Faculty day, and ceremonies for people that live the FoCE for retirement. These ceremonies promote sense of unity, strength organizational culture and transfer norms and values to new employees. Speeches at these ceremonies stress FoCE' successes and call for further efforts that should improve FoCE' effectiveness.

Myths and legends also exist at FoCE. Older professors tell stories about their own professors who were tough, demanded strong discipline but also were experts in their field. Functions of these myths are similar as in other organizations. According to Miller and Form (1964, 271), "some myths function to preserve group values, some 'explain' the social system, some maintain moral; other are fabricated consciously by leaders to achieve certain ends."

Though an official dress code for the FoCE does not exist, unwritten rules do exist. For example, it is expected that FoCE members do wear suits and ties during students' defense of bachelor, master and doctoral thesis. The same unwritten rules apply for opening ceremony at the beginning of an academic year and during

the ceremony on Faculty day. Less strict rules apply for the dressing of lecturers during the regular teaching and research activities. There is also no written rule concerning dressing of students. However, this situation produced smaller incidents when lecturers did not want to meet inappropriately dressed students (according to criteria of this lecturer). Therefore, one of the questions in the survey was whether an official dress code for the FoCE should be established.

Finally, an element of organizational culture is also arrangement of working space. According to Sikavica (1999, 612-3), "open offices lead to more open communication and participative culture. In contrast, closed offices are closer to authoritarian culture… Those organizations that have a round table in the meeting room usually have participative and democratic culture…" FoCE has closed offices. There is an unwritten rule that assistant professors, associate professors and full professors have their own offices but research and teaching assistants usually share closed offices. In this respect the FoCE is closer to an authoritarian type of culture. However, meetings of the FoCE's Council are organized around a U-shaped table, which suggest a more democratic culture. Indeed, FoCE's Dean is rather *primus inter pares* than an authoritarian leader, which is a logical type of organization for university settings.

Survey at the faculty level

This research investigates organizational culture at the FoCE on the basis of questionnaire submitted to lecturers at the FoCE. Although questions do not address organizational culture directly, they address the most important elements of organizational culture, especially satisfaction of lecturers with organizational climate (see questionnaire in appendix1).

The survey consists of fourteen questions about organizational culture. Altogether 47 out of 69 senior lecturers filled the questionnaire [Dean and four Vice-Deans also filled the questionnaire]. They are selected because, according to Budd (1996, 156), "the faculty are a key element in the organizational culture of the university." Since values are "backbones" of organizational culture, two questions address values at the FoCE. In first of them, lecturers assessed what is the most important value at the FoCE [2]. According to the survey, teaching quality is the most important value followed by research excellence. Profit is only at the third place. It can be concluded that a process of commercialization is still not prevalent at the FoCE, which has its positive and negative consequences. It is positive that teaching is considered as the most important activity. Probably the most logical explanation is the way The Ministry of science finances higher education, including FoCE. However, obviously, majority of lecturers do not consider that market is the most important criteria for evaluation of their activities. It is important to note that lecturers are rather dissatisfied with existing hierarchy of values. The average level of satisfaction is only 2.89 at the scale of five. It is difficult to assess what is the main reason for their dissatisfaction but one possible explanation is that lecturers actually do want a higher level of commercialization of the FoCE. Nevertheless, such a claim demands further investigation. One important element of organizational culture is the way how new employees are selected. For example, United Postal Service in USA selects employees almost exclusively among students that work for the company during their studies (Sikavica, 1999, 615). In this respect, the FoCE has similar policy because employees at the FoCE are mainly former students. Consequently, a question in the sur-

vey asks respondents whether they are satisfied with the selection of new employees. The average level of satisfaction is 3.21 at the scale of five, which cannot be considered as a high level of satisfaction with this element of organizational culture.

However, respondents are more satisfied with the opportunities for promotion during their careers (3.85).

Four questions in the survey (6-9) deal with ceremonies and rites. Lecturers are the least satisfied with the rites of passage (3.43) and rites of enhancement (3.55). However, they are satisfied with rites of integration (like Christmas party). Here the average grade is 4.00. Furthermore, the highest level of satisfaction - in entire interview - responded expressed about rites of promotion for students (4.21), probably not without reason. Indeed, the entire rite, from the moment when students defend their thesis, to the moment when they receive their diploma, is filled with the sense of dignity. In these moments both lecturers and students follow unwritten rules about behavior, language, cloths, etc. [3], which give a sense of "glamour" to the ceremonies.

Concerning norms, as many as 91 % of lecturers think that set or rules about students' behavior should be established. Although existing Statute of the FoCE contains some basic norms concerning students' behavior [4], it is obvious that lecturers think that a more precise set of rules should be established. In this respect, it seems that respondents want a "strong" FoCE's culture [5]. However, less than fifty percent of respondents (41.3 %) think that the FoCE should have dress code for students and even lower percent is in favor of a dress code for lecturers.

Finally, it is important to investigate the level of general satisfaction with the organizational culture of the FoCE. The most logical way to do it would be to ask respondents whether they

are satisfied with the organizational culture. However, this is not an easy task. Term organizational culture is not well-known, especially not for the people who belong to technical intelligentsia. Therefore, level of satisfaction was measured through satisfaction of respondents with the interpersonal relations at the FoCE. This is a legitimate approach because, according to Sušanj (2005, 121), "composition of (organizational) climate and culture together explain 35 percent of job satisfaction." Consequently, it can be concluded that the higher the level of satisfaction with interpersonal relations the higher the level of satisfaction with organizational culture. So, are members of the FoCE satisfied with interpersonal relations? The most accurate answer is that they are moderately satisfied, being least satisfied with their relationship with colleges at the Faculty level (3.49). They are more satisfied with the relationship with colleges at the department level (3.57) *[6]*, and they are most satisfied with their relationship with students (3.72).

Organizational culture of the department of construction management and economics

Today, we have a plethora of analyses of organizational cultures in various fields. However, investigations of organizational subcultures of Universities are not so abundant. Therefore, this paper will fill the gap investigating organizational culture of DoCME at the FoCE, University of Zagreb, on the basis of a survey which included not only lecturers in the Department but also assistants, administrative staff and students at the second year of master program in the Department (the forth semester). Consequently, it is possible to compare results on the DoCME's level with the results on the

FoCE's level (questions in the second survey are in appendix 2). Furthermore, it is also possible to compare perception of DoCME's culture within three groups of DoCME's members (lecturers, assistants and students). Students are included in the survey not only for the sake of comparison but also in order to define strengths and weaknesses of DoCME's culture and in order to improve the teaching performance.

Obviously, respondents are much more satisfied with interpersonal relations at the DoCME (4.12) than at the Faculty level (3.65). The most satisfied are students (4.43) and the least satisfied are assistants (3.89). Since lecturers are also relatively satisfied with interpersonal relations at the DoCME level (4.1), it can be concluded that the DoCME has built an appropriate organizational culture. However, it is surprising that students are much more satisfied with their relationships with lecturers (4.57) than lecturers with their relationships with students (3.7). Furthermore, some assistants are very critical concerning these relations. One of them wrote: "Relationship between lecturers and students are not democratic enough because professors are too authoritarian in behavior. There is not enough interaction between lecturers and students. Students are only expected to reproduce that what they heard in class." However, since students themselves do not share such opinion this is, probably, an isolated assessment of lecturer-students relations.

Obviously, people who work in the DoCME, both lecturers and assistants, are not very satisfied with the selection of new employees (3.33). They are also not very satisfied with the opportunities for promotion (3.68) though lecturers are more satisfied (3.8) than assistants (3.56). Assistants mentioned the following problems concerning promotion: "un-

clear career plans and unclear goals, expectations and evaluations of success." Furthermore, according to some assistants, there is "too much uncertainty and promotion is connected with power structure inside the organization." Obviously, those who have already been promoted have better opinion about procedure for promotion then those who are still pending promotion in their careers. However, assistants are more satisfied with the rites of passage (4.0) than lecturers (3.8). Similarly, assistants are more satisfied with the rites of enhancement (4.25) and integration (4.22) than lecturers (3.9 and 4.1, respectively). These results are bit surprising. Senior lecturers at the DoCME really care about rites of integration (celebration of birthdays, promotions, publication of books, etc.). It is consider as an informal rule that people who work in the DoCME should make a party for every single event mentioned above. Hence, it is not clear why lecturers are less satisfied than assistants with the informal rule which very lecturers established. However, differences in results are not very high and both groups are, obviously, relatively satisfied with the rites in the DoCME. The only written criticism came from an assistant who wrote: "maybe we have too much rites." It is also a bit surprising that assistants and lecturers are much more satisfied with the rites of promotion for students (4.63 and 4.4, respectively) than very students (4.0). Nevertheless, it should be noted that, generally speaking, all the groups in the DoCME are relatively satisfied with the existing rites (4.12 on average).

Organizational cultures that have firm formal rules of behavior are labeled as "strong" cultures. Obviously, on the basis of answers on question 13, it can be concluded that members of the DoCME want "strong" culture because 88% of them (including 86%

of students) think that "the Faculty should have set of rules about students' behavior." The following rules are mentioned in the survey: "stronger punishment for cheating at exams, rules about decent behavior of students, rules about vocabulary that should be used, especially in communications with assistants and lecturers, and clearer rules about students' requirements." However, only 50% of them think that the FoCE should have dress code for students and 54% supports such a code for lecturers. Interestingly, 43% of students support dress codes for both students and lecturers. 50% of professors support additional rules about students' behavior but the same opinion has only 17% of students. An additional surprise is that more lecturers (20%) than assistants (12%) and students (14%) think that some additional rules about professors' behavior should be established.

The backbone of each organizational culture is systems of values. So, what is the main value at the FoCE? Question 10 (see appendix 2) asks respondents about existing hierarchy of values.
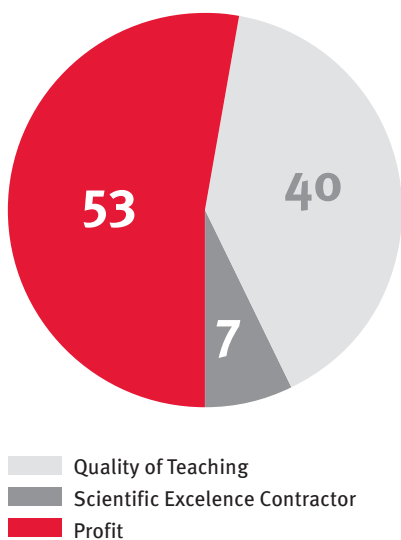
As obvious from Figure 1, 53% of respondents (lecturers and assistants) think that profit is the most important EXISTING value at the FoCE and members of the DoCME are not satisfied with such a hierarchy of values (average grade for satisfaction with the values is 2.50). Obviously, people in the DoCME want a different hierarchy of values which is also evident from Figure 2, as 60% of respondents think that the main value SHOULD BE the quality of teaching and 40% of them think that the main value should be scientific excellence. No one respondent think that profit should be the main value. It is interesting to note that 75% of assistants think that quality of teaching should be the main value.
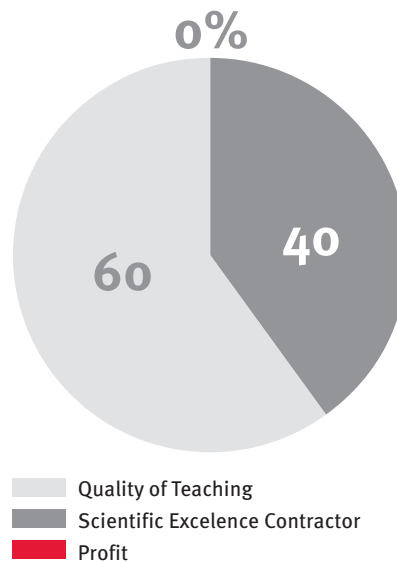
Figure 2. **Figure 2. The most important value as it *should be***

CONCLUSION

Results of this investigation do not offer much surprise. Lecturers (at the faculty level) are moderately satisfied with interpersonal relationship, with selection of new employees, with the opportunity for professional promotion and with the ceremonies at the FoCE. However, that what was not expected at the beginning of investigation is a relatively low level of satisfaction with the value system. Furthermore, it was not expected that such a high percentage of members of faculty think that clear rules of behavior for students should be established. Obviously, FoCE's organizational culture cannot be considered as a strong one because it misses some important norms.

What are the main conclusions about the organizational cultures at the DoCME of construction management and economics? There are three main conclusions. First, generally speaking, members of the DoCME are relatively satisfied with the organizational culture in the DoCME (3.91 on average). Especially important is that students are very satisfied with their relationships with professors. Second, respondent want "stronger" culture, i.e. they want clear norms about behavior at their working place, especially rules about students' behavior. Finally, members of the DoCME are not satisfied with the hierarchy of values at the Faculty level. They do not like commercialization of the FoCE and they prefer a classical form of university in which quality of teaching is the main value.

This provides a comprehensive analysis of organizational culture on the Faculty level and an analysis of subculture of the DoCME. Further research should compare results for the FoCE, University of Zagreb, with other faculties of civil engineering in Croatia and abroad.

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Figure 1. **The most important existing value at the FoCE**

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Notes

[1] Similarly, according to Vecchio, "we can define organizational culture as the shared values and norms that exist in an organization and that are taught to incoming employees (Vecchio, 2000, 342)." For different types of definitions see Shein (2004).

[2] Hierarchy of values was assessed on the basis of a semi open question (see appendix, question 10). Two lecturers added professional work into the hierarchy, putting it on the third place. One lecturer added professional prestige as the most important value, and one considered organization of work as the most important one.

[3] For example, both lecturers and students usually wear suits ore costumes, vice dean gives speech after defense of final thesis, students are offered with champagne at the end of the ceremony, etc.

[4] Article 129 says that students' behavior should be in accordance with the University's ethical code.

[5] According to Vecchio (2000, 345), "a strong (versus weak) culture is distinguished by whether the organization's values and norms are intensely held and widely endorsed."

[6] In a similar investigation Kovač (2006, 187) found a relatively low level satisfaction with governance practice on the level of faculty (2.84) but a higher level of satisfaction with governance practice on the level of departments (3.23).

APPENDIX 1

QUESTIONNARIE FOR LECTURERS IN ENTIRE FACULTY OF CIVIL ENGINEERING

Interpersonal relations

Please, answer the first nine questions on the basis of your personal assessment (1 – very dissatisfied, 2 – dissatisfied, 3 – neither satisfied, nor dissatisfied, 4 – satisfied, 5 – very satisfied).

1) How satisfied are you with interpersonal relations at the Faculty of civil engineering (1-5)?
2) How satisfied are you with interpersonal relations at your department (1-5)?
3) How satisfied are you with relations between lecturers and students (1-5)?

Human resources management

4) How satisfied are you with the way how new employees are selected (1-5)?
5) How satisfied are you with the opportunities for promotion at the Faculty (1-5)?

Ceremonies and rites

6) How satisfied are you with the rites of passage (1-5)?
7) How satisfied are you with the rites of enhancement (1-5)?
8) How satisfied are you with the rites of integration (1-5)?
9) How satisfied are you with the rites of promotion for students (1-5)?

Values

10) Sort values from the most important to the least important ones (teaching quality, scientific excellence, profit, or something else)!
11) How satisfied are you with the hierarchy of values at the Faculty (from 1-5)?

Other elements of organizational culture

12) Do you think that the Faculty should have set of rules about students' behavior (Yes or No)?
13) Do you think that Faculty should have dress code for students (Yes or No)?
14) Do you think that Faculty should have dress code for lecturers (Yes or No)?
15) Do you have any comment on questionnaire?

APPENDIX 2

QUESTIONNARIE FOR MEMBERS OF DEPARTMENT OF CONSTRUCTION MANAGEMENT

Interpersonal relations

Please, answer the first nine questions on the basis of your personal assessment (1 – very dissatisfied, 2 – dissatisfied, 3 – neither satisfied, nor dissatisfied, 4 – satisfied, 5 – very satisfied).

1) How satisfied are you with interpersonal relations at the Faculty of civil engineering (1-5)?
2) How satisfied are you with interpersonal relations at the Department of construction management (1-5)?
3) How satisfied are you with relations between lecturers and students (1-5)?

Human resources management
4) How satisfied are you with the way how new employees are selected (1-5)?
5) How satisfied are you with the opportunities for promotion at the Faculty (1-5)?

Ceremonies and rites
6) How satisfied are you with the rites of passage (1-5)?
7) How satisfied are you with the rites of enhancement (1-5)?
8) How satisfied are you with the rites of integration (1-5)?
9) How satisfied are you with the rites of promotion for students (1-5)?

Values
10) Sort EXISTING values from the most important to the least important ones (teaching quality, scientific excellence, profit, or something else)!
11) How satisfied are you with the hierarchy of values at the Faculty (from 1-5)?
12) Sort values as they SHOULD BE ESTABLISHED from the most important to the least important ones (teaching quality, scientific excellence, profit, or something else)!

Other elements of organizational culture
13) Do you think that the Faculty should have set of rules about students' behavior (Yes or No)?
14) Do you think that Faculty should have dress code for students (Yes or No)?
15) Do you think that Faculty should have dress code for lecturers (Yes or No)?
16) Do you think that Statute of the Faculty should add some additional rules about students' behavior?
17) If answer is yes, which ones?
18) Do you think that Statute of the Faculty should add some additional rules about lecturers' behavior?
19) If answer is yes, which ones?
20) What is you status at the Department?
21) Do you have any comment on questionnaire?

Questions in this survey are composed on the basis of Nachmias (2000, 233-43).