

# Rituals and their transcendence in Corporate Culture

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## ABSTRACT

*The organization is structured in a "hard" and "soft" system, our research was focused on the image (soft system) and the result presents the importance to create a strong corporate culture (CC), to simultaneously enhance the positive image as well as the economic results (benefits). The Object of the study are working-hours dedicated to consolidate the rites and rituals as part of the CC implemented in Wal Mart SuperCenter (store No. 2346) in Mexico. We want to know if is possible to classify and measure the CC through the "Rites and Rituals". On the basis of the results obtained and the manner in which our research evolved, we believe that it is possible to draw the conclusion that corporate culture can be numerically measured in terms of manhours. The rituals with the greater numerical representation within the company are the administrative ones, leading us to consider that the company is principally concerned with maintaining an open and continuous communication with its employees.*

**KEY WORDS:** Corporate culture, Corporate rituals, Organizational culture, Internal communication.

## 1. Introduction

When we are talking about corporate organisation we need to differentiate between two environments or systems that complement one another within the company: a *hard* system and a *soft* system<sup>1</sup> the first summarizes the company's basic organisation and includes, amongst others, products, services, markets, structure, decision-making processes, planning and control. The second is the image, or more specifically, the result of adding the company's identity and its culture together.

Since it is considered to form part of this *soft* system, rather than being one of the company's assets, culture tends to be put in a secondary position, both in terms of its development and care, and also in its effects. It is precisely the observation of this fact that leads us to a first approach in studying corporate culture. Thanks to observing this in a real context, we have been able to identify its elements and have attempted to measure it by means of one of them: Rites and Rituals.

## 2. Subject of the research

In our research we aim to give corporate culture a tangible nature<sup>2</sup>, for which reason we consider it necessary to believe that it can be classified and measured. As far as classifying it is concerned, we have already found a typology of corporate culture and a breakdown of the elements it contains. As regards measuring the time that is invested in culture, few of the authors we have researched cover this subject; while some studies mention that 97% of man-hours are wasted on meetings<sup>3</sup> this study attempts to discover whether this percentage is exaggerated or whether it reflects the reality of corporate culture in the contemporary company.

Given that the elements which make up corporate culture are varied (myths, legends, heroes, values, rites and rituals, etc.) we have decided to select only one of them in order to achieve our aim, and to this end have decided to base our research on the Rites and Rituals<sup>4</sup> of the organisation. We have chosen these because, of all

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<sup>1</sup> Villafañe J, 1993. Imagen Positiva, Gestión Estratégica de la Imagen de las Empresas. Ediciones Pirámide. Madrid.

<sup>2</sup> Schein EH, 1988. La cultura empresarial y el liderazgo, Plaza y Janés, Barcelona.

<sup>3</sup> Deal T, Kennedy AA, 1985. Culturas Corporativas, Ritos y Rituales de la vida organizacional. Fondo Educativo Interamericano, México.

<sup>4</sup> Deal T, Kennedy. Op. cit.,

the cultural elements, they are the ones that have the clearest and most quantifiable manifestation within the corporate culture being analysed.

### **3. Aims of the Research**

#### **3.1. General aim**

To make a numerical classification and representation in man-hour terms of Rites and Rituals as elements of corporate culture, with the purpose of demonstrating that it can be quantitatively and physically represented.

### **4. Subject of the study and Hypothesis**

#### **4.1. Subject of Study**

The classification and numerical representation, in man-hour terms, of Rites and Rituals as elements of corporate culture in store nº. 2346 of the "Wal Mart Supercenter" chain located in the State of Aguascalientes, in Mexico.

#### **4.2. Hypothesis**

Corporate culture can be classified and measured numerically in terms of man-hours by looking at one of its elements: Rites and Rituals.

### **5. Theoretical assumptions on which the Research is based**

Studies into corporate culture spring from two main methodological systems, as explained by Thèvenet<sup>5</sup>:

- a) The ethnographic approach
- b) Organisational Development (OD)

The ethnographic approach is an analysis that has been used in anthropology to learn about ancient peoples and is based on the premise that the organisation can be observed and that the behaviour of its participants appears to show similar tendencies permanently<sup>6</sup>.

Organisational Development is a method developed by M. Schein<sup>7</sup> that serves to highlight the main features of corporate culture. Its aim is for the company itself to become aware, thanks to a process of self-analysis, of its ways of working, in order to evolve.

In this research we have opted for studies of an ethnographic nature, since we believe that these are best adapted to the purpose of this study, as they endeavour to describe those cultural aspects that are shared by a group<sup>8</sup>. This kind of study is based on the diversity and range of the data that must be collected, studied and verified. Key factors for success are linked to the researcher's ability to select appropriate data for collection, evaluation and explanation, as well as to his/her relationship with the members of the organisation. They are centred on the concern to perfect a description of the company expressed as a cultural system. For this approach the researcher must be a participant and totally involved in the situation (s)he is trying to research.

As part of the ethnographic approach there are three studies or styles of interpretation which summarize the different theories<sup>9</sup>: the systematic style, the semiotic one and the behavioural; the third has the objective of providing data on categories of events and particular behaviour patterns which have been selected beforehand.

Due to the nature of our research we consider this final style as the most operative system, since it does not cover the meaning, but rather the observable behaviour patterns, which are then classified and compared. Therefore our research on Wal Mart's corporate culture in Mexico can be defined as Ethnographic-Behavioural<sup>10</sup>.

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Bertrand Y, 1991. *Culture Organisationnelle*. Collection Communication Organisationnelle, Presses de l'Université du Québec. Tele Université. Canadá.

<sup>5</sup> Thevenet M, 1992. *Auditoría de la Cultura Empresarial*. Ediciones Diaz de Santos. Madrid.

<sup>6</sup> Thevenet M. Op. cit.

<sup>7</sup> Schein EH, 1988. *La cultura empresarial y el liderazgo*, Plaza y Janés, Barcelona.

<sup>8</sup> Rossi I, O'higgins E, 1981. *Teorías de la Cultura y métodos antropológicos*. Editorial Anagrama, Barcelona.

<sup>9</sup> Thevenet M, 1992. *Auditoría de la Cultura Empresarial*. Ediciones Diaz de Santos. Madrid.

## 6. Research Methodology

In view of our study subject, and given that we have opted for the use of the ethnographic method, which bases its methodological principles on observation, we can divide the methodological description of research into:

### 6.1. On the nature of the study: Case study.

We shall speak first about how our study is descriptive and covers a phenomenon or situation by means of studying it within a designated space and time. We have established that there will be four months' observation of the ritual phenomenon within the company identified above: Wal Mart Supercenter no. 2346, located in the state of Aguascalientes, in Mexico. The purpose of the case study is to enable us to prepare a study framework as the starting point for deducing a further scenario or else to formulate a diagnosis with a view either to discovering intrinsic weaknesses, or else to suggesting a future course of action<sup>11</sup>. We shall endeavour wherever possible to prove the numerical demonstration of culture and to learn how much working time is given over to Rites and Rituals.

### 6.2. On the research techniques.

We refer to observation as a research technique consisting of watching and hearing the event under study<sup>12</sup>. Within the observation method there are various types, of which we shall choose structured observation, since it requires instruments for data and observed event collection, establishing beforehand which aspects have to be studied. These aspects are called categories, titles that describe a series of phenomena within which one can codify an observed form of conduct<sup>13</sup>.

As part of the structured observation we were natural participants<sup>14</sup>, since during information collection we are part of the group being researched. This scenario is helpful when developing the research, since as with the observed elements, we have an internal vision of the organisation and its reality is more directly accessible to us as observers<sup>15</sup>. We were individual observers of the event taken from real life; we did not use laboratory observation.

### 6.3. On the means of observation employed.

We based the research on information collecting in a notebook and work sheets.

### 6.4. On the data presentation.

Once the information had been collected it was deposited within a typological classification of corporate rites and rituals and percentage figures calculated on the total time spent on rites. Once these figures had been charted we went on to obtain data corresponding to the total man-hours worked in the company over these four months and compared this data with the percentage of time invested in rites. This enabled us to establish the time that the demonstration of these observed rituals represents for the company.

## 7. Development of Ritual Research

### 7.1. Variables under study

The study of the numerical demonstration of corporate culture through Rites and Rituals, taking Wal Mart as a reference point, has led us to consider and define four main variables:

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<sup>10</sup> González Z, 2003. Los Ritos y Rituales en la Cultura Corporativa de Wal Mart Supercenter. Estudio de caso para la medición de la Cultura Corporativa a través de los Ritos y Rituales observados en Wal Mart Supercenter no. 2346 en México. Tesis doctoral. Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona. Facultat de Comunicació. Barcelona.

<sup>11</sup> Ander EE, 1978. Introducción a las técnicas de Investigación Social. Editorial Hvmánitas, Buenos Aires, Argentina.

<sup>12</sup> Festinger L, Katz D, 1992. Los Métodos de Investigación en las Ciencias Sociales. Ediciones Paidós, Barcelona.

<sup>13</sup> Festinger L, Katz D. Op. cit.

<sup>14</sup> Ander EE. Op. cit.

<sup>15</sup> Jorgensen DL, 1989. Participant Observation. A methodology for Human Studies. SAGE Publications, California, EEUU.

**a) Type of Ritual**

This concerns the typological classification into which the different observed rituals fit, which we have subjected to the Rites and Rituals described by Yves Bertrand<sup>16</sup> and by Deal & Kennedy<sup>17</sup>.

**b) Average ritual duration time**

Thanks to the *time study* we will determine the average time of the manifestation of each one of the classified rituals.

**c) Number of people involved**

This figure corresponds to the number of the people involved in each ritual, which, depending on the type of manifestation, will generally have to have an adviser or leader who guides the ritual.

**d) Number of repetitions**

In order for an event to possess ritual characteristics, it must be repeatedly manifested to people within the organisation and also have a defined protocol. This variable corresponds to the number of times the ritual is manifested during the observation of the event.

**8. Rites and Rituals observed in Wal Mart**

Using the classification of Rites and Rituals described by Yves Bertrand<sup>18</sup> and by Deal & Kennedy<sup>19</sup> we have been able to identify the following Rites and Rituals in the Wal Mart store being studied. In every case, as well as describing in a general manner the rite or ritual, we offer a series of objectives which, because of their characteristics, we consider Wal Mart is seeking as it carries them out.

**8.1. Initiation Rites**

**A) Welcome**

The welcome plays an important part in employee development, establishes the phase in order to encourage a high level of morale and is an opportunity for employees to know that they are important for the company. The welcome process includes information specific to each division and company, and is the same for all company divisions. This offers great consistency between divisions by promoting Wal Mart culture, values and expectations amongst all new staff.

**Aims**

- + Consistency in the information and culture creation process for all new employees.
- + Take the new employee from understanding Wal Mart corporate culture to the specific training their position requires.
- + Increase participation by store managers as part of the settling in and welcome process.
- + Adapt to the needs of new and existing stores.

**8.2. Rites of Integration**

Within the company we identified and classified three different types of integration ritual: company breakfasts, the so-called "Saturday Night Dances" and the company cheerleading.

**A) Breakfasts**

These rituals take place on Friday every week at the beginning of the morning shift. They are informal meetings in which all the daytime and night staff who are in the company at the time take part. Led by the Store Director, staffs are brought up to date with the latest news about the company and people are encouraged to participate with comments.

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<sup>16</sup> Bertrand Y, 1991. Culture Organisationnelle. Collection Communication Organisationnelle, Presses de l'Université du Québec. Tele Université. Canada.

<sup>17</sup> Deal T, Kennedy AA, 1982. Corporate Cultures: the Rites and Rituals of Corporate Life. Reading, MA : Addison Wesley. 1982.

<sup>18</sup> Bertrand Y. Op. cit.

<sup>19</sup> Deal T, Kennedy AA. Op. cit.

**Aims**

- + Encourage participation in the company's *open door* policy.
- + Create in the employee the feeling of belonging to the organisation.
- + Make a relaxed atmosphere and prepare people for the days with the biggest sales.

**B) "Saturday Night" Dance**

This is what we have elected to term a game-ritual, a dance that is held to create a pleasant work environment, consisting of a version of the song *Saturday Night* with words that refer to the store and its aims, slogan, objectives and the sales strategy generally. The dance takes place every Monday morning and all the daytime staff, directed by the Store Director, take part.

**Aims**

- + Make known the sales strategies through a vehicle that is easy to memorise.
- + Amuse and motivate the employee to carry out their daily activities properly.
- + Create in the employee a feeling of identification with the company.

**C) "Wal Mart" Cheer**

This is another game-ritual which gives the employee an enjoyable and invigorating start to the working day. It consists of shouting out each one of the letters that makes up the word Wal Mart as loudly as possible ("give me a W, give me an A..."). The manifestation of this ritual mainly takes place on Sundays, one of the store's best selling days, which motivates the employee to start the day with enthusiasm and enjoyment. It should be pointed out that there are no other rituals on Sunday, given that the percentage of sales is increased considerably.

**Aims**

- + Easy recognition of the store name and symbols (WAL MART and "squiggly", the small star between the two words Wal Mart which was added to the logo after the death of the founder Sam Walton).
- + Encourage group unity in an amusing and accessible way.
- + Begin store activities with the right degree of motivation.

**8.3. Rites of Exclusion**

Within the company we were able to observe only one rite of exclusion manifested during the observation period, whether it was simply to reprimand or with the aim of dismissing an employee. This rite is known internally as:

**A) Advice for Improvement**

This type of ritual is useful as management support to correct and modify employee behaviour. It is a process that is designed to drive him or her to satisfy the company's expectations by means of feedback and support.

**Aims**

- + Correct the performance of the employee's activity.
- + Serve as an example to the rest of the employees of what should be a proper work attitude
- + Demonstrate that unacceptable activity is not tolerated within the organisation.
- + Show the company's approach in dissuading the employee from inappropriate behaviour.
- + Open the doors to open communication on the part of the employee.

**8.4. Work Rituals**

We have been able to classify work rituals into two main groups: performance evaluations and training courses.

**A) Performance evaluations**

We have classified these as work rituals because they form an active part of corporate culture and enable the staff to receive feedback, which allows them to continue making an effort and improving those areas which need to be developed<sup>20</sup>.

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<sup>20</sup> Smith A, Kelly T, 2006. El capital humano en la economía digital. Ediciones Deusto, Barcelona.

The employee is evaluated for the first time 90 days after joining the firm; his/her second evaluation takes place six months after joining, and subsequent annual evaluations will determine both his/her stay in the store and any salary rises. This process directly involves the supervisor who has the main responsibility for the employee, thus encouraging service leadership<sup>21</sup>.

**Aims**

- + Grow contact between the employee and their supervisor.
- + Encourage service leadership on the part of the supervisor.
- + Identify training and development needs in the company.
- + Help the employee to be more efficient.
- + Ensure that everyone is working well.

**B) Job position training**

Good training provides stability and consistency in services and operations. Employees are informed about the workings of the organisation and about their position within it. Their superiors supervise and guide this training, given that they are the principal beneficiaries when their subordinates perform well at work. The most important training session for the employee is when he/she first joins the firm. He must then be fully informed of the activities he will be carrying out during his working day, so this initial period should not be omitted. Although we should point out that training is continuous within the company, during the observation of this kind of ritual in Wal Mart we were only able to detect training programmes relating to new members of staff.

**Aims**

- + Lower staff turnover
- + Improve morale by minimising worries about job roles.
- + Reduce losses due to greater sense of responsibility on the part of the employee.
- + Greater identification with the company and its culture.
- + Cost saving due to helping people to do their job well from the outset.
- + Accident reduction.

**8.5. Administrative Rituals**

Internal Wal Mart meetings are considered to be fundamental elements both at marketing and motivational levels. They take place periodically and at all levels, with four main types:

**A) Store director meetings**

This type of meeting takes place every month by videoconference when Directors of the different stores nationally discuss key issues for running the store.

**Aims**

- + Permanent communication with other stores in order to maintain similar management style throughout the stores.
- + Learn about the tactics and strategies that other store directors are using in the areas of store administration, management and sales.

**B) Middle management meetings**

These meetings take place once a week and cover issues relating to the store and the various departments, as well as the points covered during the store directors' meeting. All the store managers take part in this kind of meeting with the store director, and decisions affecting the company's development are taken, making these meetings extremely important.

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<sup>21</sup> Berry L, 2004. *Un buen Servicio ya no basta. Más allá de la excelencia en el servicio*. Ediciones Deusto, Barcelona.

**Aims**

- + Keep middle management informed of the decisions taken by other directors or higher management.
- + Create work strategies to maximise or maintain sales.
- + Maintain open and cyclical communication between middle management in order to avoid misunderstandings.
- + Communicate the decisions taken by senior management.

**C) Heads of Department Meetings**

Here the issues previously discussed by management are transmitted to the various department heads and supervisors. They are also weekly meetings, generally taking place a day after the management meetings and, like the two former types, may be of an extraofficial nature and called without previous warning, as in the case of situations that are considered critical for the stores. As well as their sales content, they are also useful as channels for motivating the employees and include celebrations of specific events such as staff birthdays or commendations for participants' good performance.

**Aims**

- + Maintain continuous communication with all store departmental heads so that information flows directly to the rest of the workforce.
- + Encourage participation in decision making by management.
- + Create a team work ethic that is reinforced by the equal importance attached to each and every departmental head.
- + Communicate decisions that are vitally important for the running of the store.

**D) Employee Meetings**

These take place every day on the morning shift. These are simple meetings with the sole aim of motivating staff at the outset of their working day to perform their tasks better and are generally led by a member of the management team and the Head of Human Resources. In these meetings, as well as mentioning specific issues which relate to the running of the store and affect employees, there is a warm-up exercise session in which the employees are reminded of the importance of carrying out these exercises for their safety.

**Aims**

- + Inform the staff of important in-store matters.
- + Communicate decisions about sales strategies.
- + Maintain and encourage *open door* policy between management and staff.
- + Involve the employee in company culture.
- + Motivate the employee to take part in teamwork.
- + Improve the working atmosphere.

**8.6. Recognition Rituals**

We observed that this kind of ritual is manifested as part of other rituals, as in the case of the Friday breakfasts, when the *Associate of the Month* is congratulated each month or the *Yes, you can!* Award given to the employee with the best idea for cost saving in store. This is also when the *Salesperson of the Month* is congratulated, all with the intention of making the employee know that he is doing a good job and of acknowledging this in front of his co-workers<sup>22</sup>. Since this type of company rite has a numerical man-hours manifestation, at times it is difficult to discern when the breakfast ritual has turned into a recognition ritual. For this reason we have decided to present the integration and recognition rituals together.

**8.7. Management Rituals**

Management rituals have very little or no presence in Wal Mart. Apart from the Rites already described above, there are few rituals which are included as a result of management initiative. During the period in which the company was under observation we were only able to detect one management ritual.

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<sup>22</sup> Sethi D, 2006. Las siete características de la autoestima. Ediciones Deusto, Barcelona.

### A) Interdepartmental Dancing Competition

This type of ritual was manifested in the final month of observation and was created by management in order to motivate sales by creating a healthy spirit of competition between the Meat department and the Fish & Shellfish department. The staff used their free time and rest periods to rehearse the dances they were going to present in the competition. During this ritual, people felt motivated to work as a team and felt identified with their department and their store.

#### Aims

- + Motivate group unity and teamwork.
- + Increase sales since the rivalry was linked not only to the dancing competition but also to sales.

### 9. Application of measurement criteria

Time research and measurement is an area that has been extensively covered by Industrial Engineering and the Production Organisation methodology. In order to be able to corroborate our hypothesis we decided to use the findings in this field. We refer to the term that in Work Measurement is known as *Time Study*:

*"Work measurement is the determination of degree and the amount of manpower that is involved in production and operations activities" <sup>23</sup> ."*

But it is not the work measurement in itself that has attracted our notice in order to achieve our aims, but rather the conceptual tools that are used to study work. These are the so-called Techniques for Work Measurement and there are six main ways of establishing a time standard for work<sup>24</sup>:

1. Taking no notice of the formal work measurement process.
2. Using the data approach from previous experiences.
3. Employing the direct time study approach.
4. Using the predetermined time study approach.
5. Using the work sample approach.
6. Combining approaches 2 and 5, that is, using data from previous experiences and the work sampling approaches.

In our time study we will use technique number three, *the direct time study approach*, since this enables us to learn in detail how much time is employed in the manifestation of various rites. The direct study approach is also known as time study, chronometrical study or job position timing; in the words of Moisés García<sup>25</sup>, time study comes from:

*"In general terms, in order to obtain this time measurement for repetitive tasks, the productive activity is divided into the most basic tasks that involve completely standardised movements, or else have a well specified content".*

[As well as being the most widely used method when establishing work standards in factories, time study will be, in the case in hand, the method that indicates the guidelines to follow for the study of the numerical manifestation of Rites and Rituals.]

The methodology or process used by the time study is the following:

*"1. Observing the job that is being timed [...]*

*2. Selecting a cycle of the job position. Identifying the elements of the job that make a complete cycle. Deciding how many cycles should be time monitored.* [Instead of selecting the job position, we selected the rituals, from which the total number of elements making up the ritual's cycle was identified, elements that were described when analysing Wal Mart's rituals.]

*3. Timing the job in all its cycles. [...]* [All the rituals were monitored in their entirety, establishing standard figures, once the information gathering had been completed. We had the advantage of the company members not being aware that they were being monitored, so their responses were natural and not conditioned.]

<sup>23</sup> Adam EE, Ebert RJ, 1991. Administración de la Producción y las Operaciones Conceptos, modelos y funcionamiento. Ed. Prentice Hall Hispanoamericana, México.

<sup>24</sup> Ídem.

<sup>25</sup> García M, 1984. Economía de la Producción y Contabilidad de Costes. Ministerio de Economía y Hacienda, Madrid.



4. *Calculating the normal time, based on the cycle times.* [Thanks to this methodology it was possible to develop the observation of the Rituals manifested within the organisation and thus obtain the standard times that each one of them takes.]
5. *Determining tolerances for personal times, delays and tiredness.*
6. *Establishing the performance standard (time standard) as the sum of the normal observation time and the tolerances that had been determined."*

For this time study we first obtained the standard figure for each ritual's manifestation and then proceeded to chart the time that, in a standardised manner, was observed in the ritual research period of the organisation under analysis. (Table I)

<b>Type of Ritual</b>	<b>Average duration per session</b>	<b>Number of sessions</b>	<b>Number of people (pax.) pers session</b>
<b>Initiation Rites</b>			
Welcome	16 hours	13	2 pax. 1 adviser 4 pax. 1 adviser 3 pax. 1 adviser 4 pax. 1 adviser
<b>Integration Rites</b>			
Friday breakfasts	20 minutes	17	50
"Saturday Night" dance	10 minutes	17	20
The "Wal Mart" cheer	10 minutes	17	20
<b>Exclusion Rites</b>			
Advice for Improvement	60 minutes	10	2
<b>Work Rituals</b>			
Performance Evaluations	30 minutes	219	2
Job Training	240 minutes	13	2 pax. 2 advisers 4 pax. 4 advisers 3 pax. 3 advisers 4 pax. 4 advisers
<b>Administrative Rituals</b>			
Directors' Meetings	60 minutes	4	2
Management Meetings	240 minutes	18	5
Dept. Head Meetings	240 minutes	17	32
Employee Meetings	15 minutes	103	20
<b>Recognition Rituals</b>			
<b>Management Rituals</b>			
Interdepartmental Dance Competition	30 minutes	30	1

*Table I. Numerical data obtained in terms of man-hours*

For the interpretation of results we have converted the data obtained on time into their percentage presence in the company (Table II)

Type of Ritual	Percentage	Kind of ritual	Individual percentage
<b>Initiation Rites</b>	6,66 %	Welcome	6,66 %
<b>Integration Rites</b>	96,71 %	Friday breakfasts	6,93 %
		"Saturday Night" dance	1,39 %
		The "Wal Mart" cheer	1,39 %
<b>Exclusion Rites</b>	0,49 %	Advice for Improvement	0,49 %
<b>Work Rituals</b>	7,91 %	Performance Evaluations	5,36 %
		Job Training	2,55 %
<b>Administrative Rituals</b>	74,87 %	Directors' Meetings	0,20 %
		Management Meetings	8,81 %
		Dept. Head Meetings	53,26 %
		Employee Meetings	12,61 %
<b>Recognition Rituals</b>	0 %		
<b>Management Rituals</b>	0,37 %	Interdepartmental Dance Competition	0,37 %
<b>Total Working Percentage</b>	97,29 %	<b>Total Working Hours</b>	4085,66
<b>Total Ritual Percentage</b>	2,702 %	<b>Total Ritual Hours</b>	113,47

Table II. Percentage Data obtained from Ritual Typology

## 10. Results

This research job has enabled us to gain a wider understanding in the area of culture in general and corporate culture in particular. At this juncture we should remind the reader that the purpose of the research was to be able to demonstrate that corporate culture can be quantified in man-hours, with the aim of acknowledging that culture is not an intangible product of the organisation, but that it possesses a representation that can be measured, which would permit us to corroborate our Hypothesis.

This hypothesis requires us to take an ethnographic estimate based on the concern over the description of the company as a cultural system, since the data we gathered is based on forms of behaviour and reactions on the part of individuals in the company being studied.

We should remind ourselves at this point that ours is a descriptive case study that bases its results on events observed during the carrying out of activities in the company in a specific time and place, so that obtaining and collating the information is limited to the activities of the company observed over four months.

We believe that using a research technique such as direct observation of an event enabled us, in addition to the gathering of information, to gain an overall knowledge of the company and a closer observation of its cultural reality. Another type of research technique could not have shown with such clarity in-house ritual manifestation, although we should acknowledge that other complementary research could have given us more data about the feelings of the organisation members with regard to their culture, which would also be useful for a greater identification of cultural features of a ritual nature which might have been missed while the observation was being conducted.

For the study of rites, as is the case for corporate culture, we opted for an initial anthropological definition which would allow us to clarify the concept in this field before going on to define it in the corporate arena. Once we had defined this element we were obliged to refine the concept, bringing the definition of ritual to a more specific breakdown thanks to a ritual typology that subsequently would allow us to classify the ritual manifestations that occur in the company under study.

The development of our theoretical framework ends at this point, although we have taken the liberty of making our own contribution to the classification of elements of corporate culture that have been identified and described by various authors:

1. First we defined the group that concerns itself with the behavioural aspects of employees within the organisation, i.e. what the company expects of its individuals; within this group, which we termed **behavioural**, because it was linked to a behavioural aspect in the organisation, we included the following three elements: *Beliefs, Values and Rules*.

2. The second group, where we believe the broadcasting elements of corporate culture should be included, and which we classify as the **communication** group, containing the vehicles that the company has chosen to transmit to its company members these afore-mentioned values, beliefs and rules. Amongst them: *Stories; Myths or Legends; and Symbols*.

3. The third group would include the *Hero*, one of the main roles in this cultural network and part of what we have termed the **reference** group. The hero is a role model for the ideal of expected behaviour by individuals within the firm.

4. A fourth and final group in which we classify those elements which serve as vehicles for manifesting corporate culture and which we have catalogued under **expression** and where the following elements would go: *Rites and Rituals*.

Prior to identifying the company's Rites and Rituals it was necessary to learn about all the elements of its culture. In this way we were able to observe that beliefs are mainly centred on customer service, respect for the individual and the search for excellence in all the activities carried out by an individual within the organisation.

With regard to values, we observed that the company puts a lot of emphasis on the fact that its most important asset is its employees, a value it publicises with its customers under the slogan *Our people make the difference*, but how can a company say that its most important asset is human? Thanks to the fact that it possesses a culture that reinforces this belief constantly from inside, leading the employee almost unconsciously to behave in a special way, providing real service and truly having an attitude of wanting to meet their customers' needs<sup>26</sup>. The observation of the firm's myths and stories reinforces this fact, given that the staff go beyond the accomplishment of their work activities, always taking as their reference point the figure of Sam Walton, founder and *hero* of the company.

The next stage in the research, where the company rites are described in detail, required much more detailed attention on our part as researchers, given that it is at this juncture that the confirmation or refutation of our hypothesis really began to take shape. Once the variables and tools for our research of Wal Mart rituals had been defined and established, we proceeded to the synthesis, which we subsequently extrapolated into percentages, and from which we came to the conclusions explained below.

We could observe that the rituals with the greater numerical representation within the company are the administrative ones, leading us to consider that the company is principally concerned with maintaining an open and continuous communication with its employees. This creates a feeling of teamwork reinforced by the equal opportunities that every employee has, to participate in the communication. Another conclusion we drew is that practically no employee is excluded from this kind of manifestation, the principal aims of which are to communicate, inform and involve the employee in the company's culture, as well as maintaining constant communication with the rest of the stores in the country, in order to keep management tactics and strategies consistent across the board.

The type of ritual with the second biggest numerical manifestation is that concerned with Integration, leading us to deduce that the company endeavours to restate its interest in involving the employee in the *open door* communication policy and to create a feeling of belonging to the firm.

We could also observe how elements that do not have a significant numerical manifestation due to their brevity still do have a lot of significance. This is the case of the Wal Mart cheerleading and the *Saturday Night* Dance that, as well as enabling the employee to memorise the name of the company and having the effect of reinforcing the sales tactics, make for a worldwide identification with the rest of the members of Wal Mart. We were able to observe this thanks to the videos of annual store meetings, attended by the best employees of each

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<sup>26</sup> Berry L, 2004. *Un buen Servicio ya no basta. Más allá de la excelencia en el servicio*. Ediciones Deusto, Barcelona.

store. At these meetings, which take place at the company headquarters in Bentonville, Arkansas, we were able to observe that these are elements of cultural identification and serve to unite all the participants at the event.

The work rituals are listed in descending order of numerical representation in the company, with the repetition of this ritual being higher than any other rite. 219 repetitions were observed in which 109 employees took part individually and in a personalised manner, which enables us to deduce that the company takes the trouble to evaluate each and every one of its employees individually and to learn and acknowledge their working strengths and weaknesses, which all help to detect training needs in each case.

The Initiation rites follow in descending order in this list, but we consider this logical since these occur only when a new employee joins the company; however it must be acknowledged that the total of hours spent -272 hours- for just 13 new employees shows clearly the importance that is attached by the firm to this first introductory step.

With percentages well below the average, we come to the Exclusion rituals. These had a low representation, which indicates that the situations in which the company felt obliged to reprimand or dismiss an employee were few.

Management and Recognition rituals were the last on the list. These showed very little percentage representativity, given that their manifestation was short and occasional.

Now we come to the final part of these conclusions: whilst not extensive, it is of vital importance for our research. On the basis of the results obtained and the manner in which our research evolved, we believe that it is possible to draw the conclusion that corporate culture can be numerically measured in terms of manhours.

#### **Limitations and further research**

This, clearly, does not rule out the possibility of other elements being able to serve this purpose and, assuming this to be the case, although culture can have a numerical representation in accordance with its elements, it is important to clarify that cultural manifestation is not limited to its rituals; not only the hero, the values, the myths and the symbols can work as elements that measure culture, but this evaluation through any of its other elements is not relevant to our research, we acknowledge our limitations in this respect, given that this statement would imply taking into account other aspects that in this study have been relegated on the grounds of lacking specific importance for this research.

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