

5. A COMPARISON OF THE COLLECTIVIST ATTITUDES AND PERCEPTIONS OF ORGANISATIONAL CULTURE AMONG RUSSIAN-SPEAKING ORGANISATIONAL MEMBERS IN LITHUANIA AND ESTONIA

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Abstract

The aim of the present study is to find connections between the collectivistic attitudes and perceptions of organisational culture among the Russian-speaking members of organisations in Lithuania, and to compare them with the respective findings in Estonia. Collectivistic attitudes of individuals are regarded in this paper as components of a common cultural background of people of the same nationality, which influence other aspects of life. The attitudes are grouped according to three relationships levels, namely, relationships with family, friends (peers), and society. Perceptions of organisational culture are measured alongside the task and relationship orientations dimensions of organisational culture. It is found that collectivistic attitudes towards friends, co-workers and neighbors serve as the most important predictor of how people perceive organisational culture, being positively correlated with both orientations of organisational culture. Collectivistic attitudes towards one's society are found to be positively correlated with the relationship orientations of organisational culture.

Introduction

In the last decade, most researchers of organisational culture have come to agree with the idea that approaches to the cultivation of organisational culture in different countries should be differentiated according to their national cultural characteristics. For the small but ethnically heterogeneous Baltic States, the question about the interrelationships between national cultural features and organisational culture is of particular interest. All three countries – Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania – have similar large Russian-speaking minority populations. Although these communities vary in size and ethnic roots, they represent a specific ethnic identity in all the three countries, playing a significant role in all aspects of life. Their unique position allows us to refer to them as a common pan-Baltic variable. Therefore, for the purpose of studying organisational cultures in the Baltics, it is necessary to ascertain whether there are any differences between the majority and minority populations' attitudes that are important for organisational life, and how they affect organisational culture. A previous study (Vadi, Allik, Realo, 2002) has identified certain connections between the collectivistic attitudes of organisational members, including those of Russian-speaking people in Estonian organisations in Estonia, and their perceptions of organisational culture. The present survey mainly focuses on such connections among Russian-speaking employees in a large Lithuanian organisation – the Ignalina Nuclear Power Plant (INPP). The latter is an interesting case because its Russian-speaking community forms the majority of its workforce. The same is true about the city where the INPP is situated, which is very untypical of Lithuania. The purpose of the given study is to find the connections between the collectivistic attitudes and perceptions of organisational culture of the Russian-speaking members of the organisation under study in Lithuania, and to compare them with the respective findings in Estonia.

Theoretical background

Culture has been defined as a set of commonly held and relatively stable beliefs, attitudes and values existing within an organisation in respect of organisational culture (Schein, 1985; Deal, Kennedy, 1984; Trice, Beyer, 1993; Hofstede, 1997, 2001), and within a group of people of the same nationality in respect of national culture (Hofstede, 1997, 2001). In many scholars' opinion, values are one of the most important components of culture. They are defined as the assumptions about "how things should be", as the broad tendencies to prefer certain states of affairs to others, and they are often unconscious and not expressed clearly (Hofstede, 1997: 8). Beliefs are defined by Mead as conscious convictions about something's existence or approval in the society, and attitudes – as standpoints of how people should behave (Mead, 1994: 7).

According to Hofstede (1997), national cultural values influence both beliefs and attitudes in the national culture, being therefore more substantial. However, the focal point of the given study is attitudes towards how people should behave in their mutual relationships both within and outside the organisation.

One of the most important functions of organisational culture is stabilising individual behavior: it provides people with indications about what is successful and non-successful behavior in the organisation (De Witte, van Muijen, 1999). Hence, the perception of organisational culture comes into question. There are many domains that detect organisational culture and thus can serve as the basis for studying its perception, like hierarchical relations, peer relations, relations between sub-groups, reward systems, socialisations, etc. (*Ibid*).

However, many researchers agree that organisational culture is primarily shaped by two major factors: the organisation's task and relationship orientations (Schein, 1985; Harrison, 1995; in Vadi *et al*, 2002). Task orientation shows general attitudes towards organisational tasks, while relationship orientation reveals interpersonal relationships between organisational members (Vadi *et al*, 2002).

When new organisational members enter an organisation, they have most of their national cultural values firmly entrenched (Hofstede, 1997). Consequently, we may suggest that these values have a certain impact on individuals' perceptions. Indeed, research has shown that national culture together with economic ideology are the primary forces shaping (managerial) work values (Ralston, Holt, Terpstra, Yu, 1997), and also that national cultural values affect the nature of relationships within organisations (Jackson, 2001). Hofstede (1984) has claimed that national culture explains half the variance of employees' attitudes and behaviors (Alkhazraji, Gardner, Martin, Paolillo, 1997). Therefore, when studying perceptions of organisational culture, it is important to consider what national cultural values, beliefs and attitudes organisational members may have.

While researchers have identified a variety of national cultural dimensions, the individualism-collectivism dimension is considered to be one of the most important bases for cultural variation (Triandis, 1995; Ralston *et al*, 1997; Abraham, 1998; Realo, 2002). It has been referred to as a simple yet powerful tool for explaining the cultural differences. Individualism involves one's emotional independence from organisations, groups, or other collectives (Hofstede, 2001). Collectivism is defined as a set of feelings, beliefs, behavioral intentions, and behaviors related to solidarity and concern for others (Hui, 1988; in Alkhazraji *et al*, 1997). Hence, collectivism is a measure of interdependence.

The word interdependence suggests that these two concepts are important for organisations as well, according to the purport of their existence. For instance, Boyacigiller and Adler (1991) found that collectivism engenders organisational commitment (Jackson, 2001). Indeed, Parkes, Bochner, and Schneider (2001) also found that collectivists were more committed to their organisations and had longer tenure than individualists, and that the interaction between employees' orientations and organisational cultures on individualism-collectivism should have a significant effect on individuals' work-related outcomes.

Other findings suggest that these constructs may affect individual-based or group-based problem solving or decision making, which can be based on majority vote or group consensus (Triandis, 1995). Triandis (1995) also claims that there is little need for much socialisation into the job in case of individualists, and much need in case of collectivists, who must generate a common culture that will then coordinate their activities.

In the past, the term collectivism has been used to describe the low end of the individualist spectrum. However, many researchers now assume that individualism and collectivism are not necessarily the opposite poles of the same dimension (Realo *et al*, 1997; Triandis 1995; Vadi *et al*, 2002). For instance, Triandis (1995) asserts that in fact every culture contains at the same time both individualistic and collectivistic features. Triandis reconceptualises the traditional individualism-collectivism construct into vertical and horizontal dimensions: verticality assumes the acceptance of authority-ranking, horizontalness stems from equality (*Ibid*). It has also been shown that various cultural and socio-demographic groups may have different patterns of collectivism (Vadi *et al*, 2002).

According to Hui (1988), individualistic and collectivistic tendencies are target group specific, depending largely on how important the target group is to the person (e.g. spouse, parents, friends, co-workers) (Realo, 2002). In order to distinguish between collectivistic attitudes, it is necessary to answer the question – collective in relation to what or to whom? Realo, Allik, and Vadi (1997) found that collectivism can be regarded as a hierarchical construct involving three levels of relationships: those with family, friends (peers), and society.

Family-related collectivism (Familism) implies dedication of one's life to his/her family, putting its interests higher than one's own personal aspirations. Family security, respecting one's parents and elderly people, honoring traditions and reciprocating favors serve as the guiding principles of a familist's life. (Vadi *et al*, 2002)

Peer-related collectivism (Companionship) can be described by close relations between an individual and his/her neighbors, friends, or co-workers. (Vadi *et al*, 2002)

Society-related collectivism (Patriotism) means dedication to serving one's nation by surrendering one's personal comforts for the sake of the latter. Patriots are always ready to sacrifice themselves to defend their nation against enemies. (*Ibid*)

Application of the hierarchical model of collectivism allows us to distinguish the society-level collective values from the other values, and to study how different domains of collectivism are related to organisational culture and to the differences in its perception. Besides interdependence at individual and organisational levels, collectivistic attitudes are formed and transferred through the dominant culture of the society in which the organisation operates (Vadi *et al*, 2002). Therefore, collectivistic attitudes stemming from such a cultural context are of importance when studying the levels of connections between collectivism and organisational culture.

Cultural contexts of the Russian-speaking communities in the Baltic countries

The proportions of Russian-speaking populations in the Baltic countries are: Lithuania – 9.5%, Latvia – 40%, Estonia – 32% (http://www.balticsworldwide.com/economic_stats.htm). Besides ethnic Russians, Belorussians and Ukrainians are also included in this group (corresponding to 1–3.9% of the total populations in these countries) (Baltic Media Book, 2001). This approach is explained by Linz and Stepan (1996) who assert that since identities are in fact socially constructed and constantly changing, the russophone population, whether from the Ukraine, Belarus, Russia, or some other CIS republic, is actually developing a new diaspora identity of a “Russian-speaking minority”. Indeed, in the russophone diaspora many people identify themselves as “Russian-speaking” rather than as “Russians” (Linz, Stepan, 1996).

The common legacy of these populations in the Baltic countries from the Soviet time is the switchover from perceiving themselves as a majority of the Soviet Union to being a minority in one of the independent republics. The nationality issue is still a problem today for many of them, although in Lithuania, with ethnic Lithuanians being an overwhelming majority, this issue is considerably more relaxed than in Estonia and Latvia, where it used to be and often continues to be perceived as a threat. In Lithuania there is actually a special law on the national minorities (1989), which guarantees minority rights to schools, newspapers, organisations, religious congregations, etc. (Runblom, 2002).

However, the legacy of the Soviet period is that the Russian-speaking minorities in the Baltics often see Russia as “a large, unstable, and potentially aggressively nationalistic and self-appointed “homeland” (Linz, Stepan, 1996). In terms of national culture, this could mean that the Russian-speakers in the Baltics may have common cultural traits with their Russian counterparts.

Among the most commonly regarded national cultural characteristics of Russians are the emphasis on the primacy of the collective for sheer survival (Kets de Vries, 1999), and group orientation (Naumov, 1996). As argued by Vlachoutsicos and Lawrence (1996), Russian collectivism and its ethic of egalitarianism are an intrinsic component of the inner logic of managerial values. Kliuchevskii (1990) also emphasizes Russians’ tendency to work in groups, and to monitor results rather than set goals (Fey, Denison, 1999).

Another striking aspect of Russian culture is the extremely important role that family continues to play for Russians throughout their adult lives (Fey, Denison, 1999). Thus, in the frame of the hierarchical collectivism concept our first hypothesis is the following:

Hypothesis 1: Russian-speaking people in Lithuania will score in a similar way to their counterparts in Estonia on the concepts of Familism and Companionship.

As discussed above, the national identity issue of Russian-speaking people is less problematic in Lithuania, where they have

automatically been granted citizenship as well as all the ensuing public rights by a special law (The Russian ..., 1999). We can suggest that today they identify themselves as Lithuanians rather than Russians. This is in stark contrast with the situation in Estonia, where a large part of the Russian-speaking community are not citizens and can therefore have weaker or even no national identity, therefore retaining the national traits of their counterparts in Russia to a comparatively larger extent. This allows us to suggest that the third component of collectivism – Patriotism – is stronger in Lithuania. Hence the second hypothesis:

Hypothesis 2: Compared with the other subscales, the Russian-speaking minority in Lithuania allocate more relative weight to Patriotism than do their counterparts in Estonia.

Regarding the perception of organisational culture, the following argument can be presented. According to some authors, Russians tend to place a high value on established social norms (Puffer, 1994; Holt *et al*, 1993), and appear to be more contemplative than action or task-oriented (Kets de Vries, 2000) and extremely focused on the importance of personal relationships and trust (Ledeneva, 1998). Therefore, the next hypothesis runs as follows:

Hypothesis 3: The Russian-speaking community in Lithuania will score relatively higher on perceptions of relationship orientation of organisational culture than on perceptions of task orientation.

According to previous research conducted in Estonia (see Vadi *et al*, 2002), Familism were negative predictors of high values on the task orientation of organisational culture, yet there was a weak positive correlation with relationship orientation (*Ibid*). It is expected to find similar relationships in the current survey:

Hypothesis 4: The ratio of Familism of the Russian-speaking members of organisation will be negatively correlated with the perceptions of task orientation of organisational culture and positively correlated with the perception of relationship orientation.

The findings in Estonia did not show any significant relationship between Companionship and the organisational culture in the

overall sample; however, it tended to be negative for both orientations (see Vadi *et al*, 2002). At the same time, if analysed separately, then the Russian-speaking respondents in Estonia were negative predictors of high values of both orientations of organisational culture (*Ibid*). So, our next hypothesis is set as follows:

Hypothesis 5: The ratio of Companionship of Russian-speaking members of organisation will be negatively correlated with perceptions of both orientations of organisational culture.

In previous research Patriotism was found to promote organisational members' wish to support organisational culture from both perspectives (Vadi *et al*, 2002). Although, as mentioned above, the Russian-speaking community in Estonia generally had a more negative attitude towards both orientations of organisational culture, the hypothesized propensity of Russian-speaking people in Lithuania to be more patriotic may outweigh such a tendency in a way that they will support their organisation to a higher extent. Hence, the sixth hypothesis is:

Hypothesis 6: The ratio of Patriotism of Russian-speaking members of organisation will be positively correlated with perceptions of both orientations of organisational culture.

In order to test the hypothesis, the following study was undertaken.

Data and methodology

Initially, this study was conducted in Estonia in 1996–2001 among Estonian and Russian employees. The current study, made in April–May 2003, is thus a replication study, focusing only on the Russian-speaking employees of the Ignalina Nuclear Power Plant in Lithuania. The majority of this large organisation is Russian-speaking, as is the population of Visaginas (80%), the city where it is situated and which was especially built for its workers (Ignalina ..., 2000).

The same Russian-language version of questionnaires was used. Application of the same methods allowed us to compare the findings of both studies.

For the purpose of studying perception of organisational culture, an instrument developed by Vadi (2000) was used. The organisational culture questionnaire (OCQ) consists of 43 items measured on the Likert-type 10-point scale, 16 of which form two scales: eight items with substantial and unique loadings measuring task orientation of organisational culture and the other eight measuring relationship orientation (Vadi *et al.*, 2002). The respondents were asked to rank the statements about their organisation in accordance with the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with each of them.

The RUSCOL Likert-type 5-point scale (Realo *et al.*, 1997) was used to measure collectivistic attitudes. The scale consists of 24 items which measure three subtypes of collectivism: Familism, Companionship, and Patriotism. Each respondent was asked to rank the statements in accordance with the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with each of them.

The sample under study consisted of 203 respondents, with the mean age $M = 40.9$ ($SD = 8.5$), among which there were 123 males and 36 females (44 undefined). The occupational groups were divided as follows: 42 workers, 55 specialists, and 24 managers (82 missing values).

Findings

The mean values of the overall sample for the two organisational culture subscales were $M = 5.53$ ($SD = 1.48$, $n = 202$) for task orientation (OC1) and $M = 7.45$ ($SD = 1.33$, $n = 203$) for relationship orientation (OC2). One-way ANOVA showed differences in relationship orientation among the age groups: the younger people scored much higher ($M = 7.52$ compared to $M = 7.00$ of the older group, $SD = 1.2$, $F(1,133) = 4.856$, $p = .029$).

Among all three RUSCOL subscales, the mean values of Russians-speaking employees in Lithuania for Familism (COL1) were the highest ($M = 2.94$, $SD = 0.68$), whereas for Companionship (COL2) and Patriotism (COL3) these numbers were 2.07 ($SD = 0.49$) and 2.19 ($SD = 0.64$), respectively (overall $n = 201$).

In order to find the differences between age groups, all the respondents were divided into two – the “younger” group of 40 and below ($n = 67$), and the “older” group aged 41 and above ($n = 67$, missing values for all is 69). One-way ANOVA showed that the older group ($M = 3.17$, $SD = 0.51$) scored significantly higher on COL1, $F(1,131) = 9.615$, $p = .002$.

The distribution of all RUSCOL subscales was normal. This allowed us to take their mean values as a basis for categorizing the subscales into low and high, e.g. for COL1 all values that were less than 2.94 ($n = 92$) were considered as “low”, and the rest ($n = 109$) as “high”. One-way ANOVA showed that there were differences in perceiving organisational culture on the COL2 subscale: those respondents who scored higher on Companionship (referred to as Companions below) scored significantly higher on both OC1 and OC2 subscales ($M = 5.88$ compared to $M = 5.21$, $F(1,199) = 10.702$, $p = .001$, and $M = 7.66$ compared to $M = 7.29$, $F(1,200) = 4.038$, $p = .046$, respectively). For the Patriotism subscale Patriots scored higher on OC2 ($M = 7.69$ compared to $M = 7.28$, $F(1,200) = 4.828$, $p = .029$).

In order to find the relationships between three RUSCOL and two Organisational Culture subscales, Pearson Correlation was conducted. As the analysis of variance predicted, Companionship (COL2) attitudes were significantly correlated with both organisational culture subscales. An interesting finding is that Patriotism (COL3) is positively correlated with the relationship orientation of organisational culture (OC2). The pattern of correlations is exhibited in Table 5.1.

Table 5.1. Pearson correlations between the RUSCOL and QOC subscales

	OC1	OC2
COL1	0.04	0.03
COL2	0.21*	0.17*
COL3	0.14	0.21*

* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (1-tailed).

Discussion

As expected, the research showed that among the Russian-speaking employees in Lithuania collectivistic attitudes towards the family are strongest. The same relationship was found for Estonia, however, the difference between Familism and Companionship scores there was much bigger (see Vadi *et al*, 2002). Accordingly, the Russian-speaking minority in Lithuania were relatively less familist in their attitudes and relatively more oriented towards friends and companions, i.e. their scores were in between the scores of their counterparts in Estonia. Thus, hypothesis 1 was not confirmed.

This can probably be explained by the national identity of the Russian-speaking diasporas – as argued above, Russian-speaking people in Estonia may feel more separated from the society at large, therefore retaining the national characteristics (i.e. attitudes towards family) of their compatriots in Russia to a comparatively larger extent.

However, this explanation contradicts to our expectations regarding Patriotism – according to what was argued above, the Russian-speaking people in Lithuania were thought to have higher scores. Nevertheless, the scores on the Patriotism subscales among these groups were quite similar, the one for the group in Estonia being even a bit higher. Thus, hypothesis 2 was not confirmed either. This finding implies that the questions of patriotism and national cultural identity should be treated more carefully and more research is needed.

The current survey shows that the Russian-speaking employees in Lithuania perceive their organisational culture as more relationship-oriented. This resembles the findings in Estonia and confirms our hypothesis 3. It can be stated that the strong focus on the importance of personal relationships alongside the primacy of the collective discussed above as typical features of Russian culture are still present among the Russian-speaking people in both Lithuania and Estonia.

No correlation was found between Familism and organisational culture orientations among the Russian-speaking employees in Lithuania. As a result, hypothesis 4 was not confirmed. This is an interesting finding, especially compared to the one of the overall sample in Estonia, where Familism had the strongest and negative correlation with the task orientation of organisational culture (Vadi *et al*, 2002). The latter has also been confirmed by earlier studies (*Ibid*). The fact that for the Russian-speaking minority in Lithuania there is no inconsistency between individual-level attitudes towards family, or family loyalty, and the perception of organisation as a collective phenomenon, might be explained by the peculiarity of the given organisation. The very purpose of building the town of Visaginas was to provide accommodation for the employees of Ignalina Nuclear Power Plant, and probably their family members are either employed by the same organisation or perceive it relatively more like a family unit. However, this speculation needs a more sufficient basis.

Companionship, on the other hand, was found to be the most important predictor for the perception of organisational culture. Companions evaluated their organisation as both more task and more relationship-oriented, and the attitudes towards friends and peers were significantly positively correlated with both organisational culture subscales. Hence it could be concluded that hypothesis 5 was confirmed partially, as there was a correlation present, though opposite to the expected one. This finding is rather impressive compared to the findings in Estonia where no relationship was revealed between Companionship and organisational culture. Again, in the organisation under study it could stem from the nature of its inner relationships, when most friends of an employee are also his/her co-workers.

The correlation of Patriotism with the relationship orientation of organisational culture and its weak correlation with task orientation resemble the findings in Estonia. As in the latter, the discussed above less tense national identity issue of Russian-speaking people in Lithuania suggests a positive emotional connection with this society and nation, thus providing a ground for

supporting one's organisational tasks and relationships. It confirms hypothesis 6 put forward above.

There are several limitations to a sound comparison of the findings of the studies in Lithuania and Estonia. One is due to the difference in sample sizes – most of the contrasts between demographical variables in a much larger sample of Estonia were significant (Vadi *et al.*, 2002). Another important issue is that the organisations were not carefully fit – the Russian-speakers sample of the respective Estonian study represented several organisations, whereas in Lithuania the respondents represented only one organisation. Here also the specifics of the different industries may have an impact. However, the current study has brought out certain traits of the Russian-speaking communities and their relationships with organisational culture, which can serve as a basis for further research.

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KOKKUVÕTE

Vene keelt kõnelevate töötajate kollektivistlikud hoiakud ning organisatsioonikultuuri tajumine Leedus ja Eestis

Rebekka Vedina

Uurimuse eesmärgiks oli leida seoseid kollektivistlike hoiakute ja organisatsioonikultuuri tajumise vahel vene keelt kõnelevate töötajate hulgas Leedu organisatsioonis. Vene keelt kõnelevaid töötajaid käsitletakse antud uurimuses kui organisatsioonide ühist muutujat, mis pakub võrdlusalust organisatsioonikultuuride uurimiseks Balti riikides. Uurimuse tulemusi võrreldakse varem Eestis läbiviidud uurimuse tulemustega (Vadi, Allik, Realo, 2002). Kollektivistlikke hoiakuid käsitletakse antud uurimuses kui ühise rahvuskultuuri komponente, mida töötajad toovad endaga kaasa organisatsiooni ning mida mõõdetakse kolmel tasandil – perekonnaliikmete, sõprade-kaaslaste ning ühiskonna suhtes. Organisatsioonikultuuri tajumist mõõdetakse vastavalt kahele organisatsioonikultuuri orientatsioonile – ülesande- ning suhete orientatsioonile.

Uurimuses kasutati Vadi (2000) ja Realo *et al* (1997) väljatöötatud meetodikat, mida kasutati ka eelnevas uuringus Eestis. Hüpoteeside püstitamisel eeldati, et Leedus on rahvusliku identiteedi küsimus vähem terav kui Eestis ning seega ilmnevad seal vene rahvuskultuurile omased elemendid vähem kui Eesti vene keelt kõnelevate töötajate hulgas. Püstitatud hüpoteesidest leidsid täielikult kinnitust kaks ning üks leidis kinnitust osaliselt.

Uurimuses leiti, et kollektivistlikud hoiakud sõprade-kaaslaste suhtes on positiivselt seotud mõlema organisatsioonikultuuri orientatsiooni tajumisega ning hoiakud ühiskonna suhtes on positiivselt seotud organisatsioonikultuuri suhete orientatsiooni tajumisega. Need tulemused aitavad mõista vene keelt kõnelevate töötajate rahvuskultuurilisi omapärasusi.