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Ethical and Ethnic Values in Organizational Culture in Latvia. Part I

Wartości etyczne i etniczne w kulturze organizacyjnej na Łotwie. Część I

Abstract: The authors of the article show the importance of studying the economic environment, organizational culture in Latvia, as an ethnically diverse side, taking into account the influence of the ethnic factor. Since there are two ethnocultural poles in the ethnic diversity of Latvia – ethnic Latvians, who are the core of the Latvian nation-state, and Russians, as the largest ethnic minority in the country, the author of the article focused on the issue of the nature of ethnic differences within the Latvian organizational culture. The complexity of this approach to description is due to the fact that the vast majority of scientific works in Latvia, taking into account the influence of the ethnic factor on social life, belong to the field of political science and sociological research. While the few works within the framework of the economic science of Latvia consider the established organizational culture in this country mainly as a homogeneous ethno-cultural entity. To confirm the hypothesis that the ethnic factor also plays an important role in the economic life of Latvia, the author of the article in 2021 organized a sociological study in research project "Interaction of the individual, society and the state in the overall process of Latvian history: conflicts of values and the formation of common values at historical breaking points". The purpose of this study was to identify the ethnic characteristics of the organizational culture in Latvia through the nature of the ethical relationship between ethnic Latvians and Russians in the economic life of the country. As a key indicator of the integrity of organizational culture for the multi-ethnic environment of Latvia, the author chose the value of universal moral norms, primarily justice, to regulate relations between ethnic Latvians and Russians, to mutually assess their professional and

personal qualities in the life of companies and organizations. The data of this study showed that a high assessment of the ideals of justice is characteristic of the moral consciousness of both ethnic Latvian and Russian respondents. At the same time, the attitude towards the implementation of these ideals, as well as other moral values, in economic behavior, business communication, in the adoption of corporate ethics and respect for the established hierarchy in the enterprise and organization, in the perception of professional, moral and psychological qualities of employees with different ethnic identities has some differences among representatives of these ethnic groups. This indicates a significant place of ethnic favoritism both in the minds of ethnic Latvians and Russians when assessing the opposite side, and thus the existence of ethnic subcultures within the business culture and organizational culture in Latvia.

Keywords: organizational culture, multi-ethnic environment, ethical values, ethnic favoritism

Abstrakt: Autorzy artykułu wskazują na wagę badania środowiska gospodarczego i kultury organizacyjnej na Łotwie, jako kraju zróżnicowanego etnicznie, z uwzględnieniem wpływu czynnika etnicznego. Ponieważ w różnorodności etnicznej Łotwy wyróżnić można dwa bieguny etnokulturowe – etnicznych Łotyszy, którzy stanowią trzon łotewskiego państwa narodowego, oraz Rosjan, jako największą mniejszość w kraju, autorzy artykułu skupili się na zagadnieniu charakteru różnic etnicznych w łotewskiej kulturze organizacyjnej. Złożoność takiego podejścia do opisu wynika z faktu, że zdecydowana większość prac naukowych na Łotwie, uwzględniających wpływ czynnika etnicznego na życie społeczne, należy do obszaru nauk politycznych i badań socjologicznych. Podczas gdy nieliczne publikacje z zakresu nauk ekonomicznych traktują ugruntowaną kulturę organizacyjną w tym kraju głównie jako jednorodną całość etniczno-kulturową. Aby potwierdzić hipotezę, że czynnik etniczny odgrywa również ważną rolę w życiu gospodarczym Łotwy, autorzy artykułu, w 2021 roku, zorganizowali badanie socjologiczne w ramach projektu „Interakcja jednostki, społeczeństwa i państwa w ogólnym procesie historii Łotwy: konflikty wartości i kształtowanie się wspólnych wartości w historycznych punktach zwrotnych". Celem tego badania była identyfikacja etnicznych cech kultury organizacyjnej na Łotwie poprzez naturę relacji etycznych pomiędzy Łotyszami i Rosjanami w życiu gospodarczym kraju. Jako kluczowy wskaźnik integralności kultury organizacyjnej dla wieloetnicznego środowiska Łotwy, autorzy wybrali wartość uniwersalnych norm moralnych, przede wszystkim sprawiedliwości, do regulowania stosunków między etnicznymi Łotyszami i Rosjanami, do wzajemnej oceny ich zawodowych i osobistych cech w życiu firm i organizacji. Dane z tego badania wykazały, że wysoka ocena ideałów sprawiedliwości jest charakterystyczna dla świadomości moralnej zarówno respondentów łotewskich, jak i rosyjskich. Jednocześnie stosunek do realizacji tych ideałów, a także innych wartości moralnych, w zachowaniach ekonomicznych, komunikacji biznesowej, w przyjmowaniu etyki korporacyjnej oraz poszanowaniu ustalonej hierarchii w przedsiębiorstwie i organizacji, w postrzeganiu zawodowych, moralnych, psychologicznych cech pracowników o różnych tożsamościach etnicznych ma pewne różnice między przedstawicielami tych grup. Wskazuje to na istotne miejsce faworyzowania etnicznego zarówno w świadomości etnicznych Łotyszy, jak i Rosjan przy ocenie strony przeciwnej, a co za tym idzie na istnienie subkultur etnicznych w obrębie kultury biznesowej i kultury organizacyjnej na Łotwie.

Słowa kluczowe: kultura organizacyjna, środowisko wieloetniczne, wartości etyczne, faworyzowanie etniczne

The theoretical basis of the study

Organizational culture is understood as "a pattern of shared basic assumptions learned by a group as it solved its problems through external adaption and internal integration, which has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems"[1]. Every company has its way of working, and this significantly affects every aspect of the day-to-day life of the organization, from the tone of voice in email communications between team members, to the way people dress, to how they treat customers. or products for sale. This is what is called "organizational culture" – it refers to core values, beliefs, and concepts; in general, these aspects function as forms for the basis of the organization's behaviour and management system. If and when these aspects are shared by all members of the organization, they can be long-lasting and sustainable. The messages that come from the culture of an organization are closely related to the organization's strategy and management practices and have a great impact on the people who work in it[2].

Organizational culture is most frequently defined as the underlying beliefs, assumptions, values and ways of interacting that contribute to the unique social and psychological environment of an organization. Organizational culture comprises the fundamental values, assumptions, and beliefs held in common by members of an organization[3]. It may be also defined as "the specific collection of values and norms that are shared by people and groups in an organization and that control the way they interact with each other and with stakeholders outside the organization"[4]. It reflects the unique social and psychological environment within the organization. Employees transmit the culture to new members and expect them to share same values. Culture affects whether employees re-

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[1] E. Schein, *Organizational culture and leadership*, San Francisco 2010, p. 18.

[2] D.R. Denison, W.S. Neale, *Denison Organizational Culture Survey. Facilitator Guide,* https://www.academia.edu/35981824/Denison_Organizational_Culture_Survey_Facilitator_Guide (access date: 12.12.2019).

[3] C. Ostroff, A. Kinicki, M. Tamkins, *Organizational Culture and Climate*, "Handbook of psychology" 2013, Vol. 12, p. 565-593.

[4] C.W.L. Hill, G.R. Jones, M.A. Schilling, *Strategic Management: An Integrated Approach,* Boston 2015, p. 410.

late themselves to other team members and the environment within the organization.

The most important feature of organizational culture, established in the economic life of a particular nation state, is the degree of its internal differentiation, depending primarily on the ethnic diversity of society. Ethnic differentiation of the Latvian society is the most important factor influencing the differentiation of organizational culture in commercial companies, state organizations, depending on the proportion of certain ethnic groups employed in these companies. In addition, ideas about ethnic groups as carriers of different types of organizational culture, business ethos, etc. are taking root in society. According to Schein, culture is what a group learns over some time as that group solves its problems of survival in an external environment and its problems of internal integration. Such learning is simultaneously a behavioural, cognitive, and emotional process. As Schein defines "Extrapolating further from a functionalist anthropological view, the deepest level of culture will be cognitive in that the perceptions, language, and thought processes that a group comes to share will be the ultimate causal determinant of feelings, attitudes, espoused values, and overt behaviour"[5]. Within each collective, there is a variety of individuals. At the organizational level, culture can be defined as the collective programming of the minds of group members with which one group differs from other groups in the same way as the definition of national cultures. Another classification distinguishes between strong and weak organizational cultures is provided by Spivak:

• A strong culture is characterized by the values that are most widespread and intensely maintained in an organization. The more employees in the organization recognize the importance of these core values, share them, and are committed to them, the stronger the culture.

• A strong culture is a potent regulator of personnel behaviour. It regulates and determines their actions. Employees understand what the reference behaviour (which they should strive for) is. A high degree of formalization of the main provisions ensures the predictability and consistency of personnel in an organization with

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[5] E.H. Schein, *Organizational culture,* "American Psychologist" 1990, № 2, p. 109-119.

any corporate culture. However, a strong culture can achieve the same result, often without documenting norms and values, since they will be accepted by an employee who takes and shares the culture of the organization, subconsciously, as the basis of his activities.

• Organizational culture can be considered weak if fragmented, and divided into small parts not connected by shared values and beliefs. Conflicts between different aspects of culture can decrease the organization's productivity and various internal corporate problems[6].

Latvia is a nation state of ethnic Latvians with a very large ethnic diversity. Ethnic Latvians make up 60,2% of the total population of the country for 2022, Russians – 24,4%, Ukrainians and Belarusians – 3,0% each, Poles – 2,0%, Lithuanians – 1,2%, other ethnic groups – 6,7%[7]. In this ethnic diversity, there are two ethnic poles – ethnic Latvians and Russians – whose share is 84,6% of the total population of Latvia. The share of the Russian population in the largest cities is especially high, which exceeds the share of this ethnic group in the country's population as a whole: in Riga 35,7%, in Daugavpils – 47,8%, in Liepaja – 27,2%, in Jelgava – 24,9%, in Jurmala – 32,6%[8]. Ethnic Latvians and Russians, in comparison with other ethnic groups (with the exception of the Roma), are characterized by an ethnocultural identity based on the native language of these groups. This is ultimately manifested in the features of their social culture, including the features of the formation of networks of socio-cultural solidarity in entrepreneurship, organizational behavior and economic life in general. For ethnic Latvians, the mother tongue is Latvian in 95,7% of cases, for Russians, Russian – 94,5% of cases, for Ukrainians, Ukrainian – in 27,2%, for Poles, Polish – in 19,4%, for Belarusians, Belarusian – in 18,8%[9].

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[6] Vide: V. Spivak, *Corporate culture*, Sankt Petersburg 2004.

[7] *Latvijas iedzīvotāju sadalījums pēc nacionālā sastāva un valstiskās piederības*, https://www.pmlp.gov.lv/lv/media/9161/download (access: 21.10.2022).

[8] *Iedzīvotāju skaits un īpatsvars pēc tautības reģionos, republikas pilsētās, novados un 21 attīstības centrā gada sākumā – Tautība, Teritoriālā vienība, Rādītāji un Laika periods*, https://data.stat.gov.lv/pxweb/lv/OSP_PUB/START__POP__IR__IRE/IRE030/ table/ tableViewLayout1/ (access date: 01.06.2022).

[9] *2017. gadā pastāvīgo iedzīvotāju skaits Latvijā samazinājies par 15,7 tūkstošiem*, https://stat.gov.lv/lv/statistikas-temas/iedzivotaji/iedzivotaju-skaits/preses-relizes/2063-iedzivotaju-skaita-izmainas (access date: 02.05.2022).

However, despite the high proportion of Russians in the country's population, its presence in the most prestigious types of professions and large businesses is not very large, where ethnic Latvians dominate. There are practically no Russians in the leadership of big business in Latvia either. For example, among the top 20 taxpaying businesses in 2019, ethnic minorities were CEOs of only one company, which ranked last on the list, and among the top 60 companies, only six (BERLAT GRUPA, SIA; GREIS, SIA; GREIS loģistika, SIA; Accenture Latvijas filiāle; LIVIKO, SIA; BITE Latvija, SIA)[10].

In Latvian sociology and political science, the role of the ethnic factor in the life of the Latvian society is considered primarily in order to gain a deeper understanding of the political processes in the country, the peculiarities of national and political identification, geopolitical sympathies, the nature of public communication and historical memory. However, inter-ethnic interaction, mainly between ethnic Latvians and Russians, at the individual level in the public space is most intensively and almost daily implemented in the economic space. The contradictory nature of the interaction of economic and ethnic factors was already revealed in the studies of Latvian sociologists. On the one hand, the significant role of the economy in the integration of Latvian society was noted. On the other hand, studies have shown a significant division of the business environment along ethnic lines. At the same time, the authors of the study considered the position of the Latvian language in the business communication of representatives of different ethnic groups to be the most important criterion of ethnic differences in economic life. Sociologists noted that Russians, when recruiting in companies, focused on informal connections more often than ethnic Latvians. Both ethnic Latvians and Russians have negative stereotypes about each other as employees[11]. Sociologists found that Russian respondents positively evaluate their personal relations with ethnic Latvians, but the evaluation of the country's ethnopolitics is negative. At the same time, there is a pronounced "feeling of

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[10] Calculated by: *TOP 100 lielākie nodokļu maksātāji 2019. gadā*, https://blog.lursoft.lv/2020/04/27/top-100-lielakie-nodoklu-maksataji-2019-gada/ (access date: 20.04.2022).

[11] Vide: B. Zepa, A. Selecka, I. Šūpule, J. Krišāne, I.Tomsone, L. Krastiņa, *Sabiedrības integrācija un uzņēmējdarbība: etniskais aspekts*, Rīga 2004.

threat, separation from other ethnic groups" among these ethnic groups, which indicates the presence of signs of ethnic conflict[12]. In the scientific literature devoted to the peculiarities of the economic environment of Latvia, the emphasis is usually placed on the fixation of ethno-cultural differences in it, mainly in the organizational culture of the ethnic Latvian and Russian population, and the importance of the role of moral norms in the formation and functioning of the unified corporate culture of multi-ethnic organizations and companies is not particularly emphasized[13].

In Latvian science, there are not many studies devoted to the analysis of the national characteristics of the Latvian business culture and the internal ethnic differentiation of this culture. Although some studies note the lack of integrity of the business culture of Latvia as a social phenomenon in which the influence of many countries (Germany, Scandinavian countries, Russia) is intertwined. And, given the high proportion of the Russian population in Latvia, and especially in its largest cities, one can also assume a high internal differentiation of organizational culture. This study shows that business people surveyed believe that the Latvian business culture is characterized by both positive qualities (precise; honest; patient; creative; flexible) and negative qualities (lack of initiative; need for authoritative management, precise instructions; evade taking responsibility; failure to plan a long-term business development; evade taxes paying, pay salaries "in envelopes", use unfair business practices; in society entrepreneurs are considered to be unfair towards other people society; lacks entrepreneurship skills). An important feature of this study was the identification of a conflict between the high expectation on the part of compatriots to implement universal moral norms in the regulation of relations between people, including in the business environment, on the one hand, and the low level of expectation from these people to implement these moral norms in relation to representatives of specific social groups, especially disadvantaged ones[14].

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[12] Vide: B. Zepa, I. Šūpule, E. Kļave, L. Krastiņa, J. Krišāne, I. Tomsone, *Etnopolitiskā spriedze Latvijā: konflikta risinājuma meklējumi*, Rīga 2005.
[13] Vide: Dž. Mouls, *Biznesa kultūra un etiķete Eiropas valstīs*, Rīga 2003.
[14] Vide: M. Kāle, G. Klāsons, I. Šterna, *Business Culture and Values in the Baltic states*, Riga 2013.

The widespread fact that the dissemination of the necessary information for the successful operation of an enterprise depends on a specific group of employees, for example, on issues of overcoming corruption, is also noted by other researchers of business culture in Latvia[15]. In some scientific works, ethnic diversity is also not always noted among the social factors influencing the business culture, organizational culture of Latvia. In scientific works, it is studied how the formed organizational culture of enterprises and organizations meets the tasks of business, innovative activity. As the most important characteristics of organizational culture, Latvian researchers consider both the solidarity of employees of commercial organizations and the features of building hierarchical, bureaucratic structures for managing organizations[16].

In journalistic articles, as a rule, the fact of the ethnic diversity of the Latvian organizational culture, which is identified with the Latvian ethnic organizational culture, is ignored. At the same time, this culture is identified with the business cultures of the Nordic countries. The distancing of ethnic Latvians in relation to representatives of other countries and cultures is emphasized. At the same time, they speak of a high ability to adapt to new conditions, the need to learn new and progressive technologies[17].

Researchers around the globe widely use Quinn and Rohrbaugh's Competing Values Framework (CVF) to assess organizational culture and its connection with organizational performance metrics, such as employee engagement, quality improvement implementation and others[18]. A well-known Hofstede cultural dimensions theory is a framework for cross-cultural communication[19]. It stands for the idea that national and regional culture in-

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[15] *Sabiedrība par atklātību – Delna. Pretkorupcijas datu publiskošanas prakse uzņēmumos Latvijā 2021*, Riga 2021.

[16] L. Dubkēvičs, *Organizācijas kultūras un klimata mijiedarbības vadīšana radošuma veicināšanai valsts teātros Latvijā. Promocijas darba kopsavilkums*, Rīga 2014; J. Grizāns, *Uzņēmējdarbības vides konkurētspēja Latvijas pilsētas un tās paaugstināšanā piemērojamie instrumenti. Promocijas darbs*, Rīga 2015.

[17] *Biznesa un saskarsmes kultūra Latvijā,* https://balticexport.com/raksts/biznesa-un-saskarsmes-kultura-latvija-6899c27a58 (access date: 20.10.2022); *Latviešu lietas,* https://latvjulietas.lv/ (access date: 20.10.2022).

[18] R. Quinn, J. Rohrbaugh, *A Competing Values Approach to Organizational Effectiveness,* "Public Productivity Review" 1981, № 2, p. 122-140.

[19] G. Hofstede, *Culture's Consequences: Comparing Values, Behaviors, Institutions, and Organizations Across Nations*, Thousand Oaks 2001.

fluences human behaviour. The theory has been widely used in diverse fields as a major resource for various research, especially international management and cross-cultural communication.

The scientific approach, which considers that the interaction of employees in organizations and companies is mostly a form of intercultural communication, was manifested in the research of Geert Hofstede (1928–2020). First, these studies focused on understanding the characteristics of intercultural interaction in different countries and regions of the world. G. Hofstede's theory includes the idea that fairly stable features of national cultures have been formed so far, which are manifested in various areas of private and public life, including economy, business and management. The typology of cultural differences includes such dimensions as the level of distancing (distancing) from power; the degree of development of individualism as opposed to collectivistic cultures; the level of masculinity (masculinity) as the need to achieve operational efficiency regardless of circumstances; avoiding a situation of uncertainty (this means the need to follow clear rules, as well as the desire for agreement in the social community, avoiding risk, showing initiative, a group with a low degree of tolerance for other opinions); the level of development of strategic thinking as an alternative to focusing on the demands of tradition, the fulfillment of social obligations; the level of opportunities for free satisfaction of an individual's basic needs without strict societal control. It is assumed that in every country national culture exists as a normative system, which should be equally expressed in the economic behavior of people, regardless of their ethnic and cultural origin and identity. However, in the real situation, even within the framework of one national business culture, conflicts may arise, the views of the conflicting parties coincide with their ethnocultural lines. Therefore, we can expect a relativization of moral requirements regarding members of companies and institutions depending on the ethno-cultural identity of these people[20]. These ideas are largely based on the works of Ronald Franklin Inglehart, in which the level of economic development of different countries is explained as

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[20] G. Hofstede, G. J.Hofstede, M. Minkov, *Cultures and Organizations. Intercultural Cooperation and Its Importance for Survival.* New York 2010.

the result of the influence of the cultural characteristics of these countries[21].

Although G. Hofstede's theory is widely used in scientific research, it is quite justifiably criticized in the matter of interpreting national and cultural differences. There is also a need to review the approaches in the existing cross-cultural studies, especially those related to the concept of "others" and distancing from the "hegemonic" scientific discourses, which use the normative interpretation rhetoric of multicultural personnel management of companies. Attention is also drawn to the fact that this theory is politically motivated, as it clearly sympathizes with Western management value systems and practices over non-Western management options. Thus, Hofstede's theory, according to Galit Ailon, "once again creates a global hierarchy and shows different societies in it depending on the degree to which they recognize, demonstrate or use Western technology and the concept of Western knowledge"[22]. Sociologists have long noted society's desire to combine universal human rights, individualistic and collectivistic, including ethnocultural, values in a balanced way. This means, in particular, a change in the moral paradigm – from focusing only on individualistic values to strengthening a "social order that respects the autonomy of the individual"[23].

The most important role of morality in the integration of Latvian society as a whole, in the formation of a general type of economic, entrepreneurial culture, is related to the universality of its norms, which is especially emphasized in I. Kant's ethics[24], and a similar understanding has been supported by other moral researchers[25]. It is the universalism of moral norms, the possibility of imposing its demands on all people, regardless of their social status, ethno-cultural identity and other characteristics, as well as the

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[21] R. Inglehart, *Culture Shift in Advanced Industrial Society*, Princeton 1990; R. Inglehart, *Modernization and Postmodernization: Cultural, Economic, and Political Change in 43 Societies*, Princeton 1997.

[22] G. Ailon, *Mirror, Mirror on the Wall: Culture's Consequences in a Value Test of Its Own Design*, "The Academy of Management Review" 2008, № 4, p. 898.

[23] A. Etzioni, *The New Golden Rule: Community and Morality in a Democratic Society*, New York 1996.

[24] I. Kants, *Praktiskā prāta kritika*, Rīga 1988.

[25] J. Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*. Cambridge 2005; J. Habermas, *The inclusion of the other. Studies in political theory*, Cambridge 1998.

strengthening of the principles of political democracy, that contribute to the realization of the equal status of all members of society in the economic life of various ethnic communities. Although there is also a tradition in science that indicates the diversity of moral norms depending on belonging to a social group, including ethnic[26].

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