

THE IMPLICATIONS OF NATIONAL AND ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE: A CASE OF LITHUANIAN AND RUSSIAN SMEs

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Abstract. The paper presents research which investigates the implications of national culture and organizational culture in Lithuanian and Russian SMEs. While much of the attention has been given to organizational culture in large companies, little research has been focused on organizational and national culture in SMEs. The research is based on the main ideas of Hofstede's framework of seven cultural dimensions and Denison's cultural model, which measures culture in organizations with four major traits such as involvement, consistency, adaptability, and mission. The quantitative research is based on responses to a questionnaire embracing various aspects of national and organizational culture. Authors of the research have elaborated proposals, for further research.

Keywords: national culture, organisational culture, SMEs, Lithuania, Russia.

Jel classification: M10, M14, M19

1. Introduction

The focus of scholars on culture has been vast over the past decades. The scientific researches have explored the impact of culture at the national and the organisational levels. Obviously, the different layers of culture interact and impact each other.

The impact of national culture on organizational culture in large companies has been widely addressed by researchers from various countries. On the other hand, little research has been focused on organizational and national culture in small and medium enterprises (SMEs). SMEs, playing a significant role in the growth and change of economy, are confronted with international competition and are forced to compete in international markets. The managers of SMEs are forced to understand peculiarities of various countries and the impact of culture on the firm's success.

The paper aims to reveal the implications of national culture and organizational culture in Lithuanian and Russian SMEs. The research is based on the main ideas of Hofstede's framework and Denison's cultural model, which measure involvement, consistency, adaptability, and mission. The paper is based on quantitative research.

2. The concept of culture

The scientific literature linked to culture is seen as vast and extensive. Notably, a lot of attempts were made in order to clarify the concept of culture. The

researchers have proposed to define culture as the shared patterns of behaviours and the meanings that are attributed to these behaviours (Schneider, Barsoux 2003). Therefore culture consists of language, ideas, beliefs, customs, taboos, codes, institutions, tools, techniques, and works of art, rituals, ceremonies, and other related components.

Kroeber and Kluckhohn (1954) have provided 164 definitions of culture and have come to the conclusions that usually the word culture is used in three basic assumptions:

1. Different expressions of art, also known as high culture.
2. Human beliefs, behavior and knowledge, gained through social learning.
3. Shared values, goals, practices and attitudes within a specific organization, institution or group.

Culture is seen as the shared system of meanings (guides how the world is perceived and culture is organized), relative (there is no cultural absolute and there is no set standards for perceiving culture), learned (it is derived from social environment and not from genetics) and about groups (it is a collective phenomenon and about shared values and meanings). On the other hand, culture could not be right or wrong, inherited or about individual behavior (Hoecklin 1995; McKenna and Beech 1995).

Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (1998) are stating that culture of one country could not ever

be understood by other cultures. Even people of same culture can never say that they fully understand even people of their own culture. On the other hand, the discussions in scientific literature predict that internationalization will create a common culture worldwide and it should make the life of international managers much easier. According to Ohmae (1994), the impact of national cultures on organisational cultures appears likely to continue to decline.

Despite the debate related with convergence of cultures, other scholars adopt different approach (Hofstede 2001; Tayeb 1996). They state that organisations need to be aware of differences in national cultures and the influence of these differences upon the organisation's culture. Cultural differences exist not only in respect to far away and exotic countries. Neighboring countries and even regions within the same country can also have significant differences. For example, European Union is a symbol of unification of many countries. Apart legal problems, there is a whole layer of different problems, as nowhere do cultures differ so much, as inside Europe (Kaarna 2010; Korsakiene 2009; Ruzier *et al.* 2006; Adekola *et al.* 2008; Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner 1998; Hoecklin 1995).

The review of the concept of culture implies that there is no single interpretation of the meaning (Stankevičienė *et al.* 2009). Nevertheless, most scholars agree that culture concept is a multifaceted notion that plays an important role on various levels such as community, organizations and firms, and nation. In order to set consistent basis for further course of current research, Hofstede's interpretation of cultural concept and its application is chosen as the basis for current research.

3. Hofstede's dimensions of culture

Cultural differences at the country level reside mostly in values, less in practices. At the organizational level, cultural differences are considered mostly of different practices, not of different values. Using one word culture for speaking about organizational culture and national culture is a mistake, as nation is not an organization and there are two types of cultures of different kinds (Hofstede 2001). Social behavior is embedded in a particular content of the country and is connected to others deeply held values and beliefs. Mismanaging cultural differences can lead to inability to motivate employees, increase rotation and fail to build competitive advantage. On the other hand, when successfully managed, differences in cultures can lead to increasing innovations in business practices, faster and better learning within the organization and sustainable growth (Hoecklin 1995).

Geert Hofstede is Dutch sociologist and anthropologist, also best known for his research in the field of cross-cultural organizations. The research of Hofstede focuses on the differences and similarities between national cultures. Hofstede (1991) has proposed several cultural dimensions: power distance (PDI), individualism vs. collectivism (IND), masculinity vs. femininity (MAS), uncertainty avoidance (UAI). With conducting new research Hofstede has introduced new dimension – long term orientation (LTO), which originally was named Confucian dynamism and was identified only when Hofstede's research was restructured with the involvement of Chinese researchers to deliberately create a non western bias (Hofstede 2001). Later on, based on the work of Minkov (2007), Hofstede has added two more dimensions: indulgence vs. restraint and monumentalism vs. self-effacement (Hofstede 2009).

Power distance is the extent of inequality in a society- less powerful members of institutions and organizations within a country are expecting and accepting that power is distributed unequally. Power and inequality are fundamental factors of any society and any person with international experience has to know that "all societies are unequal but some are more unequal than others cultures (Hofstede 2001). In countries where power distance is low, inequities between people are more likely to be minimised, what leads to consultative management style, as power distance between the hierarchy levels is small and encourages more communication between the boss and his or her subordinates. However, in countries where power distance is high, there is more dependence between the boss and subordinates, where subordinates prefer dependence and more authoritarian boss (Hofstede 2001, Machado and Carvalho 2008).

Notably, individualism vs. collectivism refers to the extent to which individuals are oriented to themselves and their immediate family, rather than groups (Millmore *et al.* 2007). This dimension is the only one of all other dimensions for which worldwide shifts have been noticeable in the past. According to the observations, there is a relationship between cultural individualism and economic wealth. For instance, wealthier countries score more individualist and countries which recently started to become wealthier start to become individualist. Nevertheless, while wealth increases individualism, it does not make those countries as individualist as Western countries. Therefore, increasing or decreasing wealth reduces but does not eliminate differences in individualism/collectivism among parts of the world (Hofstede 2001).

The dimension of masculinity vs. femininity refers to the extent to which assertiveness and de-

cisiveness are prioritized over more caring values. Notably, this dimension refers to the division of emotional roles between the genders which is another fundamental issue for any society. The research discovered that women's values vary less among societies than men's values (Hofstede 2001). However, what behaviors are supposed to be feminine or masculine is the subject of discussion among modern societies. According to Hofstede (1991), masculine societies have established clear roles of males, meaning that males have to be confident and oriented toward the material success. In such societies where gender roles overlap are supposed to be feminine (Hofstede 1991, 2001; Machado and Carvalho 2008).

Uncertainty avoidance is the extent to which the members of a culture feel threatened by uncertain or unknown situations and opposes toughness and is toward more flexible cultures. Weak uncertainty avoidance stands for citizen competence—that is the belief that ordinary person is able to influence the authorities and shares some degree of mutual trust among them. Strong uncertainty avoidance implies that decisions should be left to experts – citizens and authorities mutually distrust each other (Hofstede 2001). Cultures which are avoiding uncertainty are trying to control it by installing laws and regulations, various safety measures, or by emphasizing the philosophical and religious taboos. On the opposite type, uncertainty accepting cultures are more tolerant towards change and of different opinions compared to what they are used to. They have very few rules and laws and their philosophical and religious views are relative and could be openly discussed and contradicted (Hofstede 2001).

Long-term vs. short-term orientation originally was called Confucian dynamism. Later renamed to long term vs. short term orientation this dimension was added as a fifth dimension to the original four ones to distinguish thinking between the East and West (Draguns 2007). Long term orientation means focusing on the future. It implies a cultural trend toward delaying immediate result by practicing persistence and thriftiness. On the opposite, short term orientation means focusing on the past and present by respecting tradition and by a need to follow trends in spending, even if this means borrowing money. Long term oriented societies encourage virtues of orientation towards rewards, holding savings and fast adaptation to changes in situations. Short term oriented societies are more related to valuing past and present it as national pride, respects traditions and fulfilling obligations to the society of being an obedient citizen environment (Hofstede 2001).

Indulgence vs. restraint dimension is based on Minkov's (2007) World Survey data analysis for 93 countries. Notably, indulgence stands for society which allows relatively free display of basic human desires, enjoying life and having fun. High indulgence culture will emphasize generous spending which can be caused by self-enhancing attempts to be proud and successful individuals who are not saving their money to get satisfaction or limit themselves in their desires and feelings. On the opposite, restraint stands for a society that suppresses the display of human desire of having fun and regulates it by introducing strict social norms and taboos environment. Minkov (2007) specified that happiness is linked to the perception of the control of personal life, with life representing a source of freedom and leisure.

Minkov (2007) explained that in monumental cultures people will have a tendency to have a positive self-regard and seek positive information about themselves. In such culture, interpersonal competition is valued as it provides an opportunity to demonstrate personal superiority. Because of the interpersonal competition the large differences in income will be present. According to Heine (2003), such individuals will not be interested in self improvement, as they will not see the need to improve what is already good enough. Moreover, as they don't view individuals being flexible, they would not be easily convinced that self improvement will bring positive results. Representatives of such culture will view cultural adaptation as a kind of betrayal as they are proud of who they are and view their values and beliefs indispensable (Minkov, 2007). On the other side, self-effacement cultures will be more flexible and obedient. People will view themselves as adaptive individuals who can adjust to any situation and view self-improvement activities as the way of coping with deficiencies (Heine, 2003). In such cultures, failure would not be perceived as a problem and task at which one has failed will not be dismissed as unimportant, as they will view failure as a lesson and they will admit their mistakes and will try to learn from them in order to avoid repeating them in the future (Minkov, 2007).

The researches of Hofstede have influenced works of other scholars. For instance, Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (1998) have identified seven dimensions of culture, which are conceptually related to Hofstede's dimensions. On the other hand, McSweeney has argued that Hofstede's research fails to show a causal link between the dimensions of a particular culture and specific actions (McSweeney 2002). However, despite the prevailing critics, the analysis of culture based on Hofstede's dimensions can not be ignored.

4. Denison culture model

Fey and Denison (2003) argument that organizational culture is a multifaceted phenomenon, scoping from deeper layers like beliefs and assumptions to visible layers like structures and practices. Notably, Denison and his colleagues have developed an organizational culture model based on four traits of organizational cultures: involvement, consistency, adaptability and mission (Denison and Mishra 1995). Each trait breaks down into three more specific areas for a total of 12 indices (Hooijberg and Denison 2002).

Involvement describes the empowerment and teamwork which are necessary to address competitive environment. Indices which measure involvement are: empowerment, teamwork and capability development. Consistency measures the unified approach to goal achievement and problem resolution that allow dealing with various challenges (Denison *et al.* 2004). Consistency creates a “strong” culture based on beliefs, values and symbols that are widely and commonly understood by all people in organization (Guidroz *et al.* 2005). Indices which measure consistency are: core values, agreement and coordination. The trait of adaptability assumes translating the demands of the business environment into action. This trait describes organization’s efforts to balance internal identity with external events and impetus to change (Denison *et al.* 2004). Indices which measure adaptability are: creating change, customer focus and organizational learning. The mission trait emphasizes defining a meaningful long-term direction for the organization. The indices of mission consist of: strategic direction and intent, goals and objectives, and vision.

The scholars emphasise that the model focuses on the contradictions involved in simultaneously achieving internal integration and external adaptation (Fey and Denison 2003). Hence, the authors of this paper agree with the main ideas and insight proposed by Denison and his colleagues. Therefore the above discussion leads to several research questions which are related to dimensions of national and organizational culture.

5. Methodology

Current research is developed to investigate the impact of national culture on organizational culture in Lithuanian and Russian SMEs. For present exploratory research a convenience sample was chosen as this sampling method is less costly in time and monetary terms than random sampling (Marshall 1996).

In order to determine and evaluate difference of national culture impact on organizational culture the decision was made to conduct research in two stages. During the first stage questionnaires on national culture dimensions were distributed to managers of Lithuanian and Russian SMEs. The second stage of research included distribution of questionnaire on organizational culture dimensions to the participants from the same sample.

The review of the relevant literature has allowed formulating hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1: In Lithuanian SMEs participants of Lithuanian nationality will score less on power distance (PDI) and monumentalism (MON) than participants of Russian nationality.

Hypothesis 2: In Lithuanian SMEs participants of Lithuanian nationality will score more on mission, adaptability, consistency and involvement traits of organizational culture than participants of Russian nationality.

SMEs were selected from tourism, recruitment agencies, transportation and logistics industries. The online questionnaire was distributed to respondents through personal e-mail invitations, followed by personal phone calls. The e-mails of managers and directors were obtained upon personal referral in Russia and Lithuania, as well as retrieved from database of SMEs in Lithuania-Creditreform database, or on company’s website, where it possible.

The ideal size of a homogeneous sample, as indicated by Hofstede, is 50 respondents, though a heterogeneous sample of 20 respondents in one country is considered to be yet sufficient for statistical analysis (Hofstede *et al.* 2008). Therefore, the ideal target sample of present research is 50 respondents in each of both countries - Lithuania and Russia. A total of 29 and 26 usable questionnaires were returned from Lithuanian and Russian samples respectively.

6. Results

In order to check the reliability of data the Cronbach Alpha analysis was applied. A reliability test like Cronbach’s Alpha should not be based on individual scores but on country mean scores. Obviously this presupposes data from a sufficient number of countries, in practice at least ten. For comparison across fewer countries the reliability of the VSM at the country level has to be taken for granted. Since current research observed only two countries, the Cronbach Alpha analysis was used to check reliability of dependent variables of organizational culture.

Table 1. Reliability statistics

Scale	Cronbach's Alpha	Number of valid cased	% of valid
Involvement	,926	55	100,0
Consistency	,741	55	100,0
Adaptability	,429	55	100,0
Mission	,686	55	100,0

Reliability analysis showed that the data obtained from the survey questionnaires provides well-designed measures that accepted internal consistency of data only for two organizational culture traits such as involvement and consistency. The data for adaptability and mission organizational traits have not passed reliability test for data consistency. Consequently, adaptability and mission organizational traits could not be considered well-designed constructs and measures within the scope of current research.

In order to check the compatibility of the data from the two samples the *t-test* analysis ($\alpha=.05$) was conducted to compare sample means and reveal if there are significant differences in variance of the two samples. The *t-test* ($\alpha=.05$) failed to reveal any significant variance in samples. Consequently, the means for dependent and independent variables can be compared to identify differences in national culture and organizational culture dimensions in both samples (Table 2).

The comparison of means of variables suggests that there is slightly significant difference in power distance (PDI) whereas all other dimensions of national culture and organizational culture traits differ significantly in both samples. Despite slightly significant difference in power distance (PDI) between Lithuanian and Russian participants, the mean value for Lithuania (mean=47.2414) and mean value for Russia (mean=43.2692) suggest that namely Lithuanian managers are more willing to accept inequality and unequal power in the organization than Russian managers.

The mean value for individualism vs. collectivism (IDV) dimension is (mean=38.6207) for Lithuanian managers and (mean=59.2308) for Russian managers imply that Russian managers tend to be more independent and self-reliant than Lithuanian managers.

Masculinity vs. femininity (MAS) mean value is (mean=21.7241) for Lithuanian managers, while for Russian managers it is (mean=6.7308). The comparison of MAS means implies that Lithuanian managers are more assertive, focused on performance and material success, whereas Russian managers tend to focus more on relationships and quality of life.

Table 2. Independent samples test and group statistics

	Lithuania	Russia	<i>t</i>	Sig.
N	29	26		
Power Distance (PDI)	47,2414	43,2692	0,240	0,873
Individualism vs. Collectivism (IDV)	38,6207	59,2308	-1,278	0,447
Masculinity vs. Femininity (MAS)	21,7241	6,7308	0,953	0,354
Uncertainty Avoidance (UAI)	-22,931	-53,6538	1,964	0,255
Long-Term Orientation vs. Short-Term Orientation (LTO)	27,7586	5,7692	1,503	0,897
Indulgence vs. Restraint (IVR)	25	79,2308	-2,834	0,987
Monumentalism vs. Self-effacement (MON)	13,1034	38,6538	1,493	0,294
Involvement	3,5655	3,2167	1,949	0,344
Consistency	3,5149	3,5	0,126	0,888
Adaptability	3,9034	3,6641	3,700	0,14
Mission	3,5862	3,4077	1,496	0,608

Uncertainty avoidance (UAI) mean value is negative due to subtraction in the formulas when no adjustment constant was applied. However, Lithuanian participants score higher than Russian participants with mean values (mean= -22.931) and (mean= -53. 6538) respectively. This implies that Lithuanian managers perceive the ambiguity more stressful and avoid unknown situations and uncertainty more than Russian managers.

Long-term orientation vs. short-term orientation (LTO) dimension mean values imply that Lithuanian managers are more focused on future and tend to delay immediate results by thriftiness as their mean score is (mean=27.7586). On the contrary, Russian managers focused more on present and immediate results since mean value for Russian sample is (mean=5.7692).

Indulgence vs. restraint (IVR) mean value for Lithuanian sample is (mean=25), whereas for Russian sample it is (mean=79. 2308). High mean value for Russian sample implies that Russian managers tend more to display human desires, to enjoy life and to spend generously to approve their success. On the contrary Lithuanian managers tend to introduce strict norms and taboos as well as have more control over life.

Monumentalism vs. self-effacement (MON) mean value is (mean=13.1034) for Lithuanian sample and (mean=38.6538) for Russian sample, which implies that Russian managers tend to be more self-enhancers and reject the change more than Lithuanian managers.

In regard to organizational culture traits, mean values (mean=3.5149) for Lithuanian sample and (mean=3.5) for Russian sample imply that there is no significant difference for consistency in both countries. Therefore, managers in both countries perceive there is “strong” culture based on beliefs, values and symbols that are commonly understood in their organizations.

Involvement mean values are (mean=3.5655) for Lithuanian sample and (mean=3.2167) for Russian sample, implying that Lithuanian managers encourage sense of responsibility and nurture commitment to organization more than Russian managers.

The mean values for adaptability organizational culture trait are (mean=3.9034) and mean=3.6641) for Lithuanian and Russian samples respectively. Higher mean for Lithuanian sample implies that Lithuanian managers favor organizational change in response to customers and the marketplace more than Russian managers do.

The mean values for mission organizational trait are (mean=3.5862) and (mean=3.4077) for Lithuanian and Russian samples respectively, which implies that defining long-term direction for the organization and shaping current behaviors by envisioning a desired future state are more pursued by Lithuanian managers than Russian managers.

7. Conclusions

Given the results of current research on the impact of national culture on organizational culture and their implications for HRM, following conclusions have been made:

There is slightly significant difference in power distance in both Lithuanian and Russian SMEs whereas other national culture dimensions of individualism, masculinity, uncertainty avoidance, long-term orientation, indulgence vs. restraint and monumentalism differ significantly.

Organizational culture traits such as involvement, consistency, adaptability and mission are higher for organizational cultures in Lithuanian SMEs, providing grounds to conclude that Lithuanian SMEs have stronger organizational culture and organizational values if compared to Russian SMEs.

The limitations of the presented study were connected with the small sample size and the fact that SMEs included in the sample represented only

some business sectors. Further research should therefore concentrate on a deeper analysis of differences between countries and business sectors.

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