
Economic Environment in Latvia: Interaction of Ethical and Ethnic Values in Organizational Culture

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Abstract: The article shows the importance of studying the economic environment and the organizational culture in Latvia as an ethnically diverse aspect, taking into account the influence of the ethnic factor. To confirm the hypothesis that the ethnic factor also plays an important role in the economic life of Latvia, the article written in 2021 organized a sociological study in the 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”. 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. 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, in economic behavior, business communication has some differences among representatives of these ethnic groups.

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

1. 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 adaptation 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” (Schein, 2010). Such an understanding of organizational culture as a social phenomenon, formed on the basis of a strictly selective attitude towards functioning values, norms, institutions, social practices in the external environment, directly follows from the essence of the organization as a way of adapting to this environment, which has limited resources (Pfeffer 1982). In the sociology of organizations, special attention is paid to the

characteristics of the external environment, since it is with this that organizations and organizational culture have to interact (Scott 1981). 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. The ethnic differentiation of the Latvian society is the most important factor influencing the differentiation of organizational culture in commercial enterprises and state organizations, depending on the proportion of certain ethnic groups employed in them. In addition, ideas about ethnic groups as carriers of different types of organizational culture, business ethos, etc. are taking root in society.

Latvia is a nation state of ethnic Latvians with a very large ethnic diversity. Ethnic Latvians made up 60.2% of the total population of the country in 2022, Russians – 24.4%, Ukrainians and Belarusians – 3.0% each, Poles – 2.0%, Lithuanians – 1.2%, other ethnic groups – 6.7% (*Latvijas iedzīvotāju...*, 2022). In this diversity, there are two ethnic poles, Latvians and Russians, whose constitute 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: Riga – 35.7%, Daugavpils – 47.8%, Liepāja – 27.2%, Jelgava – 24.9%, in Jūrmala – 32.6% (*iedzīvotāju skaits...*, 2022). 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 (95.7%), for Russians, Russian (94.5%), for Ukrainians, Ukrainian (27.2%), for Poles, Polish (19.4%), for Belarusians, Belarusian (18.8%) (*2017. gadā pastāvīgo...*, 2022).

Already in the classical period of the development of sociology, the idea of the role of ethno-cultural factors in the constitution of types of economic behaviour, and as a result, organizational cultures, have taken root. The most popular are the views of Weber on the types of rationality in the formation of organizational culture, which researchers still refer to (Hall, 2001). The author of this article, as well as other scientists, show that the environment as a factor influencing the organizational culture in Latvia is extremely complex. Among the elements of the external environment, which directly affect the ethno-cultural characteristics of the organizational culture of various ethnic groups are, first of all, the institutionalization of the Latvian language as the only official language in the country, which is also the only language of public administration and official business communication (*Valsts valodas likums*, 2022). The consequence of this law, as well as the Act on education, is the almost complete dominance of Latvian as the language of business communication and the displacement of the languages of other ethnic groups in Latvia to the periphery of private communication in the business environment. However, there are some consequences of laws on language and education, which also have an impact on the socio-economic behaviour of people for whom Latvian is not their native language. According to sociological research, it can be seen that there is a correlation between the subordination of the value of the Latvian language and the languages of ethnic minorities in business communication, and at the same time the widespread perception in society about the difference in social opportunities, including in economic life, for ethnic Latvians and members of ethnic minorities (Volkov, 2017).

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, there were only six (BERLAT GRUPA, SIA; GREIS, SIA; GREIS loģistika, SIA; Accenture Latvijas filiāle; LIVIKO, SIA; BITE Latvija, SIA) (*Calculated by...*, 2022).

2. The Theoretical Basis of the Study

In Latvian sociology and political science, the role of the ethnic factor in the life of 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 Latvians and Russians, at individual level in public space is most intensively and almost daily implemented in economic space. The contradictory nature of the interaction of economic and ethnic factors was already revealed in the studies by Latvian sociologists, who noted the significant role of the economy in the integration of Latvian society, however studies have also shown a significant division of the business environment along ethnic lines. At the same time, the authors 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 Latvians. Both Latvians and Russians have negative stereotypes about each other as employees (Zepa et al., 2004). Sociologists found that Russian respondents positively evaluate their personal relations with Latvians, but the evaluation of the country's ethnopolitics is negative, while there is also a pronounced „feeling of threat, separation from other ethnic groups” among these ethnic groups, which indicates the presence of signs of ethnic conflict (Zepa et al., 2005). 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 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 (Mouls, 2003).

There are not many Latvian studies devoted to the analysis of the national characteristics of the Latvian business culture and the internal ethnic differentiation of this culture, although some researchers 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. Given the high proportion of the Russian population in Latvia, 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 paying taxes, pay salaries 'in envelopes', use unfair business practices; entrepreneurs are considered to be unfair towards other people and lack entrepreneurial skills). It was important to identify the conflict between the high expectation on the part of society to implement universal moral norms in the regulation of interpersonal relations, including in the business environment, 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 (Kāle, Klāsons, & Šterna, 2013). It is widely known 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 (*Sabiedrība par atklātību...*, 2021). In some scientific works, ethnic diversity is also not always noted among the social factors influencing the business culture, organizational culture of Latvia, showing how the formed organizational culture of enterprises and organizations meets the tasks of business, and the 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 (Dubkēvičs, 2014; *Grizāns*, 2015).

Journalists, as a rule ignore the ethnic diversity of the Latvian organizational culture, which is identified with the Latvian ethnic organizational culture. At the same time, this culture is identified with the business cultures of the Nordic countries. The distancing of ethnic Latvians in relation to

other nationalities and cultures is emphasized, at the same time indicating a high ability to adapt to new conditions, the need to learn new and progressive technologies (*Biznesa un saskarsmes...*, 2022; *Latviešu lietas...*, 2022).

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 Hofstede (1928-2020). First, these studies focused on understanding the characteristics of intercultural interaction in different countries and regions of the world. Hofstede's theory includes the idea that fairly stable features of national cultures have been formed so far, manifested in various areas of private and public life, including the 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 behaviour of people, regardless of their ethnic and cultural origin and identity. However, in reality, 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 relativisation of moral requirements regarding members of companies and institutions depending on the ethno-cultural identity of these people (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010). These ideas are largely based on the works of Inglehart, in which the level of economic development of different countries is explained as the result of the influence of the cultural characteristics of these countries (Inglehart, 1990, 1997).

Although 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 sympathises with Western management value systems and practices over non-Western management options. Thus, Hofstede's theory, according to 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” (Ailon, 2008). 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” (Etzioni, 1996).

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 Kant's ethics (Kant, 1988), and a similar understanding has been supported by other moral researchers (cf. Habermas, 2001; Rawls, 2005). 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 strengthening of the principles of political democracy, that contribute to the realisation of the equal status of all members of society in the economic life of various ethnic communities. However, there is also a tradition in science that indicates the diversity of moral norms depending on belonging to a social group, including ethnic (Harman, 1975; Neumann, 1969; Shultz, Hartshorn, & Kaznatcheev, 2009; Wong, 1984).

3. Sociological Research Data

In 2021, this author organized a sociological study „Economic environment in Latvia: the interaction of ethical and ethnic values” in order to analyse the peculiarities of ethical norms (primarily norms of moral justice) regulating relations between members of different ethnic groups (mainly Latvians and Russians) in economic life, in companies and in institutions. At the same time, the task was to show to what extent different ethnic groups were ready to apply moral universal norms and evaluations in working relationships with colleagues of different ethnic origins, and whether universal moral values function in Latvian economy as a regulatory mechanism that overcomes barriers of ethnic identity, allowing individuals to respect the principles of social equality in their relations with people of different ethnic origins, or whether moral regulators acquire an ethnic character and if the principle of equality is applied only to their own ethnic group. The total number of respondents of the sociological study was 1008, of which 609 were Latvians, 327 were Russians, and 72 representatives of other ethnic groups. Sociological data collection was carried out by the SKDS Research Center in June-September 2021 (SKDS is a member of WIN – Worldwide Independent Network of Market Research and Opinion Poll). The study was funded from 2018-2021 in the State 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 research data showed that a high evaluation of the ideals of justice is characteristic of the moral consciousness of both Latvian and Russian respondents, whereas there are certain differences in the attitude of Latvian and Russian respondents towards the ideal of justice, as well as the implementation of other moral values in economic behavior, business communication, the observance and respect of the principles of corporate ethics and certain hierarchies in companies and institutions, the professional, moral and psychological characteristics of employees with different perception of their ethnic identity. The research showed that there was a very large proportion of respondents who consider it necessary to be guided by the principles of moral justice when assessing people’s opportunities to access public amenities, so that the remuneration received by people is appropriate for their contribution to work (71% – 83% of the entire choice set). There is also the skepticism of the respondents to associate this ideal with the perspectives of various ethnic groups to enter state power or receive similar remuneration was revealed (42%-53%) (Table 1). The low assessment of social and political prospects of different ethnic groups to some extent coincides with the low assessment of social and political prospects of people belonging to different social classes. This confirmed the tendency of Latvian public consciousness to link ethnic differences with social status differences noted by this author (Volkov, 2017). A similar situation was already analysed in scientific literature as a fact of the “hybridization” of real moral requirements (Gert, 2016).

One of the tasks of the study was to find out the peculiarities of Latvian economic and business culture and the influence of ethnicity on it. Indicators of attitude towards hierarchy in the company and organization, as well as orientation towards agreement or conflict in defence of one’s interests, were chosen as the parameters of such a culture (these indicators coincide with the indicators in Hofstede’s study). The research showed differences between Latvian and Russian respondents when evaluating the importance of these indicators in corporate culture. For Latvians, the desire to be guided by respect for the hierarchy when it is necessary to fulfill professional duties turned out to be less pronounced than for Russians (33.3% and 47.5%, respectively). In order to fulfill their professional duties, Russians were more than Latvians, ready to enter into conflict with work colleagues (35.0% and 20.2%, respectively) (see Table 1 and Figure 1). In general, the data of the sociological research carried out confirmed the hypothesis put forward above, namely that the intensive economic interaction of representatives of different ethnic groups contributes to the formation of typical features of economic behaviour and corporate culture (for example, the desire to defend one’s opinion about professional duties in discussions both with work colleagues and with the management, as well as a higher assessment of the order established in the company or institution compared to the economic interests of the employees). However, the peculiarities of economic socialisation, recruitment, career prospects, types

of work and professional activity also reproduce differences, and the expressed values in the field of work and corporate culture. Thus, the existing collision between the high assessment of the role of universal moral norms in the minds of the respondents in general, regardless of their ethnic identity, with the obvious skepticism inherent in using these norms in the perspective of representatives of different ethnic groups (for example, careers) in the economic life of Latvia, is becoming more and more understandable.

This study demonstrated ethnic delimitation in terms of assessment by Latvian and Russian respondents of the professional qualities of workers, employees belonging to an ethnic group other than the respondents themselves (for Latvian respondents, these are Russians, for Russians – Latvians). It can be seen that ethnic favouritism plays a significant role in the minds of the respondents, who characterised employees of their own ethnic groups as more professionally trained to perform official functions, creative tasks, embodying positive moral values than they saw in the other ethnic group (Latvians among Russians and Russians among Latvians) (see Table 3).

Table 1. To what extent is it necessary for the situation in the country to meet these characteristics in order to be able to say that there is moral justice in the country? (answers: «necessary», %)

	Latvians n = 609	Russians n = 327	Mann-Whitney U
All people are equal before the laws of the country	86.4	81.1	.045
People have equal opportunities to access public goods (education, quality medical services, etc.)	83.7	78.4	.072
The remuneration (income) received by people is commensurate with their contribution to work	78.3	71.1	.011
All people are equal before the moral law	76.1	75.3	.744
Human rights correspond to obligations	64.3	64.6	.756
Representatives of different nationalities have equal incomes	59.7	58.1	.469
Representatives of different nationalities have equal chances to enter the power apparatus (become high-level officials)	44.2	53.0	.015
Representatives of different social classes have equal chances to enter state power (become high-level officials)	49.0	48.7	.864
Representatives of different social classes have equal incomes	45.4	45.8	.913

Source: based on the result of own research.

Table 2. What is your individual experience in realizing professional cohesion in the company (institution)? (answers: «agree», %)

	Latvians	Russians
If the internal hierarchy of the company was violated for the sake of economic success (profit), I would not do it	55.2	61.4
In my opinion, maintaining the company's internal hierarchy is more important than my ideas about professional responsibility and quality work	33.3	47.5
I participate in the company's corporate meetings (birthday celebrations, internal company celebrations, etc.)	69.6	63.5
The interests of the company or institution are more important to me than informal friendly relations with other employees	39.3	42.8
If it is necessary to perform my professional duties well, I defend my opinion, even if it is not to other employees	52.9	57.0
If it is necessary to perform my professional duties well, I am ready to come into conflict with my colleagues	34.3	42.3
If it is necessary to perform my professional duties well, I always defend my opinion in front of the management	66.1	66.6
In order to fulfill my professional duties well, I am ready to come into conflict with all other employees in the company/institution	20.2	35.0

Source: based on the result of own research.

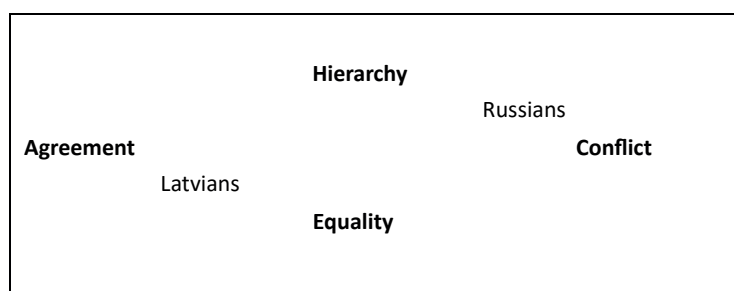


Fig. 1. The attitude of the representatives of the ethnic groups towards the hierarchy in the company and orientation towards the conflict in the realization of their interests

Source: based on the result of own research.

Table 3. Opinion of respondents: values possessed by different ethnic groups (%)

	Opinion of ethnic Latvian respondents		Opinion of ethnic Russian respondents	
	for Latvians	for Russians	for Latvians	for Russians
Reliability	40.3	21.0	14.3	33.6
Loyalty	31.8	21.9	15.6	21.0
Commitment	31.3	19.7	21.5	31.3
Openness	21.2	14.1	25.0	30.4
Honesty	33.3	18.1	11.9	20.0
Efficiency	23.7	13.3	14.0	26.1
Creativity	30.6	11.6	16.0	18.2
Innovativeness	19.5	11.3	12.6	16.4
Consistency	19.4	9.8	8.5	14.9
Patriotism	46.1	34.3	15.2	13.4
None of these properties	8.1	11.4	12.3	10.0
Hard to say	29.2	35.8	41.1	31.2
Total	334.5	222.3	207.8	266.4

Source: based on the result of own research.

4. Conclusions

The article showed the importance of studying the economic environment, the organizational culture in Latvia, as an ethnically diverse aspect, taking into account the influence of the ethnic factor. Since there are two ethnocultural poles in the ethnic diversity of Latvia – Latvians, who are the core of the Latvian nation-state, and Russians, as the largest ethnic minority in the country, the author focused on the issue of the nature of ethnic differences within the Latvian organizational culture. The conducted sociological research showed that the ethnic differentiation of the Latvian society has an impact on the established organizational culture in commercial organizations and state organizations, as well as on the perception of the professional qualities of Russians by ethnic Latvians, and vice versa, on the perception of the professional qualities of ethnic Latvians by Russians. These ethnic groups are characterized by ethnic favouritism in a more positive assessment of the business qualities of 'their' ethnic group, compared to the professional qualities of the 'other' group. Ethnic favouritism constitutes a fairly common phenomenon as the presence of elements of ethnic segmentation of economic life. Despite the fact that institutions and value systems function in public life, including the economic life of Latvia, contribute to the integration of society, and the creation of a typified national culture, including economic life, yet ethnic boundaries exist in organizational culture. This is manifested in the

weakened role of universal moral norms (for example, the ideal of justice) in regulating relations between ethnic Latvians and Russians in public life, including the economic activity. If one talks about the most important differences between ethnic Latvians and Russians in their orientation towards different types of organizational culture, then the data of the conducted sociological survey showed a greater orientation of ethnic Latvians towards the need to seek agreement when solving communication problems with colleagues compared to Russians, who more often allow the possibility of entering into conflict. Russians are characterised by a greater respect for the established administrative hierarchy than is shown by ethnic Latvians, who value the principles of equality in communication with colleagues more highly.

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Środowisko gospodarcze na Łotwie: interakcja wartości etycznych i etnicznych w kulturze organizacyjnej

Streszczenie: W artykule ukazano znaczenie badania środowiska gospodarczego i kultury organizacyjnej na Łotwie jako aspektu zróżnicowanego etnicznie, z uwzględnieniem wpływu czynnika etnicznego. Aby potwierdzić hipotezę, że czynnik etniczny odgrywa ważną rolę w życiu gospodarczym Łotwy, przeprowadzono badanie socjologiczne w ramach projektu badawczego „Interakcja jednostki, społeczeństwa i państwa w ogólnym procesie historii Łotwy: konflikty wartości i kształtowanie wspólnych wartości w historycznych momentach krytycznych”. Za kluczowy wskaźnik integralności kultury organizacyjnej dla wieloetnicznego środowiska Łotwy autor wybrał wartość uniwersalnych norm moralnych, przede wszystkim sprawiedliwości, regulujących stosunki między etnicznymi Łotyszami i Rosjanami. Uzyskane rezultaty wykazały, że wysoka ocena ideałów sprawiedliwości jest charakterystyczna dla świadomości moralnej respondentów zarówno łotewskich, jak i rosyjskich. Jednocześnie podejście do realizacji tych ideałów w zachowaniach gospodarczych i komunikacji biznesowej różni się między przedstawicielami grup etnicznych.

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