Organizational Culture and Cross-Cultural Relations: A Case of a Danish Company in Russia

Alia Anisimova Novosibirsk State University Novosibirsk, Russia; Graduate School for Social Research Warsaw, Poland

Problem Area While some research has been done recently on the cultural impact on foreign businesses in Central-Eastern Europe and Russia, in our view this area still lacks the attention of scholars. The majority of studies on foreign businesses in the area of transition
tend to emphasize the influence of the so-called "national culture" of transitional countries, and the organizational culture of the local company or the work habits of socialist time in general, as major factors influencing the
organizational culture of these western companies. This approach keeps most of the studies within the frames of a traditional comparative management approach, which is concerned with variation in managerial and employees' practices and attitudes across countries. Most western scholars researching in this field, however, tend to mix national cultural peculiarities with those shaped by systemic differences between the East and the West.
We would claim, however, that analysis of cultural interactions in the context of post-communist countries inevitably reveals cultural diversity caused not by national character peculiarities, but by differences shaped by political, ideological and economic factors of a supra-national nature.
In such a view, the "East-West" perspective in the cross-cultural organizational research helps to bring into focus those issues of cross-cultural interactions that tend to be overlooked or misinterpreted within the frames of a comparative management approach.
The use of this perspective also seems to be justified by the self-identification of respondents in accordance with an East-West dichotomy in some cross-cultural studies in the region of transition. For example, as it was pointed out by S. Michailova, "the terms "West," "western" and "westerners" have been proposed and used extensively by the respondents in the study of the organizational culture of foreign acquisition in Russia. Within the boundaries of the Russian context, the employees of five different nationalities see themselves as "westerners.".. rather than representatives of their national cultures" (Michailova 1997).
Our own findings in the study of a western multinational company in Russia in 1995 also demonstrate the prevalence of "Russian" or "Soviet" identity among representatives of different nationalities of the former Soviet Union, as opposing the "westerners"-representatives of more than ten

nationalities (Anisimova 1995). Therefore, although the term "West" is seen as ambiguous from the western perspective, we would argue that it provid~s certain advantages in understanding the nature of cross-cultural problems In

the context of post-communist countries. The majority of studies analyzing the cultural dimensions of international businesses in the post-communist countries deal with such forms of international businesses as foreign take-overs or international mergers that assume foreign purchase of the already-existing local company. This moves scholars to analyze both contacts between different organizational cultures and between national cultures. This, on the one hand, makes the researchers' task more complex, but on the other hand, when it COlnes to analysis of foreign companies in transitional societies, paradoxically tends to reduce cross-cultural issues to the matter of adaptation of local employees and learning the rules of a new game in the market-type economy. The organizational culture of the socialist (or formerly socialist) enterprise is usually seen by western managers as a source of work habits of the socialist time, and inappropriate in the conditions of a market economy and, therefore, as an obstacle for the company's successful transformation into the profit-oriented capitalist company. This is why such types of projects as foreign mergers and take-overs are seen by practitioners in the companies and by cultural analysts as highly risky culturally, for they imply a dramatic importance of cultural interactions in which not only national but also organizational cultures are involved. The present study analyses cross-cultural issues in a green-field company. The green-field start implies that the company starts its business in the new country from the ground. Green-field starts as a type of international business are considered to be less risky culturally, for they do not imply the interaction of foreign and host organizational cultures since the later simply does not exist. Hofstede, for example, points out that although being very slow in terms of development, the green-field start diminishes cultural problems because it gives the foreign company an opportunity to select and hire from the local population those people who will fit the organizational culture best of all (Hofstede 1991). However, our empirical evidence shows that even in the case of green-field start, employees within the company experience cross-cultural communication problems and misunderstandings.

Research Questions

The main purpose of this study is to contribute to a better understanding of intercultural relations among employees of western companies in contemporary Russia and to examine organizational culture of the company as it affected professional lives and personalities of employees. In particular, the researcher is interested in the interaction of Russian and Danish participants' organizational attitudes and expectations, their perception of organization, and of their professional lives in the organization.

The following research questions served as the basis, for analysis:
• Are the organization's beliefs, attitudes, and expectations in conflict
or in congruence with participants' personalities, expectations, and work needs?
•
To what degree do different participants identify themselves with the organization? .

•
Do Russian and Danish participants interpret certain events, notions, and actions related to the organization differently?

•
How are differences in interpretations reflected in work practices in the company?

Theoretical Framework
The field of organizational culture studies represents itself as a heterogeneous theoretical body, but two paradigms tend to dominate the field: functionalism and interpretevism. The functionalist paradigm, derived from systems theory in sociology and anthropology and traced to the works of Durkheim, Parsons, and Radcliffe-Brown, views culture as a nation-based independent variable. The interest of the researcher is to understand different national contexts and their implications for the management of the organization (G.Hofstede 1991; S. Sackmann 1997).
The interpretivist paradigm is linked with the phenomenological tradition and works of Schutz, Berger and Luckmann, interpretive ethnography, hermeneutic traditions, and ethnomethodology. Different scholars of organizational culture working within the interpretivist paradigm share an ideational concept of culture derived from a number of schools of cultural anthropology. Lately most European scholars have been strongly influenced by the symbolic school and works of C. Geertz. According to Geertz, culture is understood as a socially constructed "web of meanings" (C. Geertz 1975), within which actors seek to reach understanding and to interpret their actions. Organizations, in such a view, are understood as a multiplicity of cultures (which includes national culture).
The constructivist approach gives a researcher advantages in dealing with the process of cultural transformation and culture creation. Such a conceptualization of culture allows one to take into consideration the influence of national and societal culture; but at the same time, the understanding of culture as socially constructed allows one to embrace the process of the ongoing change and negotiation of meanings, which allows actors with different intersubjective worldviews to come eventually to mutual understanding. This approach incorporates the West-East perspective and at the same time does not reduce the cultural analysis to a national or systemic opposition, but instead grasps the whole organizational cultural complexity,

including generational, professional, educational, departmental, and individual cultures, as well as their transformation.

Main Assumptions

1.

One of our basic assumptions is that due to cultural diversity, foreign managers and local employees are confronting values, attitudes, and forms of actions, and prescribe different meanings to certain notions and concepts related to the company. This might be expressed through differences in every-day work practices, attitudes toward the management style in the company, and forms of communication between employees.

2.

In our view, the confrontation might be caused by a different understanding of the same phenomena and by initial expectations and stereotypes about the other culture. These expectations and images of "the other" may contribute to the cultural conflicts if expectations are not met in the real-life experience.

3.

The further development of intercultural understanding within the company might depend on whether the organizational members are able to change their initial images and expectations, as well as resulting practices, in the process of intercultural contacts, and to develop new shared understandings of organizational phenomena.

The Organization

The organization under study here is a large multinational company of Danish origin, one of the world leaders in precise mechanical and electronic equipment production. The company has subsidiaries in more than 100 countries; the total number of employees exceeds 20,000. The company started in Russia as green-field, having established its Sales Office in 1993. Currently the company is represented by the Sales Office and a production unit in Moscow and by three branch offices in three other Russian cities. The Moscow office and production unit employ about 100 people.

Participants

The participants of the study were selected out of 102 employees. They represent different age, gender, professional, departmental, and hierarchical subcultures, and have different durations of employment and promotion histories in the company.

This sample selection represented 20 different sites and several different positions, permitted a wider variation among the participants, and encouraged later transferability of the findings. This paper is based on a detailed analysis of 10 sites, which in our view represent a variety of organizational positions and personal backgrounds, as well as several pairs of "su pervisor -su bordinate" relations.

Vitaly was an IT manager in his late thirties. By the time of the study he had ~orked in the company for two years and had work experience as IT responsIble-the only person in charge of IT in the company. Then, when the

IT department started to grow, he worked under the supervision of a Danish man~ger, and re~ently he has ~een promoted to the manager of IT department. He IS responsIble for maIntenance and development of Information Technologies in the office and also for staff recruitment and development in the IT department. He had two younger subordinates. His reorientation toward the managerial career happened when he started to realise that his specialist career in computer science had slowed down. Vitaly was very critical toward the situation in the company and toward his Danish colleagues. He strongly differentiates between Danes and Russians, his identification with the company is low, and he distinguishes between his own needs and company needs.

Andrey was an employee of the IT department, 24 years old, and started his work for the company few months ago. He had education in computer science and work experience in the Russian bank as a systems administrator. He was strongly motivated to develop his professional knowledge and skills and was more oriented toward a professional (specialist) rather than managerial career. Andrey was very enthusiastic about his work, the company, and collaboration with Danish colleagues, whom he did not perceive as foreigners. "When I speak to Sven it is like I am speaking with a Russian who speaks different dialect." Andrey strongly identifies himself with the company and perceives the company needs as his own.

Victor, 28, works for Technical Support department, has worked for a Russian-Danish institution before; he started to work for the company few months ago, and works with a Danish manager. He feels comfortable in relations with his own supervisor, although he has certain reservations about general Danish attitudes toward Russians. Victor does not tend to distinguish between Danes and Russians as such. In his words, "a lot depends on the personality... Danish are like this, Russians are like this-I can't say so." His identification with the company is moderate. He likes his job and wants to do it fine; however, he "would not call himself a company patriot."

Jesper, in his middle 40s, is Victor's supervisor; he is very sensitive toward cross-cultural issues and considers them to be extremely important for the company life. He was also described by his subordinate as a very tolerant and understanding boss and a very modest and easy-going person.

Ove, marketing manager, in his late 20s, has a banking education, worked for few years as a financial consultant, then was re-educated to work with international markets. As a part of this education, he was in a nine-month traineeship in Eastern Europe. He explained, "that's how I entered DANCOR in Russia." After he finished his traineeship he was offered a marketing manager position. The peculiarity of his position is that he "does not really know DANCOR in Denmark ...so it's kind of strange situation-to enter such a big organization and to know only DANCOR in Russia." OVE thinks that this has both advantages and disadvantages.

Tanya (early 30s) worked for the marketing department under Ove's supervision. She was one of the "founders" of the c~mpan~ who started to work 5 years ago as a secretary in the Sales representattve offIce and later was

moved to Marketing. Her identification with the company is rather strong. aWe are all here one nation-the DANCOR nation." She does not have problems in relations with Danes, although she refered to Danish business practice in Russia as not always appropriate for the "extraor?i~ary Russian conditions"; she is not fully satisfied with Ove's style of supervislon.

Sven, in his late 20s, works for accounting; he is known, however, as a person who is actively involved in activities beyond his immediate responsibilities. He initiated several interdepartmental projects carried out by temporary working teams and participated in them as well. His international
"
work experience included USA and Italy.

Nikolay, in his late 30s, occupied one of the key positions in the company and reported directly to the GD. He was hired through a "head-hunting" agency; previously he had occupied a high managerial position in an internationally known American company. His identification with the company was strong.

Mikhail is a middle line manager in his early 30s, a head of one of thesales units; he has several Sales engineers under his supervision, and his superior is Nikolay. Mikhail is one of the "founders"; he worked in the company from its very first days. His identification with company is very strong. Mikhail, as well as Tanya, was an example of someone with a long-term career within the company. His own career changes took place in the context of over-all organizational changes linked with company's growth and development.

Ivan was a sales engineer in his fifties. Before he joined the company, he worked for a Russian project institute for many years. His supervisor is Mikhail. Ivan represents a quite specific subculture within the company-older former research workers and engineers. He had good connections with Russian research and project institutions, which helped him to promote the company products in their environment and attract potential customers. His identification with the company was rather weak. He worked for money and was afraid to lose his job.

Data Collection

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with participants, direct and participant observation, informal conversations, and analysis of documents. Interview questions were centered around issues of self-image, foreign partner image, education and learning, decision-making, means of supervision and control, motivation, accounts of personal changes and growth, visions of the future, and professional and employment history.

Data Analysis

To analyze the data collected with the interviews, the field notes, and the artefacts, the Strauss and Corbin (1990) model for coding data in stages was utilized. During the open coding, each data unit was analyzed for evidence of the following categories designated to organize the data: expectations and aspirations, perception of the organization, dealing with

organization. In the paper, the results of the open-coding stage of the data analysis are discussed. As research progresses, the axial coding stage of data analysis is to follow the open coding stage in order to reassemble the data in new ways and to increase density and precision of grounded theory analyses (Strauss, Corbin, 1990). . .

. .

Expectations and Aspirations

The participants of the study discussed their expectations and aspirations of the company through three major themes, which emerged. from the data analysis: professional development and learning, application of experience and skills, and organizational advancement. When present, these conditions were found to promote positive feelings toward the organization, contributed to a feeling of cornmunity, a deeper identification with the organization, and encouraged aspiration toward long-term involvement with the organization and promotion to a higher position. When not present, these conditions caused dissatisfaction with the organization and the participant's role, and questioning of long-term employment plans.

"Learning and doing new things" is mentioned as factors of primary importance for all participants, often more important than material benefits. The organization was expected to provide jobs that promote a work style new for Russia, and people were attracted by the opportunity. As A. noted, "to work with foreigners and to see what they really are, and to get new professional experience, to do things you never did before." Vitaly put it the following way:

I wanted to work with advanced technologies and equipment, and to develop these ...and to learn something new, to get new knowledge and skills.

If these expectations were not met, the participants told of experiencing frustration and dissatisfaction. They claimed that they "felt disappointed from a professional point of view" and that "everyday routine does not leave enough time for self-education." Such complaints are interpreted in terms of comparison with the previous work experience in Russian firms and organizations:

In the bank where I worked before my self-education, reading during working hours was possible, and there were no problems.

The standardization and uniformity of equipment and technologies
required by the big company-for example, soft-ware-was per~e~ved by
some Russian participants as a restriction on personal creatIvlty and
professional development:

In the Russian company I had all freedom for my programming activities, but here it is not the case.
The e self-development expectations seem to be rather typical of
Russian professionals, and if not realized, can be a source of disappointment.
Professional development, which is not linked directly with company needs,
might not be among the priorities of the company. Therefore, it would be
good if the company helped future employees to imagine realistically their
work perspectives.
The second theme that emerged was the presence or absence of an application of participants' experience and skills. If the aspiration to learn new things was most typical of younger participants, the desire to use the knowledge, skills and expertise acquired was very typical of the older employees. They wanted "to be useful, to use experience and skills ... [they] had by that time, and to implement these in the company." They wanted "to share with Danish colleagues," they expected that "Danes realized that we know better how to work in this country," and "we have connections, we know the situation in the market."

Often Russian participants felt that "recommendations from Russians are not very welcomed." If Danish colleagues neglected local experience, and said "don't listen to Russians," this attitude was perceived by some participants as personal offense and interpreted as lack of trust and validation. For example, the decision of the Danish manager to export computer equipment from Denmark and to use the services of Danish computer firms instead of using services of similar Russian firms was interpreted by Vitaly as distrust and arrogance toward Russians. In his view:

the company lost money and quality simply because he (the Danish manager) did not trust anything Russian.

When experience and qualifications were acknowledged, it raised the degree of satisfaction and professional self-esteem. Ivan put it the following way:

Gradually the Danes realize that Russian engineers are better professionals than Danish who possess quite superficial knowledge and have a superficial approach to problem-solving.

Nikolay developed this theme further:

Russian sales engineers have to solve many other problems apart from sales. That is why they (Danes) hire professionals.

!he advancement of a weste:n way of doing business was of great Importa~ce, alth?ugh often questIoned by participants. When present, it raises the feelmg of pnde for the company and satisfaction with personal affiliation

with the organization. As Ivan put it:

I could not even dream about working for DANCOR, it is such a famous name, a leader in the field ...

When advancement was questioned, it was discussed mostly in terms of inapplicability of a western way of doing things to the local Russian conditions, which are characterized as unstable and with low predictability. The western way of doing business was seen by participants as designed for a stable market and societal conditions.

Maybe it is good for stable markets, when everything is known and can be planned ten years ahead, but in Russia-yesterday it was no market at all and now it is developing so quickly-customers come and go.

When absent, advancement was perceived with disappointment. For example, certain equipment and technologies used in Russia were referred to as backward.

They do not use advanced (IT) technologies in Russia. In other divisions and in Headquarters they do use them, they pay attention to this, and they have resources, but not here. From the professional point of view, I was disappointed.

As far as Danish participants are concerned, they found it difficult to formulate expectations they had at the beginning. They perceived Russia as "new and unknown" and this did not allow them to have any concrete expectations. Some of the Danish participants, however, mentioned that they expected to find in the company "more order" and expected to do "a more important, serious job" instead of "spending a lot of time doing jobs (they are) not supposed to do." The expectations of more strategic and long-term oriented work, and aspirations to escape or minimize everyday routine, became sound among Danes. As Ove put it:

I spend... time doing these very basic ...things which have to be done, but if I had more time I would be able to do more in developing tools for planning, to analyze future needs of sales promotion and marketing ...if I had more time I would be able to devote more time in developing a frame ...

When these expectations were not met, Danish participants tried, if po sible, to delegate a concrete everyday job to their subordinates and to concentrate on tasks that they perceive as more strategic and long-term oriented.

Perceptions of the Organization

The participants of the study discussed their perception of organization through the following themes that emerged from the data analysis: validation, inclusion, effectiveness, and harmony.

Validation was discussed by participants in terms of trust, respect, and recognition. Participants referred to the organization's recognition of their importance, the organization's trust in their efforts and expertise, and the organization's respect of their experience, work, and personal needs. If the organization acknowledged hard work, expertise, experience, and efforts, it was perceived more favorably. It was revealed that the organization did tend to acknowledge the hard work and efforts beyond the expected tasks with opportunities for more responsibility, autonomy, and promotion., organizational expectations of the employees, however, seemed to be rather high. For example, it was considered as a norm or at least as a "bon tone" to stay at work for longer hours. Some employees even admitted that they felt uncomfortable when they left the office at the end of the official work hours. Often when I am leaving work on time I meet Lars (Deputy Director) on my way out, and every time, I had a feeling that he does not like it.

Expertise and experience were mentioned as not acknowledged by the organization very often. These traits were most often mentioned in relation to recognition of "local Russian knowledge." Russian participants without exception suggested that Danes should perceive the local knowledge of Russians with more respect and appreciation. Danes were expected to trust more Russian suggestions and vision of situations.

The lack of validation of expertise was discussed in terms of distrust, lack of respect, and negligence; participants spoke of experiencing frustration and feelings of ineffectiveness and being held back. Vitaly's comment on this
was as follows:

They don't listen to you, they do what they think is better, then it does not work, but time and money are already wasted.

Similarly, if the organization respected employees' work and personal needs, it was perceived favorably and was interpreted by participants as the organization's orientation toward creating conditions for long-term employment and career development of employees.

The second theme that emerged was the presence or absence of inclusion within the organization. According to the data obtained, "inclusion" referred ma.i~ly to the indivi?ual' s perception of belonging to the organization' and the abillty to comnlunlcate and share information with persons at all leve.ls. of the organization. The degree of inclusion varied essentially among ' . partlcl pants.

The perception of belonging to the organization can be described through the degree of participants' identification with the company, which can be presented in a simplified manner through the dichotomy of "in-group" and

"out-group.H The term "in-group" is used to describe those participants who identify themselves most closely with the company, refer to the company as "their company," and even refer to the company as the most important part of their lives. As Mikhail put it:

"I actually don't have any life beyond my work."

"In-group" members perceive the company's problems and successes as their own and are self-motivated in their work. They usually work long hours on a regular basis and are able to take initiative. The "in-group" is represented mostly but not exclusively by "founders"-employees who joined the COlnpany immediately or soon after its establishment in Russia. However, some of the "in-group" members joined the company just recently.

It seems possible to distinguish the following features of "in-group" membership:

First of all, it should be mentioned that the degree of inclusion tends to depend on the relations with foreign colleagues. "In-group members" usually have closer relations with their foreign colleagues. It is essential that this relate both to Danes and Russians. Although the company is Danish by origin, this does not seem to lead to the automatic "inclusion" of Danish members of the organization. Some Danish participants had a feeling of being "not really in," missing some essential implicit meaning of communication. The closer links with foreign colleagues resulted in the fact that "in-group" members had a lower tendency to regard their colleagues in terms of nationality. They claimed that they do not distinguish between Russians and Danes in the company. Russian "in-group members" distinguish between "Moscow Danes" and Danes in Headquarters. The basis for such a distinction is the perception of "Moscow Danes" as part of a common "DANCOR nation" in the Moscow office, whereas Danes in Headquarters are perceived as foreigners. "In-group" members have relations with each other apart frOITl work and usually find the atmosphere in the company friendly and harmonious. They work long hours on a regular basis and tend to stay longer at company parties.

On the contrary, "out-group" members do not have close relations with foreign col1eagues, and Russian "out-group" members do not distinguish between Danes in Moscow and Danes in Headquarters; at the same time they strongly distinguish between Russians and Danes. They do not have relations with other employees apart from work and do not work long hours on a regular basis. They find the atmosphere in the company peaceful but indifferent and if they take part in social gatherings they stay there only for a short time.

The typical features of "in-group" and "out-group" are summarized in Table 1.

HIn-group" members	HOut-Kroup" members
Have close relations with foreign colleagues	Have no close relations with foreign colleagues
Do not make a clear distinction between Russians and Danes	Distinguish strongly between Russians and Danes
Distinguish between local Danes and Danes in headquarters	Do not distinguish strongly between Danes in the local office and in Headquarters
Are dissatisfied and even upset with formalization and loss of informal relations with superiors	Respect formalization and accept the lack of informal relations with superiors
Find the atmosphere in the company friendly	Find the atmosphere peaceful but indifferent
Have relations with each other apart from work	Do not have relations with other members apart from work
Work long hours	Do not work long hours
Stay longer and feel more comfortable at company's internal parties	Leave company's internal parties earlier

The ability to communicate and share information with persons at all levels of the organization was discussed mostly through the degree of formalization of communication within the company and language skills of the organizational members. The degree of fonnalization tends to increase in the process of company growth. In this respect, the difference in evaluation of this tendency by Russian and Danish participants is striking.

Many Russian participants expressed dissatisfaction with increasing formalization of communications within the company. Informal communications with superiors were referred to as very valuable. When present, they increased the feelings of unity and satisfaction with work effectiveness. As M. recalled:
I could enter Lts office any time and discuss the problem directly t I did not have to write official requests or other papers to solve the problem.

Ivan described the early days in the company like this:
There was a time at the very beginning when we worked in
L's apaliment, there was no office space yet. It was the best
time, we were all so close!

Most of the participants admit that a certain level of formalization is necessary in a big company. As Vitaly put it:
There are many hidden streams, conflicts between
departments and people; structurization and formalization can
solve these problems. Mechanisms, duties, structures must be
formali zed.

However, as the informal cotnmunication tends to decline as the company grows, it meets dissatisfaction of those participants who used to enjoy it in the past. These were mostly "founders" and "in-group members." Some of them even claimed that if the degree of formalization and bureaucratization continue to grow and substitute for the informal relations, they would prefer to leave the company. That was most clearly put by Mikhail:
I think that if this personal contact will become impossible, well, then probably it is necessary to search for another company, perhaps a smaller one.

In general, Russian participants evaluated the present degree of formalization either as sufficient or as exceeding the necessary level.

On the contrary, Danish participants evaluated the degree of formalization as not sufficient and supported the further formalization of communication. For example, Ove put it like this:
Communication flows mainly informally;' it should be more structured.

Language skills strongly influence the communication process. Danes who do not speak Russian and Russians who do not speak English mentioned that they often felt excluded or limited in their access to information and interpretations of organizational events.

Danes who do not speak Russian are mostly excluded from the informal oral communication. Since part of formal written communication (memos, orders, etc.) is bilingual (English-Russian), those Russians whose English skills are poor meet difficulties mainly in oral communication with Danish colleagues and also with written information that is not available in Russian. This complicates their communication with Headquarters and makes it difficult to perceive themselves as "a part of the whole," as members of world-wide multinational organization.

Communication with Headquarters in general was characterized by participants as not very efficient. Russian particip.ants often expresse? dissatisfaction with responsiveness of Headquarters. VIctor commented on It

like this:

You send them a fax and there is no response or a very formal

meaningless reply. Communication with Headquarters was often described as slow, formal, and superficial. Ivan noted that:

Sales engineers for months can not get a response to their requests to Headquarters. Everything is discussed, documented; information is accumulating but no measures are taken.

Russian participants interpreted the reasons for such attitudes in different ways. One reason is that Headquarters in Denmark does not see activities in Russia as important.

It seems that for those who deal with Russia in Denmark, Russia is not the main priority.

Another participant had an impression of "lack of respect and attention toward Russian colleagues; their (Headquarters) attitude toward Russian subsidiary is that of consumption, it is not a true partnership."

Another theme through which the perception of the organization was discussed was absence or presence of efficiency. Both Russians and Danes mentioned that activities in the company were not always organized in the most efficient way. However, the understanding of efficiency/inefficiency was found to be strikingly different for Russians and Danes. Russians interpreted efficiency in such terms as quickness, flexibility, and reaching goals.

The way Ivan has presented the issues of quickness and flexibility reflected the opinion of many participants of the study:

Things are changing in Russia every day-you have to react quickly if you want to succeed .... You have to be able to change your approach if necessary, be more flexible.

The value of reaching goals and an orientation toward final results, rather then ways of achieving these results, was verbalized by Tanya:

I don't have to write a detailed plan of what I am doing; it is enough for me if I make a small note in my organizer-and I know it will be done.

Danes discussed efficiency through such terms as setting priorities, making plans, discussing issues with colleagues, "structuring activities," and

"developing frameworks." For example, Jesper's interpretation of effective-ness was the following:

Jt means to make priorities, see clearly what is urgent what is not, and then take an urgent case and take care of it, inform colleagues that we are doing this and that, make sure that everyone agree to do this and this.

Ove discussed what "effective reporting" is supposed to be:

I believe strongly that reporting should be much more structured; otherwise it is not effective. It should be a reporting scheme ... , with items to report on. Then it does not take so much time.

Inefficiency was discussed by Russians in terms of slowness, lack of flexibility and adaptability to changing conditions. Slowness was often mentioned by Russian participants in relation to situations where a collective mode of decision-making, which implies discussions aimed toward consensus, was introduced by Danes.

They discuss the same issue several times and still think they have to discuss more; it takes so much time.

Another example of slowness most often mentioned by Russians was linked with communication with Headquarters. In this relation, organization was referred to as a "huge, clumsy monster," "an inflexible structure," and "a slow, conservative machine."

It usually takes DANCOR two years to introduce the new product; as a result, some segments of the market are taken by competitors-usually small companies that are more flexible and are able to fill the gap and to adjust their products to the specific requirements quickly.

Conformity and a tendency to sustain uniformity imposed by Headquarters, in the words of some Russian participants, were maintained "even at the price of effectiveness" and were also perceived as inefficiency.

As for Danish participants, they interpreted inefficiency as lack of planning, reporting, discussions of problems, and as "lack of order in the company." Often Danes perceived as ineffective those procedures or activities that they found difficult to control.

The system of reporting in Sales is not very effective ...! have asked to see reports by sales engineers, but I was told they do not exist. ..So the manager simply compiles information on an

informal basis for his report. I have on1y read a report by the Director.

Since it is difficult for a Danish manager to gather information on an informal ba is, he feels that such system of reporting is not effective.

The fourth theme that emerged from the data related to the participants' perception of the company was the presence or absence of harmony within the company. The notion of harmony emerged when participants described the atmosphere and relations in the company. Most of participants referred to the atmosphere in the company as peaceful, calm, and friendly. Participants used such metaphors as "community" and "friendly village" when they discussed relations in the company. The presence of harmony was mentioned by participants with satisfaction and pride.

The first impression of the organization varies greatly from participant to participant; most of participants, however, mentioned that it was very different from their previous experience. All Russian participants gave their impression of a "western company," where you have to "work really hard, not like in Soviet times." Many participants described a busy, but pleasant and tension-free, climate in the company.

On the other hand, some of newcomers reportedly "felt lost and lonely" in spite of the ritual of being "taken around the office," introduced by administration and aimed at facilitating socialization. They referred to the attitude of other employees as "polite but indifferent." As VI. put it:

If you need help and ask for it you will probably get it, but do not expect that somebody will come up to you and ask whether you need help.

Some participants interpreted harmony as a superficial, surface phenomenon and mentioned "hidden streams, controversies and conflicts" that underlie the surface harmony. Some Russian participants related the surface harmony by presence of Danes in the company:

Who knows how it would be if they (Danes) were not here, maybe we would have open conflicts. But it is not good to behave rudely in front of the foreigners.

Dealing with the Organization

Yet another set of themes suggested the ways that the participants have dealt with the conditions present in the organization. The following themes emerged from the data: work strategies and methods, internal strengths and beliefs.

. Work .strategies and methods of Russian and Danish participants dIffered essentIally. The Danish work method is oriented toward teamwork. Danish participants repeatedly stressed the importance of group discussions, co-ordination of actions and necessity to reach consensus when making

decisions. They were ready to discuss problems openly and ready to give and receive help fronl colleagues. On th~ c~n~rary,. ~ussjans tended to be individualists in work, they

preferred an IndlvlduahstJc mode of decision-making, did not consider discussions very important, and avoided discussing their job Inatters, and especially problems, with other people.

OVE mentioned that Russians "express a strong resistance if somebody tries to step into their business area." Some Danish participants

•   demonstrated cultural sensitivity and were trying to meet a Russian individualist work style with understanding, interpreting it sometimes as a heritage of an old system. For example, Jesper put it like this:

In Denmark we discuss things very openly, people are not afraid to discuss problems and co-operate in a very open way; it's very common to give your comments on very sensitive things. But here you should not go in your discussions beyond a certain level, you should not come up with too many complains or personal things, it is difficult to explain. When you come as a foreigner you should take much care not to hurt, not to come up with: "Oh, I'm a foreigner, I'm a specialist, I know how to co-operate, how to do this and

h· "

tiS....

The Danish work method can be described as result-oriented, but at the same time it emphasizes the very process of work and method of achieving goals. Attention is paid to the reflection and optimization of actions. As it was put by Ove:

I am very focused on improvements, how to learn from experiences. If I work in a group and we have done some work, then I have to evaluate how we can improve ourselves, how we can learn from our experiences.

Such process-and optimization-orientation implies the importance of planning, setting priorities, and checking the status of events in the course of work. Planning is perceived by Danes as long-term, and Danes are used to "setting the plan in the beginning of the year and then to work through it and execute this plan." Danish managers confessed that in Russia "this does not work this way." Russian employees were characterized by both Russian and Danish participants as "not interested very much in planning," especially in long-term planning.

Russians do not find it very important to settle on a plan for the whole year. They think OK, we know what to d? for this month and the next month, and then we speak about It.

Russian participants consider long-term planning to be useless, for example Tanya was trying: " to explain to Ove (her Danish boss) ~hat .it is impossible to plan everything in Russia. Of course there are some dIrectIons where you can plan a year ahead-for large, stable customers, for example-but in other departments, everything changes so quickly."

It is suggested that such difference in attitudes toward planning between Russians and Danes originates from a different understanding of the very notion of planning. Planning in a Russian understanding is a commitment.

And when you make commitment you also have to be responsible for it. And you might not reach your goal and then you have to explain why you did not reach the goal. ... And I believe that after having the system we used to have, people are simply afraid of not reaching the goal because not reaching a goal is seen as a defeat.

On the other hand, in a Danish understanding, planning is:

Simply a question of setting some goals to have something to focus on. [And if you do not reach a goal] ...it is not a defeat, it is not a personal defeat, it might turn out that there is a natural explanation for that and then you just have to adjust your goals for the next period of time.

Planning understood as an ultimate value might be seen as a heritage of the old system where a planned economy on a societal level reinforced the plan executed by al1 means, including manipulations and massive collective overtime work. In the Danish understanding, planning is seen as an instrumental value, as a tool for an evaluation of work progress.

The Russian work method can be characterized as short-term-and result-oriented. Russian participants admitted that they do not reflect on the status of the events in the process of work. For them the "job is either done, or not done yet. And then it has to be done instead of discussing how it is supposed to be done." This makes it difficult for Danish superiors to control the process of their subordinates' work and even makes them think that the job is not being done at all. Tanya put it as follows:

He (the Danish manager) worries and wants to be sure that everything is being done and is under control. It seems to him that nothing is under control. And then he is surprised that it is done and he asks: "How did you manage to do all this?"

The Russian work method does not imply a "constant written information about the event." As Tanya put it: "for me it is enough to make a note in my diary and it will be done," whereas Danes "write checklists and memos for

every event." This difference may be interpreted in terms of high-context Jaw
context cultures-a well-known concept in cross-cultural studies.

The second theme, which emerged from the data, included features
which paiticipants described as essential for achieving good results in work.
These features were labelled "internal strengths and beliefs.~' These features
seem to be interrelated with participants' choice of work method. Sufficient
differences between Russian and Danish internal strengths were found.

Danish internal strengths included punctuality, attentiveness to details, and ability to formulate issues
precisely. These qualities seem to be important for the discussion-oriented, collective mode of decision-
making that were found to be typical for the Danish work method. Additionally, Danes possessed more
practical knowledge than theoretical and preferred to learn by acting. They were characterized as
people who "do not listen to advice and prefer to learn from their own experiences and mistakes."

Russian internal strengths included quick reaction to the changing situation, ability to act on the basis of
fragmented information or intuition, and an ability to take risks. These features seem to be interrelated
and shaped under conditions of instability, lack of clarity, and scarcity of information.

The aspiration of Russian employees to act and make decisions on the basis of intuition often did not
meet an understanding attitude from Danish co11eagues, because for Danes only logical arguments and
proofs are convincing. As Vitaly put it:

Sometimes I feel that we have to do something like this but I can not explain why, I just know so. And
then it becomes a problem, because if a decision does not become his (the Danish manager's) decision,
if he is not convinced, then he will not agree. What is convincing for a Dane? Logical argumentation but
not specific Russian experience in the specific Russian conditions.

In order to convince Danish colleagues, Russians should probably learn how to present their local
experience and intuition in the form of logical

●

reasomng.

Another skill that Russians have to learn in order to be able to promote their ideas among Danish
colleagues is to be persistent and to raise the same issue several times until it is solved. Russian
participants reportedly felt uncomfortable approaching Danes repeatedly in relation to the same issue.
In Russian-Soviet culture, being persistent and insisting on something was not considered to be good. It
was presumed that if the person you approached once does not respond positively, it means that s(he)
either does .not ",-,ant to give a positive response, or the issue is still in the process of consldera~lon. In
any case, persistence in raising the same issue again WOUld. be percelved as disturbing and irritating
and could even lead to a negat~ve outcome. In accordance with such an interpretation of persistence,
RUSSIans often prefer

not to come back to the same issue. As a result, an issue either would not be solved at all, or would be solved in the Danish way. On the contrary, Danes do not hesitate to insist on what they consider to be important. According to Victor:

If Danes need something, they will insist, and will call you back repeatedly and ask, "So how about this?" And if you try to explain to them that you do not find it necessary right now, or that you have more urgent things to do, they kind of agree, and pretend that they understand but still keep insisting.

In a Danish understanding, it is normal to be persistent with other people in order to achieve your goal. It is even considered to be a sign of serious intentions and demonstrates how determined the person is. In such a view, Russians should be advised to reconsider their attitude to persistence when they are dealing with Danes.

Those distinctions between Russian and Danish internal strengths were highlighted as the most striking. It does not mean, however, that there were no common features found in the study. Some Russian participants perceived Danish preoccupation with accuracy and planning as congruent with their personal work style and aspirations. It can be illustrated by Victor's comment:

Danes are accurate, and like to plan everything; this can be difficult for Russians, but I personally like planning and for me it's OK, I feel more comfortable working with Danes than with Russians. I know, I understand what the supervisor wants from me and I know that what I am doing will satisfy him and our business.

Another example of a merging of Russian and Danish perspectives is a notion of punctuality. As it was noted, the attitude to punctuality and the very understanding of the concept of punctuality varies essentially between Russians and Danes. Danish participants mentioned punctuality among their internal strengths and considered it to be one of the essential features of a Danish work style.

The Russian attitude to punctuality is different. Although the requirement of punctuality is not perceived negatively as such, it is not considered to be of primary importance for an employee's performance. When speaking about the presence or absence of punctuality, Russian participants tended to link it with the issues of effective time use and redistribution of time resources during the working day. Tanya, for example, argued:

I can be half an hour late in the morning, but then again, I normally work during the lunch break. I mean, officially

lunch break lasts one hour, right? And it takes me only 15 minutes to have a meal and I am back to work. So I think it's OK if I am late sometimes.

Danish managers frequently complained about their Russian

, subordinates not being punctual, for example, being late to work in the morni~g. However,. even a~ong Danish managers an understanding of the necessIty to reconsIder then concept of punctuality in the Russian context gradually .emerged. Pa~ly this .i~ caused by the recognition of specific MOSCOW-CIty transportatIon condItIons in comparison to Danish ones. As it was put by Ove:

I understand that Moscow is such a big city and many of our Russian employees use public transportation and the public transportation does not always work perfectly, so it's really difficult sometimes to calculate the exact travel time.

In our view, such developments might be seen as signs of certain mutual adaptation of two cultures within the company. Both parties learn to accept other cultural meanings in order to make joint work possible. For example, Ove admitted:

I understand that in terms of order, this company will never be like the company in Denmark. A certain degree of disorder, or what I would call a disorder, will always be here and 1'11 have to live with it.

This example, however, does not demonstrate the creation of new meanings, re-conceptualization of notions. As one can see, a Danish manager does not move toward a new understanding of order; he still tends to label the existing state of events in the company as disorder, or "a certain degree of disorder." He is ready to tolerate it simply because he does not feel that he is able to change the situation.

Even such adaptation, however, has its limits. It was mentioned by many Russian participants that "in terms of work, Danes do not really change." Danish participants also mentioned a persistence of certain Russian work practices inappropriate from the Danish point of view. One example is the unwillingness of Russian sales engineers to present a structured monthly report to the Sales manager. It seems, however, that in general Russians tend more to adapt Danish work practices, adjusting them when it's necessary to Russian conditions.

Discussion

Our assumption was that Russian and western employe.es pr~scribe different meanings to the same notions, concepts, ~nd actI?ns In the organization. The reasons for this might be embedded In the dIfference of

cultural backgrounds that shape the initial understanding and expectations of the members of the organization about themselves, other members, and about how things in the company should be organized.. . .
We suggest that it is possible to interpret dIfferences 1n RussIan and

Danish attitudes and understandings of organizational phenomena from an "East-West" or "post-communist--capitalist" perspective. Post-communist cultural trends are seen as shaped by socialist cultural relics, cultural tendencies of the transformation period, and idealized expectations of foreign partners and the company.

For example, Russians' negative attitudes toward planning can be shaped both by the experience of a planned economy that makes them perceive planning as an ultimate value, and by the experience of instability and low predictability of the transformation period that makes people feel that plans are useless.

A Russian understanding of efficiency is seen as shaped mostly by the experience of the time of transformation, with its mode of constant and quick change. On the contrary, Danish participants' interpretation of efficiency might be shaped by conditions of a stable economic situation and sustainable company development in the well-established market.

Expectations of the foreign partner may be derived from ideas and impressions of a more general level. In other words, expectations of the company and foreign partner might be shaped by participants' interpretations of a broader socio-cultural background of the partner. So Russians might base their expectations of the western company on general ideas and impressions about the West and western business culture, whereas western managers' expectations of Russian employees and Russian companies might be based on their ideas about Russia and the post-communist society and economy In general.

This might explain why Russians expect the western company to promote the freedom of creativity and self-development, since these are values thought by Russians to be of great importance in a western democratic society. Russian employees, therefore, might expect that the same values and corresponding practices are of great importance for the western business organization and can feel disappointed if this is not the case in reality.

On the other hand, Danish managers might have their concerns about the poor economic situation in Russia and prejudices about professionalism of Russian employees, which force them to introduce tighter control and to allow less freedom for the activities of Russian employees.

We believe that these expectations and interpretations of the two parties might be seen as a source of cross-cultural problems within the company. Interpretations of one's own culture are based on real-life experience, whereas expectations of the foreign partner are not based on real experience; therefore it is possible that these expectations are not met in the process of intercultural interaction.

We suggest, therefore, that West-East communication problems are caused not only by the export and application of native assumptions into

different environment, but also from the transfer of assumptions and expectations about the other party from one level of generalization to another, namely from societal to the organizational level. This leads to an inappropriate application of concepts relevant for the broad societal context to the organizational setting.

Also the attempt is made to show that the focus on the East-West cultural trends can produce fruitful insights and fresh understanding of certain organizational phenomena, including those which are seen by organizational members as problematic for the successful functioning of organization: conflicts, distorted communication, and problematic relations.

References

Anisimova, Alla. 1995. Value Conflict Between Employees and Organization: The Case of Western Company in Russia. MA thesis. Prague: Central European University.

Geertz, Clifford. 1975. Interpretations of Cultures. London: Hutchinson.

Hofstede, Geert. 1991. Cultures and Organizations: Software of the Mind. London: McGraw-Hill.

Michailova, Snejina. 1997. Interface Between Western and Russian Management Attitudes: Implications for Organizational Change. Working paper No.8, Centre for East European Studies, Copenhagen Business School.

Sackmann, Sonja. 1997. Cultural Complexity in Organizations: Inherent Contrasts and Contradictions. SAGE Publications.

Strauss, Anselm L. and Juliet Corbin. 1990. Basics of Qualitative Research: Grounded Theory Procedures and Techniques. SAGE Publications.