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Polish Emigrants on Organizational Culture of Austrian Companies

1. Introduction

Employment constitutes one of the aspects of migration. In many ways, a new workplace is a challenge for migrants. Organizational culture is one of them. It constitutes a specific system of cultural values associated with a particular company. As a consequence, undertaking employment puts migrants in a difficult position connected with cultural adaptation and associated problems. This phenomenon is also valid for Austria, which has been a destination for the migration of Poles for several hundred years. Therefore, a research problem arises which pertains to the perception of organizational culture by Poles employed in this country. The problem is linked with the issue of how different the culture is and whether it poses a cultural barrier in employment for Poles.

2. Migration of Poles to Austria- historical background

Poles' migration to Austria commenced in the period of partitions of Poland in the second half of the 19th century. The migration chiefly involved peasants from Galicia and Cieszyn Silesia, was economic in character, and was

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exclusively unidirectional. On the other hand, Poles' political migration from the Prussian and Russian Poland resulted in aristocracy, researchers, artists, wealthy citizens and public servants leaving for Vienna. Poles assimilated well with the Austrian population, undertook employment and organized life abroad. They established Polish organizations and schools. After Poland regained independence in 1918, many of these emigrants returned. However, Polish institutions, schools, libraries and scouting continued to operate in Austria.

Thousands of Polish forced laborers and prisoners of concentration camps were sent to Austria during WWII. After the war, the majority of them returned to Poland or re-emigrated to other countries.

The number of Polish emigrants in Austria soared in the 1970s when no-visa entry was granted. In the 1980s, transit camps for refugees fleeing communist states operated in Austria. Poles constituted the vast majority of their residents. Most of the emigrants remained in Austria after they applied for asylum. When martial law was introduced in Poland in 1981, Polish population in Austria amounted to over 30 thousand. After the political system was transformed in 1989 in Poland, some of the emigrants returned.

Emigration to Austria was further stimulated by Poland's accession to the EU in 2004 and by restriction-free employment being granted in May 2011. This fostered a temporary economic migration, different in character from the previous ones (Historia Polonii w Austrii 2018).

To conclude the discussion of Poles' migration to Austria, the following characteristics of the migration may be enumerated (Historia Polonii w Austrii 2018, Czakon 2011, pp. 167-184, Czakon 2014, pp. 83-104, Atlas polskiej obecności za granicą 2018, Nowak et al. 2011, pp. 195-21, Lech, Kling 2009, p. 28, Duszczyk, Wiśniewski 2007, p. 13, Romaniszyn 2017, p. 7-40, https://wieden.msz.gov.pl/pl/wspolpraca_dwustronna/polonia_w_austrii/):

1. Since the partition period, Poles settled in various regions of Austria. However, their predominant destination was Vienna and its neighboring areas. Large groups of Polish emigrants can also be found in Linz, Graz, Salzburg and Klagenfurt.
2. Many graduates of Polish universities, artists, professors of various fields, doctors, engineers, architects and technicians live and work in Austria. This characteristic applies to Polish emigrants whose residence in Austria is not temporary and purely economic.
3. Several Polish emigrants experience being declassed. They work outside their fields, have limited rights, do not participate in public life, have low public prestige compared with their situation in their home country.

4. At present, Poles find employment in the construction sector, farming, HORECA, and nursing home care.
5. Polish community does not have a large share in Austrian public life. Emigrants focus their activities predominantly upon their own community,
6. Despite considerable effort, Poles in Austria are not considered an ethnic group.
7. Employment of Polish labor remains relatively constant as far as the period before and after 1st May 2004 is concerned and amounts to 10 thousand people per annum.
8. Poles constitute the largest group of employees in Austria among those originating from the latest EU member states (approx. 40%).
9. Statistical data pertaining to Poles settling in Austria is diverse. Based upon the data originating from the Polish embassy in Vienna, Polish community in the country is estimated at approx. 70 000.

3. Organizational culture in the context of migration

The phenomenon of spatial mobility and transfer between various populaces is referred to as migration. It is associated with a new place of residence, establishment of interpersonal relations, social status, expectations, as well as emergence of problems and challenges. Employment constitutes a significant challenge. It entails a foreign, often specialist language, work methods and regulations, and interpersonal relations. Cultural adaptation remains to be the most vital matter. This is due to the fact that migration constitutes a clash between values, attitudes and patterns of behavior of the hosting community with the system of values, norms, patterns of behavior, attitudes, lifestyle, and cultural capital of migrants. It also requires migrants to adopt a new identity (Dzięglewski 2013, pp. 147-188). Migration in itself requires migrants' interaction with the new social space and is determined by the space the migrant was socialized in (Okólski 2011, p. 4). This results from the fact that migrants' views upon what is suitable and unsuitable in a workplace have already been established. They are anxious towards new work and fear language barriers. However, they may not be fully aware that they will face cultural barriers as well. Employment abroad poses adaptation-related problems for migrants. These problems emerge from organizational culture.

The significance of organizational culture in understanding a new work environment results from the fact that it reflects what the organization supports and how it operates (Griffin 2005, p. 117). As a consequence, it is defined as

a uniqueness of the organization (Glinka 2010, p. 56) or the structure of knowledge and perception (Wiśniewska-Mikosik 2014, p. 78). When indicating the basic characteristics of organizational culture, Reynolds, Valentine (Reynolds S., Valentine 2009, pp. 17-18) drew attention to the fact that it is implanted and shared by many people, that it defines the most significant values and resists change. In addition, the culture is associated with people, constitutes a recurring phenomenon and forms a collection of acquired experiences (Serafin 2015, p. 88). Moreover, the culture limits and facilitates activities (Keyton 2011, p 17). On the one hand, it also develops a framework which limits what employees perceive and interpret. On the other hand, it constitutes a catalyst because it helps to understand events occurring in the surrounding environment. It also forms a system composed of various elements such as premises, values, norms, artefacts, and attitudes. According to Ferguson and Milliaman (Ferguson, Milliaman 2008, p. 108), values constitute the core of organizational culture, represent philosophical views, priorities and the sense of purpose in the organization. As a consequence, there exist several definitions of organizational culture describing it as a system of cultural values (Sułkowski 2002, p. 53; Bratnicki et al. 1989, p. 74). The following can be mentioned with regard to cultural values describing organizational culture:

1. People focus. It is rooted in democracy. It expresses the subordinate role of the organization in relation to employees. Trust and empathy emerging from the respect of individual's autonomy and people being treated individually and in a partner-like manner (Baruk 2011, p. 254).

2. Task focus. Prioritizes economic and financial performance. The structure, operations and people are subordinated to the achievement of priorities. All personal needs will be suppressed if the effectiveness of operations is endangered (Worach 2009, p. 35).

3. Small power distance. It manifests in low social acceptance of unfair division of authority. It negates obedience and unfairness but accepts verbalization (Rebecca, Merkins 2006, p. 143).

4. High power distance. It denotes high acceptance and expectations of unfair division of authority. It is expressed by less influential members of the organization or institution (Hofstede 2000, p. 67).

5. High uncertainty avoidance. It is characterized by focus upon change in the organization, acceptance of actions undertaken in the conditions of the deficit of information, a model of multi-dimensional "game" in making decisions (Sułkowski 2012, p. 109).

6. Low uncertainty avoidance. A negative inclination to emotional, cognitive and behavioral response to uncertain situations and events (Buhr, Dugas 2006, p. 223).

7. Individualism. It emphasizes the isolated identity, work for oneself and satisfaction of own needs, individual achievements, self-deciding (Mead, Adrews 2011, p. 63).

8. Collectivism. It highlights "we", collective awareness and identity, emotional dependence upon a group, group solidarity, sharing responsibilities, need for a stable and specific friendship, group decisions and particularism (Brewer, Chen 2007, p. 141).

9. Status based upon achievements. It has its origins in meritocracy. It is based upon the premise that the cultural performance of employees is evaluated upon what and how they did (Trompenaars, Hampden-Turner 2002 p. 101).

10. Status based upon bestowal. It makes a premise that employees' performance is assessed upon other characteristics such as employee potential, their rights, work experience, ethnic background, sex (Trompenaars, Hampden-Turner 2002, p. 101).

11. Activity. It describes the openness to novel solutions. It is manifested in learning, risk-taking, being critical with regard to the hitherto routines and standards of behavior (Drozdowski 2010, p.20).

12. Conservatism. It highlights security, conformism, traditions, external motivation towards uncertainty avoidance, preservation of the status quo (Sitko-Lutek 2004, p. 52).

13. Focus on the surrounding environment. It is manifested in the organization's attention being directed at its environment, its careful observation and response to emerging changes, as well as interest in and a positive (friendly) attitude towards external entities (Glińska-Neweś 2007, p. 223).

14. Focus on the inside. It expresses the emphasis of internal affairs, integration, unity, harmony, effective operation of the whole (Cameron, Quinn 2003, p. 39, 133).

The fundamental role of the system of cultural values is seen in selecting means for satisfying needs and interests, but also indicating preferences in the objectives of the organization and employees.

4. Characteristics of the Austrian organizational culture

The operation of any company is heavily influenced by its organizational culture and the organizational culture of the country the organization functions in. The description of the national organizational culture enables values characteristic for a particular organizational culture of companies in the specific country to be identified (Wolniak 2012, pp. 89-99). As far as Austria is concerned,

G. Hofstede identified high cultural values such as masculinity, uncertainty avoidance, long-term focus. According to the scholar, Austria, with the score of 55 is an individualistic society. This means there is a preference for a loosely-knit social framework in which individuals are expected to take care of themselves and their immediate families only. However, this result suggests that anti-collectivism constitutes a strong cultural value. In Austria, distance to power is low (Hofstede).

In the Globe project, Austria, along with several other countries, was classified among German culture states. As far as the realized practices are concerned, the following are high: uncertainty avoidance, distance to power, assertiveness, future focus, task focus. Low level of these practices is observed with regard equal opportunities for sexes, humanitarian focus. Austrian companies manifest an average group collectivism. On the other hand, as far as the declared values are concerned, Austrian companies exhibit high task focus, humanitarian focus, group collectivism, and future orientation (Komor 2013, pp. 107-109).

Studies of organizational culture by F. Trompenaars, Ch. Hampden-Turner define Austrian national culture as the Eiffel tower. It is characterized by universalism, collectivism, reserve, fragmentariness, status based upon achievements, sequentiality, and outer containment (Trompenaars, Hampden-Turner 2002, pp. 198-202).

On the other hand, the studies of communicative content by Hall indicate that Austria is a culture of low context. Organizational culture of Austrian companies is monochronic and future-focused (Suska 2012, pp. 58-62).

The cultural values describing Austrian organizational culture in the present paper constitute a background for the discussion of cultural differences and barrier perceived by respondents.

5. Research methodology

The main objective of the study was to examine the opinion of Polish migrants employed in Austria regarding the organizational culture of Austrian enterprises. In addition, research results were to determine whether they perceived any cultural differences in relation to their work experience in Poland.

The diagnosis of organizational culture was based upon values such as people and task focus, low and high power distance, low and high uncertainty tolerance, proactivity and conservatism, individualism and collectivism, focus on the outside and inside, status based upon achievements and bestowal. Selected values enable a broad outlook upon the work environment to be made.

The diagnosis was conducted on the basis of direct interviews with 40 Poles. Sampling was purposive because it encompassed Poles who have been employed in Austria for a minimum of 5 years and possessed a minimum of 5 years' of work experience in Poland. All respondents worked under a full-time employment contract. Their work was not seasonal in character. The sample included the following: 25 women (five aged 30-39, fifteen aged 40-49, and five aged 50-60), and 15 men (seven aged 30-39, eight aged 40-49). Eight respondents worked in Austria for 5-10 years, 18 between 10-19 years, 10 between 20-30, and 4 between 30-40. Respondents were employed in construction companies (10 people), logistics companies (8), cleaning (6), and in shops (3), bakeries (1), and at the airport (4). Such sampling does not offer opportunities for generalization. The study ought to be considered as pilot.

6. Analysis of results

The organizational culture of companies Poles were employed in is not straightforward. As far as the dilemma concerning the priority of Austrian companies' operation is concerned, the majority of respondents defined it as objective-driven. They observed that the organizational system and people are strongly subordinated to the achievement of objectives. These are clearly defined, translated into norms and efficiency and framed into procedures. Reward systems are based upon performance review of individual employees. According to several respondents, the objective focus is evident in various changes introduced in companies. Some of respondents were aware of objectives pursued by their organization but knew little about the organization's strategy. They described objectives in terms of finances, quantity, but also applied pro-social valuation. This is due to the fact that they recognize the management's interest in employees, evident in well-developed social policies. These are based upon universal principles concerning all employees regardless of their gender, nationality and positions they occupy. Some respondents mentioned complex social benefits and other employment-friendly policies. Many respondents highlighted a clear anti-nationalist attitude of the management in relations with the representatives of various nationalities and ethnic groups.

In the perception of respondents, Austrian employees consider themselves cosmopolitan and feel attached to the organization. Long-term employment in the organization can be observed. They are also disinterested in searching for other employment opportunities. In addition, the pro-social policy which evokes the feeling of security, translates into employee loyalty towards the organization.

Cosmopolitism is believed to be motivated by long-term multiculturalism and multinationalism of employees, sufficient assimilation of foreigners, but also temporariness of employment in Austria. Organizations prefer tolerance and respect for diverse views and national identity. This is not only true for coworkers, but for clients, business partners, and other entities in the surrounding environment. However, this does not mean that respondents did not experience, or were unaware of situations where one was treated differently due to their religion or nationality. Respondents are aware of the fact that cooperation with representatives of some countries is difficult, thus they tend to avoid it. Priority for good relations and interest in external entities are as important as the pursuit of order and internal harmony.

As far as the management-subordinate relationship is concerned, respondents had a more unanimous opinion. Austrian managers are perceived as open to meetings and conversations. They are also believed to maintain proper relations with their subordinates. The relations were defined as business- and partner-like, but with a certain distance to power. Respondents rarely defined the relationship as friendly. The first name basis in the relationship included Poles who worked in the organization for a longer period of time. The first name basis applied exclusively to Poles' direct superiors. Managers do not hesitate to share their knowledge and information. However, knowledge sharing applied to particular situations and problems. Clarity and directness are preferred in the communicative process. This indicates low communicative context. The fact that respondents linked this with frequent language barriers and not with the feature of communication is noteworthy. Neither managers nor employees transfer professional relations outside the workplace. Many respondents meet with managers and other employees in pubs. This frequently occurs on managers' initiative.

Low power distance, which corresponds with public acceptance for equal distribution of authority, is not fully reflected in basic employee perception. Austrian companies mix both status based upon bestowal and achievement. Employee performance review is based upon employees' achievements and development of their competences. The review rarely includes work experience. Respondents observe that this is a common practice. On the other hand, promotion system is not as clear. In general, respondents are familiar with it. They are aware of the fact that the development and employee competences constitute the basis for promotion. However, respondents observe that it is Austrians rather than other nationalities who are rise from the lower ranks. On the other hand, respondents perceive promotion opportunities as fair in higher

levels of the hierarchy. Status based upon bestowal is indicated by the respect towards the superior observed by respondents in the occupied position and place in the hierarchy of the organization.

All respondents assessed the organizational culture of Austrian companies as individualistic. Individual responsibility and interest have priority over group responsibility. Respondents were made aware of the significance of individual work and independent decision-making since the beginning of their employment. Their salaries were predominantly dependent upon individual achievements. Tasks are usually assigned to individual employees. In case the necessity of teamwork arises, Austrian employees eagerly become involved, however, without sacrificing their own independence. Despite this individualistic approach and mode of operation, and probably, due to the people focus, multi-nationality and pursuit of tolerance, managers strive to achieve harmony, responsibility for the group and organization, and prevent conflicts. When discussing conflicts and the way they are solved in, respondents mentioned specific subconscious and high level of management by conflict.

Task focus of Austrian companies is stimulated by the activity of their employees. Respondents recognize Austrian employees' occupational activity and low resistance towards change. Change is perceived as positive both for employees and the organization. Positive aspects include e.g. improvement of results, new clients being gained, promotion, improved development conditions, new challenges, and higher salary. The management fosters employees' initiative. However, according to respondents, self-activity pertains to a particular task or request. Employees' initiative is strictly limited to the specific task. Own tradition is respected along with the general acceptance of employees' active behavior. However, the respect does not refer to the application of old, tested solutions, but appreciation of previous activities and achievements. One of the respondents believed that the strength of the bakery he worked in was its 100-years' old tradition and several generations of Vienesians being aware of it.

Activity of Austrian employees ought to be reflected in high uncertainty tolerance. However, respondents express diverse views upon the subject. Flexibility, risk-taking and the ability to adjust to circumstances are considered daily practice. Employees' actions are limited by procedures and regulations which apply universally to all workers. Therefore, risk level and flexibility of operation have rational boundaries. Austrians assess their work as outstanding, which proves low uncertainty tolerance.

7. Conclusions

According to the surveyed Poles employed in Austria, the organizational culture of Austrian companies constitutes an amalgamate of various values perceived by respondents in a diverse way. The following describe the values:

1. People focus prioritizing people in the organization, but at the same time, task focus defining the success of the organization in financial terms. Task focus is not problematic for respondents because it defines their duties and roles clearly. It also translates into respondents' improved well-being during adaptation and adjustment periods. Task focus was also characteristic for respondents' previous workplaces in Poland. On the other hand, their perception of Austrian management's people focus was received positively. Respondents seem to pursue this value.

2. Focus on the outside affirming the establishment of and care for relations with external entities, but also focus on the inside translating into internal affairs and order. According to respondents, focus on the outside observed in Austrian companies was also present in Polish enterprises. However, it only pertained to marketing, sales, and relations with clients and consignees. Respondents did not associate it with multi-national and multi-cultural interpersonal relations because such links are virtually nonexistent in Polish companies. Such relationships in Austria constituted a novel life experience and respondents fared better and worse in these. Strong focus on the inside was also attributed with Polish companies. Respondents described Austrian workplaces as relatively stable, and Polish ones as changeable.

3. Low power distance determining considerable participation of all employees in the life of the organization. Polish experiences of respondents with the management indicate a strong power distance. Only a few of them described their relations with managers as partner-like. High power distance does not constitute a problem for Austrian managers. On the other hand, low power distance is appreciated by them. Respondents do not attempt to bridge the distance. They prioritize proper, business-like relations with managers.

4. Status based upon achievements allowing people with strong competences and accomplishments to perform significant roles in the organization, and at the same time, status based upon bestowal. Respondents believe that status based upon bestowal and one based upon achievements characterized Polish companies. As a consequence, these cultural values did not pose any barriers in adaptation.

5. Individualism prioritizing own interest over group interest. Individualism of Austrian employees did not present a barrier for the majority of respondents because Polish workplaces were also dominated by this attitude. Respondents were able to embrace individual responsibility relatively swiftly because it was associated with individual performance review and being awarded for own achievements. However, respondents miss a group they could exchange ideas in and one which would support them in problematic situations.

6. Activity determining change and progress, but also conservatism in respecting tradition. As far as Polish work experience is concerned, Polish respondents favored conservatism. Fragmentary character of work, external control, and limited self-initiative are conflicting features of work in Austria. For some respondents, demonstrating activity presented a significant problem. This was associated with several other issues in the initial employment period. All respondents observed that, as their proficiency in German improved, they felt more confident and their activity grew. However, few of them pursued strong work autonomy.

7. High and low uncertainty tolerance. Respondents observed higher uncertainty tolerance in Austria than in Poland. They believed that uncertain situations are not received well by Polish employees. They partly shared the opinion as far as Austrian employees are concerned. However, their low tolerance was not associated with the change of the character of work but the company itself. Very much like in the case of activity, respondents experienced problems with high uncertainty tolerance in the adaptation phase. However, the tolerance improved over time.

In conclusion, it can be argued that for the surveyed Poles, the cultural work environment in Austria did not pose a significant barrier. However, several values or their aspects constituted a challenge for respondents. It pertains to activity, high uncertainty avoidance, focus on the outside associated with multiculturality and multi-nationality. Respondents perceived people focus, task focus, low power distance and focus on the inside positively.

The cultural characteristics of Austrian work environment outlined above are obviously fragmentary and non-representative. However, these may be compared with the properties of organizational culture of Austrian enterprises. Drawing upon studies by G. Hofstede, several recurring cultural values may be indicated, e.g. individualism, uncertainty avoidance, and low power distance. On the other hand, in relation to Globe project results, as far as the realization of values in practice is concerned, uncertainty avoidance and

task focus were acknowledged. Contrary to the project's results, respondents recognized power distance, humanitarian focus, and individualism.

Obviously, the present results cannot be generalized to describe all Austrian companies and Polish emigrants in Austria. This is due to the fact that they constitute opinions of a small, purposefully selected sample. Therefore, further studies require the sample to be expanded and defined. The sample ought to be random and take differentiating factors into consideration. The factors may include age, time spent abroad, separation from the family, character of migration, sector, company size. This would enable a more in-depth examination of the organizational culture of Austrian companies, cultural differences and responses to these along with the problems of intercultural management associated with these.

Summary

Polish Emigrants on Organizational Culture of Austrian Companies

The paper is of theoretical and empirical character. It outlines considerations and studies pertaining to the perception of organizational culture of Austrian companies by Polish emigrants. When undertaking employment abroad, emigrants face a challenge of adapting to a new environment. The adaptation pertains to several aspects. Organizational culture is one of these. Therefore, the following research problem arises: What is the organizational culture of Austrian enterprises like?, and, Do emigrants experience problems with the cultural adaptation? Interviews with 40 Poles who worked a minimum of 5 years in Austria were conducted. The interviews revealed that respondents believed the organizational culture of Austrian companies was characterized by low power distance, individualism, activity, and status based upon achievements. The straightforward analysis was difficult to be made with regard to several values. This is true for low vs. high uncertainty tolerance, people vs. task focus, and focus on the outside vs. inside. The identified organizational culture of Austrian enterprises did not pose a significant barrier for respondents.

Keywords: *organizational culture, cultural differences, Polen, Austria, migratio*n.

Streszczenie

Artykuł ma charakter teoretyczno-empiryczny. Przedstawia rozważania i wyniki badań na temat postrzegania kultury organizacyjnej austriackich przedsiębiorstw przez polskich emigrantów. Migrujący podejmując pracę za granicą stają przed wyzwaniem adaptacji do nowego środowiska. Obejmuje ona wiele płaszczyzn, a wśród nich jest kultura organizacyjna przedsiębiorstwa. Powstaje więc problem badawczy, jaka jest kultura organizacyjna austriackich przedsiębiorstw i czy migrujący ma problem z kulturową adaptacją. W tym celu zostały przeprowadzone wywiady z 40 Polakami, którzy w Austrii pracują minimum 5 lat. Na ich podstawie stwierdzono, że w opinii respondentów kultura organizacyjna austriackich przedsiębiorstw charakteryzuje się małym dystansem władzy, indywidualizmem, aktywnością, statusem opartym na osiągnięciach. Co do kilku wartości kulturowych trudno o jednoznaczną ocenę. Dotyczy to niskiej versus wysokiej tolerancji niepewności, orientacji na ludzi versus na zadania oraz orientacji zewnętrznej versus wewnętrznej. Zidentyfikowana kultura organizacyjna w austriackich przedsiębiorstw nie stanowiła dla badanych istotnej bariery.

Słowa kluczowe: *kultura organizacyjna, różnice kulturowe, Polska, Austria, migracja.*

JEL Classification: M14, F22

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