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Differences in Organizational Culture among Estonian Municipalities with Different Ethnic Compositions

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1. Introduction

Local governments have a direct impact on the course of development of the region. For building successful local governments in a multicultural environment, it is relevant to look at how the ethnic composition of municipalities and their administrations affect organizational culture and hence performance. In order to understand the impact of ethnic composition, we need to observe the differences between municipalities with different ethnic compositions. This article focuses on ethnic composition in the sense of proportions, rather than in terms of cultural differences, which have already been widely researched.

Previous studies about the impact of ethnic diversity (Williams and O'Reilly 1998; Paletz et al. 2004; Jackson et al. 2003) on team performance provide the starting point for this paper. Williams and O'Reilly (1998) conclude from their review of 40 years of research that diversity can have both positive and negative outcomes for organizations. It depends on various factors, such as the nature of the task and how long the team has worked together. Past studies have mainly focused on the aspects of heterogeneity and homogeneity, overlooking the proportions of different groups, and compared differences between races rather than nationalities within a race. Taking a more detailed approach, Paletz et al. (2004) have studied different proportions of majority and minority groups. Studies about organizational culture in a heterogeneous environment mainly focus on international workforce – meaning people coming from different countries. Less research is conducted about organizational culture in connection with a country's ethnic majority and minority. There are studies about organizational culture in the public sector (Haage 2002)

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and in local governments (Vinkel 2008) but disregarding ethnic composition. Also, a quantitative approach is more wide-spread. There is a research gap to be filled: current research is about local governments with different ethnic composition and different capacity; the research is conducted qualitatively and in a highly ethnographic manner.

This paper brings forth the differences in organizational culture among municipalities with different ethnic compositions. It attempts to explain them on the example of one region. This article seeks to discover what influence the ethnic composition of the municipality and its government may have on the organizational culture of that government.

To keep the focus strictly on the proportions in ethnic composition, the study is carried out with a narrow case sample (*ceteris paribus*, to minimize different influences). The study uses Ida-Viru County in North-East Estonia as its case. Ida-Viru has the largest Russian-speaking community in Estonia, with 83 % of its inhabitants being Russian speakers. The county is divided into municipalities with very different ethnic compositions. There are municipalities where the state's Russian minority makes up the local majority, others where the local municipality's population structure mirrors that of the state, with an Estonian majority, and still others with an equal ethnic composition. It is relevant to point out that the use and definition of "ethnic" and "national" in the context of minorities is not entirely clear and universal (Šmihula 2009; UN 1994). There are limitations on using theories of national cultures for describing ethnic minorities. These groups (Russians in Estonia, for example) are in a process of becoming a diaspora. For the current research, the terms are used as synonyms.

The expected outcome of the research is a description of the differences between majority- and minority-concentrated Estonian municipalities in terms of their organizational cultures. The differences are brought out by municipalities themselves. The questions were very open, and anything even remotely related to organizational culture is analyzed. Communication difficulties surface as the most pressing and nuanced issue showing differences in organizational cultures. Secondly, attitudes towards personal development varies among municipalities with different ethnic composition. The interviews also illuminate how officials themselves see ethnic diversity in municipalities, especially in comparison with earlier studies. Lastly, there are some observations regarding the congruence of organizational culture and the leadership style. Language is demonstrated to have a connection to the congruence between leadership style and organizational culture.

This highly exploratory case study research includes observation, preparatory interviews, focus group interviews and expert interviews with the representatives from the municipalities. Theories of organizational composition, organizational and national cultures help to systematize and give broader meaning to the results. Although it is a case study, the results are meant to be generalizable to other similar

municipalities in post-Soviet countries with similar history. For ensuring generalizability a bigger effort is put into describing the research object and the methodology.

2. The research object and problem

Estonia regained independence in 1991 and ratified the European Charter of Local Self-Government in 1995. Estonia restored the system of local governments, but many borders of municipalities stayed unchanged from their soviet-era formations. The principles of local government are written into the constitution and have not changed. Estonia has recently undertaken an administrative reform to adjust the sizes of municipalities to be more even and hence more strategically competitive.

This study takes a *qualified hunch* (Rohlfing 2012, 101) that the organizational culture of local governments is different in municipalities because of the different ethnic compositions, though the legal framework is the same. Support for the hunch comes from long-term observations and a previous study where Kiisla (2009) interviewed local government leaders of North-East Estonia. Based on their answers, the conclusion was that possible differences in organization culture start to reveal themselves when the ethnic composition is 20/80. If the ethnic composition is more equal, its effect on general organization culture tend to be unnoticeable. Based on this *qualified hunch*, this study focuses on the potentially revealing differences in the organizational culture in municipalities with a more uneven ethnic composition.

The formulation of the central research problem stems from an intriguing correlation between the proportion of the state's majority, Estonians, and the capacity of a municipality.[2] Capacity, capability, success and performance are not defined or measured here but taken as something every municipality should strive for. The correlation between the share of the majority population (census 2011) and the capacity index (Geomedia 2011) is insignificant when we look at all 226 municipalities in Estonia (a correlation index of 0.07). Overall, most municipalities have Estonian majority populations. But the picture changes when we look at cities only. For historical reasons, Russian ethnic minorities mainly inhabit cities, and some cities also have Russian populations forming the majority. The correlation index of cities between the capacity index and majority population is three times higher – 0.21 – showing the link between better capacity of the municipality and a higher proportion of the majority population. In addition to the general result correlations were calculated between every single (six) component of the index with the ethnic composition. Most results were insignificant. One significant correlation was between the proportion of the state's majority and the capacity to deliver local public

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2   The index includes six components: 1) population and land, 2) local economy, 3) welfare of the population, 4) government, management and organizational capacity to provide services, 5) the local government financial capacity and 6) the capacity to deliver local public services. See for an explanation: http://geomedia.ee/eng/definition-of-local-government-index/.

services, which was 0.35 (again, only cities), even higher than the correlation with the general index.

Data from 2011 is taken because it is the best for comparison. It was the latest census, and later many municipalities merged and the number of municipalities changed.

A study of the training needs of local officials (Sepp and Noorkõiv 2006) also revealed some differences between Estonian-populated (majority-concentrated) and Russian-populated (minority-concentrated) municipalities. In Russian-populated municipalities, the officials attend the courses less frequently; they feel more need for training; they feel less supported by employers to attend the courses; and they even say they expect more pressure and motivation from the employer to go to the training courses (Sepp and Noorkõi 2006). The word "motivation" was used when people were asked about training. Barkov (2004, 129) explains that in the Russian language, the word is understood differently. By *motivation*, they mean *reward* or *stimulus*, not *willingness* or *reason*. There is some interesting evidence about cultural differences in organizational learning. Apparently higher power distance is good for implementing learnt skills and information into practice. Employees with a higher power distance seem to accept what an employer considers necessary to learn. High uncertainty avoidance and individuality might be good for personal development but not necessarily for the organization (Škerlavaj et al. 2013). So, in heterogeneous organization the employer might not choose appropriate motivation mechanisms if the employee is a carrier of a different culture.

To link the research object of differences in organizational culture with the problem of correlation in capacity, this research considers whether there are possible revealing differences in the organizational culture of municipalities with an uneven ethnic composition and whether these differences also have an impact on the capacity of a municipality.

3. Theoretical background

The role of theory in this article is to help explain the differences that emerge from the interviews. To describe differences in the organizational culture in municipalities with different ethnic compositions, the theoretical framework of this research builds on the studies of three main research fields. Firstly, the main elements or aspects of organizational culture are defined to be referred to later in the analysis. Secondly, a broader background of studies of national cultures is provided, differentiating between the elements of national culture and organizational culture. This differentiation helps generalize the results of the current study to ethnicities cohabitating in a municipality as majority or minority groups other than Estonians and Russians. And thirdly, the chapter introduces previous studies of ethnic composition to highlight possible parallels and echoes in the conclusions drawn in the

current study. As this case study is based only on municipalities, the occupational culture (Hofstede 1997) of municipality officials is the unifying factor defining the case sample.

Although this article focuses on the connections between national culture (ethnic composition) and organizational culture we acknowledge the other factors. There could be many other variables beside ethnic composition which shape organizational culture. Ethnic composition itself might not be the reason for differences in organizational culture. It could be the case of path dependency, where ethnic composition is just an element or detail in a longer chain. Ethnic composition and its effect on organizational culture could also be a result of a state's policies (e.g. historical institutionalism – Thelen 1999 – and path dependency – Mahoney and Schensul 1989; Thelen 1999). Other factors influencing organizational culture in local government are age, gender and tenure of officials; occupational culture, salary, reputation and the role of local government in society. In this study the influence of other factors is minimized as much as possible.

3.1 Organizational Culture

"The culture of a group can be defined as a pattern of shared basic assumptions learned by a group as it solved its problems of 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).

Organizational culture in its complexity is ubiquitous; it is wide enough to be investigated in relation to different aspects of organizations, including performance, success, or capacity; composition or diversity; communication; and attitudes towards personal development. Cameron and Quinn (2011) and Schein (2010) have affirmed the connection between the organization's success and organizational culture. More nuances and details from previous research about relations between culture and performance are demonstrated by Abu-Jarad et al. (2010). Cameron and Quinn (2011, 53) argue that when the leadership strengths of an individual are congruent with the dominant organizational culture, those leaders and their units tend to be more successful.

There are different ways of categorizing organizational culture, and each of them can open new perspectives for research. This article uses Schein for describing the general principles of organizational culture. Schein's theory is used by many researchers, and it enables comparisons between studies. Schein (1990, 1999, 2010) identifies three levels in organizational culture: 1. manifest, visible, tangible artefacts that are easy to experience but hard to decipher; 2. espoused values and ideologies that are put forth as the explicit reasons why things are done the way they are; and 3. shared, tacit assumptions about how things are and should be.

In addition to levels of culture, there are divisions by topic or type. This article also uses Cameron and Quinn (2011) for describing and analyzing municipalities. Cameron and Quinn (2011) use labels like *hierarchy*, *clan*, *adhocracy* and *market* to describe different orientations of organizations. "Hierarchy" is a very formalized and structured place to work. Maintaining a smoothly running organization is most critical. "Clan" resembles a family, where leaders are like parents and commitment is high. Team-work, participation and long-term benefit are important. "Adhocracy" means creativity, initiative, freedom, taking risks, and being on the leading edge. "Market" is a results-oriented organization, where the major concern is getting the job done. People in this organization are competitive.

Vinkel (2008) found that the prevailing dominant organizational culture in Estonian municipalities is a clan-like culture (see Cameron and Quinn 2011). He did not find significant differences between city and rural municipalities or between different regions of the state; rural and smaller municipalities were only slightly more clan-like than cities. Using Vinkel's results provides the possibility to compare the data from different times (his and current research). That is one of the best reasons to use the same framework for the current article.

The current research makes use of some of the narrower studies of certain aspects of organization culture. Roots (2003a; 2003b) concluded that in Estonia, in many cases, management styles and leadership have stayed somewhere in industrial society (path dependency). In his study, he also introduces and compares the results of two master's theses, Haage (2002) and Kütt (2002). The former analyzed public sector organizations and the latter businesses. Roots (2003a; 2003b) concludes that in the core factors of organizational culture there were few differences. It is interesting because earlier studies in other countries have concluded that public organizations are fundamentally different from private ones (Parker and Bradley 2000).

3.2 National Culture

National culture is one of the many factors shaping organizational culture (Hofstede 1998). Much of how people behave is determined by their national culture. The phenomenon of national culture is observable and is based on the values of the nations. Although this article focuses on national (ethnic) majorities and minorities and not cultures themselves, it is necessary to have an understanding of what the categories of differences between different national cultures are.

The current research takes its theoretical basis from a more generalized overview of various studies and approaches on cultural dimensions. Maleki and deJong (2014) have systematized different theories and ended up with nine exclusive cultural dimension clusters: Individualism vs. Collectivism; Power Distance; Uncertainty Avoidance; Mastery vs. Harmony; Traditionalism vs. Secularism; Indulgence vs. Restraint; Assertiveness vs. Tenderness; Gender Egalitarianism; Collaborativeness. Individualism vs. Collectivism characterizes the interrelatedness of individu-

als. People in collectivist cultures are more loyal to the group, and individualistic cultures value individual achievements. Power Distance reflects the extent to which hierarchical relations and position-related roles are accepted. Uncertainty Avoidance indicates to what extent people feel uncomfortable with uncertain, unknown or unstructured situations. In uncertainty-avoidant cultures, many rules and prescriptions exist, even though they may not always be followed. Being innovative to improve performance is relevant to low uncertainty avoidance orientation. Mastery vs. Harmony consists of those constructs which manifest the cultural attributes of competitiveness, achievement and self-assertion, as opposed to consensus, equity and harmony. Traditionalism vs. Secularism accounts for the cultural traits of religiosity, self-stability, feelings of pride, and consistency between emotion felt and their expression vs. secular orientation and flexibility. Indulgence vs. Restraint reflects the extent to which gratification of desires and feelings is free or restrained; it indicates whether people express emotions openly or control the expression of emotions. Assertiveness vs. Tenderness refers to the cultural feature of being assertive and aggressive vs. kind and tender in social relationships, manifested also in communication styles. Gender Egalitarianism concerns discriminatory gender roles as there are still modern societies with a stronger role division between genders. Collaborativeness shows the spirit of team-work. It might be confusing that collectivism and collaborativeness are not considered synonyms, but there can be individualistic cultures which are very good at team-work and collectivist cultures in which team-work is not strongly developed (Maleki and deJong 2014).

The necessity to describe some other theories emerged only after initial analysis. It is relevant to give a short overview of them, too. Hall (1977, quoted in Schein 2010, 119) described high-context and low-context cultures. In low-context cultures, communication is more explicit; in high-context cultures, on the other hand, things can be understood only in context, like the rules of politeness coding everyday interaction. Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck (1961, quoted in Schein 2010, 146–149) note that cultures have different assumptions on how to act. At one extreme is the "doing" orientation ("if you have a problem, do something about it") and at the other the "being" orientation ("we cannot influence nature anyway; better accept it as it is"). Between those two extremes lies "being-in-becoming". This orientation emphasizes self-development, fulfilling one's potential, the idea of achieving harmony with nature by controlling the things that can be controlled.

3.3 Ethnic diversity in organizations

Organizational demography in terms of heterogeneity and diversity of teams has been studied for over half a century. Characteristics that have been studied are sex, age, race/ethnicity, tenure, education, experience, personality, etc. Williams and O'Reilly (1998) reviewed 40 years of research in that field. They concluded that research results on the effects of heterogeneity on group performance are variously optimistic and pessimistic. The biggest potential advantage of a diverse group is

better decision making and creativity. The most common problems concern communication. Having one dissimilar member in a group creates less disturbance than two or more. However, these small minorities in almost homogeneous groups tend to feel dissatisfied with their work and leave (Williams and O'Reilly 1998).

Paletz et al. (2004) is one of the few studies on different proportions of subgroups. Their findings are very different, demonstrating that there is no clear answer which combination is the best for group performance. There are many aspects to consider: how many minorities are in the group, which group constitutes the majority, is the majority group the majority in society as well, have they always been a majority, etc.

According to *Rollid ja hoiakud…* (2009, 31), 54 % of officials consider acting in favour of some groups interests to be a strong violation, and 39 % consider it quite a strong violation. A study of English local governments found that the representativeness of a bureaucracy is unrelated to the level of performance as measured systematically and audited; surprisingly, it is negatively associated with public perceptions of organizational performance (Andrews et al. 2005, 499).

Osbeck et al. (1997) note that there is more willingness to communicate with the representatives of cultures with similar characteristics. The connection is especially strong in the case of minority groups. When Williams and O'Reilly (1998) categorized research they called it "similarity/attraction". This difference in willingness might be an important contributor to communication difficulties and lead to problems in performance.

4. Methodology

4.1 Case selection strategy

Interrelations of organizational and national cultures in the local municipalities of one Estonian region, Ida-Viru County in North-East Estonia, have been chosen for the case study in this paper. In this region, the two main ethnic groups are Estonians and Russians. Russians living in Estonia have their own distinctive culture that is an amalgam of Estonian and Russian cultures, influenced by the minority status and the overall history of the 20th century (Fein 2005). Besides national cultures, there is an occupational culture (see Hofstede 1997), the culture of local governments in Estonia. Hofstede et al. (2008, 3) say that comparisons "should be based on matched samples of respondents: people who are similar on all criteria other than nationality that could systematically affect the answers." In this case these similar criteria are field of work, position in an organization, and region.

In North-East Estonia, there were 22 municipalities (since the 2017 local elections, there have been 8 municipalities, but the most recent comparable data, used in this study, is from 2011, when there were still 22 municipalities) with very differ-

ent ethnic compositions (Graph 1). There are municipalities where Estonians make up 98 % of the local population, municipalities with a 96 % Russian population, and municipalities with even ethnic compositions. The Estonian constitution states that the official language of government agencies and local authorities is Estonian and that "in localities where at least one half of the permanent residents belong to a ethnic minority, everyone has the right to receive responses from government agencies, local authorities and their officials also in the language of the national minority."

To choose the municipalities for the case study, the state of the representative bureaucracy in each municipality was assessed to help categorize the 22 municipalities. Overall, there is a quite good state of representative bureaucracy in this region (Graph 1). There is a higher proportion of Estonians among officials caused by the requirement of very good knowledge of the state language. While reading the data in Graph 1, it is relevant to consider that many administrations are so small that one person makes a significant difference in percentage points (up to 25 % on Graph 1). Generally, administrations are representative enough to deduce the composition of officials from the municipalities' ethnic compositions of the officials.

As the second step, municipalities were divided into categories using multidimensional case selection. The most important dimension was ethnic composition (Census 2011). The second one was the capacity of local government, also mentioned earlier (Geomedia 2011). 22 municipalities of North-East Estonia were divided into six categories, as shown in Table 1. From each cluster, the most typical case was chosen for the study. In addition, two other aspects were considered while choosing the cases from each category: whether the municipality was urban or rural and whether it was small or large in terms of the number of inhabitants; though not under study, these factors were controlled to ensure a set of typical cases.
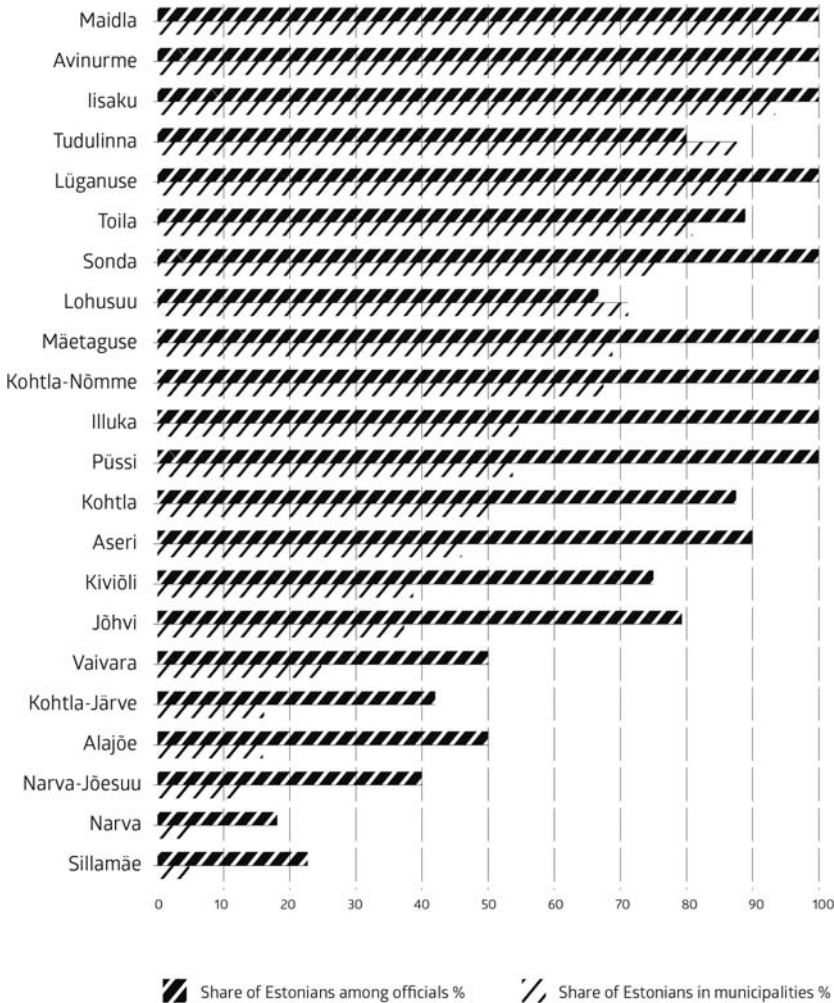
Table 1

Clusters of municipalities of North-East Estonia. Sources used: Census 2011 and Geomedia 2011

	Capacity under average	**Capacity over average**
State majority is local majority (more than 80 %)	Tudulinna, **Iisaku**, Avinurme, Maidla	**Toila**, Lüganuse
Heterogeneous (20–80 %)	Aseri, **Kohtla**, Püssi, Illuka, Kohtla-Nõmme, Lohusuu, Sonda	Vaivara, **Jõhvi**, Kiviõli, Mäetaguse
State's majority is local minority (less than 20 %)	**Narva-Jõesuu,** Alajõe	**Sillamäe**, Narva, Kohtla-Järve

The municipalities of Iisaku (rural, small), Toila (rural, big), Kohtla (rural, small), Jõhvi (rural+urban, big), Narva-Jõesuu (urban, big) and Sillamäe (urban, big) were chosen based on the aforementioned criteria. The same officials were interviewed throughout the study.

Graph 1

The share of majority population in municipalities of North-East Estonia. Sources used: Census 2011 and web-sites of the municipalities.[3]

Share of Estonians among officials %   Share of Estonians in municipalities %

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3   In Estonia ethnicity is considered delicate information, which means nobody has to declare his or her ethnicity. We do not have any statistical data for investigating representativeness. There are few studies in Estonia on this topic. Roose-Reinthal (2010) conducted a poll for this, and Iva-nov (in an email conversation on the methodology of determining the ethnicity of officials from 2014) determines ethnicity by the name of the official. Since no method is perfect, determining the ethnicity by the name (first and surname) was chosen as the most realistic.

4.2 The course of the study

Schein (1990, 110) is very sceptical if culture can be measured by surveys at all. Using surveys assumes knowledge of the relevant dimensions to be studied. The researcher might not know what cultural themes are relevant to the organizations. This research is conducted ethnographically with some elements of clinical research. The ethnographical approach is descriptive and thus provides a richer understanding of organization. It also helps to build better theory. The clinical descriptive approach (Schein 1990, 110) usually applies to consultants who first observe the organization, then suggest some improvements, then observe the result and then suggest other improvements if necessary. The author of this article has supervised students' practical training in municipalities for over ten years. Supervising also includes cooperation with municipalities. Through that lens there is more rich information at hand than just using data from the interviews. One cannot deny the possibility of researcher bias, but there are strategies for overcoming it.

Schein (1990) suggests distinguishing three fundamental levels at which culture manifests itself: observable artefacts, values, and basic underlying assumptions. Artefacts include the physical layout, the dress code, the manner in which people address each other, the smell and feel of the place, its emotional intensity, and the more permanent archival manifestations. The problem with artefacts is that they are palpable but hard to decipher accurately: open-ended interviews are the most appropriate method for studying a culture's espoused values, norms, ideologies, and philosophies – all parts of organizational culture. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, it is difficult to detect whether the themes an outsider/researcher is asking about are relevant in that culture. "Through involving motivated members of the group in intensive self-analysis, one can seek out and decipher the taken-for-granted, underlying, and usually unconscious assumptions that determine perceptions, thought processes, feelings, and behaviour" (Schein 1990, 112).

To establish the topics municipalities themselves consider important, preparatory open-ended interviews were conducted to help develop a framework for the main interviews. Based on observations and previous cooperation, the two interviewees for these preparatory interviews were chosen from Narva's city government. Both had worked in the same organization for over three years but also had experiences from other organizations. One of the interviewees was of Estonian ethnicity and the other of Russian ethnicity.

Extremely exploratory focus group interviews followed the preparatory open-ended interviews. Barbour (2007, 16) suggests using focus group interviews for clarifying sensitive topics (of which ethnic relationships could be one) and for reaching "hard to reach" groups that might get lost in quantitative studies (see the correlation between capacity and ethnic composition). The higher officials (Heads of Administration) from the six selected municipalities were invited together to participate in one focus group interview. As Barbour (2007, 3) suggests, they have

enough in common, yet have sufficiently varying experiences or perspectives. The Heads of Administration also have a broad enough perspective of the whole administration's work to attempt making generalizations. The aim of the questions asked in focus group interviews was to make people discuss. The actual answers were usually less informative than the discussions. For example: "What are the five most important virtues of a local government official? Put them in the order of importance" or "What are the factors that have the biggest impact on the local legislation process?" Analysis used *in-vivo* coding because of the exploratory character of the interview. The codes appeared in the process of analysis. From this focus group interview the most relevant topics were formulated and the following analysis is structured by these topics.

After the initial analysis of the material gathered in the focus group interview, individual expert interviews with each of the focus interview participants were conducted. Also, at a very late stage of the study, after the material of the focus group interview and expert interviews were analyzed, six additional expert interviews with the mayors of the same six municipalities were conducted, resulting in a threefold interview phase for gathering data.

5. Results and discussion

The most important findings of this article come from the empirical part, which uses a qualitative approach. Individually, without giving these results a meaning, they are not very valuable or understandable. That is why the results and the discussion are presented together, not in separate chapters. This chapter attempts to find some explanations with the help of theories and personal observations. This chapter is structured by the main empirical findings, complemented by a discussion. These are topics that municipalities consider important. During the analysis, the interviews revealed some significant differences between municipalities with different proportions of ethnic majority and minority populations. Communication difficulties surfaced as the most pressing and nuanced issue showing differences in organizational cultures. Secondly, attitudes towards personal development and training varied among municipalities with different organizational cultures. The interviews also illuminated how officials themselves see ethnic diversity in municipalities, especially in comparison with earlier studies. Lastly, there were some observations of the congruence of organizational culture and the leadership style and of the peculiarities of public-sector hierarchy. The above topics were analyzed in the context of success and performance.

5.1 Communication

The main communication-related topic occurring frequently in the interviews without direction by the interviewer was the communication between the admin-

istration and the local citizens and the language issue. On one hand, it seems ex-
pected that language-related complications may rise in bilingual environments, but
on the other hand, the sub-themes reveal the unexpected depth and diversity of
the subject. Dealing with language related issues is distinctive to minority munici-
palities. Officials in minority municipalities spend a significant amount of time on
language-related communication problems, while colleagues in other municipali-
ties can spend their working time on their main responsibilities. For example, in
municipalities with a high proportion of Russian speakers, most administrative acts
are translated into two languages, requiring considerable resources. In addition to
the time-consuming translating, some difficulties are caused by overly literal trans-
lations that fail to capture the ideas expressed. Media consumption habits disrupt
participation and government attempts to inform citizens. Citizens in Russian-con-
centrated municipalities do not follow Estonian news, so everything the municipal-
ity does needs to be more thoroughly explained. Officials have to explain not only
their own work, but also that of the state. Citizens in these areas follow Russian me-
dia. Neither media consumption nor translation difficulties can be easily explained
by cultural differences. This situation makes serving local people and their needs
more difficult. As a consequence, these municipalities spend more time and energy
on informing people than Estonian-concentrated municipalities. All three factors
might affect the administration's performance and explain the correlation between
ethnic composition and the capacity to deliver local public services (0.35). Here,
some process tracing might reveal more interesting research perspectives.

Other communication differences can be understood within Hall's (1977,
quoted in Schein 2010, 119) framework of high-context and low-context cultures.
This framework informs differences in what is considered polite, which is not con-
nected to belonging to a majority or minority group. Still, different understandings
of politeness can have an impact on the municipality's capacity as well.

An Estonian official described a recent incident in which a citizen called her
and asked if he could come to the council meeting. The official was glad about it and
put an extra chair into the room so the citizen could attend the council meeting.
One Russian official described how citizens call her and tell her what they believe
is wrong and the local government should do. Another Russian interviewee added
that there are certain activists ("loyal customers") who always make suggestions.
It was implied these suggestions are quite emotional (or even aggressive). These
are examples of the indulgence vs. restraint cluster (Maleki and deJong 2014; all
dimensions are briefly described in the theory section). In relation to citizens, both
ethnicities consider it important to explain things rather than merely to give brief
instructions. The difference is that ethnic Russians called it politeness and Estonians
call it efficiency.

Another difference connected to communication style was that Russians tend
to see arguing and criticism as impolite. In the focus group interview, Russian of-

ficials said that a good employee must not criticize much. These examples demonstrate the differences in the mastery vs. harmony, power distance and uncertainty avoidance clusters (Maleki and deJong 2014).

5.2 Personal development and change

In the chapter introducing the research object, an intriguing issue was raised: given that Russian officials feel the need for training, why do they attend training courses less frequently, even though by law they should not have the language barrier? Škerlavaj et al. (2013) argue that little is known about how the learning process is influenced by workers' ethnic backgrounds.

One question in the focus group interview was about the virtues of local government workers, and many Estonian officials gave the same answer: knowledge and skills. A Russian official stressed the importance of interpersonal skills. This is an example of mastery and harmony (Maleki and deJong 2014).

Interviews revealed more of a "doing" orientation among majority or Estonian governments, although it is not clear whether this is a result of ethnic background or majority status (see Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck 1961, quoted in Schein 2010, 146–149).

Development entails change. In the focus group interview, Estonian officials were persistent in emphasizing the ability to go along with changes and the importance of innovative thinking. This is considered to be an example of low uncertainty avoidance (Maleki and deJong 2014). For clarification, the interviewees were asked about the procedure of choosing training courses and deciding whether to go. Normally, every official monitors the courses and decides on the need. Some experts acknowledged that sometimes officials need extra motivation or even to be commanded to attend a training course. These answers came from the minority-concentrated municipalities. It could be tied to uncertainty avoidance (Maleki and deJong 2014); at trainings, people (hypothetically Russians) might feel bad because they do not know everything. Škerlavaj et al. (2013) see the connection with power distance. They found that in those cultures where members are more likely to accept and expect the power to be distributed unequally, they are also willing to conform to managerial control and modify their behaviours according to corporate values. For those people who are less tolerant of the managerial control, they would be more likely to act independently and differently from the organizational learning culture. In this context it actually makes sense if Russian officials (bigger power distance) say they need their employer to motivate them to take courses. Here the difference is marked and the question is raised, but it needs to be tested in further research.

Schein sees attitude towards personal development as a part of organizational culture (a sub-theme of human activity and human nature), pointing to the general underlying question as to whether human nature is perfectible or fixed (Schein 1990).

Based on limited empirical data, whether there is any causal connection between attitude toward training and the capacity index cannot be stated. Still, previous research can support the hypothesis.

Knowledge (training) is the first and most easily achievable step toward changing organizational culture. Acquiring knowledge helps to prepare for future changes. Changing attitudes or behaviour of individuals and groups is much harder, as changing values starts with changing the leaders' understanding of management and leading (Siimon and Vadi 1999, 220–221 amended, based on Hersey and Blanchard 1993).

As the surrounding environment is constantly changing, the organizations need to learn and adapt to cope and enhance their performance and capacity. Changing the organizational culture is possible, but difficult (Cameron and Quinn 2011), and the changes are mainly influenced by the leaders (Schein 1999; Cameron and Quinn 2011).

5.3 Attitude towards ethnic diversity

According to the studies of organizational composition and especially of ethnic diversity in organizations, there is contradicting evidence on how diversity affects performance. In the current research, actual performance (or capacity or success) was not measured. Instead, subjective observations and interpretations of the interviewees were the basis of the analysis. Operating in the same legal framework and the same region, similar tasks of municipalities seem to have a stronger impact on comprehension than the ethnicity or mother tongue of the officials (see occupational culture in Hofstede 1997; cultural diffusion in Schein 2010). Although the interviewed officials give several examples of cultural differences between officials of Estonian and Russian ethnicities, they unanimously state that the ethnic composition of the municipality has no effect on how administration works. Sepp (2008) has also found that the deeper misunderstandings lie outside municipal institutions; a strong sense of loyalty is formed by the closeness to power, greater participation in decision making, and perceived responsibility and control over policy.

The interviewed officials did not support the concept of representativeness in bureaucracy because it conflicts with the concept of officials' objectivity. This is in accordance with *Rollid ja hoiakud…* (2009, 31) and Andrews et al. (2005, 499).

In the interviews, a hypothesis about a stronger willingness to communicate with the representatives of cultures with similar characteristics was proposed (Osbeck et al. 1997; Williams and O'Reilly 1998). Some experts guessed it could be possible in larger organizations. According to them, the reason is language: citizens prefer using their mother tongue with the officials.

In multiethnic communities, officials seem to take diversity for granted; it is considered a norm, and officials are accustomed to ethnically diverse environments.

Diversity being a norm, the officials' and citizens' "similarity/attraction" dimension (Williams and O'Reilly 1998) does not apply, especially in small municipalities. In the light of research on perceived diversity (Shemla et al. 2014), given the controversial results of previous findings, the results of the current study are expected.

The theoretical chapter claimed that a possible advantage of ethnically diverse organization is in decision-making and the biggest threat to communication. It is up to the competency of leaders to see the existing similarities or diversity of the officials as an asset or a distraction.

5.4 Hierarchy and power

Communication, personal development and homogeneity-heterogeneity are all components of organizational culture. In this section, the focus is on something characteristic of the public sector: hierarchy (as a dimension of organizational culture) and power distance (as a dimension of national culture), but it will be looked at in the context of performance/capacity. With regard to performance it is necessary to study the congruence of organizational culture and leadership style, which will be briefly looked at in this chapter and in more detail in the next one. Like all topics in this chapter this one also arose from the focus group interview. Interconnections between these subchapters are not studied here.

The preparatory interviews revealed some topics that could be interesting for comparison in Estonian- and Russian-concentrated municipalities. Some of them supported the personal observations accumulated during many years. First, interviewees had different preconceptions of the status of officials and different understandings of officials' tasks, and attitudes towards the civil service differed among Estonians and Russians. Second, Russians address their colleagues formally, and there are few cases of avoiding addressing superior authority. These are representations of power distance (Maleki and deJong 2014). Interestingly, there were no good examples about power distance in the focus group interviews. Since these interviewees were higher officials, Schein's observation is more applicable here; he sees similarities inside occupational cultures; higher power distance is found more among unskilled or semiskilled workers than among professional and managerial workers (2010, 151). It is also possible that officials have long ago silently acknowledged that Russians in general have a bigger power distance than Estonians.

There are some other factors of national cultures that affect organizational culture. Collaborativeness (Maleki and deJong 2014) seems to be different in Estonian and Russian cultures. An Estonian official from the focus group observed that "The whole team cannot do everything. Somebody has to be the one who watches the progress and realizes it's time to move on", while a Russian official said of a team member, "… [he or she] thinks about the team – that's what I expect from an employee." These examples can demonstrate that Estonians are more task- and Russians more relations-oriented.

If power distance is clearly different between Estonians and Russians, not everything is clear about hierarchy in local governments. Next, this article examines the connections of power distance within occupational culture (local government officials) and "hierarchy" as a type of organizational culture.

Cameron and Quinn (2011) use labels like "*hierarchy*", "*clan*", "*adhocracy*" and "*market*" to describe different orientations of organizations (in Graph 2, marked with the letters *h*, *c*, *a*, and *m*, respectively). As mentioned earlier, focus group discussions did not reveal any noteworthy differences in power distance. Expert interviews, on the other hand, showed that Russian- or minority-concentrated municipalities characterize their organizations as hierarchical rather than some other culture type. At the same time, all experts (both Estonian and Russian) assess their own management style at least partially as hierarchical. It may be just a result of habit that the public sector is hierarchical, or as Roots (2003a; 2003b) argued, "leadership has stayed somewhere in industrial society." Cameron and Quinn's (2011) own study shows that hierarchy was the widest spread leadership type in the public sector.

Vinkel's (2008) quantitative data helped to see whether anything outside his main results was revealing regarding majority- and minority-concentrated municipalities (in the same Ida-Viru region of the current research). Since the sample of six municipalities is quite narrow, statistically relevant conclusions cannot be drawn, but these observations were used in the further stages of this study. Vinkel concluded that the most dominant culture is clan-like. Vinkel's data show that Estonian-concentrated municipalities consider themselves less clan-like than Russian-concentrated ones, but Estonians want to be more clan-like, and Russians prefer to be less clan-like. Curiously, Estonian-concentrated municipalities in North-East Estonia preferred more hierarchy (2008). Expert interviews of this study included descriptions of Cameron and Quinn's (2011, 75) four dimensions. The expert's opinions on the organizational culture in his or her municipality was marked with a responding letter (*h*, *c*, *a*, and *m*). The experts held the same positions as those Vinkel questioned. It was expected that some changes in organizational culture might surface (between 2008 and 2015) and give a deeper insight to municipalities with majority and minority populations. Graph 2 shows that majority (Estonian-concentrated) municipalities in 2015 are still clan-like, with elements of adhocracy and hierarchy (in 2008 they wanted more hierarchy). Minority (Russian-concentrated) municipalities seem to have lost any clan-like organizational culture completely (as they wanted). A comparison of the results of Vinkel's (2008) study and current expert interviews gave confidence in the reliability of the data.

5.5 Congruence between organizational culture and management style

Since Cameron and Quinn (2011, 53) predicted success for an organization if the organizational culture is congruent with management style, and there was a slight

correlation in the present study between capacity and ethnic composition of municipalities, a more detailed investigation is needed. Expert interviews revealed how interviewees describe their own management styles. A list of keywords and adjectives about leadership types from Cameron and Quinn (2011, 53) was shown to the experts, who chose some keywords and explained the reasons for their choices as well as how they understood the word. The data collected was not enough to confirm Cameron and Quinn's (2011, 53) prediction, although it showed some evidence of the above-mentioned connection. The mayors' styles were also studied because main experts of this study, Heads of Administration, do not make strategic decisions. However, their position is more stable and hence more influential for organizational culture, which is also quite stable. How much the mayors affect organizational culture depends on how long they work as mayor. Their positions are political and sometimes temporary. The answers of the mayors were added. The hypothesis from Cameron and Quinn (2011, 53) cannot be convincingly confirmed or disproved, but there is some relationship.

Graph 2 presents the general results of the expert interviews. The number in the middle of the chart is the total number of answers (coded labels) given by the interviewees. Under the chart is marked the type of the municipality (Estonian/majority, heterogeneous, or Russian/minority) and whether the capacity index of this municipality is over or under the Estonian average. To keep the focus on organizational culture and leadership style, in the bold and black striping is the number and proportion of congruent answers from the two categories, and in the grey the non-congruent answers.
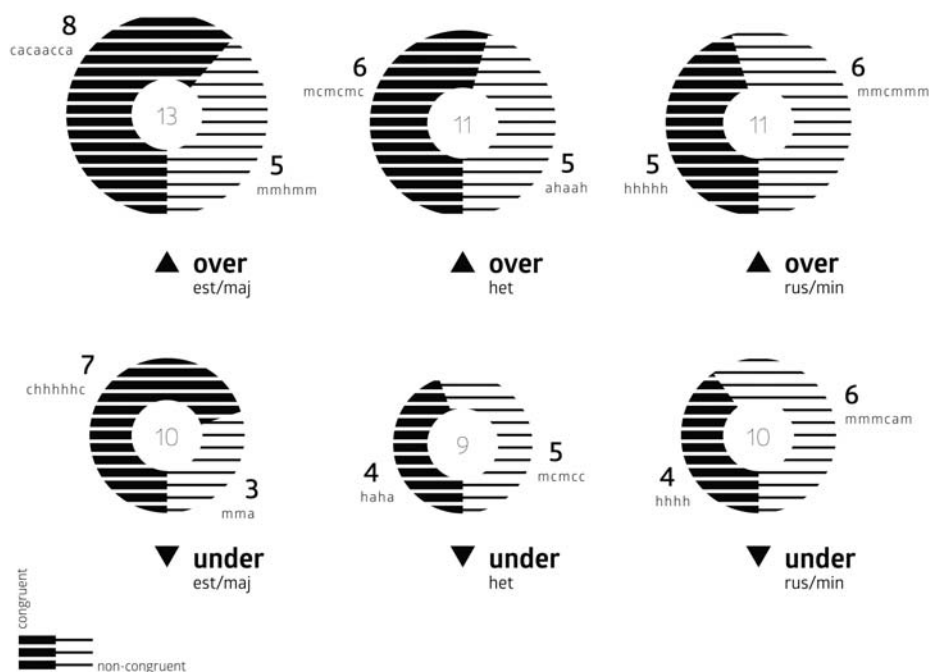
The graphs reveal that for the heterogeneous and minority municipalities, better congruence in answers correlates with a better capacity index. When comparing two of the same type of municipalities, in the case of heterogeneous and minority municipalities, the one with capacity above average also has higher congruence in answers. But this correlation does not exist among majority municipalities, where the congruence in both above- and below-average capacity municipalities is higher than in heterogeneous and minority municipalities.

Next, the greatest congruence occurs in Estonian majority municipalities, with less in heterogeneous municipalities and the least in Russian minority municipalities. Among Russian minority municipalities, even the ones with the greatest congruence feature less than half. Although this chart aimed at demonstrating the correlation between the organizational culture, management style and capacity of a municipality (based on the hypothesis from Cameron and Quinn 2011), it once again underlines the importance of the language issue. Based on the current case study, two main conclusions can be drawn:

1) In organizations with higher congruence between organizational culture and management style, there are fewer communication problems, but this does not guarantee a strong capacity index;

2) Cameron and Quinn's 2011 hypothesis is confirmed, but complicated by the component of language.

Graph 2
The results of the expert interviews[4]

To summarize, monolingual (Estonian majority) municipalities (with capacity indices either above or below average) have generally good congruence. The bilingual (heterogeneous and Russian minority) municipalities, on the other hand, have less congruence in capacities both above and below average.

Anecdotally, it is interesting to observe how many market-related characteristics managers believe they have which are not actually present in the organizational culture, but this observation is not related to the main research interest of this study.

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4   The number in the middle of the chart is the total number of answers given by the interviewees. Numbers and letters next to the striped sections represent the answers which are congruent or not congruent. The letters represent *clan*, *adhocracy*, *hierarchy* and *market*. Under the chart is marked the type of the municipality (Estonian/majority, heterogeneous, or Russian/minority) and whether the capacity index of this municipality is over or under the Estonian average. The bold and black striping shows the proportion of congruent answers, and in the grey the non-congruent answers.

5.6 Practical implications

As a result of this analysis, some conclusions can be drawn which may be practical for the heads of local municipalities. Firstly, the success of a municipality is seen in the congruence of leadership style and organizational culture as well as the state of the language issues. Given similar language situations, municipalities with more congruence in leadership and organizational culture tend to be more successful. Therefore, it is advisable to enhance the congruence, as this is more easily achieved than improving the overall language situation. Secondly, managers and mayors should acknowledge that Estonian-concentrated municipalities have more clan-like organizational cultures and Russian-concentrated municipalities have more hierarchical organizational cultures for the sake of the overall performance of the municipality, especially as it was confirmed that managers can change organizational culture. In this case, organizational cultures (clan-like and hierarchical) are most probably related to the national cultures of Estonians and Russians rather than related to majority or minority concentration in a municipality. Thirdly, what is generalizable to other municipalities with other ethnic cultures is the suggestion to acknowledge the effect of national culture on organizational culture. Leaders should be aware of this and of their own management styles, which would result in better performance if they tried to bring them closer together. It is also useful to understand how language usage affects the capacity to deliver local public services (the correlation between ethnic composition and the component of performance index). Ethnic composition also relates to attitude towards training, as discussed previously. Bringing organizational culture and management style closer together implies changes, and making changes inevitably implies learning.

5.7 Contribution to organizational culture theory and future research possibilities

The outcome of this exploratory research is a description of the differences between majority- and minority-concentrated Estonian municipalities in terms of their organizational cultures. The main contribution to organizational culture theory is the statement that there is a difference, and it does not arise only from national culture or composition in general. The differences are brought out by municipalities themselves, which is different from most studies in the field.

The influence of the language issue is more nuanced than expected and definitely deserves more research. The topic of congruence between organizational culture and leadership style is not new itself but in relation with language it needs more insight. Also the topic of learning in different cultures needs further attention. It is also an important contribution that most local government officials in a multicultural environment are notably indifferent towards representative bureaucracy and diversity management altogether.

6. Conclusions

The current study aimed at describing the differences in organizational culture between majority- and minority-concentrated municipalities. The value of the research is in its exploratory and qualitative approach. The stresses are laid by interviewees and are also reflected in the structure of the paper. This article describes the differences which municipality officials consider to be most important in their daily work. As the case study of Ida-Viru County municipalities demonstrated, the differences are not remarkable but, still, to some extent generalizable to other municipalities, and of some practical value. The opening question for this study was to learn whether the ethnic diversity of the local administration or the composition of the local population has any impact on municipalities' organizational culture and on their capacity.

The main results that surfaced from analyzing the individual and focus group interviews can be classified according to the components of organizational culture, gathered under five main topics: communication, personal development, ethnic diversity, hierarchy, and congruence of organizational culture with management style.

Under the general topic of communication, primarily questions concerning language appeared. Two dominant traits occurred with regard to language issues: poor or unequal language skills causing extra effort for local government officials, and, when citizens do not follow the news in the state language, municipal officials needing extra time to explain and forward information to local people. Interviewed officials explained how sometimes misunderstandings occur even when language skills are strong. Solving these misunderstandings takes time which could otherwise be spent on main responsibilities. In some municipalities, legal acts are translated into the other language. In this case, there are constant additional costs that other municipalities do not have. This language situation is probably one of the reasons for a positive correlation between the share of Estonians in the municipality and its capacity to deliver local public services, which was 0.35. Neither of these sub-themes can be explained by cultural differences. According to Schein (1990), it is a question of the relationship between the organization and its environment.

The next most prominent theme, personal development, particularly officials' attitude towards continuing training courses, is a possible topic for further study. Officials of minority ethnicity, or in minority municipalities, sometimes avoid training courses, which might affect the productivity of the official and hence the municipality's capacity. Training is one of the easiest options for changing organizational culture. Thus, a positive attitude towards training supports the process of change. Based on previous analysis (*Rollid ja hoiakud…* 2009, 31), one can conclude that it is one of the factors that differ in majority and minority municipalities. According to Schein (1990), it is a question of whether people consider human nature perfectible or fixed.

The third of the revealing focus topics, ethnic diversity, does not itself have a notable impact on organizational culture in local governments. Educated and experienced leaders can turn it into an asset, but actual differences in everyday work are more likely caused by language use and attitudes towards training. This has to be considered a positive tendency, since national diversity cannot be altered in democratic societies, whereas language skills and attitude towards training are changeable.

Lastly, organizational cultures are influenced by national culture and management style. If organizational culture and management style are not congruent, it might predict lower capacity. In this study, the prediction was partly confirmed. The causal mechanisms behind the difference in congruence in minority and majority municipalities and the "distracting" role of language remains partly unexplained. Because of the differences in capacity, this area of possible correlations is worthy of further study. If congruence between the organizational culture and the leaders' management style really predicts success, this understanding can have an actual practical value in working to bring them closer to each other. The comparison between Vinkel's study (2008) and the current one on organizational culture shows municipalities' flexibility and capability to change. Organizational culture does not change accidentally, but managers and leaders can steer it. According to Schein (1990), it is a question of human relationships that is considered to be the best way of organizing society and distributing power.

The main results of this exploratory research are connected to communication, especially language issues. Language has been demonstrated to have a connection to the congruence between leadership style and organizational culture, though this connection is not fully confirmed. The evident difference in attitudes towards training is a subject for further research. Although this paper aimed to describe the differences in the organizational cultures of minority and majority municipalities, it also revealed a similarity: municipalities with different ethnic compositions do not show any differences in attitudes towards ethnic diversity.

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