Beáta Nagy – Lilla Vicsek: Exploring Gender Culture at a Telecommunications Company.

The current manuscript version had been created before the article was copy edited, so some of the formulations are different in the final text.

Abstract

Purpose (mandatory)
The study interprets the expectations, the norms and values related to gender, within the concept of organizational culture. Over the past decades organizational researches have paid great attention to cultural research, and feminist theories have increasingly examined organizations from the angle of gender. The research we conducted in a business organization attempts to link these two areas.

Design/methodology/approach (mandatory)
We used the focus group discussion method at a telecommunications company in the spring of 2011 in Central Hungary.

Findings (mandatory)
The employees interviewed made a sharp distinction between professional and managerial competencies of female managers, accepting the former and often questioning the latter. Female managers met with lack of understanding and reserve if they returned to work while their children were still very young – not a common practice in Hungarian society – or if they worked in a top managerial position.

Research limitations/implications (if applicable)
The findings cannot be generalized.

Practical implications (if applicable)

Social implications (if applicable)
Although women managers' acceptance is widespread on the level of rhetoric, they face prejudices in several situations in workplaces.

Originality/value (mandatory)
Novelties of the research include examining the compatibility of priorities based on traditional gender expectations and priorities based on high level of investment in women's human capital in a highly competitive organizational context within a post-socialist society. The paper presents new insights linked to gendered organizational culture, which has been rarely analysed and presents

data from a Central Eastern European society which differs in many respects from previously investigated countries.

Exploring gender culture at a telecommunications company

Introduction

In the present study we analyze the interpretability and meaning of gender within organizational culture at a multinational company in Hungary. The field of gendered organizational culture is relatively new and so far little attention has been paid to it (Rutherford, 2001).

In spite of the fact that Central European post-socialist countries have distinct gender features, basically no research projects have made a comprehensive examination of gender culture at organizations in these societies (one exception is an earlier paper by the authors of this article: Vicsek and Nagy 2006). Traditional gender expectations and a high level of investment in women's human capital can make contradictory demands on women's employment. The novelty of the present research is that it examines the compatibility of these priorities in a highly competitive organizational context. While it is in the company's interest to take the fullest possible advantage of women's employment and therefore incentivize them to take only short maternity leave, the organizational culture is not necessarily welcoming regarding the return of female managers with very young children.

The post-socialist legacy

In spite of the twenty years that have passed since the change of system, post-socialist countries are still marked by striking gender characteristics. In these countries neither the value choices nor the social policy measures have supported the broad social acceptance of the employment of women with very young children, or of a career as a legitimate goal for mothers of very young children. The question of gender equality is no longer on the political agenda in these countries. Traditional, conservative values strengthened in the post-socialist societies in the 1990s (Křížková et al., 2010).

The change in values parallel with the change of system, the increasing shortage of places in child-care facilities, the unchanged length of child-care leave (3 years on child-care allowance) all strengthened the phenomenon of re-familization (Saxonberg and Sirovatka, 2006). Value surveys have found that Hungarians defined

the roles of men and women in a traditional way, although according to the latest findings paid activity by women with very young children had become somewhat more accepted in Hungary by 2009 (Pongráczné and S. Molnár, 2011). There is still a broad consensus in Hungary that it is good for children up to kindergarten age if their mothers remain at home with them (Blaskó, 2010).

This process of re-familization ran contrary to Western European trends (Saxonberg and Sirovatka, 2006). A recent analysis of the 2004 data of the European Social Survey showed that, compared to women who had children earlier, women who had children after the change of system felt that becoming mothers had a negative effect on their careers. This was particularly marked in Poland and Hungary (Valentova and Zhelyazkova, 2011).

It is clearly not by chance that in Hungary – besides the well-known obstacles in the way of women – the traditional gender order and the disproportionate sharing of tasks pushes women in the direction of not wishing or accepting higher managerial positions, especially if they have very young children. The proportion of women among managers in general and among board members in particular is below the European average, while this was not the case twenty years ago (Nagy, 2012).

Thus, it is obviously important to see where Hungary is placed in international comparison. The Global Gender Gap Report 2013 once again indicates that the country has a disadvantageous position in the rankings. In the previous year Hungary ranked 87 out of 136 countries, and its position has deteriorated almost continuously (WEF, 2013: 199).

Societal and organizational culture

Hofstede recently also found in his international comparison that Hungarian society is masculine; it has a rather high score: 88 out of 100 on the masculinity/femininity scale (Hofstede et al., 2010). (This score is very close to the highly masculine Japanese society, which has the value of 95.) Competition and conflicts characterize masculine societies, where the demands of working life clearly contradict the perceived and expected female characteristics, such as cooperation and subordination. This might lead to role incongruity in the life of working women.

Another study, however, reached opposite results. As part of the international GLOBE investigations, Hungarian researchers found that Hungary belonged to the cluster of countries which were "relatively gender egalitarian" in the late 1990s (Bakacsi et al., 2002: 75). GLOBE surveys used two connected approaches to investigate the gender components of culture: the descriptive cultural practices ('as is') and the prescriptive cultural values ('should be'). For example they posed the following questions on organizations: 'In this organization, men are encouraged (should be encouraged) to participate in professional development activities

more than women'. Gender egalitarianism meant that in Hungary the perceived value of gender egalitarianism (as is) was 4.06 on a scale of 1 to 7, whereas the world average was 3.39 (Bakacsi et al., 2002). (Researchers used a Likert-scale for the question above, ranging from 1 for 'strongly agree' to 7 for 'strongly disagree'.) GLOBE researchers also explored a strong positive relationship between societal and organizational gender egalitarianism practices. The correlation was even stronger in the case of values (House et al., 2004). Most of the gender-specific GLOBE analyses focused on societal (Paris et al., 2009), rarely on organizational level (Bajdo and Dickson, 2001), and they did not connect the three dimensions. None of them investigated this issue thoroughly, except for the above general finding (House et al., 2004).

However, GLOBE's position is strongly criticised by Hofstede et al. (2010), who think that these organizational and societal cultures differ in nature. They also noted that a national culture is a deep 'mental software' which contains basic values, whereas organizational cultures contain more superficial practices. He and his colleagues say that researchers cannot explore the shared practices, only the shared perceptions of daily practices (Hofstede et al., 2010).

Organizational culture and gender

For a long while academic enquiry did not focus on whether the dominant structure of organizations and the organizational culture contained gendered elements – often men's general experience was projected also for women (Rutherford, 2001; Billing, 2011). In Gherardi's opinion, from the 1970s the appearance of the concept of gender brought the parallel introduction of two important dimensions to organizational research: sexual differences and power differences (Gherardi 2005).

From the 1980s the study of organizational culture became more popular among both researchers and organization development consultants. The appearance of feminist theories greatly enriched thinking on organizational culture. The critical approaches not only involved women in the analysis, they tried to understand the whole process of organization from the gender viewpoint. Gherardi expressed the change in the following way:

> What is required is not study of participation by women in organizational processes, but rather a redefining of "organizational categories" so that they explicitly accommodate the experiences of men and women and reveal the ideological consequences of representing an abstract "labor force" and de-sexualized and disembodied worker in language. (Gherardi, 2005: 212)

The 1990s saw growing interest in pinning down the gendered organizational culture empirically. Maddock and Parkin (1999) examined the situation of women at public authorities in the UK in the early 1990s.

Maddock and Parkin argue that the organizations have a fundamentally male culture, which is why they found concern among the managers that women would have children and therefore they were encouraged and trained less, while women who nevertheless took advantage of the opportunities met with strong rejection, mainly on the grounds that they did not spend enough time with their children (Maddock and Parkin, 1999).

In a study in 1996 Gherardi looked at the attitude towards women who entered a male world at Italian companies. Although she could identify six different narratives at the companies, aloofness towards women characterized each of them, suggesting that the organizations have countless difficulties in positioning the first female applicants. In a later publication she also emphasized that the organizational practices, rules and tactics reproduce the "dichotomous order of gender", and "keep women in their place" (Gherardi-Poggio, 2001: 246).

Liebig's starting point for the definition of gender culture is that the members of an organization connect the conditions, expectations and views inside and outside the particular organization with the ideas on gender (Liebig, 2000). Like Liebig, in the following we understand gender culture appearing in the organizations to be the different collective expectations, interpretations and demands members of the organization have regarding male and female employees. She identified three dimensions of gender culture: 1. corporate gender relations, 2. relation between corporate and societal gender order, 3. gender equality policies and reactions to them. Liebig classified the gender cultures observed in the Swiss companies into four groups which are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1 here

Although most types of corporate cultures that she found were characterized by following to some degree traditional perceptions on societal gender relations, there was also one type, "pragmatic utilitarism", where this was not the case. Since we have already surveyed the literature on gender culture in our earlier article (Vicsek and Nagy, 2006), we will not go into detail here. Further details on gender culture can be found among others in the writings of Liebig (2000).

Some writers have argued for the existence of a dual structure in organizations. Ressner (1987) differentiates between bureaucracy and patriarchy (cited in Acker, 1990: 143) and argues that people within organizations must comply with a dual system of expectations: the professional expectations and the gender-related expectations.

Acker (1990, 1998) pointed out that a deep gender substructure underlies the organizations. Women's position is clearly related to the male dominance that is explained by the gender positions in the division of labor and in reproduction. Moreover, she emphasizes that we have to look at the organization as a gendered process (Acker, 1990: 146).

Women in management

The appearance of women in management also brought changes in the research questions, while at the same time men have continued to dominate within management. What has changed has been related to the substantial increase in the proportion of women at middle management level (Broadbridge and Hearn 2008). Together with the usual questions – in particular, why women continue to be underrepresented in the top echelons of economic life – a new theme also appeared as a question: the extent to which women are accepted in management positions (Schein 2001), and whether management always reflects male norms (Billing 2011). Opinions within an organization on women's presence in management can be regarded as one aspect of gender culture.

The degree to which women are accepted in management positions has been debated at great length. Although research conducted in the United States from the 1960s has found growing acceptance and has shown a positive influence of the work experience, international and Hungarian studies still report on substantial antipathy (Powell and Graves, 2003; Schein, 2001; Nagy and Vicsek, 2008). The concepts *think manager – think male* still remain paired, regardless of the country examined (Powell, 2012).

Numerous articles summing up empirical research covering a wide range of countries claim that people evaluate female managers less positively than male managers (Powell, 2012). As one of these studies concludes: "In essence, even when women leaders performed identically to men, they were judged to be less competent than their male counterparts" (Prime et al., 2008: 174). Competence cannot be to the detriment of their "femininity" or their families, otherwise their environment punishes them (Eagly and Carli, 2007).

In a recent publication Billing (2011) put forward a new approach where she would like to do away with the assumption that organizations and management are definitely and always imbued with the male norm, and this explains the difficulties women have in advancing. In the interviews with Danish and Swedish female managers she found that the younger and highly educated managers never encountered traditional expectations, they were much better able to avoid these (trap) situations (Billing, 2011). But this does not mean that there are no barriers in the top level of management or in other countries. As Powell argues: "women's presence in top management positions violates the norm of men's

higher status and superiority to a greater extent than women's presence in lower-level management positions" (Powell, 2012: 122). Researchers agree that the issue of gender and management has to be kept on the research agenda firmly, even if the facilitating and limiting factors of gendered careers might change (Broadbridge and Simpson, 2011).

Gender culture at a local government

In 2004-2005 we examined the gender culture of a local government in Budapest (Vicsek and Nagy, 2006). Women made up 80% of the employees. The majority of the leaders, including the mayor, were also women. Four focus group discussions (group interviews) were held at the organization with employees.

The group members took a negative view of the fact that there was a majority of women at the local government. Many of them described female managers in general as having negative characteristics and some people said the same of the female leaders at their own local government (Nagy and Vicsek, 2008).

We analyzed gender culture according to the three dimensions differentiated by Liebig (2000). The picture that emerged in the focus groups of the gender relations dimension was that the men who worked at the local government were not considered to be "masculine". Local authority work was regarded as feminine work: a kind of work that required personality traits they thought were more characteristic of women (for example, greater ability to tolerate stress, less need for freedom) and in their opinion the low pay and prestige also matched the social expectations for women. The participants thought that the women in their organization – including the female leaders – could remain feminine, although they often judged negatively what they regarded as feminine features. At the same time they expressed criticism of female managers working in the private sector, considering them "masculinized".

Liebig's second dimension is formed by the extent to which the employees separate the outside world from the world of the organization. The high proportion of women among the office managers was not in contradiction with the gender order of society outside the local authority because the participants did not regard these as real leadership positions with high salary and prestige and the freedom to make one's own decisions.

Liebig's third dimension is the judgment of equal opportunity measures. A variety of attitudes appeared in the groups. The male employees regarded the question as the unfair privilegization of women. Some regarded equal opportunities as a problem outside the organization, but according to the majority it was not a major problem outside the organization either.

The present research at a telecommunications company

Aims, data and methods

The aim of the research we conducted in 2011 was to explore the appearance of gender culture in profit-oriented organizations. It is our view that Liebig's approach to gender culture is fruitful in investigating gender culture. Similarly to our earlier research at the local government, research questions for this project were based on the dimensions that Liebig differentiated as part of gender culture. Therefore, our research questions were:

1. What characterized the corporate gender relations?
2. What was the relationship between the corporate gender relations and the societal gender order?
3. How were gender equality policies evaluated in the organization?

Around 600 employees work at the site of the telecommunications company investigated, with slightly more men than women. There is both horizontal and vertical segregation within the organization. Very few departments have a balanced gender ratio. Although there are women in middle management, they are underrepresented compared to the proportion of women within the organization. There is only one woman in the top management.

Similarly to Liebig's (2000) research, we used focus groups to explore the gender culture. The method was well suited to the aims of our exploratory research and made possible a rich, deep and nuanced characterization of the gender culture (Vicsek 2006). Among the limitations of the focus group method it is important to take into account the limits of generalization: how far the two focus groups reflect the culture of the entire organization is open to question (Vicsek 2006).

In the research two focus groups were held at the company: a group of female employees and a group of male employees. The members of the groups had secondary or higher qualifications and their ages ranged from 20 to 50 years. There were eight persons in the men's group and ten in the women's. A selection criterion was that some of the participants should come from units which were composed mainly of men while others should come from units which had a majority of women. Within these units focus group members were chosen randomly out of those employees who met our age and education specifications but were not in management positions. The discussions were held in a conference room in the company building. We made audio recordings of the conversations. It is important to mention that the fact the moderator was a woman may have influenced the results.

A fine-grained, in-depth qualitative data analysis was made based on the transcripts with the help of NVivo software. The transcripts were coded for their thematic content. In choosing our

analytical aspects for the qualitative analysis, we built on one hand on the dimensions of gender culture Liebig (2000) specified. Additional analytical sub-categories were developed based on a close study of the text.

Discussion

- *Characteristics of the corporate gender relations and their relationship to the societal gender order*

The employees of the company mentioned that there were only a few units with a balanced gender ratio. By way of explanation they pointed to the existing differences in the level of qualifications (e.g. fewer women had technical qualifications), and also noted that different types of work had different gender "requirements".

The groups fully accepted the horizontal segregation. Positive stereotypes often appeared in the explanations given for the horizontal segregation: women were more patient, showed more empathy, were friendlier to the clients, or they were "better able to tolerate" monotonous work and were therefore more suited for customer service. The contrasting of certain positive stereotypes related to women with negative stereotypes attributed to men is well known from the literature and paradoxically is also one of the barriers to full acceptance of women in management (Eagly and Carli, 2007). It also emerged from the replies that some jobs performed by women (e.g. customer service) had lower prestige, and not only were women better suited to them but men were less willing to perform such work. They failed to take into account the fact that the positions held by women had lower prestige (Eagly and Carli, 2007). This is in line with the findings that there are still stereotypical role concepts within the society (Pongráczné and S. Molnár, 2011).

The majority of women in some departments was judged negatively: in the discussion on female majority, negative stereotypes related to women were emphasized: they are "envious", "needle each other", "hate in silence", "form cliques", "have hissy fits", "are moody". The female majority was judged negatively by members of both the male and the female employee's focus group. This highlights a consensus independently of gender on supposed negative behavioral characteristics of women. Our other research projects have also illustrated that not only men, but women in Hungarian society often tend to incorporate the dominant negative stereotypes on women into their way of thinking and this effects how they experience interactions with women (Nagy and Vicsek 2008; Vicsek and Nagy, 2006) .

Thus the results show that there is a contradiction between the argument that the participants stress the aptitude of women for

customer service work and the fact that they judge female employees negatively with respect to relations with colleagues.

Respondents of both groups described many female managers working at the company as "masculine". A number of things made them masculine in their eyes. On the one hand, personal characteristics: firmness, hardness, dominance. On the other, they were defined as masculine because they chose a career differing from what was regarded at the company as the typical and ideal female career, i.e. they went back to work soon after giving birth. Earlier studies have also reported on the trap that female leaders are punished both for being too feminine or too masculine (Eagly and Carli, 2007; Powell, 2012). The listing of gender stereotypes and prejudices continued in connection with managers and was in line with earlier findings (Nagy and Vicsek, 2008; Powell, 2012), but contradicts the Scandinavian experience where younger female managers rarely reported on negative experiences (Billing, 2011).

The topic of female managers at the company with very young children featured prominently in the groups: they were mentioned spontaneously and they cropped up repeatedly in the discussions. Participants expressed in various ways that they did not consider it a good or natural life course for a woman to return to work when her child was only a few months old: they used expressions such as "extreme", "unnatural" for this. The majority looked with a certain degree of antipathy towards female managers who returned to work a few months after giving birth, while the others regarded such a choice as strange ("it's strange that she doesn't have any maternal urges"). They did not consider it a good thing if a woman's career became "too important" for her.

The following conversation is a good illustration of this antipathy towards female managers with very young children:

PETER: Well, now we have something that perhaps wasn't in the picture in the past, a career for women too. Here at the company too, I could name, but of course I won't, three or four women colleagues who, perhaps I'm exaggerating, gave birth and four months or even three months later they were back here. I even know of a case, two actually, where she gave birth and came right back. Very, very soon, because you have to build your career.
...
PAUL: Yes. So there are women like that who look to the outsider a bit as though they have no emotions, they live their lives like robots and tick off everything they have planned in advance.
PETER: There's a picture of the child on her screensaver or on her desk.
PAUL: And that's enough. There are extremes that I think are difficult to understand, even from a man's point of view.

Strongly negative opinions were expressed in the women's group too:

IRENE: They cling so strongly to their post and career, that the child for them is one stage...

TOGETHER: The child is a means. A tick.
KATE: I'd like to talk with them in five or six years' time, to see what they think about it. Or when the child is at school, I'd ask her, Mummy how many times did you see your child. I'm sure you can see the effect on the child too, who's bringing it up and who's at home with it. [Much murmuring and agreement]

Maddock and Parkin (1999) had similar results in their British investigation twenty years ago, when women were constantly criticized because they worked too hard. Valentova and Zhelyazkova (2011) identified the same view in the perception of young female managers who experienced difficulties in returning to work after childbirth according to the European Social Survey 2004. On this point the aversions found at the company were fully in line with traditional views (Pongráczné and S. Molnár, 2011). No one in the groups thought it a problem if a man put his career before his family, or that if a male manager was career-oriented he would regard a child as a "means" or a "tick". In both groups there were people who said that the child was a "tick" for female managers with very small children. The use of similar expressions suggests that this has been a topic of conversation among employees at the company at other times too.

What we can see here is a strong confrontation between the (seemingly gender neutral) bureaucratic structure and the patriarchal structure (Ressner, 1987 cited in Acker, 1990), moreover we found evidence for the gendered substructure of organizations (Acker, 1998). By returning to work a few months after giving birth, these women signal to the management that their career continues to be important for them. At the same time the members of the organization show no understanding for the decision taken by the mothers who return soon. It is important here to emphasize the age of the very young children as traditions support a very long absence of 2-3 years. The female managers criticized in the discussions represent a rare group: only a very small percentage of women in Hungary return to work when their child is only a few months old (Blaskó, 2010).

Our findings are similar to what Maddock and Parkin had found in the UK in the beginning of the 1990s, namely that in male organizational cultures women are criticized also if they spend too little time with their children (Maddock and Parkin, 1999). This coincides with our research result that having a child was referred to in a very prejudiced tone as a task to be ticked off by career-oriented women.

It was mentioned during the discussions that one of the essential qualities of the ideal workplace manager is that they fight for the interests of their group, so in this context the participants regarded it as a positive thing if a manager is firm, dominant or even aggressive. Earlier in the discussion they had defined these qualities as masculine. It was remarked that if they wish to be recognized, female managers have to behave like men:

EVE: You have to fight hard to win recognition. And my boss too, often wins it by fighting as tough as any guy. She has to, because in countless cases there is a conflict say, between my sales people and my boss on certain matters of principle, and the woman stands her own. And she says out straight, yes, go and do it, that's the rule, and it has to be done. And then they leave and after, you can see for a while, that in a little way she becomes a woman again.

At the same time it is an indication of the trap: some women respondents specifically stressed that it bothered them if a female manager had personality traits they regarded as masculine. As Christina put it: "my suppressing and conflict-evading mechanism as a woman switches on when she pulls on trousers and suddenly grows a moustache in a discussion".

It can be seen that the gender order within the company and the order outside the company were in contradiction as regards female managers. The respondents regarded a different life course as typical and desirable for women and attributed different qualities to women in general than to female managers within the company.

Some participants said that male and female managers were equally accepted at the company. However it can be concluded from remarks made in both groups that there are certain limitations to the acceptance of female managers. The opinion that female managers have to struggle more for acceptance was also expressed in both groups.

IVÁN: It's tougher for them [women] to have themselves accepted by their subordinates, the other departments, the employees.

In the men's group it was stressed that the women were less ready to accept a female manager. But in the women's group precisely the opposite claim was made: that male subordinates were less ready to accept female managers. While based on these answers, we cannot say who is opposed to female managers more – some men or some women - these answers do suggest that there seem to be some problems with the acceptance of female managers at the company. A few participants (mainly in the women's group) openly declared that they preferred a male boss.

CLAIRE: For me only a man is a boss. Somehow I haven't been able to work with women...

When asked on whether they prefer to work with a male or female boss, there were others who emphasized that gender made no difference to them.. It is relevant to mention, that answers to a general question on whether the participants have a gender preference for a boss might not be a good way to measure actual attitudes. In our earlier research at the local government we found that many research participants answered to this question that gender made no difference to them and then contradicting this general statement went on already in their next sentence to

strongly criticize concrete female managers based on their supposed gender characteristics. At the telecommunication company, such very crude and strong contradictions could not be observed and some participants even reported on positive experiences with female managers. However, we did find that some of the competences of female managers were questioned recurrently at other parts of the group discussions - which again do suggest problems with the acceptance of female managers. We found that for the most part the professional competence of female managers was generally judged more positively than their managerial competence - its seems that the system of patriarchal expectations impedes full acceptance of their managerial performance.

> CARL: ... if a woman rises, say, to be a manager, her professional knowledge is generally greater than that of a man. But in my opinion she can't manage people the way a male manager can.

- *Gender equality and the evaluation of measures*

The (low) number of female managers at the company or in the country as a whole was not defined as a problem for the participants. In the men's group it was pointed out that one quarter to one third of managers at the company were women. They regarded this number as "a lot" compared to the national average.

There was also an argument in the groups that what counts in the private sector is merit, performance is the yardstick and no one suffers discrimination because of their gender: This view coincides with what Maddock and Parkin (1999) called a gender-blind culture. At this point regarding the gender equality policy we found strong evidence for the type Liebig called normative individualism.

> RICK: I don't think that's so typical in the private sector, because everyone has an interest in the result, and who produces it and how makes no difference at all.

The participants in both groups generally rejected the idea of increasing the number of female managers through policy measures. On the one hand this was led back to the argument that it is not good to "reform society by command" from up above, there should be no interference in the how things go, as it will not work well anyway and as commands from above bring back negative associations with the socialist era. For some others basically, there was no need for policy as there was no need for more female managers.

> IRENE: I don't know, they were talking about it in politics somewhere, the government of a country somewhere was trying to have a higher proportion of women in the government. I think this should definitely not be regulated artificially.

MODERATOR: And what do you think then, perhaps measures should be introduced so that there are more female managers...?
MARK: That will happen eventually anyway.
тOM: I don't think you can impose that from above.
SOMEONE: I don't either...

A factor influencing equal opportunities for women at the company is the extent to which family and work can be harmonized. The members of the men's group (together with their admission that they were not the ones responsible for family tasks) did not think that harmonizing family tasks and work was a problem. The women placed much more emphasis on the difficulties of reconciliation.

According to their accounts the volume of work was big but there was generally flexibility in this respect for the majority (except, for example, for the customer service workers – most of whom were women), if someone had some private business to do, in theory she could get time off – but this was difficult because of the big volume of work:

JULIA: I don't generally plan that for weekdays (private business), because then I know I won't be finished with my work. It's hard to fit it in.

The employees were not aware of any measures at the company designed to help harmonize family and work, they linked this question more to the informal attitude of managers (although it had been mentioned earlier that in certain areas there was a limited possibility for home-working).

In the course of the discussion someone recounted how, in some cases, the company tried not to take back women who had had children and stayed at home for a long while: placing them in a situation that they themselves did not accept. The participants made no connection between this phenomenon and the fact that many female managers return to work soon after giving birth.

The participants unequivocally rejected any form or appearance of equal opportunity measures, at the most they complained of the failure of the company to provide afternoon child supervision. Implicitly this would be a form of support for mothers, as in the dichotomous world this is a task assigned to women. In these opinions we recognized the system of views we had seen in the research at the local government, and also encountered evidence of normative individualism.

Conclusions

This article adds to the works on gender and organizational culture, as it examines the gender culture of organizations in a Central-Eastern European context neglected by earlier research. The gender culture of the Hungarian telecommunications company was

different in some respects from the local government we investigated earlier (Nagy and Vicsek, 2008; Vicsek and Nagy, 2006). While the local government was characterized by homogeneity in terms of femininity, i.e. female managers were perceived as feminine and even the men working at the organization were seen as feminized, in contrast within the company many female managers were regarded as masculine – based on their characteristics and life paths. Still, an underlying similarity between the two gender cultures was that female managers were perceived through a lens reflecting the traditional views dominant within Hungarian society. In both organizations it was found that the participants in the discussions preferred to see women in traditional, stereotypical positions, in jobs regarded as feminine. Female managers appeared especially problematic in discussions at the local government, where it was objected that they had feminine characteristics which were problematic for a leader, but the image of a firm, masculine stand by female managers was also repeatedly rejected by respondents in both organizations.

Some articles have pointed out that women's acceptance is on the rise in the western world (Powell, 2012), and some even explored the lack of male norm in management in Sweden and Denmark (Billing, 2011). The traditionalism underlying the gender cultures we found contrasts with the results of Billing, and we did not find evidence for the widespread acceptance of women in higher managerial positions, either. Results of our current and previous research highlight with respect to these current debates of women in management that in at least some post-socialist organizations the situation is far from what Billing has claimed. The acceptance of women in very prestigious and influential positions is still far from equal, even if the GLOBE investigation found some evidences for gender egalitarianism in Hungary (Bakacsi et al., 2002). Based upon our research we tend to agree more with Powell's arguments that women are not allowed to "violate" the gender norm, i.e. men's higher position (Powell, 2012). We would add that it is particularly tough for women with small children as they violate the norm doubly due to their gender and to their motherhood status. It might be a very relevant aspect for further investigations in the refamilialised post-socialist context.

We found that while it is in the company's interest to use women's human capital as efficiently as possible, and this is why the female managers return so soon after giving birth, the company did not communicate this in a way that the employees accustomed to the traditional gender culture would understand. The organization was thus ambivalent on the question because it did not send a clear message; this is why we constantly encountered criticism of the individual (e.g. careerist women), and basically never of the organization.

Our paper shows that organizational culture is not necessarily able to separate itself from the surrounding societal culture, even if

this culture goes against the goals of the organization. This result clearly contradicts the GLOBE results. It might be explained by both the different methodology and the composition of respondents, i.e. middle-level managers answered the GLOBE questionnaires. For a successful implementation of the goals of the telecommunications company, an organizational culture which was opposed to the societal culture would have been needed: a culture where female managers who go back to work after having a baby would have been well accepted members of the community. Instead of this there is a gender culture, which we call 'counterproductive gender culture', a sub-optimal solution, which endangers the efficient functioning of the organization, by going against the aims of the company.

Here we detected a clear contradiction or even a tension between the organizational and the societal gender order. Whereas the employees interviewed believed in meritocracy and did not perceive any gender bias within the organization, they believed firmly in the traditional gender order on societal level. Based on these results we cannot support previous statements that Hungary is a "relatively gender egalitarian" society (Bakacsi et al., 2002). In our investigation the organizational gender culture was interwoven with the signs of traditional societal gender culture.

We have to explain, however, the contradictory situation described above: the traditional gender order in society vs. the strong belief in meritocracy, which leads to a sub-optimal solution on the whole. We would call this type post-socialist traditionalism. It means that due to the socialist memories people are quite sure that career paths are open to women and men equally within the organization. These people are used to women working full-time, as their mothers mostly did, even if in a gender-segregated labour market. Twenty-five years is not such a long time that people forget the emblematic symbols, in this case the working woman of socialism. It also explains why the GLOBE study (Bakacsi et al., 2002) labeled these countries more gender egalitarian than other parts of the world. Still, there has been a backlash against women's emancipation in the post-socialist countries. It started already in the period of late socialism with the idea of traditional motherhood, and continued with the conservative turn after the change of the system. As a result women found themselves caught between the demands that they be a perfect mother and a competitive working woman. They have been expected to stay at home with the baby for a long paid period, still to contribute considerably – mostly full-time – to the family budget, plus take advantage of career opportunities, if possible. Staying at home on a long parental leave, but working full-time before and after the leave because of the badly paid and extremely limited part-time opportunities, is a typical pattern in all European post-socialist countries. This difficult tension has never been thematized on societal or organizational level. We should have had organizational messages or clear communication rather than

stressing mothers returning from the parental leave, or accepting the label of tough careerist women.

A clear distinction was made at the company between the professional and managerial competence of the managers, and it is a unique finding among the Hungarian organizational investigations. Women were valued highly only for their professional and not for their managerial skills in top positions. Their presence in the highest level of management violates the traditional gender order, as referred above. We can regard as new the finding that a conservative, anti-career attitude towards women in management positions can be found not only at the level of women's perceptions or in the case of gender roles, but also at the level of company employees in this post-socialist country. This result clearly contradicts the Northern experiences reported by Billing (2011), however clearly coincides with the potential dangers warned by other researchers (Broadbridge and Simpson, 2011).

Prospective investigations should also focus on the acceptance of women managers in the CEE regions. As expectations and perceptions on this issue have an impact on women's participation in management, further investigations are needed in the interest of both social justice and economic efficiency. Otherwise we cannot expect that women's increased participation in higher education and middle level managerial position will change the societal milieu towards women's acceptance in top managerial positions.

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