

## How to manage Eastern and Western Christians successfully in one organization?

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**Practical background.** Geographical and historical conditions have made Podlaskie Voivodeship (North-Eastern part of Poland) a place of coexistence of various nations and cultures. Multinational character provided background for the creation of distinct systems of values and attitudes, characteristic of representatives of different denominations inhabiting the north-east of Poland. Nowadays, those who constitute the largest ethnic group for the most part are members of Catholic Orthodox Church. The main practical issue is how to avoid conflicts resulting from belonging to different religious groups by workers in organizations in the Podlasie region and representing different cultures based on religious assumptions. It concerns the ABW SUPERBRUK company, the producer of road-building materials, which work force is not culturally homogenous. They represent two different Christian religions: Catholics and Orthodox. ABW SUPERBRUK operates in the most religiously diverse region in Poland.<sup>1</sup> Other practitioners in the region have not noticed the importance of the problem and, the majority ignores it "Mazur, (2009)".

**Research background.** In theory of management the conflicts between workers in heterogeneous organizations are usually taken to the ethno- racial basis, hardly ever to any other basis even though diversity has many different sides. The issues of diversity in Poland are considered mainly on the demographic basis (women-men, the young-the old), not on religious basis which is sensitive data. The broad theory of managing cultural diversity lacks a reference to religion, which has a culture-building meaning and is the source of value preferences, behaviors and attitudes for believers. Most Europeans avoid discussing religion because of historical reasons "Simons (2002)". Overall, there is no specific theory of management for Catholic and Orthodox believers "Mazur (2008)".

**Aims.** The main aim of the article is to discover and elicit theologically-cultural differences between Catholic and Orthodox denominations on the basis of the reference literature and identify them in the ABW SUPERBRUK company. They include: Individual v. social aspect of Christianity, Didactics v. mysticism, Rational v. irrational knowledge, Dichotomy of freedom, Grace v. merit. It is also intended to make managers more conscious of the religion influence on employee value preferences and his/her attitudes at work to let them be more effective managers.

**Main contribution.** The level of diversity in the world is systematically increasing due to the globalization and integration processes. In order to make diversity more

tangible and comprehensible, various dimensions of diversity representing "subcategories of diversity" have been developed. The main categories comprising diversity are as follows: *gender, nationality and ethnicity, social class background, sexual orientation, age, mental and physical capability, and religion*. The last is considered by psychologists one of the most influential on human's behavior because it deals with values of key importance for human identity. The main contribution of the article is the thesis supported by empirical evidence that despite globalisation cultural differences resulting from religious backgrounds of employees are sometimes fundamental to organizations. The article consists of three major parts. In the first one, the review of main cultural differences between catholic and orthodox religions is presented, in the second part the possible influences of cultural values resulting from those religions on employees' behavior at work are predicted. The third part of the article aims to prove that the company is an open system and that employees representing different cultural (religious) backgrounds behave accordingly to the cultural values specific for their religion. To support the assumption on the impact of cultural values on employees' conduct the example of ABW SUPERBRUK-bicultural company operating in Podlaskie Voivodeship in Northern Poland-will be used.

**Implications.** The awareness of religious biculturalism at ABW SUPERBRUK will not be universal, because every company working in the conditions of religious diversity of human resources should discover and analyze its own cultural environment. On its basis, the companies will be able to efficiently manage cultural diversity under the condition of individualization of the religions of its own workers.

The usage of that knowledge will contribute to the prevention of conflicts resulting from different religious values, understanding particular attitudes of the representatives of various religions, move workers' understanding from the company to other basis of social and political life.

## Introduction

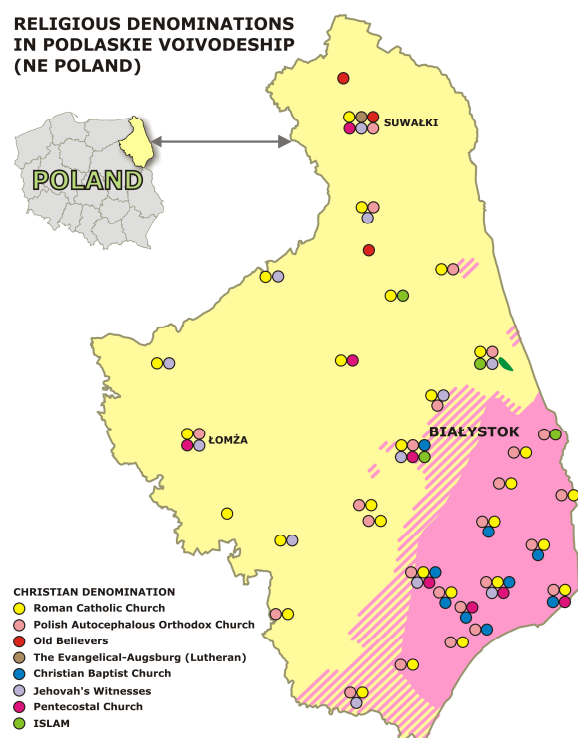
Companies in Podlaskie Voivodeship operate in an environment of cultural multiformity which stem from the province's location and history, as the area has always been a melting pot of different religions and ethnicities. Its multinational character provided solid background for the creation of distinct systems of values and attitudes. Nowadays, those who constitute the largest ethnic group

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.superbruk.com.pl/>

for the most part are members of Catholic Orthodox Church<sup>2</sup>. According to 31.12.2000 data there are 1,222,709 inhabitants of Podlaskie Voivodeship. The Catholic and Orthodox congregations make 77% and 13,5% of all inhabitants of Podlaskie Voivodeship respectively (in some districts, for example in Hajnowski district, the inhabitants are over 80% Orthodox Church believers). The actual location of denominations in the Podlasie region is shown on the map below.

An Orthodox may remain under the influence of orthodoxy relating to "here and now", only on the level of culture "Pawluczuk (1999)". The border between the spheres of influence of Roman Catholicism and Orthodoxy that is crossing Europe has cultural origins: quite different types of behavior occur on its both sides. Latin societies are richer than the Orthodox ones. They are frugal; life decisions are made on rational basis. Orthodox societies are orientated towards feelings and emotions. Thus, they are more likely to become joy-driven. This can be explained by the differences in Roman Catholic and Orthodox theologies.



**Figure 1.** Religious denominations in Podlaskie Voivodeship in 2000.

## Eastern Christianity v. Western Christianity – theological and cultural differences

The reasons for the split of the Church into Western – Roman Catholic and Eastern Byzantine branches have origins in different conditions of political, economic and religious lives in the Western and Eastern parts of the Roman Empire, in profound dissimilarity of Roman and Greek identities. The Greeks were particularly driven towards philosophy and arts as well as dogmatic disputes, while Romans perfected their political, judicial and organizational skills.

The question of differences between Eastern and Western Christianity can be perceived and discussed from several –historical, political, mainstream culture and strictly theological – perspectives "Radziukiewicz, (2005)". An analysis of historical and political determinants was made in *Philosophy in the Shadow of Orthodoxy* "Krzemień, (1972)". She also presented the significance of cultural and theological differences. They might be gathered under five headings and listed in the following way "Mazur, (2009)":

**Individual v. social aspect of Christianity.** Both Eastern and Western Christianity concur as far as fundamental truths are concerned; they differ on the definition of the role prescribed to each individual in his contact with God. The East, where *synodality* is the ultimate resort in matters of doctrine, custom and jurisdiction, views man as part of the community of believers. The entire community receives inspiration and guidance from the Holy Spirit, which results in the community's uniform character – the Holy Spirit speaks through believers, who remain consonant, holds the Christian doctrine of the East. As for the social aspect of initiation, also present in the Orthodox liturgy, Roman Catholic attitude towards religion is individualistic in relying the authority of the Church on the person of pope.

The sources of Western individualism can be traced back to ideas which appeared in 12-13th century culture and religious life. They underlined man's individual path to God combined with personal responsibility for one's life. The significance of individual standing, intuition, self-analysis and sense of responsibility occupies prominent place in this and similar works of the period. Crystallization of the concept of conscience as a prerequisite criterion of man's activity occurred simultaneously with bringing out to light the direct relationship between God and man. According to Saint Thomas Aquinas, man should always follow his conscience and conviction, and no threat of excommunication by the Church should distract him from his path "Kłoczowski (2007)". Individualism in Roman Catholic tradition is expressed by the priest's use of "I", which is absent in Orthodox tradition. Orthodox doctrine holds that a community attracts God's attention better than an individual; thus prayer needs to be expressed collectively, and praising God in singing – in chorus.

**Didactics v. mysticism.** Long before the schism, the Church in the East was concerned with God's mysteries; Western Church at the same time explored the relationship between God's grace and man's freedom. Rational, social and active attitude on one hand was opposed to

<sup>2</sup> Christian religion which aroused in 9<sup>th</sup> century, and was definitely separated from the Roman Church in 1054, after the exclusion of Constantinople's patriarch Michael Cerularius from the Church by Pope Leo IX.

contemplative and mystical one on the other hand. It is often mentioned that the West takes on stronger moralistic stance, revealing itself in the importance attributed to the way in which man presents his account to God than the East; the latter being immersed in mystical meditation.

This dissimilarity can also be seen in the attitude towards pictures. In the West they are visual aids and catechetical tools, in the East an image resembles a sacrament; it is a living presence, an intermediary in the contact with God, a form of His presence rather than a means of communication, an admonition, a warning or a mere decoration. The East has never attributed utilitarian values to arts, as the West has. The disparity can be observed in liturgy: didactic and catechetical part in Roman Catholic mass is elaborate; mystical aura prevails Orthodox liturgy.

**Rational v. irrational knowledge.** Despite theological differences, both Eastern and Western historians and theologians agree that it wasn't the dogmatic issues that brought about the schism. Cultural and historical matters reflected in liturgy, literature and philosophy influenced unique and specific attitudes toward the world, different lifestyles or different solutions of philosophical dilemmas.

Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, Christian theologian and philosopher of the late 5th and early 6th century, distinguished two theological traditions which may be useful while explaining the differences between Eastern and Western Churches. Cataphatic way expresses God through positive terminology; it provides an insight into God's nature, although the understanding is limited and imperfect. Apophatic theology describes God by negation, which is admitting one's ignorance and limited capability of comprehension "Nowosielski, (1998)".

Cataphatic theology provides us with analogies of God's image by means of intellectual comprehension. Rationalism and ability to reach God through mind occur; God becomes an object of rational recognition. The transcendence of God arises from the juxtaposition of comprehending subject with the object of comprehension.

Apophatic tradition attempts to overcome this opposition. It accentuates not the juxtaposition of transcendence with immanence, but the synergy of God and man which leads the latter to becoming close with God, who is omnipresent and becomes united with man in love. Comprehension and love become unified in a mysterious and inexpressible experience. Apophatic theology, congruent with Orthodoxy, contemplates God in His ineffability, since God by his nature is unknowable. God is beyond all that exists; in order to approach Him one needs to deny everything that is inferior to God, i.e. everything that exists. It is via negation that we can recognize him who is beyond and above all subjects of potential comprehension. From such perspective rational reasoning never becomes a path to God; theology should become experiencing of what escapes all understanding – claims Orthodox doctrine. "Logical" does not apply to the quality of truth; the obviousness of God reveals itself in the realm of existence and remains beyond any recognition. Hence the East's aversion to exactness and classifications, as compared to the West with its inclination to narrow, conceptual reasoning and providing definitions.

Any form of individualism is alien to Eastern spirituality;

mysticism is ubiquitous, not only in personal experience, but in the life of the entire community, in customs and liturgy, since original substance is not rational. God is not defined by logical arguments: theology and liturgy inspire contemplation and perception of personal existential presence of God "Krzemień, (1972)".

In the East the traditional distinction between the rational and the irrational – mystical is expressed in a metaphor of heart and mind. The Eastern conception of faith situates it in the heart and never describes it using the terminology of an intellectual system. Such attitude remains in conflict with Catholic theology which does not discredit the quality of comprehension through reasoning. St. Thomas of Aquin recognizes revelation as the ultimate level of comprehension, but accepts cognitive value of reason as well. Orthodox theologians claim that concepts and notions reveal neither the essence of God, nor can they express the Orthodox faith, and they reject the necessity of theological canons "Krzemień, (1972)".

On the whole, if liturgical order in the West aims to arouse will and consciousness, to nurture and shape this consciousness on the level of discursive reasoning, Eastern liturgies are driven by a sort of psychophysical activity which pervades subconsciousness and those strata of consciousness that avoid the principles of intellectual speculation. It can be described as organization of collective mystical experience, in case of Eastern liturgy – as liturgical mysticism. It is a significant element of Orthodox religious experience, not present in the West where individual mysticism reached its peak. Mystical consciousness of St. John of the Cross developed in the course of individual effort. Nothing in his work proves any direct and necessary relationship between the consciousness of a Spanish mystic and his familiarity with liturgical practice or experience.<sup>3</sup> It was not the case in the East, where very early (in the works of Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite) liturgical activity was recognized as a profound experience of metaphysical mystery.

**Dichotomy of freedom.** The concept of *free will* is another important religious and philosophical question. The perception of only internal, spiritual aspect of freedom is characteristic of Orthodoxy. Free will in the West is considered one of the most significant values, as God's most precious gift. Freedom is our only attribute that is absolute; reason has limitations, will is infinite – that's where we are equal with God. Orthodoxy considers the very inclination to making choices a flaw, a limitation of genuine freedom. Free will is defective and signifies the fall of man, his loss of semblance to God. The ultimate form of freedom is an activity which brings about its own rights and does not yield by making a choice. It is a state of mystical revelation, a direct proximity of good where no alternative choice exists – good is so pervasive that no activity other than good is possible. The will to make choices is the cause of sin – human will selected a path that was not God's choice. Human mind's natural

<sup>3</sup> Sometimes in history, for example during the Age of Enlightenment, cold intellectualism, a kind of "rationalistic downgrading", occurred. It rejected any spiritual experience or mysticism. A 1740 theological dictionary described the great mystical expression of St. John as "excessive" matter.

disposition towards God was reversed and man turned to light instead; material conditions suppressed the spiritualization of body. The denial to recognize the source of evil only in the free will resulted in man's failure to free himself from evil. He subordinated his freedom to external needs. Genuine freedom means creativity, rendering man's own rights. Paradoxically, for the man of the West the deeds, in which no choice is allowed, seem most natural and unhindered "Krzemień, (1972)".

Evil becomes reality not only as the result of will; it's the will that brings it forth. The beginning of evil has origins in the spiritual world. All that had been created is good: "Evil is not conditioned by the creature itself, its source is alien to being which is good. Thus evil does not come from the lower side, from the carnal side, but from the top, from spirituality. Its origins are rooted (...) in the free choice of the human mind "Evdokimov, (1964)".

Orthodox tradition nurtures the assumption that natural world, realms of facts and carnality are good, and evil can not originate in non-spiritual world. Here, unlike in the West where free will operates in the world created, it is a quest of something unfathomable, which exceeds any capability of human understanding, which has no foundation in this world: becomes 'unreasonable', 'impossible' and absolute. The West essentially affirms the world and participation in its transformation; in the East it's conversion – invocation to God and world renunciation as necessary for the concentration of the soul on the self – that brings about spiritual life. Such attitude is a ceaseless effort of will addressing God.

**Grace v. merit.** The Orthodox interpretation of the question of relationship between grace and merit is different from that in Catholicism. Since the times of St. Augustine and his *Civitas Dei*, building God's kingdom on Earth is the duty of every Christian. Life of purity and acts of kindness matter, and redemption leads to deliverance from death. Orthodoxy is reproachful of the West, with its interpretation of grace as an external quality which justifies man who is, by his nature, not just, but who can be rewarded with grace. The concept of grace is rejected in the East. Grace does not take on a form of an external excuse, but remains an ontological transformation and divinization of man, and becomes the presence of God. The synergy of God's and human will does not allow for the separation of grace from human freedom. This particular grasp of the notion of grace results from theological disparity: according to the West grace has been created, though not separated from its source – the Holy Trinity; in the East grace is perceived exclusively as uncreated energy "Krzemień, (1972)".

## Eastern and Western Christians in an organization

On the basis of the review of the features specific for orthodox and catholic cultures it can be predicted that the presented differences exist and are visible in companies operating in culturally diverse regions. When translated into organizational reality they could mean that:

- in the context of *individual v. social aspect* of Christianity - for orthodox believers – a group is more important than an individual person, a group cannot be

wrong, the group's representation works for all the group members; while for catholic believers – an individual is responsible for his/her life and is independent from other members of the group, has ability to critical self-assessment and difficulty to create a group in organization;

- in the context of *didactics v. mysticism* - for orthodox believers – passive attitude is characteristic, authorities can make decisions concerning individuals without giving a reason standing behind them, no instructions are given; for catholic believers - active, rational and social attitude is specific, explaining and instructing is important;
- in the context of *rational v. irrational knowledge* - for orthodox believers - phenomena are uncognizable, rational arguments are not useful for attaining truth which has no logical nature; they have distaste for strict and conceptual thinking, they reveal preferences for emotional experiences and influencing subconsciousness; for catholic believers – rationalism, gaining knowledge by learning, appealing to intelligence and logic are distinctive;
- in the context of *dichotomy of freedom* - for orthodox believers – the only freedom possible to achieve by humans is spiritual, the necessity of choices limits human liberty; for catholic believers – freedom means the freedom of choice which together with responsibility is the most important value;
- in the context of *grace v. merit* - for orthodox believers- any award results from approaching to organizational power or authorities. For being awarded individual must change and fit to its expectations; for catholic believers - to deserve an award men should take actions which lead to reward. Any reward is always a natural consequence of desirable behavior.

## Religion driven values in ABW SUPERBRUK

For discovering whether cultural differences between orthodox and catholic religion are contributory in a work place, the empirical investigation was undertaken. In March 2009 one of the managers of ABW SUPERBRUK – the enterprise operating in a very diverse part of Podlasie region was questioned on the differences between orthodox and catholic believers in the company. This company - producer of road building materials - came into being in 1992. In the next years the company started to expand its market systematically. After two years from starting with the first production line, the second line was launched. In 2003 the decision about modernizing the production system was made. Due to it the third production line was activated and its efficiency was 2,5 times bigger than the other lines. It resulted in turning the first line off. In the last four years the production took place only on the second and third line. In 2008 the fourth line was finally designed. It will be built in spring 2010.

The structure of SUPERBRUK company includes two sections – production and service. The production section comprises of lumps production, the service section –

making pavements, roads, car parks, alleys in housing estates, driveways, etc. Three managers are also SUPERBRUK the owners. One of them is responsible for marketing and tenders as well as for sales, the second one – for investments, renovations, replacements, the third – for human resources management. The decisions are usually made without many formal procedures, the employees have got easy access to the managers. The employees' number is changeable - 68 are employed for long term and from 40 to 90 are seasonal workers. The company uses the outsourcing method when it is cost effective.

The interview with Krzysztof Bargłowski – ABW SUPERBRUK manager and owner - had in purpose the verification of the thesis on the influences on employees' behavior at work the culturally conditioned assumptions resulting from their religions.

Barbara Mazur: Are Catholics more individualistic at work than Orthodox employees?

Krzysztof Bargłowski: *When Catholics come to ask for increase of their wages they do this personally while Orthodox believers send their superior to negotiate for them. It seems that the relations among Orthodox believers are much stronger than among Catholics. The Orthodox managers stand more frequently for their orthodox subordinates than for the benefit of organization. In the history of the firm a following event took place: all the employees went on strike and the owners made up their minds to dismiss all of them and recruit employees the next day. The following morning all the Orthodox employees came to work while the Catholics delayed.*

B. Mazur: Do the Orthodox employees have any special characteristics as a group?

K. Bargłowski: *We have had Orthodox employees working in our firm from the very beginning. Some of them are very humble, they do not ask for increase of wages, they do not ask for promotion at work but they do not involve themselves in the development of the firm. They adopt passive attitude – when they are suggested to introduce changes, they usually refuse. They hardly accept changes and they adapt to a new situation only when they manage to transfer something well-known into the new situation.*

*The Orthodox prefer their coreligionists when new employees are hired by the enterprise. There was such a situation two years ago. The ABW SUPERBRUK owners noticed that the person who was delegated to recruit new workers during two years had been employing only Orthodox believers. The owners decided to take the function away from this person.*

B. Mazur: Is the approach to freedom different?

K. Bargłowski: *Let's take an example. Two automaticians work in the same department at our firm. One of them constantly improves something, looks for innovations in his job, the other changes nothing by himself, he does his job without doing anything additional that hasn't been recommended by his superior. The second does not take any responsibilities for innovations, prototypes, improvements. The first behaves differently –*

*he suggests changes, tries to modernize, he isn't afraid of any changes. He feels free to improve and develop.*

*Let's take another example. The main assumption of our firm is that the people should create relations and manage by themselves. The owners expect self-reliance and initiatives from the employees. And the Orthodox believers more often than Catholics wait for instructions or permissions.*

## Conclusions

In the interview with the ABW SUPERBRUK manager and the owner, the cultural differences between Catholics and Orthodox believers were generally confirmed. Among the strongest were: Catholic individualism and collectivism typical for Orthodox believers. Each of the cultural features might be either advantageous or troublesome in particular circumstances. Individualism may be perceived as inconvenient in case of team work but on the other hand it may result in creativity and inventiveness. Collectivism does not stand security for creativity, though it promises stability and certainty of existence. The outlined differences when properly managed, allow a company to keep balance in the quickly changing environment in which it operates. It means that introducing cultural diversity management is the solution for those who want to change the diversity into competitive advantage. Diversity management emerged as a distinct concept within the field of Human Resource Management only recently, in the 1980s'. Although American in origin, it found applications in all areas where multicultural corporations operate. Diversity management can be adapted to many different types of working environments and integrated into many different styles of managing.

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## Biographies

Barbara Mazur, PHD in philosophical studies. Since 1978 employed at the Technical University in Białystok: since 2000 – senior lecturer at the Chair of International Management in the Faculty of Management and Marketing at the University of Finance and Marketing in Białystok. In the latter for several years she has been also Head of the Department of Science, Foreign Affairs and Publications. In 1997 she completed an MA course in Management at the University of Greenwich in London. She has authored numerous papers on cultural aspects of management, published in Poland, Italy, Norway, Slovakia and Russian Federation. She has published three books so far (two in Polish – *Pejzaż kulturowy krajów Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej* and *Zarządzanie w warunkach różnorodności kulturowej* and one in English – *Introduction to international Business. Cultural approach to management*) and she's working on the next book about organizational culture in culturally diverse environments.

Krzysztof Bargłowski, ABW SUPERBRUK manager and co owner, completed the studies in engineering in Technical University in Białystok, He has worked for several years abroad (USA and Western Europe), and from the beginning of 1990s' he has been actively involved in developing the private sector of Polish economy. Before setting up ABW SUPERBRUK he run the network of supermarkets in Białystok In ABW SUPERBRUK he is responsible for technological side of the production – his is a supervisor of all production lines in the company.

