

The Structure of Russian Organizations

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This paper examines the extent to which the structure of Russian organizations is similar to that observed among organizations in the West. Data were obtained in 1995 from a sample of organizations in the greater Moscow area by means of a structured interview schedule administered to the chief executive officer within each organization. The interview schedule contained measures developed by the Aston Group which have been used widely in previous research. The structure of Russian organizations was evaluated in terms of a causal model based upon consistent findings of previous research in this area. The results suggest that the structure of Russian organizations differs in important ways from the type of structure observed in most Western organizations. The major differences are that size, specialization and formalization are positively associated with centralization in Russian organizations. It is suggested that the historical tradition of centralized rule in Russia and the criminal environment of current Russian organizations are, in part, responsible for this difference.

In his influential study of Russian managers under Communism, David Granick (1961, p. 280) concluded:

The Russian manager is a man with power, but he is no independent decision-maker. He is an organization man, filling a slot in an industrial bureaucracy which has lines reaching to the very heights of Soviet power. His production goals, his costs, and even his industrial research objectives are set for him.

Granick (1961, p. 27) also stated that "the manager has no possibility of starting his own business and gaining future financial independence." The situation in Russia is, of course, radically different today. Andrew Cowley (1995, p. 3) notes that for the first time in Russia's history the market is more powerful than the state: "Proportionately, Russia's state-owned sector is now smaller than Italy's." Gerber and Hout (1998, p. 6) note that "by the end of 1994, 65% of officially registered state and municipal enterprises were transformed to private ownership" and that this represents "a significant transformation of the Soviet economy."

The purpose of the present research is to examine the extent to which the structure of Russian organizations is similar to that observed among organizations in the West. There is reason to expect such similarity in structures. DiMaggio and Powell (1983) argue that organizations tend to imitate others considered to be similar and more successful. In restructuring their organizations to

compete in the new market economy, Russian managers might be expected to incorporate institutional understandings of what constitutes successful organizational structures in other market economies in order to increase the prospects of their survival (Meyer and Rowan 1977). Similarly, market transition theory (Nee 1996, p. 910) proposes that "the transition from one institutional form to another entails remaking the fundamental rules that shape economies, from formal regulations and laws to informal conventions and norms." A critical factor in this transformation is the emergence of a class of new managers and entrepreneurs who must "strive to institute new rules of competition and cooperation to meet the standards of the advanced market economies."

The United States and Western European countries have introduced programs to assist the transition process. For example, in 1994 the United States Information Agency began sponsoring its Business for Russia program in which managers from Russia were placed in internships with small- and medium-sized United States firms in order to "allow young Russian entrepreneurs to experience firsthand Western business practices and to see how decisions are made" (Swalley and Joselyn 1995, p. 1). In 1994 about 350 Russians served as interns in eleven United States cities. From 1991 to 1995, schools of business and MBA programs, imitating United States and comparable Western European academic programs, were established in the institutions of higher education across Russia, and international law and audit firms opened branches in Moscow and other large cities. Child and Czegledy (1996, p. 170) note that the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, a key provider of financial resources in the privatization program in Russia, expects major changes in the forms of organization and in the managerial competencies to support these new forms of organization.

Finally, research undertaken in other Eastern European countries with respect to changes in organizational structure may also be relevant for understanding the transition process in Russia. Many of these countries began the transition process before Russia did, and their experiences with foreign direct investment and the privatization of state enterprises may therefore serve as examples. Czegledy (1996, p. 329) describes how foreign direct investment often results in the incorporation of Western practices: "It is through the leadership of [Western] executive-level managers that most processes of organizational change are envisaged." Nilsson (1996) describes the substantial organizational changes that accompanied the buying of an East German firm by a large Swedish construction combine. A Swede was appointed CEO, emphasis was placed on production and decentralization, and "a new organizational structure, supported by computerized management accounting systems, was to be introduced to achieve this goal" (Nilsson 1996, p. 298). Soulsby and Clark (1996, p. 240) studied four former state enterprises in the Czech Republic that had been

privatized and found that "they all adopted variations of the divisional form, which they perceived to be the typical structure of the successful Western company." To summarize, there is reason to believe that the structure of Russian organizations would be similar to those in the West on the basis of current institutional and market transition theories, the actions of Western countries to assist in the transition process, and the experiences of organizations in other East European countries.

On the other hand, there is also good reason to expect that the structures of Russian organizations will differ significantly from those observed in Western organizations. The modern civilization paradigm portrays Russia as a unique civilization that "clashes with" (Huntington 1996) or exists "aside from" (Panarin 1995) the values of Western civilization. As Moshchelkov (1996, p. 129) points out, "The contemporary transformational processes in Russia take place under the essential influence of a world (external) trend, but along with its own internal laws of development." In contrast to Western practices of governance which emphasize the supremacy of rules, decentralization, and rationalization, Russian social organization at all levels could be effectively held together "by exceptionally able rulers" (Riasanovsky 1993, p. 40). The long-standing tradition of authoritarian centralized governance that had its origins in the unlimited power of the Moscovite tsars and emperors found a continuity in the heavily centralized "Soviet society" (Kerblay 1983), "Leninist state" (Chirot 1987), and the "redistributively integrated economy" (Szelenyi and Kostello 1996). As Hickson and Pugh (1995, pp. 123–24) note, the Russian model of management "took shape in a culture that, both under the tsars and before the tsars, had no real experience of anything other than autocracy." Because of this long tradition of centralized rule, Moshchelkov (1996, p. 129) argues that the utilization of authoritarian managerial practices in contemporary Russia is consistent with the unique nature of Russian civilization. In this respect, the former First Deputy Prime Minister and close Yeltsin associate Boris Nemtsov recently defined the distinctive nature of Russian capitalism by describing it as "oligarchical capitalism."

An additional factor making Russian organizations different from their Western counterparts concerns the fact that almost no new business leaders, free from the communist *nomenklatura* experience, have emerged in Russia to date. Rather, the contemporary class of new Russian managers and entrepreneurs is firmly rooted in the old communist cadres and therefore the product of the unique Soviet type of economic, educational, professional, and managerial experience (Savateeva 1994; Gubin 1995; Gerber and Hout 1998). Thus, the transition to a market economy in Russia has been described as a process of "the enfranchisement of *nomenklatura*," by which the communist *nomenklatura* has transformed itself into capitalist entrepreneurs (Gubin and Kostiouchenko 1997; Mitzal 1993; Rona-Tas 1994). This is the reason, in part, that Vlachoutsicos and

Lawrence (1996, p. 312) describe Russia's move towards a market economy as "disappointing, even for those who anticipated the magnitude and difficulty of the changes that were required." They note that the reform undertaken by the Russian government failed to address: (1) the need for radical restructuring of the large state enterprises, (2) the almost total absence of any distribution or marketing institutions in the old Russian economy, and (3) the lack of training and experience of Russian managers in management skills and techniques key to a market economy. As a result, many privatized enterprises in Russia "have been largely frozen in place" (Vlachoutsicos and Lawrence 1996, p. 317). Similarly, Grancelli (1996, p. 6) argues that "socialist enterprises were imbued with values rather different from the 'rationalized myths' of Western culture" which has resulted in many elements of continuity in the management of organizations despite the privatization programs now under way. In their study of the restructuring of Czech enterprises described above, Soulsby and Clark (1996, p. 240) conclude: "In their enthusiasm to make a clean break from the past, the degree of decentralization introduced with the new divisions proved to be too sudden and radical . . . so the structure was amended and recentralized."

Finally, Villingier (1996) has described the highly turbulent conditions surrounding the transition to a market economy and concludes that "the extreme environmental complexity and turbulence could prevent successful learning, and the consequent uncertainty might encourage managers to stick to 'their old' practices." Adding to this turbulent environment is the role of criminal activities in Russia (Eberwein and Tholen 1997). As Gubin (1995, p. 22) notes, "Russia is arbitrarily run by three huge corporations: executive state bureaucracies, business bureaucracies, and Mafia syndicates." Cowley (1995, p. 20) states that "In Russian business it is often hard to draw a clear line between normal business practices and criminality." Hersh (1994, p. 66) cites research showing that "forty percent of private businesses and sixty percent of state-owned companies have been corrupted by organized crime" and that "the Russian Mafia may own half the nation's commercial banks and 50 to 80 percent of the shops, hotels, warehouses, depots, and service industries in Moscow." Radaev (1994b, p. 21) conducted a study of entrepreneurs based upon a representative sample of private enterprises in Moscow and recorded how frequently these entrepreneurs encountered extortion from bureaucrats. He found that almost one-third encountered extortion frequently and almost half were occasional victims. Rudnev and Illesh (1994) report that of the officials sued for corruption in the Russian courts in 1993, 43 percent were employees of the executive organs of government and 26 percent were employees of the procurator and police offices. To summarize, there is reason to expect that the structure of Russian organizations would be different from those in the West because of the authoritarian tradition, enfranchisement of the *nomenklatura*, and the criminal environment.

Method

Data were obtained in 1995 from a sample of organizations in the greater Moscow area of Russia by means of a structured interview schedule administered to the chief executive officer within each organization. The interview schedule was translated into Russian and then successfully back-translated, and all interviews were conducted by one of the authors whose native language is Russian. In two cases, the interview schedule was left with the respondent who filled it out and mailed it to the university in the United States. Potential respondents were contacted by telephone and asked for an appointment at which time they were given a letter explaining the study objectives, guaranteeing them and their organizations complete anonymity, and stipulating that they could refuse to participate at any time and for any reason. Two potential respondents declined to participate in the study.

No complete listing of organizations in Moscow existed at the time of the study, so a purposive sample was selected in an effort to obtain diverse types of organizations which also reflected the major differences in the origins of organizations in present-day Russia. The sample included (1) eight older governmental organizations that had experienced no property changes after the privatization of the Russian economy, (2) eight former governmental organizations that had been recently transformed into private enterprises as a result of the break-up of larger organizations, (3) five organizations founded with foreign capital and having foreign ownership and/or management, and (4) fourteen new private companies founded by one or more Russian citizens. The sample was selected with the help and advice of officials from a ministry of state and by members of the Department of Research Methods, Faculty of Sociology, at Moscow State University. The sample, which consists of 35 organizations, contains banks, hospitals, hotels, trading companies, manufacturing organizations, construction companies, a newspaper, a computer company, an audit firm, a tourist company, and four divisions of the state government.

A potential problem in this type of research concerns whether respondents understand the concepts employed in the interview and consider the questions relevant to their particular organization. Fortunately, the respondents showed an unusual level of interest in the study and the questions asked. All of the respondents requested a copy of the study results, and most of them asked if their organizations were structured differently from those in the United States. These comments, along with their voluntary explanations for why their organizations were structured as they were, suggest that the respondents found the questions asked to be meaningful, important, and relevant for their organizations.

Organizational Structure

Henry Mintzberg's (1979, p. 2) frequently cited description of organizational structure provided the basis for the selection of variables and measures used in this research:

Every organized human activity—from the making of pots to the placing of a man on the moon—gives rise to two fundamental and opposing requirements: the division of labor into various tasks to be performed and the coordination of these tasks to accomplish the activity. The structure of an organization can be defined simply as the sum total of the ways in which it divides its labor into distinct tasks and then achieves coordination among them.

A great deal of research has been conducted which examines the variations in organizational structure resulting from efforts to minimize coordination and control costs. Marsden, Cook, and Kalleberg (1994, p. 912) note that "the empirical documentation undergirding these models remains among the strongest in the literature on organizations." Similarly, Lex Donaldson (1996, p. 134) believes that this research "points unequivocally to the validity of generalizations" that apply across industries and across nations. The present research examines the relationships among four major characteristics of organizational structure employing the most commonly utilized measures identified in this literature.

Blau and Schoenherr (1971, p. 57) argue that "size is the most important condition affecting the structure of organizations," and similar conclusions have been reached by Pugh, Hickson, Hinings, and Turner (1969) and Donaldson (1996). Blau's influential theory of organizational structure (1970, 1972) states that the increasing size of organizations is associated with increasing complexity (differentiation) and that both create administrative problems of coordination and control. In such situations, organizations increasingly become decentralized and rely upon impersonal mechanisms of coordination and control (Blau and Schoenherr 1971; Pugh et al. 1969; Child 1972; Zey-Ferrell 1979; Donaldson 1995, 1996). Blau and Meyer (1987, p. 183) argue that "throughout much of the history of modern organizations, there has been a diminution of face-to-face command authority and a corresponding rise of alternative and indirect means of securing coordination and control." Organizational *Size* is measured by the log-10 transformation of the number of employees in the organization. The justification for the use of the log transformation in the present analysis is that in every relationship involving size, the scatterplots indicated that the logged measure better fit the assumptions of linearity and homoscedasticity (Kimberly 1976).

The division of labor into different tasks across different levels of personnel is measured in terms of the *Specialization* scale originally developed by the Aston researchers (Pugh, Hickson, Hinings, and Turner 1968; Inkson, Pugh, and Hickson 1970). An organization received a score on this scale corresponding to

the number of separate functions for which there was a specialist employed. This scale evidenced high reliability ($\alpha = .81$). Two independent meta-analytic reviews of the published literature have shown that size is positively related to this measure of specialization across widely differing types of organizations located in many different countries. Miller (1987) analyzed 27 published studies which provided a total sample of 1,066 organizations located in 11 different countries. A positive relationship was obtained in all of these studies, and neither type of organization nor country was a significant moderator variable that affected significantly these relationships. Similarly, Donaldson (1996, p. 138) analyzed 40 studies which used this measure conducted in 16 different countries which included samples of manufacturing organizations, service organizations, and a mixture of manufacturing and service organizations. A positive association between size and specialization was also obtained in all of these studies.

Formalization is one of the most studied impersonal mechanisms of control and coordination. Formalization refers to the established system of rules, regulations, and procedures utilized by the organization to ensure uniformity of operations and make possible the coordination and control of the various organizational activities (Blau and Scott 1962; Hage and Aiken 1967; Pugh et al. 1968; Blau and Schoenherr 1971; Miller and Sharda 1995). Formalization was measured by means of the scale originally developed by the Aston researchers (Pugh et al. 1968; Inkson et al. 1970). This scale measures the extent to which communications, rules, and procedures are written down and filed. This scale evidenced a moderately high reliability coefficient (α) of .69. Two independent meta-analytic reviews of the research literature have shown that size is consistently and positively related to this measure of formalization in very different types of organizations located in very different countries. Miller (1987) analyzed 24 published studies which provided a total sample of 834 organizations from 10 different countries. A positive correlation was found in all but one of the studies. Neither type of organization nor country was a significant moderator variable affecting these relationships. Similarly, Donaldson (1996) analyzed 19 studies conducted in 9 different countries and found positive correlation between size and this measure of formalization in all but one of the studies.

Centralization is an indication of the distribution of power in an organization, and the most studied aspect concerns the right to make decisions. If most decisions are made at the top of the authority hierarchy, the organization is said to be centralized and control is exercised by the CEO and/or the board of directors (Hall 1999, p. 74). A consistent finding in most studies is the negative relationship between centralization and size. However, such decentralization of decision-making often necessitates the introduction of impersonal mechanisms of control, such as formalization, to reduce the risks involved. In general, the previous research literature shows that centralization and formalization are *alter-*

native methods of control. Centralization is measured by the scale originally developed by the Aston researchers (Pugh et al. 1968; Inkson et al. 1970). The organization's score is the number of specific decisions the chief executive officer either followed, made him/herself, or delegated to others below him/her in the hierarchy from a list of twenty-three key decisions. This scale also evidenced high reliability ($\alpha = .88$) in the present study. A meta-analysis of the published literature reporting a relationship between size, and this measure of centralization was conducted by Miller (1987). The analysis was based upon 25 studies which provided a total sample of 885 organizations in 11 different countries. A negative relationship was reported in 20 of these studies, and these relationships were not affected significantly by the effects of type of organization or country.

The theoretical model based upon this previous research appears in Figure 1. Size and specialization are assumed to have both direct and indirect effects upon centralization. Both also have direct effects upon formalization, which in turn also has a direct effect upon centralization. The argument is that increases in either (or both) size and specialization lead to an increase in formalization as an impersonal mechanism of control. With increased impersonal control, decision making can be decentralized. Hence, the overall effects of increases in size and specialization should be to increase formalization and to lessen centralization. Therefore, increasing size, specialization, and formalization should all reduce centralized control.

Results

Table 1 contains the zero-order correlation coefficients and univariate statistics for the variables in the Russian sample. It will be noted that none of these relationships is statistically significant, although this may be partly a function of the small sample size. Though nonsignificant, the *pattern* of relationships among the structural variables suggests possible differences in the way organizations are structured in Russia. Only one of these relationships is consistent with the results of previous research—greater size is associated positively with greater formalization. However, Russian organizations differ from most of the published research results in the area in *all* of the other relationships.

Table 2 presents the regression coefficients for the relationships among the structural variables depicted in Figure 1. These coefficients show the effect of one variable on another when all of the other variables in the model have been controlled and can, therefore, differ from the zero-order correlations. It will be noted that none of these coefficients is significant statistically and that the model explains very little of the variance in specialization, formalization, or centralization. Again, Russian organizations deviate from the pattern observed in most previous research in this area. Of most interest in this respect is the finding that greater size, specialization, and formalization are all associated with *greater*

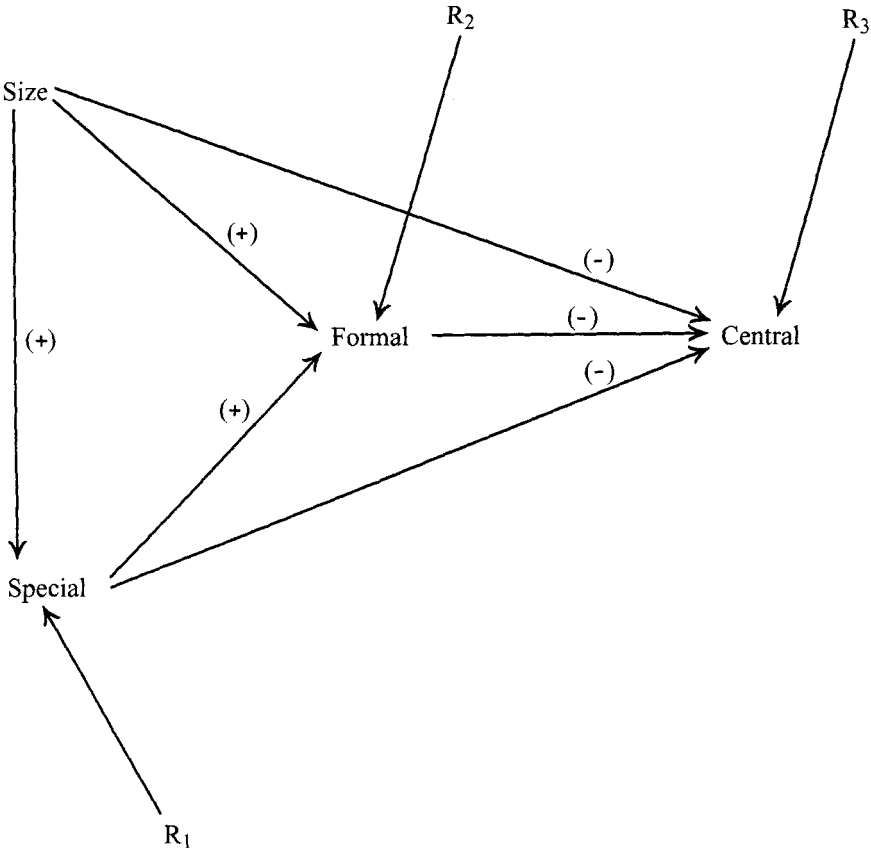


Fig. 1. Causal model of organizational structure.

Table 1
Zero-Order Correlations, Means, and Standard Deviations for Structural Characteristics of Organizations in Russia

Variable	Mean	S.D.	Size	Special	Formal	Central
Size	1.947	.485	—			
Special	15.057	2.449	-.121	—		
Formal	12.371	2.647	.314	-.040	—	
Central	37.114	8.522	.172	.200	.238	—

Table 2
Relationships (Standardized Regression Coefficients)
among Variables in the Causal Model

Variables		Coefficients		
Dependent	Independent	β	SE	R ²
Special	Size	-.121	.173	.015
Formal	Size	.314	.166	.099
	Special	-.002	.166	
Central	Size	.135	.173	.117
	Special	.225	.165	
	Formal	.205	.172	

centralization of decision making in Russian organizations. These same three variables are all associated with *less* centralization in most previous studies—which formed the basis of the theoretical model evaluated herein.

Discussion and Conclusions

The consistent differences in the direction of these relationships, although nonsignificant statistically, suggest that Russian organizations are structured differently than their Western counterparts. We believe that managers in present-day Russia try to exert personal control over their organizations through the centralization of decision making. This is in contrast to Western organizations where impersonal control is achieved through decentralization. Comments made by the respondents, plus the results from other studies conducted in Russia at about the same time as the present study, provide the basis for this interpretation.

Interviews with the Russian managers in this study illustrate both the role of tradition and the effects of the criminal environment as reasons for their exercising personal control. Nearly all of these respondents were former party members with substantial previous experience in the Communist Party and Komsomol apparatus. Most of them still believed in the basic organizational principal of the communist system: "the leader is responsible for everything." This was further substantiated in a recent poll of 277 top managers of Moscow organizations, which reported that 50 percent prefer to make the main decisions involving their organization unilaterally (Radaev 1994a, p. 153). One of the respondents in the present study, the president of a large bank, was very candid in describing his managerial style: "My organization is extremely centralized it is

true. If my employees don't like it or disagree with me, I fire them." The vice-president of an insurance company was concerned with the degree of centralization in his organization: "Our company is the most centralized institution I have ever worked in. All decision are concentrated in the hands of the CEO. I bet you find this centralization in many other organizations in Russia."

The criminal environment has created additional problems for these managers. Most were very concerned about protecting their organizations from the infiltration of criminal elements. They indicated that a key problem is to recruit "trustworthy" employees and then institute personal control in an effort to insure their loyalty to the organization. One of the most influential Russian newspapers, *Kommersant'-DAILY*, reports on how newly established Russian firms have attempted to assess the loyalty of their employees by collecting information about their contacts, installing unseen cameras at work, and even using so-called "trust detectors" (Ivanuschenkova 1995, p. 8). Another respondent in this study, the vice-president of a bank, reported: "Our bank is an extremely centralized institution. Every decision requires coordination with the president. However, this might be the only possible way to exist, survive, and conduct business affairs in such a criminal environment with the high risk." Similarly, the CEO of a large construction materials company responded, "In such an unstable and criminal situation, I hire only people I personally know or at the recommendation of the people I personally know and can trust."

Because of this, most of the managers in this study had little faith in the effectiveness of rules and regulations (formalization) for controlling employee behavior. They felt there was ample evidence (i.e., corruption, extortion, low level of law enforcement) that rules did not work at the level of Russian society, so there was little reason to believe that they would work at the organizational level. In this respect, a recent opinion poll reported that 75 percent of the CEOs of Russian private enterprises believed that business laws and regulations "do not work" (Khahatulina 1994, p. 46). Another respondent in this study, the CEO of a large joint-venture company with extensive international experience, reported:

The Russian employees are well educated and can learn new things very quickly. Their technical and computer skills are superb. However, if I release my tight personal control, I am not sure that the employees will follow the company rules. The problem is that most of the Russian employees I have been working with are suited (conditioned) to personal guidance and constant control. They are not trained to operate within a framework of written rules and instructions.

Thus, it would appear that these managers have adopted an historically familiar organizational structure in which they have relied upon personal control as a method of coping with the contemporary situation. In the new economic environment of Russia, attempts to introduce "Western" models of organization coexist and often conflict with the more traditional modes of organization char-

acteristic of Russia historically. The situation is complicated further by the criminal environment and general uncertainty pervading the society. The results of this research suggest that the structure of Russian organizations reflects, in part, the effects of these unique conditions.

If this interpretation is correct, the findings of this research have implications for current organization theory. Most of the research on organizational structure reviewed earlier in this paper has supported the "culture-free" hypothesis. This hypothesis argues that the relationships among the major components of organizational structure are similar across very different societies, and researchers report relatively consistent relationships in a large number of different national contexts in support of this hypothesis (Miller 1987; Donaldson 1995). In this respect, two of the originators of this hypothesis (Hickson and Pugh 1995, p. 287) recently stated that "The uniformity of these processes happening in all countries is quite striking." However, the marked differences in the way Russian organizations are structured provide an important limitation on the generality of the "culture-free" hypothesis. Cultural differences in basic values and ways of thinking about organizations can result in the same types of organizations exhibiting very different structures in different national contexts. Indeed, Russian organizations provide an example of the fact that organizations are also "culture-bound."

Finally, there are some weaknesses in the present study that could be addressed by future research. First, the sample is small and contains very heterogeneous types of organizations reflecting different bases of origin. Because of this, subsample comparisons involving different types of organizations, organizations in different industries, and/or organizations with different origins were not possible due to the very small numbers involved. Second, all of the organizations were selected from the greater Moscow area, and it may be the case that organizations in other areas in Russia would exhibit different structural configurations. Third, and most important, the social and economic environment in Russia continues to change rapidly, and this presents additional constraints and challenges for the managers. If the interpretation offered in this paper is correct, there is reason to expect additional changes in the structure of Russian organizations.

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