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**GHOSTING IN LABOUR RELATIONS AS AN ORGANIZATIONAL  
ALIENATION**

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*Abstract*

Ghosting in labour relations is a new trend in human behavior in relation to the organization recorded by foreign and domestic employers. Critical understanding of economic, social, technological and organizational factors of ghosting made it possible to conclude that there are no certain grounds for explaining its practice in the organization. Philosophical approach to ghosting as a groundless termination of labour relations - both existing and potential - made it possible to consider this phenomenon in the integrity, to reveal its essential features characteristic of alienation and to establish universal means of overcoming it as a form of alienation. Labour ghosting is defined by a special form of organizational alienation - a person's alienation from the organization in which employee's freedom of action in labour relations is not limited to their responsibility. The problem of labour ghosting prospects in the organization is outlined. The article substances overcoming ghosting by "ad hoc" organizational structure, cultivating transparency and involvement in the organization and stimulating potential ghosts with flexible working conditions.

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**Keywords:** Labour ghosting, organization, organizational relations, organizational alienation, responsibility.



## 1. Introduction

Ghosting in labour relations (labour ghosting) - both potential and existing in foreign and domestic practice - is a fairly new and insufficiently studied phenomenon. Analytical assessment and overcoming of ghosting should be approached in a dialectical way, not reducing this phenomenon to negative interpretation, but taking into account labour ghosting opportunities in developing organizational relations.

Ghosting (from the English *ghost*) was a trend in 2018 labour relations: almost half of UK recruiters from over 600 LinkedIn responses “faced an increase in the number of ghosts” (Smith, 2019). According to a survey of British employers, “every tenth employee refused to be interviewed at the last minute, and this figure reached 17.7% among Millennials”. 10% of current employees” were also ghosts in relation to their employer. Ghosting was recorded in the USA; this phenomenon is mentioned in the Beige Book, an analytical report of the Federal Reserve System on assessing the economic situation in 12 districts in November 2018 (The Beige Book..., 2018).

A survey conducted by Head Hunter among 287 employees in February 2019 confirmed that ghosting phenomena exists in Russia. As a result of the study, it was found that 59% of responses encountered ghosting, and most of the cases of “ghostly behaviour” were demonstrated by the organization potential employees. So, in 66% of cases, job seekers stopped contacting the employer after the interview; 49% did it after receiving a job offer; 26% of employees stopped coming to work and did not contact the company within a few days after companies officially hired them, and in 17% of cases employees stopped contacts with companies within a few weeks after it started; in 14% of cases ghosting was demonstrated by employees who had been working in the company for a long time and only 10% of employees did not encounter the fact of ghosting (Ghosting: the results of a survey of employers, 2019).

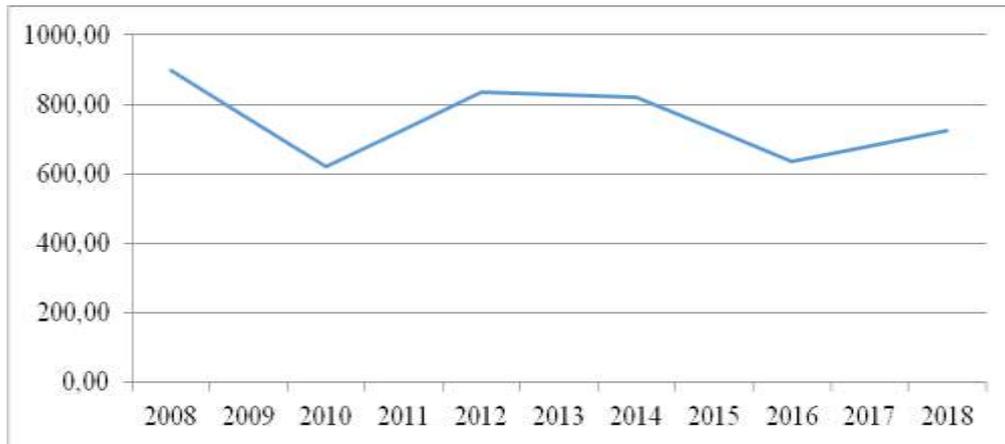
## 2. Problem Statement

### 2.1. Economic factors of ghosting

Foreign practices connect ghosting in labour relations with economic factors. In particular, researchers in the UK explain this phenomenon by increase in the number of vacancies (UK Job Vacancies..., 2019), which determines the advantages of applicants over employers (Smith, 2019).

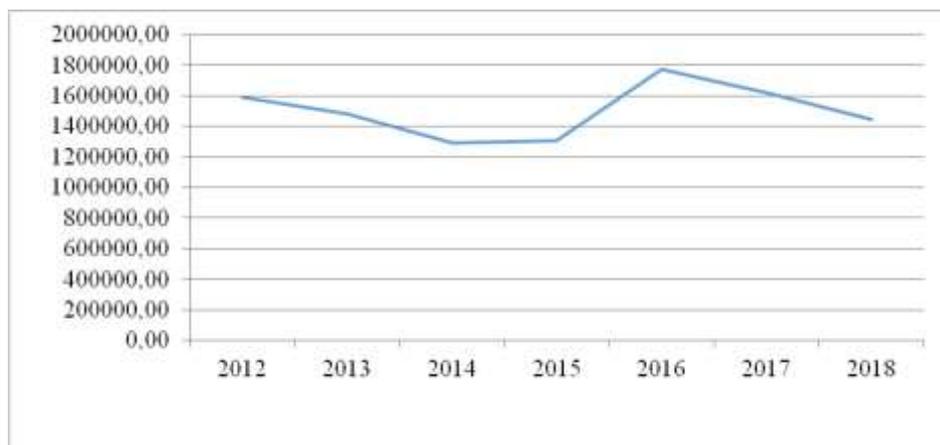
To analyze and assess the dynamics of the total number of vacancies in the Russian labour market, different databases were used (Rosstat, Rostrud and HeadHunter group). This statistics makes it possible to consider the situation from different angles and identify trends in its development (Figure 01).

The source of data on the need of organizations for employees to fill vacant jobs was the reporting of the Federal state statistics service, formed on the basis of a sample survey of organizations conducted every two years, respectively, for even periods from 2008 to 2018. This survey included organizations (not counting small businesses) engaged in all types of economic activities, except organizations whose main activity is financial activity; public administration and military security; social insurance; activities of public associations and extraterritorial organizations (On the number and needs of organizations in workers by occupational groups, 2019). The use of linear interpolation (Microsoft Excel) made it possible to calculate data in the specified time interval for odd periods.



**Figure 01.** Need of the organization in workers in the Russian Federation, thousand people Source: revised and supplemented by the authors on the basis of Rosstat (On the number and needs of organizations in workers by occupational groups, 2019)

Rostrud data were a source of information on the situation in the registered labour market about the need for workers declared by employers for the period from 01 January 2012 to 01 May 2019 and placed in the public domain (Statistical information on the situation in the registered labour market, 2019). In Rostrud database the relevant information is presented by month at the end of the period. In this regard, the average annual value of the need for employees declared by employers in the period from 2012 to 2018 was calculated so as to correctly compare them with the profile of Rosstat vacancies. Figure 2 shows the need for workers in Russia, declared by employers (vertical axis shows the quantitative expression of the need, horizontal axis reflects the period of measurement).



**Figure 02.** Employers' declared need for employees in Russia Source: revised and supplemented by the authors on the basis of (Rostrud) (Statistical information on the situation in the registered labour market, 2019)

The alternative labour market research carried out by Head Hunter group of companies is an additional evidence of the lack of stable growth in the total number of vacancies. These statistics data are formed by months of the current year relative to the same period last year. Figure 03 shows the dynamics

of the total number of vacancies in the Russian Federation, demonstrating change in the employer's demand for an employee in the market as a whole for all professional areas (the vertical axis contains the value in percentage, the horizontal reflects the period).



**Figure 03.** Dynamics of the employer's demand for an employee in Russia

Source: revised and supplemented by the authors on the basis of (Statistics on Russia, 2019) (Hh.ru)

The decrease in vacancy growth has been observed since about December 2018. For the first time in recent years, a negative dynamics of vacancy growth was recorded in May 2019, amounting to 4 %, while the maximum rate of vacancy growth for the specified period was fixed at 57% in June 2018 compared to June 2017 (Statistics on Russia, 2019).

Thus, the situation in the Russian labour market differs from the similar situation in the UK. Analysis of the total number of vacancies in the Russian labour market revealed, firstly, the lack of linear growth in demand for employees and, secondly, unstable nature of changes in the total number of vacancies. Therefore, the dynamics of the total number of vacancies in Russia cannot be the only reason for labour ghosting. It is also necessary to take into account the relative informativeness of this indicator due to the relevance of the information provided by enterprises on the number of vacancies.

## 2.2.Social and technological factors of ghosting

The recourse to socio-technological factors of labour ghosting is due to the fact that this phenomenon is usually demonstrated by representatives of a certain generation of applicants, whose behaviour was influenced by the electronic and digital environment. Information technology development has allowed leveling physical boundaries and changing the format of communication: due to the virtualization of communication, the number of face-to-face contacts has decreased. To a greater extent, high-tech changes have engulfed the younger generation.

A joint study by Google and Ipsos in 2016 revealed that 98% of young people use the Internet every day, while the national average was 65%. At the same time, 57% of young people aged 13 to 24 spend time on social networking sites and applications, a quarter of this age respondents check information on social networks every 30 minutes, 27% of respondents spend more than 5 hours a day on social networks (How the new generation lives: statistics on Russian youth, 2016).

Social media and Internet instant messaging services have increased the possibility of one-way disconnection without explaining the reasons. Technologically, the interruption of communication was the norm of virtual communication, as well as the fact that "the ability to communicate anonymously does not require mandatory responsibility for their actions and words" (Ryumshina, 2016, p. 84).

### **2.3. Organizational factors of ghosting**

The organizational factor of ghosting can be inefficient communication: lack of mutual understanding, interaction with others as an exchange of meanings, lack of operational anti-hierarchical feedback, and, as a consequence, difficulties in relations between employees and employers. One way or another, the organizational factors of labour ghosting also manifest the influence of technological factors.

According to the Headhunter research service, the main reason for ghosting from the point of view of the vast majority of Russian employers – 82 % – is the fact that applicants or employees are not determined enough to directly state "that they are not satisfied with anything." 36 % of employers associate ghosting with unexpected finding of more interesting / high-paying job by the applicant. 21% of employers say that another reason for ghosting is "too high level of stress, when it is easier not to show up for work than to explain anything. Among other reasons of ghosting specified by employers are: "irresponsibility", "internal complexes connected with new team", "individually, the reasons are usually different and not always logical", "modern youth infantilism" and "low culture of business communication". All the above mentioned reasons constitute 9%. 7% of respondents' votes were divided between temporary or permanent loss of working capacity and difficulty to answer (Ghosting: the results of a survey of employers, 2019). Consequently, the dominant causes of labour ghosting are value and psychological factors.

Thus, a critical analysis of economic, socio-technological and organizational factors of labour ghosting enables the authors to conclude that separately considered reasons cannot be the basis for this phenomenon in Russia. This leads to the expediency of applying to a universal approach which makes it possible to use a holistic understanding of ghosting in labour relations.

## **3. Research Questions**

### **3.1. Ghosting in labour relations as organizational alienation**

The philosophical approach to labour ghosting as groundless termination of relations with the organization makes it possible to consider it as a form of organizational alienation. From the standpoint of philosophy, "alienation" represents a certain objectification of "qualities, results of activity and relations of people, which opposes them as a superior force and turns them from a subject into an object of its influence" (New philosophical encyclopedia..., 2010, p. 18). In management, "alienation" is based on

delegation of authority – an act of conscious human action. The roots of alienation go to the theory of social contract of the new time (as interpreted by J.-J. Rousseau, D. Locke, T. Hobbes, K. Helvetius), suggesting the transfer of human rights to the state – the bearer of supreme power. "Human beings" explained Hobbes (2010), must strive for peace, must agree to give up the right for everything to the extent that is necessary in the interests of peace and self-defense; and be content with such a degree of freedom in relation to other people, which these human beings would allow other people in relation to them; mutual transfer of rights is what people call a contract.

In the context of human performance of labour functions in the organization, the concept of "alienation" is a form of a person's self-alienation, which is implemented in "a person's alienation from ..." – a human being, process and result of labour: "people's own activity becomes alien to them; these people no longer dominate their activity: such activity turns into alien power which oppresses the person" (Marx & Engels, 1955, p. 31).

Alienation as a phenomenon of human beings' detachment from themselves is based on socio-economic factors. According to Marx's (1956) concept, alienation as devaluation of a person is shown in the relation to a product – result of work "as to the alien subject dominating a human being", and in production activity – as "the relation of workers to their own activity as something alien, not belonging to them" (p. 564) therefore, their generic essence is alienated from human beings.

Alienation is universal, it permeates people's attitude to their work, to the things they consume, to the state, to their neighbours, and to themselves (Fromm, 2015). Different categories of workers can be subjected to the phenomenon of alienation. According to Fromm (2015), alienation is inherent in the worker and the Manager-administrator and / or owner of the enterprise. Alienation in capitalist society is explained by the monotony of labour, the objectification of the world in conditions of mass industrial production and bureaucratization of the organizational structure. The nature of alienation cannot be fully understood without taking into account one feature of modern life: the routine and disregard of fundamental problems of human existence fundamental problems. In modern society, the phenomenon of alienation is realized in an unstable environment under the influence of an ever-increasing information flow. The problem of alienation in the information society is an independent subject of research (Ignatov, 2015; Isachenko, 2018). Ghosting as a real process in labour relations is a new form of alienation: alienation of a person from the organization and organizational potential or existing relations in which the freedom of labour action is not balanced by responsibility.

### **3.2. Labour ghosting perspectives**

On the one hand, the prospect of labour ghosting spreading is determined by the expected mass arrival of young people to the labour market, who are well-integrated into the high – tech digital environment-Millennials, generation Y (Adkins, 2016) and the next generation Z ("IGen", "digital generation", "network generation") (Stillman & Stillman, 2017), whose values were formed in the conditions and under the influence of the electronic network environment. According to experts, by 2020, 50% of the labour force will be Millennials, and 20% representatives of generation Z; by 2025 the number of the first will reach 75 % (Balabanyuk, 2016, p. 49) in the total labour force.

On the other hand, it should be noted that Howe and William Strauss's theory of generations N, in the context of which the evaluation of the prospects of the labour force are assessed, determines not only the cyclical nature of generational change and differences in the value orientations of different generations representatives, but also provides for changes in attitudes and human behaviour as people are getting older resulting in the so-called "generational diagonal" (Howe & Strauss, 2007, p. 45). In addition, we should not ignore the fluctuations in labour mobility and its decline with age: "among young people (up to 30 years), the intensity of external mobility exceeds 25 %, and internal mobility reaches 8.5 %, while among the elderly (50 years and older), similar indicators are only 9.5 and 3%, respectively" (Gimpelson, Kapelyushnikov, & Sharunina, 2016, p. 215).

## **4. Purpose of the Study**

### **4.1. The problem of removing ghosting as organizational alienation**

The approach to labour ghosting as an organizational alienation involves solution of this problem from the perspective of overcoming (removing) alienation, including the identification of factors contributing to its elimination or prevention.

#### **4.1.1. Principle of transparency**

Transparency is a common property of communication in the organization, which characterizes this process as "visible through" because organizational interactions (relations) are open for analysis, evaluation, logical conclusion, explanation and regulation, and rejection of double standards. The principle of transparency makes it possible to assess organizational relations as true-corresponding to reality, as they really are. Transparency in this context has a moral nature; it is an imperative of communication in the organization, which increases the degree of trust and mutual understanding of various parties concerned.

Recourse to the principle of transparency in overcoming the institutional alienation has advantages for ghosts, and for the company. "Transparency is necessary for those employees who are offended. They can demand being compensated or at least their experience being recognized" (Henriques, 2007, p. 3). The argument in favour of the principle of transparency from the business perspective is based on reducing transaction costs, including legal and financial costs associated with the absence of an employee in the workplace and hiring a new one.

However, even in conditions of cultivating the principle of transparency in the organization, it is necessary to consider difficulties of introducing this interaction. The practice of absolute honesty and utmost transparency principle in the investment company Bridgewater Associates-the fifth most important in the United States according to Fortune-showed that the process of employees adapting to this communication principle can take up to 18 months. Everything depends on the person's individual characteristics (Dalio, 2017).

## **4.2. Transformation of the organizational structure**

In defining the concept of organizational structure transformation, the authors of the article proceed from the premise that the modern form of organizational alienation is manifested under the influence and in a complex, unstable, dynamically developing environment.

Bureaucratic organization, with its characteristic hierarchy, extreme formalization of organizational relations, standardization and adequate to the needs of industrialism (Weber, 1978; Mintzberg, 1979; Toffler, 1971; Crozier, 1997), does not imply freedom of labour. Bureaucratic system does not solve the problem of alienation, but supports it with a system of control: the alienated subject is absorbed by the form of alienated being (Marcuse, 1991). Bureaucracy is not able to respond quickly and flexibly to problems as challenges of the time, the emergence of which is inevitably accompanied by a constantly increasing flow of information. "Ad hoc" organization is relevant for such changing environment. The main coordinating mechanism of "ad hoc" organizations is mutual agreement (Mintzberg, 1979).

Toffler (1971) defines ad hoc organization as "the fast-moving, information-rich, kinetic organization of the future, filled with transient cells and extremely mobile individuals" (p. 144); "transience-high mobility between organizations, never-ending reorganizations within them, and a constant generation and decay of temporary work groupings" (p. 146).

Adhocracy is characterised by insignificantly formalized behaviour; it assumes use of interaction tools for mutual coordination (Mintzberg, 1979) and team work. This type of organizational form provides opportunity to timely establish anti-hierarchical feedback as an indicator of communication effectiveness and building organizational relationships based on the principle of transparency.

## **5. Research Methods**

To analyze and assess the dynamics of the total number of vacancies in the Russian labour market, different databases were used (Rosstat, Rostrud and HeadHunter group). This statistics makes it possible to consider the situation from different angles and identify trends in its development.

The source of data on the need of organizations for employees to fill vacant jobs was the reporting of the Federal state statistics service, formed on the basis of a sample survey of organizations conducted every two years, respectively, for even periods from 2008 to 2018.

## **6. Findings**

### **6.1. The concept of involvement**

The instrument of overcoming organizational alienation is determined by a person's involvement in the organization. The representatives of Marxism and Personalism philosophy referred to involvement as a means of overcoming economic alienation in "involving a person in the process of labour". They "opposed society capitalization and the cult of goods" and approved the need for "a person's self-realization through the process of labour" (Prokofieva, 2011, p. 496). Modern research and practical interest in increasing the level of staff involvement is associated with the awareness of person's value in the organization as the main source and driver of its competitiveness. Analysis of the variety of

methodological approaches to defining personnel involvement, its diagnosis, algorithmization, improvement and identification of business indicators and effects (Henriques, 2007; Hellevig, 2012; Aon Hewitt's Model of Employee Engagement, 2015; Bersin, 2015; Cheglakova & Kabalina, 2016; Dolgaya, 2017; Gromova, 2018) indicates the relevance of employee involvement problem as a manifestation of the attitude to the organization, work and Chief.

Involvement in order to overcome organizational alienation is implemented on the basis of transparency and implies recognition of interaction value and division of organizational goals; meaningful, emotional commitment to the organization, manifested in employee's behaviour and leading to increased productivity.

It is necessary to take into account that "digital aborigines" (Higa, 2016) act as ghosts and the main object of involvement, for whom digital existence is natural existence. So, it is recommended to virtualize the relationship between the person and the organization so as to identify employee's and organization's value. Encouraging potential ghosts by flexible schedule and remote work in accordance with current legislation (The labour code of the Russian Federation, 2019) in areas of work that allow remote execution of job functions, will emphasize recognition of employee's value by the organization and approve employee's personal responsibility, contributing to organizational relations development.

## 7. Conclusion

Thus, labour ghosting is a form of organizational alienation, i.e. alienation of the employee from the organization and both existing and potential organizational relations, in which freedom of employees' labour activities is not balanced by their responsibility. Understanding ghosting in labour relations requires taking into account the totality of various factors that affect its occurrence. To overcome ghosting as a form of organizational alienation, it is not enough to ignore the fact of its existence. It is also impossible to eliminate ghosting when returning to the state of the world "before high technologies" as the basis for transforming communication in everyday life. It is expedient to approach overcoming of labour ghosting from the position of transforming the attitude to the person in the organization, cultivating the principle of transparency and realizing the concept of involvement in the ad hoc environment. Ghosting should not be evaluated only negatively. It is necessary to take into account the potential risk of unjustified termination of labour relations.

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