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Cultural Dimensions and Leadership Styles Perceived by Future Managers: Differences between Slovenia and a Cluster of Central European Countries

Danijel Pučko, Tomaž Čater

University of Ljubljana, Faculty of Economics, Kardeljeva ploščad 17, 1000 Ljubljana;
danijel.pucko@ef.uni-lj.si; tomaz.cater@ef.uni-lj.si

The article contributes to the body of knowledge about the perceptions of future managers (i.e. business and engineering students) in both Slovenia and a cluster of Central European (CE) countries regarding actual cultural practices in their social environments, the value systems they possess and their attitudes to leadership styles. The main question addressed is whether future Slovenian managers are good representatives of the average future manager from CE (transitional) countries as far as their value system and attitudes to individual leadership styles are concerned.
The research results confirm that the Slovenian (potential) future managers perceive actual cultural practices in their environment rather differently from their counterparts from the cluster of CE countries. Two decades of transition from socialist/communist socio-economic systems were apparently not long enough periods to achieve a higher level of harmonisation of existing cultures. The relevant value systems held by the Slovenian (potential) future managers and the CE cluster's future managers still differ significantly. The Slovenian future managers have (statistically) significantly different attitudes to individual leadership styles than their counterparts in the CE countries' cluster. The smallest differences in perceptions between the two stated groups of (potential) future managers exist regarding their views on what are the most important traits and skills of managers.

Keywords: culture, value system, leadership style, Slovenia, Central European (transitional) countries

1 Introduction

The GLOBE research project was initiated at the Wharton Business School of the University of Pennsylvania in the early 1990s and investigates business leadership worldwide. It has become a basis for developing a worldwide GLOBE community. Many researchers have joined the GLOBE project whose main research objective is to determine the extent to which the practices and values of business leadership are universal and to which they are specific to a specific country or a cluster of countries (House et al., 2004: 3). They have found that cultural universal attributes as well as culturally contingent attributes exist, enabling them to form implicit leadership theories in several cultural environments (House et al., 2004). Their research results are based on empirical surveys carried out among middle managers of 61 countries (Chhokar et al., 2008: 1). The research samples have focused on current managers and their perceptions.

Our research interest is linked to the main research objective of the GLOBE project, although we raise somewhat specific questions: What can we expect in the near future? What are the perceptions of today's cultural practices and cultural values of future managers? What can we expect their leadership styles will be in the future? By building on the research findings of the GLOBE research, we assume that future managers will be recruited out of today's university students. Therefore, we started the GLOBE STUDENT research project, which focuses on (potential) future managers and their perceptions of societal cultural dimensions and leadership styles.[1]

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1 We express our gratitude to the GLOBE community, which provided us with the theoretical background questionnaire items and many empirical insights, but especially to all research participants in the GLOBE STUDENT project. The project is co-ordinated by R. Lang from Chemnitz University of Technology. The other international research participants are for the time being D. Catana and A. Gh. Catana (Technical University of Cluj-Napoca, Romania), A. Lašakova (Comenius University Bratislava, Slovakia), P. Skalova (University of West Bohemia, Plzen, Czech Republic) and the authors of this article (University of Ljubljana, Slovenia).

The GLOBE STUDENT project was initiated in 2008. It is organised as a fairly permanent project and has attracted researchers from five Central European (CE) transitional countries: Czech Republic, Germany (specifically former East Germany), Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia at the beginning. Researchers from these countries have already produced the first research results. They are in the process of preparing them for publication.

Our purpose here is to contribute to the body of knowledge about the cultural dimensions of Slovenian society in which future managers are raised, their value systems and their probable future leadership styles based on our research findings from a specific angle. We explore how the perceived cultural dimensions of Slovenian society and future leadership styles differ from the CE cluster.

We are aware that Slovenia is a CE country. There is no doubt that there are more than five CE transitional countries. However, our CE cluster of countries is defined here as consisting of just four CE countries: Czech Republic, Germany, Romania and Slovakia. Slovenia is excluded from the CE countries' cluster because we need two independent samples that could be statistically tested regarding mutual differences. Other CE transitional countries were not included in the CE cluster because they have not yet participated in the GLOBE student research project.

Our research sample (agreed upon in advance for the whole GLOBE STUDENT project) includes business and engineering students on undergraduate and graduate levels. The presentation of the empirical findings will be systematised by offering answers to the following research questions:

1. How do Slovenian students' perceptions of current practices differ from those of students from the CE countries' cluster on average?
2. How do Slovenian students values differ from those of students in the CE countries' cluster on average?
3. Which future leadership styles are preferred by Slovenian future managers and do they differ from those preferred by future managers from the CE countries' cluster?

The article is structured in six steps. After this introduction, a concise review of the relevant literature on cultural dimensions and managerial leadership styles is offered in part two, followed by a short description of the research methodology in part three. In part four, we present the empirical findings of our study which are based on the assumption that future managers will mostly come from two broad fields of university studies, i.e. business and engineering. In part five, the research results are discussed, followed by a conclusion in part six.

2 Literature review

Anthropologists do not agree about the precise meaning of culture (Schneider & Barsoux, 2003: 21). Some definitions include everything from law and religion to art, while others concentrate on specific "value orientations". The anthropologist Margaret Mead proposed to understand culture as "shared patterns of behaviour", while Claude Levi-Strauss and Clifford Geertz define it as "systems of shared meaning or understanding" (Schneider & Barsoux, 2003: 22). Trompenaars (Zagoršek, 2004: 59) defines it as the way people resolve dilemmas emerging from universal problems, particularly in connection with relationships, time and the external environment. The management scholar Ed Schein defines culture as "a set of basic assumptions – shared solutions to universal problems, of external adaptation (how to survive) and internal integration (how to stay together) – which have evolved over time and are handed down from one generation to the next" (Schneider & Barsoux, 2003: 22). The GLOBE researchers explain culture as shared motives, values, beliefs, identities and events that result from common experiences of members of collectives and are transmitted across age generations (House et al., 2002: 5).

Due to the wide heterogeneity of explanations of what culture really is, researchers have problems when they try to measure existing cultures. The GLOBE researchers decided to use a number of cultural attributes focused on shared modal values of collectives for measurement purposes. These values are expressed in response to questionnaire items in the form of judgments of what should be. Values represent what is expected or hoped for in a society, not what is actually materialised. Therefore, the other measurement of culture, i.e. modal practices, is based on indicators that assess "what is", or "what are" common behaviours, institutional practices, proscriptions and prescriptions (House et al., 2002: 5).

The GLOBE researchers based their assessment of culture on a psychological/behavioural tradition, which assumes that shared values are incorporated in behaviours, policies and practices. Due to the empirical research needs they have operationalised culture in nine cultural dimensions. These dimensions are: 1) uncertainty avoidance; 2) power distance; 3) collectivism 1 (societal collectivism); 4) collectivism 2 (in-group collectivism); 5) gender egalitarianism; 6) assertiveness; 7) future orientation; 8) performance orientation; and 9) humane orientation (House et al., 2002: 5-6). It is known that the first six dimensions are rooted in cultural dimensions defined originally by Hofstede (1991). Future orientation was derived from Kluckholn & Strodtbeck, and performance orientation from McClelland (House et al., 2002: 6).

Values are relatively stable and do not change quickly (Ule, 2003). The values in a social system, that are resistant to change, are, according to Williams (1979: 34), those, that are "high in centrality, pervasive, and supported by powerful sanctions and high consensus and supporters of these values hold positions of high prestige and authority". Such values are quite stable but, according to the European Values Survey, might change especially when one generation succeeds another (Keating et al., 2002: 637). Psychologists (Musek, 2003, Mead, 1998, Helson, Jones, Kwan, 2002) warn that people's values do change during their life cycle. In the period of youth, hedonistic values prevail, later on the values of power become more important and, finally, moral values and self-actualisation take primacy.

According to Kovač (2008: 48), organisation can be perceived as consisting of organisational structure, organisational processes and culture. Organisational culture is an important factor of business firm efficiency and effectiveness (Mc Ewan, 2001: 327). On the other hand, many management scholars try

to prove that a direct relationship exists between culture and leadership styles. They argue that specific cultural traditions, values, beliefs and norms, which are the cornerstones of culture, have a direct impact on leadership (House et al., 2002: 3). Values motivate people and normatively lead their behaviour, interests, thoughts and actions (Musek, 2003). Researchers do not agree completely regarding the role of values in guiding behaviour. Studies support the thesis that values do motivate behaviours, but their influence might depend on differences in normative pressures as well as situational pressure on individual's behaviour (Mihelič & Lipičnik, 2010: 296).

Leadership is another phenomenon without a well-accepted unified definition. Zagoršek (2004: 9) very clearly presented the multitude of leadership theories. Each tries to explain leadership somewhat differently. One of them defines leadership as an influence process between a leader and followers whereby the leader influences, motivates and facilitates the activities of an organisational group toward goal achievement through mostly no coercive means (Zagoršek, 2004: 10). Kotter (1990:106) defines leadership as an ability to influence, motivate and direct co-workers towards the achievement of goals. The GLOBE definition of organisational leadership does not differ much from the stated ones and says that it is "the ability of an individual to influence, motivate and enable others to contribute toward the effectiveness and success of the organizations of which they are members" (House et al., 2002: 5).

GLOBE has empirically identified six leadership styles[2] from a large pool of theoretically defined leadership behaviour patterns. These patterns/styles are (House et al., 2004: 14, Steyrer et al., 2008: 365): 1) charismatic/value based leadership; 2) team-oriented leadership; 3) participative leadership; 4) humane-oriented leadership; 5) autonomous leadership; and 6) self-protective leadership. Charismatic/value-based leadership reflects the ability to inspire, to motivate, and to successfully demand high performance outcomes from others based on firmly held core values. Team-oriented leadership emphasises effective team building resulting in mutual support and the creation of a common purpose. Participative leadership develops a high level of involvement of subordinates in making and implementing decisions. Humane-oriented leadership is described as developing a high degree to which leaders in organisations or societies encourage and reward individuals for being fair, altruistic, friendly, generous, caring and kind to others. Autonomous leadership refers to independent and individualistic leadership, whereas self-protective leadership describes leadership behaviour that is self-centred, status-conscious, procedural and conflict inducing.

The GLOBE research findings regarding leadership styles have shown that some of them are seen as good and effective or bad and unwanted in all countries and regions, while others are more culturally contingent (Lang et al., 2010: 111).

Through his well-known empirical survey carried out among the employees of IBM subsidiaries in 1971 in many countries, Hofstede's research was probably the first to discover the characteristics of national cultural dimensions (a cultural dimension is defined as set of cultural attributes identified in empirical research). Slovenia as part of Yugoslavia at that time was also included in his research. Therefore, he found cultural dimensions that are also valid for Slovenia. He was able to present research findings for Slovenia for only four of his five dimensions i.e. power distance, individualism, masculinity and uncertainty avoidance[3]. He did not have enough data for the fifth dimension, i.e. long-term orientation (Hofstede, 2002: 100).

Bakacsi et al. (2002) as co-investigators of the GLOBE project applied GLOBE's methodological approach to samples of the Eastern European cluster of countries at the turn of the century. Slovenia was included in this cluster. They identified key societal cultural dimensions and attitudes to different leadership styles for Slovenia based on a sample of Slovenian middle managers.[4]

Zagoršek focused in his research on the issue of the universality versus cultural contingency of leadership and used samples of MBA students for his research from six countries, including Slovenia (Zagoršek, 2002). He identified the characteristics of four of Hofstede's cultural dimensions for each of the chosen countries and attitudes to GLOBE's leadership styles. Prašnikar et al. (2008) carried out comparative research concentrating on the culture of managers and future managers (i.e. MBA students) in Russia, Serbia and Slovenia, but their research approach was not based on the GLOBE questionnaire. Mihelič and Lipičnik focused their research on managers' and business students' values in Slovenia in 2006. They examined differences in values with regard to age (Mihelič & Lipičnik, 2010: 289). Their questionnaire was radically different from the GLOBE one.

As far as we are aware, only one empirical research so far has tested potential differences in perceptions of managers and students (i.e. future managers by assumption). Keating et al. (2002) investigated whether managers and students of Ireland and Austria share the same perceptions of culture using the GLOBE societal culture questionnaire. Their findings supported the conclusion that in Ireland and Austria, no significant differences exist between managers and students from an individual each country regarding their perceptions of practice but, on the other hand, they found quite significant differences in perceptions regarding practices between the two countries. The differences found in perceptions regarding values were much smaller between all four groups of respondents. These research results suggest that if we have students as respondents we should not expect bigger differences between Slovenian managers and students perceptions of existing cultural practices and values held by both groups.

2 K. Lewin defined leadership style as the manner and approach of providing direction, implementing plans, and motivating people (Leadership Styles). Besides K. Lewin, R. M. Stodgill (see his work Handbook of Leadership. New York: Free Press, 1974) and B. Bass (see his book Stodgill's Handbook of Leadership. New York: Free Press, 1981) made classic contributions to the field (Northcraft & Neale, 1994: 377).

3 Hofstede collected data for his famous IBM study from the Yugoslav agent of IBM in 1971. In 1993 he went back to these data and split them into Slovenia, Croatia and Serbia; while the IBM did not have sufficient employees in the other republics (Hofstede, 2002: 100).

4 Brenk Klas was the investigator from Slovenia.

3 Research methodology

All variables of our study were defined and taken out of the GLOBE research project (House et al., 2004). The relevant GLOBE questionnaire was used with some modifications that were required because of having students and not managers as respondents in our survey. We used a translated version of the adapted questionnaire into relevant domestic languages. Regarding the scales used in the questionnaire the respondents were asked to express their agreement with a given statement using a seven-point, Likert-type scale (from 1 = strongly disagree, to 7 = strongly agree). Answering questions in the second and fourth parts of the questionnaire demanded respondents to assign to the stated attributes an appropriate number of points from the same seven-point scale according to their assessment of the importance of the stated attribute. The last part of the questionnaire collected some demographic information from the respondents.

The research population was defined as business and engineering students studying at the University of Ljubljana in Slovenia and universities in the four other already stated Central European countries. The four countries (Slovenia excluded) represent our Central European cluster. It differs from the Eastern European cluster identified by Gupta et al. in the original GLOBE project research (Gupta et al., 2002), because it includes many more countries from Eastern Europe and even Kazakhstan (as an Asian country). We assume that the chosen four Central European countries well represent a wider set of countries, which are usually taken as Central European (transitional) countries (Warner et al., 2005).

Business and engineering students were chosen based on the assumption that the future generation of middle managers will mostly come from these two fields of study (the German and Slovakian samples also include the group "others", there are a few students from related interdisciplinary fields). Each of the participating countries in the GLOBE research project has to find at least 300 respondents that should be as much as possible equally distributed according to business and engineering studies as well as first and second study's degree. Table 1 shows the joint sample structure of our respondents, which gave us usable data.

The respondent's population consists of 51% male and 49% female students. Close to half the respondents were undertaking a first study degree and the rest a second degree. The surveys were carried out either in individual participating countries in 2008 or the first half of 2009.

Our main research hypothesis was that Slovenian (potential) future middle managers are the "average" Central European (transitional) managers.[5] Their perceptions of existing cultural practices, values that they prefer (and will most probably try to implement in their future managerial practice) as well as preferred leadership styles should not differ much from the average perceptions of (future) middle managers in the Central European countries' cluster.

We processed the collected empirical data by using SPSS 18. First, a descriptive statistical analysis was carried out for the whole cluster of countries and separately for the Slovenian sample. In the second step, significant differences in mean values for the chosen cultural dimensions as practices and as values between the Central European cluster and Slovenia were investigated. Finally, significant differences in mean values for different leadership styles between the relevant Central European cluster and Slovenia were identified by using two tails t-test for independent samples (Simple Interactive Statistical Analysis, 2010). The research results were later discussed briefly.

4 Research results

The research results will be classified in three groups: namely: 1) differences between Slovenian students' perceptions of current cultural practices from those of the CE countries' cluster; 2) differences of Slovenian students' values from those of the CE countries' cluster; and 3) differences between the preferred

Table 1: The joint respondents' sample structure

Country	*Total number of respondents*	*Respondents from business studies*	*Respondents from engineering field*	*Others*
Czech Republic	324	164	160	-
Germany	345	162	133	50
Romania	427	166	261	-
Slovakia	339	182	136	21
Slovenia	300	150	150	-
Total	1,735	824	840	71

5 V. Edwards found in his research of managers in Central and Eastern European countries that Slovenian managers took in general a "middle" view on questions he had asked them in his empirical research (Edwards & Lawrence, 2000).

Table 2: Assessed mean values of actual cultural dimensions in Slovenia and the CE countries' cluster

Cultural dimension / Country or cluster	*Gender egalitarianism*	*Performance orientation*	*Humane orientation*	*Assertiveness*	*Family/ group collectivism (Collectivism 2)*	*Institutional collectivism (Collectivism 1)*	*Power distance*	*Future orientation*	*Uncertainty avoidance*
Slovenia	4.13	4.05	3.97	4.24	5.22	4.04	5.03	3.79	4.19
CE cluster	3.97	4.06	3.54	4.11	4.67	4.25	5.39	3.94	4.08
Difference	0.16	0.01	0.43	0.13	0.55	-0.21	-0.36	-0.15	0.11
Sign. (2-tailed)	0.002	0.877	0.000	0.028	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.037	0.030

future leadership styles of Slovenian students and students in the CE countries' cluster.

4.1 Differences in perceptions of current cultural practices

We used nine of GLOBE cultural constructs representing society, as it is (i.e. actual cultural dimensions or culture-related practices) and computed the mean values for each construct for Slovenia and for the CE countries' cluster. The results are shown in Table 2.

Most cultural practices perceived by the Slovenian students as shown in Table 2 seem to be quite similar to the practices perceived on average in the Central European countries' cluster if we look at the computed absolute differences in the assessed mean scores. However, statistical tests of differences of the stated means reveal quite a different story. On applying the t-test of differences between the assigned mean scores for these two independent samples, we find that relevant differences are statistically significant with all cultural dimensions except one, i.e. performance orientation. The computed two-tailed significance levels, shown in Table 2, prove this conclusion, as all differences except one are significant at $p < 0.05$.

Slovenian future managers perceive existing cultural practices according to five dimensions (gender egalitarianism, humane orientation, assertiveness, family/group collectivism and uncertainty avoidance) as present more decisively in Slovenia than their counterparts in the CE countries' cluster. The opposite findings (meaning so intensively not present) are valid for the other three dimensions of existing cultural practices (i.e. institutional collectivism, power distance and future orientation). The latter three dimensions were assessed by respondents from the CE countries' cluster as being present significantly more intensively in these countries in comparison with Slovenia.

According to these research results, it is hard to argue that Slovenian cultural practices are very similar to average Central European (transitional) cultural practices and that therefore they are a good representative of them.

Table 3: Assessed mean scores for future cultural dimensions in Slovenia and the CE countries' cluster

Cultural dimension / Country or cluster	*Gender egalitarianism*	*Performance orientation*	*Humane orientation*	*Assertiveness*	*Family/ group collectivism (Collectivism 2)*	*Institutional collectivism (Collectivism 1)*	*Power distance*	*Future orientation*	*Uncertainty avoidance*
Slovenia	4.55	5.78	5.08	4.09	5.69	4.46	2.94	4.74	4.55
CE cluster	4.53	5.82	5.28	3.57	5.60	4.71	2.63	4.91	4.69
Difference	0.02	0.04	0.20	0.52	0.09	0.28	0.31	0.17	0.14
Sign. (2-tailed)	0.670	0.550	0.001	0.000	0.212	0.000	0.000	0.005	0.012

4.2 Differences in perceptions of values

The similar nine GLOBE cultural constructs representing society as it should be (i.e. cultural dimensions which future managers believe in) were used to find out which values future managers appreciate the most. The computed mean score values for those variables are presented in Table 3.

Slovenian future managers' perceptions of future cultural dimensions in Slovenia mostly differ from the perceptions of their counterparts in the CE countries' cluster. Table 3 shows that the assessed mean scores for many of the individual cultural dimensions in Slovenia are in absolute terms not very different from the relevant mean scores computed for the whole CE cluster.

The dimensions of assertiveness, institutional collectivism and power distance seem to differ somewhat between the two samples. However, statistical testing of the differences between relevant individual means (t-test of the differences between both groups) show that the truth is different.

We found statistically significant differences linked to the dimensions of humane orientation, assertiveness, institutional collectivism, power distance, future orientation and uncertainty avoidance. These conclusions are based on the computed 2-tailed significance levels shown in Table 3. According to the computed p-values, Slovenian future managers only share similar attitudes with their counterparts from the CE countries' cluster as regards three cultural dimensions, namely gender egalitarianism, performance orientation and family/group collectivism.

Future Slovenian managers will be less radical in increasing a humane orientation and future orientation than their CE counterparts. On the other hand, they will be ready to accept a higher level of assertiveness and power distance. Regarding the diminishing uncertainty avoidance, they will not be as demanding as their CE counterparts will.

There are only three future cultural dimensions, which might be universal within CE (gender egalitarianism, performance orientation and family/group collectivism). If the identified changes in cultural dimensions actually occur, we might predict a move towards a certain homogenisation of cultures within CE countries in the future, but this move will still be far away from any complete harmonisation.

On comparing the mean scores for individual cultural dimensions for the Slovenian environment for the actual and assessed future situation in Tables 2 and 3, one can see the predicted improvements in the dimensions of gender egalitarianism, performance orientation, humane orientation, family/group collectivism, institutional collectivism, future orientation and uncertainty avoidance. Those changes can also be expected in the CE countries' cluster. On the other side, radical reductions of power distance and of assertiveness are predicted in Slovenia and in the CE countries' cluster in the future, which should be seen as a change in the right direction. What is a surprise in a certain sense is the mean score for uncertainty avoidance. Future managers in Slovenia and in the CE countries' cluster believe that the level of uncertainty avoidance will be increased in the future, which runs counter to the trend of cultural harmonisation around the world.

4.3 Differences between the preferred future leadership styles

The GLOBE research project has empirically identified six leadership styles (House, 2004). We also used the constructs of these six styles in our GLOBE student research project. The collected empirical data enabled us to ascertain which leadership styles are appreciated by future managers. We computed the mean score values for the set of attributes, which determine each its construct. These indicators are presented in Table 4.

Table 4 mostly does not show big absolute differences between mean scores for individual leadership styles as computed based on assigned points from the seven-point Likert scale by Slovenian future managers and future managers in the CE cluster. Statistical testing for relevant differences in mean scores between both groups shows that our first impression is not correct. The attitudes of Slovenian future managers differ significantly regarding four leadership styles in comparison with future managers from the CE countries' cluster. Slovenian future managers appreciate more self-protective and autonomous leadership styles. More than their Slovenian counterparts, the CE countries' future managers like charismatic/value-based and participative leadership styles. Both groups of respondents appreciate team-oriented and humane leadership styles quite similarly.

Table 4: Computed mean scores for individual leadership styles in Slovenia and the CE countries' cluster

Leadership style Country or cluster	*Value-based*	*Team-oriented*	*Participative*	*Humane*	*Selfprotective*	*Autonomous*
Slovenia	5.46	5.69	3.80	4.52	3.70	4.26
CE cluster	5.58	5.70	4.10	4.53	3.46	4.11
Difference	-0.12	-0.01	-0.23	-0.01	0.24	0.15
Sign. (2-tailed)	0.004	0.791	0.000	0.880	0.000	0.030

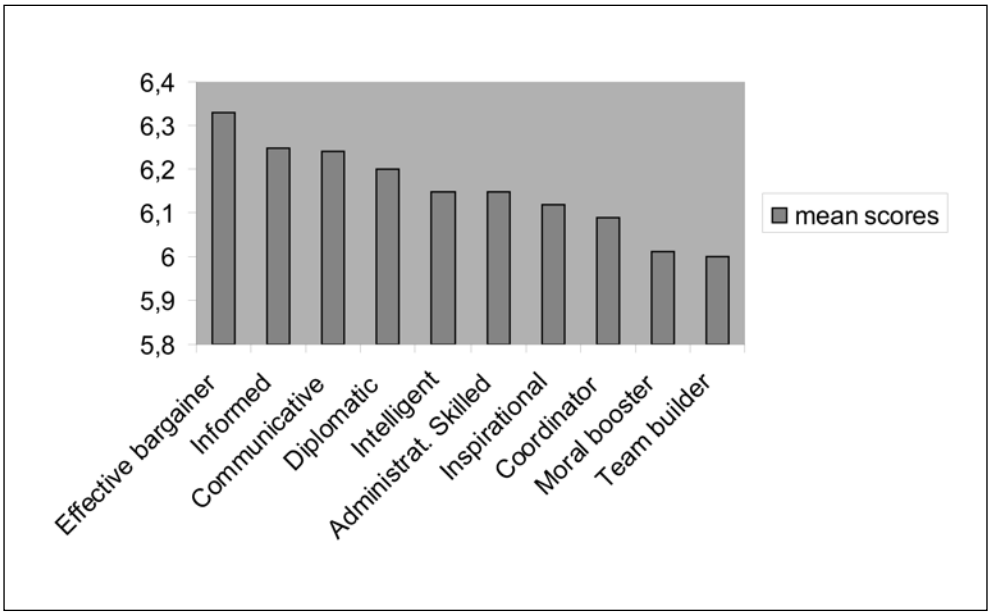


Figure 1: Top appreciated leadership traits and skills by Slovenian future managers

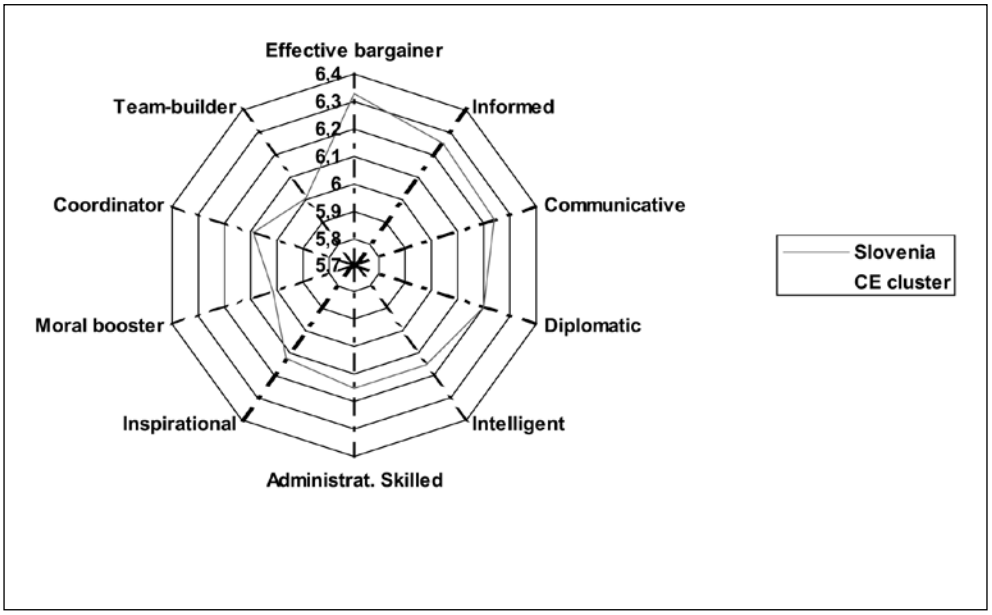


Figure 2: Comparison between the most important leadership traits as perceived in CE cluster and by Slovenian respondents (measurement by mean scores)

The Slovenian future managers assigned the highest mean scores to a team-oriented (i.e. 5.69) and value-based (i.e. 5.46) leadership style which are the two leadership styles also assessed as the most appropriate by respondents in the CE countries' cluster. Respondents in both samples assessed self-protective and participative leadership styles as the least appreciated. These findings might suggest that in the future a certain harmonisation of leadership styles might be expected in the region.

In Figure 1, we present the ten leadership traits and skills most appreciated by our respondents (the concept is based on the trait approach to the leadership theory) (Zagoršek, 2004). Slovenian future managers consider being effective bargainers as the most important characteristic required of managers. On average, it received 6.33 points on the seven-point Likert scale. A manager as a well-informed human being was ranked second among all traits (mean score of 6.25). Being communicative follows as a required skill (mean score of 6.24). Respondents believe that a very important manager's trait is the skill of being diplomatic (mean score of 6.20). All other traits and skills had an assigned mean score lower than 6.20, but none of the top 10 traits or skills received less than 6.00 points on average.

Future managers in the Central European cluster chose a very similar list of the most important leadership traits and skills. They did not choose three which appeared on the top ten Slovenian list, namely the skill of being a good co-ordinator, of being a morale booster and having a team-building skill. All others appear on both lists.

Figure 2 shows slight differences in the ten most important traits and skills as perceived by the Slovenian respondents and the mean scores assigned to the same traits and skills by the Central European cluster's respondents. The CE cluster's respondents assessed being trustworthy, being a motive arouser and having a win-win problem-solving skill of a leader as traits or skills which belong among the ten most important ones. The Slovenian respondents ranked those three traits or skills lower.

On comparing the ten most important traits and skills assessed by Slovenian future managers with the relevant assessments by future managers in the CE countries' cluster, all absolute differences between the mean scores assigned to individual traits or skills are below the value of 0.20. These identified small absolute differences in assigned importance to an individual leader's traits and skills are statistically confirmed as being mostly insignificant. The statistical test of relevant differences shows that only two traits or skills of a leader are significantly different if we make a comparison based on the ten leader traits or skills most appreciated by the Slovenian respondents. These traits or skills are being intelligent and being communicative. The importance of the other eight most important traits or skills was assessed as very similar in importance in both samples.

5 Discussion

Our empirical research results do not support our basic hypothesis formulated in part three. Slovenian future managers cannot be perceived as the "average" Central European (transitional) manager. Their perceptions of existing cultural practices, values as well as preferred leadership styles differ significantly from the perceptions of future middle managers in the Central European countries' cluster. We found that significant differences exist regarding perceptions of actual cultural practices. Relevant value systems are significantly different and most attitudes to different leadership styles differ significantly between the future CE managers and the future Slovenian managers.

The smallest differences in the perceptions of the future managers when comparing the Slovenian sample with the CE cluster's sample were discovered regarding their views of what are the most important traits and skills of a manager.

It is hard to explain the significant differences found in the perceptions of current cultural practices between Slovenia and the CE cluster. Two decades of transition from previous (somewhat different) socialist socio-economic systems might be too short a period for achieving a higher level of harmonisation of existing cultures.

One might explain that the more intensively present (according to the assessments) gender egalitarianism, humane orientation and family/group collectivism in Slovenia are rooted in the previous self-management culture, which prevailed in socialist Yugoslavia. Other CE (transitional) countries had central planning systems, which supported the stated cultural dimensions less. Therefore, we might expect that the future managers in the CE cluster will emphasise more the needed changes in these cultural dimensions than their Slovenian counterparts in the future. We found some empirical support for this contention (see the radically increased mean scores for these three cultural dimensions in Table 3 in comparison with the relevant mean scores in Table 2 for the CE countries' cluster).

Slovenian future managers assessed that assertiveness and uncertainty avoidance are more intensively present in the Slovenian environment than the CE cluster respondents assessed them. These differences are not easy to explain. The concept of assertiveness originates (in part) from Hofstede's cultural dimension of masculinity versus femininity (Den Hartog, 2004: 401). It is seen as part of the masculinity dimension and includes aggressive, tough and competitive ways people deal with others. The GLOBE study found a mean score of 4.00 for assertiveness for Slovenia's actual cultural practice, which is between the highest mean score of 4.89 identified for Albania and the lowest mean score of 3.38 for Sweden. The relevant mean score of 4.59 found for the "what it should be", i.e. as a value, was from the ten countries with the highest average score (Den Hartog, 2004: 410). No country from our CE cluster was included in the GLOBE study and therefore we can only conclude on this basis that Slovenian middle managers had assessed the level of assertiveness in actual practice somewhat lower than the Slovenian students in our survey, and that students as respondents believe that the assertiveness level should be lower (compare the relevant mean scores in Tables 2 and 3) although, on the other hand, Slovenian managers believed it should be significantly higher (their mean score of 4.59 compared with the Slovenian students' mean score of 4.09). Of course, one should not forget that these two surveys were carried out in different periods and on different samples. What we might add to these findings is the fact that our survey potentially indicates a common trend in the CE region because we found that, similarly as Slovenian future managers, future managers from the CE cluster also wish to have a lower level of assertiveness in their society in their future.

Hofstede found in his research (Hofstede, 2002: 100) a very high level of uncertainty avoidance (a mean score of 6.16) as an existing cultural dimension in the Slovenian environment. He carried his research out in 1971. His sample included managers from an IBM subsidiary in Slovenia. The GLOBE study in the 1990s identified a relevant mean score of 3.78 for uncertainty avoidance for Slovenian practice, but a belief (as a value) that it should be at the level of 4.99 (De Luque, 2004: 623). Our survey produced the assessed level of existing practice with a computed mean score of 4.19 and the desired level described by a mean score of 4.55. These results suggest the conclusion that Slovenian managers in the socialist past worked in a culture with a very high level of uncertainty avoidance. In the 1990s, managers assessed that the start of the transition had brought quite a radical reduction in this actual cultural dimension in the country, yet they wished to live in a society with a much higher level of uncertainty avoidance.

Slovenian future managers seem to be quite similar in their relevant value system. In comparison with their CE counterparts, they will seek more orderliness, consistency, well-defined structures, formalised procedures and laws to cover situations in their daily lives. Their preferences for higher uncertainty avoidance might be even based in a historic heritage, linked to the centuries of Austrian rule.

According to Hofstede, collectivism combined with strong uncertainty avoidance produces an explosive mixture: strong uncertainty avoidance stands for intolerance of others, of "what is different, is dangerous" which is not far from nationalism (Hofstede, 2002: 99). Therefore, we cannot positively assess the identified predicted changes in the stated cultural dimension in either Slovenia or the CE region.

If we compare our findings regarding the universality of cultural practices within the CE region (i.e. comparing the findings for Slovenia with the findings for the CE countries' cluster) we find that only one actual cultural dimension is "universal" within the region. Namely, it is only performance orientation as a dimension that does not differ significantly between the two samples. By contrast, we found three such "universal" cultural dimensions for the CE region when we compare cultural dimensions as values (what they should be). CE future managers do not value differently (no statistical significance was discovered) the dimensions of gender egalitarianism, performance orientation and family/group collectivism. These findings might mean that a certain harmonisation of cultures within the CE region is happening.

The research results enable us to expect a number of improvements in cultural environments in the CE region. On comparing mean scores separately for Slovenia and for the CE cluster in Tables 2 and 3, we find that future managers will endeavour to increase the level of gender egalitarianism, performance orientation, humane orientation, assertiveness, family/group collectivism and future orientation. Conversely, they would like to reduce the level of power distance, representing another change in an acceptable direction. All of the stated changes would be welcomed.

The "predicted" changes in the majority of cultural dimensions in the CE region should influence improvements in the applied leadership styles. In spite of our findings of statistically significant different attitudes to individual leadership styles held by future Slovenian managers and future managers from the CE cluster, they share important common views linked to leadership styles. We discovered that future managers in the CE region (i.e. Slovenia plus the CE cluster) appreciated charismatic/value-based and team-oriented leadership styles the most and, on the other hand, self-protective and participative styles the least. Such a commonality might contribute to mutual economic co-operation and further regional internationalisation.

Team-oriented leadership styles will apparently be the most appreciated leadership style among Slovenian future managers as well as among CE countries' future managers (see the computed mean scores in Table 4). A charismatic value-based style (building on inspiration, motivation, and high performance requirements as well as core values) will also be very popular. These two leadership styles also received the highest mean scores among all researched styles in the GLOBE study of Slovenian managerial environment (Bakaczi et al., 2002: 77). Slovenian middle managers as respondents in the stated study carried out in the 1990s assigned an even slightly higher mean score of 5.69 to a charismatic/value-based style and 5.91 to a team-oriented style than the Slovenian student respondents in our survey.

By contrast, self-protective (self-centred, status-conscious, procedural and conflict-inducing leadership) and participative leadership styles seem to have small chances of being applied frequently in managerial practices in the future. The relevant findings of the GLOBE study from the 1990s show that Slovenian middle managers as respondents had quite a similar attitude to the self-protective style (a mean score of 3.61), and appreciated the participative style much more (a mean score of 5.42). It is interesting that in his research in 2001 using the GLOBE questionnaire and using Slovenian MBA students as respondents, Zagoršek obtained exactly the same mean score (i.e. 5.42) for the participative leadership style as was obtained in the GLOBE study. Therefore, our Slovenian respondents surprisingly assess the last stated leadership style as being the least appropriate. Researchers usually relate team-oriented, participative, and humane-oriented leadership styles as those, which support the classic human relations theory, according to which group orientation, and considerate, participative leadership foster goal identification and thereby reduce resistance and withdrawal tendencies in organisations (Steyrer et al., 2008: 370). Is the identified unpopularity of the participative leadership style among Slovenian future managers and CE future managers some kind of a reaction to the "official" socialist/communist values of workers' participation in management or enthusiasm for the past self-management in the region that comes with quite a time lag?

We discovered statistical significant differences in assessing the importance of individual leaders' traits and skills only for two traits or skills when comparing Slovenian future managers and the CE cluster's future managers, namely: 1) being intelligent; and 2) being communicative. Such a finding might lend additional support for the conclusion that certain commonalities in views about what is a good leader exist among future managers in the region. On the other hand, we should not forget that a list of the ten most important traits and skills of leaders does not guarantee that a manager with such characteristics would be successful in all different cultural environments.

6 Conclusion

Our research findings offer specific answers to the research questions we posed in the introduction as well as regarding the basic hypothesis we developed in part three. We discovered that:

- Slovenian future managers perceive actual cultural practices in their environment rather differently from their counterparts from the cluster of CE countries. Two decades of transition from socialist/communist socio-economic systems were apparently not long enough periods to achieve a higher level of harmonisation of existing cultures.

- The relevant value systems held by Slovenian future managers and the CE cluster's future managers still differ significantly.
- Slovenian future managers have (statistically) significantly different attitudes to individual leadership styles than their counterparts in the CE countries' cluster.
- The smallest differences in perceptions between the two stated groups of future managers exist regarding their views on what are the most important traits and skills of managers.
- There are signals that future managers in the CE (transitional) countries' cluster will try to make more radical changes than their Slovenian counterparts are in the majority of those cultural dimensions that differ the most for the time being from the cultural practices of the developed Western countries.
- Assertiveness as a cultural dimension is not perceived by Slovenian future managers as something which, being a less acceptable cultural characteristic, demands a radical reduction. Counterparts from the cluster of CE countries show more sensitivity regarding its excessively high level in their environments.
- Slovenian future managers would like to have a higher level of uncertainty avoidance than their CE cluster counterparts and at the same time, on "predicting" its higher level than its actual level is, cannot be assessed as a change in the right direction.
- Only one cultural dimension, i.e. performance orientation, is "universal" in the CE region at present, yet there are signals that changes will happen towards further harmonisation in culture in the CE region (the three cultural dimensions discovered which will become "universal" for the region: gender egalitarianism, performance orientation and family/group collectivism).
- Improvements in the level of gender egalitarianism, performance orientation, humane orientation, assertiveness, family/group collectivism and future orientation as well as power distance can be expected in the CE region (i.e. in Slovenia and the CE countries' cluster).
- Future managers in the CE region appreciate charismatic/value-based and team-oriented leadership styles the most and self-protective and participative styles the least. Such commonalities might contribute to further mutual economic co-operation and regional internationalisation.
- Certain commonalities in views on the issue of which traits and skills a good leader should have exist among future managers in the CE region, and this might contribute to further successful internationalisation in business fields.
- Our basic hypothesis that Slovenian future middle managers would represent, according to their cultural characteristics, the "average" Central European manager was not confirmed. The cultural orientation of Slovenian future middle managers will still in many regards be different from the regional averages.
- Some policy measures and educational programmes are needed to achieve changes in those less efficient value orientations of future managers we discovered (for example, attitudes to assertiveness by Slovenian future managers and attitudes to a participative leadership style by all regional future managers).
- The dissemination of our research findings among active managers in the region (and beyond) may contribute to better management practices in the region.

Our research findings have at least a few serious limitations. We are aware that assuming that business and engineering students will become a core part of the future population of managers in the CE region is risky. Taking a sample of CE countries, which is only based on four CE countries (Czech Republic, Slovakia, (East) Germany and Romania is possibly another critical assumption. Some would also probably criticise our inclusion of Romania in the CE region. Our comparisons with research findings other researchers have produced based on different samples and in different periods might be problematic. Despite those limitations, we still believe that our research findings offer certain insights into the relevant issues. These insights might be useful to help today's active managers better understand differences in managerial behaviour in the region and engage in more efficient decision-making based on such knowledge.

Future research should focus on studying cultural practices and value systems as well as leadership styles in several directions. One should study possible differences in respondents' relevant perceptions based on sub-segments of our survey respondents (for example, just business students or just graduate students, male respondents or female respondents etc.). In addition, future research should be dedicated to a wider sample of CE countries. We hope that our research group will achieve this in the not so distant future. Subsequent systematic research verifications of how recent predictions would be realised in the CE region would also be needed.

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Danijel Pučko is a full professor at the Faculty of Economics, Ljubljana University. He became a teaching assistant at the Faculty of Economics in 1968 where he completed his masters in Business Administration in 1974 and his doctoral studies in 1978. After being an assistant professor and associate professor he became a full professor in the field of business economics and business planning in 1990. His books in Slovenian are in the field of business economics, strategic management, business planning and business performance analysis. He also publishes as a co-author of books in Croatian and English language. He has had over 60 articles published in Slovenian and foreign scientific journals. In the mid-1990s, he was Dean of the faculty of Economics and since 2001 he was for six years vice dean for graduate and doctoral studies at the stated school. Danijel Pučko was a co-editor of the *Economic and Business Review for Central and South East Europe* in the period 1999 – 2009.

Tomaž Čater has been employed at the Faculty of Economics, University of Ljubljana since 1998. Among his important past and present positions at the Faculty of Economics are Head of Distance Education, Head of the Department of Management and Organization and Head of the master's degree program in Sport Management. He teaches several courses in the field of management and organization, which is also his main field of research. More specifically, his current research interests encompass environmental strategies and relationship-based competitive advantages. The results of his research have been published in recognized domestic and foreign publications, such as Transformations in Business and Economics, Industrial Marketing Management, Journal of Business and Industrial Marketing, Service Industries Journal, and Journal for East European Management Studies.