Identifying Hungarian cultural characteristics in Europe’s cultural diversity in the 21st century: a controversial issue

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Hungary and Europe

21st century – the ‘global’ century but
the importance of recognizing cultural diversity is increasing
Cultural differences present new challenges and opportunities
Especially true for Europe and the EU
Aim of research: to explore and analyse the main causes of intercultural communication gaps and conflicts in Hungarian based Br.-Hung. And US-Hung. organisations

On the basis of the author’s fieldwork findings of twenty-years (1993-2013) of research in fifty-three, mainly British-Hungarian and American-Hungarian organisations, 460 deep interviews, Hungarian (business) culture can be characterised as follows:
The Hungarian (business) cultural traits as opposed to Br and US

Along Hofstede’s, some of Trompenaars’ and Hall’s categories Hungarian national culture is:

rather high power distance, moderately collectivist with individualistic features, masculine, particularist, diffuse, ascription-oriented, high-context, polychronic but also monochronic features, moderately long-term oriented, high uncertainty avoidance. (Falk-Bano, 1999, 2001, 2008)
Semi-structured Interviews

First part of the interview: questions concerning respondents’ earlier experience, expectations prior to interacting with host’s/visitor’s culture, how they compare with actual experiences. (Also length of time spent in the org., position, command of the other language)

Second part of the interview: respondents asked to mention cases of obvious miscommunication from their experience with members of the other national culture. (Falk-Bano 1999, 2001, 2008)
Results not from IBM database, replication

Results from students of six Hungarian higher educational institutions (Dienes, 1999-2000)

Very young people, mostly without any work experience

- PDI 19
- IDV 11
- MAS 17
- UAI 83
By 2002 results from 61 countries
Hungarian Results – University of Economics, (now Budapest Corvinus University) (Bakacsi et al.)

Great advantage: multi-method (quantitative and qualitative) project
Another great advantage:
Distinction between
• Practices: as is
• Values: as should be
Globe survey – Hungarian Results (Bakacsi et al., 2002)

Societal Culture on a scale 1-7:

**Uncertainty avoidance** – as is: 3.12 – as should be: 4.66

**Power distance** – as is: 5.56 – as should be: 2.49 (!)

**Societal collectivism** – as is: 3.53 – as should be: 4.50

**In-group collectivism** – as is: 5.25 – as should be: 5.54

**Gender Egalitarianism** – as is: 4.08 – as should be: 4.63

**Assertiveness** – as is: 3.23 – as should be: 4.49
Future Orientation - as is: 3.21 - as should be: 5.70!

Performance Orientation – as is: 3.43 – as should be: 5.96!

Humane Orientation – as is: 3.35 – as should be: 5.48
Hungary’s place on the basis of GLOBE results

**Eastern European cluster**: Albania, Georgia, Greece, Kazahstan, Poland, **Hungary**, Russia, Slovenia: several cultural differences but in all countries:

Large power distance, strong family and group collectivism, values – as should be- towards more Performance and more Future Orientation,
Values – charismatic and group-oriented leadership
Hungarian culture according to Trompenaars:
- More universalist than particularist
- Individualistic
- Neutral
- Specific, also some diffuse
- Achievement-oriented
Why are the results on Hungarian culture so controversial?

- Cultural differences of age groups everywhere, especially in Central and Eastern Europe since the changes from 1989
- Different researches ask different questions and interpret answers in different ways
- Different researches have different databases, even in the same research if replication (Hofstede’s dimensions)
- People answer questions sometimes writing what they would like, not what it is like now. (GLOBE)
Hungary in Europe

Hungarian cultural characteristics reflect our dual character – eastern and western features.
Personal relationships

- Strong relationship-orientation
- Critical business issues need to be discussed face-to-face
- Frequent visits and phone calls are required
Time

- Polychronic features in its relationship focus but also monochronic features
- Meetings start on time
- Punctuality and keeping schedules are appreciated

- BUT- Hungarians may lose all sense of time if they get involved in a lively discussion (polychronic)
Negotiations, presentations

- Small talk
- Business negotiations more slow than rapid
- The usual style is discussing issues item by item
- But we may lose all sense of time
- Hungarians are complainers (they complain if their ice cream is cold)
- Emotion rather than rational analysis often determines behaviour.
Negotiations, presentations

- Often moody, raise problems without offering solutions, expect the other party to come up with a solution
- Avoid saying no and often fail to answer questions directly
- Indirectness connected with high-context culture
- Decision making usually done at the top, process more lengthy (large power distance)
- Presentation should be with background information, facts and technical details.
So, what are Hungarians like?

- Hungarian culture tends to have slightly collectivist (younger generation is more individualist), and masculine values
- Hungarians seem to have a talent for absorbing themselves into other cultures and then becoming the prototypes of those cultures (eg a Hungarian turning communist was worse than the original ones, etc), as
- Hungarians do things with exaggeration.
So, what are Hungarians like?

• Hungarians are clever at always finding the loopholes (survival tactics-historical reasons as well)

• Similarities between the Hungarian and the Mediterranean business cultures (hierarchical attitudes, strong uncertainty avoidance and highly relation-oriented attitudes)

• Selective politeness (friendly with their business partners but sometimes rude with strangers in the street) - high-context culture (clear distinction between 'insiders' and 'outsiders')
So, what are Hungarians like?

- If there are 3 Hungarians there will be 4 opinions
- I want the same like my neighbour has, but even bigger and nicer
- If my cow dies I want the neighbour's one to die as well
- Hungarians do not like critics and open confrontation with problems
- Corruption, Outstanding hospitality, Creativeness
Some of the most typical comments of Western managers, based on 460 interviews:

- Reluctance in taking responsibility, inefficiency
- Marked differences between age groups
- Not enough planning in Hungary, keeping deadlines difficult
- Hungarians do not have customer orientated attitude
- Bureaucracy, hierarchical attitude, titles, formality
- Use of telephone and fax for private purposes
- Importance of personal relationships
Some of the most typical complaints of Hungarian employees, based on 460 interviews:

- Different attitude of Western management to expatriates and local employees
- Tense working tempo
- Hungarian opinion not considered credible by expatriates
- Expatriates often arrive with no or very little knowledge of the region. People from the west think Hungary is the end of the world.
- Language problems
References

References