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Differences on Organizational Practices and Preferred Leader Attributes Between Polish Managers Investigated in 1996/1997 and 2008/2009

This study compares Polish managers' perceptions of their organizational culture and their beliefs concerning attributes necessary for leadership effectiveness, investigated in 1996/1997 and 2008/2009. As was unexpected, our results show that Polish managers of 2008/2009 score significantly higher than managers of 1996/1997 on Power Distance, Individualism, Masculinity and slightly lower on Future Orientation and Humane Orientation. Our findings suggest that more individualistic orientation in Polish organizations is still necessary in order to survive and be effective during the current turbulent and highly uncertain economic and business conditions. Relatively higher scores on Power Distance on the part of Polish managers being studied in the years 2008/2009 are also in line with findings concerned with attributes necessary for leadership effectiveness. Mean comparisons on beliefs concerning attributes necessary for leadership effectiveness show that Polish managers of 2008/2009 in comparison with their counterparts studied in 1996/1997 scored higher on Autocratic Orientation, Risk Avoidance, Isolationistic Orientation and Individualistic Orientation. Our findings are also consistent with regard to leadership attributes of Performance Orientation, Team Orientation, Decisiveness, Diplomatic, Humane Orientation, Integrity, Visionary and Charismatic/Inspirational, which are somewhat less strongly associated with leadership effectiveness by Polish middle managers investigated in 2008/2009 in comparison with their counterparts studied in 1996/1997.

Keywords: *Leader attributes, Organizational practices*

Introduction

Taking into consideration the extensive globalization of economic institutions and the increased interdependencies among nations in the past three decades, there is an urgent need for a better understanding of cultural influences on leadership and organizational practices.

As House stated "cooperative behavior across national borders is required to manage the complex technological, political, and economic interdependencies of nations. Yet despite this need, there is little systematic knowledge concerning international leadership and organizational practices" (House, et al., 1997, p. 217). This view is shared in Poland, particularly by Sułkowski, who stated that "studies of the impact of societal culture on organizations became

especially important in the face of internationalisation of business activity, which resulted in development of intercultural management" (Sułkowski 2009, p. 16).

Attempting to fill this gap Robert House, professor of the Wharton School at the University of Pennsylvania, developed the GLOBE project designed to study leadership perceptions, organizational practices and values cross-culturally.

The basic theoretical proposition of the GLOBE study is "that the attributes and entities that distinguish a given culture from other cultures are predictive of the practices of organizations of that culture and predictive of leader attributes and behaviors that are most frequently enacted, acceptable and effective in that culture" (House, et al., 1997a, p. 225). In the GLOBE research program, culture

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was defined as “shared motives, values, beliefs, identities and interpretations of meanings of significant events that result from common experiences of members of collectives and are transmitted across age generations” (House, et al., 1999, p. 182). In the GLOBE study, leadership was defined as “the ability of an individual to influence, motivate and enable others to contribute towards the effectiveness and success of the organization of which they are members” (Den Hartog, et al., 1997, p. 256).

More and more people are involved in cross border operations, inter-cultural management or organizational leadership in cultures different from their own. Knowledge produced by the GLOBE study will, among other things, help in selecting, counseling, and training individuals who work under these cross-cultural conditions (House, et al., 1997).

Problem

The overall purpose of our research presented in this paper was to compare Polish managers investigated in 2008/2009 and their counterparts studied during 1996/1997 on dimension of organizational culture and manager’s beliefs concerning attributes and behaviors that distinguish effective from less effective managers.

Data analyzed in this paper concerning Polish managers studied during 1996/1997 were drawn from extensive international research under the auspices of the GLOBE project, which was developed by House (1997) to study societal, organizational and leadership differences more extensively through the use of multiple methods and at multiple levels of analysis (House, et al., 1997).

In turn data concerning Polish managers during 2008/2009 were collected by students of the Management Academy in Legnica, while working on their M.A. dissertations.

Although some knowledge can be derived about the political and economic transformation in Central Europe, nevertheless not much is known about organizational values and management practices in Central European countries such as Poland.

As a result of the breakdown of the communist regime after nearly fifty years of rule, Poland is currently undergoing the process of transition towards a free market economy.

Poland, as a member of the European Union, is also in the process of designing the appropriate institutions and legislation that are essential to a democratic system. One could expect that the political and economic transition underway will be beneficial for shaping Polish management practices and values.

Method

Middle Polish managers (defined as managers having at least two hierarchical levels below and above them) of randomly selected industrial organizations participated in the study. Managers filled out a questionnaire measuring organizational culture as it was seen at the time of the study in the organizations. All managers under study also answered questions about their beliefs regarding attributes that distinguish effective from less effective managers.

In the years of 1996/1997 two hundred seventy seven Polish managers completed the leader attribute questionnaire and of these 134 completed the organizational questionnaire developed by GLOBE research project. In the years 2008/2009, a follow-up study was conducted among 100 managers representing several industrial organizations (employing at least 100 people) located in Western part of Poland. Middle Polish managers tested in the years 2008/2009 filled out identical questionnaires as their counterparts studied in the years of 1996/1997.

100 Polish managers completed the organizational culture questionnaire and of these 82 completed the leader attribute questionnaire.

The culture measurements asked managers to describe their organization as it was seen at the time of study as a whole, according to the dimensions that are presented below:

- Achievement Orientation: the extent to which organizational members are encouraged to improve performance and excel.
- Future Orientation: the extent to which organizational members are encouraged to plan, invest in the future, and delay gratification.
- Individualism/collectivism: the degree to which people are integrated into groups instead of differentiated individually.
- Power Distance: the degree to which organizational members expect power to be concentrated in the hands of a few instead of shared equally.
- Humane Orientation: the extent to which organizational members are encouraged to be fair, altruistic, generous, caring, and kind to others.
- Uncertainty avoidance: the extent to which organizations use social norms and procedures to avoid uncertainty and make future events more predictable.
- Gender differentiation: the degree to which work roles are differentiated by gender.

The measurement of beliefs about attributes that distinguish effective from less effective leaders asked managers to rate 12 attributes according to the degree to which they either help or inhibit someone from being an outstanding leader. Thus, a high attribute score indicates

Table 1
Differences between the Polish middle managers of 1996/1997 (N=134) and 2008/2009 (N=100) on organizational practices.

Organizational practices	Number of items	Polish Managers of 1996/1997		Polish Managers of 2008/2009		Sign. Level
		Mean	St. dev	Mean	St. dev	
Achievement orientation	3	4,62	1,15	4,55	1,72	n.s.
Future perspective	3	4,08	1,21	3,88	1,53	n.s.
Individualism vs. Collectivism	9	4,33	0,6	3,94	1,51	p<0,05
Power distance	3	4,21	1,04	4,69	1,56	p<0,01
Humane orientation	4	4,36	0,92	4,10	1,54	n.s.
Uncertainty avoidance	3	4,81	1,14	4,77	1,74	n.s.
Gender issues (masculinity/femininity)	8	3,77	0,55	3,38	1,43	p<0,01

that the attribute is perceived to be necessary for leadership effectiveness.

The leadership measurements asked managers to assess (estimate) their leaders, according to the traits that are presented below:

- **Performance Orientation:** improvement oriented, excellence oriented, achievement oriented.
- **Team Orientation:** group oriented, collaborative, loyal, consultative.
- **Individualistic Orientation:** autonomus, independent, unique.
- **Isolationistic Orientation:** nonparticipative, nondelegator, micromanager.
- **Autocratic Orientation:** dictatorial, bossy, elitist.
- **Decisiveness:** willful, logical, decisive.
- **Risk avoider:** ritualistic, formal, habitual, procedural.
- **Diplomatic:** worldly, win-win problem solver, effective bargainer.
- **Humane Orientation:** generous, compassionate.
- **Integrity:** honest, sincere, just, trustworthy.
- **Charismatic/Visionary:** foresight, prepared, anticipatory, plans ahead.
- **Charismatic/Inspirational:** enthusiastic, positive, morale booster, motive arouser.

In generating leadership items, the focus was on developing a comprehensive list of leader attributes and behaviors rather than on developing a priori leadership scales. The initial pool of items was based on leadership behaviors and attributes in several extant leadership theories, as described in House et al. (1997). The items were rated on a seven-point Likert-type scale that ranged from a low of "This behavior or characteristic greatly inhibits a person from being an outstanding leader" to a high of "The behavior or characteristic contributes greatly to a person being an outstanding leader" (Koopman, P., et al., p. 11).

All scales used in this study are based on extensive pilot study (see House, et al., 2004). Questionnaire items were translated from English to Polish and then translated back into English. Back-translation were checked by US coordinating team.

Data analysis: T-tests were performed to assess whether differences between means of the Polish managers during

1996/1997 and 2008/2009 on the scale of culture dimensions and leadership attributes are significant.

Analysis of Research Results

Table 1 presents mean organizational culture scores separately for Polish managers during the year 1996/1997 and the year 2008/2009.

The results presented in Table 1, indicate that Polish managers investigated in 2008/2009 in comparison to their counterparts from 1996/1997 are significantly more individualistic, more power oriented, more gender differentiated (differentiate more between work roles according to gender) and slightly less future and humane oriented.

Slightly lower scores on future orientation among Polish managers of 2008/2009 might reflect ongoing experience with coping with world economic crisis. Polish managers of 1996/1997, despite the transition from a command economy to free market economy, had to some extent the possibility to plan farther ahead, since their social and organizational circumstances allow them a little bit more stability to formulate long range strategies and plans.

Polish managers of 2008/2009, however, might find themselves too preoccupied with coping with the immediate and difficult day-to-day demands of worldwide economy crisis to be able to plan as far ahead as their counterparts studied in 1996/1997 could.

Table 2 presents the differences on scores connected with attributes necessary for leadership effectiveness between Polish middle managers investigated in 1996/1997 and 2008/2009.

From the results presented in Table 2, it can be concluded that middle managers investigated in 2008/2009, in comparison with their counterparts studied in 1996/1997, scored higher in the following attributes: Autocratic Orientation, Risk Avoidance, Isolationistic Orientation and Individualistic Orientation.

The emerging picture is also consistent with regard to leadership attributes of Performance Orientation,

Table 2
Differences between the Polish middle managers of 1996/1997 (N=277) and 2008/2009 (N=82) on preferred leader attributes.

Leader attributes	Number of items	Polish Managers of 1996/1997		Polish Managers of 2008/2009		Sign. Level
		Mean	St. dev	Mean	St. dev	
Performance Orientation	3	17,54	3,1	14,31	4,01	p<0,01
Team Orientation	6	33,18	5,3	23,78	8,29	p<0,01
Individualistic Orientation	4	17,39	4,63	33,82	8,62	p<0,01
Isolationistic Orientation	4	8,46	3,95	12,2	4,96	p<0,01
Autocratic Orientation	6	19,25	7,33	23,72	8,39	p<0,01
Decisiveness	4	23,88	3,36	18,08	4,85	p<0,01
Risk avoider	5	19,5	4,79	22,02	5,05	p<0,01
Diplomatic	4	29,87	4,0	17,06	5,44	p<0,01
Humane Orientation	2	8,07	2,5	7,17	3,17	p<0,05
Integrity	3	22,23	3,9	12,48	4,27	p<0,01
Charismatic/Visionery	9	54,06	7,28	38,62	11,64	p<0,01
Charismatic/Inspirational	9	52,44	6,8	36,76	11,13	p<0,01

Team Orientation, Decisiveness, Diplomatic, Humane Orientation, Integrity, Visionary and Charismatic/Inspirational, which are somewhat less strongly associated with leadership effectiveness by Polish middle managers studied in 2008/2009 in comparison with their counterparts investigated in 1996/1997.

Our results with respect to dimensions associated with leadership effectiveness are largely consistent with findings reported for differences in organizational dimension scores. Attributes such as autocratic leadership style, risk avoidance, individualistic orientation and isolationistic are more strongly associated with leadership effectiveness by Polish middle managers studied in 2008/2009, who also describe their organizational cultures as higher on Power Distance, Individualism, Gender Differentiation and slightly lower on Future Orientation and Humane Orientation.

It appears that more autocratic leadership style is applied towards followers, there is a less opportunity to display collective, visionary, integrity, and charismatic leadership attributes in organization.

It is surprising and to some extent unexpected, that middle managers studied in 2008/2009 exhibited a considerably less negative attitude towards autocratic behavior than did middle managers investigated in 1996/1997.

This might be a result of the present ongoing worldwide economic crisis, which probably call for more autocratic approach in order to solve accumulating obstacles and organizational problems.

GLOBE research results clearly indicated that Polish managers under study were clustered along South/East European countries. According to Jago, Mączyński and Reber “a radical political transformation between 1988 and 1994 produced few differences in managerial styles. If the political change can be labeled a discontinuous leap, the managerial changes must be labeled incremental”

(1996, p. 114). It has been widely accepted that managerial leadership style is influenced by the dimension of national culture which Hofstede labels “Power Distance”. From a survey of 116,000 employees in 40 countries, Hofstede defines this construct as “the extent to which a society accepts the fact that power in institutions and organizations is distributed equally” (1980, p. 45).

According to Hofstede (1980; 1991; 2000) in high power-distance countries, managers make decisions autocratically; they employ close supervisions and do not show much consideration for subordinates’ feelings. These subordinates are unwilling to disagree with their superiors. On the other hand, managers in low power-distance countries consult with their subordinates before making final decisions and demonstrate a higher level of consideration for subordinates’ views. These subordinates assess close supervision negatively and are reluctant to disagree with their superiors.

It should be noted, that our previous study under the GLOBE research project (1996/1997) contrasting North/West and South/East European countries, showed a considerably less negative attitude towards autocratic leadership style from the part of managers representing Eastern European countries in comparison with western managers.

Research results proved that participative leadership is perceived to be more important in facilitating effective leadership in western European countries that in the East European countries including Poland (Brodbeck, et al., 2000; Jago, et al., 1996; Mączyński 1998; 2001; 2002; Mączyński, et al., 1994; 2008; 2010).

Higher scores on Power Distance of Polish managers studied during 2008/2009 than their counterparts investigated in 1996/1997 were unexpected, since a great deal of advantageous changes in Poland associated with transition from a command economic system to the new

free market economic system and above all, the process of joining European Union in 2004, took place. That is why one could expect that tremendous changes in political, social, and organizational systems, under the current transition process should weaken Power Distance in organizational values and practices and lead to a more negative attitude, among other things, towards the autocratic leadership style of the newer generation of Polish managers.

Interpreting our findings in this light, leads to the conclusion that Power Distance is still a persistent phenomenon deeply embedded in Polish culture, which has a profound effect on leadership style of Polish managers. That is why Polish managers of 2008/2009 have a considerably less negative attitude towards autocratic behavior than their counterparts investigated during 1996/1997.

Our research results point to the conclusion that the introduction of a market economy in Poland has shown little effects so far on the leadership behavior of Polish managers. It would mean that profound changes in political, social, economic and institutional systems are not sufficient (satisfactory) factors that would modify organizational values and subsequent attitudes and behaviors. It means that deep changes in the mentality of people are needed to make necessary, beneficial changes in the cultural values and subsequent (succeeding) attitudes and behaviors.

Our findings presented in this paper indorse the views expressed by Hofstede (2000) and Martan (1993) that changes in mentality require a substantial period of time. So, we can come to the conclusion that the process of changing the mentality of Polish managers despite the fact that the former command political and economic system in Poland have ceased to exist (function), is indeed very slow and difficult to progress.

It should be noted that progressing higher scores on Power Distance and Autocratic Behavior for Polish organizations produce disadvantageous situation for Polish institution relative to Western organizations. If as we speculate, organizations in the new free market system will have to adapt to rapidly developing world-wide economy crisis, managerial practices and values that stress Power Distance and Autocratic leadership style will probably become particularly dysfunctional for organizational survival and effectiveness. This means that to be able to cope effectively with the present economic crisis and to be competitive with organizations in western countries, Polish managers will have to acquire such a values and management practices which would help them to overcome demanding severe economic conditions.

In summary, our overall purpose in the present paper was to compare Polish middle managers studied in 2008/2009 and 1996/1997 on dimensions of organizational culture and on managers' beliefs concerning attributes that distinguish effective from less effective leaders.

Data reported in this paper were drawn from a larger

international study, the GLOBE project, which was designed to investigate societal, organizational and leadership attributes and compare them with a new set of data collected in the period of 2008/2009.

We hope our analyses will contribute to a better understanding of culturally driven differences in leadership and serve as a source of information concerning management practices in Poland under the present world-wide economic crisis.

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