

Leading in Hungary

How Dutchmen perceive Dutch-Hungarian differences in leadership on the work floor

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ABSTRACT,

The aim of this study is to identify the Hungarian cultural standards as perceived by the Dutch, in order to understand what effective leadership in Hungary is. In this qualitative research, five Dutch managers, working in Hungary were interviewed and asked about frictions with their Hungarian colleagues. These conflicts can be referred to as “critical incidents” which help to identify the contrasting cultural standards. In total, eleven Hungarian cultural standards were identified: Indirectness, No-autonomy, Authoritarianism, Hierarchy, Change avoidance, Politeness, Self-protective behavior, Hiding of compliments, work-to-live, Relationship avoiding and Low self-esteem. These cultural standards can help Dutchmen with understanding Hungarian behavior to avoid cultural clashes. From the cultural standards, a Hungarian leadership style was derived, which was compared with the leadership style of the Dutchmen. Contrasting leadership behaviors and attributes were found, especially regarding autonomy, hierarchy and authority.

Keywords

Cross-cultural management, Cultural clashes, Cultural standards, Dutch, Hungary, Leadership.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In today's globalized world, international trade has vastly increased, just as the number of intercultural contacts. Better understanding and higher acceptance of different cultural backgrounds leads to more effective communication and eventually higher chances of success in business (Raju, 2017). There is great need to recognize cultural differences and learn to use them to our advantage, instead of ignoring them (Adler & Gundersen, 1997). Problems can arise on many levels due to ignorance of the cultural differences. For example, even the diversity of cultural backgrounds within one organization can lead to an increased risk of emotional conflicts, as "people find it difficult to identify with (and easy to stereotype) those of a different race or tenure" (Pelled, Eisenhardt, & Xin, 1999, 20). Research on the relation of culture and management is extensive, most famous being Hofstede's research on cultural dimensions. However, most research in this field consists of quantitative cross-national comparisons, where universal categories or dimensions are used to describe various national cultures (Sackmann & Phillips, 2004). Far less research on the intercultural interactions between two specific nations has been conducted with an interpretive qualitative approach, although this can give a more detailed understanding of the differences.

The GLOBE research project has been describing the interrelationship of societal culture, societal effectiveness and societal expectations of leaders. It identified nine cultural dimensions, and six different leadership types (House, Dorfman, Javidan, Hanges, & Sully de Luque, 2013). It has completed research in over 60 countries and created a framework to compare these countries (GLOBE, 2004). According to the results of the GLOBE project, there are strong differences between the expected behaviors and attributes of leaders in the Netherlands and in Hungary.

Dutch leaders are expected to be highly charismatic and strongly believe in the importance of participative leadership, the involvement of others in making and implementing decisions. At the same time (The GLOBE project, 2022), leaders are expected to support independent thinking (autonomy). Leaders are reluctant to show self-protective behavior since this is not accepted. To conclude, effective leaders in the Netherlands are visionary, inspirational and have integrity (The GLOBE project, 2022).

Leaders in Hungary however, are not expected to show such high levels of charisma, and participative leadership is of even lower importance (The GLOBE project, 2022). The use of self-protective behavior is more accepted in Hungary, and leaders will therefore often show this behavior. In general, effective leaders are those who have a realistic vision and are mostly performance oriented and decisive (The GLOBE project, 2022). Additional research to leadership in Hungary shows signs that an autocratic leadership style is still effective for organizational performance, and that financial rewards are most often used as a motivational tool by leaders (Karácsony & Czibula, 2020). A recent study, contrasting the outcomes of the GLOBE, found that ignoring the opinion of subordinates and being non-consultative and non-listening are seen as negative behaviors, whilst democratic and supportive leadership were seen as positive contributors (Eversole, et al., 2016).

Several studies mention that resistance to change is an additional issue that managers in Hungary must deal with. The Hungarians

have learned to resist to changes or to tolerate changes without questioning and believing the "why" of these changes (Fehér, 1997). Changes in Hungarian organizations are slow, and it would be unwise to introduce radical change (Commisceao Global, n.d.). Since it is now more than 30 years after the fall of the communist regime in Hungary, it is interesting to see whether the resistance to change is still as strong as in the 1990s.

The literature clearly suggests that there are great differences between Dutch leadership and Hungarian leadership. I.e., in the Netherlands a participative leadership style and autonomy are expected behaviors and attributes of leaders, whereas in Hungary these aspects are not expected from leaders. Besides the differences, the literature is not unanimous about which leadership attributes are most effective in Hungary: being consultative or not. This paper is adding knowledge about effective leadership in Hungary, from the perspective of Dutch expatriate managers. Thus, the goal of this paper is to find out what are the main differences in leadership as perceived by Dutch managers in Hungary. How do Dutch managers cope with these differences, and what are the effects of their reactions? This research also wants to discover whether a strong resistance to change is experienced by the Dutch managers, and how they deal with it. To the best of our knowledge, this is the first study directly comparing the Dutch and Hungarian leadership styles.

Given the above, the following main research question was formulated:

What differences do Dutch managers experience between Hungarian and Dutch leadership styles?

Two sub-questions are added:

How do Dutchmen, cope with these differences?

How do Dutch managers overcome the resistance to change?

2. ACADEMIC RELEVANCE

Culture-interactional research is particularly important for our understanding of intercultural interaction, and relatively speaking, there has been much less culture-interactional than culture-comparative research. There is thus a great need for more research that explores the dynamics of intercultural interaction (Spencer-Oatey & Franklin, 2009). Research comparing leadership in Hungary and the Netherlands, provides us with more knowledge on management practices on today's Hungarian work floor. Previous studies showed contradictory results on what behaviors lead to effective leadership in Hungary. These studies, however, are comparative studies, where the intercultural interactions between Hungarians and Dutchmen are not considered. This study can also contribute in testing the typology of the GLOBE project and whether it is reflected in the experiences of Dutch managers. Also, it remains unclear how managers can best implement changes in the work process in Hungarian companies. In all, research to the intercultural interactions between specifically Dutchmen and Hungarians has, to the best of our knowledge, not yet been done. This paper will bring new insights into effective behaviors/attributes of leaders in Hungary, through the perspective of Dutch managers.

3. PRACTICAL RELEVANCE

The paper will provide new insights in the cultural differences between the Dutch and the Hungarians. With these new insights, (HR) managers can provide training for the expatriates. With this cultural training Dutch managers will learn what behaviors will lead to cultural clashes and what behaviors will be tolerated and effective. Cultural training is very important for the success of expatriates, and any form of training is seen as beneficial (Suutari & Riusala, 2001). The paper will provide expatriate managers with new knowledge about what leadership style is most effective to reach their goals on the Hungarian work floor.

4. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In this section, the relevant literature for conducting the proposed research will be discussed. This encompasses a review of existing literature about the GLOBE research, leadership in the Netherlands and in Hungary, transformational leadership and resistance to change in Hungarian organizations.

4.1 *The GLOBE project*

4.1.1 *an introduction to the GLOBE project*

One of the most extensive research projects in the cross-cultural field, is the Global Leadership and Organizational Behavior Effectiveness project (GLOBE). The GLOBE research, started in the early 1990's, is a study on the interrelationships among societal culture, societal effectiveness and societal leadership expectations. The central argument in GLOBE's research is that attributes and characteristics that separate societal cultures from each other, may also differentiate organizational practices and leader attributes and behaviors, that will be effective in that culture (House, Dorfman, Javidan, Hanges, & Sully de Luque, 2013). Similar to the research by Hofstede, the GLOBE research uncovered cultural dimensions such as power distance and uncertainty avoidance. Countries receive a score on two levels, the country practice score i.e., "as is" and the country value score i.e., "should be". In addition to the cultural dimensions, the GLOBE research identifies six leadership types, such as autonomous and charismatic leadership. Based on the findings of this study, countries can be clustered in groups of similar countries. The Netherlands is clustered in the Germanic Europe cluster, whereas Hungary is clustered in the cultural group of Eastern Europe. This implies that there are differences between Hungary and the Netherlands, which will be briefly discussed.

4.1.2 *Effective leadership in the Netherlands*

Effective leaders in the Netherlands, show high levels of charisma, who strongly believe in the positive effects of participative leadership whilst also supporting independent thinking (autonomy). Self-protective behavior of leaders, such as promoting their self-interest above that of the group, is strongly rejected. On the contrary, leaders that are visionary, inspirational and have integrity are respected and valued in Dutch organizations (The GLOBE project, 2022). Autocratic leadership is amongst one of the least effective and preferred leadership attributes in the Netherlands, for the Netherlands belongs to group of countries (from the GLOBE research) that least prefer autocratic attributes (Thierry, den Hartog, Koopman, & Wilderom, 2007).

4.1.3 *Effective leadership in Hungary*

Effective leaders in Hungary however differ on these aspects. Charismatic traits are of lower importance compared to the Netherlands. Participative leadership is seen as not particularly relevant for effective leadership, contrary to the Netherlands (The GLOBE project, 2022). As a result of this, consensus seeking is more often seen as a sign of weakness than as positive contribution (Commisceao Global, n.d.). Effective leaders in Hungary are also not reluctant to show self-protective behaviors (The GLOBE project, 2022). In contrast to the GLOBE results, a recent study on effective leadership in Hungarian organizations found that ignoring the opinion of subordinates and being non-consultative and non-listening are seen as negative behaviors, whilst democratic and supportive leadership were seen as positive contributors. In this study, the informants (both managers and non-managers) were asked to decide which leadership behaviors and attributes are effective and ineffective to them. This was done with the use of critical incidents in which the informants were asked to recall situations in which this effective or ineffective behavior was shown (Eversole, et al., 2016). Thus, the question is whether (Dutch) managers in Hungary should be consultative and listening to their subordinates or not, to be most effective.

4.2 *Transformational leadership*

From section 4.1.2, we can derive that (aspects of) effective leadership in the Netherlands is closely related to the transformational leadership style. Therefore, this leadership style will be explained in more detail, because it is likely that the Dutch managers have a similar leadership style. Transformational leaders have been shown to include the following four interrelated components: charismatic, inspirational, intellectually stimulating and individually considerate (Bass & Avolio, 1996). Charismatic leaders are role models that their sub-ordinates strive to emulate and align around a vision, mission and a common purpose. Inspirational leaders strive to provide meaning and optimism about the mission and its achievability to the followers. Intellectual leaders encourage followers through the questioning of basic assumptions and by using new and unique perspectives on problems. Individually considerate leaders, diagnose the individual needs of their followers, in order to elevate them to a higher level (Bass & Avolio, 1996). A transformational leader can therefore be described as a leader who influences followers by getting them to transcend their self-interest for the greater good (the team or organization etc.), while also enhancing followers' expectations, abilities and willingness to take risks (Bass & Avolio, 1996).

4.3 *Transactional leadership*

A different leadership style is transactional leadership (related to the autocratic leadership style), which is often used to contrast transformational leadership. We can distinguish two aspects of transactional leadership: management-by-exception and contingent reward. A transactional leader concentrates on identifying and correcting mistakes by adopting disciplinary actions towards the subordinates. Contingent reward has more positive origins where the leader and followers negotiate agreements about objectives and/or task requirements. The leader provides rewards and recognition if the followers fulfill the requirements (Bass & Avolio, 1996). Recent research to organizational performance in Hungarian organizations found, that an autocratic leadership style brings higher levels of performance. Financial rewards and recognition are still among the most used motivational tools in Hungarian organizations (Karácsony & Czibula, 2020). Thus, it would seem that (Dutch)

managers in Hungary would be most effective when using a more transactional and less transformational style. However, Viktor Orban, the Hungarian political leader, who is dominating Hungarian political life since 2010, can be characterized as a charismatic leader (Körösényi, 2017). This raises the question whether transformational leadership might not work in Hungarian organizations too.

4.4 Resistance to change in Hungarian organizations

Resistance to change is another issue that managers in Hungary must deal with according to several scholars. Hungarians have learned to resist to changes or to tolerate changes without questioning and believing the “why” of these changes (Fehér, 1997). The resistance has come from different historical-cultural circumstances such as the communist regime. According to Fehér there are thus lower levels of commitment to a change in Hungarian organizations. The typical character of change in Hungarian organizations is slow and it would be imprudent to introduce radical change (Commisceao Global, n.d.). Resistance to change, in Hungarian organizations, seems to increase when the size of the organizations increases. In micro-organizations resistance to change is less noticeable by the employer. In medium sized organizations, resistance to change is found to be four times higher (Richbell, Szerb, & Vitai, 2010). Transformational leadership is found to be significantly positively influencing individuals’ commitment to a change (Herold, Fedor, Caldwell, & Yi, 2008). However, this research is done in the western part of the world, where transformational leadership is more often used by management. It is not certain if the same effect applies to Eastern European countries.

4.5 Conclusion

From the sections above, we can conclude that research on effective leadership in Hungary has produced inconsistent results. Especially for (Dutch) expatriate managers it is very important to know what leadership style is most effective in Hungary. This paper will bring additional knowledge on effective leadership in Hungary, from the Dutch perspective.

5. METHODOLOGY

5.1 Research Design

For this research, an inductive qualitative method was used to answer the research questions. The use of interviews is seen as the most relevant method for data collection, because we are seeking deeper understanding of the experiences of Dutch managers. Interviews give the opportunity to use open-ended questions to collect in-depth information. This study is inductive because from the observation from the interviews a general conclusion is formed. In cross-cultural management studies, interviewing expatriates can be extremely useful because they are the ones who have first-hand experience of the differences across countries (Suutari & Riusala, 2001).

5.2 Data Collection

The Dutch expatriates were found and contacted through LinkedIn. The interviews were carried out online through Microsoft Teams and Zoom, since the Dutch expatriates were still working in Hungary and thus it would be too complicated to arrange physical meetings with them. Five interviews were conducted with Dutch expatriates who fulfill the following requirements:

- They should be working in Hungary for more than half a year.
- They should have finished an intermediate or higher education.
- They should not work for a Dutch company but among Hungarians.

Table 1 gives an overview of the demographics of the research group. One additional note is that every interviewee worked in a multinational company based in Hungary.

Interview no.	Gender	Age	Duration	Industry/sector
1	M	44	12	Service
2	M	49	2	Manufacturing
3	M	43	5	Service
4	M	47	17	Financial service
5	M	52	2	Service

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of the Dutch interviewees

5.3 Research Instrument

The interviews were semi-structured to collect qualitative, open-ended data. The use of semi-structured interviews gave the interviewer the opportunity to explore the participants’ thoughts, feelings and beliefs about the topics that were relevant for them. On the other hand, this type of interview also allows for an objective comparison between the participants because (Pollock, n.d.). This enabled the interviewer to delve deeply into the personal and sometimes sensitive experiences. After the interviews, Amberscript software as well as Microsoft Teams were used to transcribe the recorded interviews into a word document after which the texts have been corrected by hand.

5.4 Data Analysis

For conducting cross-cultural research to the different attitudes towards leadership in the Netherlands and Hungary, the Critical Incident Technique (CIT) was used. CIT was originally described as a set of procedures to collect observations of human behavior, to facilitate their potential usefulness in solving practical problems (Flanagan, 1954). Critical incidents in an intercultural context can be seen as recurring situations that are unexpected, strange, irritating or immoral (Thomas, 2010). Critical incidents emerge mostly in situations where the cultural differences are the largest (Gioia, Corley, & Hamilton, 2012).

Thomas (2010) conducted research to the intercultural interactions to derive cultural standards. Cultural standards can be defined as forms of perceptions, thought patterns, judgements and interactions that are shared by the majority of the members of one community, who regard this behavior as normal, typical and binding (Thomas, 2010). Uncommon behavior is judged on the basis of these cultural standards, this is when we see the critical incidents. Critical incidents can however both be pleasant and unpleasant behavior, although the name might suggest otherwise (Fiedler, Mitchell, & Triandis, 1971).

To further analyze the transcribed texts, the Thematic Analysis (TA) method was used. The Thematic Analysis is used to create patterns or themes from the data, to address the research question. The first step is to familiarize with the data by reading through it several times. Thereafter, the coding starts, in this phase the relevant passages (the critical incidents) in the text are identified

and coded with a color. The third step is to cluster the passages together in an excel sheet and label them as to topics or themes. The themes will then be reviewed, defined and named (Smith, 2015).

6. RESULTS

In this chapter, the results of the research into the cultural and leadership differences between Hungarians and Dutchmen will be discussed. The cultural standards will first be given a definition, to clarify their meaning in this research. This chapter will also give the results about the resistance to change.

6.1 The Hungarian cultural standards

The analysis of the transcripts from the interviews have produced eleven Hungarian cultural standards, which will be defined below in table 2. Only the cultural standards that were mentioned more than once have been included. As a result, the cultural standards “knowledge-based” and “short-term oriented” were removed.

Cultural standard	Definition	Number of interviewees mentioned the cultural standard
Indirectness	Reluctance to act or speak and opinions and feedback are not openly expressed	5
No-autonomy	There is no freedom to make independent decisions without the chef being involved	5
Authoritarianism	High acceptance of orders being imposed from above	5
Hierarchy	People behave according to the position in the hierarchy or type of relation	4
Change avoidance	Wanting things to remain unchanged	4
Politeness	Showing respect and kindness for people, especially with authority	3
Self-protective behavior	Behavior to protect or enhance one's own status	3
Hiding of compliments	Keeping it for themselves when receiving a compliment	3
Work-to-live	There is a low attachment to the job	2
Relationship avoiding	Building relationships with colleagues or clients is not important	2
Low self-esteem	People have a negative self-image	2

Table 2. overview of the Hungarian cultural standards (from a Dutch perspective)

6.1.1 Indirectness

One cultural standard that has led to many Critical Incidents, is the indirectness. Indirect means that Hungarians are very reluctant to act or speak and try to postpone giving their opinion if not keep entirely quiet.

Quote:

“Hungarians find saying “no” very difficult. Whenever I explain something and ask if they understood, they always say that they understood. However, a week later I can just see that they did not understand. They just think it is difficult to say “no, I don’t understand”. I have always learnt that, if I don’t understand, I will keep asking questions until I fully understand. In my opinion, asking questions is a form of showing interest, but the Hungarians see it as impolite.” (Interviewee 1)

Thus, Hungarians find it difficult to be honest and say what they really think. They will also not go back with questions to the supervisor. For a Dutchmen, it is more common to (quickly) speak their mind and ask questions. However, interviewee 1 also mentioned that he sometimes tries to remain silent during the first ten minutes of a meeting. He does this to give Hungarians the opportunity to speak their mind.

6.1.2 No-autonomy

The Hungarian cultural standard, no-autonomy, is a comprehensive cultural standard mainly comprised of the aspects decision-making and responsibility. In short, it means that there is no freedom to make independent decisions without the chief being involved.

Quote:

“I gave a group of four Hungarian employees a task, and I formulated specific questions. But coming to an answer went very painful, they came back to ask if they were permitted to contact different parties or where they could find certain information. I expect people to try to find out things themselves.” (Interviewee 5)

This quote shows that the Hungarian employees did not work autonomously, because they went back to the supervisor to ask for permission and with other questions. The Dutch supervisor in this case expected employees to work autonomously and make decisions themselves.

6.1.3 Authoritarianism

A returning Hungarian cultural standard is authoritarianism. Authoritarianism means the high level of acceptance, that orders are being imposed from above, so from management to subordinate.

Quote:

“When my Hungarian colleague became interim director, he immediately started to behave as if he was better than the rest. He wanted to have two meetings every week to which I said “hold up, I only do meetings if there is really something to discuss”. He started to behave incredibly bossy, which I did not like, so I told him what I thought of his behavior, but he did not appreciate that. We talked it over, and the conclusion was that I had to calm down and respect his choices because he was the boss.” (Interviewee 4)

In this example the Hungarian director shows that with authority comes the power to impose orders. The Dutchmen however showed through his response that this is normally not accepted in the Dutch culture.

6.1.4 Hierarchy

All interviewees mentioned that the hierarchy is still very present in Hungary. This means that Hungarian people behave according to the position in the hierarchy or type of relation. As a result, there are clear barriers between the managers and their subordinates.

Quote:

“Whenever the CFO, he was from Belgium, came to visit, all the Hungarians were petrified with fear, just because it was the CFO. So, I tell the Hungarians that they should not forget that he is also only human who just happens to have a good career. So, I step up to him with ease, and we have a fun conversation and ended up having dinner together. So, I think that the Dutch are not so impressed by someone’s position or status, whilst the Hungarians are.” (Interviewee 4)

In this quote, the Hungarian employees tend to fear meeting with the superior because of a title or status, this leads them to avoid contact with a superior. The Dutchmen however sees himself as an equal to his superior (and vice versa), this means that they can talk to anyone.

6.1.5 Change avoidance

The Hungarian cultural standard change avoidance means that people prefer things to remain unchanged. It was mentioned by most interviewees, although it had not led to large conflicts.

Quote:

“It is not only about actual change, but also about for example new or higher targets. Whenever we set our target higher than before, people respond as if it is not possible, there is no belief or support” (interviewee 2)

This quote showcases that the Hungarians look upon the possibility of change with disbelief, and as a result there is less support. For the Dutchmen, this disbelief is not normal because Dutchmen have more confidence that they can influence the situation.

6.1.6 Politeness

One returning Hungarian cultural standard is politeness. This cultural standard means that the Hungarians show respect or formal behavior for people, especially people with authority.

Quote:

“In the morning, when the employees arrive, men give each other a hand but they never give the women a hand. For me, as a Dutchmen, this was very difficult because to me men and women are equals, so that was troublesome for me. So, when I arrived in the morning, I gave everyone a hand. However, I noticed that the men thought this was strange whilst the women felt uneasy. Eventually I stopped giving hands at all. But now I have learnt that the reason for not giving hands to women is a form of respect because they don’t want to obligate physical contact.” (Interviewee 3)

In this quote the Hungarian behavior is a form of respect and politeness towards women. But for the Dutchmen, this behavior seems disrespectful because it seems as if women and men are not equals.

6.1.7 Self-protective behaviors

Although the self-protective behavior has led to fewer Critical Incidents, the consequences can be far more severe. Self-

protective behavior are behaviors that try to protect or enhance someone’s status or dignity.

Quote:

“The database was corrupted, which meant that applications stopped working. I could quickly see in the log-file that someone had deleted a table and replaced it with a faulty or outdated one. In the log-file, the name of this person was also mentioned, so after a few hours, I asked him if he knew what happened, but he denied. Only after three days, he finally admitted, but I do not understand that when I asked him, he did not admit sooner. Because of this behavior I do not trust him anymore.” (Interviewee 1)

According to the quote, the Hungarian employee tried to cover up his mistake, and even when there was proof of guilt he still denied. For the Dutchmen this behavior was surprising because making mistakes is accepted in the Netherlands. Additionally, this behavior is considered as lying by the Dutchmen and now he does not trust the Hungarian employee anymore, which is a strong disqualification in the eyes of a Dutchmen.

6.1.8 Hiding of compliments

Another Hungarian cultural standard is the hiding of compliments. This cultural standard can be observed by the behavior of keeping it for themselves when receiving a compliment and not sharing it with their colleagues.

Quote:

“Although the Hungarians like to receive a compliment, I notice that they rather keep this to themselves. They rather not make this public because it can lead to jealousy from their colleagues. Those colleagues can then complain and say, “why did he get rewarded while I did not?”” (Interviewee 2)

It is thus noticed by the Dutch manager that most Hungarians prefer to keep a low-profile when receiving compliments or rewards. Publicly sharing compliments or rewards has led to conflicts, however this was only mentioned by interviewee 2.

6.1.9 Work-to-live

The Hungarian cultural standard work-to-live is comprised of multiple observed behaviors such as: “work is just a way to earn money” and “lower levels of loyalty to the company”. In general, this cultural standard can be described as a low attachment to the job.

Quote:

“My opinion is that the people here easily switch jobs. They will leave to the competitor for a 15 percent pay-raise. I would look at the long-term growth, and I also think that it is not very loyal to go to the direct competitor.” (Interviewee 5)

In this example, it is mentioned that the Hungarians easily switch for an increase in their salary, additionally they switch to direct competitors. For the Dutchmen, the importance of money is much lower than for example the long-term personal growth. It is also seen as disloyalty to switch jobs to a direct competitor.

6.1.10 Relationship avoiding

An additional Hungarian cultural standard is that of relationship avoiding. For Hungarians it is not or less important to build relationships with colleagues or clients to do business. Therefore, Hungarians avoid bonding with colleagues and clients.

Quote:

"Whenever there is a problem, they always mail around. I tell them, pick up the phone and call the guy, to which they respond 'yeah, but it is the head of, or he is this and that'. I tell them that it is not relevant who someone is, it is important that the problem is solved. They still find this difficult. I tell them to find out who the person really is and try to bond with them. In my opinion, the creation of this bond makes doing business much easier, but they avoid building relations" (Interviewee 4)

In the previous mentioned example, the Hungarian both avoid direct contact by not calling a client, whilst also avoid building a relation with him. The Dutchmen however is convinced that relations with stakeholders, in this case a client, would be beneficial for solving the problem.

6.1.11 Low self-esteem

An additional Hungarian cultural standard is that of low self-esteem. This means that Hungarians tend to be more negative about themselves when comparing themselves with people from Western-Europe.

Quote:

"It is hard to imagine but I do notice that Hungarians look at North-, and Western-Europe as if they are more developed and have more money. I hear that from Hungarians who leave Hungary, for example someone is leaving because she is going to work in the Netherlands for a much higher salary. So, the feeling of being the underdog is maintained this way." (Interviewee 5)

In this example, the Hungarians have mentioned to the Dutchmen that they see other parts of Europe as more developed and wealthier.

6.2 Hungarian leadership style

From the Hungarian cultural standards, the common Hungarian leadership style can be derived. The cultural standards that have the highest influence on the leadership style are: hierarchy, indirectness, authoritarianism, no-autonomy, work-to-live and self-protective behaviors. The Hungarians act according to the position in the hierarchy, this means that leaders should create clear barriers between them and their subordinates. Because they are positioned higher in the hierarchy, it also means that leaders can impose orders onto the subordinates. The cultural standard no-autonomy suggests that subordinates should not be given the freedom to make independent decisions by their leaders. Work is also seen as solely a way to earn money, and therefore the employees would have low attachment to the job. The importance of money would suggest that leaders can use financial rewards to motivate employees. Self-protective behavior is another attribute of leadership according to the GLOBE (2022). Since the Hungarians are not reluctant to show these behaviors, leaders in Hungary should also accept or support self-protective behaviors. In short, from the Hungarian cultural standards, aspects of an autocratic and transactional leadership were derived such as no autonomy and financial rewards.

6.3 The Dutch leadership style

Not only could the Hungarian cultural standards be derived from the data analysis, but also aspects of Dutch leadership. These aspects can for example be the attitude towards decision-making or motivation. Typical transformative leadership aspects were found such as diagnosing individual needs for personal development. Interviewee 3 mentioned *"I often show the pyramid*

of Maslow, because I want my employees to reach the highest level. I work with them to get them there". Other aspects are the encouraging of questioning and finding (new) solutions to problems. Interviewee 5 said *"I do not believe that it is right for people to never question anything, to believe that all wisdom is concentrated into a small group of people. I think we can achieve way more when we stimulate those people to question and reflect more"*. Additionally, motivating employees is seen as part of their job as a leader. Interviewee 2 had the following comment about motivation *"I use humor to make the achievement of targets less heavy. I also give examples of past achievements to create a positive image"*. This example relates to the inspirational aspect of transformational leadership, where the leader tries to create optimism about the achievability of a goal or mission, in this case the target. The last aspect is that of charisma, where the leader tries to create a common goal or mission. Interviewee 3 said *"for me it is always about a purpose. First, I want to know their individual purpose, so we can align that with the purpose of the team"*. The Dutch managers thus use, at least to a certain extent, a transformational leadership style.

Worth mentioning is how Dutchmen look upon the opposing transactional and autocratic leadership style. According to the respondents, these leadership styles are more commonly used by Hungarian managers. These leadership styles are characterized by their use of (financial) rewards for motivation and the low levels of autonomy. When the interviewees were asked how they as Dutchmen motivate their employees, none of them mentioned the use of (financial) rewards. However, when explicitly asked about the use of financial rewards, two out of the five respondents mentioned that employees can receive financial rewards. Thus, the use of financial rewards is not the standard tool for motivation by the Dutchmen, but in some cases, it is still used. The aspect of autonomy is about giving the employees the freedom to make decisions and not exercising control. Four out of five respondents mentioned that they prefer or encourage autonomy. For example, interviewee 1 mentioned *"A good manager should give their employees the responsibility and freedom to decide how they achieve their tasks. This means that he should not continuously check on them."*. Additionally, interviewee 3 mentioned *"When my employees ask me for help, I never tell them what to do. That is because I want them to think and find out for themselves. They usually don't experience this in Hungarian organizations."*. Interviewee 3 also said *"I strongly believe in freedom, no matter the cultural background. Sometimes they struggle at first because they are not used to it."* In the previous quote, freedom refers to freedom in decision-making, this shows that the Dutchmen think autonomy is of great importance for doing business.

6.4 Comparison between Dutch and Hungarian leadership styles

The Hungarian leadership style and the Dutch leadership style are to a large extent each other's opposite. Especially when it comes to the hierarchy, autonomy and authority leadership aspects, there are direct opposites of the (transformational) leadership style of the Dutchmen. When interviewee 4 was asked about the autonomy he mentioned that *"The Hungarians are not used to it. It is normal for them to come to the chef when they have a problem, and then the chef will come with a solution. Giving them the opportunity or maybe even the obligation to think for themselves, takes time. However, it does work!"*. Another example, from interviewee 3, who said *"My management style was new for them, but they seem to enjoy it. We also conduct engagement surveys, which show that 80 percent or more is engaged."*. Interviewee 3 also mentioned that in their other office, where the autocratic leadership style was more commonly used, the employees were much less satisfied.

Lastly, interviewee 5 said *“I do not believe in an authoritarian model, not even in a country where authority is normal and accepted. I think that with autonomy, we as a company can reach much more.”*. In short, Dutchmen recognize the contrast between the Hungarian culture and their own leadership style. However, in their experience their (transformative) leadership style is more effective in Hungary than an autocratic or transactional leadership style.

6.5 Resistance to change

The results of the data analysis show no significant signs of a resistance to change. Interviewee 3 said *“I feel more resistance in the Netherlands than here. That is because in the Netherlands people argue more easily, whereas the Hungarians rather do it because they think that arguing will get them in trouble.”*. Interviewee 4 said *“Change is always difficult, not only with my Hungarian colleagues. Either people accept change because it is what management dictates, or people will say that they will not cooperate. But I cannot say that the Hungarians have a typical response.”* There were thus no signs that making change is more difficult in Hungary than for example in the Netherlands. However, there were signs of lower commitment to change or even fear of change. Interviewee 1 said *“Often people know that things have to change, for example with the elections, but they have this fear of change which leads them to not change their vote”*. And interviewee 5 mentioned *“I think people prefer not to change, because I think the people are less committed”*. Thus, the Hungarians show signs that they prefer to remain unchanged, however this has not led to any significant resistance.

6.6 How did the Dutchmen cope with the differences?

Although the Dutchmen experienced cultural and leadership differences, they generally did not adapt. The Dutchmen instead tried to change the behavior and attitude of their Hungarian colleagues. This can be due to the fact that the Dutchmen are convinced that their own leadership style is the best. In section 6.3, several examples were mentioned that indicate that the Dutchmen indeed are convinced that some leadership attributes and behaviors are the best. For example, interviewee 3 mentioned that he strongly believes in the positive effects of autonomy, even though the Hungarians seem to struggle with this behavior at first. Similarly, interviewee 1 mentioned that a good manager should give their subordinates the responsibility and freedom to make independent decisions. Because of their opinion on effective leadership, the Dutchmen try to change the behavior of the Hungarian colleagues. For example, the Dutchmen encouraging their subordinates to make independent decisions, the Dutch managers supported the Hungarians to show autonomous behaviors which is the opposite of their cultural standard. The same holds for the hierarchy, authority and indirectness, the previously mentioned example by interviewee 4 in section 6.1.4 is a good representation of the Dutchmen staying true to their own cultural standards, leading to a conflict with the Hungarian colleague. Although, the Dutchmen experienced their leadership style to be effective in Hungary, it is not clear whether the Hungarians prefer this over a Hungarian leadership style. An example which indicates that the Dutch leadership style might not be as effective as the Dutchmen experience is from section 6.5, where interviewee 3 mentions that change is more difficult in the Netherlands, because the Hungarians argue less since they are afraid to get into trouble. If the Dutch leadership style would be effective, the Hungarians should feel empowered to speak their mind and question the things that they disagree with. An example where the Dutchmen did adapt his own behavior is from interviewee 1 who said that he sometimes tries to remain silent

during the first minutes of a meeting, to give other people the opportunity to speak. On the one hand this shows that the Dutchmen changed his own behavior to be less direct, however, the intention is to stimulate the Hungarians to be less indirect. He noticed that this was pleasant for the Hungarians. This raises the question, whether it really is effective as a Dutchmen to stay close to their own style of leadership or that adapting might be even more beneficial. To conclude, the Dutchmen cope with the cultural and leadership differences, by stimulating and encouraging the Hungarians to move away from their cultural standards.

6.7 Generational differences

The analysis of the data also uncovered several indications of generational differences. Comments such as *“we work with younger people, thus”* or *“the newer generation”* were common, clearly suggesting that differences are to be expected. Besides these typical comments, interviewee 4 mentioned *“The generation before communism, is somewhat rigid in their perspective on the world and in their way of thinking. The generation after does not have this to the same extent, they are more motivated to expand their perspective on the world”*. Interviewee 3 also gave a similar example *“In the older generation who grew up with the communist regime, people did not question or challenge each other, it was just about having a job and not about efficiency. The younger generation wants to be more innovative, and therefore it is different.”*. Clearly there are indications of strong generational differences between the generations pre- and post-communism.

7. DISCUSSION

The goal of this research was fourfold. First, to find out what differences in leadership the Dutchmen experience. Secondly, which behaviors and attributes of leadership are perceived effective in Hungary. Thirdly, how do the Dutchmen cope with the differences. Finally, this study was to explain the Hungarian attitude to change.

7.1 Comparison with the literature

In this chapter, the results of this research will be compared with the findings from the literature review. The main focus is on the results of the GLOBE research, since this was the foundation of this study. The goal of the GLOBE project was to identify effective leadership in a society. The relevant societies in this research being, the Netherlands and Hungary.

Effective leadership in the Netherlands according to the GLOBE research, show high levels of charisma. Additionally, leaders support the independent thinking (autonomy) of their employees. Leaders are also visionary, inspirational and disapprove self-protective behaviors (The GLOBE project, 2022). It was also found that autocratic leadership attributes were amongst the least preferred or effective (Thierry, den Hartog, Koopman, & Wilderom, 2007). This study revealed that the leadership style by the Dutch managers in Hungary, is similar to the pre-described leadership style. The results show that the Dutchmen indeed, support and encourage the independent thinking (autonomy) of their employees. Additionally, autocratic leadership attributes such as the authority and hierarchy were not preferred by the Dutchmen.

Effective leadership in Hungary, according to the GLOBE research showed lower levels of charisma. Also, autonomy was found to be less important, where consensus seeking could even be experienced as a sign of weakness (The GLOBE project,

2022). In contrast to the GLOBE research, a recent study found that ignoring the opinion of subordinates and being non-consultative and non-listening are seen as negative behaviors, whilst democratic and supportive leadership were seen as positive contributors in Hungarian organizations (Eversole, et al., 2016). This research found that leadership attributes such as charisma and inspiration are experienced as effective by Dutchmen. Additionally, autonomy was encouraged by the Dutchmen, who found this to be positively contributing to the effectiveness. On the other hand, the Hungarians were not used to having this freedom and responsibility, which meant that they often needed some time to adjust.

There was no significant evidence to support the claim by Fehér (1997) that Hungarians resist more to change than in other cultures. It was even said to be easier than in the Netherlands, because the Hungarians are more reluctant to openly disagree. However, it might be that the Hungarians secretly disagree with the changes, which is not visible for the (Dutch) manager. The Hungarian cultural standards, indirectness and authoritarianism, support this statement, because the change is imposed from above, the Hungarians are more likely to accept and less likely to openly disagree with the manager. Besides, it was experienced that there are sometimes lower levels of commitment to a change. In some cases, the attitude towards change was even perceived as “fear” by the Dutchmen. The lower levels of commitment could be the result of their disagreement. Therefore, this study confirms the statement of Fehér (1997) about the lower commitment to change. To conclude, Hungarians prefer to remain unchanged, however this does not lead to higher levels of resistance in the eyes of the Dutchmen. Therefore, the Dutchmen did not have a specific strategy to overcome resistance to change.

7.2 Effective leadership in Hungary perceived by the Dutch

From the Hungarian cultural standards, a Hungarian leadership style was derived, which was found to be opposing to the Dutch leadership style on many aspects. According to the experiences of the Dutch managers, their leadership style was still effective, if not more effective. It was experienced that the Hungarian employees needed some time to adapt to this, for them, new approach to leadership. Nevertheless, the Dutchmen see their leadership style as more effective than the autocratic or transactional leadership style. The attributes and behaviors that were effective according to the Dutchmen were: autonomy, flat-hierarchy, encouragement and empowerment. It is strange that the Dutchmen experience their leadership as effective on these aspects, since these have led to the many critical incidents with the Hungarians. Take autonomy for example, even though the Dutchmen mention that this is extremely important and effective, there have been many examples where the Hungarians showed no autonomy. This was also represented by the example of interviewee 3 about resistance to change in section 6.5, which signified that the Hungarians do not express the same levels of questioning that employees in the Netherlands do. It is thus questionable if the Dutch leadership style is truly effective. Therefore, the shortcoming of this study is that whether the Dutch leadership style is effective or ineffective, is solely based on the impressions of the Dutch managers. The Dutchmen might be blinded because of their own belief in the effectiveness of their leadership style. Besides this, the Hungarian culture potentially has a large influence on these impressions of the Dutch managers. The indirect and authoritarian character of the Hungarian subordinates might keep them from criticizing on the leadership style of the Dutchmen. In the example of interviewee 3, where he mentioned that 80 percent of the employees were engaged, the reluctance to disagree might give a false impression.

Additionally, since the Dutchmen were working in multinational companies, the Hungarians do not represent the typical Hungarian employee. The mindset of the Hungarians in a multinational company can be more open to the Dutch leadership style.

7.3 Academic relevance

The academic contribution of this paper lies in giving deeper insight into the literature regarding effective leadership in Hungary. The Dutch perspective brought new insights on the Hungarian culture and effective leadership behaviors/attributes, in addition to the existing culture-comparative research.

Besides the eleven Hungarian cultural standards that were identified in this study, the study also showed some results that deviates from the literature. The current study showed that (an aspect of) a transformational leadership style, which is often used in the Netherlands, were perceived as effective in Hungary, by the Dutchmen. This study also researched the resistance to change in Hungary, which according to Fehér (1997), would be high. The current study found no evidence that the resistance to change is considerably higher than in other societies. There was evidence that the Hungarians show lower levels of commitment to change, which was in line with Fehér (1997).

7.4 Practical relevance

The contribution of the current study lies in the eleven Hungarian cultural standards that were perceived by the Dutch. The Hungarian cultural standards give insight to the behavioral patterns of the Hungarians, as perceived by the Dutch. Therefore, Dutchmen will have a higher tolerance when working in a bicultural environment, because they have a better understanding of the logic behind it. In addition, this study addressed the Dutch-Hungarian leadership differences. Although the Dutchmen stated that their Dutch leadership style is effective, this study questions whether this is the best advice for (future) Dutch expatriates.

8. LIMITATIONS & FUTURE RESEARCH

The goal of this study was to uncover the leadership differences between Hungarians and Dutchmen. This was accomplished by conducting five interviews with Dutch managers in Hungary. Even though the number of interviews was deemed sufficient for the exploratory nature of this research, the limited sample could hamper the generalizability of these results. Hence future research could consider of exploring the same topic but with a bigger pool of participants. This might also result in more cultural standards.

Additionally, the pool of participants in this study was not diverse. The participants were all male, working in multinational companies. The result is that this study is limited in the generalizability, to multinational organizations. The inclusion of managers and non-managers from different types of companies, will give results that can be useful for a larger audience, not only limited to multinational companies in Hungary.

Thirdly, this study to effective leadership in Hungary, was based on the experience and impressions of the Dutchmen. Although this gives a good indication of how effective leadership in Hungary is perceived by Dutchmen, it has not yet been proven. Therefore, future research should be done the effectiveness of this leadership style, whilst comparing it to the more typical

Hungarian leadership style. Future research could for example consider the opinions of the Hungarian subordinates.

Lastly, there were indications that there are strong generational differences in Hungary. The average age of the subordinates in this research was between 30 and 35, therefore this generation has much less experience with the communist regime than the previous generation, since this ended in 1989. Future research could focus on the difference between the elder generation and the post-communism generation regarding the behavior on the work floor.

9. CONCLUSION

To conclude, the current study identified and explained eleven Hungarian cultural standards:

1. Indirectness
2. No-autonomy
3. Authoritarianism
4. Hierarchy
5. Change avoidance
6. Politeness
7. Self-protective behaviors
8. Hiding of compliments
9. Work-to-live
10. Relationship avoiding
11. Low self-esteem

To avoid cultural clashes, it is important for Dutch expatriates to recognize and understand the difference in cultural standards. Furthermore, the aim was to identify the Dutch-Hungarian leadership differences. The leadership differences were found to be most apparent in the aspects: autonomy, hierarchy and authority. Where the level of autonomy is lower, and the levels of hierarchy and authority are higher than with the Dutch leadership. According to the Dutchmen, their leadership style was effective in Hungary, however this is solely based on the impressions of the Dutchmen. This study found that the Dutchmen coped with the leadership differences by remaining true to their own perception of effective leadership, instead of adapting to the Hungarian way. The comparison with The GLOBE research and Commisceao Global, exposed contradictions. Leadership aspects such as charisma and autonomy were considered less relevant or effective, but according to the current study do positively contribute to effective leadership. Therefore, this study aligns with that of Eversole (2016) which found that ignoring the opinion of subordinates and being non-consultative and non-listening are seen as negative behaviors, whilst democratic and supportive leadership were seen as positive contributors (Eversole, et al., 2016). Additionally, the resistance to change was not found to be of an unusual high level. The commitment to change on the contrary was found to be lower.

10. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First off, I would like to extend my deepest gratitude to Dr. Arnold Enklaar, for his supervision role in this bachelor thesis. He was always there with constructive feedback and helpful suggestions. I also want to thank my second supervisor, Dr. Lara Carminati, who helped me finalize my bachelor thesis.

Thirdly, I want to express my deepest appreciation to the Dutch respondents from my interviews, without whom this thesis would not have been possible. Thank you for your willingness to participate and providing interesting contributions and answers.

Lastly, I want to thank my friends and fellow students, for their active participation and feedback.

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12. APPENDIX

12.1 Appendix A - Interview questions

12.1.1 Introduction

1. Hoe lang werkt u al in Hongarije?
2. Wat voor werk doet u?
3. Heeft u geregeld contact met uw Hongaarse collega's? Hoe vaak? En is dit in persoon?
4. In welke taal spreekt u met deze collega's? Leidt dit tot goede communicatie of levert dit vaak misverstanden?
5. Vindt u dat de samenwerking goed gaat met uw Hongaarse collega's? Wat zou er eventueel beter kunnen?

12.1.2 Main questions

1. Wat is uw ervaring met Hongaren in het algemeen? Wat zijn de grootste verschillen tussen Nederlanders en Hongaren? Heeft u daar een voorbeeld van?
 - a. Hoe is dit gebeurd? / Wat heft hiertoe geleid?
 - b. Vond u dit fijn of juist niet?
 - c. Hoe reageerde u hierop?
 - d. Hoe is het afgelopen?
 - e. Waarom denkt u dat uw collega zich zo gedroeg?
 - f. Heeft u vergelijkbare voorbeelden?
2. Bent u wel eens verbaasd geweest door het gedrag van uw Hongaarse collega's? Heeft u daar een voorbeeld van?
 - a. Hoe is dit gebeurd? / Wat heft hiertoe geleid?
 - b. Vond u dit fijn of juist niet?
 - c. Hoe reageerde u hierop?
 - d. Hoe is het afgelopen?
 - e. Waarom denkt u dat uw collega zich zo gedroeg?
 - f. Heeft u vergelijkbare voorbeelden?
3. Heeft u wel eens ervaren dat u uw Hongaarse collega's niet begreep? Kan communicatief of gedragsmatig zijn? Heeft u daar een voorbeeld van?
 - a. Hoe is dit gebeurd? / Wat heft hiertoe geleid?
 - b. Vond u dit fijn of juist niet?
 - c. Hoe reageerde u hierop?
 - d. Hoe is het afgelopen?
 - e. Waarom denkt u dat uw collega zich zo gedroeg?
 - f. Heeft u vergelijkbare voorbeelden?
4. Bent u het wel eens niet eens geweest met uw Hongaarse collega's? Heeft u daar een voorbeeld van?
 - a. Hoe is dit gebeurd? / Wat heft hiertoe geleid?
 - b. Vond u dit fijn of juist niet?
 - c. Hoe reageerde u hierop?
 - d. Hoe is het afgelopen?
 - e. Waarom denkt u dat uw collega zich zo gedroeg?
 - f. Heeft u vergelijkbare voorbeelden?
5. Heeft u wel eens een conflict gehad met uw Hongaarse collega's? Heeft u daar een voorbeeld van?
 - a. Hoe is dit gebeurd? / Wat heft hiertoe geleid?
 - b. Vond u dit fijn of juist niet?
 - c. Hoe reageerde u hierop?
 - d. Hoe is het afgelopen?
 - e. Waarom denkt u dat uw collega zich zo gedroeg?
 - f. Heeft u vergelijkbare voorbeelden?
6. Heeft u wel eens problemen ervaren met uw Hongaarse collega's wanneer er veranderingen gemaakt werden of wanneer dit slechts een idee was? Heeft u daar een voorbeeld van?
 - a. Hoe is dit gebeurd? / Wat heft hiertoe geleid?
 - b. Vond u dit fijn of juist niet?
 - c. Hoe reageerde u hierop?
 - d. Hoe is het afgelopen?
 - e. Waarom denkt u dat uw collega zich zo gedroeg?
 - f. Heeft u vergelijkbare voorbeelden?

7. Heeft u verder nog problemen ervaren met uw Hongaarse collega's? Heeft u daar een voorbeeld van?
 - a. Hoe is dit gebeurd? / Wat heft hiertoe geleid?
 - b. Vond u dit fijn of juist niet?
 - c. Hoe reageerde u hierop?
 - d. Hoe is het afgelopen?
 - e. Waarom denkt u dat uw collega zich zo gedroeg?
 - f. Heeft u vergelijkbare voorbeelden?

12.1.3 Other questions:

1. Als we het hebben over besluitvorming, kunnen uw ondergeschikten zelfstandige beslissingen nemen? Doen uw Hongaarse collega's dit anders?
2. Hoe beschrijft u zichzelf als leider? Zit er verschil tussen u en uw Hongaarse collega's als we kijken naar het managen of leiderschap?
3. Hoe motiveert u uw Hongaarse collega's? Is dit anders dan uw Hongaarse collega's? Financiële beloningen?
4. Heeft u de meningen van uw Hongaarse collega's wel eens genegeerd of naast u gelegd? Hoe werd hierop gereageerd?
5. Worden uw Hongaarse collega's vrijgelaten of is er veel controle? Is dit anders onder uw management dan onder dat van Hongaarse collega's? Hoe wordt hierop gereageerd?
6. Ervaart u dat iedereen binnen uw organisatie gelijk is? Zo niet geef een voorbeeld.
7. Worden beslissingen vaak veranderd nadat ze genomen zijn? Was dit anders in Nederland?
8. Heeft u zich voorbereid voor uw werk in Hongarije? Hoe? Is het anders dan u had verwacht?
9. Wat voor advies zou u toekomstige Nederlanders in Hongarije willen geven?
10. Een goede manager in Hongarije: hoe zou hij/zij zich moeten gedragen? Verschillen Hongaren en Nederlanders hierin?
11. Een goede leider in Hongarije: hoe zou hij/zij zich moeten gedragen? Verschillen Hongaren en Nederlanders hierin?
12. Een goede medewerkers in Hongarije: hoe zou hij/zij zich moeten gedragen? Verschillen Hongaren en Nederlanders hierin?