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## **Differences on Organizational Practices Between Polish Managers Studied in 1996/1997 and 2008/2009**

### **1. 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 expressed the idea 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” [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. 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].

Based on comprehensive discussions among 84 social scholars and management scientists representing 56 nations worldwide, GLOBE researchers proposed the following concept of leadership: the ability of an individual to influence, motivate, and enable others to contribute toward the effectiveness and success of the organization of which they are members [Den Hartog, et al. 1997b, p. 256]. Culture, in the GLOBE research program, is defined as “shared motives, beliefs, identities and interpretations of meaning of significant events that result from common experiences of members of collectives and are transmitted across age generations” [Mączyński and Zamorska 2008, p. 34]<sup>1</sup>.

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.

Some research on leadership and organizational values has been done in Poland by Mączyński, Jago, Reber and Bohnisch [1994]. The authors conducted a study comparing the leadership styles of Austrian, American and Polish managers using data collected before the transition in Poland, showing that Polish managers were relatively autocratic. Jago, Mączyński and Reber [1996] presented data gathered from Polish managers before (in 1988) and after (in 1993 and 1994) market economy reforms, revealing that management practices remain relatively autocratic, although they discovered an incremental change towards greater use of subordinate consultation. Mączyński et al. [1993a, 1993b, 1994] stated that centralised planning caused a lack of responsibility in behavior and decision making revealed by both managers and subordinates. “Factors such as the centralised control of economic undertakings, highly directive systems, excessive bureaucracy and a passive attitude of employees all contributed to managerial autocracy” [Hartog, et al. 1997].

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<sup>1</sup> A more comprehensive discussion of contemporary approaches to the concepts and definitions of “corporate culture”, can be found in an extensive paper written by professor Łukasz Sułkowski [2009, pp. 5–20].

## 2. 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 dimensions of organizational culture and on 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 the students of the Management Academy in Legnica (Bożena Cichocka, Sylwester and Damian Cichocki) while working on their M.A. dissertations.

Based on the GLOBE data [Hartog, et al. 1997]. Polish managers scored higher than for example Dutch managers on power distance, and lower than Dutch organizations on future and humane orientation. Taking into consideration the profound changes in social, economic and organizational arrangements in Poland after the collapse of the former communist system, we had hypothesized that the changes undergone in organizational values between the years of 1996/1997 and 2008/2009 have advanced to an even greater extent. That's why we predicted that the newer generation of managers would score at least lower on Power Distance and Individualism, and higher on Future Perspective and Humane Orientation than managers investigated during 1996–1997. In other words we could speculate that enormous changes in political, social, and organizational systems under the current transition period should diminish Power Distance in organizational practices, and lead, among other aspects, to a more negative attitude towards the autocratic leadership style of the newer generation of Polish managers.

## 3. 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. 134 Polish managers, tested during the years of 1996/1997, completed the organizational culture questionnaire developed by GLOBE Project.

In the years of 2008/2009, a follow-up study was conducted among 100 managers representing several industrial organizations (employing at least 100 people) located in the 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.

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 17 attributes according to the degree to which they either help or inhibit someone from being an outstanding leader. Thus, a high attribute score indicates that the attribute is perceived to be necessary for leadership effectiveness.

All scales used in this study are based on an extensive pilot study [see House, et al. 2004]. Questionnaire items were translated from English to Polish and then translated back into English. Back-translations were checked by the 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.

#### 4. 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.

**Table 1.** Differences between the Polish managers of 1996/1997 and 2008/2009 on organizational practices

Practices	Polish managers of 1996/1997		Polish managers of 2008/2009		Sign. level
	Mean	St. dev.	Mean	St. dev.	
Achievement Orientation	4,62	1,15	4,55	1,72	n.s.
Future Orientation	4,08	1,21	3,88	1,53	p < 0.05
Individualism vs. collectivism	4,33	0,60	3,94	1,51	p < 0.01
Power Distance	4,21	1,04	4,69	1,56	p < 0.01
Humane Orientation	4,36	0,92	4,10	1,54	p < 0.05
Uncertainty avoidance	4,81	1,14	4,77	1,74	n.s.
Gender differentiation	3,77	0,55	3,38	1,43	p < 0.01

The results presented in Table 1 show 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 less future and humane oriented.

Preliminary research results (not shown in this paper) indicate that the relatively high level of power distance reported by the Polish managers studied in the years of 2008–2009 is also in line with findings connected with attributes necessary for leadership effectiveness.

Our overall findings indicate that Polish managers of 2008/2009 in comparison with Polish managers of 1996/1997 reported lower levels of Future Orientation, Humane Orientation and Gender Differentiation, and higher levels of Power Distance and Individualism. No significant differences between compared groups of managers have been found on Achievement Orientation and Uncertainty Avoidance scales. Lower scores on Future Orientation of Polish managers studied in the year 2008/2009 (in comparison with managers studied in 1996/1997) might reflect more and more unpredictable economic environments. In the current turbulent and highly uncertain economic condition of the world, Polish managers of 2008/2009 might find themselves too preoccupied

struggling with the immediate and difficult day-to-day requirements of running the business.

Higher scores on Power Distance of Polish managers studied during 2008/2009 than their counterparts investigated in 1996/1997 was unexpected, since many favourable 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. Therefore we have assumed that enormous changes in political, social, and organizational systems, under the current transition period 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.

Furthermore our findings with respect to organizational culture scores reveal that there is a close relationship between Power Distance and Humane Orientation. The higher the managers scored on the Power Distance scale the lower they scored on the Humane Orientation scale.

Preliminary research results (not shown in this paper) indicate that relatively high level of Power Distance reported by the Polish managers studied in the years of 2008/2009 is also in line with findings connected with attributes necessary for leadership effectiveness. A particularly autocratic style is more strongly associated with leadership effectiveness by Polish managers of 2008/2009, who also describe their organizational cultures as higher on Power Distance and lower on Future Perspective and Humane Orientation.

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 do their counterparts investigated during 1996/1997.

It might be worth mentioning that Zamorska's [2007; 2009] findings concerning mobbing behaviors of Polish managers also correlates with still pretty high scores on Power Distance, reported by Polish managers being studied in the years 1996/1997 and 2008/2009, in comparison with Western managers [Mączyński et al. 1994].

Zamorska [2009] recommends that in order to diminish Power Distance and autocratic leadership behavior, a kind of organizational culture is required, which reduces the feelings of anxiety in the relationships between managers and their followers, and respects the right of employees to freely express their views about the organizational undertakings.

## 5. Conclusions

Our findings 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 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.

Our research results presented in this paper confirm the views expressed by Hofstede [2000] and Martan [1993] that changes in mentality require a very long time. So we can conclude that the process of changing the mentality of Polish managers, despite the fact that the former command political and economic systems in Poland have ceased to exist, is indeed very slow and difficult to advance.

We believe that comparing some of the results from the GLOBE project concerning Polish managers investigated during 1996/1997 with current studies revealed some interesting aspects about leadership in Poland. We hope our research results will contribute to a deeper understanding of culturally driven differences in leadership and organizational practices in Poland, and help Polish managers overcome dysfunctional organizational values and practices, in order to cope successfully with the current global economic crisis.

### **Abstract**

*This paper presents a comparison between Polish managers tested in 1996/1997 and 2008/2009 on their perceptions of organizational culture and their beliefs concerning attributes necessary for leadership effectiveness. As was unexpected, our results show that the Polish managers of 2009 score significantly higher than managers of 1996/1997 on Power Distance, Individualism, Gender Differentiation and significantly lower on Future Orientation and Humane Orientation.*

*Our findings suggest that the more individualistic orientation in Polish organizations is still necessary in order to survive and be effective during the present turbulent and highly uncertain economic and business conditions. In addition, Polish managers of 2008/2009 under current conditions are not prone to be especially considerate toward subordinates. Relatively higher scores on Power Distance and lower scores on Humane Orientation on the part of managers being studied in the year of 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 believe more strongly than do Polish managers of 1996/1997 that an autocratic style, diplomacy, risk avoidance and administrative skills are more strongly associated with leadership effectiveness. As mentioned earlier, managers of 2008/2009, in comparison with managers of 1996/1997, also describe their organizational cultures as higher on Power Distance, Individualism, and lower on Future and Humane Orientations.*

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