IMPRESAPROGETTO
ELECTRONIC JOURNAL OF MANAGEMENT
n. 3 - 2015

Austrian and Hungarian values and norms in cross-cultural management research

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Abstract

Different historical perspectives allow for different conclusions about whether the Austrian and Hungarian cultures have much or little in common. This paper looks at the Austrian and Hungarian values and practices as characterised in the findings of cross-cultural management investigations. In doing so, it overviews and discusses the results of two research paradigms, the dimension-based approach and the cultural standards method. Austrian cultural standards are illustrated by critical interactional incidents recollected by Hungarian interviewees within the framework of an Austro-Hungarian research project. The paper concludes that although some of the findings are inconsistent between and even within the two research lines, the revealed values and behavioural patterns are useful for informal self-training as well as more formal intercultural trainings.

Keywords: Cross-cultural management research, Cultural dimensions, Cultural standards, Critical interactional incidents, Cross-cultural training

1. Introduction

The culture of Austria and that of Hungary are generally seen as quite similar or very different depending on the perspective one takes. Those concentrating on the long common past of the two countries ending in the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy between 1867 and 1918 would generally assume that it is quite similar. At the same time, if we look at the origin and historical-societal roots of the two cultures, or

consider the forty-five years Austria and Hungary spent in two political-economic blocks in the 20th century, we may arrive at the conclusion that the members of the two cultures hold very different values, which manifest themselves in different practices, for example different approaches towards doing successful business.

Hungary's accession to the European Union in 2004 made economic cooperation easier and cheaper due to the Schengen Agreement, which allows for the free movement of people, goods, services and capital, and the abolition of excise duties. Almost the whole length of Western Transdanubia borders Austria. However given the relatively small size of the two countries we can safely say that it is not only the enterprises located in the north-west of Hungary which are in an advantageous position if they wish to establish joint ventures with south-east Austrian companies or enter the south-east Austrian market (and vice versa) but it is Hungarian and Austrian companies in general that benefit from this favourable geographical location.

The last decade saw growing interest in culture-related aspects of international management among Hungarian researchers. At the two universities of Győr in the north-west of Hungary alone, dozens of investigations have been carried out focusing on the intercultural challenges managers and employees face due to the internationalisation of workplaces (e.g. Ablonczyné Mihályka and Nádai, 2010; Konczosné Szombathelyi, 2013; Tompos et al., 2014), as well as on the differences and similarities of values and orientations of Austrian and Hungarian managers and business professionals, often in cooperation with management researchers from Austria (e.g. Reif et al., 2006, Szőke and Ablonczyné Mihályka, 2011, Tompos, 2013).

This paper sets out to compare the business culture of Austria and Hungary through the presentation and discussion of the findings of cross-cultural management investigations carried out in the framework of dimension-based research and cultural standards examinations. As well as looking at the two cultures' value orientations, the paper presents critical interactional incidents, which were collected by the author and her colleagues within the framework of a small-scale investigation, and briefly discusses how the findings of the two research paradigms can be employed in cross-cultural trainings in an effort to enhance the quality and quantity of (economic) cooperation between the two cultures. Due to the controversy in the results between and even within the two research paradigms, further investigations are called for.

2. The concept of culture in cross-cultural management research

Culture is defined in many ways depending on the discipline of the researcher. Until the beginning of the 20th century the best-known definition was that of Tylor dating from 1871, which said culture is "… that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of a group" (Tylor, 1920: 1). Eighty years later,

Kroeber and Kluckhohn (1952) discussed more than 150 definitions and the past sixty years, due to the increasing number of academics involved in culture-related research, must have seen an even more substantial growth in the number of definitions and conceptualisations of culture.

Although culture includes physical elements, for example pieces of art such as statues, paintings, buildings, poems and novels, Leung (2008: 60) points out that in cross-cultural research it is mostly the subjective elements, such as values, assumptions and norms, which are in the centre of interest. Thus, the researchers involved in cross-cultural management examinations in general emphasise two characteristics of culture, namely that it is learnt and shared.

Professor Geert Hofstede (Hofstede and Hofstede, 2005: 4), perhaps the most influential representative of the dimension-based cross-cultural management approach, refers to culture as some shared software stating that "Culture is always a collective phenomenon, because it is at least partly shared with people who live or lived within the same social environment, which is where it was learned. Culture consists of the unwritten rules of the social game. It is the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from others". Fons Trompenaars, another famous researcher in this stream sees culture as a dynamic process of solving human problems, as well as a meaningful context. In his view culture "is man-made, confirmed by others, conventionalised and passed on for younger people or outsiders to learn" (Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner, 1997: 24).

Alexander Thomas (2010: 19), initiator of the cultural standards approach, offers the following definition: "All human beings live within a specific culture and contribute to its development. Culture creates a structured environment within which a population can function. (…) Culture is always manifested in a system of orientation typical to a country, society, organisation or group. (…) The culture-specific system of orientation creates possibilities and motivation for action, but also determines the conditions and limits of the action."

As we have seen, the latter definition refers to the emergence of difficulties in the case where a representative of a given culture meets an 'outsider', who has acquired a different system of orientation. Thomas (2010: 20) notes that although culture equips the individual with tools to cope, survive and re-orient, these skills will be also different from those of the counterpart. Cross-cultural comparative studies, consequently, by unfolding the differences and similarities in the norms and values of national cultures, as well as the manifestations of these orientations in practices and behaviour, help the representatives of different cultures to understand and successfully cope with the difficulties stemming from the different views held on what is considered, for example, good and rational.

Sackmann and Phillips (2004) identify three lines of cross-cultural management research: cross-national comparison (variance of values across national cultures), intercultural interaction (culture-related processes and practices) and multiple cultures (the simultaneous impact of several – e.g. national, organisational, professional, etc. – cultures). They point out the dominance of the cross-national comparison stream and conclude that the results of these investigations have

shaped the conceptualisations of culture, which, in turn, shape research questions and methodologies.

Primecz et al. (2009: 269) claim that cross-national comparison investigations are mainly related to the positivist paradigm while intercultural/bicultural interaction research is mostly interpretivist. Given this view, dimension-based investigations belong to the cross-national comparison perspective while cultural standards studies, since they put emphasis on the relativity of cultural self-assessment, fit in the intercultural interaction stream. Below, through the discussion of Austrian and Hungarian values and practices as characterised in the findings of dimension-based and cultural standards investigations, the paper describes the approach and methods of the two research paradigms.

3. Austria and Hungary in dimension-based investigations

Dimension-based cross-cultural management research takes its roots from the Value Orientation Theory put forward by two American anthropologists, Florence Kluckhohn and Clyde Strodtbeck (1961). They argued that there are a limited number of universal problems which each society faces. Each society is aware of each possible solution to these problems but for some reason they prefer one solution and moreover, tend to see the others as weird, illogical, unnatural or evil. Thus the task of cross-cultural research is to identify the universal problems and the possible solutions (values), as well as to find out about the preferences of different national cultures.

Dimension-based examinations for the past forty years have mostly relied on large-scale questionnaire surveys carried out in numerous cultures with the aim of creating the comparability of cultures. Table 1 summarises the findings (respective of Austria and Hungary) of three seminal investigations, which are most often referred to in specialist literature when discussing the variation of values across national cultures.

Professor Geert Hofstede carried out his initial investigations in the 1970s and over thirty years he gradually expanded the number of examined national and regional cultures from 40 to 72. While the indices concerning Austria have been present since his earliest publications as ones based on research, the Hungarian figures in the second edition of *Cultures and organizations* (Hofstede and Hofstede, 2005) are still estimated; based on smaller-scale investigations carried out by Hungarian management researchers. The Hungarian indices in brackets show the figures which appeared in the Hungarian translation of the same volume (Hofstede and Hofstede, 2008), where the Hungarian editor, with professor Hofstede's permission, changed the indices to ones obtained from an examination of his.

Thus the picture is not very clear-cut: based on these findings we can only say that members of both cultures seem to be quite unhappy with the ambiguities of life (relatively high uncertainty avoidance). However, the SMILE project, which

investigated the values of small- and medium-size Hungarian enterprises, found low uncertainty avoidance, together with low power distance, individualism, femininity and short-term orientation (Kovács, 2006: 82). Another survey carried out by Kopfer-Rácz et al. (2013) also indicates higher levels of individualism, lower power distance and uncertainty avoidance and strong short-term orientation in the case of Hungarian manager-entrepreneurs, which values, they state, are different from those demonstrated by managers of large companies or the Hungarian population in general. Yet, the Hungarian culture, according to other pieces of research carried out to validate the Hofstedean figures, is usually depicted as an individualistic, masculine and short term-oriented one with high power distance and low uncertainty avoidance (Kovács, 2006: 82).

Table n. 1 – Austrian and Hungarian values in large-scale dimension-based surveys

Dimension	*Austria*	*Hungary*
	Hofstede and Hofstede, 2005 (2008)	
power distance	11	46 (19)
individualism	55	80 (11)
masculinity	79	88 (17)
uncertainty avoidance	70	82 (83)
long-term orientation	31	50 (50)
	Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner, 1997; Kovács, 2006	
universalism/particularism	universalism	more towards universalism
individualism/collectivism	individualism	between the two
neutral/affective	more towards neutral	between affective and neutral
specific/diffuse	specific	more towards specific
achievement/ascription	achievement-orientation	between the two
sequential/synchronic	sequential	more towards synchronic
inner-/outer-oriented	inner-oriented	more towards outer-oriented
	House et al. 2004, as is (should be)	
power distance	4.95 (2.44)	5.56 (2.49)
uncertainty avoidance	5.16 (3.66)	3.12 (4.66)
humane orientation	3.72 (5.76)	3.35 (5.48)
institutional collectivism	4.30 (4.73)	3.53 (4.50)
in-group collectivism	4.85 (5.27)	5.25 (5.54)
assertiveness	4.62 (2.81)	3.23 (4.49)
gender egalitarianism	3.09 (4.83)	4.08 (4.63)
future orientation	4.46 (5.11)	3.21 (5.70)
performance orientation	4.44 (6.10)	3.43 (5.96)

Source: own elaboration based on the investigations indicated in the table

Fons Trompenaars conducted his original research during the 1980s. The results concerning the preferences of Hungarian respondents are sometimes

controversial (e.g. the separation of the work sphere from the private sphere [specific/diffuse], even in the second edition of his *Riding the waves of culture* [Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner, 1997]), thus the Hungarian preferences in the table draw upon a replicate study carried out by Kovács (2006), using Trompenaars' questionnaire.

The results can lead us to the conclusion that Hungarian managers are slightly more particularistic (circumvention of rules and laws) and diffuse (mixing the working and private spheres) than their Austrian counterparts but they are still on the universalistic and specific end of the scales. While Austrians seem to be individualistic, neutral and achievement-oriented (i.e. they accord status on the basis of achievements), Hungarians, being in the middle of these scales, are more collectivistic, emotional and ascription-oriented. Austrian managers prefer to have clear schedules and do one thing at a time (sequential culture, termed monochronic by Hall, 1983) and rule nature (inner-oriented), while Hungarians seem to organise their activities more synchronically (or polychronically as in Hall, 1983) and be 'the captains of their fate' to a lesser degree.

At the same time, other pieces of research seem to shape this picture. For example, the findings of a questionnaire survey carried out by Szőke (2014) among managers and employees of Hungarian SMEs operating in the Austro-Hungarian border regions indicate that Hungarians tend to be neutral and not show their emotions when negotiating with their Austrian partners.

The third investigation to be overviewed is the GLOBE survey, which was launched in 1991 by the American management professor Robert J. House, aiming to explore the interrelations of society, organisational culture and managerial behaviour along nine dimensions with existing ('as is') and desired ('should be') values. Although Hungary is placed in the Eastern European cluster while Austria is in the Germanic cluster, some of the findings concerning the two cultures are not strikingly different. Power distance in Hungary is slightly higher than the world average of 5.15 while Austrian middle managers perceive lower inequalities in power; still, both cultures seem to think it should be much lower. Similarly, humane orientation is under the world average of 4.09 in both cultures but both Austrian and Hungarian respondents believe they should be more rewarded for being fair and caring.

Scores on the other dimensions, however, are more different. With regard to collectivism, Austrian middle managers seem to be more encouraged to act collectively, whereas Hungarians are more likely to express pride and loyalty in their groups and families. Austrian employees seem to rely much more on rules and norms to avoid uncertainty and be significantly more assertive, future- and performance-oriented than Hungarians, whereas their Hungarian counterparts feel a much stronger differentiation in gender roles. At the same time, in desired values there is only one striking difference between the two cultures: Hungarians would like to be more assertive and straightforward while Austrians would prefer to be much less confrontational than the 'as is' Hungarian value.

As the figures in Table 1 and the above discussion indicates, there are controversial findings concerning the values held by the two cultures between the three overviewed pieces of research and even between Hofstede's and

Trompenaars' investigations and their replicate studies. These inconsistencies stem from the difference in the approaches taken, the different aspects of the same dimension (and consequently, different questions), the sampling methods and respondents (e.g. smaller or big organisations, potential differences in the preferences of age groups), as well as the limitations of questionnaire surveys in general.

4. Austria and Hungary in cultural standards research

Cultural standards research, as an alternative to dimension-based investigations, was developed by the German psychologist Alexander Thomas (1991). The proper method to be employed is narrative interviews conducted with respondents who worked or have been working for a relatively long time in a given foreign culture. The ultimate aim is to give a thorough description of the foreign culture through the lens of culture and interpretations of members of another culture. Thus the investigation is usually bicultural, although there are examinations that target several cultures, for example Dunkel and Meierewert (2004) studied four cultures.

The main purpose of the interviews is to have the interviewees recall so-called 'critical interactional incidents', which occurred during an interaction with a representative (or representatives) of the 'other' culture. Critical incidents may be positive (where the respondent expected difficulties which did not arise) resulting in relief, or negative (where the respondent did not expect the difficulties which arose) resulting in embarrassment or resent. During the analysis of the incidents recurring patterns are identified and eventually labelled as cultural standards. Cultural standards, consequently, are perceptual, behavioural, conceptual, evaluative and meaning-constructive norms (Thomas, 1991).

Carrying out cultural standards research is a complex and consequently time-consuming task and there is always a threat that the researcher will not be able to set up categories, thus several variations of the original approach exist. Topçu (2005: 91) notes that since culture standards gained popularity the interviews have become more structured. Moreover, although in the formulation of cultural standards the researchers are expected to rely on the conceptualisation of the respondents, in an effort to establish neutral categories, they often 'borrow' the category labels (e.g. monochronic/polychronic or specific/diffuse) of large-scale dimension-based investigations.

Table 2 summarises the findings of cultural standards investigations in the context of Austria and Hungary. The results are based on varying numbers of interviews. For example Dunkel and Meirewert (2004) analysed 201 interviews carried out with Austrians, Hungarians, Germans and Spaniards while the results reported from Garai (2011) and Tompos and Ablonczyné Mihályka (2011) rely on the analysis of only 30 interviews. The latter interviews were conducted within the framework of the OPTICOM project, which aimed to contribute to a better

understanding and improved cooperation between the SMEs located in the Austro-Hungarian cross-border regions.

Table n. 2 – Austrian and Hungarian norms in cultural standards research

Austria	*Hungary*
Brueck and Kainzbauer 2000	
Distinction of private and business life	Mix of private and business life
Reservation	Collectivity
Discipline at work	Flexibility at work
Direct communication	Indirect communication
Formal communication	Informal communication
Non-material motivation	Material motivation
Patronising attitude	Feeling of discrimination
Meirewert and Horváth-Topçu 2001	
Specific culture	Diffuse culture
Weak aspects of relationship	Strong aspects of relationship
Devotion to regulations	Circumvention of regulations
Formal communication	Informal communication
Weak hierarchic orientation	Strong hierarchic orientation
Strong self-confidence	Changing levels of self-confidence
Dunkel and Meirewert 2004	
Respect for achieved positions	Small interpersonal distance
Monochronic time concept	Polychronic time concept
MbO leadership style, power through hierarchy and authority	Patriarchal leadership style, power through hierarchy and authority
Role of personal contacts, diffuse culture	Role of personal contacts, diffuse culture
Strong self-confidence	Changing levels of self-confidence
Topçu 2005	
Specific culture	Diffuse culture
Weak relationship-orientation	Strong relationship-orientation
Observation of rules	Context-dependent interpretation of rules
Objective approach (surnames)	Subjective approach (first names)
Constant, focused attention, achievement	Wavering, diffuse attention, achievement
Long-term orientation	Short-term orientation
Strong self-confidence	Limited self-confidence
Garai 2011; Tompos and Ablonczyné Mihályka 2011	
Rule-orientation, strong work discipline	Flexibility at work
Patronising attitude, lack of trust	Feeling of discrimination
Formal communication	Informal communication
Strong hierarchic orientation	Weak hierarchic orientation

Source: own elaboration based on the investigations indicated in the table

Hofmeister-Tóth et al. (2005) carried out a survey in the two capitals, Budapest and Vienna, in order to validate the culture standards established by Brueck and Kainzbauer (2000) and Meirewert and Horváth-Topçu (2001). The questionnaire results confirmed the direct, formal (Austria) vs. indirect, informal communication (Hungary) divide. However, they only partly validated the non-material orientation and strong self-confidence (AT) vs. material orientation and lack of self-confidence (HU) opposites. Moreover, they failed to confirm three sets of norms, namely the separation of work and private life spheres, individualism and discipline at work in Austria vs. the mixing of work and private life, collectivism and flexibility at work in Hungary.

However, as we can see in Table 2, subsequent investigations seem to confirm the respective categories except for the separation or mixing of work and life spheres (specific vs. diffuse) categories, where examinations continue to come to different conclusions, and the individualistic vs. collectivistic approach, which was not identified as a cultural standard in subsequent studies. Although the cultural standard labels are different, the studies indicate that, at least in a cross-cultural context, there are differences in the practices of Austrian and Hungarian managers.

Below is a summary of the cultural standards which have been found characteristic of the business interactions between the two cultures. Each divide is illustrated with a critical interactional incident (author's translation) collected within the framework of the OPTICOM project by the author and her colleagues. The respective incidents were recalled by Hungarian interviewees, thus they reflect the Hungarian perspective.

5. Critical interactional incidents

All studies have found that Austrian managers demonstrate a higher level of self-confidence (manifested, for example in the ability to say no) than Hungarians. This very often results in Hungarians' perceptions of being patronised and discriminated. On the other hand, Hungarian businesspeople are seen by Austrians as ones who do not initiate thus they need to be told what to do. The following funny critical interactional incident was recalled by a manager of a Hungarian mid-size enterprise: *I have no outstanding positive or negative experiences with our Austrian partners as compared to our other international partners. However, there was a partner, who, at a business dinner, explained to me that the thing on the table was a kiwi; the kiwi is a kind of fruit that needs to be peeled before eaten even if we were both wearing Boss suits...* Another incident clearly shows the Hungarian respondent's unhappiness and perceptions of lack of trust on the part of her Austrian superiors: *I am now organising the 20th anniversary of our Hungarian subsidiary and my Austrian colleague has come in fact to check what I am doing and how. I was surprised to hear that the anniversary at our Belgian subsidiary was organised by the Austrian headquarters. I think that means*

lack of trust and inflexibility on their part. I have to provide the headquarters with all the preparation documentation, bookings, menus, etc. translated into German. This is totally new to me since my Hungarian boss trusts me because he knows I am able to do quality work. This is something my Austrian colleagues do not seem to believe.

The formal vs. informal communication divide has also been confirmed by most investigations (this can be considered an aspect of weak/strong relationship-orientation in Topçu, 2005). Hungarian managers (at least those working for smaller companies) seem to prefer business interactions taking place in a relaxed atmosphere. For them, the use of first names contributes to this, as the following incident demonstrates: *It is a recurring problem, which, for us, Hungarians is very weird, not to call a long-term partner by their first name. This does cause problems, like in my case when I entered the Austrian market. Before our first face-to-face meeting we had communicated only via e-mail. The meeting aimed to discuss the plans and details of a machine. At the beginning of the meeting I called him by his first name and used a very pleasant and personal communication style. His mood darkened and he became totally reserved. He was sitting there, folding his arms and was not really communicative – I almost felt he wanted to put an end to our meeting and cooperation. Later my more experienced Hungarian colleagues told me what a big mistake I had made. It took me a long time to appease my Austrian partner by means of presents and compromises*.

Austrian managers tend to demonstrate stronger work discipline than their Hungarian counterparts. Subsequently, Austrians see Hungarian practices more unpredictable and unreliable, often inclusive of the circumvention of rules. In contrast, Hungarians appreciate their own 'flexibility' and believe that Austrians are too obsessed with the rules and regulations as shown in the following example of critical interactional incidents: *Once our company was responsible for updating the heating system of an Austrian hotel. New furnaces were ordered and when they arrived, it turned out that the door of all the furnaces opened from left to right, but the location of some half of them necessitated doors opening from right to left. The hotel management insisted that they should be sent back to the company although the problem could have been solved by unscrewing and re-screwing two screws per furnace. Of course, the delay was our problem.* At the same time, Hungarians seem to appreciate Austrians' strong work discipline, fairness and respect for deadlines when it comes to prompt payment: *An Austrian company transferred the price of our products to a wrong bank account – it was their fault. When we complained that we had not received the amount, they transferred the money to our account without waiting for it to come back from the wrong account. I cannot imagine such a thing happening when dealing with a Hungarian company*.

The Austrian cultural standard 'power through hierarchy and authority' established by Dunkel and Meirewert (2004) contradicts the 'weak hierarchic orientation' found by Topçu (2005). The OPTICOM interviews seem to support the former view since respondents recalled events where they felt uncomfortable with what they sensed as strong hierarchic orientation. During the interviews they made general comments, such as: *My Austrian colleagues who are at the same level as me expect their boss's approval in tasks which seem to me minor ones while I am*

used to taking more responsibility – possibly Austrian managers see this behaviour as a lack of discipline. Another respondent expressed similar Hungarian views: *I would highlight their inflexibility, which I have already mentioned. If there is a problem they expect their Hungarian partners to react flexibly and fast. When one speaks to a responsible person in Austria, but the solution of the problem calls for a decision from a person higher up in the hierarchy who is not available, it is impossible to execute a temporary solution, so they are inflexible concerning time and decision, they are unable to make temporary decisions, they insist on spheres and limits of responsibilities*. A third interviewee described a more concrete incident: *We were organising the travel fair in Győr and wanted to have the Austrian Tourism Agency as a guest. They did not even respond to our initial letters and e-mails. It was very difficult to get to the right person, who, however, gave us the glad hand*.

The Hungarian cultural standard 'material motivation' is only present in the findings of Brueck and Kainzbauer (2000). However, several OPTICOM respondents recalled positive incidents relating to prompt payment. For example, one of them said, *What I could definitely mention as a positive experience is that when an agreement is reached on the service, its price and terms of payment, it works. It means that if we carry out the tasks and they are satisfied with our work, they pay correctly. It allows for the planning with the sum, which, I think, is very valuable in today's world*.

The above examples demonstrate how Hungarian managers and employees of SMEs interpret their Austrian counterparts' behaviour. Certainly, the incidents allow for conclusions about the Hungarian culture as well. Austrian OPTICOM interviewees expressed the views that Hungarians are hard to get to know, often unreliable, and are no good at initiating and delegating tasks but are very proud (Garai, 2011).

6. Implications for cross-cultural training

Both research paradigms allow for the application of their results in practice. The values explored by dimension-based investigations make it possible to describe the practices which are characteristic for cultures representing a given dimension. Empirical research reports often end in pieces of advice. For example, Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (1997) offer 'practical tips for doing business' after each category they examine, while Szabo and Reber (2008:140) discuss practical implications for managers when analysing the Austrian culture and leadership factors on the basis of the GLOBE findings. Cultural standards also allow for the formulation of 'do's and don'ts' in a bicultural context. Given the overview above we can advise Hungarians not to be too friendly when meeting their Austrian business partner for the first time or not to try to bypass the rules and the hierarchy.

These tips might be useful for informal self-study before one visits another country or sets out to establish a business partnership with a company in a foreign culture. At the same time, there is a threat that these pieces of advice give rise to evaluative stereotypes or are regarded as rule-of-thumb patterns for behaviour, which grant immediate acceptance and success in any context. Certainly, it is not the case since each individual and situation has unique traits, even in two countries as small and as close geographically as Austria and Hungary. Further, as we have seen above, the findings of both research paradigms bear some inconsistency with regard to the two cultures.

Still, theoretically and methodologically grounded intercultural trainings are believed to raise business professionals' cultural awareness and equip them with practical skills and applicable knowledge, which in turn is expected to result in improved intercultural business interactions. The findings of cross-cultural investigations are considered to provide a sound theoretical basis while the case study approach is seen as a most useful tool when discussing and analysing cross-cultural misunderstandings (Ablonczyné Mihályka, 2015).

Dongfeng (2012: 73) suggests that cross-cultural training programmes should have the following four characteristics: (1) Since the most important parts of culture for a newcomer are the hidden values that govern behaviour, trainees should be helped to move from the overt and descriptive level to the analytical and interpretive level; (2) Trainees must be made to understand the dynamics of cross-cultural communication and adaptation; (3) In order to develop coping strategies and understanding rather than amassing questionable information, training programmes should move from the culture-general to the culture-specific, encouraging trainees to reflect on their own culture as well as the foreign culture; (4) A training programme should provide the conceptual frameworks for understanding as well as the opportunities to apply them through participatory or experimental exercises so that each trainee develops their own strategies for cross-cultural adjustment and communication.

The critical interactional incidents presented above are assumed to offer practical insights into the behaviour and way of thinking of the representatives of both the Austrian and Hungarian cultures. As real-life case studies they provide for a variety of use in any cross-cultural training programme, encouraging participants to reflect upon their own cultural values as contrasted with the deduced orientations of the host culture.

Similarly, cultural standard categories grant opportunities for prospective sojourners to speculate about the host culture's values and orientations, which result in the detected behavioural or perceptual norms. Exercises and tasks based on critical interactional incidents are not expected to enable the participants to fully understand the other culture but are believed to help them to develop strategies to understand it.

7. Conclusions

Borders divide but, at the same time, connect nations, regions, cultures and economies (Rechnitzer, 1999). They form joint interests, necessitate cooperation and the utilisation of new resources. Conducting successful international business, however, as well as other factors, depends on the knowledge of the business culture of the partner. In other words, it requires cultural knowledge, intercultural skills and the awareness of cultural differences.

Researchers involved in cross-cultural management research emphasise that neither dimensions (e.g. Primecz, 2006: 9) nor culture standards (e.g. Dunkel and Meirewert, 2004: 152) give a complete description of a given culture. Indeed, both approaches have limitations inherent in qualitative and quantitative social research. The inconsistencies in the findings pointed out in the discussion of the two approaches in the context of Austria and Hungary indicate the need for further research. As well as new investigations in the dimension-based and cultural standards fashion, additional research lines are believed to add new dimensions to the results. For example, studies of the simultaneous impact of the national, organisational and professional cultures in an Austrian-Hungarian setting would further shape the picture.

However, the explored values and norms, by making un- or subconscious knowledge explicit, provide us with a springboard of ideas when preparing to meet a member of the other culture for the first time. The overviewed pieces of research may also provide conceptual frameworks for cross-cultural training programmes. Moreover, critical interactional incidents are believed to offer several ways of involving trainees in meaningful activities, triggering their analytical, reasoning and interpretation skills. At the same time, due to the inconsistencies and even controversies both within the findings of the same paradigm as well as between the two approaches, the results of no single research are sufficient to describe the values and practices of Austrian and Hungarian managers.

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