

PROSPECTIVE LEADERS' VIEW ON ROMANIAN SOCIETAL CULTURE

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This study deals with Romanian prospective leaders' perceptions and expectations concerning the societal culture. It is a part of a European research project, *GLOBE Students*, dealing with the interrelations between societal culture and leadership. The basic theoretical constructs and methodological framework of investigation are those developed by GLOBE international research project. In adapting our research to student population peculiarities, *GLOBE Beta* questionnaire was altered through adding new items (scales). The sample consists in 429 students in business/economics and engineering, belonging to three Romanian universities. The findings show that in student's opinion there are significant differences between societal culture practices and values (expectations) on all nine cultural dimensions in GLOBE model.

Keywords: cultural dimensions, cultural values, cultural practices

JEL classification: M19

Introduction

More than one million students are enrolled in Romanian universities and other tens of thousands abroad. Their number tripled in the last decade (Numarul studentilor din Romania a ajuns, în 2008, la un million, '2009). The students are a very important group of population, because from it will be selected the next generations of managers and leaders. And for many reasons, they will be different from the present managers and leaders. In this context, it is surprising how little knowledge is available about the students' values and the impact of these values on their perceptions on management. Same surprise is encountered on reverse case: students' weak knowledge about present leaders' cultural values. This is why we hope that the present study will contribute to a better understanding of the students' perceptions of present societal culture dimensions and their cultural expectations.

During the last edition of Romanian students in United Kingdom Conference (London, October 25, 2009), the Director of one of the biggest audit and consultancy companies in the world (British native), asserted that the fundamental difference between Romanians and British behaviour is that while Romanians focus on *practices – doing things as they are told to do*, the British focus on *values*, doing things as they *should do*. On the positive side, he acknowledged that Romanians are good communicators in foreign languages and are in the world top in IT. At the same time, among the drawbacks he mentioned excessive bureaucracy, lack of long term planning, "astounding" H.R.M., corruption and legal regulation fluidity (Boros, 2009). The mentioned advantages and drawbacks could get a rational explanation based upon a closer look at societal *cultural practices and values*. For this, the school should teach the pupils *how to learn, practice and develop* our cultural values, while the academic education should provide the students lectures on how to measure and compare different societal practices and how to build own cultural expectations.

The present study aims at answering the following questions: 1. How do the students perceive the societal cultural dimensions? 2. Which are the students' cultural expectations (*values*)? 3. What are (if any) the differences between the perceived cultural *practices* and expectations (*values*)? 4. Are the students' perceptions and expectations sensitive to their demographic variables?

Theoretical remarks

It is well known that there is no one generally accepted definition of societal culture. Probably this is why cultures differ one from another. Our study shares the definition used by GLOBE international research project: *Culture* (in general) is a set of shared motives, values, beliefs, identities and interpretations or meanings of significant events that result from common experiences of members of collectives and are transmitted across age generations (House et al. 2004:15).

How we measure the culture of different entities (groups) in order to compare them? The word “measure” is linked to some *measureable dimension*. So, if we want to measure cultures, than must accept that these cultures can be characterized by *sizes* (probably different) of the same dimension.

GLOBE research characterizes the culture through nine *discrete global dimensions*: *performance orientation, future orientation, assertiveness, power distance, humane orientation, institutional collectivism, in group collectivism, uncertainty avoidance, gender egalitarianism* (House et al, 2004). The definitions and their theoretical support are provided by GLOBE books (House et al, 2004; Chhokar et al. 2007). GLOBE compares these dimensions across 62 societal cultures, analysing *how* different or similar are those cultures and *why* are they different or similar. But the cultural dimensions of a group are *not static*. The culture is not only a given set of beliefs, norms, patterns, projections and institutions configuring the cultural aspirations of a given group. This is why, GLOBE model distinguishes between cultural *practices* (*how the culture it is*) and cultural *values* (*how the culture should be*). While practices describe the (actual) *cultural product* of analyzed community, the values describe the *desired cultural product*. In other words, practices display the socio-cultural *phenomenology*, while values concern the *targeted future* of that community in the field. Of course, the distinction between practices and values is a relative one. Philosophical speaking, a good practice is a *learned* value. Almost always the values are about something important. This is why they are followed by individuals and groups. This might explain why some authors consider that values express the effectiveness of most efficient individuals, such as leaders (House et al. 2004; Javidan et al. 2006a; 2006b), while practices express the average effectiveness of a society. Values distinguishing a culture from the others are *predictors* for cultural practices, as well as for leadership features and behaviours in that culture (House et al. 2002). The shared values become good future practices. Values distinguishing a culture from the others are *predictors* for cultural practices, as well as for leadership features and behaviours in that culture (House et al. 2002).

Based upon GLOBE model, studies from different societal cultures proved that there are significant differences between practices and values all over the world (House et al.2004; Chhokar et al. 2007), including Romania (Catana, Catana, 2010 in print). The mentioned findings are based on data collected from present middle managers. Or, our study pursues to discover the *cultural identity of future managers and leaders* in Romania. The findings about the students’ perception on cultural practices and their expectations about societal culture are helpful in imagining the societal culture in its dynamics. Axiological speaking, the values the students aspire to, will probably be their future practices (as managers and leaders), their future behavioural patterns. From cultural perspective, a society oriented towards future leaders’ values is a dynamic one. We expect to discover significant differences between practices and values due to the simple fact that the *values are more important than practices in the students’ world*.

Research methodology

As shown above, in performing our study on Romanian students’ opinion about societal culture *dimensions* we used the methodological framework created by the GLOBE project. Data about societal culture dimensions has been collected using GLOBE II Beta questionnaire. *Culture dimensions* have been measured using the scales in section 1 (*as it is*) and, respectively, section 3 (*as should be*). Scales in section 1 ask the students to value “the way our society is” (practices), while scales in section 3 ask the students opinion about “the way our society should be”. In order to test the *statistical significance* of the differences between societal practices (“as it is” variables) and societal values (“as it should be”

variables) the paired-samples *t-test* was employed, using the 0.05 significance threshold. All the answers are assessed with seven points Likert scales (1=strongly agree; 7= strongly disagree, with some items reverse coded; see the GLOBE Culture and Leadership Scales Guidelines and Syntax for the GLOBE Leadership and Culture, 2006).

Data collection run between November 2008 and April 2009. The *sample* consists in 429 students attending business/economics and engineering in three Romanian universities. The basic assumption in choosing the sample was that most of future managers and leaders will be economists and engineers. The sample is structured based upon the following *criteria*: gender, age groups, field of study, level of study, interest in management career, and interest in founding a business venture (see *Table 1*). In testing *statistical significance* of differences between different groups of the sample, the *independent samples* test was employed, using the 0.05 significance threshold (equal variance assumed or not for Levene's test).

Table 1 Sample demographics

	Gender		Age groups		
	Female	Male	18-22	23-27	≥ 28
<i>Field of study:</i>					
Business/Economics: 168 (39.16%)	128 (76.2%)	40 (23.8%)	81 (48.2%)	72 (42.8)	15 (9.00%)
Engineering:261 (60.84%)	111 (42.5%)	150 (57.5%)	187 (71.6%)	74 (28.4%)	-
<i>Level of study</i>					
Bachelor: 278 (64.8%)	140 (50.4%)	138 (49.6%)	246 (88.5%)	19 (6.8%)	13 (4.7%)
Master: 151 (35.2 %)	99 (65.6%)	52 (34.4%)	22 (14.6%)	127 (84.1%)	2 (1.3%)
<i>Interested in management career</i>					
Yes: 288 (67.13%)	174 (60.4%)	114 (39.6%)	174 (60.4%)	102 (35.4%)	12 (4.2%)
No: 141 (32.87%)	65 (46%)	76 (54%)	94 (66.6%)	44 (31.2%)	3 (2.2%)
<i>Interested in founding a business venture</i>					
Yes: 317 (73.9%)	178 (56.1%)	139 (43.9%)	199 (62.8%)	107 (33.7%)	11 (3.5%)
No: 112 (26.1%)	61 (54.5%)	51 (45.5%)	69 (61.6%)	39 (34.8%)	4 (3.6%)
TOTAL: 429	239 (55.7%)	190 (44.3%)	268 (62.5%)	148 (34.5%)	13 3.00%)

Findings

The preliminary findings of our research are presented following the succession of research questions. *Table 2* displays the mean values, ranks, significant differences and ratios between cultural practices and values in students' opinion.

Practices perception: The way Romanian society it is

It seems the students make up a cultural community perceiving a high power distance (5.80) and a relatively high in group collectivism (5.13). They also feel Romanians have practices less future oriented (3.44) and enough uncertain (3.49). The other practices got lower scores than the scale midpoint (4), while gender egalitarianism is situated in the scale midpoint.

Cultural values (expectations): The way Romanian society should be

The students believe the cultural dimensions should change their hierarchy comparing with current perceived practices. They expect: performance (5.89), institutional collectivism (5.71), humanism (5.41), future orientation (5.24) and control of uncertainty (5.10). In their cultural logic, these expectations could be attained if the power distance is significantly reduced (2.64). Gender egalitarianism (4.14) and assertiveness (4.00) are scored in the middle band of the scale.

Differences between practices and values

All the dimensions of societal culture record significant differences between practices and expectations (t-test values are high and sig-2tailed got 0.000 for all). The highest difference is recorded for power distance (t = 51.576; sig = 0.000). Very high difference is also recorded for performance orientation (t = -37.525; sig = 0.000), uncertainty avoidance (t = -29.636; sig = 0.000), humane orientation (t = -29.279; sig = 0.000) and, respectively, future orientation (t = -26.878; sig = 0.000). Even though the differences between the other pairs of cultural dimensions are statistically significant, they have a lower *differentiation potential* in students' mind. The differentiation potential is shown by the size of the ratio between practices and values in *Table 2*.

Table 2 Differences between perceived cultural practices and cultural expectations* (N = 429)

Cultural dimension ("as it is")	Rank	Mean	t-test (sig 2-tailed)	Mean	Cultural dimension ("as should be")	Rank	Practice/Values
<i>Uncertainty avoidance</i>	8	3.49	-29.636 (0.000)	5.10	<i>Uncertainty avoidance</i>	5	0.68
<i>Future orientation</i>	9	3.44	-26.878 (0.000)	5.24	<i>Future orientation</i>	4	0.65
<i>Power distance</i>	1	5.80	51.576 (0.000)	2.64	<i>Power distance</i>	9	2.19
Collectivism 1	5	3.78	-19.155 (0.000)	4.94	Collectivism 1	6	0.76
<i>Humane orientation</i>	4	3.84	-29.279 (0.000)	5.41	<i>Humane orientation</i>	3	0.70
<i>Performance orientation</i>	6	3.66	-37.525 (0.000)	5.89	<i>Performance orientation</i>	1	0.62
Collectivism 2	2	5.13	-11.474 (0.000)	5.71	Collectivism 2	2	0.89
<i>Gender egalitarianism</i>	3	3.99	-11.271 (0.000)	4.41	<i>Gender egalitarianism</i>	7	0.90
<i>Assertiveness</i>	7	3.51	- 8.717 (0.000)	4.00	<i>Assertiveness</i>	8	0.87

*paired samples, t-test

Sample demographics and differences in cultural dimensions

Table 3 shows that seven out of nine cultural dimensions are sensitive to the sample demographic variables. *Statistically significant* differences between societal practices and values were found in the following cases (based on *t* value):

Study level (bachelor or master) influences the students perception on *practices* concerning *gender egalitarianism* (t = 3.499; sig = 0.001) and *performance orientation* (t = 2.659; sig = 0.008). At the same time, the study level influences the students *expectations* concerning *uncertainty avoidance* (t = 2.727; sig = 0.007), *performance orientation* (t = -2.360; sig = 0.019) and *humane orientation* (t = 1.983; sig = 0.048).

Field of study (business/economics or engineering) influences the students perception on *practices* concerning *institutional collectivism* (t = 2.342; sig = 0.020), and their *expectations* about *performance orientation* (t = -2.841; sig = 0.005) and *gender egalitarianism* (t = -2.270; sig = 0.024). *Gender* (female vs. male) leads to differences in perception of *gender egalitarianism* in *practice* (t = -2.102; sig = 0.036) and *in group collectivism* (t = -2.653; sig = 0.008) and *assertiveness* (t = -2.188; sig = 0.029) at *expectations* level.

Students *interest in following a management career* (Yes vs. No) influences respondents perception on *practicing institutional collectivism* (t = 2.170; sig = 0.036) and *gender egalitarianism* (t = -2.198; sig = 0.029).

Finally, the *interest for setting up own business venture* (Yes vs. No) is a factor differentiating the *expectations* concerning *institutional collectivism* (t = 3.124; sig = 0.002).

Table 3. Sample demographics and significant differences in cultural dimensions

Cultural dimension	Sample Mean (N=429)	St. dev	Mean (G1)	Mean (G2)	t-test (sig-2 tailed)
GENDER (G1=female; n=239; G2 = male; n=190)					
<i>Practices</i>					
a. Gender egalitarianism	3.99	0.674	3.92	4.06	-2.102 (0.036*)
<i>Values</i>					
a. Collectivism 1	4.94	0.751	4.85	5.04	-2.653 (0.008*)
b. <i>Assertiveness</i>	5.10	0.768	3.93	4.09	-2.188 (0.029*)
FIELD OF STUDY (G1=Business/Economics; n=168 ; G2=Engineering; n=261)					
<i>Practices</i>					
a. Collectivism 2	5.13	0.779	5.24	5.05	2.342 (0.020*)
<i>Values</i>					
a. <i>Performance orientation</i>	5.89	0.706	5.77	5.97	-2.841 (0.005*)
b. Gender egalitarianism	4.41	0.567	4.34	4.446	-2.270 (0.024*)
LEVEL OF STUDY (G1= Bachelor; n= 278; G2= Master; n=151)					
<i>Practices</i>					
a. <i>Performance orientation</i>	3.66	1.00	3.75	3.48	2.659 (0.008*)
b. Gender egalitarianism	3.99	0.674	4.07	3.82	3.499 (0.001*)
<i>Values</i>					
a. <i>Uncertainty avoidance</i>	5.10	0.768	5.18	4.96	2.727 (0.007*)
b. <i>Humane orientation</i>	5.41	0.769	5.46	5.31	1.983 (0.048*)
c. <i>Performance orientation</i>	5.89	0.706	5.83	6.00	-2.360 (0.019*)
INTEREST IN MANAGEMENT CAREER (G1 = Yes; n=288; G2=No; n=141)					
<i>Practices</i>					
a. Collectivism 2	5.13	0.779	5.18	5.01	2.107 (0.036*)
b. Gender egalitarianism	3.99	0.674	3.84	4.08	-2.198 (0.029*)
<i>Values : none</i>					
INTEREST IN FOUNDING A BUSINESS VENTURE (G1=Yes; n=317; G2=No; n=112)					
<i>Practices: none</i>					
<i>Values</i>					
a. Collectivism 2	5.71	0.902	5.79	5.48	3.124 (0.002)

Conclusions

The present study shows that next generation of Romanian managers and leaders (students in business/economics and engineering) looks like a cultural body with homogeneous perceptions on societal cultural practices and with well outlined cultural expectations. The main two characteristics of the Romanian students' cultural portray are perception of a significant *power surplus* in the hands of elites and, respectively, of a significant *deficit* in society performance orientation. Students' cultural dynamics is highlighted by (statistically) significant differences between current cultural practices and their expectations (values).

Our study has theoretical and practical relevancy. From theoretical point of view, it proves GLOBE theoretical model based on CLT and ILT. From practice perspective, our study has relevancy for employers, universities, government and students. The employers could get an image of the cultural profile of future managers and leaders, based on which can design development programs for present managers and leaders, according to the trend expressed by students' population. Universities and government could use our findings in designing the strategies aiming at preparing the students for the market of next elites in economy, for creating and developing a leadership culture among young generations. Students themselves could take into account our findings in clarifying their options for own business or management positions. Our research is an ongoing, thus its findings and conclusions should

be taken in this context. Certainly, they could be influenced by the sample size, structure and geographic location. At the same time, it is probably that certain perceptions and expectations had been influenced by the fact that the data collection took place in full economic crisis. Additionally, the students form a specific population, still in molding process. They are influenced by a lot of social factors which were left out of our attention. The methodological limits should be also, mentioned. Some of them might be diminished in future research, pursuing two major objectives: a) performing comparative studies based upon the data collected in GLOBE students research for other European countries and b) comparative studies based upon Romanian students population and middle managers (GLOBE II research).

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