

BRIDGING THE CULTURAL DIVIDE: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF HUNGARIAN AND SOUTH KOREAN BUSINESS CULTURES

Tünde CSAPÓNÉ RISKÓ¹, Troy B. WIWCZAROSKI²

¹Associate professor (Institute of World Economy and International Relations,
Faculty of Economics and Business, University of Debrecen) Debrecen, Hungary

²Associate professor (Institute of World Economy and International Relations,
Faculty of Economics and Business, University of Debrecen) Debrecen, Hungary
risko.tunde@econ.unideb.hu

troy.wiwczaroski@econ.unideb.hu

Abstract: *In recent years, South Korea has emerged as one of Hungary's preeminent capital investors, driven by the strategic framework of the "Eastern Opening" policy and robust bilateral trade agreements. While macroeconomic data indicates a rapidly growing investment partnership, foreign enterprises frequently encounter significant operational difficulties due to cultural expectations, practices, and behavioural norms at every stage of business engagement. The primary objective of this study is to analyse the cultural similarities and disparities between both countries. By examining these nuances, the paper aims to facilitate efficient and effective collaboration among business professionals from both nations.*

Based on a comprehensive review of academic literature, both cultures are analysed and compared through established value dimensions. The theoretical framework integrates Hall's concepts of context, time, and proxemics; Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner's seven-dimension model; and Lewis's LMR (linear-active, multi-active, reactive) typology.

The findings reveal that while both nations exhibit high-context communication characteristics, South Korea operates within a rigid hierarchical, face-saving protocol heavily influenced by Confucian values. Hungary demonstrates a hybrid nature, blending relationship-driven polychronic flexibility with universalist and achievement-oriented standards in modern business contexts. According to the Lewis model, Hungary is positioned between the linear-active and multi-active poles, whereas South Korea aligns closely with the reactive pole.

To translate massive Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) inflows into long-term success, Hungarian business actors must develop specific cultural intelligence. Success in bilateral cooperation relies heavily on mastering indirect communication, respecting strict age-and-rank corporate hierarchies, and investing substantial time in relationship-oriented pre-negotiations.

Keywords: Hungary; South Korea; cultural dimensions; international business

JEL Classification: F23; M12; M16

1. Introduction

Recent trends indicate a growing number of Hungarian companies engaging in business relations with South Korean firms. Driven by their formidable performance, numerous South Korean corporations have emerged as dominant actors in global markets. While foreign entities are increasingly interacting with South Korean enterprises, they frequently encounter difficulties during these operations due to the distinct expectations, practices, and behavioural norms that prevail at every stage of business engagement. These disparities primarily originate from cross-country cultural differences. Although South Korea is widely regarded as one of the most westernised nations in Asia, many South Koreans strongly maintain culturally rooted traditions, customs, and practices in the business sphere. Consequently, understanding South Korean cultural norms enables others to conduct business with South Korean counterparts more efficiently and effectively. Foreign business operations can achieve greater efficacy through a deeper comprehension of the value system underlying South Korean culture and by recognising its impact on business conduct. Ultimately, a more profound understanding of Korean culture allows outsiders to enhance the success of their business endeavours with South Koreans (Lee, 2012).

To date, South Korea has become one of Hungary's preeminent investors, indicating that Korean enterprises maintain confidence in the Hungarian economy. Within Asia, Hungary conducts its largest volume of trade with South Korea, surpassed only by China. Currently, approximately 300 South Korean companies operate in Hungary, employing more than 20,000 individuals (kormany.hu, 2022). South Korea represents the largest capital investor within the framework of the "Eastern Opening" policy in Hungary. This aligns with the government's objective to establish Budapest as a regional financial hub serving as a bridge between Asian and European markets. The further intensification of economic relations is supported by the investment promotion and trade development agreement signed between Seoul and Budapest in 2022 (mfor.hu, 2023; Rádi, 2023; vg, 2023).

According to the 2023 report of the Hungarian Investment Promotion Agency (HIPA), the results for 2023 exhibit outstanding growth in all respects compared to the previous year. On an annual basis, investment volume doubled from 6.5 billion euros to 13 billion euros, while the number of announced projects demonstrated an even more dynamic increase. The number of newly created jobs reached 19,692, representing a 30 percent year-on-year growth. This constitutes the highest number of newly created jobs ever recorded within a single year. These record figures are primarily attributable to the high level of activity from Eastern investors—namely China, South Korea, and Japan—whose investments accounted for nearly 82 percent of the inflowing Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) and 67 percent of the newly announced jobs. A total of 19 projects are linked to these countries. Chinese enterprises committed to investing over 7.6 billion euros across 8 projects, making China the largest investor in Hungary once again, following its previous leading position in 2020. South Korea ranked second in terms of investment volume with a total investment value of nearly 2 billion euros, surpassing Germany and the United States (hipa, 2024).

2. Methodology

Based on academic literature, this study analyses the cultures of Hungary and South Korea through the value dimensions established by renowned culture

researchers. The cultural dimensions of Edward T. Hall, Fons Trompenaars and Charles Hampden-Turner, as well as Richard R. Lewis, serve as the foundation for the subsequent comparative analysis. The objective of the research is to analytically explore the similarities and disparities between the cultures of the two nations. The findings may prove beneficial in facilitating seamless and efficient collaboration among business professionals and colleagues from both countries.

3. Results

3.1. Cultural dimensions of Edward T. Hall

In his seminal work (*The Silent Language*, 1959), Hall defines culture as communication (Loch, 2010). Every culture reflects within its language that which is valued by its members. Consequently, language becomes both the embodiment of culture and the primary instrument through which individuals communicate with others, whether within their own cultural sphere or in another (Adler, 2002 in Albaum et al., 2016). Herein, three of Hall's cultural dimensions will be examined: (1) Cultural Context: High-Context – Low-Context; (2) Conception of Time: Mono-chronic – Polychronic; and (3) Proxemics: Low – High Territoriality.

In Hall's interpretation, context refers to the comprehensive set of information available to the participants of communication in a given situation (Loch, 2010). In high-context cultures, words themselves carry relatively little inherent meaning. In these cultural environments, individuals must read between the lines to comprehend the intended meaning of a message. High-context cultures frequently employ silence during communication, and interaction is indirect rather than direct. When conflicts arise, they are managed with subtlety and discretion. Verbal statements reflect the underlying social relationship and its shared assumptions. In contrast, in a low-context culture, meaning resides within the words themselves, and the significance of a message can be separated from the context in which it appears. In a low-context language and culture, the message is explicit. In low-context environments, individuals state their expectations or desires directly; these cultures tend to be straightforward and highly verbal. Low-context cultures are predominantly found in Northern Europe and North America, including the Anglo-Saxon countries, Germany, and Switzerland. Conversely, high-context cultures are prevalent in Asia (e.g., Japan, China, Korea), Latin America, Southern Europe, the Middle East, and the Central and Eastern European region. Because members of low-context cultures prioritise directness, they typically view high-context communication as a waste of time. For instance, Americans tend to raise their voices, speak rapidly, and clearly express what is on their minds. In contrast, the Chinese are less overt and utilise body language, silence, and pauses to convey messages (Gesteland, 1999 in Albaum et al., 2016; Samovar et al., 2009 in Chaney – Martin, 2014; Deresky – Miller, 2023; Falkné Bánó, 2008; Szedlacsó, 2012). Hall also referred to low-context cultures as deal-oriented and high-context cultures as relationship-oriented (Csath, 2008). Heidrich (2001) formulates that in high-context scenarios, the message is already inherently present in the individual, requiring only a portion to be expressed in an explicit, coded form. In low-context scenarios, the majority of the message is explicitly coded, spoken, or written. According to research by Falkné Bánó (2008), Hungarians exhibit high-context characteristics. Heidrich (2001) also concludes that Hungarians belong to high-context cultures, noting that

they are continuously surrounded by a highly intensive information network. Holicza (2016) similarly identifies Hungary as a high-context culture, where a large portion of information is assumed to be known and universally understood. Nonverbal coding is substantial, and a significant portion of communication relies heavily on nonverbal cues. South Korea is a distinctly high-context culture, which is clearly manifested in its communicative specificities. According to Székács (2019), in Korea, the appropriate forms of establishing and maintaining relationships between communicating parties—including every aspect of behaviour—are traditionally determined by commitment to the community, strict adherence to hierarchy, and a pursuit of harmony and order. Communicating parties are guided by collective responsibility rather than individual interest. Within this framework, communication is characteristically governed by age, gender, social rank, position, and status.

Conception of Time: Members of cultures following a monochronic time orientation perform only one primary activity at a time, whereas those following a polychronic time orientation work on multiple activities simultaneously. In monochronic cultures, time is viewed as something tangible; people use expressions such as "wasting time" or "time is money." Time is perceived as linear and manageable, and tasks become more important than human relationships. Engaging in two or more activities simultaneously is considered impolite. These are generally characteristic of low-context cultures (Kopf – McCroskey, 2007 in Chaney – Martin, 2014; Loch, 2010; Szedlaczkó, 2012). In polychronic cultures, people are well-adapted to doing several things at once, executing multiple tasks in parallel. For members of polychronic cultures, people and personal relationships are more important than adherence to schedules. This results in a lifestyle that is more unstructured than that of monochronic individuals (Samovar et al., 2009 in Chaney – Martin, 2014). High-context cultures typically fall into this category (Szedlaczkó, 2012). Falkné Bánó (2008) cites the view of Hall (1990) that the two-time orientations do not mix. She adds, however, that Hall's view is not unequivocally true, as numerous cultures—including Hungarian culture—blend monochronic and polychronic traits. Adherence to schedules is important, which is a mono-chronic trait; at the same time, Hungarian culture is strongly relationship-oriented, human relations are more important than deadlines, and emotions carry significant weight, all of which are polychronic traits (Falkné Bánó, 2008). Falkné Bánó (2008) and Lewis (2006) write that Hungarians exhibit both time orientations: polychronic in friendships and monochronic in formal relations. Meetings begin punctually and agendas are strictly followed, but if participants engage in a lively conversation, they tend to lose their sense of time. According to Holicza (2016), Hungary is a monochronic culture, which implies that punctuality is expected and meetings proceed according to a specific agenda. Regarding relationships, however, polychronic traits are also present. The research findings of both Szalay (2005) and Heidrich (2001) substantiate that Hungarians have a polychronic time orientation. South-East Asian countries are polychronic, while most Eastern European countries exhibit a slightly polychronic time management (Gesteland, 2000 and Bartosik-Purgat, 2006 in Adamczyk, 2017). South Koreans are highly industrious and rarely waste time. They are relatively punctual and possess an Americanised attitude, meaning they aim to condense as many tasks as possible into a given timeframe (Lewis, 2006).

Cultures also differ in their perception of physical space. We possess our own sense of personal space and feel uncomfortable when others violate it. Conversational distance is smaller in Latin America than in Northern Europe or the United States

(Cavusgil et al., 2017). Proxemics addresses the impact of proximity and space on communication (Deresky – Miller, 2023). In personal relations, Hungarians sit and stand close to one another. Physical contact is frequent, and handshakes are practically mandatory (Lewis, 2006). In Hungary, people stand further than an elbow's length apart, but close enough to touch wrists. Close friends and relatives greet each other with a kiss on the cheek, provided at least one of them is a woman. Hungarian men greet each other with a handshake, which differs from the Western handshake as it is restricted to a single grasp without shaking the hand. The handshake lasts no longer than one or two seconds (Holicza, 2016). South Korea is a crowded country, and space, particularly in large cities, is scarce. South Koreans are accustomed to working in close proximity to one another; however, they require clearly defined personal space in formal situations. They do not prefer physical touch (Lewis, 2006).

3.2. Cultural dimensions of Fons Trompenaars and Charles Hampden-Turner

Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner developed their model after studying human values and preferences across numerous cultures over a ten-year period. They found that individuals from different cultures do not differ randomly, but in highly specific and even predictable ways. In fact, every culture possesses its own mode of thinking, its own values and beliefs, as well as distinct preferences based on a variety of factors. They concluded that what distinguishes people of one culture from another is where these preferences are situated along the following seven dimensions: (1) Universalism vs. Particularism, (2) Individualism vs. Communitarianism, (3) Specific vs. Diffuse, (4) Neutral vs. Emotional, (5) Achievement vs. Ascription, (6) Sequential time vs. Synchronic time, and (7) Inner-directed vs. Outer-directed (Holtbrügge, 2022).

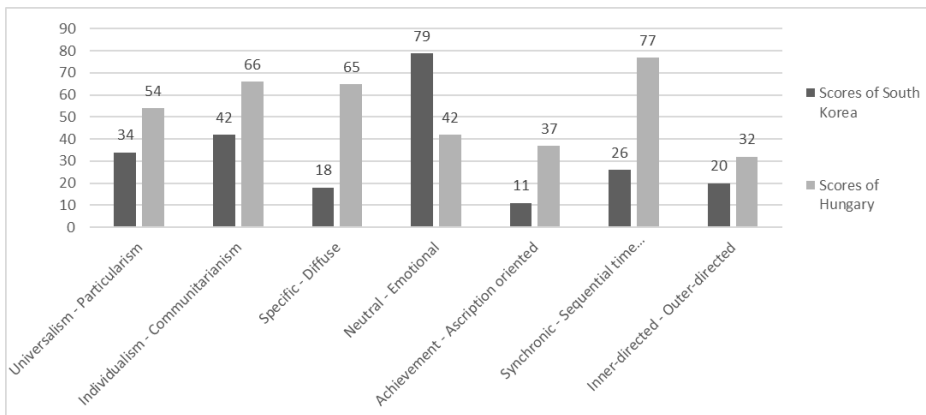


Figure 1: Scores of Hungary and South-Korea based on the Cultural Dimensions of Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner

Source: own editing based on *thtconsulting.com* (2025)

Universalism vs. Particularism: This dimension pertains to the extent to which rules are accepted and applied, as well as the degree to which deviation from rules is tolerated by considering the unique circumstances of a specific case (Loch, 2010). The universalist approach applies rules and systems objectively, without regard to

individual circumstances, whereas the particularist approach places primary obligation on relationships, operating on the principle that "everything depends on who is who" (Csath, 2008; Deresky – Miller, 2023). Examples of universalist cultures include Anglo-Saxon countries, Switzerland, and Germany, while particularism is characteristic of Mediterranean cultures, France, Spain, Central and Eastern Europe, and the Middle East (Szedlacsó, 2012). The particularist approach is highly prevalent in Asian countries and is thus characteristic of South Korea as well (Deresky – Miller, 2023; Holtbrügge, 2022). According to Figure 1, Hungary lies in the intermediate value range, whereas Korea's score indicates a particularist society. A particularist perspective evaluates individuals through their interpersonal relationships. Friends, siblings, colleagues, and children hold special importance for a given person, placing unique demands on their emotions. Therefore, supporting, protecting, and judging a person must be conducted independently of the rules (Trompenaars – Hampden-Turner, 2012 in Ylikortes, 2020). The research finding of Gaál et al. (2005) from 2004 reflects a universalist orientation for Hungary. Falkné Bánó (2014) also confirms a universalist orientation through her own research, as do Holicza (2016), Trompenaars – Hampden-Turner (1997), as well as Kovács (2006) in Tompos (2015), and Hidasi – Lukinykh (2009).

Individualism vs. Communitarianism: This dimension examines the extent to which individuals prioritise individual interests over the interests of the community. This dimension corresponds to Hofstede's "individualism vs. collectivism" dimension (ecampusontario, 2023; Loch, 2010). Individualism is particularly strong in Western Europe and North America. Communitarianism prevails in Asia, Africa and Latin America (Holtbrügge, 2022). Hungary is characterised by an individualistic culture, whereas South Korea possesses a collectivistic one (theculturefactor.com, 2025). Osváth (2019) emphasises that Korea is characterised by high power distance and collectivism. Consequently, hierarchy plays a significant role, and individual interests are subordinated to those of the community. The corporate community is perceived as a large family where the leader assumes a paternal role—acting strictly and issuing directives, yet simultaneously providing care for loyal subordinates. This collective sentiment is further reinforced by corporate uniforms and company anthems. Furthermore, corporate management endeavours to involve employees' family members in the life of the company through various leisure programs. Korean business leaders encourage informal, after-hours social gatherings over food and drinks, which typically extend late into the night. It is believed that these activities strengthen team spirit and mutual trust. Korean employees frequently maintain the appearance of intense industriousness and remain in the office until late hours. However, this does not imply that their work is more efficient. The Korean employee feels that projecting the appearance of diligent work is a societal expectation; hence, they see no reason to finish work by 5:00 p.m. when they are expected to stay much longer. Al-Alawi and Alkhodari (2016) also refer to South Korea as a collectivistic society where emphasis is placed on long-term commitment and the cultivation of inter-group relationships. Ting-Ying (2013) classifies South Korea as a highly or moderately highly collectivistic culture. Székács (2019) emphasises the influence of Confucianism on behaviour, which is heavily shaped by group spirit, male dominance, and respect for age and rank. Individuals position themselves based on their status within the group, and they approach others, dress, behave, and communicate accordingly. Individual interests are systematically overridden by the collective interest, which also entails a sense of responsibility toward the community.

Individuals must identify with their community, and failure to do so results in the loss of the protection their community provides. Through primary research, Milassin (2020) confirms the findings of the aforementioned author, emphasising that the typical Korean identifies with their respective group, and its expectations guide their every action. An individual's identity is determined by the group. Koreans are highly situation-dependent people. Lee (2012) describes South Korea as a highly collectivistic society. Kim (2000) also notes that strong in-group solidarity is a key cultural characteristic of the Korean people. The primary foundations for the formation of such in-groups include a shared alma mater, place of birth, workplace, and social clubs, among others. The research finding of Gaál et al. (2005) from 2004 shows an individualistic orientation for Hungary. This is also confirmed by Holicza (2016) and Hidasi – Lukinykh (2009). According to Tompos (2015), citing Trompenaars – Hampden-Turner (1997) and Kovács (2006), Hungary is situated rather between the two poles. According to Figure 1, Hungary is rather an individualistic society, whereas South Korea is more a collectivist society.

Specific vs. Diffuse: This dimension indicates the degree of separation between the private sphere and social existence, examining the extent to which an individual commits themselves to things, persons, and relationships (Loch, 2010). In specific cultures, individuals separate work and personal matters, isolate their professional life from their private life, and tend to be more open and direct. In diffuse cultures, work and personal relationships intermingle (Deresky – Miller, 2023). A specific culture can be referred to as deal-oriented, while a diffuse culture can be termed relationship-oriented (Csath, 2008). The research finding of Gaál et al. (2005) from 2004 reflects a specific orientation for Hungary. The research results of Falkné Bánó (2014) also support a specific orientation, though she mentions diffuse tendencies as well. Holicza (2016) and Hidasi – Lukinykh (2009) share a similar view. Specific and diffuse cultures are also referred to as low-context and high-context cultures, respectively. This indicates how much we need to know prior to communication, how much shared knowledge we take for granted, and how many references are made to implicit common ground. Low-context cultures are generally more adaptable and flexible; a stranger will not face significant difficulties in joining the communication. The Korean language is highly contextual. Contextual countries are typically sophisticated and may never be truly comprehensible to foreigners who have not fully assimilated (Trompenaars – Hampden-Turner, 2012 in Ylikortes, 2020). According to Figure 1, the score for South Korea indicates a diffuse culture, whereas that for Hungary points to a specific culture.

Neutral vs. Emotional: This dimension expresses the extent to which the public expression of emotions is acceptable, and how desirable it is to keep emotions under control or concealed (Loch, 2010). In neutral cultures, business relationships are goal-oriented and serve efficiency; there is no place for emotions within them. Such cultures are found in the Anglo-Saxon region and Northern Europe. Members of affective cultures engage in business relationships with their full personality, and emotions carry importance as well. Such cultures are found in South America, the Middle East, and Central and Eastern Europe (Szedlacskó, 2012). The research finding of Gaál et al. (2005) from 2004 shows a value close to the average for Hungary. Individuals belonging to a culture with such a value view those with a more neutral orientation as placing primary emphasis on containing and suppressing thoughts and emotions, and on unemotional conduct during negotiations. This is also confirmed by Tompos (2015), citing Trompenaars – Hampden-Turner (1997)

and Kovács (2006). The research results of Falkné Bánó (2014) also show mixed traits. Holicza (2016) mentions Hungary as a neutral culture. Hidasi – Lukinykh (2009) write that the value of the neutral orientation (56) is stronger than that of the emotional orientation (44). According to Figure 1, the score for South Korea indicates a neutral culture, whereas that for Hungary shows an affective culture.

Achievement vs. Ascription: This dimension refers to the method of acquiring status (Loch, 2010). In an achievement-based society, status and influence are based on individual performance. Women, minorities, and young people generally have an equal opportunity to acquire positions based on their accomplishments. In an ascription-oriented society, people attribute status based on class, age, gender, etc. (Deresky – Miller, 2023). For instance, Anglo-Saxon cultures are achievement-oriented, while Central and Eastern European or Mediterranean countries are ascription-oriented (Szedlacskó, 2012). The research finding of Gaál et al. (2005) from 2004 shows a value close to the average for Hungary. This is also confirmed by Tompos (2015), citing Trompenaars – Hampden-Turner (1997) and Kovács (2006). According to the research results of Falkné Bánó (2014), Hungarians are rather achievement-oriented, but there are also traits indicating an ascription orientation. According to Hidasi – Lukinykh (2009), a slight achievement orientation can be observed in Hungarian culture. According to Figure 1, the scores for both countries indicate ascription-oriented cultures, although this tendency is stronger in South Korea.

Confucianism permeates South Korean culture. Status is determined by age, gender, education, family background, wealth, qualifications, and political alignment. Social connections have an impact on success. Younger generations are considerably more materialistic than their parents and grandparents. Origin and background are important, determining how people are treated in this hierarchical society (Chaney – Martin, 2014).

Sequential time vs. Synchronic time: This dimension examines the extent to which a culture prefers doing things one at a time in an orderly manner, as opposed to a more flexible schedule that allows for performing multiple things simultaneously and in parallel (ecampusontario, 2023). The sequential conception of time corresponds to Hall's monochronic conception of time, while the synchronic conception corresponds to the polychronic conception of time (Loch, 2010). Sequential people adhere to pre-prepared schedules and value punctuality. Time is divided among various intervals, and actions are typically executed in a clear order. Any change or disturbance in the sequence makes sequential individuals more insecure. Time is constructed as a series of events occurring at regular intervals between people. The future can be directed by personal achievement and internally directed effort only in the short term, having no impact on the distant future. Time can also be viewed as cyclical and repetitive in sequential cultures. In contrast, synchronic cultures view the past, present, and future as intertwined periods. Koreans attribute greater importance to the future and the least to the past, but they see all periods as overlapping with one another. They carry their past through the present into the future and are reluctant to change unless they are convinced that their heritage is secure (Trompenaars – Hampden-Turner, 2012 in Ylikortes, 2020). According to Figure 1, the score for South Korea indicates a synchronic society, whereas that for Hungary indicates a sequential time orientation society. However, based on previous research findings (Trompenaars, 1999 in Holicza, 2016; Trompenaars – Hampden-Turner, 1997 and Kovács, 2006 in Tompos 2015) Hungarians were rather

characterized by synchronic time management. In line with Hall's time concept (3.1) and the dual nature of Hungarian temporal perception, we can conclude that the Hungarian culture exhibits a combination of synchronic and sequential time management styles.

Inner-directed vs. Outer-directed: This dimension pertains to the relationship with nature and examines the extent to which members of a culture believe they can control themselves and their environment (ecampusontario, 2023). Members of outer-directed cultures view themselves as part of nature, recognise the power of nature, and frequently believe in some force guiding the world. Inner-directed cultures consider themselves to be more than nature and seek to dominate it. Members of these cultures feel they can control their own destiny, and that their success depends solely on themselves (Loch, 2010). Examples of the most inner-directed cultures include much of Europe and Anglo-Saxon cultures, while the most outer-directed cultures are the Arab world and much of Asia (Szedlacsó, 2012). The research finding of Gaál et al. (2005) from 2004 shows a value close to the average for Hungary. According to Holicza (2016) and Hidasi – Lukinykh (2009), Hungarians are rather characterized by outer direction. According to Figure 1 the scores of both countries indicate outer-directed cultures.

3.3. Culture Model of Richard L. Lewis

Richard D. Lewis posits that cultures can be classified into three distinct categories: linear-active, multi-active, and reactive. He illustrates his cultural model as a triangle (Figure 2), in which countries are positioned along the lines connecting the two vertices (Lewis, 2000).

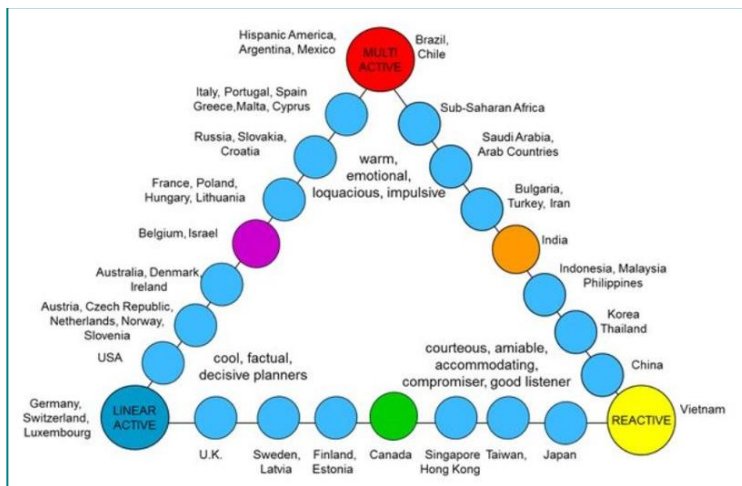


Figure 2: Culture Model of Lewis

Source: Jaakkola – Thalheim (2014)

The linear-active group encompasses the Anglosphere—namely North America, Great Britain, Australia, and New Zealand—as well as Northern Europe, including Scandinavia and the Germanic countries. Members of this group are task-oriented, highly organised planners who execute chains of action by completing one task at a time, preferably adhering to a linear agenda (stray-partners, 2023).

The reactive group comprises the countries of Asia. They are excellent listeners who rarely initiate action or conversation, preferring first to listen to the other party's position, and then react to it to formulate their own opinions (straypartners, 2023). The multi-active group is more dispersed, spanning Southern Europe, the Mediterranean countries, South America, Sub-Saharan Africa, the Arab world and other cultures in the Middle East, India, Pakistan, and most Slavic countries. Although these cultures are highly diverse geographically, as well as in their religions, beliefs, and values, they can be categorised as a group because their behaviour follows the same pattern characterised by the following traits and commonalities: emotionality, loquacity, dramatic expression, eloquence, persuasiveness, expressive body language, the importance of religion or creed, the primacy of family bonds, low-trust societies, unpunctuality, variable work ethic, inadequate planning, capacity for empathy, collectivism, relationship orientation, reservation toward formalities, sociability, nepotism, irritability, volatility, historical consciousness, and an aversion to strict discipline (straypartners, 2023).

As illustrated in Figure 2, Hungary is positioned between the linear-active and multi-active poles, though slightly closer to the multi-active group. South Korea is situated between the multi-active and reactive poles, practically in the direct vicinity of the reactive pole.

Hungarians, similarly to Latins, sit and stand close to one another. Physical contact is frequent, and handshakes are essential. Although they arrive punctually to scheduled appointments, they frequently lose their sense of time as soon as a lively conversation commences. Regarding their perception of time, much like Latins, they are people-oriented rather than clock-oriented. Eye contact is important. Women are generally idealised in an old-fashioned manner, although this does not necessarily preclude them from assuming prominent roles in business. Resembling Germanic cultures, Hungarians tend to engage in much deeper analyses. They are prone to pessimism and painting a negative picture of situations, often elaborating on problems without proposing solutions. Similar to Spaniards, Hungarians can be sensitive and easily offended (Lewis, 2010).

South Koreans are energetic conversationalists with a highly flexible perception of truth. They are polite listeners in true Asian fashion, yet they often give the impression of anticipating what will be said to them. They frequently provide animated feedback and may pose questions on matters already discussed. Maintaining face is of paramount importance to them. Protocol is strictly observed. If a South Korean is not granted the respect corresponding to their rank, status, or age, they will withdraw and avoid their partner in the future. If an individual fails to observe the fundamental rules of social interaction and appropriate respect in Korea, they become "impersonal"; from that point on, South Koreans will disregard them, even if they remain polite. In fact, they can exhibit aggressive behaviour toward impersonal individuals. Touching another person constitutes an insult. Business professionals now engage in handshakes to demonstrate modernity, but they frequently bow simultaneously. Punctuality is reasonable, yet considered less critical than in China or Japan (Lewis, 2006).

4. Conclusions and Recommendations

The comparative analysis of Hungarian and South Korean cultures through the multidimensional frameworks of Hall, Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner, and

Lewis reveals a complex landscape of both synergies and profound disparities. These cultural nuances carry significant weight in the context of the rapidly expanding macroeconomic partnership between the two nations. While both countries are classified as high-context cultures where communication relies heavily on implicit shared knowledge and non-verbal cues, the operationalisation of this trait differs substantially. South Korea exhibits a much more rigid and extreme form of high-context interaction, deeply governed by Confucian values, strict hierarchical protocols, and the paramount importance of maintaining "face." In contrast, while Hungarian culture values personal relationships and displays polychronic tendencies in social dimensions, its business environment has increasingly adapted to Western European standards of universalism, directness, and achievement-oriented status.

This dichotomy creates a unique challenge for intercultural business operations. On one hand, both cultures recognise the primacy of relationship-building over purely transactional, deal-oriented interactions. On the other hand, the highly structured, age-and-rank-governed nature of Korean corporate hierarchy can create friction with the more flexible and egalitarian approaches often found in contemporary Hungarian management. To translate the massive Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) inflows and strengthening bilateral trade agreements into long-term organisational success, specific cultural intelligence must be applied.

Based on these academic findings, the following strategic recommendations are formulated for Hungarian business professionals, diplomats, and managers engaging with South Korean counterparts:

- Prioritise meticulous protocol and hierarchy: Hungarian negotiators must strictly observe the rank, age, and status of their Korean partners. Communication and decision-making should flow through appropriate hierarchical channels. Failing to grant the expected level of respect or bypassing a superior can cause the Korean partner to lose face, which may result in them withdrawing from the cooperation entirely or treating the Hungarian party as "impersonal."
- Master the art of indirect communication: Given the highly contextual and reactive nature of Korean communication, Hungarians should avoid overly blunt, aggressive, or purely linear arguments. Silence, pauses, and non-verbal cues should be respected rather than filled with rapid speech. Criticism should never be voiced publicly; instead, it must be addressed with utmost subtlety, discretion, and ideally in private settings to preserve the harmony of the group.
- Bridge the gap in time perception: While Hungarians tend to lose their sense of time during engaging discussions, they must recognise that South Koreans, despite their polychronic worldview, operate with an intensely industrious and punctual "Americanised" attitude toward daily tasks. Respecting schedules and demonstrating a high work ethic are critical to building initial trust.
- Invest heavily in relationship-oriented pre-negotiations: Since Korean business culture is deeply particularist, trust is not placed in abstract contracts but in the individuals representing the companies. Hungarian professionals should be prepared to invest substantial time in informal socialising, dining, and network-building before expecting concrete business commitments.

Ultimately, the synergy between Hungarian adaptability and South Korean formidable industrial execution can yield outstanding results, provided that both actors—particularly the Hungarian side as the host and partner—actively decode and respect the cultural value systems governing their counterparts' behaviour.

References

1. Al-Alawi, A. I. – Alkhodari, H. J. (2016) Cross-cultural differences in managing businesses: Applying Hofstede cultural analysis in Germany, Canada, South Korea and Morocco. *International Business Management*. 95 (2016) pp 40855-40861
2. Adamczyk, M. (2017) The importance of cultural differences in international business. *Central European Review of Economics and Management*. Vol. 1, No. 2, pp 151-170
3. Albaum, G. - Duerr, E. - Josiassen, A. (2016) *International marketing and export management*. Pearson Education Limited, Harlow.
4. Cavusgil, S. T. - Knight, G. - Riesenberger, J. R. (2017) *International business. The new realities*. Pearson Education Limited, Harlow.
5. Chaney, L. - Martin. J. (2014) *Intercultural business communication*. Pearson Education Limited, Harlow.
6. Csath, M. (2008): *Interkulturális menedzsment*. Nemzeti Tankönyvkiadó, Budapest.
7. Deresky, H. - Miller, S. R. (2023) *International management. Managing across borders and cultures*. Pearson Education Limited, Harlow.
8. ecampusontario (2023) *Intercultural business communication. Trompenaars's dimensions of cul-ture*.
<https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/communications/chapter/trompenaars-dimensions-of-culture/>
9. Falkné Bánó, K. (2008) *Kultúraközi kommunikáció, Az interkulturális menedzsment aspektusai*, Perfekt Kiadó. ISBN 978-963-394-747-0.
10. Falkné Bánó, K. (2014) "Identifying Hungarian cultural characteristics in Europe's cultural di-versity in the 21st century: a controversial issue", in: *Alkalmazott tudományok I. fóruma: Proceedings* pp 17-28. ISBN:978-963-71-5992-3
11. Gaál, Z. – Szabó, L. – Kovács, Z. (2005) Nemzetközi vállalati stratégiák és a nemzeti-vállalati kultúrák összefüggései. *Vezetéstudomány*. Vol. XXXVI, No. 6., pp 2-14
12. Heidrich, B. (2001) *Szervezeti kultúra és interkulturális menedzsment*. Human telex Consulting Budapest.
13. Hidasi, J. – Lukinykh, Y. V. (2009) *A comparison of Russian and Hungarian Business Cultures*. Budapesti Gazdasági Főiskola – Magyar Tudomány Ünnepe, 2009. pp 1-8.
14. hipa (2024) *Minden idők legnagyobb beruházási rekordját érte el Magyarország a korábbi csúcsteljesítmény megduplázásával*. <https://hipa.hu/hir/minden-idok-legnagyobb-beruhazasi-rekordjat-erte-el-magyarorszag-a-korabbi-csucsteljesitmeny-megduplazasaval/> Accessed: 5 September 2025
15. Holicza, P. (2016) "Understanding Magyar: An Analysis of Hungarian Identity within the Framework of Cultural Dimensions Theory and Additional Metrics", in: *Legal, Economic, Managerial and Environmental Aspects of Performance Competencies by Local Authorities: 4th international scientific correspondence conference*. pp 118-124. Publisher: Slovak University of Agriculture in Nitra
16. Hotlbrügge, D (2022) *Intercultural Management, Concept, Practice, Critical Reflection*, SAGE Publications Ltd.
17. Jaakkola, H. – Thalheim, B. (2014) Multicultural Adaptive Systems. *Frontiers in Artificial Intelligence and Applications*. Vol. 272, pp 172-191 DOI: 10.3233/978-1-61499-472-5-172

18. Kim, K. K. (2000) Dimensions of Korean Culture. *The Korean Language in America*, 2000, Vol. 5, pp 199-208
19. kormány.hu (2022) *További dél-koreai beruházások érkehetnek Magyarországra.* <https://kormany.hu/hirek/tovabbi-del-koreai-beruhazasok-erkezhethetnek-magyarorszagra> Accessed: 5 September 2025
20. Lee, C. Y. (2012) Korean culture and its influence on business practice in South Korea. *The Journal of International Management Studies*, Vol. 7, No. 2, pp 180-189.
21. Lewis, R. D. (2000) *Cross Culture. The Lewis Model.* Richard Lewis Communications.
22. Lewis, R. D. (2006) *When cultures collide: Leading across cultures*, Boston – London: Nicholas Brealey International. ISBN: 978-1-904838-02-9
23. Lewis, R. D. (2010) *Country Focus: Hungary.* <https://www.crossculture.com/country-focus-hungary/> Accessed: 10 September 2025
24. Loch, Á. (2010) Hall, Hofstede és Trompenaars dimenziói. *AGORA* 2010/5, pp 55-65
25. mfor.hu (2023) *Meglepő, kik lettek az egyik legnagyobb befektetők Magyarországon.* <https://mfor.hu/cikkek/befektetes/meglepo-kik-lettek-az-egyik-legnagyobb-befektetok-magyarorszagon.html> Accessed: 5 September Letöltés ideje: 2025
26. Milassin, A. N. (2020) Kulturális eltérések elemzése értelmezése Dél-Koreában magyar szem-mel. *Távol-Keleti Tanulmányok* 2020/1: pp 151-167. DOI: 10.38144/TKT.2020.1.7.
27. Osváth, G. (2019) *A koreai gazdaság és menedzsment.* pp 395-420 in Mohr, R. – Székács, A. (ed.) (2019): *Japán, kínai és koreai üzleti kultúra. Távol-keleti menedzsment interkulturális és gyakorlati nézőpontból.* Budapesti Gazdasági Egyetem Keleti Üzleti Akadémiai Központ
28. Rádi, B. (2023) *Kiderült miért választja egyre több koreai befektető Magyarországot.* <https://index.hu/gazdasag/2023/06/01/korea-toke-beruhazas-varga-mihaly-penzugyminiszterium/> Accessed: 5 September 2025
29. straypartners (2023) *When cultures collide.* <https://www.straypartners.com/lewis-model>
30. Szalay, Gy. (2005) "Magyarok német tükörben", *Vezetéstudomány.* Vol. XXXVI. No. 12. pp 28-43
31. Szedlacsó, Z. (chief editor) (2012) *Export menedzsment.* ICC Hungary Egyesület
32. Székács, A. (2019) *Etikett és protokoll Japánban, és Koreában.* pp 249-288 in Mohr, R. – Székács, A. (ed.) (2019): *Japán, kínai és koreai üzleti kultúra. Távol-keleti menedzsment in-terkulturális és gyakorlati nézőpontból.* Budapesti Gazdasági Egyetem Keleti Üzleti Akadémiai Központ
33. theculturefactor.com (2025) *Country comparison tool: Hungary – South Korea.* <https://www.theculturefactor.com/country-comparison-tool?countries=hungary%2Csouth+korea> Accessed: 5 September 2025
34. thtconsulting.com, (2025) *The 7D World map.* <https://thtconsulting.com/resources/culture-explore/>
35. Ting, S. K. T. – Ying, C. Y. (2013) Culture Dimensions Comparison: A Study of Malaysia and South Korea. *Review of Integrative Business and Economics Research*, Vol 2(1) pp 535-543

36. Tompos, A. (2015) Austrian and Hungarian values and norms in cross-cultural management research. *ImpresaProgetto Electronic Journal of Management*, n. 1, 2015. pp 1-16. ISSN 1824-3576
37. vg (2023) *Megbízna a dél-koreai cégek Magyarországon*. <https://www.vg.hu/vilaggazdasag-magyar-gazdasag/2023/06/megbiznak-a-del-koreai-cegek-magyarorszagban> Accessed: 5 September 2025
38. Ylikortes, M. (2020) *Cultural and communicational challenges when working in South-Korea: Finnish Employee's perspective and thematic analysis*. Bachelor's Thesis. Haaga-Helia University of Applied Sciences