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## Social intelligence in the cultural context: comparison of Ukrainian and Slovak managers

**Abstract.** The presented theoretical and methodological study is based on the assumption that social constructs do not have a generally valid form but are culturally conditioned. The study presents the results of a research aimed at an analysis of the consistency of the factor structure of the MESI methodology (Measuring Social Intelligence) in the Ukrainian and Slovak managerial environment. At the same time, the results of the analysis of differences in the assessment of the extracted social intelligence factors (Manipulation, Empathy and Social Irritability) between the managers from Ukraine and Slovakia are presented. The data collection was carried out between August 2014 and March 2015 on a research file which consisted of 131 managers, of whom 65 were Ukrainian and 66 were Slovak managers from the areas of administration, trade and services. The findings make it possible to formulate answers to two questions. The first is related to the degree of universality of the extracted factor structures of social intelligence in the individual cultures. The second relates to the assessment of individual specified social intelligence factors within different cultures.

The presented findings confirm that the factor structure of the MESI methodology, which is based on the samples of the Ukrainian and Slovak managers, is consistent. The existence of several differences in the assessment of social intelligence, with social irritability as an attribute, was confirmed. Social irritability is more prominently rejected by the Slovak managers. The cultural impact in terms of Social irritability is manifested by the fact that the Slovak managers reject the specifics of this construct (such as «it makes me nervous when I am with other people», «I rather avoid the presence of others», «the manifestation of the feelings of other people baffle me», and «the weaknesses and the wishes of others distract me») more strongly than the Ukrainian managers. This finding also points to the necessity of accepting the cultural context in examining social intelligence and social constructs in general.

**Keywords:** Social Construct; Social Intelligence; Cultural Context; MESI Methodology; Manager

**JEL Classification:** L29; Z10

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**Соціальний інтелект у культурному контексті: порівняння українських і словацьких менеджерів**

**Анотація.** В основу теоретичного й методологічного дослідження, представленого у цій роботі, покладено припущення відносно того, що, не маючи загально визначених форм, соціальні конструкти обумовлюються культурою. Метою дослідження є аналіз відповідності факторної структури методики вимірювання соціального інтелекту в управлінському середовищі України та Словаччини. У статті представлено результати аналізу відмінностей в оцінці виявлених чинників соціального інтелекту, таких як маніпуляція, емпатія та соціальна дратівливість. Збір даних проводився в період з серпня 2014 року до березня 2015 року. У дослідженні взяли участь 65 менеджерів з України й 66 менеджерів зі Словаччини (загальна кількість 131 особа), що представляють сфери управління, торгівлі та послуг. За результатами проведеного дослідження було сформульовано відповіді на два основних питання. Перше стосувалося ступеня універсальності виявлених чинників соціального інтелекту в окремо взятих культурах, друге – оцінки виявлених чинників соціального інтелекту в різних культурах. У ході дослідження було підтверджено те, що факторна структура методики вимірювання соціального інтелекту, визначена на підставі вибірки українських і словацьких менеджерів, є стійкою. Також було підтверджено наявність деяких відмінностей в оцінці такої складової соціального інтелекту, як соціальна дратівливість, яка більшою мірою неприйнятна для менеджерів зі Словацької Республіки. Цей висновок вказує на необхідність урахування культурного контексту у вивченні соціального інтелекту й соціальних конструктів.

**Ключові слова:** соціальний конструкт; соціальний інтелект; методика вимірювання соціального інтелекту; менеджер.

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**Соціальний інтелект в культурному контексте: сравнение украинских и словацких менеджеров**

**Аннотация.** Представленное в работе теоретическое и методологическое исследование основано на предположении о том, что, не имея общепризнанных форм, социальные конструкты обуславливаются культурой. Целью данного исследования является анализ соответствия факторной структуры методики измерения социального интеллекта в управленческой среде Украины и Словакии. В статье представлены результаты анализа различий в оценке выявленных факторов социального интеллекта, таких как манипуляция, эмпатия и социальная раздражительность. Сбор данных проводился в период с августа 2014 года по март 2015 года. В исследовании приняли участие 65 менеджеров из Украины и 66 менеджеров из Словакии (общее количество 131 человек), представляющих сферы управления, торговли и услуг. Результаты проведенного исследования позволили сформулировать ответы на два основных вопроса. Первый вопрос касался степени универсальности выявленных факторов социального интеллекта в отдельно взятых культурах, второй – оценки выявленных факторов социального интеллекта в разных культурах. В ходе исследования нашел подтверждение факт того, что факторная структура методики измерения социального интеллекта, определенная на основании выборки украинских и словацких менеджеров, является устойчивой. Также было подтверждено наличие некоторых различий в оценке такой составляющей социального интеллекта, как социальная раздражительность, которая в большей степени неприемлема для менеджеров из Словацкой Республики. Данный вывод указывает на необходимость учета культурного контекста в изучении социального интеллекта и социальных конструктов.

**Ключевые слова:** социальный конструкт; социальный интеллект; методика измерения социального интеллекта; менеджер.

**1. Introduction and Brief Literature Review**

Accepting the requirement to explore social phenomena in a cultural context is an important theoretical and methodological basis of any social research. Scientists focus not only on the comparison of social, ethnic and cultural differences reflected in human behaviour, but also on studying the impact of culture on the development of individuals. Discussions are aimed at verification of generally applicable characteristics, independently of the cultural context, as well as at how a particular culture affects a person.

This approach automatically assumes that social constructs do not have a generally valid form but, on the contrary, they are shaped by cultures, habits, customs - the entire cultural heritage of a particular society (Heine & Ruby, 2010 [1]; Markus & Kitayama, 2003 [2]). Culture influences the formation of human characteristics, including attitudes, behaviours, habits and values that are transmitted from one generation to another (Matsumoto, 2000) [3].

One of the typical examples of research into the cultural context is the area of values (Hofstede, 2001) [4], but Markus and Kitayama [2] also discuss the impact of culture on the processes of self-esteem, self-respect, management, selection, dissonance, emotions, motivation, control, attention and categorisation, creativity, the impact of culture on the assessment of well-being, morality, health, and so on. In this concept, social intelligence also has its place (Birknerová, Vávrová et al., 2013) [5].

From the perspective of exploring social intelligence in a cultural context, it is possible to define at least two sets of issues.

The first one is related to solving the level of universality of the extracted factor structures of social intelligence in individual cultures. The other is related to the assessment of individual specified factors of social intelligence in different cultures.

The studies of social intelligence are carried out within various social contexts and fields of social practice. This way we can think of areas of work, education, leisure, family and a number of other typical areas of social phenomena. In this sense, the context of work comes to the fore as it is significantly linked to the other areas of human life. From the point of view of managers, this relationship is even more important because it is also directly related to other people's lives.

Every manager behaves differently in social situations. Some feel comfortable in these situations. Behaviour does not present a problem for them. They even seek such situations out. Others avoid them, feeling uncomfortable. They are unable to choose the right behaviour forms. The causes of these differences can be sought in several areas and analysed from different angles. It is clear that the specifics of behaviour in these situations can be caused not only by characteristics at the individual level of each manager (temperament, personality characteristics, experience), but also at the level of the situation (culture, conflict, friendly atmosphere, threats, unknown situation). Social intelligence in this context can be considered as one of the leading personality predictors of managerial behaviour in social situations.

Social intelligence is an individual personality trait (Silvera, Martinussen & Dahl, 2001) [6]. The efforts to conceptualise and

operationalise it date back to Thorndike (1920) [7]. However, the efforts to theoretically define social intelligence faced certain difficulties [6]. Discussed are the issues of distinguishing social intelligence from other similar constructs, such as academic intelligence, emotional intelligence, practical intelligence, communication, social influence, etc. At the same time, the understanding of social intelligence as a performance characteristic or a personality trait is also discussed.

According to Sigmar, Hynes and Hill (2012) [8], social and emotional capabilities are at least an equivalent predictor of professional success as cognitive assumptions. In terms of identifying social intelligence as a predictor of successful managerial behaviour, two concepts can be mentioned. The first one is related to social competences as a prerequisite for the management of work teams. The second one is based on the findings of Boyatzis (2011) [9] and assumptions that social and emotional intelligence explain a significant part of the variance in the prediction of managers' performance competences.

From the viewpoint of both concepts, it is necessary to consider the impact of the cultural context on the aforementioned attributes.

**2. Research Purpose**

The purpose of the research is to contribute to the discussions about the cultural impact on the constructs of social intelligence on the basis of a comparison of the extracted factor structures, Cronbach's alpha values, intercorrelations and the specification of differences in the evaluation of the identified factors on the sample of the Ukrainian and Slovak managers, as well as to verify the possibilities to use the MESI questionnaire in various cultural contexts.

**3. Research Methods**

The MESI methodology (Measuring Social Intelligence) by Frankovský and Birknerová (2014) [10] detects social intelligence as a personality trait. Its authors assume the transsituational stability of social intelligence which they define as a dispositional personality attribute. MESI was developed on the basis of the previous research studies, in which the EMESI methodology (Frankovský & Birknerová, 2013) [11] was used. Both MESI and EMESI were inspired by and proposed according to the PESI methodology created by Kaukiainen, Björkqvist, Osterman, Lagerspetz, and Forsblom (1995) [12].

MESI consists of 21 items evaluated on a 5-point Likert scale where 0 represents «never» and 4 represents «very often». By means of a factor analysis, three factors were extracted and labeled by Frankovský and Birknerová [10]. They are:

1. Manipulation. People who have higher scores in this social intelligence attribute are able to persuade others to do almost anything. They can use others for their own benefit and persuade them to take their side. At the same time, they are happy about it. They use lies of others for their own advantage. Its reliability is expressed by  $\alpha = 0.854$ .
2. Empathy. Individuals with higher scores in this factor are able to recognise the intentions, feelings and weaknesses of other people. They can decipher the ways others think, adapt to new people, guess and fulfill their wishes. Its reliability is expressed by  $\alpha = 0.783$ .
3. Social irritability. Persons characterised by higher scores in this factor are nervous in contact with other people. They avoid the presence of others if possible. Feelings of others baffle them; adapting to other people is a problem for them as it invokes unpleasant feelings in them. Weaknesses and wishes of others confuse them. Its reliability is expressed by  $\alpha = 0.716$ .

The data collection was carried out between August 2014 and March 2015 on a research sample consisting of 131 managers. Of these, 65 (49.9%) were Ukrainian managers and 66 (50.4%) were Slovak

managers. The sample of Ukrainian managers was made up of 31 (48%) men and 34 (52%) women, aged from 24 to 69 (M = 43.3 years). The sample of Slovak managers was made up of 29 (44%) men and 37 (56%) women, aged from 23 to 65 (M = 40.5 years). The number of working years in a managerial position in the Ukrainian sample ranged from 1 to 42 years (M = 11.3 years). The number of years of managerial experience in the Slovak sample ranged from 1 to 30 years (M = 9.7 years). In terms of their economic area, the Slovak sample contained 21 managers from administration (32%), 22 from trade (33%), and 23 from services (35%). The Ukrainian sample consisted of 23 managers from the area of administration (35%), 19 from trade (30%), and 23 from services (35%). As for their managerial level, there were 10 top managers (15%), 33 middle managers (50%), and 23 first-line managers (35%) from Slovakia, and 16 top managers (25%), 28 middle managers (43%), and 21 first-line managers (32%) from Ukraine.

**4. Results**

The research problem was aimed at determining whether the factor structure of the MESI methodology, identified on a sample of Slovak managers, is identical to the factor structure of the methodology extracted on the sample of Ukrainian managers.

On the basis of a factor analysis carried out on the sample of the Slovak and Ukrainian managers, three identical factors of social intelligence were extracted in both cases (Table 1). The identified factors can be described as manipulation, empathy and social irritability. The explanation of the MESI factors used in the research is presented below:

- 1\_MESI: Contact with others makes me nervous.
- 2\_MESI: I can guess how to adapt to new people.
- 3\_MESI: I am able to guess the wishes of others.
- 4\_MESI: Feelings of others baffle me.
- 5\_MESI: I am able to persuade others to do almost anything.
- 6\_MESI: Using others for my own benefit pleases me.
- 7\_MESI: I feel uncomfortable when I have to adapt to new people.
- 8\_MESI: I am able to recognise the wishes of others.
- 9\_MESI: I know how to act in accordance with the feelings of others.
- 10\_MESI: Weaknesses of others baffle me.
- 11\_MESI: I can use my behaviour to persuade people to do for me what I want.
- 12\_MESI: If I want, I know how to use others for my own benefit.
- 13\_MESI: I know how to use the lives of others for my own benefit.

Tab. 1: Factors extracted on the sample of the Slovak and Ukrainian managers and their saturation with the individual items of MESI

MESI	SLOVAKIA			MESI	UKRAINE		
	Empathy	Manipulation	Social irritability		Empathy	Manipulation	Social irritability
1_MESI			.759	1_MESI			.551
2_MESI	.600			2_MESI	.570		
3_MESI	.772			3_MESI	.743		
4_MESI			.596	4_MESI			.719
5_MESI		.719		5_MESI		.529	
6_MESI		.552		6_MESI		.546	
7_MESI			.731	7_MESI			.218
8_MESI	.732			8_MESI	.818		
9_MESI	.445			9_MESI	.458		
10_MESI			.638	10_MESI			.564
11_MESI		.707		11_MESI		.593	
12_MESI		.807		12_MESI		.834	
13_MESI		.730		13_MESI		.646	
14_MESI			.803	14_MESI			.396
15_MESI			.718	15_MESI			.726
16_MESI	.777			16_MESI	.781		
17_MESI	.638			17_MESI	.757		
18_MESI			.691	18_MESI			.354
19_MESI		.598		19_MESI		.685	
20_MESI		.750		20_MESI		.758	
21_MESI	.401			21_MESI	.692		

Source: Developed by the authors

- 14\_MESI: I feel uneasy when I have to adapt to new people.
- 15\_MESI: Wishes of others make me nervous.
- 16\_MESI: I am able to guess the feelings of others even when they do not want to show them.
- 17\_MESI: I can guess the weaknesses of others.
- 18\_MESI: People who are willing to do anything for me make me nervous.
- 19\_MESI: I use others for my own benefit.
- 20\_MESI: I know how to persuade others to take my side.
- 21\_MESI: In contact with other people I can recognise their intention.

On the basis of the factor analysis, it may be claimed that the factor structure of the MESI methodology, detected on the sample of Slovak managers, corresponds to the factor structure of the mentioned methodology detected on the sample of Ukrainian managers. The individual extracted factors in both cases are saturated with the same items of the methodology.

The factors extracted on the Slovak sample of managers explain 54.9% of the variance, while the factors extracted on the Ukrainian sample of managers explain 50.7% of the variance. In both cases, the variance is explained at an acceptable level and is essentially identical. The factor structure of the methodology extracted on the samples of the Ukrainian and Slovak managers is also identical. The MESI methodology is therefore applicable to both Slovak and Ukrainian managers. This fact is also demonstrated by the graphical expressions of the extracted factors (Figure 1, Figure 2).

The degree of internal consistency of the individual factors was measured by the Cronbach's alpha coefficient (Table 2).

The Cronbach's alpha values, detected on the Slovak sample of managers, show a sufficient internal consistency of the individual factors of the MESI methodology. The Cronbach's alpha values measured among the Ukrainian managers represent a sufficient reliability of the items within the individual factors of the methodology; only within the Social irritability factor, the coefficient values are at the acceptability limit.

The results of the intercorrelation analysis, carried out on both samples of managers, indicate the existence of certain differences in the statistical significance of the detected correlation coefficients. The intercorrelation coefficient values found on the sample of Ukrainian managers (Table 3) point to a significant relationship between Empathy and Social irritability, which is expressed by a negative correlation coefficient. This fact tells us that those Ukrainian managers who score higher in the Empathy factor are less socially irritable. The contact with other people does not disturb them; on the contrary, they can adapt to other people. The feelings and weaknesses of others do not baffle them, and the weaknesses and wishes of others do not distract them. On the other hand, the more empathic the Slovak managers are, the more elements of social irritability they display.

In the case of the Slovak managers (Table 4), the intercorrelation coefficients demonstrate a positive statistically significant relationship between Empathy and Manipulation. The higher the managers score in the Empathy factor, the higher their tendency towards Manipulation is, and thus the higher the tendency to use other people in their favour, to persuade them to do anything for them and stand on their side is. This tendency was also reflected in the sample of Ukrainian managers, but it was not statistically significant.

The correlation between Manipulation and Social irritability does not appear to be statistically significant within either of the research samples of managers.

It should be noted that the negative correlation (statistically significant) between Empathy and Social irritability on the

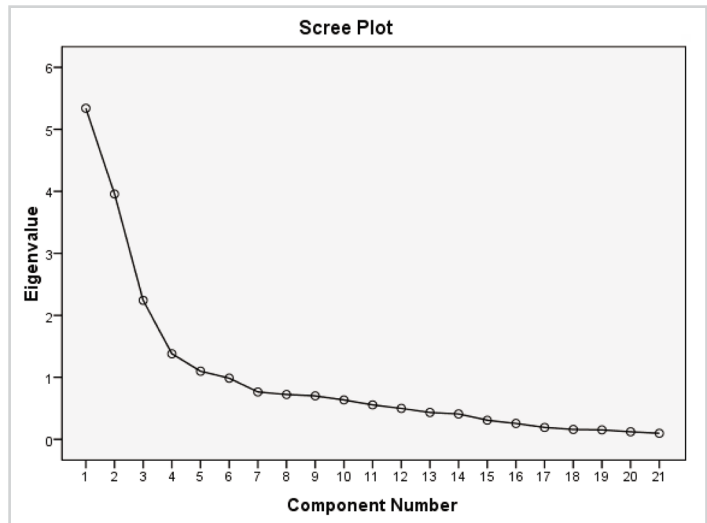


Fig. 1: Scree plot of the factors extracted on the Slovak sample of managers

Source: Compiled by the authors based on the analysis

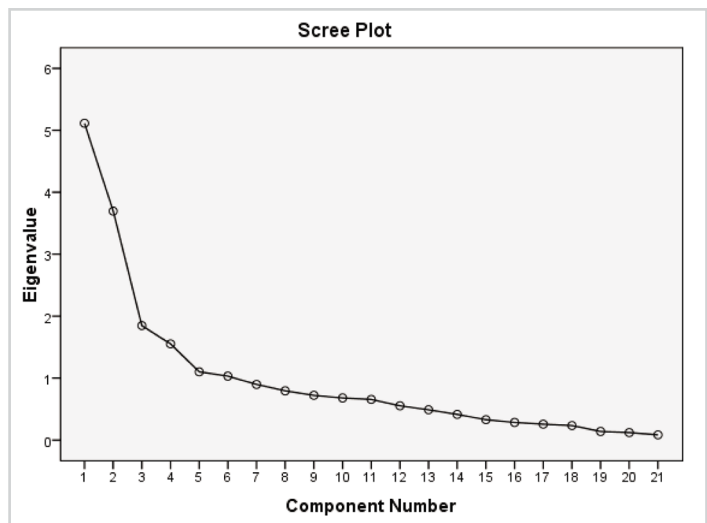


Fig. 2: Scree plot of the factors extracted on the Ukrainian sample of managers

Source: Compiled by the authors based on the analysis

Tab. 2: Cronbach's alpha values for the MESI methodology factors extracted on the sample of the Slovak and Ukrainian managers

COUNTRY / FACTOR	Manipulation	Empathy	Social irritability
Slovakia (α)	.853	.795	.846
Ukraine (α)	.800	.855	.641

Source: Compiled by the authors based on the analysis

Tab. 3: Intercorrelations of the MESI factors extracted on the Ukrainian sample of managers

FACTOR	Manipulation	Empathy	Social irritability
Manipulation		.229	.138
Empathy	.229		-.317*
Social irritability	.138	-.317*	

Note: \* statistical significance at the 0.05 significance level

Source: Compiled by the authors based on the analysis

sample of Ukrainian managers does not correspond to a relatively high positive correlation (statistically insignificant) between Empathy and Social irritability on the sample of Slovak managers. This finding can be interpreted in the context of the ideas of social constructivism as a certain cultural influence.

Tab. 4: Intercorrelations of the MESI factors extracted on the Slovak sample of managers

FACTOR	Manipulation	Empathy	Social irritability
Manipulation		.400**	.026
Empathy	.400**		.217
Social irritability	.026	.217	

Note: \*\* statistical significance at the 0.01 significance level

Source: Compiled by the authors based on the analysis

Based on the presented analysis of the factor structures extracted on the samples of the Ukrainian and Slovak managers, a comparison of the evaluation of the individual attributes of social intelligence between the managers from Ukraine and Slovakia was carried out (Table 5).

A statistically significant difference between the Ukrainian and the Slovak managers was reflected only in the assessment of the social intelligence attribute of Social irritability. Higher scores for the assessment of this factor were achieved by the Ukrainian managers. This means that the Slovak managers expressed a higher degree of rejection of Social irritability than the Ukrainian managers. It should be noted that the difference is only in the extent of the refusal. Both the Ukrainian and the Slovak managers expressed a negative relationship to this trait.

### 5. Conclusion

The presented theoretical and methodological study is based on the assumption that social constructs do not have a generally valid form but are conditioned by culture. The presented results contribute to the discussion of the definition of attributes, which can be understood as transculturally unchanged, or the attributes that are modified by a particular culture. At the same time, these results support the findings of Markus and Kitayama [2] on the broad-spectrum impact of culture and beyond. In this concept, social intelligence also has its place [5].

These findings suggest that if considering social intelligence as a significant predictor of managerial behaviour is to be productive, it should be interpreted within a cultural context. In this respect, it is possible to examine the issue of whether the influence of culture changes the internal structure of social intelligence and whether it is possible to specify different attributes of social intelligence in different cultures, or whether the extracted factors change under the influence of culture or not. In this context, it is possible to interpret the confirmation of the extracted factor structure of the construct of social intelligence on the samples

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Tab. 5: Evaluation of the social intelligence attributes by the Ukrainian and Slovak managers

FACTOR	COUNTRY	M	SD	t	p
Empathy	Ukraine	2.5209	.67689	.921	.359
	Slovakia	2.6169	.50502		
Manipulation	Ukraine	1.5231	.71575	1.161	.248
	Slovakia	1.6688	.72157		
Social irritability	Ukraine	<b>1.6396</b>	.54755	2.076	<b>.040</b>
	Slovakia	1.4199	.65771		

Source: Compiled by the authors based on the analysis

of the Ukrainian and Slovak managers. Consequently, it is possible to find an answer to the question of whether the cultural context (such as in Hudec, Suhányi & Urbančíková, 2014 [13], Suhányi & Suhányiová, 2014 [14], or Štefko & Nowak, 2014 [15]) is reflected in the level of the evaluation of the individual factors of social intelligence. In this sense, it is also possible to interpret the detected statistically significant difference in the degree of rejection of the social intelligence attribute of Social irritability between the Ukrainian and the Slovak managers.

The cultural impact in terms of Social irritability is manifested by the fact that the Slovak managers reject the specifics of this construct (such as «it makes me nervous when I am with other people», «I rather avoid the presence of others», «the manifestation of the feelings of other people baffle me», and «the weaknesses and the wishes of others distract me») more strongly than the Ukrainian managers. In this sense, a similar result can be reported when comparing the assessment of Social irritability by the Czech and the Slovak respondents. Even in this case, the Slovak respondents rejected Social irritability more strongly [5].

At the same time, it should be noted that the influence of another cultural environment has been manifested not only in terms of the extracted factor structure of the studied concept of social intelligence, but also in the assessment of the social intelligence factors of Empathy and Manipulation.

The presented results support the necessity of accepting the possible cultural specifics in the studies of social phenomena, including social intelligence. At the same time, they indicate the appropriateness of utilising the MESI methodology in other cultures as well.

The influence of culture on the assessment of the attributes of social intelligence needs to be interpreted both in the context of the specifics of the research sample used, as well as in terms of the proximity of the cultures in Slovakia and Ukraine.

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