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THE IMPACT OF CULTURE ON COMPETITIVENESS – MULTILEVEL MANAGERIAL APPROACH

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SUMMARY



In an era of globalization, where companies compete internationally and interact with diverse cultures, understanding how culture influences competitiveness becomes paramount. Over time, the complexity and depth of the concept of culture has been discussed in both theoretical and practical approaches. The Dutch researcher and social psychologist Geert Hofstede (1980, 1984, 2001) defines culture as "the collective programming of the mind, which differentiates the members of one human group from another." According to Taylor and Stacy Blake (1991) "cultural diversity creates competitive advantages". Culture is also a determinant of a nation's abilities to develop economically, as it shapes individuals' attitudes toward risk, opportunity, and reward.

The introduction of the new paradigm of "competitive advantage" by Porter (1998) influenced the concept of competitiveness, making it gain major importance and new meanings. Competitiveness in general, is an overall phenomenon, meaning the ability of a country to create and maintain a favorable environment in terms of economic, social and political aspects, with the aim of supporting creation of added value. Therefore, competitiveness represents an unlimited scientific process, due to complexity of global environment, the elements that define it and exogenous factors.

Starting from the idea of the authors Gehlhar and collaborators (2006) that said: "competitiveness is not limited to a single level, but to a national, industrial or company level", the process of the research proposed on the PhD thesis focused on multilevel approach.

Considering the topics covered in the research of culture and competitiveness, we can say that the two concepts are extremely complex, and their synergistic treatment can generate new opportunities and ways of actions on management level.

The reason for choosing the research theme emerged from the desire to explore and examine the impact of culture on competitiveness from several perspectives (national, industries, companies) and to bring a significant contribution to understanding the cultural complexity for the ever-changing business environment.

The actuality of the research subject comes from the recent studies of specialized literature, and on the other hand comes from the managerial implications that the two key concepts that accompany the entire PhD thesis – culture and competitiveness – have on national economies and especially businesses. Lately, a series of research have highlighted the influence of national culture on human development, social responsibility, financial decisions, etc. but in no way is highlighting cultural influence on competitiveness and increasing performance in a national approach, at the level of industries and businesses.

In this context, the topic proposed for research through this PhD thesis named "The impact of culture on competitiveness: multilevel managerial approach" will contribute to the development of the field of "management" through the fundamental subject of interest both for the academic world and for the business environment.

The current state of knowledge in the field of research undertaken highlights a multitude of specialized works (national and international) generated by the complexity of the topic addressed. However, several limitations have also been identified, the subject being far from exhausted. Mainly, the existing studies reflect the fact that the approach to such a topic is one-off, without a multi-level approach.

By exploring this complex topic, the purpose of the research is to identify and analyze the impact of culture on competitiveness, both at the national and company level in order to outline a holistic conceptual model to integrate and value the cultural dimensions that contribute to growth competitiveness.

Considering the purpose of the research, the specific objectives of this scientific approach are based on the current state of knowledge in the field and on the limits generated by the existing bibliography.

- theoretical substantiation of the concepts of culture and competitiveness, as well as highlighting their role in previous studies;
- presentation and description of the perspectives regarding the cultural dimensions identified in the specialized literature;
- identification and evaluation of existing models for determining and measuring competitiveness at the level of nations, industries & companies;
- approaching the binomial relationship culture - competitiveness and identifying trends in the field;
- investigating and determining the relationship between cultural dimensions and competitiveness at the level of nations, industries & companies;
- proposing and developing a conceptual model for determining business competitiveness (ICF) that integrates the 6 cultural dimensions (6D).

Also, from the purpose and objectives of the research, a series of specific hypotheses can be outlined, as follows:

- the examination of the scientific literature will highlight the complexity and continued relevance of the culture and competitiveness concepts in the academic field and in the business environment.
- the analysis of perspectives on cultural dimensions will indicate a diversity of models and approaches that will contribute to a deeper understanding of how culture is perceived and conceptualized in the context of comparative management.
- the identification and assessment of existing models for determining and measuring competitiveness in nations, industries & companies will highlight the

diversity of multilevel approaches and methods used in the assessment of competitiveness.

- in the specialized literature there are significant concerns about the relationship between culture and competitiveness and there are essential key elements that indicate the current trends and the evolution of this field of research.
- by investigating the relationship between cultural dimensions and competitiveness at the level of nations, industries and firms, using a varied range of methods and statistical analyses, the results will indicate the existence of significant interdependencies between them.
- the development of the Business Competitiveness Conceptual Model (ICF) will provide a comprehensive approach to understanding how culture influences business performance.

To be able to achieve the proposed goal and objectives and to be able to confirm/deny the stated hypotheses, the PhD thesis is based on a structured research methodology applied with methods, techniques, research tools and statistical models, including:

- ✓ documentary analysis of national culture and competitiveness – books, scientific articles, international reports, studies and specialized websites;
- ✓ fundamental and applied investigation - identification of cultural models and determination of competitiveness, determining factors etc.;
- ✓ comparative analysis between nations/industries/companies;
- ✓ bibliometric analysis regarding the measurement and mapping of existing research;
- ✓ logic and deduction - analyzing and interpreting data, synthesizing information relevant to research, formulating notions, reasoning and presenting arguments;
- ✓ statistical analysis and application of statistical methods and models: descriptive statistics method (mean values, standard deviation, coefficient of variation), correlation analysis (Pearson coefficient), multiple regression model (coefficient of determination of the analyzed variables, ANOVA analysis, coefficients of significance), automatic linear modeling (importance of predictors, ANOVA analysis of the model, coefficients of importance), factor analysis (KMO test, communality, explained variation, Varimax rotation method), cluster analysis (segments formed based on the analysis, importance of predictors in clusters).
- ✓ the use of research support tools: VOSviewer version 1.6.19, SPSS version 26 and Microsoft Excel.

The scientific approach is based on a base of comprehensive bibliographic resources that include specialized books and scientific articles from academic journals indexed in prestigious databases such as: SCOPUS, Web of Science, Science Direct etc.

Also, for the analytical and synthetic approach to the research and the realization of the empirical research, sources that provide credible data and information were used, namely: (1) reports published by important international organizations, such as: Institute of Management and Development (IMD – Institute for Management Development), World Economic Forum (WEF - World Economic Forum), OECD (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development - for competitiveness), Council of Europe, etc.; (2) databases - web sources such as: Hofstede – for culture, Thomson Reuters – financial and non-financial indicators, Investopedia, etc.

The structure of the thesis follows a logical, well-defined path and highlights the main theoretical and methodological aspects in accordance with the stated objectives, respecting the norms of ethics and conduct in research.

The scientific approach is structured to respond to the complexity of the theme in 5 chapters, to which introduction is added, conclusions, personal contributions and bibliographic references.

The content of the thesis is based on 442 bibliographic references, 45 tables and 51 figures. The logical scheme of the doctoral thesis is illustrated in Figure 1.0.

Figure 1.0. The logical scheme of the doctoral thesis



Source: proposed by the author

The first chapter entitled „National culture from the perspective of comparative management - evolution, particularities and conceptual approaches” is structured in 3 subchapters and aims to present the conceptual and epistemological framework related to culture. In the first part, the theoretical perspectives on national culture and the main concerns regarding "culture" and "national culture" are highlighted. In section 2, as the title suggests, the fundamental elements and characteristics of culture are described. Finally, in section 3, the models for measuring culture from the perspective of cultural dimensions are highlighted and presented: Hofstede's model, Schwartz's model, Trompenaars's model, GLOBE's model and Inglehart's model.

The second chapter of the doctoral thesis, entitled „Competitiveness – theoretical-methodological foundations”, presents a critical perspective regarding the current state of knowledge of the concept of competitiveness. The research focused primarily on exploring the literature on competitiveness by identifying trends regarding this concept in the economic and managerial field. Second, the research sought to present the economic theories that influenced the understanding of competitiveness. In addition, the chapter includes the approach to competitiveness from the multilevel perspective: the competitiveness of nations, the competitiveness of industries and businesses. Through research and review of studies and reports developed by renowned international institutions, a range of models used to measure and determine competitiveness in a global context were presented: at national level (World Economic Forum (WEF) Model, Institute for Development Model Management (IMD), the Model of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the Model proposed by the European Commission), at the industry level (Porter's 5 Forces Model) and at the business level (Bloomberg, Thomson Reuters, Fortune Global 500, Forbes Global 2000). These models provide a detailed and comprehensive picture of the positioning of a country, industry or firm in terms of competitiveness.

The third chapter „Culture-competitiveness binominal: bibliometric analysis - for measuring and mapping existing research” consists in identifying and analyzing existing research in the specialized literature on the relationship between culture and competitiveness. The research methodology follows, firstly, the scientific approach according to the SCOPUS database, and secondly, the exploration of existing research through data mapping. The VOSviewer (2023) data review software was used to analyze and map existing research. This tool allowed the visualization of networks and connections between countries, research organizations, keywords and co-citations - cited author, based on bibliometric information of publications in the field.

Chapter IV of the doctoral thesis, entitled „Quantitative research on the impact of national culture on international competitiveness” focuses on the development of a methodological and exploratory research framework from the perspective of the impact of culture and the competitiveness of nations. Essentially, this chapter focuses on the analysis of the role of cultural dimensions on the competitiveness index, with data collected from secondary sources: Hofstede – culture analysis and IMD –

competitiveness analysis. The methods and techniques applied in the research aim, on one hand, to evaluate the impact of cultural dimensions (6D) on the Global Competitiveness Index (GIC) over a period of 6 years (2017 and 2022), using descriptive statistical analysis and correlation analysis. On the other hand, it aims to evaluate the influence of cultural variables (6D) on the Global Competitiveness Index 2021 (ICG2021), applying the multiple regression model and automatic linear modeling.

Chapter V of the doctoral thesis, entitled „Quantitative research on the impact of culture on business competitiveness” focuses on a technical-methodological approach with the aim of determining the impact of culture on business competitiveness. The research study aimed to identify a model for measuring competitiveness at the company level. Through the analysis of specialized literature and the evaluation of the determining factors that influence the determination of business competitiveness, a conceptual model composed of 21 indicators was proposed and developed. The scientific approach involved the analysis of 352 companies from 32 countries, representing 10 sectors of activity. The study approach included the use of statistical methods, such as descriptive statistical analysis and correlation analysis (at the level of the 352 companies and the 10 sectors of activity), factor analysis (identification of factors according to their importance on the competitiveness index of ICF companies) and the TwoStep cluster method (grouping companies based on the new indicators developed in the research).

Following the empirical analysis, a series of research results were outlined, among the most relevant being:

- between the cultural dimensions (6D) and the competitiveness index at the level of nations (2017-2022) there is a statistically significant relationship;
- cultural dimensions have a significant influence on the level of competitiveness of a country (the regression model explained approximately 56.9%);
- cultural dimensions: uncertainty, power distance and long-term orientation are important predictors that influence competitiveness (ICG2021) at the nation level;
- between the cultural dimensions (6D) and the variables for determining the business competitiveness index (proposed and developed conceptual model - ICF) there is a statistically significant relationship (0.803);
- the new factors created (F7) following the factor analysis have the ability to explain a significant proportion (79.165%) of the variation in measuring business competitiveness (ICF);
- following the factor analysis, the most important significant predictor on the business competitiveness index (ICF) resulted - F1- 4D: (PDI, INV, LTO, IND). The other factors in order of importance are: F2 - Rentability (ROA, ROE, ROIC, P/B), F3 - Debt (leverage and debt-equity ratio), F4 - Liquidity & Solvency (immediate & current liquidity and solvency), F5 - Profitability (net profit margin & operating profit), F6 – 2D (MAS, UAT) and F7- Market value (EV/EBITDA and P/E);

- through the formation of clusters, the differences and similarities between businesses were highlighted according to the importance of the determining factors of business competitiveness, thus Factors F1 (4D - cultural dimensions) and F5 (profitability) are significant in all four formed clusters.

The doctoral thesis „IMPACT OF CULTURE ON COMPETITIVENESS - MULTILEVEL MANAGERIAL APPROACH” includes the following personal contributions and elements of originality:

 Theoretical-conceptual:

- ❖ synthesizing the most comprehensive and relevant definitions related to culture and competitiveness (at the level of nation, industry and business) identified in the specialized literature;
- ❖ examination and identification of specific opinions for the development of the theoretical - conceptual - empirical framework;
- ❖ presentation of approaches regarding cultural differences;
- ❖ proposing a definition regarding national culture and competitiveness (from a multilevel perspective);
- ❖ determining models for measuring and evaluating competitiveness at the nation, industry and business level;
- ❖ critical review of perspectives on the use of financial and non-financial indicators as a viable method for evaluating a company's competitiveness;
- ❖ identification of research tools, methods and analyzes in order to carry out the scientific approach.

 Empirical and methodological:

- ❖ identification of an in-depth research direction related to culture and competitiveness through a bibliometric analysis (1237 publications);
- ❖ determination of current trends regarding existing research in the literature related to the period 1970-2022;
- ❖ capturing the cultural dimensions and competitiveness index (2017-2022) at the level of 56 nations;
- ❖ multilevel approach to the impact of national culture (cultural dimensions) on competitiveness;
- ❖ applying a set of statistical methods and models (linear, factorial) in order to identify and explain the causes and effects between the cultural dimensions and the competitiveness index;
- ❖ proposing and developing a holistic conceptual model for measuring business competitiveness that integrates cultural dimensions and validates the role of culture on competitiveness;
- testing and validating a series of hypotheses that highlighted the impact of cultural dimensions on national, industry and business competitiveness;

- outlining future research directions.

The research results were disseminated through:

(1) publication in specialist journals of 3 ISI (Studies in Business and Economics), 1 SCOPUS (European Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies) and 4 BDI (Economic Review, Managerial Strategies Magazine) articles;

(2) participation in 9 conferences in the country (Alba, Cluj, Sibiu, Pitesti, Constanța) and 5 conferences outside the country (EBEEC 2022 – Florence, Italy and EBEEC 2023 – Chios, Greece, Turkey, Chisinau).

Given that the field in which the research topic falls is a complex one, future research directions will aim at:

- continuous updating of the state of knowledge by identifying the most current publications in the field;
- expanding the sample and including a larger number of nations, companies from the activity sectors;
- improving and testing the predictability of the developed model.

The doctoral thesis „THE IMPACT OF CULTURE ON COMPETITIVENESS - MULTILEVEL MANAGERIAL APPROACH” addresses the impact of culture on competitiveness from the national perspective, industries and businesses through in-depth analysis, by presenting the most current data provided by specialized institutions at the international level and by presenting some statistical and conceptual models adapted to different dimensions of the economy.

The paper approached a subject from an unexplored theoretical-empirical perspective, which denotes the novelty and development of knowledge. This research can contribute to the development of more advanced and vigorous approaches both in the field of international management and for determining business competitiveness. It can also support the decision-making process in developing appropriate strategies and policies to improve competitiveness in various business and activity sectors. In addition, the results of this study emphasize the importance of the interrelationship between culture and competitiveness in the development of economic progress and sustainable growth.

Finally, the scientific approach opens new perspectives regarding the impact of culture on competitiveness and provides a clear direction for further research. The research topic will remain a topic of perpetual interest to researchers, given the ever-evolving complexity of the global environment.

Key words: *national culture, cultural dimensions, Hofstede’s model, competitiveness, IMD model, multilevel approach, comparative management.*

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