

CROSS-CULTURAL PERSPECTIVES ON LEADERSHIP: EVIDENCE FROM ROMANIA AND JAPAN

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Abstract

The paper explores how do Romanian and Japanese employees perceive and describe leadership approaches in the workplace, and how can the cross-cultural differences be explained through Hofstede's cultural dimensions. By using qualitative research methods and conducting semi-structured interviews with young employees from Romania and Japan, this study aims to highlight the impact of cultural values on leadership style in both countries. The results of this research show that the Japanese employees prefer a more structured, hierarchical leadership, while the Romanian employees lean towards a more flexible leadership. From a theoretical point of view this study underlines that cultural values are dynamic by highlighting the changing in the Japanese Short-Term vs Long-Term orientation and offers practical insights for global leaders and multinational companies. This study contributes to a better understanding of leadership approaches across cultures and highlights the importance of an adaptable leadership style in today's rapidly changing work environment. Traditional leadership approaches must adapt to the changing attitudes and expectations that younger workers bring to the workplace. To reflect the dynamic interaction between tradition, contemporary times, and age shifts, our understanding of leadership must evolve beyond unchanging frameworks and adjust to shifting cultural norms.

Keywords: leadership; Japan; Hofstede's cultural dimensions; global leaders

JEL Classification: O15

1. Introduction

In today's globalized business environment, it is more important than ever to understand how cultural values influence management and leadership styles. This study uses as a theoretical framework Geert Hofstede's theory of cultural dimensions to illustrate the effects of leadership styles on workers in two culturally different nations: Japan and Romania. Through an analysis of important cultural aspects including power distance, individualism vs. collectivism, masculinity vs. femininity, uncertainty avoidance, long-term vs. short-term orientation, and indulgence vs. restraint, this study seeks to comprehend how these elements shape employee's experiences in both nations (Hofstede, 2011).

This study is important from both a practical and a theoretical perspective. Theoretically, it advances our knowledge of how organizational dynamics and leadership behavior are influenced by culture. From a practical point of view, it draws attention to the negative effects of leadership approaches to cultural changes, including poor communication, disengagement, and lower morale of the employees. To sustain high employee engagement and productivity in an international corporate environment, companies need to manage these cultural differences.

This paper aims at exploring how cultural differences in leadership styles impact work satisfaction, motivation, and employee engagement in Romania and Japan. Exploring how leadership shapes these specific outcomes is important because it can bring light regarding two distinct cultural settings helping global organizations in need to modify their leadership approaches

to better fit with the local cultures. By doing so, we can gain a better understanding of the cultural values that influence workplace dynamics in each nation by using these aspects as a framework. Second, with a focus on significant elements like “power distance, individualism vs. collectivism, and masculinity vs. femininity, uncertainty avoidance, long-term vs. short-term orientation, and indulgence vs. restraint” (Hofstede, 2011), the study will show and contrast employee experiences with leadership in both nations. Additionally, this research will contrast the cultural settings regarding the impact of leadership styles on decision-making, communication, and employee engagement.

This study offers valuable insights into the importance of collaboration between companies with a different cultural background, pointing out how the performance can be increased by understanding two fundamentally distinct societies and the cultural factors that shape them, because the employee motivation, engagement, and satisfaction may decline if these cultural peculiarities are ignored, which may ultimately have an impact on output and overall company success.

Furthermore, by highlighting the value of leadership approaches within global organizations, we can capture the significance of adapting to cultural norms within diverse local communities.

2. Literature review

Culture is defined as “the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from another” (Hofstede, 2011). The cultural aspects model developed by Geert Hofstede is one of the most popular frameworks that guide our understanding on how national culture plays a role in shaping leadership approaches (Hofstede et al., 2010). In addition to Hofstede’s theoretical framework the Globe study conducted by House et al. (2004) provides a deeper understanding of how cultural values can influence leadership styles. This study illustrates how cultural norms such as performance orientation, uncertainty avoidance, and institutional collectivism are significantly influencing leadership effectiveness across different countries.

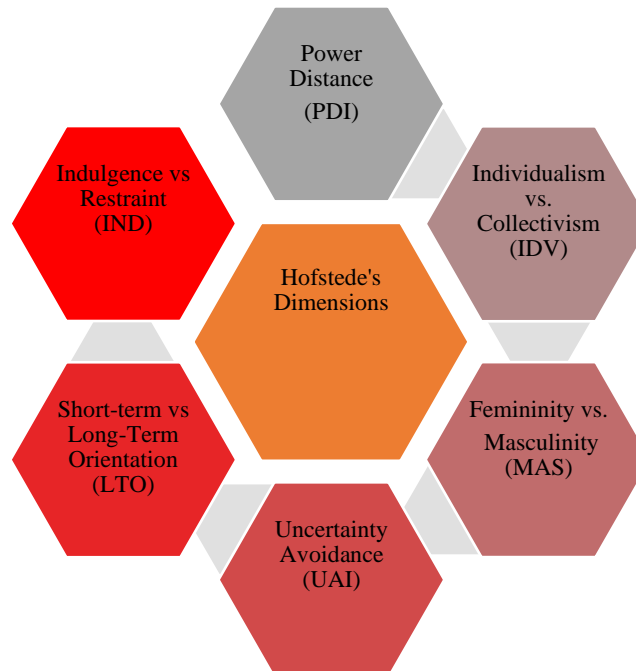


Figure 1. Culture's consequences: International differences in work-related values
Source: Hofstede, G. (1984)

This study applies Hofstede’s six dimensions framework to compare two countries, Romania and Japan, across each dimension this study is highlighting both the differences and similarities between the two cultures.

Power distance

Power distance is described “as the extent to which the less powerful members of organizations and institutions (like the family) accept and expect that power is distributed unequally” (Hofstede, 2011). This dimension also influences how people view status and authority in a business environment (Matsumoto and Juang, 2016). Romania has a low power distance index 33 as resulting from the research conducted by Luca (2005), this score indicates a cultural tendency to challenge authority and support equal solutions. Power gap, however, manifests itself in a complex way in the Romanian setting, reflecting a complex connection with hierarchical organizations as well as negativity against authority. This can result from the existence of the psychological phenomenon called counter-dependence that represents the tendency to either strongly disagree with or idealize authority figures, as well as the general acceptance of abusive behavior when it is carried out by those in positions of authority (Luca, 2005). On the other hand, Japan has a moderate to high power distance index 54 (Traquandi, 2016) resulting from the mutual respect between a subordinate and a mentor (Obara et al., 2021). While respect for hierarchy and clearly defined roles remains important, leadership in Japan often goes beyond simply giving orders. Managers are expected to act as guides and supporters, helping to build trust and ensure the team functions smoothly as a whole. This cooperative style is deeply rooted in the cultural importance of maintaining harmony and showing respect within the group. Leaders commonly involve their team members in the decision-making process, creating a work environment where employees feel valued and included. As a result, Japanese leaders earn both respect and trust by balancing their authority with the commitment to the group’s unity and well-being (Taka and Foglia, 1994).

Individualism vs. Collectivism

The degree to which members of a community are interconnected is reflected in individualism and its opposite the collectivism. Social relationships are generally weak in an individualistic society, where people are expected to look out for themselves and their close relatives. On the other hand, people in collectivist societies are born into connected groups, which frequently include extended family members like grandparents, aunts, and uncles. Organizations in collectivist societies provide lifelong safety and support in exchange for undying commitment. Additionally, these organizations frequently define themselves in contrast to other groups (Hofstede, 2011). Romania’s organizational culture reveals collectivist tendencies, this is supported by the study Luca (2005) where the Romanian population scored an index of 49 on the individualistic scale. People in collectivist cultures tend to obey the rules and expectations of the group they belong to, which creates a social structure that is split up into different interest groups that put their own members' success first, frequently at the expense of others (Luca, 2005). Japan scores 46 on the individualistic scale (Obara et al., 2021) this results that Japan trends to the collectivistic side because Japanese organizational culture emphasizes the importance of group harmony, with leaders seen as mentors and figures who guide the team through collaboration rather than relying on authority. Japan's institutional structures and rich cultural traditions strongly correlate with how individuals communicate. Because of its perspectives the Japanese culture places a high value on maintaining group cohesion and avoiding conflict. As a result, group harmony is maintained through indirect, courteous communication (Shen et al., 2024)

Femininity vs. Masculinity

Viewed as cultural rather than personal characteristics, masculinity and femininity characterize the distribution of values between genders, a fundamental problem that each civilization deals with differently (Hofstede, 2011; Brooks, 2001). In October 2023, a group

entitled Hofstede Insights rename this dimension transiting to Motivation Towards Achievement and Success that shows that this dimension does not evaluate gender roles it actually concerns to how a society perceives characteristics that are either feminine pointing out the caring, compassionate traits or masculine highlighting the strong drive for achievement and success (Hofstede Insights, 2023). Even though this dimension has been renamed, this research is based on previous studies that use the original terminology and do not incorporate the new change of this dimension's understanding. Romania scores 39 on the Masculinity vs Femininity scale as it results from the study Luca (2005). Romania's culture, as analyzed through Hofstede's framework, primarily leans toward femininity, emphasizing values like quality of life, cooperation, and interpersonal relationships. The leadership tends to balance ambition with concern for employee well-being. However, Romania also exhibits moderate masculine traits, particularly in urban and professional environments, where competition, ambition, and performance are valued (Luca, 2005). On the other hand, Japan scores 95 (Obara et al., 2021) on the Femininity vs. Masculinity scale that means that Japan is characterized by a high degree of masculinity, because employees are expected to work long hours to demonstrate commitment to company goals. The workplace is driven by a desire to excel, and there is a cultural expectation that individuals will put the company's needs ahead of personal time. Employees often work long hours to show commitment, and success is measured through performance and achievement. Managers reinforce this ethic by demanding discipline and fostering ambition (Sugimoto, 2010).

Uncertainty Avoidance

“Uncertainty Avoidance deals with a society's tolerance for ambiguity. It indicates to what extent a culture programs its members to feel either uncomfortable or comfortable in unstructured situations” (Hofstede, 2011). Because it affects how businesses manage risk, make choices, and communicate policies, uncertainty avoidance continues to play a crucial role in determining leadership expectations around the world (Taras et al., 2012). Romania illustrates a score of 61 on the scale of uncertainty avoidance (Luca, 2005). Employees prefer structured environments in Romania, with clear rules and guidelines. Leaders are expected to provide stability and predictability, but this preference for structure can sometimes result in slow productivity. While stability is valued, the rigid frameworks may slow down quick decision-making and adaptability. Leaders are expected to establish detailed procedures and stable working conditions. While this creates a sense of security, it can also interfere with innovation and adaptability (Hurduzeu, 2015). On the other hand, Japan scores an even higher level of uncertainty avoidance 92 (Obara et al., 2021). Leaders in Japan focus on long-term vision and ensure consistency in operations, with an emphasis on thorough preparation. This structured approach allows for predictability but can sometimes be slow to adapt to changing circumstances (Etzrodt, 2020). In their research Smith, Peterson, and Thomas (2008) are illustrating that behaviors such as organized leadership in high uncertainty avoidance cultures are not only preferences but rather fundamental because they impact communication, team cohesion and performance.

Short-term vs Long-term Orientation

“A cultural emphasis on future benefits, highlighting values like perseverance and conservation, is referred to as long-term orientation. It involves preparing for the future and basing decisions on long-term objectives. On the other hand, short-term orientation places more emphasis on the present moment since it is based on the idea that the future is unexpected and uncertain” (Obara et al., 2021). Romania is more likely to be short-term oriented with a score of 33 as showed in the study of Luca (2005). Rapid results are frequently the emphasis of organizational goals, and leaders prefer observable results that provide advantages right away. Although this way of thinking is helpful in unstable or transitional economies, it might restrict sustainability and strategic thinking (Luca, 2005). Japan has a score of 88 (Obara et al. 2021) that represents that Japan has a high inclination towards long-term orientation. Like its working culture, Japan's diplomatic techniques place a strong emphasis on discipline and patience to achieve long-term goals. Their economic

tactics, such as the emphasis on gradual but steady development through tiny, deliberate stages, reflect these similar characteristics (Envall, 2015).

Indulgence vs Restraint

A culture that allows the unrestricted fulfillment of fundamental human needs associated with having fun and enjoying life is said to be indulgent. On the other hand, a society that restricts satisfaction of these wants and regulates them through rigid social rules is described as restrained (Obara et al., 2021). Romania has a cultural balance between enjoying life and conforming to societal rules, as evidenced by its score on the restraint scale 20 (Dindirel and Sirok, 2013). Romania has a cultural balance between enjoying life and conforming to societal rules, as evidenced by its low score on the restraint scale. Even though people respect their own time and engage in leisure activities, particularly in casual and familial settings, there is still a significant social expectation to maintain self-control, discipline, and formality, especially in professional settings. This approach is often reinforced by Romanian leadership, which upholds a formal, regulated work environment where work obligations come before leisure time. Also, the Romanian organizational culture tends to lean more to restraint, but the indulgence tendencies can appear resulting in a balanced or traditional shape of this dimension (Hatmanu et al., 2023). Japan, on the other hand, has a score of 42 on the Indulgence vs Restraint scale which leans toward a slightly more restraint than indulgent, the importance of putting work before leisure, even during summer vacations and New Year’s Day (Obara et al., 2021). Workers are required to be extremely committed to their jobs, frequently forgoing comfort and personal time to meet organizational standards (Sugimoto, 2010).

Table 1. Cultural dimensions scores from Romania and Japan according to Hofstede’s Framework

Dimension	Romania	Japan
Power Distance	Low Power Distance Index (Luca, 2005) - 33	Moderate to High Power Distance Index (Traquandi, 2016) - 54
Individualism vs Collectivism	Collectivist tendencies (Luca, 2005) - 49	Collectivist (Obara et al., 2021) - 46
Masculinity vs Femininity	Leans toward Femininity with Moderate Masculine Traits (Luca, 2005) - 39	High Degree of Masculinity (Obara et al., 2021) - 95
Uncertainty avoidance	Moderate score on Uncertainty Avoidance Scale (Luca, 2005) - 61	High degree of Uncertainty Avoidance (Obara et al., 2021) - 92
Long-Term vs Short-Term Orientation	Short-Term Orientated (Luca, 2005) - 33	Long-Term Orientation (Obara et al., 2021) - 88
Indulgence vs Restraint	Restraint Tendencies (Dindirel and Sirok, 2013) - 20	Leans to More Restraint (Obara et al., 2021) - 42

3. Research methodology

The main objective of this paper is to explore how cultural values, as defined by Hofstede’s dimensions, shape employees’ experiences and perceptions of leadership in Romania and Japan. To sustain these results the following research question is proposed: How do Romanian and Japanese employees perceive and describe leadership approaches in the workplace, and how can the cross-cultural differences be explained through Hofstede’s dimensions? Participants were selected using a convenience sample. To be included in this study participants 1) had to be at least eighteen years old, and (2) had to be employed in Romania or Japan on an active part-time or full-time basis. These criteria were put in place to ensure that the data resulting in the study is rooted in the real-world experience of young adults working in a professional environment in both countries. To ensure transparency and confidentiality, participants were asked for their informed consent regarding this research and were asked to fill in a pre-interview questionnaire. Additionally, individuals were made aware of their freedom to withdraw from study at any time without having

to give a reason, and participation was completely voluntary. The study included a total of 6 individuals, with a deliberate attempt to guarantee a balanced representation from each country setting, by selecting three participants from Romania: two women aged between 22 and 24, and one man aged 21. The participants have between 5 months and 2 years of work experience. Moreover, the study also includes three participants from Japan: two women aged between 22 and 24, and one man aged 27. Their work experience ranges from 5 months to 2 years.

This study employed a qualitative, cross-cultural comparative methodology in order to investigate how employees in Romania and Japan view leadership. Hofstede's six cultural dimensions were used as the basis for analyzing and interpreting the interviews (Hofstede, 2011). Semi-structured interviews were conducted individually in Romanian and English which lasted between 15-30 minutes. Due to geographical limitations, interviews were conducted via video conferencing equipment-zoom meetings. With the participants' informed consent, all interviews were audio recorded, and they were then transcribed for analysis. This approach provides an organized yet flexible framework that guarantees conceptual unity throughout interviews while giving participants the freedom to share their distinct perspectives and go into further detail about experiences. The interview questions' open-ended format allowed for the development of unexpected themes while yet being consistent with the primary theoretical assumptions of the study. All interviews were anonymized using pseudonyms to protect privacy.

The interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis procedures, using the six-step framework developed by Braun and Clarke (2006): Transcription and familiarization with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes and producing the final report. To better understand the participants' comments, the transcripts were carefully reviewed several times (transcription and familiarization with the data). First step was to collect the data by transcribing the interviews, followed by the interpretations and analysis, the coding phase/generating initial themes, and these interpretations were checked to make sure that the themes align with the participants' opinions in different contexts. The next step was to review themes phase/defining and naming by making additional revisions to the existing codes and, if needed, establish new ones. After finalizing the themes, sub-themes were developed to offer a deeper understanding of the codes that emerged from the participants' perspectives.



Figure 2. The steps followed for creating the Report/Results

Source: Framework developed by Braun and Clarke (2006)

Table 2. Themes and sub-themes by dimensions

Theme	Sub-Theme	Codes
1. Power distance	<i>Passive vs. Authoritative leadership Fear of overstepping boundaries vs Opened Communication Hierarchical Communication Barriers</i>	Leadership view, Passive management, Permissive leadership, Supportive leadership, Controlling, Changing leadership, Strict leadership, Perfectionist leadership, Active leadership, Hierarchical leadership, Unpredictable leadership, Leadership's final decision, Formal chain of command, Authority challenges, Power abuse, Weak/lack of authority, Lack of involvement, Low involvement, Vague roles, Dependence on authority
2. Individualism vs Collectivism	<i>Team oriented work cultures Group cohesion or collapse</i>	High team performance, Collaboration, Equality, Low competition, Friendly rivalry, Teamwork motivation, Desire for group acceptance, Fear of standing out, Balancing competition and belonging, Avoiding standing out, Lack of group work, Toxic competition, Workplace toxicity
3. Long-Term vs Short-Term Orientation	<i>Current-Oriented work environment and Slow Change</i>	Changing leadership, Experience-based ideas, Experience-based trust, Strategic planning, Acceptance based on experience, High Pressure
4. Masculinity vs Femininity	<i>Perfectionist behaviour vs Performance Expectations Employee engagement and Perceived inequality from flexibility</i>	High motivation, Low motivation, Recognition, Initiatives, Employee engagement, Performance focus, Individual achievements/recognition, Poor task distribution, Unequal workload, Lack of recognition, Perceived inequality from flexibility, Work-centred mindset
5. Uncertainty avoidance	<i>Security Through Authority and Experience</i>	Lack of authority, Prompt responses, Conflict avoidance, Passive leadership, Leadership's final decision, Experience-based trust, Sense of security, Lack of communication, Lack of transparency, Communication problems, Poor communication with upper management, Communication and decision-making gaps, Broken or delayed promises, Low participation
6. Restraint vs. Indulgence	<i>Task-Oriented Over Personal Fulfilment</i>	Fear of standing out, avoiding standing out, Quiet satisfaction, Modest recognition, Work before leisure, Passive coping, Low-key rewards, Lack of motivation, High leadership expressions

4. Results and discussions

Theme 1: Power distance

Sub-Theme A: Passive vs. Authoritative leadership

This sub-theme shows the differences between authoritative leadership styles and passive leadership. The participants' contrasting opinions reflect their own leadership experiences: one group emphasizes the value of structure, discipline, and authority in leadership, while the other group prefers a mentor-like figure who promotes equality. Participant 1 from Romania, highlighted the importance of non-hierarchical, supportive leadership by describing the ideal manager as a mentor and equal. However, this was a quite different experience from what they had. The manager's adaptability and passivity lowered his authority.

“I think a manager should be a mentor for the team they are leading.”/ “But at the same time, there was a leak of authority”/ “He wasn't very authoritative. In my view, he was too permissive” (Participant 1, Romania)

Participant 4 from Japan, had another perspective regarding authority. Pointing out that authority and control are the core of good leadership. They favoured a more controlling and demanding leadership style that maintains boundaries and expectations.

“Manager here, we call them a leader.”/ “They are strict in the time of work, when we are doing our jobs.” / “They are almost perfectionists on everything.” (Participant 4, Japan)

This sub-theme highlights that individual and cultural values influence leadership preferences. A mentoring role for managers appears to be preferred in Romania, which, if not

properly balanced, might cause misunderstanding or a lack of authority. In contrast, control and structure are highly valued in Japan, where it is believed that discipline and authority are necessary for good leadership. This suggests that the cultural and individual expectations of the employees involved may have an impact on how effective a leader is viewed.

Sub-Theme B: Fear of overstepping boundaries vs High or low degree of communication

This sub-theme points out the conflict between the advantages of direct and encouraging communication and the fear of crossing hierarchical boundaries. It draws attention to the ways that leadership conduct and cultural norms can promote communication between managers and staff. Participants in many interviews showed a profound dependence on hierarchical expectations, frequently choosing silence over open communication, even when urged to voice concerns or suggestions. Participant 2 from Japan described a group setting in which even an open invitation to speak resulted in silence because she pointed out that this kind of behavior is common in their culture.

“I had a meeting in the company and it's a Zoom meeting, and there's like 30 people in the meeting...at the end of the meeting, the person asks, "Are there any questions?" And they don't say anything all the time. And then they started to type because they don't want to talk or, like, you know, get the spotlight.” (Participant 2, Japan)

Some individuals highlighted relationships where open, two-way communication reduced the power gap, even though many others described leaders who were distant. In these situations, managers considered staff opinions and supported their decisions as presented in the following quotes from the Participant 5 that works in Romania.

“Since I started this position, I felt supported, and she doesn't show that just toward me, but also to the other interns, even if she isn't directly their manager. My manager is communicative.” / “...we actually communicate quite well, and she often asks me questions and considers my ideas.” (Participant 5, Romania)

According to the answers provided, cultural context significantly influences how people communicate at work. Communication is low in high power distance societies, such as Japan, where employees frequently choose to remain silent out of deference to superiors or fear of criticism. On the other hand, communication is easier in groups where there is less hierarchical distance, like in some Romanian workplaces. A more involved and cooperative environment is encouraged by leaders that value employee opinions along with communication.

Sub-Theme C: Hierarchical Communication Barriers

This sub-theme is used to describe the cultural barriers that prevent free communication in companies, particularly when authority is centralized. This subject focuses on how decision-making is slowed down, and direct communication is discouraged by strict hierarchies. Participants in several interviews indicated that hierarchical structures had become the core layout of the organization's communication processes. Employees frequently turned to formal chains of command or avoid speaking up at all, and ideas, or concerns that were rarely directly addressed, particularly toward high management, this behavior is described by Participant 2 who has over one year of work experience in Japan.

“I would've asked to my him first, and if he said no to me, I would ask to the upper one”/ “But the decisions weren't taken by my manager there's an old guy, like 60 years old.... he used to be a boss in this branch, so he's a, like, ex-boss... But he has the power to decide.” (Participant 2, Japan)

Participants indicated a preference for respect and caution even when supervisors encouraged input, demonstrating that organizational responsibilities can be replaced by cultural norms.

“He said, like, "Email me anytime"...but he still had to ask someone else.” (Participant 2, Japan)

Organizational titles may be superseded by cultural respect for seniority and age. Communication becomes defended and filtered as a result, which could limit employee involvement, creativity, and response.

Theme 2: Individualism vs Collectivism

Sub-Theme A: Team oriented work cultures

This sub-theme explores how teamwork and harmony are valued more in the workplace than individualism. Participants from various cultural backgrounds highlighted the importance of teamwork in daily operations, where mutual dependence and shared duties were critical to complete their duties. The participants frequently discussed a feeling of mutual dependence, in which one person's choices had an impact on everyone else's results. This attitude was common in both cultures, and it was described by two participants.

“...we always work as a team”/ “We really need a team to do our job”/ And it's obvious that if we won't work together, the job will not finish. (Participant 4, Japan)

“Teamwork is what makes a good team... If even one of my colleagues doesn't do their job properly, it affects all of us.”/ “There's no room for individualism.” (Participant 3, Romania)

But not all collectivist versions were perfect. Participant 3 from Romania also talked about how tension or anger were caused by unfair workloads, a lack of transparency, and uncontrolled rivalry that interfered with teamwork.

“Usually, we have clearly defined roles, but some people try to take on more depending on their experience” / “... This leads to frequent problems—like, “I work more than you,” or “I work less but get paid more.” / “This competition isn't really managed by the manager. It's usually chaotic. And that leads to arguments and difficult situations” (Participant 3, Romania)

With many participants expressing satisfaction and dependence on their colleagues, this theme demonstrates how collectivist work contexts promote strong teamwork. Team cohesion is strongly preferred above individual achievements in both Romania and Japan.

Sub-Theme B: Group cohesion or collapse

This sub-theme illustrates how group dynamics in the workplace can be represented in two ways while the desire to be a part of a team can motivate people and provide emotional security; badly managed group unity can also result in toxicity and gossip.

At first, the participants talked about how important it is to collaborate and fit in with the team but looking into other perspectives we can point out the problems that occur when the leaders did not address bad behavior or establish boundaries, and these problems are described by Participant 1 who has over 3 years work experience in Romania.

“...people try to be part of something, not individual...” / “It's very Japanese thing... be a part of the group, just not stand out, obvious for everyone” (Participant 2, Japan)

“Over time, small groups appeared as happens in most companies. This wasn't very helpful. They talked about negative things, mostly about other team members. It became toxic, and our manager, in a way, encouraged this behavior. He knew what was happening, and instead of stopping it, he sometimes even added to it.”/ “There were always discussions, jokes, constant chatter it became tiring and distracting from actual work.” (Participant 1, Romania)

From the employee's perspective we can conclude that being part of a group can have advantages and disadvantages. In one part, it promotes teamwork and provides emotional support especially in cultures like Japan where being part of a group is valued. On the other hand, in Romania the problem occurs between the informal groups and the management's failure to step in which illustrates how permissive leadership can lead to negative group behavior.

Theme 3: Masculinity vs Femininity

Sub-Theme A: Perfectionist behavior vs Performance expectations

This sub-theme highlights the conflict between strict leadership that demands perfect execution and motivational tactics that prioritize development and acknowledgment. Depending on how rigorous and supportive a leader is, they may either inspire or overwhelm.

Leaders sometimes place values on accuracy and excellence execution. Employees are motivated to achieve greatness in this setting, but frequently at the expense of more stress and inflexible procedures. High performance standards can also inspire teams, particularly when there is a balance between encouragement and support. This reflects a conflict between results-driven motivation and perfectionist demands. According to Participants 4, their leaders were severe, stubborn perfectionists who valued perfect work and stuck to strict rules and schedules.

“They are almost perfectionists on everything.” / “...they just hate mistakes.” / “Everyone is following the orders alphabetically.” / “You have a strict schedule and rules that you have to follow.” (Participant 4, Japan)

Clear objectives, measurable standards, and frequent feedback also provided motivation for many participants, despite the stress of perfectionism. Acknowledgment for achieving goals boosted individual motivation and team spirit according to Participant 2 from Japan and Participant 5 from Romania.

“...what I really like them is they always motivated us” (Participant 4, Japan)

“...when I achieved 100%, they, like he mentioned about me and then complimented my work” (Participant 2, Japan)

“Finds new methods to implement ideas that weren’t initially considered—but she insists on bringing them to the department, and we’ve actually had some very good results thanks to those initiatives.” (Participant 5, Romania)

In the Japanese environment, leadership was often described as rigorous emphasizing faultless execution and rule compliance. Although this strategy encouraged order it also produced a demanding workplace where staff members felt limited. Romanian participants, on the other hand, spoke of a more adaptable and creative leadership approach. Although there were still performance standards, the main goals were achieved through open communication and innovative thinking. Leaders were viewed as helpful, promoting initiative and providing feedback.

Sub-Theme B: Employee engagement and Perceived inequality from flexibility

This sub-theme shows how managerial flexibility can result in unfair treatment and misunderstandings. In addition to discussing how managers can improve employee satisfaction, participants pointed out that passive flexibility might occasionally cause stress and can reduce the trust in leadership. Managers who adapt to the demands of each employee are frequently recognized for their human-centered leadership in work environments. This opinion was expressed by a number of participants from Romania, who described helpful leaders who were accessible and present.

“Yes, I can say that in my case, my manager really supports me. Whenever I needed an hour or two off for university, or even a full day of leave, or when I was running half an hour late due to school or personal reasons, he was always there. He even worked in my place when I was away.” (Participant 3, Romania)

But this adaptability also brought about an insignificant but developing tension. Although it benefited individuals, it occasionally threw off the team's sense of fairness.

“It also creates situations among colleagues, maybe misunderstandings between the manager and employees.” (Participant 3, Romania)

Even with good intentions, unequal flexibility can cause anger or the feeling that effort is not being rewarded equally. This conflict was particularly apparent in teams where leaders did not have a high involvement as presented by Participant 6 from Japan.

“...the manager doesn’t really do anything.” / “There’s a rule, but the manager doesn’t really care.” (Participant 6, Japan)

In this case, being helpful turned into being a passive leader, while being flexible understood of not having any rules. Due to unclear boundaries, some participants from both Romania and Japan felt unsure about their manager's role.

“We don’t really know what he is doing” (Participant 6, Japan)

“...he didn't seem too concerned” (Participant 1, Romania)

Although supporting flexibility was highlighted by Romanian employees, they also acknowledged that it could lead to perceived unfairness. In contrast, when flexibility lacked stability, Japanese participants related it to poor leadership. Overall, the theme demonstrates that to preserve team trust and involvement, flexibility must be balanced.

Theme 4: Long-Term vs Short-Term Orientation

Sub-Theme A: Current-Oriented work environment and Slow Change

Short-term priorities and intense daily pressure in the workplace are all reflected in this theme. A short-term orientation within the organizational environment was indicated by the absence of forward planning or strategic decision-making. According to the Participant 3 from Romania, their occupations are rapid and stressful, with daily responsibilities taking priority over long-term improvement.

“Right now, at my workplace, there's a high level of stress and daily tasks, and without the help of a capable manager, I don't think we could handle everything-like the volume of customers we have and managing all the situations between colleagues. Also, the situations that arise between us, the employees, and the customers in our daily work.” (Participant 3, Romania)

Also, a Participant from Japan pointed out the strong authority of the management where mistakes are severely punished and success is determined by daily performance. Managers are viewed as discipline controllers who make sure that everyday activities go without any problems. This reflects the short-term performance of the workplace.

“Yeah. In the morning and then while doing the job, he monitors us, looking at us. And then if we are doing another thing, then he will come to us then say that "Hey, this is what you need to do. This is your job. So, why are you doing that? It's not your job. This is what I told you, so you have to do this, you must finish this.” / “Then if it is wrongly, if I do a mistake for a task, they will shout at us, calling us an idiot, something like that. But it's kind of normal here” (Participant 4, Japan)

This participant, also mention a change in leadership style over time. Leaders became more encouraging, cooperative, and receptive to ideas after staff members understood what they must do and which rules to follow.

“...I experience this stuff only on the first, um, first period of my, of my life working here. But then when I learned how to, to do everything, he changed. He became good managers to me” (Participant 4, Japan)

Participants in both Romania and Japan spoke about current-oriented settings that value short-term outcomes and respect to regulations over long-term planning. While Japanese employees highlighted a leadership that could eventually soften, Romanian employees relied on helpful managers to get through the stressful times.

Theme 5: Uncertainty Avoidance

Sub-Theme A: Security Through Authority and Experience

This sub-theme illustrates how authoritative leadership provides emotional and operational security for workers in high uncertainty avoidance cultures. Employees desire predictability not just from the rules that they must follow, but also from the supportive and present leaders. From the interviews that were conducted, Participants from Romania frequently spoke of mentors or leaders who were present when needed. In situations that were confusing, their leadership reduced stress and uncertainty by providing advice and emotional stability.

“I'd say that my manager is a leader. A person who can handle interpersonal situations, who knows the field well.” / “I can say that in my case; my manager really supports me. Whenever I needed an hour or two off for university...he was always there. He even worked in my place...” (Participant 3, Romania)

Many workers felt safer finishing tasks when they had a competent mentor. These leaders frequently made decisions in unclear circumstances, relieving workers from different problems that occur during work as described by Participant 6 from Japan.

“...they get injured, and they need to go to a hospital... And then it was a, at night, so it's a, like a middle of the night. So, if we should call the taxi or we should do a, like 911.... we cannot decide our, ourselves, so we need to ask him” (Participant 6, Japan)

In high uncertainty avoidance situations, when employees may be unwilling to act on their own out of fear of making mistakes or going too far, the leader's involvement is crucial, this behavior was pointed out by a Participant from Japan.

“He has the power to make a decision” (Participant 2, Japan)

Employees in both Romania and Japan value capable leaders particularly during stressful or uncertain times. Japanese employees depended on authority and organized decision-making, whereas Romanian employees prioritized empathy and assistance.

Theme 6: Restraint vs. Indulgence

Sub-Theme A: Task-Oriented Over Personal Fulfilment

This sub-theme highlights the working environment that values discipline and favorable results over employees' personal development. Employees' productivity is the main core of this theme where job satisfaction and motivation are sometimes overlooked.

In several interviews, participants from both Romania and Japan talked about their workplaces that prioritized task performance and discipline. The participants pointed out that the workplace was organized around duties and rules and that performance was more important than passion.

“You have a strict schedule and rules that you have to follow.” (Participant 4, Japan)

“... we just got vague promises that took forever to materialize, if they ever did.” / “I often stayed late doing extra reports for months, until someone told me, “This isn't even your responsibility.” (Participant 1, Romania)

Work was viewed as a duty rather than a source of personal pleasure. Performance conversations, and demands like feeling heard, inspired, or respected were mostly ignored this comportment was highlighted by a Participant from Japan who encountered this problem.

“...when I achieved 100%, he mentioned about me and then complimented my work...but then he always mentioned about the number and how percent we need to be on top.” (Participant 2, Japan)

Participants in both Romania and Japan spoke of work environments that prioritized responsibility and discipline over the job satisfaction. Japanese employees faced performance-oriented routines, whereas Romanian staff complained about unclear roles and a lack of follow-through. In both cases, work served more as a duty than as a source of fulfilment.

Table 3. Results summary

Dimension	Romania	Japan	Results
1. Power Distance	Low Power Distance Index (Luca, 2005)	Moderate to High Power Distance Index (Traquandi, 2016)	Romania opposes authority (low power distance), and Japan addresses hierarchy (high power distance).
2. Individualism vs Collectivism	Collectivist tendencies (Luca, 2005)	Collectivist (Obara et al., 2021)	Both countries lean towards Collectivism, but Japan highlights more group harmony.
3. Masculinity vs Femininity	Leans toward Femininity with Moderate Masculine Traits(Luca, 2005)	High Degree of Masculinity (Obara et al., 2021)	Romania shows a balance between Masculinity and Femininity and Japan is characterized by Masculinity.
4. Uncertainty avoidance	Moderate score on Uncertainty Avoidance Scale (Luca, 2005)	High degree of Uncertainty Avoidance (Obara et al., 2021)	Both countries showed a high degree of uncertainty avoidance.
5. Long-Term vs Short-Term Orientation	Short-Term Orientated	Long-Term Orientation (Obara et al., 2021)	Both countries lean towards Short-Term orientation.

	(Luca, 2005)		
6. Indulgence vs Restraint	Restraint Tendencies (Dindire and Sirok, 2013)	Leans to More Restraint (Obara et al., 2021)	Both countries lean to be more Restrained, Japan with a higher degree due to work setting.

This study illustrates how different cultural values are reflected in corporate settings through important topics like work orientation, teamwork, communication, and leadership styles. These results offer a deeper understanding of the ways in which cultural and personal expectations affect employee engagement and leadership performance. This study's main goal was to investigate how cross-cultural differences in leadership styles affect employees in distinct organizational contexts, in particular employees' perspectives from Romania and Japan. Influenced by Hofstede's cultural dimensions, the results of this study show distinct variations in leadership practices and preferences, highlighting the ways in which culture shapes employee expectations and leadership practices. The results show that Japan's highly structured, short-term-focus orientation, which places a high value on group cohesion and performance while balancing hierarchical respect, shapes leadership in this culture. Japanese leaders are seen as mentors who lead groups by discipline, and shared principles. This correlates with Hofstede's dimensions, especially high masculinity, uncertainty avoidance, and short-term orientation, which point to a culture that prioritizes professional success over personal fulfilment. The only differences between the theoretical part and the results were regarding Short-term vs Long-term orientations, because in the findings of Obara et al. (2021), Japan leans toward Long-term orientation but in the results of this paper leans more toward Short-term orientation. This can result from the importance of cultural evolution from Japan, because this research focus on young employees aged between 20-27 that are leaning away from the traditionally long-term focuses values, when in the research Obara et al. (2021) they are focusing on traditional norms and institutions using participants aged between 30-40 years. The leadership culture in Romania is more adaptable and short-term oriented, leaning more toward emphasis on interpersonal interactions and a smaller power distance. Leadership is more likely to be informal and shaped by a balance between masculine, competition, and feminine, collaborative, ideals. These results support Hofstede's description of Romania as a relatively feminine, collectivist, and short-term-focused country with a leadership culture that is socially sensitive and adaptable.

The results of this paper resonate with the existing literature described in the theoretical part. This study is based on Luca's (2005) framework, even though more recent data indicates that Romania currently scores higher on the power distance dimension. According to Luca (2005), Romanian culture is counter-dependent on authority, which explains why people prefer leaders that are balanced and approachable. The view that Japan's leadership is built on rigid hierarchical standards and performance-based is further supported by Obara et al. (2021) and Sugimoto (2010). Because each dimension provides a clear understanding of management approaches, communication styles, and organizational expectations, Hofstede's (2011) theoretical framework works especially well for supporting these leadership styles.

The focus on young professional viewpoints and the cultural differences in leadership expectations in modern work environments sets this study apart from previous research. This study emphasizes the important role that age plays in influencing leadership experiences and workplace expectations, in contrast to previous research that tended to generalize cultural qualities at the national level. It also suggests that recognizing changing cultural dynamics requires an understanding of demographic categorization. For instance, the finding that Romanian leadership combines formal organizational discipline with informal indulgent behavior in personal interactions demonstrates a cultural dynamic that is occasionally overlooked in more general cultural studies. The numerous ideas of Japanese leadership as both participative and hierarchical, which represents the blending of traditional principles with modern workplace dynamics, offers a deeper understanding than strict cultural labels.

This study expands the use of Hofstede's theory to the real-world experiences of workers in Romania and Japan while proving its value in cross-cultural leadership studies. In addition to improving our knowledge of how culture affects leadership, the comparative method highlights how crucial cultural awareness is when leading international teams.

5. Conclusions

Using Hofstede's cultural dimensions as the theoretical framework, this study aimed to show how employees from Romania and Japan view and describe leadership approaches in the workplace. The study highlights that significant variations in leadership perceptions still exist in today's workplaces, despite being framed by Hofstede's previous theoretical model. When compared to previous research, this study's qualitative analysis of interview data has illustrated both supporting and opposing findings, providing a new perspective on how leadership is viewed and practiced in these two very different cultural contexts. The *Power Distance* dimension was highlighted by the Romanian participants through their mixed attitudes toward authority, alternating between admiring or opposing it, which is reflected by Luca's (2005) findings where she highlighted that low power index is related with the concept of counter-dependence. From the participants' perspectives, respect for leaders should be earned through competence, fairness and trust rather than being given automatically because of their position. On the other hand, although hierarchical systems are generally accepted in Japanese culture, Japanese respondents pointed out a leadership style, in which team leaders are supposed to help and mentor their teams, balancing harmony and control. Through this research we can underline a difference of how people view leadership and power because the Japanese workers appreciate discipline but also expect a supporting leadership and the Romanian workers are trying to challenge the authority and expect that leaders should prove their value.

Both countries lean toward collectivist attitudes when it came to *Individuality vs Collectivism*, but for different reasons. The need for connection and support within certain groups, seems to be the main idea of the Romanian collectivism. Japanese collectivism, on the other hand, was pointed out from the compliance to the rules, and the focus on harmony within the group. Japanese responders placed a high importance on avoiding disagreement and communicating indirectly, indicating a collectivism that values group stability over self-expression. The greatest difference between Romania and Japan was seen in the *Masculinity vs Femininity* dimension. Japan's culture was defined by Masculinity, with a focus on success and high standards for performance. Respondents talked about the pressure to perform well that highlighted the findings of Sugimoto (2010). In contrast, Romanian participants had a more Feminine attitude, underlining cooperation, balance, and well-being at work. Both cultures valued structure and clear instructions when it came to avoiding uncertainty, but Japan showed a greater demand for order and short-term planning. Although Romanian participants valued rules, they also showed a negative attitude towards strict structures that slow down the progress and the adaptability.

Regarding the *Short-term vs Long-term* dimension an interesting result emerged from the findings of this research. Japanese participants highlighted that their decision-making process is more focused on immediate results pointing out to a short-term orientated culture, opposing the findings of the research Obara et al., (2021) that underlined that Japan leaned more toward long-term planning. Interviews showed that younger Japanese workers are becoming more focused on personal fulfilment and short-term success, possibly because of the changing expectations and economic conditions. These shifts can serve as a reminder that the Japanese culture can change with time depending on the age group. Additionally, the Romanian participants lean toward short-term orientation preferring quick results over strategic long-term planning aligning with the findings of the theoretical research Luca (2005). When it comes to the *Indulgence vs Restrained* dimension both cultures tend to be more restrained because the Romanian participants pointed out a culture that values discipline in the working environment but also values personal enjoyments. On

the other hand, Japanese employees prioritize work over personal enjoyments leaning toward a more restrained culture. The theoretical implications of this research point out Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Theory, but it also shows that cultural values are dynamic, by highlighting the changing in the Japanese short-term vs long-term orientation where the findings of this paper showed a shifting towards short-term orientation among Japanese employees, suggesting the necessity of continuous cultural revision.

This study also has significant practical implications that implies global leaders and multinational companies to better understand the needs of employees from different cultural contexts. Japanese workers are still respecting the hierarchy, but they expect their leaders to encourage harmony and mutual trust. In contrast, Romanian employees may respond best to balanced leadership that respects individual boundaries. Understanding these differences can increase worker engagement and decrease communication barriers in international work environments. However, this research had also some limitations. One major obstacle was overcoming language difficulties, which occasionally made it difficult to communicate clearly and deeply during interviews, particularly when participants needed translation or were not competent in English. Also, the challenge of finding and setting up interviews with Japanese participants was a significant study restriction. Email communication was attempted several times, but the response rates were low, and many people either did not respond or chose not to participate. Moreover, the sample was restricted to young individuals, and it might not accurately represent the opinions of other professional sectors or older generations.

Future research can improve in several ways to address the limitations of this study. The language issues can be addressed by choosing bilingual assistants that could guarantee better understanding and communication. Also, response rates could be raised by collaborating with regional organizations and for the restricted sample future research should include a wider range of ages and professional backgrounds. Moreover, to reduce the limitations future research can also incorporate quantitative research methods.

This paper provides an understanding of generations that are often overlooked in traditional cultural frameworks because it emphasizes that younger workers in quickly evolving workplaces may require distinct approaches to leadership than those that worked well in the past. Building an inclusive and successful leadership approach requires an understanding of how younger generations may question or reinterpret existing cultural norms. Future leadership models need to be based on both cultural awareness and generational understanding as workplace demographics and expectations change. The study's emphasis on young professionals offers an original and relevant viewpoint on how cultural values appear in contemporary workplaces. Traditional leadership approaches must adapt to the changing attitudes and expectations that younger workers bring to the workplace. To reflect the dynamic interaction between tradition, contemporary times, and age shifts, our understanding of leadership must evolve beyond unchanging frameworks and adjust to shifting cultural norms.

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