

## **Effects of intercultural changes on communication and management models in agricultural enterprises**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*The effects of globalization events in Hungary have justified the actuality of this topic. The aim of this study was to analyze the cultural gaps between Hungarian and Anglo-Saxon organizational and communicational structure that causes conflicts at occupation, and explore the tools of management to handle these problems. As research tool we applied the methods of sociological research. To give representative samples, companies with turnover over 10 milliard HUF and over 250 employees were examined. In the comparing analyses we involved 21 employees from different scope of activities, from 7 enterprises. The structural changes were initiated by the top management. According to the main interests of modernization ambitions of the newly built company structure, the organizational structure was a more simplified system, it allowed two-way communication system. For the internal communication strategy, within one organization, all interviewers have suggested the heterarchic system, where the main element is the teamwork, and the major communication guidelines are open, without any strict regulations. Analyzing training costs, average expenditure gave the result that numbers of the participants of manpower-trainings are decreasing from the operative management and top management levels, executive employees take part on courses in a higher number. Other employees, under the management level usually can take part only in language courses.*

(Keywords: organizational culture, structural changes, business communication, training)

### **A szervezeti kultúra változásának hatásai a szervezeti felépítésben és kommunikációs modellben az agrárágazatban működő társasvállalkozásokban**

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### **ÖSSZEFOGLALÁS**

*Jelen tanulmány célja volt megvizsgálni a magyar és angolszász vegyes vállalatok kulturális és kommunikációs stratégiájában feszülő ellentéteket melyek munkahelyi konfliktusokhoz vezetnek, valamint feltérképezni a menedzsment eszközrendszerét, mellyel a problémákat kezelni tudja. A vizsgálathoz a szociológiai kutatás módszereit alkalmaztuk, a vizsgálat bázisául szolgáló társas vállalkozások reprezentativitását biztosította, hogy a megkérdezett cégek árbevétele meghaladta a 10 milliárd forintot, illetve a munkavállalók létszáma 250 felett volt. Az összehasonlító elemzésben összesen 21 munkavállaló vett részt különböző munkavállalói szinteket reprezentálva összesen 7 vállalat részéről. A szervezeti változások minden esetben a felső vezetés kezdeményezésére indultak meg. Az újonnan kialakított szervezet struktúrájában lényegesen leegyszerűsödött, kétirányú kommunikációs*

*csatornák nyíltak meg. A szervezetek belső kommunikációs stratégiája az interjúk tanúsága szerint heterarchikus felépítésű, mely fő jellemzője a team-kultúrán alapuló munkaszervezés, amelynek kommunikációs csatornái nyíltak, kevésbé szabályozottak. A tréningköltéség átlagos kiadásainak elemzése során arra következtethettünk, hogy a résztvevők létszáma a munkavállalói szinteknek megfelelően felülről lefelé csökkenő tendenciát mutattak. Az alacsonyabb szinten dolgozó munkavállalók lényegében csak nyelvi képzésben részesültek.*

(Kulcsszavak: szervezeti kultúra, szervezettefejlesztés, üzleti kommunikáció, tréning)

## **INTRODUCTION**

Since the past decades, the international researchers have been focusing on the main issues of the intercultural management and communication. The intercultural communication referencing to the organizations' international relations and communication being introduced as new subject at Europe's several universities. The effects of the present globalization events in Hungary have justified the actuality of this topic.

The natural resources of Hungary, soil and climatic characteristics provide appropriate conditions for agricultural production. In spite of the excellent potentials the Hungarian agricultural sector shows poor performance. The production is not efficient. After the process of socio-economic transition of the 90's in Hungary a new framework of conditions were shaping including such key factors that can be defined as market orientation, effectiveness, quality aspects, globalization and knowledge based services. Meeting the intercultural challenge is one of the most important effect in regions which increasingly face these types of conflicts. Agricultural enterprises in Hungary had to change in being able to fit themselves into a new context of market economy indicated by the alterations of the external economic environment. Alterations in the inner and outer environment forced them to change their organizational structure. Within the context of global trends and tendencies developing communication skills in human resources management have become essential. Among organizational resources human resources gained cardinal importance as the managing force of the process of value creation.

The aim of this study was to analyze the cultural gaps between Hungarian and Anglo-Saxon organizational and communicational structure, that causes conflicts at occupation, and explore the tools of management to handle these problems.

In the course of research we were intending to follow the events and measures that occurred in connection with personnel management and were concerning individual enterprises.

On the basis of the results we drew conclusions about the relationships of human factor in the questioned organizations – which are the communication strategies and functions, most characteristic of personnel management of the enterprises.

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

Hungarian socio-cultural and business cultural characteristics and the intercultural communication as problem and friction arise daily interactions between members of different cultures. This is for special interest of agricultural enterprises in Hungary, since political changes in the region resulted that the number of greenfield starts, foreign takeovers, foreign joint ventures, and cooperation with foreign partners has been rapidly increasing.

To solve the problem of scientific research we applied the methods of sociological research. In the secondary research we gathered information from Hungarian and international journals, scientific publications and monographies published in the last

decade. Primary researches were made by questionnaires. To give representative samples, companies with turnover over 10 milliard HUF and over 250 employees were examined. In the comparing analyses we involved 21 employees from different scope of activities, from 7 enterprises. 5 of the enterprises work as a joint-stock company, 2 of them were a limited liability company.

The applied questionnaire was focusing on the changes of enterprises in the altering political economy mostly since the 1990's, especially with regard to structural changes and connecting provisions mapping different events in an interdisciplinary way. As research method essentially we used the appliances of economic-science, but also integrated the elements of the sciences of sociology, psychology, linguistically- and cultural anthropology. I tried to recover how working conditions, strategies, and elements of communication change in the human approach during the structural changes in the whole.

In the process of research we applied the method of gaining data with the help of questionnaires we have specially designed for this purpose. The data was processed in four principle phases; the control of questionnaires, encoding data, totalizing data in tables, demonstrating conclusions in tables. For evaluation we applied mathematical and statistical methods and computer programs as well.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

At present, agricultural production has a direct impact on the income and existence of almost half a million of families in Hungary. Based on data provided by the Hungarian Central Statistical Office (HCSO) and EUROSTAT we can assert that according to EU standards the vast majority - more than 96% - of Hungary belongs to the category of rural-like area (HCSO, 2007). Almost 74% of the Hungarian citizens live in this area. The rate of basically rural areas (61,5%) is also above the average of the EU (47% according to HCSO data).

Companies recorded in the research, have gone through the structural change gradually. After the privatization, capital injection of the multinational companies contributed to the technological modernization of the production equipments. For this reason these companies had no investment difficulties. Under these circumstances, these enterprises enjoyed the benefits of modernization, by foreign investors, against the capital-scarce domestic companies.

### **Organizational structural changes**

The structural changes were initiated by the top management. For the employees it often seemed forced, and in the short term, the modernization didn't make any changes in the way of thinking of the employees. During the enquiry period, market environment had an intensive dynamic change. Therefore the newly formed companies could only carry out a primary change, which was not followed by the employees in their head and in their evaluation system. Intensively and dynamically changing market required subsidiaries to become a real "learning-company" to be able to provide new solutions. As Csath (2001) has also introduced in her work, organizational changes cannot be successful without the creative, future-oriented management tools, and mostly without considering the local aspects of working culture.

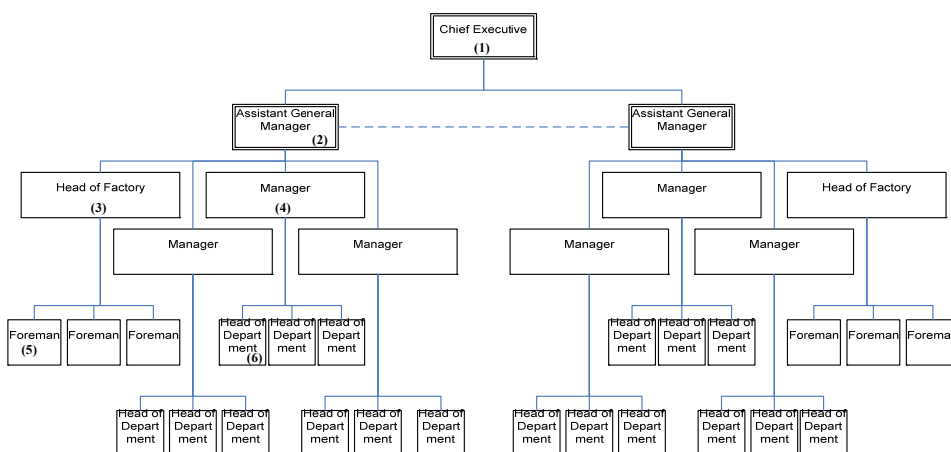
Among competing companies, sampling in the research, belonging to the same category, could be recognized parallelism in database of the research. The modernization and reformation of the company structure was in all cases going hand in hand with the alterations.

The Hungarian business approach and the foreign manager's cultural background generated the new environmental structural changes in structural development as it is introduced in the followings:

Using the right and the high quality managing practice for conducting changes of re-structuring the organization can be solved by the method of "reengineering" as *Münser* (2000) have described it in the past decade. In the twentieth century, the top management coordinated and directed exclusively all activities in the Hungarian companies. For this reason a bureaucratic multilevel structure was evolved. All decisions were made exclusively by the top management, employees were not involved in the procedure. Characteristically the multilevel decision-making process caused a complicated inner connection ship in the organization. Answers been given for the questions in the questionnaire have shown a clear view on the multilevel and centralized company structure (*Figure 1*).

**Figure 1**

**Organizational conformation before structural changes**



*1. ábra: Szervezeti felépítés a változások előtt*

*Vezérigazgató(1), Vezérigazgató helyettes(2), Gyárigazgató(3), Főosztályvezető(4), Csoportvezető(5), Osztályvezető(6)*

This system had the following effect on the functioning of the enterprises as the personal interviews reflected: the achievements were just partially accepted by the top management. The opened-question in the questionnaire reflects concordantly a quite low loyalty towards the employer and the company. It could be resulted by the isolation of the top management and indirect contact between them and the employees, the conventions of deferred and one-way communication structure, which gives no opportunity for feed-back.

Because of the traditional organizational-cultural conditions, decision-making mechanism of these companies was centralized, slow, and risk avoider. These circumstances did not allow them to cope other counterparts and to adapt new challenges

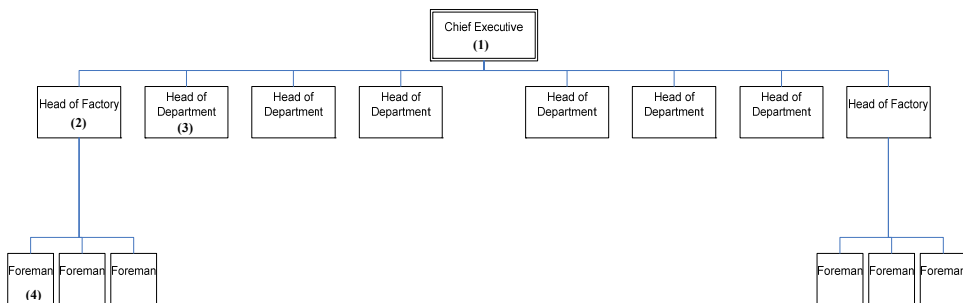
of the continuously changing business environment. Top management had an introverted decision making mechanism, shared with its different interests. Therefore this system was foredoomed to failure in the period of the changing of economical market.

As *Blackler* (1995) has introduced, “knowledge-workers” can form the organizations as a “learner organization” or “knowledge-intensive organization”. Following *Steeg and Ziggers* (2000), who has publicized the learner-enterprise, as a very well functioning system, being managed through using the tools of total quality management (TQM). Problem recovery and solving are leaning on the basis of widely diverse directions of information flow. Benchmarking as another tool can be useful for the management, which helps in learning from another ones’ mistakes, starting a good-spiral, that allows the structure to be more effective (*Weick and Westley*, 1996).

The main interests of modernization ambitions of the newly built company structure by all enterprises were similar. Reaching market goals the new, simplified organizational structure was shaped, as it is introduced on Figure 2.

**Figure 2**

### Organizational conformation after structural changes



2. ábra: Szervezeti felépítés a változások után

Vezérigazgató(1), Gyárigazgató(2), Osztályvezető(3), Csoportvezető(4)

Thus, the new structure was a more simplified regulation system, indicating less bureaucracy, and particularly reduced in the number of employees. This way it allowed a more effective and obligates, two-way communication system, also with feedback from employees.

Reducing the number of hierarchic levels squarely brought forth the transparency of actions of structure. New structure was focusing on that the top management is the decision making level, with the main aim to organize the employees every-day task, directly and efficiently. The communication guidelines among the management and employees were simplified in order to achieve high level of service for the customer. Still, results were far from the desired optimum.

Personal interviews showed a positive picture of the newly built structures. Performance analyses at every level, new-structure-communication system within the network, more effective information flow, development trainings have all contributed to a positive change within the company. These changes have contributed to the alteration

of the cultural-attitude of the organizations and effectiveness of the new managing practice. According to participants of the personal interviews, the new system resulted in an out bounded, decentralized, faster and more effective decision-making structure, opened an honored working contacts, and increasing risk-taking level, as the subjects of the interviews reported.

Interviews showed diverse results, too. The still growing decisively North American Management style, being inflexible, and making no efforts on getting know the local traditions and working style, as being introduced, could not always respond properly on the present situation in certain cases rendered more difficult in the retooling of organizations.

The contrasts between the poles by Hofstede's cultural dimensions have been evolving by two main guidelines: approach to the management prestige, and the ways of handling uncertainty. Employees, having the Hungarian cultural background have a vision in their huge-power-distance culture, that the good manager is friendly, autocrat, helpful, and an absolute controller of the authority. It results the feeling of security for all operatives. In contrast with the Hungarian system, the main philosophy of the Anglo-Saxon management is based on democracy.

### **Organizational culture**

The applied questionnaire has included open questions in consideration of organizational-cultural relationships. It was due to be able to compare different cultural attitudes and these relationships obviously. To evaluate the cultural attitudes and connections, they were categorized at different levels. Moreover the open question system has also allowed presenting individual cases.

All companies, developed from the same cultural background, based on common historical past showed the similar starting organizational structure according to open questions of the questionnaire. Thus, each organization had a similar structure, and size, the management has also had the same educational and political background as they solved organizational challenges considering their executive abilities. According to Handy's approach, introduced by *Falkné* (2001), the basic culture was compounded by two main elements: compounded the power-based and the personal character-based management. The top manager, who was located in the focus of the company structure, controlled companies. This top manager controlled the whole network of the company; all information-flow was set up around his personality, all his personal connections determined and directed the whole organization. There were few directives and administrative tools that could impact on the daily operation, so all parts of the workflow were controlled directly by the top manager.

The operatives were against the new structure called the role-culture by Handy's system, since they previously used to get on a system, which was not functioning anymore. The previously practiced and regular ambition strategies didn't work anymore in the new structure.

According to data of *Table 1* the new system was focusing on the management position, but not on the person, who is holding the position. This alteration has different effect on the efficiency of the operatives' daily routine. It has been confirmed by the results of the personal interviews. If the personality of the chief executive fits to the autocrat principles, he has gain the loyalty of the operatives. In case the chief executive's working knowledge and experience was not sufficient to fulfill this position, he has made some re-structuring by the company therefore making the system even more complicated. With the re-structuring it has managed to hide the incompetence of the

chief executives. The employees of these companies had considered the structure of these companies clear, and obvious.

**Table 1**

**Appearances of organizational cultures after structural changes**

<b>Power culture (1)</b>	<b>Role-culture (2)</b>	<b>Task-culture (3)</b>	<b>Personality-culture (4)</b>
43,59 %	48,72 %	7,69 %	0%

*1. táblázat: A változások után kialakult szervezeti kultúrák*

*Hatalmi kultúra(1), Szerepkultúra(2), Feladatcultúra(3), Személyiség-kultúra(4)*

**Changes of values at work**

Interesting result in connection with working valuation systems is that the “personality of manager” as a value-category was formerly on the first rank, by now dropped to the 6<sup>th</sup> place. In the past 5 years, the order to valuing different aspects at work has significantly changed. In accord with *Fábián et al. (2006)* it is also shown on the chart that the order of all other factor has also changed (*Table 2*). Since continuous changing of the political and economic environment resulted less safe employment policy, it resulted that “Stability of working place” has moved forward in the rank, namely taken over the first place according to 87% of interviews instead of that previously it was at the second place. The other factor that had changed significantly according to environmental changing as the different values at work is “competitive salary”. Before the structural changes, salaries were more or less well balanced at the same category, but after political change there could be measured extreme differences in material allocations within the same sector.

**Table 2**

**Rank of working values - as an overage ranking according to the employees, were interviewed**

<b>Observation points (1)</b>	<b>1989</b>	<b>2004</b>
	<b>Rank (2)</b>	
Substantive work (3)	5.	4.
Utilising own abilities during work (4)	4.	3.
Self supporting working (5)	6.	5.
Personality of manager (6)	1.	6.
Safe of employment policy (7)	2.	1.
Competitive salary (8)	4.	2.

*2. táblázat: A munkahelyi értékek rangsora a megkérdezett beosztottak körében*

*Vizsgálati szempontok(1), Helyezés(2), Érdemi munka(3), Saját képességek kiaknázása a munkavégzés során(4), Önálló munkavégzés(5), Főnök személye(6), Munkabiztonság(7), Versenyképes fizetés(8)*

All global enterprises as the participants of the research are owned by multinational capitals, mostly with an Anglo-Saxon roots. Also the reachable literature on management studies and educations are also belonging to the same cultural background it is expected that this company management system will be shown up in Hungary as well. As one of the Hungarian managers drafted: "I'm absolutely sure, that for the future Hungarian employees will take over these sample, as this Anglo-Saxon company management model will be generally accepted principle."

### **Main parameters of the intercultural communication in Hungary**

All employees socialized and educated before the 1990's cultural environment needed to face at the period of local political-economical changing with developing their communicational skills and abilities, which were historically and socio-culturally incomparable with the new requirements. Since then organizations have been trying to find the possible way to appropriate new challenges (*Juhász and Kemény, 2007*).

By business communication, the main problem arises from the diversity of contexts of languages. Hungarian language characteristically has a high context-communication system, so it explains just a little, doesn't give unnecessary additional information, to the basic instruction, as the language expresses the additional meaning of the instruction by itself. Therefore Hungarian employees have problem with the instructions with too much comments of the foreign management, as Anglo-Saxon language has low-context communication system.

The other critical point is the choice of business language. The cause of tension is that while Hungarian is a small, European language contrary to English that is extended all over the business world. Mostly English needs to be used at the meetings, discussions, educations, no matter where they're hold. It can be said, that Hungarian employees have already reached remarkable success on this field. Although it was expressed that the native speakers do not have any respect for the non-native speakers.

Considering the other side of the problem, interviewing the foreign managers, they have reflected, how they think about the communication problem: observing it form the other side of the "table". The older generation is not willing to take responsibility for their work. They are slow, and not effective. It's explained in description of scope of activities detailed what is their daily routine, but they are still not able to follow this route. The foreign managers consider very formal, and forced their needs for a hierarchical structured company. Hungarian employees do their job with full of their emotions, their attitude is rather particular, their dependence on circumstances strongly, and dealing with their job is rather polychronic. For this reason, it s difficult for Hungarian employees to keep deadlines, in contrast with the Anglo-Saxon colleagues, with their monochronic attitude, which seems unreliable, irresponsible and impolite, from the Hungarian employees' point of view.

Consonance with attainable international literature, the hypothesis of the research – that the Hungarian environment culture is rather hierarchical, with huge distance between the management and the operatives try to avoid any uncertainty – was also confirmed by the interviews.

### **Changes of the communication strategies**

Regarding the communication strategy, corresponding to the issue's characteristic there were closed-questions drafted in the questionnaire. Results are unambiguously showing that the language for external-communication is Hungarian. For internal-usage both



languages are used, the local one and the language of the parent company. In this case it was the English in most cases.

As the main issue of the research, we were led to the conclusion that Hungarian is a high context language, in contrast with the low context English language according to the classification from Hall's nomenclature. Interviews confirmed the following conclusion: this marginal difference between the two languages arouse by the Hungarian employees dissonance as they consider that longer speeches of the foreign managers is because of distrust, and contempt to their direction. From the other side, the managers think to give a detailed explanation to their employees, rather then later making any mistake because of lack of proper information. It is also important to check their operative work continuously, in order to give a chance to correct mistakes, as the shortly given instruction can result mistake. The American managers consider the monocronic communication strategy as an improper communication strategy, as they feel Hungarian colleague would mix up the different problematic topics, and would try to discuss them in the same time. Nevertheless, this problem derives from the different way of communication, between the two cultures.

For the internal communication strategy, within one organization, all interviewers have suggested the heterarchic system, where the main element is the teamwork, and the major communication guidelines are opened, without any strict regulations. Although the personal interviews have confirmed that there are some cases where the top manager doesn't trust his employees, therefore he is also coordinating all workflow as operative manager as well. This communication system doesn't provide an objective view for effective function of the organization. It has a negative impact on relationship among the top management and its operatives and also the top management and its operative management as well. The loyalty for the company has declined by the operatives and managers.

### **New tendencies at manpower development**

Analyzing the training cost, average expenditure can give information about the proportion of human resource development of the whole company's efforts for manpower organizational strategy development.

According to the personal-interviews 80% of the training cost was spent on activity-based trainings, 20% was spent on team building, and cooperation-development-trainings (*Table 3*). The activity-based trainings were focusing on achievement and efficiency development (48%). Remarkable is that all respondents have confirmed that companies do not organize any training on conflict-controlling techniques or on recovering tensions coming out of cultural background differences. These problems need to be solved by the employees themselves since the beginnings up to this day. The costs of the trainings have been increasing in the last couple of years, in compared to the average 10 million HUF in the first year of the examined duration.

Numbers of the participants of the trainings are decreasing from the operative management and top management level, executive employees taking part on courses in a higher number. Other employees, under the management level usually can take part only in language courses. All respondents could confirm this difference. Comparing the strategies of development trainings has confirmed that the examined companies support the mobilization procedure just within narrow range.

The implementation of the knowledge-capital-innovation in the organization strategy has not confirmed yet the companies to be ready for the desired status, which is called learner-company. For the long term, these companies will become follower at this branch. As the Hungarian feeding market is relatively small and slow, the disadvantage will not be obvious for the short term.

**Table 3**

**Average repartition of the training costs according to the structure of courses**

<b>Topics (1)</b>	<b>Average repartition of costs % (2)</b>	
Training based on activity (3)	80%; shared: (16)	
Language course (4)		15%
Change-management (5)		17%
Expansion of the achievement (6)		25%
Enhancement of the effectiveness (7)		23%
Organization development (8)	20%; shared:	
Team building (9)		10%
Personal development (10)		4%
Carrier management (11)		4%
Other skill and ability development (12)		2%
Settling matters arising from cultural differences (13)	0%; shared:	
Conflict management (14)		0%
Problem solving (15)		0%
Altogether (17)	100%	

3. táblázat: A tréningköltségek átlagos megoszlása az alkalmazott képzési struktúrának megfelelően

*Témakörök(1), Átlagos költségfordítása(2), Tevékenység-specifikus képzések(3), Nyelvi képzés(4), Változásmenedzsment(5), Teljesímenynövelés(6), Hatékonyság-fokozás(7), Szervezetfejlesztés(8), Csoportépítés(9), Személyiség-fejlesztés(10), Karrier-menedzselés(11), Egyéb készség- és képességfejlesztés(12), Különbözőségekből adódó problémák feltárása(13), Konfliktuskezelés(14), Problémamegoldás(15), Ebből(16), Összesen(17)*

**CONCLUSIONS**

As playing key-role in the factor of domestic agriculture, feed-industry, its economic notability can be found in the linking position between the plant culture and stockbreeding sectors.

Since 1989 the market conditions have changed intensively dramatically, and dynamically, there has been evaluating new challenges for the modern management. Mostly in the examined sector in Hungary, mainly the Anglo-Saxon model has been used as general practice.

At the beginning intercultural international performers caused conflicts, by having different cultural background, which has inhibited the effective function of the branch. Foreign managers' main problem derives from that Hungarian employees have an individualistic attitude, low risk and responsibility-taking level, no active participation in daily routine. Nevertheless Hungarian employees feel defenseless against the top management, as they cannot fit in a structure, where they also need to make decisions.

The ranges of values at work have been totally restructuring. The new form is reflecting the Anglo-Saxon model that comes from its cultural background, and the reshaping modern market condition – as the results of interviews showed it up.

The strategy of the external and internal communication has been also changing. The high context Hungarian language is in contrast with the low context English language. These marginal differences result dissonance by the Hungarian employees as well as by the foreign top managers.

All researches in the subject supported the hypothesis that Hungarian organization culture in comparison with the Anglo-Saxon model is more hierarchic, there are huge distances among the power of management and the operatives, and strongly tries to avoid instability. The activity of the Hungarian employees at occupation is rather more emotional, more dependent on the outstanding circumstances, while doing their job their time-structure is rather polichronic, in opposite to the Anglo-Saxon monochronic working style.

The organizational conformation has also been developed to a modern, sophisticated system, so it has contributed to the better business position under in the present market circumstances. According to the respondents were interviewed, the transmission period started up difficultly for the Hungarian workers, who maintain the respectabilities. Nevertheless, purposeful, effective, and success-oriented top management could achieve the desired structural modernization, bringing the business success to book.

The Human Resource Management outlined the following cost-expenditure strategies: significant part of the training cost was spent on the activity based trainings, bad smaller part was spent on organization-development trainings (studiously for team building trainings proving effectiveness) Personality development, carrier building, and other skill development programs were not so popular. The intercultural conflict management or learning the problem solving techniques unfortunately has no tradition in Hungary.

Achievements were evaluated by the measurable results in the practical training structure. The position and function valuating system complementary to the former ones were less popular.

These results reflect the necessity of risk taking and necessity of feedback of successful that is characteristics for the branch in the short term.

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