Slovenian business culture – How proverbs shape dynamic leadership styles*

*Gregor Pfajfar, Miha Uhan, Tony Fang, Tjaša Redek***

This paper examines the characteristics of Slovenian business culture in a proverbial context using the Yin-Yang (holistic, dynamic, dialectic) approach to analysing cultures. The results show that Slovenian managers are generally risk prone, and apply feminine values in their leadership. The charismatic leadership style dominates. The research makes several contributions to the literature. It is the first practical application of the Fang (2012) dialectic approach in Slovenia. Second, the research builds a bridge between Fang (2012) and Hofstede by systematising proverbs. Third, this study stresses the importance of introducing a more dynamic understanding of leadership styles in a cultural context through paradoxical proverbs.

Key words: culture, leadership style, Yin Yang proverbs, Slovenia
(JEL Codes: M12, M14, M16)

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** Gregor Pfajfar (Corresponding author), University of Ljubljana, Faculty of Economics, Kardeljeva ploščad 17, 1000 Ljubljana, Slovenia. Research interests: International Marketing and Business-to-business marketing. E-mail: gregor.pfajfar@ef.uni-lj.si.

Miha Uhan, University of Ljubljana, Faculty of Economics, Slovenia. Research interests: Entrepreneurship and Leadership.

Tony Fang, Stockholm Business School, Sweden. Research interests: Cross-cultural Management and Chinese Business Studies.

Tjaša Redek, University of Ljubljana, Faculty of Economics, Slovenia. Research interests: Intangible Capital, Firm Behavior and Development.

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Introduction

Found among humans and animals (Bass/Stogdill 1990), leadership is a universal activity supposed to be crucially important for the effective functioning of organisations and society as a whole (Antonakis/Cianciolo/Sternberg 2004). In addition to planning, organising and controlling, leadership is one of the four basic, for some even the most important, functions of the process of management (Dimovski/Penger/Žnidaršič 2005). Recently, much attention has been placed on dynamic leadership styles (e.g. Manning/Robertson 2011; Tucker/Lam 2014) and the importance of adjusting leadership styles to different situations, populations and cultural settings. This article's purpose is to examine the characteristics of Slovenian business culture in the context of Slovenian proverbs using the Yin-Yang (holistic, dynamic, dialectic) approach to analysing cultures. The Yin-Yang approach is especially suitable for capturing dynamic leadership changes in the global economic and business environment because in essence its approach is dynamic, holistic and dialectic. The Yin-Yang approach views culture as an ocean in which the currents (changes) bring up a culture's more silent aspects, which are never totally absent. As such, the context, situation and time are the framework within which leadership is analysed. In this setting, selected cultural aspects come to the forefront given the changed context/time/situation (Fang 2012). The cultural dimension is captured with the use of proverbs. Proverbs encapsulate the essence of cultural characteristics and thus also the values and behaviour of people in business interactions (Rezaei 2012).

Today, business is global or at least glocal (Strizhakova/Coulter/Price 2012). Nonetheless, a manager is never global or independent of their cultural roots, even when trying to adapt to a multicultural setting. We thus believe that leadership styles are contextually and culturally based, and also situation embedded. Accordingly, the aim of this paper is to examine how proverbs are linked to certain leadership styles of Slovenian managers and which situational/cultural factors impact the change of a particular leadership style used. Empirically, we challenge these questions by comparing the management styles of firms that do business with China with other firms. In sum, this paper seeks to answer the question of how leadership styles are related to situation, context and time.

First, we examine different paradigms for studying culture, stressing the development of the theory towards a more dynamic view on culture, and provide a link between culture and proverbs. Second, we overview leadership theories to show how leadership styles can vary within a single culture depending on the situation, context and time. Third, we present the research framework's merger with the Fang (2012) dynamic approach to culture, capturing leadership styles in situation, context and time with proverbs. This is followed by a description of the research results where we compare companies that work with Chinese and those which do not. We conclude with managerial and research implications.

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Culture and leadership: a theoretical background

Every national culture reveals a rich historical experience of the nation, encapsulating the essence of the most decisive positive or negative experiences, influences and developments. Fang (2012) divides the cross-cultural management literature into two broad paradigms, namely the (1) *static* and the (2) *dynamic*, with the former so far dominating the field. Hofstede (1980, 1991, 2001) is the chief representative of the static paradigm of culture which uses bipolar cultural dimensions to describe national cultures. Over the past three decades, many other researchers (e.g. Schwartz, Hall, Trompenaar, House's Globe study, etc.) have introduced different dimensions, sometimes similar, sometimes complementary, sometimes different, sometimes overlapping and other times conflicting ones (Maleki/de Jong 2014; Hwang/Matsumoto 2014). Only recently has the theoretical and methodological status quo in this field been challenged by an attempt to bring together the most common denominators of the cultural dimensions, introducing clusters of dimensions (Maleki/de Jong 2014; Minkov/Hofstede 2014). Six assumptions underpin this paradigm: (1) the complex phenomenon of culture is captured through simplifications; (2) nationality or nation state is adopted as the basic unit of analysis; (3) cultural difference is the focus; (4) cultures can be analysed in bipolar cultural dimensions along which each national culture is given a fixed indexing; (5) value is the most crucial component of culture; and (6) culture is conceptualised as stable over time because values are viewed as difficult to change.

However, some (e.g. Fang 2012) believe that the static paradigm is incapable of capturing cultural dynamics in a globalising society since the paradigm ignores within-culture diversity as well as cultural change over time. In addition, the static paradigm has completely missed a duality perspective as culture has the capacity to reconcile the opposite poles of any cultural dimensions. Even authors within the opposing paradigm (e.g. Maleki/de Jong 2014) believe that being a multifaceted phenomenon culture cannot possibly be covered by a small number of linear dimensions and should be treated as a multi-level and multi-layer construct (Čater/Lang/Szabo 2013). As a result, Fang (2012: 26) introduced the Chinese indigenous Yin-Yang approach to achieve a fuller understanding of culture and cross-cultural management using 'three tenets' of duality: holistic ("*a phenomenon cannot be complete unless it has two opposite elements"*), dynamic ("*opposite elements will mutually transform into each other in a process of balancing under various conditions"*) and dialectic ("*two contrary yet interdependent elements exist as opposites in unity to mutually affirm and mutually negate*"). In Hofstede's static paradigm, culture is captured as a situation-free, context-free and time-free phenomenon. This is consistent with the belief in and pursuit of absolute truths that is popular in classical Western logical positivism. In contrast, from the Yin-Yang perspective, there is no absolute truth; truth is embedded in and associated with situation, context and time (Fang 2012).

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The dynamic, holistic and dialectic Yin-Yang approach is especially useful in a globalised world in which cultures interact on a daily basis. According to Fang (2012), such interactions spur cultural learning and change and facilitate the incorporation of opposite cultural values through time, given the context and situation. By doing so, cultures grow and change or, put in the perspective of an 'ocean', the deep currents are stimulated to surface. According to Xu (2013), this is a "negotiated multiculturalism based on a Yin Yang principle of coexistence, mutual reinforcement and paradoxical unity". But, despite this interaction, clash and emerging of new identities, this cultural growth implies, again using the ocean paradigm, that in fact existing, perhaps even very old values are again emerging due to a specific set of circumstances. While globalisation on one hand can be viewed as a process of growth and change it can also be viewed as a process of identifying cultural roots, returning to some long-lost foundations.

What kinds of currents are hidden in the ocean? In this context, proverbs become very important. The English philosopher, statesman, scientist, jurist and author Sir Francis Bacon wrote that »the genius, wit, and the spirit of a nation are discovered by their proverbs«. Proverbs can also be viewed as sets of metaphors. According to Lu (2012), metaphors are pervasive, structured, natural and cognitive. The author continues by claiming that proverbs are short, easy-to-remember statements that encapsulate "words of wisdom", common observations and contain everyday experiences. Further, people normally use them to comment on relationships and social situations/events. Proverbs are significantly culturally based, the results of historical national experience and development, and should always also be explained in the context of a specific nation (Honeck/Temple 1996 in Lu 2012). When devoid of the time, context and situation, proverbs are stripped of their essence.

Since proverbs encapsulate the essence of cultural characteristics, and given the tremendous influence of the cultural environment and social interactions on an individual's set of values (Moore/Asay 2013), we argue that proverbs as codified cultural values thereby indirectly influence individuals' behaviour, including in business interactions. Therefore, proverbs encapsulate societal and consequently personal values. Since values are defined as guiding principles of thought and behaviour (Moore/Asay 2013), we can say that proverbs are values that guide our actions, including the actions of a manager, representing his leadership style.

Since culture is reflected in proverbs and leadership is also at least partly explained by culture (Grisham 2006), proverbs as metaphors for everyday wisdoms can also be linked to leadership styles. But already Burns (1978) stated that »Leadership is one of the most observed and least understood phenomena on earth«, as clearly reflected in the many leadership definitions available. Namely, already in 1990 almost 5,000 studies of the leadership concept had

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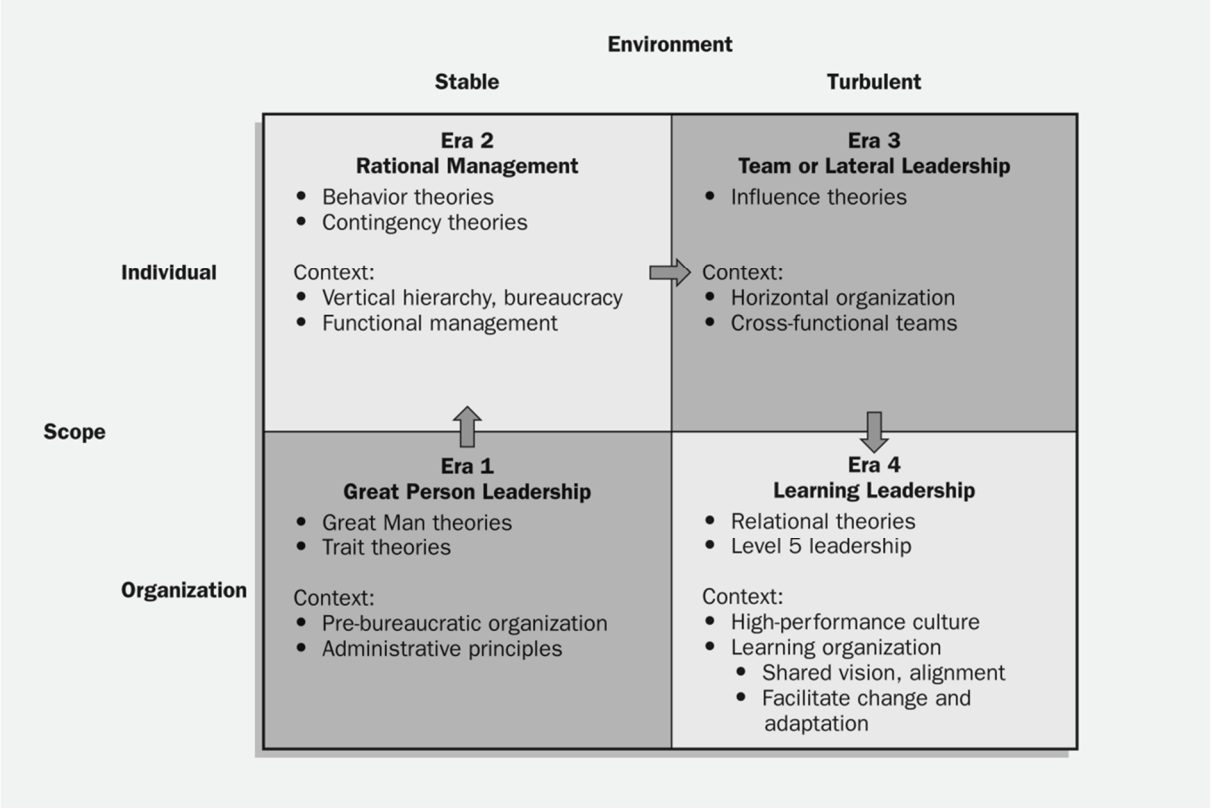
been identified by Bass and Stoghill (1990), pointing to great diversity in the literature.

The various leadership theories can be categorised in six basic groups – Great Man theories, Trait theories, Behaviour theories, Contingency theories, Influence theories, and Relational theories. Figure 1 provides a framework for examining the evolution of leadership from the early Great Man theories through to today's relational theories.

Figure 1: A model of leadership evolution (Daft 2008: 22)



The early research on leadership presented above has produced a lot of absolute leadership styles – e.g. autocratic (authoritarian/authoritative), democratic, laissez-faire, coercive, paternalistic, charismatic, transactional and transformational – most of which tend to be attributed to different cultures.

In the context of this research, which focuses on how culture is reflected in management style in different contexts, situations and time using proverbs, it is especially the contingency theories that are relevant. The idea behind contingency theories is that leaders can analyse their situation and tailor their behaviour to improve their leadership effectiveness. Assuming that a leader can properly diagnose a situation and muster the flexibility to behave according to the appropriate style, successful outcomes are highly likely. Major situational variables are the characteristics of followers, characteristics of the work environment and follower tasks, and the external environment, including the culture of the environ-

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ment one works in. This may or may not coincide with one's 'native' culture. Contingency theories, sometimes called situational theories, emphasise that leadership cannot be understood in a vacuum separate from various elements of the group or organisational situation (Daft 2008), which also coincides well with the notion of the 'ocean approach' to culture. They both rely on the dynamic approach, stressing the time, context and situation.

Several models of situational leadership have been developed – the contingency model developed by Fiedler and his associates (1954, 1958, 1967), the situational theory of Hersey and Blanchard (1982), path-goal theory, the Vroom-Jago (1988) model of decision participation, and the substitutes for leadership concept. Two basic leadership behaviours that can be adjusted to address various contingencies are task behaviour and relationship behaviour. Research has identified these two meta-categories, or broadly defined behaviour categories, as applicable to leadership in a variety of situations and time periods. A leader can adapt their style to be high or low on both task and relationship behaviour. Both Fiedler's contingency model and Hersey and Blanchard's situational theory use these meta-categories of leadership behaviour but apply them based on different sets of contingencies (Daft 2008).

Research also shows there is quite a wide variety of leadership styles and that these are related to culture. For example, 'leadership' in most of North America is usually based on assumptions of individualism as opposed to collectivism, rationality rather than ascetics, hedonistic rather than altruistic motivation, centrality of work, and democratic value orientation (Ardichvili/Kuchinke 2002). Yet cultures other than the North American one bring different assumptions. Elenkov (1997), for example, clearly demonstrates that the American assumption that staff should participate in managerial decisions and that staff may negotiate with its leadership could not succeed in the Russian culture, where there is great emotional distance, large possession of power distinctions between leadership and staff, and a strong collective mentality. In Russian culture, authoritarian leadership is the prevailingly successful type. As Smith (2012) states, Western leadership researchers have most frequently stressed the efficacy of charismatic or transformational leader behaviours.

However, the 61-nation, cross-national survey of leadership by House et al. (2004) showed that managers in China and other Confucian-Asian nations rated charismatic leadership less highly than those from many other parts of the world. In a similar way, a meta-analysis by Leong and Fischer (2011) of studies that had used Bass' (1997) measure of transformational leadership pointed to lower scores for respondents from Confucian-Asian nations (Smith 2012).

Within the context of 'culturally based' management styles, values should also be mentioned. Values can be understood in essence as behaviour "bound to emotions of people and as such have motivational power, representing desired

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goals which people want to attain" (Remišova/Lašakova/Krzykala-Schaefer 2013: 518). Thus, values serve as criteria for managerial decision-making. People of different cultures perceive and respond differently to various leadership attributes (Hofstede 1991, 2001; House/Hanges/Javidan/Dorfman/Gupta 2004).

There are important reasons to examine the impact of culture on leadership (House/Javidan/Hanges/Dorfman 2002): "There is a need for leadership and organizational theories that transcend cultures to understand what works and what does not work in different cultural settings (Triandis 1993). Further, a focus on cross-cultural issues can help researchers uncover new relationships by forcing investigators to include a much broader range of variables often not considered in contemporary leadership theories, such as the importance of religion, language, ethnic background, history, or political systems (Dorfman 1996)."

We recap this theoretical discussion by building our main hypothesis. In a globalised world, cultures interact. In the context of the Yin-Yang approach to cultural studies, this dynamic context of situations changing in time on one hand cause a change in cultures. On the other hand, from a managerial perspective, dealing in such an environment causes the management to adjust. To observe these reactions and adaptions to changes in context/situation/time, proverbs as indicators of national culture can be used. To consider this process of adaptation and change, we examine carefully the behaviour of one culture (Slovenian) in two different cultural environments (China and the rest) by observing leadership styles through proverbs. In sum, we hypothesise as follows:

> *H_1: Leadership styles are influenced by cultural values that are reflected through proverbs.*

Slovenian culture in the Yin-Yang perspective

Empirical data for Slovenia reveal that the culture has changed in the past few decades, primarily due to the transition of the economic system – from socialism to capitalism. While Hofstede (1980) stresses the high power distance, collectivistic spirit and femininity coupled with high uncertainty avoidance, the most recent research reveals that Slovenian culture has today shifted significantly towards individualism and low power distance (Jazbec 2005). These might be attributed to changes in the country during its period of transition from communist society to a market-based economy. GLOBE study data reveal that managers are much more future and performance oriented, but still value the cultural heritage of family and group cohesion, which also transcends in team-oriented leadership (Bakacsi/Takacs/Karacsonyi/Imrek 2002). We believe that Slovenia (as a representative of Eastern Europe) underwent a similar transformation to the fast-growing and changing Chinese society, where new culture evaluation models were born that opposed traditional models from the West.

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We examine the characteristics of Slovenian culture using Fang's (2012) Yin-Yang approach, which identifies paradoxical, contradicting and coexisting proverbs using its holistic, dynamic and dialectic paradigm. Following Fang (2012), the opposing cultural characteristics in each historical moment melt dialectically into a harmonious unit. Two elements of this cultural hypothesis are to be noted. First, at each moment a set of opposing (antithetic in dialectical theory) values co-habitate but, second, a specific historical moment caused every individual to choose the most appropriate. The objective historical setting similar for the vast majority of the population at every point in time causes a specific cultural vector to be dominant.

Using this approach, we illustrate the culture and examine the leadership styles via a number of proverbs that capture the most noted characteristics of Slovenian people already recognised by Hofstede (1980) and Jazbec (2005). There is not much doubt that the national culture also significantly impacts the business culture and partially in turn co-determines nations' economic success (Hofstede 2001; Khakhar/Rammal 2013).

Recently, an issue of Journal of East European Management Studies (Vol. 18, No. 4; 2013) was dedicated to research on leadership in the context of Central and Eastern European countries. The researchers found that East European cultures, similarly to Germanic ones, share a high level of the autonomous behaviour of leaders and particularly differ with respect to perceived leadership (Čater/Lang/Szabo 2013). It seems that these perceptions are more influenced by country of origin than by managers' perceptions, supporting the presumption that some cultural dimensions in the region show a trend toward harmonisation (Catana/Pučko/Krzykala-Schaefer 2013). If leaders in Central and Eastern European countries were once known for their traditional or conservative leadership styles, a recent study shows that current managers rank participative leadership more highly than future managers (Lang/Szabo/Catana/Konečna/Skalova 2013). In sum, the lack of a homogenous Central and Eastern European cluster of values (Borgulya/Hahn 2008) makes us assume that Slovenia as one of the countries in the region may be unique with respect to leadership styles.

We presume that the current Slovenian culture marked by uncertainty avoidance, feminism and to some extent also individualism and low(er) power distance can be recognised in the prevailing proverbs in use today. Further, we claim this is also reflected in the leadership styles (e.g. charismatic, laissez faire, contingent reward, transformational etc.) that prevail in Slovenian companies. Although the GLOBE study found that a few leadership traits and behaviour were culturally bound (e.g. cunning, sensitive, evasive), while others were universal (e.g. team-oriented, charismatic), the word "leadership" has a different meaning in different cultures. If leaders are usually admired and respected in most Anglo-Saxon countries (e.g. UK, Australia, USA), the same expression is connected to distrust and fear of power in many other countries (e.g. Mexico,

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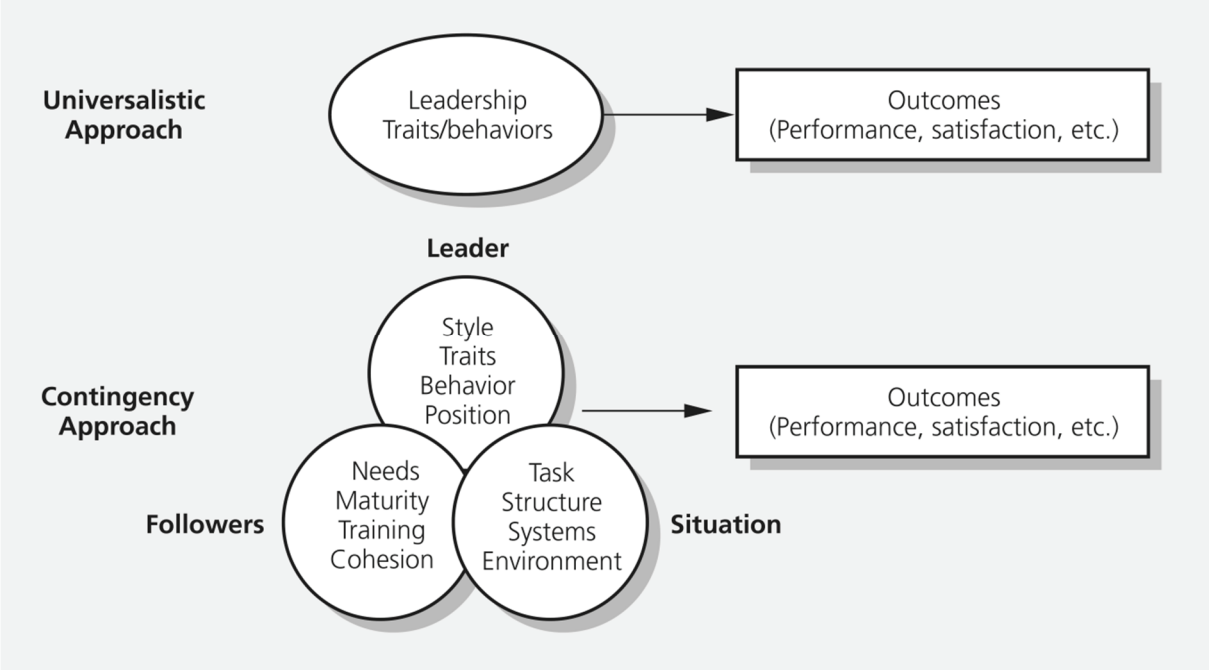
Egypt, Romania). More specifically, leadership will differ regarding whether a society is individualistic (where leadership refers to a single person who is a visionary in society) or collectivist (where leadership is closely related to group actions) and hierarchical (where leaders are separated from their followers) or egalitarian (where leaders are more approachable) (Sanchez-Runde/Nardon/Steers 2011). These speculations require further testing, especially in a relatively open business culture.

Dynamic leadership defined

Two basic leadership behaviours or meta-categories have been identified within the contingency leadership theories research – task behaviour and relationship behaviour. As evident from Figure 2, scholars subscribing to contingency leadership theories (Daft 2008) claim that the contingencies most important to leadership are the situation and the followers (the two meta-categories).

Figure 2: Comparing the universalistic and contingency approaches to leadership (Daft 2008: 64)



Of all the approaches to leadership presented above, we find the contingency approach most suitable for the modern business world, as well as most in line with Fang's Yin Yang dynamic paradigm of culture (Daft 2008: 81): "Contingency means that one thing depends on other things, and for a leader to be effective there must be an appropriate fit between the leader's behaviour and style and the conditions in the situation. A leadership style that works in one situation might not work in another situation. There is no one best way of leadership".

However, in accordance with the Yin-Yang perspective, we see the task/relationship behaviour dichotomy as being too restrictive. As truth is em-

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bedded in and associated with situation, context and time (Fang 2012), we should also see the leadership style as dependent on the organisational (situation), national (context) and historical (time) perspectives of culture. This approach builds on the contingency approach, but goes well beyond organisational culture and the situational leadership theory. To differentiate it from the contingency approach, we call this the *dynamic* leadership style (Figure 3).

Figure 3: The dynamic leadership style

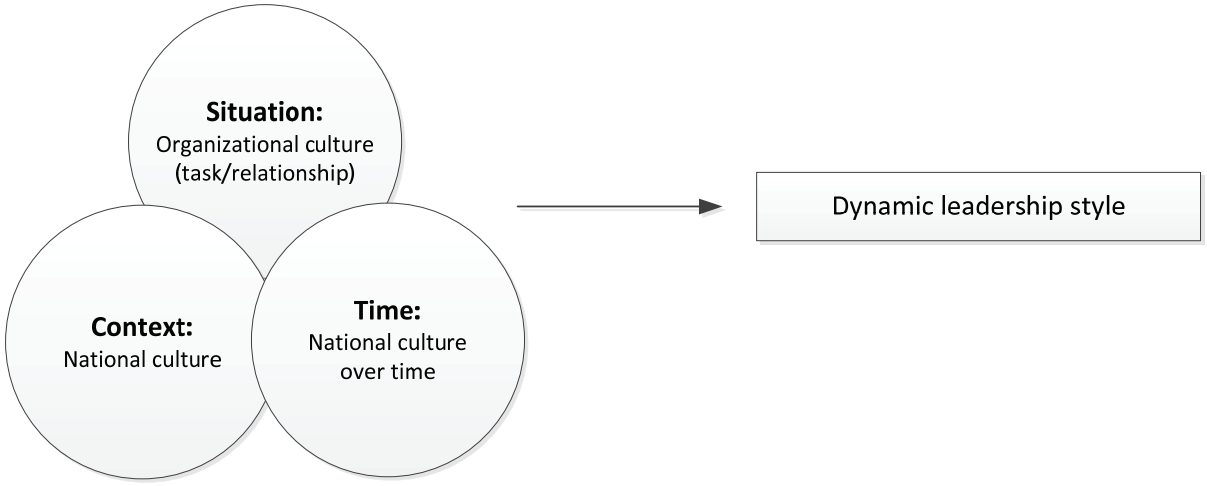

Figure 3 shows that the traditional contingency/situational theories of leadership embrace only one of our three constituents of our dynamic approach to leadership. The situation in the organisation is naturally a very important factor in the process of forming or selecting the most appropriate leadership style. However, this view is too narrow in our opinion. We should also look at the context, i.e. the specifics of the national culture (e.g. Hofstede's four cultural dimensions). More importantly, it is also necessary to take a national culture's development over time (dynamic paradigm) into account.

Leadership styles and personality traits

Recently, many studies have emerged (e.g. Day/Antonakis 2012; de Vries 2012; Judge/Bono/Ilies/Gerhardt 2002; de Hoogh/den Hartog/Koopman 2005) that used personality traits, defined as "relatively enduring and cross-situational consistent sets of behaviors" (de Vries 2012), to predict leadership styles. While it has been confirmed that personality plays an important role in leader emergence and effectiveness, the results of studies testing the relationship between leadership styles and personality traits have been equivocal. For instance, extraversion was found to be the strongest and most consistent predictor of transformational leadership (Bono/Judge 2004), honesty-humility on ethical leadership, agreeableness on supportive leadership, and conscientiousness on task-oriented leadership (de Vries 2012). However, there is strong evidence that the relationship between (charismatic and transactional) leadership and personality traits is strong,

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particularly in dynamic contexts (de Hoogh/den Hartog/Koopman 2005). Some studies (e.g. de Vries/Roe/Taillieu 2002) even tested the opposite relationship of how leadership impacts the individual's outcomes, but the support for this hypothesis was very weak, only giving support to work stress and conflict, but not any personality traits. Moreover, attempts have also been made to link personality and values (e.g. Yik/Tang 1996) and all personality dimensions were related to the value types either alone or in combination with openness to experience as being most frequently related to other dimensions. Given the mixed findings in previous research and evidence that the dynamic environment plays a significant role in the investigated relationship (e.g. de Vries 2012; de Hoogh/den Hartog/Koopman 2005), the following hypotheses were developed:

H_2: Cultural values have an influence on leaders' personality traits.

H_3: Personality traits influence cultural values at the leader's individual level.

H_4: Personality traits impact the choice of a leadership style.

Figure 4: A conceptual model

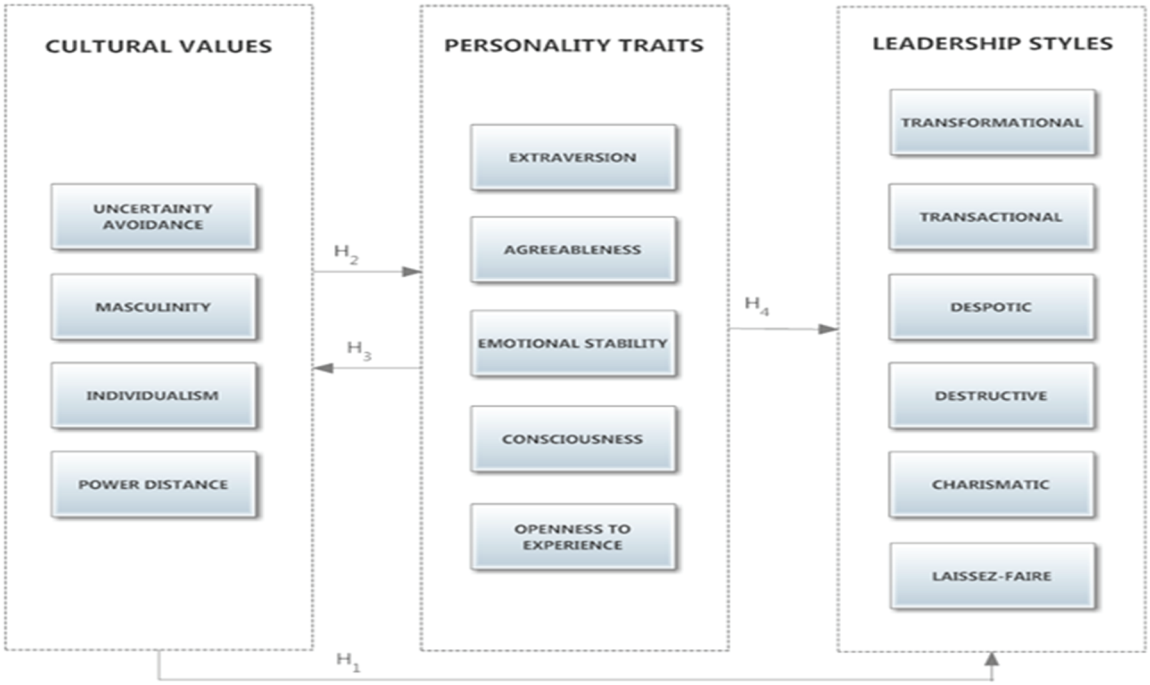

Figure 4 depicts the framework for a conceptual model, hypothesising the relationships between three focal constructs of this research: cultural values (measured through proverbs), personality traits, and leadership styles.

Sampling and methodology

The purpose of the paper is to examine Slovenian business culture and leadership in the context of proverbs. The research is based on two approaches:

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1. a (theoretical) literature survey of a vast number of proverbs in the existing literature (mostly Slovenian literature), analysis of the etymology of proverbs, their systematisation and categorisation in different cultural vectors; and
2. an empirical analysis, comprising a survey among several Slovenian businessmen and businesswomen to capture their view of the dominant cultural vector through proverbs and connections between proverbs and leadership styles.

To 'describe' the culture, we relied on Hofstede's (2001) cultural dimensions, but we captured these dimensions with proverbs. First, proverbs were identified at both extremes of Hofstede's initial four cultural dimensions. Thus, we can claim that proverbs were set in a paradoxical relationship to each other. Proverbs were selected based on the focus group selection and peer-academic evaluation. According to the Hofstede (2001) research, Slovenia scored quite high in power distance (71, scale 0–100), where we recognised the following proverbs: a) He who mixes himself in the bran risks being eaten by the pigs (*Slo. Kdor se med otrobe meša, ga svinje požro*); b) It is certain death if a pigeon goes among the eagles (*Slo. Če golob med orle zaide, gotovo smrt najde*); c) The sword does not cut off obedient heads (*Slo. Pokornih glav sablja ne seka*). On the low power distance aspect, we acknowledged the following two proverbs: a) Practice makes perfect (*Slo. Vaja dela mojstra*); and b) Every beggar can become an emperor, if only the people elect him (*Slo. Cesar lahko postane vsak berač, če ga le ljudstvo izvoli*). In terms of individualism, Slovenia scored low (27, scale 0–100), where we identified the following proverbs: a) It takes two for happiness (*Slo. Za srečo sta potrebna dva*); Like a tree cannot live without roots, a man cannot go without company/society (*Slo. Kot ne more drevo živeti brez korenin, ne more človek brez družbe*). On the other extreme of this cultural dimension we found the following proverbs: a) Help yourself and God will help you (*Slo. Pomagaj si am in bog ti bo pomagal*); b) Everyone is the maker of his own luck/fortune (*Slo. Vsak je svoje sreče kovač*); c) Where there are more millers, there is less flour (*Slo. Če je več mlinarjev, je manj moke*). Slovenia also scored quite low in masculinity (19, scale 0–100), where we may observe the following proverbs: a) The wife holds three corners of the house, and even helps her husband with the fourth one (*Slo. Žena hiši drži tri ogle in še pri četrtem pomaga*); b) Men build houses, women create homes (*Slo. Možje gradijo hiše, žene ustvarjajo dom*); c) Motherly love never grows old (*Slo. Materinska ljubezen ne stara*). On the high masculinity extreme, we recognised the following two proverbs: a) Even the devil is afraid of a woman (*Slo. Babe se še hudič boji*); b) A poor house where the hens sing and the roosters are silent (*Slo. Uboga hiša, kjer koklje pojejo in petelini molčijo*). Last but not least, measurements for Slovenia's uncertainty avoidance index were high (88, scale 0–100), where we acknowledge the following proverbs: a) Better a sparrow in the hand than a dove

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on the roof (*Slo. Bolje vrabec v roki kot golob na strehi*); b) He who aims high, falls low (*Slo. Kdor visoko cilja, nizko pade*); c) It is too late to learn how to swim after you fall in the water (*Slo. Ko padeš v vodo, je prepozno, da bi se učil plavati*). At the opposite extreme, we may find: a) He who does not take risk, has little gain (*Slo. Kdor ne tvega, ne dobi*); and b) You have to strike while the iron is hot (*Slo. Kuj železo dokler je vroče*).

Second, we used an online survey with a structured questionnaire as a method to collect data from Slovenian managers on their most common leadership styles, personality traits and their opinion concerning in which situation (e.g. normal working conditions, at the time of a crisis, in a cross-cultural environment, under time pressure, when work is important etc.) the above proverbs describe their leadership style. We speculate that in different working conditions not only will different leadership styles be used, but also different values and personality traits will rise to the surface. It is important to note that managers self-evaluated their behaviour, thus the interpretation is limited by a self-evaluation bias. In other words, the managers might have given overly positive self-reports due to self-protection or avoidance tendencies (Gramzow/Elliot/Asher/McGregor 2003), which was reduced by ensuring the survey participants were provided with adequate information prior to the survey about the study's scope and goals, as suggested by Mann (1997).

a) *Personality traits* were measured in the management literature by various models, from the Big Five leader traits/Five-Factor personality model (extraversion, agreeableness, emotional stability, consciousness, openness to experience; e.g. Goldberg 1990; Bono/Judge 2004) to a revised version in the form of NEO-PI-R (neo personality inventory; Costa/McCrae 1992), and HEXACO-PI-R (Ashton/Lee 2008; de Vries 2012) where the honesty-humility dimension was added. As the first scale was most commonly applied in the cross-cultural management literature, we employed the Big Five leader traits model. However, instead of the original 240-item scale (Goldberg 1990), we used the so-called 40-item mini-marker set developed by Saucier (1994). After conducting confirmatory and exploratory factor analysis on our data, we propose an even shorter version with 24 items (see the reliability analysis in Table 1).

b) *Leadership styles* scales are even more diverse, thus in our selection process we wanted to identify positive (e.g. charismatic, transformational) and negative (e.g. transactional as opposed to transformational from the viewpoint of motivation theory, despotic, destructive, laissez-faire) aspects of leadership. We adapted the scales for the transformational (Rafferty/Griffin 2004), transactional (Bycio/Hacket/Allen 1995), despotic (de Hoogh/den Hartog 2008), destructive (Shaw/Erickson/Harvey 2011), charismatic (Bycio/Hacket/Allen 1995) and laissez-faire (Hinkin/Schriesheim 2008) leadership styles.

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Table 1: Personality traits and leadership styles' scales reliability test

Author	Name of the scale	Original study α	Our study α
BIG FIVE LEADER TRAITS			
Saucier, 1994	Extraversion	0.85	0.67
	Agreeableness	0.85	0.69
	Emotional stability	0.76	0.61
	Consciousness	0.86	0.75
	Openness to experience	0.78	0.68
LEADERSHIP STYLES			
Rafferty & Griffin, 2004	Transformational	0.82	0.67
Bycio, Hacket & Allen, 1995	Transactional	0.71	0.64
de Hoogh & den Hartog, 2008	Despotic	0.82	0.71
Shaw et al., 2011	Destructive	0.85	0.65
Bycio, Hacket & Allen, 1995	Charismatic	0.97	0.73
Hinkin & Schrieshem, 2008	Laissez-faire	0.69	0.76

The structured questionnaire was back-translated and sent out electronically with two reminders that followed in the period between August and September 2013. Based on the SloExport database 2013, 840 Slovenian managers were contacted and 429 responded, of whom 226 had not completed the questionnaire, leaving 202 respondents as the final sample size (24% effective response rate). The sample consisted of 43% males and 57% females, where 20% were aged between 21 and 30 years, 27% between 31 and 40 years, 23% between 41 and 50 years, 25% between 51 and 60 years and 5% above 61 years. The majority has a university degree or Bologna master's (46%), while the rest has finished a first-level bachelor (18%), high school (26%) or master's/PhD (10%). The highest number of respondents (43%) is part of middle management, 23% are members of the board of directors, 19% are CEOs and the remainder have lower managerial responsibilities or work as project managers. On average, the respondent managers have 39 subordinates, while their average period of working in the current position is 10.5 years, meaning the majority has vast experience with leadership in a cross-cultural context. In terms of the companies that employ them, 61% primarily serve the B2C market, the rest the B2B market, while 39% of them are small companies (up to 50 employees), 35% medium-sized companies (50–250 employees) and the remaining 27% are large companies. When comparing companies which work with the Chinese market (63 companies in the sample) with those that do not (139 companies in the sample), the samples chiefly differ in company size (on average, companies that work with the Chinese are larger +), gender (more males in the sample work with Chinese) and average number of subordinates (51 in the subsample working with Chinese compared to 32 in the other subsample).

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Results

This section provides key results of the survey. First, paradoxical proverbs in relation to variuos working conditions are discussed with the help of descriptive analysis. Second, the hypothesised relationships between cultural values, personality traits and leadership styles are assessed through regression analysis.

Paradoxical proverbs in Slovenian culture

Today, the drive for success and ambition can well be described by the proverb "Practice makes perfect". Despite the less obvious collectivistic and power distance vectors, the importance of family and traditional values is reflected in the continuing dominance of the femininity dimension, best illustrated by the well-known proverb "The wife supports three corners of the house and even helps the husband with the fourth one". Something similar holds for the avoidance of uncertainty, which again may be illustrated by the well-known proverb "Better a sparrow in the hand than a dove on the roof (English equivalent: A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush)" or "Who aims high, falls low". However, this is a static view in line with the Western view on culture.

When assessing the paradoxical nature of proverbs in Slovenian culture, we wanted to measure them in a different context, situation and time, which we evaluated through a description of various working conditions. On average, 49% of the respondents usually work under time pressure, 76% are able to allocate work obligations over time, 52% have many contacts with co-workers from another cultural environment and 60% devote most of their working time to very important tasks. There are differences between two subsamples (not/working with Chinese). We observe that managers engaged with Chinese companies/partners (either through exports or a company's own operations on the Chinese market), work more under time pressure, are more able to allocate work obligations and deal much more with very important tasks for most of their working time.

Managers were asked in which context, situation and time the selected proverbs representing one extreme of a cultural variable (without telling which part of the cultural extreme they belong to) describe their leadership style. The results are presented in Table 2, where light-grey colour was used to mark the condition in which the proverb applies the most, and black was used where the proverb epitomises the leadership style the least. First, when looking at the results for uncertainty avoidance, we observe that in normal working conditions managers do not tend to avoid uncertainty. In contrast, their leadership style at the time of a crisis is predominated by uncertainty avoidance, while in most other situations this type of leadership style does not apply. When looking from the masculinity perspective, Slovenian managers tend to apply feminine values (e.g. family, social responsibility etc.) in normal working conditions, but stress more masculine values (e.g. success, career etc.) when work is very important or not at all in any

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Table 2: The application of proverbs to managers' leadership styles under various conditions measured by frequency of use (in %)

		in normal working conditions	under time pressure	when work is very important	when working with co-workers from other cultures	at the time of a crisis	this proverb does not describe my leadership style in any situation
UA +	Better a sparrow in the hand than a dove on the roof.	5.20	22.50	11.60	**0.60**	**34.10**	26.00
UA -	You have to strike while the iron is hot.	**44.30**	**4.00**	30.70	6.80	8.00	6.30
UA +	He who aims high, falls low.	22.70	6.70	**2.50**	4.90	11.00	**52.10**
UA -	He who does not take risk, has little gain.	**33.70**	12.40	14.20	**4.10**	18.30	17.20
UA +	It is too late to learn how to swim after you fall in the water.	18.20	12.60	10.70	**3.10**	12.60	**42.80**
MAS -	The wife holds three corners of the house, and even helps her husband with the fourth one.	**37.80**	10.80	14.90	**1.40**	2.70	32.40
MAS +	Even the devil is afraid of a woman.	5.80	14.50	7.20	**1.40**	7.20	**63.80**
MAS -	Men build houses, women create homes.	**53.80**	1.40	8.30	2.80	2.80	31.00
MAS +	A poor house where the hens sing and the roosters are silent.	21.10	6.00	6.80	6.00	**4.50**	**55.60**
MAS -	Motherly love never grows old.	**50.00**	**2.30**	10.00	3.80	6.90	26.90
IND +	Everyone is the maker of his own luck (fortune).	**68.10**	7.20	13.00	**2.20**	3.60	5.80
IND -	It takes two for happiness.	**51.60**	5.50	11.70	9.40	3.80	18.00
IND +	Help yourself and God will help you.	**39.70**	15.30	**5.30**	3.80	16.80	19.10
IND -	Like a tree cannot live without roots, a man cannot go without company/society.	**54.10**	**3.80**	15.00	13.50	4.50	9.00
IND +	Where there are more millers, there is less flour.	**27.90**	11.60	10.90	**5.40**	24.00	20.20
PDI +	The sword does not cut off obedient heads.	22.20	6.00	11.10	**3.40**	10.30	**47.00**
PDI -	Practice makes perfect.	**69.40**	9.70	11.20	3.70	**3.00**	**3.00**
PDI +	He who mixes himself in the bran risks being eaten by the pigs.	15.30	8.50	8.50	**5.90**	24.60	**37.30**
PDI -	Every beggar can become an emperor, if only the people elect him.	**33.00**	**4.30**	13.90	7.80	11.30	29.60
PDI +	It is certain death if a pigeon goes among the eagles.	17.70	11.50	7.10	**5.30**	17.70	**40.70**

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other situation. The strongest confirmation of the Yin-Yang approach to the study of culture is visible when examining the results for the dimension of individualism. The results confirm a similar probability that managers apply highly individualistic and highly collectivistic leadership styles in normal working conditions. Finally, managers do not stress a high power distance in normal working conditions, but only at the time of a crisis and sometimes when work is very important. Another interesting finding is that, when working with co-workers from other cultures, the managers do not apply extreme leadership styles along the four investigated dimensions.

In addition, we tested for a direct relationship between Slovenian managers' perception of proverbs and various leadership styles (here we only report statistically significant differences with $\alpha \leq 0.05$). Those managers who perceive they highly use the transformational leadership style are more risk takers than the others (UA3 – He who aims high, falls low). The transactional leadership style is associated with masculine values (M4 – A poor house where the hens sing and the roosters are silent). Managers with a despotic leadership style tend to be more individualistic than collectivistic (I3 – Help yourself and God will help you). Finally, a destructive leadership style is present in the working environment where the power distance is low (PD1 – The sword does not cut off obedient heads).

The link between cultural values, personality traits and leadership styles

The research acknowledged the differences between companies that do business with Chinese and those that do not in terms of certain personality traits and leadership styles. Among all six leadership styles investigated in the research, differences were only found in charismatic leadership (companies which do business with Chinese: $\mu = 3.56$, s.d. = 0.5251; opposed to those without any Chinese relations: $\mu = 3.77$, s.d. = 0.5340). It seems that the charismatic leadership style is utilised more when doing business domestically or with other cultures, except Chinese. Further, managers who do business with Chinese perceive themselves as more disorganised, more philosophical, less intellectual and less envious than their colleagues who do not work with Chinese.

When looking at the connection between cultural characteristics (we must note that for this purpose proverbs were recoded where the proverbs were set in the opposite direction and grouped together in four dimensions according to Hofstede's typology and used as an independent variable in the above model) and personality traits, emotional stability as a personality trait has a strong positive relation to masculinity, individualism and power distance. The evaluation of the opposite relationships revealed positive relations only between masculinity and emotional stability. When looking at *positive leadership styles (transformational, charismatic)*, the cultural characteristics have no impact, while among all personal traits extraversion strongly positively relates to both leadership styles.

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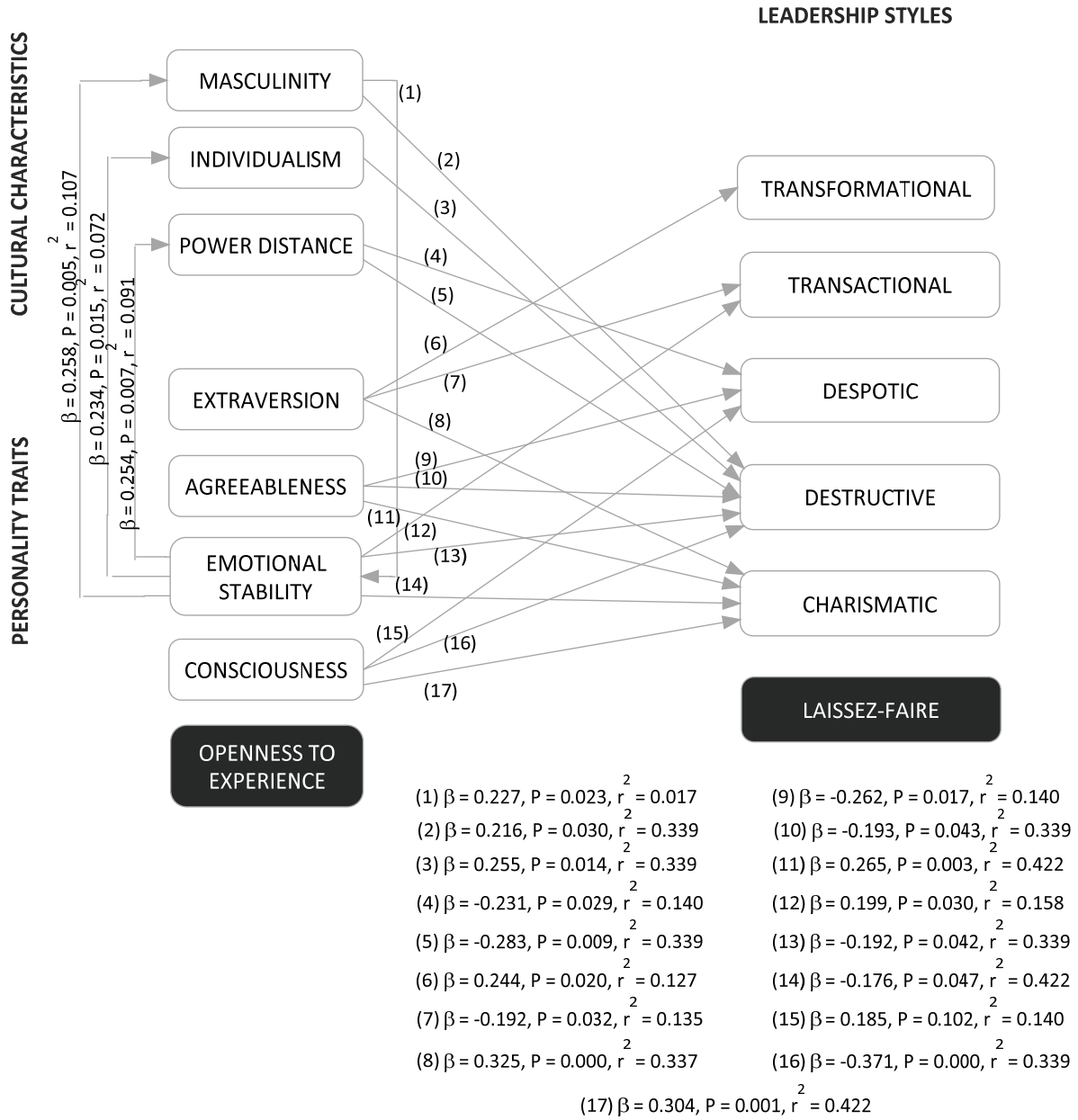
The charismatic leadership style is most connected to personality traits among all the styles: extraversion, agreeableness and consciousness have a positive relation to it and emotional stability a negative relation. Among the negative leadership styles, the destructive style plays the most important role in the model. It seems that masculinity and individualism have a positive relationship with the destructive style and a negative one with power distance, while among the personality traits agreeableness, emotional stability and consciousness negatively impact the destructive leadership style. The openness to experience personality trait and the laissez-faire leadership style do not have any relations with any variable in the model. See Figures 4 and 5 for a more detailed presentation of the investigated relationships.

Figure 5: The relationship between cultural values, personality traits and leadership styles measured through regression



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Research implications and contributions

The research offers several original contributions to the literature. First, the practical application of the Fang (2012) dialectic approach to the business culture of Slovenia is the first of its kind. Second, the research led to a systematisation of proverbs illustrating each of Hofstede's well-known dimensions, thereby building a bridge between two seemingly very different approaches (Eastern Yin-Yang school vs. the Hofstede methodology). Third, this study corresponds to a call to move beyond Western established models of leadership and provide cultural characteristics (originally stemming in the Chinese Yin-Yang philosophy) of the differences in global management. Hofstede's cultural typology has helped segment leadership styles across cultures. Yet, unlike in his study and those of other scholars our contribution to the field is that, by using paradoxical proverbs, we introduce a more dynamic understanding of leadership styles in a cultural context.

The research findings were surprising in two ways. First, cultural values only have an impact on the use of negative leadership styles, which might imply that charisma, vision, inspirational communication and intellectual stimulation are universal around the world, confirming some findings of the GLOBE study. Second, openness to experience and laissez-faire did not play a part in the model. Laissez-faire or the absence of leadership proved to be an inefficient way to deal with a crisis, although we may at least expect it is connected to emotional stability. We speculate that the higher the emotions in relationships, the higher the possibility of negative conflicts, which at least some managers may in turn tend to avoid. The absence of openness to experience may relate to the nature of the average Slovenian manager, who operates in a relatively closed small market with few incentives to disseminate knowledge. The Slovenian manager works in an environment influenced by new Western trends and still under the burden of a socialist history, where they need to balance the company strategy depending on various external factors. This balance is well evident in the case where individualism is applied to leadership style. The research found that a manager will apply both collectivistic and individualistic leadership yet in different situations, at the same time stressing the importance of team work and also personal career goals. In sum, the art of a dynamic leadership style lies in its balance as is a Yin-Yang concept of balance in life.

The research was somewhat limited by the sample size and measurement issues. The results comparing Slovenian and Chinese culture are constrained by the empirical data. Although the sample is relatively large and representative of the Slovenian manager population, the nature of study may lead us to collect data from both sides, Slovenian and Chinese, given the goal was also to assess how leadership styles differ when doing business with Chinese. Slovenian and Chinese share a common history (socialism, a closed market, strong relationships during the Cold War) and their cultures might thus not be as different as they

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seem to be presented in Western literature. We believe that, by being deeply rooted in Slovenian culture itself, proverbs may show that leadership styles cannot be described as black *or* white but black *and* white, depending on the situation, context and time; an explanation stemming from the Chinese Yin-Yang perception of culture. In addition, the strength of business relationships may vary dramatically when comparing companies that are just one of many suppliers/buyers to being the strongest business partner or that even have their own operations in China. Thus, future research might overcome this limitation by studying the strength of relationship ties with Chinese counterparts. Measurement is the second limitation. We asked managers to assess their own personal characteristics and their own leadership style they used, which raises a possible self-perception bias. This may be avoided in the future by asking subordinates to assess their manager's leadership style, combining the results from both angles.

Some researchers (e.g. Derr/Roussillon/Bournois 2002) argue that leadership development should be approached from a cross-cultural perspective, whereas others (e.g. Beechler/Javidan 2007; Kessler/Wong-MingJi 2009; Lane/Maznevski/Mendenhall/McNett 2004) talk about global leadership as the strategic imperative. It seems that the sooner we understand there is no single universal leadership style appropriate for all contexts, times and situations, the better we can do our job as leaders. Or, as noted by Goleman (2000) in his famous HBR article: "New research suggests that the most effective executives use a collection of distinct leadership styles – each in the right measure, at just the right time. Such flexibility is tough to put into action, but it pays off in performance. And better yet, it can be learned".

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