

## **Integrating stakeholders' multiple intelligences into the leadership development of a cross-cultural entity: Evidence from the CI Ljubljana\***

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*This paper presents the first qualitative research study of the multiple intelligences of Chinese and Slovenian stakeholders at the Confucius Institute Ljubljana. Our research question is: "How can the integration of multiple intelligences into leadership development help in accomplishing the mission of CI LJ?" According to a contemporary leadership development literature review, sustainable leadership development – based on the theory of multiple intelligences – is more appropriate for social and environmental needs than a focused leader development. The findings demonstrate that individual differences influence cultural orientation and that management needs to integrate the individual, organisational, social and environmental developmental components through sustainable leadership development.*

*Dieser Artikel legt die erste qualitative Studie über die multiplen Intelligenzen von chinesischen und slowenischen Stakeholdern des Konfuzius-Instituts Ljubljana vor. Unsere Forschungsfrage ist: „Wie kann die Integration der multiplen Intelligenzen in die Führungsentwicklung die Zielerreichung des KI LJ unterstützen?“ Gemäß einem aktuellen Literaturüberblick ist eine nachhaltige Führungsentwicklung – basierend auf der Theorie der multiplen Intelligenzen – besser für die sozialen und umweltbedingten Anforderungen geeignet als eine eher individual-zentrierte Führungsentwicklung. Die Ergebnisse zeigen, dass individuelle Unterschiede die kulturelle Orientierung beeinflussen und dass das Management die individuellen, organisatorischen, sozialen und umweltbedingten Entwicklungskomponenten durch nachhaltige Führungsentwicklung integrieren muss.*

*Key words: national culture, leadership development, sustainability, multiple intelligences, diversity (JEL: M1; M12)*

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## 1. Introduction

Future leadership development in the new global economy must consider the national culture, background and personalities of potential leaders as significant variables in training techniques, methods and philosophies (Derr et al. 2002). Recent economic and financial crises, austerity, unemployment, and the emergence of many economic, social and environmental protest movements around the world have put the vast questions about the vision of a better world back on the agenda. Leaders of our private and especially public organisations are dealing – and even more so will be dealing – with these ever more important questions in relation to corporate social responsibility (Peterlin et al. 2011; Remišová/Búciová 2012) in the future. But are our leaders equipped (Fry/Kruger 2009) with the appropriate knowledge and competencies (Mühlbacher et al. 2011) to be able to provide proper responses (Hargett/Williams 2009) to these crucial issues with regard to the optimal economic (and consequently political) system and general organisation of our society? Further, should we be developing our future leaders in the same way across the world (Carroll et al. 2008) or do culture-specific developmental characteristics exist (Omerzel et al. 2011)?

We agree with Oldham and Hackman (2010:6), who state that *“in normal science, research evidence gradually corrects and elaborates existing conceptual models, new and improved research methods are developed, and new generations of researchers try out fresh approaches to understanding the phenomena being investigated. Eventually, of course, a wholly new theory will appear to replace that which had previously guided scientific work. But the phenomena themselves stay the same”*. Therefore, we undertook research guided by the theory of multiple intelligences and conceptualised a novel model that we operationalised by implementing the MIDAS Profile (Shearer 1996) in a reflective qualitative study.

To the best of our knowledge, no research has so far been done to compare the Slovenian and Chinese perspectives on leadership development in a cross-cultural entity. The novelty of our paper lies in its presentation of the leadership development currently underway at one of the only five business-oriented Confucius Institutes (CIs) in the world. Existing leadership development theory (Yukl 2002; Zaccaro/Horn 2003) is based on either the Western or Eastern perspective; however, our paper offers an insight into the combination of both leadership development perspectives in the case study of CI Ljubljana (CI LJ). The importance of the growing CI network as a tool of *“soft power”* in China's diplomacy also carries with it responsibility regarding which kind of leadership CIs wish to develop and promote around the world and also be known for.

We propose in this paper that every leadership development is situated in a specific cultural environment with particular values of which some are universal (such as integrity, honour) while others are individual-specific (such as values to

which the individual gives preference and are emphasised in education systems, e.g. collectivism vs individualism). The MIDAS profile is a good tool for demonstrating that individuals in China and Slovenia have both differences and similarities and that it is the organisation that needs to develop the type of sustainable leadership programmes that can take the strengths from each of them and enable sustainable leadership development on a long-term basis.

In our paper, we first present the theory of sustainable leadership development and the theory of multiple intelligences. In the second part, we present empirical evidence of leadership development gathered at the CI LJ. In the last section of the paper we provide our conclusion with recommendations.

## 2. Theoretical backgrounds

There is no single best (universal) approach (Clarke 2011) to leadership development (Alon/Higgins 2005) because there is no single best culture. Cultures differ – and so should the training and development of leaders (Avolio et al. 2009a). Moreover, even within certain cultures, the structure of the portfolio of visible (surface) values changes over time as the ocean changes (Fang 2005) and depends on the context, time and situation (Fang 2003). This is in line with the view of Adler (in Bendixen/Burger 1998) who argued that the national culture has a greater impact on employees than the organisational culture (Groysberg/Slind 2012) and that management must thus concern itself more with developing appropriate management methods relevant to the national culture than with optimising the organisational one. Škerlavaj, Su and Huang (2013) examined the moderating effects of national culture dimensions on key elements in the development of organisational learning culture and established that the relationship between information interpretation and behavioural and cognitive changes was negatively moderated by individualism, masculinity and uncertainty avoidance.

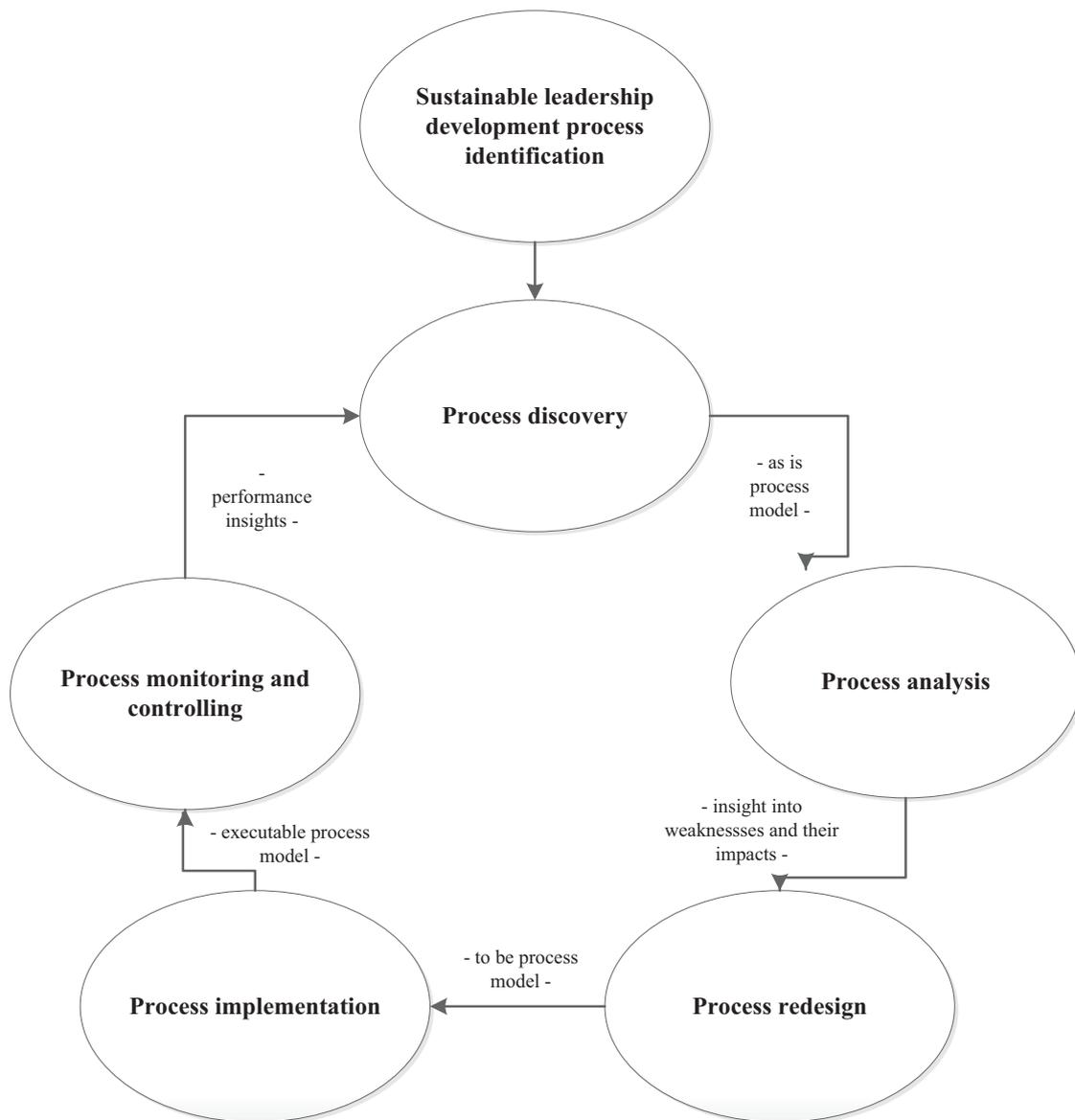
According to the Derr-Laurent Triangle, national culture is the most determining factor in influencing a person's cognitive map (Bosley et al. 2009) by shaping their basic assumptions (Ancona 2012): “*National culture impacts the culture of organizations by selecting and framing particular sets of organizational values, norms, and artifacts that are consistent with the basic assumptions. Such perceived values, norms, and artifacts related to the world of work in organizations and occupations constitute the leadership context. Thus leadership selection and development are directly influenced by organizational cultures that themselves mediate and differentiate the broader contextual effect of national cultures*” (Derr et al. 2002: xiii-xiv). However, like in almost every scholarly debate, there is also a different view on the importance of national culture for management practice. Anderson (in McSweeney 2002) sees nations as imagined communities and McSweeney (2002) disagrees with Hofstede's conceptualisation of national culture as implicit, core, systematically causal, territorially unique and shared.

The validity of the national culture identification claims faces two main problems: (1) generalisations about national-level culture from an analysis of subnational populations necessarily rely on the unproven and unprovable supposition that within each nation there is a uniform national culture; and (2) the elusiveness of culture (McSweeney, 2002:108).

The CI LJ leadership development context potentially offers an insight into encouraging the development of multiculturalism around the globe. The mission of CIs is to promote learning of Chinese, understanding of Chinese culture and develop international business partnerships. The CI LJ was founded on 26 May 2010 and is one of only five business-oriented CIs in the world that direct their operations to students, businessmen and companies. Our goal is therefore to present a model of sustainable leadership development in a business-oriented CI which places it in a unique context (see Figure 1).

We identified the sustainable leadership development process in the case study of the CI LJ that offers a valuable insight and recommendations to other CIs on how to systematically manage the process of leadership development. The challenges of sustainable leadership development are: (1) how to combine cross-cultural developmental processes; (2) how to link sustainable leadership development processes in CIs around the globe; (3) how to use model-driven design concepts; and (4) how to facilitate compliance measurement. In our paper, we propose to facilitate the compliance with sustainable leadership development through validated MIDAS developmental tools.

*Figure 1: Process of improving sustainable leadership development in a cross-cultural entity*



## 2.1 Leadership development

The paper is based on the following assumptions (McCauley et al. 2010): (1) that there are a number of different leadership roles (Zagoršek et al. 2009) and most people are involved in them during their lives; (2) people are involved in leadership roles in order to fulfil responsibilities to larger social entities; (3) leadership roles may be formal or informal; (4) instead of the traditional classification of the leader-follower relationship, our paper is based on the premise that people develop in different ways (Schyns et al. 2011) that make them more successful in their various management roles; (5) leadership development is bound to the context; and (6) leadership is possible and desirable to develop. Leadership development (Day 2001) systems are embedded in the organisational culture, where Škerlavaj, Štemberger, Škrinjar and Dimovski (2007) found that

learning the culture is the link between business process change and organisational performance. It is therefore established that leadership development is based on a culturally rich environment (Aditya/House 2002) that is also observed from a certain culture-based point of view (Chen/Li 2013). Derr, Roussillon and Bournois (2002:ix) state that “*the Confucian ethic of ancient China dictated a system of leadership development*”, and it is noted that a mixture of historical-cultural elements of socialist, communist and capitalist society is influencing leadership development in Slovenia.

## 2.2 Sustainable leadership

Tregear (2006: 7) writes that “*while curiosity and love of exotic motifs borrowed from neighbors to East and West have helped to shape a great technical mastery and a rich vocabulary of style, a love of tradition has ensured that homogeneity persists*”. Avolio, Reichard, Hannah, Walumbwa and Chan (2009b) found that leadership has a positive impact on work outcomes. Since Arvey, Zhang, Avolio and Krueger (2007) state that it is possible to develop leaders, in our opinion it makes sense to explore how to develop sustainable leadership. Reichard and Paik (2011) note that leadership development theorists have for a long time addressed the issue of whether leadership capability is innate or nurtured, although it is now concluded that leadership can be developed (Hiller et al. 2006). The academic community is therefore faced with a new question: “How to develop sustainable leadership – and more integrity-based (better) leaders (Murphy/Johnson 2011)?” Because organisations invest more than USD 30 billion in leadership development each year (Reichard/Paik 2011) this means it is necessary to ground developmental activities with a clear developmental orientation that is theoretically based.

According to the expert opinion of Professor Zhao (2013) from Shanghai University of International Business and Economics, the market for environmental products, clean technology and high technology products will open itself in the next five years in China. China will be therefore confronted with the need for leading sustainability-oriented companies that sustainable leadership development (Grooms/Reid-Martinez 2011) enables. This especially holds true for the times of serious environmental challenges that China will be meeting in the future. Professor Kirkulak-Uludap (2013) also highlighted that the Chinese population in itself is unsustainable due to its one-child policy and elderly population. On the other hand, Slovenia is faced with an ageing society and a high percentage of unemployed youth. The question therefore remains and is becoming increasingly salient: How to develop sustainable leadership which is tailor-made to specific cultural and individual needs?

As conceptualised in our paper, sustainable leadership incorporates seven principles (Hargreaves 2007): (1) the creation and sustaining of the life-long learning of stakeholders; (2) a focus on the long-term consequences of daily decisions

and tracking the environmental impact of organisational performance; (3) the encouragement of shared leadership responsibility – especially of the young and elderly generation – through empowerment for social network technology usage; (4) incorporation of social justice themes into the daily agenda of business partners; (5) the development of human and material resources, instead of their exploitation; (6) the development of environmental diversity; and (7) active engagement in taking care of the wider environment. In the next section of the paper, we propose the theory of multiple intelligences as a viable way to approach these sustainable developmental challenges.

### 2.3 *Multiple intelligences*

In a culturally-based model of leadership development dynamics (Brougher 1997), individual differences (Chemers 2002; Penger et al. 2008) represent an important contextual variable (Derr et al. 2002:xiv): *“Although the concept of national culture [...] is powerful in formulating leadership constructs, people are noted for their ability to make personal choices and deviate from family and cultural values. There are diverse personal experiences within any common context. Hence, it is important to recognize that cultural/ethnic orientation is also influenced by individual differences”*.

Sternberg (1999) defines intelligence as the ability to purposively adapt to, shape and select environments. Intelligence can also be explained as a bio-psychological potential to process information of a certain type in a certain way (Solomon et al. 1999). According to Howard Gardner (1983), people can be intelligent in a variety of ways. In 1983 he suggested the theory of multiple intelligences (MI) according to which intelligence is not a unitary entity but a collection of seven distinct intelligences: linguistic, logical-mathematical, musical, spatial, bodily-kinesthetic, intrapersonal and interpersonal. Naturalistic intelligence was officially added to the original intelligence framework. This list is also being supplemented by existential intelligence that is under Gardner's consideration.

Gardner (1983; 1993; 1995; 1999; 2007) stated that every individual possesses all of the above intelligences, yet the degree of intelligence varies depending on the individual (Bellflower 2008). Meško, Videmšek, Štihec, Šinigoj, Šuc, Karpljuk and Lavrenčič (2012) emphasize the need for employers to arrange work environment in a way that enables multiple intelligences development, especially not neglecting kinesthetic intelligence development of professionals where sitting is predominant. Armstrong (2012) elaborates on the criticism and explanations Howard Gardner has provided during the three decades of the existence of the theory of multiple intelligences. One of the most common ones is that he claims that all people are intelligent, whereas Gardner (1983) claims to present a pluralistic view of intelligence that is a corrective of the deficiencies of

traditional psychometric measures of intelligence. In addition, cultural context is an important consideration when defining intelligence (Solomon et al. 1999).

#### **2.4 Theoretical conceptualisation**

Based on the above theoretical background and qualitative research findings from previous research (Dimovski et al. 2013) which concluded that China and Slovenia have a unique cultural background grounded in sustainability, we investigate specific leadership development in a cross-cultural team of the CI LJ. The Slovenian stakeholders perceive the CI LJ very differently from the Chinese ones – they first seek differences between the Slovenian and Chinese cultures, whereas the latter tend much more to seek similarities between both cultures. The sustainable leadership development approach was conceptualised accordingly. We propose that national culture influences the multiple intelligences of individuals up to a certain level. However, organisations play a crucial role in tactical development that can be narrowly oriented towards an individual's needs – leader development – and an organisation also demonstrates social and environmental responsibility through a wider sustainable leadership development focus.

We propose that leadership effort should be directed towards sustainable leadership development that connects individuals, organisations and societies with nature through (cultural) artefacts such as language, common values and principles. The CI LJ reflects these sustainability qualities through its mission and activities. We propose sustainable leadership in all fields of human life and learning experiences (Bergsteiner/Avery2014; Sfard/Prusak 2005).

Based on the literature review, we propose:

*Proposition 1: Completion of the MIDAS Profile is the beginning of the sustainable leadership development process, which is based in appreciative inquiry.*

*Proposition 2: The development of logical-mathematical, linguistic, intra- & inter-personal and naturalistic intelligences is the foundation of a sustainable leadership development process.*

*Proposition 3: In order to develop a leader sustainably, leadership development programmes in the West should focus more on developing spatial, bodily-kinesthetic, musical, interpersonal and existential intelligences.*

### **3. Methods**

Empirical data were gathered at the CI LJ due to its unique position in the Slovenian business environment and for pragmatic reasons of the willingness of its stakeholders to participate in our research. For qualitative research, it is recommended to investigate a case that provides an in-depth insight; therefore, our research enables an insight into sustainable leadership development that brings

together two different approaches to leadership development – Eastern and Western in a dynamic and symbiotic relationship. Data were gathered in 30 qualitative interviews, noting that McCracken (1988) considers large data sets those which consist of more than 20 qualitative interviews. We conducted interviews with stakeholders (people who have a stake in how the CI LJ functions): 8 pair interviews with CI staff, 14 qualitative interviews with Si.mobil company stakeholders dedicated to sustainability at different hierarchical levels, 1 qualitative interview with a representative of a major CI stakeholder – the Hans Christian Andersen kindergarten (where children learn the Chinese language with CI professors), 3 expert interviews with leadership development professionals and 4 expert interviews with university professors from the Faculty of Economics, University of Ljubljana, the Jožef Stefan Institute, the Faculty of Philosophy and Rhodes Business School South Africa.

An attempt to represent the physical environment of the CI LJ and the FELU was undertaken in line with reflective ethnography where photographs are treated as representations of “*aspects of culture*” (Pink 2005:58). The research design consisted of four phases. The first phase was the interviews (from which we highlight proof citations (Langley 2012)), based on which a questionnaire was chosen (phase two). This was followed by the MIDAS online survey (phase three) and qualitative analysis (phase four). The Multiple Intelligences Developmental Assessment Scales (MIDAS) test, developed by Professor Branton Shearer, was used for the sustainable leadership development tool of the CI LJ stakeholders. Subsequently, additional interviews (Bryman 2004) were conducted in order to obtain more reliable and validated data (Cho/Trent 2006).

To be able to validate the stated propositions, we conducted a study at the CI LJ. The MIDAS Profile (Shearer 2011) was used at the CI LJ in order to increase the stakeholders' understanding of their strengths and limitations so that the strengths can be employed productively and help the CI LJ accomplish its goals. After completing the MIDAS Profile, the researchers provided the participants with an outline (Colville et al. 2011) of their multiple intelligence results. This feedback loop is what is rarely found in other surveys, which is why we perceive this as one of the advantages of this specific leadership development tool. The MIDAS Profile provides a foundation for reflection (Collinson 2005) that is recommended if one wants to advance and further develop their multiple intelligences.

#### 4. Results and discussion

We found that the MIDAS Profile provides the participants with a useful insight into their potential. It was shown that both approaches (Eastern and Western leadership development) are shifting to sustainable leadership development, where Chinese leadership development has a strong tradition in sustainable leadership development. This has, however, been neglected in the period of

rapid economic growth, but is revitalising its leadership development due to the social and environmental challenges contemporary China is encountering. The Chinese participants expressed the need for stronger environmental awareness where the CI LJ as a representative and promotional institution could include in sustainable leadership development the MIDAS tools that also embrace the testing of naturalistic (environmental) intelligence. Through our research we have identified an emphasis on sustainable leadership development due to the need to do business in the global market.

Researchers of Chinese leadership (Pye in Yang 2002) established that Chinese people tend to bond with people with whom they share a geographical space – where working in the same place in the past is a sufficient condition to attract each other. Trust and confidence are built as people remember shared experiences. Therefore, we started our leadership development research at the CI LJ by asking and observing how multiple intelligences, especially interpersonal and intrapersonal intelligences of key stakeholders at the CI LJ, are being developed through everyday working tasks and how normality is being produced through sense making of a partner's behaviour.

After conducting qualitative interviews with Mrs Danijela Voljč, the director of the CI Ljubljana, we identified a unique developmental need of the CI LJ stakeholders in order to help them with leadership development in Slovenia. Mrs Voljč emphasised the lack of any form of literature, research or course on business culture in Slovenia, which she perceives as a mission of the CI LJ and also a possibility for it to grow professionally by being a central development point for Chinese stakeholders. Due to the vast differences in the sizes of both countries, it is hard to compare Chinese and Slovenian cultural and leadership traits, although the national managers' association, the Managers' Association of Slovenia, has published a Cross-cultural guidebook: online business guide for encounters with foreigners and foreign habits (2014) which demonstrates that Slovenian business is opening up to global markets and feels the need to be equipped with cultural guidelines. The guidebook therefore provides basic recommendations for businessmen when doing business with Chinese. It is highlighted that the role of businesswomen is still not equal to businessmen, especially in negotiations. In comparison to Slovenian business culture, Chinese business culture is also more polite and inclined to communicate “*yes of course*” because Chinese do not want to demonstrate a bad mood and dissatisfaction in front of foreigners. Slovenian businessmen found out that a positive response from their Chinese counterparts does not necessarily mean the successful finalisation of a contract as many times one needs to be persistent and repeat one's request for a longer period of time to be completed to mutual satisfaction. Time management is also different from the Slovenian model as the working week in China includes 6 to 7 days from 6 a.m. to 8 p.m. with little or no vacation and,

therefore, Chinese workers typically have a slower pace of work from the perspective of Slovenian businessmen (Ham 2014).

The participants in our study showed good results for academic intelligences such as logical and verbal intelligence, which we associate with the line of work – the CI LJ stakeholders are namely educated and highly cultivated individuals who care about future generations due to their pedagogical interest. However, not only did the academic staff highlight personal development (of logical and linguistic intelligence), but they also put a strong emphasis on developing the social and natural environment through their influence.

#### **4.1 Development of logical-mathematical intelligence**

The emphasis of the teaching methodology in the Chinese education system is shifting from exambased education to the holistic development of education, experiences and skill strengthening: *“The Chinese education system requires of students: You must be excellent! A lot because, for the students, they should have a good education, good experiences and be very skilled in many ways and then they can obtain a very nice job with a good salary”*.

#### **4.2 Development of linguistic intelligence**

According to the Slovenian education system that is based on academic intelligences of preferably stimulating linguistic (verbal) and logical intelligences, the linguistic intelligence of the Slovenian participants in the study is highlighted. However, this can also pose a problem when seeking to grasp the essence of things, as one Chinese representative at the CI LJ observes in the following paragraph: *“Actually we are all the same in the world, not so different, we are socialist and you are capitalist. [...] If you compare the economics, the system, the companies, you will see everywhere is exactly the same. It's only the name. I compare healthcare and you are really socialist. In China, we have to pay for everything by ourselves. We are so capitalist. So you should not care so much about what people say. You should look inside at what there is... that is the real thing”*.

#### **4.3 Development of inter- and intra-personal intelligence (cultural intelligence as part of interpersonal intelligence)**

The importance of sustainable leadership development is demonstrated in the following quote of a Chinese representative of the CI LJ: *“I think the CI has a great role to just make the two nations understand each other. I think this is a great role, so for your people they know more and more about China and understand our people I think... I have worked in Europe for many years and I know your nation and I know your people's thinking so sometimes I think that nobody understands us very deeply. So, from your side, when I first arrived in Europe everybody thinks the Chinese are just somebody working in a restaurant or*

*something like that. You only see one aspect of China and not the whole China. Through the CI that came here we are bringing more and more students here and many international exchanges through this stage... and then the two nations can understand each other more”.*

#### **4.4 Development of naturalistic intelligence**

The root of the Chinese attitude to sustainable leadership development is interestingly highlighted in a quote from a Chinese representative at the CI LJ who perceives Chinese culture as oriented towards saving due to experiences from the past, which proves to be beneficial for sustainability: *“People are learning to protect. Also in our country the people, because before the economic ascent, the people were poor – so their habit is to save things. They are not used to using too many things. So we save things, they may look useless now but maybe later we can use them in the future”.*

A Slovenian leader at the CI LJ remembered a traditional painting with the nature–human relationship as its main motive that had a strong impact on her: *»I still remember a Chinese traditional painting where nature was presented so powerfully and the human was so tiny«.* This tells a great deal about the core of the relationship between nature and humans. Even though Chinese society has neglected its natural environment during its turbulent business advancement, the inclination towards symbiosis with nature is prevailing in the traditional Chinese philosophy that is spreading.

The participants of the study scored lower in their MIDAS profiles on spatial, bodily-kinesthetic and musical intelligences. However, in our opinion, a leader needs holistic development in order to sustain his or her efforts in the demanding global business environment.

#### **4.5 Development of spatial intelligence**

The findings confirmed our propositions that both – Eastern and Western formal education systems – have mainly prepared us to use scholastic intelligences and have somehow neglected the development of so-called practical intelligences. As these are regarded as very important for the employability of FELU Alumni in the international business world, we propose the systematic use of developmental tools based on spatial intelligence, such as diagrams, graphs, figures, maps, visualisation, photographs, slides, movies, visual mind games, art, picture metaphors, drawing, sketching, mind maps, graphic symbols, computer graphics, searching visual patterns, optical illusions, and colours.

One assistant at the FELU indicated as follows when reflecting on future changes and improvements in class during the Exercises: *“I intend to use more practical examples, definitely, more and more, because theory needs to be applied in practice. And I will use more interactive instruction tools, such as vid-*

*eos, that you make on your own, because I think that now I am not sufficiently trained in these new technological developmental tools”.*

#### **4.6 Development of bodily-kinesthetic intelligence**

We propose that creative workshops, excursions, mimic plays, competitions, experiential learning and relaxation (such as mindfulness skills) need to be integrated into the developmental practices of study programmes to a greater extent. In line with this, a doctoral student and colleague at FELU demonstrates: *“Of course, I say it every year that I will organise company visits, but then there’s not enough time, will or energy. Company visits seem great to me, especially when we as students went on company visits in HRM courses. I think that for a young person, who is just beginning to study at a business school, these visits are very good because you actually get to see how things are done. One thing is the Lecture Hall and another is practice. How does it work in practice? Just to see the offices. That somebody accepts you in the company. That you feel accepted. That you have the honour to see the business environment from the inside. To imagine yourself in that environment, so that your vision for your future begins to develop – that is very important”.*

#### **4.7 Development of musical intelligence**

Musical intelligence turned out to be the least developed intelligence of the CI LJ stakeholders. This means that our society and culture of the higher education institution do not seem to perceive it as necessary for gaining socially desirable goals. However, due to the effect musical intelligence has on logical intelligence and their interconnection in grasping patterns, we recommend that the following activities be strengthened within CI LJ programmes: organising concerts at the CI LJ, playing mood music to engage students in teamwork, playing background music, connecting music with theoretical concepts and music as a memory tool.

#### **4.8 Development of interpersonal intelligence**

Given the line of work the CI LJ is engaged in – connecting people from different cultures with the aim of building business partnerships – the development of interpersonal intelligence is vital. We therefore propose the systematic integration of the following techniques to stimulate intrapersonal intelligence in the study programmes, not only at the CI LJ specifically but also at the FELU: promoting interpersonal communication among students, acting in conflict situations, encouraging altruism, empathy, group brainstorming, involvement in local challenges and simulations in social activities.

The transfer of ex-cathedra knowledge is based on an industrial educational framework that needs a reflective adjustment in line with the findings of the theory of multiple intelligences: *“The ex-cathedra principle is very out of date and unnecessary because education is moving in the direction where students come*

*prepared for the lecture, that is to say, that they read what will be explained at the lectures. Added value lies in the discussion, in the debate, in opening of the floor to different opinions, widening new horizons and methods. The aim is to bring the students to grasp the concepts. This is where multiple intelligences are useful, that is to say, this is learning by doing or learning by thinking”.*

#### **4.9 Development of existential intelligence**

The development of existential intelligence is one of the newest developmental fields and still under professor’s Howard Gardner’s consideration for inclusion in the official theoretical framework of multiple intelligences. Since it has gained considerable attention in dealing with environmental challenges in practice, we propose the inclusion of existential questions in debates and conferences at the CI LJ and FELU, such as “*Who are we?*” and “*Where is our society headed?*”

Empirical subsections cast light on the validity of the propositions derived from the literature review. Our research findings demonstrate that the participants were more open to taking part in leadership developmental activities through the MIDAS profile if they were supported with qualitative methodology (Proposition 1). From the qualitative research we found enough empirical verification for Proposition 2 as the stakeholders of the CI LJ are excited by being able to learn the Chinese language, know Chinese cultural habits and raise environmental awareness. Due to the Slovenian stakeholders’ exposure to tai chi workshops every May at the CI LJ, it is becoming ‘*normal*’ to integrate spirituality with bodily fitness. The Eastern developmental activities at the CI LJ are also introducing and opening new ways to develop musical, interpersonal and existential capabilities (Proposition 3).

### **5. Conclusion**

The paper opens the way for incorporating the theoretical and empirical investigation of multiple intelligences into sustainable leadership development because our findings suggest it is a fruitful tool for leadership development in an international entity as it shows that not only are cultures different but that each person has a unique personal profile with main strengths and weaknesses, and sustainable leadership is therefore an appropriate theoretical framework to empower the stakeholders of a cross-cultural entity.

The academic contribution of this paper lies in its integration of two theories: the theory of multiple intelligences and sustainable leadership development theory. The practical contribution may be found in its recognition of individual and cultural differences in approaches to leadership development and its demonstration at the CI LJ. We are coming to realise that, as the CI LJ’s mission is to foster business collaboration between China and Slovenia, the mindset of both nations needs to change in line with serial entrepreneur Hoffman’s notion that “*there is*

*no they*”, meaning that we need to establish a mutual understanding, and develop and build upon our unique cultural characteristics.

Slovenian managers need to educate themselves in the field of diversity management, especially when it comes to doing business with China, as this is still too often perceived from the Unitarian perspective. However, as we found in the framework of our study, the cultural variety in Chinese society is itself much bigger than we tend to perceive it from our Western perspective. Sustainable leadership development is only possible if we promote a culture that: (1) is open to the unexpected; (2) encourages its members to step out from their comfort zone; and (3) encourages its members to surround themselves with people who inspire them (Lapalme 2013).

A practical implication of carrying out the research into multiple intelligences emphasises the importance of being aware that intelligence assessment is a valuable topic that demands an adjusted methodology. In our qualitative study we used MIDAS questionnaires as a developmental tool from which we can gain valuable information as to whether this could be a valuable future leadership developmental tool at the CI LJ. Our research shows that our preliminary proposition was correct and that the assessment of multiple intelligences is a sensitive topic for participants and, therefore, in our case the parallel qualitative interviews proved to enable a richer data collection.

Slovenian management has been in regular contact with the larger former Yugoslav market that still poses a smaller challenge regarding the cultural dimension than doing business with China. However, when looking at leadership development at the crossroads of both cultures at the CI LJ, leadership development in the East was demonstrated to be considerably different from Western practices. While a mentor of Chinese teachers emphasises hard work and pressure in the developmental process of Chinese youth, Slovenian leadership focuses on achieving creative solutions. What is essential for sustainable leadership development at the CI LJ is the readiness of both cultural representatives to collaborate, contribute to the growth of the CI LJ and work diligently to achieve ambitious goals.

As it is the mission of the CI LJ to help build a bridge between Chinese and Slovenian cultures, leadership development is an area in which the CI LJ has much to offer. However, the CI LJ needs appropriate operational tools provided by the theory of multiple intelligences. Due to the expressed interest, demonstrated initiatives and their successful realisation of sustainable actions in the past, the authors recommend the integration of sustainable leadership development within the scope of CI LJ that could – with proper management of social and environmental responsibility – represent a considerable competitive advantage of the CI LJ in the global community. A feasible solution in the short run is to extend the activities of the Re.think initiative that the FELU is already carry-

ing out in cooperation with the company Si.mobil. One of the thematic fields at the CI LJ in the future could be dedicated to social and environmental responsibility that is important for both China and Slovenia, and is included in the value system of all stakeholders of the CI LJ.

Our paper offers a novel research field to scholars and CI policy-makers. In the paper, we give an in-depth unprecedented overview of how strengthening multiple intelligences at one individual CI, namely CI LJ, can offer the global scientific community a common ground for developing learning practices in line with sustainable leadership development.

We claim that today's fragmented creative teaching and learning techniques need to be conceptualised on the solid theoretical foundation that the theory of multiple intelligences offers to the CIs leadership and at the same time enables autonomy of implementation in their individual educational settings. CIs around the world aim for creativity and innovation, where the theory of multiple intelligences can be of valuable didactic and developmental assistance. When properly implemented, the theory of multiple intelligences enables a wide range of people to holistically exploit their personal and professional potential.

Practical implications of this paper also include making sense of the professional leadership development of the CI LJ stakeholders and highlighting the importance of sustainable leadership development in a cross-cultural management and scientific environment. Further investigation is needed about how CIs across the world could share and store their intangible leadership development practices. An annual event dedicated to sustainable leadership development could be hosted by individual CIs.

We intend to compile data and engage in methodological triangulation for longitudinal research into the business environment of CIs. As CIs become more multinational, the cultural component of leadership development will become even more vital and methodology on how to develop their stakeholders even more important. We therefore recommend use of the MIDAS Profile as a beneficial tool for sustainable leadership development, globally.

The limitations of our study stem from the fact that the number of participants was not as large as hoped for due to the low response rate to the MIDAS assessment which, according to MIDAS expert Branton Shearer (email correspondence with the authors), is normal when initially presenting the methodology (we therefore compensated the data collection with a large qualitative data set). The definition of stakeholders' representatives was made for the purposes of our research questions. Another limitation is our inability to speak Chinese and we were thus unable to grasp the in-depth meaning of the Chinese representatives' leadership development, which is also why the MIDAS profile was useful. Another limitation is that, because the official language of the MIDAS assessment

tool is English, only those representatives with a working knowledge of English were included in the survey.

This is an explorative qualitative study based on 30 interviews at the CI LJ. The paper presents a qualitative starting point for further longitudinal research. Our study provides the framework for performing further research on bigger and more diverse samples and advancing the work on multiple intelligences (Chen et al. 2009). Future MIDAS research should include Chinese students of the University of Ljubljana as the CI LJ has been integrated under the leadership of the rector of the University of Ljubljana. Our findings are not intended to be generalised to a population, however they offer empirical insights that extend the theoretical and empirical framework of sustainable leadership development.

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## Appendix

### *Research notes*

In our research process, we took an in-depth approach to the developmental mechanisms of representative individuals – unique cases working in an international environment of the Confucius Institute Ljubljana (CI LJ), the Faculty of Economics at the University of Ljubljana (FELU) and the University of Ljubljana that we divided into four groups: (1) Chinese representatives at the CI LJ; (2) Slovenian representatives at the CI LJ; (3) representatives of the FELU; and (4) representatives of natural science departments at the University of Ljubljana. The findings do not allow any generalisation but are intended to illustrate the usefulness of the MIDAS Profile for leadership development in an international working environment. The CI LJ narrow international team is composed of the identified individuals with whom we conducted qualitative interviews, pair interviews and distributed the MIDAS questionnaire to them.

MIDAS is a process approach to the assessment of multiple intelligences in the 'dialogue of discovery' that can generate increased self-understanding. MIDAS gives: (1) a reasonable estimate of a person's intellectual disposition in each of eight constructs (linguistic, logical-mathematical, spatial, musical, kinesthetic, naturalist, interpersonal and intrapersonal); (2) the skills associated with each intelligence are described; (3) intellectual style scales estimate a person's proclivity for innovation, general logic and leadership; and (4) information from each question provides descriptions of particular intellectual skills and daily life activities. MIDAS perceives intelligence as a life-long evolving process with parameters that may shift with time and effort (Shearer 1996). Self-reflection can be beneficially used by engaging the MIDAS process to enhance productivity, team performance and intrinsic motivation (Shearer 2011).

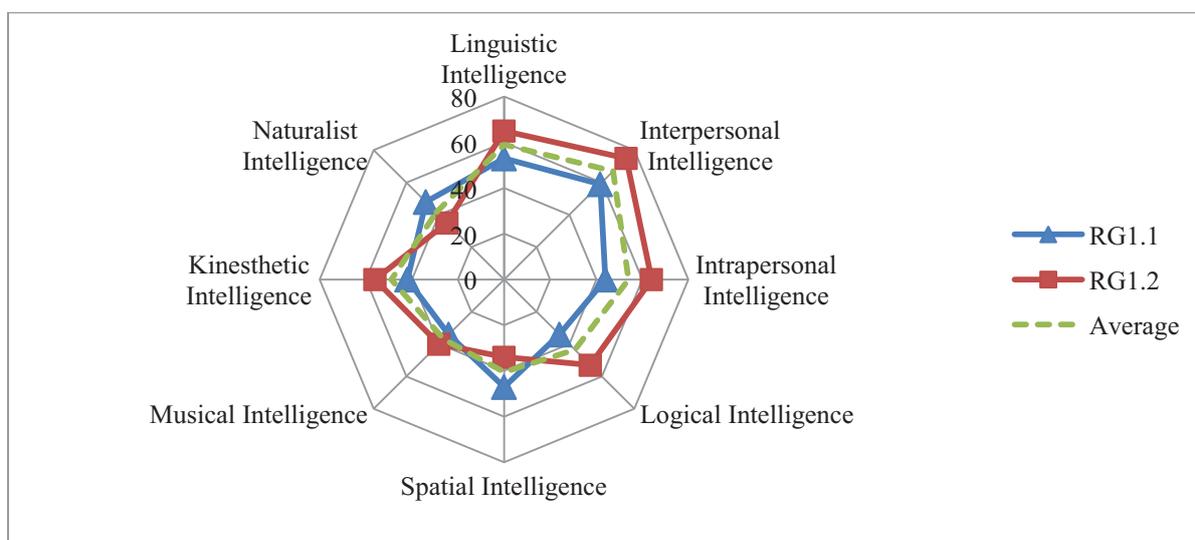
The MIDAS Profile (Shearer 2011) provides a guide for employee professional development that uses an individual's strengths as a means to benefit the whole organisation and wider environment: "This is particularly true when interpreting the profile to gain an understanding for how an individual can develop unique leadership potential. When an individual's strengths cannot be immediately employed on-the-job then the MIDAS Profile can provide guidance for engaging one's strengths in vocational and recreational activities that will provide per-

sonal satisfaction and reduce frustration at work. These non-work related activities might also be drawn upon as contributions to ‘the workplace culture’” (Shearer 1996:56).

The results of the inquiry into the 14 CI LJ stakeholders are presented below.

Two Chinese representatives with Chinese nationality provided us with their completed MIDAS Profiles and the key findings are that interpersonal intelligence is their most and musical intelligence is their least developed intelligence (Figure 1).

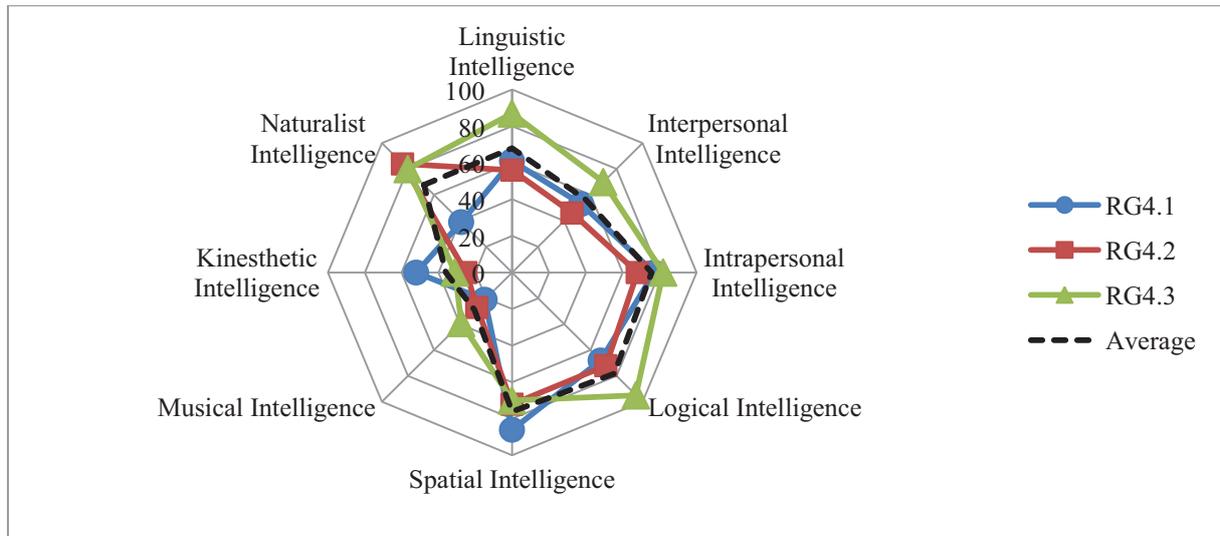
Figure 1: Presentation of the MIDAS Assessment of Chinese representatives at the CI LJ



We defined the Slovenian staff representative at the CI LJ as professional service that works with Chinese representatives at the CI LJ on a daily basis and provides professional support at the CI LJ. The gathered data demonstrate that the most developed intelligence of the Slovenian project manager at the CI LJ is linguistic intelligence and the least developed is kinesthetic intelligence (Figure 2).



Figure 4: Presentation of the MIDAS Assessment of representatives of natural science departments at the University of Ljubljana



Since multiple intelligences are defined by Gardner (1983) as a tool for attaining a socially desirable goal, Shearer (1996) designed the MIDAS assessment for investigating leadership, general logic and innovation potential. Figure 5 shows that the CI LJ stakeholders demonstrate different potential regarding innovation, general logic and leadership, and complement each other.

Figure 5: Leadership, general logic and innovation potential assessment

