

USING TEST OF COLOUR SEMANTIC DIFFERENTIAL FOR RESEARCH INTO ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE

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Abstract

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The aim of this article is to show the possibility of using a combination of the Values Survey Module 1994 (VSM 94) and the Test of Colour Semantic Differential (TCSD) for research into organizational culture. The results of the VSM 94 enable the researcher to determine which poles of Hofstede's cultural dimensions a particular working group is in fact approaching while the data obtained through TCSD make it possible to define how employees consciously rate and unconsciously perceive expressions related to Hofstede's cultural dimensions, or how they identify themselves with the researched values, respectively. The final values from the VSM 94 are compared with Hofstede's national values and it is investigated whether it is possible to speak about the impact of national culture on corporate culture. This article also describes advantages and disadvantages of TCSD as well as the possibilities of its more focused use for research into organizational culture. TCSD has not been widely used for research into organizational culture although it has many practical uses thanks to the ability to work with respondents' unconsciousness in connection with culture.

organizational culture, national culture, Hofstede's dimension of culture, Test of Colour Semantic Differential, Values Survey Module 1994

The underlying thesis in several studies on national and organizational culture is that there are nationality influenced differences in work values, beliefs and orientations of organizations across different countries (Hofstede 2007; Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner, 1996). National culture can be viewed as the norms, values and beliefs shared by individuals from a particular nation that distinguish it from others. Various researchers focused on study how national cultures might influence organizational cultures in particular country settings (Hofstede, 1996 and others). Since its publication in 1980, Geert Hofstede's *Culture's consequences*, has had a profound influence on the development of cross-cultural studies within organization studies and in the social sciences more generally (Smith, 2002). Hofstede (2001) defines culture as *the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from another*. Hofstede's view is that cultures

are deeply embedded and rather strongly resistant to change. We are programmed by our culture in early life and the diverse elements within a national culture typically serve to sustain and enhance its coherence (Smith, 2002).

If we focus on the concept of organizational culture, we will find out that it is defined in the existing literature with a number of definitions. The prominent organizational theorist Schein developed an influential model of organizational culture. Thus, for Schein (2004), organizational culture is *the pattern of basic assumptions that a given group has invented, discovered, or developed in learning to cope with its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, and that have worked well enough to be considered valid, and therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to these problems*. In the Czech Republic the most frequently cited definition comes from Lukášová (2010), who argues that organizational culture can be understood as a set of

basic assumptions, values, attitudes, and norms of behaviour that are shared within the organization. These manifest themselves in thinking, feeling and behaviour of the members as well as in artifacts of both material and immaterial nature.

It is possible to find certain common features in the definitions by other authors dealing with organizational culture. These definitions agree on the fact that organizational culture refers to the set of shared beliefs and assumptions that are unique to the organization and that shape the way organizational members think and act.

In general, to achieve the desired working environment it is inevitable that managers focus their attention not only on the management of the company, but also on the management of corporate culture. It is also important to integrate the importance of corporate culture in relation to human resources management (HRM). Should corporate culture be used efficiently as a tool for the HRM, an internally coherent and logically structured complex of requirements applied to workers must be formulated in order to influence workers (Krninská, 2002). Quality work performance of individuals can be sustainable especially if there is an effort to reconcile the business's fundamental goals and values with workers' needs and desires (Rešlová, 2011).

The aim of this article is to show the possibility of using a combination of The Values Survey Module 1994 (VSM 94) and the Test of Colour Semantic Differential (TCSD) for research into organizational culture. The most of presented data were obtained through author's thesis. The author of the both used tests is Geert Hofstede; it is also important to mention that TCSD has not been widely used for organizational culture research although it has many ways of use thanks to the possibility to work with respondents' unconsciousness in connection with culture.

As Pavlica *et al.* (2000) claim, the semantic differential method can be found on the virtual border between qualitative and quantitative methods. On the one hand, it is typical for this method to try to capture the meanings that a particular person associates with various concepts ideographically; on the other hand, this method also includes scales that can be used to quantify the responses of different individuals and to search out more general patterns and context by using mathematical-statistical procedures. Specifically, TCSD was included among the methods used in the Czech psychological diagnosis more than a decade ago, as claimed by Štěpichin, Štěpichinová (1992). In the practice of social research, TCSD brings a wide range of uses. It is considered to be a relatively fast and reliable means to determine the hierarchy of values on an unconscious level as well as emerging attitudes for subsequent actions and behaviour of individuals or groups. The test is applicable in the social and cultural sphere to evaluate cultural dimensions and to find common values that the

examined society shares. The higher the conformity among the associations of society members is, the more one can say what common values are shared or what cultural aspects of different groups are relevant (Štěpichin, Štěpichinová, 1992).

The VSM 94 is a revision of an earlier questionnaire, based on the question of Hofstede's original IBM research and it was developed to compare culture-dependent values of individuals (Hofstede, 2007). Many researchers use the VSM 94 as a psychological instrument, despite the fact that the Hofstede's indices were intended to show aggregate, sociological levels of values (Bearden *et al.*, 2006).

MATERIALS AND METHODS

To examine organizational culture two-star hotels were chosen; one of them is located in the Czech Republic while the other one is in Spain. Both the hotels have a similar organizational structure and they are not part of multinational hotel chain. The hotels wished to remain anonymous in the research and the will be referred to as "Hotel CZ" and "Hotel ESP".

In addition, a hotel chain that has its components around the world and that entered the Czech market recently was also chosen. We examined its hotels located in the Czech Republic and Spain. The paper also focuses on the question whether the organizational culture of the hotel chain in the selected components is uniform and thus has a multinational character. Both the researched hotels of the chain wished to remain anonymous, and therefore they will be referred to as "HC-CZ" and "HC-ESP".

The research sample consisted of 10 workers from the Czech Republic and Spain. The sample for "Hotel CZ" contained 1 woman and 2 men; the sample for "Hotel ESP" comprised 2 women and 1 man. The research sample for "HC-CZ" consisted of 3 women and 4 men; the sample for "HC-ESP" included 5 women and 2 men. All employees from the Czech Republic have had Czech nationality and similarly all workers from Spain have had Spanish nationality. None of the workers held the position of manager in the hotel.

To understand the cultural dimensions of the selected enterprises the VSM 94 and TCSD questionnaires were used. Hofstede (2007) has developed a model that describes the differences in cultures along five dimensions, as follows:

- a) *Power Distance (PD)*: the extent to which the less powerful members of society accept that power is distributed unequally.
- b) *Individualism versus Collectivism (IDV)*: in individualism people look after themselves and their immediate family only vs. collectivism where people belong to in-groups.
- c) *Masculinity versus Femininity (MAS)*: the dominant values of masculinity are achievement and

successes vs. those of femininity are caring for others and quality of life.

- d) *Uncertainty Avoidance (UA)* refers to the extent to which people feel threatened by uncertainty and ambiguity and try to avoid these situations.
- e) *Long-term orientation or Confucian dynamism (LTO)*: the degree to which a culture focuses on the future.

It was possible to determine from the results of the VSM 94 which poles of the cultural dimensions the working group is in fact approaching; the data obtained through TCSD enabled us to define how respondents consciously rated and unconsciously perceived expressions connected with individual cultural dimensions, or the TCSD outcome made it possible to determine which approach and behaviour is desirable for workers, respectively. Due to the fact that the tests were used only in a corporate environment, the final dimensions could be considered as cultural dimensions describing the corporate culture of the selected companies.

Processing and evaluating the VSM 94

The VSM 94 contains 26 questions and these questions were rated in a numerical scale (1–5). Subsequently, individual indexes for each cultural dimension were calculated¹; their final value ranged between 0 and 100. Thus, the lower the value for each dimension is, the lower is the *power distance*, *individualism* degree, *masculinity* degree, less effort to *avoid uncertainty*, and a tendency to *short-term orientation*. The results where the value approaches the number 100 indicate the opposite tendency.

Processing and evaluating TCSD

TCSD is based on qualitative approaches (use of colours), and in the process of implementation result quantification (conversion of colours to numerical values) is also incorporated; therefore a simple quantitative comparison of obtained results is possible, ensuring their objective finding (Krninská, 2002b).

Standard TCSD contains 51 words and for each word respondents chose 3 colours. In TCSD respondents worked with 12 colours that were well-distinguishable from each other and that commonly occurred in nature. For each concept respondents assigned colours depending on how they matched the word. After colouring all fields in all concepts, respondents marked each word from 1 (the best) to 4 (the worst); subsequently they ranked the hierarchy of colours on the basis of their likeability (1–12) ranging from the most likeable to the least likeable one. Thus, numerical values were obtained, enabling us to measure the relationship towards the analysed word (Ščepichin, Ščepichinová *et al.*, 1992).

Of all the words contained in TCSD four pairs of expressions characterizing each cultural dimension

were selected. Tab. I shows the key words sorted by the pairs where one word belongs to one pole of the cultural dimension while the other is the opposite pole of the expression in the same cultural dimension. For example, the key expression “being the first” was selected due to a *large power distance*, because it is associated with a large distance between the superior and subordinate as well as with behaviour when an employee does not care much about the other co-workers in achieving their objectives. For a *small power distance* the expression “victory” was chosen as it is characterized by fair behaviour when an individual takes into account even other involved persons. Two additional expressions for both poles of other cultural dimensions were also selected in a similar way.

By colouring all the fields in the test (3 colours for each word) we obtained a hierarchy of values in the

I: Chosen words of TCSD for cultural dimensions

1. PD	
High PD	Low PD
be first	victory
myself	ideal me
supervisor	ideal man
quarrel	ideal woman
2. IDV	
High IDV	Low IDV
myself	friends
solitude	people
duties	work place
work	home
3. MAS	
High MAS	Low MAS
men	women
father	mother
sex	love
lover	wife
4. UA	
High UA	Low UA
change	boredom
dreams	peace
fight	silence
happiness	tiredness
5. LTO	
High LTO	Low LTO
past	future
fun	joy
death	life
mood	education

Source: Author

¹ To calculate the indexes, standard formulas from the website <http://www.geerthofstede.nl/vsm-94> were used.

unconscious of individual respondents based on their colour preferences. The order of the colours in the colour hierarchy was adopted in the form of numeric values. Colours 1–6 were considered positive and marked with “+” whereas colours 7–12 were considered negative and marked with “-“. The prevalent unconscious evaluation (UNC) of the words was:

- „+“ provided that all the three colours were positive,
- „+-“ provided that two colours were positive and one was negative,
- „-+“ provided that one colour was positive and two were negative,
- „-“ provided that all the three colours were negative.

The total unconscious value of the word was therefore the sum of colour values.

Conscious evaluation (CON) was conducted in the form of numbering the words in TCSD using a scale from 1 (the best) to 4 (the worst). Numbering all expressions provided us with a hierarchy of word values in the respondents' consciousness. Conscious and unconscious evaluation was averaged for the whole monitored society when conducting the evaluation.

The test was evaluated in a standard way according to the “Testcentrum Hogrefe” testing centre program. To compare individual societies, TCSD Result Appraisal 2.0b software was used.

RESULTS

Obtained survey results and proposed recommendations for Hotel CZ and Hotel ESP

Tab. II and III show the results of TCSD and VSM 94 for hotels. The Tab. II of TCSD results was abbreviated: it does not include the final values for each word, but only the average of these values. The lower the value is, either for the conscious (CON) or unconscious (UNC) evaluation of the word, the more positively the investigated society perceives the selected words, or the pole of the cultural dimension, respectively. Therefore, from the data obtained through TCSD we can determine which of the poles of the cultural dimensions is desirable for workers (more positively perceived or preferred) while the values of the VSM 94 indicate which pole of the cultural dimensions is applied within the company.

Analysing the results of the hotels survey showed us that a *small power distance* is desirable for both enterprises, which is in fact implemented only in “Hotel ESP”; however, in “Hotel CZ” there is a *large power distance*, which may be closely related to the negative perception of the manager at a conscious and unconscious level. Respondents of the selected enterprises consciously and unconsciously prefer *collectivism*; nevertheless, in “Hotel CZ” strong *individualism* and *masculine* behaviour occur, which seems to be caused by a negative attitude of subordinates towards the hotel manager. This was proved by the conscious and unconscious evaluation of the manager in TCSD. Employees of “Hotel ESP” tend to *collectivism* and in connection with *feminine* behaviour that prevails in the hotel an atmosphere supporting building a strong corporate culture can be created. Hotels try to a large extent to *avoid uncertainty*, which is understandable due to their smaller size. The final *short-term orientation* of

II: Cultural dimensions for the hotels (TCSD)

Cultural dimensions for the hotels							
	Object	Values (average)		Object	Values (average)		
		CON	UNC		CON	UNC	
High PD	Hotel CZ	2.67	2.42	Hotel CZ	2.17	1.75	Low PD
	Hotel ESP	2.33	2.08	Hotel ESP	1.67	1.08	
High IDV	Hotel CZ	2.42	2.34	Hotel CZ	1.59	1.92	Low IDV
	Hotel ESP	1.84	1.5	Hotel ESP	1.58	1	
High MAS	Hotel CZ	2.17	1.83	Hotel CZ	1.83	2	Low MAS
	Hotel ESP	1.92	1.25	Hotel ESP	1.5	1.08	
High UA	Hotel CZ	2.42	2	Hotel CZ	2.5	2.58	High UA
	Hotel ESP	2.08	1.83	Hotel ESP	2.25	2.5	
High LTO	Hotel CZ	2.17	2.33	Hotel CZ	1.75	2.33	High LTO
	Hotel ESP	2.5	2.08	Hotel ESP	1.5	1	

Source: Author

III: Cultural dimensions for the hotels (VSM 94)

	PD	IDV	MAS	UA	LTO
Hotel CZ	76.85	85	83.3	94.25	24
Hotel ESP	15	55.67	20	83.2	66.6

Source: Author

“Hotel CZ” may be related to what has been stated above, and it is probable that the employees lack the support in the management as well as a sense of belonging. “Hotel ESP” shows a *long-term orientation*; the reason may be its good management and creating a positive work environment.

Given the “Hotel CZ” results, which discovered negative perceptions of the manager by other employees, it would be advisable to change the manager’s behaviour towards the subordinates in the enterprise. Realizing the manager’s unwanted attitude to other employees and its subsequent change could create an atmosphere supporting the development of corporate culture in the enterprise, and it could also establish better working relationships. Building confidence in this working group would lead to better collaboration, communication and closer working relationships, which could form the basis of an efficient business. The overall positive development would also help the hotel with its stronger future orientation.

The obtained results for “Hotel ESP” show the importance of development support of the established good working environment. Given the very close working relationship the enterprise does not have to avoid uncertainty and risk to such an extent. The manager could also encourage new ideas coming from his subordinates, who could then bring new ideas to help improve communication with the public, and thus increase the occupancy of the hotel, which is currently very low.

Obtained survey results and proposed recommendations for the component of the hotel chain

The Tab. IV and V show the results of TCSD and VSM 94 for the hotel chain. The Tab. IV of TCSD results is presented again in an abbreviated form; it does not include the final values for each word, but averages of these values. The lower the value is, either for the conscious (CON) or unconscious (UNC) evaluation of the word, the more positively the investigated society perceives the selected words. Therefore we can determine from the TCSD values, which pole of the cultural dimensions is desirable for workers (i.e. is more positively perceived or preferred), while the values of the VSM 94 indicate which pole of the cultural dimensions is applied in the enterprise.

In the surveyed components of the hotel chain, which operates in the Czech Republic and Spain, the employees naturally more unconsciously prefer a *small power distance*, even though in fact both the hotels apply a *large power distance*. The causes of the differences are shown through TCSD where the “HC-CZ” respondents perceived the manager negatively (similarly to “Hotel CZ”). On the contrary, workers in “HC-ESP” perceived their manager positively (similarly to “Hotel ESP”). The examined society in “HC-ESP” favours *collectivism*, which is actually implemented in the enterprise, and it is therefore likely that the authority of the manager is rather informal. In the “HC-CZ” the employees tend to behave *individualistically* due to the *large power distance* of the manager, which also supports the employees’ *masculine* behaviour, clearly confirmed by VSM 94. The “HC-ESP” applies the *feminine* approach, which is closely related to the *collective* behaviour in the enterprise. Both the components of the hotel chain tend to *avoid uncertainty* and their

IV: Cultural dimensions for the hotel chain (TCSD)

Cultural dimensions for the hotel chain							
	Object	Values (average)		Object	Values (average)		
		CON	UNC		CON	UNC	
High PD	HC-CZ	2.45	2.15	HC-CZ	2.18	1.86	Low PD
	HC-ESP	2.39	2.11	HC-ESP	2.11	2.04	
High IDV	HC-CZ	2.11	2.04	HC-CZ	2.11	2.21	Low IDV
	HC-ESP	2.18	2.25	HC-ESP	1.39	1.25	
High MAS	HC-CZ	1.86	1.68	HC-CZ	1.86	2	Low MAS
	HC-ESP	2.39	2.36	HC-ESP	1.39	1.25	
High UA	HC-CZ	2.61	2.39	HC-CZ	2.39	2.47	High UA
	HC-ESP	2.25	2.36	HC-ESP	2.36	2.32	
High LTO	HC-CZ	2.82	2.82	HC-CZ	1.29	1.53	High LTO
	HC-ESP	2.75	2.72	HC-ESP	1.22	1.22	

Source: Author

V: Cultural dimensions for the hotel chain (VSM 94)

	PD	IDV	MAS	UA	LTO
HC-CZ	83.35	60	90	69.7	71.4
HC-ESP	69.95	34.25	30.1	73.5	62.8

Source: Author

long-term orientation, proved by the tests, and may be caused by a strong position of the hotel chain in the international field.

DISCUSSION

The results show that organizational culture of the researched hotels of the hotel chain is not quite the same, and therefore does not have the multinational character, although it would be theoretically expected. To achieve the multinational corporate culture, quality training for current hotel managers is proposed; it would make it possible to unify the management quality of the each hotel. Emphasis should be placed on achieving an unforced perception of a managerial position where the management function would be an expression of necessity and not superiority, and his or her formal authority would thus be a natural consequence stemming from the size of the hotel chain. Hotel managers should also be aware that no matter how strong the position of the hotel chain is it does not affect the good functioning of its individual components. The risk of a poorly managed hotel of this multinational company can result in the destruction of the reputation of the entire company.

This article has so far described and compared the organizational culture of selected enterprises; it was possible to find out how employees identify themselves with the given culture thanks to TCSD. Due to the fact that the VSM 94 was used for the research, it is suitable to compare the final values of this test for the Czech and Spanish enterprises with Hofstede's national values² for these countries. However, it is important to mention that to work with the VSM 94; the obtained size of the sample for this research (10 respondents per country) seems to be insufficient for exploring national culture. In manuals, Hofstede considers 20 respondents as the lower boundary of a representative sample for drawing conclusions about national culture traits. A smaller sample was chosen because of the use of

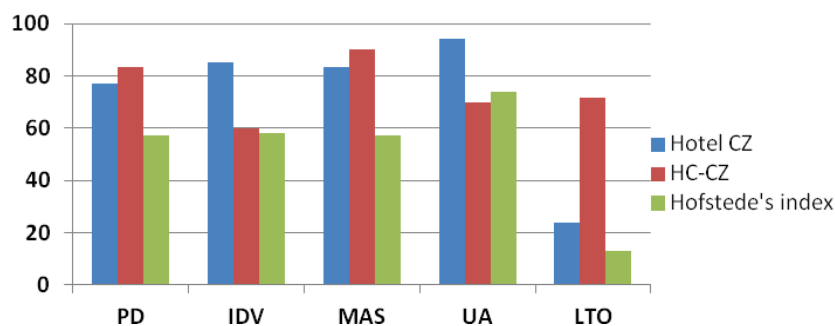
TCSD and because the objective of this article was not comparing national cultures, but corporate ones. Nonetheless, comparing the final values of the VSM 94 for Czech and Spanish enterprises seems appropriate. Values for each Czech and Spanish enterprise are kept separate to illustrate whether their values are similar.

However, if we want to compare the final data from the VSM 94 with Hofstede's national values for the Czech Republic, it is necessary to mention that Hofstede's values do not come from "direct" research, but they were calculated using replication, or determined through a reasonable estimate (Hofstede, 2007). In the Czech Republic, comparative research of national cultures using Hofstede's methodology was conducted by Czech psychologist Kolman, but on a specific sample of the population. This sample included only university students (Průcha, 2007).

Comparison of values from Czech enterprises with Hofstede's index

The Fig. 1 shows that Hofstede's values as well as the values of the surveyed enterprises for the first four dimensions (PD, IDV, MAS, UA) suggest that in the Czech Republic there is a tendency for a *large power distance*, *individualistic* way of behaviour, *masculinity*, and *avoiding uncertainty* and risk.

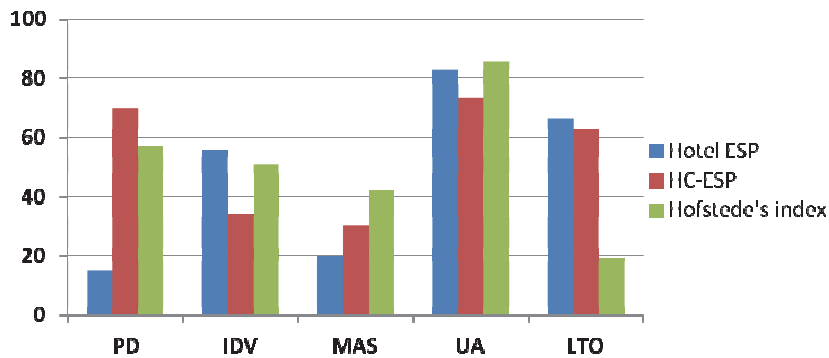
If we focus on the IDV dimension, in "HC-CZ" the value is very close to Hofstede's, but the results in "Hotel CZ" point to a large degree of *individualism*, which may stem from the overall dissatisfaction of employees and thus mistrust created in the working environment (which has also been suggested by the TCSD results). In such cultures it is possible to encounter a situation that managers are primarily interested in power ambitions, centralization of power, which gives rise to the reluctance to delegate the authority and power to lower positions. According to research, the value for the *long-term orientation* dimension is high only for "HC-CZ"; however, the results in "Hotel CZ" are close to



1: Cultural dimensions for the Czech Republic

Source: Author

2 National values for the Czech Republic and Spain were obtained from the website <http://geert-hofstede.com/countries.html>



2: Cultural dimensions for Spain
Source: Author

Hofstede's index. The difference in values found by the research may be caused primarily by the business atmosphere that is closely related to staff's short-term or long-term orientation.

If we think about the question of the influence of national culture on corporate culture, the compared results enable us to speak of the influence of national culture on corporate culture only in the first four dimensions (PD, IDV, MAS, UA).

Comparison of values from Spanish enterprises with Hofstede's index

When comparing the values of the surveyed enterprises located in Spain and comparing them with Hofstede's values, there are obvious differences both between the values of the examined enterprises and in their comparisons with Hofstede's values. The Fig. 2 shows that Spaniards tend to *collectivism*, *feminine* way of behaviour and *uncertainty avoidance*.

Values in the *power distance* dimension appeared very low for "Hotel ESP", which may be mainly due to the family environment and good relationships in the workplace. An interesting comparison can be found in the LTO dimension where the value was almost the same for both the surveyed enterprises and the enterprises are dominated by a *long-term orientation* although Hofstede's value suggests a *short-term orientation* of the Spanish culture. These differences may be related mainly to the fact that the research was conducted in enterprises where the orientation of workers and managers is naturally of a rather longer nature.

We can talk about the unambiguous influence of national culture on corporate culture in three cases: the cultural dimension of IDV, MAS and UA.

CONCLUSIONS

It would be appropriate to compare obtained results with similar research in this field;

nevertheless there has not been such research into organizational culture which would combine The Values Survey Module 1994 and the Test of Colour Semantic Differential. The TCSD has not been widely used for research into organizational culture in the Czech Republic although it has many practical uses thanks to the ability to work with respondents' consciousness and unconsciousness in connection with culture. This test might be considered as universal or transcultural because everyone understands words and colours that are used in the test although different people or nations may have distinct ideas about their importance. In TCSD, however, each respondent sets the main evaluation criteria (colours) themselves, which is a peculiarity of this type of testing. Evaluation of the unconscious perception of words using TCSD may also uncover facts that the researcher could find usually only at a personal interview.

In further use of TCSD for exploring corporate culture it would be appropriate not to use only words that standardly appear in the test, but to replace them with words that are typical for the work environment (e.g. control, discipline, performance, etc.). Thus it would be possible to find deeper connections in the mindset and behaviour of workers or managers. A basic advantage of TCSD is also identification of words that are often associated within the researched group, so it is more possible to find workers' shared values. Furthermore, it is possible to determine the degree of disagreement when comparing unconscious and conscious evaluations. A drawback of using TCSD is the need to process the obtained data through the program that is not freely accessible, or it is possible to process the data using mathematical and statistical methods. In this case, it is very important that the researcher understands the whole context in TCSD and clearly describes the process of evaluating the obtained data.

SUMMARY

This article showed the possibility of using a combination of The Values Survey Module 1994 and the Test of Colour Semantic Differential for research into organizational culture. The results of the VSM 94 revealed which poles of cultural dimensions the surveyed work teams are in fact approaching while the TCSD values made it possible to determine how employees consciously rated and unconsciously perceived expressions related to Hofstede's cultural dimensions (i.e. it was possible to reveal how workers identify with that culture). The final values from the VSM 94 were also compared with Hofstede's national values and it was investigated whether it is possible to speak about the impact of national culture on corporate culture.

This research has provided us with information which dimensions of culture the surveyed work teams approach, and the results confirm the fact that for a good working environment it is essential to establish adequate working conditions for employees since each person has a certain set of values, which he or she always projects into his or her work life. Finding common values of employees and their union with the goals and values of the company can help to meet strategies and achieve corporate goals.

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