

ETHICAL RESEARCH WITH STATISTICAL METHODS– FOCUS ON HUNGARY, SLOVAKIA, ROMANIA AND SERBIA

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Abstract

Our international research aimed to investigate, how respondents conceive of moral philosophy. The paper starts with theory about ethical idealism and relativism, followed by country descriptions and analysis of empirical data in four countries (n=825): Hungary, Romania, Serbia and Slovakia.

Key words: Business Ethics, Hungary, Romania, Serbia and Slovakia

JEL Code: C12, C38

Introduction

Pojman (2002) concludes that ethics are necessary for: (1) keeping society from falling apart, (2) ameliorating human suffering, (3) promoting human flourishing, (4) resolving conflicts of interest in just and orderly ways, and, (5) assigning praise and blame, reward and punishment, and guilt.

We can find some definition of ethics. According to Spence and Van Heekeren (2005), ethics can simply be defined as a set of prescriptive rules, principles, values and virtues of character that inform and show interpersonal and intrapersonal behavior: that is, the conduct of people toward each other and the conduct of people toward themselves.

In Ferrell and Fraedrich's (1997) opinion ethical issues are problems, situations or opportunities that require a person or organization to choose among several actions that must be evaluated as right or wrong.

Gini (2004) considers that ethics is about the assessment and evaluation of values, because all of life is value-laden. Personal moral philosophies are based on the traditional ethical theories of deontology, teleology and ethical skepticism. In this context, moral philosophies can be defined in terms of whether individuals approve high or low idealism and relativism.

According to the ethics position theory (EPT) individuals' personal moral philosophies influence their judgments, actions, and emotions in ethically intense situations (Forsyth et al., 2008). This theory enhances two dimensions: idealism and relativism. Idealism and relativism have a significant role to play in the development of ethical theory, for ethical ideology can explain differences in individuals' moral judgment (Forsyth 1980, 1992) the idealist individuals maintain the absolutism of a moral standard in contrast to relativists who try to avoid universal moral rules.

1 Methods

Our goal was to investigate, how respondents conceive of moral philosophy. To measure it, we used the Ethical Position Questionnaire (EPQ), that developed by D. R. Forsythe. This instrument contains 20 statements. The first 10 statements measure idealism and the last 10 statements measure relativism. In current questionnaire each statement was rates by a 5-point-scale Likert-scale from 1 - strongly disagree to 5 - strongly agree. To indicate the Idealism and Relativism scales we scored average of first and last 10 statements. Higher scores represent higher levels of idealism or relativism.

The goals of the research were: to analyze the relationship between ethical positions and objective variables among Hungary, Slovakia, Romania and Serbia. The objective variables were: Gender, Age, Years of work experience, and Place of work experience, Nationality, Citizenship and a summarized variable of Citizenship-Nationality. In order to find statistically significant differences comparing of means and ANOVA test and ETA value was used.

2 Results and Discussion

Most relativistic individuals mean that moral actions depend on the nature of the situation (Forsyth, 1992). Highly relativistic individuals refuse universal moral principles, but non-relativistic individuals accept universal principles when making ethical decisions (Bass et al., 1998).

Idealists believe that good outcomes for all can be achieved by morally correct actions (Forsyth 1980). According to non-idealists morally correct actions could also lead to negative consequences. Idealism measures the extent in which the consequences of an action are important to an individual (Hartikainen, Torstila, 2004). The intersection of idealism-relativism brings four moral philosophies: high idealism/low relativism (ethical absolutists),

high idealism/high relativism (ethical situationists), low idealism/low relativism (subjectivists), and low idealism/high relativism (exceptionists) (Forsyth, 1980). Even though ethical ideologies are distinct from practical behavior in particular situations, they are related. Absolutists tend to have the strictest moral judgments and higher ethical attitudes, whereas subjectivists tend to have the most lenient moral judgments (Hartikainen et al., 2004).

Forsyth et al. (2008) draws four ethical positions according to idealism and relativism dimension. Absolutists (high idealism – low relativism); Exceptionists (low idealism – low relativism); Situationists (high idealism – high relativism); Subjectivists (low idealism – high relativism)

Fig. 1: Ethical Positions by Forsyth

		Relativism	
		LOW	HIGH
Idealism	LOW	Exceptionism: Individuals should act in ways that are consistent with moral rules, but one should remain pragmatically open to exceptions to these rules	Subjectivism: Individuals' personal values and perspectives should guide their moral choices, rather than universal ethical principles or desire to achieve positive consequences
	HIGH	Absolutism: Individuals should act in ways that are consistent with moral rules, for doing so will in most cases yield the best consequences for all concerned	Situationism: Individuals should act to secure the best possible consequences for all concerned even if doing so will violate traditional rules about ethics

Source: Forsyth et al. 2008

The research was conducted in four countries – Hungary, Slovakia, Romania, and Serbia – among people with different nationality (belonging to different ethnic groups). The second table shows the distribution of our sample:

Slovakia: Today Hungarians in Slovakia are the largest ethnic minority of the country, numbering 520,528 people or 9.7% of population (2001 census). A third of the population of the districts situated on the Slovak-Hungarian border is ethnic Hungarian. Ethnic Hungarians compared to Slovaks are more likely living in villages and are less educated (Miller et al., 2011). The Hungarian population has less favorable indicators for qualifications obtained as

compared to Slovak average. Some of 30.5% of ethnic Hungarians in Slovakia has only the highest level of education of primary school. The proportion of the higher education graduates was only 4.3%, less than half compared to the Slovakian national average.

Table 1: The number of respondents by country and nationality

Countries	Hungarians (HU)	Romanians (RO)	Serbians (SB)	Slovakians (SK)	Total
Hungary (HU)	268				268
Romania (RO)	96	25			121
Serbia (SB)	66		119		185
Slovakia (SK)	213			38	251
Total	643	25	119	38	825

Source: own research

Hungary: With the change of regime in 1989, the ownership and the structure of Hungarian society were gradually changed. Today, Hungary is a fully developed market economy. Private property has become commonplace. New values became important. Customer orientation has become crucial to the business world. With the spread of globalization foreign language proficiency has become a necessity for success.

Overwhelming majority of the Hungarian society belongs to Jewish-Christian culture. Being religious in the Hungarian population is moderate (43%) according to the research of EVS (Halman, 2001).

The research of different cultures results (GLOBE, Hofstede) show that among the Hungarians individualism, masculinity, and cultural power distance are more typical. (Hofstede and Hofstede, 2005).

Romania: is one of the largest countries of Central and Eastern Europe, its population was 19,043,767 at the Census from 2011. Hungarian are the largest national minority from Romania (1,268,444, forming 6.6% of the country's total population) they are mostly living in the historical region of Transylvania, which had become part of Romania after the 1st World War. Religious life appears important or very important for the huge majority of Romanians: religious beliefs are shared by almost two thirds of them and praying is a very common practice. Some 19% of the Romanians mentioned religion as one of the three most important values for them personally, compared with 7% on average for the European Union. The highest percentage (46%) had chosen 'human rights' and 22% put 'the rule of law' among the

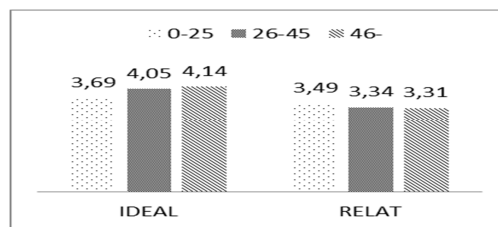
most important values. An overwhelming majority of the country's citizens (85,95%) are of Orthodox religion, 4,56% are Roman Catholic and 3,16% are protestant.

Serbia's territory is 88 361 km², where about 7 121 000 inhabitants live. The local companies' HRM practice and business ethic approach is deeply influenced by the country's history and the elements of its national culture. In Serbia the majority (85%) of the population are Serbs and pravoslavs, but there are more than 20 nationalities and other religions, too. The global financial crisis negatively influenced Serbia's economy as well, as it can be concluded based on data presented below. Serbia's cultural characteristics based on Hofstede's research can be defined as: high uncertainty avoidance (88), high power distance (76), individualism (27) and the dominance of femine values (21). Serbia is the most similar to the South American and Mediterranean countries, and the biggest differences are present compared to the Anglo Saxon countries. Janićijević's (2003) research results show that for the Serbian organizational culture the low formalization and bureaucracy, the respect of non formal and non written rules and the social control based on roles and norms is characteristic. Leaders have a special role at the job as the employees are very loyal to them. Hungarians make less than 4% of Serbia's population living on the North part of the country, in its Vojvodina province. The behavior and value system of Hungarians in Vojvodina is different from the majority. Due to the minority life, the war and ethnical discriminations they went through the majority of local Hungarians are characterized by passivity, inferiority complex and high respect of authorities. Dobos (2011) highlights that the main values of Hungarians living in Vojvodina are: family, work and prosperity. The significant part of the community still thinks that the standing out for the interests of Hungarians may lead to negative discrimination.

We can state that women in average are more idealistic than men. The analysis of variance has shown significant difference among the means for idealism (0,000), but the difference is not so obvious for relativism (0,090).

As regards the strength of relationship, both scales show weak relationship with the gender variable (Eta: 0,178 and 0,059)

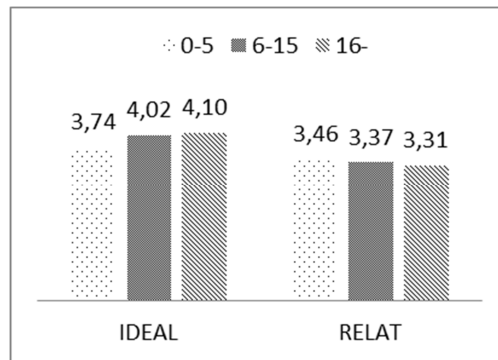
Fig. 1: Idealism and Relativism values according to ages



Source: own research

Figure 1 illustrates the values of idealism and relativism for different age groups. We can conclude that older people are more idealistic and younger people are more relativistic. The level of idealism grows and the level of relativism decreases with age, The difference of means is significant (0,000 and 0,001) for both scales, but, the deviation coefficients indicate weak relationship between age and idealism (0,312), as well as among age and relativism (0,126).

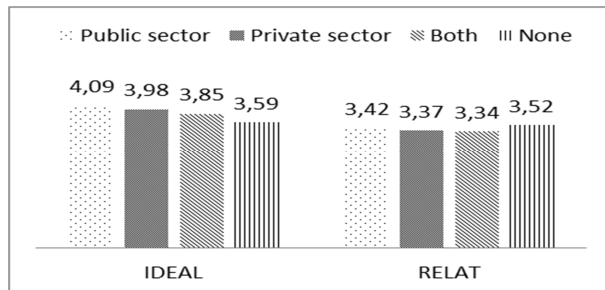
Fig. 2: Idealism and Relativism values according to years of work experience



Source: own research

The values of idealism and relativism also differ according to years of work experience. Figure 2 shows that people with more work experience are more idealistic, than those with less work experience, who are on the other hand more relativistic. Differences of means are significant for both cases (0,000 and 0,016) and relationships between dependent and independent variables are weak (0,259 and 0,100). However, we have to mention that in our opinion the relationship between work experience and idealism/relativism are due to age, as those with more work experience are probably also older.

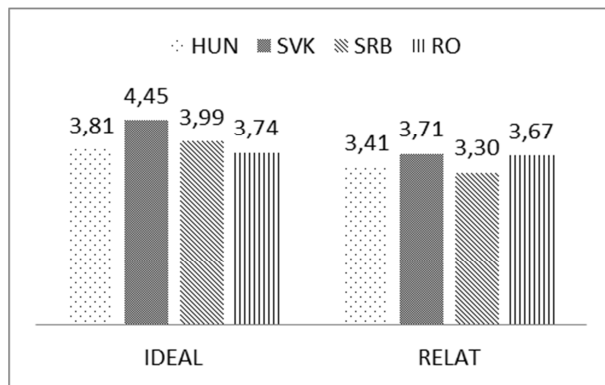
Fig. 3: Idealism and Relativism values according to place of work experience



Source: own research

The evolution of idealism/relativism according to the place of work experience is presented in Figure 3. We can state that those respondents from our sample, who had gathered their work experience in the public sector only, are more idealistic, but also more relativistic, than those who have only worked in the private sector. Those respondents, who have obtained work experience both in the public and the private sector are less idealistic and less relativistic than those from either of the groups mentioned before. Least idealistic and most relativistic are those, who have no work experience at all. The last conclusion is also related to age, as those without work experience are mostly young people. Differences of means are significant in case of both dependent variables (0,000 and 0,010), but relationships with the independent variable are weak (0,313 and 0,116).

Fig. 4: Idealism and Relativism values according to nationality

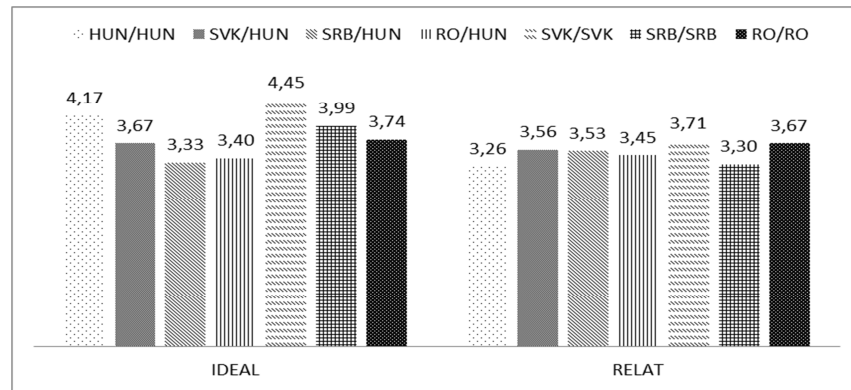


Source: own research

Figure 4 illustrates the relationships between nationality and idealism/relativism. The conclusions based on our sample are the following: Slovaks are the most idealistic, followed by Serbs, Hungarians and Romanians. Slovaks ranked first also on the scale for relativism, followed by Romanians, Hungarians and Serbs. Analysis of variance showed a significant difference of means for both scales (0,000 and 0,001), but again the relationships between variables are weak (0,240 and 0,145).

According to the results obtained for our sample: Hungarian citizens are the most idealistic, followed by Slovaks, Serbs and Romanians. Slovak citizens are the most for relativists, followed by Romanians, Serbs and Hungarians. Analysis of variance showed a significant difference of means for both scales (0,000 and 0,000); the relationship between variables is of medium strength for idealism (0,400) and weak for relativism (0,215).

Fig. 5: Idealism and Relativism values according to citizenship/nationality



Source: own research

Figure 5 presents the idealism and relativism values according to the combined citizenship/nationality variable, allowing us to conclude for our sample the following: Slovaks living in Slovakia are the most idealistic, they are followed by Hungarians from Hungary, Serbs from Serbia, Romanians from Romania, Hungarians from Slovakia, Hungarians from Romania and Hungarians from Serbia. The most relativistic respondents were also Slovaks living in Slovakia, followed by Romanians from Romania, Hungarians from Slovakia, Hungarians from Serbia, Hungarians from Romania, Serbs from Serbia and Hungarians from Hungary. Analysis of variance showed a significant difference of means for both scales (0,000 and 0,000); the relationship between variables is of medium strength for idealism (0,542) and weak for relativism (0,243).

Conclusion

Our international research aimed to investigate, how respondents conceive of moral philosophy. The paper starts with theory about ethical idealism and relativism, followed by country descriptions and analysis of empirical data in four countries (n=825): Hungary, Romania, Serbia and Slovakia. To measure it, we used the Ethical Position Questionnaire (EPQ), that developed by D. R. Forsyth. This tool assesses personal moral behavior, along two dimensions, idealism and relativism. The goals of the research were: to analyze what is the relationship between ethical positions and objective variables among respondents in Hungary, in Romania, in Slovakia and in Serbia. The objective variables were: Gender, Age, Years of work experience and Where gained work experience in.

In our paper we have analyzed the evolution of the idealism/relativism variables in our samples from Hungary, Slovakia, Romania and Serbia. According to the combined citizenship-nationality variable, Slovaks from Slovakia are the most idealistic, which means that they accept more readily ethical principles, than the other respondents. In the same time Slovaks from Slovakia ranked first also on the relativism scale, meaning that situational factors are as important for them as ethical principles. Even though analysis of variance showed a significant difference of means, the values of the means are very close for each respondent group.

Our initial hypothesis was that Hungarians living as national minorities in the countries neighboring Hungary would score on the idealism/relativism scale similarly with Hungarians from Hungary, because of the common language and cultural background. Research data has convinced us to reject the hypothesis. It is an interesting phenomenon, that the values obtained for minority Hungarians are neither similar to those of the Hungarians from Hungary, nor to those of the majority population from the country whose citizens they are, meaning that they have specific characteristics, especially regarding idealism. In the case of relativism the differences are not so obvious.

Finally we want to underline that our study does not aim to make judgments upon moral attitudes. We agree with the opinion expressed by scholars (Donelson – Forsyth – O’Boyle, - McDaniel, 2008) that there are no good or bad views. We also have to admit that our sample is not representative for the whole population of the countries studied, thus we can not make generally valid statements for the seven groups. Most of our respondents (from each group) were younger people. As a food for thought we raise the question whether the idealistic-relativistic views are really changing with age, or we are witnessing to a generation gap?

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