“Corporate culture interplay issues in global economy”

AUTHORS	Marcel Kordoš https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1833-7096 http://www.researcherid.com/rid/P-4568-2018 Jozef Habánik

ARTICLE INFO	Marcel Kordoš and Jozef Habánik (2018). Corporate culture interplay issues in global economy. *Problems and Perspectives in Management*, *16*(3), 302-310. doi: 10.21511/ppm.16(3).2018.24
DOI	http://dx.doi.org/10.21511/ppm.16(3).2018.24
RELEASED ON	Friday, 17 August 2018
RECEIVED ON	Saturday, 19 May 2018
ACCEPTED ON	Friday, 20 July 2018

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JOURNAL	"Problems and Perspectives in Management"
ISSN PRINT	1727-7051
ISSN ONLINE	1810-5467
PUBLISHER	LLC “Consulting Publishing Company “Business Perspectives”
FOUNDER	LLC “Consulting Publishing Company “Business Perspectives”

NUMBER OF REFERENCES	NUMBER OF FIGURES	NUMBER OF TABLES
26	1	3

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BUSINESS PERSPECTIVES

LLC "CPC "Business Perspectives"
Hryhorii Skovoroda lane, 10, Sumy, 40022, Ukraine

www.businessperspectives.org

Marcel Kordoš (Slovak Republic), **Jozef Habánik** (Slovak Republic)

CORPORATE CULTURE INTERPLAY ISSUES IN GLOBAL ECONOMY

Abstract

The topic of this paper is the comparative analysis assessment of American and European (Slovak) systems of corporate culture describing the cultural differences within transnational companies. The study is comparing the American system of corporate culture with Slovak corporate culture model. The goal of this paper is to figure out the real model of an American enterprise within its interaction with European (Slovak) enterprise and detect the differences between them. Based on the SWOT analysis coming out of two surveys via questionnaires outputs, the comparative analysis assessment dealing with the successful symbiosis of foreign American company operating within the European (Slovak) enterprise environment will be worked out. The paper reveals the similarities and differences between the Slovak and U.S. corporate culture standards such as conflict avoidance, focus on relationships, self-confidence of comparing cultures, personal responsibility, one's own initiative and autonomy and so on.

Keywords corporate culture, interpersonal relations, patriotism, internal communication, international business

JEL Classification F68, F23, M14

Received on: 19th of May, 2018
Accepted on: 20th of July, 2018

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Marcel Kordoš, Ph.D., Assistant Professor of International Economic Relations, Faculty of Social and Economic Relations, Alexander Dubček University in Trenčín, Slovak Republic.

Jozef Habánik, Ph.D., Associate Professor of Regional Economics, Rector, Faculty of Social and Economic Relations, Alexander Dubček University in Trenčín, Slovak Republic.

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INTRODUCTION

All companies and businesses differ in size, focus, and especially corporate culture being different in the U.S. and European conditions. Companies have their own corporate culture, which is constantly changing and shaping. Every employee should know it before getting a job in a company and know if being able to be identified with it. It is the corporate culture that can influence the satisfaction of employees, their motivation and all the relationships at a workplace.

Great emphasis in the U.S. and Slovak companies is put on communication, which, along with the image of a company and corporate culture, influences the motivation of its employees. Through communication, employees form opinions and attitudes towards the company. Communication here transfers information between superiors and subordinates, among employees, and should work in both directions (Grenčíková & Vojtovič, 2017). If it works only one way, so employees cannot express their opinions, their satisfaction and performance will decrease. Both the U.S. and Slovak firms strive to balance the internal environment with employee motivation by means of various programs.

The paper deals with the cultural differences within companies in international business environment, as well as the analysis of the U.S. system of corporate culture and its comparison with the Slovak model of corporate culture. The goal of the paper is to determine

the level of successful symbiosis based on a comparative analysis of the real model of American system of business environment and its interaction with the European (Slovak) one, respectively, the antagonism of the business environment and the employment culture of the U.S. corporation with the European (Slovak) one. Methods such as analysis, synthesis, comparison, and logical deductions were used to reach the goal of the paper.

1. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND LITERATURE OVERVIEW

According to Nový et al. (1996), there are several views on the relationship between national and business culture. Hamilton and Wepster (2009) state that business cultures are perceived as representatives of national culture, e.g. they are formed on the basis of cultural patterns given by the national culture. Balaz (2010) argues that within one national culture, there are very different business cultures that are individual and independent and have their own content, form and strength. There is a view that recognizes that very diverse corporate cultures can arise in the environment of a single national culture, but at the same time the corporate culture is not considered as a separate system being separated from national culture (Grencikova, Spankova, & Karbach, 2015).

According to Lukášová (2004), relationships with national and corporate culture must, in particular, be addressed by businesses operating in different parts of the world. There are different views on what kind of concept the international corporations should choose in their corporate culture within their branches. Nový and Schroll-Machl (2005) limit this wide range with two approaches. "Universalists" understand the principles of corporate culture as generally valid and independent from the specific national culture in which the enterprise operates. "Cultural relativists", on the other hand, believe that different management approaches to particular national culture need to be applied in different national cultures.

Fojtikova (2016) argues that corporate respective employee culture includes its principles, rules and social norms that affect the mutual coexistence and relationships in a particular organizational community. It can be created spontaneously or it is the result of a purposeful action. Just as a national culture arises, changes and develops over time. It is of a temporary nature and is influenced by business priorities and the dynamics of external environment. As Brakman et al. (2006) state, in organizations, there are several rules that employees must observe, otherwise, they will be punished due to non-compliance with or breach of their obligations. According to Kachaňáková (2008), the conflict of two national (and corporate) cultures can occur in different situations, for example:

- in organizations where a person from another country works with own national culture (e.g., within the free movement of labor in European Union);
- in an transnational organization that has several branches in different countries;
- business contact with companies from different countries of the world.

Cihelková and Hnát (2008) argue that when it comes to linking businesses within our territory, it is also necessary to reconcile two different corporate cultures and different forms and methods of mutual communication. A cross-cultural culture is called a multicultural situation.

1.1. Sources of corporate culture

A unique feature of corporate culture is the corporate identity. Its emergence is a long-term process that can be impaired by insensitive interventions. Šroněk (2000) states that the culture of a particular corporation is formed at a certain time and under certain conditions. Some of them are heavily dependent on the entrepreneur as the leader of organization and are able to be influenced. They give him/her an opportunity to determine the direction in which the corporate

Source: OTT (1989).

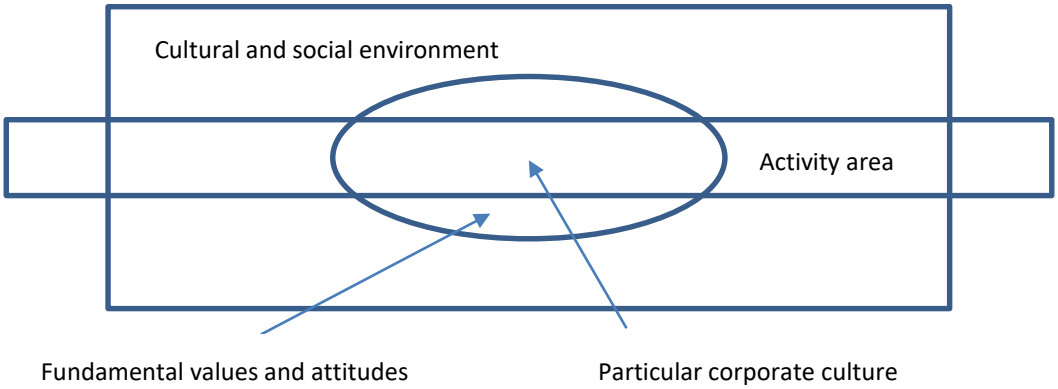

Figure 1. Corporate culture sources

culture will be oriented. Other conditions are considered above all to be affected by the individual. Business management needs to take into account all these conditions when planning an enterprise culture concept. The basic corporate culture sources diagram can be seen in Figure 1. According to Ott (1989), it is possible to define three basic resources from which the corporate culture is developed and is determined by them.

1. Wider social and cultural environment in which the enterprise operates is the most basic framework for shaping a corporate culture that always grows on the foundations of social standards and attitudes recognized in the company and it can not be diverted from a particular national culture.

2. The business sector and the business environment, the specification of the industry in which the enterprise cooperates, causes that the corporate culture of an organization in a particular field has more consistent features than for enterprises in different industries. The following reasons are possible:

- the domination of distinctive features required by the industry, for instance in trade, it is assumed that sales representatives need to persuade, directly influence the customer and pass on their information;

- to create a culture in particular field is influenced by the type of issues which companies must be involved in; like being related to the media, what society expects from it, etc.

Obadi and Korček (2015) declare that values, concepts and basic attitudes are already reflected in the staff selection process, where candidates are assessed how their values and attitudes match the values and attitudes of the organization, and whether they seem adaptable.

1.2. The impact of cultural differences on an enterprise

Delgadová and Gullerová (2017) argue that each culture contains universally recognized standards that were determined by the environment in which the employees were educated. These standards affect the behavior of the company's employees. One set of standards is a set of rules of social contact, ethics. Ethics means rules of dressing, dining, and others. Okręglicka, Mynarzová, and Kaňa (2015) argue that different parts of the world apply different ethical principles among people; different standards are used, whether they are between urban and rural populations or between people from different social strata.

According to Vojtovič, Navickas, and Gruzauskas (2016), in the business area, ethics has different specifications and its application may be more significant than in other areas. This concerns, for example, behavior in workplace, telephone conversation, negotiation with a business partner, consultations, etc. It is in the enterprise's interest to control and use the business ethics. Differences in the ethics can be observed in dealing with other cultures. It should be noted that although different cultures can act by means of ethics similarly, the cultural differences between them can be much greater.

Blecharz and Stverkova (2014) argue that managers of international, as well as domestic, companies should control the rules of social behavior. They should also act on their co-workers to see their observance as obvious. In today's highly competitive environment, this is one of the aspects that significantly influence the position of each business (Taušer, Arltová, & Žamberský, 2015).

1.3. The appearance of cultures at international level

Building up an enterprise culture should be based on a reasonable compromise of the following two options. In the first option, culture emerges spontaneously as a consequence of the natural behavior of employees. The second option is the culture as a result of systematic and targeted activities of company's management. According to Dunning and Lundan (2008), there are three levels of corporate culture:

- patterns of basic assumptions, values and attitudes of employees;
- values orienting the individual in how to behave, what is permissible, unacceptable;
- symbols by which the values of the company are transferred to employees.

Koisova and Haviernikova (2016) state that corporate culture greatly influences the workplace of employees and at the same time creates a specific, original image of company. It is necessary to gain one´s own identity in relation to customers and other external stakeholders. According to Dubravská, Mura, Kotulič, and Novotný (2015), a good corporate culture has the following benefits:

- unambiguous internal communication of the company;
- corporate culture is a general criterion for making decisions;
- recognition of employees with corporate goals and their greater loyalty and motivation.

According to Drulák and Druláková (2014), combining two or more national and corporate cultures is a typical situation in international firms. This occurs in the following cases:

- establishment of subsidiaries – representations in another country;
- taking over the company abroad, acquisition;
- international merger;
- joint venture.

Brakman et al. (2006) argue that to achieve success means to make the way towards a common corporate culture through the following steps:

- to analyze the current state of the partner organization's corporate culture and examine whether an existing corporate culture makes it possible to implement a business strategy for the future;
- not to analyze the differences but start building on what both cultures have in common;
- to respect different values of the other actor;
- to enable enough time, space and forms for mutual clarification, understanding, open communication through joint meetings, engaging in joint projects or teamwork;
- in personnel field, to supervise the needs of multicultural environment of company during staff selection, motivating, educating, gaining experience and any further work with employees.

In the international environment and in international corporations, it is necessary to overcome not only differences in national, but also in organizational cultures. Taušer and Čajka (2014) argue that it is important to be aware that the diversity of environment in which the international organization is doing business must also meet the appropriate internal diversity. An attempt to find common principles for the functioning of the whole organization is not always the most effective way. Perhaps, this is a simple solution, but it may be contrary to the needs of some of the different cultural components in the whole unit.

2. PROBLEM FORMULATION AND RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research task of this paper is focused on analyzing how different corporate cultures along with their interactions can be acting in the same environment. The issue is also to find out the proper involvement of different corporate culture approaches and their synergies affecting the production, labor productivity and overall working conditions in companies, while corporate management is being involved in the processes. The research will be focused on exploring of two different companies acting in the Slovak Republic in the area of machinery industry. One is the Slovak-based company HBP, a.s. Prievidza and the other one is a U.S. based company Johnson Controls Inc. making its business in the Slovak Republic. To execute this task the SWOT analysis of two questioner surveys outputs will be used. Two questioner surveys were executed in two companies of HBP, a.s. Prievidza and Johnson Controls Inc. Trenčín being distributed to their employees and management staff in the number of 120 pieces to each company within the overall 87 % of a return. From the surveys via questionnaires outputs, the SWOT analysis has been elaborated followed by a section discussing the parallels and synergies regarding the Slovak and U.S. corporate culture symbiosis. Within the hypothesis we suppose that the Slovak and U.S. corporate cultures do not interfere to each other and their synergies create a proper environment and conditions for making business.

The goal of this paper based on the Slovak and U.S. corporate cultures comparison analysis is to figure out the real model of American enterprise within its interaction with European (Slovak) enterprise along with their impact on employee environment as the way to achieve satisfying and efficient corporate culture strategy. Basic data were drawn from two surveys via questionnaires being executed in two companies. To accomplish this goal, methods such as SWOT analysis, comparative analysis, synthesis and logical deduction are to be used; facts from scientific and professional publications, periodical and non-periodical press as well as internal documents of both companies will be primarily used and examined. Subsequently the analysis will lead to synthesis, prognosis and by means of abstraction method to eliminating the less important factors in order to set general statements and opinions.

3. RESULTS

To meet the goal of the paper, the crucial step is to compare the American and Slovak corporate culture system in Johnson Controls, Inc. Trenčín and HBP, a.s. Prievidza by means of SWOT analysis, to find out which system of corporate culture in each company is doing better, and at last their strengths and weaknesses, opportunities and threats will be revealed. The surveys via questionnaires outputs being transformed into the SWOT analysis for the U.S. company doing business in Slovakia are elaborated in Table 1 and for the Slovak-based company are presented in Table 2.

Table 1. The U.S. corporate culture system at Johnson Controls (by using the SWOT method)

Source: Elaborated by authors based on research results.

Strengths
• continuous development of individual and group abilities; • learning by doing method; • offering foreign internships, summer internships; • practice jobs for students; • focusing on the employment of graduates; • scholarships for students; • presentations at schools, universities; • branches around the world; • projects for regional development; • creating a good work environment for performance and teamwork development; • assisting students in writing final thesis
Weaknesses
• low tolerance rate; • domestic consumers prefer domestic services and products; • unethical behavior of business companies; • informal relationships at workplace; • lack of job opportunities for better job positions
Opportunities
• the use of modern management methods; • productivity increasing; • reducing the risk of labor disputes; • staff training on ethics and compliance with law; • corporate culture promotion; • new jobs creation; • better position on the international market
Threats
• highly qualified workforce shrinkage; • lack of funding; • increasing competition; • market position changes; • investments based on cheap labor; • labor migration increase

Table 2. Slovak corporate culture system at HBP, a.s. Prievidza (by using the SWOT method)

Source: Elaborated by authors based on research results.

Strengths
• a pleasant working environment; • a good working team; • offering multiple educational programs; • a network of cultural institutions and sports facilities (social infrastructure); • relatively low unemployment rate; • a high degree of labor mobility; • high number of private enterprises; • lectures of managers at universities; • implementation of foundations; • cooperation with schools in practice; • employment of foreign employees
Weaknesses
• increased and insufficiently satisfied demands for social and health care services; • some degree of employment dependency of some enterprises from others; • the partial loss of human capital by migration; • insufficient supply or demand for specialized secondary education; • a shortage of free job vacancies
Opportunities
• business activity increasing; • modern approaches to technologies; • improving health care; • incentive programs for employees; • teaching foreign languages; • foreign internships in action; • focus on innovation; • new jobs creation
Threats
• threat of dismissal/firing; • insufficient ability of business entities to create jobs; • migration of new labor forces abroad; • loss of highly qualified workforce; • foreign competition; • lack of funding

On the basis of the information obtained from the SWOT analysis, in Table 3 there are compared selected corporate culture values of both assessed corporations Johnson Controls, Inc. Trenčín and HBP, a.s. Prievidza.

4. DISCUSSION

Based on the results obtained from the SWOT analysis being conducted in the U.S. corporation Johnson Controls Inc. Trenčín based in Slovakia and the general features of the U.S. corporate culture system, the U.S. cultural standards can be defined as follows.

The U.S. companies as employers do their best to create working conditions and environment that encourage excellent workers. They place great emphasis on personal responsibility, initiative and autonomy of each employee. Employees are expected to provide the best of their knowledge and skills, being open to everything new, would be initiating changes and innovations, they would perform their work in such a way that they deserve the trust of their co-workers. Companies also pay attention to creating an appropriate working environment for their employees. It is important for them to work in an atmosphere of trust, good mood, and always be able to give a helping hand. Based on our empirical survey, it has been figured out that the following standards are typical for the U.S. corporate culture system.

- Equality – Americans believe in equality of opportunity and the possibility of career promotion. They are convinced that hard work is a success. The expression of equality is informal personal contact, calling by the first name without using university degrees. To customers they behave friendly and with great respect.

Table 3. The comparison of Johnson Controls, Inc. Trenčín and HBP, a.s. Prievidza

Source: Elaborated by authors based on research results.

Corporate culture values	Johnson Controls	HBP, a.s.
The company's values	• customers' satisfaction; • integrity; • employees' involvement; • sustainability	• innovation; • customer orientation; • flexibility; • high workload
Education	• professional conferences; • participation in language courses; • skills enhancement programs	• internal training by its own experts; • foreign and domestic training; • teaching foreign languages
Cooperation with educational institutions	• summer student internships; • life long trainee programs; • learning by doing approach	• presentations at schools; • secondary school practice; • student organizations
Benefits	• a jubilee reward; • reward for years worked; • holiday allowance; • sports days; • rehabilitation and recreation; • summer camps; • Christmas parties	• sports programs; • relaxing events; • reconditioning stays; • loyalty programs; • allowance for recreation; • a contribution to health care; • reward for years worked out

- Communication orientation – Americans are very active both in private and professional spheres. They prefer practical matters to ideals. Americans are pragmatic towards the future and believe that everyone is capable of influencing their current situation or changing it for better.

- Serenity – Americans tend not to plan their activities in detail unless it is necessary.

- Performance orientation – this cultural standard implies that Americans are a very competitive and powerful nation, the need of social status is a proof of their competence.

- Competitiveness leads to the best results and motivates and increases self-confidence.

- Individualism – in this concept, great emphasis is placed on responsibility, entrepreneurship and independence. Every individual feels responsible for own lives and shows the desire for independence in decision making.

- The social recognition need – for Americans, the signs of irritability and anger in public are unacceptable. They try to avoid conflicts and consider social success as part of their success.

- Minimizing of interpersonal distance – inner personality is largely open. Thanks to their openness and friendliness, they make contacts easier. On the other hand, in interviews about personal problems and feelings, they are very reticent, protecting their privacy.

- Patriotism – this is a strong patriotic attitude that is largely prideful and respectful regarding American (patriotic) constitution and democracy. They feel pride and expect respect from other nations.

Last but not least, historical circumstances that have a decisive impact on the development of cultural standards in the US play a major role. The United States of America is a country of immigrants who in the past have been particularly affected by Protestant thinking. These aspects have already been reflected in the above-mentioned cultural standards in many ways. A good example is the confrontation of US immigrants with the environment after their arrival in the US where they were forced to act quickly to survive. This is where the foundation of cultural standard has been laid – the orientation to the action. The fundamentals of another cultural standard – performance orientation have shaped immigrants' efforts to increase their standard of living, making work very attractive to them.

Based on the results obtained from the implemented SWOT analysis in Slovak corporation HBP, a.s. Prievidza and the general signs of European or Slovak corporate culture system, the Slovak cultural standards can be defined as follows.

- Relationship orientation – Slovak employees prefer in mutual acting and communication the relational aspect rather than pragmatic. They search for personal contacts and appreciate the sympathy of others.

- People-oriented control – is underrated in our system because employees tend to break the general rules in favor of preserving their personal sovereignty. Friendship is binding on them. They therefore prefer a people-oriented culture.

- Underestimation of structures/tendency to improvise – employees feel the system of planning as their personal constraint. In many cases, they are skeptical about planning, often ignoring it. Rules and standards are considered useless. They like to improvise what they perceive as their inner feeling of freedom.

- Simultance – employees like to spend time doing more than one activity simultaneously. They often confuse the order of priorities of each activity with confidence in their improvisation skills.

- The interpenetration of different areas of life and aspects of personality – almost in all social situations, the aspects of emotionality and rationality, private and working life, formal and informal structures are overlapping. Slovaks consider this complexity of their lives as a manifestation of personal reliability and sincerity.

- Vulnerable self-confidence – self-confidence among our employees is subject to great fluctuations.

- Conflicts avoiding – employees do not like to discuss their problems, talks on this topic are unpleasant and therefore they try to avoid them. They say they can not handle hard discussions. They prefer the possibility to avoid conflicts before they get involved in them.

- The communication context – is characteristic for Slovak employees, meaning their communication contains indirect information. They work with non-verbal signals that need to be deduced from the overall content, as they are a necessary element for understanding the regulation.

Authors contend that the above mentioned cultural standards have been influenced to a certain extent by many historical circumstances. Events such as the occupation by Nazi Germany, the Habsburg monarchy and, last but not least, the dictatorship of the Communist Party, all these historical circumstances have somehow been signed by the Slovak nation and their identity. Compared to the United States' cultural standards, obvious differences can be observed. In Slovakia, still a relatively small percentage of employers are more intensively committed to promoting the harmonization of work and family life of their employees. In the Slovak Republic, labor flexibility is not very much used, but it is expected that progressive employers will soon understand its importance and start to use it more in accordance with the needs and preferences of its employees.

From the comparison of the previous parts, it can be said that the Slovak cultural standards are in most cases different from the U.S. ones. The biggest difference is in the self-esteem of compared cultures. As already mentioned, the self-reliance of Slovak employees is subject to great fluctuations. On the contrary, Americans are self-confident, initiative and success are not seen as just a possibility. Another distinct element is the reluctance of Slovaks to take responsibility for the results of their work, and on the contrary, Americans place great emphasis on personal responsibility, initiative and autonomy. Also the avoidance of conflicts as a common feature of American and Slovak corporate culture can be included. Both cultures try to work in such a way that they do not come into conflict either in collegial relationships or with the outside environment. The common feature of both cultures is their orientation towards relationships being a prerequisite for good communication and cooperation and is the main feature of a well-functioning organization.

CONCLUSION, LIMITATIONS AND FURTHER DIRECTIONS

Summing up on the basis of results being obtained, it can be said that there is no universal corporate culture in the world that would suit everybody. This is, for example, the reason why job candidates are also guided by corporate culture when choosing a job. Personal freedom is particularly appreciated; one is initiative and has a desire to self-actualize. Handling the corporate culture can become a very powerful tool for work motivation, which can also affect the success or failure of an enterprise. By properly applied corporate culture, it is possible to reduce fluctuation and increase business efficiency. The executed research has shown that executive organizations are characterized by dynamic culture of a company having the character of a learning company, focusing on customers, employees and other external stakeholders. Corporate culture gives the company identity. At the same time, the communication activities of a company towards the public also affect the employees and their perceptions. Therefore, it is necessary to strengthen the pride of employees towards the company, which eventually leads to a shift in corporate culture.

It is unclear whether U.S. or Slovak corporate culture is better because both companies have the same number of strengths and weaknesses. HBP, a.s. Prievidza, as well as Johnson Controls Inc. Trenčín, carry out their personal and work-based development of employees by a number of training programs. They strive to provide a comfortable work environment for all their employees, they ensure the effective functioning of corporate culture system and create an image that helps build a good name for a company.

In terms of limitations that could affect the executed research, the following issues can be mentioned such as questioners' management distribution difficulties and not enough time to fill in the questioners properly by respondents.

Further research will be devoted to exploring the role of corporate culture within the European Union countries, especially the new and old member states, as well as the corporate culture assessment for companies making their business in European Union and South East Asia region, such as China and South Korea, as a lot of foreign direct investments flow into Slovakia from there and their corporate culture and management approaches and tools are so different from the European ones.

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