



## Social intelligence in the Cultural Context: Comparison of Indian and Slovak Managers

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**Abstract.** The presented study is based on the assumption that social constructs do not have a generally valid form but are culturally conditioned. *Purpose.* It presents the results of a research aimed at an analysis of the consistency of the factor structure of the MESI methodology (Measuring Social Intelligence) in the Indian and Slovak managerial environment. At the same time, the results of the analysis of differences in the assessment of the extracted social intelligence factors (Manipulation, Empathy and Social Irritability) between the managers from India and Slovakia are presented. *Study design.* The research file consisted of 504 managers, of which 252 were Indian and 252 were Slovak managers. *Findings.* The findings enable formulation of solution to two issues. The first is related to the degree of universality of the extracted factor structures of social intelligence in the individual cultures. The second relates to the assessment of the individual specified social intelligence factors within different cultures. The presented findings confirm that the MESI methodology factor structure detected based on the samples of Indian and Slovak managers is consistent. The only difference was detected in the order of the factors extracted based on the percentage of the variance explained. Consistency of the factor structure presented is confirmed also by the results of saturation of the factors by the individual items, the Cronbach's alpha values, and correlation of the extracted factors. Existence of several differences in the assessment of the social intelligence attributes of Manipulation and Social Irritability was confirmed. Manipulation was more prominently rejected by the Indian managers, while Social irritability was more prominently rejected by the Slovak managers. *Value of results.* This finding also points to the necessity of accepting the cultural context in examining social intelligence and social constructs in general.

**Keywords:** social intelligence, cultural context, MESI, management, manipulation, empathy, social irritability.

### Introduction

Culture has a great impact on the formation of human characteristics, including attitudes, behaviors, habits and values that are transmitted from one generation to the next (Matsumoto,

2000). Accepting the requirement to explore social phenomena in a cultural context is an important theoretical and methodological basis of any social research. The researchers focus not only on the comparison of the social, ethnic and cultural differences that are reflected in the behavior of people, but also on studying the impact of culture on the development of individuals. Discussions are aimed at verification of generally applicable characteristics, independently of the cultural context, but also at how a particular culture affects a person. This approach automatically assumes that social constructs do not have a generally valid form but, on the contrary, they are shaped by culture, habits, customs — the entire cultural heritage of a particular society (Heine, Ruby, 2010; Markus, Kitayama, 2003).

M. E. Ascalon, D. J. Schleicher, and M. P. Born studied the issue of social intelligence across cultures and developed an instrument which was labeled as CCSI (Cross Cultural Social Intelligence). According to their research, CCSI can be used in cross-cultural situations, although one crucial limitation of its use is that it has not been validated in terms of relations to job performance. After development of CCSI, the authors argued that there had been no similar instrument available at that time, particularly not a theoretically grounded and empirically sound one (Ascalon, Schleicher, Born 2008).

The presented study therefore focuses on the theory and methodology based on the assumption that social constructs do not have a generally valid form but are culturally conditioned. Its objective is to explore the differences in the assessment of the particular social intelligence factors by Slovak and Indian managers in the context of verification of an own, original methodology for measuring social intelligence — MESI (Frankovský and Birknerová, 2014a), which is further described in the methodological section of this paper.

## Literature review

Every manager behaves differently in social situations. Some feel comfortable in these situations; behavior does not present a problem for them; they even seek these situations out. Others avoid them, feel uncomfortable; they are unable to choose the right behavior forms. The causes of these differences can be sought in several areas and analyzed from different angles. It is clear that the specifics of behavior in these situations can be caused by characteristics at the individual level of each manager (temperament, personality characteristics, experience), but also at the level of the situation (culture, conflict, friendly atmosphere, threats, unknown situation). Social intelligence in this sense can be considered as one of the leading personality predictors of managerial behavior in social situations.

One of the typical examples of research into the cultural context is the area of values (Hofstede, 2001), but H. R. Markus and S. Kitayama also discuss the impact of culture on the processes of self-esteem, self-respect, management (Markus, Kitayama, 2003; see also Mikušová, Horváthová, 2010), selection, dissonance, emotions, motivation, control, attention and categorization, creativity, the impact of culture on the assessment of well-being, morality, health, and so on. In this concept, social intelligence also has its place (Birknerová et al., 2013).

When defining social intelligence, the emphasis is on how individuals understand and interpret their own behavior and behavior of other people, and also, depending on this interpretation, how they can effectively regulate their behavior. Some definitions accentuate rather perceptual, cognitive-analytical dimension, or an ability to understand other people (e.g. Barnes, Sternberg, 1989). Other definitions concentrate more on behavior, or an ability to successfully affect other people (e.g. Ford, Tisak, 1983), and accentuate the behavioral aspect. Social intelligence is characterized also from the point of view of the traditional three-component model with differentiation of perceptual,

cognitive, and behavioral components (Bjorkqvist, 2000). Multidimensional feature of the social intelligence construct is unquestionable.

D. H. Silvera, M. Martinussen, and T. I. Dahl describe social intelligence as an individual personality trait. Beginnings of the efforts to conceptualize and operationalize it date back to E. L. Thorndike (1920). However, efforts to theoretic define social intelligence come across certain difficulties (Silvera, Martinussen, Dahl, 2001). Issues of distinguishing social intelligence from other similar constructs (academic intelligence, emotional intelligence, practical intelligence, but also e.g. communication, social influence, etc.) are still under discussion, as well as understanding of social intelligence as a performance characteristic or a personality trait.

As we observe the basic lines of social intelligence study in the literature, essentially, two main tendencies represented by the psychometric and the personal approach (Kihlstrom, Cantor, 2000) can be set apart. The psychometric approach conceptualizes and operationalizes social intelligence as ability or a number of abilities, where people can be compared on a low versus high dimension, and in this case the only difference from the academic intelligence lies in the focus on the social sphere (Silvera, Martinussen, Dahl, 2001). On the other hand, the personal approach representatives speculate about social intelligence on the basis of behavior in various interpersonal situations, social interactions, and social structures (Ruisel, 1999), which are not evaluated strictly on the efficiency dimension.

In terms of exploring social intelligence in a cultural context, it is possible to define at least two sets of issues. The first one is related to solving the level of universality of the extracted factor structures of social intelligence in individual cultures. The second one is related to the assessment of the individual specified factors of social intelligence in different cultures.

R. J. Emmerling and R. E. Boyatzis focused in their study on the cultural issues related to applied use of emotional and social intelligence competences, particularly to their cross-cultural validation, which is seldom studied empirically. Their research revealed that these competences represent a practical, reliable, theoretically coherent, and valid approach to the assessment and development of individuals in diverse cultures (Emmerling, Boyatzis 2012).

In accordance with L. S. Sigmar, G. E. Hynes, and K. L. Hill social and emotional capabilities are at least an equivalent predictor of professional success as cognitive assumptions (Sigmar, Hynes, Hill, 2012). In terms of identifying social intelligence as a predictor of successful managerial behavior, two concepts can be mentioned. The first one is related to social competences as a prerequisite for the management of work teams. The second one is based on the findings of R. E. Boyatzis (2011) and says that social and emotional intelligences explain a significant part of the variance in the prediction of managers' performance competences. From the viewpoint of both concepts, it is necessary to consider the impact of the cultural context on the aforementioned attributes.

## Methodology

The aim of the research was to contribute to the discussions about the cultural impact on the construct of social intelligence on the basis of a comparison of the extracted factor structures, Cronbach's alpha values, correlations and the specification of differences in the assessment of the identified factors on the samples of Indian and Slovak managers, and at the same time to verify the possibilities to use the MESI questionnaire in various cultural contexts.

The MESI methodology (*Measuring Social Intelligence*; Frankovský, Birknerová, 2014a) detects social intelligence as a personality trait. Its authors assume the trans-situational stability of social intelligence which they define as a dispositional personality attribute. MESI was developed on the

basis of the previous research studies in which the EMESI methodology (Empathy, Manipulation, Social Irritability; Frankovský, Birknerová, 2013) was used. EMESI had been initially designed for students, their peers, and their teachers to measure the perception of social intelligence as a performance characteristic. Its structure was then revised and perfected to accommodate wider audience, i.e. to become MESI — a generally applicable tool for detecting social intelligence of people. Both MESI and EMESI were inspired by and proposed according to the PESI methodology (Peer-Estimated Social Intelligence) created by, A. Kaukiainen, K. Bjorkqvist, K. Osterman, K. Lagerspetz, S. Forsblom (Kaukiainen et al., 1995).

MESI consists of 21 items evaluated on a 5-point Likert scale where 0 represents „never“ and 4 represents „very often“. By means of a factor analysis, three factors were extracted and labeled by M. Frankovský and Z. Birknerová (2014a) as follows:

**Manipulation:** People who have higher scores in this social intelligence attribute are able to persuade others to do almost anything. They can use others for their own benefit and persuade them to take their side. At the same time, they are happy about it. They use the lie of others for their own advantage. Example item: “I know how to persuade others to take my side”.

**Empathy:** Individuals with higher scores in this factor are able to recognize the intentions, feelings, and weaknesses of other people. They can decipher the ways others think, adapt to new people, guess their wishes as well as fulfill them. Example item: “I know how to act in accordance with the feelings of others”.

**Social irritability:** Persons characterized by higher scores in this factor are nervous in contact with other people. They avoid the presence of others if possible. Feelings of others baffle them; adapting to other people is a problem for them as it invokes unpleasant feelings in them. Weaknesses and wishes of others confuse them. Example item: “People who are willing to do anything for me make me nervous”.

The research sample, which was collected offline using the Snowball data collection method, consisted of 504 managers. Of these, 252 (50%) were Indian managers and 252 (50%) were Slovak managers, all approached in their native cultural environment. The sample of Indian managers was made up of 125 (49.6 %) men and 127 (50.4 %) women, aged 33.7 years on average (SD: 10.860 years). The sample of Slovak managers was made up of 123 (48.6 %) men and 129 (51.4 %) women, aged 30.4 years on average (SD: 9.125 years). Two methodology language variations were used to conduct the research – the Slovak version for the Slovak sample (Frankovský, Birknerová, 2014b), and the English version for the Indian sample (Frankovský, Birknerová, 2014a). The acquired data was processed by means of the SPSS 20 statistical software.

## Results

One of the possible approaches to verifying the new methodology is also the definition of its use in other linguistic mutations in different cultural environments. The research problem was aimed at determining whether the factor structure of the MESI methodology, identified on a sample of Slovak managers, is identical to the factor structure of the methodology extracted on the sample of Indian managers. One of the primary objectives of the conducted study was to verify the factor structure on two culturally distant samples in order to find out whether the attributes of social intelligence remain unchanged when assessed by managers whose cultural background is in many ways different from the one where the initial methodological studies had been conducted (Frankovský, Birknerová, 2013; 2014a; 2014b).

On the basis of a factor analysis (Principal Component Analysis with Varimax Rotation) carried out on the sample of Slovak and Indian managers, three identical factors of social intelligence were

extracted in both cases (Table 1). The identified factors can be ordered according to the variance explained and described content-wise as Manipulation, Empathy and Social irritability.

Table 1. Factors Extracted on the Sample of Slovak and Indian Managers and Their Saturation with the Individual Items of MESI

MESI items	Slovak managers			Indian managers		
	Manipulation	Empathy	Social Irritability	Manipulation	Empathy	Social Irritability
5. I am able to persuade others to do almost anything	.496			.426		
6. Using others for my own benefit pleases me	.784			.704		
11. I can use my behavior to persuade people to do for me what I want	.697			.538		
12. If I want, I know how to use others for my own benefit	.791			.739		
13. I know how to use the lives of others for my own benefit	.700			.687		
19. I use others for my own benefit	.824			.775		
20. I know how to persuade others to take my side	.806			.519		
2. I can guess how to adapt to new people		.703			.460	
3. I am able to guess the wishes of others		.765			.671	
8. I am able to recognize the wishes of others		.764			.637	
9. I know how to act in accordance with the feelings of others		.488			.503	
16. I am able to guess the feelings of others even when they do not want to show them		.765			.675	
17. I can guess the weaknesses of others		.620			.636	
21. In contact with other people I can recognize their intention		.549			.483	
1. Contact with others makes me nervous			.640			.652
4. Feelings of others baffle me			.493			.639
7. I feel uncomfortable when I have to adapt to new people			.628			.584
10. Weaknesses of others baffle me			.542			.494
14. I feel uneasy when I have to adapt to new people			.583			.605
15. Wishes of others make me nervous			.518			.489
18. People who are willing to do anything for me make me nervous			.635			.337

On the basis of the factor analysis it may be claimed that the factor structure of the MESI methodology detected on the sample of Slovak managers corresponds to the factor structure of the mentioned methodology detected on the sample of Indian managers. The individual extracted factors in both cases are saturated with the same items of the methodology. Factors extracted on the Slovak sample of managers explain 54.2% of the variance, while the factors extracted on the Indian sample of managers explain 42.2% of the variance. In both cases, the variance is explained at an acceptable level and is essentially identical.

The eigenvalue and percentage of the variance explained for the individual extracted factors on the research samples of Slovak and Indian Managers are displayed in Table 2. It is necessary to note that the order of the factors extracted based on the percentage of the variance explained was in the sample of Indian managers as follows: Empathy, Manipulation, Social irritability. In the sample of Slovak managers it was first Manipulation, followed by Empathy and then Social irritability.

Table 2. Eigenvalue and Percentage of Variance Explained for Individual Extracted Factors on the Research Samples of Slovak and Indian Managers

Statistics	Slovak managers			Indian managers		
	M	E	SI	E	M	SI
Eigenvalue	4.642	4.114	2.653	3.284	3.041	2.542
Variance (%)	22.019	19.592	12.631	15.640	14.480	12.103

Note. M = Manipulation; E = Empathy; SI = Social Irritability

The factor structure of the methodology extracted on the samples of Indian and Slovak managers is also identical. The MESI methodology is therefore applicable to both the Slovak and the Indian managers. This fact is also demonstrated by the graphical expressions of the extracted factors (Figure 1, Figure 2).

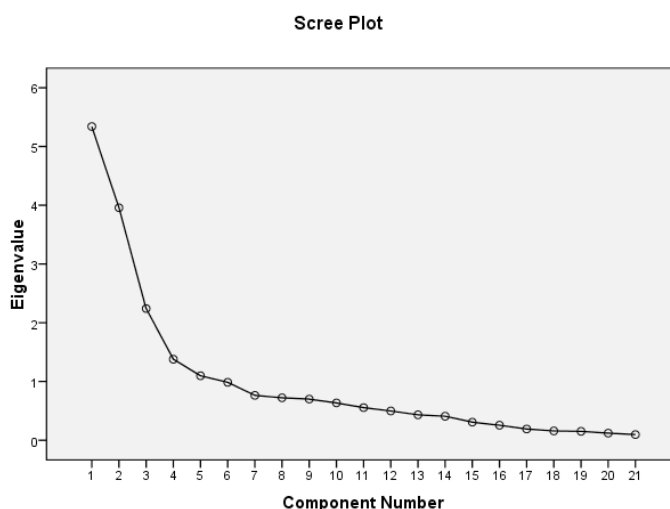


Figure 1. Scree Plot of the Factors Extracted on the Slovak Sample of Managers

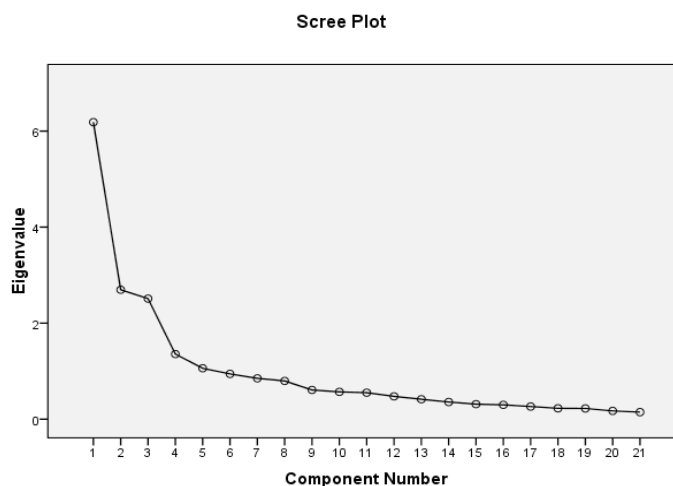


Figure 2. Scree Plot of the Factors Extracted on the Indian Sample of Managers

The degree of internal consistency of the individual factors was measured by the Cronbach's alpha coefficient (Table 3).

Table 3. Cronbach's Alpha Values for the MESI Methodology Factors Extracted on the Sample of Slovak and Indian Managers

Country/Factor	Manipulation	Empathy	Social irritability
Indian managers	.805	.721	.743
Slovak managers	.882	.830	.780

The Cronbach's alpha values detected on the Slovak sample of managers show a sufficient internal consistency of the individual factors of the MESI methodology.

The results of the correlation analysis of the extracted MESI factors carried out on both samples of managers indicate the existence of similarities between these factors calculated from the data from the Slovak and the Indian samples of managers. The correlation coefficient values found on the sample of Indian managers (Table 4) point to a significant relationship between Empathy and Manipulation, which is expressed by a positive correlation coefficient. This fact tells us that those Indian managers who score higher in the Empathy factor have higher scores also in the factor of Manipulation. It means that the managers who are able to guess the wishes, feelings, and intentions of other people are, at the same time, capable of persuading them to behave and act in their favor and support them, standing by their side.

A significant relationship was detected also between the assessment of Manipulation and Social irritability, which is expressed by a positive correlation coefficient. It means that the managers, who tend to behave manipulatively, feel unpleasant when having to adapt to other people. They perceive the feelings and wishes of others as unpleasant.

Table 4. Correlations of the MESI Factors Extracted on the Indian Sample of Managers

Factor	Manipulation	Empathy	Social irritability
Manipulation			
Empathy		.381***	.283***
			.068

Note. \*\*\*  $p < .001$

Analysis of the data gained from the Slovak managers (Table 5) confirmed, similarly to the Indian sample, the existence of statistically significant correlation coefficients between Empathy and Social irritability. These results prove that the higher the Slovak managers score in the Manipulation factor, which means using other people for their own benefit and persuading them to do whatever they want, the higher their tendency towards to assess themselves as able to guess the wishes, feelings and intentions of others.

Contrarily to the Indian managers, the correlation analysis on the sample of Slovak managers confirmed a statistically significant correlation between Empathy and Social irritability. It means that the managers who are able to guess the wishes, feelings, and intentions of others, at the same time feel unpleasant when having to adapt to other people. They perceive the wishes and feelings of others as unpleasant.

Table 5. Correlations of the MESI Factors Extracted on the Slovak Sample of Managers

Factor	Manipulation	Empathy	Social irritability
Manipulation			
Empathy		.454***	.147*
			.160*

Note. \*\*\*  $p < .001$ , \*  $p < .05$

Based on the presented analysis of the factor structures extracted on the samples of Indian and Slovak managers, a comparison of the assessment of the three MESI factors, individually for the managers from India and for the managers from Slovakia, was carried out.

The multivariate analysis for repeated measurements confirmed the similarity of statistically significant differences in the assessment of the three factors of the MESI methodology by the Slovak managers (F test value was 317.258, statistical significance 0.00) as well as by the Indian managers (F test value was 273.243, statistical significance 0.00). The average values of the individual MESI factor assessments by the Slovak and the Indian managers are shown in Figure 3.

The Indian and Slovak managers indicated that they use the social intelligence attribute of Empathy often in their behavior. It means that they can guess the wishes, feelings, and intentions of other people, and when necessary, they can also adapt to them. Contrarily, the manifestations of Manipulation and Social irritability in the behavior of the Slovak and Indian managers occur only rarely.

From the above results it is necessary to draw attention to the difference between the Slovak and Indian managers in the assessment of manipulative behavior. Data analysis confirmed a statistically significant difference in the assessment of this factor among the Slovak and Indian managers (Table 6).

Table 6. Country comparison of the social intelligence factors

MESI factors	Country	M	SD	p	t
Manipulation	Indian managers	1.6803	.76341	< .01	3.805
	Slovak managers	1.9416	.77080		
Empathy	Indian managers	2.5391	.57991	.308	1.021
	Slovak managers	2.5920	.57172		
Social Irritability	Indian managers	1.4003	.63272	.049	1.981
	Slovak managers	1.5017	.51366		

It is obvious that the Indian managers significantly less often use manipulative behavioral attributes than the Slovak managers. They have a lesser tendency to use other people for their benefits, to persuade them to do anything for them and stand on their side.

At the same time, the Slovak managers assessed themselves as less socially irritable than Indian managers (as seen in Table 6). They feel less uncomfortable if they are to adapt to others. They perceive wishes and feelings of others as less unpleasant. Figure 3 presents an overall illustration of the differences in the assessment of each of the MESI factors between the studied samples (*t test*).

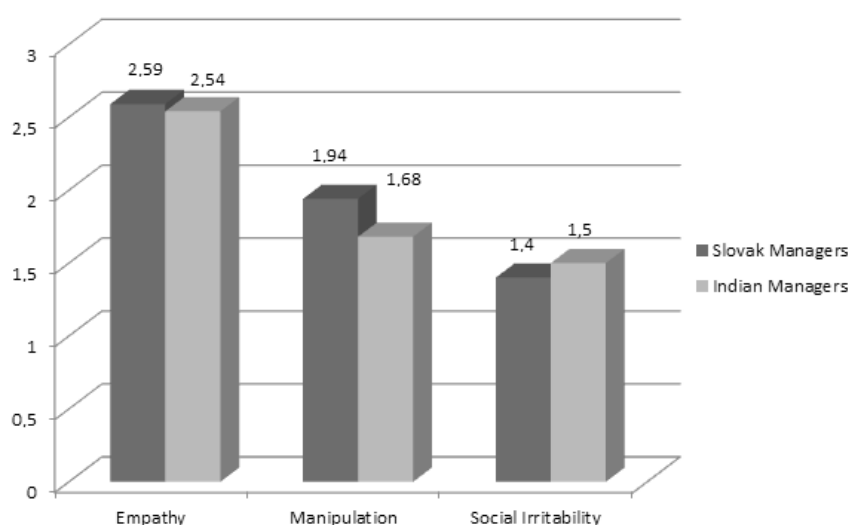


Figure 3. Average Values of the Individual MESI Factor Assessments by the Slovak and the Indian Managers



## Discussion and Conclusion

MESI methodology has been utilized in the previous research studies but it is still quite a new tool that needs to be validated within various contexts. H. Uzun, A. C. Buran, and E. T. Beydilli used MESI to investigate the effect of dimensions of social intelligence on entrepreneurship intention. They conducted a survey on the sample of 249 students of Kutahya Social Sciences Vocational College and Kutahya Technical Sciences Vocational College. In their analyses they found out that manipulation and empathy had a direct impact on entrepreneurship intention. As entrepreneurship requires strong social relations of individuals, it raises the idea that entrepreneurs with a high level of social intelligence will have high levels of manipulation in the context of personality or empathic approach (Uzun, Buran, Beydilli, 2017).

The theoretical and methodological concept of social intelligence presented in this study in the context of cultural specifics is based on the assumption that social constructs do not have to have a generally valid definition but are may be conditioned by culture. The acquired results contribute to the discussion of the definition of attributes, which can be understood as transculturally unchanged, or the attributes that are modified by a particular culture. At the same time, these results support the findings of H. R. Markus and S. Kitayama (2003) on the broad-spectrum impact of culture and beyond. In this concept, social intelligence also has its place, as already proven in the previous studies (Birknerová et al., 2013; Frankovský et al., 2018).

T.-Y. Kim and M. A. Rahim carried out a cross-cultural study on the links between leaders' social intelligence and their creative performance (Kim, Rahim, 2013). Based on their model, which was tested on the sample of employed MBA students from five countries (Hong Kong, Thailand, U.S., U.K, and Scotland) and designed to indicate to what extent their supervisors displayed social intelligence and creative performance, they found out that the supervisors with greater social intelligence contributed more to creative performance.

The findings presented in this contribution suggest that the social intelligence attributes are trans-culturally fixed (extracted factor structure of social intelligence, saturation of the factors by items, similar Cronbach's alpha values), as well as confirm the existence of certain cultural specifics of this issue (links between Empathy and Social irritability within the Slovak sample, order of the extracted factors according to the variance explained, as well as the assessment of Manipulation and Social irritability as such). An essential finding resulting from this research is confirmation of the stable factor structure of the MESI methodology in both cultures and, at the same time, detected different assessments of two of the social intelligence factors (Manipulation and Social Irritability) between the Slovak and the Indian managers.

In general, it is possible to discuss the issue of whether the influence of culture changes the internal structure of the social construct, i.e. social intelligence and thus if it is possible to specify different attributes of social intelligence in different cultures, or if it is possible to identify the influence of culture only in the context of assessment of these extracted factors. From this viewpoint it is also possible to interpret the detected statistically significant difference between the Indian and the Slovak managers in the assessment of manipulative forms of behavior. Indian managers use manipulative behavioral attributes significantly less than Slovak managers. At the same time, the Slovak managers considered themselves less socially irritable than the Indian managers.

The presented results support the necessity of accepting the possible cultural specifics in the studies of social constructs including social intelligence, but at the same time they indicate the appropriateness of utilizing the MESI methodology also in other cultures, as already proven within the Ukrainian settings (Frankovský et al., 2018).

The mentioned characteristics of the influence of culture on the assessment of the attributes of social intelligence need to be interpreted in the context of the specifics of the research sample used. At the same time, from the perspective of the possibilities of using the presented MESI methodology, it is necessary to extend the research scope to other cultural environments, as well as to accentuate the issue of language transformations of the MESI methodology. In this sense, it is crucial to verify the language variations of the methodology by means of a reverse translation.

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# Социальный интеллект в культурном контексте: сравнение индийских и словацких руководителей

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**Аннотация.** Представленное исследование основано на предположении, что социальные конструкты не имеют общепринятой формы, а обусловлены культурой. *Цель.* В статье представлены результаты исследования, направленного на анализ согласованности факторной структуры методики «Измерение социального интеллекта» (*Measuring Social Intelligence, MESI*) в управленческой среде Индии и Словакии. Вместе с этим представлены результаты анализа различий в оценке выделенных факторов социального интеллекта (манипуляция, сочувствие и социальная раздражительность) между менеджерами из Индии и Словакии. *Дизайн исследования.* Выборка исследования включала 504 менеджеров, из которых 252 были индийскими и 252 были словацкими менеджерами. *Выводы.* Полученные данные позволяют сформулировать решение двух проблем. Первая связана со степенью универсальности выделяемых факторных структур социального интеллекта в отдельных культурах. Вторая относится к оценке отдельных указанных факторов социального интеллекта в разных культурах. Полученные результаты подтверждают, что факторная структура методики MESI, выявленная на материале выборки индийских и словацких менеджеров, является согласованной. Единственная разница была обнаружена в порядке собственного значения факторов на основе процента объяснённой дисперсии. Непротиворечивость представленной факторной структуры подтверждается также результатами наполнения факторов отдельными переменными, значениями коэффициента альфа Кронбаха и корреляцией выделенных факторов. Было подтверждено существование нескольких различий в оценке атрибутов социального интеллекта — манипуляции и социальной раздражительности. Манипуляция была более заметно отвергнута индийскими менеджерами, в то время как социальная раздражительность была более заметно отвергнута словацкими менеджерами. *Ценность результатов.* Результаты исследования указывают на необходимость учёта культурного контекста при рассмотрении социального интеллекта и социальных конструктов в целом.

**Ключевые слова:** социальный интеллект, культурный контекст, MESI, управление, манипулирование, эмпатия, социальная раздражительность.