

# AHP Analysis of Cross-Cultural Experiences by Italian Expats Working for Korean Organizations

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| Abstract |

This paper examines cross-cultural experiences of Italian professionals living in Korea and working for Korean organizations. Aimed at understanding whether cultural differences between Koreans and Italians can be found and how these influence the experience of Italian expats, it analyzes the dimensions of Decision-making Process, Leadership Style, and Team Environment in an organizational context. Considering the increasing number of Italians living in Korea and the highly relevant trade partnership between Italy and Korea, this research wants to fill in the current gap in the cross-cultural management literature between such countries and individuals. By using the Analytic Hierarchy Process (AHP), which transforms intangible judgments into consistent and tangible data, responses from the surveyed experts were ranked to see which criteria and sub-criteria are more important to Italian expats. After comparing the current literature and the

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results obtained from the AHP analysis, similarities in the studied dimensions were found. In particular, Italians have shown similar collectivistic and hierarchical values to Koreans at work. Nevertheless, an important variance in communication style has been discovered and linked to the average-low satisfaction levels among Italian expats. From a practical point of view, by depicting such similarities and differences, this paper wants to help both Italians and Koreans at better understanding each other and, therefore, at maximizing the outcomes of their businesses. Moreover, it wants to be a foundation for further research on cross-cultural management between Italians and Koreans.

▪ Key words: Italy, Korea, Leadership Style, Decision-Making Process, Team Environment

## I . Introduction

The term globalization is a fairly controversial notion that has caused strong debates among scholars. In the field of trade, the term has been juxtaposed with that of integration and it has been defined as the phenomenon resulting from lower trade barriers, shrunk transportation costs, a sharp pressure for migration, increasing capital flows, and the quick spread of ideas (World Bank 2002, 1). However, in other fields such as sociology, scholars have not found a commonly accepted definition of the notion yet (Van Der Bly 2005, 876). This work is not concerned with explaining what globalization is. However, it is a pretty non-debatable fact that globalization has spurred the increase of Multinational Enterprises (hereafter, MNE) in recent years and has allowed these businesses to exist in a favorable environment. Moreover, together with businesses and enterprises, it is essential to mention that people are also moving for

commercial purposes and that they are bringing their own cultures and beliefs into new and different environments. Currently, more than 258 million people live abroad.<sup>1)</sup> These expatriates made it possible for cross-cultural management to develop in recent years as a field of research and for academia to be more interested in the concept of culture. Cross-cultural management studies compare the behaviors of employees from different cultures and countries to understand what would cause harmony and discord in organizations. By looking at the high number of individuals living abroad and the current trend of globalization, we can state how cross-cultural management is the norm for today's enterprises. It would be difficult to find companies with employees that have never traveled abroad and have not been influenced by other cultures. Considering the increasing number of Italians living abroad and in Korea,<sup>2)</sup> this work wants to analyze the experience of Italian professionals living in Korea and working for Korean organizations. It is aimed at understanding whether cultural differences between Italians and Koreans can be found and how these influence the experience of Italian expats. We will first take a look at the current literature on culture and cross-cultural management, by analyzing how the definition of culture has not been assessed yet and studying the current state of the field. Moreover, we will briefly introduce two important research that has been executed in the field of cross-cultural management. Finally, we will take a look at the present literature on three important areas of study in organizational behavior: decision-making,

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1) United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (2017), "The International Migration Report 2017 (Highlights)," <https://www.un.org/development/desa/publications/international-migration-report-2017.html#:~:text=There%20are%20now%20an%20estimated,today%2C%20on%20International%20Migrants%20Day>. (Accessed on July 20, 2020)

2) Anagrafe Italiani residenti all'estero (2019), "Anagrafe degli Italiani residenti all'estero," [http://ucs.interno.gov.it/FILES/AllegatiPag/1263/INT00041\\_ANAGRAFE\\_DEGLI\\_ITALIANI\\_RESIDENTI\\_ALL\\_ESTERO\\_-A.I.R.E.\\_ed\\_2019.pdf](http://ucs.interno.gov.it/FILES/AllegatiPag/1263/INT00041_ANAGRAFE_DEGLI_ITALIANI_RESIDENTI_ALL_ESTERO_-A.I.R.E._ed_2019.pdf). (Accessed on July 12, 2020)

leadership, and teams. Through the literature review, seven hypotheses will be drawn and later tested. The Analytical Hierarchy Process (hereafter, AHP) was used to assess which variables within “Decision-making Process”, “Leadership Style”, and “Team Environment” are valued the most by the participants and the results were compared with the available literature. By using such a methodology, we can validate judgments and transform intangible results into tangible ones through pairwise comparisons. The results are depicted in the data and result analysis sections.

## II. Literature Review

### 1. Culture

The notion of culture has received notable attention from scholars, but it is still difficult to find a commonly accepted definition. Hofstede (1980, 51) believes that culture is the collective programming of the mind and that through it, we can separate members from different human groups. He asserts that culture is something that is not simply given to an individual, but it is a constructed set of norms and values that are learned during someone’s course of life. By deploying a research project in more than fifty countries, but in only one organization (IBM), he discovered the existence of five dimensions of culture.

Hofstede, as well as other colleagues, was influenced by the work of Clyde Kluckhohn. He defined culture as a set of patterned ways of thinking, feeling, and reacting that is acquired and transmitted mainly by symbols (Kluckhohn 1951, 86). The essence of culture was deemed to consist of traditional ideas and their attached values. His work was further analyzed by Florence Kluckhohn and Fred Strodtbeck (1961) in the so-called Values Orientation Theory. Similar to the five dimensions of

Hofstede, they asserted the existence of six dimensions or orientations of culture: motivation of a certain behavior, nature of human beings, time, relationships between humankind and environment, relationships between humans, and space. Parsons and Shils (1951) have also tried to define culture. They described it as an organized set of desirable standards that an individual is committed to following. However, this definition is quite parochial as it considers only what is desirable to do within a certain culture. A more recent interpretation has been given by Schein (2010, 18) that thinks of culture as a set of shared assumptions that are considered to be valid and that are learned by a certain group. These help groups to adapt to the external world and to create inclusion within groups. Scholars have also extensively studied how culture affects processes such as negotiation (Fisher 1980) and decision-making (Vitell et al. 1993) and how it shapes different leadership styles (House et al. 2004) and team dynamics (Earley & Mosakowski 2000). Other scholars have discovered variances between loose and tight cultures (Gelfand et al. 2011). Nevertheless, a commonly accepted definition of culture has not been found yet. This is because of the complexity of the term itself and its volatility. However, even if culture is still a debatable terminology, its relevance in management can be easily noted and, no matter what definition an individual wants to give to it, culture has proved to influence who we are and the way we work by all the above-mentioned scholars. Therefore, it is a key factor to take into consideration when we globalize our businesses or when we work with people from different countries. As assessed by Hofstede (1980), there are desired and desirable values, and these can be different in each culture. Accordingly, what could be considered bad in one culture, could be regarded as acceptable in another one. Considering how one-third of the global output comes from MNEs and more and more individuals work in foreign countries, on one hand, it is very important for expatriates to not only understand their hosting

culture(s) but to also grasp how one's words and actions could be perceived by locals. On the other hand, it is also important for corporations to learn how to leverage the benefits of merging a minor culture into a dominant one.

## 2. Cross-cultural Management

Global organizations are no longer the exception, but the norm (Burke 2010). Managing human resources has now a different meaning than before as enterprises hire both local and foreign talents. Moreover, even if an organization hired only domestic employees, at least one of them would have probably come into contact with different cultures through multicultural experiences such as traveling abroad or study exchange programs. Cross-cultural management is no longer the exception in human resource management, but the norm. It is aimed at understanding how culture influences businesses and organizations (French 2015, 209) and can be defined as a field studying people's behavior in organizations that are globally located (Adler 1983, 226). Cultural differences can cause frictions but if leveraged and managed well, they can be the keys to success. Researchers have asserted that negative outcomes include miscommunication and the creation of barriers, while a smoother development and integration of enterprises in foreign lands represent positive outcomes of such management. Cross-cultural management has become a relevant topic of research in the area of organizational behavior in the past few decades and two of the most recognized and quoted works in the field are represented by Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Theory and the GLOBE Framework.

### (1) Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Theory

Hofstede conducted large-scale research in which he analyzed cultures of different branches of IBM and derived the existence of five cultural dimensions. These represent common problems that every society in the world faces and the ways each society responds to these, give us ground to understand differences in cultures. The five dimensions that were discovered are Individualism and Collectivism, Power Distance, Uncertainty Avoidance, Long- Versus Short-Term Orientation, and Masculinity and Femininity (Hofstede 1980, 151). Although highly regarded by academia, Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Theory was nonetheless not spared from criticisms. Many derived from the type of methodology used in assessing cultural differences as Hofstede assumed that in one country there is one homogenous culture, which is not necessarily true as populations can be formed by different ethnic groups (Nasif et al. 1991, 82). Furthermore, because he surveyed employees working in the same organization (IBM), scholars have pointed out how this limitation cannot provide any kind of strong scientific basis for the differences he illustrated (Søndergaard 1994, 449). While it still represents a foundation in the field of cross-cultural management, Hofstede's work should be revised taking into consideration current circumstances and without falling for the "one culture, one nation" hasty generalization.

### (2) The GLOBE Framework

Another highly quoted work in the field of cross-cultural management is the GLOBE Framework. This is a ten-year research program whose main purpose was to expand accessible knowledge of cross-cultural interplays (House et al. 2004, 3). Researchers here have collected about 17,000 responses from managers of 951 different organizations working in

sixty-two countries around the world to see how these societies scored on nine features of culture and six global leader behaviors (House et al. 2004, 3). The research consisted of three stages. In the first and second phases, the involved scholars have asserted the existence of nine attributes of culture and have used these to study organizational behaviors in the sixty-two analyzed countries. They discovered the existence of ten different cultures that are Anglo, Confucian Asia, Eastern Europe, Germanic Europe, Latin America, Latin Europe, Middle East, Nordic Europe, Southern Asia, and Sub-Saharan Africa (House et al. 2004, 713). The third phase, instead, focused on strategic leadership across cultures and was later published.

### 3. Business Culture in Korea and Italy

#### (1) Decision-making Process

A decision is the commitment to certain actions or resources and a decision process is represented by those steps taken to do so (Mintzberg et al. 1976, 246). In terms of culture, Mann et al. (1998, 326) argued that the way we make decisions is influenced by the values and the beliefs belonging to those involved in the process and these are important spectra of culture. Consequently, the decision-making process is highly influenced by the culture(s) of those participating in such a process. Knowing the way decision-makers work and think, will help organizations in foreseeing the consequences and outcomes of these decisions. Adler (1997, 163) asserts the existence of five steps in decision making (Recognition of a Problem, Search of Information, Alternatives' Construction, Choice, Implementation) and explains how all of these change because of culture. Parkin (1996, 259) has also illustrated five steps involved in this process: Definition of a Problem, Thought, Judgment, Decision, and Action. The literature on this



field is quite vast, but the one interlinking decision-making with cross-cultural management is still missing, with a lot of questions that have not been answered yet. Nevertheless, two variables that have been widely studied in the field of cross-cultural management are correlated to the decision-making process: leadership and communication.

Assertiveness measures the degree to which individuals are confrontational when socializing (House et al. 2004, 395). In the GLOBE Framework, countries and societies that scored high on assertiveness are inclined to value direct and unambiguous communication, explicitness, and expressiveness. However, individuals from countries with low assertiveness are drawn to speak indirectly and to use subtle language (House et al. 2004, 405). On a scale from one to seven, with seven being very high, Korea has scored 3.75 in values (what should be) and 4.4 in practice (what it is). Very similarly, Italy has scored 3.82 in values and 4.07 in practice. However, Meyer (2016, 53), while analyzing communication in different countries, has ranked Korea as a high-context country and Italy as a medium-context country. Meyer (2016, 53) describes a high-context country as one where individuals are not upfront, and messages are implied and read between the lines. Indeed, Koreans are skilled at hiding their emotions and they have mastered the use of evasive language to maintain surface harmony (Gesteland 2012, 203). On the other hand, Italians are sometimes not interested in maintaining a peaceful environment and will be more straight to the point compared to Koreans. This is especially true when giving negative feedback and in case of disagreement: Italians will be straightforward, while Koreans will not. From this analysis, the first hypothesis was derived.

Hypothesis 1: Italians working in Korean organizations in Korea regard effective and straight-to-the-point communication in decision-making as an important variable more than Koreans would do.

## (2) Team Environment

Individualism and collectivism represent opposite side poles. While collectivism is rooted in Confucianism and, therefore, in Asian societies, individualism is appreciated and idolized in Western cultures. Countries with collectivist cultures tend to care more about groups' well-being and collective goals are more important compared to individual ones (House et al. 2004, 454). As a primary example of a Confucian country, Korea scored 5.54 in in-group collectivist values and 5.41 in practices in the GLOBE Framework. On the other hand, one would expect Italians to be more individualist and less group-oriented. Based on such a belief, Hofstede gave Italy a score of 76 in terms of Individualism, while Korea scored a mere 18. However, Italians focus on creating and nourishing good relationships and on ensuring the well-being of the groups they belong to. Not surprisingly, in the GLOBE Framework, Italy scored 5.72 in in-group collectivism values and 4.94 in practices. Meyer (2016) also confirms such scores by defining both Italy and Korea as relationship-based countries. These are countries in which trust is built through daily interactions and relationships are constructed in the long term (Meyer 2016, 163). To assess the level of individual responsibility in corporations in different countries, Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (1997, 57) run an experiment through which they enquired whether the fault of a mistake was of the individual or the group to people belonging to different cultures. The results here are definitively surprising: only thirty-two percent of the surveyed Italians admitted that the individual was wrong, showing one of the highest scores in collectivism among all the forty evaluated countries. On the other hand, Korean nationals have shown a higher percentage in terms of individualism, with forty-one percent of them blaming the individual, not the group. Finally, Lewis (1996, 33) found three clusters of cultures: Linear-active, Multi-active, and Reactive. Confirming the previously analyzed studies, Italians fall under the

Multi-active category, which is characterized by people-oriented cultures, and Koreans are categorized as part of the Reactive group, which is also considered to be very people-oriented. Based on this discussion, Hypothesis 2 and Hypothesis 3 are proposed.

Hypothesis 2: Team Environment is the highest-ranked value for Italians working for Korean organizations in South Korea.

Hypothesis 3: Italians think that a good relationship with team members is more important than their individual success.

### (3) Leadership Style

An egalitarian society is defined as one in which hierarchy is flat and there is a low distance between the leader and the subordinates (Meyer 2016, 122). Examples of this type of business culture include Denmark, Sweden, and the Netherlands. However, other European countries such as Italy, France, Spain, and Germany have shown to be more on the hierarchical side. Nevertheless, hierarchy is not as important as in East Asian countries such as Korea, where the patriarchal culture is still vivid and is rooted in Confucianism and Korean culture. In terms of what a great leader is considered to be, while Italians will emphasize more on charisma and degree of participation, meaning how much leaders involve subordinates in making decisions, Koreans will consider more an outstanding leader, one that is self-protective and autonomous (House et al. 2004). Nevertheless, Hofstede (1980) discovered that Italians and Koreans do not differ much in terms of Power Distance. Indeed, Korea was given a score of sixty out of one hundred, while Italy's score was only ten points lower than the Korean one. Both Koreans and Italians expect their leaders to always have a solution, to be dependable, and, therefore, they also

consider a structured hierarchy in an organization to be normal and acceptable. This is confirmed by House et al. (2004), who gave similar scores to both Korea and Italy in terms of Power Distance (5.61 and 5.43 out of seven respectively). The fourth hypothesis is then formulated.

Hypothesis 4: Similar to what Koreans would do, Italians working for Korean organizations in Korea rank the dependability of their leaders as a more important factor than flat hierarchy.

#### (4) Cross-cultural Management of Italian Professionals Working in Korea

Although Italian and Korean business cultures have been individually studied, no one has analyzed the experience of Italians working in Korea or the one of Koreans working in Italy. Currently, the number of Italians living in Korea is quite low: only 554 have declared to be living in Korea.<sup>3)</sup> Nevertheless, the number of these has increased during the past years.

Italy represents one of the strongest European partners of Korea. With nearly 4,000 million Euro of imports in 2019, it is the third country for the number of Korean imports in the European Union. Moreover, the value of exported Italian goods to Korea amounted to nearly 5,000 in 2019, ranking Italy as the third European country exporting to Korea.<sup>4)</sup> Trade between the two countries has been increasing since the implementation of the EU-Korea FTA and in the

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3) Anagrafe Italiani residenti all'estero (2019), "Anagrafe degli Italiani residenti all'estero," [http://ucs.interno.gov.it/FILES/AllegatiPag/1263/INT00041\\_ANAGRAFE\\_DEGLI\\_ITALIANI\\_RESIDENTI\\_ALL\\_ESTERO\\_-ALIRE.\\_ed\\_2019.pdf](http://ucs.interno.gov.it/FILES/AllegatiPag/1263/INT00041_ANAGRAFE_DEGLI_ITALIANI_RESIDENTI_ALL_ESTERO_-ALIRE._ed_2019.pdf). (Accessed on July 12, 2020)

4) Eurostat (2020), "South Korea-EU - international trade in goods statistics," [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=South\\_Korea-EU\\_-\\_international\\_trade\\_in\\_goods\\_statistics](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=South_Korea-EU_-_international_trade_in_goods_statistics). (Accessed on October 10, 2020)

next years, it is expected to follow the same path.

Considering the importance of the trade partnership between Korea and Italy and the increasing numbers of Italians in Korea in recent years, this paper aims to fill in the gap in the current cross-cultural management literature regarding Italian professionals based in Korea and working for Korean organizations. This research will first analyze what variables in Decision-making Process, Leadership Style, and Team Environment are more important for Italians living in Korea and working for Korean organizations. By taking into consideration the current literature on culture and cross-cultural management, a comparison will then be drawn to understand whether there could be cultural differences between Koreans and Italians. If a difference is found, it will be then analyzed to understand whether that could influence the experience of these Italians and how it could affect it. A fifth, sixth and seventh hypotheses are formulated as follows.

Hypothesis 5: Koreans and Italians do not show many differences in Decision-making Process, Leadership Style, and Team Environment.

Hypothesis 6: The working experience of Italians at Korean organizations is not negatively influenced by the minimum cultural differences.

Hypothesis 7: Italians working for Korean organizations are generally satisfied with their institutions and work environment.

### **III. Research Methodology**

In our daily life, we are asked every day to make some kinds of decisions. Making a decision usually implies having multiple choices to

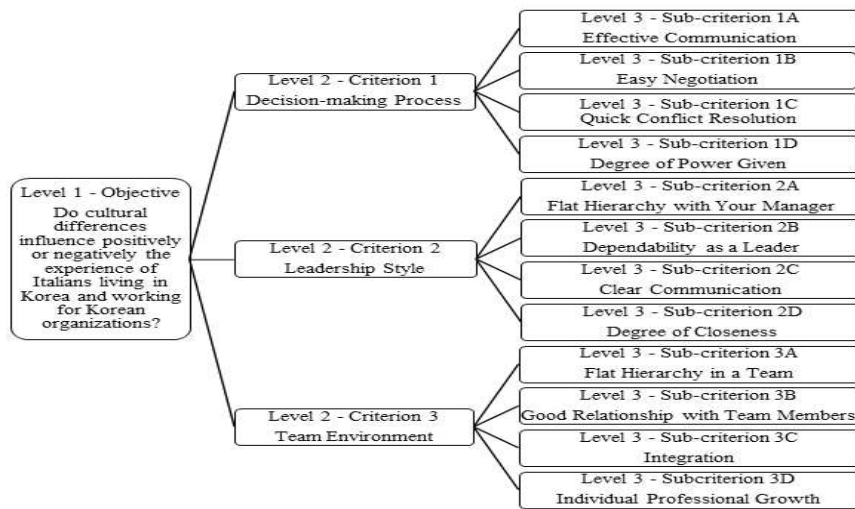
select from and, while we would like to think that every human being makes rational and consistent decisions, that is not always the case. Moreover, it is very difficult to prioritize some factors over others. Our judgments and ideas are indeed difficult to measure because they are intangible but, by giving them tangible measurements, such as weights and numbers, we can understand the hierarchy of our choices, or sub-criteria, and make better decisions. This is the aim of the Analytic Hierarchy Process (hereafter, AHP) of Professor Thomas Saaty.

It can be defined as a multi-criteria methodology of measurement through which decisions are made by comparing criteria and sub-criteria, that are elements that influence a certain decision, on a defined scale and has been mainly used in decision theory, conflict resolution, models of the brain, planning, etc. (Saaty 1987, 161) By using AHP we can deconstruct a difficult problem and achieve consistent solutions. After identifying a daunting issue and decomposing it into different concepts (our criteria and sub-criteria), we then have to arrange them on different levels and among themselves to create an organized hierarchical structure, in which the interrelationships between the variables can be noticed. The matrix should be similar to a family tree where all the criteria and sub-criteria are interconnected. In this phase, it is not only important to define as clearly as possible the definition of each criterion, but to also formulate a survey that can be easily understood by the decision-makers. To assess whether this step has been successfully completed, a hierarchy evaluation must be completed.

The overall objective of this research is to understand whether cultural differences influence positively or negatively the working experience of Italians working for Korean organizations. For this purpose, Italians with professional experience in Korean organizations were identified as experts to be surveyed. Moreover, with the term organization, we refer to any working entity such as private companies, governmental institutions,

universities, schools, NGOs, research centers, etc. The overall aim of this research constitutes the first level of the hierarchical framework that has been designed. The second level is formed by the main criteria that have been set for this work. These constitute three of the most important areas that have been researched in cross-cultural management and organizational behavior (“Decision-making Process”, “Leadership Style”, and “Team Environment”) and that can be assessed in every organization, whether it is a university or a private corporation. The third and last level consists of all those sub-criteria that influence each of the criteria. “Decision-making Process” was divided into “Effective Communication”, “Easy Negotiation”, “Quick Conflict Resolution”, and “Degree of Power Given”. For “Leadership Style”, the “Flat Hierarchy with your Manager”, “Dependability as a Leader”, “Clear Communication”, and “Degree of Closeness” sub-criteria were identified. Finally, concerning “Team Environment”, “Flat Hierarchy in a Team”, “Good Relationship with Team Members”, “Integration”, and “Individual Professional Growth” sub-criteria have been studied. The hierarchical framework is shown in <Figure 1>.

<Figure 1> AHP Hierarchical Framework



The second step is the evaluation of the results. Using AHP, each criterion on the same level must be evaluated against another one on a scale from one to nine. A detailed explanation of the different scores used is depicted in <Table 1>. Moreover, each of the sub-criterion belonging to the same criterion is then pairwise compared to another one using the same scale. This process needs to be repeated for all the levels in the framework we have designed to get measurements and weights of each of the criterion and sub-criterion we have assessed.

&lt;Table 1&gt; AHP Scale

Measure of Importance	Interpretation
5	Equal Significance
4 6	Moderate Significance
3 7	Strong Significance
2 8	Very Strong Significance
1 9	Absolute Significance

As previously mentioned, human beings do not always make consistent decisions. Therefore, a fundamental characteristic of AHP is to calculate the consistency of the responses given by the examined experts. Each individual was asked to first pairwise evaluate the criteria and then each of the sub-criterion was compared with another of the correlated criterion. This process led to the construction and analysis of four consistency tests for each response submitted to the survey.

The Consistency Index, the Random Index, and finally the Consistency Ratio constructed by Saaty were used. To relatively rank the different criteria and sub-criteria and see whether the given answers were consistent or not, the eigenvalue  $\lambda_{max}$  was first calculated. By using  $\lambda_{max}$  and  $n$ ,



the number of compared criteria or sub-criteria, the Consistency Index was then found.

$$Consistency\ Index = \frac{\lambda_{max} - n}{n - 1}$$

However, to calculate the Consistency Ratio, the Consistency Index needs to be compared to those judgments randomly made. Therefore, Saaty has calculated the Random Index for different n matrices that is depicted in <Table 2>.

<Table 2> Random Index

n	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
RI	0.52	0.9	1.12	1.24	1.32	1.41	1.45	1.49

$$Consistency\ Ratio = \frac{Consistency\ Index}{Random\ Index}$$

Normally, a Consistency Ratio of  $\leq 0.1$  or ten percent is considered to be optimal. Nevertheless, in this case, a Consistency Ratio of  $\leq 0.2$  or twenty percent was defined to be acceptable. Indeed, thirteen out of the twenty-two experts that had a CR of  $0.1 \leq x \leq 0.2$  have been slightly inconsistent only in one of the four tests they had to pass, meaning that their intention was indeed to be consistent and that their data was not random. Furthermore, twenty-six out of the above-mentioned exports, had an inconsistency ratio  $\leq 0.12$  or twelve percent, showing again readiness to give reliable answers. It is possible to have a higher CR in case some of the judgments have been haphazardly inverted if the rest of the test is deemed to be consistent. Moreover, the more different the compared criteria are, such in this case, a higher CR is expected (Forman & Selly 2001, 95). Finally, Saaty himself and other authors have shown that a CR of  $\leq 0.2$  or twenty percent is considered to be tolerable (Byun

2001, 290; Dolan 2008, 422; Forman & Selly 2001, 47; Saaty 1983, 147; Wedley 1993, 152).

## IV. Data Analysis

To judge whether cultural differences between Koreans and Italians living in Korea and working for Korean organizations influenced negatively or positively the experience of the expatriates, a survey was conducted. The experts were contacted through different online platforms and were asked to fill out the survey only in the case they had experience in working for one or more Korean organizations. The questionnaire consisted of five parts in which not only pairwise comparisons were required, but also general information such as one's gender and length of stay in Korea were also assessed for statistical purposes. Moreover, the overall satisfaction of their work experience at their designated Korean organization(s) was also evaluated. Before they completed each part, the purpose of the survey was explained in detail to all participants. Furthermore, to ensure better consistency, explanations on how to fill out the questionnaire were also provided. Out of 554 Italians living in South Korea, fifty responses were collected, representing nearly nine percent of the total Italian population in the country. Out of these fifty experts, thirty-four passed the consistency test.

### 1. Demographics and Overall Satisfaction

Among the fifty individuals that responded to the questionnaire, fifteen were males, accounting for thirty percent of the total respondents. As expected, considering the high ratio of female to male expats living in Korea, females constituted the majority of the respondents, with

thirty-five surveys being completed by them. This number is more than double the number of male respondents and accounts for seventy percent of the entire registered Italian population in Korea. A similar percentage was registered in terms of age: fifty-eight percent claimed to be between twenty and twenty-nine years old. Among the remaining, thirty percent were aged between thirty and thirty-nine, eight percent between fifty and fifty-nine years old, while only four percent were between forty and forty-nine years old. No respondent declared to be less than twenty or more than sixty years old. Moreover, ninety-eight percent of the respondents have been living in Korea for more than one year, meaning that they are already accustomed to Korean culture.

In terms of the type of organization and length of employment, the respondents were asked to reply based on their most recent Korean employer. The majority (forty-four percent) stated to be working in SMEs and to have worked for their Korean organization for less than a year (fifty-four percent). These experts have mainly worked in Other non-specified fields (thirty-four percent), Marketing and Sales (thirty-four percent), Education (twenty-eight percent), Procurement (two percent), and Production (two percent). None of the interviewees worked in Human Resource Management, Accounting & Finance, IT, or Logistics.

Regarding the overall satisfaction with their Korean employers and with the “Decision-making Process”, “Leadership Style”, and “Team environment” criteria, there were no striking differences, with an equal number of responses for each satisfaction level in each category. The respondents were asked to rank their overall satisfaction from one to five, with one being extremely dissatisfied and five extremely satisfied. The weighted averages showed that, overall, Italian professionals were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with their Korean employers (3.14). Moreover, considering the similar importance given to work relationships by both Italians and Koreans, it is not surprising the fact that the criterion that

they were most satisfied with was “Team Environment” (3.34). However, for both “Decision-making Process” and “Leadership Style”, interviewees have asserted to be slightly more dissatisfied (both scored 2.68).

## 2. AHP Analysis

The goal of this work is to understand whether cultural differences between Koreans and Italians influence the experience of Italians living in Korea and working for Korean organizations. To do so, we first needed to analyze which ones of the criteria and sub-criteria introduced in this research are most valued by the surveyed experts. Participants were asked to pairwise compare “Decision-making Process”, “Leadership Style”, and “Team Environment”. Overall, they ranked “Team Environment” as the most crucial criterion (48.67 percent), “Leadership Style” as the second most important (26.66 percent), and “Decision-making Process” as the least important among all the three criteria (24.67 percent). It is important to notice how the results of “Team Environment” were a reflection of the satisfaction level: “Team Environment” was the criterion Italian employees were satisfied the most with. Moreover, there is also an important difference between the first and second-ranked criteria, showing that these experts consider “Team Environment” to be much more important than the second-ranked criterion. Finally, “Decision-making Process” and “Leadership Style” had only a subtle difference (around two percent). The priority vectors and rankings are depicted in <Table 3>.

<Table 3> Priority Vectors and Rank

Criteria	Priority Vector	Rank
Decision-making Process	24.67%	3
Leadership Style	26.66%	2
Team Environment	48.67%	1
CR		0.0186

Under “Decision-making Process”, participants ranked “Effective Communication” first (39.38 percent). This was followed by “Quick Conflict Resolution” (26.05 percent) and “Easy Negotiation” (18.95 percent). The lowest-ranked sub-criterion was “Degree of Power Given” (15.62 percent). Details of the results are illustrated in <Table 4>.

<Table 4> Priority Vectors and Rank for Decision-making Process

Criteria	Priority Vector	Rank
Effective Communication	39.38%	1
Easy Negotiation	18.95%	3
Quick Conflict Resolution	26.05%	2
Degree of Power Given	15.62%	4
CR		0.0068

Within the second sub-criterion, “Leadership Style”, the highest-ranked was “Clear Communication” (43.22 percent). The result confirms the “Effective Communication” sub-criterion analyzed under “Decision-making Process” and can be therefore interfered that effective and clear communication is an important value for Italians. “Dependability as a Leader” and “Degree of Closeness” were locally ranked as the second and third most important criteria (22.64 percent and 17.28 percent respectively), while “Flat Hierarchy with Your Manager” was given the lowest rank (16.68 percent). Results are depicted in <Table 5>.

<Table 5> Priority Vectors and Rank for Leadership Style

	Priority Vector	Rank
Flat Hierarchy with your Manager	16.86%	4
Dependability as a Leader	22.64%	2
Clear Communication	43.22%	1
Degree of Closeness	17.28%	3
CR		0.0009

“Good Relationship with Team Members” was the sub-criterion that ranked first (34.62 percent) within “Team Environment”. The second and third-ranked had little difference in their local weights: “Integration” came second with 27.05 percent and “Individual Professional Growth” was ranked third with 26.05 percent. Lastly, confirming the results of the “Flat Hierarchy with your Superior/Manager” sub-criterion within “Leadership Style”, “Flat Hierarchy in a Team” was the lowest-ranked criterion (12.29 percent). This is an important finding as it shows that Italians living in Korea and working for Korean organizations consider flat hierarchy to not be an important value in organizations. The priority vectors and rankings are shown in <Table 6>.

<Table 6> Priority Vectors and Rank for Team Environment

	Priority Vector	Rank
Flat Hierarchy in a Team	12.29%	4
Good Relationship with Team Members	34.61%	1
Integration	27.05%	2
Individual Professional Growth	26.05%	3
CR		0.0078

Finally, to have an overall view and rank, the global weights and rank were also computed. Among all the sub-criteria, the sub-criterion “Good Relationship with Team Member” within “Team Environment” was considered to be the most important for the participants (16.85 percent). This was followed by “Integration” and “Individual Professional Growth” which closely ranked second and third with global weights of 13.17 percent and 12.68 percent respectively. Communication was given medium-high importance: “Clear Communication” under “Leadership Style” and “Effective Communication” within “Decision-making Process” ranked fourth and fifth with global weights of 11.52 percent and 9.72 percent respectively. Not surprisingly, “Degree of Power Given” and “Flat Hierarchy

with your Manager” were the lowest-ranked alternatives with similar global weights of 4.49 percent and 3.85 percent respectively. Detailed results are illustrated in <Table 7>.

<Table 7> Global Weights and Rank

Criteria	Sub-criteria	Global Weights	Global Rank
Decision-making Process	Effective Communication	9.72%	5
	Easy Negotiation	4.67%	9
	Quick Conflict Resolution	6.43%	6
	Degree of Power Given	3.85%	12
Leadership Style	Flat Hierarchy with Your Manger	4.49%	11
	Dependability as a Leader	6.04%	7
	Clear Communication	11.52%	4
	Degree of Closeness	4.61%	10
Team Environment	Flat Hierarchy in a Team	5.98%	8
	Good Relationship with Team Members	16.85%	1
	Integration	13.17%	2
	Individual Professional Growth	12.68%	3

## V. Analysis of Results

<Table 4> shows that Italians regard “Effective Communication” as the highest-ranked sub-criterion among the ones in the “Decision-making Process” category. Moreover, <Table 7> depicts that “Clear Communication” within the “Team Environment” dimension globally ranks fourth. It is followed by “Effective Communication”, which positions itself fifth in the global ranking. However, as the previous literature review has pointed out, Koreans are proven to be very subtle in their communication style, not clearly expressing how they are feeling for the communal well-being or to respect the societal hierarchy (Gestland 2012; Meyer 2016). This proves not

only that our first hypothesis is accepted, but also that effective and clear communication in an organizational setting is an important value for Italians working for Korean organizations in Korea. Furthermore, by accepting this hypothesis, we can also derive that, because of different communication styles, cultural differences appear in this dimension and that these could potentially have a negative impact on the working experience of Italian professionals at Korean organizations. This is because, while satisfaction in communication does not result in higher job performance, it does have an impact on having better employees' commitment (Dasgupta et al. 2012, 189).

Hypothesis 1 "Italians working in Korean organizations in Korea regard effective and straight-to-the-point communication in decision-making as an important variable more than Koreans would do" is supported.

Throughout the entire analysis of the constructed AHP model and the results that were drawn, it can be observed how Italians living in Korea and working for Korean organizations have shown collectivist values instead of individualist ones. Hofstede has given seventy-six points out of one hundred to Italy within the realm of Individualism, while Korea only scored eighteen. By rejecting these findings, we support the views of others that positioned Italy as a country showing high values of collectivism (House et al. 2004; Lewis 1996; Meyer 2016; Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner 1997). In fact, <Table 7> depicts how "Good Relationship with Team Members" has scored the highest global weight and has therefore been ranked as the first sub-criterion among all the analyzed ones. Moreover, between our studied criteria, "Decision-making Process", "Leadership Style", and "Team Environment", the latter has been ranked the highest with a priority vector of nearly fifty percent and a big gap of nearly twenty-five percent can be observed between it and the second-highest ranked, "Leadership Style". Finally, while "Individual



Professional Growth” has been ranked as the third most important value for the experts, it is still considered to not be as important as the well-being of the group and of the feeling of belonging to a certain team (integration). Therefore, it can be said that Italians value collectivism more than individualism and have similar group values as Koreans. This helps in the integration process and depicts no cultural differences concerning this matter.

Hypothesis 2 “Team Environment is the highest-ranked value for Italians working for Korean organizations in Korea” is supported.

Hypothesis 3 “Italians think that a good relationship with team members is more important than their individual success” is supported.

While Italy is not a country characterized by Confucianism values, it has shown a high level of “Power Distance” (Hofstede 1980; House et al. 2004; Meyer 2016). Within the criteria “Leadership Style”, “Flat Hierarchy with your Manager” was ranked the lowest among all the sub-criteria and ranked eleventh out of twelfth globally. Moreover, under the realm of “Decision-making Process”, the criterion “Degree of Power Given” has been ranked the lowest both globally and locally. On the other hand, “Dependability as a Leader” has been locally ranked second within “Leadership Style”. These findings confirm the hypothesis that Italians living in Korea and working for Korean organizations are willing to give up their freedom to follow a more structured and hierarchical organization, which is similar to what happens between Koreans.

Hypothesis 4 “Similar to what Koreans would do, Italians working for Korean organizations in Korea rank dependability of their leaders as a more important factor than flat hierarchy” is supported.

Korea is defined as a high-context culture in which ideas, opinions, and feelings are shown through ambiguous statements and answers (Chaney & Martin 2011, 93). For Koreans, it is important to maintain a friendly and polite image and to never publicly criticize someone, to avoid hurting their feelings. Moreover, while subordinates have to respect their leaders or managers, these have to ensure the well-being of subordinates (Alston 1989, 29). These cultural aspects are reflected in the results found by scholars in terms of “Power Distance” (Hofstede 1980; House et al. 2004; Meyer 2016). The global rank of our AHP analysis depicted in <Table 7>, shows the great importance given by Italian professionals working for Korean organizations in Korea to the well-being of the group and the little importance given to flat hierarchy. Again, these results reject Hofstede’s “Individualism” values given to Italy and confirm the studies of other experts, showing that Italians are much more collectivists than individualists when it comes to in-group relationships. Furthermore, similar to the Korean sphere, the results confirm the high “Power Distance” grades given to Italy (Hofstede 1980; House et al. 2004; Meyer 2016). However, at the same time, “Clear Communication” within the “Leadership Style” criteria and “Effective Communication” under “Decision-making Process” ranked respectively fourth and fifth in the constructed Global Rank. This means that while Italians are very similar to Koreans when it comes to develop good relationships with team members and to respect authority, Italians are more assertive and direct than Koreans and will prefer communication to be direct and clear, instead of ambiguous. Therefore, we can assert that, while cultures with similar values characterize the realms of “Leadership Style” and “Team Environment” between Italians and Koreans, communication, which is an important aspect of “Decision-making Process” and “Leadership Style”, underlines cultural differences that could cause frictions in a cross-cultural context. Moreover, the survey has also shown that the surveyed Italians gave an

average-low satisfaction score for “Decision-making Process” and “Leadership Style” (2.68). This shows that while authoritative-style leadership and collectivism are common between Italians and Koreans, communication style, which is the variable that differs between the two groups, might play an important role in lowering satisfaction levels and in negatively influencing the experience of the expatriates. Finally, the survey’s results have shown us that Italians are neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with their Korean organizations, showing an average satisfaction score of 3.14 out of five.

Hypothesis 5 “Koreans and Italians do not show many differences in Decision-making Process, Leadership Style, and Team Environment” is partially refuted.

Hypothesis 6 “The working experience of Italians at Korean organizations is not negatively influenced by the minimum cultural differences” is refuted.

Hypothesis 7 “Italians working for Korean organizations are generally satisfied with their institutions and work environment” is partially refuted.

One limitation of this paper can be observed in the 0.2 Consistency Ratio that has been used to pass the consistency test. Nevertheless, it has been already explained how a higher Consistency Ratio up to 0.2 can be considered acceptable. Moreover, it is important to consider how, among those that passed the test with a CR higher than 0.1 but lower than 0.2, the majority passed it with a CR lower than 0.15. Furthermore, the majority failed only on the four tests they had to pass, showing that the respondents wanted to be consistent when answering and they were not randomly comparing the criteria and sub-criteria.

A second limitation of this research is found in the number of experts that were surveyed, with only fifty questionnaires that were collected. Nonetheless, while the number of Italians living and working in Korea has been increasing in recent years, the number is still low, with only 554 expats. Moreover, among the registered Italians living in Korea, several are students without any experience in Korean enterprises, professionals working for foreign or Italian organizations, and self-employed individuals. If such information is taken into consideration, the number of the surveyed experts becomes more relevant.

This paper analyzed the experience of Italians working for Korean organizations and living in Korea and focused on understanding whether these experts have different cultural values than Koreans and whether these can positively or negatively affect their working experience. However, to extend this work, further research should be conducted on those Italians who are not accustomed to Korean culture. Moreover, it would be interesting to cross-cultural compare the experience of Koreans working for Italian organizations in Italy. Currently, the number of such individuals is around 4,300, majority of them being students and managers of Korean MNEs with branches in Italy.<sup>5)</sup> Further research should also be conducted considering dynamism in culture, tightness and looseness, and other criteria such as negotiation processes. Comparing the differences between generations of Italians working in Korea and Koreans working in Italy could also represent compelling research to assess cultural dynamism and draw future perspectives. Finally, considering the current pandemic, understanding how much global virtual teams could change and influence the results found in this work is essential.

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5) Ministry of Foreign Affairs Republic of Korea (2020), "Coreani in Italia," [http://overseas.mofa.go.kr/it-it/wpge/m\\_8805/contents.do](http://overseas.mofa.go.kr/it-it/wpge/m_8805/contents.do). (Accessed on September 30, 2020)

## VI. Conclusion

This paper aimed at understanding whether there are cultural differences between Italians and Koreans in decision-making processes, preferred leadership style, and team environment. Moreover, if dissimilarities were to be found, this study wanted to understand whether these would influence positively or negatively the working experience of Italian employees of Korean organizations. Italy and Korea were chosen for this analysis due to the increasing amount of trade between them in recent years and the fact that Italy represents one of the biggest European commercial partners of Korea.<sup>6)</sup> Moreover, while the number is still relatively low, the increasing number of Italians living in Korea<sup>7)</sup> and Koreans living in Italy<sup>8)</sup> enforces the need for research in cross-cultural management between the two countries. This work wanted to fill the current literature gap and provide a reference point for those interested in further analyzing such a matter. By drawing a survey and asking Italian professionals working for Korean organizations to pairwise compare criteria in “Decision-making Process”, “Leadership Style”, and “Team Environment”, we discovered that Italians, like Koreans, are individuals that prioritize the well-being of the group and accept a hierarchical structure. However, we have also asserted how clear and efficient communication is an important value for Italians, which causes cultural

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6) Eurostat (2020), “South Korea-EU - international trade in goods statistics,” [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=South\\_Korea-EU\\_-\\_international\\_trade\\_in\\_goods\\_statistics](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=South_Korea-EU_-_international_trade_in_goods_statistics). (Accessed on October 10, 2020)

7) Anagrafe Italiani residenti all'estero (2019), “Anagrafe degli Italiani residenti all'estero,” [http://ucs.interno.gov.it/FILES/AllegatiPag/1263/INT00041\\_ANAGRAFE\\_DEGLI\\_ITALIANI\\_RESIDENTI\\_ALL\\_ESTERO\\_-A.I.R.E.-\\_ed\\_2019.pdf](http://ucs.interno.gov.it/FILES/AllegatiPag/1263/INT00041_ANAGRAFE_DEGLI_ITALIANI_RESIDENTI_ALL_ESTERO_-A.I.R.E.-_ed_2019.pdf). (Accessed on July 12, 2020)

8) Ministry of Foreign Affairs Republic of Korea (2020), “Coreani in Italia,” [http://overseas.mofa.go.kr/it-it/wpge/m\\_8805/contents.do](http://overseas.mofa.go.kr/it-it/wpge/m_8805/contents.do). (Accessed on September 30, 2020)

frictions and lower satisfaction levels. This is an important discovery as it gives both Italian employees and Korean employers a base for improving their relationships. On one hand, it is essential for Italians to better understand the non-verbal signals of Korean colleagues and employers. On the other hand, Koreans need to be more explicit so that clearness is achieved when communicating. This also reflects the beauty of cross-cultural management: there is no right or wrong. There is no cultural behavior that is better than another one. Cross-cultural management aims at finding a balance and equilibrium between two different points of view or behaviors to gain from both.

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| 국문초록 |

## 한국기관에 근무하는 재한 이탈리아인들의 조직문화 경험에 대한 AHP 분석

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본 논문은 한국에 거주하면서 한국기관에 근무하는 이탈리아인들의 이문화 경험을 살펴보았다. 한국인과 이탈리아인 사이의 문화적 차이가 식별될 수 있는지 파악하고, 의사결정 과정, 리더십 스타일, 조직환경의 차이와 유사성에 주안점을 두고 이것이 이탈리아인들의 근무경험에 어떠한 영향을 미치는지 여부를 분석하였다. 주한 이탈리아인의 수가 늘어나고 이탈리아와 한국 사이의 무역관계도 깊어지고 있음을 감안하면, 이문화 관리에 대한 보다 많은 연구가 필요한 실정이다. 본고는 Analytic Hierarchy Process 기법을 활용하여 이들을 대상으로 의사결정 과정, 리더십 스타일, 조직환경 등의 어떠한 세부사항들이 중요한지 알아보았다. 분석결과, 한국인과 이탈리아인은 ‘의사결정과정’과 ‘리더십 스타일’에서는 유사한 반면, 서로 다른 의사소통방식을 선호하는 것으로 나타났고, 이러한 차이가 한국기관에 근무하는 이탈리아인들의 만족도를 낮추는 것으로 나타났다. 두 문화의 유사성과 차이점을 분석한 본고의 연구결과를 통해 이탈리아인과 한국인이 서로를 보다 잘 이해하고, 두 나라 사이의 사업성과가 극대화될 수 있기를 기대하며, 앞으로 보다 많은 후속연구가 진행될 것을 기대한다.

▪ 주제어: 이탈리아, 한국, 리더십 스타일, 의사결정 과정, 조직환경