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Source / Izvornik: **Management : Journal of Contemporary Management Issues, 2019, 24, 103 - 120**

Journal article, Published version
Rad u časopisu, Objavljena verzija rada (izdavačev PDF)

https://doi.org/10.30924/mjcmi.24.1.7

Permanent link / Trajna poveznica: https://urn.nsk.hr/urn:nbn:hr:124:321534

PERCEIVED TRENDS IN VIEWING THE FUTURE BY CROATIAN AND SLOVENIAN BUSINESS STUDENTS: IMPLICATIONS FOR MANAGERIAL EDUCATION

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Received: 12. 4. 2018
Accepted: 19. 3. 2019
DOI https://doi.org/10.30924/mjcmi.24.1.7

Original scientific paper
UDC 316.644-057.875:378.633

Abstract. *This paper presents appreciative inquiry (AI) methodology in the context of management education. Therefore, we propose that AI, which focuses on positive aspects of doing business, needs to be implemented into management education of future managers in Slovenia and Croatia and we provide empirical evidence of thinking patterns of business students studying at the University of Ljubljana and the University of Split. For comparison, we investigated the previous experiences and future expectations of business students in Croatia and Slovenia. Empirical part is composed of two parts: qualitatively based AI and a quantitative study, based on statistical methods. Results show a positive outlook of business students in both countries.*

Key words: *appreciative inquiry; society; management education*

1. INTRODUCTION

Understanding the trends is one of the strategic activities educational and business setting needs to undertake, besides strengthening the entrepreneurial spirit of the youth (Vuković et al., 2017). Fast advancement of technology and internet provide students with an easy access to diverse and large amount of external information in a turbulent business environment (Chang et al., 2017). Historical thinking skills are important for mastering more and more demanding tasks, requiring analysing of information from multiple sources (Baranović et al., 2016; Merkt et al., 2017:144). This has an impact also on business education. Kantar (2014) acknowledges a teacher-centred approach with a focus on teaching content and examining retention, whereas we explore student-centred approach of appreciative inquiry (AI).

According to research conducted by IMD World Competitiveness Center in Switzerland, for the 61 global economies,

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in 2015 Slovenia was the second most pessimistic country in the world (Bris, 2015). China held the most pessimistic perception of their business situation in the world, followed by Slovenia and the Republic of Korea in 2nd place and Russia in 3rd place. Slovenian managers' perception of the country's economic situation has been negative in the recent years, which may have a significant impact on investment and positive outlook of future business.

Additionally, the focus on the younger population indicates the opposite findings. In accordance with Schnurr et al. (2011), Croatian students, attending the Faculty of Economics and Business at the University of Zagreb generally expressed positive attitudes regarding the future. More recent research (Tipurić et al., 2013) has shown that students' attitudes toward resolving business crisis situation differ significantly: from facing the challenges and using active strategies (students of the Faculty of Political Science, University of Zagreb) to using passive approach imbued with caution (students of the Faculty of Economics and Business, University of Zagreb).

The aim of this study, therefore, is twofold. First, we present to the management education community the method of gaining insight into students' perspectives and opinions by adopting AI methodology. This will enable us to answer our first research question: How do business students perceive the future?

Secondly, having explored the students' perspective of future economy we will compare the two subsamples: Slovene and Croatian. Thus, our second research question is: Do Slovene and Croatian students differ in viewing the future? We propose and thus intend to test the hypothesis that there are no significant differences between Croatian and Slovene students regarding their views of the future due to the similar cultural upbringing. Furthermore, we compare the two subsamples in terms of their distribution into particular thinking patterns and their attitudes toward the future.

The methodology we use in order to answer both research questions is AI. Related to the first research question, we propose that AI, which focuses on positive aspects of doing business, needs to be investigated and implemented into management education of future managers. Strategic analysis of the Slovene economy overall (Table 1) demonstrates strengths, opportunities, weaknesses and threats, highlighting education, infrastructure and efficiency of the public administration as pillars of national competitive advantage.

Table 1. SWOT analysis of Slovene economy by IMD World Competitiveness Centre

Strengths	**Weaknesses**
• Education („top 10 in the world") • well educated workforce („top 20 in the world")	• managerial practice • credibility of managers • corporate boards (61)
Opportunities	**Threats**
• higher level of education • education of women (9) • number of researchers (14) • % educated population (30)	• Transfer of global corporations abroad (61; Italy, Austria etc.) • aging of population – pan European problem

Source: Bris, A., 8th December, 2015, Global Competitiveness – case of Slovenia. Ljubljana. Slovenia, FELU.

Furthermore, strategic analysis of Croatian economy, according to Šola (2014) recognises strengths such as attractiveness of the destination, multilingual force, entrepreneurial zones and ICT infrastructure while weaknesses are market monopolization, lack of expert workforce and low efficiency of public administration. The author also stresses the enhancement of the country's competitiveness through specialization of the regions and development of regional clusters as opportunities of Croatian economy while economic crises and decline of competitiveness are recognized as threats.

Based on the IMD World Competitiveness Yearbook (2016) comparing the 2016 data with those in the 5 previous years indicates that both Slovenia and Croatia have experienced a decrease in economic performance and overall competitiveness ranking. Accordingly, the need for developing new approaches in management training practice have become a high priority and a new challenge. Therefore, the IMD World Competitiveness results in 2017 show the need to focus on the positive aspects of doing business and partnership.

Further, we aim to offer the scientific community a new methodology that solves real business, relational or individual issues. Contribution of our paper is in the field of management education and AI field. Positive core of the existing situation is chosen as the focus of the AI process. The purpose of this paper is to understand the thinking patterns of the business students – "managers of tomorrow" and offer an alternative approach to tackling challenges, based on analysing the causes of previous successes. We gathered the data at the Faculty of Economics, University of Ljubljana and the Faculty of Economics, Business and Tourism, University of Split and provide qualitative as well as quantitative research findings, together with our recommendations for future management education practice.

2. THEORETICAL OVERVIEW

Positive and negative role models of business (Penger et al., 2015) affect students' attitudes, expectations, and behavioural intentions regarding their future business behaviour (Baden, 2014). Positive role models help raise awareness of both ethical and profitable character of business (Peterlin et al., 2011) that enhanced orientation towards ethical business practices (Baden, 2014). Appreciative inquiry is one of the thinking and communication approaches (Bavčević, 2016) about the past, current and future state. The foundational theoretical conceptualization of our paper is a positively oriented thinking methodology AI. Keefe and Pesut (2004) indicate the need to develop AI (Cooperrider et al., 2008) and sense making skills in the times of constant changes and high-risk events worldwide.

AI is different from problem solving (Table 2). Grant (2006) provides several critical views of AI. The main difference is based on the fact that we create what we focus on. UN 2015 report states that from around 350 high-risk events globally in 1980 this number grew to almost 1000 in 2014 (van der Vegt et al., 2015). Kish-Gephart and Campbell Tochman (2015) found out that social class origin of a manager has a lasting and varying impact on firm risk taking. AI is based on Gergen's sociorationalism (Bushe and Kassan, 2005:166) which claims that there is no empirical truth to discover "out there" in social relations. It is a philosophy that enables moving towards collective vision. Practicing judgment about the future reflects "phronesis" – practical

Table 2. Comparison of problem solving and appreciative inquiry

Problem solving	Appreciative inquiry
• need is felt	• appreciating and valuing the best of what is
• analysis of causes	• envisioning what might be
• analysis of solutions and action planning	• dialoguing and innovating what could be
• deficit based	• possibility focused
• an organisation is a problem to be solved	• an organisation is mystery to be embraced

Source: Seminar at the University of Ljubljana for the staff and students, Mary Alice Arthur, 22nd April 2015, Ljubljana.

wisdom (Shotter and Tsoukas, 2014). New management theories can be derived from case studies, other inductive methods and thought experiments (Byron and Thatcher, 2016:3).

Research expresses concern about the "decline in empathy among learners" (Neumann et al. in Butani and Plant, 2016:2) and "association between lower empathy and burnout" (Brazeau et al. in Butani and Plant, 2016:2). Implications of AI in managerial education are that it promotes professional identity formation of students, facilitates students' reflective capacity and encourages a positive outlook towards person's environment (Butani and Plant, 2016:6).

Educational implications for AI integration include developing interpersonal skills (Bedwell et al., 2014), meaningful relationships with professors and peers, leadership opportunities, experiential learning, and creativity and flexibility in program design (Grandy and Holton, 2010). AI encourages students to develop positive interaction (Neville, 2008). In professional management education AI offers a positive focus and collaboration which frames the process for the development of a professional learning community to a highly productive collaborative learning space (Jansen et al., 2010).

AI used as a course creation method (Conklin, 2009; Conklin and Hartman, 2014) showed that students put effort towards achieving their highest possible learning experience and constructed autonomy-supportive classroom. A way of collective course construction fosters the growth of students' mind-sets and encourages their imagination (Conklin and Hartman, 2014). AI does not put teachers in the dominant role in a learning process (Eow et al., 2010). A study researching the impact of AI on creating classrooms desired by the participants showed a significant relationship between the course high priorities and students' assessment of achievement and their contribution to that achievement (Conklin et al., 2009).

AI was introduced in 1980s by David Cooperrider at the Case Western Reserve University Weatherhead School of Management, has been used in many international organisations and research projects (Harmon et al., 2012:119). AI generates new ways of perceiving the world (Barrett, 1995:36) and enhances the creative process (Leng et al., 2010: 1131). It is a transformational method of change (Bushe and Kassan, 2005), leadership skill, future thinking, philosophy, and »*future–creating mental activism*« (Cooperrider et al. in Pesut, 2001:163). AI focuses on individual and organisational positive core (Ricciardi,

Table 3. Hammond's AI basic assumptions

AI basic assumptions
• In every organisation there is something that functions well.
• Looking for what works well is more motivating that searching for what does not function.
• What we focus on becomes our reality.
• The act of asking questions begins the change.
• Organisations move toward what they ask about or focus on.
• We have more confidence and comfort to set towards a destination if we remember parts of the past.
• We need to remember past successes.
• The words we use to anticipate and describe reality, build it.

Source: Keefe & Pesut (2004).

2004) as a storytelling method (Stefaniak, 2007:43).

Hoefer and Green (2016:130) state that communication practices of decision makers both enable and constrain how people manage the risks and uncertainty of their judgements. »*Emphasis is placed on learning about and understanding human expertise through a process of inquiry rather than trying to implement a process that extracts, elicits, acquires or mines human expertise*« (West and Thomas, 2005). AI process enables the setting of trust and mutual understanding (Erikson et al., 2005:787).

AI has several basic assumptions (Table 3). Milliken et al. (2015) claim that employee voice, in a sense that people have a chance to express their wishes and concerns, can highly positively effect employee behaviour. AI promotes resilience and contributes to formation of professional identity in a safe environment (Butani and Plant, 2016).

3. METHODS

The main method that we used in gaining the qualitative data is AI, designed by David Cooperrider and available online at the AIM2flourish platform where business innovation is strengthened among the global business education professors together with UN Global Goals initiative. AI is the perspective we propose as a developmental tool for management education in higher education institutions (HEI). Our comparative analysis is based on the analysis of the Slovene and Croatian data.

AI methodology is adaptable and flexible in its implementation (Harmon et al., 2012:123). One-on-one appreciative questionnaires gave students experience of AI and impacted mutual sense making (Burt, 2010:268). Students shared experiences and began to socialize with their colleagues: "*Cooperative attitude fosters creativity and innovation between individuals and encourages new partnerships and alliances*"(Harmon et al., 2012:122). AI required from students to identify the positive and potential contribution of every individual in order to begin to live a new strength-based story about who they are and what they wish to be and achieve (Harmon et al., 2012:120). Students were instructed to perform AI and follow ground rules (Keefe and Pesut, 2004:107): (1) be an attentive listener; (2) avoid evaluation and criticism; (3) focus on data and idea generation; (3)

create notes, memos, comments, ideas; and (4) place other issues and ideas into "parking lot" for later consideration. We examined parts of students' histories that they believed should be maintained, their vision of the future and ways of achieving their aspirations (Farrell et al., 2003:364).

Due to the common history and similar educational systems of the two countries we were interested in comparing the findings of the two subsamples: Slovenian and Croatian. The data for the Croatian sample of business students were gathered at the Faculty of Economics, Business and Tourism, University of Split. According with the AI methodology we analysed: a) 60 content answers to the question "*Tell me about the time that stands out for you as a high point moment or peak experience—one where you felt most effective, alive, engaged, or passionate (it can be from private or study/professional life)?*"; b) 54 content answers to the question "*What is it in your present life that you would like to keep/continue in the future?*"; c) 60 content answers to the question "*What do you most wish to learn in the next year?*"; d) 60 content answers to the question "*Let's assume that tonight, after this session, you go into a sound sleep. When you wake up it is 10 years into the future - it is now 2026. While you were asleep many small and large developments happened. Please describe highlights or images of what you see in your vision of a better world. Describe what is happening in 2026 that is new, changed, or better*".

Additional method applied for obtaining quantitative data was k-means cluster method. "Cluster" can be defined as a *"collection of objects which are 'similar' between them and are 'dissimilar' to the objects belonging to other clusters"* (Ashok et al., 2013:41). In context of our research the named clusters correspond to thinking patterns. Being more detailed, this method is used with the purpose of revealing significant quantitative research data by clustering the data according to variable belonging to particular thinking patterns. Four distinct clusters (logical, correlative, lateral, and non-conceptual) were expected and the same number of cluster was obtained. The k-means algorithm as an iterative procedure (Hartigan and Wong, 1979) measures the distance between objects and through this principle determines which objects belong to a particular cluster. Chi Square test confirms the differences between countries regarding belonging to particular thinking patterns.

4. RESULTS OF AI METHODOLOGY AMONG CROATIAN BUSINESS STUDENTS

Firstly, we present the key identified themes using illustrative examples from the data to support our analysis. We have found out that what Croatian students value most in their life are first working experiences ("*I can say it was the time when I worked as a firefighter and that experience is very fulfilling and when I work with tourists, when I interact with people in general and do practical things, things from which I can learn stuff.*"), travelling ("*I personally feel most alive and engaged when I travel, so anytime I visit another country or city - that is the time when I am most passionate about life.*"), feelings ("*That time is now, actually. I feel very effective as I came to the island of Hvar to work during the summer season and at the same time I am trying to pass exams at University. I feel very alive, because I`m playing sports and meeting new people.*"), friends ("*When I am with my family and friends just happy or pursuing my dreams, whether it is a conference, research or a talk with an investor.*").

We have found out that, from their current lives, students would most like to preserve their friends, which was the dominant wish (Figure 1), the ties with the family or partners ("*I would like to keep positive look to the future, faith, my family and friends and will to accomplish life goals*") and they also hope to preserve all the good things in their lives and to think positively ("*I`m a positive person and I would like to remain so in the future*").

Figure 1. NVivo Word frequencies of students'preservation wishes

Life-long learning is also one of the prominent themes in our research findings. We found out that students have a desire to learn. Most of them expressed the wish to learn foreign languages, preferably German. They also wish to learn more about economy ("*I would like to learn how to manage my time so I become more productive. I would also like to learn how to spend money wisely*."), marketing, and tourism ("*I wish to learn more concrete stuff, do more practice and gain that kind of knowledge. I think that less theory is needed*").

Students in Croatia also highlight "people" component in their visions of the future. The focus of their thinking is on the people ("*I'd say that I had contributed to the well-being of my community and made it more sustainable, recognizable and appealing to others. People rely on each other even more and they all share same values in life. Lots of entrepreneurial activities have taken place, mostly from the young passionate people.*"). They think that people will be more socially responsible, aware of sustainability (new medicine for the diseases, better transportation, less poverty, better working conditions, no wars etc.): "*No more wars, no terrorism, people respect each other, found the medicine for cancer, reduced environmental pollution and so on*". Technology is also an important part of students' thoughts about the future ("*We will control computers with our minds. 3D printer for organs. Mankind will be on the edge of making the first robotic man.*").

The appreciative inquiry methodology on the sample of Croatian business students showed that first working experiences are memorable and provide the energy for future challenges. It is good to know that students are enthusiastic about work and set it as a priority in their life. Given the economic and social situation of their country, students learned to value availability of jobs and wish to learn languages in order to be more competitive in the international working environment. It is worth mentioning that the University of Split is situated in the region where the local community is highly dependent on tourism as a source of income; thus such a high interest in learning languages, tourism and marketing in the data.

5. RESULTS OF AI METHODOLOGY AMONG SLOVENE BUSINESS STUDENTS

Based on the longitudinal qualitative analysis we have noticed a positive attitude

towards the future in the sample of business students at the Faculty of Economics, University of Ljubljana (2012-2016). Analysis of 2012/13 AI interviews in Slovenia revealed emphasis on the "people" component and the need of the students to understand life and make sense of gained knowledge and experiences.

Students would most like to preserve in the future their creativity, hard work, family members around them, experiences and knowledge gained. The students' vision is most clear in their expectation of transfer into the working environment, where their wish is to be successful and be part of a larger social entity – company. New ways of communication represent an important consideration for the students, enabling them to stay in touch, being aware of things happening around the world and being able to express themselves. Analysis of 2013/14 AI interviews in Slovenia revealed emphasis on "people" component", meaning that relationships are very important to students. They also stress the need to think about contemporary issues and gain practical experiences. Students would like to preserve work ethics and dedication to hard work. The vision of the future is fuzzy but they do express concern for world affairs and wish to progress.

Analysis of 2014/15 AI interviews in Slovenia revealed emphasis on the need to be empowered, independent and proactive. Students expressed their wish to be driven by intrinsic motivation and respected in their profession. They would most like to preserve their "drive", be it personal values, and desire to succeed, or prove something to themselves and their parents. The visions of this generation were focused on balancing successful international careers and family lives.

Analysis of 2015/16 AI answers in Slovenia revealed a positive outlook into the future, not only business situation, but also personal development. Students attach high valuing to relationships with their friends and family, which is in line with the larger role of social relationships in the stage of secondary socialization, and the role friends have in students' lives as important others and opinion makers.

6. QUANTITATIVE DATA ANALYSIS BETWEEN SLOVENE AND CROATIAN BUSINESS STUDENTS

The empirical part of the paper presents the results of the research conducted in December 2016 among the students at the University of Ljubljana, Faculty of Economics and University of Split, Faculty of Economics, Business and Tourism. The respondents were students in the Business Economics, Economics and Tourism study programmes. The questionnaire was administered online to 195 students in Split and 101 students in Ljubljana who were asked to complete it on voluntary basis.

The total of 94 (49%) Croatian students and 101 Slovene (100%) students completed the questionnaire. The collected data were processed using SPSS 23.0. To test the hypothesis: *There is no significant difference between Croatian and Slovene students regarding their view into the future due to a similar cultural upbringing in the region,* descriptive statistics analysis, cluster analysis and correlation matrix were performed on the data sets from the 2016/2017 academic year. The sample distribution according gender and study program is presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Distribution according to gender and study program

Study program	Gender		
	Male	Female	Total
Business	36	57	93
Economics	31	42	73
Tourism	8	21	29
Total	75	120	195

Source: Authors' research (N=195)

Cluster analysis classified the variable *belonging to particular thinking patterns*. By using k means method, four clusters related to thinking pattern are confirmed. Within the same process of analysis it was confirmed that all differences between clusters are statistically significant (p=0,000), as shown in Table 5.

The precise distribution into particular thinking patterns was determined by factor analysis, or rather, principal component analysis as presented in Table 6.

Table 5. Cluster analysis output

	Cluster		Error			
Thinking pattern	Mean Square	df	Mean Square			Sig.
Logical	18,708	3	,574	191	32,580	,000
Correlative	10,053	3	,663	191	15,168	,000
Lateral	21,731	3	,489	191	44,439	,000
Non-conceptual	42,189	3	,537	191	78,530	,000

Source: Authors' research (N=195)

Table 6. Principal component analysis

	Component			
	1	2	3	4
Logical	0,980			
Correlative		0,980		
Lateral			0,998	
Non-conceptual				0,967

Source: Authors' research (N=195)

The distribution between students' belonging to particular patterns and countries is enclosed in Table 7.

Cross tabulation process divided the students according to the countries. Applied Chi Square test with 3 degrees of freedom confirmed the relevant differences (p=0,001) between groups.

Table 7. Thinking patterns vs countries distribution

	Cluster Number of Case				
	Lateral	Correlative	Logical	Non-conceptual	Total
Slovenia	1	34	52	14	101
Croatia	6	13	48	27	94
Total	7	47	100	41	195

Source: Authors' research (N=195)

Table 8. ANOVA

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
A1	Between Groups	,921	1	.921	1.144	.286
	Within Groups	155,458	193	.805		
	Total	156,379	194			
A2	Between Groups	,314	1	.314	.376	.541
	Within Groups	161,102	193	.835		
	Total	161,415	194			
A3	Between Groups	4,005	1	4.005	4.495	.035
	Within Groups	171,974	193	.891		
	Total	175,979	194			
A4	Between Groups	,043	1	.043	.043	.836
	Within Groups	194,552	193	1.008		
	Total	194,595	194			
A5	Between Groups	19,647	1	19.647	13.825	.000
	Within Groups	274,271	193	1.421		
	Total	293,918	194			

Source: Authors' research (N=195)

Furthermore, the level of agreement with the following statements is investigated:

- A1 – I am satisfied with the present.
- A2 – I expect good things to happen in the future.
- A3 – I am satisfied with my life so far (satisfied with the past).
- A4 – I like changes.
- A5 – I am looking forward to retiring from my job.

According to ANOVA findings (Table 8), differences between countries regarding the satisfaction with the past and the present moments, future views as well as openness to change are not relevant. Croatian students are slightly more satisfied with their lives so far, compared with the Slovene colleagues (p=0,035). They are also slightly more looking forward to retirement (p=0,000).

Data findings in Table 9 indicate that students generally expect positive things to happen in the future (mean average = 4.17).

Table 9. Mean values of students' expectations

	Mean		
	Total	Slovenia	Croatia
A1	3,94	4,0	3,9
A2	4,17	4,2	4,1
A3	3,99	3,9	4,1
A4	3,73	3,7	3,7
A5	2,98	2,7	3,3

Source: Authors' research (N=195)

In that context, a medium correlation (Table 10) between variable *Expecting positive things* and variables such as *satisfaction with the past, with the future as well as readiness to change* is revealed.

Table 10. Pearson correlation output

		A1	A3	A4	A5
A2	Pearson Correlation	,433	,405	,310	-,052
	Sig. (1-tailed)	,000	,000	,000	,235
	N	195	195	195	195

Source: Authors' research (N=195)

Table 11. Thinking pattern frequency distributions

	Cluster Number of Case (Means)			
	Lateral	Correlative	Logical	Non-conceptual
A1	4,4	4,0	3,9	4,0
A2	4,0	4,3	4,1	4,2
A3	3,9	4,0	4,0	4,0
A4	3,1	3,7	3,8	3,6
A5	3,0	2,7	2,9	3,4

Source: Authors' research (N=195)

Findings also indicate that students with positive future view mostly belong to correlative thinking, while those more open to change are students belonging to logical thinking pattern (see Table 11).

Finally, according to the answers to the question: *How do you see the world in 2026*? the Slovene as well as Croatian students share similar attitudes regarding the importance of family, technology, health, wealth, living abroad, kids and job, focusing on personal details or general ones. Our research confirmed significant differences in only two values (segments). More precisely, Slovene students significantly pay more attention to segments such as job (p=0,000) and technology (p=0,000) than Croatian students. Regarding all other segments the importance and frequency from Croatian and Slovene perspective is almost equal.

7. DISCUSSION

Students' AI data was first examined by using content analysis in three thematic segments: 1) favourite quotes; 2) preservation of past and present into the future and 3) vision of the future. Analysis of AI revealed emphasis in students' favourite quotes on the "people" component and the need of the students to understand life and make sense of gained knowledge and experiences. They also stressed the need to think about contemporary issues and gain practical experience. Students in the Slovenian subsample would most like to preserve their work ethics, dedication to hard work, creativity, family members around them, experiences and knowledge gained. Their visions are focused on balancing successful international careers and family lives. New ways of communication represent an important consideration for the students. They expressed their wish to be driven by intrinsic motivation and being respected in their profession.

Similarly, Croatian students expressed their wish to preserve strong relationships with their loved ones – friends and family.

The AI methodology adopted in the 2015/16 sample of Slovenian and Croatian business students revealed similar attitudes towards positive future. Accordingly, we consider the posed hypothesis confirmed.

Both groups of students stress the importance of family values and relationships with friends and intend to balance professional duties and family. Likewise, both groups are oriented towards learning foreign languages. Slovene students are induced by successful international careers while Croatian students recognized tourism potential of their country and, accordingly, consider learning foreign languages *as sine qua non* for taking advantage in the tourism market. However, the statistical analysis applied on the data collected by the on-line questionnaire, provided insight in particular differences between the two subsamples. Thus, cluster method and Chi Square test revealed the differences regarding particular thinking patterns to which students belonged. The results showed that significantly more Slovene students belong to logical and correlative thinking patterns, while significantly more Croatian students belong to lateral and non-conceptual thinking patterns.

Furthermore, according to the results of ANOVA, Croatian students seem to be more satisfied with their lives so far compared to their Slovene colleagues. We believe that it may correlate with the previously stated positive relationship with family values and/or very important role of the family in Croatian culture. This variable is positively correlated with memories originated from past events, moreover with positive perfectionism. It is in accordance with Stoeber and Corr's (2017) study, indicating self-oriented perfectionism as positively related with positive expectations. Haase and Prapavessis (2004) consider the family environment and the associated sense of pride if the set objective is achieved, as item of positive perfectionism scale. The role of family scrutinized through authoritarian, but not highly psychologically controlled, parenting style is agitated as one of the functional perfectionism predictors (Craddock et al., 2009).

We also note, in the correlation matrix output, that students with positive outlook mostly belong to the correlative thinking, while those more open to change are students belonging to logical thinking pattern. The participants with positive experiences from the past nourish also positive future insight. Here we can notice the presence of analogical approach, which is one of the main features of correlative thinking pattern. At the same time, those who accept changes use their logical appeals to achieve a single correct answer and explain themselves the sense of accepting the change.

Our qualitative and quantitative findings are in accordance regarding the attitudes towards technology and professional careers. In that context we noticed that Slovene students pay significantly more attention to job and technology than Croatian students, although technology appeared as an important part of Croatian students' thoughts related to future.

We argue that in course of time and due to an increased presence of IT in the society, understanding of IT also rises. It opens new opportunities for IT endeavours to be more successful than is revealed by Ewusi-Mensah (in West and Thomas, 2005:440). Since Slovene students are more devoted to careers than Croatian students it is expected that they should be closer to new technologies as an integrated part of modern/current business models.

8. CONCLUSIONS

Our paper provides a cross-management perspective of business students from the two neighbouring countries in the Balkan region. We investigated the outlook of students, prospective managers of business ventures and active professionals, which makes it important to understand their thinking patterns. Understanding the outlook of business students from two neighbouring countries prevents potential conflicts among youth prospective businessmen participating in the global business world.

We conclude that the prospects for successful collaboration among Slovene and Croatian businessmen in the future are good. In the first part of our study we focused our attention on the AI instrument and its questions. In the quantitative study, we highlighted the comparative results of both samples of students which we prepared and gained based on (i) AI questions and (ii) on line survey quantitative data. We consider the results obtained using quantitative method (clustering method) as complementary to results obtained by the main research method (AI method). This mixed-methods approach provided a deeper insight into the outlook of Slovene and Croatian business students, its similarities as well as some differences. In summary, we argue that Croatian and Slovene students share similar outlook and values, but use different thinking patterns.

Theoretical implications of our paper are in elaborating on AI in management education as managers have a prevailing "nurturing" role of their employees and local communities that is often neglected in the effort to achieve short-term profits and a constant growth. AI states that results can be achieved in a more humane and productive ways. Through AI students are active in designing their future and foresee that they wish to accomplish in an autonomy-supportive classroom (Conklin and Hartman, 2014).

Practical implications are in the presentation of a study of AI methodology among business students. AI (Arthur, 2015) helped students to clarify their strategic goals and visions through introspection and qualitative methodology (Lundgren and Jansson, 2016). Professors can implement and adjust the AI questionnaire, based on their own developmental objectives and also based on the needs of their students. Contribution of our paper is in the field of business education and AI field. Discussing the topic of setting the strategic goals for the organization in our courses, we realised that thinking about multinationals is often too far away and too abstract to the reality of 20-year olds. Therefore, we approached the learning objective of understanding strategic planning through personal management and setting a 10-year vision in a safe developmental environment through AI. AI provides an alternative outlook to the traditional strategic thinking and planning process (Harmon et al., 2012). It establishes a way of being as a useful philosophy, a methodology, and a set of tools (Keefe and Pesut, 2004).

Last but not the least, *implications for managerial education* are twofold. Firstly, the study programs in both countries should be restructured with intentions to better introduce business students to innovative models dedicated to successful management of family-owned small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). Secondly, considering the presence of different thinking patterns, the managerial education for Slovenian students, closer to logical and correlative thinking pattern, should be complemented with latest tools for business analytics performances. Likewise, teaching content for

Croatian business students, more inclined to lateral and non-conceptual thinking patterns, should be supplemented with the upward constructive discussions and group decision techniques. To additionally clarify, the above stated assumes using various tools and techniques in any kind of managerial education. Based on these research results, we suggest a more sophisticated teaching content, in accordance with the recognised thinking patterns, dominating the student sample.

AI can be applied in all social contexts, adjusted versions are specially recommended for top managerial levels when setting strategic goals. Further research among managers is recommended, as well as a symbiotic relationship of business students and managers as role models.

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PERCIPIRANI TRENDOVI U POIMANJU BUDUĆNOSTI KOD HRVATSKIH I SLOVENSKIH STUDENATA: POSLJEDICE ZA MENADŽERSKO OBRAZOVANJE

Sažetak

Rad prezentira rezultate primjene metodologije afirmativnog istraživanja (AI) u menadžmentu obrazovanja. U tom kontekstu se predlaže primjena afirmativnog istraživanja, koje je usmjereno na pozitivne aspekte poslovanja, u proces obrazovanja budućih menadžera, te se prilažu empirijski nalazi obrazaca razmišljanja studenata Sveučilišta u Ljubljani i Sveučilišta u Splitu. Nadalje se metodom usporedbe, istražuju prethodna iskustva i buduća očekivanja studenata poslovne ekonomije u Sloveniji i Hrvatskoj. Empirijski dio sadržava dva dijela: kvalitativni dio temeljen na afirmativnom istraživanju i kvantitativni dio temeljen na statističkim metodama. Rezultati ukazuju na pozitivan pogled prema budućnosti kod studenata poslovne ekonomije u obje zemlje.

Ključne riječi: *afirmativno istraživanje; društvo; menadžment u obrazovanju*