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Values and leadership styles of managers in Slovenia

Jure Kovač, Manca Jesenko*

Managers play a key role in the restructuring and transformation of economic structures in transitional countries. It is therefore not surprising that they are at the centre of attention for experts and others as well. This paper describes the results of two studies conducted in 1998 and 2003 regarding the values governing the life, work and leadership styles of managers. Special attention was paid to the shifts in values which occurred in the five-year period between the two studies, and to demonstrating the correlation between an individual's values and his/her leadership style.

In den Prozessen der Umstrukturierung und Umwandlung der wirtschaftlichen Strukturen in den Reformländern nehmen die Manager eine Schlüsselrolle ein. Es überrascht keineswegs, dass sie im Mittelpunkt des Interesses sowohl der fachlichen als auch einer breiteren Öffentlichkeit stehen. In diesem Beitrag sind die Ergebnisse der 1998 und 2003 durchgeführten Untersuchungen über die Wertorientierung dargestellt, die mit der Lebensführung, der Arbeit, den Unternehmen und Führungsstilen einzelner Manager zusammenhängen. Besonderes Augenmerk wird der Verlagerung der Wertorientierung im besagten Zeitraum von fünf Jahren und der Wechselwirkung der Wertorientierung und der jeweiligen Führungsstile gewidmet.

Key words: Manager / transitional country / leadership / values / Slovenia

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1. Introduction

Now that transitional countries have undergone transformation for more than a decade, the most important discovery is that the building of a democratic society and market economy is a very complex and long-term process. Gone is the illusion that an overnight change is possible by transferring institutional models of developed economies – rather than having a more evolutionary approach. Although experts and politicians talk about the end of transition, the difference between non-transitional and transitional countries¹ in Europe is obvious.

The research into transition processes conducted until now has produced interesting information disseminated in numerous publications (Nutti, 2003; Blejer, 2001; Lang, 2001; Hancock, 2000; Derleth, 2000; Schönfeld, 2000; etc.) Research carried out by different experts continues to indicate that the complex and causal interdependence between transition processes occurring within social sub-structures makes an integrated approach impossible, and instead requires reductive research methods and partial analyses.

The transformation of economic structures remains one of the most conjectural and interesting areas of transformation processes research, and empirical research into management its important part. Managers have occupied the most exposed position in the transformation of economic structures. Privatisation and consolidation of ownership have often forced managers to take key initiatives in directing their company's development. They are often referred to as change agents or accelerators of transformational processes (Lang/Müller, 2000, 201).

Actions undertaken by managers have a multi-level influence on different areas in a company and environment. Given the ever-fiercer pressures of competition as well as the globalisation process, managers have tried to find new ways of gaining a competitive advantage. In this, they are more and more aware of the importance of people as the key competitive factor in their companies. In the management process, they typically attempt to involve people in common efforts to gain competitive advantage. The values of managers play a very important role in the manner they choose to direct people in achieving company objectives. Their leadership style, also, depends a great deal on these values. The interest researchers have shown in the values of managers in transitional countries is therefore not surprising (Kohl, 2003; Dietrich, 2003; Wade, 2003; Lang, 2000; Lang, 1998; Lang, 1996; Luthans, 1998; Bigoness/Blakely, 1996; etc.)

We have focused our research on the values and leadership styles of managers in Slovenia. The Slovenian economy has constantly increased its integration

¹ In this paper, the term 'transitional countries' describes the countries moving from centrally planned economic structures to market economies (EBRD, 1999; Wade, 2003).

with the international economic environment. As work methods and techniques similar to those of managers in developed economies are being introduced, thus homogenising business conditions, the need arises to explain, understand and compare management-area processes.

2. Conceptual Framework

Values can be posited as the reference framework of individual actions at the level of environment apprehension and interpretation. Hofstede, one of the most prominent theoreticians in this area, defined values as broad tendencies to prefer certain states of affairs over others, and considered them to be at the core of culture (Hofstede, 1991; Wade, 2003). Values can therefore be described as the standards we strive for and see as our objective or ideal (Musek, 1993, 72ff.). For individuals, our values are the internal criteria against which we judge our actions. On that basis, we distinguish right from wrong and rank alternative actions. Although we are often not aware of them, they serve us as internal control (Kavčič, 1998, 11). Our families and society contribute most to the shaping of our values (MacLagan, 1998, 10) and for this reason they can only be changed over a long period of time, hardly overnight.

In our research we consequently assumed that differences in values and perceptions, as well as leadership styles can also be explained by national cultural factors (Lang, 2000, 166). Values play an important role in the work of managers. Schein and Trompenaars define managers' values as commonly accepted ideals and norms that managers use, perhaps implicitly, in guiding their organisations and their own behaviours and decisions in a professional context (Schein, 1992; Trompenaars, 1994; Wade, 2003).

Values thus serve managers as signposts in their daily decision-making and operations. Values exert a huge influence over the work of managers, that is:

- their perception of situations and problems;
- their decisions and solutions taken in this regard;
- their attitude towards and treatment of other individuals, and the relationships they develop with them;
- their perception of organisational success and methods of achieving it;
- their perception of what is and what is not ethical or moral behaviour; and
- their level of acceptance of organisational pressure and objectives (Bass, 1990; Dessler, 2001).

The very wide spectrum of influence values have on the management process has always sparked interest among the experts. Values research has a long history in developed economies (Szaba et al, 2001). However, the research of

managers' values is internally differentiated and goes from the culture behind specific values, to the connection between values and ethical or moral behaviour to the connection between values and leadership styles (MacLagan, 1998, 11)².

Research into the connection between values and management practices – which can be defined as the commonly-accepted general management behaviour and routines that are considered appropriate in managing organisations and/or conducting business (Wade, 2003) – is very complex and therefore sub-divided. One of the branches of research is the connection between values and management systems. The term management systems denotes operational procedures or structures that are commonly used to resolve specific types or sets of organisational problems (Wade, 2003).

We have based our research model on the interdependence of values and leadership styles in Slovenia on the above-mentioned research framework, which represents its central platform. We have based an understanding of leadership styles on the dichotomy model (Bass, 1999), that is to say, on what instruments are mainly used to influence employees' orientation in achieving set objectives.

This paper presents the results from two studies of values connected with life, work, companies and management styles, which were conducted within a five-year interval. Special attention was paid to the shifts in values occurring in the this period.

3. Research Methodology

The empirical research of values and leadership styles was carried out together with a research group at the Faculty of Economics and Business Administration, Chemnitz University of Technology, led by Prof. Rainhart Lang³. Empirical data was collected by means of a questionnaire, developed within a research project in intercultural comparison INTERKULT of 1994 (Lang et al, 1995). The project used a theoretical model based on the Hofstede's model and its five

² In Slovenia, no comprehensive and representative studies of management values have been conducted. These have been researched only within the broader management or companies' transformation studies (e.g. Pučko, 1996). On the other hand, there has been quite a lot of empirical research of work values. Such was the participation in the international project Meaning of Work (Rus, 1971; Rus, 1987; Rus 2000), the Longitudinal Project on Public Opinion realised by the Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Ljubljana (Toš, 1997; Toš, 1999; Toš, 2001), and European Research Network (Svetlik, 2000).

³ The research group at the Faculty of Economics and Business Administration, Chemnitz University

descriptive dimensions of national cultural differences, and draft version of Transformational Leadership by Bass (Lang/Müller, 2000, 217).

The first empirical study in Slovenia, which was conducted in 1997-98, used a sample of 100 Slovenian managers (Florjančič et al, 1998). Its main objective was to study the values of Slovenian managers and compare them with the values of their German colleagues. A standardised survey questionnaire with five sets of questions was used. Most questions were phrased as statements to which managers were asked to respond using a rating scale of “disagree completely” to “agree completely”. The results showed that values of managers in both countries were very similar (Florjančič et al, 2000)

We repeated the empirical study in 2003, using a sample of 134 Slovenian managers. We used the same questionnaire and the same sample selection model. Senior and post-graduate students helped collect the data, which was then processed in exactly the same way as the first time in order to facilitate the comparison of the results. In presenting the study results, we have emphasised the comparison of general values, and the connection between values and leadership styles (Jesenko/Kovač, 2003).

Table 1. Characteristics of samples included in the 1998 and 2003 studies

		1998	2003	Average
		%	%	%
Age	20-30	15.3	18.8	17.1
	31-40	37.8	42.1	40.0
	41-50	28.6	21.8	25.2
	over 50	18.3	17.3	17.7
Gender	Male	75.5	70.9	73.2
	Female	24.5	29.1	26.8
Education	Less than secondary school	0	0.8	0.4
	Secondary school	14.6	9.2	11.9
	University diploma	77.1	76.9	77.0
	MSc, PhD	8.3	13.1	10.7
Position	Director	25.8	22.8	24.3
	Business segment manager	27	38.6	32.8
	Department manager	24.7	25.2	25
	Group manager	5.6	6.3	5.9
	Specialised staff member	16.9	7.1	12

Table 1 compares the characteristics of samples used in the two studies. It also shows the following trends in changes in Slovenian management structures: a younger age structure, an increase in the number of female managers and a higher education level. All these trends correspond to the overall trends manifested in the total population. We can also see that the percentage of mid- and higher-level managers has increased.

4. Presentation of results by segments

4.1 Importance of life values, work values and objectives

This section first summarises the average ratings of eleven life spheres, which respondents evaluated on a scale from 1 (not important) to 3 (very important). The importance ascribed to them is relatively high (2.7), since seven out of eleven life spheres received an above-average rating. Table 2 shows that respondents rated highest work (3.0), family (2.9), health (2.9) and personal success (2.9). They rated political influence and religion lowest, the majority of them as ‘less important’ or ‘not important’. More than half rated free time and income as ‘very important’.

Compared with the 1998 study, child-raising has fallen from third to fifth place, free time has become less important than income (falling from eighth to ninth place), while health and personal success have gained in importance (climbing from fourth to third place and from fifth to fourth place respectively).

Table 2. Importance of life-related values

	1998	Rank 98	2003	Rank 03
Work	2.93	1.5	3.00	1
Family	2.93	1.5	2.98	2
Good health	2.91	4	2.97	3
Personal success	2.89	5	2.96	4
Child-raising	2.92	3	2.81	5
Social relationships	2.88	6	2.80	6
Love and affection	2.87	7	2.70	7
Income	2.50	8	2.51	9
Free time	2.40	9	2.50	8
Political influence	1.51	10	1.61	10
Religion (faith)	1.50	11	1.50	11

Basing our research on questions regarding the importance of life values, satisfaction with certain elements, and future requirements regarding managers' skills and knowledge, we have used factor analysis to reduce the original set of variables to a more manageable set of variables – factors – for each set of questions. Since respondents participating in the second study did not differ significantly from those participating in the first one, we have also combined the data bases to obtain a larger sample, which, in addition, has improved the reliability of the results. Moreover, the advantage of a combined data base is that it allows comparison of differences occurring between 1998 and 2003.

In the first set of questions in which respondents estimated life values, three underlying general factors were identified (income and health were excluded because of the small correlation with other variables): social values, family, and personal and political power.

Table 3. Factor analysis of life-related values

	social values	family	personal and political power
social relationships	,776		
love and affection	,727		
leisure time	,668		
upbringing children		,849	
Family		,753	
political influence			,764
personal success			,737

Respondents then estimated 16 work-related values on a scale from 1 (not very important) to 5 (very important). Table 4 shows that they rated highest performance, creativity and fulfilment of duties (average rating 4.6), while they rated lowest diligence (3.5), family honour (3.5) and modesty (3.5).

Table 4. Importance of work-related values

	1998	Rank 98	2003	Rank 03
Creativity	4.61	1	4.61	2
Performance	4.60	2	4.62	1
Fulfilment of duties	4.50	3	4.60	3
Collegiality	4.31	5	4.32	4
Discipline	4.30	4	4.30	6
Social security	4.10	6	4.31	5
Self realisation	4.00	8	4.20	7
Assiduity	4.10	7	4.10	8
Participation	3.92	10.5	4.09	9
Equal treatment	3.91	9	4.00	11
Autonomy	3.92	10.5	4.10	10
Democracy	3.90	12	3.90	12
Thrift	3.60	14	3.60	13
Family honour	3.70	13	3.50	15
Diligence	3.50	15	3.51	14
Modesty	3.20	16	3.40	16

In the second set of questions, in which respondents estimated work values, four underlying general factors were identified (performance and fulfilment of duties were excluded because of the small correlation with other variables): tradition – society, democracy, tradition – work, creativity. Finally, respondents rated eight objectives on a scale from ‘least important’ to ‘most important’. Table 6 shows the average ratings of these objectives.

Table 5. Factor analysis of work-related values

	tradition - society	democracy	tradition - work	creativity
modesty	,786			
thrift	,682		,315	
family honour	,637			
collegiality	,621			
social security	,470			
democracy		,856		
equal treatment		,785		
participation		,709		
discipline			,846	
obedience			,818	
diligence	,399		,593	
creativity				,810
Self- realization				,590
autonomy		,477		,572

Table 6. Importance of objectives

	1998	Rank 98	2003	Rank 03
Preservation of a stable economy	6.60	1	6.20	1
Preservation of high economic growth	6.00	2	5.80	2
Progress towards a more humane/less impersonal society	5.11	3	5.30	3
Combating crime	5.10	4	4.80	4
Progress towards a society in which ideas are more important than money	3.70	6	4.60	5
More rights as regards participating in decision making at work and in the local community	3.50	7.5	3.90	6
National security	3.90	5	3.20	8
More rights as regards participation in important government decisions	3.50	7.5	3.40	7

On average, respondents rated highest the preservation of a stable economy and preservation of high economic growth, while they rated lowest participation in decision-making at work and in the local community, and national security. Compared with the 1998 study, national security has seen the biggest shift – this objective has fallen from fifth to eighth (last) place.

In the third set of questions, in which respondents rated objectives, four underlying general factors were identified: stable economy, humane society, direct participation, maintenance of law and order in the country.

Table 7. Factor analysis of objectives

	stable eco- nomy	humane society	direct partici- pation	keeping order in the country
preservation of a stable economy	,856			
preservation of high economic growth	,802			
progress toward a more humane and less impersonal society		,832		
progress toward a society in which ideas are more important than money		,794		
more rights to participate in the matter of your job and in your local community			,830	
more rights to participate in important governmental decisions			,799	
security of the country				,875
struggle against crime	,409	,310		,643

Compared with the 1998 study, respondents rated highest social values, societal traditions, democracy, a humane society, direct participation, job security, expression of one's own ideas, free time and future requirements regarding managers' team skills. They were also more satisfied with work and relationships at work. On the other hand, they gave a lower rating to a stable economy, law and order in the country, feeling of usefulness, job security, and future requirements regarding managers' personal and professional skills. Generally speaking, we can say that shifts in values over the five-year period have been relatively minor, indicating a relatively stable value structure.

4.2 Leadership styles and values

The management process of an organisation can be defined as a social process of directing organisational complexity and conceiving organisational changes in a rapidly changing environment. Management behaviour comprises coherent ideas which are then put into practice by means of management tools (Lindert, 1996: p. 91). We classified the ways in which managers use these tools to influence employee orientation with regards to established objectives into four management styles, i.e. V1, V2, V3 and V4 (see table 8).

Leadership styles, from V1, the autocratic, to V4, the participatory, with transitional ones (V2 and V3) in between, were explained in the questionnaire.

Respondents were required to select the style they used, the style their manager used, and the style they preferred as subordinates. See Table 9 for these results.

Table 8. Leadership styles

V1	Makes decisions immediately and informs subordinates about them. Expects them to be loyal and not cause problems in the execution of his/her decisions.
V2	Makes decisions immediately, but tries to explain things to subordinates in detail beforehand. Gives reasons for his/her decisions and answers all questions asked by subordinates.
V3	Usually consults with subordinates before making a decision, when he/she takes account of their proposals. He/she then expects everyone to participate in the execution of decision, regardless of whether this corresponds to their proposal.
V4	Usually convenes subordinates when an important decision must be made, explains the problem and encourages discussion. He/she then makes the decision based on majority opinion.

Table 9. Leadership styles 98:03

	Which leadership style do you prefer as a subordinate?		Which leadership style does your manager use?		Which leadership style do you use?	
	1998	2003	1998	2003	1998	2003
V1	1,0%	3,3%	31,5%	26,2%	2,1%	8,1%
V2	19,8%	16,3%	20,7%	31,3%	23,7%	20,3%
V3	46,9%	37,1%	30,4%	27,2%	48,5%	46,2%
V4	32,3%	43,3%	17,4%	15,3%	25,7%	25,4%

Which leadership style do you prefer as a subordinate?

The table demonstrates that the percentage of those who prefer to work with a V4 manager has increased in the period from 1998-2003. It is interesting to note that the percentage of those who prefer to work with a V1 manager has also increased, albeit marginally. The percentage of those who prefer to work with V2 and V3 managers has decreased.

Which leadership style does your manager use?

The comparison between the answers given in 1998 and 2003 is most interesting. The tables show that V1 and V2 styles prevail. There is an obvious upward trend in the V2 style, and an obvious downward trend in V3 and V4 styles.

Which leadership style do you use?

In both studies, the majority of respondents said they used the V3 style. Interestingly, there has been a slight increase in the V1 style. The distribution of answers across V2, V3 and V4 styles remained more or less the same.

The answers to the three questions highlight a discrepancy between one's wishes, his/her perception of their management style and the actual leadership styles used. While the prevailing current leadership styles are more autocratic (V1 and V2), respondents perceive their own leadership styles as, or would like their managers to use, participatory styles (V3 and V4). Based on the aforementioned factors, we then examined whether there were any differences in respondents' values dependent on the management style they desired, or used by their manager or themselves.

We have combined the 1998 and 2003 databases to obtain a larger sample, and then employed factor analysis. The average value of all factors across the sample was zero. Comparison of leadership styles in 1998 and in 2003 shows that the importance of factors differs depending on management style and year. Results of comparison of factors' average values depending on management style and year are presented below. When presenting the correlation between values and management style we took account only of the answers to the question 'Which leadership style do you use?' because we considered that these were the most representative.

Respondents' identification with a certain leadership type (1998 : 2003)

Respondents who identified themselves with type V1 managers rated highly tradition at work. They were also more satisfied with their work and remuneration. They rated lower social values, family, democracy, self-achievement, a stable economy, feeling of usefulness and job security, as well as team skills and knowledge of managers-to-be (due to the small number of subjects [12], results for this group are less reliable).

Respondents who identified themselves with type V2 managers rated higher family, a feeling of usefulness and expression of one's own ideas, and were more satisfied with relationships at work. They rated lower tradition at work, a humane society, direct participation, law and order in the country, job security, and participation in decision-making at work and in the local community, as well as team skills of managers-to-be.

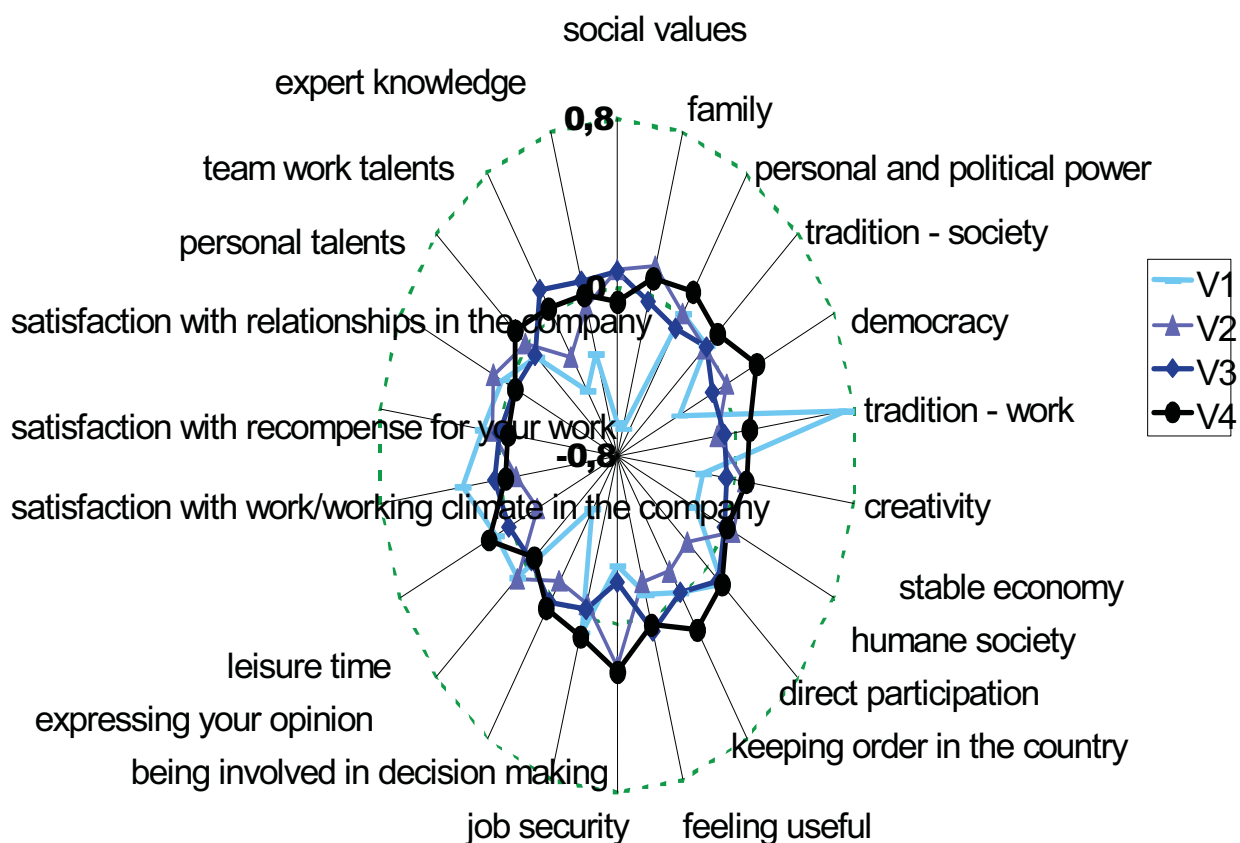
Respondents who identified themselves with type V3 managers rated higher social values, humane society and team skill of managers-to-be. They rated lowest the feeling of usefulness.

Respondents who identified themselves with type V4 managers rated higher family, personal and political power, societal traditions, democracy, direct participation, feeling of usefulness and free time, as well as personal skills of

managers-to-be. Figure 1 shows the correlation between values and leadership style respondents identify with.

Based on the analysis we can say that there is a certain correlation between an individual's values and his/her leadership style. Persons who tend to use V1 and V2 leadership styles have the following values: tradition at work, family, expression of own ideas, and were more satisfied with relationships at work. They find less important social values, a humane society, democracy, self-achievement, stable economy, a feeling of usefulness and job security, as well as team skills and knowledge of managers-to-be, further direct participation, law and order in the country, participation in decision making and free time, as well as team skills of managers-to-be.

Figure 1. Correlation between values and leadership style respondents identify with



Persons who tend to use V3 and V4 leadership styles have the following values: social values, a humane society, democracy, direct participation, a feeling of usefulness and free time, as well as team skills of managers-to-be. At this point, we must mention the variances in answers, and that further analyses would be required to make the results more reliable.

5. Conclusion

Managers' values significantly characterise their conduct and behaviour. In recent years, management researchers have conducted more frequent detailed research into managers' values. They have become the centre of attention for professionals, in particular in connection with ethical and moral dilemmas within the modern business environment.

The empirical research we conducted within a five-year interval (1998:2003) was aimed at identifying shifts in values related to life and work, as well as management styles.

We can say that there has been a certain shift to values considered as post-modern in all the areas covered by the questionnaire. Our thesis that changes in values are a very long-term process without rapid shifts and radical leaps has also been confirmed. Compared with 1998, five years later respondents rated higher social values, societal traditions, democracy, a humane society, direct participation, job security, expression of one's own ideas and free time, as well as team skills of managers-to-be. They were also more satisfied with work and relationships at work. On the other hand, they ascribed less importance than in 1998 to family, a stable economy, law and order in the country, feeling of usefulness and, as well as to personal and professional skills of managers-to-be. Generally speaking, we can say that the shifts in values occurring over the five-year period have been relatively minor, indicating a relatively stable value structure.

In analysing the different management styles, we see a discrepancy between one's own wishes, his/her perception of their own management style and the actual leadership styles used. On one hand, prevailing leadership styles tend to be autocratic, while on the other, respondents prefer participatory leadership styles and think that they make use of these. The correlation between leadership styles and values is more complicated. Individuals who are oriented towards autocratic leadership styles rate higher values such as tradition at work, family, and expression of one's own ideas, and are more satisfied with relationships at work. They find less important social values, a humane society, democracy, self-achievement, a stable economy, a feeling of usefulness and job security, as well as team skills and know-how of managers-to-be. Individuals who are oriented towards participatory leadership styles rate higher social values, a humane society, democracy, direct participation, a feeling of usefulness and free time, as well as team skills of managers-to-be. At this point, we must mention the variances in answers, and that further analysis would be required to render the results more reliable.

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