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# The Effects of Charismatic Leadership of the Eastern European Cultural Cluster in Crisis Situations

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### Abstract

Within the last ten years, the European continent has been strongly affected by three major crises. In addition to the migrant crisis, Covid-19, and the Russian-Ukrainian war, a fourth energy crisis is now on the horizon. All these crises have affected the social changes in European countries, also influencing their leadership which had to adjust to new situations that brought uncertainty and required rapid and radical changes. The goal of this paper is to analyse the effects of charismatic leadership in the cultural cluster of Eastern Europe during the crisis. The cultural cluster of Eastern Europe is characterised by a high degree of collectivism, as opposed to a low degree of future orientation and avoidance of uncertainty. A charismatic leader focused on values, people, and results responds to these characteristics of culture. In addition, charismatic leadership has a specific effect on followers in crisis situations by instilling confidence and making them feel safe. Literature review indicated that the alignment between the characteristics of cultural cluster and leadership style leads to positive effects and a strong relationship between leaders and followers in the crisis management process.

*Keywords:* charismatic leadership, cultural cluster, Eastern Europe, crisis situations, changes

## **The Effects of Charismatic Leadership of the Eastern European Cultural Cluster in Crisis Situations**

Within the last ten years, the European continent has been strongly hit by three major crises. In addition to the migrant crisis, Covid-19, and the Russian-Ukrainian war, a fourth energy crisis is now on the horizon. All these crises have affected the social changes in European countries, also influencing their leadership which had to adjust to new situations that required urgent and difficult decisions.

According to literature review there is a significant number of scientific papers illustrating the specificities of leader profiles within different cultural clusters (Koopman et al., 1999; House et al., 2004; Bakacsi et al., 2002; Gupta et al., 2002). Furthermore, some scientific studies explore charismatic leadership during the crisis (Tortola & Pansardi, 2019; Bastardoz et al., 2022; Levay, 2010). However, there are no concrete scientific results related to the effects of charismatic leadership in the last ten years, in time when the biggest crisis is affecting the cultural cluster of Eastern Europe.

Globalization has helped us to understand how cultural differences can affect leadership performance. In this regard, Adler & Bartholomew (1992) argued that leaders must develop five multicultural competencies. First, leaders must understand the business, political, and cultural environment; they must learn the views, trends and technologies that exist in other cultures. They must be able to cooperate with people from different cultures. Furthermore, they need to know how to adjust their communication to specific cultures. Finally, they must learn to treat people from other cultures as equals, not just from a position of cultural superiority. In accordance with this, Ting - Toomey & Dorjee, (2018) believe that leaders must be trained to create multicultural visions.

Over the past three decades, the research on leadership has been a subject of significant number of social science studies as an interpersonal process of influence and governance were found in almost every aspect of

human civilization. The definition of leadership demands not only theoretical support, but also deeper understanding of existing relations between leaders and their respective groups, along with different levels of meaning and value that are essential for identifying someone as a leader within a given contextual framework (Rivers, 2019). There is a significant number of different leadership definitions that do not represent only the views of theorists but rather the entire society in the context of certain time. Author Bass (1990) considers leadership as a centre of group processes. Starting from this point of view, the leader is the centre of changes in the group activities. Within the second group of definitions leadership is considered from the personality aspect and defined as a combination of special characteristics and traits possessed by an individual, which enable him to influence the others. In that direction, Ralph Stogdill has found that different researchers identified specific traits related to leader's ability, which he categorized as: physical traits, personality traits, work-related traits, social traits, and intelligence (Wehrich & Koontz, 1998, p. 493). Another group of theorists believe that leadership is a set of certain skills (Katz, 2009; Mumford et al., 2000). Furthermore, in some approaches leadership is defined as a behaviour (Lewin et al., 1939), or activities that leaders undertake in order to cause a change within the group. In addition, leadership is defined in the context of leader's power (French et al., 1959). From that point of view, leaders possess the power which they use to make changes. There are also opinions that leadership is a transformational process by which followers are motivated to achieve more than what can be expected of them (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Author Peter Northouse (2008, p.2) defines leadership as a process in which an individual exerts influence on a group to achieve a common goal. Precisely, this definition is in accordance with the discussion in this paper.

In the specific area of culture and leadership, the research conducted by House et al. (2004) is known as the GLOBE project. The researchers from GLOBE have published the findings of their study conducted in 62 countries within regional groups, as an acceptable way to analyse the similarities and

differences between cultural groups and meaningful generalizations on the topic of culture and leadership. To create regional clusters, GLOBE researchers used previous research, common language, geography, and historical facts. Based on these factors, they grouped countries into 10 clusters: Anglo-American, Latin Europe, Nordic Europe, German Europe, Eastern Europe, Latin America, the Middle East, sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia, and Confucian Asia (House et al., 2004). To test whether the clusters or cultural groups of the countries are valid, the researchers conducted a statistical analysis of data based on surveys of individuals in each of the clusters. The research findings indicated the correlation between the participants' answers within the same cluster, that were not in correlation with the participants from other clusters. These results showed that regional clusters are valid and reliable to differentiate and classify countries into ten different cultural groups (Northouse, 2008, p. 214). When it comes to the European continent, some authors believe that two large clusters can be distinguished, the cluster of north-western and south-eastern Europe. Within these clusters, differences in leadership prototypes reflect differences in culture (Koopman, et al., 1999). Clusters provide important information regarding social variations and are a useful way to summarize intercultural similarities as well as intercultural differences (Gupta et al., 2002).

The aim of this paper is to analyse the effects of charismatic leadership within the cultural cluster of Eastern Europe in crisis situations within the last ten years. The objectives of this research are focused on determining the alignment between the characteristics of the cultural cluster and the leadership style on the example of Serbia, which belongs to the cultural cluster of Eastern Europe.

In accordance with the defined goal, the paper will consider the characteristics of charismatic leadership, the characteristics of the cultural cluster of Eastern Europe, the alignment between the characteristics of the cultural cluster and charismatic style, as well as charismatic style in the crisis management process.

## Specifics of the cultural cluster of Eastern Europe

There are many definitions of culture in literature, as many as there are theorists who dealt with this subject. Authors Kroeber and Kluckhohn recognised even 164 definitions of culture. The differences in understanding the concept of culture stem from differences in the use of the term itself (Jahoda, 2012; Cohen, 2009). Generally, the term could refer to intellectual or artistic endeavours known as “high culture”, which is opposite to “popular culture” or folk customs. Edward Tylor (1870) believes that “primitive culture” is related to all the qualities that people have in cultural groups, as such it represents a complex whole that includes knowledge, beliefs, art, moral, law, customs and other abilities that a person acquires as a member of society (Spencer-Oatey & Franklin, 2012). In this regard, Kroeber and Kluckhohn indicate that Tylor’s definition represents a foundation for anthropological studying of culture on which many researchers have built their understanding of culture (Baldwin et al., 2006). It should be noted that the term is defined differently in the context of different aspects of social analysis (Faulkner et al., 2006). From the psychological perspective, differences between “East and West” have been studied in terms of variability of cultural dimensions (Cohen, 2009).

The highest interest for intercultural issues in management, psychology and education have been initiated by Hofstede’s research in 1980. Hofstede was the first who developed the model of culture based on empirical study conducted in more than 50 countries. The author recognised five main dimensions on which cultures differ, such as: individualism versus collectivism, avoiding uncertainty, the distance of power, male – female roles, long-term and short-term orientation (Beugelsdijk, 2017). All of these dimensions have influence on shaping the culture of particular group of countries, or clusters. According to Hofstede, the cluster of Eastern Europe is characterised by high results for perseverance, collectivism in the group and gender equality, great power distance. Poor results are related to avoiding uncertainty (Northouse, 2008, p. 215; Bakacsi, et al., 2002).

Authors Hickson & Pugh (1995) have defined the cluster of Central and Eastern Europe including Russia, Poland, Bulgaria, Ukraine and Latvia, while

Smith et al. (1996) indicated that Eastern European cluster is consisted of Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Greece, Hungary, Poland, Russia, Yugoslavia. While the researchers of the GLOBE program identified Greece, Hungary, Albania, Slovenia, Poland, Russia, Georgia and Kazakhstan within the cluster of Eastern Europe (House et al., 2004). However, Serbia was not included in the GLOBE research program, although according to its position and cultural values, it belongs to the cultural cluster of Eastern Europe. The cluster is a combination of countries with different linguistic, ethnic, religious traditions and economic backgrounds, while sharing many other attributes (Bakacsi et al., 2002). The cultural background of countries that belong to Eastern European cluster is not homogeneous, since there are significant differences in their history, religion, and languages. Van Vlimmeren et al. (2017) consider that differences among the cluster countries might occur in measuring certain values. In addition, the differences may be recognised in term of cooperation, orientation on specific values, and even leadership style. Different cultural groups may have different conceptions of leadership, or different prototypes of leadership (Koopman et al., 1999). For example, there are cultures that support authoritarian style, as opposed to those that are more democratic-oriented. Jung et al., (1995) stated that transformational leadership is more effective in collectivistic than in individualistic cultures. The differences may be seen from the aspect of time as well. With this regard, leadership profile of cultural cluster should be analysed exclusively from the aspect of time and socio-historical circumstances. This is supported by the statement of Kiezun (1991), who showed that in the late 80's. leadership styles in Hungary and Poland were rigid and autocratic (Bakacsi et al., 2002). However, the aim of the GLOBE project was to determine how people belonging to different cultural groups view leadership. In addition, the researchers wanted to determine the ways in which cultural characteristics are associated with culturally accepted leadership behaviour. To describe how leadership behaviours are viewed across cultures, GLOBE researchers identified six global leadership behaviours: charismatic, values-based, team-oriented, participative, humane-oriented, autonomous, and defensive (House et al., 2004).

Based on that analysis, the researchers were able to determine leadership profiles for cultural clusters. Each leadership profile describes the importance and desirability that different leadership profiles correspond to different cultural clusters. According to the results of this research, the cultural cluster of Eastern Europe corresponds to a charismatic leadership style that is value-oriented and team-oriented (House et al., 2004; Northouse, 2008, p. 218). The GLOBE survey is the largest survey to date that analyses leadership in different cultural clusters in all parts of the world. Furthermore, this research points to the complexity of the leadership process. Bearing in mind the time distance when the GLOBE research and the studies of the cited authors were carried out (Hosfede, 1980; Hickson & Pugh, 1995; Smith et al., 1996; House et al., 2004), as well as the social changes that have occurred in the last ten years, it would be necessary to start new research that would analyse the value of cultural clusters as well as the leadership profile. Regarding the profile of leadership in Republic of Serbia, in most situations, team-oriented leadership is emphasized, especially when making strategic decisions. Within the cultural cluster of Eastern Europe, the Republic of Serbia is demonstrating the strong feeling of cultural pride, which is reflected on both internal and foreign political activities. Team orientation, but also an independent relationship when urgency is required in the decision-making process, depicts behaviour that provides security and safety, keeping positions, respecting procedures, willingness to cooperate, integrative action and diplomacy, which indicates charismatic leadership.

### **The characteristics of charismatic leadership**

Charismatic leadership implies a clear vision, emphasizing values that are in line with the vision and establishing strong ties with followers. This type of leadership underlines the leader's influence on group, organisation, or society to "make the world a better place."

Charismatic leadership is most effective and applicable in uncertain, crisis situations that require fast and radical changes. To accomplish their vision, charismatic leaders are willing to take the risk more than others. Therefore,



charismatic leadership is the most suitable in situations when the leader's ideology should be followed in politics, religion, in time of emergencies, or in wars (Janovac, 2020, p. 136). The negative implications of charismatic leadership are related to its application in non-crisis situations when leader could experience repression or rejection by followers who are prone to individualism, self-initiative, independence. In non-crisis situations, a charismatic leader can be burdened by underestimating real problems (Guenzi & Ruta, 2013, p. 43).

The concept of charisma was introduced into the study of politics and society by Max Weber, a famous German sociologist, economist, politician, historian, and lawyer, in the 1950s. According to Weber, charisma is a special characteristic that gives a person "superhuman and extraordinary powers", is possessed by a small number of people and is of "divine" origin. Although Max Weber was the first to define the term, charismatic leadership as a theory is related to Robert House, who developed the concept during the 1970s. Robert House (1976) published *The Theory of Charismatic Leadership*, which is based on the psychological aspect of observing these leaders. House considers that charismatic leaders have special effects on their followers. The author emphasizes dominance, the strong desire to influence, self-esteem and a feeling of moral value as the most important characteristics of charismatic leaders (Northouse, 2008, p. 121). In addition to the stated list, energy, empathy, high degree of emotional intelligence and willingness to take risk could be included as well. Furthermore, charismatic leaders express their feelings openly, which is one of their main characteristics. Moreover, charismatic leaders create many supporters, but they can also have a certain number of enemies (Janovac, 2020, p.136). Max Weber considered charisma to be a great revolutionary force that can change the structure of traditional societies. Weber opposes charismatic leadership and authority with two other forms of government: traditional and rational-legal. While the first one is based on history and tradition and the second on laws, the charismatic leadership depends on the attitude of "veneration" that the leader provokes among followers because of his exceptional abilities. This definition also implies the dependence of charismatic authority on

performance, whereby if the performance of the leader fails, the obedience of the followers disappears (Tortola, & Pansardi, 2019).

Charisma originates from the leader's personality, intelligence, charm, personal power, and potential. The charismatic leader affects people behaviour by his strength of personality and actions. The leader's charisma comes to the fore especially in crisis situations, when he instils confidence in his followers who feel trust and safe beside him and accept his ideas. The influence of charismatic leadership on followers becomes stronger with the increase of leader status, as well as the level of his expertise.

Creating charisma is a process that takes place between leaders and followers and is conditioned by many factors, primarily certain characteristics, abilities and competencies of the leader, his potentials, personality traits, historical and social circumstances. Besides the certain characteristics which define them, charismatic leaders have a specific profile of behaviour, attitudes, and values that they tend to be adopted by the followers. They captivate with their appearance, performance, words, and deeds. Furthermore, they are reliable, competent, eloquent, with strong ideals, future oriented (Janovac, 2020, p. 137). Reforms are the focus of a charismatic leader who creates the support and trust of followers in formulating a new and definable path to success (Rivers, 2019). Charismatic leaders have high ethical standards of behaviour, and articulate ideological goals that encompass moral values. The effects of charismatic leaders are reflected in the followers' trust and loyalty resulting in their willingness to accept the ideas and visions that are promoted by the leader (Northouse, 2008, p.122). Because of their unique relationship with followers, charismatic leaders can be powerful actors of social change (Fiol, et al., 1999).

### **Charismatic leadership in the process of crisis management**

A crisis can be defined as an accompanying or detrimental event with a high level of initial uncertainty that occurs suddenly with little time available to respond. According to Morgeson, et al. (2015) crises have a significant

impact on people, organizations, and society. The crisis intensity is defined by its novelty, criticality, and disruption. In addition, the crisis may differ in term of content and scope. Critical and disruptive events can occur at any hierarchical level. Crises can range from critical situations to extreme crises such as Covid-19. Due to their sudden onset and demanding nature, combined with the immediate need for action, crises can be considered as significant disruptive events (Klebe, et al., 2021). Tucker (1968) & Pillai (1996) believe that crisis situations require charismatic leaders (Levay, 2010), exceptional political actors who can alleviate people's stress and anxiety by presenting inspiring visions and solutions for the future, thus creating conditions for materializing new social rankings (Tortola & Pansardi, 2019). Trice and Beyer (1986) introduced a set of five phenomenological factors associated with charismatic leaders including social crisis: a leader with certain potentials and competencies; a radical set of crisis resolution ideas; affirming the charisma of a leader based on success; followers attracted by the exceptionalism of a charismatic leader (Rivers, 2019).

The European Union, and above all Eurozone, have been in a state of economic, political, and institutional crisis for almost a decade. However, in this situation it is difficult to recognise the specific leadership style that stands out among the European leaders. Particularly, there is a lack of charismatic leadership, which is still underrepresented in EU, resulting in the deficiency of effective leadership within the member states as well (Tortola & Pansardi, 2019). The changes in the leadership of many countries, as well as the deviation in the prototype of leadership among countries, indicate a mismatch that exists between the characteristic of cultural cluster of Eastern Europe and the charismatic style that is typical for this cultural group. The case of Serbia can be cited as a typical example of alignment between the characteristics of cultural cluster of Eastern Europe and the charismatic style.

The charismatic leadership in cultural cluster of Eastern Europe is based on values and people oriented (House et al., 2004). This leadership style is focused on followers' motivation in achieving high results, based

on clearly defined key values. Furthermore, charismatic leadership implies vision, inspiration, sacrifice, reliability, determination and focus on results. In the cultural cluster of Eastern Europe, a leader is described as someone who is very independent in the decision-making process, which is an advantage in crisis situations that require urgency in decision-making. At the same time, this leader behaviour reflects conduct that provides security and safety, includes conflict resolution, generosity, and compassion, keeping positions, respecting procedures. In addition, the specific behaviour of charismatic leader within this cultural group includes defining a clear goal and motivation and providing support to followers. It implies willingness for cooperation, integrative action, diplomacy, goodwill, and administrative competence (Northouse, 2008, p. 218). It was charismatic leadership that led to positive effects in crisis management, such as Covid-19 and the migrant crisis, where the leadership of Serbia protected the national interest and successfully overcame the situations. The ability of leaders to solve problems and manage the crisis evokes respect, trust, loyalty of followers as evidenced by the results of the research conducted by ISPOS in 2020. The findings of the survey show that the citizens of Serbia have enormous confidence in the Government and the President. Namely, over 58% of citizens believe that the president is doing his job well and managing the crisis (FoNet, 2020).

The success in managing Covid-19 has brought some benefits for the citizens such as the supply of respirators, medical equipment, medicines, and the provision of vaccines from various manufacturers. The economic measures undertaken by the Government of the Republic of Serbia contributed to the stabilization of the health sector, the economy and provided help to citizens (Ministry of Finance, 2022). In addition, migrant crisis and nowadays energy crisis have indicated the inventiveness and quick response of leaders in unforeseen circumstances. Serbia's GDP growth of 4.3% in the first quarter and 4% GDP growth during the second quarter of 2022 compared to the same period of the previous year (Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, 2022) is the proof of proper implementation of reforms and responsible

management of the crisis situation. The results in the process of implementing reforms, consistency, and principals of leaders in domestic and foreign policy have gained the trust and respect of followers and citizens, resulting in a willingness to fully follow the leader's ideas and vision, as evidenced by the results of the presidential and parliamentary elections held in 2022 with a convincing victory (Republic Electoral Commission, 2022).

All this indicates that followers foster a positive interpersonal relationship within a high-power distance, which positions charismatic leadership among the most effective leadership models within this cultural group and confirms the thesis that the alignment between the characteristics of the cultural cluster and the leadership style leads to positive effects in the process of crisis management.

## **Conclusion**

This study was among the first to analyse charismatic leadership in crisis situations that have taken place in the last ten years in the cultural cluster of Eastern Europe and thus contribute to a deeper understanding of this style in accordance with social circumstances. Literature reviews have indicated that charismatic leadership additionally strengthens the bond between leader and followers in crisis situations based on the results that the leader achieves through his personal commitment. In crisis situations, charismatic leader instils confidence in his followers who feel trust and safe next to him and accept his ideas.

On the example of charismatic leadership in Serbia which belong to the cultural cluster of Eastern Europe, we can see the effects of applying this style in crisis management, as well as alignment between cultural cluster characteristics and leadership style.

This manuscript presents a useful basis for further theoretical and empirical research. However, changes in the leadership of other countries, deviations in the leadership style that is characteristic for this cultural group, as well as the lack of information on the results of leadership in other countries,

are a limiting factor in analysing the effects of leadership in crisis management in the Eastern European cultural cluster. In addition, the limitation of this study is the fact that there is no research related to the study of the value of the cultural cluster in the last ten years, when the biggest social changes are taking place. The challenge in further explorations will be to measure the differences in leadership prototypes between nations or states within the cultural cluster of Eastern Europe.

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## **Efekti harizmatičnog liderstva kulturnog klastera Istočne Evrope u kriznim situacijama**

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### **Sažetak**

U poslednjih deset godina tri velike krize pogodile su najviše evropski kontinent. Pored migrantske krize, Covid-19 i rusko-ukrajinskog rata, na pomolu je i četvrta energetska kriza. Sve ove krize uticale su na mnoge društvene promene evropskih zemalja. To je dovelo i do promene vođstva evropskih lidera i prilagođavanju situacijama koje donose neizvesnost i koje zahtevaju brze i radikalne promene. Cilj rada usmeren je na analizu efekta harizmatičnog liderstva kulturnog klastera Istočne Evrope u kriznim situacijama. Kulturni klaster Istočne Evrope specifičan je po visokom stepenu kolektivizma, nasuprot niskom stepenu orijentisanosti ka budućnosti i izbegavanju neizvesnosti. Ovakvim karakteristikama kulture odgovara harizmatičan lider usmeren na vrednosti, ljude i rezultate. Harizmatično liderstvo ima specifičan efekat na slebenike iz razloga što harizmatični lider u kriznim situacijama uliva poverenje svojim sledbenicima koji se osećaju sigurno pored njega. Teorijskom analizom utvrđeno je da saglasnost između karakteristika kulturnog klastera i liderskog stila dovodi do pozitivnih efekata i čvrstog odnosa između lidera i sledbenika u procesu upravljanja krizom.

*Ključne reči:* harizmatično liderstvo, kulturni klaster, Istočna Evropa, krizne situacije, promene