Does Individualism and Uncertainty Predict Operational Discipline in Brazilian Oil and Gas Industry?

João Lafraia
Rennes School of Business, France

Murillo Dias
Instituto de Desenvolvimento Educacional – IDE
Fundação Getulio Vargas – FGV, Brazil
Corresponding author's e-mail: agenda.murillo@gmail.com

ABSTRACT
This study examines the impact of organizational power distance, uncertainty avoidance, autonomy, and trust on the capacity to produce desired operational discipline and achieve better ESG results in a Brazilian Oil and Gas Company's business unit. Previous studies highlight the importance of intangible factors in internal coordination for operational discipline. However, a combination of low trust, high power distance, high uncertainty avoidance, and collectivism creates a reactive planning culture, increasing transaction costs and hindering efficiency and effectiveness in solving complex problems. The results show that individualism and uncertainty avoidance predict operational discipline, while power distance and trust moderate the first two variables.

Keywords: Numerical simulation, Phase change material, Indoor air temperature, Thermal comfort.

INTRODUCTION
Managers and researchers have devoted significant efforts to understanding how contextual elements affect safety culture. Several authors [1]; [2]; [3]; [4] demonstrate the context matters for human behavior. Furthermore, [5] and [6] argues that culture is a relevant contextual variable that should be considered in understanding human reliability. After 19 years of research and practical managerial observations in the workplace, we were able to isolate the critical factors and establish causal relationships. Excessive norms and low trust need to be replaced by new ways of managing human factors.

The combination of low trust [7], high power distance and high uncertainty avoidance [8] has created a culture of reactive planning, short-term focus, and focus on excessive controls, which significantly increases transaction costs and do not promote efficiency, effectiveness, or the ability to solve complex and systemic problems. This article analyzes these cases and the research trajectory that led to these results. The combination of the above factors promotes a great distance between the prescribed and actual tasks, generating a disconnection between the objectives and values proclaimed by organizations and the concrete reality of the work environment. This disconnection is Brazil's leading cause of low operational discipline. Reintegrating these elements presupposes opening spaces for the performer's participation in

seeking solutions to perceived concrete problems. However, the leadership style of the Brazilian cultural model, combined with low trust, is a significant barrier to robust advances.

In this article, we present a longitudinal study in a Brazilian Oil and Gas Company business unit to understand the internal articulations that historically ensured a low number of accidents and high degrees of operational discipline. Our results show that the exercise of individualism (independence, empowerment and autonomy) and risk avoidance (in the form of structured process) combined with trust on the leader and reduced power distanced is essential for promoting operational discipline and probably the reduction of accidents.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Operational Discipline

We adopted the terminology proposed by Klein [9], for whom operational discipline (OD) is the consistent adoption of rules by all interested parties in an organization. Those rules should be a way of living for the organization. However, more than the existence of rules is required. The challenge is to have a culture where everyone, every time, does everything according to those rules. Moreover, if there is a better way of doing this, all stakeholders will act to revise and review the existing rules so that they are constantly updated and valuable. Scholars such as Hopkins [6] and [10], [11] came up with the discussion between the plan and execution. Executing accordingly to the plan is the essence of the operational discipline paradigm. In many organizational environments, this way of doing is considered extremely bureaucratic. However, operational discipline is essential for operational excellence, which is necessary for mature risk, safety, and asset management [12]. Not only that, but it is also vital for the successful implementation of the ESG strategies.

Also, there is a tendency in many organizations to consider operational discipline as bureaucratic and a productivity hindrance. Implementing a "structured process," poses many challenges for leaders and team members. Nevertheless, it is necessary for critical situations such as aviation, nuclear, energy, mining, oil and gas industries, to name a few [5]. The same trend should be critical services such as hospitals, police, and firefighters' organizations [13].

Nonetheless, International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) studies [14] demonstrate that cultural dimensions such as power distance affects the relationship between pilot and copilot in the airplane cabin, negatively affecting the team´s perception of the risk by the copilot and his/her capacity to assertively inform the pilot of a problem, wasting a precious time to avoid an accident. In this case, the negative impact of national culture on coordinating efforts in safety assurance is clear. Hofstede [8] argues that power distance, a concept that produces a significant reduction of the cultural phenomena (necessary for quantification and comparison), especially when combined with substantial uncertainty avoidance, produces a management style that is more political than strategical. He also argues that a voice is the best proxy of power distance. The higher the power distance, the lesser the voice of the shopfloor is heard. Furthermore, high power distance cultures tend to produce less trust [8]. Moreover, trust is relevant for cooperation and the capacity for solving conflicts related to different views of facts [13]. The difficulty of escaping the excess of controls to focus on objectives, typical of contexts of low trust, is one of the major obstacles to increasing the effectiveness of Brazilian organizations [13].

Organizational Culture

Our focus was on the effect of national culture on the country's safety, governance, and ESG results based on objective performance indicators such as road work accident indices, economic growth, governance practices, and national companies' ESG results. However, national culture differs from the organizational culture [8]. Furthermore, we saw that both are related but not the same. To better understand this relationship, we endeavored in a qualitative case study to pinpoint precisely how the national culture affects and is related to the culture of a particular organization. First, we have learned that interviews and focus groups require time investment and researcher commitment to come up with conclusions and suggestions because the methodology requires a rigorous procedure to be valid. Therefore, approaching a more horizontal case study would take significant workforce investment.

Secondly, besides the large sample adopted for the results, it is still tiny compared to the size of Brazil's Oil and Gas industry. To overcome that, developing a practical instrument, such as a questionnaire, is necessary to reach a larger sample size. Not only that, but with an objective questionnaire, the quantitative analysis could provide a faster diagnosis for the business environment and, depending on the case study, start an in-depth qualitative cases study using interviews, focus groups, and ethnographic analysis to delve into the issues previously pointed by the numeric approach. Therefore, we decide to develop a culture-specific questionnaire starting with one company in which the researcher has extensive experience. Once this instrument is tested and validated, other organizations could use it to bring more horizontal suggestions and conclusions. To do so, the constructs or themes described in the following items were included in the questionnaire, which was found in the literature review.

CONCEPTUAL MODEL AND HYPOTHESES

Conceptual Model

Based on the theoretical background we designed the Organizational Cultural Behavior Questionnaire (OCBQ), to conduct a quantitative deductive study of the proposition and hypotheses. This questionnaire has five independent constructs called "power distance (PD)," "uncertainty avoidance (UA)," "individualism (Voice)," "trust in leaders (TL)" and "trust in peers (TP)", which are the independent latent variables initially formed. In addition, it has one dependent latent construct called "operational discipline (OD). Figure 1 show the questionnaire items (manifested variables displayed in boxes) for each of these constructs (displayed in the ellipses).
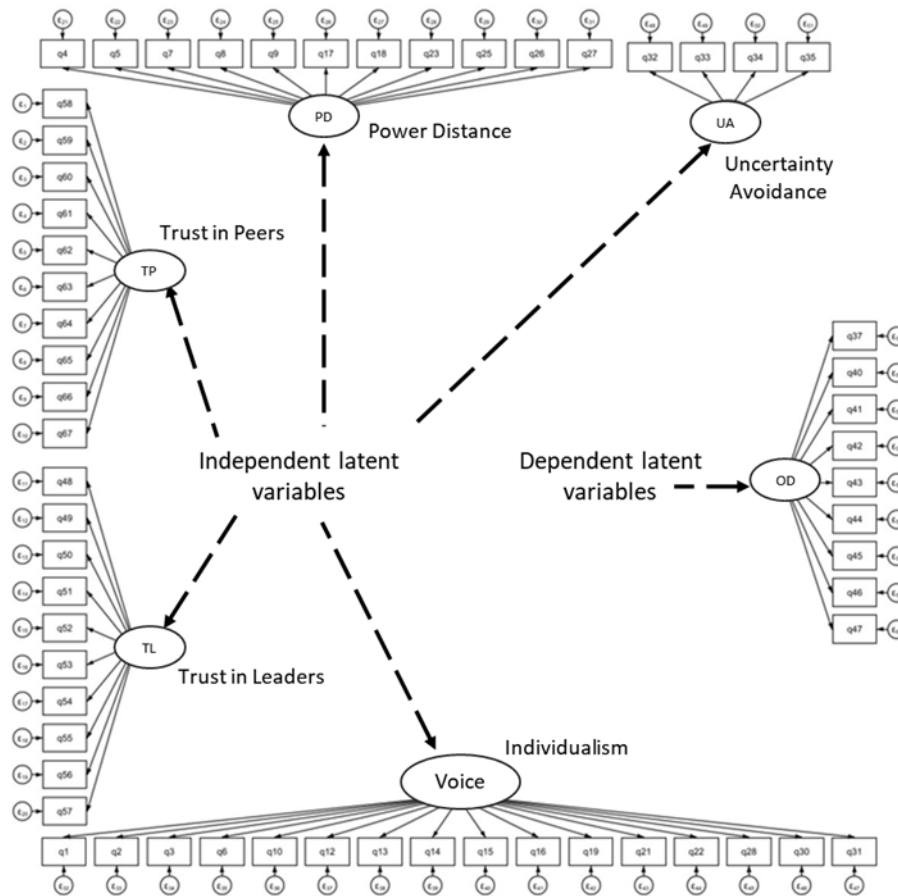
Figure 1: variables of each latent construct

Hypotheses

- ➢ **H1:** Individualism (Voice) predicts Operational Discipline (OD). **Justification:** the effect of individualism on economic national performance. In this article we verify if the same effect is found at the organizational level. The hypothesis matches the research objectives and is presented as part of a Path Diagram for all other constructs in Figure 1.

- ➢ **H2:** Power distance (PD) predicts Operational Discipline (OD). **Justification:** power distance is one of the most studied Hofstede's cultural dimensions. However, the results vary a lot, and some are even contradictory.

- ➢ **H3:** Trust in peers (TP) predicts Operational Discipline (OD). **Justification:** Trust is almost always associated with countries economic performance [16]. [13] have suggested in his research that trust is a major factor in organizational effectiveness in a Brazilian critical organization. Could it also be perceived in this case?
  - o **H3a:** Trust in peers (TP) is correlated with power distance.
  - o **H3b:** Trust in peers (TP) is correlated with voice.
  - o **H3c:** Trust in peers (TP) is correlated with uncertainty avoidance. **Justification** for H3 a, b and c: Trust had strong collinearity with uncertainty avoidance. However, in the reviews we also observed some scholars suggesting to the

mediating effect of trust on power distance, voice and uncertainty avoidance [16].

➢ **H4:** Trust on Leaders (TL) predicts Operational Discipline (OD). **Justification:** Following Gillespie (2003) approach we have separated trust in two constructs: one for assessing trust in peers (TP) and other for trust in leaders. This is important for this case due to the relation of teams with power in Brazil. We have started with the Gillespie construct on trust, but the response in the pretest (2003) led this researcher to develop a more customized trust construct.

- o **H4a**: Trust on leaders (TL) is correlated with power distance.
- o **H4b:** Trust on leaders (TL) is correlated with voice.
- o **H4c:** Trust on leaders (TL) is correlated with uncertainty avoidance. **Justification** for H4 a, b and c: The same rational for trust in peers are present in these hypotheses, but this hypothesis is specifically related to trust on leaders.

➢ **H5:** Uncertainty Avoidance (UA) predicts Operational Discipline (OD). **Justification:** As we want to check the collinearity between Trust and Uncertainty avoidance (UA), we check in this model.

➢ **H6:** Uncertainty Avoidance (UA) is correlated with individualism (Voice).

➢ **H7:** Power distance (PD) is correlated with individualism (Voice). **Justification** for **H6** and **H7**: As we assess if individualism have a strong effect on Operational Discipline (OD), we check if power distance and uncertainty avoidance are mediating this effect.

➢ **H8:** Power distance (PD) is correlated with Uncertainty Avoidance (UA). **Justification:** In the literature review some scholars [13] suggests that these concepts are almost the same in Anglo-Saxon Countries.

➢ **H9:** Trust in peers (TP) is correlated with Trust on Leaders (TL). **Justification:** collectivism and power distance are heavily affected by the national culture. "Trust in peer" and, on the other hand, the reduced "trust on leaders" can cause direct effect on Operational Discipline (OD). In here, we are interested in verifying if they have a synergic effect on the dependent variable. Figure 2 illustrates the model and the hypotheses **H1** to **H9**, as follows:
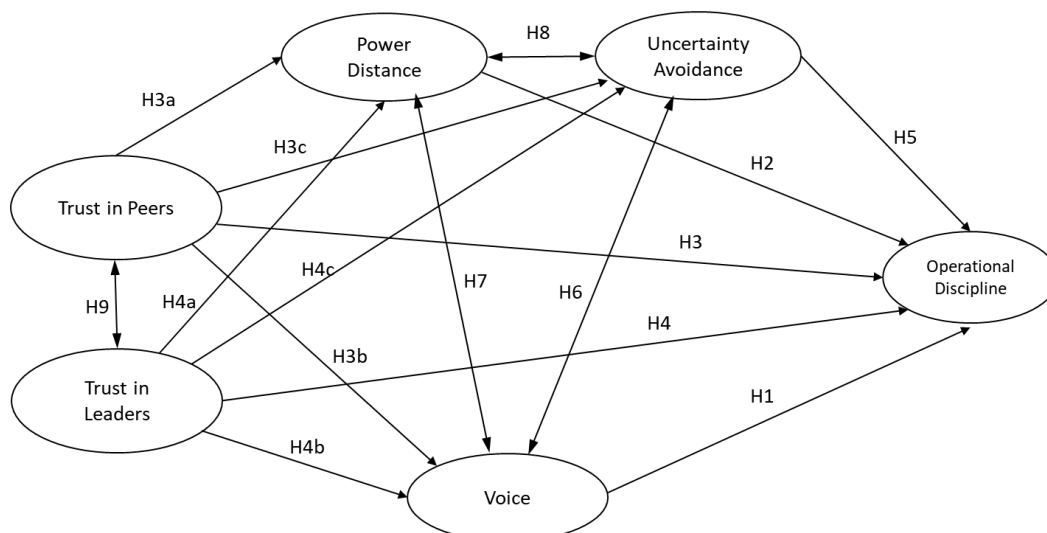
Figure 2: Model with the hypotheses

METHODOLOGY

Using a questionnaire, the study uses a positivistic approach to analyze the impact of organizational culture constructs on organizational results. This approach is a faster and cheaper alternative to quantitative assessment, requiring less time and resources. Samples of personnel from an operational unit of a Brazilian Oil and Gas company validated the questionnaire. The STAT17 software program was used for data analysis, using Cronbach's Alpha, exploratory factor analysis, covariance, factor forces, confirmatory factor analysis, and adjustment indexes. The questionnaire preparation protocol involves organized stages to build a valid measurement questionnaire, which may be rare. The study concludes that the proposed model can be used for structural evaluation.

RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

This paper tests a model in Brazil to examine the impact of cultural team behaviors on Operational Discipline (OD) and predict team member behavior. The model's SRMR is better than 0.05, indicating a good fit, but less than 0.1, indicating an acceptable fit of the proposed path diagram. The RMSEA is 0.061, less than 0.08, indicating an acceptable model, but more significant than 0.050, indicating a good fit. The CFI and TLI fit indices need to be more acceptable. The adequacy and reliability of the fourth OCBQ questionnaire, with discriminant validity, were established.

> **H1:** Individualism (Voice) predicts Operational Discipline (OD). There is a significant effect of Individualism (Voice) on Operational Discipline (OD). Therefore, the hypothesis H1 is not rejected. **Justification:** SEM show correlation of .039 (p<.001). With a correlation of .39 and p<.001 indicates that Individualism (Voice) has a positive effect on Operational Discipline (OD), answering the research question regarding the influence of organizational cultural individualism dimension on Operational Discipline (OD). Therefore, the same effect is found in organizational contexts, aligned with the results in critical organizations in Brazil [13]. It is worth mentioning that individualism was mostly absent from most of the Focus Group discussions [17], but its characteristics such as autonomy, empowerment and drive are of recognizable importance even for a collectivist society as Brazil and its organizations.

> **H2:** Power distance (PD) predicts Operational Discipline (OD). There is a significant effect of Power distance (PD) on Operational Discipline (OD). The null hypothesis H2 is rejected. **Justification:** SEM show correlation of .088 (p>.05). This seems to go against many scholars that proclaims power distance as the most discussed national cultural dimension. However, as hypotheses H7 is not reject the endogenous correlation with individualism, in this case, may account for an interchangeable effect of both power distance and individualism, but it is hard to explain which comes first: worker is afraid of risking their face because of large power distance, or leaders do not need that their teams to act with proactivity as power is not largely shared? This may be a question for further research.

> **H3:** Trust in peers (TP) predicts Operational Discipline (OD). There is a significant effect of Trust in peers (TP) on Operational Discipline (OD) The hypothesis H3 is rejected.

o **H3a:** Trust in peers (TP) is correlated with power distance (PD). There is a partial mediation of Trust in peers (TP) on power distance regarding Operational Discipline (OD). The hypothesis H3a is rejected.

o **H3b:** Trust in peers (TP) is correlated with Individualism (Voice). There is a partial mediation of Trust in peers (TP) on voice regarding Operational Discipline (OD). The hypothesis H3b is rejected.

o **H3c**: Trust in peers (TP) is correlated with Uncertainty Avoidance (UA). There is a partial mediation of Trust in peers (TP) on uncertainty avoidance regarding Operational Discipline (OD). The hypothesis H3c is rejected.

Justification for H3 and H3 a, b and c: SEM show correlation of -.11 ($p>.05$), -.027 ($p>.05$), .13 ($p>.05$), .13 ($p>.05$), respectively. As the model shows, trust in peers have less significance than trust in leader regarding other constructs dimensions and also on the dependent Operational Discipline (OD). Observing the structural model results, trust in peers has no significant effect in any other construct apart from trust in leader (**H9**) which is very interesting considering the collectivist characteristic of the organization in this case. One explanation could be that the prevalence of the distance in power makes the team spirit that is so important in imported business methodology be taken for granted by Brazilians organizations.

➢ **H4:** Leaders (TL) predicts Operational Discipline (OD). There is a significant effect of Trust on Leaders (TL) on Operational Discipline (OD). The hypothesis **H4** is rejected.

o **H4a:** Trust on leaders (TL) is correlated with power distance (PD). There is a partial mediation of Trust on leaders (TL) on power distance regarding Operational Discipline (OD). The hypothesis **H4a** is not rejected.

o **H4b:** Trust on leaders (TL) is correlated with Individualism (Voice). There is a partial mediation of Trust on leaders (TL) on voice regarding Operational Discipline (OD). The hypothesis H4b is not rejected.

o **H4c:** Trust on leaders (TL) is correlated with Uncertainty Avoidance (UA). There is a partial mediation of Trust on leaders (TL) on uncertainty avoidance regarding Operational Discipline (OD). The hypothesis H4c is not rejected.

Justification: SEM show correlation of -.005 ($p>.05$), -.66 ($p<.001$), -.63 ($p<.001$), .58 ($p<.001$), respectively. Trust is one of the most discussed themes when debating about transactions costs and economic performance. However, these hypotheses show that trust on leaders do not affect directly Operational Discipline (OD) in this model (**H4**). However, **H4 a, b** and **c** show that trust in leaders is significantly correlated to all cultural dimensions' constructs. This is aligned with was found in Lafraia[17], where the hierarchical relationships were the most frequent theme. This is also coherent with the results of Article One where Trust has a mediation effect on culture regarding ESG. In the case of operational discipline, trust seems to be positively correlated with uncertainty (risk) avoidance (**H4b**) and negatively correlated with power distance and voice.

➢ **H5:** Uncertainty Avoidance (UA) predicts Operational Discipline (OD). There is a significant effect of Uncertainty Avoidance (UA) on Operational Discipline (OD), The hypothesis H5 is not rejected. **Justification:** -.71 ($p<.001$). Uncertainty avoidance is significantly correlated with trust in leader (**H4c**), as also showed in Article One. Both in here and in there, cultural dimensions are more directly affecting the dependent variable and trust seems to be linked to the cultural dimension a mediation effect.

➢ **H6:** Uncertainty Avoidance (UA) is correlated with Individualism (Voice). There is a significant correlation (covariance or non-directional path) between Uncertainty Avoidance (UA) and individualism (Voice). The hypothesis H6 is rejected. **Justification:** SEM show correlation of -.094 (p<.01). Considering that the case study is in an Oil and Gas company where safety is one of the most important values, this result is coherent and expected, showing that the questionnaire is also capable of indicating that.

➢ **H7:** Power distance (PD) is correlated with Individualism (Voice). There is a significant correlation (covariance or non-directional path) between Power distance (PD) and individualism (Voice). The hypothesis H7 is not rejected. Justification: SEM show correlation of .3 (p<.001). As we assess if individualism have a strong effect on Operational Discipline (OD), we check if power distance and uncertainty avoidance are mediating this effect.

➢ **H8:** Power distance (PD) is correlated with Uncertainty Avoidance (UA). There is a significant correlation (covariance or non-directional path) between Power distance (PD) and Uncertainty Avoidance (UA). The hypothesis H8 is not rejected. **Justification:** SEM show correlation of .13 (p<.001). This is coherent with the literature showing that the three cultural dimensions are strongly correlated to each other.

➢ **H9:** Trust in peers (TP) is correlated with Trust on Leaders (TL). There is a significant correlation (covariance or non-directional path) between Trust in peers (TP) and Trust on Leaders (TL). The hypothesis H9 is not rejected. **Justification:** SEM show correlation of .33 (p<.001). However, it is important to notice that trust in leaders is correlated with all cultural dimensions where trust in peers is not.

IMPLICATIONS AND RESEARCH LIMITATIONS

From the managerial perspective, it is interesting that uncertainty avoidance, which was not a critical factor, appears to influence operational discipline positively. However, this may be skewed by the influence of a robust safety management system that encourages standardization, a traditional way of reducing risks and uncertainties.

This article has implications in other fields and subfields of research, such as: (a) Return to Work [18, 19]; (b) trust [20]; (c) business lobby [21]; (d) healthcare [22]; (e) socialization process [23]; (f) business negotiations [24]; (g) psychological contract [25]; (h) virtual business negotiations [26], [27], to mention a few.

One crucial implication of this work is that the collectivism could suggest that the construct trust in peers would present a high score. However, the results showed in this article that trusts in leaders is more significant than trust in peers, which is contradictory as collectivism would imply higher trust among equals. This raises the point about Brazilian's way of dealing with power distance and how it influences other constructs. If Brazilians have high power distance, why do they trust more in leaders more than peers? Additionally, Brazil is known for its low trust index among nations, but when asked if they trust leaders, they still say yes, probably to avoid consequences if they choose the contrary. Another important implication for management is that sound theory and qualitative approaches are necessary to understand quantitative results and help each other. For example, suppose one applies a prepared questionnaire without being aware of the cultural dimensions that influence those preparing

it. In that case, the results may not be relevant to management decisions as they may not measure cultural characteristics missing in their culture. This work shows the importance of customization in social science instruments such as questionnaires applied to measure latent variables, such as culture, due to the subtle influence of culture in management practices.

This research also implies that individualism is as essential at the national level as at the organizational level. Individualism, represented by the voice construct, predicts operational discipline, whereas power distance and trust only indirectly influence operational discipline, which aligns with the results [17]. Moreover, trust in leaders does not directly influence operational discipline but is related to all relevant cultural dimensions. This may suggest to management that a leader that works to increase the trust level in their team will have substantial influence in reducing power distance and increase in voice, which would finally have a positive impact on the operational discipline. The following limitations apply to this Article's results.

Firstly, as the sample from this research is restricted to one company in oil and gas company in Brazil, its results are limited to this organization. Future research can apply the questionnaire in other companies and industries to enlarge the sample to expand the conclusions to other companies and sectors.

Secondly, the operational discipline was measured by a latent construct called Operational Discipline (OD) which is somehow subjective. Future research could study the correlation between the questionnaire scores and objective performance indicators such as total fatality rate, serious accidents, incidents, and deviations rates to make the conclusions more objective.

Thirdly, this Article shows that for the Oil and Gas industry, uncertainty avoidance and trust constructs are deeply correlated. This issue also emerged in previous works, and the researcher tried to untangle them based on the Focus Groups discussions [17]. However, the results show a strong correlation between the two constructs again. Therefore, future research could run a more extensive construct to differentiate them more precisely.

FUTURE RESEARCH

Future researchers are encouraged to investigate this phenomenon with larger sample sizes, and the validity, reliability, and discretion should be confirmed once more using the methodology applied in this Article. Developing constructs based on qualitative studies with interviews or focus groups from the country analyzed is very important regarding the invisible nature of the cultural influence on people's minds.

CONCLUSION

One of the objectives of this Article was to investigate if individualism and uncertainty (risk) avoidance directly affect operational discipline. In contrast, power distance and trust are moderated in the first two variables. The other objective was to develop a questionnaire that could point to this difference so that organizations could help organizations adapt their leadership style and the desired culture could emerge.

Ultimately, the results confirm that the questionnaire can detect differences in the groups that answered it, such as a significant difference in Organizational Cultural Behavior among units and the contract style in the units.

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