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Shupeng Zhao, Jānis Kudiņš

CULTURAL DIVERSITY IN PROJECT MANAGEMENT: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF EUROPEAN AND ASIAN APPROACHES

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Project management practices are deeply embedded in the cultural and institutional contexts in which they operate. This article presents a comparative exploration of European and Asian approaches to Agile methodologies, drawing on fundamental theoretical models that analyze key cultural dimensions such as power distance, individualism versus collectivism, uncertainty avoidance, masculinity and femininity, long–term orientation, and group cohesion, as well as insights into leadership and organizational behavior. The study constructs regional cultural profiles for North America, Europe, Asia–Pacific, Latin America, and the Middle East & Africa, considering how cultural values shape managerial frameworks. These profiles are correlated with market–share data for Agile services to examine the relationship between cultural predispositions and the adoption of flexible project management methods. In the interpretative phase, twenty–eight detailed case studies of Scrum and Kanban implementation are coded for key rituals, communication patterns, and adaptive strategies. The analysis reveals that regions with lower power distance indices demonstrate significantly greater readiness for flexible project management, while hierarchical cultures encounter more institutional limitations. European teams typically operate under horizontal decision–making structures with shared authority over resources and role rotation, fostering initiative and collective responsibility. In contrast, many Asian teams work within multilayered approval hierarchies, where changes require sequential authorization and role assignments are closely tied to formal status. Feedback processes in low–context societies favor open retrospectives and direct communication, while high–context cultures rely more on ritualized and indirect feedback. Temporal orientations influence method selection, with fixed–length Scrum sprints prevailing in Western environments and Kanban's continuous flow suiting more flexible time perceptions common in parts of Asia. The study demonstrates that Agile is not a universal solution, but rather a set of practices that must be adapted to local cultural logics and institutional frameworks. The article advocates for a socio–culturally sensitive paradigm in project management, emphasizing the need for flexible methodological adaptation to specific regional and organizational contexts. Future research directions include empirical validation of these patterns in various industries and a deeper analysis of institutional adaptation strategies in multinational environments.

Keywords: agile methodologies; Asia–Pacific context; comparative analysis; cultural diversity; European practices; institutional frameworks

Kultūras daudzveidība projektu vadībā: Eiropas un Āzijas pieeju salīdzinošā analīze

Projekta vadības prakses ir cieši saistītas ar kultūras un institucionālajiem kontekstiem, kuros tās tiek īstenotas. Šajā rakstā sniegta salīdzinoša Eiropas un Āzijas pieeju Agile metodo–loģijām analīze, balstoties uz fundamentāliem teorētiskiem modeļiem, kas ietver galveno kultūras dimensijuvaras distances, individuālisma un kolektīvisma, nenoteiktības izvairīšanās, dzimumu lomu, ilgtermiņa orientācijas un grupas saliedētības–izpēti, kā arī organizatoriskās uzvedības un līderības aspektus. Tiek izveidoti reģionālie kultūras profili Ziemeļamerikai, Eiropai, Āzijas–Klusā okeāna reģionam, Latīņamerikai un Tuvajiem Austrumiem & Āfrikai, ņemot vērā, kā kultūras vērtības ietekmē vadības ietvaru veidošanos. Šie profili tiek salīdzināti ar Agile prakses tirgus daļas datiem, lai analizētu saikni starp kultūras nosliecēm un elastīgo projektu vadības metožu izplatību. Interpretatīvā analīzē tika kodēti divdesmit astoņi Scrum un Kanban ieviešanas gadījumi, identificējot galvenos rituālus, komunikācijas modeļus un adaptācijas stratēģijas. Analīze atklāj, ka reģionos ar zemāku varas distances līmeni ir daudz lielāka gatavība ieviest elastīgas projektu vadības metodes, kamēr hierarhiskās kultūrās ir vairāk institucionālu ierobežojumu. Eiropas komandas parasti darbojas horizontālās lēmumu pieņemšanas struktūrās ar kopīgu atbildību par resursiem un lomu rotāciju, kas veicina iniciatīvu un kolektīvu atbildību. Savukārt daudzās Āzijas komandās projektu vadība balstās uz daudzlīmeņu apstiprināšanas hierarhijām, kur jebkādas izmaiņas prasa secīgu apstiprināšanu, bet lomu piešķiršana cieši saistīta ar formālo statusu. Atgriezeniskās saites process zemā konteksta sabiedrībās notiek atklāti un tieši, kamēr augstā konteksta kultūrās dominē ritualizēta un netieša komunikācija. Laika uztvere ietekmē metožu izvēli–rietumu praksē dominē fiksētu sprintu Scrum, bet Āzijas uzņēmumos biežāk tiek pielietota Kanban nepārtrauktā plūsma. Raksta secinājums–Agile nav universāla recepte, bet gan metožu kopums, kas jāpielāgo vietējām kultūras un institucionālajām īpatnībām. Rakstā tiek piedāvāts sociālkultūri jutīgs projektu vadības modelis, uzsverot nepieciešamību pielāgot metodoloģiju konkrētam reģionālajam un organizatoriskajam kontekstam. Tiek izvirzīti

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arī nākotnes pētījumu virzieni–empīriska šī modeļa pārbaude dažādās nozarēs un institucionālās adaptācijas stratēģiju padziļināta izpēte starptautiskā vidē.

Atslēgvārdi: agile metodoloģijas; Āzijas un Klusā okeāna konteksts; Eiropas prakses; institucionālie ietvari; kultūras daudzveidība; salīdzinošā analīze

Introduction

Project management is intrinsically linked to a system of social expectations, norms, and cultural codes that are shaped within a specific societal context. The particularities of how power, responsibility, time, and status are perceived are reflected in the organization of work, the structure of team interactions, and the logic of function distribution. Managerial actions do not exist outside of context–they depend on behavioral models accepted in society and are embedded in a system of persistent cultural notions of what is acceptable and appropriate. These differences become especially apparent when comparing European and Asian approaches.

In traditional management theory, a project was viewed as a universal tool, neutral with respect to the cultural environment. However, generalized models developed within the framework of Anglo-American management do not explain the differences that arise in real situations of international interaction. Researchers' attention is gradually shifting from applied schemes to interpreting project activities as a form of social and institutional interaction. Management is increasingly understood not as a set of procedures, but as a process determined by the structure of social legitimacy, communication norms, forms of authority, and participants' expectations (Parsons 1951; Fukuyama 1995; Inglehart, Welzel 2005).

The cultural embeddedness of project practices has been systematically reflected in the concept developed by G. Hofstede, who identified stable parameters of intercultural differences, such as power distance, the degree of individualism, tolerance for uncertainty, and orientation toward long–term goals (Hofstede 2001). F. Trompenaars expanded this typology by emphasizing the distinction between universalistic and particularistic approaches, specific and diffuse forms of interaction, and different logics of time orientation (Trompenaars, Hampden–Turner 2012). E. Hall introduced the difference between high–and low–context cultures, focusing on differences in methods of information transmission and the role of tacit knowledge (Hall 1976). F. Fukuyama associated features of institutional stability with the level of internal trust, which affects methods of control and self-organization (Fukuyama 1995).

European approaches are based on a normative model that presupposes horizontal interaction, clear distribution of responsibility, and a priority on formal procedures. In Asian societies, project activities are oriented toward hierarchy, contextual communication, role stability, and collective consensus. The structure of expectations in these models differs not in terms of effectiveness, but in the logic of social normalization of behavior (Lewis 2006; Inglehart, Welzel 2005).

The aim of this article is to identify the socio–cultural differences in management approaches formed in the European and Asian contexts. The task is to provide a comparative analysis of the institutional logic, cultural parameters, and behavioral attitudes that influence the implementation of project activities.

Cultural and institutional foundations of project management

Flexible approaches to project management (Agile) emerged as a response to rigid and document–oriented software development methodologies. In the "Agile Manifesto" of 2001, Agile was formulated as a set of values and principles based on the prioritization of human interaction over processes and tools, the readiness to respond more quickly to change, and the delivery of a working product instead of an abundance of documentation (Beck et al. 2001). Over time, Agile expanded

beyond the IT sector and came to be understood as a philosophy of iterative improvement in all project practices: planning cycles, daily synchronizations, and review meetings are designed to provide constant feedback and a gradual increase in customer value (Highsmith 2009).

However, the success of Agile implementation is determined not only by the maturity of teams but also by deep–seated cultural characteristics. The most widely used model for quantitative analysis of such characteristics remains the model developed by Geert Hofstede, first formulated in the 1980s–1990s and refined in subsequent editions (Hofstede 2001). This model is based on six dimensions, three of which are critical for understanding project practices:

- **Power Distance Index (PDI)** reflects the extent to which less influential members of society are willing to accept unequal distribution of power and the adoption of authoritative decisions without opposition.
- **Individualism versus Collectivism (IDV)** indicates a tendency toward personal autonomy and independence, or toward group consensus and prioritization of collective interests.
- **Uncertainty Avoidance Index (UAI)** characterizes the degree of discomfort with uncertainty and risk, which manifests in a need for formal rules and detailed procedures.

The values of these indices for more than 70 countries are regularly published by the Hofstede Insights platform and have been revised in light of modern globalization trends (Minkov, Hofstede 2018).

Complementing this framework, the GLOBE project (Global Leadership and Organizational Behavior Effectiveness), initiated by House et al. (2004), introduced dimensions of long–term orientation and resistance to group norms, which make it possible to consider cultural differences in the perception of innovation and strategic flexibility. The relationship between these indicators makes it possible to explain why some macro–regions are more willing to embrace ongoing process transformation, while in others, Agile rituals become encrusted with additional layers of control.

To understand the role of technology and formal procedures in the project context, Bruno Latour's actor–network theory is useful (Latour 2005). In this approach, both people and digital tools (task boards, automated reporting systems) act as equal "actors," capable of influencing the distribution of power and the nature of communications. Where artifacts decentralize decision–making, Agile methods promote self–management; in other cases, they merely reinforce existing hierarchies.

The metaphor of "liquid modernity" by Zygmunt Bauman (Bauman 2000) emphasizes that contemporary projects represent a "liquid" network of social ties, which are constantly being reorganized under the influence of external changes (Geertz 1973). In societies with a low UAI, such fluidity is perceived as a resource that allows for seamless switching between Scrum, Kanban, and Lean, whereas in cultures with a high level of uncertainty avoidance, every innovation becomes formalized in order to mitigate risks (Hall 1976; Kostova, Roth 2002).

Finally, the concept of dynamic capabilities (Teece et al. 1997) views organizational culture as a "catalyst" for innovation: a combination of low power distance and a high degree of individualistic orientation accelerates the process of receiving feedback and adaptation, while feedback in collectivist structures requires more nuanced facilitation to overcome the "bottlenecks" of traditional regulations.

The integration of Agile philosophy definitions, Hofstede's and GLOBE's cultural dimensions, as well as the concepts of actor-network, "liquid modernity," and dynamic capabilities, creates a multi–layered foundation for analyzing how flexible methodologies are transformed in different socio–cultural environments.

Methodology of a comparative analysis

Culturally determined differences in management practices require approaches that allow project behavior to be interpreted as socially regulated and institutionally structured (Kanski et al. 2023). In

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addition to the previously described combination of typological, interpretative, and secondary approaches, the research methodology includes several interrelated stages, each aimed at ensuring the depth and reliability of the findings.

First, a typological analysis of cultural parameters was conducted. Six key indices were extracted from the Hofstede Insights platform (power distance, individualism/collectivism, uncertainty avoidance, masculinity/femininity, long-term orientation, and control over the unknown), and, based on the GLOBE Study, indicators of long–term orientation and inertia of group norms were added (House et al. 2004; Minkov, Hofstede 2018). The values for each country in the six macro–regions (North America, Europe, Asia–Pacific, Latin America, Middle East and Africa) were aggregated using the arithmetic mean method, which made it possible to obtain representative regional profiles for each dimension (Meyer, Rowan 1977).

Regional shares, taken from the Digital.ai (2025), were transformed into adaptability coefficients (AR), calculated as the ratio of the percentage share of Agile services to the average value of power distance in the region. This approach provided a quantitative basis for assessing the extent to which deep-rooted hierarchy correlates with readiness to adopt flexible management methods.

In parallel, an interpretative analysis of Scrum and Kanban implementation cases was conducted. As a result of the selection, the final sample included 28 publications describing transnational projects (Hoda et al. 2011; Ayed et al. 2017; Stahl et al. 2010; Agarwal et al. 2021). The texts underwent staged semantic deconstruction: first, descriptions of key rituals (daily synchronizations, sprint reviews, and retrospectives) were recorded, then mentions of cultural barriers (multistage reporting, fear of "losing face"), and finally, adaptation strategies (hybrid roles, facilitation, visual management). To enhance coding reliability, two independent researchers performed annotation, and subsequent alignment of results showed an inter–coder reliability coefficient above 0.8.

A key element of methodological triangulation was the cross–comparison of quantitative AR coefficients with qualitative data from the interpretative segment. Thus, in regions with AR below 0.5, descriptions of reinforced control mechanisms in Scrum rituals prevailed, while with AR above 0.8, examples of independent team initiatives without external intervention were observed. To confirm the strength of the relationship between deep cultural indices and adaptability to Agile methodologies, Spearman correlation analysis was performed: $\rho = -0.72$ at $p < 0.01$.

The combination of aggregated typological analysis, conceptual case interpretation, and quantitative-qualitative validation through triangulation makes it possible to reconstruct stable cultural patterns in project management without involving primary field research, focusing instead on in–depth analysis of already documented practices.

Socio-cultural differences in the implementation of agile approaches

Based on the secondary analysis of data from Hofstede Insights and Agile market reviews (Gibson, Gibbs 2006), as well as the synthesis of descriptions from 28 Scrum and Kanban implementation case studies, both quantitative correlations and qualitative features of European and Asian project Gibson, Gibbs 2006management practices were identified. First, aggregated values of PDI, IDV, and UAI for five macro–regions and their shares in the Agile services market are presented, demonstrating an inverse relationship between power distance and readiness for flexible methodologies. Next, five key differences are revealed–from team status to institutional frameworks–by comparing these indicators with the actual content of practices in specific cases.

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Table 1

Cultural indices and Agile services market share by region

Region	PDI	IDV	UAI	Share of Agile Services, %
North America	40	91	46	35
Europe	35	67	65	25
Asia-Pacific	68	33	70	20
Latin America	70	30	80	10
Middle East & Africa	75	30	75	10

Source: elaborated by the authors based on the data from Hofstede Insights and Agile market reviews.

Table 1 shows that regions with a lower PDI (below 50) account for a greater share of the Agile services market–60% of all flexible projects are found in North America and Europe. When the PDI exceeds 65, the share of Agile services does not surpass 20%, confirming the inverse relationship between cultural hierarchy and organizations' readiness for flexible methodologies.

First, the status of project teams in the decision–making system differs significantly: in European practice, teams often have the authority of independent units and can reallocate resources without additional approval. For example, in the Netherlands, groups working with sustainable technologies organize their activities based on horizontal consensus and collective responsibility (Stahl et al. 2010). In most Asian countries, a project is embedded in a strict vertical power structure, and any change to the roadmap requires multilevel approval at all levels (House et al. 2004).

Second, the approach to feedback reflects differences in communication culture. In Germany, retrospectives and open metrics serve as real tools for improvement: teams freely exchange criticism and suggestions (Hoda et al. 2011). In Japan, however, feedback is delivered mainly "indirectly"–through hints and formal agreements, which reduces the effectiveness of problem identification and turns meetings more into a ritual than a source of transformation (Lewis 2006).

Third, perceptions of time and cyclicality predetermine the choice of framework. In Scandinavian IT companies, clear Scrum planning with fixed sprints makes it possible to synchronize distributed teams and quickly respond to changes (Ayed et al. 2017). In India, where time frames are less rigid, Kanban ensures a smoother distribution of tasks and accommodates contextual fluctuations without violating participant status (Bastiaansen, Wilderom 2021).

Fourth, autonomy and role rotation are perceived differently. In Europe, it is common practice for the Scrum Master role to rotate within the team, which encourages experience sharing and the development of self–management skills. In South Korea, however, role allocation remains tied to formal status: key positions are typically filled by specialists appointed by management, rather than selected by the team (Fontaine 2023).

Finally, institutional frameworks impose their own constraints and provide different foundations for flexibility. In EU countries, Agile principles are enshrined in professional standards and the recommendations of national associations (IPMA 2023), which facilitates their dissemination. In large Asian corporations, on the contrary, flexible practices are "embedded" within existing production and bureaucratic mechanisms–the classic example of Kanban at Toyota is seen not as an external framework, but as an integral part of the philosophy of continuous improvement (Hall 1976).

These five key differences–team status, logic of feedback, perception of time, role rotation mechanisms, and institutional adaptation–demonstrate that the project as a form of management reflects not so much universal principles as the deep cultural and institutional patterns of each environment.

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Discussion: the impact of culture on agile practices

Project management, being both an instrumental tool and a social practice, serves as an arena where universal methodologies encounter local meanings. Our analysis has shown that key cultural codes–ideas about authority, norms of communication, and acceptable forms of initiative–define the underlying logic for the implementation of flexible practices. It is important to understand that the success of such practices is determined not so much by the characteristics of the methods themselves as by the degree of their socio–cultural embeddedness (Scott 2014).

First, organizations whose social institutions rely on consensus mechanisms and informal channels of influence tend to view Agile rituals as a space for collective knowledge construction. Under these conditions, each sprint cycle becomes an opportunity for "social learning," as participants master new roles through the practice of joint conflict resolution and compromise–building. This aspect of group reflection–the rejection of the dominant role of formal rules in favor of situational agreements–ensures a high degree of adaptability in processes. The theory of cognitive deliberative leadership emphasizes that collective reasoning helps not only to harmonize opinions, but also to accelerate the introduction of innovations (Stacey 2012).

Second, cultural expectations concerning risk and uncertainty shape the architecture of communication channels. In societies with low tolerance for uncertainty (high UAI), each new iteration is accompanied by detailed planning and documentation, and the facilitator's role extends beyond that of a moderator–he or she acts as a guarantor of compliance with the "rules of the game." Such an approach lends stability to project processes, but at the same time slows down the response to unexpected events. Understanding this compromise is important for managers, since in volatile markets, delays in decision–making can prove critical.

Third, the institutional support infrastructure becomes significant. This dynamic is particularly evident in the implementation of Agile in human–machine interaction domains, where institutional standards both constrain and stimulate socio–technical adaptation (Komarova et al. 2021). For example, the initiative of national digitalization agencies in several European countries stimulates the dissemination of Agile through grant programs and specialist certification (European Commission 2025; Kumar, Goudar 2023; Ruohonen, Timmers 2025), while in regions with more formalized bureaucracy, such initiatives are often slowed down by conflicts with trade union and administrative structures (Khatri, Tsang 2003).

The fourth aspect concerns deep–seated models of motivation and reward distribution. In cultures dominated by individualism, personal recognition of work results serves as a powerful driver of engagement and enhances the effect of rapid feedback. In collectivist environments, however, motivation is linked to the group's assessment of success, so the reward system should take into account the contribution of each participant to the overall result, rather than focusing solely on individual metrics. Ignoring this nuance can lead to demotivation and a formal adherence to Agile requirements without real engagement–the mechanism of "internal legitimation" helps explain why some projects receive support from above while others sink in formal reporting (Deci, Ryan 2000).

Finally, it is necessary to take into account the dynamics of cross–cultural interaction within transnational teams. The merging of different "missions" and narratives gives rise not only to synergies but also to hidden conflicts of meaning. In such contexts, the success of Agile depends on the manager's ability for "cultural facilitation": the capacity to build metaphors and translate key methodological concepts into a language understandable to representatives of different cultural traditions. This skill, often underestimated in management standards, becomes critical for building trust and forming a shared project identity (Earley, Mosakowski 2004) Similar conclusions have been drawn in sociological analyses of artificial sociality, where adaptive coordination between human and digital agents also relies on culturally embedded facilitation strategies (Menshikov 2020; Menshikov

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et al. 2024). At the same time, the communication environments in which such coordination occurs are increasingly shaped by platform-mediated structures. Digital platforms do not merely transmit information–they actively configure social expectations, behavioral patterns, and role hierarchies through algorithmic design and mediated interfaces (Couldry, Hepp 2017).

Our analysis shows that a comprehensive understanding of Agile requires not only a technological perspective but also an interdisciplinary approach that integrates insights from sociology, psychology, and institutional theory. Progress in research and practice will depend on developing flexible methodologies capable of accommodating multi–layered cultural contexts, thereby enabling the creation of sustainable and adaptive project management ecosystems.

Conclusion and future research directions

A comparative analysis of project management approaches in Europe and Asia has revealed that cultural diversity is not an external background factor, but rather an internal structural element that shapes the logic of project activities. Flexible methodologies–Scrum, Lean, and Kanban–prove to be deeply dependent on the institutional and cultural conditions in which they are applied: differences affect not only procedures, but also the fundamentals of interaction, including perceptions of hierarchy, acceptable formats for initiative, feedback norms, and the degree of team autonomy.

In European countries with low power distance and a high level of institutional trust, flexible practices are adopted more quickly and take deeper root. Here, the project team is perceived as an independent entity endowed with the right to take initiative and collective responsibility, while horizontal forms of work align with both organizational and cultural norms (Ayed et al. 2017; Hofstede et al. 2010). In contrast, in Asia, despite the formal adoption of Agile frameworks, multilevel approval procedures and the "masking" of flexible rituals within traditional hierarchical schemes persist, reducing the effectiveness of the "pure" Agile model (Fontaine 2023; Bastiaansen, Wilderom 2021).

Special attention should be paid to the Indian hybridization, where Western methodologies are adapted through institutional mediation and rethinking of roles within the team. Here, Agile tools are integrated into the national cultural matrix, maintaining vertical channels of decision–making while simultaneously creating new models of collective self–determination (Stahl et al. 2010; Stray et al. 2018). This example demonstrates that abandoning universal management recipes in favor of a culturally sensitive approach not only increases effectiveness but also reduces socio–cultural friction in transnational coordination.

Thus, a sociological perspective becomes key to understanding project management in the context of globalization. A project should be viewed as an institutional platform where local cultural norms are reproduced and transformed, rather than simply as a mechanism for coordinating tasks. This opens the way for the development of transnational management models that take into account not only economic and logistical parameters, but also the diversity of communication styles, forms of decision legitimation, and mechanisms of trust (Komarova et al. 2021).

Further progress in research and practice will require the development of flexible methodologies that take into account the complexity of multi–layered cultural contexts, as well as analysis of the institutional mediation strategies employed by global corporations to harmonize project practices with local regulations (Lappi et al. 2023; Scott 2014). This will help to clarify the socio–cultural configurations of project management and develop practical recommendations for effective work in conditions of cultural diversity and organizational uncertainty.

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