

BALANCING DATA AND INTUITION IN A VUCA WORLD: CROSS-CULTURAL EVIDENCE FROM AUSTRIA AND INDIA WITH IMPLICATIONS FOR CENTRAL EUROPEAN MANAGEMENT

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Abstract

This study examines how intuitive (experiential) and cognitive (data-driven) processes interact in business decision-making, comparing professionals and early-career participants from Austria and India. This country-dyad selection was made on the basis of rising trade relations between a developed and rising economy. Using a sequential mixed-methods approach (194 survey responses and 159 reflective essays), the authors developed a 2×2 cognition–intuition typology and conducted thematic analysis to identify culturally and gender-influenced decision patterns. Findings show: (1) analytical reasoning dominates structured, high-stakes decisions, while intuition supports rapid and creative choices; (2) Austrian participants tend toward strategic, data-oriented thinking, while Indian participants emphasize context-sensitive, experience-based intuition; and (3) women more often report integrating both approaches. We discuss practical implications for Central European firms, highlighting the need for dual-process decision training and culturally responsive leadership development, particularly in the light of deepening EU–India trade relations.

Implications for Central European audience: This study shows how cross-cultural cognitive styles influence collaboration in Eurasian value chains, offering practical advice for Central European firms working with Indian partners. As EU–India trade grows, firms should adjust procurement and negotiation to balance structured analysis with intuition. We recommend: (1) formalizing decisions while allowing brief storytelling at meeting starts, (2) training teams to blend narrative sense-making with analytics, and (3) creating mixed decision committees with experiential experts. These steps help bridge differing thinking styles, analytical (Austrian) and intuitive (Indian), and can improve joint decisions and innovation in high-stakes contexts.

Keywords: cross-cultural decision-making; intuition and data-driven strategies; gender differences in business decisions; dual-process decision models; EU–India business relationships, cognitive/intuitive competencies.

JEL Classification: M160, M590

Introduction

Today's world places escalating demands on executives to make evidence-based decisions supported by vast, real time data streams (Elkington, 2018; Minciu et al., 2020). However, the sheer volume and velocity of information overwhelm cognitive capacity, leading to analysis paralysis (Eppler & Mengis, 2008). In such contexts, intuition, grounded in richly encoded experiential patterns, provides a vital complement to formal analysis, enabling swift responses when time or clarity is constrained (Dane & Pratt, 2007; Simon, 1987). Also, cognitive and intuitive processes are culturally inflected: Western low context traditions often privilege explicit, data driven frameworks, whereas high context societies draw more heavily on implicit, experience-based reasoning (Hall, 1973; Hofstede, 2024).

Austria was selected as a representative economy for comparison as currently it has a small but rising trade with India ¹. In year 2025, Austria and India were a picture of contrasts with India having the highest worldwide population at 1.4 billion, highest GDP growth rate at 6.6% per annum and among the lowest GDP per capita at USD 2818, whereas Austria was 99th on the list of most populated countries ² with 0.3% GDP growth rate with GDP per capita at USD 61,694 ³. The India-EU Free Trade Agreement in January 2026 opened up tremendous business opportunities between India and European Countries ⁴. However, conducting business on the ground may not be as easy due to diverse socio-economic and cultural conditions between Europe and India, which reflects directly on business decision-making processes.

Decision-making in business inherently engages two complementary mental processes: fast, intuitive judgments and slow, analytical reasoning (Kahneman, 2011). Although this dual process paradigm has long underpinned managerial thought, rigorous scientific investigation has accelerated only in the past two decades (Epstein, 2003). Yet, scant research has examined how these cultural norms modulate the integration of intuition and analysis in business decision making.

Addressing this gap is critical: understanding culturally embedded dual process strategies equips global organizations to design training and communication that resonate across diverse markets and to foster leadership capable of balancing analytical rigor with instinctive agility. By exploring these dynamics among Austrian and Indian business professionals, this study offers actionable insights for theory and practice in an era defined by rapid change and data complexity. This research investigates the interplay between intuition and cognition through a mixed-methods approach by integrating qualitative narrative analyses and quantitative classifications to reveal culturally embedded decision-making styles in a Central European country and in India, thereby shedding light on underexplored areas such as gender influences and cultural nuances. The study provides actionable insights for international managers, cross-cultural researchers, and policymakers seeking to develop

¹ https://www.cii.in/International_ResearchPDF/India_Austria_Report_2024_Web.pdf, accessed 24th March 2026

² <https://www.worldometers.info/world-population/population-by-country/>, accessed 24th March 2026

³ <https://www.worldometers.info/gdp/gdp-by-country/>, accessed 24th March 2026

⁴ www.commerce.gov.in/wp-content/uploads/2026/01/Factsheet-on-India-EU-trade-deal-27.1.2026.pdf, accessed 24th March 2026

culturally sensitive strategies that effectively balance intuitive and analytical decision-making in a global context.

The remainder of this article is organized as follows. First, a theoretical overview is provided, discussing the current state of research on cognitive system theories, cultural dimensions, and the GLOBE study which supplement the guiding research questions of this contribution. The “Materials and Methods” section explains the mixed-methods approach and outlines the structure of the study, followed by the analysis and discussion of the results. Finally, the conclusions drawn from the findings, along with the implications for Central European managers and relevant academic research, as well as limitations and suggestions for future research, are presented at the end of the article.

1 Theoretical Perspectives and Research Linkages

Decision-making based on cognitive styles is a core element of leadership, shaping the direction of individuals and organizations alike (Hunt et al., 1989). Intelligence, which is an important facet of decision-making are of two types – fluid intelligence and crystallised intelligence. “Fluid intelligence refers to the ability to reason about and solve novel problems that require an understanding of new rules or concepts, while crystallized intelligence denotes the ability to reason using previous experience and learned concepts” (Skagerlund et al., 2022, p. 2). Decision making was also dependent upon “individual differences in the decision maker and the nature of the decision task” (Phillips et al., 2016, p. 260). Acciarini et al. (2021) highlighted that the “strategic role of cognitive biases appears to be crucial when investigating the related impact on strategic decisions in times of environmental transformation”. Wiedenhofer and Plomp (2017) conducted a systematic literature review that revealed how personality and cognitive style may influence the adoption and use of data-driven decision support systems. This paper synthesizes key theoretical perspectives to provide a foundation for investigating how rational (data-driven) and intuitive (emotion-based) decision-making interact with particular attention to cultural and gender influences.

1.1 Cognitive Systems Theories

Dual-Process Theories distinguish between two cognitive systems: System 1 (intuitive, fast, subconscious) and System 2 (rational, slow, deliberate) (Evans & Stanovich, 2013). Both systems are engaged depending on the situational demands: thinking that is quick, subconsciously conducted, and intuitive (System 1) and the second type of thinking that is slow and deliberate, more thoughtful, and conscious of situations and outcomes (System 2). These theories create a framework for understanding how people engage in decision making and suggest that decision making involves both intuitive and deliberate thinking processes. Dual-process theories of thinking and decision making along with cognitive-experiential theories have applications in the field of cognitive psychology and behavioural economics. This provides the foundation for analysing how decision-making occurs at various managerial levels within an organization, and for assessing when and why a specific type of cognitive process (intuitive or deliberate) becomes dominant in the decision-making process.

While dual-process theory provides the scaffolding for our analysis (Evans & Stanovich, 2013; Kahneman, 2011), its integration into organizational decision making remains under-theorized. Scholars such as Hodgkinson and Sadler-Smith (2018) argue that intuition in management is not merely heuristic, but a learned skill rooted in domain-specific expertise.

Moreover, the bounded rationality perspective (Simon, 1987) reinforces that decision-makers under time pressure revert to intuitive strategies not out of preference, but necessity. By situating our empirical findings within this expanded cognitive repertoire, we highlight the need for context-contingent decision-making frameworks that flexibly toggle between analytic rigor and experiential insight, particularly in cross-cultural business environments.

Decision making under risk and uncertainty has evolved under the term of “Prospect Theory”. Leading psychologists Daniel Kahneman and Amos Tversky (1990) developed this theory. The proposition was that any human being would evaluate every loss and gain with reference to a particular situation and within a point in time and not simply in isolation. An extension of the dual-process theories was “Cognitive-Experiential Self-Theory” (CEST) developed by Epstein (1998). According to CEST, there are two information processing methods – rational systems and experiential-based systems. Logic and data are the basis of the rational system and is contemporary, while the experiential system is older and is based on emotions and its associative lessons. The assertion by Seymour Epstein was that individuals utilize rational or experiential information processing based on their own personality, pre-conceived biases, situations, and the urgent demand of a task at hand. Cognitive biases lead to distortions in judgement and decision-making processes (Acciarini et al., 2021). These cognitive biases are pre-conceived notions built into our subconscious mind over time. Understanding and self-awareness of these cognitive biases helps reduce errors in decision making.

Expected Utility Theory, first proposed by Bernoulli (as e.g. discussed in Broome (2001) posits that rational actors seek to maximize expected outcomes, typically relying on logic and data. In contrast, Prospect Theory highlights how decisions often deviate from rationality under risk, with individuals evaluating losses and gains relative to a reference point rather than in absolute terms. These theories underline that data-driven decisions dominate well-defined, low-ambiguity contexts, whereas intuitive judgments often emerge in uncertain, high-stakes environments.

Traditional, deliberate decision-making becomes less feasible when time is limited, and information is incomplete. In such contexts, intuitive thinking (System 1) often takes precedence, relying on experience, heuristics, and rapid judgment to navigate complexity.

1.2 Influence of Cultural Differences on Cognitive/Intuitive Balance

Cultural theories, particularly Hofstede’s Cultural Dimensions, provide a framework for understanding how socio-economic and cultural backgrounds influence decision-making styles (Hofstede & Bond, 1988; Minkov, 2009; Hofstede, 2011; Hofstede et al., 2010). Table 1 summarizes the six dimensions of Hofstede’s Cultural model based on his and his colleagues’ seminal work.

Table 1 | Hofstede Cultural Dimensions

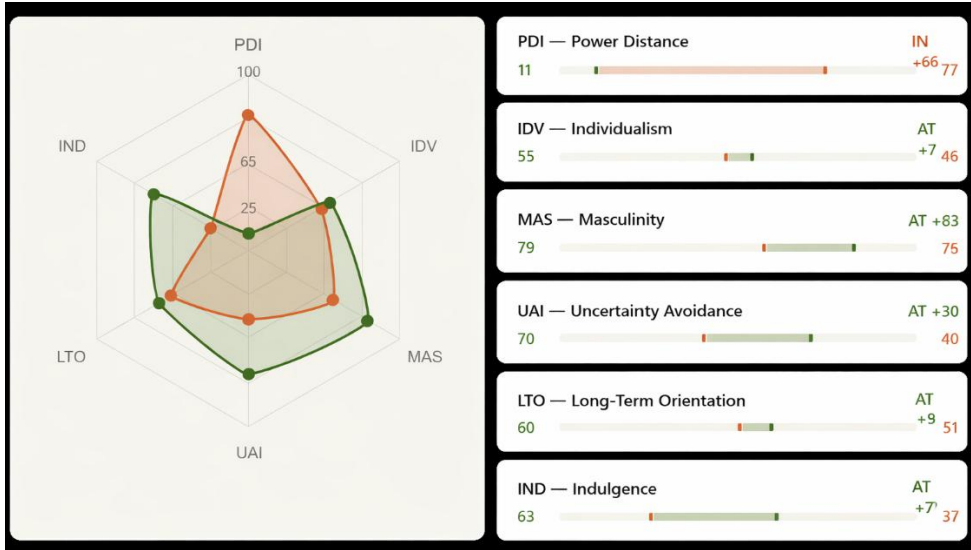
Power Distance (PDI)	Reflects the extent to which less powerful members of a society accept and expect that power is distributed unequally, with high-scoring cultures exhibiting deference to authority and hierarchical structures, and low-scoring cultures favouring egalitarianism and the questioning of authority.
Individualism vs. Collectivism (IDV)	Captures the degree to which individuals are integrated into groups, with individualist societies prioritising personal autonomy, self-reliance, and loose social ties, while collectivist societies emphasise group loyalty, cohesion, and collective responsibility over individual interests.
Masculinity vs. Femininity (MAS)	Describes the distribution of values between assertiveness, material achievement, and competitiveness on the masculine pole, versus cooperation, modesty, and quality of life on the feminine pole.
Uncertainty Avoidance (UAI)	Indicates the degree to which members of a culture feel threatened by ambiguous or unknown situations and consequently develop institutions, rules, and rituals to minimise unpredictability and enforce conformity.
Long-Term vs. Short-Term Orientation (LTO)	Describes the extent to which a society maintains pragmatic, future-oriented values such as perseverance and thrift, as opposed to Short-Term Orientation, which favours the preservation of tradition, social obligations, and immediate gratification.
Indulgence vs. Restraint (IVR)	Captures the degree to which a society permits relatively free gratification of basic human desires related to enjoyment and pleasure, as opposed to suppressing such gratification through strict social norms and regulation.

Source: Hofstede & Bond, 1988; Minkov, 2009; Hofstede, 2011; Hofstede et al., 2010

For Austria and India, the results reveal several significant differences. Compared with Austria's relatively low power distance and preference for egalitarian relationships, India shows a much higher acceptance of hierarchy and unequal power distribution. Further, Austria scores very high on individualism, emphasizing personal autonomy and individual achievement, whereas India is more moderately individualistic with stronger importance placed on family and group ties. Both countries lean toward masculinity, but Austria scores higher, indicating a stronger cultural focus on competition, achievement, and performance than India.

Austria has also a high uncertainty avoidance score and tends to prefer clear rules and predictability, while India is more comfortable with ambiguity and flexible approaches to uncertainty. While India shows a stronger long-term orientation with a pragmatic approach to future planning and adaptation, Austria tends to be more normative and tradition-focused. Finally, Austria is relatively indulgent, encouraging enjoyment of life and personal freedom, while India is more restrained, with stronger social norms regulating gratification (Hofstede, 2024). Figure 1 summarizes the scores of Austria and India across all six dimensions.

Figure 1 | Country comparison on Hofstede dimensions – Austria (green) vs. India (orange)



Source: Own illustration, based on Hofstede (2024)

Nevertheless, the cultural model of Hofstede is not without criticism. Along four dimensions the approach faces critical discussion within the academic literature: (1) methodological, as the IBM sample is seen as not being a valid window onto national cultures (McSweeney, 2002), (2) ontological, as nations are not culturally homogeneous units (Baskerville, 2003; Baskerville-Morley, 2005), (3) psychometric, as the survey instruments may not measure what they claim (Javidan et al., 2006), and (4) temporal, as cultures shift, but Hofstede's scores do not (Tang & Koveos, 2008). None of these critics dismiss the framework's overall heuristic utility. Thus, most acknowledge its important influence on cross-cultural research while urging greater caution and methodological reflexivity in its application. Thus, this will be considered as an important limitation to take into account for our research approach.

Among the critics, the Global Leadership and Organizational Behavior Effectiveness (GLOBE) project by Javidan et al. (2006) offered one of the most comprehensive empirical alternatives to Hofstede's cultural dimensions.

The GLOBE (Global Leadership and Organizational Behavior Effectiveness) project extends cultural analysis by distinguishing between "practices" (as is) and "values" (should be), and by incorporating leadership dimensions across 62 societies (House et al., 1999; House et al., 2004). Compared to Hofstede's more parsimonious framework, GLOBE offers greater conceptual granularity but increased complexity. Given our study's focus and comparative design, Hofstede's model was selected for its clarity, widespread validation, and suitability for cross-country comparison.

Building on foundational work such as Mann et al. (1998), cross-cultural research has consistently shown that managerial decision-making differs systematically across cultures in terms of risk perception, confidence, and cognitive style (Weber & Hsee, 2000; Yates et al., 2010). More recent studies (Yates & de Oliveira, 2016; Li et al., 2018; Soltwisch et al., 2023; Costa & Carrus, 2024) extend this by highlighting culturally embedded decision processes

and context sensitivity. However, the literature remains dominated by single-method, predominantly quantitative designs and focuses largely on Western–East Asian comparisons. Responding to recent calls for richer, multi-method approaches (Jackson, 2023), our study addresses this gap by examining the underexplored Austria–India context through a mixed-methods design that integrates validated scales with in-depth qualitative narratives, capturing how managers experience and combine intuition and analysis in practice.

1.3 Research Questions

These theoretical perspectives establish the conceptual basis for exploring how rational and intuitive decision-making approaches are incorporated in business contexts, the types of decisions associated with cognitive versus emotional strategies, the role of intuition under time pressure and uncertainty, and the influence of cultural differences on these dynamics. Together, they ground the development of our research questions:

- How are rational and intuitive decision-making approaches incorporated in business decisions?
- Which types of decisions are data-driven versus emotion-based?
- What role does intuition play under time pressure or uncertainty?
- How do cultural differences influence the balance of cognitive and intuitive decision-making?

2 Materials and Methods

To rigorously explore how business decision-making balances data and intuition across cultural contexts, this study employs a sequential, mixed-method approach, integrating a structured quantitative survey with an extensive and thematically rich qualitative dataset. This combination was chosen to address the abstract and often implicit nature of intuitive cognition and its interplay with rational reasoning, particularly in cross-cultural contexts such as India and Austria. While the quantitative component serves primarily as a classificatory instrument, the qualitative phase forms the empirical core of the study, offering interpretive depth and contextual richness that is essential for understanding how cognition and intuition manifest in real-world decision-making behaviour.

In the first phase, we administered a quantitative survey instrument grounded in Cognitive-Experiential Self-Theory (CEST) (Epstein et al., 1996), which differentiates between intuitive-experiential and analytical-rational thinking styles. The survey administered to participants from Austria ($N = 76$) and India ($N = 83$) included two primary constructs grounded in Cognitive-Experiential Self-Theory (Epstein, 2003). Intuitive thinking was assessed with 12 items, while rational cognition was measured with nineteen items. Responses were collected online between January and March 2025.

The sample was collected as a purposive mixed sample of early-career professionals and students with relevant business experience (part-time students). This sampling strategy was chosen deliberately because the study sought respondents with relevant business exposure and decision-making experience, rather than a statistically representative population sample. Accordingly, the quantitative survey served a classificatory and typological purpose, providing an empirical basis for the qualitative analysis and enabling comparison across culturally comparable respondent groups.

Purposive sampling, a widely utilized non-probability sampling strategy in qualitative inquiry, entails the deliberate selection of participants according to predefined characteristics or criteria aligned with the research objectives (Etikan et al., 2016). Its application is further substantiated in mixed-methods research, where the inclusion of individuals with specialized expertise or situated within organizational contexts is essential (Palinkas et al., 2015).

Respondents were recruited via (a) employer and professional networks, including targeted LinkedIn outreach and corporate training contacts, (b) alumni and continuing education lists, and (c) university cohorts predominantly consisting of working students or individuals with prior professional experience. Importantly, we addressed students and alumni from the researchers' institutions via institute databases and LinkedIn. This approach allowed for control over the respondent pool and ensured alignment with the study's inclusion criteria. Indian participants spanned two major age groups (22–34: ~50%; 35–54: ~50%) and were predominantly male (22% female, 78% male), while the Austrian cohort was aged 22–34 and had a balanced gender distribution (51% female, 49% male).

Quantitative data was analysed with SPSS (v. 29.0). Particular care was taken in the analysis of descriptive statistics and diagnostic measures to ensure a robust assessment of data quality and to support the reliability of subsequent factor-analytic procedures. To examine the appropriateness of factor analysis for the combined data, a Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy and Bartlett's test of sphericity were performed. The results of the KMO and Bartlett's test for each construct and country are presented in table 2. In both countries, the KMO values indicated acceptable sampling adequacy for factor analysis, with KMO values exceeding the commonly recommended threshold of 0.60. Specifically, the KMO values ranged from 0.740 to 0.893, suggesting adequate sampling for the intended factor structure. Bartlett's test yielded significant results for all scales ($p < 0.001$), indicating that the correlation matrix was sufficiently different from an identity matrix, thus supporting the factorability of the data (see table 2 for the descriptive statistics).

For internal consistency, Cronbach's alpha values were computed for each scale. The results showed satisfactory reliability for both constructs across both countries. Specifically, Cronbach's alpha values for intuitive thinking and rational cognition in both countries had alphas exceeding the accepted threshold for reliable scales.

Table 2 | Descriptive statistics of classification survey

Country	Scale	No of items	Cronbach's alpha	KMO	Bartlett's (p-value)
Austria (n=76)	Intuitive Thinking	12	0.730	0.738	< 0.001
	Rational Cognition	19	0.826	0.698	< 0.001
India (n=83)	Intuitive Thinking	12	0.897	0.839	< 0.001
	Rational Cognition	19	0.760	0.773	< 0.001

Source: Prepared by the authors based on own data.

Factor scores were derived via regression following an exploratory factor analysis (EFA) constrained to a single factor. The factor scores were computed for each participant by multiplying standardized item scores with the corresponding factor score coefficients. These continuous factor scores (mean = 0, SD = 1) were subsequently dichotomized via median

split to distinguish between high vs. low levels of cognition and intuition, which yielded a 2 × 2 classification of cognitive styles: low cognition / low intuition; low cognition / high intuition; high cognition / low intuition; high cognition / high intuition. Dichotomization was used for pragmatic and interpretative reasons, especially when the goal is to classify individuals into discrete cognitive style categories. While dichotomization reduces statistical power and variability, it is justified here by the study's focus on typological profiling rather than fine-grained individual differences.

The classification does not serve as a standalone result but rather provides a structural basis for interpreting the essay data. The categorical typology was used to contextualize the narrative patterns that emerged in the subsequent qualitative analysis, offering a lens through which to examine cultural and gender-related variation in decision-making strategies.

The second and principal phase of the research involved qualitative analysis of 159 reflective essays. 83 were from Indian and 76 from Austrian participants, each ranging from 200 to 400 words. The participants in the qualitative study were deliberately the same as those in the quantitative study (i.e., not an independent sample) to obtain both a quantitative and a qualitative perspective on the topic as per respondent.

All respondents completed the quantitative survey first and could be classified in one of the cognitive styles (see above). The difference in the number of respondents between the quantitative and qualitative studies in both countries is since not all participants who completed the quantitative survey also submitted a thematic essay, as participation in this part of the study was also voluntary.

Participants responded to the following prompt: *“How do intuition and rational analysis interact when making your important decisions? When and where does each approach prove effective or reveal its limits in a professional context? Include examples and reflect on your personal experiences. When do you rely on your intuition, and when do you prefer data-driven analysis?”*

MaxQDA 2020 was used to perform the qualitative analysis. A thematic content analysis (TCA) was then conducted using an inductive, phenomenological approach (Boyatzis, 1998; Kuckartz, 2016; Mayring, 2015). Manual pre-coding supported by AI identified initial themes, followed by researcher cross-validation to ensure interpretive reliability and cultural sensitivity. Themes were first extracted independently for Indian and Austrian respondents, then subjected to comparative analysis. Verbatim quotations were retained throughout to illustrate emergent patterns and preserve narrative authenticity.

The coding strategy was deliberately designed to allow partially different code structures for the Indian and Austrian essays, because the purpose of the qualitative phase was to capture culturally embedded meaning patterns rather than to force both datasets into an identical scheme. To increase systematicity, the analysis was guided by a deductive/inductive hybrid approach: Cognitive-Experiential Self-Theory provided deductive sensitizing dimensions (i.e., analytical-rational versus intuitive-experiential processing), while Hofstede's cultural dimensions and Hall's context perspective informed the interpretation of culturally specific expressions of decision-making. Within this framework, country-specific subthemes were generated inductively, then compared across cases to identify both convergent and divergent decision patterns. This procedure strengthened the analytical validity of the findings by preserving emic differences while still linking them to the study's theoretical foundations.

This integrated design enabled us to address all four research questions and to explore both quantified cognitive styles and richly expressed decision-making narratives. Crucially, it allowed us to examine not only individual-level variation but also broader cultural and gender-related influences on how analytical and intuitive strategies are balanced. The qualitative depth, supported by a robust classificatory frame, positions this study to contribute meaningfully to cross-cultural management and decision-making scholarship in dynamic, uncertain environments.

3 Results

This section presents the main findings based on the research questions, which address the integration of rational and intuitive approaches in business decisions, the dominance of data-driven versus emotion-based decision types, the role of intuition under time pressure, and the influence of cultural differences on decision-making styles. Table 3 shows the main themes and subthemes that were extracted from the essays for India and Austria.

The thematic analysis reveals both convergence and divergence in decision-making approaches between India and Austria. In both contexts, intuition and rationality are not viewed as mutually exclusive but are integrated depending on situational demands (Table 3). Indian respondents emphasized data-enhanced intuition and experience-based choices under uncertainty, reflecting a more context-sensitive and adaptive approach.

In contrast, Austrian participants displayed a stronger strategic and rational orientation, grounded in corporate structures and cultural framing. While trust in intuition under time pressure appears in both samples, Austria links it more with flexibility, whereas India connects it to emotional certainty and speed. Cultural framing is more explicit in Austria.

Table 3 | Main themes and subthemes extracted from both samples

INDIA	
Interplay of Intuition and Rational Analysis	• Integrated Decision-Making (intuition + analysis) • Contextual Role of Rationality
Data-Driven Intuition	• Data as Intuition Enhancer • Audience & Market Insight Dependence
Decision Context Sensitivity	• Uncertainty and Time Pressure • Experience-Based Choices
Trusting the gut	• Emotional Certainty • Quick Decision-Making
Rational Structure in Planning	• Structured Problem Solving • Information-Driven Choices
AUSTRIA	
Rational and Strategic Orientation	• Strategic Decision-Making • Data-Driven Rationality
Cultural and Linguistic Framing	• Multilingual Perspective • Cultural Influence on Rationality
Personal Experience and Introspection	• Self-Reflection in Decisions • Learning from Experience
Analytical Trust in Corporate Contexts	• Company-Oriented Decisions • Trust in Data
Intuition in High-Pressure Scenarios	• Time-Driven Decisions • Flexible Thinking

Source: Prepared by the authors based on own data.

3.1 Integration of Rational and Intuitive Decision-Making

Across both datasets, a central finding was that the respondents do not perceive intuition and cognition as mutually exclusive but rather as complementary components of decision-making. In India, respondents frequently described a process where an initial intuitive insight triggers the decision process, which is subsequently refined through rational analysis. This layered approach was vividly captured by Respondent 3 (India), who noted, *“Intuition often gives me the initial direction, but I always validate it with rational analysis before making key marketing decisions.”* This quotation illustrates an interplay of two significant subthemes: the integrated decision-making process, where intuition serves as a preliminary guide, and the contextual role of rationality, which refines and confirms the initial gut reaction.

A similar integrated model emerged in the Austrian dataset, though the articulation was typically more formal and structured. Respondent 12 from Austria stated, *“Marketing decisions should always be guided by strategic analysis and hard data, especially when budgets are at stake.”* Austrian respondents position intuitive insights as a necessary complement to a methodical, data-driven approach. In the Austrian context, the integration was often described as a parallel process, whereby intuitive and rational inputs are considered simultaneously, with a strong emphasis on strategic calibration. Consequently, while both groups validate the necessity of integrating intuition with cognition, Indian respondents tend to present an experiential narrative, whereas Austrian respondents frame

the integration within well-defined strategic and analytical parameters. Hofstede's Uncertainty Avoidance Dimension can explain these differing narratives. Austria's high score reflects a preference for structure and analysis, aligning with Austrian respondents' strategic framing. India's lower score indicates greater comfort with ambiguity, supporting Indian respondents' experiential, intuitive approach (Hofstede, 2024).

3.2 Types of Decisions: Data-driven versus Emotion-based

The essays reveal a clear dichotomy in decision-making types, with distinct patterns observed for decisions that are data-driven versus those that are intuition-based. For both Indian and Austrian respondents, decisions involving quantitative assessments – such as campaign budgeting, pricing strategies, and market segmentation – were characterized by a high degree of reliance on cognition and rigorous analytical reasoning. In India, Respondent 10 succinctly reflected this tendency by stating, *“For campaign budgeting or segmentation, I stick strictly to numbers and structured analysis.”* This remark underscores data-centric pragmatism, wherein formal quantitative methods are deemed essential for decisions with tangible financial repercussions.

In contrast, decisions that required a more subjective, creative input were more frequently associated with intuition. Indian respondents often referred to these as “gut feelings” or intrinsic insights regarding consumer engagement and branding. One prominent example comes from respondent 7 from India, who explained, *“When creating branding concepts, my gut feelings drive the creative process – even if I later supplement it with data.”* Such statements highlight the dual role of intuition: serving both as a catalyst for innovative ideas and as a means for quickly interpreting ambiguous market signals.

Austrian respondents displayed analogous patterns in decision type differences. While strategic decisions were conducted within a framework of hard, data-driven analysis, there was an equally significant emphasis on intuitive inputs for creative and adaptive decisions. Respondent 8 captured this balance by stating, *“When I don't have time to think through everything, my gut usually points me in the right direction it's quick and effective.”* The contrast between the analytical and intuitive approaches is particularly revealing in the Austrian context, where formal corporate language (e.g., *“strategic analysis”* and *“hard data”*) often appears alongside references to personal experience (e.g., *“Bauchgefühl”* [i.e. “gut feeling”]). Thus, although both cultural groups endorse both decision styles, the concrete decision context determines which process predominates.

3.3 Intuition under Time Pressure and Uncertainty

A recurrent theme in the analysis concerns the role of intuition in situations marked by time pressure or uncertainty. When faced with incomplete information or rapidly changing circumstances, respondents from both India and Austria indicated a distinct shift toward relying on intuition. In the Indian dataset, Respondent 15 articulated this adaptive behaviour: *“In high-pressure situations, I rely more on my past experiences and intuition, especially when data isn't available.”* This finding reinforces the approach towards rapid intuitive decision-making, whereby intuition acts as a reliable fallback mechanism when analytical deliberation is impractical or impossible.

In the Austrian context, a similar phenomenon was evident. Respondent 19 observed, *“When urgency strikes, I depend on my gut feeling to steer the decision; it's an instinct honed through*

experience.” This quotation not only underscores the efficiency of intuition under stress but also highlights the commonality of the intuitive fallback strategy across divergent cultural settings. The reliance on intuition under uncertainty points to a universal adaptive trait among decision-makers – where quick, effective responses are necessary – and confirms the role of experiential knowledge as an essential component of the decision-making process.

Furthermore, the texts reveal that while the shift to intuitive decision-making under pressure is common, the articulation of this shift differs culturally. Indian narratives often integrate context-specific examples, referencing practical work scenarios or academic deadlines, whereas Austrian accounts tend to emphasize strategic urgency in professional settings. These cultural nuances are critical for understanding how decision-making processes are embedded within local contexts and underline the importance of culturally sensitive marketing strategies.

3.4 Cultural Influences and Gender Differences

A cross-national comparison reveals that cultural context significantly moderates the balance between intuition and cognition. Indian respondents adopt a more narrative-driven and experiential style. Their decision-making accounts are interwoven with contextual details and vivid illustrations of real-life scenarios. For example, Respondent 22 remarked, *“In my day-to-day marketing decisions, I feel the pulse of my audience, which guides my intuition, though I never completely abandon data analysis.”* Such expressions highlight a culturally embedded reliance on context and social interaction, suggesting that intuition is intricately linked to interpersonal and situational dynamics in India.

In contrast, Austrian respondents display a more structured, formalized approach. Their essays often include precise language and references to well-defined decision-making frameworks. Respondent 20 summarized this perspective by stating, *“I always balance my ‘Bauchgefühl’ with empirical evidence because in our competitive market, precision is as important as personal insight.”* The use of the German term “Bauchgefühl” [i.e. “gut feeling”] emphasizes that while intuition is valued, it is consistently calibrated against rigorous data. This approach suggests that Austrian cultural norms foster a greater appreciation for systematic and measurable decision-making processes.

The observed differences in decision-making approaches between Indian and Austrian respondents can be contextualized using established cultural theories, notably anthropologist Edward T. Hall’s high-context and low-context communication framework, as exemplified in his early works (Hall, 1973). In high-context cultures, such as India, communication relies heavily on implicit messages, shared experiences, and contextual cues. Conversely, low-context cultures, like Austria, depend on explicit, direct communication and detailed information.

Gender differences further mediate these cultural influences. Across both countries, male respondents tend to prioritize cognitive and data-driven reasoning, with a considerable proportion falling into high cognition categories. In Austria, male respondents were predominant in these categories; for instance, most respondents identified as male were associated with highly analytical narratives.

Indian male respondents show a balanced, integrated approach, both using rational decision making as well as intuition. In contrast, Indian female respondents were more frequently

found in the high intuition category, as illustrated by the statement from Respondent 11: *“I trust my gut when it comes to creative decisions, even if I sometimes compromise on detailed analysis.”* This observation points to a gendered propensity wherein females lean more toward intuitive decision-making when cognitive engagement is lower.

Austrian data echoed these findings, albeit with variations. Many Austrian females were well represented in the integrated category, revealing an elevated level of both cognitive engagement and intuitive insight, however, with a tendency to more rely on intuitive decision making. Respondent 27, an Austrian female, noted, *“My decisions in marketing are always a blend of data and feelings; I believe that true insight emerges only when the two converge.”*

Table 4 summarizes the findings by presenting a comparison matrix of the dominant thinking styles by category and country. In both nations, Category 1 respondents – those with low cognition and low intuition – display less engagement, often characterized by vague or passive language. Categories 2, 3, and 4, however, illustrate a clear differentiation between intuitive and data-centric approaches, with higher cognitive engagement seen among male respondents, and a stronger inclination toward intuition observed among female respondents, particularly in Austria.

This matrix thus provides an empirical basis for understanding how cultural and gender-related factors shape the interplay between intuition and cognition in marketing decisions among respondents.

Table 4 | Response types per country, core interpretations

Theme	India: Response type	Austria: Response type	Core Interpretation	Decision types (managerial action)
Integration of rational and intuitive decision-making (Section 4.1)	Layered, experiential integration: intuition often provides the initial direction, then rational analysis validates the choice.	Structured, parallel integration: intuition is present, but decisions are framed more formally and strategically.	In both cultures, intuition and analysis are complementary, but India emphasizes an experiential sequence, whereas Austria emphasizes strategic calibration.	Implement a staged decision process: start with an intuitive hypothesis (e.g., manager judgment), followed by structured validation using data, KPIs, or scenario analysis. Or vice-versa.
Types of decisions: data-driven versus emotion-based (Section 4.2)	Data-driven for budgeting, pricing, and segmentation; intuition for branding and creative choices.	Data-driven for high-stakes strategic decisions; intuition for creative or adaptive decisions.	Both samples separate decision types by context, but Austria uses more formal analytical language, while India more often frames intuition as “gut feeling” or audience sensitivity.	Match decision mode to task type: apply formal analytics for financial, pricing, and strategic decisions, and explicitly allow intuitive input for branding, innovation, and customer experience choices.
Intuition under time pressure and uncertainty (Section 4.3)	Reliance on past experience and intuition when data are incomplete or time is limited.	Reliance on gut feeling under urgency, understood as experience-honed instinct.	Intuition functions as a fallback under uncertainty in both countries, though Indian narratives are more context-rich and Austrian narratives more urgency-oriented.	Establish fast-track decision protocols: define when decisions can rely on managerial experience (e.g., under time/data constraints) and document post-hoc evaluation to refine intuition over time.
Cultural influences and gender differences (Section 4.4)	More narrative-driven and experiential; male respondents often show a balanced or integrated style, while female respondents lean more toward intuition.	More structured and formalized; male respondents tend toward cognition-heavy styles, while female respondents are often more integrated.	Cultural context shapes the language and emphasis of decision-making, while gender further moderates the balance between cognition and intuition.	Design cognitively diverse decision teams: combine analytical and intuitive profiles, and create shared decision rules (e.g., structured discussion formats) to align different cultural and gender-based approaches.

Source: Prepared by the authors based on own data.

3.5 Quantitative Triangulation of the CEST-Based Typology

The quantitative findings complement the qualitative analysis by providing a structured, comparable classification of respondents along the cognition–intuition continuum and thereby strengthening the study’s triangulation. As reflected in table 5, the survey data broadly corroborate the narrative patterns identified in Sections 4.1–4.4: Austrian respondents, particularly men, are more strongly associated with cognitive decision-making, whereas Indian respondents show a more balanced or intuitively oriented profile, with women

displaying a relatively stronger intuitive tendency. In this way, the quantitative part does not stand apart from the essays but gives the qualitative interpretation a measurable basis and demonstrates that the observed cultural and gender differences are not only discursive, but also empirically visible in the classification data.

Table 5 | Comparison Matrix of Thinking Styles by Category and Country

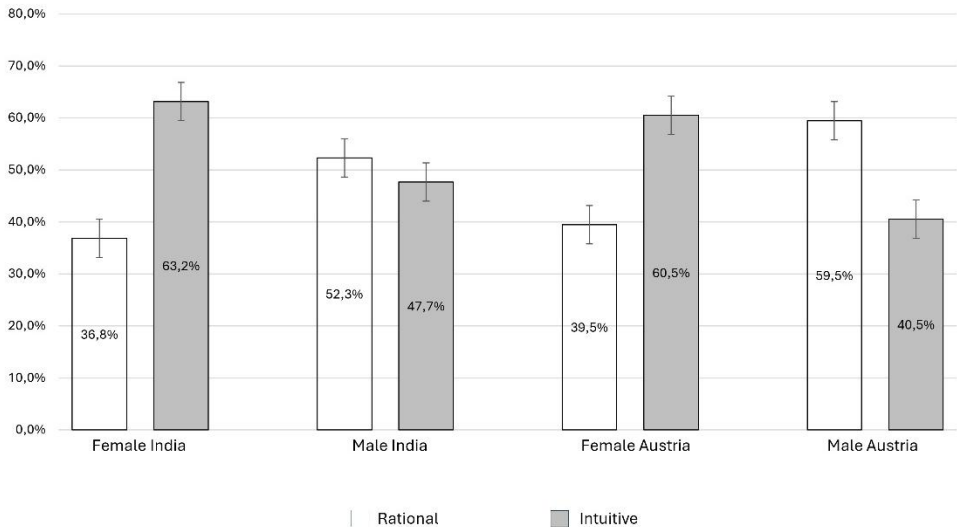
	Cognition	Intuition	Thinking style	Essay characteristics
India	Low	Low	Unengaged	Passive mentions; vague language
	Low	High	Intuitive/Emotional	Predominance of gut-feelings, audience focus
	High	Low	Analytical	Data-driven, formal, structured narratives
	High	High	Integrated	Blended logic & intuition, confident integration
Austria	Low	Low	Vague/Strategic	General uncertainty, filler language
	Low	High	Reflective/Emotional	Highly personal and subjective, reflective
	High	Low	Rationalist	Classic rational logic, process-oriented
	High	High	Contextual/Adaptive	Integrated and flexible decision-making

Source: Prepared by the authors based on own data.

Figure 2 (based on the quantitative findings) confirms this. Male respondents from India show a balance of cognition and intuition when making decisions. Austrian males have higher levels of cognitive decision making, whilst the opposite is the case for Austrian female respondents. Female respondents from India, however, show a much stronger tendency to intuitive decision-making approaches. These findings are broadly consistent with the study by Sladek et al. (2010), which found that men tend to prefer rational processing more than women, while women show a greater inclination toward experiential processing. Our study extends these insights by introducing a cultural dimension to this pattern. The findings highlight how gender and cultural context mediate self-assessments and narrative representations of decision-making styles.

The quantitative findings should be interpreted as indicative of respondent typologies within the purposive sample rather than as statistically generalizable estimates for all early-career professionals and students in Austria or India.

Figure 2 | Rational vs. intuitive decision making by country and gender



Source: Prepared by the authors based on own data.

3.6 Synthesis of Qualitative and Quantitative Insights with Theoretical Convergence and Cross-Cultural Nuances

Combining the categories with the respective narratives suggests that high cognition is typically associated with a systematic, analytical approach to decision-making, particularly valued in high-stake professional and financial contexts. Conversely, strong intuitive emphasis is often linked to creative, rapid, or emotionally nuanced decisions. The quotes from India (e.g., Respondent 7's emphasis on gut-driven branding) and Austria (e.g., Respondent 27's description of integrated decision-making) serve as critical anchors for these themes, demonstrating that while the mechanisms of decision-making might be universal, the expressions and priorities are contextually bound.

Our study also resonates with the growing body of literature on organizational ambidexterity, where firms must balance exploitation (data-driven decision-making) with exploration (intuition-driven innovation) (O'Reilly & Tushman, 2013). High-performing respondents, particularly those in the "high cognition/high intuition" quadrant, demonstrated the capacity to shift between strategic analysis and gut-driven creativity depending on situational demands. This duality is a cornerstone of adaptive capabilities and may reflect an emerging competency in fast-changing, innovation-intensive sectors. These results suggest that intuition should not be viewed as irrational but as a strategic resource that complements formal analysis, particularly in emergent market conditions.

Taken together, the findings largely mirror Cognitive-Experiential Self-Theory by showing that respondents in both countries combine analytical-rational and intuitive-experiential processing rather than treating them as mutually exclusive. They also align with cultural theory: the Austrian essays reflect higher uncertainty avoidance and a more explicit, structured, low-context style, whereas the Indian narratives are more context-sensitive, experiential, and relational, consistent with Hall's high-context perspective and Hofstede's

cultural dimensions. What is particularly remarkable, however, is that intuition becomes salient in both cultures under time pressure and uncertainty, suggesting that experiential processing is not culturally confined but situationally activated. The gendered pattern, especially the stronger integration among women and the more analytical orientation among Austrian men, further indicates that cultural effects interact with individual-level decision preferences rather than operating as simple national stereotypes.

4 Discussion and Conclusions

In sum, the thematic content analysis reveals a dual-process model of decision-making among our respondents in both India and Austria. The empirical data indicate that marketing decisions are rarely the product of a singular approach; instead, they involve an interplay between intuitive and rational processes. These findings are in line with a study by Sanz de Acedo Lizárraga et al. (2007) that used naturalist theory which undelines the role of experience and personal competence in the decision-making process. Similar study by Dabić et al. (2015) on impact of national culture on decision making was conducted among eastern European countries of Croatia, Slovenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Hungary proved that “complex decisions are, above and beyond all others, the consequence of social and cultural values installed in every individual”. This integration is articulated across multiple decision contexts: data-driven strategies are predominant in formal, high-stakes decisions such as budgeting and risk assessment, while gut-driven intuition is more prominent in creative and fast-changing scenarios.

The findings have several significant implications for both theory and practice. First, they confirm that business related decision-making in the 3rd decade of the 21st century is inherently hybrid, merging the strengths of both intuitive insights and analytical reasoning. This integrated approach is essential in dynamic and uncertain markets, where the pace of change demands quick, instinctual responses and careful, data-backed analysis. The integration of these processes ensures flexibility, allowing decision-makers to be both innovative and rigorous. Business practitioners should develop training programs that foster analytical and intuitive decision-making skills such that it can enhance cognitive flexibility leading to a tendency towards rational thought and decision making (Weller et al., 2018).

The implications of our findings extend into organizational practice and innovation strategy. Decision-making must transcend traditional dichotomies of logic and intuition to accommodate dynamic complexity (Mack et al., 2016). By training for dual-process flexibility, firms can better equip emerging leaders to navigate data-saturated, time-sensitive environments. This aligns with Elkington’s (2018) assertion that effectiveness increasingly depends on an executive’s ability to synthesize analytics with intuitive foresight. Furthermore, cultural sensitivity in decision-making styles, such as Austria’s structured cognition versus India’s experiential orientation, should inform intercultural team dynamics, global marketing campaigns, and leadership development programs tailored to regional cognitive strengths. The importance of recognizing cultural differences between India and Europe were highlighted more than a decade earlier by Manfred (2013) and are still valid in today’s business scenario. Kumar and Taneja (2023) analysed intuition as a viable way forward to recognise patterns in high volumes of information overloads in uncertain situations.

As the findings suggest, most respondents navigate complex business environments through a hybrid approach that blends data analysis with instinctive judgment. Preparing employees

to recognize when to lean on structured reasoning and when to trust experiential insight will enhance adaptability and performance, especially in dynamic fields like marketing. Machines can only predict based on the data being fed into them and lack intuitive skills of humans and hence hybrid decision making would be the way forward (Princes & Kosasih, 2021). Further research on hybrid decision making involved the use of AI (Bork et al., 2023), which is also an area of future study involving cross cultural influences on decision making.

Second, cultural and gender differences play a crucial role in shaping the balance between intuitive and analytical decision-making. Austrian respondents consistently emphasized formal analysis, even when incorporating intuition, whereas Indian respondents showed a more varied pattern, with a notable reliance on experiential knowledge, particularly among females. Across both countries, male participants tended to favour data-driven approaches, while female respondents, especially in Austria, demonstrated a more integrated style, combining high levels of cognition and intuition. These patterns highlight the importance of considering cultural norms, and gender differences when designing marketing strategies, training programs, and organizational practices that aid in the decision-making process. In Austria, messages that emphasize structure, clarity, and data are likely to resonate, while in India, storytelling and emotionally engaging content can be more effective. Gender differences also matter: female audiences may respond more positively to messages that reflect a balanced integration of intuition and logic, whereas male audiences may be more persuaded by data-driven appeals. Research findings from this study reinforce the findings of Delaney et al. (2015) which reveal that decision making styles based on intuitive vs rationality and gender differences generally showcase mixed results, but women tend to exhibit more of “interpersonally oriented decision-making styles”. Further research by Nabayinda et al. (2026) showed a significant correlation between “gender norms” on “decision-making autonomy”.

Third, for business practice, these insights can further improve the development of tailored communication strategies. For instance, brands targeting the Austrian market might emphasize empirical data and structured decision frameworks, while those addressing the Indian market could adopt a more narrative-driven style that weaves in both hard data and emotive storytelling. Understanding that female consumers are more likely to appreciate an integrated approach can also inform the design of differentiated messages that target male versus female segments more effectively. Our research findings are in line with Siddiqui and Ali's (2025) research that brought out gender influences on the manner in which there is engagement with communication material with men reacting better to “transactional advertising” while women get more connected by “emotional appeals”.

Lastly, in recruitment and employer branding, organizations should shift the focus from task descriptions and job security toward conveying the experiential aspects of the workplace. Ceschi et al.'s (2017) findings emphasized that “employee functioning” depended upon the “work environment” as well as “decision-making processes”.

Cruz and Rosário (2025) conducted a systematic literature review on data-driven decision making in marketing and came up with four theoretical bases for data-driven decision making – Institutional Theory based, Dynamic Capabilities, Resource-Based View and Technology-Acceptance Model. From an academic perspective, this study contributes to the broader literature on dual-process decision-making by elucidating the contextual, cultural, and gender-specific factors that emphasize how intuitive and rational processes interact. The

findings suggest the need for further research – particularly longitudinal studies that examine how these decision-making profiles evolve over time with more professional experience and exposure to global marketing practices.

In conclusion, the empirical evidence presented underscores the complexity of decision-making. The integration of intuition and cognition is not only a means of compensating for information gaps and time constraints but also a culturally embedded practice that varies by gender and context. Austrian respondents tend to highlight a more formalized and structured approach, while Indians reveal a diverse range of narratives, indicating that intuitive, experience-driven insights play a critical role in everyday decision-making. These findings advance our theoretical understanding of dual-process models and have practical implications for how organizations craft strategies, training, and communications to better appeal to a dynamically evolving generation of business professionals.

The findings of this study suggest several implications for practitioners and policymakers in Central European contexts. First, the results indicate that decision-making in cross-cultural settings involves differing emphases on analytical and intuitive processes. This suggests that training and organizational practices may benefit from acknowledging and accommodating both structured, data-driven approaches and more experience-based, intuitive inputs.

Second, the observed differences between Austrian and Indian participants imply that cross-cultural collaboration could be supported by establishing decision routines that allow for both formal analysis and contextual interpretation (e.g., structured discussions complemented by experiential insights).

Lopez Perez (2025) studied the use of intuition in decision-making while Wei (2025) developed a hybrid multi-criteria framework for decision making to be used while navigating complex and unstable business environments. There are several independent studies on decision-making but there are no studies that combine both cognitive and intuitive elements in decision-making in a cross-cultural setting through the use of a representative country from an emerging and developed economy. Our research findings point to the potential value of developing decision-making competencies that integrate cognitive and intuitive elements, particularly in environments characterized by uncertainty and time pressure within differing cultural and economic contexts.

While these implications are indicative rather than prescriptive, they highlight areas where organizations may adapt practices to better align with culturally embedded decision-making patterns.

5 Limitations and Avenues for Future Research

This study offers valuable insights into culturally embedded decision-making processes; however, several limitations should be acknowledged. While we found key indicators in Austria and other Central European countries such as export quota and sectoral scope quite similar, we acknowledge differences in economic and cultural business-related settings, which may constrain the generalizability of findings across broader professional contexts.

Because recruitment relied on purposive access through professional, alumni, and university networks, the sample may overrepresent respondents embedded in education-linked or professionally connected segments. This does not invalidate the design, but it does mean

that the quantitative component is best read as analytically informative and typology-generating rather than population-representative.

Purposive sampling, while valuable for ensuring theoretical relevance and depth, compromises the statistical representativeness required for quantitative generalizability, as the deliberate non-random sample selection violates the assumption of equal probability of selection that underpins inferential statistics and population-level claims (Etikan et al., 2016). Consequently, our findings are context-bound and mainly analytically transferable rather than statistically generalizable to broader populations (Patton, 2014).

Further, despite efforts to ensure comparability across the Austrian and the Indian sample data, demographic imbalances between both samples represent a methodological limitation. Esp. demographic differences between the two samples can introduce confounding effects that hide real between-sample differences and/or inflate or suppress effect sizes (Anderson-Cook, 2005). Such imbalances may threaten the internal validity (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013). There is still a gender imbalance in the representation of women in leadership positions in Indian organisations. A research report in the year 2024 by All India Management Association (AIMA) – KPMG revealed that 56% of the organisations in India have only 10–30% of women in leadership positions, while 9% organisations in India have no women representation at all ⁵.

Future research should test the typology on additional Central European managerial samples across industries (e.g., manufacturing, IT, finance) and on senior managers to assess how professional experience shifts cognition–intuition balance. Additionally, self-reported data may be influenced by retrospective rationalization or cultural desirability biases. Future research could adopt longitudinal or ethnographic methods to capture real-time decision-making dynamics. Expanding the study across diverse industries and additional cultural contexts would enhance comparative depth.

Future research should build on the study by Lowman (2022) and investigate the ethical aspects of decision making while conducting business in a cross-country cultural setting and comparing countries from the emerging and developed economies.

Furthermore, integrating psychological or neuroscientific approaches could offer a more granular understanding of the interplay between intuition and rationality in culturally shaped cognitive processes. A potential avenue for future inquiry lies in expanding the geographical scope to encompass additional Eurasian economies – particularly in Central Asia, Eastern Europe, and East Asia – where decision-making traditions may blend collectivist and hierarchical influences in unique ways. Research from these regions could provide valuable contrasts or reinforcement to our findings, especially in economies navigating post-transition or digital transformation contexts (Acciarini et al., 2021). Further, comparative studies involving organizational leaders could yield actionable insights for policy design in education, human resource management and innovation ecosystems across Eurasia.

⁵ <https://assets.kpmg.com/content/dam/kpmg/in/pdf/2024/04/women-leadership-in-corporate-india-2024.pdf>, accessed 7th April 2026 (page 4 of the report

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