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**International analysis of organizational transformation  
processes induced by Industry 4.0 - using Austria and  
Hungary as examples**

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Doctoral (PhD) Thesis

**THESIS BOOKLET**

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## 1. The topicality of the research and the structure of the thesis

The Fourth Industrial Revolution is fundamentally changing the economy, society and the way companies operate. Industry 4.0 is no longer just a “future trend”, but is increasingly being placed at the centre of the company's strategic agenda. Some manufacturing companies have already taken the first steps towards Industry 4.0, but the path is an evolutionary process, not a revolutionary one. Information, automation and manufacturing technologies will be more interconnected than ever, making networking not just a goal, but a requirement of this process. Industry 4.0 solutions have fundamentally transformed business organizations, new cyber-physical systems have been created, where real economic and IT processes form an integrated and inseparable unit (Horváth, 2023, Veile et al., 2021). The concepts of industrial digitalization currently constitute a challenge for manufacturing companies in various departments, such as purchasing, production, intralogistics, sales and human resources. Therefore, there is a great need for a systematic approach to development, development and implementation of strategies. However, companies show different degree of readiness in terms of new technologies, processes and organizational aspects (Pessl et al. 2017).

The thesis consists of four main parts. In the first few chapters, I examined the domestic and international topicality of the issue, and I discussed where Hungary and Austria stand in the European ranking based on the Digital Economy and Society Index (DESI), and why the digital comparison of the two neighboring countries is interesting.

In the second part, I present the results of my exploratory qualitative research, including interviews and case studies. Then, in the third part, I describe the details of the quantitative research, covering each section of the questionnaire.

Finally, the fourth part is about the research results, presenting new scientific findings.

## 2. Research objectives

I have a personal attachment to the chosen topic, as I have worked primarily for small businesses that had difficulty implementing Industry 4.0 for various reasons. I wanted to explore the opportunities SMEs have in order to implement Industry 4.0 and whether they can even catch up with large companies in terms of Industry 4.0 maturity.

Today's important issue is industrial digitalization and its impact on companies. The topic is relevant as Industry 4.0 is transforming industrial sectors at an astonishing rate, with smart devices already being capable of collecting, analyzing, evaluating and using huge amounts of data at lightning speed. This data enable and improve the optimization of production, business processes and industry operations. This change extends to almost all industries, forcing managers to adapt, shape and reorganise their strategies accordingly. Naturally, if a business opens up to new technologies, it also requires a completely new strategy, which may involve risks. However, there are companies that do not want to take risks and are satisfied with the situation they already have.

My research is about the readiness of Hungary and Austria for Industry 4.0. I considered it important to compare the level and direction of the digital development of the two neighbouring Central European countries, as they share a common commercial and historical past and are currently important economic partners. Austria is one of the most economically stable countries in the Central European region, while Hungary is trying to catch up after the regime change, although this is a great challenge due to the former socialist economic structure.

In my research, I investigated the digital development of Austrian and Austrian companies in terms of strategy and organisation, employees and the use of new digital technologies, and how the corporate culture of companies is related to the Industry 4.0 strategy. I wondered whether there were any similarities in their Industry 4.0 readiness and how they were progressing with the digital transition. Nick et al. (2019) showed in their study that Industry 4.0 differs at separate levels of digitalization: Hungary aims to catch up with the leaders and join the global value chain, while in Austria the industrial maturity is more advanced and the main goal is to keep it dynamic. I hope that my research results and theses will help companies that have not yet embarked on the transition to digitalization to start their journey.

In my PhD thesis, I sought answers to the following questions:

1. During my research, I paid significant attention to examining the readiness and maturity of Hungarian and Austrian companies for digitalization and Industry 4.0. Accordingly, I wanted to find out whether there is a difference between the digital readiness of the two countries. What is the most important aspect when implementing Industry 4.0?
2. In domestic and Austrian companies, what areas have been developed that supported Industry 4.0 initiatives in SMEs?
3. An important area for research is what kind of Industry 4.0 in-house training programmes the executives of Hungarian and Austrian companies consider important within their own industry.
4. It is also worth looking at how corporate culture relates to the Industry 4.0 strategy. Are there relevant differences in the corporate culture of companies with Industry 4.0 strategies in the two countries? What type of corporate culture do the companies with Industry 4.0 strategy have?

## 3. Research methods

### 3.1. Qualitative research

During the exploratory qualitative research, I conducted a total of six semi-structured interviews: three with Hungarian company managers, one interview with the head of the corporate digitalization working group of a professional-industry association, and two with Austrian company managers, which I supplemented with three Hungarian and one Austrian case studies.

Four interviews were conducted in Hungary. The first interview was done with László Fükő, factory manager of a large tool manufacturing company in Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén County, where Industry 4.0 technology is already used. I also visited two other SME managers, István Liker from Liker Motors Kft and István Sándor from EMR Kft. Through my interviews I present companies operating in completely different market situations and business approaches. The fourth Hungarian interviewee is Balázs Tordai, Industry 4.0 expert from the Association of IT Enterprises (IVSZ). Balázs explained how the Association of IT Enterprises can help the process when a company starts moving towards digitalization.

In the Austrian interviews, Michael Vinatzer, the head of Transalpina GmbH, presented the path to digitalization of a dynamically growing medium-sized company, and I talked to Dr. Ewald Koppensteiner, the head of HPW Metallwerk, about how a large Austrian company, which is one of the leading suppliers to the automotive industry, works.

I supplemented the interviews with case studies, which provide an even deeper insight into the digitalization processes and developments of companies. The Hungarian case studies were conducted at two dynamically developing SMEs, ECT Hungary Kft and Grif Tools Kft. The Austrian case study was conducted at a large telecommunications company, Hutchison Drei Austria GmbH, based in Vienna.

The interviews and case studies were carried out in 2021-2022, which I also carried out with a case study of a large enterprise in 2024, in which I examined the openness of a large company manufacturing and developing electronic components in Western Hungary to development and to the changed technological environment.

When conducting the interviews and case studies, I was mainly looking for answers to the following questions:

- How does industrial digitalization affect the development of the company?
- What digital tools does the business use?
- In which areas of digitalization are they planning to make improvements in the near future? Has the Covid pandemic accelerated these developments?
- What advantages and disadvantages do companies face in their daily life when using digitalization?

- To what extent has digitalization increased efficiency in their company?
- How important is Industry 4.0 development for an SME?
- What should be taken into account by companies planning to introduce digitalization?

### 3.2. Quantitative research

I conducted a questionnaire survey as part of a quantitative exploratory research, during which I interviewed managers of Hungarian and Austrian SMEs and large companies. When compiling the questionnaire, I mainly relied on the project titled "Industry 4.0 National Technology Platform" developed by MTA Sztaki, which assessed the needs and expectations of the industry and strategic economic management, along with the current situation of Industry 4.0 at the companies interviewed; furthermore, using the literature I provided more details about the topics identified in the interviews. The data collection took place both in person and online. A total of 156 companies were surveyed, including 102 Hungarian and 54 Austrian companies. The goal was to survey 100 Austrian companies, however, they were very reluctant to participate and the response rate was lower than in domestic companies. The quantitative survey was performed in the following industries:

- Manufacture of machinery, manufacture of industrial equipment, repair of electrical equipment, manufacture of electrical equipment,
- Manufacture, sale and repair of road vehicles and motorcycles,
- Warehousing and auxiliary transport activities,
- Production of computers, electronic and optical products
- Manufacture of chemicals and chemical products.

Based on my research using the literature, Industry 4.0 is already present or plays a prominent role in the selected industries, which is why I included the industries listed. I also interviewed manufacturing and service companies. The full query was conducted in 2021-2022.

Questionnaire research was the most effective method for the survey, as it allowed me to ask a wider range of companies.

The analysis was carried out using the IBM SPSS 25.0 software package.

The questionnaires in Hungarian and English consist of the following four chapters:

- I. *The questions about Industry 4.0 corporate rating*, including: I examined the Industry 4.0 readiness of companies, their current situation, future plans and prospects in the subchapters titled Strategy and Organization, and Employees and Application of New Digital Technologies. I intend to find out how open companies are to development and the changed technological environment, and whether they can position and improve their strategies in line with their self image.
- II. *Examining corporate culture*: the research also focuses on the impact of corporate culture on openness to digital transformation. I used the Cameron and Quinn culture

model to assess corporate culture, which provides useful information for analyzing the organizational culture of companies.

III. *General characteristics*: demographic data of the business.

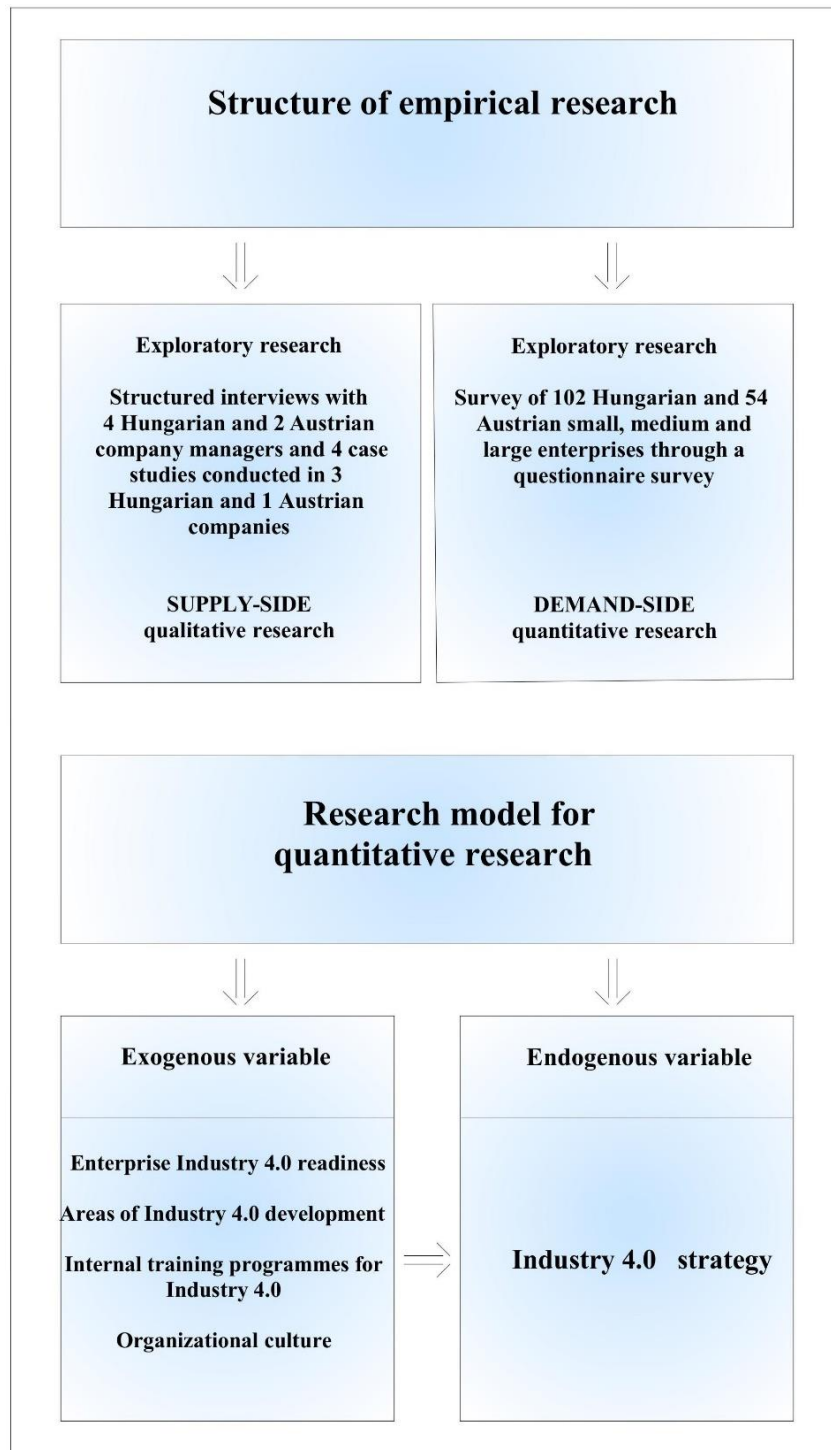
IV. *Demographic questions*: concerning company executives.



## 4. Research model

The literature review confirms that corporate digital readiness, development areas and in-house training programmes for Industry 4.0 and corporate culture are related to the Industry 4.0 strategy.

Based on these findings, I set up my own initial research model, which is shown in Figure 1.



**Figure 1.** Research model

Source: own editing, 2023

## 5. Hypotheses

After reviewing the literature, I looked at the findings and formulated my hypotheses related to the research questions.

The hypotheses refer to the relations between the areas presented in the research model.

H-1: When introducing Industry 4.0, domestic companies focus on strengthening competitiveness, while Austrian companies emphasize the improvement of their market position.

H-2: Developing certain areas of Industry 4.0 has a multiplier effect on other areas both in domestic and Austrian companies.

H-3: The Industry 4.0 in-house training programme is production-oriented in Hungarian companies, while the two key areas for Austrian companies are human resources and digital workflow.

H-4: There is a correlation between the type of organizational culture examined on the basis of the Cameron-Quinn culture model and the degree of Industry 4.0 readiness in the surveyed companies.

## 6. Research results

In my review of the national and international literature, I pointed out that more and more business leaders are taking the first steps towards Industry 4.0. Progress depends mostly on the ability of the owners to implement change and it is essential that company managers are prepared in time for the changes to occur.

In my literature review, I also described the most important inhibiting and supporting factors. In Austria, IT and data security issues and the lack of a technology roadmap are inhibiting factors. In Hungary, the transition is slowed down by the lack of experts, money and Industry 4.0 strategy. Although, in my experience, many Hungarian companies are also afraid to embark on such a large-scale investment, especially if it is not absolutely necessary for the implementation of their projects. In Austria, companies are optimistic that the introduction of digitalization will improve their market position and domestic companies hope to achieve competitiveness. Digital transformation increases efficiency and effectiveness, but there are not enough experts to create a new economic structure.

Industry 4.0 may have impact on the working environment, skills development, economic growth, but sustainability and environmental aspects should also be considered. Changes affecting several areas facilitate the development of smart factories and smart manufacturing. In my opinion, it is also essential to improve training systems and to restructure the companies so that the digital transition may take place as quickly and smoothly as possible. During the literature review, I came to the conclusion that employees play a key role in the introduction of Industry 4.0 technologies, and it is worth encouraging and motivating them, because it can promote digital development in the company. Therefore, it is of paramount importance that companies help educate employees, however, governments should also support continuous internal training programmes. Furthermore, based on my previous experience, I believe that a well-designed corporate training programme can facilitate and accelerate the digital transition in companies.

During the review of the literature, I realized that besides the development of different areas and internal training programmes, corporate culture is also an important aspect in the digital transition, as corporate cultures can help companies adapt to Industry 4.0. Nevertheless, I felt there was insufficient information concerning how corporate culture is related to the Industry 4.0 strategy, and whether companies moving towards digitalization really need an innovative culture.

The DESI results revealed that there is a big gap between Hungary and Austria in terms of digital development. However, the two countries have different co-operative advantages, for example, Hungary has well-trained but cheaper labour force than Austria. In Austria, the digital transition started much earlier and at a higher level than in Hungary, where digitalization began in small steps a few years after the change of the regime. It takes a long time to catch up, if it is necessary at all.

## 6.1. Summary of qualitative research results

The interviews reveal that some of the companies surveyed do not have the prerequisites to implement the developments at a faster pace, and some companies are moving at a tremendous speed to develop digitalization. Implementing Industry 4.0 has a great deal of potential benefits. The main benefits are increased flexibility, quality standards, efficiency and productivity. This enables mass customization, allowing companies to meet customer demands and to create value by constantly introducing new products and services to the market. Moreover, the cooperation between machines and humans may have a social impact on the lives of future workers, particularly as regards optimizing decision-making (Tjahjono et al., 2017).

The interviews and case studies revealed that almost all of the companies surveyed are open to Industry 4.0 technology. Each of the Hungarian and Austrian companies interviewed have already taken the initial steps towards digitalization, but they did not consider digitalization important for individual items. The Hungarian and Austrian SMEs can mostly make their own decisions, so decision-making about the new technology can take place much faster.

According to the responses of the companies surveyed, Hungarian company managers do not have complete information about their options, with only one manager having contact with the university. Thinking in terms of "partnerships", building relationships with universities, and collaborating with other businesses would offer an opportunity for the companies to introduce Industry 4.0 and work together even more effectively. Austrian executives, on the other hand, have more information on development and funding opportunities.

Financing problems and the uncertain economic situation are hindering the implementation of this technology. Companies are afraid to plan ahead and invest in advance, unless they have "the order in hand". Introducing lean in companies would be essential before they initiate digitalization; lean should be made "mandatory" in companies as a "gateway" to digital development.

In my opinion, the digitalization transition would accelerate if companies had Industry 4.0 experts who would be responsible for digital development. Furthermore, the new digital technology would provide an additional opportunity to expand the product portfolio, if this is feasible.

Based on the results of the interviews and the case studies, I believe it would be important for SMEs to use more digital applications.

A major adoption barrier is the lack of up-to-date expertise in companies, which could be the driving force behind digital development, and the efficiency achieved through digitalization is

mostly not measured by the companies surveyed. Company managers have short-term Industry 4.0 strategies, they do not consider long-term schemes.

The interviews and case studies revealed that some of the companies surveyed lack the prerequisites to implement the developments at a faster pace, they have insufficient resources for excessive Industry 4.0 investments, but some companies are moving at an immense speed to improve digitalization. Business leaders are forced to react quickly to changes and if they fail to do so and reject new business paradigms, they may even experience how easily they can be replaced as business partners (Kusmin, 2018).

According to the results of Bánhidi et al. (2023), micro and small enterprises, if they want to expand their activities or workforce, should pay special attention to "levelling up" in information and communication technology skills when developing their growth strategy, as confirmed by the case studies and interviews.

Based on the DESI, economic indicators, industrial readiness scores for the two countries, and after conducting the comparative analysis of the interviews and case studies, I went on to do the quantitative research, in which I examined a larger sample size.

## 6.2. Summary of quantitative research results

The quantitative results also confirmed that companies are open to innovation. All the large Austrian companies examined have Industry 4.0 technologies, and most of the Hungarian companies have embarked on digitalization. My findings show that Hungarian executives are not fully aware of their options, neither of financing nor of information channels. The results were already similar during the interviews and case studies, but the quantitative study revealed even more the fact that besides the development of strategy, the management of corporate culture is a crucial aspect when a company steps on the path towards digitalization. However, the results show when starting digitalization processes the companies, especially the Hungarian ones, do not pay adequate attention to corporate culture management and Hungarian companies do not have Industry 4.0 strategies either.

Using more and diverse digital applications as well as cooperations with universities and other companies would be essential. I think digital transition could be accelerated by expanding information channels, informing managers about opportunities, and perhaps by Hungarian companies opening up to developing customer-specific areas.

Based on the quantitative results, Austrian companies are in fact already studying Industry 4.0 in the entire supply-chain logic, which I perceive as an advanced level. The result of the DESI indicator was confirmed, which showed the relevant difference between the two countries. Hungary is still primarily production-oriented, thinking in terms of production-specific Industry 4.0, whereas in Austria, according to the results, the entire supply chain process is designed with Industry 4.0 technology in mind, in which the preparation of employees is an important factor.

Companies that transform their business and operations in accordance with the principles of Industry 4.0 face complex processes and high expenses due to interdependent technologies that affect process inputs and outputs. As the transformation to Industry 4.0 changes the way we do business and create value, it becomes a critical concept that requires the support of senior management for projects and investments. Therefore, it requires a comprehensive view of the company's strategy, organization, operations and products (Akdil et al. 2018).

## 7. Summary

The main objective of the research was to assess the Industry 4.0 readiness of Hungarian and Austrian companies and the influencing factors that company managers take into account when implementing Industry 4.0 initiatives.

To sum up, the answers to the research questions formulated at the beginning of the thesis are as follows:

1. During my research, I examined the readiness and maturity of Hungarian and Austrian companies for digitalization and Industry 4.0. Even at company level, there is a relevant difference between the two countries; 92,59 % of the Austrian SMEs surveyed are already engaged in digitalization, and 46,43% of domestic SMEs are open to Industry 4.0. Of the Hungarian large companies surveyed, 88.89% already have some level of an Industry 4.0 strategy, while all the Austrian companies surveyed have started to move towards Industry 4.0. 18 of the Hungarian companies consider it highly important and 42 companies consider it important that Industry 4.0 technology makes the company competitive. Solving the human resources problem, compliance with market partners, competitiveness and achieving higher profits are also vital. As for Austrian companies, the aspect of improving their market position was significantly prominent. Based on the research results of Nick et al. (2017) the "Industry 4.0 National Technology Platform Questionnaire" developed by MTA Sztaki, the majority of companies do not have an Industry 4.0 strategy; my results suggest that this has changed positively in recent years, and more and more companies develop an Industry 4.0 strategy.
2. I found out in which areas the developments supporting the implementation of Industry 4.0 were carried out in domestic and Austrian companies. According to Industry 4.0, the two main areas in Hungarian companies are manufacturing and sales, and development of areas supporting manufacturing and sales. Austrian companies focus on the development of the two main areas, i.e. internal processes and customer-specific areas. There is a strong link between sales, service, information technology, information security and customer relationship management and, for example, research and development are independent of sales development. In Austria, more and more companies have already connected their systems to their customers in order to serve

them even faster and more efficiently. Industry 4.0 technology extends beyond companies. Hungarian and Austrian companies focused mainly on improving internal processes, however, according to the results, Austria is also open to develop customer-specific areas outside the company. The qualitative research results show that Austrian companies keep Industry 4.0 in mind in the entire supply chain, which is an advanced level in my opinion. However, domestic companies still focus on manufacturing, so the DESI test result has been confirmed at micro level.

3. My research also covered the issue of which Industry 4.0 in-house training programmes the executives of Hungarian and Austrian companies consider important within their own industry. According to my results, the Industry 4.0 internal training programme is production-oriented in domestic companies, while the two key areas for Austrian companies are human resources and digital workflow. So, even this research result confirmed that Hungary is production-oriented when it comes to Industry 4.0, and that manufacturing can be made even cheaper and more efficient. In Austria, on the other hand, Industry 4.0 is already handled separately in digitalized production processes and in human resources.

Austrian put more emphasis on human resources and preparing people for the new technology. They are no longer interested in purchasing monitors and software, because they have already gone through these processes.

It is a process, where the customer is the end point and the whole process is comprehended, while we emphasize manufacturing and the acquisition of the necessary equipment.

4. Considering the results I think there is a partial difference between corporate culture in the Hungarian and Austrian companies, and this difference is also perceived in the companies that have already implemented Industry 4.0 to some extent. Clan culture is dominant in Austrian companies, but not as strongly as in domestic ones. Both the hierarchical culture and market culture are predominant in Austrian companies, the adhocracy culture is only slightly behind the dominant culture, which promotes innovative approach. Thus, in view of the results I believe that the organizational culture in Austrian companies is more supportive of the full implementation of Industry 4.0 than in Hungarian ones, but companies do not necessarily need to have an innovative adhocracy culture in order to be open to Industry 4.0.



## 8. Independent, novel scientific findings

### 1. Thesis statement:

Although there are differences in the implementation of Industry 4.0 in both countries across sectors, overall it was found that Hungarian companies focus on strengthening competitiveness, while Austrian companies emphasize the improvement of their market position.

### 2. Thesis statement:

Developing certain areas of Industry 4.0 has a multiplier effect on further developments in other areas both in domestic and Austrian companies. Hungarian and Austrian companies focused mainly on improving internal processes, however, according to the results, Austria is also open to develop customer-specific areas outside the company.

### 3. Thesis statement:

The Industry 4.0 internal training programme is production-oriented in domestic companies, while the two key areas for Austrian companies are human resources and digital workflow.

### 4. Thesis statement:

There is a partial correlation between the type of organizational culture and the degree of readiness for Industry 4.0. While the domestic results show that the clan culture is the absolute dominant one, the Austrian results are not so evident, as the market and hierarchy cultures are also prominent. In Austrian companies, the organizational culture is more supportive of the full implementation of Industry 4.0 than in Hungarian ones, but companies do not necessarily need to have an innovative adhocracy culture in order to be open to Industry 4.0.

## 9. Conclusions and suggestions

During the research, I concluded that there are relevant differences in the digital readiness of Hungary and Austria not only at the macro level, which I presented using the DESI indicator, but also at the micro level, based on qualitative and quantitative research results. Hungarian companies are falling behind Austrian companies in adopting Industry 4.0 technologies. However, it is worth noting that Hungarian business leaders believe in the importance of digital transformation too (Katona et al., 2023).

The analysis revealed that the main problems are that company managers are not aware of or do not take advantage of financing opportunities, and the information channels are inadequate. Since the Covid-19 pandemic, companies have been much more cautious about making investments, and the results of the study show that the pandemic has not accelerated the digital transition as expected.

The results of the research confirm that, overall, both Hungarian and Austrian companies are open to digitalization, with all the Austrian companies examined having Industry 4.0 technologies, and many of the Hungarian companies having already started digitalization. Small enterprises also increasingly open up to digitalization, and it is vital for them not to remain in a restricted environment, not to be afraid of innovation and reforms, even if it involves huge risks. This reduced room for manoeuvre may limit strategic development and result in growth problems. It may even concern reach medium-sized enterprises, where leadership roles, workflows and organizational culture completely change. Naturally, this also requires a completely new strategy and a new corporate culture, which may involve danger. Some company executives are satisfied with the growth and open to new opportunities, while others are content with their already established situation and are reluctant to open up to digitalization because they are afraid of the risks. In large companies, digital development and the introduction of new technology take much longer, from the decision-making process to the implementation, than in a smaller companies.

I came to a similar conclusion as Matyusz-Pistrui (2020), whose results suggest that business leaders should think about the role and effects of IT in a much broader spectrum than before. It is recommended to appoint a person responsible for this role in the company, who can coordinate these processes, knows what competences are required in order to properly utilize digitalization solutions at all levels of the corporate value chain. It would be fundamental to keep up, because SMEs lagging behind may lead to the limitation of the long-term competitiveness of the economy (Gyimesi - Fejes, 2023). My results are in line with the conclusion of Szabó - Hortoványi (2021) that a company can be mature in terms of Industry 4.0 regardless of its size, therefore, SMEs can also be digitally advanced.

It should be pointed out that the results of the study show when starting digitalization processes in Hungarian companies, there is not adequate focus on corporate culture management. In the Hungarian companies studied, the clan culture is the dominant corporate culture, which does not support innovation. The DESI indicator showed discernible difference between the two countries; Hungarian companies have not reached the same level of digital transformation as Austrian ones. In my opinion, this can also be attributed to corporate culture, as Austrian results show that companies are much more open to market and hierarchical culture.

The literature has also repeatedly implied the significance of supporting corporate culture management in companies. The quantitative survey showed that this segment is important or highly important for 49,02 % of domestic companies. Unfortunately, the majority of Hungarian companies ignore corporate culture, in contrast, 79,63% of Austrian company managers considered it highly important or important, which is a very positive result. This aspect may also explain the relevant difference in digital development between the two countries.

## 10. List of the author's publications related to the topic

<https://m2.mtmt.hu/api/publication?format=html&labelLang=hun&sort=publishedYear,desc&cond=authors;eq;10060923>

### SCIENTIFIC JOURNAL ARTICLE PUBLISHED IN AN INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL

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### SCIENTIFIC JOURNAL ARTICLE PUBLISHED IN A HUNGARIAN JOURNAL IN A FOREIGN LANGUAGE

1. **Katona, A.** – Birkner, Z. - Péter, E.: 2023, *Expanding digitalisation for subsistence and sustainability in the heart of Europe, based on the examples of Hungarian companies*, Progress in Agricultural Engineering Sciences 19: 1 pp. 15-34., 20 p.
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