

Cultural differences in leadership



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To what extent is leadership culturally dependent? Take a look at the following statements collected from interviews with different managers from different countries:

The American people value two types of leaders. They search for empowerment from leaders who establish self-sufficiency governance and assign authority to subordinates. They also give high opinion to the confident, forceful, risk-taking and bold leader as personified by John Wayne.

The Dutch puts high importance on egalitarianism and are doubtful about the significance of leadership. Words like manager and leader are seen to be dishonoured. If a father is in employment as a manager, Dutch children will not acknowledge this to their friends.

Arabs adore and give veneration their leaders as long as they are in authority!

Iranians search for supremacy and strength in their leaders.

Malaysians imagine their leaders to act in a manner that is meek, reserved, and distinguished.

The French value two types of leaders e. g. Mitterand and De Gaulle.

Mitterand is an example of a harmonious builder, association former and successful negotiator. De Gaulle seen as an example of a strong charismatic and enigmatic leader.

Given the quick expanding of globalization of firms and improved interdependencies among countries, the need for greater understanding of cultural pressures on leadership and managerial practices has never been

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higher. In recent times, managers of global organisations face stern and hastily altering in international competition. The up-and-coming drift in the direction of an international economic society is apparent and this 21st century we find ourselves in may just become called the “ global world” (McFarland, Senen, & Childress, 1993). The huge significance depended on the interaction and communication in today’s business world which is becoming known as a global village makes it mandatory for multinational firms and their leaders to dig deeper to acquire the knowledge of other global leaders and their culture to be able to better interact and conduct lucrative business with them without offending their way of life. “ As national economies, political systems, cultures, technologies, resources and industries increasingly converge – perhaps to meld, perhaps to take shape in new forms – global management skills and abilities become more important to all organizations. These skills will be diverse.” (Parker, B. (2005) p. 24).

The globalization of firms shows quite a few leadership and organizational challenges which the success of organisational leadership happens to be majorly dependent on for the success of international operations. There are essential limitations in conveying theories from one culture to the next. What is successful in a particular culture may not necessarily be as victorious or openly accepted in another culture. According to Triandis (1993), leadership researchers would be able to modify theories by exploring cultural dissimilarities as constraints of those theories. According to Northouse’s (2004) general definition of leadership “ Leadership is a process whereby a person influences a group of people to achieve a common goal.”

‘ Organizational leadership can be described as the ability of a person to inspire, persuade, encourage and allow others to contribute towards the effectiveness and success of the organizations of which they are members’ (GLOBE PROJECT, 1997. Pg. 5). In addition, the GLOBE PROJECT research (1997) views ‘ culture as being operationally defined by the use of measures reflecting two kinds of cultural manifestations: (a) the commonality (agreement) among members of collectives with respect to the psychological attributes specified above; and (b) the commonality of observed and reported practices of entities such as families, schools, work organizations, economic and legal systems, and political institutions.’ With the ever growing trend of globalization in today’s world which is categorized by the never-ending growth of global trade and to a greater extent international mergers & acquisitions, the necessity of knowing and having a better grasp of the different qualities of various cultures becomes mandatory for individuals working in these conditions. A lot of the impending disagreements, inconsistencies and disturbances in international joint ventures are mainly a result of the lack of taking into account the cross-cultural differences when establishing the venture (Lichtenberger, B. et al., 1993). Apart from companies that have the intention or plan or already have merged or acquired companies from other countries, this understanding is very vital for companies which are located in other counties with the intent of doing business with other companies from different countries. When it comes to the stage of outsourcing and transferring of production products or plants, issues arise on the matter of deciding which particular manager will be the most appropriate to put in the national or regional branches of the firm. The cultural background of the manager and that of the firm would also be

considered. The kind of manager that will be able to go about the operations of the firm with little or no distractions from the culture of the firm and its employees and also how effective leadership for the firm can be guaranteed are all issues that would be taken into consideration when choosing a suitable manager.

With the help of a feasible framework to assist in conducting and directing cross-cultural leadership research, it is easier understood. Some of these frameworks would be discussed below. One of the many research carried out on cross-cultural issues in leadership includes the Globe Project. The prime researcher of GLOBE (the Global Leadership and Organizational Behaviour Effectiveness Research Project) is Robert J. House, along with numerous co-prime researchers and an international coordinating group. He directs a group of over 190 researchers from all over the globe in the study of the different types of networks of leadership, organizational culture and societal culture. Other dimensional frameworks include those by Hofstede's (1980), Schwartz (1999), Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck (1961) Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (1997), Hofstede (1980, 2001) and those which were originated during the GLOBE study (e. g. House et al., 1999; House and Hanges, & Ruiz-Quintanilla, 1997;). According to Bass, B. M. et al, one of the major characteristics of a charismatic leader is having an enormous influence on its followers (Bass, B. M. et al. (1990) p. 184). The supervision and management of a charismatic leader will direct its followers to performing better as it increases their motivation and zeal to become more productive which in turn increases the power and authority the leader has over them therefore, charismatic leadership is extremely vital in the

organizational context as well (Hwang, A. et al. (2005) p. 963). Charismatic leaders are often seen as very energetic and self-motivated individuals who offer motivation and encouragement, are enthusiastic about what is necessary and competent (De Vries, M. K. (1996) p. 486). ' Therefore, following a charismatic leader is not just obeying orders to satisfy the superior, it is more a conviction about the performance and the beliefs of the leader' (Ladkin, D. (2006) p. 173). This implies that the influence of a charismatic leader is highly accepted by his followers. They do not follow the leader because they have to but do so because they feel a sense of loyalty and attraction towards the leader. Charismatic leaders are viewed to require strong emotional and social skills because of the need of an intimate communication with the subordinates and offering the inspiration needed for them (Grove, K. S. (2005) p. 258).

The United States and Japan have been chosen as comparison cultures due to their highly divergent relevance for a broader understanding of communication phenomena in cultures. According to Hofstede (2001, pg 9), ' the United States is a highly individualistic culture. However Japan is a collectivistic culture. Japanese management and leadership styles have received extensive attention in both the scholarly and popular management literature in the United States' (Hofstede, 2001, pg 9). Ochi (1981) suggested Theory Z due to the organizational management principles in Japanese firms. He suggested that most Japanese firm's operations could be implemented by some of the American firms. Therefore, Japan is seen to have a similar culture to that of the United States for scholars examining leadership within organisations.

Leadership in the United States is identified by recognising leaders' functions in organisations and grouping the various kinds of leadership found into different leadership styles. For example, Yukl (2002) defines leadership as 'leadership is the process of influencing others to understand and agree about what needs to be done and how it can be done effectively, and the process of facilitating individual and collective efforts to accomplish the shared goals...Leadership is treated as both a specialized role and a social influence process' (Yukl's 2002 pg. 5). Yukl (2002) also suggested that decision making is an important function for leaders. Therefore, the techniques which different leaders decide to engage in making decisions has been raised as a subject matter which has to be further investigated. A way of making efficient decisions by a leader is known as participatory leadership. Yukl (2002), also suggested that a lot of the functions of administrators and managers include deciding executing decisions involving the different procedures needed to complete a particular task, choosing the right subordinates, finding solutions technical difficulties, deciding on which subordinate deserves a pay increase and so on. In addition, Indvik, 1986 proposed that supportive leadership has been proven to show that there is consistent strong positive connection between the subordinates' satisfaction and the organisation's commitment and also with fair to strong connections with the subordinates' position's uncertainty and performance in the United States. The moderate masculinity and low power distance ratings for the United States' culture are highly reflected in these findings.

Directive leadership has also been a significant factor in most United States' firms with some analysis made which showed strong positive associations

determining the subordinates satisfaction and role ambiguity and moderate positive associations with the subordinates performance (Podoloff, Tudor, & Schuler, 1983).

Nevertheless, these findings are profoundly based on the characteristics of the firm and the individual. Kerr and Jermier (1978) argued that employees who are extremely skilled, knowledgeable and certified will need little or no directive leader role model to be able to carry out their responsibilities. As pointed out by Hofstede (1980) and Smith and Peterson (1988) the exceedingly high individualism trait found in the United States strongly relies on the participative management processes.

Keys and Miller (1982) proposed that the reason for the effectiveness leadership style is due to the fact that their style of decision making has led to inherent job contentment, dedication, allocation of decision making and increased levels of motivation. Ochi (1981) proposed that the Japanese culture is seen as a collectivistic culture. Therefore the practise in the Japanese organisations would be to put emphasis on collective responsibility and collective decision making. According to Hirokawa (1981), he used a communicative perspective to explain the Japanese firm's style of participative leadership communication. Leaders in Japanese firms are meant to act as effective communicators in order for them to be fully understood and effective. Managers aid, persuade and assist the flow of information and knowledge between their members and this also leads to the effectiveness of the Japanese firms. Most leaders in Japanese organisations endeavour to sustain harmony within the firm and also adopt a "bottom-up process of decision-making" so that they are more accessible by their workers.

The United States, as depicted by Hofstede (1980) is highly individualistic, medium on masculinity and low on power distance and uncertainty avoidance. Howell and Dorfman (1988) explained paternalism in the United States as medium while Confucianism in Japanese firms needs reverence and submission from subordinated to leaders who have in the past responded with highly paternalistic attitudes (Peter W. Dorfman et. al, 1997)

The high achievement and high individualism motivations that characterizes United States employees are shown in rewards and retribution contingent on a person's performance (McClelland & Boyatzis, 1982). Over and over again, affirmative effects for reliant reward behaviour in the United States has been proven by Podsakoff and his associates (1992). Showing concern for followers and getting engaged in their private lives is expected by managers in Japanese firms therefore these organisations are exceedingly hierarchical and are firmly organized (Chen, 1995)

Given the various leadership styles and differences and similarities between the United States and Japan, some recommendations on how to better achieve effective leadership between them from (from the Japanese perspective) is discussed as follows. In affective cultures, such as the United States, leaders tend to exhibit their emotions. They reveal their thoughts verbally and non-verbally. Touching, gesturing and strong facial expressions are commonly used and their statements are made fluently and dramatically while in neutral cultures, such as Japan and China, leaders do not tend to show their emotions. They do not reveal what they are thinking or feeling. Physical contact, gesturing or strong facial expressions are not used and their statements are mostly said in a monotonous voice.

Some of the key factors that a Japanese Manager should keep in mind before venturing out to the U. s to lead a group of employees is that he should avoid a detached, ambiguous and cool demeanor as this will be perceived as a negative behavior. They should try and find out whose work and enthusiasm are being directed into which projects so that they are able to better appreciate the vigor and commitment the U. S employees have for these efforts towards their jobs. They should let people be emotional without personally becoming intimidated by their behavior.

These Japanese managers also have to work a bit on themselves as this is not just a one-way street. They should not put off stride when the employees create scenes and become hysterical; they should take some time out for sober reflection and not react on impulse. They should also keep in mind that the purpose of the business is typically focused on themselves as a person rather than the aim or purpose of the proposition that is being presented.

In conclusion, as discussed above about the different leadership frameworks in which both countries fall into, it is quite clear that the differences outweighs the similarities in their leadership styles. These differences need to be taken into consideration if an effective leadership is desired.