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Leadership across cultures

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For their survival organisations need to rely on leadership. Changing environments necessitate constant transformation, which in turn requires leaders who define the need to change, create new visions, and mobilize commitment to these visions. Currently organisations face increasing globalisation and cultural diversity of the work force. In order to cope with these challenges, leadership needs to be sensitive to societal cultural differences.

What makes leadership effective across cultures?

This question (among others) is addressed in the GLOBE programme (**G**lobal **L**eadership and **O**rganisational **B**ehaviour **E**ffectiveness) founded in October 1993. Today GLOBE consists of about 170 researchers from more than 60 countries. The focus of the GLOBE programme is on leader behaviours and attributes that are reported to be effective or ineffective in each societal culture represented in GLOBE. In addition to the various qualitative and quantitative data sources that were used in each country, a cross-cultural leadership questionnaire was developed and validated. Thereafter it was used with a sample of more than 15.000 middle managers from about 800 organizations (food, finance, telecommunication sectors) located in 62 countries covering all major cultural regions in the world (Brodbeck, et. al., 2000; Den Hartog et al., 1999; House, et al., 1999).

What is effective leadership? Leadership in organizations is commonly defined as having and being seen to have the ability to influence, motivate, and enable others to contribute toward the effectiveness and success of a working group or an organization. According to recent research it is the charismatic/transformational leader who can ultimately transform organisations and individuals. S/he articulates a realistic vision of the future that can be shared by followers, raises the awareness of the importance and value of the desired outcomes, gets followers to transcend their own self-interests accordingly, stimulates them intellectually, and alters or expands their needs. Meta-analytic reviews of hundreds of field studies demonstrate the positive effects charismatic/ transformational leadership has on organisational performance and on follower satisfaction, commitment, and organisational identification.

However, why does it work? Research in this area shows that charismatic/ transformational leadership is closer to the followers' perceptions of "ideal" leadership than other leadership styles (e.g., transactional leadership, i.e., exchanging rewards for appropriate levels of effort, or responding to followers self-interests as long as they are getting the job done). In other words, being perceived as a (close to ideal) leader is a prerequisite for being able to go

beyond a formal role in influencing others. In the same vein, research about leadership categorisation theory (Lord & Maher, 1991) demonstrates that leadership is *recognized* based on the fit between an observed person's characteristics with the perceiver's implicit conceptualisation of what effective leaders are and what behaviour they show. The better the match between a perceived individual and the leadership concept held by the perceiver, the more likely it is that the perceiver actually "sees" the individual as a prototypical leader. Followers who categorise a person as a prototypical leader allow her/him to exert influence on them – "leadership is in the eye of the beholder".

GLOBE was designed to test the hypothesis that differences in leadership concepts (leadership prototypes) held in different societies correspond with differences in societal cultural practices, norms, values, and beliefs systems. People develop leadership prototypes in the societal culture in which they were brought up, live and work. To the extent that cultural values, norms and beliefs systems are shared within a society and are distinctive from the values systems endorsed in other societies, leadership prototypes should be shared and distinctive as well.

Why does this matter? The influence on followers exerted by expatriate managers or leaders in a culturally diverse work force is constrained to the extent that leadership concepts differ as a function of societal cultural differences. Identifying the characteristics that differ in leadership prototypes endorsed in different cultures improves our understanding of why leadership across certain cultural boundaries is more or less effective. The issues identified can then be addressed in leadership training and assessment (see below).

Furthermore, our current knowledge of effective leadership across cultures is limited because the field of leadership research during its about 100 years long history has been dominated mainly by US American theorising and research. This makes it likely that the body of accumulated scientific knowledge about effective leadership is ethnocentric to a certain extent. What has been found in the context of US American business and society may not transfer easily to other business and societal cultural contexts.

GLOBE was also designed to distinguish culturally contingent leadership attributes from those that are universally endorsed. It may be that certain leadership characteristics are perceived as effective leadership in all cultures studied. Identifying these is helpful in at least two respects. First, a global perspective complements and transcends ethnocentric theorising and research. Second, universal leadership attributes, although they may be enacted differently in each culture, help us to understand and address the core issues involved in the leadership process as it unfolds in social interaction all over the world.

The findings

A set of 21 leadership prototypicality dimensions was identified (see Table 1), which reliably differentiates the societal cultures studied. These dimensions allow to give a comparative and descriptive account of culturally contingent and universally held leadership concepts.

Table 1. The GLOBE Leadership Prototypicality Dimensions

Scales	Items ^a
1. Visionary	Visionary, foresight, anticipatory, prepared, intellectually stimulating, future oriented, plans ahead, inspirational.
2. Inspirational	Enthusiastic, positive, encouraging, morale booster, motive arouser, confidence builder, dynamic, motivational.
3. Self Sacrificial	Risk taker, self sacrificial, convincing.
4. Integrity	Honest, sincere, just, trustworthy.
5. Decisive	Willful, decisive, logical, intuitive.
6. Performance Oriented	Improvement, excellence and performance oriented.
7. Team Collaborative	Group oriented, collaborative, loyal, consultative, mediator, fraternal.
8. Team Integrator	Clear, integrator, subdued, informed, communicative, coordinator, team builder.
9. Diplomatic	Diplomatic, win/win problem solver, effective bargainer.
10. Malevolent	Irritable, vindictive, egoistic, non-cooperative, cynical, hostile, dishonest, non-dependable, intelligent.
11. Administrative	Orderly, administratively skilled, organized, good administrator.
12. Self Centered	Self interested, non-participative, loner, asocial.
13. Status Consciousness	Status conscious, class conscious.
14. Conflict Inducer	Intra-group competitor, secretive, normative.
15. Face Saver	Indirect, avoids negatives, evasive.
16. Procedural	Ritualistic, formal, habitual, cautious, procedural.
17. Autocratic	Autocratic, dictatorial, bossy, elitist, ruler, domineering.
18. Participative	Non-individual, egalitarian, non-micro manager, delegator.
19. Humane Orientation	Generous, compassionate.
20. Modesty	Modest, self effacing, patient.
21. Autonomous	Individualistic, independent, autonomous, unique.

Adapted from Brodbeck et al. (2000)

^a Full item descriptions are omitted.

Culturally contingent leadership concepts

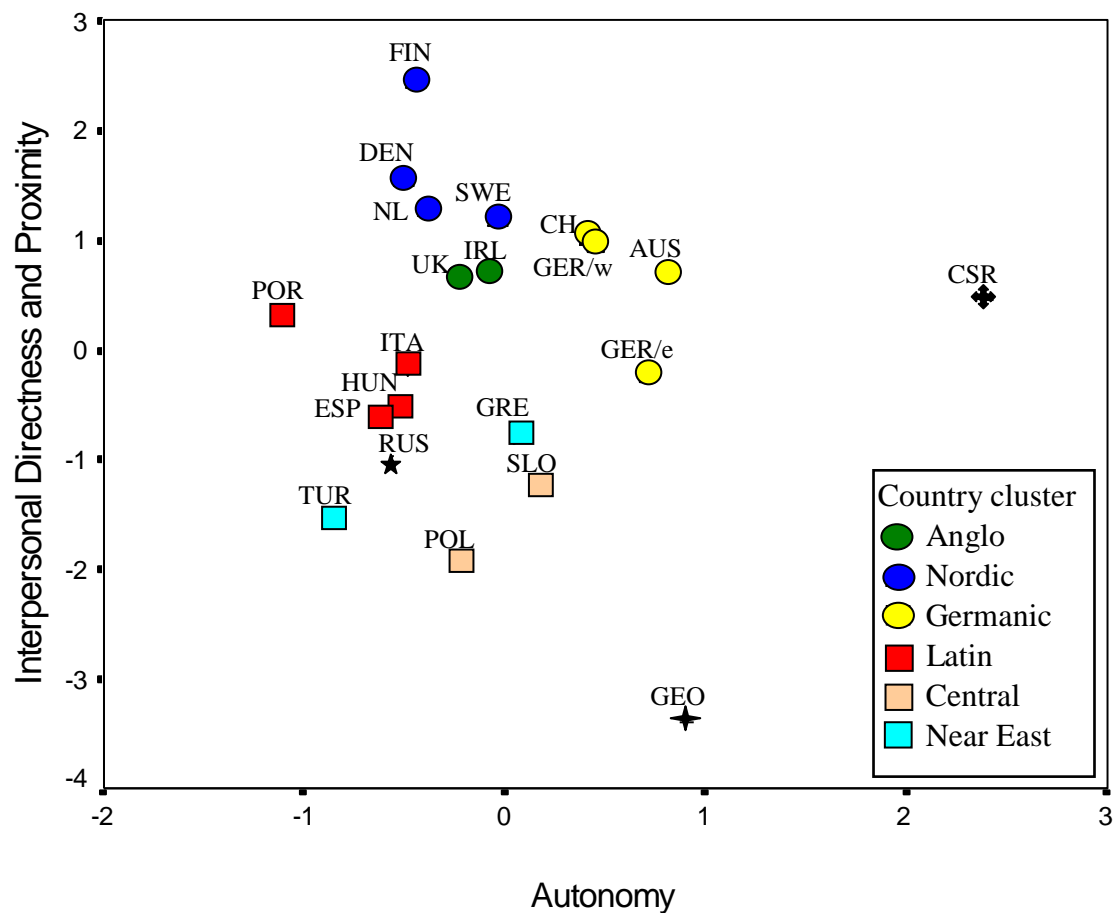
The most detailed account of culturally contingent leadership characteristics, currently published, is given in the European GLOBE study (Brodbeck, et al., 2000; a world wide account will be given in the near future by House et. al., in prep). It is based on the 21 leadership prototypicality dimensions identified by GLOBE (see Table 1) and involved more than 6.000 middle managers from 22 Pan-European countries. Results strongly support the hypothesis that leadership concepts vary by culture in Europe. Specifically, the five clusters of European countries, which according to previous cross-cultural research differ in cultural values (Anglo, Nordic, Germanic, Latin and Near East European countries), were upheld and shown to differ exactly the same way in leadership prototypes. One additional cluster of countries emerged (Central Europe) represented by Poland and Slovenia that share common leadership concepts that differ from the five other European clusters. Compatibility of leadership concepts from countries within the same cultural clusters is higher than from countries that belong to different cultural clusters and regions.

In order to compare singular countries on the basis of culturally contingent leadership prototypes, multi-dimensional analyses with the 21 leadership prototypicality dimensions were undertaken, resulting in three higher order dimensions: 1) *Interpersonal Directness and Proximity* (i.e., low face saving, low self-centred, low administrative; high inspirational & integrity), 2) *Autonomy* (i.e., individualistic, independent, autonomous, unique), and 3) *Modesty* (i.e., modest, self effacing, patient). Using the first two dimensions, each country's score on each dimension is plotted (see Figure 1) resulting in a between-country-distance map for culturally endorsed leadership prototypes. The European cultural regions (Anglo, Nordic, Germanic, Latin, Central and Near East) are again clearly distinguishable. The "Interpersonal Directness and Proximity" dimension mainly separates the South/East from the North/West European countries (the only exceptions are former East Germany and Portugal). In the Germanic, Anglo and Nordic countries, leadership attributes of higher interpersonal directness and proximity are perceived to be more prototypical of effective leadership than in South/East European countries. In respect of the "Autonomy" dimension, the Germanic cluster, Georgia and most prominently the Czech Republic showed leadership attributes of autonomy (individualistic, independent, unique) to be perceived as more prototypical of effective leadership than in the Anglo, Nordic, Central, Latin and Near East European countries.

Universal leadership concepts

In at least 95% of the 62 countries studied, three of the 21 dimensions were commonly perceived to substantially facilitate effective leadership, namely Integrity, Inspirational, and Team Integrator, and two were found to substantially impede effective leadership, namely, Malevolent and Face Saver (Den Hartog et al., 1999). The hypothesis put forward by House et al. (1999), that charismatic/ transformational leadership (Integrity, Visionary, Inspirational, Self-Sacrificial, Decisive, and Performance Orientation) is a universally endorsed leadership concept received mixed support. Only two (Inspiration, Integrity) of the altogether five dimensions are universally endorsed. More specifically, items that were universally endorsed include motive arouser, foresight, encouraging, communicative, positive, trustworthy, dynamic, and confidence builder. Items that were culturally contingent include enthusiastic, risk taking, ambitious, self-effacing, unique, self-sacrificial, sincere, sensitive, and compassionate (Den Hartog et al., 1999).

Universal endorsement of leadership prototypicality dimensions or items does not preclude cultural differences in the enactment and contextualisation of the underlying concepts. For example, inspirational characteristics usually associated with charismatic/transformational leadership (e.g., enthusiasm, compassionate or risk taker) are seen in some cultures as mixed blessing. In these societies the danger of self-exploitation (as a response to highly inspirational leadership) or risk taking in general (e.g., due to high uncertainty avoidance as part of the cultural values system) are discouraged. A charismatic/ transformational leader in those cultures is likely to show behaviours that are less enthusiastic, compassionate and risk taking than charismatic/ transformational leaders in societal cultures that are less sceptical about the values underlying these behaviours.

Figure 1. Between-country-distance map for leadership prototypes in 21 European countries.

Note. AUS = Austria, CH = Switzerland (German speaking part), CSR = Czech Republic, DEN = Denmark, FIN = Finland, UK = United Kingdom, GER/w = former West Germany, GER/e = former East Germany, GEO = Georgia, GRE = Greece, HUN = Hungary, ITA = Italy, IRL = Ireland, NL = Netherlands, POL = Poland, POR = Portugal, RUS = Russia, SLO = Slovenia, SPA = Spain, SWE = Sweden, TUR = Turkey.

Implications for Training and Assessment

How can the development of management training, coaching and consulting benefit from the GLOBE programme?

The ordering of countries on the leadership prototypicality dimensions identified by GLOBE is a useful tool with which relative differences between leadership concepts of different target cultures can be represented.

The amount of prior training, coaching and cross-cultural experience necessary to ensure effective cross-cultural leadership will depend obviously on the magnitude of differences between the target cultures.

As a starting point for cross-cultural training, a dimensional ordering of leadership concepts in different societal cultures is a useful tool to help extending managers' knowledge about how societal culture affects human cognition and behaviour, about concrete fits and

misfits in leadership prototypes from various societies, and about which problems to anticipate in particular situations of cross-cultural leadership.

The cultural proximity of two target countries determines the type of materials and training methods necessary for cross-cultural management preparations. More specifically, the ordering of countries on the GLOBE leadership dimensions is a useful tool for developing a range of training situations likely to generate cross-cultural misfit (or fit) in leader-follower relationships. For example, in Germany Integrity - an individualized version of Integrity that is compatible with Autonomy - is a central element to the concept of an effective leader. In contrast, in Spain Team Integrator is a central component, as is Integrity, which is a family collective version of Integrity that is compatible with Team Integrator. In Germany an effective leader is expected to show higher Autonomy and higher Interpersonal Directness than in Spain (see Figure 1). In situations with an inherent conflict between individual and group interests, it is most likely that German and Spanish parties collide. In line with the German leadership prototype a German manager quite naturally favours a more autonomous and interpersonally direct approach. This approach is likely to collide with the expectations of a Spanish manager who favours a team integrative and interpersonally less direct approach. Again, a collision occurs only in situations where the particular misfit in leadership prototypes becomes salient. In our example, this happens in a situation where individual and group interests are in conflict. In these and similar situations of a salient misfit in leadership prototypes, GLOBE results predict less leadership influence than in situations where leadership concepts are less likely to collide (e.g., Performance Orientation for German-Spanish cross-cultural situations).

For the development of cross-cultural training, GLOBE delivers empirically grounded information for any combination of target countries. All 21 leadership dimensions with altogether more than 100 items and item descriptions can be analysed and transformed into diagnostic training situations. Furthermore, the extent to which GLOBE predictions for particular combinations of target countries hold can be evaluated (in training situations and in vivo) on the basis of the particular misfits and fits in leadership prototypes.

GLOBE results are also useful for the design of personnel assessment and selection tools, although further empirical validation is necessary. The GLOBE questionnaire, translated into more than 30 different languages and repeatedly validated in altogether 64 countries, has been developed for the use of country level cross-cultural comparison. Once adapted to the individual level of analysis, it can be a useful tool to select individual expatriate managers or leaders of culturally diverse teams on the basis of how strongly their

individual values, beliefs systems and leadership concepts overlap with the values, beliefs systems and leadership concepts predominantly held in the target countries involved.

The future

During its first two phases GLOBE focused on perceived aspects of effective leadership. Behavioural differences in leadership across cultures and how they link to individual and organisational performance are currently investigated as part of the phases three and four of the GLOBE programme.

We are hoping that GLOBE stimulates other researchers to address even further issues of leadership concepts, behaviour and performance in the context of cross-cultural management. The cultural regions found and the leadership prototypicality dimensions identified provide a useful basis on which to develop concrete hypotheses for such research endeavours.

UK's central position makes ABS special

Take another look at Figure 1. UK leadership prototypes are located in a central position within the scatter plot of European countries. The average distance between the UK's and all other countries' positions is among the shortest of all countries. That means that leadership prototypes in the UK have the highest overlap with all other culturally endorsed leadership prototypes. This, and the fact that Aston Business School hosts a culturally diverse assembly of staff and students (not to mention all the other credentials ABS has to offer), makes it an ideal place for teaching and actively researching issues of cross-cultural management in Europe and world wide.

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