Cultural Dimensions of Leadership

Dr. Connson Chou Locke
Cultural Dimensions of Leadership

Dimensions of Cultural Difference

Leadership and Culture
What is culture?

• Something **shared** by all or almost all members of some social group

• Something older members of the group try to **pass on** to younger members

• Something that **shapes behaviour** or **structures one’s perception** of the world (e.g., morals, laws, customs)

Any stable group can develop a culture

Simple daily interactions can be affected by cultural differences

The Location: Taipei. The office building of a large Asian film production company, CMPC.

The Characters:
- Chinese male, 60’s, President of CMPC
- Chinese female, 30’s, Foreign Liaison for CMPC
- White American male, 50’s, President of HBO Asia
- White American female, 40’s, Legal Counsel, Warner Bros.

The Scene: All four are standing in an elevator on their way to a meeting in the CMPC President’s office. The elevator doors open. No one moves. Why is no one leaving the elevator?
Culture is deep and multi-layered

- **Observable Artifacts**: Manifestations of culture that can be easily observed, e.g., institutions, behaviour, clothing.

- **Values and Norms**: Widely accepted beliefs about right and wrong. Widely held expectations for how people “should” think and act.

- **Underlying Assumptions**: Taken-for-granted beliefs and values so deeply ingrained that individuals are not conscious of holding them.

Three dimensions of culture are relevant for leadership:

- **Power Distance**
  - Egalitarian/Informal
  - Hierarchical/Formal

- **Primary Focus**
  - Deal (individualistic)
  - Relationship (collectivistic)

- **Communication Style**
  - Low Context (direct)
  - High Context (indirect)
Power Distance

**Low Power Distance**
(egalitarian, informal)

- Australia/New Zealand
- Nordic countries, the Netherlands
- USA, Canada

**Egalitarian**
- Treat everyone equally; expect relatively equal distribution of power
- Expect boss to be participative and open
- Ascribe status based on achievements and competence
- Eschew symbols of status

**High Power Distance**
(hierarchical, formal)

- Most of Europe, Africa, Asia
- Mediterranean Region
- Arab World
- Latin America

**Hierarchical**
- Abide by social hierarchies; expect unequal distribution of power
- Expect boss to be decisive and authoritative
- Ascribe status based on age, gender, organizational rank
- Emphasis on symbols of status and giving “face”

What would you do?

You are riding in a car driven by a close friend. He hits a pedestrian. You know he was going at least 35 miles per hour in an area of the city where the maximum allowed speed is 20 miles per hour. There are no witnesses. His lawyer says that if you **testify under oath** that he was only driving 20 miles per hour it may save him from serious consequences.

Would you testify he was going 20 miles an hour?
Would you testify that your friend was driving within the speed limit?

**NO**
- Switzerland 97%
- United States 93%
- Canada 93%
- Ireland 92%
- Sweden 92%

**YES**
- Venezuela 68%
- Nepal 64%
- South Korea 63%
- Russia 56%
- China 53%

Universalistic (rule-oriented)

Particularistic (relationship-oriented)

Primary Focus

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Deal (individualistic/independent)</th>
<th>Relationship (collectivistic/interdependent)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Northern Europe, UK</td>
<td>South Africa, Latin Europe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North America</td>
<td>Central, Eastern Europe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australia/New Zealand</td>
<td>Chile, southern Brazil, northern Mexico</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hong Kong, Singapore</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Arab World</td>
<td>Most of Africa, Asia, and Latin America</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Deal-Focus**
- Willing to do business with strangers
- Business relationship can be agreed quickly
- Rely primarily on written agreements
- Impersonal and contract-based (detailed contracts)
- Achievement is important

**Relationship-Focus**
- Prefer doing business within personal network
- Business relationship requires time
- Often require personal contact to obtain a reply or action
- Personal and trust-based (flexible contracts; detail indicates lack of trust)
- Trust/cooperation are important

The simplest statement can be communicated in many ways

Low Context (direct)

- Close the door.
- Can you close the door?
- It might help to close the door.
- Would you mind awfully if I asked you to close the door?
- Did you forget the door?
- It’s getting cold in here.
- I don’t want the cats to get out of the house.

High Context (indirect)
## Communication Style

<table>
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<td>Mediterranean Europe</td>
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### Low Context
- Deal-focused, therefore gets to the point quickly
- Precise and transparent
- Direct questions
- Criticism can be blunt
- Expect instructions to be clear and specific

### High Context
- Relationship-focused, therefore does not like to say “no”
- Indirect and ambiguous, esp. if message is negative
- Avoids direct questions
- Criticism is often disguised
- Instructions that are too specific can be insulting
Subcultures can exhibit conflicting communication styles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WOMEN tend to:</th>
<th>MEN tend to:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Take turns</td>
<td>• Interrupt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Self-denigrate</td>
<td>• Use one-upsmanship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Ask questions</td>
<td>• Avoid questions (lose face)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Use “we”, not “I”</td>
<td>• Use “I”, not “we”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Say “sorry”</td>
<td>• Avoid apologizing (lose face)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Avoid stereotyping individuals; there is wide variation within each country.
What is the culture in your organisation?

Egalitarian/ Informal

Power Distance

Hierarchical/ Formal

Deal (individualistic)

Primary Focus

Relationship (collectivistic)

Low Context (direct)

Communication Style

High Context (indirect)

How do these dimensions help you understand and manage your team, colleagues, and stakeholders?
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Dimensions of Cultural Difference

Leadership and Culture
Leaders create organisational culture through their behaviours

**Leader Behaviour**
- Give team urgent work at 7pm before every major presentation

**Group Norm/Value**
- Last minute work is okay
- Work is more important than personal time

**Org Culture**
- 24-7 on call
- High stress and burn out
- Only the “tough” survive
Culture and Leadership

“Culture and leadership are two sides of the same coin in that leaders first start the process of culture creation when they create groups and organizations. After cultures exist, they determine the criteria for leadership and thus determine who will or will not be a leader.” (Schein, 2010)
A large portion of communication is nonverbal

Channels of Communication

- Kinesthetic
- Visual
- Paralinguistic
- Linguistic

Nonverbal signals
Nonverbal signals have a greater impact than we may realise

People in power are expected to...

... use eye contact (while speaking)
... speak audibly with a confident tone
... speak fluidly (pauses, no fillers)
... use confident gestures (no fidgeting)
... stand up straight
... take up space

Leaders who use a confident demeanour are judged to be more:

- Inspirational
- Leader-like
- Influential
- Charismatic
- Effective
- Competent
Our judgments of leaders are based on mental prototypes

There is no critical attribute that defines all leaders

The leader prototype clashes with the female stereotype

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Male stereotype</th>
<th>Communal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Agentic</strong></td>
<td><strong>Female stereotype</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Concerned with mastery and control</td>
<td>• Concerned about welfare of others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Assertive</td>
<td>• Kind</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Strong</td>
<td>• Warm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Decisive</td>
<td>• Sympathetic</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

“backlash” = agentic women in male-dominated jobs receive more negative assessments for like-ability

Gender and cultural stereotypes can cause “unconscious bias”
Awareness and attitude are important

1. Awareness in male and female decision makers (Implicit Association Test)
   – But awareness is not enough
2. Motivation of decision makers to pay attention and avoid stereotypes
   – Help them find the time
3. Acceptance of men in counter-stereotypical roles
4. Inclusive language to avoid us-versus-them
Real change cannot occur without changing the systems
Female leaders must balance agentic and communal behaviours

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Communal</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Demanding</td>
<td>Caring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authoritative</td>
<td>Participative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-advocating</td>
<td>Other-serving</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distant</td>
<td>Approachable</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Do you do this already? Have you seen it done well? Share some examples.

And learn to balance their own needs with those of others

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Others</th>
<th>Self</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Focus on others</td>
<td>Take center stage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seek approval</td>
<td>Proceed until apprehended</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Be modest</td>
<td>Project personal power</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work harder</td>
<td>Be politically savvy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Play it safe</td>
<td>Play to win</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Play it ruthlessly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Be narcissistic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Be arrogant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Be a ruthless politician</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Flynn, Heath, & Holt (2011) Break Your Own Rules: How to change the patterns of thinking that block women’s paths to power
Manage your energy level

Leaders affect the energy level around them and must consciously manage their own energy levels.
Use power poses to boost self-confidence

www.ted.com/talks/amy_cuddy_your_body_language_shapes_who_you_are.html
Develop your personal bases of power

**Bases of Power**
(French and Raven, 1959; Raven, 1965)

- **Legitimate**: Based on target’s felt obligation to comply with agent
- **Reward**: Based on target’s desire for valued resources or outcomes
- **Coercive**: Based on target’s fear of punishment
- **Expert**: Based on target’s respect for agent’s expertise
- **Referent**: Based on target’s desire to maintain a good relationship (because of agent’s attractive personal qualities)
- **Information**: Based on target’s change of attitude as a result of agent information and logic
Focus on your Circle of Influence in order to create change

Covey, S. (1989) The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People