

Leadership in Cross-Cultural Environments

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Abstract

In this age, there are few successful businesses that work with people from only one culture. Most businesses employ people from many cultural backgrounds, and many companies either outsource parts of their business or are outsourcing partners for other businesses. This is why leaders in the need to be able to adapt their leadership skills, managing people of different cultures, they have to be able to understand and capture the essence of each culture quickly, because culture is so important in shaping customer or employee behavior. In addition, leaders must learn to shape culture so that it is positive, constructive, to get the best from the individuals with whom they work efficiently and aligned with the direction the organization is taking.

Most people will agree that leadership is a crucial element in the success of businesses, especially in international or multicultural organizations. Leadership has been studied a lot in the last decades, but in our globalized world it becomes even more significant to understand and to learn how to practice cross-cultural leadership in a productive way. One should keep in mind the significance of leadership issues on global management, team work, the relationship between leaders and those they work and communicate with, etc. In addition, we have to ask ourselves how culture affects leadership and leadership styles, the influence of social and cultural context on the performance of teams, and should we adapt ourselves or not when we deal with people from diverse cultures.

In this paper I will try to show how to become an effective leader in cross-cultural environments, I will look at different theories and describe what has been found by GLOBE, an international research project about leadership and organization behavior, in Europe and particularly in Germany.

INTRODUCTION

When we think of leadership, like every other social activity, we are focusing on the process of social interpretation. Everyone seeks to make sense of events as a part of a larger context, to provide meaning to the events (Gannon & Newman, 2002). We judge whether or not a person can be a leader, what are the characteristics or the typical traits that make a leader a good leader, what should or shouldn't be done, and the qualities and behaviors of effective leadership, etc. The individuals that we choose to identify as leaders are the ones that succeed to provide meaning to events, and influence our understanding (Gannon & Newman, 2002).

Leaders are not working in a vacuum, they work in a specific context, specific culture, they are inherent part of their society (Gannon & Newman, 2002). The success of a leader and his or her acceptance in the contest, are influenced from several aspects.

First, one should adapt to the context that he or she work in, remembering that a culture has shared motives, values, beliefs, identities, and interpretations or meanings of significant events that result from common experiences of members of collectives and are transmitted across age generations (Brodbeck *et al.*, 2002).

Misumi (1985) argued that there are certain universal functions that effective leaders must fulfil themselves or see that they are fulfilled by others. He also mentioned that the way to fulfil the functions vary from different cultural contexts (Gannon & Newman, 2002). Therefore, if one aspires to establish a universal leadership process, one should plan measures that are broad and general in the content. But, if one aspires to understand cultural differences in the given meaning to a particular leader action, one should plan measures that are focusing on specific behavior (Gannon & Newman, 2002). In other words, there are general leadership functions, but the meaning to a specific action is culturally biased, and is judged in specific contexts. We think that one should take into consideration these two things to better understand how leaders in cross-cultural situations should act.

Many leadership theories were developed in the USA, and were tested afterwards outside of the US. We will describe the Transformational leadership theory, because transformational leadership has gained academic attention over the last 20 years as a new paradigm for understanding leadership (Gannon & Newman, 2002). And we will describe the GLOBE project, which was built around several theoretical perspectives in Europe and particularly in Germany as a case study.

Transformational leadership

Transformational leadership is a type of leadership style that leads to positive changes in those who follow. Transformational leaders are generally energetic, enthusiastic and passionate. Not only are these leaders concerned and involved in the process; they are also focused on helping every member of the group succeed as well (Gannon & Newman, 2002). "The concept of transformational leadership was initially introduced by leadership expert and presidential biographer James MacGregor Burns. According to Burns (1978), transformational leadership can be seen when "leaders and followers make each other to advance to a higher level of moral and motivation." Through the strength of their vision and personality, transformational leaders are able to inspire followers to change expectations, perceptions and motivations to work towards common goals" (Cherry, 2009).

Later, researcher Bernard M. Bass expanded upon Burns original ideas to develop what is today referred to as Bass' Transformational Leadership Theory. According to Bass (1985), transformational leadership can be defined based on the impact that it has on followers. Transformational leaders, garner trust, respect and admiration from their followers" (Cherry, 2009).

The Transformational leadership assumptions are that:

- (a) People will follow a person who inspires them
- (b) A person with vision and passion can achieve great things, and
- (c) The way to get things done is by injecting enthusiasm and energy. Working

for a Transformational Leader can be a wonderful and uplifting experience. They put passion and energy into everything. They care about you and want you to succeed.

Transformational Leadership starts with the development of a vision, a view of the future that will excite and convert potential followers (Bass, 1985). In the "one minute manager" determination this is the "goal". This goal may be developed by the leader, by the senior team or may emerge from a broad series of discussions. The important factor is that the leader buys into it, and erodes the others with him. As "The One Minute Manager" said: The leader and the follower should agree on one goals, see what good behavior looks like-that will help to reach the goal, write out each of your goals on a single sheet of paper using less than 250 words, read and re-read each goal, which requires only a minute or so each time you do it, take a minute every once in a while out of your day to look at your performance, and see whether or not your behavior matches your goal (Blanchard *et al.*, 1982).

The next step, which in fact never stops, is to constantly sell the vision. This takes energy and commitment, there will be people that will immediately buy into the vision, and some will join slowly than others (Bass, 1985). The Transformational Leader thus takes every opportunity and will use whatever works to convince others to climb on board (Bass, 1985). In order to create followers, the Transformational Leader has to be very careful in creating trust, and their personal integrity is a critical part of the package (Bass, 1985). In other words the leader is selling himself as well as the goal or vision.

In addition to the "selling" activity, one should seek the way forward (Bass, 1985). Some Transformational Leaders know the way, and simply want others to follow them. Others do not have a ready strategy, but will happily lead the exploration of possible routes to the "promised land" – the goal. The route forwards may not be obvious in the beginning, and may not be specified in to details, but with a clear vision, the direction will always be known (Bass, 1985). Thus, finding the way forward can be an ongoing process of course correction and the Transformational Leader will accept that there will be failures and unknown surprises along the way (Bass, 1985).

The next stage in Transformational Leadership is to remain up-front and central during the action (Bass, 1985). Transformational Leaders should be always visible and stand up to be counted rather than hide behind their troops. They are acting as role models, showing by their attitudes and actions how everyone else should behave (Bass, 1985). They also make continued efforts to motivate and rally their followers, constantly doing the rounds, listening, soothing and enthusing.

The leaders commitment, as much as anything else, is what keeps people going, particularly through the darker times when some may question whether the vision can ever be achieved. If the people do not believe that they can succeed, then their efforts will flag (Bass, 1985). The Transformational Leader seeks to infect and re-infect their followers with a high level of commitment to the goal. One method that can be used by the Transformational Leader to sustain motivation is in the use of ceremonies, rituals and other cultural symbolism (Bass, 1985). Small changes get big hurrahs, pumping up their significance as indicators of real progress. Overall, they balance their attention between action that creates progress and the mental state of their followers (Bass, 1985).

The best way, according to The One Minute Manager, to motivate, improve, and progress is by "Praising" (Blanchard *et al.*, 1982). Praising works well when you:

- (a) tell people up front that you are going to let them know how they are doing
- (b) praise people immediately
- (c) tell people what they did right and be specific
- (d) tell people how good you feel about what they did right, and how it helps the organization and the other people who work there
- (e) stop for a moment of silence to let them "feel" how good you feel
- (f) encourage them to do more of the same, and
- (g) shake hands or touch people in a way that makes it clear that you support their success in the organization (Blanchard *et al.*, 1982).

One should keep in mind that perhaps more than anything, Transformational Leaders are people-oriented and believe that success comes first and last through deep and sustained commitment (Bass, 1985).

When we understand that failure will be an integral part of our lives, we should embrace it, learn from it and to try to develop and grow. The best way according to The One Minute manager, to improve and progress is by Reprimand. The One Minute Reprimand works well when you:

- (a) tell people beforehand that you are going to let them know how they are doing and in no uncertain terms. *The first half of the reprimand:*
- (b) reprimand people immediately
- (c) tell people what they did wrong - be specific
- (d) tell people how you feel about what they did wrong - and in no uncertain terms
- (e) stop for a few seconds of uncomfortable silence to let them feel how you feel.

The second half of the reprimand

- (f) shake hands, or touch them in a way that lets them know you are honestly on their side
- (g) remind them how much you value them
- (h) reaffirm that you think well of them but not of their performance in this situation,
- (i) realize that when the reprimand is over, it's over (Blanchard *et al.*, 1982).

To summarize, Bass (1985) suggested that there were four different components of transformational leadership.

The first is **Intellectual Stimulation** - leaders not only challenge the status quo; they also encourage creativity among followers, encourages followers to explore new ways of doing things and new opportunities to learn.

Secondly, **Individualized Consideration** leaders should offer support and encouragement to individual followers. In order to foster supportive relationships, leaders keep lines of communication open so that followers feel free to share ideas and so that leaders can offer direct recognition of each follower's unique contributions.

Third, **Inspirational Motivation** - leaders have a clear vision that they are able to articulate to followers, help followers experience the same passion and motivation to fulfill these goals. Finally, **Idealized Influence** – leaders serves as a role model for followers. Because followers trust and respect the leader, they emulate the leader and internalize his or her ideals" (Cherry, 2009).

Transformational leadership and cross-cultural leadership

The culture-specific perspective suggests that many leadership theories developed in North American culture may not be generalizable when used by leaders with different cultural orientations because they are bounded by their roots in Western cultures (Hofstede, 2001). Individuals with different cultural values may perceive leadership differently (Hofstede, 2001). If so, Why Cultural Values Might Matter for Transformational Leadership?

Cultural groups vary in their conceptions of the most important characteristics of effective leadership (Hofstede, 2001). In addition, cultural values have an important influence on the development of prototypical leadership ideals (Hofstede, 2001). This is why different countries seem to have different prototypes of business leaders. The effectiveness of a leader is thus inferred through the lens of cultural values. Leadership styles that are consistent with the cultural values of a nation are reinforced and encouraged (Hofstede, 2001).

Each culture is based on traditional values; these values are reflected and influence the relationship between dimensions of transformational leadership (appropriate role model, intellectual stimulation, high performance expectations, and articulating a vision) and the leadership effectiveness. There are a lot of different aspects that should be taking care and examined when one wants to fully understand how to become a productive leader in a cross-cultural environment. Next, we will see what

GLOBE has found in Europe. What are the most significant traits, the cultural aspects that should be taken in consideration?

According to GLOBE (Global Leadership and Organizational Behavior Effectiveness), The definition of culture is, “Shared motives, values, beliefs, identities, and interpretations or meanings of significant events that result from common experiences of members of collectives and are transmitted across age generations” (Brodbeck *et al.*, 2002). The GLOBE program is a multi-phase, multi-method project examining the interrelationships between societal culture, organizational culture, and leadership. The goal of GLOBE is to develop empirically-based theories to describe, understand, and predict the impact of specific cultural variables on leadership and organizational processes, and to determine their effectiveness (Brodbeck *et al.*, 2002).

Another study from GLOBE had pointed out the interesting facts about leadership prototypes and characteristics in European countries (Brodbeck *et al.*, 2000). This study was conducted in 22 European countries, which are England, Ireland, Netherlands, Sweden, Finland, Denmark, Germany (West), Germany (East), Switzerland, Austria, Czech Republic, France, Hungary, Italy, Spain, Portugal, Poland, Slovenia, Greece, Turkey, Russia and Georgia. All countries are categorized into two dimensions: North and South regions, and West and East regions; and also in six clusters based on cultural value which are Anglo cluster, Latin Cluster, Germanic cluster, Nordic cluster, Central cluster and Near east cluster (Brodbeck *et al.*, 2000).

The results showed clearly the different rankings of leadership attributes between regions and clusters. For example, the attribute ‘participation’ was rated as highly prototypically leadership attributes in North/West region but as the slightly facilitative leadership attributes in South/East region; and the attribute ‘administrative’ was rated as slightly prototypical attribute in Anglo and Nordic countries but as highly prototypical attribute in Germanic countries and South/East region. The attribute ‘Interpersonal directness and Proximity’ are also more strongly associated with outstanding leadership for North/West European managers than managers from the east region; and the attribute ‘Autonomy’ are more strongly associated with outstanding leadership in Germanic countries and the Czech Republic than in Latin countries (Brodbeck *et al.*, 2000).

As this study has been done in just few years after German reunification and the fall of communism regime, the cause of major geopolitical changes in many countries in Europe; it showed how European community and the economic integration stimulate the need of adaptation of managers to cross-cultural work environment. Expatriate managers need to compromise their leadership behaviors toward their team members in order to reach optimal team performance (Brodbeck *et al.*, 2000). According to characteristics of high performing teams; the team needs to start with appropriate purpose to reach optimal productivity and good morale. But the means to those ends are empowerment, relationships and communication, flexibility and recognition and appreciation (Bianchard *et al.*, 1996).

Because different cultural values can also cause misunderstanding and conflicts; so it is very important to learn, to understand, and to show respect other culture via communication. This study can be helpful in planning the training for cross-cultural encounters and produce advices for the employees who face the cultural challenges (Brodbeck *et al.*, 2000).

Germany - as a case study

One of GLOBE purpose is to help executives in the U.S. and other countries to better understand German cultural practices and values, and their implications for effective leadership. This will be helpful in managing German operations, negotiating with

German counterparts, and in managing cross-border mergers, acquisitions, and alliances with German corporations (Brodbeck *et al.*, 2002).

The GLOBE project has shown that characteristics attributed to a country's outstanding leaders match closely with its cultural values and practices. Managers were asked about their perceptions of current practices ("as is") and ideal values ("should be") pertaining to nine societal and organizational cultural dimensions, such as, common behaviours, institutional practices, and prescriptions defined within GLOBE (Brodbeck, Frese, Javidan, 2002). The respondents then identified those characteristics and attributes that contribute to or hinder outstanding leadership.

The most pronounced German cultural value is performance orientation. Performance orientation is the degree to which a collective encourages and rewards group members for performance improvement and excellence (Brodbeck *et al.*, 2002). The first secret in the One Minute Manager, "One Minute Goals", makes clear what each person's responsibilities are and what they are being held accountable for. Perhaps that could make the "as is" more positive and decrease the thought of how things "should be". If German companies had their employees write down each of their goals in no more than 250 words, everyone would know what is expected of them (Blanchard *et al.*, 1982). By doing so, everyone understands their objectives, which can lead to a more productive staff and better performance. When goals are undefined it can lead to hidden agendas, which only make people more confused and inefficient. It could also increase conflict and controversy among the interrelations between the manager and his or her employees, which Germans already have enough of.

The hallmark of German cultural practices of German managers is high levels of uncertainty avoidance (ranked among the top 25% of all countries) and assertiveness. Uncertainty avoidance is the extent to which a collective relies on social norms, rules, and procedures to alleviate unpredictability of future events (Brodbeck *et al.*, 2002). High uncertainty avoidance, in reference to German managers, means that Germans prefer their lives to be structured, well organized, and secure. They rely on rules and institutionalized procedures to reduce stress and anxiety when facing ambiguity and uncertainty (Brodbeck *et al.*, 2002). Assertiveness is the degree to which individuals are assertive, confrontational, and aggressive in their relationship with others. High assertiveness means that Germans are more confrontational in their relationships with others than members of most other societies are (Brodbeck *et al.*, 2002).

German managers also showed low levels of humane orientation, the degree to which a collective encourages and rewards individuals for being fair, altruistic, generous, caring and kind to others (Brodbeck *et al.*, 2002). Social interaction in German companies tends to be more task-oriented, straightforward, and less "kind" than in many other countries. Getting the task done, minimizing errors, and achieving high quality standards seem to be more important than compassion and interpersonal consideration. At work, compassion is low, interpersonal relations tend to be aggressive and assertive, and the language that people use tends to be straightforward and stern (Brodbeck *et al.*, 2002). Conflict and controversy seems to also be built into the German societal culture.

In the One Minute Manager, there was a quote that well-defined what an effective manager is; "Effective managers manage themselves and the people they work with so that both the organization and the people profit from their presence" (Blanchard *et al.*, 1982). It depends on the right combination of leadership style, behavior, and management to obtain the desired outcome. There are many large German organizations that are very successful, but the question is, is the organization profiting more than the employees? Effective German leaders are characterized by high performance orientation, low compassion, low self-protection, low team orientation, high autonomy, and high participation (Brodbeck *et al.*, 2002).

One minute praising lets you know precisely what you've done right and you get praised for it immediately. When a manager notices what others are doing well and praises them for it, it makes the employee feel good and, produce good results (Blanchard *et al.*, 1982). The key is to get crystal clear feedback so you know exactly what you have done and what you can do to learn from your mistakes. This technique could be very useful in German organizations. When one is praised, even for the littlest thing, it makes him or her feel good to know that what one was doing was being noticed and appreciated, which, in turn, encourages them to keep doing the best they can and to reach their highest performance potential. One minute reprimands are just as important as praising. The right way is to give the reprimand as soon as an employee has done something wrong and that the manager specifies exactly what the employee has done wrong (Blanchard *et al.*, 1982). German managers tend to be "tough on the issue, tough on the person". Perhaps German managers should rather attack the behavior of the person in a certain situation instead of attacking the person—a more "tough on the issue, soft on the person" leadership approach to show more compassion.

This brings us to the paradox of low compassion and the ideal of social welfare, mentioned in Brodbeck *et al.* (2002) article. On the one hand, as mentioned earlier, Germany scores low on humane orientation and compassion at work. On the other hand, Germany enjoys many humane-oriented institutions and legal practices. The highly valued principles of social justice, which pertain to social fairness, generosity, and caring, are institutionalized and enshrined in German law, for example, by measures of the social market economy, co-determination, and workers' councils (Brodbeck *et al.*, 2002). Therefore, the German approach to humane orientation seems to be manifested in institutionalized societal caring for people, especially the disadvantaged, rather than in interpersonal relations at work.

Germans strong tendency to avoid uncertainty in people's lives may have prompted the development of elaborate institutionalized social systems to take care of people and to reduce risks to individuals and institutions (Brodbeck *et al.*, 2002). As Transformational leadership characteristics are also focused on interpersonal relationship orientation, perhaps promoting this concept can be helpful to persuade the German managers to take care of feeling of their team members; in order to build social rapport in team and increase their appreciation in the next stage of team building.

The reunification of East and West Germany in 1990 had an influence on how Germans do business, but also created an asymmetric situation. The reunification was not a cultural merger of equals, rather the West German system was substituted for the old system in East Germany virtually overnight (Brodbeck *et al.*, 2002). West German middle managers' treatment of the East Germans was discriminatory at work—many East German leaders were not promoted, were demoted, or even lost their jobs. The West German style, emphasizing on individual achievements and high flexibility, made East Germans more aware of their collectivistic cultural inheritance. Even years after the reunification, East Germans had to compete with the "Besser-Wessies", which made their future outlook even more threatening (Brodbeck *et al.*, 2002).

Germany's past economic success may have resulted from high performance orientation and assertiveness paired with low interpersonal compassion at work, which allows for higher levels of conflict and controversy at work. However, if dealt with properly, task conflict does not turn into relationship conflict, and if a minimum of mutual trust is given, conflict is likely to result in high quality and efficiency at work (Brodbeck *et al.*, 2002).

CONCLUSIONS

One approach to leadership assumes that while some people are natural born leaders, it is a skill that can be learned provided you have certain inherited characteristics or personality traits. Equally, some people don't like to be in a position of leadership responsibility, but can still have a subtle influence by demonstrating through doing what they are best at and in turn, inspire without actively motivating. You might be excellent and effective at leading in one area that you're experienced in and/or good at, but could also be only mediocre at other types of leadership roles. One approach may be effective for one person or culture, and not for another. This is obviously seen in effective business leadership approaches in Germany compared to other countries and between East and West Germany. Self-protective leadership (conflict inducer, face saver, self-centered) is seen to inhibit effective leadership in Germany, because high self-protective behavior of a leader is perceived to inhibit open conflict and controversy in favor of saving face. However, East German managers seem to be more lenient towards self-protective leadership attributes than West German managers (Brodbeck *et al.*, 2002).

In the literature, *The Nature of Leadership*, it is mentioned that, "Effective leaders, who can inspire their people to realize their personal and collective potential, are often the deciding factor between a company being good at what it does and achieving greatness" (Mullins, 2007). We believe that this is true. If the employees are motivated and inspired by their leader they will work to reach their goals and the organization will benefit from it. Motivation is an important part of leadership.

The path-goal theory is "based on the belief that the individual's motivation is dependent upon expectations that increased effort to achieve an improved level of performance will be successful, and expectations that improved performance will be instrumental in obtaining positive rewards and avoiding negative outcomes" (Mullins, 2007). The outcomes depend on the type of leadership behavior. GLOBE came up with five different prototypes that describe leadership approaches (transformational/charismatic, humble collaborator, individualistic, bureaucrat, and oppressive). The transformational/charismatic leader (who is also administratively competent and team integrative) and the humble collaborator (who reduces status differentials and encourages participation) seem to best fit the leadership prototypes held by German middle managers (Mullins, 2007).

Unfortunately, there aren't many real leaders who have all of the attributes that ideal leadership types comprise and there is sometimes an overlap between prototypes. For example, the overlap between the autocratic and individualistic leader types suggests that German middle managers are more tolerant towards autocratic leadership styles. Also, a person with high assertiveness and low humane orientation may still be perceived as a transformational/charismatic leader in Germany (and get away with poor interpersonal behavior) because interpersonal humane orientation is less highly valued in German society and organizations than performance orientation and decisiveness (Brodbeck *et al.*, 2002). Although German leadership approaches seem to be working out well for the benefit of the German organizations, there is room for future improvement. A critical challenge is how to restructure the traditionally institutionalized mechanisms for maintaining social welfare, cooperative capital-labor relationships, and personal safety while at the same time cutting down on high taxes, high labor costs, and a cumbersome bureaucracy (Brodbeck *et al.*, 2002). Having managers who are insensitive to the feelings of employees and so task focused, that learning and development are not on their agendas. Another need for change is a higher level of future-orientation "should be" among German middle managers. In globalized and multicultural workforces soft skills become critical attributes for success. German managers need to change their "Tough on the issues, tough on the

person” approach to a more compassionate one. Basically, effective leadership is about dealing with people (compassion) as much as it is about dealing with change (future-orientation) (Brodbeck *et al.*, 2002). Therefore, I recommend promoting the importance of interpersonal communications in organization to make both leaders and team members better understand feeling of each other and contribute deep-routed rapport between them. More communications between leaders and team member could help employees realize supporting from their organization, which is called ‘Perceived organizational support - POS’. Those results can lead to organizational commitment, an emotional attachment toward organization, which can decrease turnover rated and increase quality of performance (Nehmeh, 2009; Shanock & Eisenberger, 2006).

In addition, one should always remember that he or she should be open minded, invest time in knowing his or hers colleagues and subordinates. Understanding and accepting different cultures into an organization and a team could lead to a more productive and high performing teams.

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