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**POINT**

Leadership Is Culturally Bound

Leaders must adapt their styles to different national cultures. What works in China is not likely to work in Canada or France.⁹⁹ Can you imagine, for instance, executives at a large department store chain in Canada, such as The Bay, being effective by humiliating their employees? But that approach works at the Asia Department Store in central China.¹⁰⁰ Executives there blatantly brag about practising “heartless” management, requiring new employees to undergo two to four weeks of military-type training in order to increase their obedience, and conducting the store’s in-house training sessions in a public place where employees can openly suffer embarrassment from their mistakes.

National culture affects leadership style by way of the follower. Leaders cannot choose their styles at will. They are constrained by the cultural conditions that their followers have come to expect. For instance, Korean leaders are expected to be paternalistic toward employees; Arab leaders who show kindness or generosity without being asked to do so are seen by other Arabs as weak; and Japanese leaders are expected to be humble and speak infrequently.¹⁰¹

Consistent with the contingency approach, leaders need to adjust their styles to the unique cultural aspects of a country. For example, a manipulative or autocratic style is compatible with high power distance, and we find high power distance scores in Russia and Spain, and Arab, Far Eastern, and most Latin countries. Power distance rankings should also be good indicators of employee willingness to accept participative leadership. Participation is likely to be most effective in low power distance cultures as exist in Norway, Finland, Denmark, and Sweden.

**COUNTERPOINT**

Leadership Transcends Culture

The GLOBE research program, which we introduced in Chapter 3, has gathered data on approximately 18 000 middle managers in 825 organizations, covering 62 countries. It is the most comprehensive cross-cultural study of leadership ever undertaken. So its findings should not be quickly dismissed. It is illuminating that one of the results coming from the GLOBE study is that there are some universal aspects to leadership. Specifically, a number of the elements making up transformational leadership appear to be associated with effective leadership regardless of what country the leader is in.¹⁰² This conclusion is very important because it flies in the face of the contingency view that leadership style needs to adapt to cultural differences.

What elements of transformational leadership appear universal? Vision, foresight, providing encouragement, trustworthiness, dynamism, positiveness, and proactiveness. The results led two members of the GLOBE team to conclude that “effective business leaders in any country are expected by their subordinates to provide a powerful and proactive vision to guide the company into the future, strong motivational skills to stimulate all employees to fulfill the vision, and excellent planning skills to assist in implementing the vision.”¹⁰³

What might explain the universal appeal of these transformational leader attributes? It has been suggested that pressures toward common technologies and management practices, as a result of global competition and multinational influences, may make some aspects of leadership universally accepted. If this is true, we may be able to select and train leaders in a universal style and thus significantly raise the quality of leadership worldwide.



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