Global Leadership Study: A Theoretical Framework

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Abstract

Traditional leadership theory and research courses do not adequately prepare students for cross-cultural leadership. This article notes six premises of Western theories and demonstrates the limitations of these premises in non-Western settings. A framework for the study of cross-cultural leadership, The Global Leadership-Learning Pyramid, is proposed, and the theoretical foundations are discussed.

Introduction

Issues of global leadership intrude on our lives everyday. Business, politics, and popular culture are on the world stage, a milieu of political, economic, and social changes. Our runaway world (Giddens, 2003) is out of control, filled with risks and culturally complex. Taking the lead has always required talent, skill, preparation, and practice. When the complexities and vagaries of a different culture are added to the mix, the leader must expand his or her leadership repertoire. How then do we prepare future leaders for the global theatre?

In this article, I address six premises of Western leadership theories derived from history and culture that present potential obstacles to leadership in non-Western cultures. These premises join with research findings on cross-cultural interaction to form a theoretical framework for the study of global leadership.

Literature Review

In surveying the literature, I noted three relevant themes. The first was the nature of globalization and its ramifications for individuals and societies. Second was how societal history and culture shape global differences. The third theme encompassed the common threads or premises that give leadership theories their Western identities and constrain them in their global application.

Globalization

The works of Giddens (2003), Hofstede and Hofstede (2005), and The GLOBE Study (House, Hanges, Javidan, Dorfman, & Gupta, 2004) provided complementary perspectives on issues of globalization. Giddens' short treatise on the transformative aspects of globalization presented a succinct definition and addressed issues of national entrenchment. While Hofstede and Hofstede countered Giddens' arguments that a new world order is inevitable, they concurred with his views on entrenchment, emphasizing the importance of national identities to cross-cultural interactions. Dorfman, Hanges, and Brodbeck (2004) in The GLOBE Study supported Hofstede and Hofstede's conclusions on the importance of cultural identity, urging adaptation of leadership style to meet societal demands.

History, Culture, and Leadership

Geert Hofstede (1980) opened the eyes of the business world to the importance of culture to management almost 30 years ago. More recently, The GLOBE Study (House, et al., 2004) has expanded and refined the implications of culture for leadership. Brodbeck, Hanges, Dickson, Gupta, and Dorfman (2004) concluded from The GLOBE Study that societal values were the most important influence on desired leadership within organizations. This conclusion supported the Wren and Swatez (1995) conceptual model that embedded elements of the immediate or organizational context within the larger contexts of history and culture. Hofstede and Hofstede (2005) and The GLOBE Study further explained how history and culture shape leadership practices and follower expectations. Dorfman, et al. (2004) developed from The GLOBE Study results culturally endorsed leadership profiles to describe the leadership patterns of the study's 10 cultural clusters. They demonstrated that the values, ideas, and beliefs of a culture or culture cluster determine its conception of effective leadership.

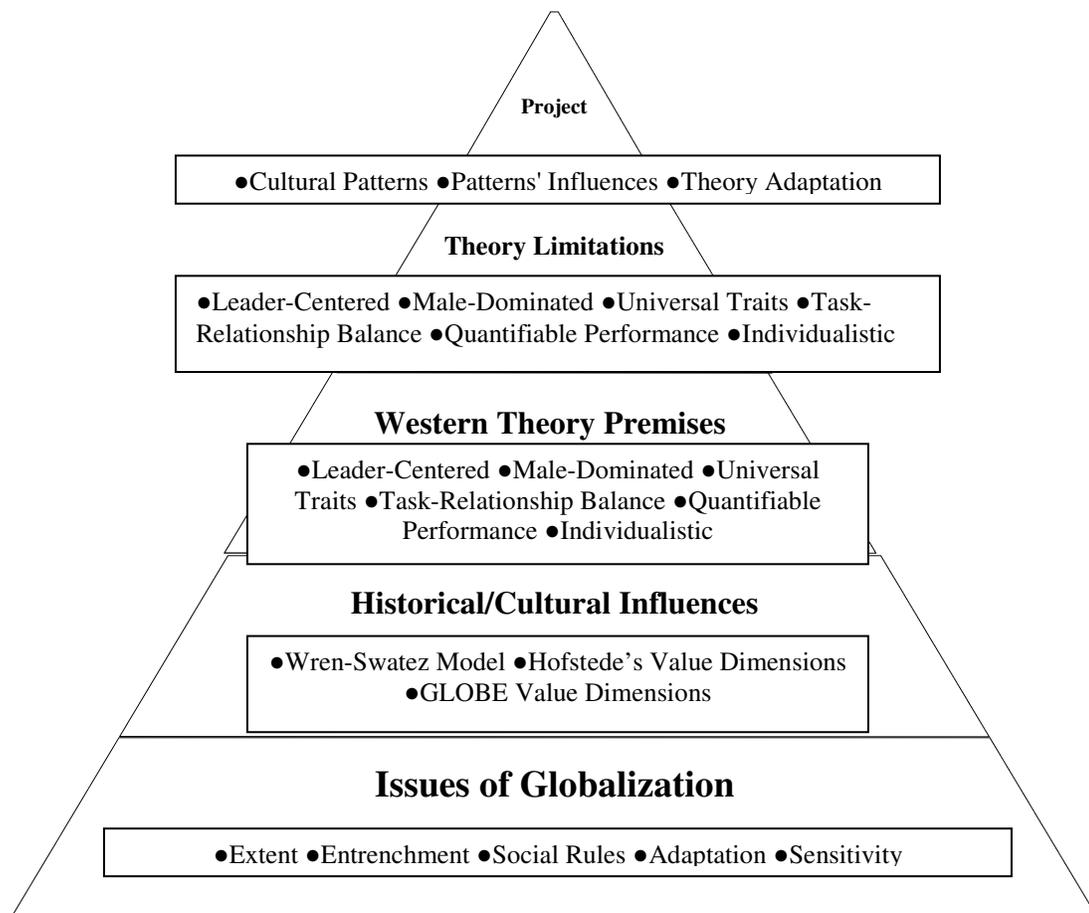## Premises of Western Leadership Theories

Findings of Hofstede and Hofstede (2005) and The GLOBE Study (House, et al., 2004) also demonstrated the discrepancies between Western leadership theories and non-Western leadership practices. GLOBE findings on power distance (Carl, Gupta, & Javidan, 2004), gender egalitarianism (Emrich, Denmark, & Hartog, 2004), humane orientation (Kabasakal & Bodur, 2004), performance orientation (Javidan, 2004), assertiveness (Hartog, 2004), individualism/collectivism (Gelfand, Bhawuk, Nishii, & Bechtold, 2004), and uncertainty avoidance (de Luque & Javidan, 2004) supported the presence of a Western, especially American, bias in contemporary theories that is ill-suited to most cross-cultural interaction. While Bass (1995) noted the universality of leadership, Komives, Lucas, and McMahon (2007) expressed its distinctive Western flavor in their

generations and categories of leadership theories. A review of Yukl (2006) and Northouse (2007), standard texts in undergraduate theories courses, confirmed the Western premises of leadership theories as did Chemers' (1995) work on modern leadership theories.

Global Leadership-Learning Pyramid

The literature leads us directly to the first three levels of global leadership study. The Global Leadership-Learning Pyramid (see Figure 1) rises from the broad foundation of the issues of globalization. Each subsequent category narrows the focus of study, preparing students to apply their knowledge and understanding of cross-cultural patterns to leadership.

Figure 1
The Global Leadership-Learning Pyramid

Project

●Cultural Patterns ●Patterns' Influences ●Theory Adaptation

Theory Limitations

●Leader-Centered ●Male-Dominated ●Universal Traits ●Task-Relationship Balance ●Quantifiable Performance ●Individualistic

Western Theory Premises

●Leader-Centered ●Male-Dominated ●Universal Traits ●Task-Relationship Balance ●Quantifiable Performance ●Individualistic

Historical/Cultural Influences

●Wren-Swatez Model ●Hofstede's Value Dimensions ●GLOBE Value Dimensions

Issues of Globalization

●Extent ●Entrenchment ●Social Rules ●Adaptation ●Sensitivity

Level 1. Issues of Globalization

Extent of Globalization. Globalization is a term that has almost sinisterly crept into our vocabulary, yet determining a universal meaning is as challenging as agreeing on one definition of leadership. Giddens (2003) provides the simplest characterization of globalization – there is now one economic and political world order. Skeptics, however, insist that the resultant loss of national influence is just talk. Like all controversial subjects, the truth most likely falls somewhere near the middle of the continuum of possible alternatives. Thus, the extent of globalization is an issue that students must address.

National Entrenchment. The implications of globalization extend far beyond economics and politics and not in the way one might surmise. While telecommunications has opened the world beyond national borders in ways never imagined 50 years ago, they have not helped us surmount our differences (Giddens, 2003). If anything, we seek stability in the sphere of the familiar – the values, culture, and traditions that ground our society. So an unexpected consequence of globalization is local entrenchment that stands in opposition to the much ballyhooed global village. The rise of fundamentalist movements accentuates the tendency to cultural entrenchment in opposition to global forces. Hofstede and Hofstede (2005) note, "The software of machines may be globalized, but the software of the minds that use them is not" (p. 330). Fundamentalism is thus another global issue for students to explore

Social Rules. Even when culture adapts to external, global influences, the changes are often only cosmetic. Hofstede and Hofstede (2005) compare the expressions of culture to the layers of an onion. Even though the outer layers such as symbols, heroes, and rituals are fairly easily peeled away, the values that comprise a culture's core remain virtually intact and unassailable. Hofstede and Hofstede liken culture to an unwritten rulebook that society imparts to its members. Students must understand the concept of a social rulebook and the importance of the rules of the social game.
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Cultural Adaptation. Once students are comfortable with the idea of conflicting rules between societies, they must confront the issue of cultural adaptation. How must they modify their behavior to account for the different social rules, such as those that govern communication and other forms of social interaction? Averting or addressing issues of cultural confusion is paramount. Success in a multinational setting requires careful consideration of organizational design and appropriate leadership style (Dorfman, et al., 2004; Dorfman & House, 2004).

Cultural Sensitivity. Leadership in any venue is not just about style or learned skills. Perhaps of greater concern and less easily controlled are issues of cultural sensitivity. As the onion metaphor (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005) demonstrates,

effective leadership requires more than observation and tolerance of cultural idiosyncrasies. Because they are products of long-held core values, students must delve deeply into the foundations of cultural practices and appreciate how these values influence the culture's views and expectations of leadership.

Level 2. History, Culture, and Leadership

Empirical research (Dorfman & House, 2004) supports the assertion that culture influences such aspects of leadership as: societal requirements for holding a leadership position; leader power, influence, and privileges; extent to which social position influences elevation to a leader role; expected and preferred patterns of leader behaviors or styles; and response of followers to various leader behaviors. Brodbeck, et al. (2004) reach the compelling conclusion that societal values, not industry factors, are the strongest influence on an organization's culture and desired leadership. The interplay of history, culture and leadership is complex, and understanding requires guidance.

Wren-Swatez Model. Wren and Swatez (1995) provide a visual model for students to conceptualize the relationship. Using concentric circles, they illustrate how leader-follower interactions occur within three distinct yet overlapping contexts – immediate, contemporary, and historical. The innermost circle is the immediate context. It is here that leaders and followers, with all of their idiosyncrasies, confront the micro factors of the leadership situation – organizational structure and goals, organizational culture, and specific tasks and problems. The immediate context sits within the contemporary context. This context includes the current societal factors, such as social values, cultural mores, and subculture norms that shape customs and traditions. It is the contemporary context that generates specific expectations of leader actions, behaviors, and styles. The outermost circle represents the macro factors or historical context, the long-term political, intellectual, economic, and social forces. These enduring influences shape the standards followers use to measure leader success. Successful leadership approaches correspond to the demands of the immediate context and the expectations of the contemporary context while recognizing these demands and expectations have their roots deep in a society's past. History and culture surround the current leadership environment, molding and limiting leadership choices and potential solutions.

Hofstede's Value Dimensions. For Hofstede & Hofstede (2005) a person's country is the individual's cultural home from which the person observes the rest of the world through a window. The unconscious programming or conditioning of the mind that defines national culture establishes societal rules for thinking, feeling, and acting. Cultural programming starts in the family at birth and continues first in school then at work. The fundamental cultural differences between nations are in their values. Hofstede & Hofstede describe five areas in

which dissimilarities in values occur, resulting in a five dimensional model of differences between national cultures. These dimensions of differences are power distance, individualism versus collectivism, masculinity versus femininity, uncertainty avoidance, and long-term versus short-term orientation. For each dimension, a country falls somewhere along a continuum from strong to weak as compared to other nations. In relation to these five dimensions of national culture, the United States is a low power distance, individualist, masculine, uncertainty accepting, and short-term oriented country. Using the United States as a benchmark, students can visualize the relation between their societal values and those of other nations as they inform leadership.

The GLOBE Study Value Dimensions. The GLOBE Study (House, et al., 2004), the most extensive to date on the cultural contingency of leadership, concludes that each society has culturally endorsed leader behaviors labeled leadership belief systems. To guide the research, the study (House & Javidan, 2004) developed the culturally endorsed implicit theory of leadership (CLT). The GLOBE Study (House, et al., 2004) resulted in nine dimensions of value differences between cultures: performance orientation, future orientation, gender egalitarianism, assertiveness, institutional collectivism, in-group collectivism, power distance, humane orientation, and uncertainty avoidance. Here the United States is part of the Anglo cluster that includes Australia, Canada, England, Ireland, New Zealand, and South Africa-White Samples. Agreement within cultures as to their beliefs about leadership is so substantial that significant differences between societies are evident. The GLOBE Study enables students to examine the cultural differences in leadership

Level 3. Premises of Western Theories

The ideal American leader steps out of his or her leadership heritage as do leaders in all societies. If students are going to be successful cross-cultural leaders, they will likely need to reassess the trusted leadership theories learned in class. These theories have a very strong Western bias as to preferred leadership styles, behaviors, and methods for group or organizational success. In the preface to the GLOBE Study, House (2004) advises, "To date more than 90% of the organizational behavior literature reflects U.S.-based research and theory" (p. xxv). The premises of these theories are grounded in Western, specifically North American, ideas and experiences. If Hofstede and Hofstede (2005) are correct in their assumption that different societies and cultures generate different mental software for their members, thereby creating the desire for cultural congruence in the workplace (Dorfman & House, 2004), then the chances of our future leaders being out of step with a non-United States, especially non-Western, leadership environment are extremely high.

Although leadership research seems to be a Western phenomenon, ideas and philosophies of leadership are ancient and universal. Bass (1995) notes that concepts of leader, follower, and leadership were present 5000 years ago in Egyptian symbols as well as in the writings of Confucius and Lao Tzu. Western students of leadership, however, usually begin their study with the Greek philosophers, examining the thoughts of Plato and Aristotle on the ideal leader. From there, leadership study becomes a journey through Western civilization (Wren, 1995). Komives, et al. (2007) provide a concise outline of the generations of Western leadership theories. Beginning with the Great Man Theory and ending with current chaos or systems theories, they describe the evolution of leadership study and research from leader-centered (trait, behavior, and contingency theories), to leader-follower interaction (transaction/influence theories, reciprocal theories, etc.), to a post-industrial leadership paradigm for a chaotic world.

What Rost (1991) termed the Industrial Paradigm Model was often leader-dependent and male-dominated with an emphasis on management, control, goal-achievement, and personal self-interest. Post-industrial leadership approaches attack the industrial paradigm head-on. Examples include Wheatley's (1999) chaos theory of leadership, SuperLeadership of Manz & Sims (1995), and the Relational Leadership Model (Komives, et al., 2007). Other post-industrial approaches have emerged from the remnants of industrial paradigm methods. Northouse (2007) notes the resurgence of interest in trait, transformational, charismatic and affective approaches to leadership. Along with transformational leadership, implicit leadership theory takes center stage in the GLOBE Study (House, et al., 2004).

From the Komives, et al. (2007) outline and other sources such as Northouse (2007), Yukl (2006), and Chemers (1995), six premises of Western theories can be deduced. Students must recognize these premises as the next step up the learning pyramid.

Premise 1. Leader-Centered. The most obvious principle of the leader-centered approaches is the importance of the leader. Who the leader is (either through lineage or inherited traits), what the leader does, and when, where, and with whom the leader performs are central. Leadership and leader are one and the same. This idea persists throughout the evolution of Western theories. Even in leader-follower interaction and post-industrial approaches, we see the primacy of the individual leader as visionary, path-setter, meaning-maker, motivator, role model, and leader-maker of able followers. Only in Wheatley's (1999) chaos theory does the leader appear less at the front and more as a part of the whole.

Premise 2. Male Dominated. The second premise that emerges is male-domination. As the Great Man Theory focuses on hereditary male leaders, trait theories posit leader characteristics observed more often in men than women –

masculinity, dominance, assertiveness, drive, the need for achievement. While the idea of male ascendancy has been sorely tested in the last 30 or so years, women are still woefully underrepresented in the highest leadership positions (Hoyt, 2007). The equal presence of women in managerial and professional positions, however, indicates the erosion of this premise as do studies cited in Hoyt demonstrating the effectiveness of leadership factors more generally associated with women – participative style, caring orientation, interpersonal skills, and use of contingent rewards.

Premise 3. Universal Traits. Trait theories give rise to a third idea of Western leadership, the universality of effective leader qualities. Even though the exact relationship of traits to successful leadership has not been determined, our students probably can agree on a general list of desirable leader characteristics and assume that there will be little argument from anyone else. Northouse (2007) focuses on five of the most desirable traits: intelligence, self-confidence, determination, integrity, and sociability. Integrity, character, and ethics are notably emphasized in leader-follower interaction theories and post-industrial approaches. Implicit leadership theories remind us of the importance of beliefs and assumption to one's recognition of leadership. Because these ideas are formed and shared by others in the culture the congruence of leader traits is understandable. It is not a difficult leap to assume universal agreement.

Premise 4. Task – Relationship Balance. Behavioral and contingency theories inform Western thoughts on the most effective leadership styles and actions. They speak to a fourth premise, the balance of task (directive/authoritative) and relationship (consultative/participative) behaviors. Interestingly, only in the United States does participatory leadership positively influence performance (Dorfman & House, 2004). Here we expect the leader to exhibit some mix of task-relationship behaviors, usually adapting to meet follower needs.

Premise 5. Quantifiable Performance. This leads to a fifth principle of Western leadership, its emphasis on quantifiable performance and outcomes. In most situations, measurable results determine leadership effectiveness. If the outcomes meet or exceed expectations, then we deem the enterprise successful. How we arrived at that point is not relevant. Effective leaders get the job done.

Premise 6. Individualistic. Leader-follower interaction and post-industrial theories illustrate a sixth premise, the primacy of the individual in the leadership process. Followers as well as leaders have specific wants, needs, drives, and ambitions. Affective factors, such as personal beliefs, values and assumptions, also come into play. Effective leadership results when a leader and follower form a unique and mutually satisfying relationship based on their individual characteristics and motives. This premise assumes that followers desire engagement or participation in the leadership process.

Level 4. Cultural Constraints on Western Theories

Such culturally-conditioned follower expectations and preferences for leadership are the sticking point for Western theories in non-Western cultures as they vary greatly across nations. Examining the aforementioned premises of Western theories in light of the cultural value differences noted above points out some theory limitations that students must acknowledge.

Limitation 1: Leader-Centered. Of the six premises of Western leadership theories discussed, leader primacy would seem the least contentious. It is, however, not without controversy in countries that place high priority on egalitarianism in terms of power. As noted previously, the United States is a relatively small power distance country (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005), but a leader-centered approach can run into problems in smaller power distance nations where followers prefer flatter organizational structures and power-sharing, expect equality and interchangeability of leader-follower roles, and presume at the very least consultation in planning and decision making. Differences between countries on Hofstede & Hofstede's Masculinity (MAS) Index also have consequences for leader-centered approaches. The United States ranked relatively high on the MAS Index (19 on the ranking of 74 nations), noting greater acceptance of distinctions in gender roles. Like small power distance countries, cultures that are more gender egalitarian also tend to expect more equality between leader-follower roles (Emrich, et al., 2004).

Limitation 2: Male-Dominated. The prevalence of masculine ideals and traits in American leadership theories clearly reflects the United States' position on the masculinity v. femininity dimension (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005). When working in a nation whose culture values "tender" or "feminine" attributes (i.e., intuition, compromise, consensus-building), using "tough" masculine traits, such as assertiveness and dominance, and directive, confrontational approaches may be less effective. Gender egalitarian cultures place greater emphasis on charismatic/value-based attributes (i.e., inspirational, motivating, self-sacrificing) and participative behaviors (Emrich, et al., 2004).

Limitation 3: Universal Traits. Apparently, then, masculine leadership traits are not universally valued. Other preferred Western traits (Northouse, 2007) suffer the same malady. Leader self-confidence, personal integrity, and sociability are not as highly valued in collectivist cultures as they are in the individualistic United States (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005). In collectivist nations, individual traits are secondary to group roles and duties. The knowing and assuming of one's designated role in the group is of more importance than intelligence and confidence in one's ability. An individual accepts and performs the leader role because society has deemed him (usually male) worthy due to social position

and/or in-group networks. Because of the priority placed on harmony in collectivist cultures, Western-style integrity also suffers. Hofstede and Hofstede note that honesty, for example, is less valued if it results in disruption of harmony, in-group shame, or loss of face. The emphasis on adaptation and networks in long-term oriented nations results in bribery being an accepted part of doing business. The very strength of in-groups and networks in the workplace of collectivist cultures, often dictated by social norms, makes sociability moot. If one is a member of the in-group, then sociability is not necessary; if one is an outsider, then sociability is futile. Sociability is also not as highly valued in high uncertainty avoiding nations where structure and task take priority over relationships because of the desire to reduce ambiguity by controlling the environment.

Limitation 4: Task-Relationship Balance. Uncertainty avoiding countries also shatter the belief that a balance of task and relationship-oriented behaviors is desirable across cultures. Their desire for more structure and rules stems from an emotional need to feel in control, leaving nothing to chance (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005). This often results in ritual behaviors and archaic regulations that may seem dysfunctional to the outsider but are necessary for the organization's sense of security. Followers expect leaders to micromanage, providing precise tasks, and rules for performing these tasks. Followers in large power distance countries share this expectation of discipline and structure which is the consequence of long established and accepted hierarchical roles. The ideal leader is the benevolent autocrat. In such societies, the leader high in consideration may be viewed as weak (Carl, et al., 2004). On the opposite end of the spectrum, nations that place high priority on egalitarianism resent the discipline and directiveness of leader task behaviors. This is also true for countries that have a more feminine or less assertive orientation where there is more emphasis on caring, generosity and fairness than on authority, direction, task and results.

Limitation 5: Quantifiable Performance. Hofstede and Hofstede (2005) see task-orientation and performance orientation as decidedly masculine cultural values. Similar values are echoed in short-term oriented nations. Masculine countries with short-term orientation, such as the United States, are largely concerned with the bottom line. Rewards are based on performance, valuing meritocracy and delineation by abilities over economic equality. Cultures that have a long-term orientation conversely tend to place a greater emphasis on persistence in pursuit of goals rather than immediate returns. They are more likely to endure setbacks to reach long-term goals. Differences in performance orientation are especially noticeable in terms of individualism versus collectivism. In collectivist societies the leader meets societal obligations and performs specified duties in return for follower obedience and loyalty. Because loyalty and in-group preference are more important than follower performance, poor performance alone is not a justifiable reason for firing an employee. In large

power distance countries, the leader is also impervious to the consequences of poor performance. Leaders are placed on a pedestal and highly respected, but there are seldom any performance expectations. Categorizing performance orientation as a separate dimension of culture, the GLOBE Study (Javidan, 2004) concluded that nations with low performance orientation are more focused on loyalty, tradition, and seniority than reaching high performance goals. Their communication styles are apt to be more subtle and indirect, leading to misunderstandings and confusion for the culturally uninitiated. Members of such cultures may also find more direct communication styles offensive. Here are definite pitfalls for the performance-oriented, straight-talking citizen of the United States of America.

Limitation 6: Individualistic. In the American way of thinking, along with quantifiable performance come contingent rewards for the individual. Encouragement and personal reward for innovation, high standards, and performance improvements are characteristics of a performance-oriented society (Javidan, 2004) that support an individualist culture's emphasis on the importance of individual interests in the workplace. Individual performance and achievements are rewarded according to merit. The motivational aspects of Western leadership theories assume the primacy of individual self interest while leader-follower interaction and post-industrial approaches tout the importance of the relationship between leader and follower as unique individuals. The majority of the world, however, is collectivist (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005). Here the emphasis is on group cohesion and loyalty, not personal achievement, merit, and reward. In societies with strong in-group affiliations, in-group may influence hiring. It is common and ethical for leaders to show preferences to family and friends. Management is of groups, not individuals, and workers usually do not seek individual recognition. They will more often act out of loyalty to group than personal self-interest.

In an attempt to overcome the constraints of Western leadership theories, the GLOBE Study (House, 2004) proposed an integrated theory of leadership that attempted to account for culturally-based differences in implicit views of leadership. Based on the CLT, the study (Dorfman, et al., 2004) found six globally desired leader behaviors: charismatic/value-based, team oriented, participative, humane-oriented, autonomous, and self-protective. But this theory also has limitations. The six rank uniquely within each country. The priority and weight assigned behaviors within a nation will greatly influence appropriate leadership actions, styles, and strategies. For example, Dorfman, et al. (2004) describes a universally accepted and effective leader as someone with the highest level of integrity. As noted above, the defining characteristics of integrity are culturally determined. Like any Western theory, the use of CLT is country specific.

Level 5. Country Analysis and Adaptation Project

Because of the country-specific nature of cross-cultural leadership, global leadership education necessarily culminates with a country cultural analysis. Through the country analysis, students apply cross-cultural models to determine implications for leadership. While country analyses of various types are available from scholarly sources (Hofstede, 1980; Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005; Chhokar, Brodbeck, & House, 2007) as well as various governmental agencies, such information is often incomplete and sometimes contradictory or biased. Direct analysis enables student engagement with the cultural data and more thoughtful consideration of societal patterns that influence leadership.

Students may analyze their chosen country through traditional research or a modified evaluative case study. Using a single case, embedded design and data triangulation (Yin, 2003) students are able to analyze their country in a systematic, information-rich way. Regardless of method, however, the project should challenge the student to discern cultural patterns, articulate the influence of these patterns on leadership, and generate recommendations for Western leadership theory adaptation.

The analysis and adaptation aspects of the country project challenge students to apply cross-cultural models and confront the limitations of Western theories. Through direct application, the abstraction of models and theories become concrete. Students thus see the relevance of course information and understand how to use it.

Conclusion

While there is no substitution for experience, learning global leadership entirely through the school of hard knocks is painful and counterproductive. It is, therefore, critical to design effective global leadership courses. The Global Leadership-Learning Pyramid provides a framework for study that: integrates broad issues of globalization, history, culture and leadership; determines nation-state cultural patterns and implications for leadership; and adapts Western theories for cross-cultural use. Grounded in cross-cultural research, this framework marries theory and application to better prepare students for the complexities of global leadership.

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Biography

Dr. Anne W. Perkins is Professor of Leadership Studies, in the Department of Leadership and American Studies, and Coordinator of the Interdisciplinary Studies Program at Christopher Newport University in Newport News, Virginia. In addition to introductory and capstone courses in leadership studies, Dr. Perkins teaches courses on cross-cultural leadership, self as leader, historical leaders, and leading change. Her current research examines the influence of history and culture on leader development, ideas, and decision making. Dr. Perkins received her doctorate from The College