

Exploring the Link between Emotional Intelligence and Cross-Cultural Leadership Effectiveness

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Abstract

Global corporations operate in an environment characterized by cross-cultural differences. This exploratory research examined how varying cultures perceive the effectiveness of differing leadership styles. Using categories developed by Project GLOBE, the study surveyed a sample of international sales managers from four cultural clusters to assess the role of emotional intelligence (EI) in determining leadership effectiveness. The results confirmed that EI is valued more highly than technical skills and cognitive skills, especially regarding social skill, and supported earlier findings that transformational/charismatic leaderships are favored across cultures. Implications for organizations and their managers seeking to enhance their cross cultural leadership effectiveness are discussed.

Keywords: Leadership, Emotional Intelligence, Cross-Cultural Differences



Introduction

Global corporations and their leaders operate in an increasingly interconnected business environment; for example, global flows of investment more than trebled, and investment in developing countries grew six fold during the 1990s (Javidan & House, 2001), and this trend has only expanded into the 2000s. Thus, many important business opportunities of the 21st century will exist outside the headquarters country (Larsen, Rosenbloom, Anderson, & Mehta, 1999). Furthermore, the fact that the business world is becoming increasingly global does not mean that cultural differences are diminishing. Business success and profitability overseas will rely heavily on the quality of effective multinational corporate leadership (Adler, 2002), yet based on the results of a three-year study completed by Gregersen, Morrison, and Black (1998), 85 percent of U.S Fortune 500 firms do not think they have an adequate number of global leaders to sustain their multinational operations.

A country's culture profoundly influences the behavior of organizations as well as the behavior of people within organizations. Prior research has shown that many cross-cultural differences, such as Hofstede's (1997) collectivism/individualism, may affect organizational performance. For example, in some cultures, people prefer to act as a cohesive group (collectivism) rather than as individuals motivated primarily by self-interest (individualism). Shared collectivist characteristics may include: identity based on the system, weak division between private life and work, priority on relationships, tight social networks, and external pressure or "shame." Examples of collectivist societies include Panama, Guatemala, Colombia, Japan, Hong Kong, and India, while individualistic cultures are found in Australia, Germany, Canada, and the United States (Trompenaars, 1993; Hofstede, 1997).

Furthermore, a nation's specific cultural attributes play an important role in determining the selection of management and leadership style. As Leung (2005) noted in her study of Western managers in Chinese firms, effective leadership in one cultural setting may be ineffective in another. Organizations become more effective when they are able to identify and foster the appropriate leader behaviors for the relevant cultural situation. Managers are expected to arrive promptly for meetings in time-focused cultures such as the United States, while deadlines may have little importance in less time-focused cultures such as Greece or Italy (Trompenaars, 1993). Some cultures, such as India, may display a long-term orientation in terms of employee rewards and career development, compared to others, such as the United States, which focus on short-term recognition and reinforcement (Ilangoan, Scroggins, & Rozell, 2007). For the global manager to lead effectively in a diverse international environment, he or she must recognize cultural differences and learn to integrate culture and leadership style to his/her advantage, rather than either attempting to ignore them or allowing them to cause problems (Adler, 2002).

Leadership and Emotional Intelligence

Prior research has explored the concept of emotional intelligence, which is the ability both to know one's own emotions and to read others' emotions as well (Davies, Stankov, & Roberts, 1998; Zadel, 2008). Work by Goleman (1995; 1998) has assessed the link between emotional intelligence and leadership ability. Goleman researched and analyzed 188 companies (primarily large and global organizations), to determine the personal capabilities among leaders which appeared to drive outstanding performance within these organizations, and to what degree they did so. Personal capabilities were clustered in three categories: technical skills, such as accounting and engineering; cognitive skills like analytical reasoning; and competencies demonstrating emotional intelligence (EI), such as the ability to work with others and effectiveness in leading change (Davies, et. al., 1998). According to Goleman's research, emotional intelligence proved to be twice as important as technical skills and cognitive abilities for leadership jobs at all levels of an organization. Intellect remained a driver of outstanding performance, and cognitive skills such as big picture thinking and long-term vision were also important, but mainly as "threshold capabilities": entry-level requirements for executive positions.

Goleman (1998) listed five components of emotional intelligence that an effective leader exhibits: self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skill. Self-awareness means having a deep understanding of one's emotions, strengths, weaknesses, needs, and drives, as well as their effect on others. Characteristics of a self-aware individual include self-confidence, realistic self-assessment, and a self-deprecating sense of humor. Self-regulation is the ability to control or redirect disruptive impulses and moods and the propensity to suspend judgment--to think before acting. Characteristics include trustworthiness, integrity, comfort with ambiguity, and openness to change. Motivation, the third component, is defined as a passion to work for reasons that go beyond money or status, with a propensity to pursue goals with energy and persistence. Characteristics of a motivated emotionally intelligent leader are strong desire to achieve, optimism--even in the face of failure--and organizational commitment. Empathy, the fourth component, is the ability to understand the emotional makeup of other people, with skill in treating people according to their emotional reactions. Characteristics include service to clients and customers, cross-cultural sensitivity, and expertise in building and retaining talent. Social skill, the final component of EI, is proficiency in managing relationships and building networks, with an ability to find common ground and build rapport. Characteristics include effectiveness in leading change, persuasiveness, and expertise in building and leading teams.

Emotional Intelligence in the Cross-Cultural Context

This exploratory research examines EI leadership skills in a cross-cultural setting, a linkage which has begun to be examined by scholars of international management. Prior research has identified the importance of considering emotional intelligence when selecting expatriate managers (Jassawalla, Truglia,

& Garvey, 2004), and a study of managers from the U.S., the U.K., and Malaysia by Shipper, Kincaid, Rotondo, and Hoffman (2003) indicated positive relationships between manager effectiveness and the self-awareness component of EI. Leung (2005) found that the espoused competencies of EI among Western managers may clash with Chinese culture and values, and Ilangovan, Scroggins, and Rozell (2007) proposed that Indian employees will prefer a more directive, task-oriented style of leadership, compared to the participative style advocated by many U.S. managers.

Following these researchers, this study proposes that an experienced manager familiar with a country's culture may incorporate one or more of the components of emotional intelligence to effectively match the needs of a particular culture, thus leading the organization towards desired results. Many cross-cultural differences clearly exist between countries. Prior research has identified many variances in attitudes across cultures, such as power distance (Hofstede, 1997) and time focus (Trompenaars, 1993). Further, studies have shown that organizational cultures are influenced by national cultures (Hofstede, 1997; Adler, 2002), and the greater the cultural distance between the two countries, the greater the differences in organizational attributes and practices (Javidan & House, 2002).

While it is useful to study cross-cultural differences, it is important as well to assess the extent of similarities between cultures. The study also sought to examine whether similar views of effective leadership may prevail across different cultures. Prior research by House and his colleagues in Project GLOBE (House, et al., 2004) found that several attributes associated with charismatic/transformational leadership were seen as contributing to outstanding leadership across most of the cultures studied. They did note, however, that a shared preference for a type of leadership does not mean that the leader attributes will be enacted in exactly the same manner across all cultures. For example, charismatic leadership is often associated with powerful leader rhetoric, but rhetoric may range from the quiet, soft-spoken manner of Mahatma Gandhi and Mother Teresa to the more 'macho' oratory of John F. Kennedy and Jack Welch (House, et al., 2004).

One way to explore cultural similarities in the world is to study cultural clusters. A cultural cluster is a group of countries that share many similarities; the countries in a cluster are more like each other than another country from outside the cluster (Javidan & House, 2002). Multinational corporations may find it less risky and more profitable to expand into more similar cultural clusters rather than those which are drastically different. For example, a study by the consulting firm KPMG found that the returns from cross-border mergers between U.S. and U.K. firms (both in the Anglo cultural cluster) were 45% more successful than the average rate of return of all cross-border deals (Gupta, Hanges, & Dorfman, 2002).

To test the proposition linking EI and cross-cultural leadership, the study surveyed managers from four cultural clusters (Anglo, Latin European, Eastern European, and Southern Asian) adapted from the categories of Project GLOBE. Project GLOBE was a multi-phase, multi-method research project in which some

170 investigators from over 60 cultures representing all major regions in the world collaborated to examine the interrelationships between societal culture, organizational culture, and organizational leadership (House, et al., 2004). In Project GLOBE, clustering of nations is utilized as a practical way to describe intercultural similarities as well as intercultural differences. In GLOBE's analysis, 61 nations are grouped into 10 distinct clusters. For this research paper, four clusters and their respective leadership styles and traits are reviewed: the Anglo cluster; the Latin Europe cluster; the Eastern European cluster; and the Southern Asia cluster.

The Anglo Cluster comprises Australia, Canada, England, Ireland, New Zealand, South Africa (White sample), and the United States of America. These countries are all developed nations, predominantly English speaking, and were all once British colonies. Today, they are among the wealthiest countries in the world (Ashkanasy, Trevor-Roberts, & Earnshaw, 2002). According to the research results of Project GLOBE, charismatic, team-oriented, and participative leadership styles are perceived to be the most effective in the Anglo Cluster. The charismatic leadership behaviors include being visionary and inspirational and appealing to the underlying values of followers. Shipper and his colleagues (2003) found that self-awareness of interactive skills may be a critical component to manager effectiveness in high power distance Anglo (U.S. and U.K.) cultures. Although these leadership styles were effective across all the cultures in this cluster, each national culture does carry specific leadership behaviors that are perceived to be effective only for that specific country. For example, being charismatic in Australia can sometimes conflict with the importance of egalitarianism for successful leadership. A leader must therefore be visionary and inspirational but still be seen as "one of the boys" (Ashkanasy, et al., 2002).

The Latin European cluster consists of France, French Switzerland, Italy, Portugal, and Spain. In Latin Europe, charismatic/values-based, team oriented, and participative leadership are considered the most effective leadership attributes. Charismatic/values-based leadership consists of such attributes as visionary, inspirational, self-sacrificial, integrity, decisiveness and performance orientation. Team-oriented leadership comprises collaboration, team integration, diplomacy, and administrative competence (Jesuino, 2002).

The Eastern European cluster comprises Albania, Georgia, Greece, Hungary, Kazakhstan, Poland, Russia, and Slovenia. This region is facing significant challenges during its period of transition from communist philosophy to market based economies. The participating managers in Project GLOBE were strongly attached to their cultural heritage of deep family and group cohesion (Bakacsi, Sandor, Andras, & Viktor, 2002). In the Eastern European cluster, the key elements of successful leadership in the region were composed mostly of transformational-charismatic and team-oriented leadership. There is also a strong expectation toward participative leaders. Participation has some historical roots in the region, as large consultative bodies combined with paternalistic leadership style (asking the opinion of others) has been a dominant pattern in status conscious eastern societies (Bakacsi, et al., 2002).

The GLOBE Southern Asia cluster consists of India, Indonesia, Iran, Malaysia, Philippines, and Thailand. In this cluster, transformational–charismatic and team-oriented leadership are perceived as the most effective leadership styles (Gupta, Surie, Javidan, & Chokar, 2002). Leaders are expected to act as patriarchs who help subordinates aspire toward more ambitious and collective goals. At the same time, they need to make sure their actions and decisions help develop and sustain the team and family orientation in their organizations. The global leader in this cluster needs to be open to negotiations and ideas from many corners to make sure s/he does not disenfranchise any group members (Gupta, et al., 2002).

Method

Mid-to-upper-level international sales managers from four cultural clusters were surveyed. The focus of the sample is executives in international sales and product management positions for several reasons. In many cases, the international sales manager, particularly in a small-to-mid-size company environment, acts as an arms-length extension of the company which s/he represents. This manager is the primary contact point from the overseas office to the corporate office and vice versa. In the smaller company environment, the sales manager must perform many corporate functions besides sales and marketing, including finance, operations, and general management. For example, if a product regulatory question arises in the pharmaceutical industry, the international sales manager must know about different countries' healthcare regulations before altering product specifications.

Given the dispersed geographic locations of the sample, forty surveys were e-mailed, and received twenty-seven responses, for a response rate of 67.5%. The sample included executives living in the U.S., Canada, and the U.K. (representing GLOBE's Anglo cluster); Spain and Italy (Latin Europe cluster); Russia, Poland, and Greece (Eastern Europe cluster); and the Philippines and Thailand (the Southern Asia cluster). The respondents worked in a variety of industries, including healthcare, consumer goods, and international services such as translation. Most worked for small or mid-sized companies; their average work experience was eleven years.

The survey contained fifteen questions which used five-point Likert scale response options ranging from 1 = Very Important to 3 = Neutral to 5 = Not Important at All. The respondents were asked to rate the importance of technical skills, cognitive abilities, and emotional intelligence for leaders in an international setting (Questions 1 through 3). Questions 4 through 14 focused specifically on the subcomponents of emotional intelligence traits, such as social skills, participative leadership, and self-awareness (Goleman, 1998; Davies, et. al., 1998) and the leadership traits identified by Project GLOBE. For question 15, respondents were asked to rank the five most important characteristics for an international sales manager when leading a foreign sales team. The Appendix illustrates sample survey questions.

Results and Discussion

As Table 1 shows, the entire sample of respondents considered emotional intelligence as 1 = Very Important, and all 27 managers also selected emotional intelligence traits as the most important attributes for successful leaders, followed by cognitive abilities (mean = 1.9) and technical skills (2.3). These results support Goleman's (1998) contention that EI is the critical component for effective leadership, and they suggest that the emotional intelligence element of leadership may apply across different cultures.

Table 1 also reports the sample's mean rankings of the individual leader attributes studied by Project GLOBE and the emotional intelligence subcomponents. As shown, social skill, transformational/charismatic, and visionary traits were rated highest among these respondents, corresponding to GLOBE findings (see House, et al., 2004). Interestingly, self management was reported least important (mean = 2.6), suggesting that many of these managers are more concerned with monitoring their external behavior, compared to their internal self-knowledge.

Table 1
Aggregate Mean Scores of Leader Traits and Attributes
Selected as Most Important

Ranked in order from 1 = Very Important to 5 = Not Important At All
 n = 27

<i>General Leader Traits/Skills</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Standard Deviation</i>
Emotional Intelligence Traits	1.0	0.0
Cognitive Abilities	1.9	0.72
Technical Skills	2.3	0.72
<i>Individual Leadership Attributes</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Standard Deviation</i>
Social Skills	1.2	0.4
Transformational/Charismatic	1.4	0.49
Visionary	1.5	0.64
Team Skills	1.6	0.69
Motivation	1.7	0.48
Directive	1.7	0.49
Participative	2.0	0.85
Supportive	2.0	0.65
Self-Awareness	2.2	0.74
Empathy	2.2	0.89
Self-Management	2.6	0.63

Table 2 reports the results from survey question 15, which asked the respondents to rank the five most important characteristics for an international sales manager (from the survey's list of fourteen) when leading a foreign sales team. Again, the results paralleled those found by Project GLOBE, with transformational/charismatic, visionary, team skills, and social skills selected most often by the respondents as key attributes of effective leaders. These rankings would appear to support GLOBE's propositions that transformational/charismatic and visionary leadership styles are universally endorsed and that team leadership is favored across cultures.

Table 2
Most Frequently Chosen Leadership Attributes
 (Survey question #15)

<i>Individual Leadership Attributes</i>	<i>Number of Times Selected</i>
Transformational/Charismatic	21
Visionary	17
Team Skills	17
Social Skills	17
Directive	12
Motivation	12
Participative	9
Empathy	7
Self-Awareness	5
Supportive	3
Self-Management	3

In Table 3, the survey responses are broken down by cultural cluster. As shown, there are some interesting differences across cultures. While all four clusters selected emotional intelligence traits as most important, the individual EI and leadership traits rated as important varied. In addition, the respondents varied in terms of the importance they assigned to the individual traits, ranging from 1.0 Very Important to 2.9 (3 = Neutral).

Table 3
Leader Traits and Attributes Selected Most Important, by Cultural Cluster
 Ranked in order from 1 = Very Important to 5 = Not Important At All

Anglo		Southern Asia		Latin Europe		Eastern Europe	
<i>Attribute</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Attribute</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Attribute</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Attribute</i>	<i>Mean</i>
El Traits	1.0						
Technical Skills	2.4	Cognitive Abilities	1.3	Cognitive Abilities	1.9	Cognitive Abilities	1.7
Cognitive Abilities	2.6	Technical Skills	1.8	Technical Skills	1.9	Technical Skills	2.8

Individual Traits Selected:

Motivated	1.4	Transformational	1.0	Social Skills	1.1	Social Skills	1.1
Transformational	1.6	Social Skills	1.0	Visionary	1.3	Transformational	1.4
Social Skills	1.6	Team Skills	1.0	Transformational	1.5	Directive	1.4
Directive	1.6	Participative	1.3	Directive	1.8	Visionary	1.4
Team Skills	1.8	Supportive	1.3	Self-Aware	1.9	Motivated	1.6
Visionary	1.8	Self-Aware	1.5	Motivated	1.9	Team Skills	1.6
Participative	2.0	Empathetic	1.5	Participative	1.9	Supportive	2.3
Empathetic	2.4	Visionary	1.7	Empathetic	1.9	Participative	2.5
Supportive	2.4	Motivated	1.8	Team Skills	1.9	Self-Managed	2.5
Self-Aware	2.8	Directive	1.8	Supportive	1.9	Self-Aware	2.6
Self-Managed	2.8	Self-Managed	2.7	Self-Managed	2.4	Empathetic	2.9

Sample Respondents, by Country and Cluster:

Anglo: Canada, United Kingdom, United States

Southern Asia: Philippines, Thailand

Latin Europe: Italy, Spain

Eastern Europe: Greece, Poland, Russia

In addition, when the five components of Goleman’s emotional intelligence are examined (self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skill), only the social skill elements were consistently rated as key leader traits among the sample. According to Goleman (1998), social skill is defined as proficiency in managing relationships and building networks, with an ability to find common ground and build rapport. For almost all sales and management-oriented positions, social skill is a critical component to success, and for the international sales manager, social skill also includes adapting to a different cultural setting when in an international environment. The global sales manager must familiarize him/herself with the intricacies of cultural relationships, to determine which factors build relationships within a particular cultural environment (Hofstede, 1997). For example, in Latin America, sales contracts

may be negotiated at informal settings outside the office, as opposed to formal hierarchical negotiation environments (Adler, 2002).

Among the Anglo respondents, the most important leadership trait was motivation. The international sales manager working abroad must make personal sacrifices such as living outside of his/her home country. Only highly motivated leaders were perceived as able to make these sacrifices. This attitude contrasts with many other cultures, such as Latin Europe, where more time is devoted to family, religion, and other interests outside of work (Adler, 2002).

In the Southern Asia cluster, the survey results indicated that transformational/charismatic, social skills, and team skills were rated highest among the sample. GLOBE results also concluded that in the Southern Asia cluster, team and transformational/charismatic leadership were considered most important (House, et al., 2004). Similar findings were reported by Leung (2005), who reported that Chinese culture includes a natural acceptance of hierarchy, with leaders expected to show that their authority is not only exerted for their own interest, but also for the collective's well-being.

In the Latin European cluster the most important leadership traits were social skills, visionary, and transformational/charismatic, as Table 3 illustrates. In comparison, the Eastern Europe cluster perceived social skills as the most important leadership trait, followed by visionary, directive, and transformational/charismatic. Interestingly, empathetic traits were considered least important by the Eastern Europeans in the sample, with the lowest mean reported (mean of 2.9). Despite the avowed communist tenets of collectivism, apparently the dictatorial legacy of Lenin and Stalin lives on.

Conclusion and Implications

As the global manager embarks on the journey abroad to lead a foreign team, they should consider the following suggestions. First, while international managers can spend considerable effort in planning, organizing, motivating, and controlling their subordinates, success in achieving the firm's objectives cannot be realized without systematically studying and understanding the cultural environment within which they operate (Larsen, et al., 1999; Hofstede, 1997; Shipper, et. al., 2003). As this study and substantial prior research illustrate, cultural identities play an important role in determining the selection of preferred—and effective—leadership style.

Second, global leaders should attempt to match their leadership styles to the various cultural conditions. By using the appropriate behavior in the corresponding cultural environment, global managers can enhance subordinate motivation, which, in turn, can lead to organizationally desired outcomes such as enhanced performance (Adler, 2002). For example, in the Anglo cultural cluster, an effective leader must use a team-oriented and participative leadership style. Because the countries in the Anglo cluster are relatively individualistic in cultural orientation, and all are democracies, people place great emphasis on their freedom and being able to have their say. Thus, a leader should include all relevant parties in the decision making process, delegate responsibility, and try

not to lead uncompromisingly from the top (Ashkanasy, et al., 2002). In contrast, Leung (2005) found that the Western EI model of open and participative leadership contributed to the creation of ineffective, bad citizens in a Chinese firm.

Further, the results support prior research in emphasizing the importance of emotional intelligence to effective leadership (Goleman, 1995; 1998). Studies in multiple cultures have noted this connection. As an example, Zadel (2008) explored the intersection of emotional intelligence and employee satisfaction among Eastern European employees, while Ilangovan and colleagues (2007) compared EI competencies among Indian and U.S. managers. Furthermore, Jassawalla and colleagues suggest that expatriate selection should be based on specific EI competencies, as an indicator of potential adaptation to a foreign assignment (e.g., a high level of empathy will allow a manager to place oneself in another's shoes and understand differences in values and perspectives, 2004: 846).

Finally, the study results suggest that the emotional intelligence trait social skill may be critical to effective global leadership. The requirement of building long-term relationships among both multicultural clients and colleagues is a good illustration for social skill, which is defined as proficiency in managing relationships and building networks with people, and an ability to find common ground and build rapport with others. Companies seeking to strengthen their international leaders' effectiveness may consider utilizing training programs directed at this particular leader attribute. Scholars and practitioners alike have called for emotional intelligence training to help employees recognize the underlying elements of cultural differences and backgrounds (cf. Ilangovan, et. al, 2007).

As with any exploratory research, the project created as many questions as it answered. While a link between emotional intelligence and cross-cultural leader attributes was not established, the sample size was small, and focused mainly on small to medium sized multinational firms. Additional research with a broader sample, from large as well as small companies, would be valuable. Further exploration of the social skills component of EI would also provide data of interest to international managers and organizations alike.

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Appendix: Sample Survey Questions

_____ Self-awareness is described as the ability to recognize and understand your moods, emotions, and drives, as well as their impact on work performance and relationships.

_____ Transformational/charismatic is described as inspiring the interest of followers for the purpose and mission of the group. Motivates followers to go beyond their self-interests for the good of the group and organization

_____ Motivation is described as a passion to work for reasons that go beyond money or status. A propensity to pursue goals with energy and persistence.

_____ Participative is described as interacting and consulting with employees, using their suggestions before making a decision

_____ Social skill is described as proficiency in managing relationships and building networks with people. An ability to find common ground and build rapport with others. A leader's ability to manage relationships with others.

