

# Leveraging universally desirable and undesirable leadership styles

**Zeynegul Samaibekova**

Institute of Economics and Management  
 Kyrgyz State University of Construction, Transport and Architecture named after N. Isanov  
 Malydybaev str. 34b, 720020 Bishkek  
 Kyrgyz Republic  
 e-mail: samaibekova@mail.ru

**Ainura Kocherbaeva**

Department of management  
 Kyrgyz Russian-Slavic University  
 Chui Avenue 6, 720022 Bishkek  
 Kyrgyz Republic  
 e-mail: ainura\_koch@mail.ru

**Abstract** This paper focuses on cross-cultural management and leadership. In particular, it aims at universal leadership studies and attributes. By using a comprehensive literature review and some relevant examples from various sources it shows that the amount of leadership as well as leadership styles might significantly vary across countries and occupations.

Moreover, the aim of the paper is to describe applicability of the leadership styles across nations. We show that while democratic, consultative or even inclusive leadership styles are beneficial in low power distance cultures, they might cause problems in the high-power distance countries. It appears that a very important aspect of the leadership style is the style of follower which, among others, is also dependent on the country of origin. The inconsistency of the styles of leaders and followers may lead to mutual misunderstanding, conflicts and loss of effectivity. Therefore, our study confirms that sufficient training of managers in multicultural management might be necessary for achieving growth and success in the volatile and globalised business environment of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

## 1 Introduction

Many academic and business studies show that top-level community leadership is valued only when the stereotypically masculine skills and assertiveness requirements are met. Importantly, researchers show that community qualities are indeed valued by senior executives when choices are not limited (see e.g. Koenig et al. 2011). Nevertheless, it needs to be assumed that both male and female participants would value agent traits (such as proficiency and assertiveness) as more important to succeed as a leader, similar to previous research (Koenig et al. 2011). However, one should also expect an interaction between the role and gender of the participants, so that women, compared to men, consider common features to be more important in order to succeed as a leader.

The other management issue heavily discussed nowadays concerns the benefits of participative, democratic or even inclusive leadership styles (Strielkowski et al. 2017). While the traditional management relied heavily on direct management of masculine assertive leaders, current studies demonstrate, that softer management styles may bring more benefits especially in the ever changing environment when information and skills of all the members of the teams are needed to make adequate decisions (Benoliel and Somech 2010). However, participative management also have significant constraints such as inability to manipulate the people (Shagholi, et al. 2010) and may not be applicable in some cultural environments (Parnell 2010; Elele and Fields 2010). The other styles of management popular nowadays such as consultative or inclusive styles are also subject to different cultural environments (Taras et al. 2010; Host'ovecký and Poláčik 2016).

The aim of this paper is to describe applicability of the leadership styles across nations. We show, that while democratic, consultative or even inclusive leadership styles are beneficial in low power distance cultures, it may cause problems in the high power distance countries (Hofstede et el. 2010). In addition, they suite well when both the leader and the follower come from the low power distance culture. In case one of the counterparts have high power distance mentality, the use of participative, consultative or inclusive management may lead to major conflicts.

In addition the extent and the time span of management is also subject to culture. In cultures with high Uncertainty Avoidance (Hofstede et al. 2010) the managers tend to concentrate on more short-term time span and employ more micromanagement. On the other hand in low power distance countries there is more space for long term strategic management.

As such, our paper is particularly well-suited to establishing a direct causal link between leadership and differentiated evaluation of agent and community characteristics such as cultural differences. We argue that agent properties to be more important for leadership success, but less important to assistant roles. Expectations of inclusive leadership seem comparatively better compatible with stereotypical female characteristics such as empathy. Women continue to be severely under-represented in leadership roles. It may be that an effective leadership in other areas requires different leadership styles than the above.

There may also be important occupational, gender, age, education or industry differences that leaders should be aware of. Research on gender and global leadership suggests that the characteristics of female leaders differ from those of men, and that the preferred leadership styles of female leaders in different cultures vary more than the preferred leadership styles of senior executives. Participatory leadership is viewed positively in the West, while in other parts of the world the most effective leaders are paternalistic. In some societies the leadership is self-confident and dominant, while in other societies the leadership is compassionate and caring. Some cultures see power and privilege negatively, while in other cultures status differences are respected. Effective global leadership is not a static set of qualities and behaviours but requires flexibility beyond cultural frameworks to meet the different expectations of the followers.

## **2 Issues of cross-cultural leadership**

While historically direct leadership styles were considered appropriate in the context of traditional management (Anderson and Anderson, 2010), nowadays, more democratic, participative or inclusive leadership styles gain their momentum (Benoliel and Somech 2010; Strielkowski 2018). Democratic, or also called participative leadership style is the style where group members can actively participate on the decision making of their bosses and the decision is based on consensus among the team members. The final decision may be taken by a group while the role of the boss is to facilitate the discussion. The inclusive leadership goes even further to promoting and development of the talents and opinions of the most disadvantaged members of the group (Moskalenko and Yevsieieva 2015). In both cases it is accepted and expected that the group members exert a substantial initiative and participate in decision making.

The benefits behind the participative or even inclusive decision making are not only making the subordinates to feel more valuable at work, but also to employ the unique perspective the subordinates may have (Benoliel and Somech 2010). Encourage managers to consider talented and diverse candidates for challenging roles so that the management pipeline contains a varied list. For example, the cashiers in the supermarkets or the clerks at the offices of insurance companies who deal with the customers may have a unique ideas about how the customers react which may benefit the whole company. These ideas need to be taken to the level of decision making and participative management might be one of the ways to do so. Democratic leaders generally have a positive and motivating corporate culture and empower employees to deliver top performance. Democratic leadership is best suited to lead an experienced and professional team of employees. Among the industries that support a democratic leadership style are those that use creativity and creative problem-solving (Pierce and Newstrom 2003).

While the ideas and human value of participative or even inclusive leadership are substantial, in practice they are often difficult to make real. Many managers than complain, that, while they try hard, the subordinates do not really want to participate and to bear the responsibility at least in part. Cashiers or clerks are not willing to engage in thinking of how to make the company work better even if the boss consults them. In addition, often the difficulties to present their ideas to superiors are related to the country of origin of the boss subordinate. In the context of the university study, many American or English language teachers in Eastern Europe complain, that their European students do not really want to participate in the class discussions in the same way their American counterparts did. More often than not, managers complain about their Chinese subordinates that they say yes to everything the boss suggests even in the case the suggestion is not doable, and do not offer their unique insight which may make the work more efficient. Sometimes they even feel embarrassed by the suggestion that they have to advise the boss and may feel that as inappropriate loss of face, or making the leader to look weak in their eyes. The question arises as for why in some cases participative and inclusive leadership style may work well in increasing the effectivity of leadership while in the others may actually destroy the well-oiled directive decision making processes that worked so well.

Generally, there are two contexts of leadership. The first type of leadership occur in situation when the hierarchy of roles is externally given (Giessner and Schubert 2007). One of the example of such setting is the relationship of teacher and student in a university or boss and subordinate on the workplace. The second type of leadership can be characterised by the equality of positions of the counterparts in the hierarchy, where the leader on his own initiative collect and motivate his followers in the boundaries of a project. The leaders in these cases and project dependent and groups in this setting might be very volatile and dependent on a particular challenges the firm or institution face.

The inequality of roles may be handled differently dependent upon the inequality needs of both boss and subordinate and this difference is highly related to the country of origin of the main actors as well as their occupations (Hofstede et al. 2010). In some countries and occupations people are more prone to be self-governing and to exert the initiative to achieve their (and company's) goals, while in others, they rely on the leaders, bosses, wise people etc. to tell them what and how to do. It might be viewed as much easier to fulfil the orders of others than to create the orders themselves.

According to the level of dependency needs of subordinates, the countries are assigned the score on so called Power Distance Index (PDI) based on the questionnaire study of the country residents (Hofstede et al., 2010). In low power distance countries the bosses and subordinates are not views as existentially unequal and even in the case the substantial inequality of official roles (boss-subordinate) it is expected and accepted that the subordinate comes up with his own ideas and opinions and the decision making is more democratic with the both just directing the overall discussion (ibid). The leadership style is more democratic and there is more space for inclusive leadership. If the power distance is large, the subordinates expect and accept the direct orders from the bosses and the democratic or inclusive leadership styles are not often practiced (Hofstede 1980).

The smooth functioning of both hi PDI and low PDI leadership is contingent upon the similarity of the PDI levels of both bosses and subordinates. The problems occur if the levels of power distance of the boss and subordinate substantially differ and frequently happens if with the ex-pat bosses or subordinates. Two types of conflicts may arise. If boss comes from higher PDI environment than a subordinate, the former is likely to be offended by the unsolicited advises from the subordinate, which he may fell as an attack on his superior's prerogatives. On the other hand, the low PD subordinate may view his boss to be too "bossy". In the opposite case, if the boss is low PD and the subordinate is high PD, the subordinate is likely to view the boss as softie, who cannot really decide what to do, and may feel even embarrassed if is asked for an opinion. Both of the inequalities in PD may result in a conflict.

While it was stated above, that in small PD county there is more space for inclusivity as there is more initiative on the side of subordinate, it is not always practised. Everyone can call themselves inclusive, but strategically there are some key differences between those who prefer an inclusive leadership style and a more traditional leadership style. The genuine inclusivity implies also the ability to be compassionate and understand the disadvantaged groups members. The extend of this understanding also varies from country to country and it is heavily correlated with the dimension of Masculinity-Femininity (Hofstede et al. 2010). In masculine countries there is more stress of trying to be the best and more value assigned to the success, while feminine countries practice more compassion and understanding with disadvantaged, underdogs, and antiheroes. We might propose the hypothesis, that *ceteris paribus* there is more inclusive leadership practiced in the feminine countries comparing to masculine ones.

In general, great leaders have different qualities and use different leadership styles that set them apart from others. Different work environments require different leadership styles, and great leadership typically combines the features of many different leadership types to manage effectively. There are seven classic leadership types and examples of executives that make them work the literature describes.

### **3 Understanding and leveraging leadership styles**

While the difference in cultural background which is reflected in difference in leadership styles is substantial, successful leaders and their teams need to get acquainted with it in order to be successful and efficient. In a study described by Bryant (2008), the teams at different locations worked six to nine weeks apart from their normal work on a defined project. Throughout the project, the change agents informed their teams about their cultural differences. The pronounced differences substantially changed the degree of understanding and mutual cooperation. This experience has since been repeated in multinational companies to ensure better team building and cooperation.

The heads of state and government must recognize the gaps between different cultures and learn how to bridge them to avoid the conflict. GLOBE is a major research effort that provides useful tools for understanding cultural impact and developing awareness of how to deliver leadership in a global context (House et al. 2002). More importantly, it helps leaders understand effective leadership implementation behaviours and behave properly in cultural contexts. Intercultural leadership opens the opportunity to understand and work with people from different cultures. This can help to improve the knowledge of the executives at different levels. Employees working in different cultures can develop effective ideas and strategies that may be present in their culture and, if involved, can lead to tremendous success in the management style of intercultural leadership. Intercultural leadership also helps to get leaders out of their comfort zone and predictable leadership style.

Besides understanding and leveraging the different styles of leadership described above, there is one more cultural issue which interferes: the actual amount of leadership comparing to the pre-set rules and processes. The related aspect concerns the micro-management versus strategic management. In some countries, Germany is an example, there is an emotional need for rules and procedures. Most of the processes need to be specified in details

which provides the country with comparative advantage in industries needing precision such as automobile industry, machine-building, construction. Here, there is a tendency for leaders to pay more attention to micromanagement of everyday activities and specifications of the duties of their employees (Hofstede et al. 2010).

On the other hand, in countries like Britain, more is given to be guided by the actual situation and environment, the rules are created and implemented only in the case of absolute necessity. Here, there is more space for the leaders to concentrate on strategic management and deal with more long term plans (ibid).

The extent to which the residents of a country have an emotional need for rules is mapped in Hofstede study by the dimension of uncertainty avoidance. It sets the boundaries of acceptable behaviour and helps to structure the future thus avoiding the unpredicted eventualities. The fear of unknown and unpredictable future, which might result in the states of anxiety mapped by the Uncertainty Avoidance Index (UAI) is one of the dimensions of Geert Hofstede that distinguishes the mentalities of the countries (see also Zhang and Zhou 2014). There are three ways the country residents can deal with this fear: powerful others with structure the future (direct management and order taking), rules (more attention to codified rules, micromanagement) and religion, which structures this life and the life after. Each society can choose its unique combination. Countries with higher Power Distance may have high UAI, which however is not transferred to rules, but rather to the stress on powerful others. Religious countries may have high UAI, which find its outlet in religion. All in all the cultural dimensions need to be judged as a whole set. Individual comparisons may cause inadequate results (Offermann and Hellmann 1997).

#### **4 Conclusions and discussions**

In a conclusion, it becomes quite clear that in order to be successful, global leaders must have a global mindset, tolerate a high degree of ambiguity, and show cultural adaptability and flexibility. Nowadays, we hear a lot about the benefits of diversity for innovation and creativity. We begin to realize that our team members have different ways of making decisions, solving problems, and resolving conflicts. And you must adapt your management, leadership and communication style accordingly. Adjust your expectations and yours to get better results and faster resolution of project issues.

In terms of cultural diversity, we refer to a set of beliefs, values, and customs that are associated with a particular population. We grew up learning about the world from our parents and our community. Societies defined the norms of behaviour to distinguish between acceptable and unacceptable behaviour. Most people developed their leadership qualities in a workplace based on their own culture. Hence, they are also introducing processes to help people collaborate effectively. And it is not just about helping people from other cultures adapt to our existing culture. Managers need to assess what processes need to be changed to meet the more diverse tasks. Managers of culturally diverse teams need tools that enable their employees to perform well in this new environment.

If one notices cultural differences, she or he can make a significant difference between personality and communication styles. Their greatest asset will be to understand cultural differences through the lens of how culture shapes the brain. They can minimize conflicts and mitigate the negative effects of cultural differences. It also paves the way for better communication, deeper trust and closer relationships with your stakeholders. Mindful of the body language, people focus on overcoming language barriers so that they can easily forget the important role of body language in intercultural communication. The body language varies greatly between cultures, and what is normal for one person can be most offensive or strange to another person. One should look for contextual clues and pay close attention to how body language is used. Over the years, there is a noticeable pattern in the development of leadership training models. In general, an organization in America or another Western nation would create a model for effective leadership training that needs to be refined and tested in order to make it applicable worldwide. One of the modes relies of the cultural indices of Geert Hofstede discussed in this chapter.

#### **References**

Anderson D, Anderson LA, *Beyond change management: How to achieve breakthrough results through conscious change leadership*, 2nd edn. (NY:John Wiley & Sons, 2010), 320 p.

Benoliel P, Somech A (2010) Who benefits from participative management? *Journal of Educational Administration* 48(3):285-308. doi: 10.1108/09578231011041026

Bryant B (2008) *Cross-cultural leadership: How to run operations in markets we don't understand* <https://www.imd.org/research-knowledge/articles/cross-cultural-leadership>. Accessed on 11 August 2019

Elele J, Fields D (2010) Participative decision making and organizational commitment: Comparing Nigerian and American employees. *Cross Cultural Management: An International Journal* 17(4):368-392. doi: 10.1108/13527601011086586

- Giessner SR, Schubert TW (2007) High in the hierarchy: How vertical location and judgments of leaders' power are interrelated. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes* 104(1):30-44. doi: 10.1016/j.obhdp.2006.10.001
- Hofstede G (1980). Motivation, leadership, and organization: do American theories apply abroad? *Organizational dynamics* 9(1):42-63. doi: 10.1016/0090-2616(80)90013-3
- Hofstede G, Hofstede GJ, Minkov M, *Cultures and organizations: software of the mind: intercultural cooperation and its importance for survival*, 3rd edn (New York, McGraw-Hill, 2010), 576 p.
- Host'ovecký M, Poláček M (2016) Communication skills as the competitive advantage of sellers. *Czech Journal of Social Sciences, Business and Economics* 5(1):18-26. doi: 10.24984/cjssbe.2016.5.1.2
- House R, Javidan M, Hanges P, Dorfman P (2002) Understanding cultures and implicit leadership theories across the globe: an introduction to project GLOBE. *Journal of world business* 37(1): 3-10. doi: 10.1016/S1090-9516(01)00069-4
- Koenig AM, Eagly AH, Mitchell AA, Ristikari T (2011) Are leader stereotypes masculine? A meta-analysis of three research paradigms. *Psychological Bulletin*, 137(4), 616-642. doi: 10.1037/a0023557
- Moskalenko V, Yevsieieva I (2015) Effective leadership conflict management in food technology enterprises. *International Economics Letters* 4(2):91-102. doi: 10.24984/iel.2015.4.2.4
- Offermann LR, Hellmann PS (1997) Culture's consequences for leadership behavior: National values in action. *Journal of cross-cultural psychology* 28(3):342-351. doi: 10.1177/0022022197283008
- Parnell JA (2010) Propensity for participative decision making in Latin America: Mexico and Peru. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management* 21(13):2323-2338. doi: 10.1080/09585192.2010.516588
- Pierce JL, Newstrom JW (2003) *Leaders & the leadership process*, 1st edn. (McGraw-Hill/Irwin, New York, 2003), 544 p.
- Rudman LA, Phelan JE (2008) Backlash effects for disconfirming gender stereotypes in organizations. *Research in organizational behavior* 28:61-79. doi: 10.1016/j.riob.2008.04.003
- Shagholi R, Hussin S, Siraj S, Naimie Z, Assadzadeh F, Al-Hejaili H (2010) Investigation on participatory management and identify the constraints. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences* 2(2):378-382. doi: 10.1016/j.sbspro.2010.03.029
- Strielkowski W (2018) Social, economic and academic leadership: some introductory remarks. *Proceedings of the 2nd International Conference on Social, Economic and Academic Leadership (ICSEAL 2018)*, Atlantis Press. doi: 10.2991/icseal-18.2018.1
- Strielkowski W, Tcukanova O, Zarubina Z (2017) Globalization and economic integration: the role of modern management. *Polish Journal of Management Studies* 15(1):255-261. doi: 10.17512/pjms.2017.15.1.24
- Taras V, Kirkman BL, Steel P (2010) Examining the impact of culture's consequences: A three-decade, multilevel, meta-analytic review of Hofstede's cultural value dimensions. *Journal of Applied Psychology* 95(3): 405. doi: 10.1037/a0018938
- Zhang X, Zhou J (2014) Empowering leadership, uncertainty avoidance, trust, and employee creativity: Interaction effects and a mediating mechanism. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes* 124(2):150-164. doi: 10.1016/j.obhdp.2014.02.002