A "CULTURAL CONTINGENCY" MODEL OF LEADERSHIP

By Alan S. Gutterman[1]

Abstract

Muczyk and Holt prescribed that global leaders should adapt to changing economic conditions, particularly the growing intensity of globalization, by aligning their leadership styles and processes with cultural demands. They suggested a "global framework of leadership" based on four "leadership dimensions"—consideration, concern for production, incentive for performance and democracy-autonomy—and then went on to prescribe recommendations for effective leadership styles in various regions of the world based on the predominant cultural characteristics in those regions identified by various researchers.

Muczyk and Holt prescribed that global leaders should adapt to changing economic conditions, particularly the growing intensity of globalization, by aligning their leadership styles and processes with cultural demands.[2] They want on to suggest a "global framework of leadership" by mapping the cultural determinants of leadership identified by the GLOBE researchers on to the following four "leadership dimensions" from the mid-range leadership theory proposed by Muczyk and Reimann based on observations of leadership behavior in North America[3]:

- Consideration: Concern for people; good human relations; and treating subordinates with dignity, courtesy and respect.
- Concern for production: Emphasis on challenging goals; achievement orientation; and high standards.
- Incentive for performance: Creating the strongest performance reward connection that is permitted within the applicable organizational constraints.

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[2] J. Muczyk and D. Holt, "Toward a Cultural Contingency Model of Leadership", Journal of Leadership & Organizational Studies, 14(4) (May 2008), 277-286, 278 and 281 (citing also F. Walumbwa, J. Lawler and B. Avolio, "Leadership, individual differences, and work-related attitudes: A cross cultural investigation", Applied Psychology: An International Review, 56 (2007), 212-230; and N. Nadler, International dimensions of organizational behavior (4th ed.) (Cincinnati, OH: Southwestern, 2002).

[3] Id. at 281-283 (citing J. Muczyk and B. Reimann, "The Case for Directive Leadership", The Academy of Management Executive, 1(3) (1987), 301-311).

- Democracy-autocracy: Degree to which subordinates are involved in making significant day-to-day, work related decisions, including goal setting.

Other scholars, such as Muczyk and Adler, had previously argued that in order to be "effective" leaders needed to score well on the first three dimensions (i.e., consideration, concern for production and incentive for performance), regardless of the situational context and that the "prescription for these dimensions is a normative one".[4] They claimed that research confirmed that those firms that were "well-run" placed a premium on "sound human relations, high performance expectations and rewards tied to accomplishment". However, Muczyk and Holt argued that even among these "universals" differences could be found based on the cultural profile of the society within which the leader was acting.[5] For example, the level of consideration displayed by leaders could be expected to be higher in societies that scored high on femininity and humane orientation and low on assertiveness. Muczyk and Hold also recommended that appropriate "consideration" by leaders in high in-group collectivist societies would include involving family members of subordinates in employer-sponsored social gatherings.[6] With respect to "concern for production", leaders are likely to place a greater priority on this dimension when uncertainty avoidance is high and the society has an external environmental orientation and a short-term time orientation. Finally, Muczyk and Holt believed that reward systems strongly linked to individual performance would be effective in highly individualistic and performance oriented societies while reward systems based on group- or organization-wide performance would be the preferred approach in societies that score high on collectivism and low on performance orientation.[7]

As for the last dimension, democracy-autocracy, Muczyk and Adler believed it was "situational" and required much greater attention to alignment with a large range of societal culture dimensions, including power distance, individualism-collectivism, masculinity-femininity, uncertainty avoidance, perceived role hierarchy, environmental orientation and the acceptability of bypassing the chain of command (i.e., rigidity of

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[4] J. Muczyk and D. Holt, "Toward a Cultural Contingency Model of Leadership", Journal of Leadership & Organizational Studies, 14(4) (May 2008), 277-286, 278 (citing J. Muczyk and T. Adler, "An attempt at a consentience regarding formal leadership", Journal of Leadership and Organizational Studies, 9(2) (2002), 2-17).

[5] J. Muczyk and D. Holt, "Toward a Cultural Contingency Model of Leadership", Journal of Leadership & Organizational Studies, 14(4) (May 2008), 277-286, 282-283.

[6] Id. (citing M. Javidan and R. House, "Cultural acumen for the global manager: Lessons from Project GLOBE", Organizational Dynamics, 29 (2001), 289-305).

[7] With regard to evidence that organizations in different societal cultures use different reward systems, see R. Fischer, P. Smith, B. Richey, M. Ferreira, E. Assmar, J. Maes, et al., "How do organizations allocate rewards?", Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology, 38 (2007), 3-18.

hierarchy).[8] Muczyk and Holt observed that "democratic leadership" with respect to making decisions and setting goals "may be suited for cultures that are low on power distance, high on individualism and femininity, low on uncertainty avoidance and characterized by internal environmental orientation" and "might also be suitable in societies whose members have a low regard for hierarchy and an inclination to bypass the chain of command".[9] On the other hand, Muczyk and Holt speculated that "autocratic leadership" might be more appropriate in societies "that are high in power distance, collectivism, masculinity, and uncertainty avoidance and that are characterized by external environmental orientation" and in societies "whose members have a high regard for hierarchy and are reluctant to bypass the chain of command".[10] The observations made by Muczyk and Holt were similar to those made by Hofstede, who argued that large power distance and collectivism were closely related and typically associated with developing countries while small power distance and high individualism were closely related and typically associated with industrialized countries.[11]

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Muczyk and Holt made several general, and tentative, recommendations regarding the most effective leadership styles for various regions around the world based on the predominant cultural characteristics in those regions identified by various researchers.[12]

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[8] J. Muczyk and T. Adler, "An attempt at a consentience regarding formal leadership", Journal of Leadership and Organizational Studies, 9(2) (2002), 2-17. Muczyk and Adler actually distinguished between the style used for making decisions and setting goals, the democracy-autocracy continuum, and the amount of follow-up or directive behavior associated with execution of a decision that has been made or attainment of a goal that has been established, the directive-participative continuum. As a result, rather than leaders being "democratic" or "autocratic", Muczyk and Adler identified four "leadership types" by combining the extremes of the two continuums: directive autocrat, permissive autocrat, directive democrat and permissive democrat.

[9] J. Muczyk and D. Holt, "Toward a Cultural Contingency Model of Leadership", Journal of Leadership & Organizational Studies, 14(4) (May 2008), 277-286, 282.

[10] Id.

[11] G. Hofstede, "The cultural relativity of organizational practices and theories", Journal of International Business Studies, Fall 1983, 82.

[12] J. Muczyk and D. Holt, "Toward a Cultural Contingency Model of Leadership", Journal of Leadership & Organizational Studies, 14(4) (May 2008), 277-286, 283 (Table 5: Examples of Regional Leadership Styles Based on Regional Cultural Determinants). Muczyk and Holt argued that "[t]here is considerable support for a global leadership contingency model" and noted that their recommendations were inspired by the work of several researchers, including results and interpretations reported in F. Brodbeck, M. Frese, S. Akerblom, G. Audia, G. Bakacsi and H. Bendova, et al. "Cultural variation of leadership prototypes across 22 European countries", Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology, 73 (2000), 1-29; M. Javidan, P. Dorfman, M. de Luque and R. House, "In the eye of the beholder: Cross cultural lessons in leadership from Project

They began with "mainstream leadership constructs developed from North American experiences" and integrated them with research on cultural imperatives completed using a wide and robust array of multinational samples.[13] They noted that the volume of research threatened to create a global contingency model that might well be far too complex and difficult to be of any practical use to practitioners (i.e., organizational leaders and managers) and sought to create a "simplified version" that could be readily applied.[14] They also cautioned that not all leadership characteristics were a function of cultural factors and that other things, such as attributes of subordinates and requirements of the particulars situation, needed to be taken into account when identifying the most appropriate and potentially effective leadership behavior.[15] Finally, like others, Muczyk and Holt questioned whether it was realistic to expect that leaders could be flexible enough to modify their styles whenever cultural conditions dictated the need for a change and suggested that organizations might be better off taking the styles of their leaders as "givens" and investing time and effort into placing them into cultural situations where those styles would be appreciated and effective, thus taking advantages of the pre-existing "strengths" of their leaders.[16]

- ***US and Canada*:** With regard to the US and Canada, Muczyk and Holt suggested that the Muczyk/Reimann model would be applicable in selecting the leadership style that should be used in particular circumstances.
- ***Middle East*:** Muczyk and Holt suggested that the autocratic leadership style was generally recommended in the Middle East combined with "heavy doses of concern for production and consideration". They noted that "[i]n the Middle East, with the exception of Israel, there are no democratic traditions" and that "the touchstone of good leadership in that part of the world seems to have revolved around the concept of justice, not democracy".[17] As far as rewards are concerned, Middle Eastern

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GLOBE", Academy of Management Perspectives (February 2006), 67-90; P. Koopman, D. Den Hartog, E. Konrad, S. Akerblom, G. Audia, G. Bakacsi, et al., "National culture and leadership profiles in Europe: Some results from the GLOBE study", European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology, 8 (1999), 503-520; A. Laurent, "The cultural diversity of Western conceptions of management", International Studies of Management and Organizations, Spring-Summer, 1983, 75-96; and S. Ronen and O. Shenkar, "Clustering countries on attitudinal dimensions: A review and synthesis", Academy of Management Review, July 1985, 449. Muczyk and Holt also cautioned that there are obviously cultural differences within the "country clusters" and that it is necessary and recommended to match the leadership characteristics used in their model to the "specific cultural imperatives" of each country.

[13] J. Muczyk and D. Holt, "Toward a Cultural Contingency Model of Leadership", Journal of Leadership & Organizational Studies, 14(4) (May 2008), 277-286, 278.

[14] Id. at 284.

[15] Id.

[16] Id.

[17] Id. at 283. They noted, for example, the absence of democratic traditions in China, including in the workplace. Even in countries that had been exposed to democratic

cultures are probably more receptive to recognition based on group and organizational performance measures rather than on individual performance. Muczyk and Holt also commented that leaders should include family members of subordinates in organizational social functions in the Middle East.

- ***Asia (excluding Japan)*:** According to Muczyk and Holt, the preferred leadership style in Asia, other than in Japan, would be "autocratic with an emphasis on consideration".[18] In light of the collectivist nature of these societies, it is not surprising that group and/or organizational measures of performance are recommended as the basis for rewards.
- ***Japan*:** Most researchers who have worked to identify "country clusters" based on cultural dimensions have concluded that Japan, although planted firmly in the middle of the Asian geographic zone, should be treated differently than other countries in Asia.[19] Muczyk and Holt recommended that rather than the "autocratic" style preferred elsewhere in Asia, leaders in Japan should apply "democratic leadership . . . with emphasis on consideration". Interestingly, Muczyk and Holt questioned whether there was any need to tie rewards to performance since workers in Japan appeared to be condition to "do the right things because they are right not because of the rewards associated with correct behavior".
- ***Western Europe*:** For those countries in Western Europe with cultural characteristics similar to those found in the US and Canada, Muczyk and Holt recommended that the leadership style should be determined based on the Muczyk/Reimann model. However, there are some Western European countries that have a relatively higher regard for hierarchy and "chain of command" and Muczyk and Holt prescribed a leadership style for these countries that was more autocratic.
- ***Eastern Europe*:** While many countries in Eastern Europe are trying to create economic systems similar to those found in Western Europe, recent history is still hard to overcome and Muczyk and Holt recommend that for the time being it may

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institutions, such as India, the efficacy of Western leadership styles might be problematic given that democracy was not introduced to the workplace in those countries. Id. at 278.

[18] J. Muczyk and D. Holt, "Toward a Cultural Contingency Model of Leadership", Journal of Leadership & Organizational Studies, 14(4) (May 2008), 277-286, 283. They noted that the region had a history of autocratic rule and that "[a]n autocrat ruled so long as he was on good behavior . . . [i]n other words, if he treated his subjects in an evenhanded way, honored their traditions, did not publicly flout the Koran, and did not levy onerous taxes, he was expected to rule for life". Id.

[19] A number of explanations have been advanced for Japan's apparent differences from the rest of Asia, including its geographic isolation—a group of islands disconnected from the rest of Asia; its long period of diplomatic isolation from other countries, not just in Asia but all around the world; and its language, which is only spoken in Japan. Japan is also unique among countries in Asia because of it intense exposure to US institutions and values after the end of World War II, a factor that likely contributes to the heightened interest and acceptance of "democracy" in Japan in comparison to many of its Asian neighbors.

still make sense to use and autocratic leadership style coupled with concern for production. As for reward systems, individual performance measures may be used.

- ***Southern Europe*:** Muczyk and Holt recommended autocratic leadership in Southern European countries combined with a heavy emphasis on consideration and reward systems based on group or organizational measures of performance.
- ***Central and South America*:** Muczyk and Holt recommended autocratic leadership with emphasis on concern for production in Central and South American countries; however, they cautioned that leaders should not ignore the need for consideration in these countries. Reward systems in Central and South America would best when they are based on group or organizational measures of performance.