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Cross-cultural coaching:
Journal of Occupational and Organisational Psychology
Article, March 2000: Summary

Background

In March 2000 a major article, "Cultural variation of leadership prototypes across 22 European countries" was published by Felix Brodbeck and colleagues in the *Journal of Occupational and Organisational Psychology* (Vol. 73, Part 1 March 2000, British Psychological Society, pp.1-29.) Although now 20 years old, this survey of cultural variation in management style across Europe still has considerable value for those undertaking leadership coaching across different cultures in Europe.

The Survey

- The survey was designed to test the assumption that concepts of leadership vary across Europe as a result of cultural differences, and to capture and describe the core areas of difference.
- The survey was enormous in scale. It is part of the long-term GLOBE project, which involves 170 social scientists and management scholars in more than 60 countries looking at cultural differences and their impact on leadership in organisations. This particular survey involved over 40 researchers from prestigious Universities right across Europe, with 6,052 middle-level managers from 22 European countries completing questionnaires. The questionnaires contained 112 items describing leadership traits and behaviours; managers were asked how each fitted with their concept of an outstanding business leader. The data was then intensively analysed.

The Results:

a) Overall
- The general findings might be summarised as follows:
- cultural differences in management/leadership behaviours across Europe were indeed found, and I some cases run deep, "indeed [diversity] is frequently perceived to be preserved as much as possible". (p.2)
- "The more leadership concepts between foreign managers and …[the] host country differ, the less the likelihood that cross-cultural leadership [and coaching] will be accepted and effective." (p.3.)

b) Country clusters
- The study grounded its work in a very considerable body of research including familiar work by Trompenaars (1993, 1996) pointing to potential differences associated with variations in language, religions, degree of modernity, political/economic/social development (eg education levels, health care, social security) and cultural values (eg individualism, uncertainty avoidance and gender equality.)

Various studies have found "clusters" of countries with broad similarities. For example, Zander (1997) found in a 'North European' cluster (including the UK) a 'coaching leader' was preferred, while in the rest there was a preference for a 'directing leader'. (So coaching itself might be directly counter-cultural in some countries.)

- However one finding in the present research of particular interest is they identified slightly different clusters, particularly involving the Slavic countries (which weren't differentiated in earlier work), and also sub-analysed the clusters in terms of the dimensions of particular power in each.
- The Czech Republic, Russia (and France) all formed separate "sub-clusters", and Poland and Slovenia were grouped. Hungary, however, emerged in the sub-cluster with the Latin countries (Italy, Spain, etc) - the authors suggest this might be the power of the shared Catholic tradition subsuming other factors.

c) Coaching Individuals
- Table 3 (see last page of this summary) on p.15 of the study lists the ideal leadership attributes required by country, and hence provides detailed information for those coaching in each location on what a prototypically excellent business leader would do.
- There *are* some core factors that operate as ideal leadership/management characteristics across Europe: interpersonal directness and proximity; autonomy; and modesty. For the majority of the factors considered, however, the relative importance varies, in some cases considerably, between countries and clusters of countries.

d) Cross-cultural Implications
- Table 3 also illustrates the rich source of information in the report for those coaching across cultures. For example, A French coach working in the Czech Republic (or vice versa) should note carefully that being "self-sacrificial" is an essential element for outstanding leadership in the Czech Republic; in France by contrast it is seen as an impediment.
- The study also includes a few of the possible charts where distance between countries on key dimensions is shown. It is sobering to note for UK coaches working in the Czech Republic, Poland, and Russia, for example, that the difference between them over the totality of these major indicators, is great, significantly more than distances from "near neighbour" clusters such as the Nordics or Latins.

Practical implications

The authors of the study note some of the applications of their work:
- enabling awareness of difference so as to enable coaches to adjust their expectation of leadership behaviour to that required in the host country;
- helping anticipate potential problems in cross-cultural interactions within business more accurately;
- raising awareness of the different amounts of prior training, coaching, adaptation of materials and actual experience in the host countries will be required on a country-by-country and cluster basis before interventions can be effective;
- and raising awareness when selecting managers and coaches of how strongly their leadership prototype does (or does not) overlap with the host country prototypes.

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Table 3. Prototypicality rankings of leadership attributes by region and country cluster

Leadership prototypicality	North/West European region					South/East European region				
	Anglo	Nordic	Germanic			Latin	Central	Near East		
	(GB, IRL)	(SWE, NL, FIN, DEN)	(CH, GER/w, GER/e, AUS)	(CSR)	(FRA)	(ITA, SPA, POR, HUN)	(POL, SLO)	(TUR, GRE)	(RUS)	(GEO)
High positive (facilitates outstanding leadership)	Performance Inspirational Visionary Team Integrator Integrity Decisive Participative	Integrity Inspirational Visionary Team Integrator Performance Decisive Non-autocratic Participative	Integrity Inspirational Performance Non-autocratic Visionary Decisive Participative Administrative Team Integrator	Integrity Performance Administrative Inspirational Non-autocratic Visionary Participative Self Sacrificial Team Integrator Diplomatic	Participative Non-autocratic	Team Integrator Performance Inspirational Integrity Visionary Decisive Administrative Diplomatic Collaborative	Team Integrator Visionary Administrative Diplomatic Decisive Integrity Performance Inspirational	Team Integrator Decisive Visionary Integrity Inspirational Administrative Diplomatic Collaborative Performance	Visionary Administrative Performance Inspirational Decisive Integrity Team Integrator	Administrative Decisive Performance Visionary Integrity Team Integrator Humane Diplomatic Collaborative Modesty
Low positive (slightly facilitates)	Non-autocratic Administrative Diplomatic Collaborative Modesty Self Sacrificial Humane Conflict Avoider	Collaborative Diplomatic Administrative Conflict Avoider Self Sacrificial Humane Modesty	Diplomatic Collaborative Self Sacrificial Modesty Humane Conflict Avoider Autonomous	Collaborative Decisive Modesty Autonomous Humane	Inspirational Integrity Team Integrator Performance Visionary Decisive Diplomatic Collaborative Conflict Avoider Administrative Modesty	Non-autocratic Participative Self Sacrificial Modesty Humane Status Conscious Conflict Avoider	Collaborative Participative Non-autocratic Modesty Self Sacrificial Status Conscious Autonomous Humane Procedural	Participative Non-autocratic Self Sacrificial Modesty Humane Status Conscious Conflict Avoider	Participative Collaborative Diplomatic Status Conscious Self Sacrificial Modesty Conflict Avoider Autonomous	Inspirational Non-autocratic Self Sacrificial Status Conscious Autonomous Participative Procedural
Low negative (slightly impedes)	Autonomous Status Conscious Procedural	Autonomous Status Conscious Procedural	Status Conscious Procedural	Procedural Conflict Avoider Face Saver	Self Sacrificial Status Conscious Autonomous Humane Procedural	Procedural Autonomous	Conflict Avoider Face Saver	Autonomous Procedural Face Saver	Humane Non-autocratic Procedural Face Saver	Conflict Avoider Face Saver Self Centered
High negative (impedes)	Face Saver Self Centered Malevolent	Face Saver Self Centered Malevolent	Face Saver Self Centered Malevolent	Status Conscious Self Centered Malevolent	Face Saver Malevolent Self Centered	Face Saver Self Centered Malevolent	Self Centered Malevolent	Self Centered Malevolent	Self Centered Malevolent	Malevolent

Key. AUS=Austria, CH=Switzerland, CSR=Czech Republic, DEN=Denmark, FIN=Finland, FRA=France, GB=United Kingdom, GER/w=Germany, GER/e=former East Germany, GEO=Georgia, GRE=Greece, HUN=Hungary, ITA=Italy, IRL=Ireland, NL=Netherlands, POL=Poland, POR=Portugal, RUS=Russia, SLO=Slovenia, SPA=Spain, SWE=Sweden, TUR=Turkey.