
CULTURAL ADAPTABILITY AS A LEADERSHIP SKILL IN GLOBAL MANAGEMENT

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Abstract: *The drive and capacity to modify one's behavior to fit the dominant norms, values, beliefs, customs, and expectations that serve as a society level model in a particular geographic area is known as cultural adaptation. In order for failure to adapt to be a deliberate decision rather than just an ignorant mistake, cultural adaptability at the very least entails knowledge of prevalent norms, expectations, and behaviors. Our*



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primary focus has been on the company manager's ability to adjust to other cultures, especially while acting as a leader. The manager in this position must be able to collaborate well with others, particularly when operating internationally (Clark & Matze, 1999). The training literature of organizations like the US Peace Corps, international religious missionary communities, different nations' diplomatic corps and militaries, and the global business community all support the ancient and multifaceted concept of cultural adaptability (Grove & Torbiron, 1985; Torbiron, 1982).

Keywords: *leadership, cultural adaptability, leadership skill, management, international religious missionary communities, global business community*

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INTRODUCTION

The ancient and complex concept of cultural adaptability is supported by the training literature of organizations such as the US Peace Corps, international religious missionary communities, diplomatic corps and militaries of various nations, and the global business community (Grove & Torbiron, 1985; Torbiron, 1982) and these companies different functions have led to the development of various definitions for cultural adaptation. Cultural acuity has emerged as a critical leadership characteristic for successful global management in today's interconnected global economy. High cultural intelligence (CQ) leaders are able to successfully negotiate the challenges of multicultural settings, which promotes better organizational performance. According to a study by Nosratabadi et al. (2020), leaders with high CQ have a direct and indirect favorable impact on organizational outcomes by creating flexible organizational structures. Furthermore, Rao-Nicholson et al. (2020) stress that when using an exploration mode of adjustment, expatriate leaders who actively modify their leadership styles to conform to local cultural norms improve work performance. These results highlight how important it is for leaders to become culturally adaptive in order to lead diverse teams and succeed in global marketplaces.

The importance of cultural adaptability in global management has been thoroughly studied over the last 10 years, emphasizing its vital role in effective leadership in a variety of cultural situations. Leaders may effectively traverse and manage multicultural contexts by utilizing cultural adaptability, which is frequently operationalized through the concept of Cultural Intelligence (CQ). A study by Tsai et al. (2019) examines how various forms of cross-cultural leadership adjustment show up in the leadership of expatriates using Nicholson's theory of WRT as a framework. They carried out a thorough investigation into how CEOs from 25 different nations adjusted to leadership in Thailand. They discovered that foreign company executives were more likely to use the exploration mode, which entails both modifying their leadership approach to fit the local culture and causing a significant shift in their subordinates' behavior. 79% of CEOs in their survey behaved in this manner. This result confirmed the WRT theory's prediction that leadership modification is required, primarily when the cultural context. Building on this earlier research, we contend that companies that adapt will perform better because they won't have to deal with problems between managers and employees and will be more focused on making the foreign investment a success. Based on the body of existing literature, we contend that, It's not always evident in multinational corporations (MNCs) whether

managers should modify their leadership style to conform to local standards or if sticking to their pre-existing management practices and styles is preferable.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Hippler, Caligiuri, and Johnson (2014) assert that the research on expatriate adjustment is still fragmented and immature, despite the growing practical relevance of cross-cultural leadership adjustment. Others criticize expatriate studies for making the law-like generalization that there is a strong positive association between adjustment and performance without any actual empirical support (Lazarova& Thomas, 2012). According to Festing and Maletzky (2011), research on leadership adjustment has "not reached maturity" to date. While there are many theoretical discussions about these topics, there are also relatively few data-driven studies and even fewer that offer any performance indicators (Hippler et al., 2014; Söderberg& Holden, 2002). In a British multinational corporation, Rao-Nicholson et al. (2020) investigated how expatriate executives adjusted to cross-cultural leadership. According to their findings, work performance improves for leaders that use an exploration method of adjustment, in which both leaders and subordinates modify their behavior. In order to succeed in overseas assignments, this study highlights the need for leaders to adapt their leadership philosophies to local cultural norms. Research has also focused on the connection between CQ and leadership practices. A recent study looked at the relationship between CQ and leadership effectiveness and three distinct leadership behaviors: task-oriented, relations-oriented, and change-oriented. According to the study, these leadership practices have a favorable correlation with CQ, which mediates the relationship between perceived leadership effectiveness and leadership behaviors. This implies that leaders with cultural intelligence are better able to modify their approaches, which increases their efficacy in multicultural environments. In the field of cross-cultural management, Akande (2025) offers a thorough analysis of how cultural knowledge can be used to effectively manage heterogeneous teams in the modern, international business environment. The book explores cross-cultural interactions and provides useful managerial success tactics, highlighting how culture affects team performance and leadership. Additionally, the idea of adaptive leadership has been investigated in relation to a global economy. According to Raei and Rasmussen (2024), adaptable leadership techniques can help with urgent global issues like crisis management, distant work, and political and cultural divides. By offering insights into its use in other cultural situations, their study broadens our understanding of adaptive leadership beyond Western societies. When taken as a whole, these studies highlight how important cultural flexibility is to global management. In the global arena, leaders who cultivate and use cultural intelligence are more equipped to handle the challenges of multicultural settings, modify their leadership approaches accordingly, and improve their own efficacy and organizational performance.

Theoretical Foundations of Cultural Adaptability

The growing demand for successful leadership in a globalized environment has drawn more emphasis to cultural adaptation as a leadership talent. To effectively lead in multicultural settings, leaders must negotiate a variety of cultural quirks. The theoretical foundations of cultural adaptability encompass various models and constructs, including Cultural Intelligence (CQ), Cultural Agility, and Cultural Humility, which collectively enhance leaders' capacity to manage across different cultures effectively.

Emotional Intelligence and Cultural Adaptability

An increasing amount of research highlights the connection between cultural adaptability and emotional intelligence (EI). According to Goleman (1995), emotional intelligence is the capacity to

identify, comprehend, and control one's own emotions as well as those of others. In a global setting, emotional intelligence (EI) improves a leader's capacity to interact with individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds, control emotions across cultural boundaries, and modify leadership approaches in response to cultural norms. In situations where there is cultural diversity, leaders with high emotional intelligence are not just conscious of their own emotional reactions but also attentive to those of others. Mayer, Salovey, and Caruso (2004) assert that emotional intelligence (EI) is essential for leaders to control their emotions in high-stress, multicultural settings, enhancing interpersonal interactions, conflict resolution, and team dynamics in a multicultural setting.

Integrating Cultural Adaptability with Global Leadership Competencies

A set of abilities known as global leadership competencies are necessary for leaders to function well in a global setting. Studies like those by Javidan et al. (2012), who stress the significance of cross-cultural abilities in global leadership development, have examined the integration of cultural adaptability with global leadership competencies. They emphasize that in a globalized economy, leadership performance is largely dependent on competencies like strategic global management, global mentality, and cross-cultural communication. According to Javidan et al. (2012), leaders need to exhibit a global mindset, which is the capacity to recognize the complexity of international business contexts and view the world from a variety of angles. Leaders with this perspective are able to communicate successfully across cultural boundaries and make decisions that are sensitive to cultural differences. Because leaders must strike a balance between local values and practices and global corporate objectives, it is especially crucial to integrate cultural adaptation with a global mentality.

The Role of Interpersonal Communication in Cultural Adaptability

A key component of cultivating cultural adaptability is interpersonal communication. According to Gudykunst (2004), leaders who work in cross-cultural settings must possess intercultural communication skills. This includes the capacity to read nonverbal clues, practice active listening, and modify communication methods to prevent miscommunication in various cultural circumstances. Effective cross-cultural communicators are better able to foster an inclusive and cooperative atmosphere, which is essential for team success. In order to lower cultural barriers, build trust, and guarantee harmonious interactions within heterogeneous teams, Hammer (2011) addresses the importance of intercultural awareness and communication. In the globalized world of today, where success increasingly hinges on the capacity to traverse complicated cultural landscapes, leaders must possess culturally adaptable leadership. Leaders who want to succeed in cross-cultural settings need to develop critical skills that enable them to oversee and guide groups of people from different cultural backgrounds. These abilities include interpersonal sensitivity, cross-cultural communication skills, cultural agility, emotional intelligence (EI), and cultural intelligence (CQ). Perhaps the most well-known skill for culturally adaptive leadership is cultural intelligence (CQ). Metacognitive, cognitive, motivational, and behavioural aspects are the four main components of cross-cultural competency (CQ), which is defined as the capacity to comprehend, relate to, and collaborate successfully across cultural boundaries (Ang & Van Dyne, 2015). High CQ leaders are able to identify and modify their motivations, actions, and thought patterns in order to communicate successfully in culturally heterogeneous environments. This talent is crucial for global leadership since it aids leaders in navigating cultural quirks and preventing miscommunications. Emotional intelligence (EI), which is the capacity to recognize, comprehend, and control one's own emotions as well as those of others, is another essential skill (Goleman, 1995). High EI leaders are able to modify their emotional reactions to fit a variety of cultural contexts, which promotes goodwill and improves

teamwork. A critical ability for handling cross-cultural disputes and fostering trust in multicultural teams, emotional intelligence (EI) also helps leaders maintain composure and resilience in the face of cultural difficulties (Mayer et al., 2004).

Cultural Agility: is the ability to modify one's leadership approach to function well in various cultural settings. According to Mendenhall et al. (2013), this ability is recognizing the cultural dynamics at work in every particular circumstance and adjusting one's conduct accordingly. Leaders that possess cultural agility are more equipped to handle diverse teams and intricate cross-cultural initiatives because they can switch between various cultural norms and expectations. In order to make sure that everyone feels valued and included, it also enables team leaders to assist individuals from different cultural backgrounds. For CEOs hoping to thrive in the international business world of today, cultivating cultural adaptation is an essential step. Leaders must effectively deal with cultural variations as businesses grow internationally. Intercultural education, hands-on training, coaching and mentoring, self-reflection, feedback, and evaluation are some of the tactics that can be used to improve cultural adaptability. One of the most popular strategies for fostering cultural adaptability is cross-cultural training. Effective cross-cultural training programs seek to improve cultural sensitivity, awareness, and understanding of cultural norms and practices (Gudykunst, 2004). By promoting an awareness of values, behaviors, and communication styles across cultural boundaries, these programs give leaders the skills they need to manage and adjust to cultural variations. A useful tactic for preparing executives for global leadership responsibilities, cross-cultural training frequently consists of role-playing games, talks, and simulations that allow participants to experience culture differences firsthand. Another crucial tactic for fostering cultural adaptability is experiential learning. This method places a strong emphasis on learning by doing, giving leaders firsthand experience in multicultural settings. According to Mendenhall et al. (2013), leaders who take part in cross-cultural projects or overseas assignments might enhance their ability to adapt to real-world circumstances and gain a deeper grasp of cultural dynamics. Leaders can acquire the practical skills required to traverse unique team dynamics, manage intercultural relationships, and modify their leadership style in accordance with cultural norms by living and working in diverse cultural contexts. Developing cultural adaptability also requires mentoring and coaching. The advice of mentors or coaches with cross-cultural experience can be beneficial to leaders. Mentors can share their experiences, offer guidance on overcoming difficult cultural obstacles, and offer insightful suggestions on how to deal with cultural differences (Harris and Moran, 2011). Contrarily, coaching is individualized assistance that enables leaders to examine their actions and pinpoint areas in which they might improve. For leaders to develop and improve their cultural adaptability over time, both coaching and mentoring offer continuous, tailored feedback.

A key component of developing cultural adaptation is self-reflection. Regular self-reflection helps leaders identify their own prejudices, presumptions, and areas for development. Self-awareness, according to Mayer et al. (2004), is a fundamental ability for cultural intelligence because it enables leaders to recognize how their own cultural background shapes their attitudes and actions. Leaders can learn to control their responses in cross-cultural interactions and modify their actions to be more inclusive and productive by engaging in self-reflection. Subsequently, evaluation and feedback are crucial methods for fostering cultural flexibility. Earley and Ang (2003) assert that leaders can learn a great deal about how their leadership style is viewed in different cultural contexts by proactively seeking input from peers, colleagues, and subordinates. Leaders can find opportunities for improvement and make the required changes to their approach by regularly evaluating their interactions with people from other cultures. In addition to assisting leaders in identifying their areas of strength and weakness, feedback fosters ongoing learning, which is essential for fostering cultural adaptability.



CONCLUSION

In order to successfully navigate a variety of cultural contexts, promote teamwork, and propel organizational success, leaders must possess cultural adaptation. Leaders of multinational corporations need to be able to comprehend and adjust to various cultural conventions, values, and communication styles. A mix of emotional and cultural intelligence is necessary for effective leadership in cross-cultural contexts, allowing leaders to handle heterogeneous teams with tact and flexibility. A leader's capacity to handle cultural difficulties and create inclusive work settings is improved by critical competences like interpersonal flexibility, cross-cultural communication, and cultural understanding. A proactive strategy that includes cross-cultural training, practical experience, mentoring, self-reflection, and ongoing education is needed to develop cultural adaptability. Leaders can improve their ability to adapt in real-world situations by being exposed to many cultures through overseas projects or collaborations. Through the implementation of leadership development programs, the promotion of cultural interaction, and the creation of inclusive workplaces, organizations play a critical role in this growth. In the end, in today's globalized society, cultural flexibility is not only a benefit but also a requirement for leaders. Long-term success in the global marketplace is ensured by those who accept cultural diversity and consistently improve their adaptation skills, which lead to more creative, resilient, and high-performing businesses.

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