

Transpersonal Leadership Series: *White Paper Four*

Leading Across Cultures

Developing Leaders for Global Organisations

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LeaderShape
Shaping Transpersonal Leaders



TRANSPERSONAL LEADERSHIP

Routledge and LeaderShape Global in partnership are pleased to announce a series of quarterly White Papers around the subject of Transpersonal Leadership, culminating in the publication of a book entitled “Becoming a Transpersonal Leader” in January 2018.

So what is Transpersonal Leadership? The concept was first published in a report on tomorrow’s leadership, based on a leadership development journey developed by LeaderShape (Knights, 2011). The word “transpersonal” was inspired by the use of the word in “transpersonal psychology” (Bynum, 2010). “Transpersonal” is defined as “extending or going beyond the personal or individual, beyond the usual limits of ego and personality”.

*The complete definition of a **Transpersonal Leader** is:*

They operate beyond the ego while continuing personal development and learning. They are radical, ethical, and authentic while emotionally intelligent and caring.

They are able to:

- *embed authentic, ethical and emotionally intelligent behaviours into the DNA of the organisation*
- *build strong, collaborative relationships, and*
- *create a Performance Enhancing Culture that is Ethical, Caring and Sustainable*

LeaderShape Global is a UK headquartered organisation with a global culture that operates without borders. It exists to develop people around the world who can lead beyond their ego to be radical, ethical and authentic, ie. Transpersonal Leaders. It provides work-based learning through a faculty of senior executives who are accredited coaches and experienced facilitators, blended with online content and web based tools. www.leadershape.biz

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Leading Across Cultures

Developing Leaders for Global Organisations

By Jenny Plaister-Ten

This is our fourth White Paper, entitled 'Leading Across Cultures: Developing Leaders for Global Organisations' and written by Jenny Plaister-Ten. This vital subject at a time when globalization is under scrutiny follows the first three popular White Papers:

- Ethical Leadership: How to Develop Ethical Leaders
- Women, Naturally Better Leaders for the 21st Century
- Sustainable Leadership; Rewire Your Brain for Sustainable Success

This White Paper looks at how our cultural influences impact our values and beliefs and consequently our behaviours and working practices, including leadership styles. It goes on to suggest that different cultures value different leadership approaches and also attach different importance to business goals. This can create confusion, misunderstandings and conflict. Nevertheless, companies with extensive ethnic diversity are more likely to deliver the innovative ideas and the creativity to deliver new products, services and solutions. This white paper explores the limitations and considerations of tapping into that potential and of the importance of doing so for global organisations..

Jenny Plaister-Ten is a member of the LeaderShape Global faculty and is dedicated to the development of global leaders and their teams. Following a stellar international career in the IT industry with Compaq/HP and ICL/Fujitsu during which she lived and worked in the USA, the Asia/Pacific region and mainland Europe she ran her own consulting practice based in Singapore and subsequently in the UK, altogether working in over 30 countries. Jenny is now a thought-leader on the impact of culture in the coaching relationship and upon global leaders. Her book, *'The Cross-Cultural Kaleidoscope'*, a systems approach to working amongst different cultural influences was published by Karnac in 2016. She is also a contributing author to *'Intercultural Management'*, (Barmeyer and Franklin, 2016). See her full bio here www.leadershapeglobal.com/jenny-plaister.

Introduction:

"We do not see things as they are; we see them as we are.

We do not hear things as they are; we hear them as we are."

The Talmud

This topic holds significant personal meaning for me as I have not only lived and worked in several different countries, but I am married inter-culturally and have raised a son amongst several different cultures. In each instance of being transferred internationally, I was not

given any support by any of the companies I worked for at the time. I therefore made my fair share of cultural 'blunders'. My way of 'giving back' is to support others working in complex multi-cultural contexts.

Just as we thought we were making progress as an inclusive society, the UK plunged into a polarized nation that seems to have caused regressive conversations about 'foreigners' and an increase in racially-induced hate crimes. Clearly the British 'bulldog spirit'¹ is alive and well as is a radical form of bias exhibited by the US President Donald Trump during the 2016 election campaign. Elsewhere in Europe, the rise of 'far right' parties is apparent. Thus, 'in-group' and 'out-group' formation is reinforcing what social scientists have for a long-time known – that we typically like and trust 'people like us'. This is explained perfectly in the above quotation from the Talmud. In the workplace, this bias is very often unconscious as most of us think that we believe in an open, transparent, ethical and 'just' world – one that is beyond bias, beyond ego. Transpersonal even.

To understand other cultures, it is necessary to live outside your own, in multiple, extended and different tenures.

So how much are our allegiances hidden to us? In a quotation from Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (1997) we may begin to understand one of the big paradoxes of cultural bias: "A fish never discovers his need for water until he is no longer in it." Thus, those of us who have not had the opportunity to live and work outside of our home country will not appreciate the magnitude of this quotation. Even those who have had tenures overseas may have simply transferred their way of life into a new country –without really adjusting. Hofstede (2001, p. 18) explains that the difficulty arising from identifying culture-related behaviour is because "it takes a prolonged stay abroad and mixing with other nationals there for us to recognise the numerous and often subtle differences in the ways they and we behave, because that is how our society has programmed us". Hall (1976, p. 58) also states, "Understanding the reality of covert culture and accepting it on a gut level comes neither quickly nor easily; it must be lived". This seemingly implies that to understand other cultures, it is necessary to live outside your own, in multiple, extended and different tenures.

Therein lies a dilemma and perhaps explains why there are so many misunderstandings when operating globally. There are many challenges. How can global leaders, who have not had this depth and breadth of exposure really understand and appreciate what is going on for someone with an entirely different perspective? How can they make the time to explore the nuances and subtlety of cultural differences? How can leaders operating globally remain authentic whilst exhibiting cultural sensitivity and understanding? How can they be adaptive in the face of so many different cultures and cultural norms?

As this paper attempts to address these questions, perhaps it would help to first explore the notion of leadership and specifically what is imbued in the concept of 'good leadership' for different people.

1. The British Bulldog Spirit is an expression that became synonymous with Prime Minister Churchill during and after the war years to express solidity and fearlessness. It has since become used as an association with a strongly nationalistic position, viewpoint or person.

The notion of good leadership

At LeaderShape we define a good leader as operating beyond the ego, working for the greater good (caring) in an emotionally intelligent manner and within an ethical and purposeful framework. If we explore some of these concepts we can see how difficulties occur.

1. Beyond the ego. Ego is essentially an individualist construct, borne by individualist cultures. Ego is Latin for "I" and was brought into 'popular' awareness by Sigmund Freud (1923) – from Austria; an individualist culture. However, there are many cultures who do not perceive the self to be a separate entity. More significantly, concepts of self can vary widely across cultures. A person tending to construe him/herself as an independent individual, or as an interdependent member of a group, is culturally bound. Cousins (1989) devised a twenty-statement test to compare self-concepts between students in Japan and the US. Results showed that the Western self-concept is thought of as independent and autonomous, whereas the Eastern is interdependent. This is sometimes reflected in language. For example, the Japanese word for self, *jibun*, means "a share of the shared life space", according to Hamaguchi (1985, cited in Markus and Kitayama, 1999, p. 343). Furthermore, there may be cultures who are more hierarchical in nature who expect a leader to have a strong 'ego' when ego is expressed as strength of direction or force of opinion.
2. If we take 'the greater good' as a concept then for all parties this can get confusing. Which entity are we referring to when we refer to the greater good? This could be simply the 'other' as in several Asian cultures or it could be the family, the community, the organization as a whole – or a team or division, it could be a country – or a guiding spiritual force. For those cultures who believe that external forces guide their fate this is likely to be an allegiance to 'the Gods'. 'Inshallah' translated to mean 'to Gods will' can be very frustrating to those who are internally-referenced, from individualistic cultures believing in the ability, acumen or competency of the leader, rather than the fateful 'what will be, will be' approach. It can be equally as frustrating to be pushed towards an outcome or action, when one takes a *'laissez-faire'* approach to life.
3. Lastly, ethics in the concept of culture. If as Bower (1966) suggests, culture means 'how we do things around here' then an emotionally intelligent leader would be attuned into the way in which things work in the local culture and adapt accordingly. But, how far do we take this? Many companies have come unstuck when operating globally when discovering that local cultural norms and expectations run counter to their own moral compass. Bribery in one country can be tantamount to 'connections' in another. Or, in some paternalist cultures it may be seen as being benevolent towards those who do not have the resources or are not paid 'fairly'; therefore, a 'backhander' may be seen as an obligation or a cultural norm.

The net result of these differences in perspective – on a global scale – are vastly differing views of what good leadership is. In his book, "Leading with Cultural Intelligence", Livermore (2010)

explores what the leadership expectations are from different cultural perspectives. We can point to many examples where cultural differences determine what good looks like. Here are just some.

Country	Conception of good leadership
France	Cultivated and highly educated
China	Benevolence. Dignified/alooof but sympathetic
The Netherlands	Skeptical about the value and status of leaders
Brazil	A good relationship builder who demonstrates flair and empathy
Egypt	Treat leaders as heroes. Worship them so long as they remain in power
Japan	Symbolic leadership – <i>Public responsibility taken for the failures of company (e.g. CEO resigns over a corporate scandal)</i>
USA	Some like leaders who empower and encourage subordinates; others prefer bold, confident, and risk-oriented leaders.

Thus we can immediately see potential for clashes when some want empowerment, some want benevolence, some want a highly cultivated style, others want risk-takers, confidence, flair, empathy, aloofness, self-sacrifice, relationship builders and some don't value leaders at all. And those differences are from a list of only seven countries!

Differing values lead to differing emphasis on business goals

Complicating the matter still further, Hofstede et al. (2010), in a study of more than 1,800 MBA students at twenty-one universities in seventeen countries, found marked differences in *perceived* business goals. Perceived business goals means those that you personally hold to be the most important (as opposed to the ones that your boss or the organisation hold to be the most important). The international top five goals can be seen in this box below:

International top five business goals:

- Growth of the business
- Personal wealth
- This year's profits
- Power
- Continuity of the business

China and Germany were the most dissimilar from the international average. They both placed “Responsibility towards society” and “Respecting ethical norms” in the top five, whereas these were typically found in the bottom five for other countries. China also cited patriotism, national pride, honour, face, and reputation as extremely important, and Germany placed responsibility towards employees, creating something new, and profits in ten years’ time as important.

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What is Culture?

In a well-known expression, Hofstede (2003) refers to culture as “*the software of the mind*.” The question remains, is it the operating system or the application software? If one views culture as ‘the way we do things around here’ then it may be understood as the operating system. The fundamental roots, or codes, of how things work, understood by members of a group – be that a country, region, organization, community or social group or family.

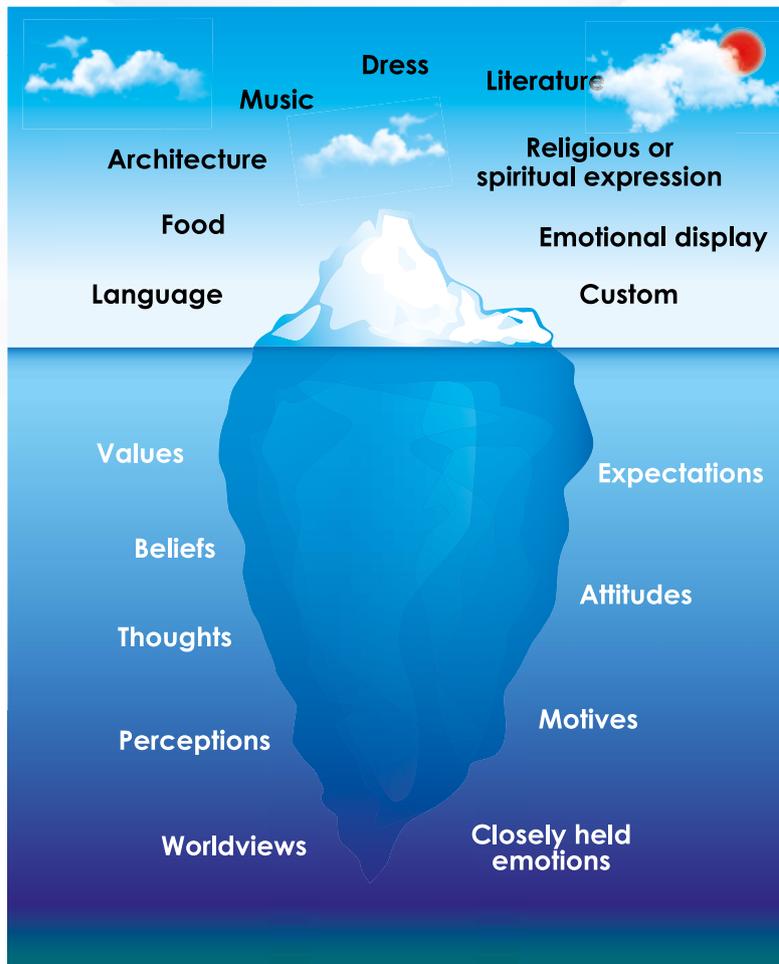
These codes are learned from an early age and are therefore largely sub-conscious to us. A useful analogy is that of the cultural iceberg. Above the waterline lies visible culture. What we can see may include customs, dress, buildings, food, rituals, and more, even the way streets are laid out or named. These aspects may be easily changed and may even be temporary or subject to the whims of ‘popular culture’. Those aspects of culture below the waterline include our thoughts, attitudes, emotions, expectations, values, and beliefs, many of which are enduring yet are difficult to observe and often remain hidden, even from our selves.

The Culture Iceberg diagram on the next page draws on Freud’s (1923) work identifying elements of culture that are held at conscious and unconscious levels, known as visible and invisible culture.

Those aspects above the water are more easily visible and understandable, whereas those beneath the water are intangible and therefore less easily understood. On a collective level, the cultural self becomes manifest in cultural norms. Whilst customs, dress, art, dance, and music, even the influence of climate, are all expressions of cultural norms, below the waterline is where most clashes occur. Here lie values, assumptions, and beliefs. They are less widely known to be the expectations and rules that guide the behaviour of members of a culture and are often held subconsciously. Thus, a leader’s beliefs and values will be informing the organisation culture.

If two icebergs were to collide, the impact would be felt below the water line. As with culture, this is where the most damage may be felt and where the potential for clashes lies. It is here that those leaders with an eye on leveraging the potential of diversity of thought need to be most aware.

CULTURAL ICEBERG



The difficulties of identifying cultural values and beliefs

Cultural communication patterns, loaded with custom, practice, and belief, along with value-laden expectations, are acknowledged to contribute to misinterpretations in a cross-cultural setting. Significantly, however, it is the meaning behind this for the individual that appears to be the area of potential conflict. Triandis (1972) suggests that subjective culture is the cultural groups' typical perception of norms, values, and beliefs. But, on the whole we do not know very much about how culture shapes our perceptions and choices; the internal drivers and deeply-held emotions of our cultural selves.

If we are not aware of these drivers of differences in perspectives how can we possibly begin to understand the reasons for workplace disagreements or behaviours that can appear subversive, obstructive or intrusive – or just plain rude!

Values-led leadership styles

One key research project that has identified similarities in leadership approaches based on where a person comes from confirms that culture affects leadership styles. The Globe Study (House, et al., 2004) has identified similarities based on ten regions around the world: Southern Asia, Latin America, Nordic Europe, Anglo, Germanic Europe, Latin Europe, Sub-Saharan Africa, Eastern Europe, Middle East, and Confucian Asia. This awareness alone can help leaders orientate themselves towards inherent differences. However, it still categorizes people into groups based on where they come from, increasing the tendency towards 'in-group' or 'out-group' perspectives and stereotyping. Many emerging leaders and 'millennials' have had exposure to multiple cultural influences before they enter the workplace, bringing with them a rich tapestry of perspectives. Therefore, this, along with a growing global middle class means that a global mindset is called for when working in multi-cultural teams and societies.

What remains true however, is that attitudes to authority can cause motivated or de-motivated staff, depending on what the expectations of a good leader are. This can be compounded when we bring organisation culture into the mix. Organisation cultures are borne out of the home culture of the original founders, or a merger of cultures in the case of international mergers and acquisitions. International mergers and acquisitions are notorious for their failures, yet are found to be at least 26% more effective if cultural issues are addressed at the outset (Renaud, 2009). Yet this is rarely done.

If cultural misunderstandings are not resolved, this can lead to clashes in the workplace. In multi-cultural teams this can mean that productivity suffers; compounded further when working remotely.

Cultural differences may be found in the following approaches to work:

- Attitude to time: with some members showing up at precisely the prescribed hour and others being late
- Differences in communication styles: with some being very direct and others indirect
- A focus on the task or the relationship
- Differing levels of accountability and assertiveness
- Focus on the context or the letter of the law/agreement
- Levels of formality and hierarchy
- Levels of fatalism compared with personal autonomy
- A concern for process or results
- Differing attitudes to risk
- A desire for achievement or balance

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These differences mean that in the workplace and in multi-cultural teams there are differing behaviours around protocols such as how to greet people, dress and exchange business cards. How to lead a meeting differs in terms of levels of formality, styles and expectations of how to behave especially concerning the amount of contribution expected or not expected from team members. Negotiations and the processes/structures involved in decision-making differs widely, with some cultures exhibiting a lot of personal autonomy and others deferring to either the wisdom of the group or the authority of the leader – or both.

Furthermore, preferred organization structures differ across cultures with gender, rank, boss and subordinate relationships all having a bearing upon the structure. Conflict resolution will also differ as will motivation and reward structures, with some being more concerned with achievement orientation and others with process and consensus.

How can Leaders stay authentic across the globe?

With so many different ways of working to navigate, how is it that global leaders manage to stay effective? Little wonder then that the organisation culture becomes touted as the ‘tune by which all shall dance’. This too comes at a cost as one party may be seen to impose its way on the other. Think about the impact of a ‘Western organisation’ imposing its will for engaged, assertive employees in a culture that thinks inactivity is wise lest a mistake might be made. Think about the impact of an ‘Eastern organisation’ planning for the long-term in a context that demands quarterly results.

Certainly, one thing leaders must not do is to stereotype. Cultural norms are simply an expression of the tendencies of the majority and do not constitute observed behaviour in every individual from that culture. An obvious statement, but one that is frequently overlooked. As we enter into a period of protectionist and nationalistic governmental policies, this will become even more important.

Emotionally intelligent (EI) global leaders seek to understand the perspectives of their global ecosystem by utilizing the four pillars of self-awareness, self-management, social-awareness and relationship-management (Goleman, 1995). These pillars and their corresponding behavioural competencies are critical in a mono-cultural environment, but even more so when operating inter-culturally. We need to first discern our culturally-bound responses (self-awareness), then we need to control the urge to respond according to our own cultural code of conduct (self-management). An awareness of the cultural norms within a multi-cultural environment would support the social awareness pillar and following the protocols and rules of the culture would support the relationship management pillar. However, this should not be at the expense of a leader’s own inner purpose or authenticity, factors perhaps more naturally associated with self-

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awareness and self-management. This approach also needs to take into account the fact that how we hold our culture internally has distinct meanings for each and every one of us.

The 4 EI competencies



It should be noted that EI and the ability to read the 'other' does not automatically translate across borders, factors perhaps more naturally associated with social awareness and relationship management.

Emotional Expression differs across cultures

This is because there are strict rules in most cultures for cultural expression with some cultures demanding active emotional expression (as in some Latin countries, for example) whilst others 'hide' it (as in Asian countries such as Japan, for example). As a further consideration, when we see a smiling face we may assume it is because the person is happy, and want to smile back. However, smiling is even frowned upon, literally not trusted in some cultures. That is why you do not see it very often in countries like Russia. Other examples of cultural expression are in the area of self-promotion which is a common expression of confidence in some cultures such as the USA, whereas it is often frowned upon in other cultures such as the UK. Similarly, according to a study comparing the emotional expression of anger in both the USA and Japan (Araki and Wiseman, 1996), found the American levels of expression to be much higher. These studies reinforce the assertion that differences lie more typically in the nuances between cultures. Not so much in the "what" – we all experience the emotion of anger – but in the "how". How it is expressed.

Furthermore, according to Tsui (2007) whilst it is universally accepted that most people want to feel good, how they go about that differs widely. Working at the level of these very nuanced differences takes dedication to observe how others behave and respond as well as shining a mirror back on to oneself to understand better our own culturally-imbued habitual responses.

So what can we do to adapt when working globally, whilst remaining authentic to our own sense of self? Here are some ways to help us on the path:

1. In seeking to be authentic, leaders must be prepared to learn and to reflect on the meanings that their own culture has for them and how this affects their attitude to the organization culture and to their role as a leader. Only with this self-awareness will they be able to recognize a cultural difference. This self-awareness can be helped with a tool such as LeaderShape's Leadership and Emotional Intelligence Performance Accelerator (LEIPA) www.leadershape.biz/leipa. LEIPA will help to discern the difference between how a leader sees him or herself and how his or her stakeholders see him or her (Wall & Knights, 2013).
2. Learn to stop imposing our own 'map' onto others. This can be tricky if it is the organization culture demanding a certain code of conduct that is culturally-bound. We can stop compounding this by being very aware of our own cultural norms as stated above. It then becomes even more important to find a way to make it explicitly known that you are doing xyz because you are from xyz culture. I for example, am known to say to my more direct Dutch colleagues, "ah, I answered in that way because I was being English and indirect" (in comparison with a typical Dutch person). If you find yourself in disagreement with another, or simply not understanding what happened, try to find at least three reasons for it happening. So, I may have responded in that way because I was being too English, or because I thought that was because my boss expected me to behave in that way, or because I simply was having a bad day. At least three reasons is important, because in that way, our own need to be right becomes loosened – which does not happen if we have only one reason, and if two reasons the choice becomes binary. Only with three can we start to see other possibilities for the situation.
3. Use a tool to help such as the Cross-Cultural Kaleidoscope™ (Plaister-Ten, 2016). The Cross-Cultural Kaleidoscope is a tool that has been developed through research and tested in practice. Its purpose is to raise culturally-derived awareness and to facilitate culturally-appropriate responsibility. It incorporates the need to take a systems view of the situation in a multi-cultural context. A systems view takes the external factors that a leader has been exposed to over the course of their international career and over their lifespan. It therefore looks at the economic circumstances, the political, as well as historical and legal. It considers the arts and the social context, including national education systems as well as the more obvious need to identify cultural norms. Diversity and religious and spiritual beliefs are also provided for in the model. It even explores the geographical and environmental factors. These elements are then examined in terms of their effect on the internal world of the leader. A concept known as the 'cultural self'. For example, if a person grew up in a country with a history and family background of slavery, the inquiry delves into how this might have

impacted their psyche and affected their leadership approach. Would they be more inclined or less inclined to do as others tell them to do?

The cross-cultural kaleidoscope™ A systems approach



4. The last point concerns 'unlearning'. At LeaderShape we call for Transpersonal Leaders to keep learning. Yet, as global leaders we need to *unlearn* faster than most. We need to be aware of those patterns that were formed in a different country or age or context that are no longer appropriate. A contemplation of culture as acquired, or learned and therefore "unlearned", suggests that an awareness of those culturally bound responses no longer serving the situation is mandatory for 21st century leadership. This implies letting go of certain cultural constructs that a leader has grown up with or developed. Yet, a warning from Hofstede "unlearning is more difficult than learning for the first time" (2003, p. 4).

The global stage is a huge playground. Schneider and Barsoux (2003) compare the quest for cultural understanding with an exploration as deep as the ocean. But the rewards are immense. Developing a global mindset and maintaining curiosity about the world and the people in it is surely one of the greatest gifts available to mankind. To work with people from different countries, organisations, sectors and walks of life represents an opportunity to leverage the creativity and innovation inherent within diverse mindsets. We truly hope that you will enjoy the journey as much as we do.

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