6

CULTURE, DIVERSITY, AND INCLUSIVE LEADERSHIP

Overview

This chapter explores how cultural and diversity differences affect leadership outcomes. It starts by defining culture and discussing how cultural practices shape individuals' values and beliefs.

You are then introduced to three well-established cultural value frameworks created by Hall, Hofstede, Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner respectively. In this chapter, you'll work through a series of reflective exercises based on these models to reveal your own cultural profile.

You are then asked to create what you perceive to be the typical cultural profile for the country where you're living, and to consider in what ways your values are most different, and what kind of leadership challenges you may encounter when interacting with others.

The chapter then introduces a new cognitive way to examine cultural differences based on the theory of analytic vs holistic thought that examines the historical roots of how people think. You'll discover your own cognitive tendencies through a reflective quiz.

Next, we explore diversity and inclusion more broadly to consider how multiculturalism plays out across organisations. The chapter concludes with inclusive leadership, a contemporary approach that champions the unique value offered by embracing diversity.

Exercise 6.1: My cultural spheres

Quiz 6.1: Hall, Hofstede, Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner

Exercise 6.2: Cultural value profiles

Quiz 6.2: Holistic cognition scale

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Cultural differences may present the single greatest challenge, and opportunity, for contemporary leaders. Individuals today bring a wealth of diverse perspectives, knowledge, and experiences to our organisations. More than ever, we need leaders who appreciate the value of diversity and can enable every follower to contribute their unique talents to the advantage of the group.

In this chapter we will focus primarily on culture and examine a series of different cultural frameworks to develop an understanding of your own 'cultural profile'. Afterwards, we'll consider diversity more generally and discuss what true multiculturalism in organisations looks like. The chapter culminates in an overview of inclusive leadership as an approach that's specifically tailored to harness the considerable benefits of diversity.

GROWING COMPLEXITY

Recall from our discussion of 'contemporary leadership challenges' in Chapter 2 that modern organisations work increasingly on an international stage, with functions distributed across multiple locations. For example, their suppliers, production facilities, distribution networks, headquarters, support offices, and customer-facing outlets may be spread across a dozen countries or more to take advantage of unique benefits offered by different locations. That means we often find ourselves dealing with people in different countries from our own.

International migration has also radically diversified domestic workplaces. On average, up to one-third of the population of developed countries is made up of first-generation migrants who were born overseas themselves and second-generation migrants with at least one parent born abroad. As people move between cities, countries, professions, and social groups, they pick up and share their culture along the way. The interactions create complex 'third culture' identities that mix international heritages and domestic influences (Pollock et al., 2017).

More people today are exposed to, learn about, and embrace cultural differences than ever before. For example, my wife is the quintessential global citizen. Her father's family came from the UK to New Zealand, where he grew up a Kiwi in a small town. He joined the military and ended up in South-East Asia before finding his way into the petroleum industry in the Middle East. Her mother is Malaysian Chinese and was sent to an American boarding school in Singapore from a young age. She grew up with American values and went on to live in Las Vegas, San Francisco, and Hawaii.

They later met back in Singapore, had their first child, my wife, in Abu Dhabi, and then lived on expatriate compounds throughout the Middle East. If you've never seen an American compound before, I assure you that it's a surreal experience. Imagine a walled-in miniature US city laid out with roads and suburban houses in neighbourhoods, complete with schools, shopping malls, movie theatres, restaurants and the like. You wouldn't even know that you were in the Middle East until you stepped outside the security gates and into another world.

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After growing up in Abu Dhabi, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia, the family spent some time in Malaysia before sending their daughters to secondary school in New Zealand, where we met. Today my wife looks half-Asian and half-European, sounds American, has some Buddhist beliefs, lives in Australia with me, and has both an Australian and New Zealand passport. Her cultural heritage is a rich tapestry of diverse experiences and perspectives.

That's quickly becoming the norm and individual people are more diverse than ever before. Within organisations it's typical to see heterogeneous constellations of people working together. Appreciate then that every person you're leading has developed a different point of view from a lifetime of experiences, and they'll perceive your leadership rhetoric and behaviour through the unique kaleidoscope of their cultural background.

We'll focus on the complexities that these cultural differences bring to how we understand and practise leadership, and discuss how we can best harness the considerable value that diversity offers our teams and organisations. To get started let's first explore what 'culture' is all about.

CULTURE

The idea of culture stems from the scientific study of humanity known as anthropology, which is a colossal field of academic inquiry that includes domains of human behaviour and biology, societies, linguistics, and culture. Tylor (1871) defines culture as 'that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society' (p. 1).

So culture is not something that we're born with; rather, it's something that we've learned and picked up through our involvement with other people in society. That includes whatever social groups that we're a part of, including our family, friends, the neighbourhood we grew up in, the schools and universities we've studied at, the cities and countries where we've lived, etc.

As we've interacted with other people in these various social settings we've seen and taken part in a broad array of cultural practices, embracing and embedding some of these behaviours and ideas as aspects of our own identity. We've all been exposed to a radically diverse constellation of customs, traditions, religions, rituals, and heritages that have shaped who we've become – for example, midday prayer, giving each other a high-five, eating with chopsticks, as well as a whole array of celebrations and all the associated rituals, rites, and forms.

Culture is something that's therefore transmitted hereditarily through social interaction, from one generation to the next. You're not born with it, it's not genetic, but you do acquire your unique cultural outlook from others who have come before you, who themselves first learned and then incorporated these cultural practices into their own lives. When we enter the world and begin engaging with other people, we start absorbing aspects of their culture from our social interactions. And there are innumerable discrete

cultural practices that people have transmitted down through the ages – for example, Oktoberfest, circumcision, singing Christmas carols, the list goes on.

Now, all these specific things that people do, these cultural practices, influence who we become by shaping our beliefs, moral standards, and behaviour. The practices we engage in teach us about what's important. Each discrete cultural practice has a history, a heritage, that's embedded with specific cultural values that it carries with it. Cultural practices themselves are therefore only the surface manifestations of our underlying cultural values. What we do is only a representation of what we think is important.

But what exactly are these cultural values? Let's dig a little deeper.

CULTURAL VALUES

Cultural values are people's perceptions of and preferences for certain kinds of behaviour, motivations, and ambitions. They're guiding principles that tell us what's appropriate and important in our societies. By being a member of various social circles, we start to understand what people in those groups value, what's expected of us, and what kind of behaviour is appropriate.

Imagine, for example, someone who's raised in a devout Catholic family, where the values around marriage uphold it as a strictly monogamous and lifelong affair. It's unlikely that they'd then consider polygamy or taking on multiple marital partners; that's not a cultural practice that would even enter their realm of possibility. But polygyny is well accepted within certain Islamic faiths and would therefore appear perfectly normal to people embedded in those religious communities.

The same kinds of formative experiences happen across the many social groups that we're involved with. Education offers another good example. If you went to Eton College in the UK where generations of English aristocracy have been groomed, you'd acquire a specific perspective about what society is like, your place in it, and how you should behave. That perspective would likely be very different if you went to a rural school in Pakistan, or an international school in Singapore.

Our cultural values will therefore shape our behaviour, influence what we aspire to, and determine what we think is right and just. More importantly, cultural values will also influence how we see other people's behaviour, motives, and morals. And here's how it starts to affect our leadership interactions.

Leadership Perceptions

You might recall that at the start of Chapter 1 I introduced you to implicit leadership theory (Lord & Maher, 1991), which is your idea of what constitutes effective leadership based on your personal beliefs. House et al. (2004) extend the framework to explain that your ideas about leadership are culturally embedded, and thereby introduced 'culturally

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endorsed implicit leadership theory'. It's best to think about it as a cultural lens through which we view leadership behaviour.

Followers' cultural leadership perspectives then serve as 'standards that guide what is regarded to be appropriate, desired, and expected of leaders' (Stephan & Pathak, 2016, p. 507). Empirical studies suggest that we're more likely to be endorsed by followers and to succeed as leaders when our behaviour aligns with their cultural leadership expectations (Epitropaki et al., 2013). Our followers' cultural values therefore determine what kinds of leadership behaviour are more or less effective.

Some of our leadership theories might work better or worse with followers who hold certain cultural values, depending on how well those theories align with their values. For example, authentic leadership portrays a certain approach that might not appeal to everyone. Some of our theories may also take on distinct forms across different cultural contexts. For example, the specific behaviours that signal charisma may vary drastically from one cultural frame of interpretation to another. The concept of charismatic leadership could still be just as effective, but enacting it appropriately might require us to alter our approach (cf. Javidan & Carl, 2004).

To be effective leaders in today's diverse organisational contexts we'll first need a clear and coherent understanding of cultural differences, and how they shape our followers' perceptions. We can then work to contextualise our rhetoric and behaviour so that it will be received and experienced exactly as intended. Everything we do as leaders therefore has to be considered from our followers' cultural perspectives.

I hope you're starting to see the challenge. We'll never be able to see perfectly through our followers' eyes, but we must work to develop an informed opinion. Think carefully about how your behaviour might be interpreted and understood.

For example, contemporary organisations across Europe and North America encourage a more egalitarian and participative leadership style, built on an understanding that everyone has something to offer and should be invited to contribute their unique talents. Indeed, most of our conversations so far have been grounded in this perspective, empowering our followers to solve problems themselves, and nurturing feelings of ownership and self-determination in their work.

And yet that's not how everyone, everywhere, believes that their leaders should behave. Attitudes and expectations towards leadership vary considerably. For example, people across Asia tend to prefer that their leaders provide a sense of direction and authority. Followers with different cultural perspectives from us have just as much to offer. But we may need to modify our leadership behaviour to translate these same inclusive ideals into forms that will be interpreted appropriately to have the desired positive effects on diverse followers.

The example above is an over-simplification that serves to introduce you to the concept of adjusting how you lead and interact with culturally diverse followers. You can't rely on naïve ideas about cultural value differences, and it will be a disaster if you get it wrong, such that your leadership behaviour offends rather than uplifts. Let's now consider the different levels or 'spheres' of society where cultural values reside.

Six Layers of Values

We're all part of many spheres of society that influence how we conduct ourselves, as well as our perceptions of and preferences for various behaviours, motivations, and ambitions. We can think about these as different nested levels or 'layers' of cultural values. Figure 6.1 illustrates the six nested layers of cultural values, starting at the global level and drilling down to the individual level.

At the highest level we have the global cultural values of all humankind as a single species. We're all a part of this one world, but we share precious few values and only a handful of concepts are appreciated by everyone. Integrity may be our only true global value; acting consistently with the values you uphold is appreciated by everyone, everywhere, and irrespective of the content of those values.

Within the global level, we then have individual nations and cultural blocs, which are groups of countries that share cultural values – for example, Nordic Europe, the Middle East, Latin America, sub-Saharan Africa (see House et al., 2004). Most cultural studies are at the national level. We can aggregate individual cultural differences to create a coherent idea about the values of each country – for example, Australian, Japanese, Egyptian values.

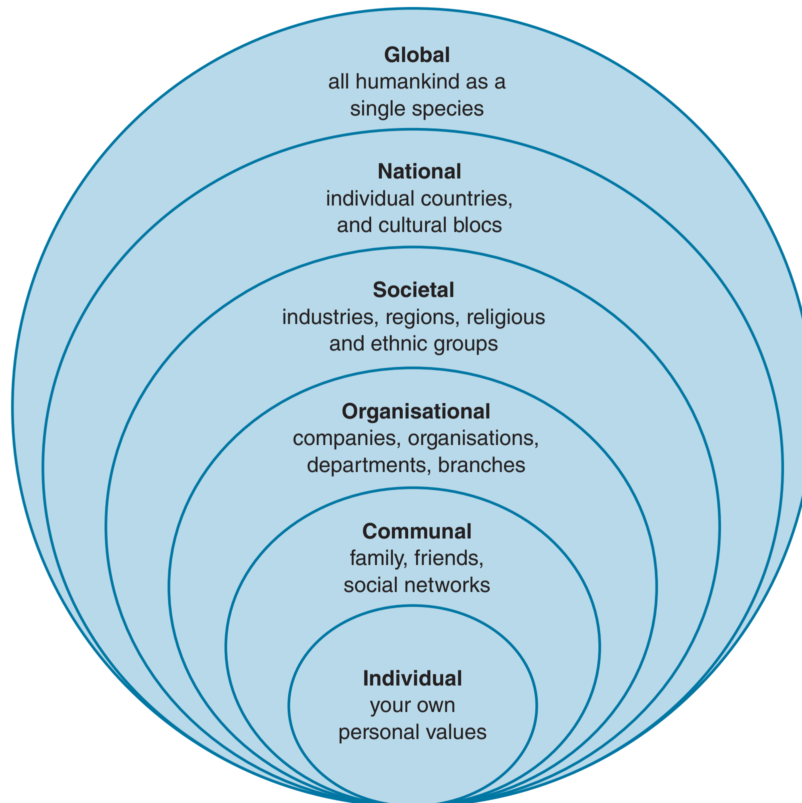

Figure 6.1 Spheres of society as containers of cultural values.

Within the national level, we then have various societal groups, including industries, smaller geographic regions, as well as religious and ethnic groups. For example, people working in the higher education sector have a set of shared values that are different to those in healthcare, agriculture, and mining. The same applies to distinct regions within countries – for example, north and south India; religious groups such as the denominations of Christian, Islamic, and Hindu faiths; and ethnic groups like the Han Chinese, French Canadians, African Americans, or Indigenous peoples.

Within the societal level, we then have individual organisations, including businesses, not-for-profit organisations, government departments, churches, schools/universities, social clubs, and the like. For example, I work at Edith Cowan University and we've articulated our shared values as 'integrity, respect, rational inquiry, personal excellence, and courage'; they guide what we do and how we behave. Every organisation has its own way of doing things that is underpinned by a set of cultural values, even if they're not written down. Some companies build a strong positive culture and draw on it as a source of competitive advantage, while others fester as a result of a toxic culture.

Below the organisational level, we have a private communal sphere which includes our family, friends, and closest social network. The people in this inner circle have a strong influence on our cultural values, first guiding our ideas in early childhood as parents, and then coming together as peers to make sense of the world and our place in it, to understand who we are and who we want to become.

At the lowest level we have the individual, our own unique cultural identity that's personal to us and distinct from everyone else on the planet. Your values will include aspects drawn from all the other layers that you interact with, including the global, national, societal, organisational, and communal levels. Understanding your values as a leader is absolutely critical and so I've dedicated a portion of the next chapter to exploring and unpacking what you believe.

The hierarchy that I've depicted between the six layers is an indication only and not strictly representative. Many exceptions readily come to mind: companies can span industries and national borders; social networks bring people together who work in different organisations, have different religious beliefs and ethnicities, and even live abroad.

Appreciate that we acquire and share values from our societal spheres, as do our followers according to their unique group membership, which then shape their preferences for certain kinds of leadership behaviour.

We can imagine these different layers of cultural values operating at the same time to dictate what's appropriate. For example, a girl sat in my classroom this week: she's part of all humankind; she's South-East Asian, from Thailand, presently in Western Australia, enrolled in higher education at Edith Cowan University in the School of Business and Law; she was with friends, and she's her own person. Her behaviour was an authentic blend of these many social influences and norms.

Let's now consider what kinds of cultural value influences you're experiencing at this moment across these six layers. Please work through Exercise 6.1 to explore the sources shaping your cultural values.

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Exercise 6.1

My Cultural Spheres

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Certain values can take precedence in specific situations, while others take a back seat. How we interact while we're out dancing with friends on the weekend can be quite different to how we'd behave when we're alone, or in a professional setting. Our individual values can of course clash with the other layers of expectation at the organisational, societal, or national level. They're also dynamic and change over time as we grow, learn, and acquire new values.

Now that we've got an outline of what cultural values are and where they come from, let's dispel some of the stereotypes and myths that surround this contentious topic.

Stereotypes and Myths

As leaders we cannot operate on stereotypes of culture and must work to develop an informed perspective based on reliable research. Like leadership itself, we've all absorbed naïve notions about what people from different cultural groups value based on what we've seen and experienced first-hand.

Unfortunately we tend to extrapolate from our small samples to whole populations, over-generalising what we know. With a little logic and a basic understanding for statistics it becomes clear that a handful of experiences with certain people can't represent the entire groups to which they belong.

Having spent an evening with a few of my in-laws in Malaysia, I might feel that I know what all Malaysian people are like, and therefore what kind of leadership style might work best to inspire them. But I'd be wrong. My in-laws are Malaysian Chinese Buddhists and hold very different values from the Islamic Bumiputera Malays who make up over 60% of the population.

There's no shortcut. We must take the time to understand the various cultural differences and then get to know our individual followers. Learning about your followers' cultural values gives you vital insight into how they're likely to perceive specific leadership behaviours, so that you can adapt your approach to be most effective from within their frame of reference.

Before we go any further, let's dispel a popular myth that all our cultures are converging into one homogeneous global community, a transcendent identity across the planet. Proponents support this story with evidence of convergence like how international

migration is cross-pollinating values, common languages are stitching together our differences, international institutions help us to find common cause to overcome global issues, and multinational organisations are standardising our experiences across the world.

Pagel (2013) explains that we're wired by evolution to cooperate on an increasingly larger scale to improve our circumstances, and so we can imagine that eventually we'd get to the global level. But as societies reach a peak standard of living, the benefits of cooperation leak away, and resource scarcity encourages governments to safeguard their citizens with protectionist policies.

The evidence suggests that we might share more of the superficial expressions of culture, like jeans, smartphones, and Netflix, but the fundamental cultural value differences remain intact (Minkov & Hofstede, 2011), and individual people are more diverse now than ever before (Stahl & Maznevski, 2021).

Let's stick to the facts. Although culture comes from the vast domain of anthropology, we only have a handful of major studies in organisational contexts, including the works of Hall (1959), Schwartz (1992), Hofstede (1980), Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (2020), and House et al. (2004). These scholars have all simplified the enormous complexity of culture down to a few dimensions to give us some actionable insights, albeit in slightly different ways.

Over the next three sections we will examine more closely the dimensions identified by Hall, Hofstede, Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner. You will notice that each one is framed as a dichotomy, a continuum between two polar ends, in the same way we examined dimensions of personality in Chapter 3. At the end we'll take a quiz and calculate your scores across each of these dimensions.

Hall

Hall (1959) studied how people communicate and discovered two dimensions of cultural difference – first, that people vary in how they use verbal and non-verbal communication techniques to convey meaning, which he called high- vs low- context communication; and second, that people vary in how they see time and attend to their work, which he called monochronic vs polychronic.

High- vs Low-Context

Meaning is transferred more implicitly in high-context communication. It's not just about what we say, but rather how we say it. Contextual and non-verbal cues convey a significant portion of the message – for example, where we are at the time, how we interact with the surroundings, our posture, gaze or where we're looking, and how we move our bodies. Emotional displays tend to be more subtle and important, often with just the eyes. In high-context communication you might find that many things are left unsaid, but instead are signalled through non-verbal and contextual cues.

Meaning is transferred more explicitly in low-context communication. It's about saying exactly what you mean, how you mean to say it, with little consideration for contextual or non-verbal cues. The intentional use of specific language becomes critical, as well as how jargon and idioms can enhance meaning. The precise words and phrases that we use, and how we structure what we say conveys most of the message. Emotional displays tend to be quite animated with more direct eye contact, and can emphasise important content. You might find that you have to spell it out to get your idea across clearly.

Monochronic vs Polychronic

People who are monochronic tend to do one thing at a time. Time is divided it into small, precise units. For example, you might plan to spend half an hour reading, then go for a quick 15-minute walk, and be done in time to meet a friend for lunch at 12:30pm. Time is therefore a precious resource that must be invested carefully. Creating detailed schedules and plans becomes critical, as well as punctuality and deadlines. When plans are set, people who are monochronic tend to stick with them and avoid 'wasting' time at all costs, their own and others'; arriving late would cause offence.

People who are polychronic tend to do multiple things at the same time. Time is seen in large fluid sections. For example, you might be cooking dinner while watching TV, referring to a recipe, and tending to your child. Time is therefore not discrete or linear and activities can freely overlap. After starting one thing you don't necessarily need to finish it first before starting another. People who are polychronic rarely feel like they're late or behind schedule; they have all the time in the world. Plans are drawn in broad strokes and can easily change as the day unfolds.

Next, we'll turn our attention to Hofstede's model.

Hofstede

Hofstede (1980) analysed over 100,000 surveys from employees working at IBM across the world, and extracted five cultural value dimensions: individualism vs collectivism, power distance, masculinity vs femininity, uncertainty avoidance, and long- vs short-term orientation. Hofstede et al. (2010) later added a sixth dimension, indulgence vs restraint, which has seen limited uptake by the academic community. Hofstede's original work has been enormously influential and supported in hundreds of studies (Kirkman et al., 2017), so we'll explore these five dimensions.

Individualism vs Collectivism

People who are individualistic tend to have loosely knit social ties. They feel responsible primarily for taking care of themselves and their immediate family – for example, their partner, children, siblings, and parents. People who are individualistic value their privacy and independence; they prefer to have their own space and be self-sufficient. In organisational contexts they tend to focus on tasks rather than relationships; they value

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personal achievement, even when working in a team and may be highly competitive. It's about having autonomy over your life, the choices you make, and how you express yourself. When transgressing social norms you'd feel guilt, which is about not living up to your own expectations.

People who are collectivistic tend to have very strong social ties. They feel deeply connected to their communities and distinguish between in- and out-groups, receiving mutual support for their loyalty. People who are collectivistic value harmony and cohesion, preferring to keep the peace in their social group. In organisational contexts they tend to focus on relationships rather than tasks, taking the time to engage in social activities to build a positive and close personal rapport with colleagues. It's about feeling connected and sharing times of celebration and times of want to support each other. When transgressing social norms you'd feel shame, which is about not living up to others' expectations.

Power Distance

People with low power distance prefer decision-making authority to be more egalitarian and distributed between leaders and followers within organisations and society. They'd expect to be consulted by their supervisor about decisions relating to their work. People with low power distance prefer democratic governments that give individuals voice, licence to question those in authority, and can hold political leaders to account. It's about having a more equal and participative society. For example, older people tend not to be ascribed any additional respect, they're just like anyone else, and parents treat their children as equals.

People with high power distance prefer decision-making authority to be concentrated in their leaders with greater disparity from followers within organisations and society. They'd expect to be told what to do by their supervisor, who should know what needs to be done, when, how, and by whom. High power distance people tend to accept more autocratic government regimes as an unquestionable fact of life. It's about feeling secure knowing that there's someone in charge. For example, older people are respected as elders in their community and have authority beyond any official capacity, and parents teach their children obedience.

Masculinity vs Femininity

People who are masculine prefer a differentiation between gender-based roles in society. They tend to believe that men should be assertive and ambitious, and women should be modest and caring. People who are masculine view work as more important than family life. For example, family life would typically be structured around the breadwinner, their schedule, their career progression, and supporting their needs so that they can in turn provide for the family. Hofstede (2006) explains that 'boys, not girls, should fight' and 'girls, not boys, may cry' (p. 894). More masculine people therefore tend to first give praise to the strong, celebrating their victory and success.

People who are feminine prefer overlapping gender-based roles in society. They tend to believe that both men and women should be modest and caring, and that either can fulfil the different spheres of responsibility in family life. People who are feminine find balance between work and family. For example, men can stay at home and look after the children, while women pursue primary careers depending on each partner's aptitude, preference, and opportunities for success. Hofstede (2011) explains that 'boys and girls may cry, but neither should fight' (p. 12). More feminine people therefore tend to first give sympathy to the weak, appreciating their efforts and challenges.

Uncertainty Avoidance

People with low uncertainty avoidance are more tolerant of ambiguity. They tend to take each day as it comes and find people and ideas that deviate from the norm curious and interesting, and appreciate surprises and getting blown off course into exciting new adventures. People with less uncertainty avoidance also tend to have lower levels of stress and anxiety; they're easy going. At work it's okay for leaders to not know all the answers, or that they don't have enough information to hold an informed opinion. Too many rules and boundaries become restrictive and can feel stifling.

People with high uncertainty avoidance are less tolerant of ambiguity. They prefer to plan carefully and are less accepting of people who deviate from the norm and ideas that go off script. For example, they appreciate doing their research first and being well prepared so that their adventures go according to plan. People with more uncertainty avoidance tend to have higher levels of stress and anxiety; they're highly strung. At work they expect their leaders to have all the answers and it's terrifying if they don't. Rules and boundaries create security because then they know what to expect, and that feels safe.

Long- vs Short-Term Orientation

People with long-term orientation focus on both the past and the future. They tend to value perseverance, temperance, and thrift. For example, they're careful with resources and dedicate themselves to significant goals worth pursuing, making incremental progress towards completion. People with long-term orientation therefore tend to see success and failure as functions of effort: if you're successful, it's because you put in the hard work. Time, resources, and effort should be invested carefully and with restraint for greater rewards in the future. Change is tested prudently with an appreciation for preserving tradition and ensuring ongoing sustainability.

People with short-term orientation focus on the present. They tend to value living each moment to its fullest. For example, they'd rather spend what they have to experience more of the world, with an associated focus on shorter tasks or smaller goals that yield near-instant gratification, praise, and reward. People with short-term orientation therefore tend to see success and failure anchored in chance or good fortune; if you're successful, it's serendipity. Time, resources, and effort should be enjoyed in the present. With a constant focus on the now, traditions are sacrosanct and kept exactly as they are, unchanged and without adaptation.

Now let's consider the framework proposed by Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner.

Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner

Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (2020) published the first edition of their book in 1993. In the three decades since they've accumulated over 100,000 survey responses from employees in over 140 different countries. They also identified five cultural value dimensions concerning people and relationships: universalism vs particularism, individualism vs communitarianism, neutral vs emotional, specific vs diffuse, and achievement vs ascription.

Note that individualism vs communitarianism is virtually identical to Hofstede's dimension 'individualism vs collectivism'. It's fascinating to see two separate studies come up with the same idea, which suggests that it's a fundamental aspect of our cultural values. I'll skip explaining it again, but let's look at the other four dimensions that Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner identified.

Universalism vs Particularism

People who value universalism tend to believe that the same ideas and practices can be applied everywhere. They don't need to tailor their thinking and behaviour to different contexts because there's an objective reality that's governed by rules, and if they're working within those rules, then they'll be successful. In organisational settings they prefer to 'get down to business' quickly and focus on the work at hand. Universalists value rational and professional arguments that are supported by compelling empirical evidence. Rules serve as ethical standards to guide decision-making and create a sense of fairness.

People who value particularism tend to believe that circumstances dictate how ideas and practices should be applied. They contextualise interactions, adjusting how they think and behave because reality is subjective and exists only as a social construct between people; success comes from forming collaborative relationships. In organisational settings, small talk is a crucial part of relationship-building to first find common ground before discussing work. Particularists welcome diverse opinions and personal experiences. Consultation gives stakeholders a voice in decision-making, while due process and consensus create a sense of fairness.

Neutral vs Emotional

People who are neutral tend to be more reserved with their emotions, holding them in check. They prefer a calm and professional tone to their communication, with fewer and more subtle non-verbal cues, which can come across as distant or formal. They're less expressive in their face, they'll smile and frown less, preferring to keep their emotions private. You'll also find that they rarely raise their voice. It may therefore be harder to pick up on how they're interpreting your interaction. People who are neutral tend to avoid physical contact and may actively avoid touching, especially colleagues in a professional context.

People who are emotional tend to be more open and expressive with their emotions. They prefer a more animated and boisterous communication style, with more dynamic body language, gestures, and gaze. Their faces are highly expressive, they'll smile easily

and often, and openly reveal what they're feeling. When they're excited, they start talking faster and louder, with more pronounced body language. It's therefore easy to tell how they're responding to your conversation. People who are emotional are comfortable with physical contact and will actively reach out to hug colleagues or touch them on the arm or shoulder as part of normal interactions.

Specific vs Diffuse

People who are more 'specific' tend to keep their public, private, and professional lives separate. They'll have a small private space or inner circle consisting of a handful of their closest confidants that they'll guard carefully. Different spaces are then only shared with certain people. For example, work colleagues will remain separate from social acquaintances, and from family and friends; the three groups might never meet. Individuals who are specific also tend to interact differently in each social space – who they are at work is distinct from who they are in public, or in their homes. These different versions of them stay in their corresponding spaces.

People who are more 'diffuse' tend to have an extensive overlap between their public, private, and professional lives. The three spaces are then of equal size with broader membership from across categories, and they're all equally guarded because entering one of the social spaces also grants entry into the others. For example, it's not unusual for a new business partner to invite you home to have dinner with their family. Individuals who are diffuse also conduct themselves the same way across all three spaces. There are no distinct public, private, and professional versions of them. Connecting with them in one capacity means being welcomed into their whole life.

Achievement vs Ascription

People who value achievement accord more status to others depending on how well they perform certain functions in society. It's about what you have accomplished, how competent you are, and if you've been publicly recognised for your achievements. Higher social status is therefore awarded on the basis of individual merit. Talented hard-working people who excel in their personal or professional endeavours, or are known for their specialised expertise, tend to be awarded more status. Having well proven skills, knowledge, or abilities will garner greater status and respect from people who value achievement.

People who value ascription accord more status to others depending on who they are as individuals within that society. It's about your power and position in society, which is a function of your hierarchical rank and title, level of education, and caste or social class. Higher social status is therefore awarded on the basis of reputation. Men, older people, and those from wealthy or well-respected families in the community tend to be ascribed more status. Having the right pedigree, position, or connections will attract greater status and respect from people who value ascription.

Okay, now let's figure out each of your cultural values and put them all together into an overall 'cultural profile'.

CULTURAL PROFILES

I'd like you to first work through a quiz (Quiz 6.1) that will calculate your scores for each of the different cultural value dimensions. For example, it will ask you a few questions and then work out whether you prefer high-context communication or low, whether you're more monochronic or polychronic with your time, and so on for each of the dimensions that we've discussed above.

Be sure to take note of your results as we'll need to use them for our next exercise.

Quiz 6.1

Hall, Hofstede, Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner

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Adapted from Hall (1959), Hofstede (1980), and Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (2020).

You should now have scores that place your values along each of the 11 cultural dimensions that we've extracted from the three frameworks proposed by Hall, Hofstede, and Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner. For example, I prefer low-context communication and choose my words carefully. I'm monochronic and like to focus on one thing at a time.

I'm more individualistic and masculine as I appreciate my autonomy and accept gendered roles. I prefer less power distance so that leaders are accountable, and leadership is inclusive. I tend to avoid uncertainty and prefer the security of structure; even my adventures are well planned. I'm focused on the long term and orient my life around ambitious goals.

I'm a universalist and value rational arguments and empirical evidence. I openly express my emotions, but that varies depending on context because I'm more 'specific' with a small inner circle and a distinct professional identity. I believe that respect should be earned by demonstrating merit or achievement.

We can think about these 11 dimensions as coming together to assemble an overall cultural values profile that will be unique and personal. Let's use your earlier quiz results (Quiz 6.1) to work out yours. Exercise 6.2 will ask you to map out your cultural tendencies across these value dimensions.

Exercise 6.2

Cultural Value Profiles

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Your unique cultural values profile is a fount of strength. Draw on what you believe to inspire and motivate others. Carefully consider the cultural values that you uphold and align your leadership style to best suit your character. You might now have a bit more of an insight into why some of the leadership theories that we've discussed have resonated with you more, or less – it's about your cultural values.

Next, let's think about others' cultural differences. I'd like you to do the same cultural values profile exercise again. But this time, instead of recording your own results, I want you to identify what you think would be the dominant cultural profile for most people across the country where you live. Are people typically more individualistic, or collectivistic? Are they punctual and focused, or do they take a more polychronic approach?

Try to support your choices for each dimension with an example of commonplace behaviour that you see in the community. For example, Australians have a fairly short-term orientation, and so I tend to see more conspicuous consumption on luxury goods and services, with less emphasis on thrift and savings.

Once you've completed a dominant cultural profile for the country, let's compare it with your own profile. Consider which dimensions are most similar, and different from, people in your country. Think carefully about the kinds of challenges that this could present. For example, people with different cultural values may not interpret your leadership behaviour in the way that you intend. Be mindful of the cultural lens through which others will see your behaviour and tailor your leadership approach to be most effective from their perspective. It's not about denying your own cultural values; it's about appreciating theirs.

I hope that's provided you with a useful perspective about cultural differences. But countries aren't always the best 'containers' of culture. Let's explore a few more contemporary ways to think about where cultural differences reside.

CONTAINERS OF CULTURE

We've traditionally thought of culture as existing within countries and large organisations – for example, Korean, British, or Jamaican culture, and the culture at Google, Toyota, or Starbucks. We can imagine countries and organisations then as distinct 'containers' of culture. Hofstede (1980), Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (2020), Schwartz (1992), and House et al. (2004) all followed this dominant trend. They identified dimensions of cultural value differences, and then aggregated their findings to the country level to describe national cultures.

The problem is that we now know that 80% of the variation in cultural values exists within countries, and not between them (Taras et al., 2016). For example, I was born in Ukraine, I grew up in New Zealand, and now live in Australia; not one of these countries' values fits me well. It's clear that countries are a poor proxy for culture. But it remains unclear where, if not in countries, that cultural differences are contained. Scholars have only recently started to explore this question.

Taras et al. (2016) revealed through their meta-analysis that it's more appropriate for us to think about professions, socio-economic classes, and free vs oppressed societies as contemporary containers of culture. These social groups each have strong cultural norms that transcend national borders. For example, the wealthy in France have more in common with the wealthy in Japan than they do with the poor in France. Likewise nurses, lawyers, and engineers have more in common with others in their profession around the world than do all the people living in India, Italy, or Iran.

One explanation might be that occupations, for example, train people to think in particular ways, to approach and solve problems with specific sets of cognitive tools. That's why accountants all over the world get along and share similar values – they think the same way. A new perspective on cultural differences is emerging that focuses on how people think instead of what values they uphold. Let's take a look.

CULTURAL COGNITION

So far we've been talking about culture as 'cultural values' by examining what different people think is important, on the basis that these cultural values will then shape their perceptions of and preferences for certain kinds of leadership behaviour. That has been the dominant approach to studying culture since the 1980s (Kirkman et al., 2017). But it's not the only way, and more contemporary approaches explore differences in 'how' we think rather than 'what' we think.

How people tend to collect, and make sense of, information about the world varies across cultures – that is, our cognitive processes are different. One prominent model of cultural cognitive differences is called analytic vs holistic thought. Let's see what it's all about.

Analytic vs Holistic Thought

Nisbett et al. (2001) proposed that how we think today derives from two ancient civilisations: Greece and China.

Between 500 BCE and 200 BCE these two civilisations made great progress in philosophy and moral thought (Jaspers, 1953), and their unique circumstances at the time led to two very different social structures. Ancient Chinese society was complex and hierarchical with an emphasis on harmony and balance, while ancient Greek society was characterised by personal agency with a focus on logic and debate.

Their social structures and philosophical ideologies shaped how people thought by making certain patterns of interaction preferable to others. The cognitive approach used by the ancient Greeks was more analytic, and that of the Chinese was more holistic. These two cognitive patterns have endured into the modern era and manifest in contemporary people.

Choi et al. (2007) developed four dimensions of analytic vs holistic thought that capture our different approaches to attention, causality, contraction, and change.

Attention: Object vs context. Attention is about what we notice in the external environment. Analytic thinkers focus their attention on the primary object and assign it to categories based on its attributes. Holistic thinkers take in the context as a whole and focus on the relationships between objects. For example, when asked to describe a dining table, an analytic thinker might say that it's made of dark wood and can seat six people. Whereas a holistic thinker might say that it's a family space for getting together to share a meal.

Causality: Dispositionism vs interactionism. Causality is about how we understand why events happen. Analytic thinkers focus on the internal 'dispositions', characteristics, or motivations of individuals. Holistic thinkers examine the contextual circumstances and 'interactions' between people. For example, when a child is caught stealing, an analytic thinker might look to their personality and motives – maybe they've got issues with authority, or they were looking for a thrill. A holistic thinker might focus instead on their social circumstances, such as problems at home, or pressure from their peers.

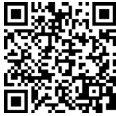
Contradiction: Formal logic vs dialectics. Analytic thinkers take all statements as either true or false, and believe that they cannot be both at the same time. When faced with a contradiction, they choose the most plausible option and reject the least. Holistic thinkers reconcile, accept, and transcend contradiction, understanding that even opposing ideas can both be true. When faced with a contradiction, they seek compromise by finding value in both arguments. For example, when asked at 12 noon if it's day or night, an analytic thinker might say that it's day, whereas a holistic thinker might say that it's both, because it's day here and night on the other side of the planet.

Change: linear vs cyclic. Analytic thinkers see change as a linear process moving through incremental and permanent steps. When contemplating the future they expect gradual progress based on their past experiences. Holistic thinkers see the world as in a constant state of change moving in a series of cycles. When contemplating the future they expect frequent cyclical change of greater magnitude. For example, an analytic thinker might picture a successful career as gradual promotion accompanied by an ever-expanding knowledge base and skillset. A holistic thinker, on the other hand, might picture each promotion as a fresh cycle where you re-learn a new role from the beginning and, once mastered, progress to the next level.

Let's take our next quiz (Quiz 6.2) to discover if you have a more analytic or holistic cognitive approach.

Quiz 6.2

Holistic Cognition Scale



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Adapted from Lux et al. (2021).

You've likely found yourself somewhere in the middle, including aspects of both analytic and holistic approaches, with one style that tends to be more dominant. Build strength through complementary diversity on your teams by collaborating with people who have different cultural cognitive approaches.

Okay, now that you've got a good grasp of various cultural differences let's consider diversity and inclusion more broadly.

DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

Diversity is about recognising that we're all different, and similar, across many intersecting dimensions, including gender, sex, sexuality, race, ethnicity, language, culture, religion, mental and physical ability, socio-economic status, carer responsibilities, and immigration status. These many differences are a source of significant advantage and can improve organisational performance (cf. Smulowitz et al., 2019).

Minority groups are traditionally under-represented in organisations, and especially so in leadership roles. But surface-level differences in gender, ethnicity, or nationality won't necessarily bring greater diversity in knowledge and perspectives if people are well acculturated to the group (Wang et al., 2019). The value comes from divergent beliefs, preferences, and problem-solving styles that broaden the range of knowledge and can generate new ideas and solutions (Stahl et al., 2010). And yet increasing diversity alone doesn't automatically produce benefits; what matters is how our organisations can harness that diversity – and that's why we need inclusion (Ely & Thomas, 2020).

Inclusion is about embracing the different skills, perspectives, and experiences that diversity can offer our organisations. Diverse people must feel safe and valued to be able to contribute these talents, and that requires an inclusive organisational culture. Here's where leadership comes in, it's up to leaders to create that positive and supportive climate that enables diverse people to flourish (Mor Barak et al., 2022).

Next we'll explore how diversity plays out in organisations.

Multiculturalism in Organisations

Cox (1991) created a three-stage framework to illustrate how attitudes towards diversity progress in organisations. He describes organisations as monolithic, plural, or multicultural.

In 'monolithic' organisations employees are homogeneous, often with a large majority of white males. The workforce includes few women, ethnic minorities, or diverse employees. There's high structural segregation, which is to say that where diverse people are employed, they tend to feature in either secretarial or maintenance positions, and not in leadership roles. There's also no integration of diverse employees into informal groups and they're excluded from the social side of the organisation. Diversity is met with prejudice and discrimination in monolithic organisations.

In 'plural' organisations employees are more heterogeneous, with greater participation of women, ethnic minorities, and diverse people. Hiring and promotion strategies may give preference to diverse employees, sometimes setting specific targets or quotas, which includes partial structural integration into leadership roles. Managers often receive training on equity, diversity, and inclusion, cultural sensitivity, and so on to reduce bias. Some diverse employees are included in social groups. Diversity is tolerated throughout plural organisations.

In 'multicultural' organisations employees are heterogeneous in proportion to the local population demographic profile, including women, ethnic minorities, and diverse people. There's complete structural integration so that diverse people are represented throughout leadership tiers, and fully integrated into social networks. Diversity is valued throughout multicultural organisations. Unfortunately, few organisations have managed to achieve these characteristics, but appreciation for diversity and inclusion is growing rapidly across all cultural spheres.

Creating inclusive multicultural work environments is fast becoming a core focus for leaders today. Let's explore how inclusive leadership theory can help.

INCLUSIVE LEADERSHIP

Nembhard and Edmondson (2006) first proposed that leadership should be inclusive to help every employee feel safe enough to fully contribute their talents. Carmeli et al. (2010) expanded the idea into 'inclusive leadership' as a distinct approach that's characterised by leaders who are open, accessible, and available to engage with their followers.

Shore et al. (2011) explain that inclusion is about feeling valued as a member of the group while satisfying our need to belong and be unique. Our need for belonging is about developing and maintaining enduring social relationships (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). And our need for uniqueness is about preserving our distinctive sense of self (Fromkin & Snyder, 1980).

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Randel et al. (2018) further developed these ideas to define inclusive leadership as 'a set of positive leader behaviours that facilitate group members perceiving belongingness in the work group while maintaining their uniqueness within the group as they fully contribute to group processes and outcomes' (p. 190).

Followers must feel both belonging and uniqueness to truly be included. That means being accepted as legitimate group members, while also acknowledging individual talents and allowing individuals' voices to be heard and appreciated.

Here's what we can do as leaders to create such inclusive workplace cultures.

Five Dimensions

Randel et al. (2018) proposed five dimensions of inclusive leadership behaviour, including three related to belongingness: supporting group members, ensuring justice and equity, and shared decision-making. Two more related to uniqueness: encouraging diverse contributions and helping group members fully contribute. Al-Atwi and Al-Hassani (2021) empirically validated the model.

Belongingness

Supporting group members is about showing that you care about your followers' needs and feelings. It includes checking in with each person on your team to find out how they're doing, to ask about their well-being and experiences working in the group. Inclusive leaders take the time to get to know each of their followers and appreciate them both as individuals, and as valued members of the team.

Ensuring justice and equity is about treating all of your followers fairly and without personal bias. It includes considering how different followers could be affected, even unintentionally, by your decisions and adjusting practices to make sure that everyone has a comparable experience. Inclusive leaders proactively seek input from each of their followers to help develop equitable systems that reduce the opportunity for prejudice to influence processes and outcomes.

Shared decision-making is about enabling every follower to have their voice heard and to contribute to decisions. It includes actively asking for opinions and perspectives from each of your followers, across different formats where individuals can feel comfortable to offer their ideas – for example, in closed meetings, one-on-ones, or offline conversations over email. Inclusive leaders share power by consulting all the relevant stakeholders before reaching a decision.

Uniqueness

Encouraging diverse contributions is about inspiring your followers to offer new ideas that draw on their unique perspectives. It includes promoting the value of

divergent thinking that can challenge conventional solutions and spur innovation; our differences are an asset. We must protect and nurture our followers' uniqueness, so that they can thrive and make the most of their talents. Inclusive leaders constructively incorporate diverse perspectives to improve overall performance.

Helping group members fully contribute is about demonstrating to each of your followers that their input is welcome and needed. It means incorporating a broad range of perspectives and making it clear that every voice must be heard: including lower-level employees, new hires, casual staff, and contractors, as well as women, ethnic minorities, and diverse people. Inclusive leaders show us that everyone has something valuable to offer and can bring their full selves to work.

Everyone can Contribute

Inclusive leaders help create an organisational culture that encourages followers' sense of belonging and uniqueness by role modelling and reinforcing these positive behaviours among other followers as well. It's not only about how our leaders treat us personally, but also how they treat everyone else, and how our colleagues treat each other; it has to be everyone (Randel et al., 2018).

Being included helps us to feel psychologically safe and empowered such that we can best contribute our talents.

Psychological safety is about feeling comfortable to be yourself and employ your unique talents without worrying that it will compromise your self-image, status, or career (Edmondson, 1999; Kahn, 1990). When we don't feel safe, we must spend our energy protecting ourselves by watching for threats and taking steps to reduce our vulnerability. Inclusive leaders enable their followers to focus on being productive and taking healthy risks – for example, by volunteering diverse opinions.

Psychological empowerment is about feeling that you matter and have control over what you're doing (Spreitzer, 1995). When we feel empowered, we tend to take the initiative and get more engaged in our work, which improves our performance. Inclusive leaders empower their followers by showing them that they're valued and have a voice in decisions.

Inclusive leadership therefore improves overall organisational performance by enabling everyone to bring their whole self to work.

Challenges in Practice

Inclusive leadership sounds amazing, but it's not without its challenges in practice.

The first challenge is called 'decoupling' and it means having a gap between your diversity and inclusion policies, and their practical implementation in the organisation. It's when leaders fail to live up to their inclusive rhetoric (Mor Barak et al., 2022). The

greater the discrepancy between what's said and what really happens, the less likely that followers will see their workplace as truly inclusive.

The second challenge is about differences in interpretation. Women, ethnic minorities, and diverse people may perceive that inclusive rhetoric is disingenuous, as something that's promoted out of necessity rather than as an articulation of real values. People take note of what you do, and investing your effort into enacting inclusive leadership behaviour will signal your genuine support (Randel et al., 2018).

The third challenge comes from encouraging diverse people to assimilate with the dominant group. Helping diverse people to 'fit in' might seem like a good idea. It's not. Asking them to repress their unique characteristics and become more like the mainstream members of the organisation is not inclusion. We don't need to help diverse people fit in; we need to respect and appreciate their differences. Inclusive leaders champion the value of diversity across all aspects of the organisation.

SUMMARY

Cultural differences may present the greatest challenge, and opportunity, for contemporary leaders. Individual people are more diverse than ever before and bring a wealth of perspectives, knowledge, and experiences to our organisations. Appreciate then that every person you're leading has developed a different point of view from a lifetime of experiences, and they'll perceive your leadership rhetoric and behaviour through the unique kaleidoscope of their cultural background. Leaders cannot operate on stereotypes of culture and must work to develop an informed opinion.

Cultural values are people's perceptions of and preferences for certain kinds of behaviour, motivations, and ambitions. They're guiding principles that tell us what's appropriate and important in our societies. Followers' cultural leadership perspectives then serve as standards that guide what is appropriate, desired, and expected of leaders. Your own unique cultural values profile is also a fount of strength. Draw on what you believe to inspire and motivate others. Carefully consider the cultural values that you uphold and align your leadership style to best suit your character.

Diversity is about recognising that we're all different, and similar, across many intersecting dimensions, including gender, sex, sexuality, race, ethnicity, language, culture, religion, mental and physical ability, socio-economic status, carer responsibilities, and immigration status. These many differences are a source of significant advantage and can improve organisational performance. It's up to leaders to create a positive and supportive climate that enables diverse people to flourish.

Inclusive leadership is about helping followers to feel valued as members of the group by creating a sense of belonging, while also keeping their uniqueness. It includes supporting group members, ensuring justice and equity, shared decision-making, encouraging diverse contributions, and helping group members fully contribute. An inclusive culture enables every follower to feel psychologically safe and empowered such

that they can best apply their talents. Inclusive leaders show us that everyone has something valuable to offer and can bring their full selves to work.

> 'There's no way I can single-handedly save the world or, perhaps, even make a perceptible difference – but how ashamed I would be to let a day pass without making one more effort.'
>
> Extract from *The Relativity of Wrong* by Isaac Asimov (1988).

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