Chapter 3
Servant-Leadership with Cultural Dimensions in Cross-Cultural Settings

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ABSTRACT

This chapter demonstrates how the power of servant-leadership characteristics and nine cultural dimensions offer intercultural leaders increased capacity in cross-cultural workplaces. Servant-leadership characteristics are paired with cultural dimensions based on their corresponding commonalities to provide intercultural leaders potential tools and strategies to successfully ameliorate cultural barriers, to productively navigate cultural differences, and to build an organizational culture of inclusion, collaboration, and participation. The main objective of the chapter is to increase intercultural leader capacity to lead in culturally mixed organizations, be they domestic or international, resulting in minimizing or avoiding institutional or organizational failure.

INTRODUCTION

This chapter explores servant-leadership characteristics in the context of cross-cultural workplaces. By linking the characteristics to the nine cultural dimensions provided by the GLOBE study (Chhokar, et al., 2008), intercultural leaders will be better equipped to lead cross-culturally, specifically to navigate cultural differences. Wibbeke (2009) states that leaders need to adjust to cultural differences and understand how culture affects leadership. "The first step for business leaders is to learn to understand how cultural differences affect leadership and life within and across organizations" (p. 28). The objective of this chapter is to improve intercultural leader capacity by embracing both servant-leadership characteristics and the cultural dimensions, resulting in plausible strategies for intercultural leaders to navigate cross-culturally.

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BACKGROUND

To navigate cultural differences effectively, intercultural leaders need both cultural intelligence and intercultural competence. Intercultural competence as defined by Bennett and Bennett (2004) is "a set of cognitive, affective, and behavioral skills and characteristics that support effective and appropriate interaction in a variety of cultural contexts" (p. 149). For clarity regarding cognitive, affective, and behavioral skills, Bennett and Bennett synthesized *mindset, skillset*, and *heartset* to clarify the meaning of cultural competence. Mindset or the cognitive aspect is about knowledge of culture-general frameworks. Namely, what one knows about cultures in general; skillset is the behavioral part including the ability to collect proper information, to empathize, listen, build relationships, and adapt, leading to skills to navigate cultural differences. Finally, heartset is the affective part, meaning, one's attitudes toward cultural differences, curiosity, risk taking, open-mindedness, and tolerance of ambiguity, or how one's feels about cultural differences.

Moodian (2009) supports Bennett and Bennett's definition by adding four aspects of intercultural competency. Moodian's first aspect of the four is *recognition*: how competent leaders are in recognizing cultural differences around them. The second aspect is *respect*: how leaders respect those cultural differences. Third aspect is *reconciliation:* how leaders reconcile those cultural differences; finally *realization*: how competent are leaders to realize the actions necessary to implement the reconciliation of cultural differences (p. 166). Given the foregoing definitions of intercultural competence, leaders do not become interculturally competent without hard work and tenacity. However, being interculturally competent may not be sufficient to navigate cross-cultural differences.

Navigating cross-cultural work setting also requires cultural intelligence. Cultural intelligence is about what happens when we meet people who think and act differently; it is defined as one's ability to participate successfully in diverse cultural settings or environments (Earley & Eng, 2003). According to Engle and Nehrt (2012), environments may range "from expatriate assignments in a foreign country to those who will need to function in multicultural teams, or even teams of a relatively homogeneous cultural make up that are working on project with multicultural implications" (p. 35). A blatant example of a lack of cultural intelligence that could have been easily avoided is discussed by Ottavi (2009), where a British manager attempted to run a Japanese company and experienced conflict from the Japanese workforce which seemed out of place because Japanese are usually polite. According to Ottavi, the British manager was not taken seriously because of her gender; thus, she was unable to participate successfully as cultural intelligence demands. Apparently she didn't know how women are viewed in Japan.

The scenario below demonstrates another example of lacking cultural intelligence and cultural competency that caused embarrassment, stress, and decrease in work performance. Some workers decided to remain home until the issue was resolved.

While working in Frankfurt, Germany, I became familiar with associates working for a Fortune 100 company headquartered in Frankfurt. The American leadership issued and attempted to implement a policy that German women as its employees would not be allowed to wear pants to work. This caused much protracted embarrassment for the American company. Because once the German Works Council (a very strong, highly respected, and often feared group of German lawyers who work for the employee) was notified, the German newspapers were relentless in telling how an American company, working in Germany, telling their women how to dress. Whitfield (as cited in Sudhakar & Reddy, 2008, pp.130-131)

Would the American leadership have demanded the same from American women had they been on American soil? Not wearing pants to work had nothing to do with safety or any other

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