

Part Two

The Impact of Culture on Leadership Decision-making

By

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Defining Culture

Leadership is more about ideas than time and place. “Culture”, like “leadership”, is a term of many countenances. Not only does the word “culture” mean different things to different scholars and non-scholars alike; it is also often simplistically used as a catchall classification for a complex mélange of frequently changing, discreet yet defining elements of a society.

In 1952, Alfred Kroeber and Clyde Kluckhom, American anthropologists at Harvard’s Peabody Museum of Cultural History and Anthropology, published a list of 160 definitions of culture. By 1952, anthropologists on both sides of the Atlantic had already been studying culture for nearly a century. For example, in 1872, a committee of the British Association for the Advancement of Science prepared a list of seventy-six cultural topics deserving of anthropological field study. It was based on the work of the British anthropologist Edward Tyler. In 1937, the Institute of Human Relations at Yale University created a classification tool for what they called the Cross Cultural Survey. Led by the American anthropologist, George Murdock, the Cross Cultural Survey led to the 1938 publication of the Outline of Cultural Materials, with seventy-nine major divisions and 637 subdivisions of cultural background information. This process and work are still used today.

In more recent times, some scholars have applied the models and ideas of anthropologists, sociologists, behavioural psychologists and cultural historians to the field of organizational culture. The work of Geert Hofstede, on what he describes as the five cultural dimensions – most notably “power distance” (Hofstede, 2001), and the Globe Study of sixty-two societies with nine cultural dimensions (House, Ed., 2004) add textured layers of information to discourse on the meaning of culture. So does the work of Edgar Schein (2004) and Daniel Denison (1990), both of whom try to unlock the meaning of a culture with the intent of aligning culture and leadership. While Dennison created a link between certain corporate culture models and bottom line financial performance, Schein linked his work to more traditional areas of culture enquiry when he focused on the role of history, rituals, and symbols on culture.

Since the early twentieth century, many culture scholars have specialized their areas of enquiry. For example, Columbia University’s Franz Boas, Ruth Benedict, and Margaret Mead immediately come to mind when we think of early research on the role of religious practices, myths, language patterns, symbols, and gender/sexuality on culture. Boas, considered by most to be the founder of modern anthropology, gave anthropology a rigorous scientific methodology, modeled after the natural sciences, where research is followed by generalizations, and not the other way around. A tipping point occurred when Boas encouraged significant field research where scholars attempted to understand a culture from the inside looking out. In more recent times, the ethnographic studies of Clifford Geertz (1973) placed emphasis on the importance of “systems of meaning” (i.e. symbols) to culture.

Different research approaches

In 1967, Kenneth Pike coined the terms emic and etic, the former referring to the inside out and the latter referring to the outside-in perspectives (Pike, 1967). For decades, researchers have focused on these two approaches as being mutually exclusive. In actuality, both the emic and etic perspectives have equally long pedigrees in the social sciences. “The emic or inside perspective follows in the tradition of psychological studies of folk beliefs (Wundt, 1888) and in cultural anthropologists’ striving to understand culture from the ‘native point of view’ (Malinowski, 1922). The etic or outside perspective follows in the tradition of behaviorist psychology (Skinner, 1938) and anthropological approaches that link cultural practices to external, antecedent factors, such as economic or ecological conditions (Harris, 1979), that may not be salient to cultural insiders” (Morris, Leung, Ames, & Lickel, 1999: 781).

The question of who got it right is truly irrelevant here. What is relevant is the recognition that all of us “see”, “know” and “imagine” based on the prisms through which we view the universe. All too often, there is a tendency for culture scholars who use one or the other method to dismiss the alternate approach as lacking in some methodological or conceptual rigor. (Martin & Frost, 1996). Debates over qualitative data v. quantitative techniques are the wrong discussion. Given culture’s complexity, we need both.

Elements of both emic and etic approaches became part of the research protocols of the emerging academic discipline of sociology long before Kenneth Pike coined the terms. In 1921 Park and Burgess and their colleagues at the First Chicago School of Sociology studied contemporary social problems in the city of Chicago. Their research demonstrated that the physical environment a society inhabited is a major factor in shaping human behaviour. They also championed the use of oral histories and interview techniques, as well as recognized the importance of subcultures. This research serendipitously verified what indigenous societies worldwide have made an important part of their folklore for centuries: physical environment is a key influencer on culture. Apropos to this, it is worth mentioning that New Zealand, the last substantial land-mass in the world discovered and settled by humans other than Antarctica, focuses much of its cultural history on this very issue. (Prickett, 2001; Bellwood, 1978).

Culture scholars who focused their research on the culture of emigration/immigration frequently used both emic and etic approaches without stating it. (Anfiteatrof, 1973; DeMarco, 1981, 1882; Dinnerstein & Reimer, 1977; Handlin, 1973; Hansen, 1940; Howe, 1976; Hughes, 1943; Jones, 1960; Tomasi & Engel, 1970; Whyte, 1943). For example, William DeMarco, heeding the advice of C. Everett Hughes of the First and Second Chicago Schools of Sociology, studied official government records on housing, employment, and marriage patterns for Italian immigrants to Boston’s North End from 1880 to 1930. He also gained access to private company employment records. He interviewed more than one hundred residents who immigrated to Boston during the period studied. He also studied church marriage records partly because they specified where the married couples came from in Italy. By using both emic and etic approaches, he discovered the degree to which old world cultures were replicated within the new environment over a fifty-year period. This work demonstrated the enduring nature of centuries old cultural patterns within a new physical locale...change occurred but at a very slow pace.

A WORKING DEFINITION OF CULTURE

I define culture as *the sum of the history, folklore, and values that, taken together, make up the unique identity of a society at a given place and point in time* (Image 1).



Image 1. DeMarco Culture Model
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Culture's Complexities

The study of culture is not an either/or paradigm; it is rather a sum game! Researchers in the field of culture study have long argued about the merits of various approaches to research on the topic. The reality is all approaches and all insights are required today if the complexities of new global realities are to be understood, and mutually beneficial solutions are to be found in times of crisis/need. Sarah Meharg and Alan Okros said it well when they wrote: "...there is a requirement to shift from the use of analysis tools to the understanding of culture concepts. Thus, the key is to understand 'me' and 'here' in order to understand 'them' and 'there'." (Meharg & Okros, 2008: 2) This is akin to the ongoing need for a transparent outward focused cultural prism and a mirrored inward focused prism. Without a common, conceptual framework about the meaning of culture, it becomes increasingly difficult if not impossible to simultaneously address the issue of how to build trust networks within and between the defence, diplomacy, development and commerce (3D plus C) communities within fractured states.

Culture's Multi-dimensionality

All cultures are made up of individuals and societies with shared history, folklore and values. Cultures are living organisms where the dynamic interplay of life impacts on and is impacted by it. The centuries old interplay between human hunter-gatherer existence, and the relatively "recent invention" of agriculture is a good example of culture as a living organism (Nicholson, 2000).

We are also part of a variety of cultures, each with its own history, values and folklore. Given this, it is no overstatement to say cultures are complex and constantly in a state of change. The kind of change we are talking about is most often imperceptible, but it is always there because yesterday's realities have become part of today's history...yesterday's experiences are part of today's folklore...and the quality of yesterday's decisions have become today's updated value system.

It is important for us to first recognize that we are part of many cultures. The first and most important is our primary culture: the "culture of self" that defines our uniqueness. This is what the philosopher and Noble Prize winning economist, Amartya Sen calls our multi-dimensionality (Sen, 2005). This is also what Meharg and Okros referred to above as the key to understanding "me" and 'here" in order to understand "them" and "there". We are also part of many different societies, each with its own culture. We have our ethnic culture, family culture, religious culture, community culture, work culture, racial culture, etc. etc. Some play a more prominent role than others. For all their multiplicity and complexity, they generally share certain elements in common. Our ability to build true trust networks is driven by our ability to find, understand, value and utilize these cultural commonalities.

Image 2 defines the history components of the culture definition. Like other components of the model, it stresses the individual and collective uniqueness of the members of the culture. It also recognizes that both internal and external persons, events and institutions impact the society's unique identity over a period of time. Of particular interest here is the "Institutions" component. Its definition has broad application, including the inclusion of the systems, structures, and formal/informal working relationships of governmental, quasi-governmental, social service, and religious agencies/institutions. However, their symbols belong under "Folklore" and their value system belongs under "Values".

Image 2. History component of DeMarco Culture Model

HISTORY	The people, events and institutions that collectively impact a society's unique identity.
People	Individuals, both inside and outside the society, who impact its direction and values over a period of time.
Events	Incidents both inside and outside a society that impact its direction and values over time.
Institutions	Systems, structures, and formal/informal relationships that impact a society's direction and values over time.

The Folklore component is where a culture's stories live. Stories have been an integral part of the human experience since the beginning of time. Stories inspire, inform, and connect participants to what the society stands for. They are rich cultural anthologies of high value as well as entertainment. They link the listener/observer to messages from the past, handed down from one generation to the next. We see this in the Jewish and Christian Scriptures, as well as the sacred scriptures of the other religious traditions. Some of these stories are symbols in the form of artistic expressions of all sorts. In societies like the Maori in New Zealand, they even tell the creation story, providing not just an ancestral linkage but also a link to the divine. The great educator and lifetime student of the history of civilization, Will Durant, described a candidate for Folklore classification in the following manner: "The

reader must not be shocked to learn that Socrates is half myth and only half a man. A learned Frenchman, M. Dupreel (in *La Legende Socratique*) has reduced the noble gadfly to the misty historical status of Achilles, Oedipus, Romulus, and Siegfried. ...we may be certain that in good measure Socrates owes his fame as a philosopher to the creative imagination of Plato...How much of Plato's Socrates was Socrates and how much of it was Plato, we shall probably never know. " (Durant, 2002: 15). All cultures have stories about individuals whose exploits are bigger than life. We frequently have difficulty recognizing the demarcation line between truth and fiction. In the Descartian world we live in, what is knowable/provable usually trumps folklore. Nonetheless, professionals in the defence, diplomacy, development and commerce communities would do well to enhance their understanding and appreciation of the heroes, myths, and symbols of the host culture. This would likely contribute to authenticity, enhanced quality of dialogue and trust building

The noted historian, Peter Gay, could have as easily been writing about folklore as history when he described the work of Herodotus this way: "He included stories that were obviously mythic or epic in origin not because they were historically reliable, but because they signified how people felt and thought and were thus historically relevant."(Gay, 1972:1 [2]). The key word is relevance...relevance to cultures being studied. One of the great challenges for western professionals trained in scientific methods of any and all sorts is to recognize the power of cultural relevance. The components of Folklore as describe in Image 3 can be of great help with this.

Image 3. Folklore component of DeMarco Culture Model

FOLKLORE	The body of knowledge/practice concerning what the society stands for, has been handed down from one generation to the next in oral/written traditions, and lives in the society's heroes, myths, and symbols.
Heroes	Individuals whose exploits are viewed as outstanding examples of what the society values most.
Myths	Stories about people, events, or institutions, loosely based on reality, commonly given as examples of what the society values most or least
Symbols	Visual, spoken, artistic, religious, and culinary manifestations that reflect a society's essence.

Values are the unique blend of perceived beliefs, needs and attitudes that live in the behaviour of most members of a society. Most culture models include values as integral to the definition. What is unique here are the three subcategories. Values in this model have everything to do with perception. It is not dissimilar to the Peter Gay's comment about history quoted earlier. The issue is not one of truth; it is one of relevance. Cultures see their reality through their own hierarchy of truth. That hierarchy has three levels of reality: (1) beliefs, which, for the most part, are immutable; (2) biases (called attitudes here) which have significant influence on individual/group behaviour; and (3) needs, which are requirements for survival/success. In fractured states or natural disaster zones, peace making and trust

building can only be achieved if the fundamental needs of a culture are first addressed. An example would be a doomed initiative of creating a working civil society in an environment with inadequate potable water, food and shelter from the elements. Beyond this, some cultures have ceremonial, religious, or symbolic needs which are so deep seated their absence would totally undermine any meaningful discourse concerning “giving purpose to collective effort and causing willing effort to be expended to achieve that purpose.”

The study of values should include the study of the history and folklore of the culture in question. The history and folklore of a culture are the outward manifestation of the inner value system. For example, if we want to know more about the beliefs of a society, look at the historical and mythological personages they lionize. These “beliefs in action” can reveal the “say-do gap” (Cox & Rock, 1997), a litmus test that differentiates beliefs from attitudes. Far too many change agents make the mistake of expecting to make changes in a cultural belief system in a relatively short period of time. Short of a truly transformational or life-altering event, beliefs are immutable. Attitudes, on the other hand, are not so deep seated and may be more open to change.

Each society/culture’s values are truly unique because individuals and groups are unique. Having said this, it is important to keep in mind that the uniqueness of individuals and societies does not lie in the uniqueness of their parts; we share far more in common than not. The uniqueness lies in the totality and interoperability of the *history, folklore, and values, which, taken together, make up the unique identity of a society at a given place and point in time!* The challenge is to find the common ground where discourse between cultures can contribute to trust building.

Image 4. Values component of DeMarco Culture Model

VALUES	The unique blend of perceived beliefs, needs and attitudes that live in the behaviour of most members of the society.
Beliefs	Ideas viewed as being true by most members of the society.
Needs	Conditions or situations perceived by most members of the society as being required for survival/success.
Attitudes	Predispositions of most members of a society that an idea has special merit.

CONCLUSION

Leadership is more about ideas than place. Its context is all about culture. Cultures are living organisms where the dynamic interplay of life impacts on and is impacted by it. We are also part of a variety of cultures, each with its own history, values and folklore. Given this, it is no overstatement to say cultures are complex and constantly in a state of change. The kind of change we are talking about is most often imperceptible, but it is always there because yesterday’s realities have become part of today’s history...yesterday’s experiences are part

of today's folklore...and the quality of yesterday's decisions have become today's updated value system.

Individual and societal cultures see the world through prisms, which ideally are transparent looking out, and mirrored looking in. All cultures suffer from some form of opaqueness when we look through our prisms. Culture is the sum of the history, folklore, and values that, taken together, make up the unique identity of a society at a given place and point in time.

The relatively new field of organizational culture can be particularly helpful in this activity because it comes out of the social science academic traditions; it attempts to find patterns of shared values to build trust relationship within rapidly changing and fast paced organizations. Morris, Leung, Ames and Lickel described it this way when they wrote: "In the study of cognition in organizations, and in social science more broadly, there are two longstanding approaches to understanding the role of culture: (1) the inside perspective of ethnographers, who strive to describe a particular culture in its own terms; and (2) the outside perspective of comparativist researchers who attempt to describe differences across cultures in terms of a general, external standard." (Morris, Leung, Ames, & Lickel, 1999: 781). The study of organizational culture focuses on observed behaviours (language, customs, and traditions), shared vision and shared knowledge, metaphors and symbols, group norms and embedded skills. (Schein, 2004).

All of these *give purpose to collective effort and cause willing effort to be expended to achieve that purpose*. Within organizational contexts, understanding the particulars of the culture becomes key to unlocking dialogue about what the company truly stands for and the rules of the road concerning what is necessary to operationalize collective effort. (DeMarco, 1984). These are core elements of the Jacobs and Jaques definition of leadership, leadership being more about ideas than place, and the context being fundamentally about culture. While some "visionary successes" have been catalogued as a result of the use of organizational culture methodologies (Basrick, 2000; Gerstner, 2002; Welch, 2001; Ulrich, Zenger & Smallwood, 1999), their analysis and their successes are limited to a short life cycle primarily because culture is a living organism.

The study of culture in its many guises has been a lifetime professional commitment of this author. Work is already under way to create a field tool, which will link elements of the DeMarco Culture Model with a trust building scale. This will be a "community engagement tool" which will help leaders "give purpose to collective effort and cause willing effort to be expended to achieve that purpose." This has relevance because there is a new emergent global culture that calls for new insights, new thinking, and a new ethos (van der Erve, 2008)

The study of culture is time consuming and challenging. It is also one of society's best hopes for finding common ground to engage in meaningful dialogue with fractured states and societies in crisis. It is hoped that the ideas expressed in these pages will enhance trust building; the fundamental challenge faced by fractured societies within global leadership locales.

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Meaningful Reflection!