

Hofstede's Cultural Dimension Model and Cultural Intelligence: A Global Imperative for the Contemporary Church Leader

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Abstract

The power of social media has shrunk the world into an increasingly truly global village. subsequently, leaders are expected by their organizations to competently fit and cope in whatever field they are assigned to serve. Thus, they are inevitably exposed daily to communities of different systems, intonations, cultures, languages, traditions, and practices. But how prepared are they to serve in a varied setting? Cultural intelligence, the ability to work effectively in culturally diverse situations, will be the focus of this paper, which seeks to help equip and guide global church leaders in light of Hofstede's cultural dimension of power distance. Further, this purely literary search attempts to create an awareness of cultural intelligence that leaders need to make sense of unfamiliar contexts, ideas, and approaches. The authors conclude that faith and culture can work in tandem, thus giving the Church capacity through its leaders to be an effective witness of the gospel to people of different tongues, tribes, and kindred.

Keywords: Cultural awareness, cultural intelligence, communication, global leadership, power distance, church

Introduction

People are becoming more interconnected than ever before. The rise of social media has created a platform for communicating instantly across cultures at the click of a button. In essence, the world has become a global village (Nwafor et al., 2023). Kanu and Igboechesi (2023, p.1) are right, "we are living in an era of globalization where the four corners of the world are brought closer with technological advancement. However, globalization has created many challenges. One is the need to identify appropriate leaders who can effectively communicate with culturally diverse followers (Northouse, 2019).

The other challenge, highlighted by Norris (1999), cautions global leaders from recklessly pushing their universal agendas at the expense of local cultural identities. Recently, Tolkach and Pratt (2022) elaborately explained how globalization affects culture, while Mokgwane (2022) examined the significant influence of culture on leadership. These realities inevitably call for leaders to develop or adopt cultural intelligence in a global context. Hence, globalization may

be perceived as detrimental because it tends to overshadow local contexts and practices. However, hybrid globalization allows leaders to function globally skillfully but with sensitivities that respect and dignify the local context.

Such sensitivity brings the concept of cultural intelligence into the equation, which "can be understood as the capability to relate and work effectively across different cultures. These different cultures can be based on geographic or ethnic cultural lines or even different company cultures" (The Martin Trust Center for MIT Entrepreneurship, 2020, para. 1). Yari et al. (2020) add that, to succeed in complex multi-cultural environments, cognition, motivation and behavior are vehicles of cultural intelligence.

The Global Village from the Lens of the Church

It is necessary to discuss the global village from the lens of the church. According to Neuliep (2009), the challenges faced by a diverse village may be numerous, but the benefits are even more

significant. This truth behooves the church to prepare its leaders (administrators, pastors, and elders) to embrace the reality of multicultural churches and the framework to navigate through this complex yet crucial matrix. While the development of the transport system has successfully helped spread diseases and increased globalization, Simankane and Mokgwane (2020) and Lo et al. (2017) contend that leaders in the global village must comprehend how cultural differences may affect the leadership process and management. Thus, today's leadership, including the Church, calls for cultural intelligence competency.

The Christian Church would do well to invest in cultural intelligence for international and local workers. This investment is necessary because the demographics of local and global abodes are increasingly receiving new immigrants. For example, the United States receives more immigrants each year, complicating the registration and care of immigrants (Kerwin & Millet, 2023). A pastor may find that his or her district has a diverse community to minister to, or the pastor may be called to serve in a new territory with multicultural settings.

In the Adventist Church, gospel ministers are ordained to serve the World Church. Hence, apart from globalization, they must adapt to living and communicating in other cultures (Sabirjanovna, 2023). The reality of diverse congregations brought about by globalization calls for leaders who will make every believer, regardless of ethnic background and culture, feel accepted and appreciated (Wiranto, 2015). It is evident that globalization impacts almost every aspect of life. In Mudau and Dingindawo's (2018) view, culture has emerged as a critical reference point among the many effects of globalization, which inevitably keeps its dynamic momentum. For this reason, spiritual leaders should strive to stay relevant by understanding the demographic and cultural makeup of their congregations.

The Power of Communication

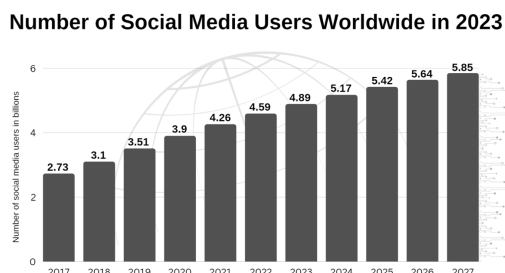
Globalization has created the need to understand how cultural differences affect leadership communication. The power of communication versus the communication of power portrays two different themes. The former describes the influence of "means any transmission of information, ideas, and emotions from a social entity (person, group, community) to another via messages" (Savu, 2019, p. 115), while the latter describes who wields power and how information is relayed to people (Florea, 2018). This section is only concerned with the former because communication is the core of life (Light, 1997). We use communication every day, either consciously or inadvertently.

Furthermore, human beings are highly social and cannot interact with each other (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2020). The various forms of communication, whether verbal, non-verbal, visual, or written, play a significant role in shaping how culture is communicated and expressed, since every culture has its own symbolic code, which must be broken down and interpreted. Communication influences our social way of thinking (Reig, 2019). Therefore, we must recognize the power of communication in cultural discourse.

The Covid-19 pandemic has given rise to the increased use of digital communication, since physical interaction is limited. Social media has taken center stage. Figure 1 illustrates the total number of social media users worldwide. The growth shows an upward trend year by year. Figure 2 shows the number of active users on the different platforms. Social media has made the world a global village that can be easily and quickly reached at the click of a button. Given this reality, leaders must possess cultural competencies to stay relevant.

Figure 1

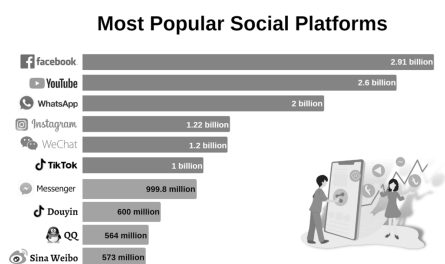
Total Social Media Users Worldwide



Source: (Blog) <https://www.broadbandsearch.net/blog/internet-statistics>

Figure 2

Most Popular Social Platforms



Source: (Blog) <https://www.broadbandsearch.net/blog/internet-statistics>

In cross-cultural communication, culture is shared (Lubis & Sagala, 2020; Zhan, 2016). As such, it would be in the leader’s best interest to learn about the nuances of each culture. What is known to have an innocent meaning in one culture may be interpreted in another culture as vulgar and inappropriate. Thus, the confluence of cultures in a globalized village has generated the need to comprehend how cultural variance affects communication in leadership. Therefore, leaders should possess the skills to effectively articulate and implement an organization’s vision in a multicultural setting. Sovic (2009) succinctly sums it up: It is good to acknowledge cross-cultural communication, but it is even more worth engaging with it.

Cultural Contexts in World Leadership

The varying cultural contexts in world leadership call for cultural intelligence. It is no surprise that such cultural diversity presents a perfect space for breeding cultural intelligence, which enhances global leadership (Alsalminy & Omrane, 2023; Alon & Higgins, 2005). Each world region has a unique leadership approach. For instance, Africa is predominantly patriarchal in its leadership thrust (Botma & Snyman, 2019). In a recent study by Omotoyinbo (2018), it emerged that women have difficulty rising to the echelons of power in Africa. World leaders need to address these issues to ensure equity in the regions in which they serve. However, this should be done with cultural sensitivity, and within a framework that alerts and educates local communities to effect the desired transformational change.

For example, Asian culture is more inclined to be hierarchical (de Guzman, et al., 2023), while Western culture is characterized by individualism (Nurmatovich, 2023) and persuasive inclinations (Jung, 2023). Aguilera-Barchet (2015) refers to the latter as soft power, now a standard reference to influence earned through the power of speech and integrity. Differences in approaches to work, social gatherings, and relationships are influenced by each region’s cultural orientation, thus forming a cultural context. In this case, the “woke” leader should navigate the local and organizational culture to achieve goals and objectives.

Hofstede’s (1991) original four cultural dimensions help us to understand the framework of world leadership in cultural contexts. These were later updated to six (Hofstede, 2011). According to Northouse (2019), research on world cultures is based on Hofstede’s anthropological analysis, spanning over fifty countries. House et al. (2004) built on the initial submissions of Hofstede by pioneering the Global Leadership and Organizational Behavior Effectiveness research program. The six cultural dimensions identified are power distance, individualism and collectivism, masculinity-femininity, uncertainty

avoidance, Confucian dynamism (long term; Table 1 shows each cultural dimension, its definition, and examples. short term), and indulgence versus restraint.

Table 1

Hofstede's Cultural Dimension Model

Cultural dimension	Definition	Examples
Power distance	Power distance is the extent to which the less powerful members of institutions and organizations within a country expect and accept that power is distributed unequally.	Low: U.S. and Canada High: Japan and Singapore
Individualism and collectivism	Individualism describes cultures in which the ties between individuals are loose. Collectivism describes cultures in which people are integrated into strong, cohesive groups that protect individuals in exchange for unquestioning loyalty.	Individualistic: U.S., Australia, and Great Britain Collectivistic: Singapore, HongKong, and Mexico
Masculinity-femininity	Masculinity pertains to cultures in which social gender roles are clearly distinct. Femininity describes cultures in which social gender roles overlap.	Masculinity: Japan, Austria, and Italy Femininity: Sweden, Norway, and Netherlands
Uncertainty avoidance(UAI)	Uncertainty avoidance is the extent to which the members of a culture feel threatened by uncertain or unknown situations.	Low: Singapore, Jamaica, and Denmark High: Greece, Portugal, and Japan
Confucian dynamism or Long-term versus Short-term orientation	Confucian dynamism denotes the time orientation of a culture, defined as a continuum with long-term and short-term orientations at its two poles.	Long-term: China and Japan Short-term: U.S. and Canada
Indulgence versus restraint	Indulgence versus Restraint, related to the gratification versus control of basic human desires related to enjoying life.	High: South and North America, in Western Europe, and parts of Sub-Saharan Africa Low: Eastern Europe, Asia and the Muslim world.

Source: Hofstede (1991). *Cultures and Organizations: Software of the Mind*. Berkshire, England: McGraw-Hill Book Company Europe, p.28; (Hofstede, 2011).

Among the many factors influencing organizations' success, cultural intelligence competence is one (Siripipatthanakul et al., 2023; Keung & Szapkiw, 2013). It takes a leader who is aware of culture's dimensions to apply themselves relevantly to get the job done. Attar et al (2019) submit that culturally intelligent leaders comprehend followers' needs and attitudes more positively. Their submission makes sense because cultural contexts comprise these attitudes. They have been layered and cemented over time to create contexts. These attitudes, cues, and behaviors must be interpreted. Thus, a prudent leader seeks to understand these contexts in order to lead the church to a desirable end. In other words, for leaders to sharpen their cultural intelligence, they need to conduct a rigorous examination of their own and host cultural settings in the milieu of global culture.

The scope of this paper does not allow for a comprehensive discussion of Hofstede's cultural dimension models listed in Table 1. Therefore, only one—power distance—will be presented for illustration purposes. A culturally intelligent leader needs to understand that the concept of power distance is applicable anywhere in the world. What makes it different is the cultural dynamics that societies and regions hold or perceive. Hofstede established what is dubbed the power distance index (PDI), which assigns a country-by-country comparison of how the world perceives power deference. See Table 1.

Low-power index countries (typically Western nations) have a setting in which hierarchy does not inhibit those in the lower rung from questioning higher authority (e.g., senior management) and demanding equity and participation (Marcus & Gould, 2000; Schwartz, 2004). The main advantage of this setting is that creative innovation is dynamic. The organization is likely to survive stiff competition and grow from the wealth of input from the spectrum of its employees. The disadvantage of these well-guaranteed freedoms is that progress might be delayed by established labor unions seeking redress into their hardships, demanding pay raise, and

sometimes disrupting businesses in shutdowns. At the same time, senior management frantically carves out a deal that will be acceptable to both sides.

However, this is not the case for the inverse. Countries with a high-power index (+50, typically Asian) where in their hierarchy, those in the lower ranks defer power to senior management and accept the power difference. This has both cultural and historical roots. For example, Japanese and Singaporean business organizations have been successful under this regimen because age is equated with wisdom. The older the boss, the wiser they are. Therefore, decisions are reached quickly. However, the disadvantage of high-power index businesses is that decision-making and innovation are relentlessly top-down, thus stifling the voice and ingenuity of the lot in the lower ranks.

Similar arguments might emerge if this paper explored the rest of Hofstede's cultural dimension model: individualism and collectivism, masculinity-femininity, uncertainty avoidance, and Confucian dynamism. However, the most intriguing question is, what are the implications for global Church leadership in the 21st century, particularly in the context of Hofstede's Power Distance? Undoubtedly, church leaders need more training in cultural intelligence to delineate the local, national, regional, and global challenges the church faces currently and in the future.

Challenges in Intercultural Church Leadership

The challenges faced by multicultural leadership are real. They are critical reminders that the church, global or local, is not an entity that functions in its own bubble. As research has highlighted the undeniable truth that cultural differences have contributed to the failure of the mission (Neate, 2022; Anderson, 2022; Livermore, 2009), the church has a responsibility to mitigate this challenge. The church is indeed an organization occupying a visible space

on the local and world stage, demanding that it consider the cultural dimension models espoused by Hofstede (2011).

In addition, the church cannot avoid doing business with secular organizations, as they have several meeting points in training and other business transactions that help make the church function. In this light, what complicates issues for the church is that although it is part of the social, cultural, political, and economic fabric, locally or globally, it is a non-profit volunteer non-governmental organization. Perhaps the reason why many church leaders lack innovation, progress, and drive towards the achievement of goals is a beckoning interrogation. While this remains a hanging question, religious leaders must not forget that the church, unlike other non-profit non-governmental organizations, has a divine mandate. The fear of God, the urgency of the mission (church business), and passion for people should be the driving force.

Ethnocentrism

The transaction of church business is not devoid of cultural challenges. Managing multicultural spaces is therefore mandatory. It begins by identifying the challenges that can easily overcome this space. Ethnocentrism is top of the list. According to Shori (2023), ethnocentrism is the belief that one's culture is superior and more important than that of others.

Consequently, people with such beliefs judge other people's cultures using their own culture's cues, norms, behaviors, and practices. This becomes a never-ending vicious cycle because no one will relent or acquiesce. Thus, Young, Haffejee, & Corsun (2017) posit that the more cultural intelligence is implemented, the lower the impact of ethnocentrism. Flexibility is affected when one group holds their way or culture as the only absolute measurement of 'righteousness.' Tucker et al. (2014) drive the point home by asserting that working with people from different cultures is critical since human beings tend to view challenges through cultural lenses. Effective global leadership is enhanced when leaders accept that addressing

the church's challenges can be accomplished in multiple ways.

Prejudice

Another challenge to intercultural leadership is prejudice. Prejudice is a "view expressed as if it is actual after reconstruction based on lack of understanding and unhealthy self-concept due to overlapped, distorted media not grounded in reality with fixation of differentiated socio-cultural structures" (Kwon & Yoo, 2017, p. 1786). Biases and stereotypes are common elements of prejudice. Sociologists and cultural anthropologists suggest that these could result from recurring sociocultural or historical factors, such as conflicts between groups of people (Maestriperi et al., 2017). The presence of cultural plurality does not make the church multicultural. It takes a dedicated leader to navigate the various cultures wisely and remain faithful to making everyone feel valued regardless of their culture through the exemplary leadership style of Jesus, servant leadership.

Poor communication emerges as a natural consequence of these two challenges. Once one group views itself as better and another holds biases against a different truth, "noise" is created. The two groups fail to hear each other. Language is the vehicle through which information and meaning are carried from one culture to the other. However, in a multicultural setting, words do not always carry meaning; instead, behavior and kinesics do (Barnett & Carter, 2018). This calls for interpretation, because each culture expresses itself differently. Lack of communication breeds impatience. As such, the frustration of not being heard cripples any effort to level the ground and stifles the mission of the church. Northouse (2019) suggests that ethnocentrism and prejudice should not be part of the contemporary leader in the quest to promote cultural intelligence. Also, the principles of mutual respect and avoiding judging other cultures using values and frameworks of our own cultures constitute a part of cultural intelligence.

The Jesus Cultural Model and Power Distance

Global and local church leadership need to know that the ultimate goal of their organizations is to carry out the mission of God: going to make disciples in all the nations, baptizing in the name of the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to obey everything Jesus Christ has commanded them (Matthew 28: 19-20c). Further, the same one who says he holds the ultimate authority and power (Matthew 28:18) is the same who tasks all the members of the church entity, “You will be my witnesses” (Acts 1:8b). It is apparent that Jesus Christ, who is high up and infinitely beyond the human hierarchy, had no intention of establishing a high-power distance regimen because he promised to be ‘with you always’ Matthew 28:20d. Cautioning church leaders and members toward a low power distance model,

Jesus called them together and said, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave—just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many (Matthew 20:25-28).

Current local and global church leaders must apply cultural intelligence, especially when serving high-power distance settings. The power distance model of Jesus is significantly non-hierarchical. He was very close to the people teaching, instructing, and eating with them.

Though He was a Jew [had his own culture], Jesus mingled freely with the Samaritans [a people of a different culture], setting at naught the Pharisaic customs of His nation [willing to give up his own culture]. In face of their prejudices [challenges], He accepted the hospitality of this despised people [exercised cultural intelligence]. He slept with them under their roofs, ate with them at their tables, — partaking of the food prepared and served by their hands,— taught in their streets, and treated them with the utmost kindness and courtesy [closed the power distance]. And while He drew their hearts to Him by the tie of human

sympathy, His divine grace brought to them the salvation which the Jews rejected. (White, 1905)

Although Jesus had his own culture, he embraced everyone. The woman at the well (John 4) was surprised that a Jew could ask for water from a Samaritan but Jesus arrested her attitude. Jesus apprehended the hostility that separated the two groups of people so that divine providence may eliminate the distance between the Savior and the sinner. The prevalence of prejudice did not deter the mission of Jesus. He exercised cultural intelligence by mingling with people from different cultures and enjoying their unique cuisines. Not only did Jesus sympathize with them, he also took it to the next level by empathizing with them. Jesus’ kindness and courtesy closed the power distance, consequently affording all a chance to eternal life.

In the model of Jesus, everyone is a participant. Though there are leaders in the system, they are not aloof. They receive feedback from ordinary people, and at the same time, show sympathy for their concerns. Jesus had his own culture but was not stuck to it. He acknowledged that he was sometimes in a different culture and thus was willing to give up his own to win them over for salvation. When facing challenges from either his own or the host culture, he exercised cultural intelligence to resolve them.

God addresses all types of people through the message of the first angel (Revelation 14:6) in the earth’s final warning, “And I saw another angel fly in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people.” The angel brought good tidings are for all not for one. While the world may look down upon other cultures and people groups, the gospel is not exclusive, but inclusive. God does not forget anyone. All people are equal before God; thus, grace equalizes power between people groups. In addition, God dispenses his grace so that the sinner may cross over from death to life by extending himself between death and life.

Practical Ways of Applying Cultural Intelligence in Power Distance Settings

Knowing Jesus' model of power distance must be accompanied by applying practical ways of eliminating or reducing power distance. It is not enough to know. Knowing must be followed by doing (Hajian, 2019), so that learning and intentional change can occur. According to Azevedo and Shane (2019), knowledge (cognitive) must be accompanied by strategy (metacognitive) and fueled by a drive (motivational), resulting in action or doing (behavioral). In this case, the fundamental motivation is to work effectively with all groups of people to achieve the church's mission. We recommend the following actions in Power Distance settings:

1. **Mingling Leadership** (Lasu & Biaggi, 2021) – This is a big part of Jesus' Power Distance model. The leader must go to the followers and not the other way around. Jesus started a trivial yet intentional conversation with the woman at the well (John 4). In Luke (7:36), He shares a meal with the Pharisees. Trivial interactions and how they are handled are what makes the leader, not so much when the leader is directing or handling a church board. In a local church, there is a difference when a local pastor visits members in their homes. Much care should be taken to get closer to junior workers/followers so they do not take offense in a gradual low power distance approach. In addition, a wise leader will learn essential phrases or greetings of some of the languages of the church members. This strategy breaks down walls and makes the followers feel recognized and close to the leader. Another way is to arrange cultural celebrations, such as a cultural parade, followed by a display and tasting of various cuisines.
2. **Exemplary Leadership** (Bell, 2021) – be humble. Humility is attractive and easily breaks any resistance to the church's agenda. Lead like Jesus.
3. **Representative Leadership** (Mokgwane, 2022) – Leaders must ensure that the leadership team represents the populace. When leaders are elected, it is incumbent on the leader or the church to promote representation according to

age, gender, ethnicity, and race. In this way, all followers will feel that they belong and that all demographics are important.

4. **Participatory Leadership** (Nazir et al., 2021) – Leaders must encourage members to express themselves freely. This will instill confidence in the members.
5. **Compassionate Leadership** (Shuck et al., 2019) – caring leadership wins the hearts of church members. This will make members identify with the Church because of its benevolent and empathetic leaders.
6. **Fair Leadership** (Kamaara, 2000) – Leaders should minimize inequalities by promoting equal rights so that every member feels valued, respected, and seen.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Hofstede's cultural dimension model can be used as a springboard to understand local and global church leadership because it is a comprehensive exposition of different cultures per country, thus giving leaders an overview of various regional settings. Church leaders are left with no choice but to learn to conduct God's business with different people from different cultural backgrounds, given the nature of the urgent mandate described in Revelation 14:6. As such, intentional training in cultural intelligence competence is a significant block to leadership development. Cultural intelligence is also "the bridge that helps us more effectively express and embody Christ's unconditional love across the chasm of cultural difference." (Livermore, 2009, p. 20). Its importance cannot be ignored.

Although this paper focused on ecclesiastical leadership, the same principles apply to other church institutions, such as medicine and education. Given this, we recommend that all Adventist Institutions offer cultural intelligence courses at the beginner, intermediate, and advanced levels. Furthermore, church employees must be assigned higher responsibilities after receiving cultural intelligence training and exhibiting cultural intelligence competencies.

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