

# THE CHALLENGES OF CROSS CULTURAL LEADERSHIP IN SOUTH EAST ETHIOPIA FIELD

## Chapter 1

### Introduction

The concepts of leadership and culture are probably the most debated subject in many parts of the world<sup>1</sup>. Hesselgrave says that human beings are cultural beings. It is difficult and undesirable, if not impossible, to separate the form of Christianity from culture. Yet Christianity is a universal religion not bound by one cultural expression.<sup>2</sup> However, Charles Craft argues that one should not expect that this flavour be reproduced in churches planted among other peoples. Their cultures, in need of transformation, are adequate, socio-cultural environments in which the gospel can take root. No cultural way of life or its Christian expression should be absolutized. It is in this sense that we might hold to cultural relativism.<sup>3</sup>

The South East Ethiopia field covers the territory of Bale, East Arsi, East Shoa, and West Arsi Zone.<sup>4</sup> There are different cultural settings within this territory in which more need to be learnt as leaders focus on leadership and evangelism in this territory. Adventists have concentrated on reaching out to others in various forms of evangelism. The bedrock of Adventism is three flying angels, sharing the everlasting gospel to “every nation, tribe, tongue and people” (Rev 14:6).

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<sup>1</sup> Schein, E. H. *Organizational culture and leadership* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass. (2004). 452

<sup>2</sup> Hesselgrave, David.. *Communicating Christ Cross-Culturally*. 2nd ed. Grand Rapids, Michigan, USA: Zondervan. 1991, 263

<sup>3</sup> Kraft, Charles H.. *Anthropology for Christian Workers*. Maryknoll, New York, USA: Orbis Books. 1996 65

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.adventistyearbook.org/ViewAdmField.aspx?AdmFieldID=SEET>

South East Ethiopia field like the rest of other cultures, have many of the deepest cultural values and much of worldview are neutral. However, within each culture are behaviours, beliefs, values, and worldview assumptions the teachings of Christianity through the lenses of the non-Christian parts of their worldview.<sup>5</sup>

### **Problem statement**

Cultural differences are at the centre of every leadership position; the main question is what can the leader do to understand the people he or she is leading in the context of their culture which differ markedly from his own?

### **Purpose of the study**

This study seeks to empirically examine the challenges of cross cultural leadership in South East Ethiopia field and the solutions to these challenges.

### **Significance of the study**

The study will be significant because it will bring to reality the challenges faced in the field and their solutions for the smooth running of the events and programmes in the field.

### **Scope and the delimitation**

This study will be focused on cross cultural leadership challenges in South East Ethiopia field. The study will not looking at the challenges faced in other fields of the country bu will be limited to the topic under study.

### **Literature review**

The information contained in this research has been taken from various sources, the sources have been helpful on how to shape cross cultural leadership. Kluckhohn tells us that

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<sup>5</sup> Kraft, Charles H. Culture, worldview, and contextualization. In *Perspectives*, ed. Ralph Winter,. Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library. 1999, 384-391

developing an understanding of differences, whilst reserving any automatic (bias-led) judgment, requires dedicated effort from even the most skilled leaders in global organisations. Particularly as leaders simultaneously need to be attuned to their own leadership style, so they can consciously prepare to flex it when appropriate.<sup>6</sup>

As a leader you need to have a capacity for leadership, no matter where you are in the social system, is both empowering but also a serious commitment. Once you have internalized these beliefs, leadership becomes a moral obligation, a duty enacted for the benefit of the community.<sup>7</sup> Simon and Klandermans, In their study they say, Social identity conflicts can be distinguished from interpersonal disagreements by the nature of the causal attributions made by the disputants and by the amplification of the event to a larger collective.<sup>8</sup>

## Chapter 2

### Understanding cross cultural leadership

The most successful cross-cultural leaders demonstrate a desire to understand differences and a willingness to be flexible.<sup>9</sup> There are stories about leaders from other cultures who fail spectacularly to achieve expected results, because their fit with the new location's culture hadn't been considered. For example, a leader may desire to make big

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<sup>6</sup> Kluckhohn, C. The Study of Culture. In Lerner, D., and Lasswell, H. D. (eds.) *The Policy Sciences*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press (1951).54

<sup>7</sup> Tung, R. Managing in Asia: Cross-Cultural Dimensions. *Managing Across Cultures: Issues and Perspectives*. Joynt P. and F. Warner. London, International Thomson Business Press. (1996).33-40

<sup>8</sup> Simon, B., and Klandermans, B. Politicized Collective Identity: A Social Psychological Analysis, *American Psychologist* (2001) 319–31.

<sup>9</sup> Oetzel, J. G. "The Effects of Self-Construals and Ethnicity on Self-Reported Conflict Styles." *Communication Reports*. (1998). 133.

decisions quickly and implement swiftly being met with resistance from his or her local team, who expected to take time building consensus around the idea before any action was taken.

Kluckhohn tells us that developing an understanding of differences, whilst reserving any automatic (bias-led) judgment, requires dedicated effort from even the most skilled leaders in global organisations. Particularly as leaders simultaneously need to be attuned to their own leadership style, so they can consciously prepare to flex it when appropriate.<sup>10</sup>

### **A leader's style is influenced by 3 things:**

- Their own individual personal style and experience
- The expectations and corporate culture of their employer organisation
- Their national identity's background culture(s).

### **Constructing new identities as leaders**

As a leader you need to find ways of mobilizing workers into action. "Leadership I have come to realize and understand has nothing to do with the office you occupy. Leadership essentially has to do with your ability to influence, inspire and motivate others."<sup>11</sup> Whatever level of influence you exercise is leadership in action.

Leadership is therefore creating an environment for yourself and others to take the lead. As a leader I am beginning to work in such a way that my behavior aligns with my principles. I am constantly reminding myself of the fact that I need not be at the forefront, but if by my behavior and actions I'm able to influence and enable others to

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<sup>10</sup> Kluckhohn, C. The Study of Culture. In Lerner, D., and Lasswell, H. D. (eds.) *The Policy Sciences*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press (1951).54

<sup>11</sup> Osland, J. S. and Bird, A. "Beyond Sophisticated Stereotyping: Cultural Sensemaking in Context." *Academy of Management Executive*. (2000): 65.

be their best then to me that is leadership. It means obvious and whole hearted commitment to helping followers.”<sup>12</sup>

There are a number of common themes as a leader you need to understand

(1) *Anyone can be a leader*: e.g. “I previously thought of leadership as political, e.g. the President. Now I see everyone is a leader, mother, father, etc. even if they don’t necessarily know it ... you can do it at any level”<sup>13</sup>

(2) *Leadership begins with self awareness*: e.g. “So I came to see first you can be a leader anywhere and everyone can be a leader because everyone has some areas of competence. And second once you understand yourself and know you have certain capacities of leadership and you can’t have all of them, you can walk anywhere, you can lead anywhere, anytime, it’s just a question of getting to know what kind of tools you can use at what time: you need to understand yourself”<sup>14</sup>

(3) *Leadership is relational*: e.g. “I have noticed that you can never think you are settled as a leader. You have to go back to listen to the community, to analyze, to ask them what they want you to do for them, not what you want to do for them”<sup>15</sup>

(4) *Leadership is for the service of the community*: e.g. “I can see that my own role is to make positive changes in my community with the purpose to contribute for the positive changes in all my country.”<sup>16</sup>

As a leader you need to have a capacity for leadership, no matter where you

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<sup>12</sup> Osland 44

<sup>13</sup> Osland 50

Ruble, T. L. and Thomas, K. W. “Support for a Two Dimensional Model of Conflict Behavior.” *Organizational Behavior and Human Behavior*. (1976). 16.

<sup>15</sup> Scott, C. L. “Interpersonal Trust: A Comparison of Attitudinal and Situational Factors.” *Human Relations*. (1980). 805.

<sup>16</sup> Sitkin, S. B. and Roth, N. L. “Explaining the Limited Effectiveness of Legalistic “Remedies” for Trust/Distrust.” *Organisational Science*. (1993). 367.

are in the social system, is both empowering but also a serious commitment. Once you have internalized these beliefs, leadership becomes a moral obligation, a duty enacted for the benefit of the community.<sup>17</sup> Simon and Klandermans, In their study they say, Social identity conflicts can be distinguished from interpersonal disagreements by the nature of the causal attributions made by the disputants and by the amplification of the event to a larger collective. In other words, a disagreement may begin between two people but in a social identity conflict, at least one party attributes causality to the social identity and intergroup history of the players, not to individual differences. When at least one party attributes a conflict event to race, gender, religion, sexual orientation, nationality or ethnicity, and takes sides based on their own race, gender, religion, sexual orientation, nationality, or ethnicity, this is a social identity conflict.<sup>18</sup>

### **Importance of cross-cultural leadership**

There are two kinds of understanding of cross-cultural leadership as stated by Lau and Murnighan<sup>19</sup>. One is from the point of view of the organization, cross-cultural leadership is the leader in the implementation of an organization constituted by the staff of different nationalities, different values and different cultural backgrounds to guide and coordinate the behaviour. From this perspective, cross-cultural leadership is present in among the multinational and transnational organizations. In addition, an understanding from the

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<sup>17</sup> Tung, R. Managing in Asia: Cross-Cultural Dimensions. *Managing Across Cultures: Issues and Perspectives*. Joynt P. and F. Warner. London, International Thomson Business Press. (1996).33-40

<sup>18</sup> Simon, B., and Klandermans, B. Politicized Collective Identity: A Social Psychological Analysis, *American Psychologist* (2001) 319–31.

<sup>19</sup> Lau, D. C. and Murnighan, J. K. Interactions Within Groups and Subgroups: The Effects of Demographic Faultiness, *Academy of Management Journal*, (2005) 645–59.

perspective of cultural exchange and cultural changes, the cross-cultural leadership as to adapt to a new wave of globalization and services worldwide wave of cultural leadership activities. From this perspective, cross-cultural leadership is a unique phenomenon to test the ability of leader's ability to lead and adapt the cultural challenges.<sup>20</sup>

Because the cultural variances are knowledge so important for the multinational companies' leadership activities, it is significant for the leaders to develop good understanding about the key of different cultural variances.<sup>21</sup> Furthermore, nation's specific cultural attributes play an important role in determining the selection of leadership style.

## Chapter 3

### **Biblical examples for cross cultural**

#### **Jesus and Paul as missionaries**

When we consider the life of Christ from a missiological viewpoint Jesus also made major adaptations in His life to fit into the culture of His "mission field." In theological terms we refer to this as the incarnational model. The missiological implications of Jesus' ministry are enormous.

Christ left behind the advanced and glorious culture of heaven, and for 33 years lived, dressed, ate, and worshiped like any other first-century Jew. Instead of worshiping to the

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<sup>20</sup> Ting-Toomey, S. and Kurogi, A. "Facework Competence in Intercultural Conflict: An Updated Face-Negotiation Theory." *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*. (1998). 187.

<sup>21</sup> Erez, M., and Earley, P. C. *Culture, Self-identity, and Work*. New York: Oxford University Press, (1993) pp. 74–96.

strains of celestial anthems, He worshiped to the blast of a ram's horn trumpet and the chants of temple worship.

Paul, following Jesus' example of adaptation, stated his "methods," ending with these significant words: "I have become all things to all men, so that by all possible means I might save some" (1 Cor 9:19-22). As Ralph Winter states, "God did not require a Gentile to commit cultural suicide to become a believer."<sup>22</sup>

Both Jesus and Paul, model missionaries, adapted their lives to the culture and needs of the people they were reaching. But beyond that, they adapted the way they delivered their message. Compare Jesus' words to the Samaritan woman (John 4) to the way He spoke to the Pharisees. Consider the way He taught the common people in parables based on familiar events in their everyday lives. Examine Paul's words to Agrippa (Acts 25:25-26:23), and compare them with the way he spoke to those gathered in the synagogue in Thessalonica (Acts 17:1-3), to the "heathen" crowd in Lystra (Acts 14:15-17), or to the Greeks on Mars Hill (Acts 17:22-32) and see how Paul presented the good news, always taking into account his audience's perspective, knowledge, and cultural background.

### **Advantages of Cross Cultural Leadership**

1. Cross Cultural Leadership opens up the avenues to understand and work with people from different cultures, this can help in enhancing the knowledge of the leader at various levels.

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<sup>22</sup> Ralph D. Winter, *The Impossible Challenge: the Founding of the U.S. Center for World Mission*. 2004 p.120



2. Leaders working in different cultures can come up with effective ideas and strategies that might be existing in their culture and if incorporated can result in tremendous success in Cross Cultural Leadership style of management.
3. Cross Cultural Leadership also helps to shake the leaders out from their comfort zones and predictable style of leadership. Effective leaders always want to add to their learning curves and highly appreciate these challenges which allow them to try and implement new strategies and enhance their planning skills.
4. Challenges in the Cross Cultural Leadership maintain the newness in the job and every day planning and making a diverse team work towards a common goal keeps not only the team members motivated but also the leader to deliver the best.
5. Cross Cultural Leadership also helps in optimum utilization of the leadership team and their skills which proves crucial especially in the companies that find it difficult to find skilled staff to fulfill the requirements of the company or the organization.
6. Cross Cultural Leadership not only utilizes the leadership skills of the leader but also personal skills that can be used to create a bond with team members or connect with them so that they share their ideas with the leader fearlessly.<sup>23</sup>

Advantages and disadvantages of any leadership style are two sides of the same coin and hence coexist, same holds true for Cross Cultural Leadership style.

### **Disadvantages of Cross Cultural Leadership**

1. A lot time is required for building the bond with cross cultural teams as communication with them cannot be very open in the initial stages at least. This bond

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<sup>23</sup> Wang, E., Chou, H.-W. and Jiang, J. "The Impacts of Charismatic Leadership Style on Team Cohesiveness and Overall Performance During ERP Implementation." *International Journal of Project Management*. (2005). 173-180.

building exercise needs lots of communication between teams and leaders, in person as well with the help of other mediums which can prove to be time consuming and might take the spot light away from more important issues.

2. In order to be highly effective in Cross Cultural Leadership leaders need to brush up the knowledge about different cultures which again takes time.
3. Cross Cultural Leadership is a difficult style of leadership in certain places where acceptance of leaders from other locality is not that welcome.
4. Cross Cultural Leadership can make some leaders of the team de motivated as they do not feel they can share their ideas with a others who belongs to other culture.
5. Cultural diversity can work as boon if team members are open about sharing their views and including the leader in their discussions, but this leadership style can fail if this sharing of opinions or views does not happen and staff shies away from sharing any additional information with the leader that can help in working of company or for making strategies for the efficient management of workforce in cross cultural scenarios.
6. Cross Cultural Leadership fails sometimes when the management fails to take the religious beliefs and sentiments into consideration while planning any marketing strategies, however if cross cultural team are able to openly share their views with leader or management these problems can be tackled at planning stage itself.<sup>24</sup>

Cross Cultural Leadership is gaining its popularity as more and more people are diversifying. To emphasize the increasing popularity of Cross Cultural Leadership many universities have introduces many courses that ensure to help leaders to develop skills to make them more effective and efficient in cross cultural leadership situation. Cross Cultural Leadership has

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<sup>24</sup> Ruble, T. L. and Thomas, K. W. "Support for a Two Dimensional Model of Conflict Behavior." *Organizational Behavior and Human Behavior*. (1976). **16**.

scope of growth and development of skills not only in leaders but also in team members, who as a result can become more receptive and open minded while talking to staff of diverse cultural back ground which can in turn ensure an environment of harmony and positivity.

### **Implications for Understanding Leadership in Ethiopia**

Martha VanCise's in her counsel to leaders she writes two particular good sections. One is on teamwork. The other is on building cross cultural relationships. The following thoughts and information comes from this later section. she writes, "One requirement of building solid cross-cultural relationships is a servant attitude". Cultures are very different and as you read the following section, Leaders can have the attitude that we are superior in intelligence, know-how, and work ethic. This works in other culture, but can be very offensive in other cultures. What does this servant attitude look like? For starters, it is a realization that another's culture is more complex than it first appears. Never make assumptions about another's culture. Be an observer, not a problem solver. Take time to watch, learn, and support those native to the culture. In seven to ten days, you will not be able to solve all the "problems" of a culture. You are unable to totally solve your own culture's problems.<sup>25</sup> Matha's main purpose is to train leaders from within cultures to effect change through Christ-centered lifestyles and leadership.

Second, the servant attitude avoids condescending attitudes. "Guard against a superior attitude in regard to your education, possessions, and spiritual life. Avoid acting toward others as if they are ignorant or inferior. Look for similarities in your culture and the culture your are visiting."

Third, the servant respects the cultures' customs and taboos. Even when they seem unfair or unjust to you, they may be well accepted and non-threatening in the other culture.

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<sup>25</sup> Martha VanCise Beliefs About Values, Status, and Legitimacy in Multicultural Groups. *Innovations in International and Cross-Cultural Management*. (2000). viii, 374.

Seating arrangements are an example. You will probably be given priority seating as you visit churches and other locations on your trip. Accept these places of honor even if others around you have to stand or are moved because of your coming.

A servant is loving and receives well. As you meet new people, greet them warmly and properly. We will have specific discussion on what is appropriate and inappropriate greetings. “Always be very careful about responses to food. Do not make casual jokes, faces, laughs, mumbled comments, or other derogatory gestures when presented with food or drink”. Show interest in the lives and lifestyles of those you visit.

A servant works in cooperation with others and does not “take charge” because he or she knows how to do it better, quicker, or with more skill. Yes, you may know a better way. Yes, you may be able to do it quicker and yes, you may have more skill. But, don’t take over as our culture would encourage. Our objective is to be able to learn together with those we meet. A “know it all” is hard to get along with. “It is better to work in harmony than to complete the job”. A servant looks to provide for his or her own needs. Don’t expect to be waited on hand and foot. Look for ways that you can contribute. Yet, at the same time, be a gracious recipient. This is a delicate balance. Receive when it is given, yet, don’t expect it all to be given to you.<sup>26</sup>

As indicated from the study of this paper, Africa is witnessing a resurgence of interest in leadership rooted in indigenous values yet much of the empirical research in this context has been conducted by Western researchers, through Western paradigms, for consumption by Western audiences. Whilst we, the authors, can not claim to buck this trend, through a more inductive appreciation of what Africans themselves say about leadership we believe that a richer and more contextually sensitive account is possible.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Martha 298

<sup>27</sup> Martha 300

As leaders we need to aspire for leadership founded on humanistic principles, and a desire for more inclusive and participative forms of leadership that value individual differences, authenticity and serving the community. Beyond that, however, lie a number of tensions that may inhibit the ability and willingness of people to take up a leadership role. Undoubtedly similar tensions are experienced by aspiring leaders in other contexts yet the nature of these tensions and how they are resolved is likely to differ between contexts and cultures.<sup>28</sup>

Within the Ethiopian context, experience of dysfunctional leadership both during and post colonization clearly influences the way people think about leadership and their desire to be seen as a 'leader'. The influence of differing religious beliefs and associated practices is also a significant factor and varies widely across and between countries. Gender and age relations are also important, as are family and community relationships. In this context the Inter Action leadership program offered a forum in which participants could work through these competing accounts to create a more integrated sense of meaning and identity. Participants appeared to be looking to embrace a view of leadership that enabled a balance to be struck between concepts, practices and experience. Thus for example, in considering their own role as 'leader', participants felt a need to relate this to the communities in which they acted.

This representation of the self as only discernable in relation to the social worlds in which we operate appears quite distinct from traditional Western representations of individuality yet nor is it "an oppressive collectivism or communalism." The Ethiopian notion most closely associated with this (and mentioned a number of times during our research) is "ubuntu" - a highly humanistic concept of interdependence that "dictates that, if we [are] to be human, we need to recognize the genuine otherness of our fellow citizens." It offers a

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<sup>28</sup> Hofstede, G. H. *Culture's Consequences, International Differences in Work-related Values*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications. (1980) 52

powerful frame for sense making capable of holding the paradox of individual and community in dynamic and interdependent tension.

The concept of ubuntu also offers a means for integrating spiritual beliefs whilst acknowledging a diversity of religious practices. Archbishop Desmond Tutu's "theology of ubuntu" is a particularly good example of this and has been put to powerful effect in the truth and reconciliation process in South Africa.<sup>29</sup>

Thus, whilst we agree with conclusion that "effective leadership processes must reflect the culture in which they are found" our findings point towards a more dynamic engagement than that indicated within more traditional cross-cultural management and leadership literature. Not only do appropriate models and ways of thinking need to be developed and presented but, ideally they should be couched within culturally relevant language and concepts. Clearly such understandings are highly context specific in ways that might inhibit critical engagement with alternative perspectives derived from other contexts yet, via a program such as Inter Action, it has been demonstrated that through collective and emergent dialogue new models and examples may surface.<sup>30</sup>

### **Engage them...**

Leaders also need to need also to encourage leadership trips and mission trips. People are the reason we do all that we do. You will encounter many "nationals" who would be more than happy to help you learn about their culture. Be an initiator. Ask questions free of criticism or judgment. You aren't from this culture—don't act as if you've got it all figured out. Be willing to be "in the dark" and admit you don't understand things. You'll learn so

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<sup>29</sup> Lee, C. H. and Templer, K. J. *Cultural Intelligence Assessment and Measurement. Cultural Intelligence Individual Interactions Across Cultures.* (2003).125

<sup>30</sup> Nemetz, P. L. and Christensen, S. L. "The Challenge of Cultural Diversity: Harnessing a Diversity of Views to Understand Multi-Culturalism." *Academy of Management Review.* (1996). 434.

much more if you don't fake it! Learn to laugh at yourself. Everyone will make cultural mistakes—learn to apologize and move on. Your hosts will appreciate your effort to learn. Be engaging in your conversations; investigate things as if studying for a final exam. Spend time with them develop relationships with your interpreters, national team leaders/coordinators, and host families. Give of yourself and you will receive back a hundred fold.<sup>31</sup>

### **Learn from them...**

Rather than going as “doers,” some powerful dynamics can be unleashed if teams go as “learners” from the poor or as “co-learners” with the poor. Consistent with an asset-based model, going as a learner emphasizes the gifts which poor people have to share with others: the spiritual, intellectual, physical, and social resources that God has already placed in their community. Listening to poor people and asking them to share their insights affirms their dignity and reduces the tendencies towards pride on the part of the outsiders. Furthermore, the poor really do have something to teach us, for they have unique insights on what it means to trust in a sovereign God to “give us this day our daily bread.”<sup>32</sup>

## **Chapter 4**

### **Summary and conclusions**

One of the factors frequently omitted from studies of leadership in Ethiopia and Africa as a whole is the consideration of the potential significance of the cultural context within which leadership and management is practised. Recent studies have shown increasing awareness of this important factor. These in turn shape their decisions and behavioural patterns within organizations and their overall contributions to organizational performance.

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<sup>31</sup> Oetzel, J. G. “The Effects of Self-Construals and Ethnicity on Self-Reported Conflict Styles.” *Communication Reports*. (1998).133.

<sup>32</sup> Sullivan, J., Peterson, R. B., Kameda, N. and Shimada, J “The Relationship Between Conflict Resolution Approaches and Trust - A Cross Cultural Study.” *Academy of Management Journal*. . (1981). 803.

The model helps throw further light on the nature of leadership in our organizations and the potentials for leadership changes that can improve organizational performance and relational growth in the union field.

The awareness that all cultures are constantly subjected to pressure for change from both internal and external factors provides our leaders with opportunities to facilitate cultural change processes in the organizations that they lead. Thus, a key message of the paper is that a leader should develop skills and must exhibit an attentiveness that is grounded in existing cultural values. We have argued that some aspects of culture may constrain effective leadership. There may be the need to unfreeze some of these established traditions and contest assumptions that have remained unexamined for centuries. But not all aspects of culture act as constraints to effective leadership. Comprehensive empirical investigations into the impact of dominant cultural attributes on leadership and organizational performance are urgently required to guide leader development interventions on the field.



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