

SIGMA Assessment Systems

Cross-Cultural Application

Assessing Leadership Across Cultures with the LSP-R™



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Leaders are critical to the success of an organization, from their ability to manage daily operations, to their influence in achieving organizational goals. Strong leaders are those who are capable of seeing the “bigger picture” of an organization’s future and setting goals to achieve that vision. What’s more, effective leaders not only manage their team’s efforts, but also inspire their followers to work hard, engage with their tasks, grow their skills, and remain with the company year after year.

Given the fact that leaders can have such a broad impact on the organization, companies are often looking to take advantage of these benefits. To do so, we must first understand what qualities define good leadership. Competency models, such as the model used at SIGMA in our leadership assessments, can help us to understand the competencies good leaders tend to possess, and the way these competencies influence their behavior. However, it is also important to take a step back and consider the context in which leadership occurs. Variables other than a leader’s skills or behaviors can influence our perception of their performance. Here, we discuss how context can influence our perception of leader competencies. We also describe how measurement can be used to capture a broad range of leadership skills to help your organization find, retain, and build a diverse and talented leadership year.^{1,2,3}

How Culture Impacts Perceptions of Leadership

One of the most important contextual considerations for defining leadership is culture. Research has shown that how we define “good leadership” differs across populations. For example, there are some leadership characteristics that are highly valued in some contexts, but which may be considered less effective in others. Some cultures may prefer compassionate leaders who focus their attention on connecting with and valuing their employees. Other cultures, however, may prefer a more direct leader who is primarily driven by task-based success and is more assertive when interacting with others. What is considered effective in one culture may be seen as off-putting or undesirable in others.

Culture not only influences perceptions of which qualities make a good leader, but also how those qualities are demonstrated. For example, Negotiation and Conflict Management are two leadership competencies that can manifest differently across groups. In some cultures, negotiation tends to emphasize “winning,” with conflict often managed through confrontation. In other cultures, negotiation tends to focus on concessions and conflict is managed less argumentatively.⁴

This is not to say that leaders around the world do not share any commonalities - some leader qualities are universally valued, such as pursuing a vision, demonstrating integrity, inspiring

their followers, and creating an effective team.⁵ In addition, many cultures share a common idea of what makes a bad leader, including malevolence, ruthlessness, or uncooperativeness.⁶

In fact, there are more shared features of good leadership than differences when it comes to culture. This is good news for organizations that are seeking to build culturally diverse leadership teams. Differences in backgrounds may bring diverse perspectives to the table, but organizations sometimes worry about how individuals from different cultures will fit in to the company, and how these leaders will function within an organization. Some organizations also worry that their own cultural biases will make it hard for leaders from other cultures to succeed, especially if their definitions of leadership do not align. However, research has shown that many positive leadership qualities are perceived similarly across cultures, indicating issues of culture fit and success may be smaller than organizations anticipate.

Cross-Cultural Leadership and the LSP-R

Take for example, the GLOBE project.⁵ Researchers gathered a large cross-cultural sample of leaders. They then examined six different leadership types that have been demonstrated around the world, and evaluated the popularity of these approaches across clusters of countries. Charismatic and team-oriented leadership were positively valued by most country clusters, and self-protective leadership was perceived negatively by most country clusters. Each of the six leadership types observed as part of the GLOBE project are largely covered by LSP-R competencies. These styles and their LSP-R counterparts are summarized in the table below.

The LSP-R and Cross-Cultural Leadership Styles

GLOBE Leadership Styles	Leader Description	LSP-R Counterparts
Charismatic	Motivational, inspiring excellence in their followers; perceived by followers as sincere and trustworthy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Emphasizing excellence ▪ Inspirational role model ▪ Integrity ▪ Motivating others
Team-Oriented	Promotes teamwork and is attentive to their followers' well-being and team dynamics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Conflict management ▪ Facilitating teamwork ▪ Interpersonal relations ▪ Organizing the work of others
Participative	Consults others when making decisions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Active listening ▪ Communication ▪ Involving direct reports ▪ Open-mindedness

Humane Oriented	Sensitive, humble, and compassionate; offers support and assistance to followers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Active listening ▪ Motivating others ▪ Sensitivity ▪ Valuing diversity
Autonomous	Prefers working independently; strong confidence in own abilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Assuming responsibility ▪ Decisiveness ▪ Independence ▪ Self-Esteem
Self-Protected*	Concerned about reputation, status, and impression management; tailors communication style depending on status of the other person	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ambition ▪ First impression ▪ Operating upwards ▪ Social astuteness

*This is one leadership style where perspectives vary more widely across cultures. While Western views on this style tend to be negative, Eastern cultures tend to view it more positively. Leaders with this style are not necessarily self-focused, but rather, seek to protect the reputation and feelings of both themselves and others. For example, they tend to convey criticism indirectly to their followers so that they do not embarrass them.⁵

The LSP-R: A Comprehensive Assessment of Leadership

Recognizing that there may be small differences in preferences for leadership styles across cultures, how can we use leadership assessments to hire diverse teams and promote individuals fairly? We do so by using measures that are inclusive of leadership competencies important across cultures. The [Leadership Skills Profile - Revised](#) (LSP-R) is based on SIGMA’s competency model. The 50 competencies included provide comprehensive coverage of skills and behaviors linked to success across a range of leadership approaches.

The LSP-R competency model contains both those competencies that are universally valued in leaders (e.g., Vision, Integrity), and those that may show some cultural preference (e.g., Ambition, Sensitivity). As a result, the LSP-R can provide a more nuanced perspective of an individual’s leadership potential. It can also be used to hone in on which competencies are most critical not just in a given culture, but in an individual organization or a specific role.

Organizations and leaders should be aware of the potential impact of culture on perceptions of leadership, especially when managing diverse teams. That said, it is more important to discuss what leadership means in a given organization than to rely on cultural stereotypes about leadership. Even within a country, differences in region, language, gender, social class, religion,

ethnicity, and personality may affect perceptions of important leadership characteristics.⁷ Rather than thinking about a broad approach to leadership, it is best to consider which competencies are critical for success in a role, and to find and train leaders to meet these needs.

Get Started with the LSP-R Today

Organizations can gain the benefits associated with strong leadership by using assessments to select and guide the development of high-performers. SIGMA's LSP-R is an inclusive, scientifically-validated, and easy to administer assessment that can help organizations understand how effective leadership is defined in their organization. [Contact us](#) to learn more about how the LSP-R can help your organization select and develop strong leaders.

How SIGMA Can Help

If you'd like help developing your leadership competencies and using assessments like the LSP-R, check out SIGMA's individual and group [coaching](#), custom [consulting](#), and [succession planning services](#). To learn more about our solutions and how SIGMA can help your leadership team, click [here](#), or contact us directly for more information.

¹ Rahmadani, V., Schaufeli, W., Stouten, J., Zhang, Z., & Zulkarnain, Z. (2020). Engaging leadership and its implication for work engagement and job outcomes at the individual and team level: A multi-level longitudinal study. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 17, 776.

² Vatankhah, S., Alirezaei, S., Khosravizadeh, O., Mirbahaeddin, S., Alikhani, M., & Alipanah, M. (2017). Role of transformational leadership on employee productivity of teaching hospitals: Using structural equation modeling. *Electronic Physician*, 9, 4978–4984.

³ Caillier, J. (2018). Can changes in transformational-oriented and transactional-oriented leadership impact turnover over time? *International Journal of Public Administration*, 41, 935–945.

⁴ Gelfand, M., Erez, M., & Aycan, Z. (2007). Cross-cultural organizational behavior. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 58, 479–514.

⁵ Black, J. S., & Porter, L. W. (1991). Managerial behaviors and job performance: A successful manager in Los Angeles may not succeed in Hong Kong. *Journal of International Business Studies*, 22, 99–113.

⁶ House, R. J., Dorfman, P. W., Javidan, M., Hanges, P. J., & Sully de Luque, M. F. (2014). *Strategic leadership across cultures: The GLOBE study of CEO leadership behavior and effectiveness in 24 countries*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.

⁷ Graen, G. B. (2006). In the eye of the beholder: Cross-cultural lesson in leadership from Project GLOBE: A response viewed from the Third Culture Bonding (TCB) model of cross-cultural leadership. *Academy of Management Perspectives*, 20, 95–101.