Cross-Culture Management: An Examination on Task, Relationship and Work Overload Stress Orientations of Dutch and Vietnamese

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ABSTRACT

Human capital plays an important role and acts as a strategic resource that helps firms achieve strategic competitiveness. In the global business context, understanding the expectations and behaviors of employees in different cultures is paramount for international and multicultural organizations to succeed. This paper examines the task and relationship orientations as well as the work overload stress perception of people in the low-context culture of the Netherlands and in the high-context culture of Vietnam. As a result of the analysis of 396 responses, some significant differences were found between the two samples. It appears that Vietnamese have significantly higher scores on task, relationship and stress orientations than Dutch respondents. While gender is a significant factor in task and relationship orientations, it did not demonstrate any differences in the stress perceptions of these respondents. In this paper, literature on Dutch and Vietnamese cultures is presented along with practical application, suggestions and implications for future studies.

Keywords: Cross-Culture Management, Dutch, Leadership, Relationships, Strategic Competitiveness, Strategic Management, Stress Perception, Tasks, Vietnam

INTRODUCTION

The variation of managerial practices across cultures is one of major topics in the management field. Hofstede (1980a, 1984) initially focused on the four dimensions explaining national culture. Hofstede (1980b) recognized that U.S. based management theories, including motivation and leadership, may not work well in other cultures. Following this research notion, several researchers have paid attention to the influence of cultural variation on major managerial phenomena, including human resource management (Schuler & Rogovsky, 1998), innovation strategy (Shane, 1995), strategic management (Sayles & Wright, 1985), operations management (Pagell, Katz, & Sheu, 2005),

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accounting system (Salter & Niswander, 1995), and organizational behavior (Peter, 1992).

Scholars in this research stream have focused on leadership as one of such managerial practices and many studies found various beliefs about leadership across cultures (Dickson et al., 2003; Giberson et al., 2009). Hofstede (1993) proposed that national culture plays a key role in enlightening local leadership practices. Gernstner and Day (1994) suggested leadership prototypes across Hofstede’s cultural dimensions. In addition, Wendt, Eeuweman, and Emmerik (2009) exhibited that the degree of individualism is negatively related to leaders’ directive and supportive behavior. It is beyond doubt that national culture has been considered as one of major factors explaining how local leaders behave. In addition, Global Leadership and Organizational Behavior Effectiveness (GLOBE) aims to investigating effective leadership practices across 61 countries (House et al., 2002; Javidan et al., 2006). Participants in GLOBE, have investigated leader behaviors and organizations in diverse countries and cultural zones. It has shown to explain various aspects of leadership practices, including paternalistic leadership (Pellegrini, Scandura, & Jayaraman, 2010), leaders’ empathic emotion (Sadri, Weber, & Gentry, 2011), and ethical leadership (Resick et al., 2009). Cultural values and norms are important to leadership and the understanding of different expectations of leader behaviors in different context (Kuchinke, 1999; Lord et al., 2001). Therefore, there is an urgent need for cross-cultural comparative research on leadership styles as it is important for managers, trainers and researchers to examine how differences in cultural background and context can lead to cultural misunderstanding that can potentially lead to organizational failure.

The purpose of this comparative, cross-national study is to examine the similarities and dissimilarities in task, relationship and work overload stress orientations between adult Dutch and Vietnamese respondents, expand the body of knowledge of cross-cultural leadership and management, and provide practical implications for international and multicultural business managers who work with these populations. More specifically, this paper addresses the following research question: Do Dutch and Vietnamese differ in their task, relationship and stress orientations based on culture and gender? In addressing this question, we use the Style Questionnaire, provided by Northouse (2007) to obtain a general profile of a person’s leadership behaviors regarding task and relationship orientations and the Overload Stress Inventory, adapted from Hyde and Allen’s conceptual analysis of overload (1996, pp. 29-30), to assess the stress perception of respondents.

We chose to compare the Netherlands and Vietnam for several reasons. Firstly, the two countries established relationship since the 17th century and in 1973, diplomatic ties between the Netherlands and the Socialist Republic of Vietnam were established. Over the past centuries, the relationship has been strengthened both economically and politically. According to Kingdom of the Netherlands (2012a), the Netherlands is currently the largest European Union (EU) investor in Vietnam and the third EU trading partner. Bilateral trade has been increasing tremendously. Figure 1 shows that the total value of bilateral trade between Vietnam and the Netherlands has increased from EUR 409 million in 2001 to more than EUR 2.0 billion in 2011. Vietnam’s exports to the Netherlands have increased almost 5 times (from EUR 335 million to EUR 1,546 million) while the Netherlands’ exports to Vietnam have increased more than 6 times (from EUR 74 million to EUR 481 million). The most significant export products from Vietnam to the Netherlands include rice, rubber, coffee, cashew nuts, seafood, textiles, footwear, handicrafts and electronic parts; whereas, main import products are machinery equipment and parts, chemical products and plastic materials. There are a large number of Dutch companies which have made significant investments in Vietnam, including Shell, Unilever, Grontmij, Damen Shipyards, Ballast Nedam, Akzo Nobel, Philips, Heineken, TNT, Friesland Campina and Royal Haskoning. This indicates a significant call for understanding the similarities and dis-
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