

# SUCCESSFUL GLOBAL LEADERS

By Caroline Yang and Lionel Laroche

*Understanding different leadership styles in different cultures can make – or break – a transferee's success while on assignment*

Many international transferees are at the management or executive level with a mandate to develop a new market, set up a new operation or transfer knowledge. It means they will be leading teams of people who are culturally different from themselves. Being a good leader can mean different things for people in different parts of the world. Two cultural dimensions that cause major differences in people's expectations of leaders are hierarchy and individualism.

Canada is among the least hierarchical societies in the world. As a result, executives coming from more hierarchical countries to lead Canadian teams, and Canadian executives going overseas to lead more hierarchical teams, face a significant challenge in how their leadership style impacts their effectiveness.

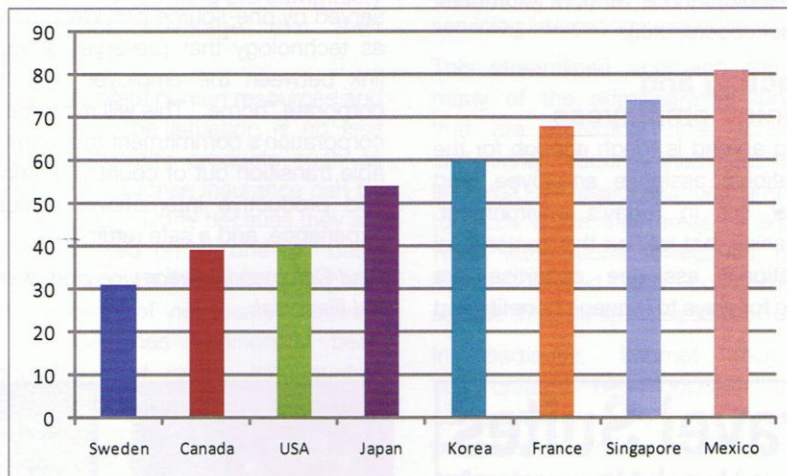
In a hierarchical society, the psychological distance between a manager and an employee is much greater than that in an egalitarian society. A manager does not need to influence the employee to do what he/she wants the employee to do. He/she just tells the employee what to do and how to do it. The 'how' is very important because employees brought up in a hierarchical culture expect their managers to give detailed instructions on how to do the job.

This results in a significant gap when an average Canadian manager, accustomed to giving employees freedom to do their job, is on assignment to an Asian or South American country. He is suddenly in a situation where he is managing employees from a hierarchical culture and who expect detailed instructions.

The diagram below shows the normalized distribution of employees in several countries on their preference of how they want to be managed. Very often the employee will keep coming back to ask specific questions on every step of the task. In the Canadian manager's

mind, the employee has no initiative because it is considered part of the employee's job to figure out the 'how.' When the egalitarian manager does not give clear answers to the employee's questions, the hierarchical employee may perceive the manager as

Hierarchy national comparison



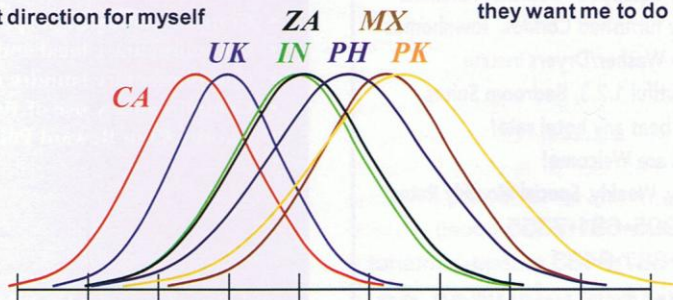
Source: Cultures and Organizations, Geert Hofstede

Organization and Culture Questionnaire™

I prefer working for managers who

give me enough freedom  
so that I can determine the  
best direction for myself

give me clear directions  
so that I know what  
they want me to do



Source: MultiCultural Business Solutions Database



Egalitarian people tend to	Solutions for leaders adjusting to an egalitarian organization	Hierarchical people tend to	Solutions for leaders leading more hierarchical employees
Find out answers themselves	Communicate with your employees and establish the norm for your working relationship	Expect manager to provide specific answers to their questions	Teach employee to find answers by themselves
Want freedom to do the job		Want clear and detailed instructions	Help the employee to plan the first project in detail and coach employee to gradually work more independently
Make decisions without checking with manager	Communicate with your employees to establish clear parameters and agree on the decision making process	Ask manager to make all decisions	Communicate with your employees to establish clear parameters and agree on the decision making process

incompetent – because managers in hierarchical cultures always provide an answer to the employee's questions.

On the other hand, when the average French manager assigned to work in Canada gives instructions or feedback, he/she may appear too micro-managing or too direct to an average Canadian employee.

Not understanding this cultural difference will lead to serious misunderstandings. On one hand, the employee may be perceived as a poor performer and perhaps even put on a performance improvement plan. On the other hand, the employee may feel de-motivated and even leave the organization looking for a more democratic leader.

Separating cultural differences and performance issues enables both the manager and the employee to problem-solve in collaboration and become more effective in achieving their goals. The chart above shows some pointers to determine whether an employee is more – or less – hierarchical than you and some practical tips to adjust leadership behaviours.

### Individualism

The most important aspect of a leader's role is to promote teamwork so that the result of the team's effort is bigger than the sum of the individual inputs. One of the most striking differences related to teamwork is the sense of how individualistically employees should behave or how much they should identify with their group. Canadians in general are more

individualistic than people in countries most expatriates come from or go to.

When translating this into behaviour in the workplace, Canadians give great importance to defining the individual roles and responsibilities of each team member because each member completing his/her tasks leads to the successful completion of the project. However, people from more collective cultures are less concerned about roles and responsibilities and more ready to help each other because the project is the responsibility of the whole team.

For example, compare the way a Chinese restaurant operates with that of a Canadian restaurant. In a Canadian restaurant, customers are assigned a server. When a customer signals for help, a nearby server will say, "I'll get your server." The server is rewarded by the tip from his/her assigned tables.

In a Chinese restaurant, when a customer signals for help, the closest server will go help that customer. The tip is shared among all servers at the end of the shift. Imagine the Canadian server working in a Chinese restaurant; he/she will probably be perceived as lazy and selfish. Conversely, the Chinese server working in a Canadian restaurant is very likely to be perceived as meddling into other servers' affairs or worse, stealing their tips.

Leaders of multicultural teams need to address the needs of all employees on the continuum of collective to individualistic tendency. On one hand, leaders need to coach collective team members to understand the importance of personal accountability and help them scope out their job and tasks properly. On the other hand, leaders need to help individualistic team members see

## Relocations to Calgary?

Trust in ExecSuite

**ExecSuite**  
SETTLE IN

1.800.667.4980 | [execsuite.ca](http://execsuite.ca)  
WEEKLY, MONTHLY & YEARLY RENTALS

## MORE THAN JUST A FURNISHED APARTMENT ...

- 1, 2 & 3 Bedroom Units
- Stylish, Clean & Comfortable Apartments & Townhomes
- Downtown & Other Desirable Locations
- Weekly Housekeeping
- On-site Management
- Exceptional Staff
- Business Services
- Fitness Centre



Individualistic team members tend to	Collective team members tend to	Solutions for leaders leading teams with individualistic and collective members
Be task oriented and focus on roles and responsibilities	Be relationship oriented and focus on team membership	Allocate time for the team to build relationship, discuss roles and responsibilities and update each other on work status
Share information on a need-to-know basis	Share information in a free flowing manner	Explain the norms of the organization, set up a team protocol and provide timely coaching
Consider the impact on themselves when making decisions	Consider the impact on all parties involved when making decisions	Encourage the team to consider the impact of their decision on other team members and provide mechanism for everyone to speak up and participate in decision making

the value of supporting each other in order to achieve the common goal.

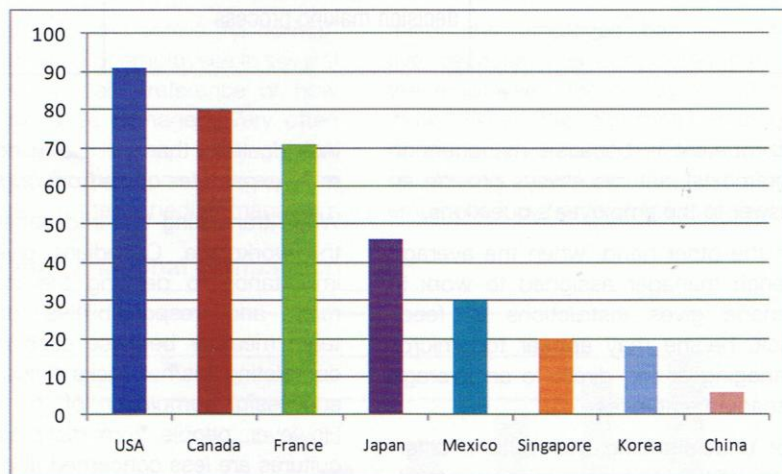
The chart above provides some pointers to determine if an employee is more individualistic or collective than you and some practical tips to meet the needs of all team members.

Recognizing cultural differences and separating this from performance or personality issues will enable leaders to be more successful at leading culturally different employees. When asked what his secret was for lasting so long and being so successful as the president of Yale University, Dr. James R. Angell explained: "Grow antennae, not horns."

To lead today's global teams, leaders need to be sensitive to the needs of their culturally diverse employees and adjust their leadership style to make their employees successful. ❧

Caroline Yang and Lionel Laroche are cross cultural consultants with MultiCultural Business Solutions.

#### INDIVIDUALISM NATIONAL COMPARISON



Source: Cultures and Organizations, Geert Hofstede

Votre alternative à l'hôtel  
Montreal's hotel alternative

**Montréal**

**Enville inc.**

Appartements meublés  
Furnished accommodations

Location à court terme  
Short term rental (514) 931-7030

VENEZ VISITER NOS APPARTEMENTS SUR LE WEB!  
COME VISIT OUR ACCOMMODATIONS ON THE WEB!

**www.enville.net**