

Different approaches in different cultures

Introduction:

Leadership theories

Different cultures in the world

Hofstede's framework

Italian theory of leadership: Machiavelli described certain effective techniques for manipulation and remaining in power.

American leadership theories:

Douglas McGregor (Theory X versus Theory Y),

Rensis Likert (System 4 management)

Robert R. Blake with Jane S. Mouton (the Managerial Grid)

What these theories have in common is that they all advocate participation in the manager's decisions by his/her subordinates.

Fred Fiedler's contingency theory of leadership Fiedler suggests that different leader personalities are needed for "difficult" and "easy" situations, and that a cultural gap between superior and subordinates is one of the factors that make a situation "difficult." However, this theory does not address the kind of cultural gap in question.

Geert Hofstede's research model:

National culture can be described by Power Distance, Uncertainty Avoidance, Individualism-Collectivism, and Masculinity-Femininity.

Power Distance measures the inequality of power distribution.

Uncertainty Avoidance shows the extent to which the society can tolerate uncertain situations and tries to avoid them.

Individualism-Collectivism indicates the relationships between people and their family members.

Masculinity-Femininity dimension measures the extent to which the dominant social values are labeled masculinity or femininity.

Different cultures in the world

Now use the Hofstede's four dimensions to describe the different cultures:

Choose France USA Sweden Italy German----Japan Taiwan Hong Kong India to analyze

1. Large Power Distance/Weak Uncertainty Avoidance: Hong Kong /India

Large Power Distance/Strong Uncertainty Avoidance: France /Italy /Japan /Taiwan

Small Power Distance/Weak Uncertainty Avoidance: USA /Sweden

Small Power Distance/Strong Uncertainty Avoidance: German

2. Large Power Distance/Collectivist: German/Taiwan/India /Hong Kong/Japan

Large Power Distance/ Individualist: France/Italy

Small Power Distance/Individualist: Sweden/USA

Small Power Distance/Collectivist: none

3. Weak Uncertainty Avoidance/Feminine: Sweden

Weak Uncertainty Avoidance/Masculine: USA/Hong Kong/India

Strong Uncertainty Avoidance/ Feminine: France/Taiwan

Strong Uncertainty Avoidance/ Masculine: Germany/Italy/Japan

Now we see clearly the cultures of different countries by Hofstede's framework.

Generally speaking, we can classify these countries above into two categories: western and oriental cultures.

Though the countries belong to either category may differ others in the same group in some dimensions. We can see that western countries usually have relatively small power distance and individualism. On the contrary, eastern countries have larger power distance and collectivism. The other two dimensions don't have the tendency.

In the eastern and western cultures, there still exist differences. For example, northern and southern Europeans are distinctly different in Uncertainty Avoidance and Feminine/Masculine.

And the same differences exist in Japan Taiwan-India/Hong Kong as well. The reason why India and Hong Kong share the Low Uncertainty Avoidance may be found in the history that they both be ruled by Britain for a long time. One interesting thing we can know from Hofstede's framework is that German, Italy and Japan share so much the same dimensions of cultures. Perhaps this can explain to some extent why facing the Great Depression in the 1930s, these countries chose fascism to resolve the problems they faced. While at the same time USA chose another road to go.

Hofstede's framework is based on the assumptions that the environment factors influenced the ways of thinking. The conditioning environment plays a key role in deciding the managerial theories' success or failure in different cultural contexts.

If the framework is useful, if I am a manager, first, I should know that a theory works well in western countries will fail in eastern countries like China, Japan and India, vice versa.

Then I will examine the national culture of the country I involved in by the four dimensions to know it is large or small power distance/uncertainty avoidance/feminine/individualism.

The next thing to do is to choose the appropriate leadership theories. Different theories have different assumptions of the four dimensions.

If this theory is the one you are using and it works well, there is no need to change. If not, you should change your way of dealing with your subordinates to ensure it works.

Conclusion:

In the eastern and western cultures, there still exist differences. The conditioning environment plays a key role in deciding the managerial theories' success or failure in different cultural contexts.