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Ideal Images of Educational Leadership in Mexico City and South Texas

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Abstract

This study used a qualitative approach to analyze ideal images of educational leadership among administrators in Mexico City and South Texas. Looking at educational leadership from a cross-cultural perspective revealed issues that are hidden when working in just one culture. Though both groups indicated that participation, clear communication, planned change, and attention to values were components of their best leadership experiences, there were subtle differences in how they discussed each dimension.

This study examined ideal images of educational leadership among administrators in Mexico City and South Texas. How did the two groups conceive of ideal leadership, and what were the differences and similarities in leadership? The answers to these questions within each culture are important in defining the direction of educational administration preparation programs. A cross-cultural approach highlights and contrasts what each group values.

Participants in the study wrote essays describing their ideal leadership experiences. A qualitative, open-ended approach was used to analyze the themes expressed in each essay. The themes of the two countries were compared, with particular attention to culture and values.

Cultural Considerations

Culture gives leadership different and varied forms. Some aspects of leadership are universal, and others are particular to a culture. Over the years, anthropologists and researchers have proffered numerous definitions of culture. Geertz (1973, 89) described culture as the way people "communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about attitudes toward life." Trompenaars (1993, 26) considered culture to be "man-made, confirmed by others, conventionalized, and passed on for younger people or newcomers to learn." Dim-

mock and Walker (2000a, 146) defined culture as “the enduring sets of beliefs, values, and ideologies underpinning structures, processes, and practices which distinguish one group from another.” Hofstede (1980, 25) viewed culture as “the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one human group from another.”

People attain culture as members of a society, and their behavior is shaped and influenced by that society’s cultural rules. Native culture becomes ingrained in the unconscious. Offerman and Hellman (1997) agreed with many cultural theorists that this ingrained cultural behavior rarely is replaced by another set of behaviors, even after extended residence in a society with different cultural norms.

People have cultural patterns of behavior, perceptions, and cognition that seem natural and universal to them. They often are unaware that these patterns are, for the most part, culturally based, and that individuals of other cultures may differ in how they characteristically act, perceive, and interpret behaviors in any given situation. According to Albert (1996), lack of cultural knowledge may lead to serious misunderstandings and possible conflicts among members of different cultures.

Hallinger and Leithwood (1998) contended that understanding the impact of societal culture on educational practices and policies is essential to any research endeavor. They suggested that Hofstede’s (1980) cultural dimensions are useful in cross-cultural studies of educational leadership—at least in the early stages.

Dimmock and Walker (2000a) recognized the impact of globalization on educational research and suggested a framework for undertaking cross-cultural educational research similar to that of Hallinger and Leithwood (1998). Dimmock and Walker (2000b) agreed with Hofstede (1980) that cultural dimensions allow researchers to describe, measure, and compare cultures. They also recognized that culture is learned and that societal and organizational culture are different. They cautioned that though Hofstede’s dimensions are useful in cross-cultural studies, there is a tendency to view these dimensions as polarized alternatives rather than degrees on a continuum.

Leadership practices and styles also are influenced by culture. Offerman and Hellman (1997) observed that cultural values are strong predictors of leadership behavior. They applied Hofstede’s (1980) cultural dimensions in their exploration of variations in leadership behavior and emphasized the concept of culture when examining leadership theory and practice.

Leadership Models

Leadership has existed in some form in all human societies throughout history. Though leadership is worldwide, scholars and researchers do not agree on a definition. Burns (1978, 2) stated, “Leadership is one of the most observed and least understood phenomena on earth.”

Leithwood and Duke (1998) reviewed a sample of English language journals to identify the most common leadership concepts under discussion. They came up with six models of leadership: instructional, transformational, moral, participative, managerial,

and contingent. These models can serve as reference points for cross-cultural studies. Pozner (2000), in his work with Latin Americans, wrote about the challenges of education and designed a model of leadership that included many of Leithwood and Duke's considerations. Pozner (2000, 16) defined leadership as being able:

to synthesize the capacity to connect knowledge and action, ethics and effectiveness, (and) policy and administration in processes that lead to continual improvement of educational practices; to explore and exploit all possibilities and to innovate in a permanent systematic process.

Pozner (2000, 15) included essential elements of strategic educational management, including "the centrality of pedagogy, ability to deal with complexity, teamwork, openness to innovation and learning, supportive and professional orientation, common vision, and systematic strategic intervention."

To see the world through the culture with which we're familiar is human nature, and we often do not realize another way of seeing things until we experience life in a different culture. Diaz-Loving (1999) suggested that the field of psychology is engrained in the English-speaking culture, and psychologists fail to see the ethnocentrism of their work. Similarly, educational administration leadership attends to the problems, questions, and interests of a handful of wealthy countries.

The internationalization of educational administration offers an opportunity to move beyond geographic and mental borders. The social sciences, as well as educational administration, are challenged to develop more inclusive theories. Dimmock and Walker (2000a) noted that educational research and theory need a renewed focus on exploring educational leadership across national boundaries and cultures.

One theory that offered promise was Kouzes and Posner's (1995) leadership challenge. In Leithwood and Duke's (1998) terms, this leadership theory can be described as transformational or, as Burns (1978) defined it, one in which leadership is cognitive and incites followers to new levels of motivation and moral commitment. A great deal of research has been conducted, primarily in the United States and Europe, to formulate a leadership theory with certain common leadership practices at its core. Kouzes and Posner (1995) described five exemplary leadership practices: challenging the process, inspiring a shared vision, enabling others to act, modeling the way, and encouraging the heart.

Research to develop Kouzes and Posner's (1995) theory was conducted in several countries, but little attention has been given to Mexico and Latin America. Therefore, the cross-cultural validity of the theory is open to question. Any comparative study of educational leadership must take into account the pervasive influence of the culture in which leadership is exercised.

Dimensions of Culture

The idea of a national culture has a long history. Inkeles and Levinson (1969) reviewed the existing English-language literature on national cultures. Their analysis suggested that a common set of cultural problems existed worldwide, each with consequences for groups

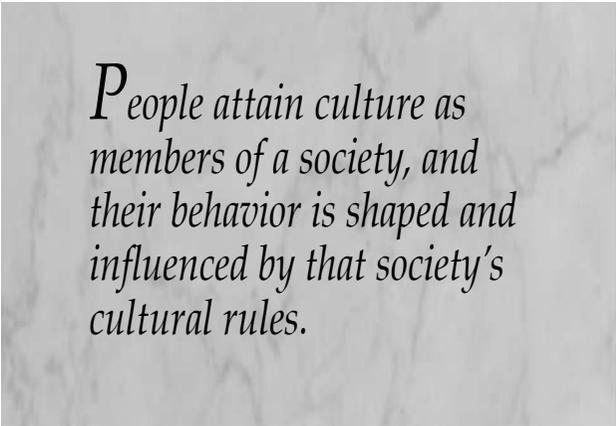
and individuals functioning within a given society. These problems were:

- relation to authority;
- conceptions of self, especially the relationship between individuals and society, and the individual's concept of masculinity and femininity; and
- ways of dealing with conflicts, including the control of aggression and the expression of feelings.

Building on Inkeles and Levinson's (1969) conclusions, Hofstede (1980; 1997) analyzed data generated by a multinational survey of 15,000 IBM® employees to identify national patterns in value systems. Hofstede's analysis revealed that common problems existed worldwide, but that solutions to these problems varied from country to country. These problems included:

- social inequality, including relationships with authority;
- relationships between individuals and groups;
- social implications of being born male or female; and
- dealing with uncertainty related to the control of aggression and expression of emotions.

These results tracked closely with the problem areas Inkeles and Levinson (1969) identified a half-century ago and represented empirically identifiable dimensions of culture, or "an aspect of a culture that can be measured relative to other cultures" (Hofstede 1997, 14). Hofstede designated the relevant dimensions as: power distance, collectivism versus individualism, femininity versus masculinity, and uncertainty avoidance. Each dimension grouped together a number of phenomena found in a society based on statistical relationships. These relationships illuminated trends within a society rather than predictions of any individual's behavior within that society. Taken together, these dimensions constituted a model by which differences between national cultures might be measured (Hofstede 1997).



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Hofstede's (1997) dimensions and Kouzes and Posner's (1995) leadership practices may not carry the same meaning in different cultural settings. Dimmock and Walker (2000a) warned against ethnocentricity in examining educational issues. Language differences present special problems and create a need for careful and thorough translation. U.S. scholars are part of a culture that represents fewer than 8 percent of the world's population, but often proposes theories and research that either purport to represent everyone or underestimate the power of differing national cultures. Dimmock and Walker (2000a, 144) cautioned that many researchers and policy makers often are "prone to draw superficial comparisons between policies and practices adopted in different countries" and

asserted that these superficial comparisons tend to be “fatuous and misleading without thorough understanding of the contexts, histories, and cultures within which they have developed.”

Cross-Cultural Research

The GLOBE research project (Den Hartog et al. 1999) used information on leadership attributes from researchers in 62 countries to examine how charismatic/transformational leadership is perceived and exhibited across cultures. Some attributes of outstanding charismatic/transformational leadership, such as being a risk-taker, were universal, but how the behavior was exhibited varied among cultures. Other attributes were culturally contingent.

In a research program that examined leadership in the United States and Mexico, Dorfman and Howell (1997) investigated managerial and leadership practices in the two countries with special attention to *maquiladoras* (Mexican manufacturing entities clustered on the U.S.-Mexico border). U.S. managers tended to work in a rule-bound context where success was defined by adherence to procedures and processes. Status often was earned by concrete achievements, and advancement was based on merit rather than connections. Mexican managers' behaviors tended to include extreme courtesy, devotion to ceremony, and a reluctance to engage in conversation that was too direct or lacked the adornment of *simpátia* (an inclination to be agreeable). The ability to negotiate with *simpátia* and to work within an existing management framework was a quality found in successful Mexican managers (Dorfman and Howell 1997).

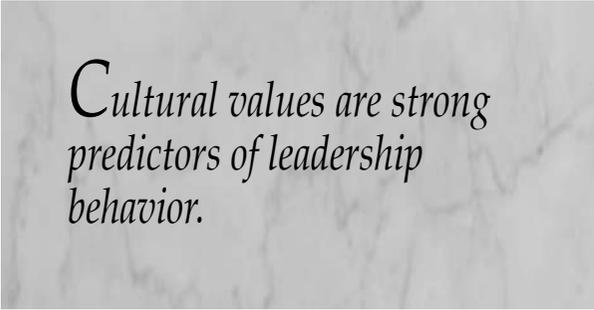
Educational Administration in the United States and Mexico

Slater, McGhee et al. (2003) conducted focus groups with master's degree students in Educational Administration in Mexico and the United States. The Mexican participants focused on collective goals, wanted to contribute to the betterment of their country, and were task-oriented and candid in their criticisms of the program. U.S. partici-

pants focused on individual goals and adopted a people-oriented approach.

Slater, Boone, Price et al. (2002) used Kouzes and Posner's (1995) Leadership Practices Inventory (LPI) to examine differences between educational administrators in the United States and Mexico. The U.S. administrators were rated higher by their observers than the Mexican administrators on five leadership practices. The top-ranked practice for the U.S. group was challenging the process. For the Mexican group, it was encouraging the heart.

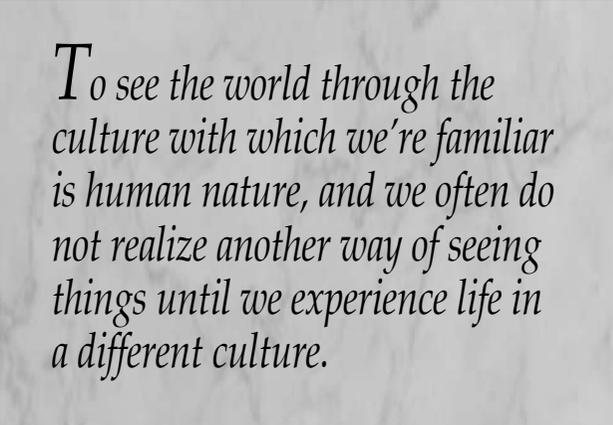
Slater, Boone, Fillion et al. (2003) tapped a second sample of graduate students to examine the same leadership practices. Leadership essays written by 26 U.S. university



Cultural values are strong predictors of leadership behavior.

students and 26 Mexican students were analyzed. The leadership essays were coded according to the five leadership practices of Kouzes and Posner (1995). Again, the U.S. group frequently mentioned concepts that were interpreted as challenging the process, while the Mexican group often mentioned encouraging the heart.

These two studies were limited by the LPI questionnaire and the preconceived categories used to code leadership practices (Kouzes and Posner 1995). A more open-ended approach was needed to determine the role of cultural factors and to allow other leadership practices to emerge. Hallinger and Leithwood (1998, 146) suggested that research into “cross-cultural conceptions of leadership should try to explore the meaning of leadership from the perspective of the people within a given culture. This will require in-depth research drawing more on anthropological than on survey methods.”



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In response to these suggestions, the authors conducted a qualitative study that examined personal best leadership stories of graduate students in Mexico City and South Texas. The researchers started their analysis with an open-ended approach to allow for leadership themes to emerge from the data in each culture.

Methods

Setting. Two universities participated in the study—one in South Texas and one in Mexico City. The South Texas university had a large undergraduate enrollment with an interdisciplinary doctoral program and a master’s program in educational administration that prepares principals and superintendents. The Mexico City university had a comparable enrollment in its graduate program, which prepares students for a range of administrative positions in elementary, secondary, and higher education schools, as well as for positions in public and private organizations.

Participants. As with the research study conducted by Slater, Boone, Fillion et al. (2003), this study began with 52 student-written essays. The authors included 26 students preparing for a superintendent’s certificate or taking classes in the doctoral program at the South Texas university. These students were teachers or administrators in mid-career, ages 30–52. The other 26 authors were students at the Mexico City university. Most of these students were completing a certification or master’s program at the Mexico City university and were practicing teachers or administrators. Their ages and educational status were similar to those of the South Texas students.

The participants and the positions they held contributed to the differences in the essays. The U.S. participants primarily were leaders in local schools, and all but one author

assumed the leader's role in the story. The Mexican participants came from a variety of positions in local schools, higher education institutions, and national commissions. Several of the Mexican authors reported on other individuals' leadership experiences rather than their own. In seven essays written by Mexico City students, the author was the leader; in five cases, the author was a participant.

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Protocol. Students were asked to reflect on leadership and describe their best leadership experience in their essays. To promote reflection and encourage detailed descriptions, the students were given a set of questions (Kouzes and Posner 1995) to guide them in their writing. The U.S. students completed the questions as an assignment for a graduate class and were graded on their work. Conversely, the Mexican students completed their essays in class and were not graded.

Procedures. Researchers examined the essays to find common vocabulary and recurring themes. They used open-ended, naturalistic inquiry based on the work of Lincoln and Guba (1985), Patton (1990), and Strauss and Corbin (1990). Through constant comparison and analysis, the essays were subjected to continual discovery, questioning, and confirmation so that themes could arise from the data and give voice to the participants.

In the first phase of the analysis, a team of South Texas researchers analyzed the South Texas essays. They were native English speakers familiar with the university's program. A team of Mexico City researchers, who were native Spanish speakers and familiar with the university's program, analyzed the Mexico City essays. The researchers chose to separate the analysis for logistical reasons, but also to ensure that the participants' perspectives would be understood by a researcher familiar with their linguistic, cultural, and community descriptions.

Researchers read and discussed each essay, returning constantly to the data to elaborate, clarify, question, and probe. They built consensus around categories and subcategories and decided on overall dimensions. During the analysis, the Mexico City and South Texas researchers conducted extensive telephone conversations to explain the concepts and theoretical frameworks they were developing.

In the second phase, the Mexico City and South Texas themes were collapsed into one set of dimensions. The researchers analyzed each theme and discussed how they might fit together. These ideas formed the basis for the analysis reported here.

Results

Throughout the study, Mexico City and South Texas were used to emphasize that the participants and their essays came from a particular region of each country. Because the samples came from specific areas of each country and may not resemble the country as a whole, caution must be taken in applying the results.

Most South Texas leadership essays were based in public schools and focused on challenges that were familiar to principals and assistant principals: applying for a grant to obtain the latest technology; organizing a literary contest, a science club, or a social studies program; adjusting to change in special education regulations; hiring a football coach; improving test scores; coping with new construction; and struggling with student discipline. Several essays were set in universities, while one took place in a prison and another in a medical office.

The Mexico City essays spanned the educational spectrum. Some essays were national in scope: arranging the certification process for a professional workshop, convening a national congress to improve education, scoring a national science examination, and organizing a national meeting of technical education directors. Other projects focused on increasing enrollment at the elementary level, improving secondary education, increasing plant maintenance, forming a graduate association, and competing for a contract to provide technical training for a major industry. Some essays were personal stories, such as ones about an abusive professor, an aeronautics graduate who might pose a threat to safety, and an uncle who played a major role in a family celebration.

A great deal of commonality was evident among the two groups regarding ideal educational leadership. Table 1 shows four leadership dimensions that emerged from the two sets of essays: participation, communication, change, and values. Though the two groups' views overlapped considerably, some subtle differences existed. Students from the Mexico City university emphasized teamwork, trust, enovation, humility, and honesty in their essays, while South Texas students' writings focused on involvement, technical communication, innovation, and learning.

Table 1: Leadership Dimensions and Predominant Themes

LEADERSHIP DIMENSIONS	SOUTH TEXAS THEMES	MEXICO CITY THEMES
Participation	Involvement	Teamwork
Communication	Technical communication	Trust
Change	Innovation	Enovation
Values	Learning	Humility and honesty

Participation

Students in both groups wrote that wide-ranging participation is an important part of leadership. The Mexico City students emphasized teams working together, while the students from South Texas tended to view participation in terms of the leader involving the followers.

Involvement in South Texas essays. Involvement can be assessed by the degree to which the leader invites participation. In the essays written by South Texas students, the highest degree of involvement was identified as empowerment, whereby followers became capable of independent initiative. The other degrees of involvement, from highest to lowest, were:

- delegation—followers carried out independent activities under the auspice of the leader;
- assistance—followers acted under the direct supervision of the leader; and
- dependence—followers depended on the leader to take care of what needed to be done.

In two essays written by students at the South Texas university, followers were empowered to act independently. Providing a moving example of empowerment, one essay described Mary, a 14-year-old girl with Down's syndrome in an elementary school. The essay chronicled the leader's three-year effort to place her in a more age-appropriate environment. Mary was empowered when her friends finally accepted her as a peer.

Mary's high school friends included her in their celebratory mischief as well as their classes. During senior prank season in early May, the football players carried Mary on their shoulders down the hall, along with several other popular girls in the senior class.

Educational research and theory need a renewed focus on exploring educational leadership across national boundaries and cultures.

Nine of the essays written by South Texas students showed a high degree of participation by followers, while five essays dealt with followers who had limited involvement. The distinction between participation and limited involvement was noticeable in comments made in the essays. For example, a first-year high school principal's high degree of participation was evidenced in his statement, "Throughout the year,

everyone has been given a voice to foster collaboration and build trust and respect so that we could excel." In contrast, another author's essay demonstrated limited involvement when he wrote about his efforts to seek the ideas and goals of followers, but he did not involve followers in making a plan. He related, "I spent several weeks evaluating the current system, interviewing the staff about their ideas and goals . . . [and] offered the new scheduling format as a first step toward these goals."

In four essays written by South Texas students, followers depended on the leader to provide them what they needed. For example, in a school under construction, staff members were dependent on the leader who wrote, "The faculty often remarked that they were inspired by the tenacity with which I carried out my efforts of keeping our physically divided campus united in spirit."

Involvement in Mexico City essays. Teamwork was a theme that appeared in nearly every essay written by students at the Mexico City university. Four essays reflected collaboration and companionship. In seven essays, everyone contributed, but not necessarily on an equal basis. In one essay, the leader delegated, but the level of participation was low.

Mexico City university students stressed careful listening and collaborative work. Members often had equal status on a team and did not view one another as part of a hierarchy. One student wrote about a national project to rate 29,000 scientific essays completed by students in secondary and higher education schools. The project's size created logistical and organizational problems in coordinating the work of many teachers and institutions. The central government had mandated the project and, initially, political motives were suspected. The leader had to organize the groups, and gain the support and trust of members to carry out the project. He said, "The group needed commitment and sharing to come together. Levels of communication were key in developing the project. Results are more consistent when authority is delegated and trust is shared."

Communication

Students from both the Mexico City and South Texas universities agreed that communication is critical to ideal leadership, yet they talked about communication in different ways. The Mexico City students described communication in terms of trust, transparency, and openness, while the South Texas students described communication in technical terms, such as clarity, speed, and efficiency.

Communication in South Texas essays. Eight essays written by South Texas students focused on clarity and direction in pressure-filled situations. The authors were commanding leaders who issued multiple directives to accomplish complicated tasks in limited time. One author wrote about the urgency of devising an emergency plan when several students planned to bring a bomb to school. Another described her reaction when she learned that school construction would not be completed before the start of the school year. She described following a fast-paced plan of action under her principal's leadership.

Seven essays written by South Texas students followed a prescribed communication process. One described hiring an athletic coach, "By clearly communicating the selection process to all stakeholders, having input on candidate profiles, and forming an interview committee to process each candidate, everyone involved took real ownership." In another essay, a student wrote, "I worked closely with the timeline and goals I had set." These leaders imitated previously used procedures and implemented a step-by-step, concrete, sequential process.

Several students emphasized two-way communication in their essays. One student stated that a meeting had become "an open sharing of ideas and perspectives that resulted in a plan." Four essays described a communications mode that was characterized by a high degree of respect and care in the leader's interaction with followers. For example, one student wrote about his response to a teacher whose fiancée was working in the World Trade Center during the terrorist attack on September 11. He offered support by contacting the company for which her fiancée worked and obtaining numbers that she

might call in New York to check on his whereabouts. Even after the teacher learned that her fiancée was unharmed, he supported her by ensuring that she had someone to take her home and stay with her, and by offering time off.

Communication in Mexico City essays. Mexico City students frequently mentioned trust in their essays: trust in themselves and others, belief in what they were doing, and confidence that the project would succeed. Communication was not viewed as a technical process to be mastered, but a generalized sense of confidence. The unspoken sentiment was that if the leader could be trusted, then the project would succeed.

One student described a leader who emerged when low enrollment threatened to close an elementary school. He organized teachers into a team that visited homes to talk with parents and recruit students. The author reported, "The professor who took the position of leader motivated with collegiality and constant help." As the leader convinced fellow teachers that they could succeed, they came to trust their own capacity and believed that enrollment would increase.

Another student wrote about his experiences with leaders of a major national congress when he was a young professional. Two distinguished educational leaders headed the congress, which focused on Mexican education; one leader provided the vision, while the other handled organizational work. The student wrote, "When there were rumors or conflicts, especially about finance and budget, the leaders immediately clarified the issues and made them transparent."

Change

Change was a theme in all of the leadership essays. The essays written by South Texas students described change from the top down, while the essays written by Mexico City students described change from the bottom up. Gelina and Fortin (1996) described these two types of change as innovation and enovation. Innovation refers to a change initiated in the higher levels of an organization, often by one person, and usually in reaction to a problem. Careful planning, a positivistic orientation, and emphasis on the product are characteristics of this type of change. Enovation refers to change that emerges within the organization. These changes have a constructivist orientation and emphasize process.

Innovation in South Texas essays. Eleven South Texas university students described change efforts by leaders as direct and forthright. This orientation was innovative because the change often was prescribed or managed by the leader. Describing her role, one author said, "I was determined to move staff and students toward the challenge of becoming 'exemplary' (a top rating given to schools by the Texas Education Agency)." Another stated, "Purpose and outcomes appeared on all of our training agendas to help us stay focused. My role as a team leader was to organize our time together to make sure we stayed true to our vision."

Other situations were considered innovative because they demonstrated management plans and activities. Describing her role, one author said, "In the course of a few weeks, an

entire plan of action had to be developed and implemented. From the start, I committed myself to putting in the hours, brainpower, and flexibility needed to make this work.”

In seven essays, leaders played the role of change agent and, though they advocated for a program or cause, they also encouraged or promoted the change efforts of followers. These efforts seemed to be both innovative and enovative. One author wrote of her efforts to transition teachers from a wholly phonics-based literacy curriculum to a more balanced literacy approach. She first explained to staff members that she was not trying to interfere with the success of the campus, but that she was trying to promote a more balanced, best-practices approach. She then asked them to commit to staff development in this area. When the teachers realized that she did not expect them to change overnight, and that the principal clearly respected teachers’ knowledge and expertise, the teachers themselves began to experiment with different approaches.

Enovation in Mexico City essays. Seven essays written by Mexico City university students were categorized as enovative. In these essays, leadership emerged from the group without central direction or control. In one essay, for example, a group of students was upset by the actions of an abusive teacher. The author described the actions of a fellow student who assumed leadership:

In the beginning there was a climate of tension, fear, and insecurity, but one classmate took the lead. He began to write on the board the points that would have to be made in a letter that we would send to the administration. From this moment, the atmosphere of tension decreased and became an atmosphere of trust and security.

Values

Every study participant included values as part of ideal leadership. Students from the South Texas university valued learning, while Mexico City university students stressed honesty and humility.

South Texas: Learning. Four of the South Texas university students wrote about transformational learning, or coming to see leadership and their own role in a fundamentally new way. They realized that they would undertake future leadership opportunities with new assumptions and aspirations. An author who was a novice leader reflected, “I learned that leadership can come even from ‘lowly’ sources, unexpected places. It comes from the heart. It is an expression of self.” Another participant learned about collaboration and gained perspective. He wrote, “I know collaboration is a powerful tool, but this experience helped me understand that my perception of a task is not always the same as those with whom I work.”

Some attributes of outstanding charismatic/transformational leadership, such as being a risk-taker, were universal, but how the behavior was exhibited varied among cultures.

Eight study participants described learning as the values and skills necessary for good leadership. One discovered the importance of courage and patience in a leader:

It takes courage to step back and study a problem before diving in to solve it . . . hasty action often makes things worse. I learned that a leader who is willing to be viewed as human, vulnerable, and eager to learn eventually gains greater trust than one who tries to appear all-knowing and bulletproof.

Mexico City: Honesty and humility. Honesty was consistently mentioned as a central value by students from the Mexico City university. In these essays, honesty extended beyond individual truth-telling and avoiding lies. It referred to an overall atmosphere of openness in an organization, which included transparency. In some essays, honesty was described as an important part of the process that the leader followed. In other essays, honesty was a goal in and of itself. One essay described a school that accepted an invitation to participate in a school improvement project. The teachers participated in continuous staff development activities with diverse groups of teachers, directors, and supervisors. The author wrote, "Honesty, truth, and civic and professional character, as well as knowledge, helped the group conclude that everyone's participation created an atmosphere of respect and openness that is necessary for collaborative work."

At the national congress discussed earlier, the leaders wanted a more open, transparent system of education in which decisions would be decentralized. One of the debates at the congress was whether or not only those with doctorates could comment on the proceedings. Eventually, the position of equity and openness prevailed, and all were included in the deliberations.

In most essays, graduate students from the Mexico City university expressed humility as constancy, perseverance, extraordinary effort to overcome resistance, and putting aside pride. One author described his hard work to overcome obstacles. Despite his lack of experience, he found himself in charge of certifying diplomas in a major staff-development project. He had to develop negotiation skills to seek the approval of authorities, and gain the confidence of participants so that they would put forth their best efforts. He wrote, "The values that guided me were humility to involve others, confidence in myself as well as others, equal treatment of all, and above all, a spirit of investigation."

Discussion

Despite historical, cultural, and economic differences between Mexico and the United States, the groups sampled here concurred that several areas were central to ideal leadership: participation, communication, change, and values. Though definitive answers about how each group conceived of leadership cannot be provided, certain concepts can be identified and compared with Hofstede's (1980) cultural theory, Kouzes and Posner's (1995) leadership theory, and the values that impinge on both.

Hofstede and Culture

Power distance. Hofstede (1980) reported that Mexico was higher in power distance than the United States. In the data from this study, however, authors from the Mexico City

university described ideal change as grassroots or enovative (Gelina and Fortin 1996), compared to authors from the South Texas university who preferred innovation from the top down. Theoretically, the reverse should be true. One would expect that leadership in Mexico would be more central and controlling, while independent teams would be common in the United States.

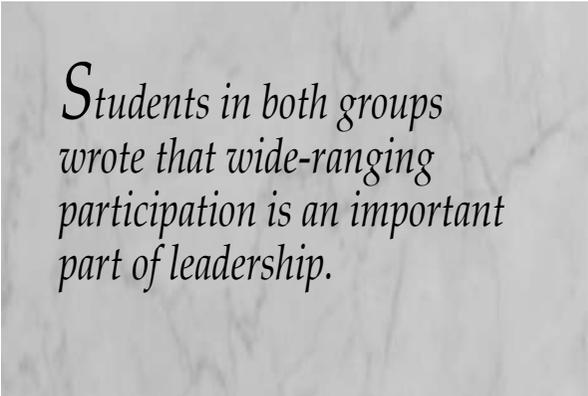
In essays written by students at the South Texas university, participation was expressed in terms of involvement circumscribed and limited by the leader. They wrote that power resided in the leader and could be shared with followers to varying degrees. The leader's task was to solve a problem or make a decision, and the members' role was to serve and please the leader.

Conversely, in essays written by Mexico City students, teams worked in equal partnership, often without direct participation of outside authority. The relationship among team members was characterized by equality, esprit, and camaraderie.

This subtle difference between involvement and teamwork pointed out different visions of leadership. In the South Texas essays, the leader listened, considered, weighed, and directed. In the Mexico City essays, a single leader was not depicted; rather, leadership rotated depending on the task. There was less position authority and more persuasion.

In surveys conducted by Dorfman and Howell (1997), job satisfaction and organizational commitment were lower for participative leaders in the Mexican group than in the U.S. group. In focus groups, however, Mexican participants mentioned the importance of participation when describing characteristics of outstanding leaders. Dorfman and Howell (1997) speculated that Mexican and U.S. managers had different definitions of participation. The data from this research suggested that distinguishing between participation as a form of teamwork versus participation as a form of involving followers may clear up the discrepancy.

Individualism/Collectivism. The desire of Mexico City administrators to work in teams may be related to the cultural value of collectivism. Hofstede (1980) reported that Mexican managers felt strongly about collectivism, while U.S. managers focused on individualism. This may seem apparent; but when one examines how participants in this study wrote about communication, the issue becomes more complex.



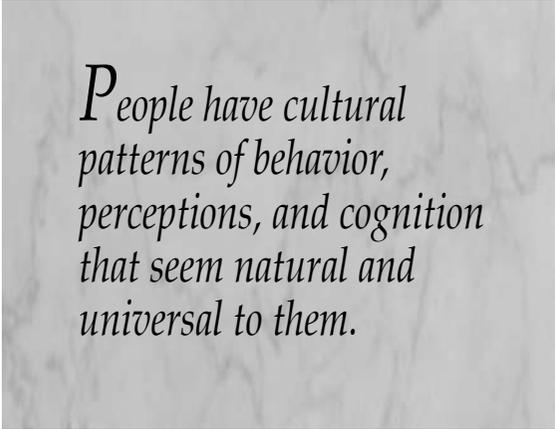
Students in both groups wrote that wide-ranging participation is an important part of leadership.

The essays written by South Texas university students reported communication as objective, technical, and quantifiable, such as phone calls, e-mail, and meetings. Essays written by Mexico City students reported communication as trust—a characteristic that was subjective and existed as part of a relationship.

Trust is an important part of communication in Mexico, but examples of its significance in the United States also exist. Bryk and Schneider (2002) studied relational trust in the Chicago schools and found a relationship between trust and school improvement. They found that in a stable, predictable environment, teachers could count on support and safety to make suggestions, try out new ideas, and extend themselves to students. As a result, students achieved more. Bryk and Schneider (2002, 5) stated, "A broad base of trust across a school community lubricates much of a school's day-to-day functioning and is a critical resource as local leaders embark on ambitious improvement plans."

Kouzes and Posner's Leadership Theory

Participation, communication, change, and values all can be found in Kouzes and Posner's (1995) leadership practices, and were deemed to be culturally contingent in Mexico City and South Texas. For example, modeling can be carried out with different values: honesty and humility in Mexico City or learning in South Texas. Empowering others to act can be done when leaders involve others (South Texas) or leadership is shared among equals (Mexico City). Inspiring a shared vision can be based on personal relationships (Mexico City) or agreed-upon processes (South Texas). In South Texas, trust of the process was present regardless of who served in the position. In Mexico City, greater trust of the person and less confidence in the process was the norm. Slater, Boone, Price et al. (2002) found that Mexican administrators rated themselves highly on Kouzes and Posner's (1995) leadership practice of encouraging the heart. This practice corresponds to the importance of relationships in business, extensive time to form agreements, and frequent celebrations.



People have cultural patterns of behavior, perceptions, and cognition that seem natural and universal to them.

Values

Students who were educational administrators in South Texas identified the experience and value of learning in their essays, while students who were administrators in Mexico City described ideal leadership experiences as those that promoted honesty and humility. For Mexico City students, honesty was an all-important value that described a transparent way of providing access to people and information, as well as receptivity to new ideas and previously unheard voices. Honesty was presented in these essays as the opposite of corruption. The corruption that has plagued Mexican society was not mentioned explicitly, but unconsciously may have impacted the essays. U.S. business is no stranger to corruption, as evidenced by the corporate scandals that appear daily on the front pages of newspapers.

Humility may seem puzzling as a leadership characteristic, because it can mean submission or self-abasement, and often has a negative connotation when used to describe individuals who give in easily or do not stand up for their beliefs. Yet, humble also means being aware

of one's shortcomings and showing deferential respect. This latter meaning was the one that students from the Mexico City university were expressing in their leadership essays.

Though humility appeared to be a leadership feature unique to Mexico City, it may be gaining popularity as a leadership value in the United States. Collins, in his article "Level 5 Leadership: The Triumph of Humility and Fierce Resolve" (2001), described a Level 5 leader as one who blends personal humility with intense professional will. The humble leader is more committed to the organizational mission than to personal ambition.

Humility also is part of Greenleaf's (1977) concept of servant leadership. The servant leader wants followers to grow as persons, and looks at the effects of decisions on the least privileged of society. These ideas have a long history. More (1961, 168) described the duties of a king in this way:

The people choose a king for their own good, not his—the idea being that his diligence and devotion can allow them to live comfortably and safe from harm. The king's duty is to care more for the people's well-being than his own.

Conclusion

This study examined how Mexico and South Texas educational administrators conceived of their ideal leadership experiences, and identified the cultural values that arose in their essays. The results from each sample will be applied to each country as a whole.

U.S. citizens generally expect a leader to get things done and take charge—particularly in times of crisis, while Mexican citizens want a leader in whom they can trust and believe—a leader who will serve the people. These ideas translate into a different philosophy of education. The goal of U.S. educators is to build competencies and master skills. Upon graduation, students are expected to take charge of people and things. A Mexican education seeks consistency, reliability, and continuity to show students their part in history. It addresses questions of identity, such as where have we been, where do I fit, and where are we going?

The educational leader has a different task in each country. The U.S. educational leader takes action to give others a sense of mastery, while the Mexican educational leader trusts people to give them a sense of pride in past accomplishments and hope in the future. How should leaders be prepared? Should each country prepare leaders for its own circumstances, or is there an overarching international perspective that should inform preparation for educational administration?

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