






LEADERSHIP ACROSS CULTURES

Understanding Dutch and British High-Performing Managers

This Quick Insight dives deep into the leadership nuances of High-Performance Managers (HPMs) in both the Netherlands and the UK, underscoring the profound influence of national culture. The research underscores both universal leadership attributes and those shaped by specific cultural contexts. A pivotal takeaway is the proactive role of HR departments in crafting culture-sensitive management development programs, ensuring leadership behaviors resonate with both global standards of excellence and unique national nuances. A must-read for cross-cultural leaders and HR professionals, the article illuminates the path to harnessing the full potential of HPMs in an interconnected world.

This Quick Insight is the management summary of: de Waal, A.A., van der Heijden, B.I.J.M., Selvarajah, C. and Meyer, D. (2015), Comparing Dutch And British High Performing Managers, Journal of Management & Organization , Volume 22 , Issue 3: pp. 349 – 366.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

-  **Universality and Variability of Leadership Traits:** While certain leadership attributes seem universal, national culture significantly influences many others. Managers need to understand that what makes them successful in one country might not necessarily work in another.
-  **Importance of Cross-Cultural Adaptability:** Managers transferring between countries should be equipped with the right tools, training, and knowledge to adapt their leadership styles according to the national culture they are going to work in.
-  **HR's Role in Structuring Management Programs:** The HR department should be proactive in devising and implementing culture-sensitive management development programs. This ensures that leadership behaviors align with both universal standards of excellence and specific national cultural nuances.
-  **Refined Recruitment Strategies:** Given the differences in high-performing managerial attributes across cultures, recruitment and selection strategies should be tailored to identify and nurture managers who align with the framework that is described in this article, the APEL framework, particularly in relation to a country's specific cultural context.
-  **Enhancing Organizational Performance through Leadership:** The direct correlation between leadership behaviors and organizational performance, as highlighted in the research described in this article, suggests that by focusing on improving leadership behaviors resonating with a specific national culture, organizations can enhance their overall performance.



INTRODUCTION

Culture plays a pivotal role in shaping workplace behaviors and attitudes. Hofstede defined culture as "the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes members of one group from another". This deep-rooted influence of national culture extends to organizational culture too. In simple terms, organizational culture can be seen as "how things are done around here". This culture significantly influences the processes within an organization and subsequently determines what attributes are seen as crucial for high performance.

Interestingly, while national culture undeniably impacts managerial traits, some characteristics that make a manager high-performing seem to transcend cultural boundaries. Various attributes of effective leadership seem universally accepted regardless of the prevailing national culture. One possible explanation is that managerial roles are similar across nations, leading to universally-valued leadership traits. Our study delves into these traits by comparing high performing managers from the Netherlands and the UK, seeking to understand how national cultures might influence them.

We've adopted the Asian Perspectives on Excellence in Leadership (APEL) framework. This framework, rooted in both Western and Eastern insights, offers a more balanced viewpoint than those focusing solely on Western perspectives. Our goal? To explore how cultural nuances between the Netherlands (classified as a Germanic cluster by Hofstede) and the UK (an Anglo-Saxon cluster according to Hofstede) shape managerial leadership behaviors. In our research, we translate these attributes into observable behaviors.

THE APEL FRAMEWORK FOR LEADERSHIP EXCELLENCE

To effectively discern the attributes that characterize high-performing managers (HPMs), we turned to the APEL framework for Excellent Leadership, formulated by Selvarajah et al. (1995). This framework stands out due to its multicultural foundation and the robust validation it has undergone in past studies. The APEL framework interprets leadership excellence as a blend of behavioral values essential for effective leadership within a specific context. Excellence here signifies "outdoing others in achievements." To ground this concept in tangible terms, 94 value statements pertaining to leadership excellence were developed. These statements describe the actions of those in managerial roles, sidestepping the harder-to-spot personal traits or characteristics, and are categorized in four pillars.



FOUR PILLARS OF THE APEL FRAMEWORK

- 1. Personal Qualities:** This pillar covers an individual's personal values, aptitudes, attitudes, behaviors, and qualities. It accentuates aspects like moral values, religious beliefs, interpersonal relationships, and effective communication.
- 2. Managerial Behaviors:** This pillar centers on the values, attitudes, actions, and management styles an individual adopts when undertaking managerial responsibilities, with a spotlight on persuasive capabilities.
- 3. Organizational Demands:** This pillar pertains to a manager's reaction to organizational goals, structures, and challenges. It underscores the significance of fostering organizational success and prosperity.
- 4. Environmental Influences:** This pillar is about the external elements that can shape an organization's success. It underscores the vital role of surveying and assessing the external environment to spot promising opportunities.

In essence, the APEL framework posits that Excellent Leadership is the fusion of behaviors and attitudes vital for proficient leadership, fine-tuned to the cultural milieu in which this leadership is exercised.

FRAMING THE HYPOTHESES: APEL MEETS CULTURAL CONTEXT

Drawing from the APEL framework and Hofstede's cultural insights, we postulated that HPMs in both the Netherlands and the UK can be accurately portrayed through the APEL lens. Stemming from this assumption, we formulated the following hypotheses:

- H1.** Leadership Excellence in Dutch and British HPMs can be accurately described using the four-pillar APEL structure: Personal Qualities, Managerial Behaviors, Organizational Demands, and Environmental Influences.
- H2.** The Netherlands, having a feminine culture (according to Hofstede), places greater importance on value statements stressing managers' respect for employees than the more masculine-cultured UK.
- H3.** Both the Netherlands and the UK, marked by a low power distance, equally value statements that highlight a manager's desire for consensus.



- H4.** In terms of managers' inclination for rules, procedures, and formal systems, these value statements hold more weight in the Netherlands, which exhibits a medium uncertainty avoidance, as opposed to the UK's low uncertainty avoidance.
- H5.** The emphasis on managers' self-orientation is consistent in both the Netherlands and the UK, given their shared characteristic of a predominantly individualistic culture.
- H6.** Value statements accentuating a manager's strength find equal resonance in both countries, reflecting their mutual assertive cultural undertones.
- H7.** The ability of managers to foster a familial organizational culture is uniformly valued across both nations, given their medium humane-oriented cultural alignment.
- H8.** In terms of communication, the preference for managers who are direct and straightforward is consistent in both the Netherlands and the UK, as they are both anchored in a performance-oriented culture.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY & FINDINGS

Research Approach

Our investigation focused on the attributes of Dutch and British HPMs spread across various managerial echelons within organizations. For our purposes, any position with at least one subordinate was categorized as a managerial role.

In the Netherlands, potential participants were engaged via the Internet through the newsletter of the country's premier management magazine, Management Team, which boasts 48,000 subscribers, predominantly managers. Additionally, managers from five organizations familiar to the authors (totaling roughly 500 persons) were directly approached. Our UK participant pool was drawn from managers working for a consortium of five ICT firms. Each respondent was tasked with rating the relevance of the 94 value statements stemming from the APEL framework. They gauged these on a scale of 1 (very unimportant) to 5 (very important), considering the traits of an exceptional leader in their organization.

Data Analysis & Results

We employed statistical tools to determine the validity of our 'Excellent Leadership' hypotheses. Here are the outcomes:



Hypothesis	Confirmed?
<p>H1. A four-dimensional structure (Personal Qualities, Managerial Behaviors, Organizational Demands, Environmental Influences) aptly defines Leadership Excellence in Dutch and British HPMs.</p>	Yes
<p>H2. Emphasis on managers valuing their employees is heightened in the feminine culture of the Netherlands as compared to the masculine culture of the UK.</p>	No
<p>H3. Both nations equally prioritize managers who champion consensus, given their shared low power distance culture.</p>	Yes
<p>H4. The Netherlands, with its medium uncertainty avoidance, places more emphasis on rules and formal systems than the UK, which leans towards low uncertainty avoidance.</p>	No
<p>H5. Both nations, known for their individualistic tendencies, equally value statements that underline managers' self-orientation.</p>	Yes
<p>H6. Managerial strength is equally important in the assertive cultures of both nations.</p>	No
<p>H7. Both countries, characterized by medium humane-oriented cultures, value the ability to nurture a family-like organizational environment.</p>	No
<p>H8. Direct and forthright communication by managers is equally vital for both countries, as these are rooted in their performance-oriented cultures.</p>	No



From these results, it is evident that while some hypotheses were confirmed, others were not, underscoring the nuanced interplay of leadership attributes and cultural context.

CONCLUSION

The cross-cultural landscape of leadership is intricate and requires nuanced understanding. Our research sheds light on the variances in HPM attributes between the Netherlands and the UK, underscoring the necessity of targeted leadership approaches for enhanced organizational performance in each specific national context.

For managers, the path forward involves honing those concrete leadership behaviors pertinent to their national culture.

Meanwhile, multinational companies face the task of recalibrating their managerial training programs to cater to these differences, ensuring that


their managers are well-prepared for overseas assignments. Human Resource teams play an instrumental role in this shift, tasked with crafting pivotal guidelines that will sculpt managerial development initiatives. These efforts, coupled with recruitment strategies anchored in the APEL framework, promise a future where managers are not only effective in their roles but can also be responsive to the unique organizational and environmental demands of different national cultures. In sum, understanding and embracing cultural nuances in leadership attributes and behaviors is the cornerstone of organizational success in a globally interconnected world.





ARE YOU READY TO TRANSFORM YOUR ORGANIZATION INTO AN HPO?

It all starts with insight, obtained through an **HPO diagnosis**. This diagnosis shows you how your organization—or even just a specific department—scores on the success factors of High Performance Organizations. You will receive development points/improvement themes that can be tackled by managers and employees together. The HPO diagnosis acts as a mirror, in which you honestly look at your organization (or part of it) and yourself: how far are we on the path to becoming an HPO? It helps you identify the 'hard nuts to crack': the focus areas that need to be addressed to realize your strategy and become an HPO. You determine your current level (the starting point) and use this as a basis to measure the effectiveness of the HPO transition. It also strengthens the 'sense of unity' within your organization: by identifying and addressing shared, supported improvement themes.

Achieving or maintaining the status of an HPO comes with a range of financial and strategic benefits for everyone involved: the organization, the customers, and the employees.

 **Customer Focus:** An HPO is invaluable to its customers. The primary goal is to boost customer value and satisfaction.

 **Employee Engagement:** Aiming for high performance re-energizes your team. It leads to increased job satisfaction as HPOs concentrate on what genuinely drives organizational success. It's not a new project; it's a new mindset and approach to work.

 **Adaptability:** An HPO is designed to evolve. It thrives in our ever-changing, competitive world, making your organization more resilient and future-proof. This is achieved through ongoing adjustments, learning, and improvements.

Our Offer

- ✓ Customized **HPO Diagnoses**
- ✓ Interactive **Lectures and Workshops** on the HPO Framework
- ✓ Comprehensive Interviews, **Articles, Books**, and Networking Opportunities
- ✓ Guidance in Implementation Led by our **HPO Experts**



Why choose the HPO Center?



Experience & Credibility

With over 15 years of practical experience combined with rigorous scientific research, the HPO Center is at the global forefront of organizational improvement advice.



Global Knowledge Center

Based in the Netherlands, the HPO Center collaborates with partners, including in emerging markets, with the aim of fulfilling its mission to improve organizations worldwide.



Unmatched Expertise

HPO doesn't stop at diagnosing organizations. We also explore, investigate, and delve deeply into related topics such as High Performance Leadership, Silo-busting, Futurizing, Social Value Creation, and High Performance Business Ecosystems—evidence of our commitment to continually expand the HPO universe.



More than Just an Organization

With a passion for inspiring, stimulating, and networking, the HPO Center is not just an organization; it's a movement. Through scientific and professional publications (all freely available at hpocenter.com and www.hpocenter.nl), books, seminars, and roundtables, we continually disseminate the knowledge of the HPO Framework and unite professionals interested in continuous improvement and excellence.

Considering an HPO transformation?

The HPO Center is ready to support and guide you on your journey toward high performance. Contact us today for an inspiring conversation or to experience an HPO workshop. Together, we'll redefine your performance.



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