

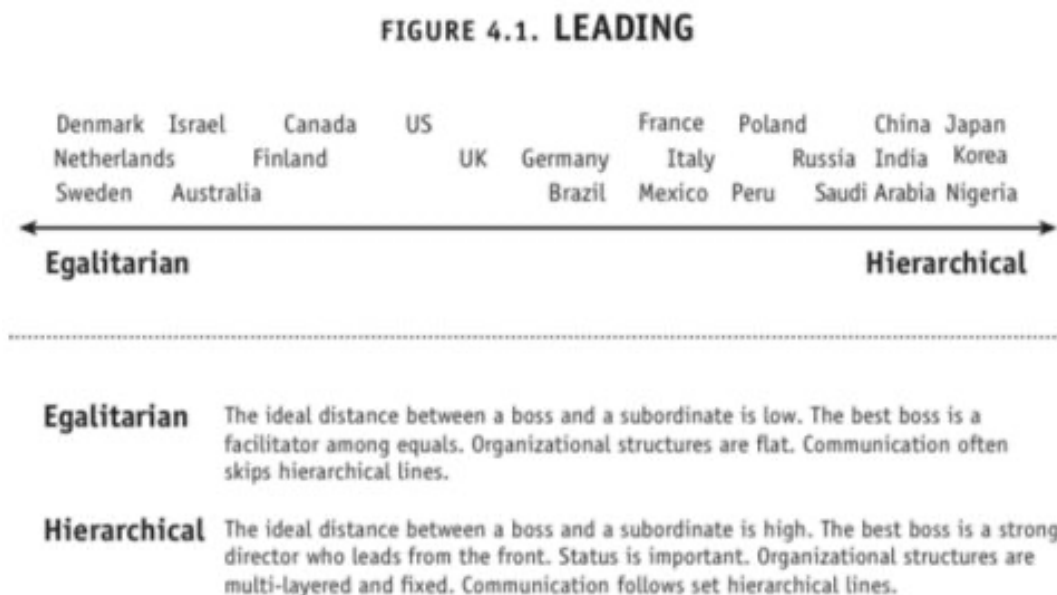
International Conversation Cafe

The Culture Map by Erin Meyer

Do cultural differences impact people and organizations that work globally? The answer is obviously, yes. From how we disagree to how we manage others, to how we communicate, our differences and misunderstandings can threaten to undo the cooperation we so desperately want. Enter Erin Meyer's, *The Culture Map*. Written in 2014, Meyer, a professor at INSEAD, a leading international business school, explains eight areas of friction between cultures. Each discussion guide focuses on one of the eight areas.

What Style of Leadership?

Look at the following chart and read the descriptions.



Identify your country on the above scale. Do you think the author correctly placed your country?

Meyer suggests that a country's history shapes the style of leadership in that country. For example, when the Roman Empire swept across Southern Europe, "the Romans built hierarchical social and political structures and heavily centralized systems for managing their vast empire" (127). Class distinctions were obvious, even revealed in how people dressed. It was obvious who was in charge. Spain and Italy especially tend to be more hierarchical.

Northern Europe at one point was dominated by the Vikings of Scandinavia. They were egalitarian. "...when the Prince of Franks sent an envoy from southern Europe to negotiate with the Vikings, the puzzled envoy returned confused and disheartened, complaining, 'I couldn't figure out who to talk with. They said they were all the chiefs'" (128). Even today, as you can see on the chart, the northernmost countries in Europe are the most egalitarian.

Another historical event that shaped people's thinking is the Protestant Reformation which removed the traditional hierarchy of the Roman Catholic Church. Instead of going through a priest or pope, Protestants believed they could speak directly to God without the help of a human go-between.

Confucius influenced much of Asia wanting to bring societal order and harmony. The following is a chart called *wu lun* which outlines five principle relationships and the obligations of each category to the other.

Emperor (kindness) over Subject (loyalty)
Father (protection) over Son (respect and obedience)
Husband (obligation) over Wife (submission)
Older Brother (care) over Younger Brother (model subject)
Senior Friends (trust) over Junior Friends (trust)

If Confucius were alive today, Meyer suggests he would add another model.

Boss (kindness, protection, care) over Subordinate (loyalty, respect, obedience) (130).

Do you identify with this kind of thinking?

What kind of system do you like to work under?

Egalitarian

It's ok to disagree with the boss, even openly.

People act w/out the boss's ok.

It's ok to email people below or above you.

Seating is in no particular order

Hierarchical

An effort is made to defer to the boss's opinion.

People will act when they have the boss's approval.

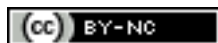
You must follow the hierarchical chain.

People are seated according to position.

Here is an example of how one person adjusted his style of leadership dependent on the predominant culture he was in. Steve Henning was a senior vice president in the textile industry. When he worked in Australia, he proudly rode his bike to work and his staff was proud of him for doing so. When he was transferred to China, he continued his habit of riding to work on his bike. But his staff there found him to be an embarrassment to their team for doing so. To them, this action indicated that he did not look at himself or them as important. "Biking is for the lower classes only." So, Steve changed.

"Well, I love my bike, but I was in China to get my team motivated and on track. I certainly didn't want to sabotage my success just to arrive sweaty at the office every morning. I gave up the bike and started taking public transportation, just like every other Chinese boss."

Share your experiences as an international student and adjustments you have made in the workplace.



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