Malaysian Culture and the Leadership of Organisations: A GLOBE Study

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ABSTRACT

Leadership behavior significantly influences the performance of companies and the motivation of people. However, much of our knowledge regarding the characteristics of effective leaders is based on research carried out in Western countries. To redress this imbalance, the Global Leadership and Organizational Behavior Effectiveness (GLOBE) Research Program was set up in the early 1990s to investigate leadership behaviors in over 60 countries around the world, including Malaysia.

Much cross-cultural research focuses on identifying differences between cultures. In contrast, the results of the GLOBE research indicate that a number of attributes associated with charismatic/transformational leadership are universally endorsed by all cultures as contributing to outstanding leadership. This paper will describe aspects of Malaysian leadership behaviors, identifying their traditional roots while placing them in the context of GLOBE findings.

As Malaysia moves from a commodity-based economy to one based on sophisticated industrial and technological export industries, Malaysian leaders are seeking to develop a more international leadership style, but one rooted in fundamental tenets of Malaysian society.

\textsuperscript{1} The Malaysian GLOBE data were collected by Zakaria bin Ismail (UKM), Norma Mansor (UM), and Nik Rahimah Nik Yacob (UKM)
INTRODUCTION

In a recent article, former director of the International Leadership Academy Adel Safty argued that three major influences inform our practice and understanding of global leadership (1999). He identifies leadership by institutions, referring primarily to the United Nations and its predecessor, the League of Nations. The United Nations promised leadership based on universally shared human values and ideas, although it has not always been able to conform to its ideals in practice. Safty argues that a second influence, that of political leadership, has become less significant in recent times. National sovereignty has been reduced in relevance as a result of trends towards greater economic liberalism, reduced protectionism and global communications.

The third influence, which Safty credits with most impact on our understanding of global leadership, is the body of knowledge surrounding corporate management and leadership. Leadership is one of the most intensively researched areas in organisational science, and many of these findings are transferable to other environments. However, much of the most publicised work done on leadership has emanated from the United States and, to a lesser extent, Western Europe. We cannot assume that the findings of such research will always apply to cultures with significantly different values and economic structures.

Accordingly, social scientists have increasingly been studying the ways in which cultures vary, and the extent to which such differences influence applicability of Western research findings. Research into cultural influences on leadership gained impetus with the early work of Dutch researcher Geert Hofstede (1980). He determined that cultures vary along a number of dimensions that have important implications for organisational structure and leadership.
practices. These dimensions have been further refined and extended by subsequent researchers. House, Wright and Aditya have recently completed a comprehensive survey of cross-cultural research into leadership (1997). However, despite the growth in this research over recent years, the authors conclude that it currently provides only a limited basis for practical knowledge and advice to assist leaders in adapting to cultural constraints.

Accordingly, House and his colleagues have recently carried out a significant international study into links between societal culture and leadership behaviours (House et al., 1999). Initiated in 1991, the Global Leadership and Organisational Behaviour Effectiveness study (GLOBE) has involved over 170 researchers from more than 60 countries, including Malaysia.

In the following section, we will discuss past studies on aspects of Malaysian leadership styles, and how these relate to Malaysian societal values. We will then relate this material to the GLOBE findings for Malaysia.

**MALAY CULTURE AND LEADERSHIP STYLES**

Malaysia is a truly multiracial society, with Malays and indigenous peoples making up around 60 percent of the population of 21 million. Chinese comprise around 31 percent, and Indians another 8 percent. It is therefore misleading to imply that there is only one culture, or one style of Malaysian leadership. While these ethnic groups share some common beliefs and values (eg deference to authority and importance of “face”), they have distinct cultural and
religious heritages (Poon, 1998). Thus, while some of the following material will apply to all three racial groups, the discussion will focus primarily on Malay culture and leadership.

Malaysia's colonial heritage, together with more recent foreign investment by Japanese and western countries, has modified traditional patterns of leadership and business management (Sin, 1991). Increasing numbers of joint ventures, together with the country's drive towards higher levels of industrialisation and economic prosperity have been associated with a 'westernisation' of many management practices. However, key cultural and religious values underpin the behaviour and beliefs of Malay managers, and these serve to create differences between leadership styles in Malaysia, and those in other regions of the world.

Religion, language and traditions create ethnic consciousness; indeed, the Malaysian Constitution states that a "Malay is someone who speaks the Malay language, practices Malay customs, and professes Islam" (Nirenberg, 1979).

Islam emphasises the importance of capability and integrity in leadership: "Those in authority are to be selected from among the members of the community on the grounds that they are capable and trustworthy" (Quran Sura 4:58). The Malaysian Anti-Corruption Agency has a vision statement that fits closely with the Islamic principles of "unity, trusteeship and justice" (Rice & Mahmoud, 1999) and strict laws are in place against bribery and corruption. In practice, however, managers believe that ethical standards have declined over the last fifteen years (Zabid & Alsagoff, 1993) and there are increasing media reports of unethical practices such as insider trading and 'kickbacks' (Gupta & Sulaiman, 1996). These authors suggest that while leaders still believe in the importance of ethical behaviour, factors such as
Pressure from increased competition and the behaviour of colleagues make it necessary for them to compromise.

The Malay culture has developed from a history of communal living and cooperation in undertaking tasks; the phrase *gotong royong* refers to working together in accomplishing a common object. While increasing economic prosperity has brought increased competition in some areas (Nirenberg, 1979), cooperation is still of great importance to Malays, especially when for the common good. Hofstede (1980) found Malaysia to be high on collectivism, reflecting an emphasis on in-group cohesiveness, collective distribution of resources and collective action. Subsequent research (e.g. by Blunt (1988) and Richards(1991)) has confirmed this finding.

Malaysian leaders are not expected to be self-serving, in the sense of placing their own interests ahead of the group. Ismail, in discussing Malaysian public administrators, notes the existence of a "'perverse equalitarianism' as when an individual in a group tends to take initiative and assume responsibility and leadership he is frequently kept down to size by ridicule. He is presumed to be asking for himself at the expense of his peers and group" (1988 p.94).

The Malay social code also encourages indirect ways of communicating. Being too direct or forthright (for example, in providing negative feedback to others) may be seen as insensitive and rude. It is important to preserve “face” (*jaga maruah*), and leaders may forego openness in the interest of maintaining social harmony (Poon, 1998).
Within Malaysian culture status differences between individuals are clearly recognised and acknowledged. Emphasis is placed on the correct use of titles, protocol and rank. Poon (1998) describes honorifics used to indicate social status and levels of authority, with different titles and ranking structures based on connections with royalty, religious standing, and awards for service to the state. Ismail (1988) argues that passive obedience to superiors is one of the basic values of Malay society, and that this strong reverence for elders and traditional leaders extends itself to a preferred authoritarian leadership style. Blunt (1988) confirmed Hofstede's (1980) finding of high power distance (ie acceptance of unequal power sharing) in Malaysian society.

Malays are often described as hospitable, accommodating, forgiving, peace loving and charitable, as having a strongly humane orientation. Ismail (1988) notes that people are entitled to compassion and magnanimity from those in positions of authority when they demonstrate weakness (as long as their behaviour does not threaten the base values of society, including both state and religion). This can result in leaders overlooking incidences of incompetence, lack of productivity, tardiness and the like.

Such an approach can be seen as placing stronger emphasis on individual welfare and group cohesiveness than on organisational performance. Indeed, the Malays do not have the same strong history of entrepreneurial involvement as other ethnic groups in Malaysia; this, coupled with a traditional emphasis on spiritual rather than material wealth, can translate into a lower level of performance orientation among Malays in leadership roles (Nirenberg, 1979). In researching the value systems of Malaysian managers, Ismail (1977) found that successful Malay managers tended to be similar to successful Chinese and Indian managers, in having
greater performance orientation and a longer time perspective than less successful Malay managers.

This summary of cultural aspects, as they relate to management, suggest a combination of traditional hierarchy, emphasis on collective morale rather than achievement in business, and a comparatively short time horizon. A number of writers on Malaysian management have noted these characteristics, and have discussed the need to balance adoption of Western management practices with a recognition of underlying Asian cultural values. Asma Abdullah, for example, uses the analogy of a tree, arguing that the roots (akar) on which organisation culture is based must reflect a deep understanding of core Malaysian values. Such values include “respect for elders, a collectivistic orientation, religious commitment, harmonious living and face-saving”. These values need to be seen to “co-exist with performance-driven values such as goal clarity, cooperation, commitment, decisiveness, and achievement” (Abdullah, 1995). In essence, Abdullah makes a case for critically reviewing overseas models and theories, to look for harmony between culture and management by “combining our own traditional strengths and indigenous expressions with a modern and contemporary appeal”.

Analysis of Malaysian results of the GLOBE study can assist us in determining the extent to which Malay managers have succeeded in making this shift.
PROJECT GLOBE

The Global Leadership and Organisational Behaviour Effectiveness Research Program (GLOBE) was initiated by Professor House in 1991 as a means by which links between culture and leadership could be systematically researched. The GLOBE community now comprises around 170 researchers in over 60 countries.

Following a comprehensive review of leadership and cross-cultural research literature, questionnaires to measure cultural values and leadership practices were developed and refined. The items included in these survey instruments were based on input from scholars in Asian as well as western countries, in order to provide instruments that could be used in all cultures. Country Co-Investigators (CCIs) in each country managed the process of translating questionnaires, and obtaining qualitative material with which to supplement the questionnaire-based measures of societal and organisational culture and leader attributes.

During the initial phase of the project, the questionnaires were psychometrically analysed to identify the underlying factor structure, and to determine the properties (eg reliabilities) of the scales. On the basis of this work, it was possible to establish nine dimensions of societal culture. Similarly, the analysis identified six global dimensions of leader behaviour, based on 21 underlying specific leader attributes or behaviours (House et al., 1999).
**Conceptual Model**

The GLOBE study uses implicit leadership theory (Lord & Maher, 1991) as a conceptual basis for its analysis of leadership. This approach argues that individuals make assumptions or develop beliefs (ie hold implicit theories) about the attributes consistent with effective leadership. When others act in ways that are consistent with these implicit theories, then individuals are more likely to accept them as leaders. With greater acceptance, such leaders will gain greater stature, and increased ability to get the organisational resources needed in order to accomplish goals. Considerable research supports the notion that implicit leadership theories constrain the exercise of leadership, the acceptance of leaders, and the extent to which they are viewed as effective.

The GLOBE study defines culture as the "shared motives, values, beliefs, identities, and interpretations or meanings of significant events that result from common experiences of members of collectives and are transmitted across age generations" (House et al., 1999). It is likely that the attributes, norms and practices that distinguish one culture from another will also influence the implicit leadership theories held by members of that culture. Leaders are therefore likely to enact the behaviours expected and valued in the particular culture. Variations in implicit leadership theories across different cultures will be reflected in the different value placed on various leader behaviours and attributes.

Societal culture is not the only variable that will influence leadership style. For example, the size and nature of the company, its competitive environment, ownership structure and organisational culture will all moderate or compete with the effect of societal culture in
determining leader attributes. A more complete model of such relationships can be found in House, Wright and Aditya (1997).

Cultural Dimensions

The nine cultural dimensions used in the GLOBE study are based on extensive previous research. The first five dimensions stem from Hofstede's work (1980), with his original Masculinity-Femininity dimension divided (on the basis of factor analysis) into two dimensions (Gender Egalitarianism and Assertiveness). The Collectivism scale was also supplemented by items based on the work of Triandis (1995). Performance orientation is derived from McClelland's (1985) work on need for achievement, and is similar to Hofstede and Bond's (1988) Confucian Dynamism dimension. Future Orientation and Humane Orientation stem mainly from work by Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck (1961).

Brief definitions of each of the cultural dimensions follow:

Uncertainty avoidance is the extent to which a society strives to avoid uncertainty by reliance on social norms, rituals, and bureaucratic practices to alleviate the unpredictability of future events.

Power distance is defined as the degree to which members of a society expect and agree that power should be unequally shared.

Collectivism I reflects the degree to which organisational and societal institutional practices encourage and reward collective distribution of resources and collective action.

Collectivism II is the degree to which individuals express pride, loyalty, and cohesiveness in their organisations or families.

Gender egalitarianism is the extent to which a society minimises gender inequality.

Assertiveness is the degree to which individuals in a society are assertive, dominant, and aggressive in social relationships.
Future orientation is the degree to which a society encourages and rewards future-oriented behaviours such as planning, investing in the future, and delaying gratification.

Performance orientation refers to the extent to which a society encourages and rewards group members for performance improvement and excellence.

Humane orientation is the degree to which a society encourages and rewards individuals for being fair, altruistic, friendly, generous, caring and kind to others.

Leadership Dimensions
The final set of leadership dimensions used in the GLOBE study were derived from factor analysis of responses to approximately 16,000 questionnaires from middle managers of approximately 825 organisations in 64 countries. A total of 21 leadership scales (first-order factors) were identified. While each of the leadership scales resulting from the first-order factor analysis are psychometrically sound, there is considerable inter-relationship between the factors. A second-order factor analysis was therefore used to reduce the number of scales to a more manageable set of less inter-related scales. A combination of statistical and theory-based considerations led to the development of six higher order leadership scales. These scales represent relatively broad leadership styles, encompassing the 21 more detailed leadership subscales. The second-order factors (marked in bold) are summarised in Table 1. The Autonomous factor is based on individual questionnaire items, and an individual item (‘Delegator’) is included in the Participative factor. The remaining second-order factors are comprised of the subscales listed under each factor heading.
TABLE 1
GLOBAL CULTURALLY ENDORSED IMPLICIT LEADERSHIP (CLT) DIMENSIONS (HOUSE ET AL (1999)).

1. **Charismatic/Value Based, 4.5 - 6.5**
   - Charismatic 1: Visionary
   - Charismatic 2: Inspirational
   - Charismatic 3: Self-sacrifice
   - Integrity
   - Decisive
   - Performance oriented

2. **Team Oriented, 4.7 - 6.2**
   - Team 1: Collaborative Team Orientation
   - Team 2: Team Integrator
   - Diplomatic
   - Malevolent (reverse scored)
   - Administratively competent

3. **Self-Protective, 2.5 - 4.6**
   - Self-centred
   - Status conscious
   - Conflict inducer
   - Face saver
   - Procedural

4. **Participative, 4.5 - 6.1**
   - Autocratic (reverse scored)
   - Non-participative (reverse scored)
   - Delegator

5. **Humane, 3.8 - 5.6**
   - Modesty
   - Humane orientation

6. **Autonomous, 2.3 - 4.7**
   - Individualistic
   - Independent
   - Autonomous
   - Unique

Samples of managers in each culture rated individual leader behaviours on a scale from 1 (greatly inhibits a person from being an outstanding leader) to 7 (greatly contributes to a person being an outstanding leader). The average score for each culture, for each of the second-order scales, was calculated and the range of scores is shown beside each of the six second-order factors in Table 1. Thus, for example, the Charismatic/Value-Based leadership style (with a range of culture scores between 4.5 and 6.5) is positively endorsed by all cultures. In contrast, the Humane style (3.8 to 5.6) is endorsed by some cultures, and seen as an ineffective leadership style by others.

**MALAYSIAN GLOBE FINDINGS**

In considering the average ratings of Malaysian managers on the GLOBE culture and leadership dimensions in the context of other countries' ratings, it is important to distinguish between meaningful and trivial differences. Hanges used a statistical algorithm (Scheffe's post-hoc test of mean differences and the standard error of the difference banding procedure)
to rank countries on each dimension, and to divide them into meaningful bands. Countries within each band cannot be significantly differentiated on the particular dimension. However, each band differs meaningfully from other bands. Depending on the spread of scores across all the countries, this procedure led to establishment of between two and five bands for each scale. In Tables 2 and 3, the number of cells in each row represents the number of bands for the particular scale. For example, countries varied widely in regard to the perceived importance of Integrity to leadership, and countries could be differentiated into five separate bands on this dimension (see Table 3). In contrast, countries were in much higher agreement regarding the value of Diplomacy, and the spread of scores was captured in only two bands of countries (see Table 3).

Cultural Scales

The GLOBE questionnaire required respondents (middle managers in business organisations) to rate (on a seven-point scale) the extent to which various norms, values and practices were characteristic of present Malaysian society. (Additional items explored how respondents felt society 'should be', but only the 'as is' ratings are reported in this paper).

Table 2 summarises the mean scores for the Malaysian sample on the cultural dimensions.

Malaysia clusters with other countries in the highest-scoring band for Uncertainty Avoidance, Humane Orientation, Collectivism (I and II) and Performance Orientation. The Uncertainty Avoidance result supports Richards' (1991) and Blunt's (1988) conclusions that Malaysia is higher on this dimension than suggested by Hofstede's (1980) original work. The high scores for Collectivism and Humane Orientation (coupled with the low Assertiveness
ranking) are also consistent with the traditional values discussed above. The cluster of scales can be viewed as underlying various Malay behavioural traits (such as being hospitable, accommodating, forgiving, peace loving, charitable, humble and self-effacing) noted by many researchers (see, for example, Mansor (1998) and Poon (1998)).

### TABLE 2
MALAYSIAN CULTURAL VALUES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cultural Dimension</th>
<th>Average Scores, Relative to Other Countries in Sample</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>High End</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Power Distance</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uncertainty Avoidance</td>
<td>4.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humane Orientation</td>
<td>4.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collectivism I</td>
<td>4.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collectivism II</td>
<td>5.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assertiveness</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender Egalitarianism</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Low = male oriented, medium equal, high = female oriented</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Future Orientation</td>
<td>4.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performance Orientation</td>
<td>4.34</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The rating for Power Distance is high, but not in the highest band. This suggests that Malay managers do not consider Malaysian society to be as strongly supportive of power inequalities as has been found in the past. Hofstede and Bond (1988), for example, found Malaysia to rank highest of fifty countries on the Power Distance dimension. Mansor and Mohd Ali (1998) have noted the tension between Islamic values (based on equality) and the traditional Malay hierarchical social structure. It is also possible that a generational shift is taking place, with younger (often overseas-educated Malaysians) adopting a more questioning attitude towards authority and social institutions than earlier generations.
Finally, the Malaysian GLOBE respondents rated Performance Orientation very highly in comparison with other countries. This conflicts with the 'laid back' image usually associated with the emphasis on traditional Malay values such as humility and compassion, and on communal harmony ahead of individual achievement.

This shift may well reflect the increasing emphasis given to educational attainment and economic development in Malaysia over recent decades. Competition for educational places is high, and considerable publicity is given to those who achieve well. The New Economic Policy has generated opportunities, and has highlighted the importance of achieving international standards. High profile infrastructure projects (including the multimedia supercorridor and KL International Airport) coupled with appeals to national pride (Malaysia Boleh!) serve to motivate a higher standard of performance in all sectors of the economy. The GLOBE results suggest that these initiatives are having an effect, at least on the attitudes of the middle managers sampled by the project.

Leadership Scales

Table 3 summarises the mean scores (based on a seven-point scale) for the Malaysian sample on each of the 21 first-order leadership dimensions. The score for each dimension is placed in a cell that represents the relative position of the country in comparison with all other countries in the sample. This enables consideration of the absolute nature of the item (is it considered to enhance (>4) or detract (<4) from effective leadership in Malaysia?) as well as the extent to which the dimension is rated more or less highly compared with other countries.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Leadership Dimension</th>
<th>Average Scores, Relative to Other Countries in Sample</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>High End</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Charismatic/Value Based</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charismatic I: Visionary</td>
<td>6.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charismatic II: Inspirational</td>
<td>6.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charismatic III: Self Sacrificial</td>
<td>5.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integrity</td>
<td>6.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decisive</td>
<td>5.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performance Orientation</td>
<td>6.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Team Oriented</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Team I: Collaborative Team Orientation</td>
<td>5.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Team II: Team Integrator</td>
<td>5.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diplomatic</td>
<td>5.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malevolent (Reverse scored)</td>
<td>1.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administratively Competent</td>
<td>5.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Narcissistic</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Centred</td>
<td>2.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Status Consciousness</td>
<td>3.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflict Inducer</td>
<td>3.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Face-saver</td>
<td>3.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Procedural</td>
<td>3.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Participative</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Autocratic (Reverse)</td>
<td>2.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-participative (Reverse)</td>
<td>2.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Humane</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modest</td>
<td>5.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humane Orientation</td>
<td>5.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Autonomous</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Autonomous</td>
<td>4.03</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Malaysians rated the dimensions of Decisiveness, Team Integration, Diplomacy, Modesty and a Humane Orientation as being more important contributors to effective leadership than
did most other countries. In the Malaysian cultural context, it is important for leaders to be self-effacing, to demonstrate patience and modesty in their undertakings. Compassion for others and a spirit of generosity is also highly valued, and this is consistent with Islamic leadership values discussed earlier. Diplomacy indicates a willingness to consider the aims and aspirations of other parties, and to seek win-win solutions to negotiations, while also being an effective bargainer.

There is a very high emphasis placed on the importance of maintaining a team approach. The Team Integrator factor reflects the importance placed by Malaysians on inducing people to work together as a team, and ensuring that communication and information-sharing contribute to a shared understanding.

Malaysians are also more willing to accept leaders who forego direct communication in favour of face-saving approaches. Thus, leaders who refrain from making negative comments in order to maintain good relationships and to save face, or who use metaphors and examples to communicate rather than go straight to the point, are more accepted than would be the case in many countries. The rating on this scale was near the middle of the seven-point scale, suggesting that some respondents saw the behaviours as contributing positively to effective leadership, while others saw them as ineffective.

Malaysian respondents rated Autonomy more highly than other countries (in contributing to effective leadership), but the average rating was only 4.03. This scale reflects the extent to which a leader acts in an individualistic, independent manner or has unique characteristics which differentiate him or her from the group. Although Malaysia is quite high on this scale
compared with other countries, the 4.03 rating is right in the middle of the scale. Some respondents saw these characteristics as detracting from effective leadership, while others saw them as having a somewhat positive contribution.

The leadership dimension rated by the sample as contributing most to effective leadership in Malaysia was Performance Orientation (6.11), and this score (adjusted for unobtrusive measures and country response bias) placed Malaysia in the second highest band for this dimension. Malaysian respondents also rated Decisiveness as a vital contributor to leadership effectiveness, more so than respondents in other countries did. Based on the items comprising these scales, Malaysians prefer leaders who strive to improve, seek to attain higher standards, and are willing to make decisions quickly and confidently (using both rational analysis and intuitive judgement).

In light of the earlier comments regarding the importance of social distinctions and titles in Malay society, the Status Consciousness dimension was not seen as an important dimension for effective leadership performance. The average rating for this dimension (3.64) suggests that most respondents saw attention to status as detracting somewhat from effectiveness.

Thus, the preferred leadership behaviours identified by respondents mirror some of the patterns in the cultural responses. A traditional leadership style is evident, particularly in regard to the concern for Diplomacy, Modesty and a Humane Orientation in the context of a team approach to leading. Considerations of ‘face’ are also important. As with the cultural scales, however, there is also an increasing emphasis being placed on effective performance.
and continuous improvement. Status and hierarchy appear to be of lesser importance. An effective leader in Malaysia is increasingly being seen as one who can achieve results, while respecting the core societal values of compassion and community.

CONCLUSION

This paper began with reference to the writing of Adel Safty (1999). Safty discussed the hope that institutions such as the United Nations would be able to provide global leadership, based on universally shared human values and ideas. He balanced this against the reality of the increasing dominance of Western-based corporate leadership models. The GLOBE study is helping us to provide a pathway between these extremes. While it has identified some leadership styles that appear to have fairly universal application, the study is also highlighting individual differences between cultures.

The GLOBE study has provided confirmation of Malaysia's orientation towards a number of cultural dimensions, and allowed a more precise understanding of its position relative to other countries. More importantly, it has indicated how aspects of the leadership style preferred by Malaysian managers maintain a balance between traditional values (of teamwork, harmony, modesty and compassion) and the attributes needed by a newly industrialised country in a global economy (such as decisiveness and performance orientation).

Malaysia has an active, coordinated program aimed at improving economic performance and individual wealth while retaining its characteristic identity as a Muslim state in East Asia.
GLOBE is helping us to more clearly recognise and accept differences in cultural values between countries, and to understand the implications of these for corporate leadership. Such understanding will facilitate the development of leadership styles in countries such as Malaysia, which achieve economic goals in a manner consistent with the underlying values of the cultures in which organisations operate.

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