



## Understanding cultures and implicit leadership theories across the globe: an introduction to project GLOBE

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### Abstract

GLOBE (Global Leadership and Organizational Behavior Effectiveness) is a research program focusing on culture and leadership in 61 nations. National cultures are examined in terms of nine dimensions: performance orientation, future orientation, assertiveness, power distance, humane orientation, institutional collectivism, in-group collectivism, uncertainty avoidance, and gender egalitarianism. In a survey of thousands of middle managers in food processing, finance, and telecommunications industries in these countries, GLOBE compares their cultures and attributes of effective leadership. Six global leadership attributes are identified and discussed. © 2002 Published by Elsevier Science Inc.

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Throughout mankind's history, geography, ethnicity, and political boundaries have helped create distinctions and differences among different peoples. Over time, societies have evolved into groups of people with distinguishable characteristics that set them apart from other human communities. It is only in the latter part of the 20th century that advances in technology and improvements in telecommunication and transportation have enabled societies to quickly and easily learn about and from others. Marco Polo, the great Italian world traveler would have marveled at the speed and ease with which his adventures can be replicated today.

One of the consequences of stronger connections among different cultures is increasing interest in two fundamental questions: first, in what way are human communities different or similar? Secondly, why? Psychologists, sociologists, economists, management scholars, as well as many researchers from other disciplines have been attempting to find the answers to these two questions. GLOBE (Global Leadership and Organizational Behavior Effectiveness) is one such endeavor. Its intent is to explore the cultural values and practices in a wide variety of countries, and to identify their impact on organizational practices and leadership attributes.

Besides practical needs, there are important reasons to examine the impact of culture on leadership. There is a need for leadership and organizational theories that transcend cultures to understand what works and what does not work in different cultural settings (Triandis, 1993). Furthermore, a focus on cross-cultural issues can help researchers uncover new relationships by forcing investigators to include a much broader range of variables often not considered in contemporary leadership theories, such as the importance of religion, language, ethnic background, history, or political systems (Dorfman, 1996).

The cross-cultural literature has generally stressed a strong connection between culture and leadership styles. There has been a plethora of country-specific and cross-cultural comparative studies to examine the relationship between culture and management styles, including leadership (House, Wright, & Aditya, 1997). The literature on this topic points to a major divergence of views regarding the universality of leadership patterns. Many researchers have argued for a direct impact of culture on leadership styles, arguing that specific cultural traditions, values, ideologies, and norms are "bound to differentiate as much or even more than structural factors between societies" (Lammers & Hickson, 1979: 10). They believe that historical developments influence the evolution of such distinctive phenomena such as the degree of cooperation, morale, and commitment to organizations (Child & Keiser, 1979; Maurice, 1979;

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Redding et al., 1994; Smith & Peterson, 1988; Tayeb, 1988), despite any economic or social similarities between nations (Ralston et al., 1993; Shenkar & Ronen, 1987).

On the other side of the debate are those who believe that at least some aspects of leadership may transcend cultural boundaries and hence are universally accepted. In support of their position, they have maintained that common technological imperatives (Woodward, 1958), common industrial logic (Adler, Doktor, & Redding, 1986), and global institutions and practices all serve to harmonize management practices and structures (Child & Tayeb, 1983; Levitt, 1983; Yavas, 1995).

## 1. The GLOBE research program

GLOBE is a multi-phase, multi-method project in which investigators spanning the world are examining the inter-relationships between societal culture, organizational culture, and organizational leadership. Close to 150 social scientists and management scholars from 61 cultures representing all major regions of the world are engaged in this long-term programmatic series of cross-cultural leadership studies.

GLOBE was conceived and initially designed by the first author of this report as the Principal Investigator. He was later joined by several other Co-Principal Investigators. Because cross-cultural research requires knowledge of all the cultures being studied, we have developed a network of approximately 150 Country Co-Investigators (CCIs) who are social scientists or management scholars from around the world. The CCIs, together with the Principal Investigators and with three Research Associates, constitute the members of the GLOBE community.

The CCIs are responsible for leadership of the project in a specific culture in which they have expertise. Their activities include collecting quantitative and qualitative data, ensuring the accuracy of questionnaire translations, writing country-specific descriptions of their cultures in which they interpret the results of the quantitative data analyses in their own cultural context, and contributing insights from their unique cultural perspectives to the ongoing GLOBE research. In most cases, CCIs are natives of the cultures from which they are collecting data, and in most cases, they reside in that culture. Some of the CCIs are persons with extensive experience in more than one culture. Most cultures have a research team of between two and five CCIs working on the project. The activities of the project as a whole are coordinated by the GLOBE Coordinating Team (GCT). The GCT is a multi-national team of researchers who are also responsible for designing quantitative measures and qualitative methods, performing cross-cultural statistical analyses, and coordinating efforts to present results of the project to the scholarly community. To date, CCIs have made over 100 presentations at professional meetings and have written over 30 published papers and book chapters.

## 2. GLOBE objectives

The meta-goal of GLOBE is to develop an empirically-based theory to describe, understand, and predict the impact of specific cultural variables on leadership and organizational processes and the effectiveness of these processes. Specific objectives include answering the following fundamental questions:

- Are there leader behaviors, attributes, and organizational practices that are universally accepted and effective across cultures?
- Are there leader behaviors, attributes, and organizational practices that are accepted and effective in only some cultures?
- How do attributes of societal and organizational cultures affect the kinds of leader behaviors and organizational practices that are accepted and effective?
- What is the effect of violating cultural norms relevant to leadership and organizational practices?
- What is the relative standing of each of the cultures studied on each of the nine core dimensions of culture?
- Can the universal and culture-specific aspects of leader behaviors, attributes, and organizational practices be explained in terms of an underlying theory that accounts for systematic differences across cultures?

The planned GLOBE research program consists of four phases. Phase 1 was devoted to the development of research instruments. The questionnaire scales developed have sound psychometric properties: high within culture respondent agreement, high between culture differences in aggregated means of individual responses, and high inter-item consistency within scales. The Generalizability Coefficient (Inter-class correlation ICC-KK), which jointly measures the psychometric properties, exceed 0.85 for all of the scales developed in Phase 1.

Phase 2 was devoted to assessment of nine dimensions of societal and organizational cultures and tests of hypotheses relevant to the relationships among these cultural dimensions and cultural-level implicit theories of leadership. Additional measures of a rather large number of variables were also developed as part of Phase 2. These variables concern the ethnic demography and religions of each country, their social, political, and economic performance as well as measures of individual physical and psychological well-being. These measures are based on data published by the United Nations, The International Monetary Fund, the World Values Survey, The Human Development Report, and The world Economic Forum's National Competitiveness rankings.

We developed societal and organizational measures of culture in the first phase of the research project. Items were analyzed by conventional psychometric procedures (e.g., item analysis, factor analysis, generalizability analysis) to establish nine dimensions of societal culture and nine isomorphic dimensions of organizational culture. Finally,

during Phase 2 unobtrusive measures were developed for each of the nine core societal level dimensions of culture. These measures correlate between 0.5 and 0.7 with the questionnaire-based measures of the core societal level cultural dimensions. These data indicate that the questionnaire-based scales are validly measuring cultural characteristics and are not mere individual perceptual descriptions of cultures.

Phase 2 data collection has been completed. The third phase of the research project will investigate the impact and effectiveness of specific leader behaviors and styles on subordinates' attitudes and job performance and on leader effectiveness. Phase 3 will also be directed toward the identification of culture-specific aspects of leadership and organizational practices, as well as the longitudinal effects of leadership and organizational practices on organizational effectiveness. Finally, Phase 3 will be devoted to identifying relationships between organizational contingencies (size, technology, environment), organizational form and processes, and organizational effectiveness.

Funding has been received from the U.S. National Science Foundation and this phase is currently under way in 25 countries. A projected fourth phase will employ field and laboratory experiments to confirm, establish causality, and extend previous findings.

Project GLOBE employs both quantitative and qualitative methods to provide richly descriptive, yet scientifically valid, accounts of cultural influences on leadership and organizational processes. Quantitative aspects include measurement of societal culture, organizational culture, and leadership attributes and behaviors. Concomitant with the quantitative analysis, qualitative culture-specific research is being conducted in the same cultures. Qualitative culture-specific interpretations of local behaviors, norms, and practices are being developed through content analysis of data derived from interviews, focus groups, and published media.

### 2.1. Construct definitions of leadership and culture

In August 1994, the first GLOBE research conference was held at the University of Calgary in Canada. Fifty-four researchers from 38 countries gathered to develop a collective understanding of the project and to initiate its implementation. In this meeting, considerable time was spent generating a working definition of leadership that reflected the diverse viewpoints held by GLOBE researchers. A consensus with respect to a universal definition of organizational leadership emerged: "the ability of an individual to influence, motivate, and enable others to contribute toward the effectiveness and success of the organizations of which they are members". Simonton (1994: 411), speaking of leadership in general, defines a leader as a "group member whose influence on group attitudes, performance, or decision making greatly exceeds that of the average member of the group". The GLOBE project concerns the phenomenon of organizational leadership, not leadership in general.

There is no agreed upon definition among social scientists for the term culture. Generally speaking, culture is used by social scientists to refer to a set of parameters of collectives that differentiate the collectives from each other in meaningful ways. The focus is on the "sharedness" of cultural indicators among members of the collective. The specific criteria used to differentiate cultures usually depend on the disciplines and preferences of the investigator and the issues under investigation. For the GLOBE research program, we theoretically define culture as 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. It is operationalized by the use of measures reflecting two kinds of cultural manifestations: (a) the commonality (agreement) among members of collectives with respect to the psychological attributes specified above; and (b) the commonality of observed and reported practices of entities such as families, schools, work organizations, economic and legal systems, and political institutions.

The common cultural attributes we have chosen to measure are indicators of shared modal values of collectives. These values are expressed in response to questionnaire items in the form of judgments of *What Should Be*. Emphasis on values grows out of an anthropological tradition of culture assessment (Kluckhohn & Strodtbeck, 1961). Another measure of culture, modal practices, is measured by indicators assessing *What Is*, or *What Are*, common behaviors, institutional practices, proscriptions and prescriptions. This approach to the assessment of culture grows out of a psychological/behavioral tradition, in which it is assumed that shared values are enacted in behaviors, policies, and practices. This assumption will be tested as part of Project GLOBE.

The following are the nine cultural dimensions studied in GLOBE:

1. *Uncertainty Avoidance* is defined as the extent to which members of an organization or society strive to avoid uncertainty by reliance on social norms, rituals, and bureaucratic practices to alleviate the unpredictability of future events.
2. *Power Distance* is defined as the degree to which members of an organization or society expect and agree that power should be unequally shared.
3. *Collectivism I: Societal Collectivism* reflects the degree to which organizational and societal institutional practices encourage and reward collective distribution of resources and collective action.
4. *Collectivism II: In-Group Collectivism* reflects the degree to which individuals express pride, loyalty and cohesiveness in their organizations or families.
5. *Gender Egalitarianism* is the extent to which an organization or a society minimizes gender role differences and gender discrimination.

6. *Assertiveness* is the degree to which individuals in organizations or societies are assertive, confrontational, and aggressive in social relationships.
7. *Future Orientation* is the degree to which individuals in organizations or societies engage in future-oriented behaviors such as planning, investing in the future, and delaying gratification.
8. *Performance Orientation* refers to the extent to which an organization or society encourages and rewards group members for performance improvement and excellence. This dimension includes the future oriented component of the dimension called Confucian Dynamism by Hofstede and Bond (1988).
9. Finally, *Humane Orientation* is the degree to which individuals in organizations or societies encourage and reward individuals for being fair, altruistic, friendly, generous, caring, and kind to others. This dimension is similar to the dimension labeled Kind Heartedness by Hofstede and Bond (1988).

The first six culture dimensions had their origins in the dimensions of culture identified by Hofstede (1980). The first three scales are intended to reflect the same constructs as Hofstede's dimensions labeled Uncertainty Avoidance, Power Distance, and Individualism. The Collectivism I dimension measures societal emphasis on collectivism, with low scores reflecting individualistic emphasis and high scores reflecting collectivistic emphasis by means of laws, social programs or institutional practices. The Collectivism

II scale measures in-group (family and/or organization) collectivism—pride in and loyalty to family and/or organization and family and/or organizational cohesiveness. In lieu of Hofstede's Masculinity dimension, we developed two dimensions labeled Gender Egalitarianism and Assertiveness. Future Orientation is derived from Kluckhohn & Strodtbeck's (1961) Past, Present, Future Orientation dimension, which focuses on the temporal mode of a society. Performance Orientation was derived from McClelland's work on need for achievement. Humane Orientation has its roots in Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck's (1961) work on the Human Nature Is Good vs. Human Nature Is Bad dimension, as well as Putnam's (1993) work on the Civic Society and McClelland's (1985) conceptualization of the affiliative motive. Sample items can be seen in Table 1.

Organizational and societal culture items were written for the nine core GLOBE dimensions, at both the societal and the organizational levels. We also wrote the items to reflect two culture manifestations: institutional practices reported "As Is" and values reported in terms of what "Should Be". The items were written as "quartets" having isomorphic structures across the two levels of analysis (societal and organizational) and across the two culture manifestations (As Is and Should Be).

The basic structure of the items comprising quartets is identical, but the frame of reference is varied according to the particular cultural manifestation and levels of analysis being assessed. Table 2 contains an example of a quartet of parallel culture items, showing essentially the same question in four

Table 1  
Culture construct definitions and sample questionnaire items

Culture construct definitions	Specific questionnaire item
<i>Power Distance</i> : The degree to which members of a collective expect power to be distributed equally.	Followers are (should be) expected to obey their leaders without question.
<i>Uncertainty Avoidance</i> : The extent to which a society, organization, or group relies on social norms, rules, and procedures to alleviate unpredictability of future events.	Most people lead (should lead) highly structured lives with few unexpected events.
<i>Humane Orientation</i> : The degree to which a collective encourages and rewards individuals for being fair, altruistic, generous, caring and kind to others.	People are generally (should be generally) very tolerant of mistakes.
<i>Collectivism I</i> : The degree to which organizational and societal institutional practices encourage and reward collective distribution of resources and collective action.	Leaders encourage (should encourage) group loyalty even if individual goals suffer.
<i>Collectivism II</i> : The degree to which individuals express pride, loyalty, and cohesiveness in their organizations or families.	Employees feel (should feel) great loyalty toward this organization.
<i>Assertiveness</i> : The degree to which individuals are assertive, confrontational and aggressive in their relationships with others.	People are (should be) generally dominant in their relationships with each other.
<i>Gender Egalitarianism</i> : The degree to which a collective minimizes gender inequality.	Boys are encouraged (should be encouraged) more than girls to attain a higher education (scored inversely).
<i>Future Orientation</i> : The extent to which individuals engage in future-oriented behaviors such as delaying gratification, planning, and investing in the future.	More people live (should live) for the present rather than for the future (scored inversely).
<i>Performance Orientation</i> : The degree to which a collective encourages and rewards group members for performance improvement and excellence.	Students are encouraged (should be encouraged) to strive for continuously improved performance.

Table 2  
Example of parallel items for the culture scales

Organization <i>As Is</i>							
The pay and bonus system in this organization is designed to maximize:							
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Individual interests							Collective interests
Organization <i>Should Be</i>							
In this organization, the pay and bonus system should be designed to maximize:							
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Individual interests							Collective Interests
Society <i>As Is</i>							
The economic system in this society is designed to maximize:							
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Individual interests							Collective Interests
Society <i>Should Be</i>							
I believe that the economic system in this society should be designed to maximize:							
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Individual interests							Collective Interests

forms: Organization *As Is*; Organization *Should Be*; Society *As Is*; and Society *Should Be*. Items were derived from a review of relevant literature and interviews and focus groups held in several countries, as well as from extant organizational and culture theory. Psychometric analyses indicated justification for grouping the items into scales relevant to nine core GLOBE dimensions of societies and organizations.

A second major question addressed by GLOBE concerns the extent to which specific leader attributes and behaviors are universally endorsed as contributing to effective leadership, and the extent to which attributes and behaviors are linked to cultural characteristics. In generating leadership items, our focus was on developing a comprehensive list of leader attributes and behaviors rather than on developing a priori leadership scales. The initial pool of leadership items was based on leader behaviors and attributes described in several extant leadership theories. The theories are described

in House and Aditya (1997). These leadership items consisted of behavioral and attribute descriptors. Examples of these items are presented in Table 3. Items were rated on a 7-point Likert-type scale that ranged from a low of “This behavior or characteristic greatly inhibits a person from being an outstanding leader” to a high of “This behavior or characteristic contributes greatly to a person being an outstanding leader”.

We empirically identified six global leader behavior dimensions from a large pool of leadership items. These dimensions are culturally generalizable. Respondents from all cultures were able to complete the questionnaire items that comprise these dimensions. These dimensions of reported leadership attributes and behaviors are dimensions of the culturally endorsed theories of leadership of the country studied.

The psychometric properties of the scales used to measure these dimensions exceed conventional standards. Two of these

Table 3  
Sample CLT questionnaire items and response alternatives

Definition of leadership	Ability to influence, motivate, and enable others to contribute to success of their organization.
Sample CLT items	<p><i>Sensitive</i>: Aware of slight changes in moods of others.</p> <p><i>Motivator</i>: Mobilizes, activates followers.</p> <p><i>Evasive</i>: Refrains from making negative comments to maintain good relationships and save face.</p> <p><i>Diplomatic</i>: Skilled at interpersonal relations, tactful.</p> <p><i>Self-interested</i>: Pursues own best interests.</p>
Response alternatives	<p>Impedes or facilitates unusually effective leadership:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Substantially impedes</li> <li>2. Moderately impedes</li> <li>3. Slightly impedes</li> <li>4. Neither impedes nor facilitates</li> <li>5. Slight facilitates</li> <li>6. Moderately facilitates</li> <li>7. Substantially facilitates</li> </ol>

Note: CLT, culturally endorsed implicit leaderships theory.

dimensions are universally viewed as contributors to effective leadership, one is nearly universally endorsed as a contributor, and one is nearly universally perceived as an impediment to outstanding leadership. The endorsement of the remaining two dimensions varies by culture. The complete description of the findings is provided in House et al. (1999).

### 3. The GLOBE conceptual model

The theoretical base that guides the GLOBE research program is an integration of implicit leadership theory (Lord & Maher, 1991), value/belief theory of culture (Hofstede, 1980), implicit motivation theory (McClelland, 1985), and structural contingency theory of organizational form and effectiveness (Donaldson, 1993; Hickson, Hinings, McMillan, & Schwitter, 1974). The integrated theory is briefly described here. For a more detailed description of the integrated theory, see House et al. (1997). A diagram of the integrated theory is presented in Fig. 1.

#### 3.1. The central theoretical proposition

The central theoretical proposition of our model is that the attributes and entities that distinguish a given culture from other cultures are predictive of the practices of organizations and leader attributes and behaviors that are most frequently enacted, acceptable, and effective in that culture. The integrated theory consists of the following propositions, which are also shown in the system diagram in Fig. 1.

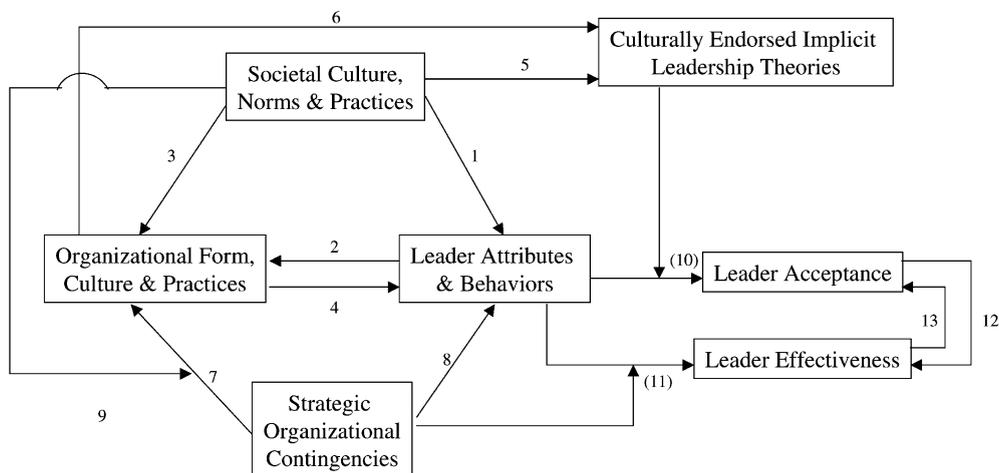
1. *Societal cultural values and practices affect what leaders do.* Substantial empirical evidence supports this assertion (House et al., 1997). First, founders of organizations—the organizations' original leaders—

are immersed in their own societal culture, and they are most likely to enact the global leader behavior patterns that are favored in that culture. Founders influence the behavior of subordinate leaders and subsequent leaders by use of selective management selection criteria, role modeling, and socialization. Further, the dominant cultural norms endorsed by societal cultures induce global leader behavior patterns and organizational practices that are differentially expected and viewed as legitimate among cultures. Thus, the attributes and behaviors of leaders are, in part, a reflection of the organizational practices, which in turn are a reflection of societal cultures (e.g., Kopelman, Brief, & Guzzo, 1990).

2. *Leadership affects organizational form, culture, and practices.* Founders of organizations establish the initial culture of their organizations (e.g., Schein, 1992; Schneider, 1987; Schneider, Goldstein, & Smith, 1995), and founders and subsequent leaders continue to influence the organizational culture (e.g., Bass, 1985; Miller & Droge, 1986; Schein, 1992; Yukl, 1994; Thompson & Luthans, 1990).

3. *Societal cultural values and practices also affect organizational culture and practices.* Societal culture has a direct influence on organizational culture, as the shared meaning that results from the dominant cultural values, beliefs, assumptions, and implicit motives endorsed by culture, results in common implicit leadership theories and implicit organization theories held by members of the culture (e.g., Lord & Maher, 1991; House et al., 1997).

4. *Organizational culture and practices also affect what leaders do.* Over time, founders and subsequent leaders in organizations respond to the organizational culture and alter their behaviors and leader styles



Numbers in parentheses indicate an interaction among two adjoining arrows

Fig. 1. Theoretical model.

(e.g., Schein, 1992; Trice & Beyer, 1984; Lombardo, 1983).

- 5, 6. *Societal culture and organizational form, culture and practices both influence the process by which people come to share implicit theories of leadership.* Over time, CLTs are developed in each culture in response to both societal and organizational culture and practices (e.g., Lord & Maher, 1991). CLTs thus differentiate cultures.
7. *Strategic organizational contingencies affect organizational form, culture and practices and leader behaviors.* Organizational contingencies (size, technology, environment) impose requirements that organizations must meet in order to perform effectively, compete, and survive. Organizational practices are largely directed toward meeting the requirements imposed on organizations by organizational contingencies (Burns & Stalker, 1961; Donaldson, 1993; Lawrence & Lorsch, 1967; Tushman, Newman, & Nadler, 1988).
8. *Strategic organizational contingencies affect leader attributes and behavior.* Leaders are selected and adjust their behaviors to meet the requirements of organizational contingencies.
9. *Relationships between strategic organizational contingencies and organizational form, culture and practices will be moderated by cultural forces.* For example, in low uncertainty avoidance cultures we expect that forces toward formalization will be weaker, and therefore the relationship between such forces and organizational formalization practices will be lower. In low power distance cultures, we expect that forces toward centralization of decision making will be weaker and therefore the relationship between such forces and decentralization and delegation practices will be lower. We specify such moderating effects in detail below when we discuss Phases 2 and 3 hypotheses.
10. *Leader acceptance is a function of the interaction between CLTs and leader attributes and behaviors.* Accordingly, leader attributes and behaviors that are congruent with CLTs will be more accepted than leader attributes and behaviors that are not congruent with CLTs.
11. *Leader effectiveness is a function of the interaction between leader attributes and behaviors and organizational contingencies.* Leaders who effectively address organizational contingencies will be more effective than leaders who do not.
12. *Leader acceptance influences leader effectiveness.* Leaders who are not accepted will find it more difficult to influence subordinates than those who are accepted. Thus, leader acceptance facilitates leader effectiveness.
13. *Leader effectiveness influences leader acceptance.* Leaders who are effective will, in the long run, come

to be accepted by all or most subordinates. Subordinates will either be dismissed or voluntarily leave the organization led by leaders they do not accept.

In summary, the attributes and practices that distinguish cultures from each other, as well as strategic organizational contingencies, are predictive of the leader attributes and behaviors, and organizational practices, that are most frequently perceived as acceptable are most frequently enacted, and are most effective. For a more detailed, fine-grained elaboration of the relationships depicted in Fig. 1, see House et al. (1997).

The questionnaire data collected in GLOBE Phase 2 consist of (a) responses to approximately 17,000 questionnaires from middle managers of approximately 825 organizations in 61 countries, relevant to societal and organizational dimensions of culture, (b) unobtrusive measures of the societal dimensions and responses to four different executive questionnaires administered to separate top-level executives in the organizations from which the middle management data were collected. The executive questionnaires elicited responses relevant to organizational attributes, organizational contingencies, and performance. These responses will be used in Phase 3 to test hypotheses relevant to structural contingency theory of organizational form and effectiveness.

This report is a very brief introduction to GLOBE. Interested readers can find a much more detailed description in House et al. (1999). They can also access GLOBE's public web site at <http://mgmt3.ucalgary.ca/web/globe.nsf/index>.

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