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Module: Intercultural Leadership in the Age of Globalisation

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Part A-Essay

Cultural and institutional impacts on leaderships in the St. Vincent and the Grenadines Tourism Authority (SVGTA) and Marriott International Inc. (MII)

The most successful Tourism and hospitality entities establish their culture on the basis of knowing what their customers require, meeting and surpassing their expectations. Nikolskaya et al. (2021) maintain that the strategic planning and management of tourism and hospitality companies are vastly affected by their internal environment of which organizational culture is a core determinant. Industry operatives are reliant on customer loyalty and customers in turn place great importance on the business' reputation during purchasing decisions, so the extent to which they are loyal is an indicator of the business' cultural impact within the industry (Nikolskaya et al., 2021). Thus a quality service, product and customer experience should all be essential parts of its culture. As a result of globalization cultural diversity is more entrenched in the work place (Rahul and Ganesan, 2015). This is the case even for those operating in homogenous societies, successful businesses can no longer operate in silos especially when one considers the ubiquity of social media and varied suppliers. Culture and leadership are inseparably linked (Groysberg et al., 2018) and as such leadership affects culture in the sense that leaders can inculcate their values on a group, this is especially relevant in new organisations (Schein, 1992 in Pennington et al., 2003). Schein's research showed that leaders who shifted into a business with an established culture did not have the same impact, instead the culture was more influential on the leadership. Hence cultural intelligence, diversity management and effective leadership should be integral components of all modern workplaces. There are some organisations like Marriott International

Inc. (MII) that have etched these components into their ethos from early on and there are those like the St. Vincent and the Grenadines Tourism Authority (SVGTA) that have not officially embed such practices for a variety of reasons. Subsequently, this essay will look at working definitions for leadership and culture, how they shape the business environment, and their various impacts on leadership within each of the aforementioned entities.

Leadership is an integral part of the business landscape and if long haul success is a strategic objective then effective leadership is necessary. For such a crucial concept it is striking that an accepted standard definition is lacking, yet Ciulla (in Boyne, 2010) acknowledges that most embrace leadership as “one person getting other people to do something” while Northouse (in Boyne, 2010) outlines that it is “...a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal” while Prentice (2014) adds that the individual who is able to do so on a consistent basis under an array of circumstances is a great leader. Prentice suggests that a great leader’s extraordinary feat is an understanding of fellow workers. Effective leadership must seek ways to motivate workers to want to give their best to achieving organisational goals (Kippenberger, 2002). This type of leadership is essential to the tourism and hospitality sectors where employee turnover tends to be higher than other industries. Qadri, et al. (2016) proposes that three principal factors determine the kind of leadership style: characteristics of leaders; characteristics of subordinates; and the organisation’s environment.

Research at Hack Future Lab (cited in Laker (2021) found that 84% of leaders agree that culture is critical for business success while 60% agree that culture is more important than strategy. Interestingly, Laker (2021) noted that despite its importance culture is often mismanaged and undervalued in most organizations. Schein (p.9, 1985 in Tierney and Schein, 1986) defines culture as “a pattern of basic assumptions-invented, discovered, or developed by a given group as

it learns to cope with its problems of external adaptation and internal integration-that has work well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems.” Though both culture and leadership are integral to a prosperous business, culture may have an influential effect on leadership for example in a mature company with a strong culture that reflects the past history of its founders, successive leadership could be heavily influence to stick with the ethos of the business or risk leadership failure. Schein (quoted in Duncan, 2018) expands that “culture is a product of years of learning and experience.” However, he adds that new values and behavior patterns can be imposed and only when they have been internalized over an extended period will they become part of an organisation’s culture. He further argues that when new leaders are thrust into establishments with strong cultures there must be a synergy between the existing culture and the leadership style to support effective management.

SVGTA is a small multinational organisation with its main office in SVG and three international offices: Toronto, Canada; New York, USA; and London, UK. It is a statutory body whose main focus are Marketing and developing service standards for SVG. There are 31 permanent employees all Vincentians: 27 at the main and 2 each at the overseas offices, creating a monoculture in that respect. Though the workforce composition is homogeneous in nationality the organisation outsources a number of services to multicultural organisation like PR and advertising. The country’s local population is racially diverse including descendants of Amerindians, African, Indians and Europeans so the local culture is an amalgamation of all. There are no known laws to mandate diversity and as such there are no official diversity policies within SVGTA. The leadership structure of the SVGTA is hierarchical: It falls under a Ministry of Tourism (MOT) and is govern by a board of directors drawn from industry stakeholders, there

is a CEO who reports directly to the board and a COO who is within the CEO's purview. The Research and Information, Marketing and Sales units fall under the CEO's supervision whilst Quality Development and Quality Assurance go to the COO.

Though the SVGTA falls under the influence of the MOT, it extends only to policy and securing finance from central government. MOT's leadership leans more to the style coined by Weber (cited in Masterclass, 2022), the bureaucratic, which is characterized by distinct decision-making hierarchies, distinct processes and regulations set by government policy with no room for flexibility. The SVGTA came to fruition in 2009 to subvert the red tape of bureaucracy and facilitate flexibility. Within the organisation leadership styles vary by CEO, Managers and projects. In its early period the SVGTA was led by a non-national CEO who demonstrated a mix of bureaucratic and autocratic traits like being rules centric and making frequently making unilateral decisions some of which employees felt contravened the inclusive values of local culture. This approach gave rise to an apprehensive environment and eventual resignations. Given the type of leadership style which the initial CEO adopted it is highly possible that choice was guided by a belief that workers need clear lines of authority and sharply defined roles akin to McGregor's Theory X which assumes that individuals innately dislike work, avoid responsibility and must be pressured and directed toward achieving organizational goals (McGregor, 1960 in Morse and Lorsch, 1970). This type of approach is best for highly regimented tasks and not necessarily work where creativity, innovation and team input are necessary.

By 2011 a new CEO was onboard with a leadership style that can be described in the early stages as transformative. Principal motivating factors are usually similar in same cultural settings (Prentice, 2014) so it can be argued that leaders who share the same national culture and whose

values align with those of the organisation should be more effective at leading in said setting.

Prentice (2014) suggest that perception plays a critical role because the one who leads effectively must seem to understand the individual's motivations and goals. Furthermore, leaders should be cognizant that their world view just like workers' can be skewed by preconceived notions and cultural biases which may lead to misconceptions, conflict and botched leadership. It wise that leaders employ emotional intelligence and shrewdness to navigate such pitfalls. This second CEO started an open door policy which enabled any member of staff the opportunity to give suggestions and air grievances. The general atmosphere of the organisation was less tense and there were no further resignations, plus within a year on the job the same CEO led the team to a successful destination rebrand. This scenario can be explained using the contingency theory where According to Vroom and Jago (2007) leadership is not inherent in the characteristic but in the actions of an individual. These actions must propel others toward the accomplishment of a higher goal which the leader and group members have consensus on (Vroom and Jago, 2007).

During the ensuing years the SVGTA CEO changed leadership style to best suit the circumstances at hand. During the tenure there were instances where the overwhelming majority of staff disagreed with a particular stance or project, yet the CEO held ground and autocratically followed through with the unpopular decisions. Additionally, the CEO was quite proficient at using storytelling to relay justifications to the point where even though one challenged an matter it usually persuaded the individual (s) to agreement to disagree and move beyond the issue at hand. Storytelling is embed in the fabric of SVG's national culture, because traditions are typically pass on orally. It is also adopted by almost all management within the SVGTA and used to convey relatability or inspire workers for seemingly insurmountable projects as well. O'Gorman and Gillespie (2010) believe that storytelling in organisation culture can combine the

prowess of mythology to create an effect and not necessarily to deliver facts .The authors further postulate that good leaders use storytelling to deliver direction, and insight in an effective way because when done right stories “...better transmit meaning, bring clearer understanding from chaotic experience and enhance empathy between speaker and audience” (O’Gorman and Gillespie, 2010).

On the Other hand, MII is a global hospitality and travel lodging company. Its roots began with food and beverage in 1927 when John Willard and Alice sheets Marriott opened a nine-seat A&W root beer stand in Washington, DC. After acquiring Starwood Hotels & Resorts in 2016 it became the largest hotel chain in the world and by 2022 it comprised 30 Brands with over 8000 properties across 139 territories globally (Marriott International, 2019). The global multinational organisation employed approximately 120 000 people worldwide in 2021 and peaked at 226 000 workers in 2016 (Statista, 2022). MII operates in North America, Asia Pacific region, Europe, Middle East and Africa region, and Caribbean and Latin America region (Statista, 2022). The organisation’s global reach necessitates that its leadership and workers must be just as diverse as the markets that it serves. The stakes are high for this multibillion dollar company and as such its official policy is inclusive of diversity, cultural sensitivities and a range of leadership styles.

Both MII overarching leadership style and organisation culture is epitomized by J. W. “Bill” Marriott, Jr. and the foundation set by his father J. W. “Bill” Marriott, Sr. Bill Jr joined the business in 1956, encourage his father to expand out of the restaurant industry into hotels in 1957 and was CEO from 1972-2012 (Marriott, 2019b). He is often described as a detailed oriented individual whose quest was to satisfy the customer. He greeted everyone by their first name, insisted they do the same and practiced a hands on approach to management. As a devout

member of The Church Of Jesus Christ Of Latter-Day Saints Bill proclaimed that “My church is at the core of my belief system.” (President & CEO Magazine, 2004 in Foucar-Szocki et al., 2004). Bill always acknowledged that the way in which associates interact with guest is MII’s real value and is best delivered by attracting, retaining, and inspiring the best people and this is done by returning values in measures beyond monetary rewards. Bill’s style of leadership parallels servant leadership which Greenleaf (1970, cited in Liden et al. 2014, in Setiawan et al., 2020) says is the result when leaders prioritise followers' needs as a means to inspire. It is distinguished by a desire to serve before leading and embodies a number of characteristics: listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, commitment to the growth of people, and building community (Spears 1995, cited in Setiawan et al., 2020). When the leader gives emotional support to help followers maximize their potential they in turn view the leader as a role model and emulate their example. Greenleaf (1977, cited in Sendjaya and Sarros (2002), in Setiawan et al., 2020) explain that such leaders possess a natural desire to want to serve and do so with everyone. It can also be proposed that Bill’s type of leadership set the stage for the dynamism in the successive leadership of MII.

From early on MII embraced diversity in its hiring practices, Bill once said that his ‘commitment to diversity is absolute’ and expounded that it was the only way to get the best talents for the sustained global growth which he envisioned for the business (Foucar-Szocki et al., 2004). Similarly Bordas (2007) echoed that a multicultural approach to leadership will help a business thrive in a global environment (in Rahul and Ganesan, 2015). MII’s company culture is guided by five core values: put people first; pursue excellence; embrace change; act with integrity; and serve our world. David Rodriguez (mentioned in Moody, 2019), MII’s then executive vice president and global CHRO highlighted that ‘putting people first’ is instrumental in MII’s global

management and underscores its commitment to diversity and inclusion. The company insists one of its main strengths is the ability to embrace differences as a means of fostering opportunities for all stakeholders. Ty Breland (cited in Amire, 2022), MII's current executive vice president and CHRO explains that "...it's not something that we just say...we show it..." Breland, like Bill, considers the way in which employees are treated as vital to MII's strategy and stresses that empathic and caring leadership is necessary. He cited one example in 2016 after MII acquired Starwood Hotels & Resorts, when top executives traveled to personally welcome hundreds of Starwood employees.

MII understands the delicate interdependence of a strong, highly valued culture and effective leadership to the point where it transfers it from one generation of managers to the next by a policy of promoting from within, therefore securing the essence of the business for the long haul. As reiterated by Groysberg et al. (2018) if in sync with workers values, drives, and needs, culture can unleash remarkable energy toward a common purpose thus enabling the organization to flourish. According to Amire (2022) the company has made the '100 Best Companies to Work For' list every year since its inception 25 years ago. This can be perceived as a testament to how mutual high regard that both company and employees have for the other. Rodriguez (in Moody, 2019), believed that the strategy of empowering workers with leadership works. He explained that MII's leadership confirm the organisations values and the workers do the rest. This is exemplified by MII's founder's motto: "Take care of your employees, they'll take care of your customers and the customers will keep coming back again and again." Rodriguez outlined that leaders in global organisation must be able to allow workers to express the organisation's core values in a fashion that is simultaneously most relevant to their work and culture (Moody, 2019). Rodriguez views on leadership across MII properties reflects motivation through inclusion

analogous to McGregor's theory Y which emphasizes that the average worker has an inherent interest in work, is self-directing, seeks responsibility, and has the aptitude to dynamically solve business issues (McGregor, 1960 in Morse and Lorsch, 1970). Though Kumar (2010, in Qadri, et al. 2016) points out that MII managers in Asian environments are likely to operate from the X theory in order to maintain the organisation's reputation. It is debated that there is a general belief that Asian people tend to avoid their duties and as a result management perceive their role as overseer to ensure employees attend to their work (Qadri, et al. 2016).

To survive, adapt and thrive an organisation must have a strong culture and effective leadership, both are intertwined and impact each other in varying ways. Leadership is affected by culture, the values, beliefs and ideals. While culture influences leadership behaviour, goals, and organisational performance. When leaders affect culture the impact is more easily identified in newer organisations that are more malleable. Founders, like Bill Marriott Jr., can leave a lasting impression on the company's culture and if it's the right set of values to anticipate and surpass customers' needs it can become a differentiating factor for the business. Intercultural and diversity management appear to play greater roles in heterogeneous societies and global multinational companies than they do in small organisation in homogeneous cultures. There is no perfect leadership style as different circumstance will necessitate varying styles to motivate employees to rise to that task at hand. An alignment of organisation culture with that of its employees and leadership can set the stage for a company to succeed in this modern and ever evolving business environment.

Part B-Reflection

My leadership competence and its implications for intercultural leadership and management

From as early as I can remember I have been introspective. As my thought process matured I observed some innate behaviours that concerned me. Primarily my aversion to conflict, difficulty saying no to people I care about; indecision due to overthinking and asking for help when it is needed. The more I discovered about my natural personality traits the more I was able to use emotional intelligence to work on what I considered my 'red flags'. Based on the 16 personalities quiz I am INFP-A or Assertive Mediator (NERIS Analytics Limited, 2013).

My personal values reflect my beliefs about the world, are formed from my experiences, my needs and my personality (Roccas et al. 2002). Prentice (2014) points out that the golden rule: "treat others as you would like to be treated" is one motivational rule that works well and as such this is the mantra that I have adopted. My top values are doing the right thing, commitment, and making a difference. I identify with Frankl (2004) who claims that when an individual identifies and actively work towards fulfilling their purpose they live more meaningful and longer live.

Though there are some personality types that are drawn to leadership more than others I personally do not subscribe to any personality owing leadership. I am a self-assured individual yet I have a tendency to shy away from leadership positions mainly because I abhor being the center of attention. However, if there is a leadership opportunity within one of my interest areas I will avail myself of the opportunity. Moreover, there are some personal traits which I have identified as being suitable for the culturally diverse work environment. However, there are also characteristics that can be drawbacks to effective leadership if I do not manage them properly.

They will be explored as the essay unfolds with relevant examples drawn from past leadership scenarios.

An enterprise's financial and social results are improved with prudent investments in leadership, culture, and human resources (Becker and Barry, 1996 in Burns et al., 2012). Businesses must hire and nurture individuals with the best prospect for high performance within their setting (Burns et al., 2012) plus detect and train their next generation of leaders (Brownwell, 2006, in SHRM, 2008). One way to do this is through the use of competency models to align employee behavior to organizational goals (Klein 1996 in Burns et al., 2012). While some leadership competencies are similar across the business landscape, each organisation must figure out which traits are essential to creating their competitive advantage (SHRM, 2008). Similar to a business' SWOT analysis I believe that individuals must realistically identify their strengths, work on weakness in order to capitalize on opportunities and mitigate threats.

Kurt Lewin classic leadership model differentiate three styles: authoritarian, democratic and laissez-faire. An authoritarian style is when there are clear delineations regarding who is in charge and this type of leader expects the team to respond accordingly. Interestingly, this type of leadership is not typically associated with the Mediator personality but I adopted this type of leadership in my early twenties. At that period I was a young teacher of teenage girls at a Roman Catholic secondary school. Though SVG consist of different ethnic groups there is little variance in the national culture and as Enz (1986) articulated the organisation culture in a homogeneous society reflects the culture of wider society. One part of my job was to reinforce the values of the school which was not always well receive by spirited adolescents. I observe that students generally had more respect for mature educators so I felt it was necessary to adopt a strict leadership style to help manage the class and deliver materials on time. There were rules which

guided our interactions and students were expected to follow them closely. I would not have won most loved teacher, but my students' grades were very good and my classroom management skills were excellent.

According to SHRM (2008) researchers at the Center for Creative Leadership pinpointed critical leadership competencies: for 'leading the organization'; 'leading the self'; and 'leading others in the organization' (Appendix A). When I evaluate myself from the standpoint of this model my greatest strength is in leading the self. I have a core belief system that aligns with the 'lawful good' spectrum (IDRlabs, 2022). I act with integrity in all spheres of my life; possess internal drive and purpose; have a commanding presence when necessary; believe that learning is a lifelong pursuit; proficient at self-management, highly self-aware and flexible enough to adapt to countless scenarios. I also possess a great capacity for leading others in my passion areas.

In my undergrad years at University of the West Indies (UWI) Mona campus I had an opportunity to demonstrate my leadership competencies for 'leading the self' and 'leading others'. This was my first experience in culture shock, because of our shared history and the extent of intermingling from decades of intraregional travel and wider corporation I expected to have more in common with the many Caribbean nationalities at the UWI Mona campus. I quickly realized that there are many variations in regional culture that are not always accurately depicted in literature. However, once we socialised it was easier to bond with persons who had similar interest (Holch, 2020). In my first year I became Household rep for a dynamic group of multinational students. This position allowed me to explore a democratic leadership style and necessitated that I motivate all members of our household to ensure that our space was immaculately tidy at all times and participate in all Hall activities. It was important for every

member of the household to contribute to how decisions were made so we had timely meeting to garner input and consensus on all matters that affected our household and Hall life.

In areas where I have minimal interest I will still put in an admirable effort in a leadership role because I believe in following through to the end of a commitment, but I know myself well enough to admit that I will struggle to motivate both myself and the team. I live by the fact that collaboration in a team setting is paramount; to support team members through self-improvement is a necessity that will provide the individual tools to perform optimally. I show up in my authentic self and embrace this for others as well. I am adept at building relationships but have difficulty maintaining consistency with networking; and managing teams or groups would require immense effort especially where tight deadlines must be kept. Additionally, leading the organisation would take me out of my comfort zone in the following areas: change management where the ensuing change contrast with my core values; and I am naturally risk adverse so taking risk in new frontiers with time constraints will be difficult because I need to examine such situations from all angles before committing to a specified action.

My most challenging leadership opportunity was during the undergrad period at UWI Mona campus, where I had to ‘lead others in the organisation’ -Vincentian Student Association (VINSAs- the Mona Chapter). I am a diehard Vincy and very passionate about promoting my culture so it was an easy decision to run for president in my 2nd year. I was an avid non-executive member in my first year thus the membership was familiar with my involvement and trusted that I would be an effective leader. Historically, VINSAs was one of the most active student associations and two of its core goals were to promote SVG and to organize events for members to experience the Jamaican culture. We also welcomed other nationalities to join us for such

activities. However, there were some processes that needed overhauling to increase organisational efficiency. By the end of my final year I had led the team to increase subscription membership, develop a logo, craft official membership certificates to formally acknowledge members and secure an annual grant from central government. My two years as VINSA's president was quite challenging because of academic commitments and the range of leadership I had to undertake. It can be likened to the Contingency theory of leadership. There were moments when I had to dig deep and be transformational, others where I had to employ autocracy and make critical decisions but overall I remember that most decisions were guided by the principles of democracy. On the other hand it was very fulfilling and even though it demanded a lot of my time, I absolutely loved uplifting my country.

Cultivating successful global leaders is a competitive strategy employed by multinationals and other similar entities (Caligiuri, 2006 in SHRM, 2008). Caligiuri, (2006 quoted in SHRM, 2008) defines a global leader "as someone that cultivates business in a foreign market, sets business strategy at a global level and manages globally diverse and diffused teams." Such leader face unique challenges that necessitate additional competencies (See Appendix). Kramer (2006 in SHRM, 2008), explain that these challenges include "managing a diverse group of employees and processes; adaptively approaching problems and challenges; adjusting to new values and cultures; and adapting to different types of business and personal stressors." To counter these challenges global leadership competencies must include "developing a global mindset, cross-cultural communication skills and respecting cultural diversity."

In my current post as a marketing officer at the SVGTA I have had numerous opportunities to lead on projects and have assessed that my leadership style is contingent on the situation at hand. Even more crucial is when I compared myself against the competency model (Appendix B) for

global executives I scored highly in all categories. Subsequently, I believe I have potential for management opportunities in intercultural environments. I have not had a prolonged exposure to leadership in a completely heterogeneous organisation or society so at this point my belief is based on what I know of my disposition. However, I cannot help but wonder how well I will function in an environment where the value system contravenes my core values. I know that I will thrive in a culturally diverse setting with almost any personality type but the organisation's core values must also be the right fit. For me to reach full potential as a productive member and inspire others through my own determination and sincerity there must be congruency with the organisation's culture.

In summary I have learnt that my self-awareness have steered me to understand my personality and character traits that facilitate competent leadership. My leadership style is fluid and depends on the environment and the circumstances at hand. Furthermore, I am comfortable in culturally diverse situations because I accept individuals based on their personality traits and not on their cultural background. My experience has taught me that I am most comfortable in an organisation whose values reflect my own ideals, it is where I can reach my most creative and inspiring height. My greatest challenges in the leadership sphere is contending with change management where changes contravene with my value system, keeping up with the demands of networking, making snap decisions, taking time constrained risk and sticking to tight deadlines. Ultimately, I have learnt that as a leader, regardless of the cultural setting, it is vital to have a mutually supporting team with the right combined skill-set that allows for a genuine team effort towards the task at hand.

Appendices

Appendix A

Figure 1: Leadership Competencies

Leading the organization:

- managing change
- solving problems and making decisions
- managing politics and influencing others
- taking risks and innovating
- setting vision and strategy
- managing the work
- enhancing business skills and knowledge
- understanding and navigating the organization

Leading the self:

- demonstrating ethics and integrity
- displaying drive and purpose
- exhibiting leadership stature
- increasing your capacity to learn
- managing yourself
- increasing self-awareness
- developing adaptability

Leading others:

- communicating effectively
- developing others
- valuing diversity and difference
- building and maintaining relationships
- managing effective teams and work groups

Source: Adapted from McCauley, C. (2006). *Developmental assignments: Creating learning experiences without changing jobs*. Greensboro, N.C.: Center for Creative Leadership Press. Permission granted from the Center for Creative Leadership to republish CCL's Model of Leader Competencies.

Appendix B

Figure 2: Global Executive Competencies

- Open-minded and flexible in thought and tactics
- Cultural interest and sensitivity
- Able to deal with complexity
- Resilient, resourceful, optimistic and energetic
- Honesty and Integrity
- Stable personal life
- value-added technical or business skills

Source: McCall, M., & Hollenbeck, G. (2002). *Developing global executives: The lessons of international experience*. Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Publishing.

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