

Culture not a factor in management styles globally

December 19 2016, by Jeff Sossamon

Geert Hofstede's "Culture's Consequences" is one of the most influential management books of the 20th century. With well over 80,000 citations, Hofstede argues that 50 percent of managers' differences in their reactions to various situations are explained by cultural differences. Now, a researcher at the University of Missouri has determined that culture plays little or no part in leaders' management of their employees; this finding could impact how managers are trained and evaluated globally.

"We all want a higher quality of life, a desirable workplace environment and meaningful work—no matter our home country," said Arthur Jago, professor of [management](#) in the Robert J. Trulaske College of Business at MU. "In management theory, we focus more on leaders' differences rather than their similarities. By analyzing the data in a new way, I found that managers across country borders and across cultures are more alike than different."

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, Jago surveyed more than 6,500 managers in 14 countries. All managers were participating in management development seminars around the world. Leaders were given 30 case studies; their reactions to each scenario were recorded.

The case studies ranged from relatively trivial decisions to more complex, unstructured judgments. Because each case was different, the researchers were able to measure behavioral intent, or the likelihood that a manager would engage in a given behavior. Jago recently reevaluated

this data in a more comprehensive manner and found that, more often than not, managers from different countries responded to the scenarios in the same way.

"We have all worked for managers that are more autocratic or more participative," Jago said. "Newer research is discovering that the differences we see in these types of managers are more determined by the circumstances at hand than individual or [cultural differences](#). Leaders, it seems, vary their responses to certain situations. Up until now, the study of these various scenarios focused on cultural differences and not necessarily on our 'sameness.' This interpretation not only exists in the U.S. but also in other countries where management styles are studied."

Jago suggests that patriotism and love of country may contribute to skewed interpretation of data and that cultural differences should not be exaggerated, inflated or overemphasized as a result. He says cultural differences—whether good, bad or neutral—may be less important than most scholars believe.

The study, "A contrarian view: culture and participative management," was accepted for publication in the *European Management Journal*.

More information: Arthur G. Jago, A contrarian view: Culture and participative management, *European Management Journal* (2016). [DOI: 10.1016/j.emj.2016.10.001](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.emj.2016.10.001)

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