An Analysis of Korean and American Leadership Styles in Business

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Abstract

Korea and the USA have recently proceeded in efforts to become closer trading partners through the passing of the United States-Korea Free Trade Agreement (KORUS) and FTAs. More economic integration calls for a stronger understanding of the influences of each other's cultures. Whether culture influences leadership style or not will be explored. Major influences include history, philosophy, and religion. The meaning of leadership and the characteristics of both of the cultures will succeed after the discussion of the major facets of culture. The application of the cultures and leadership in a business setting will be evaluated and explored. Sources will include interviews with Korean-Americans, other scholarly sources, and various culture and business books and magazines.

An Analysis of Korean and American Leadership Styles in Business

Introduction

Korea, known as "Han Guk" and "Dae Han Min Guk," is the United States' seventh largest trading partner (US Census Bureau, 2010). With the passage of the United States-South Korea Free Trade Agreement (KORUS FTA), "the Agreement will be the United States' most commercially significant free trade agreement in more than 16 years" (Office of the United States Trade Representative, 2011, para.2). The growing influences of Korea in Asia and the continuing presence of American troops in Korea call for stronger cooperation and understanding between the two countries. With the increased trade that will be flowing from both countries, familiarity of the countries' cultures and ways of doing business will be crucial in the sustainability of the free trade agreement.

A society's culture significantly impacts the style of leadership. Culture, in turn, influences the foundations of a society's treatment for others, ethics, value system, and view of the world. Culture is a driving force for much of the Korean peoples' view of life, even more so than religion since most Koreans observe Confucian principles and customs. Even those Koreans who practice some form of religion still observe and exhibit some Confucian customs, such as visiting ancestors' graves, bowing to elders during certain holidays to extend respect and receive money, and observing an ancestor's death on the day of their death with certain practices. The degree to which religious Koreans practice these customs is a matter of preference to most. Some deeply religious Christians no longer practice any sort of Confucian custom in regards to paying respect to ancestors and setting food out for them during certain holidays and times of year.

Since the United States is a conglomerate of cultures, defining American culture will be more of a challenge, but there are values and ideas that are associated in particular to America, such as self-determination, individualism, drive for success and recognition, and freedom of speech and religion. The beauty of the States is that there is no standard of American culture—anybody can be who they want to be, believe what they want to believe in, and say whatever they want to say. The States is a country of many cultures.

Does culture have a significant impact on the leadership norms and practices of a country? Culture involves the following factors:

- History: Wars, Invasions (both on other countries and suffered by country by outside invaders), long periods of famine and/or drought, the leaders of the past.

- Influences of geography.

- Structure of language: Are formal and informal used often in society? Or is there a common, every-day and everyman language used no matter what the hierarchy?

- Philosophy.

- Religion.

A country's past experiences with leaders can leave positive, neutral, or negative impressions with its citizens and can influence the expected norms that modern leaders possess. America's strong individualistic nature has promoted a belief of self-reliance and pride which can translate to resistance to government interference in businesses and a drive to accomplish ideas. Korea's traditionalistic belief of a leader possessing knowledge, honor, humility, and graciousness has led to a more paternalistic view of

higher leadership and management, but if these qualities are not evident within the leader, a lack of trust is directed toward him or her. Many American core values are influenced by the Founding Fathers and their works—combined with the effect of the nation being a melting pot, many Americans are staunch supporters of individualism, open-mindedness, and freedom.

Philosophical and religious views shape the culture of a group of people; thus it is important to consider these areas when exploring leadership styles. Many Americans have been influenced by the Christian faith, which in turn supports the Puritan work ethic that believes hard work and self-reliance are pleasing and beneficial to everybody, including God (*Encyclopedia Britannica,* 2012). Most Koreans are observers of Confucian philosophy, even if they are Christian. Despite Koreans' adherence to the customs of Confucianism, it is not a religion or faith; to them, the ideas are tradition.

The final part of the thesis will address why learning about the leadership styles of America and Korea is beneficial to those working in businesses as well as how these ways of thought can benefit from each other. An application of the values and challenges of each way of thought with regards to international business will be discussed.

Part I: Korea's Culture—An Overview

One of the most fundamental yet difficult ways to better relations with a country is to understand its peoples' way of thought and life, their culture. Korea's culture is vastly different from the US's in a variety of ways in regards to time, relationships, business, negotiations, thought processes, and whom to respect. A small peninsula jutting out from the southeast of China and Russia, Korea has been influenced by its bigger

neighbors but has retained its own culture and identity throughout thousands of years of invasions.

Confucianism

The single greatest influence on the thought processes of Koreans has been the teachings of Confucius. Although his teachings originated in China, Korea embraced the teachings to a greater extent than Japan and China did, as well as acted as a springboard for the teachings to reach Japan. To the adherents of Confucianism, the teachings are seen more as a lifestyle, and not a religion (Sprunger, n.d). One of the rumors as to why Confucianism was embraced in Korea was that Korean rulers saw it as effective for unifying and harmonizing the masses, and with Korea paying tributes to China, embracing a teaching from China would surely impress the Chinese leaders.

The main tenets of Confucianism include the sustaining of harmony (*Hwa)* in all situations, exhibiting respect and obedience to elders and superiors, recognizing a group mentality, and observing that all situations are governed by fate (Mente, 2008). In the history of Korea, the strictest implementation of Confucian ideology was during the longest dynasty, the Chosun, a period of almost 700 years (Mente). Because of the modernization of Korea, the Confucian ideology is not as strictly observed as it was before the fall of the Chosun dynasty, but these teachings remain the foundation for much of Korean thought; these teachings must be taken into consideration while dealing with all Koreans, even with those who have been partially Westernized (Mente).

Korean Way of Thought

According to Morrison and Conaway (2006), Koreans tend to think *associatively* (which means that they connect a new experience with similarities of a past one),

subjectively (they go with their feelings and emotions—if something does not feel right, it will not be done), and *relationally* ("Personal involvement is stronger than the rules and laws one might use to control behavior") (Morrison & Conaway, 2006, p. 461). They are also the most straightforward and emotional of all Asians, more independent and individualistic than their Asian neighbors, and can be very defensive, stemming from the history of being invaded or colonized multiple times by both Japan and China (Morrison & Conaway). Koreans are also known for their endless ambition and stubbornness, stemming from their more individualistic nature and freedom from their history of colonization and invasion.

While reliance on feelings for decisions may unsettle the Western businessman, a characteristic that disturbs Westerners greatly is the average Korean's belief in situational ethics. For over 700 years, justice was not law—it was what superiors and the "the teachings of harmony and social order," Confucianism said. Most ideas of fairness, justice, and equality—all very Western ideas—are foreign to Koreans and to much of Asia. Through Western influences on the country, more individuals are being exposed to Western ideas and values, but it will take more than a couple of generations to undo hundreds of years of the brainwashing done by the elites' version of Confucianism.

Depending on the situation, Koreans will adjust their responses and decisions accordingly. The actions of the Koreans are seen as inconsistent and unethical to many Westerners, while Koreans believe that being flexible to the unpredictable actions of fate is a worthy characteristic to possess. Many Koreans see Westerners' reliance on logic as being inflexible, hard to deal with, and disloyal, since loyalty to a Korean means being "flexible to change contracts and promises if the situation changes" (Mente, 2004, p. 35).

During the Chosun dynasty and its strict implementation of Confucianism, displays of emotions and individualistic opinions were severely discouraged, since they were seen to upset the general *kibun* (kee-boon), or "mood," of society (Mente, 2004). Disturbing *kibun* was disturbing harmony, and to a great extent this is still exhibited in Korea. Group consensus is still widely used for making final decisions (both in business and personal life), individuals do not usually engage in behavior that would inconvenience those around them (such as loud music from headphones, horseplay, or being too loud in a public setting, aside from festivals, dinner parties, and private gatherings).

Culture's Impact on the Business World

Culture impacts the following:

- The values society holds in esteem.

- The way people treat each other.

- Peoples' outlooks of the world.

- Various life experiences.

- How future generations will be raised.

The values that leaders hold in esteem. A value can be defined as "an ideal that has withstood the test of time and has become important in the framework of a society's behavior" (Punnett, 2009, p. 20). Values build the foundation for an individual's decision making and morals. Without solid values, a person's foundation will be shaky, and when that person is faced with difficulty, he or she is more likely to break under pressure.

Thoughts regarding time and business meetings. The majority of Koreans believe time to be cynical and polymorphic, an influence of the group/collective mindset.

Whatever is necessary and will contribute to the greater whole of things will get done, and will get done just in time with as much time as is necessarily needed be contributed to it. Despite this seemingly fatalistic mindset of time, Koreans are fairly punctual and will do everything in their power to ensure that things will get done. Deadlines and specific times for appointments are seen as guidelines, not absolutes. However, the Western businessperson needs to develop patience while waiting for his or her Korean counterpart—as Koreans appreciate and expect promptness and understanding from Western businesspeople, for Koreans are not intentionally late and expect their counterpart to understand that situations out of his or her control contribute to the tardiness (Keating, 2009). Much waiting will be done, but usually no more than twenty minutes at a time.

When first meeting a Korean businessman or woman, he or she may ask seemingly personal questions, such as salary, age, marital status, and family. These questions are meant to establish common ground and open the door to a deeper relationship. Avoidance in answering these questions may cause them to question the individual's trustworthiness, because unwillingness to share business communicates the hiding of something, possibly dishonesty (Keating, 2009). Avoidance of the questions will also make the Korean businessperson wary of doing business with the individual, since if no common ground can be established, no much more than a business relationship can be established. When times get difficult, it is much easier to break away from solely a business relationship than it is to break away from a partner with whom a relationship is established. Common business practices in Korea are bestowing favors upon those with whom a good relationship is had, giving them extra samples and

privileges than to a solely business partner. The individual who desires to get to business right away will be perceived as impatient, too serious about business, and unwilling to establish a relationship, so engaging in small talk and nurturing relationships is necessary.

Management styles and practices. Korean businesses are hierarchal and vertical, with higher management positions going to those who are older or possess connections such as college/high school connections and similar status in relation to coworkers and managers (indicated by wealth, area of country, and occupation) (Mente, 2004). It is very difficult for an individual to move through the ranks based solely on talent and ability, as trusting an individual is paramount to working together with him or her. The fewer connections and bonds that are formed, the more disadvantaged the individual is to making it somewhere within the company.

However, those who are given managerial positions do not abuse the power, as it is seen as an honor to be granted the responsibility of caring for a division of subordinates. Korean superiors exhibit a patriarchal view of caring for, disciplining, and rewarding subordinates (Mente, 2004). In turn, the subordinates pay due respect towards their superior, recognizing that the superior worked hard to be in the position and often possesses more experience, knowledge, and wisdom since most superiors and upper-management are older, more experienced individuals.

A peculiar practice a Western expatriate may notice is the averting of the subordinate's eyes while he or she is communicating with the superior. In the mind of the Westerner, the subordinate may seem distrusting, unconfident, and nervous—all undesirable traits of a businessperson. In contrast, constant eye contact is seen as rude and aggressive (Morrison & Conaway, 2006). Leaders, whether they are executives or

KOREAN AND AMERICAN BUSINESS LEADERSHIP   Estes 12

teachers, are seen as not likely to fall and are more likely to be given deference outside of the US in the form of titles and not being disagreed with in public (Grove & Hallowell, 1994).

Saving face. Saving face can be thought of as protecting dignity. Since harmony is such a vital part to Korean life, any infringement upon it is seen as something irreversible and unforgivable. One of the principle concepts of harmony is "saving face" which is "the principal measure of a person's reputation, dignity, and status" (Keating, 2009, p. 16). To belittle a person's persona in public is to threaten him or her not only with loss of face, but to shame his or her family, company, school, hometown, occupation, and much of what forms his or her identity. This is also part of the reason why Koreans are hesitant to say "no" and to immediately alert an individual of a problem, in order to preserve the face and *kibun* of their counterpart. Koreans believe it is a duty for all to support the faces of others and to humble their own to preserve social harmony; any disruption will be keenly felt (Keating).

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Part II: American Way of Thought

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Americans tend to be informal in their language and actions with others because everybody is thought of as equal since everybody is human. Four large influences on this way of thought are the Bible, English common law, the English Bill of Rights, and the Bible. The idea that nobody could escape judgment since all were born in sin (Romans 3:16) was derived from the Bible, English common law and the Bill of Rights laid the foundation for all men being under the law no matter what their class, and the Constitution was an embodiment of both—that Man is fallen and should have checks and balances since power corrupts. The pretense of social equality leads to an informal

business structure, which means superiors are respected, but are seen as just a little more privileged than subordinates are. Power distance is medium and hierarchies are flat. Formality is seen as insincere, stuffy, and sometimes fake.

Individualism sets many Americans apart from the rest of the world in how they conduct themselves. Everyone takes care of themselves, and no responsibility is to be placed on another, nor is anyone to expect anything from peers. This mindset derived from the first Americans who were strong enough to break away from their homelands to look for a better life and opportunity elsewhere. They counted on themselves and not on governments for protection and provision.

According to Bjerke (1999), Americans tend to think that the future, due to their diligence and drive for success, will be bigger and better. Wealth is usually measured with materialistic possessions and frequency of participating in the culture of consumerism. They also tend to think that nature should be subjugated to better mankind, and seek to harness the power of nature.

Time is precious to many Americans. The saying "time is money" is definitely applicable. As a consequence, Americans tend to have a short view of time. They seem to always look towards the future and are easily bored of the present—what is current is already getting old. In regards to business, technology is always being updated and new management practices implemented (Bjerke, 1999).

America has been a very action oriented culture that sees work as a necessity to living and play as a break separate from work. This mentality leads to admiration of hard work, but can also cause stress, impatience, and feelings of worthlessness to surface if performance levels are not as high as expected (Bjerke, 1999). A common saying about

this mindset is "Americans live to work; they don't work to live." Americans have one of the world's lowest vacation times offered to them by the workplace compared to other developed nations, and they are also among the people who are the least likely to take their vacation time. It is no surprise that Americans are the most over-worked, underpaid, and high-stressed workers in the workforce today. Many individuals work excessively because of massive bills, but many of them work because that is all they know to revolve their lives around. Work equals money and money is seen as the key that opens everything. Too many foreigners see the United States as a "nation of consumerism." Advertisements for items are literally everywhere, and material possessions advertise themselves as solutions to a boring, dull, and stressful day of work and uneventful life. And the eagerness that many people take with them to these stores is alarming and saddening—the value of life should not be equated in dollars and material possessions.

Characteristics of American businesses are their efficiency—being skilled and quick to solve problems because time is valuable. Logic is valued over intuition, stemming from the belief in controlling the environment in making ends meet (Bjerke, 1999). Businesses are very task-oriented and focused on profit. One of the most different views of business that Korean and Americans are is trusting individuals, no matter what their level is in the company, with the responsibility given to them. American businesses tend to view the worker as a competent human being who can think on his or her own and make his or her own decisions, who is not afraid of taking control of situations (Bjerke). There is another viewpoint, a management theory called *Theory Y,* that states that humans are inherently lazy and need monitoring, disciplining, and a structured form of work and command to get motivated into working at all (a schoolteacher approach). The thinking

of self-motivated competent human beings in the United States stems partially from America's history with leaders—every person is seen as created equal, and authority is there to serve (Bjerke). Everyone has a right to his or her opinion, even if it is different from the common way of seeing things and disagrees with tradition. Traditionally, Americans respected their leaders as well-meaning individuals who were servants of the people. Currently, an extreme yet common viewpoint of how the population sees the leaders is that they are corrupt powerful men who abuse their power in office or in the workplace for their own gain.

Part III: Leadership—an Overview

Leadership is vision and energizing others to pursue a goal or dream. *Management* is focused on results and efficiency. *Administration* executes through rules, policies, and procedures (Goldsmith, Baldoni, & McArthur, 2006). The GLOBE definition of leadership entails *influence*, "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" (House, Hanges, Javidan, Dorfman, & Gupta, 2004, p. 12). More details about the study can be found in Appendixes A-C.

The responsibilities of leadership are significant—without a clear vision or push in the right direction, a company is aimless, for "leadership is more than management, however, as it incorporates developing a shared vision throughout a group and stimulating others to behave in desired ways" (Punnett, 2009, p. 161). A leader's responsibilities include aligning the rhetoric of his or her organization with the reality of its operating environment. The leaders are the "roots" and "wings" of the company and its goals (Vicere, 2011).

The leader has the following five main responsibilities according to Vicere (2011):

- The Strategist who shapes the future.

- The Executor who is a main proponent in making things happen.

- The Talent Manager who engages in the talent pools both inside and outside of the company environment.

- The Human Capital Developer who plays a part in building the next generation.

- The individual proficient in investing in him or herself, since no time to self for reflection and rest can cause burnout.

The *AMA Handbook of Leadership* lists three behaviors that describe a leader's willingness and ability to understand and fully accept what it means to be a leader:

- The leader realizes that he or she is a role model 24/7.

- The leader acknowledges that he or she is now responsible for the organization's progress and ability to make change.

- His or her initiative will have the potential to drive a great deal of change (Goldsmith et al., 2010).

Many individuals do not see the worth of inspiration, but without inspiration, there is no purpose; people are not motivated to do anything. Inspiration enhances self-esteem to make the encouraged individual more confident and efficient. Inspiration can lead to creativity, as a positive outlook can help the individual see more angles. It increases cooperation, encourages the setting and obtaining of higher goals, leads to more

exploring and risk taking, and provides a stronger connection with the organization

(Zenger, 2011).

Business is largely dealing with people, and a leader is often thought of as an

individual who gets the job done, cares about results, and puts people behind the goals of

the organization. However, if a leader exhibits this mentality, he or she cannot have many

followers and admirers, nor can he or she be a good leader. He or she will be a good

worker, but not a good leader. Goleman (2004), an advocate of *emotional intelligence*,

challenged the traditional idea of a cold, results-oriented leader with research from over

200 organizations. The first principle of EI that he claims differentiates a good leader

from a great one is *awareness*. Good leaders understand themselves—although they are a

role model to others, they know their own weaknesses and strengths, and help others

understand, overcome, and cultivate their own. A leader cannot help empower if all he or

she knows is power and perfection. Such an individual is leading people—people with

doubts, fears, and weaknesses. The Beatitudes point to a good example of this principle:

> Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log
>
> that is in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the
>
> speck out of your eye,' when there is the log in your own eye? You hypocrite,
>
> first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the
>
> speck out of your brother's eye. (Matthew 7:3-5, *English Standard Version*)

Awareness gives the leader confidence in himself or herself and the ability to help others,

a realistic view of others' struggles, and an easy-going nature that is easy to work with

and relate with (Goleman, 2004). Being aware of peoples' problems, joys, and

opportunities before they become readily apparent will help reduce tension and stress and will help increase unity and emotional as well as relational development.

The second principle Goleman (2004) promoted was *self-regulation*. Self-control is especially vital in a leadership position. With heavy decisions being made, deadlines needing to be met, and a larger income needing regulation, self-control is essential to not destroying oneself when he is in this position of much responsibility. Some individuals think that since they have reached the top that they can then relax and delegate the work to those beneath them, but this is not teamwork or mature. Everyone is supposed to manage the work assigned to them and not be responsible for the work of those around them unless they have been asked and agree to take over a project or some other aspect of work. When a leader is able to control his or her feelings and reactions to certain events, he or she is a further inspiration to those around them. Moderation equates to responsibility, intelligence, frugality, trustworthiness, confidence, and maturity. Someone who cannot control emotions and reactions is seen as a child.

Empathy is the third skill Goleman (2004) proposed. An absolutely vital skill to have when doing business, empathy is both underrated and overrated—underrated because many logical individuals who do not depend on feelings for reasoning immediately discount it as not relevant to the goals of the company, and overrated because many businesses and organizations talk about empathy but never actually do anything in their own lives or in the lives of others to help others understand exactly what it entails. Being put into another one's shoes is not as easy as it sounds, especially if the individual has gone through experiences that the sympathizer has no experience or even a basis of comparison. Feeling what another person feels is only so useful as knowing what

to do with those feelings to help the person understand what he or she is going through and to help him or her find a solution, although there are times when individuals just want others to simply listen to them and not give advice. A leader needs to know how to utilize empathy to more effectively connect with the corporation and with the people who are counting on the company's success. Sometimes, the leader must be willing to listen to the concerns and thoughts of his or her followers, and give them the opportunity to articulate their thoughts. One of the leader's impulses is to give advice, but giving advice is not always the right thing to do, and the leader must use discretion of the situation to deduce if this is the case or not.

The fourth skill, *motivation*, is the ability to keep going no matter how difficult situations get and to never give up on set goals (Goleman, 2004). A leader needs to be consistent and patient, since change does not happen overnight. If the leader is passionate about something for only a few months and fizzles out afterwards, people will start questioning his or her stability and commitment. People do not want a leader who will leave too quickly. The leader must possess the self-confidence to carry out many goals and the determination as well as endurance to carry them out even if nobody believes in them. Sometimes followers are made through personal connections before a vision is communicated, and sometimes followers are brought on board after an idea has been set into effect. The leader must keep going even if results take a long time to show, for he or she must be ready to articulate and communicate the idea and show progress at any given moment.

The last skill that was mentioned is *social skill* (Goleman, 2004). Without being sociable, it is hard to obtain followers and influence individuals. What matters is not the

delivery of the message, but how the recipient interprets it. If the recipient interprets the

message incorrectly, it does not matter what the speaker said. If a point of contact is

failed to be established, there are no recipients to the visions, dreams, and ideas of the

leader! The leader can be as passionate about something as he or she wants to be, but if

he or she does not communicate it on a level which many can understand, those passions

and dreams will be meaningless.

Part IV: What Can the Cultures Learn from Each Other?

Since the world is a conglomeration of differing views and backgrounds, it is

impossible for one point of view to be applied to all situations and to be thought of as

superior. Punnett (2009) was wise in saying the following:

> A contingency approach, matching leadership approaches to the situation, is
>
> clearly the order of the day for international manager. These managers must
>
> evaluate each situation in terms of national characteristics as well as the other
>
> situational characteristics in order to find the best leadership approach. (p. 179-
>
> 180)

Modern leaders must learn to embrace uncertainty and train themselves to be

flexible and understanding. As more countries rise to the level of developed nation, the

American way being the only and right way is no longer true. Embracing change does not

mean to be totally rid of traditions but to embrace the change and adapt to it in the

culture's own way of evolving. What can American culture learn from Korean culture,

and vice-versa?

On the Concepts of Risk and Individualism

Americans have little fear of accepting change and risk, but one of their weaknesses is not being cautious enough at times (Bjerke, 1999). They see risks as opportunities—they are optimistic and entrepreneurial. American culture exhibits innovation, efficiency, and productivity with high focuses on talent, innovation, and technology. Witnesses to these characteristics are the numerous Nobel Prizes the United States has received and the high rankings it has from studies for being one of the world's most creative countries. Weaknesses of the culture include selfishness, greediness, and not accepting those that are in power (Bjerke). Americans are infamously recognized around the world as being self-centered and unconcerned about global happenings (other countries' people tend to know more about America and its foreign policy more than Americans themselves do), consumed with the material and the image possessions from outlets A, B, or C can give them, and getting ahead by any means possible even if it means cutting friendships, ties to the company, and sometimes even family ties, for what the individual is pursuing.

On the opposite side of the spectrum, Koreans are very good at being creative *within a box.* Numerous inspirations are drawn from thousands of years of history, legends, superstitions, and the like; the challenge Korea and countries who have thousands of years of history behind them are to adjust and adapt their foundations to the future, not letting traditional ideas and practices get in the way of innovation and change.

One of the problems Korea is having right now is how to balance the traditional with the changing present. One of the byproducts of overseas education (popular among Koreans) is that a new generation is being exposed to different ways of life, and some of

them are embracing these different values and cultures more than the culture of their

parents. They see the slow pace reform is taking to come to Korea and get restless. Older,

more traditional generations whose ways refuse to allow for more creativity is the

problem in their eyes. This generation of Koreans can be *too* cautious, afraid to step out

of their secure traditional shell. Many of them have a long-term mindset, as well as a

collective one. The weaknesses of the group mindset include the following:

- Not embracing the moment.

- Loss of creativity.

- Fear of what is different.

- Fear to take responsibility for oneself.

- Dependence on others for reassurance and input.

- Loss of personal identity and purpose outside of the group.

- Delayed realization of conclusions since confirmation from more than one

  party might need to be waited upon.

While most Americans come to an early conclusion of their desires in life, their

purpose, their place in society, and their mindset, most Koreans (especially if they are

raised in a traditional setting) do not truly know who they are until they separate from

their parents and society for the long term. Since their entire value system has already

been built for them, most Koreans have not taken the time to look within themselves and

figure out their own desires and value system. As long as it works for the group and

things progress smoothly, why bother to disrupt the balance with a simple different

thought? Sometimes, it is okay to be a little self-centered to discover oneself. This

principle is something that Koreans can take away from Americans. Americans can learn

from Koreans the concepts of humility and patience, since many Americans have

problems with overconfidence and questioning the consequences of their actions.

Team orientation. When one of the top traits of a leader is *team orientation*

(House et al., 2004)*,* a selfish, individualistic viewpoint poses challenges to the American

way of doing business. The concept of doing things in teams annoys many American

businesspeople because to them, the concept is seen as limiting. Many American

businesspeople are confident in their abilities, almost to a fault, and many believe that

they can take on projects by themselves. This self-sufficiency and initiative is seen as a

very positive attribute in the States if the individual is competent and disciplined enough

to do the entire task and does not embarrass him or herself, but when applied overseas, it

can be seen as prideful and disharmonizing.

Koreans already have an edge in this category, as working in teams is already

engrained within their culture (Mente, 2004). Korean leaders can learn from American

culture to not be afraid of simply voicing opinions, as leaders are humans capable of

error. Sometimes the pride of the leader needs checking in front of others, and others

might have other things to say on top of what one person says. It is interesting to get

multiple peoples' opinions—an idea might be generated that would not have been if

discussion and disagreement were not encouraged!

Americans can learn that it is sometimes okay to accept help from coworkers and

to get to know them on more than just a business and work related level. Giving other

people chances to work on a project will help free some time for other activities and

duties and will give the other person an opportunity to learn and apply more knowledge

to the project. In a way, letting them work on the project can enormously help with their

team and whatever skills are used in the project. Advancing in business is not just about advancing oneself, but advancing the generations to come and those around them.

      Language and systems. No barrier exists when Americans and language are concerned. There may be polite and jargon language made to help the speaker seem more educated and sophisticated, but there is no set way to communicate to someone in a higher position. The lack of a wall helps produce more unity, since no hierarchal barrier is established the minute a greeting is exchanged. This point of view stems from the fact that many Americans see themselves and others as human beings with equal rights and chances to make life better.

      Collective cultures exhibit principles of shared objectives, interchangeable interests, and commonalities among members. By contrast, individualistic organizational cultures are those that emphasize differences and unique attributes among employees (House et al., 2004). The advantages of a hierarchal system which is commonly found in a collective culture include structure and little loss of control. The disadvantages of this system are loss of creativity, inflexibility to new situations and structures, dependence on position in company to give meaning to work, and not transferring the power and responsibility to those who might be more qualified. One of the biggest barriers in Korean culture to leadership is the strong practice of hierarchy through language and expectations. According to the program manager of Korea-American Student Conferences, Sarah Soo-Kyung Henriet, formal and informal patterns of speaking instantly erect a wall, enabling speakers to evaluate their "position" in relevance to each other (Personal Communication, January 25, 2012). Korean language has three main divisions—formal, informal, and slang. Formal language uses more archaic words based

on Chinese and longer endings are added to the verbs. Informal language uses fewer

endings and more recent forms of words. Slang is a constantly changing division and is

popular among the younger generation. The following scenarios can help in the

understanding of the various forms of the language:

- A child walks up to a grandpa, and to be polite and honoring, the child

    speaks to the grandpa in formal language.

- A manager of a small company is introduced to the president of a large

    company. The manager of the small company uses formal language until

    either a) an informal relationship is established or b) the president informs

    him or her that they can stop using such formal language.

- Two friends in high school speak to each other informally and in slang,

    but when they run into their teacher, they immediately shift to formal

    language.

- Hyemi is 21 years old, and addresses her coworker Meejin who is 25 as

    Onni (older sister).

If an individual uses formal language, the person being spoken to is usually older

or in a higher position. It is almost unheard of for two people from different positions in

society to talk informally to each other. Either one speaks formally to the other, or they

are usually close friends. However, Korean hierarchy is so pervasive that even if an

individual is a year older than another one, it is respectful and preferred if the younger

Korean speaks formally to the older one.

With these walls already in place, Korean leaders find it very difficult to connect

with their followers on a personal level. They can stir them and motivate them with

words and emotions, but cannot connect with them as easily. Since many leaders in

Korea are from the upper class and have attended prestigious schools, many Koreans tend

to be inwardly jealous of these leaders, desiring their positions and doing everything they

can to get onto their good side to hopefully be chosen as a successor to a position that he

manages.

      The Image of leaders. American culture has a sort of fascination with leadership.

Leadership is listed as a required skill for the job market, stories of the great deeds of

leaders are romantically retold, and the world's top MBA programs are located in the US.

Those in leadership are generally respected, but still looked upon as normal human

beings. Most leaders in the States do not come from overly privileged backgrounds, and

most individuals can relate to one leader or another. There is a better chance of getting

into a prized position if one is privileged, but everybody has a fair shot. The belief is that,

if one works hard enough in the States, he can get anywhere and get anything.

      The image of a leader in America is important, but not nearly as influential as it is

in Korea. If a leader makes an error in the States, he or she may be much less respected,

but many individuals are willing to give him or her a second chance, especially if an

amazing good deed was done by the leader to amend wrongs. The image of leaders is

very important in Korea, for if there is anything wrong found with them, the media and

the people will find it very difficult to respect them to the level that they once had; their

leadership will be compromised. Higher status and formal language make the leader

somewhat untouchable to the regular person, which results in the image of the leader

being criticized more harshly.

A culture of comparison. There is a disease of comparison amongst the Korean people, a negative result of group culture and the rapid development of the country after the Korean War. Group culture, or *Uri* (us) mindset, causes Koreans to be very conscious of what others think of them and to be more mindful of how they rank compared to others. The advantage of this mindset is that it is more favorable in producing unity; the drawback is that people do not take responsibility for themselves and their actions. If they are not doing as well as someone who is roughly equivalent to them in status, class, or income, they feel as if they are not doing enough to beat their competition. After the Korean War,

> Korea was at the bottom of the bottom, and they had no choice but to move up. They didn't want anybody to look down on them anymore, and that's where you get your miracle story of the "Asian Tiger". At first, this mindset was seen as the way to go, the way to not be looked down upon the rest of the world, to get to the top. But the negative side of this mindset has surfaced in modern Korea today. The characteristics of jealousy, selfishness, comparison, pride, superficiality, and criticism have become more rampant than the diligence, respect, and humility that is so characteristic of Korean culture. And everybody is fed up with it. (S.S. Henriet, personal communication, January 25, 2012)

The younger generation is not as strict as adhering to the principles of Confucius as their parents' generation has been, at least not willingly. Many young Koreans are tired of the traditional way of life and want there to be reform, but since so many influential individuals are of the older generation the young people must conform to traditional ways to impress them and get a job. "They are in a box—they're encouraged to think within

the box but not outside it. The younger generation feels trapped and frustrated, and are waiting for someone who thinks outside the norms to change things to come back home" (S.S. Henriet, Personal Communication, January 25, 2012). This box is a double-edged sword—Koreans tend to be very good at whatever is within the box, but since they are so focused on what is in it, they do not see the opportunities that lie outside.

Although Koreans expect for their leaders to come from the upper class, many now want a leader who can sympathize with them and drive change, not just dream about it. Young people are frustrated with the power that the older officials hold, seeing their points of view as less qualified and outdated. Many of them want a leader who will break out of the mold, who will get into power by untraditional means, who is not the "normal" leader. "I expect that the next big leader of Korea will either be a Korean-American or a Korean from the middle class that many can relate to, someone who will be able to sympathize with their situation even though he or she makes it to the top" (S.S. Henriet, personal communication, January 25, 2012).

Unless a major reform takes place within the Korean government and high-ranking officials' offices, Korea will not change its destructive cycle of comparison until all of the traditionalists pass on, and a younger more-open minded generation fills the spaces. Contrary to popular belief that all Koreans are still ardent observers of Confucian tradition, the younger generation is not as strict in the observance of the traditions as the older one is. The younger generation definitely exhibits individualism more in line with American thinking. More of them desire to stand out somehow from their group, voicing their opinions more often, and caring about only themselves.

Part V: Conclusion

One of the categorizations of the world is by geography, and one facet of geography is borders. The world is full of hundreds of countries, and each of their inhabitants have a distinct way of thought and outlook on life influenced by that region's history, philosophers, language, and values. The individuals who rise to obtain leadership positions are no doubt influenced by the viewpoints of their upbringing, the country/countries they have lived in, their life experiences, and various other influences too numerous to list.

No matter what the viewpoint, leadership is a universal concept with societal, environmental, cultural, and various other factors. Leadership possesses certain characteristics that carry over from one culture to the next since humans possess a set of characteristics. Certain ones are more evident in some cultures and situations than in others due to different value systems, upbringings, outlooks on experiences in life, and opportunities presented. The extent to which culture plays a part in leadership is influenced by how strongly common cultural factors are evident in the leader's life, how much of the factors the leader recognizes within him or herself, and to what extent the leader will choose for those factors to have an influence in his or her life. The sooner the leader recognizes that there are more than just his or her main cultural viewpoint that is alive and well in this world, the sooner he or she can learn the other viewpoints and adapt the best viewpoints for the best situations.

Korean and American cultures are vastly different, but difference should not mean dissention, and different points of view present learning opportunities and a chance to discover more about oneself and the world. The key to everything is *balance* and

compromise—there is no one right way to do everything, and one person is not capable of thinking of all things from all angles at one time, so each person needs the input of others. When that input is from a different point of view, the subject matter has the potential to be more understood and fully discovered.

Doing business across cultures bring beauty that comes from working with those who are different, but very similar at the same time. Despite cultural barriers, those individuals can share the same goals, backgrounds, desires, and points of view. Business is so precise, yet so big picture at the same time—precise to know individuals on a personal level to cater to their needs better, and big picture in that all of us are people under the same sky living on the same planet.

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APPENDIX A: Hofstede's Study (Punnett, 2009, pp. 26-28).

Individualism (IDV): the degree to which individual decision making and action are accepted and encouraged by the society. Where IDV is high, the society emphasizes the role of the individual; where IDV is low, the society emphasizes the role of the group.

Uncertainty Avoidance (UAI): the degree to which a society is willing to accept and deal with uncertainty. Where UAI is high, the society is concerned with certainty and security, and seeks to reduce uncertainty; where UAI is low, the society is comfortable with a high degree of uncertainty and is open to the unknown.

Power Distance (PDI): the degree to which power differences are accepted and sanctioned by a society. Where PDI is high, the society believes that there should be a well-defined hierarchy in which everyone has a rightful place; where PDI is low, the prevalent belief is that all people should have equal rights and the opportunity to change their position in the society.

Masculinity (MAS): the degree to which traditional male values are important to a society. Traditional male values incorporate assertiveness, performance, ambition, achievement, and material possessions, while traditional female values focus on the quality of life, the environment, nurturing, and concern for the less fortunate. A high MAS indicates that the sex roles are clearly differentiated and men are dominant and a low MAS means that sex roles are more fluid and feminine values saturate the society.

APPENDIX B: Confucian Dynamism (Chinese Culture Connection): incorporates ideas of tie and activity. A high CD means that the society sees things long-term and looks to the future; a low CD points to a shorter time horizon and concern with events in the present and the immediate future (Punnett, 2009).

APPENDIX C: GLOBE Study

There are six "culturally endorsed leadership theory dimensions," or "CLTs" that are

common attributes of leadership all over the world. The six CLTs are:

CHARISMATIC / VALUE-BASED: Most common value associated with

outstanding and transformational leadership. This CLT dimension "reflects the

ability to inspire, to motivate, and to expect high performance outcomes from

others on the basis of firmly held core values" (House et. al., 2004, pp. 61, 65).

Charisma-inspires devotion, commitment through persuasiveness (House et al, 2004, p.

500).

TEAM ORIENTED: Second on the scale for association with outstanding leadership. It

is described as emphasizing "effective team building and implementation of a

common purpose or goal among team members." The team oriented CLT

dimension is statistically linked to five primary leadership dimensions:

"collaborative team orientation," "team integrator," "diplomatic,"

"administratively competent," and a *reverse scored* "malevolent" (Grove, 2007).

PARTICIPATIVE: This dimension "reflects the degree to which managers involve

others in making and implementing decisions. The United States was the single

culture in which participative leadership had a positive influence on employee

performance. The actual *level* of participation for the United States was also the

highest in all sampled countries" (House et al., 2004, p. 61).

HUMANE ORIENTED: This dimension "reflects supportive and considerate

leadership, but also includes compassion and generosity" (House et al., 2004,

p.62).

SELF-PROTECTIVE: "From a Western perspective, this newly defined leadership

dimension focuses on ensuring the safety and security of the individual or group

member" (Grove, 2007). It is associated with five primary leadership dimensions:

"self-centered," "status conscious," "conflict-inducer," "face-saver," and

"procedural" (Grove, 2007).

AUTONOMOUS: refers to independent and individualistic leadership.