

## ***Cross-Cultural Leadership: (XLQ) by Grisham, Thomas***

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***Reviewed by Dr. George Simons at [www.diversophy.com](http://www.diversophy.com)***

Some years ago, rushing for a five hour flight, I popped into an airport news shop and spotted the name of my favorite science fiction author on the cover of a book I had not seen before. I grabbed it, splashed cash on the counter and ran to the gate. Not until cruising altitude did I discover to my great disappointment that this was an old novel in a new cover. Later, telling this story to my publisher I was stunned to hear that at least some publishers have a regular schedule of fresh packaging for literature. Repackaging is true not only of covers but of content as well. Unfortunately in our era of branding and rebranding, leadership, intelligence, and coaching have become the buzz words for positioning services to organizations. It is therefore the reviewer's responsibility to carefully examine entries into the literature or management intervention offers to discern true value added from repackaged and shopworn goods.



Cross-Cultural Leadership: (XLQ, not to be confused with the financial software having the same acronym) is a doctoral dissertation pure and simple. It begins with the plan of the research followed by the obligatory reviews of literature in which the author pulls out of the boilerplate and established repertoire of intercultural studies, from Hofstede to GLOBE, the various values and descriptors suggesting the theoretical, practical and personal competencies and tools of leadership in cross-cultural situations. The listing is largely inclusive and not critical, other than in its selection of details to support the hypothesis of the thesis. Grisham's literature surveys are conveniently ordered by their chronological development which prevents the reader from being swamped by the related and conflicting assessments of the authors cited.

Grisham's aim is to produce a model for cross-cultural leadership intelligence (XLQ), which is a framework for assessing and training project managers in cross-cultural leadership skills. So his next step is to review the literature surrounding the meaning and relevance of cultural knowledge and the development of "intelligence" for project development, particularly in the long term. Refreshingly, his approach revolves around the theory and usage of metaphor to convey meaning. Here he pursues from classical philosophies and poetry to modern scientific analysis and management literature to explore what is a metaphor and what are its pros and cons in both signaling meaning and interpersonal connection and ultimately developing cultural competence in those who lead and advise.

Metaphor is connected to myth, symbol, storytelling, proverbs, and scripting in communicative praxis. Metaphor, usually rooted in at least a modicum of physical or bodily sensation, can be a bridge for human experience, but can be developed into a highly cultural specific and less penetrable entity reflecting a group's values and way of life, such as the prevailing sports metaphors in US life and business. Various approaches to assessing the levels of cultural competence, e.g., the Six Sigma approach is adapted to review the development of the individual toward cross cultural intelligence. I found the discussion of metaphor to be the most interesting aspect of the dissertation.

Next there is a survey of leadership theory literature again in historical order. Much of the theory cited is based on military leadership and subsequent metaphors. Expectations of leadership are related to what followers expect and situations or contexts demand. He focus of the review here as throughout the research centers in identifying threads that lead to the five elements of empathy, transformation, communication, and power essential to Grisham's thesis. These are parenthetically printed in bold type according to the author's assessment of their correlation with critical terms reported in the literature surveyed.

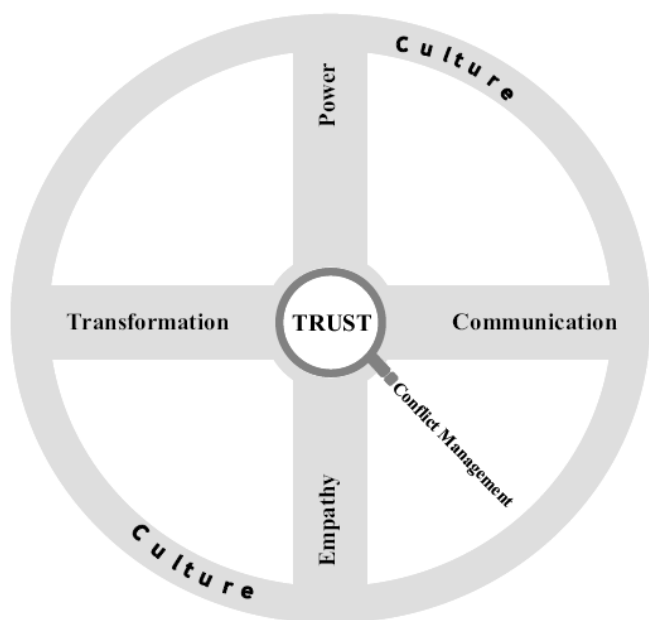
In Chapter Five, Grisham moves on to an historical review of conflict management theory and practice, lightly dipping into negotiation theory, again in order to underline the five above mentioned elements and lead into the next chapter where he formally presents his “Cross-Cultural Leadership Hypothesis.”

Grisham defines *leadership* in an all-encompassing way whatever the level of maturity or field of endeavor, viz., “This work defines leadership as the ability to inspire the desire to follow, and to inspire results that surpass expectations.” Cross-Cultural Leadership Intelligence (XLQ) in the author’s work then becomes “a learned set of skills that can be effectively translated into other cultures.” At this point, since the five elements have been used to label so many values and phenomena in the various fields of literature he has so far examined, it is necessary to pull them together in a concrete definition. Grisham posits a consensus around *empathy, transformation, communication, and power* and further posits that the effective leader is one who in a specific cultural context can bring together the culture, the organization, the leader, him or herself, and the environment. This competence is his active definition of XLQ. He then goes on to define the essence and the role of each of the five elements that he has used to sort the extensive literature he has so far perused again embedding them in literature that discusses them.

Grisham asserts that his five elements are universals, i.e., valid and essential whatever the culture under discussion, and the balance of the work looks at the author’s process for testing this hypothesis and the results of that trial. He relates how he came to choose a quantitative analysis and employ an online Delphi approach to the research project. He reviews the literature evaluating the Delphi technique and its applications. He describes the selection of the panel of respondents and the chronology of the research conducted with the online Survey Monkey tool.

Chapter Eight presents the results of the enquiry and explores the confirmation level for the elements of the hypothesis as found in the responses of the panel. Each element is presented in terms of its identified components and the level of confirmation of each. The author offers his personal comments on why various elements received higher or lower confirmation rates on the part of panel members.

The author sums up his exploration in the final chapter with a visual model for XLQ in the form of a steering wheel as follows.



“The hub of the steering wheel is Trust, without it, leadership cannot function. The spokes of the wheel are Transformation, Communication, Power, and Empathy. The rim of the wheel is culture, for without it, the wheel would in fact not be a wheel, and would be ineffective. The lubricant for the wheel is Conflict Management. Conflict can be used to stimulate creativity, but if not managed can cause enough friction so that the wheel cannot turn. The wheel also assumes that the leader has knowledge of each component of the wheel, and an understanding of the goal. A weakness in any component will reduce the effectiveness of the leader, and will potentially lead to a non-sustainable business model.” p.220

Following the presentation of the model is a table of the descriptors and sub-descriptors of each of the five elements it contains. Grisham also explains his choice of the steering wheel model over his original intentions to develop a Quibla compass that would have provided direction and measurement toward a specific target. The author began with the intent of benefitting project management with a leadership model and tool, which he felt has been sorely lacking theoretically and practically in that field. He has come up with a generic, one-size-fits-all model for leadership that that, despite the enormous citations of literature in several fields, remains on a highly abstract set of English language descriptors leaving the reader to answer the question one expected the author to answer, i.e., "How does this fit here?" the lesson is obvious, "Do your own work and don't expect others to do it for you."

The dissertation closes with the usual addenda of references, a glossary (which replaces cumbersome footnoting for many topics), and several appendices. The first of these cross-references the terminology of the thesis with the GLOBE terminology. The second presents the Hofstede data from the IBM study. There are appended a set of tables displaying the CLT Leadership Dimensions from the GLOBE Study. Appendix Six presents the questionnaire used in the Delphi study. Appendix Seven cross-references GLOBE Cultural Variables with other authors' delineation of cross cultural dimensions. Finally there is a listing of the author's clientele and papers.

In sum, I am not sure why anyone beyond a dissertation committee should read this work, even in its present somewhat streamlined form, or what motivation would exist to pursue research along the lines suggested to further expand and validate it. It does provide us with another example of how *etic* research and positioning needs to be related more solidly with *emic* data and perhaps fuels further the growing dissatisfaction with the aging categories of research in the intercultural field and how their use is forcing students and researchers into the "repackaging" that I mentioned at the outset of this review. To paraphrase a venerable axiom for the present age, "Of the making of models, there is no end."