

The GLOBE Project Robert House (1999)

GLOBE is the acronym for “Global Leadership and Organizational Behaviour Effectiveness,” the name of a cross-cultural research effort that exceeds all others (including Geert Hofstede’s landmark 1980 study) in scope, depth, duration, and sophistication. The first book-length report of the GLOBE Research Program was recently published by Sage, and it is this book that GROVEWELL is over viewing here. It is Robert J. House et al., *Culture, Leadership, and Organizations: The GLOBE Study of 62 Societies*, Sage Publications, 2004.

The GLOBE Project's Definition of Leadership

The GLOBE researchers studied leadership worldwide; they defined leadership as "...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" [p. 15].

Introductory Overview of the GLOBE Research Effort

Conceived in 1991 by Robert J. House of the Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania, and led by Professor House, the GLOBE Project directly involved 170 “country co-investigators” based in 62 of the world’s cultures as well as a 14-member group of coordinators and research associates. This international team collected data from 17,300 middle managers in 951 organizations (for details about the research sample). They used qualitative methods to assist their development of quantitative instruments. In order to accurately and sensitively record the nuances of local meanings, all instruments were developed in consultation with members of each target culture, and instrument translation was done with enormous care. Specific attention also was paid to the effect of "response bias" on data-gathering and -analysis. Relevant previous literature was exhaustively reviewed and, as appropriate, applied (making the book being overviewed here a veritable bibliographic goldmine). Ultimately, 27 research hypotheses were tested.

GLOBE is a research project of at least three phases. The first two are dealt with in the recently published book. Phase 1 involved the development of research instruments. Phase 2 assessed nine fundamental attributes, or cultural dimensions, of both societal and organizational cultures, and explored how these impact leadership in 62 societal cultures. Phase 3, currently underway, is primarily studying the effectiveness of specific leader behaviours (including that of CEOs) on subordinates’ attitudes and performance.

GLOBE’s 62 Societal Cultures and 10 Societal Clusters

The 62 “societal cultures” assessed by GLOBE range from Albania to Zimbabwe. They comprise all the business-oriented societies you might hope to find with the exceptions of Norway and Saudi Arabia, plus several you might not expect such as El Salvador, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kuwait, Namibia, Qatar, Slovenia, and Zambia.

These societal cultures are not referred to as “nations” because the researchers were admirably thinking as social anthropologists instead of political scientists. Among the 62 are included “Canada (English-speaking),” “Germany (Former East),” “Germany (Former West),” “South Africa (Black sample),” “South Africa (White sample),” and finally both “Switzerland (French-speaking)” and “Switzerland” [said on p. 725 to be German-speaking].

To aid in the interpretation of findings, the researchers grouped the 62 societies into 10 “societal clusters” or simply “clusters.” The clustering decisions were finalized before the research findings were collected, not as a result of the findings. One of the more interesting chapters in the book (Chapter 10) concerns the reasons why each societal culture was included in this or that cluster. The ten societal clusters, and the number of societies within each cluster, are as follows.

The Ten "Societal Clusters" and Number of Societies in Each

Anglo - 7	Latin Europe - 6
Nordic Europe - 3	Germanic Europe - 5
Eastern Europe - 8	Latin America - 10
Sub-Saharan Africa - 5	Middle East - 5
Southern Asia - 6	Confucian Asia - 6

There are almost no surprises in terms of which societies appear within each cluster. I say "almost" because there is one: Israel is in the "Latin Europe" cluster. About this decision, the authors explain that, long ago, some Jews in Southern Europe converted to Catholicism due to religious persecution while others migrated to Eastern Europe. Members of the latter group were largely responsible for founding Israel, and they "retained their social and business ties with the Latin European region" [p. 184].

GLOBE's Standards for Measurement: Nine Cultural Dimensions

The first major question addressed by the GLOBE researchers was which measurement standards to use so that they could be precise about the similarities and differences among various societal and organizational cultures. After a thoroughgoing literature review as well as two pilot studies, the team identified nine "cultural dimensions" that would serve as their units of measurement, or (in research language) "independent variables."

Cultural dimensions have been an often-used tool of intercultural researchers for decades; readers familiar with them will find among the GLOBE nine some that are well-known and some that have been carefully redefined or even newly developed. Each of these nine units of measurement receives a great deal of attention in the book, and is discussed at length in a third interpretative article. Here

I will list them by name only:

The Nine Units of Measurement or "Cultural Dimensions"

Performance Orientation	Uncertainty Avoidance	Humane Orientation
Institutional Collectivism	In-Group Collectivism	Assertiveness
Gender Egalitarianism	Future Orientation	Power Distance

For readers who are not familiar with cultural dimensions, I will explain that each of these is conceptualized and depicted as a *continuum* between two extreme poles. For example, people in a society or an organization might be extremely non-assertive, extremely assertive, or anywhere in between. As visually portrayed in my third article, the GLOBE researchers used a 7-step rating scale. Continuing with assertiveness as our example, "1" is *greatly non-assertive*, "4" is *neither non-assertive nor assertive*, and "7" is *greatly assertive*. If you are new to cultural dimensions, it is essential that you avoid thinking of them, implicitly or explicitly, as dichotomies.

Another significant fact about GLOBE's nine cultural dimensions is that each one was conceptualized in two ways: *practices* or "as is," and *values* or "should be." Continuing with the example above, people in a society or an organization could rate them in actual practice as "6" or somewhat assertive, but simultaneously could rate themselves as valuing, or preferring, a state of affairs that is "3" or slightly non-assertive. Some of GLOBE's most fascinating findings come to light because the team consistently sought to compare respondents' *values* with their *practices*. (<http://www.grovewell.com/pub-GLOBE-intro.html>)