

How worldview and culture shape leadership and the implications for Christians. Jeremy Peckham

Pioneering a new venture since 2009 for teaching the bible and better farming practices to rural pastors in Kenya brought me face to face with the way in which culture shapes peoples attitudes and behaviour especially in the workplace and in leadership. At the same time, through working with Christians from Central and Eastern Europe, I began to realise that there were differences here too. This might not be surprising to some but what surprised me was seeing these differences reflected amongst Christians. My presuppositions were that Christians must surely think the same way about work, leadership and ethics. It led me to think much more closely about the way in which culture, even my own Western culture, shapes the way we do things, our priorities and the way in which we lead as Christians.

A fair amount of work has been done on analysing cultural differences and how different cultures should engage with each other although most has been written from a Western perspective. This tends to centre around how global businesses engage different cultures or how Western missionaries should engage with other cultures.

Being and Doing

Whilst it is impossible to be definitive about cultural differences, some broad characterisations can be helpful in defining these differences. Some analysts group cultures into being and doing cultures with doing cultures being more task orientated and being cultures more relationship orientated (Figure 1).



Figure 1: Doing versus Being culture characteristics and example countries.

Another way of looking at culture differences and the shift in culture over time is along the axes of secularisation and individualism. The World Values Survey has produced a fascinating overview of the major culture groups around the globe using metrics to capture these values (Figure 2). These axes are more familiar perhaps to Christians and apologists since they reflect the extent to which the West in particular has moved away from a belief in God. They demonstrate that survival cultures like Africa retain their traditional beliefs or the Christian faith that they have come to embrace more recently whereas Europe that has had a long history of belief in God has abandoned this and become much more individualistic or concerned with identity. It is interesting

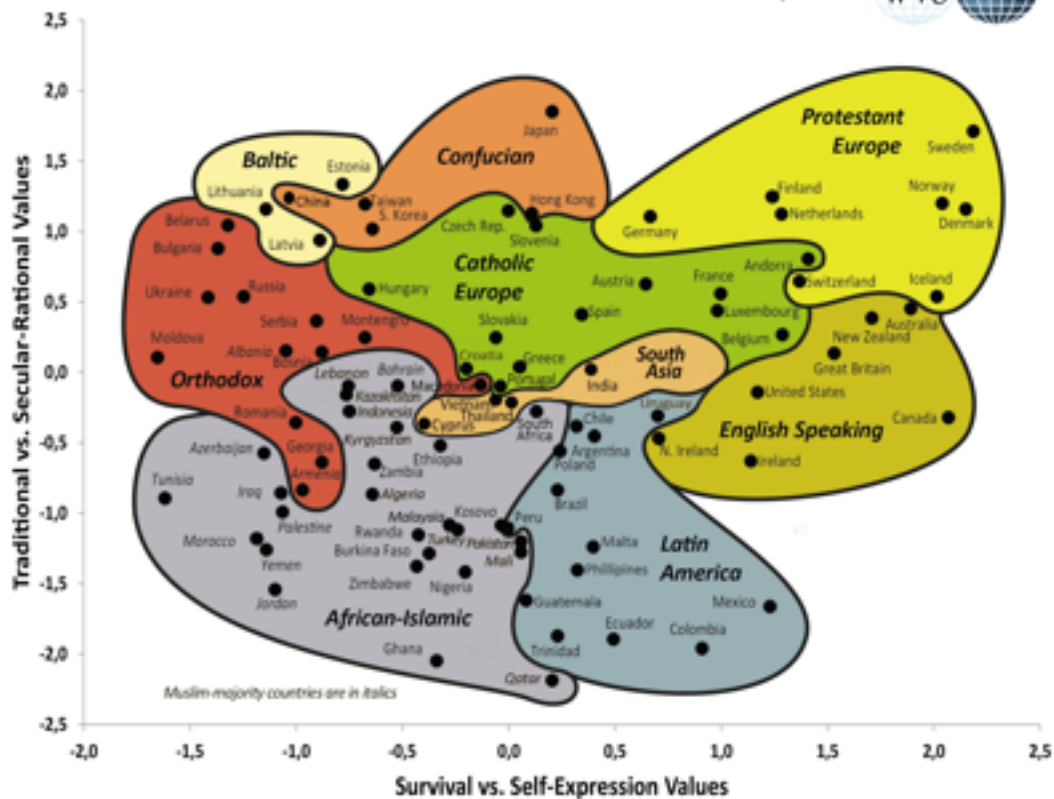


Figure 2: Major culture groupings based on traditional versus secular-rational values and survival versus self expression values. Developed by political scientists Ronald Inglehart and Christian Welzel from World Values Survey data.

that these trends towards secularisation and identity also correspond to an increase in prosperity. Post communist countries on the other hand, whilst having moved towards the Secular-Rational end of one axis are still closer to the survival end of the “Survival- Self Expression Axis. What we can see looking at these patterns and trends from an historical and Christian Worldview perspective is that certain values have become prominent. For example the West since the time of the Reformation has become a more “doing” based culture that values time and efficiency but this has been at the expense of relationships as we have become secularised. Continents like Africa on the other hand are “being” cultures that place more emphasis on relationships than material success probably because they are still by and large in “survival” mode. These culture biases play out in leadership and the workplace in a set of very different and sometimes conflicting attitudes and priorities as shown in Figure 3.

Drifting from relationships

Risk taking for example is an important feature of entrepreneurial endeavours whether in business, the church or mission. Being cultures tend to be more risk averse than doing cultures. An American Japanese brother told me that Japanese Christians find it hard to take risks in ministry because their shame culture makes it hard to deal with potential failure.

The West has drifted away from valuing relationships as it has become more prosperous and The Relationship Foundation¹ argues that much of the failure of capitalism lies in the negative impact that it has had on relationships. They argue that the bible teaches a very relational dynamic

¹ <http://www.relationshipsfoundation.org>, this thinking originally derived from the Jubilee Centre, a Christian think tank founded by Michael Schluter and based in Cambridge, UK.

How they view	Being Cultures	Doing Cultures
Authority	ascribed POSITIONAL <i>authoritarian, self protecting</i>	achieved/earned FUNCTIONAL <i>participative, team building</i>
Success	community	results orientated
The Future	SHORT TERM - concerned with here and now	LONG TERM - visionary leadership - plan for the future
Risk (dealing with uncertainty)	avoid risks to reduce uncertainty regulated environment	willing to take risks few rules pragmatic
Identity	survival	it's all about me image manipulation

Figure 3: Characteristics of Being versus Doing cultures.

derived ultimately from the Trinity and the fact that our God is a relational God. So which cultures are right? Should we just accept our differences as Christians?

Miss matching values

I believe that no culture really reflects a true Christian Worldview, even the Christian sub culture within a country, largely because we are shaped by our own prevailing culture. This is what gives rise to a miss match in expectations between Christians working across culture in the way in which I have been doing for a decade now. Whilst it is important to understand different cultures when we are working with others across the globe, I wonder Christians in all cultures have been intentional enough about developing a uniquely Christian Worldview. Western Christians can sometimes come across as believing that they have a superior and better developed approach to work and leadership. But does the bible actually lean towards a Western set of values or those reflected in the Global South? The answer is probably somewhere between because although the West has been a centre for Christianity for centuries, core Judaeo Christian values have been gradually eroded since the Enlightenment and the Reformation.

A number of key factors have conspired to erode the moderating effect that belief in God or even an acceptance of God has had in the pursuit of prosperity since the industrial revolution in Europe. Perhaps foremost amongst those factors is the individualism that has been growing since The Enlightenment and the development of rational thinking coupled with scientism, the belief that science explains everything. All these factors turn people away from God and this increases the desire for moral autonomy with the result that relationships suffer and the individual pursues his or her own values and success. The economic prosperity that resulted from Capitalism together with the globalisation of the economy and a focus on economic growth has locked many cultures into a secular and individualistic mindset. This together with the rapid progress in technology especially in Information Technology and Communications (ITC) further erodes real relationships by creating what is effectively a virtual world of superficial relationships.

The Reformation allowed our call to work to be rediscovered and re-awakened a number of ethical principles such as punctuality, planning, stewardship, service and excellence that have their roots

in scripture. These virtues, often described as the Protestant work ethic², have resulted in the West becoming a doing or monochronic culture. Activities such as planning and scheduling, time management and efficiency have led to a task orientation in our work and other activities. This in turn puts an emphasis on getting things done and achieving measurable results. All these things are well and good to a degree and have contributed to the West's economic prosperity or success.

Loss of relationships

The sting in the tail is that the very virtues that allowed industry, business and free markets to prosper have resulted in success and prosperity now becoming the driving force as Western Judaeo Christian values eroded in the mid 20th Century. The intense competitiveness that results from a free market economy further exacerbates the problem creating a pressure to constantly innovate, become more efficient and to get more things done in the same amount of time. Those of us that live in the West can readily see the consequences of these pressures in terms of work stress, long working hours and a permanent "connectedness" to others demands and information via the smart phone in our pocket. The nuclear family is disintegrating and as people live further from their work and church, relationships come under strain and disintegrate.

All of this is in contrast to many developing countries where there is a more relational or "being" culture. Unfortunately these cultures often don't naturally apply nor see the importance of the virtues that lead to task orientation and getting things done! The pressure is now of course on the developing world, largely a "being" culture, to adopt Capitalism and a free market economy, yet the cultural norms of these societies mitigate against the "success" of prosperity that the West worships. Further pressures are placed on these countries through the cultural imperialism of the morally bankrupt West pushing their equal rights agenda in respect of sexual orientation. No doubt economic aid will in due course be conditional on conformance to the West's agenda.

Shifting culture

Culture is never static and as we have seen in the West over the last 60 or so years it can change quite dramatically. What we take as a norm in a Western culture has not always been the case and an examination of history and the influence of the gospel clearly shows how cultural norms can be changed and influenced by the moral norms of scripture and worship of a God who invites us to a personal and close relationship with Him through Christ. Through the period of history from the revivals of Wesley and Whitfield in the 18 century through to the Anglican evangelical awakening and the influence of the Clapham group with the reforms that they instigated in the late 18 century and early 19 century, we can see the remarkable transformation of culture. By the mid 19 century, Wilberforce's desire to "reform the manners" of the British people had, it could be argued, to a large degree been achieved with over 50% of the population in Britain attending church.

Impact on leadership

What does all this mean for the Christian and especially the Christian leader? We must recapture a truly Christian Worldview in whatever culture we live or operate so as to be the salt that leavens the dough and the light that shines on a hill. To do this we will need to re-examine our own core cultural norms through the lens of scripture and to recapture a more balanced ethic in respect of "doing" and "being". Christian leaders need to be at the forefront of this both through practical action and showing the way to their followers, but first we must understand what is at stake. Let me illustrate with a couple of key issues, that drive different cultures, time and relationships.

You have a watch but I have time

Many will have heard of the African bishop who sitting under a tree chatting with his Western colleague retorted, "You may have a watch but I have time"! In an Eastern European context I have been caught out by differences in how schedules are viewed. For example my calendar might be fully scheduled but I am expected to bend my schedule to fit last minute arrangements, even when this would require me to reschedule another event. I am told that this does vary

² The Protestant Work Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism, Max Weber, 1905.

between individuals but there is generally not quite the same view of forward planning and sticking to the plan as a Westerner might expect. How we view time is perhaps one of the the key differences between “being” and “doing” cultures but what does the bible teach us about how to view time?

There are several aspects to time on which the bible gives us a clear perspective and that must be balanced with other teaching in the bible. Firstly we learn from Genesis onwards that time is not an abstract concept but is linear, whilst God is eternal there is none the less a beginning and end for our lives and for God’s creation.

“Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return. The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.” Job1:21

In the Greek New Testament we find two distinct words for time, *chronos* and *kairos*. How they are used and the difference in their meaning is best illustrated by a passage in Acts 1 when Jesus is talking to his disciples.

“It is not for you to know **times** (*chronos*) or **seasons** (*kairos*) which the Father has put in His own authority. Acts 1v7 NKJV

This is an important distinction because “being” cultures are mostly agrarian cultures, as indeed the West was once, and time tends to be measured by “seasons” or events. This explains why many from such cultures are relaxed about when they show up for a church service or a meeting, much to the frustration of Westerners! When I visited a Mexican church once with some missionary friends they warned me that although the service was billed for 11am it probably wouldn’t get going until around 12. This is exactly what happened and even when it got going there was no sense of needing to keep to time or a schedule as peoples birthdays were celebrated and the list was extended beyond that week. The service ran in what Westerners might feel was a chaotic way finishing sometime in the afternoon, but it was very relational.

Time to be managed

Secondly we note that time is a resource to be managed and prioritised. We see this in the way in which Jesus encouraged his disciples to take time out to rest after they returned from being sent out into the surrounding villages two by two.

“The apostles returned to Jesus and told him all that they had done and taught. And he said to them, “Come away by yourselves to a desolate place and rest a while.” For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat. And they went away in the boat to a desolate place by themselves.” Mark 6:30-32

On another occasion the morning after Jesus’s disciples had been bringing many to him to be healed they came searching for him.

“Then Jesus got up early in the morning when it was still very dark, departed, and went out to a deserted place, and there he spent time in prayer. Simon and his companions searched for him. When they found him, they said, “Everyone is looking for you.” He replied, “Let us go elsewhere, into the surrounding villages, so that I can preach there too. For that is what I came out here to do.” So he went into all of Galilee preaching in their synagogues and casting out demons.” Mark 1:32-39

Jesus’s response to Simon’s anxious remonstrance “everyone is looking for you” shows us that Jesus had other priorities than simply responding to the crowd and the immediate need. He had taken time out to pray but he also tells them that they must “go elsewhere”, “for that is what he came to do”. Time was prioritised and given to the more necessary things according to his

Father's agenda. This shows us that the need doesn't always constitute the call, we too can say no!

We have so far looked at time and the bible's views of it may tend to correlate rather well with a Western view. This is not surprising when we remember that we have been influenced by many generations of Judaeo-Christian values and the recapturing of work as a calling through the Protestant Reformation. However we are not done yet! Where has our view of time led us in regard to relationships?

Relationships matter

We saw from Jesus that time is something that has to be prioritised and managed and this is often in creating time and space for relationships. When Jesus rose early in the morning and his clamouring disciples couldn't find him, he was in fact devoting time to his relationship with his Father through prayer.

When Jesus was asked by one of the scribes which was the most important of the commandments he replied:

“The most important is, ‘Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’ The second is this: ‘You shall love your neighbour as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.”

The command to love our neighbour is one that can only be worked out in relationship as we model the relationship that God has with us, that of love, care and compassion.

All of this means that, just like Jesus, we have to prioritise and manage our time to ensure that we give time to loving God and loving our neighbour through relationship rather than just programmes. Intentionality in the use of time, being on time, scheduling, planning and prioritising in the context not just of task but of relationships will I believe put us back on track to a more balanced use of time and better relationships.

Time to adjust?

For all of us, whatever our cultural norms, this might be uncomfortable at times. An African might need to think more carefully about whether he or she is getting tasks done that ought to be done and prioritising these over breaking out to spend time chatting with a friend. A Westerner might need to be intentional about setting aside a task and leaving work on time to spend time with his or her family or a needy friend. This might mean pushing back on task schedules where they may in fact be unrealistic and end up putting pressure on employees to deliver more in the same amount of time. It is hard for employees sometimes to push back but as leaders we can ensure that we are not placing unrealistic demands on employees.

I recall on one occasion offending an African brother who worked for me because I did not find time to visit his sick mother. Even though I did not know she was ill and typically, for a Western entrepreneur, I had a full schedule, I was expected to show concern by visiting. The fact that my schedule took precedence over his sick mother showed that I didn't care for him! This was a rebuke to me and I now try, though not always successfully, to leave more time for relationship matters that may just come up.

In a church context we need to ensure that there is time for relationships, our evangelism perhaps needs to be less programmatic and more relational. This will require a rebalancing of our Church programmes and releasing people to develop relationships not only within the body of Christ but also with friends, neighbours and work colleagues. This is hard to do if an elder for example is rushing from work to a church meeting and home to connect with his wife briefly before collapsing into bed only to awake early in the morning to have a brief interaction with his kids and then rush

off to a breakfast meeting before work! Once again, as leaders we have the responsibility to role model and we are often the ones in control of the programme.

A balancing act

These balances are hard to achieve and require constant monitoring and re-evaluation of priorities. An important backdrop to all of this is a clear understanding of what God requires of us and a firm commitment to follow through, even when at times it will mean saying no to someone or some task that would compete for our attention.

So convinced are they of the importance of relationship that The Relationship Foundation, led by Michael Schluter, has developed a global agenda to re-balance society and transform capitalism from within based around recapturing the importance of relationships³. They have developed a set of metrics that can be used in companies, organisations, schools, hospitals and even prisons to measure the strength of “stakeholder” relationships across a set of five core dimensions⁴. Whilst this may be a noble objective, Christian leaders must be at the forefront in our cultures in role modelling a biblical worldview of what it means to be human and made in God’s image in business, politics, social care and the church.

Such a re-alignment will call into question another sacred cow of Western culture and one that is spreading across the globe even into Communist states such as China, that of material and economic prosperity. I will return to this topic in a future article!

Ultimately our societies will not change for the better unless there is a significant change in worldview, one based on the Lordship of Christ and the worship of our triune God rather than self and material gain. Otherwise the human desire for moral autonomy will win out, continuing to destroy relationships in the West and feeding the endemic corruption so prevalent in the Global South.

³ The ‘R’ Factor, Michael Schluter and David Lee, Hodder & Stoughton 1993.

⁴ Called the Relational Proximity ® Framework now licenced out by Relational Analytics Ltd and used by consultancies such as KPMG.