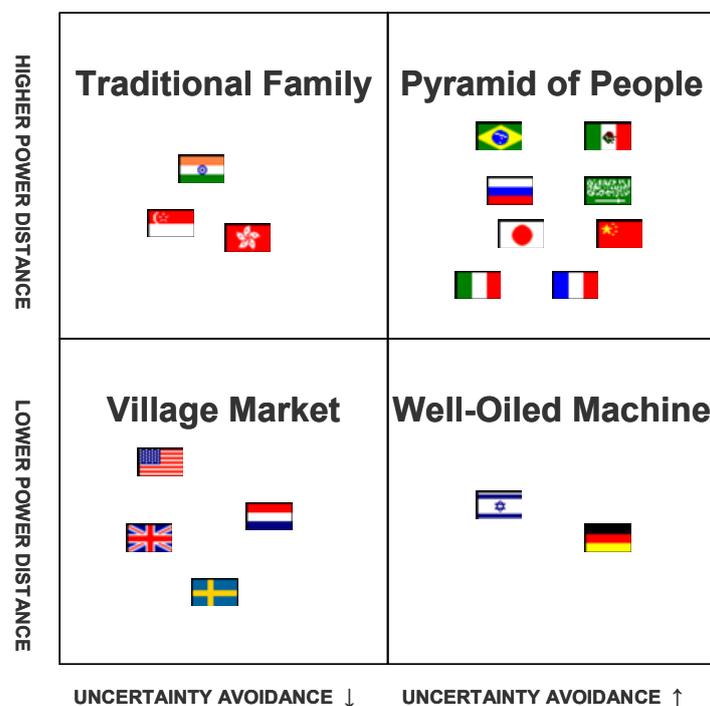


## Leading across Cultures

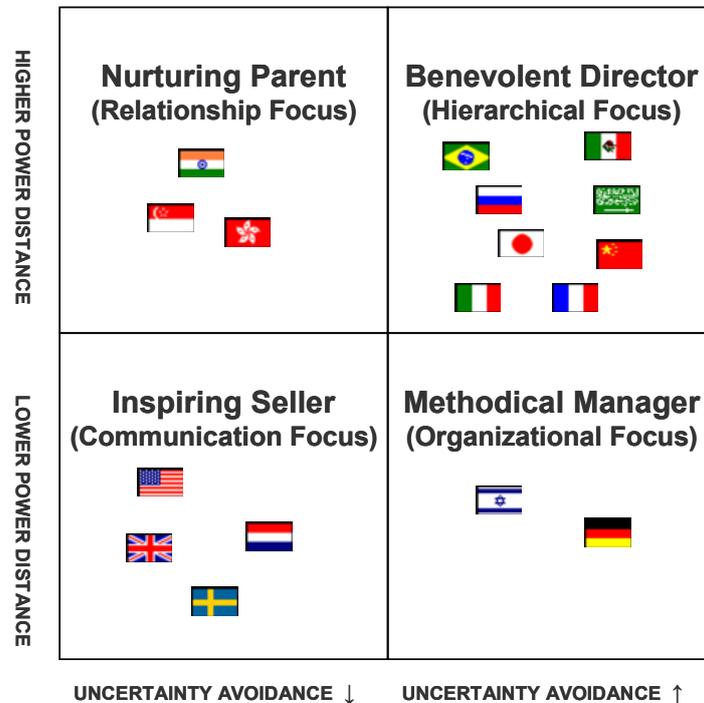
*What makes an effective leader in a global matrix organization?*

Harvard professor Edgar Schein suggests that one of the most important functions of a leader is to shape corporate culture. However, national culture plays a significant role in forming our core values of what is 'right and wrong'. Thus, it also partially determines the leadership style employees may expect from their manager. Geerd Hofstede identified two key elements of national culture that strongly effect corporate culture: power distance (How much decision-making authority is delegated to employees?) and uncertainty avoidance (How much clarity, stability and certainty do people need to feel comfortable at work?) Using these to create a matrix we can identify four typical types of organizations; the 'traditional family', the 'pyramid of people', the 'well-oiled machine' and the 'village market'.



What are the leadership styles that might likely be preferred by people from these four cultural contexts? Leaders that learn to be effective in the traditional family often take on the role of the 'nurturing parent', those operating in the 'pyramid of people' need to become the 'benevolent director', the 'well-oiled machine' needs a more 'methodical manager' and success in the 'village market' often requires an 'inspiring seller' approach. So what is the preferred leadership culture of your organization?

Leading people is difficult enough when everyone has the same preferred leadership style. What can we do when leading people with very differing expectations?



Effective global leaders ‘flex’ their leadership style to fit the cultural context and place greater emphasis on building personal relationships, providing clear and specific directions for employees, implementing effective team and organizational structures and passionately communicating their vision and values as the situation requires. Naturally, team members will also adapt over time, so the leader, as is so often the case, leads the way by being the first to flex. When leading a multicultural team, an effective leader will bring differing expectations of leadership to the surface and create the transparency that allows them to find the ‘best fit’ style for their team.

Both research and experience show that transparency and flexibility are increasingly critical mindsets for the successful global leader. And that’s the bottom line.

## References

Cultures and Organisations, Geert and Gert Jan Hofstede, McGraw-Hill, 2004

## The Author

*Mike Cook is a senior consultant with Clarion Learning and develops and facilitates learning interventions for global matrix organizations in the area of international leadership and team development, organizational change and cultural integration.*

Mike can be contacted at [mike.cook@clarionlearning.com.au](mailto:mike.cook@clarionlearning.com.au) or +61 2 9939 7017.