

Exploring Saudi managerial culture. Some evidence about performance orientation and assertiveness

A paper submitted for Submission to IACCM 2012, at Naples, Italy

Abstract

Purpose: This paper aims at investigating Saudi managerial culture and leadership styles. It contributes to fill the gap existing on the topic, given that only a few studies exist on Saudi Arabia and that the country is often studied as a part of the wider Middle East Cluster, and not as a cultural context itself. Following the GLOBE project, we particularly focus on two cultural dimensions: assertiveness and performance orientation, which we consider as very important for management and leadership.

Design: This paper is based on two qualitative analyses. The former concern 33 questionnaires to managers of large Saudi Arabia international firms. Eighteen questionnaires involved Saudi Arabia managers, and fifteen interviews involved foreign managers employed in Saudi Arabia large firms. Unfortunately only in three firms, we were able to give the questionnaires both to local and foreign managers. The second survey is made up of ten questionnaires to ten Saudi managers who were questioned about leadership attributes, which according to House et al. (2004) are culturally contingent. Our aim is to verify if Saudi Arabia presents similar characteristics as the Middle Cluster studied by House et al. or, on the contrary, it highlights specific cultural characteristics as hypothesised by Al-Khatib et al. (2004).

Findings: Saudi managers show a low degree of assertiveness and performance orientation. This emerge both from local and foreign managers' perceptions. However, as expected, foreign managers perceive a little bit higher degree of assertiveness and they disagree more on the possibility that locals assume more assertive behaviours. In addition, they agree more than their local colleagues on the statement that foreign managers should adopt more assertive behaviours. With regards to leadership, Saudi managers seem to prefer protective leadership style. Protective styles are meant both as self-protective, and group protective. The emphasis seems to be more on the group than on individuals, and sincerity and honesty are important characteristics of effective leadership. Hierarchy and roles are recognised as other main attributes of effective leadership. At the same time, they show a preference for autonomous style, too with a strong emphasis on ambition and autonomy.

Research limitations/implications: The paper suffers of the limited sample. However, as far as Saudi Arabia is not part of the Globe project and the difficulty to conduct empirical analysis in the area, these first measures are particularly interesting. This paper is actually part of a larger research we are conducting on Islamic countries, in order to get data, which can make these countries comparable with those studied in the Globe.

Practical implications: Different cultures and behaviours can affect firms' international performances. Two cultural dimensions are particularly important in the management of international activities: performance orientation and assertiveness, which impact on the capability to implement strategic decisions, to promote changes, and to motivate local workers. At the same time, understanding what Saudi managers consider as effective leadership is important for all MNCs who have to employ local managers in their Saudi subsidiaries.

What is original/ what is the value of the paper? Given the high attractiveness of Saudi Arabia, this paper contributes to the understanding of Saudi managerial culture. In addition, Saudi Arabia is not part of the Globe project. Starting to measure two dimensions can be an important step towards the analysis of Saudi Arabia national cultures and of its implications on business and leadership, which is Globe's main aim.

Keywords: Saudi Arabia, internationalization, assertiveness, and performance orientation.

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Introduction

As far as European firms' interest towards Saudi Arabia is increasing, very little is known about Saudi business environment and particularly on the influence of Saudi culture on business and on international relationships.

The most of cross-cultural studies considers Saudi Arabia as part of Middle East (Ronen and Shenkar, 1985; Hofstede, 1980, 19991, 2001; Badawy, 1979). According to this perspective, authors emphasize more the common peculiarities of the cluster than the Saudi culture itself. However Al-Kathib et al (2004) underline the necessity to consider Saudi Arabian culture as something different from other middle-east cultures. As the CIA Fact Handbooks reveal, with regards to other countries, Saudi Arabia is quite more homogeneous: the 90% of the population are Arabs and of the all population, the 99% is Sunnis. This has a strong influence on work ethic and on the way Saudi face heterogeneity, which is much more influenced by religion and social values, that in other countries.

Given both the difficulties to interpret Saudi business culture, and the increasing interest this country has for European investors, our papers aims at exploring local managerial culture in two directions. First of all we focus on performance orientation and assertiveness, which we consider ad key cultural dimensions. Performance orientation and assertiveness strongly affect international management and coordination mechanism, they are consequently very important for the success of foreign direct investments and international joint ventures. "Performance orientation reflects the extent to which a community encourages and rewards innovation, high standards, and performance improvement," (Javidan, 2004, pag. 239). Assertiveness is defined as the degree to which individuals in organizations and societies are assertive, tough, dominant and aggressive in social relationships (Den Hartog, 2004). The former is related to managers' inclination to compete and get consistent results; the latter to the way people communicate within the firms and how they adapt to the external environment.

Our paper aims at understanding Saudi managerial culture by investigating the prevailing leadership styles. Looking at leadership style it's possible to comprehend the managerial behaviours, which prevail in a certain context. In addition, given that some leadership characteristics are culturally contingent, our paper aims at understanding how similar or distant Saudi culture is with respect to the Middle East Cluster. We develop the following research questions:

RQ 1: Do assertiveness and performance orientation affect MNC in Saudi Arabia market as they do in other Middle East and Sothern Mediterranean Countries?

RQ 2: Does Saudi culture affect managerial practices and leadership style of Saudi MNC?

State of the art

As far as European firms' interest towards Saudi Arabia is increasing, very little is known about Saudi business environment and particularly on the influence of Saudi culture on business and on international relationships (Hofstede, 1980, 1991, 2001; Badawy, 1979; Ronen and Shenkar, 1985; Buda et al., 2006; Al-Sedairy, 2001; Haniffa and Hudaib, 2007).

The most of cross-cultural studies considers Saudi Arabia as part of Middle East, that is a whole of countries characterised by a strong influence of Arabic values and Islam teachings (Hofstede, 1980, 1991, 2001; Badawy, 1979; Ronen and Shenkar, 1985). While not directly focused on Saudi Arabia we refer to the GLOBE as a theoretical background to understand Saudi culture. The GLOBE contains indeed much information about Middle East, which is one of the eleven clusters highlighted by the authors (House et al, 2004).

The Global Leadership and Organizational Behaviour Effectiveness Research Project is a multi-phase, multi-method project in which researchers investigate 62 countries, grouped into ten cultural clusters, in order to analyse in depth their different cultures. Cultural contexts are examined through nine dimensions (power distance, uncertainty avoidance, institutional collectivism, in-group collectivism, gender egalitarianism, performance orientation, future orientation, human orientation, assertiveness), which explain the different perception and acceptance of leadership within each context. Each dimension is studied at two levels in order to understand the practices and the values prevailing in each context.

The meta-goal of the Global Leadership and Organizational Effectiveness (GLOBE) Research Program is to develop an empirically based theory to describe, understand, and predict the impact of cultural variables on leadership and organizational processes and the effectiveness of these processes. The GLOBE has two main goals: a) investigating aspects of leadership and organizational practices that are comparable across cultures, and b) examining and describing culture-specific differences in leadership and organizational practices and their effectiveness.

There is no consensually agreed-upon definition of leadership (Bass, 1990), however most of definitions focus on the influence of leaders on others to help accomplish group or organizational objectives. Authors give different and wide definition of leadership. Trying to get to an integrative definition of leadership, Winston and Patterson (2006) argue that "a leader is one or more people who selects, equips, trains, and influences one or more follower(s) who have diverse gifts, abilities, and skills and focuses the follower(s) to the organization's mission..."(pag. 7).

In order to examine leadership across cultures, House et al. (2004) identified six global leadership dimensions of culturally endorsed implicit theories of leadership (CLTs): charismatic vs. value-based leadership; team oriented leadership; participative leadership; autonomous leadership; human oriented leadership; self-protective leadership. While self-protective and autonomous leadership vary by culture, while the others are quite universally endorsed. This finding is coherent with the observation on the Middle East Cluster, which includes Morocco, Egypt, Qatar, and Kuwait. The Middle East cluster is characterised by low level of performance-oriented leadership (the lowest of all clusters), by a middle-high level of both team-oriented and autonomous leadership, by a middle level of humane leadership, by a low level of participative leadership and by a high level of self-group leadership.

- The *performance-oriented style* (called "charismatic/value-based" by GLOBE) stresses high standards, decisiveness, and innovation; seeks to inspire people around a vision; creates a passion among them to perform; and does so by firmly holding on to core values.
- The *team-oriented style* instils pride, loyalty, and collaboration among organizational members; and highly values team cohesiveness and a common purpose or goals.
- The *participative style* encourages input from others in decision-making and

implementation; and emphasizes delegation and equality.

- The *humane style* stresses compassion and generosity; and it is patient, supportive, and concerned with the well-being of others.
- The *autonomous style* is characterized by an independent, individualistic, and self-centric approach to leadership.
- The *self-protective* (and group-protective) style emphasizes procedural, status-conscious, and 'face-saving' behaviours; and focuses on the safety and security of the individual and the group.

While some leadership characteristics are universally accepted, some other seem to be culturally contingent. The authors find 21 culturally contingent characteristics: anticipatory, ambitious, autonomous, cautious, class conscious, compassionate, cunning, domineering, elitist, enthusiastic, evasive, formal, habitual, independent, indirect, individualistic, intra-group competitor, intra-group conflict avoider, intuitive, logical, micro-manager, orderly, procedural, provocateur, risk taker, ruler, self-effacing, self-sacrificial, sensitive, sincere, status-conscious, subdued, unique, wilful, worldly. All 21 characteristics are perceived as facilitator or inhibitor of leadership according to the cultural dimensions prevailing in each country.

Cultural dimensions affect culturally contingent leadership characteristics. Among the nine dimensions, two of them are very important to us: performance orientation and assertiveness (Calza et al., 2010). The former is related to managers' inclination to compete and get consistent results; the latter to the way people communicate within the firms and how they adapt to the external environment.

"Performance orientation reflects the extent to which a community encourages and rewards innovation, high standards, and performance improvement," (Javidan, 2004, pag. 239). It has been recognised as an important part of leadership (Fleishman, 1953; Halpin & Winter, 1957; Hempill & Coons, 1957, House & Adyta, 1997) and as an important managerial characteristic in many countries (Haire et al., 1966; Bass et al, 1979). The meaning of this dimension recalls some factors that are very important for firms' internationalization. Investing in a foreign and unstable country implies a high degree of risk. A high performance orientation enhances firms to make changes and to face risks, and consequently it impacts on firms' inclination to internationalize. At the same time, from locals' perspective, accepting to co-operate with foreign investors implies a certain degree of unease. When local people work in a foreign subsidiary, they have to accept a business culture that can be far off their own national culture. A high performance orientation could encourage local people to get innovation and to reach better results, can be an incentive to accept international relationships. Another difficulty is that local employees must subordinate to a foreign manager who they perceive to be an outsider. A high performance orientation could reduce local reluctance to accept foreign managers. If local people were performance oriented, they would consider the outsider as a means to get innovation and new knowledge.

Looking at cultural dimensions, the Middle East Cluster has got a mid-score level of performance orientation, assertiveness, institutional collectivism, human orientation and power distance; a low score of future orientation and gender egalitarianism, and a high level of uncertainty avoidance and in-group collectivism (as is scores). Positions remain substantially similar for the 'should be' scores with the exception of power distance, and uncertainty avoidance, which becomes higher. House et al. finds indeed a positive correlation between environmental uncertainty and organizational power distance and uncertainty avoidance practices, on one hand, and environmental uncertainty and authoritative and self-protective leadership, on the other. In situation of uncertainty and hostility, organizations are predicted to centralize and closely control decision-making (Aldrich, 1979; Staw, Sandelands, & Dutton, 1981). Centralization and control are expected to improve organizational power distance and uncertainty avoidance practices. The low level of charismatic leadership is coherent with the low degree of future orientation, assertiveness and performance orientation.

Looking more specifically at Globe’s findings about performance orientation and assertiveness, we get to the following results. Performance orientation is generally higher in the values than in the practices. It varies substantially across countries, which are however enough performance oriented (average 4.10). Within the ‘the should be’ scores, Iran is the most performance oriented country, while Turkey is the least (average 5.94).

Table 1. Performance Orientation

Society as is score		Society should be scores	
Country	Score	Country	Score
Iran	4.58	Iran	6.08
Egypt	4.27	Egypt	5.90
Morocco	3.99	Morocco	5.76
Turkey	3.83	Turkey	5.39

Source: *The Globe project, 2004*

Assertiveness is defined as the degree to which individuals in organizations and societies are assertive, tough, dominant and aggressive in social relationships (Den Hartog, 2004). From a cross-cultural perspective, assertiveness is important because, as a cultural dimension, it explains how the members of a community interact and how they adapt to the external environment. At an organizational level, more assertive organizations will tend to impose their decisions on their partners and to control their behaviour. Assertive individuals think of others as opportunists and because societal scales are quite confirmed even at an organizational level, organizations within assertive societies will probably assume such behaviour. The Globe project considers assertiveness as a characteristic of managers. In addition, Globe is the first cross-cultural study to consider assertiveness as an autonomous cultural dimension and to investigate the impact of assertiveness on leadership.

Assertiveness varies substantially across the countries included in the Middle East Cluster. Egypt is the least assertive country, far under the average of the GLOBE (4.14). Iran is low assertive, too, while Iran and Turkey are above the mean. The ‘should be’ score are far lower than the ‘as is’ scores. All the countries are under the GLOBE’s average (3.82), with the exception of Iran.

Table 1. Assertiveness

Society as is scores		Society should be scores	
Country	Score	Country	Score
Turkey	4.53	Iran	4.99
Morocco	4.52	Morocco	3.44
Iran	4.04	Egypt	3.28
Egypt	3.91	Turkey	2.66

Source: *The Globe project, 2004*

In our opinion, assertiveness is a key-aspect of the relationship between foreign managers and local employees (Calza et al., 2010). When multinationals invest in a foreign country, managers have to decide the managerial practices, and the control or co-ordination mechanisms to implement in the subsidiary. If local workers are low assertive, they would prefer a less direct communication style. Orders should be given considering the mood of local workers and managers should be aware of showing a deep respect of feelings. From a local perspective, working in a foreign multinational can represent an emotional effort because local workers are expected to accept managerial practices to which they are not accustomed. If foreign managers come from an assertive society, they may think that direct speaking and clear directives are much more positive because they reduce the time necessary to understand aims. However, the clash between such different behaviours can create a cultural shock and diminish local workers' feeling of belonging to the organization.

Looking together at both the dimensions, the Middle East Cluster is less performance oriented (both as is and should be scores) and less assertive (should be scores) than other clusters. We assume that this is important for the success of international management practices and we are interested in understanding: a) if Saudi Arabia shows similar degree of these dimensions; if these dimensions affect local managerial cultures and which are the prevailing leadership styles in this country.

Our hypotheses are the following:

H1: Saudi Arabia show a low degree of both assertiveness and performance orientation;

H2: The low level of assertiveness and performance orientation affect Saudi managers, who will consequently prefer protective leadership styles.

The empirical analysis

This explorative paper is based on two qualitative analyses developed in Saudi Arabia by both our Algerian colleagues who work there. The questionnaires were submitted in Arab and in English depending on the nationality of the interviewee. Some challenges derive from the translation of the questionnaire from English to Arab and back, but we tried to ensure the best translation by letting them to be controlled by experts, in addition to one of the professor who speaks and write English, too.

The former consists of 33 questionnaires to managers of large Saudi Arabia international firms. Eighteen questionnaires involved Saudi Arabia managers, and fifteen questionnaires involved foreign managers employed in Saudi Arabia large firms. Unfortunately only in three firms, we were able to interview both a local and foreign managers. Questionnaires were made up of both open and closed questions, about the advantages and risks firms face in Saudi Arabia, the impact of local cultures on business relationships, the role of women within the firms, and the managerial style prevailing within the company. A last section of the questionnaire reproduced Globe questions about assertiveness and performance orientation, in order to get a first measure of the scores of these two dimensions, bot of the as is, and of the should be scores, in a countries which has not been studied by House et al. (2004) yet.

The second qualitative analysis consists of 10 questionnaires to Saudi middle managers of 10 Saudi large firms. The questionnaires reported the same questions used in the GLOBE to evaluate culturally contingent leadership factors, and they have been conducted in order to verify if the first findings about performance orientation and assertiveness are coherent with Saudi leadership style. Data are still limited and our observation cannot be generalized. However the first measures of cultural dimensions seem to be coherent with the results of the second group of interviews.

Findings

The first empirical analysis has highlighted a great importance of culture, which is perceived as an important barrier by foreign managers. Both local and foreign managers perceive a great influence of national culture on human resource managers (33 on 33). The half of them speaks additionally of social uncertainty and instability, and one recognise a strong importance to religion in affecting workers' and colleagues' behaviours. In all firms with the exception of 4, local managers are preferred to foreign managers and this is coherent with the prevalence of family-owned firms (even large firms) and with the strong social identity (Al-Khatib, 2005). All managers declare to base their decision on discussions with subordinates and to prefer coordination rather than control. However they declare also that local subsidiaries do not take strategic decisions, which depends on headquarter. In 22 firms, women occupy managerial position, but it's interesting to note that the eleven managers who excluded the presence of women in the managerial teams are all local managers.

Table 3: First results about performance orientation and assertiveness – Saudi managers

EXPLORATION OF PERFORMANCE ORIENTATION E ASSERTIVENESS (GLOBE,2004)																	MEAN				
1) The pay and the bonus system in this organization is designed to maximize Individual vs Collective interests	7	3	4	5	5	4	7	5	2	5	4	7	5	5	6	7	5	3	1	4	4,7
2) In this organization, the pay and bonus system should be designed to maximize: Individual vs Collective interests		3	4	5	3	6	5	6	7	5	4	7	6	4	6	7	7	4	1	6	5,0526316
3) The economic system in this society is designed to maximize: Individual vs Collective interests	7	7	6	6	3	5	7	6	6	5	2	7	4	5	5	5	7	5	7	4	5,45
4) The economic system in this society should be designed to maximize: Individual vs Collective interests	7	4	7	7	2	4	7	7	3	4	7	7	6	3	7	7	7	7	7	6	5,8
5) In this organization, employees are encouraged to strive for continuously improved performance Strongly agree vs Strongly disagree	7	7	7	5	7	6	7	7	1	6	5	6	6	6	7	7	7	6	7	7	6,2
6) In this organization, employees should be encouraged to strive for continuously improved performance Strongly agree vs Strongly disagree	7			7	7	5	7	7	7	7	6	7	6	7	7	7	4	6	7	7	6,5555556
7) In this society, people are generally: Assertive vs Non assertive	1	1	1	6	6	5	4	7	2	7	5	7	4	5	2	5	4	3	4	6	4,25
8) In this society, people are generally: Tough vs Tender	7	7	7	4	7	6	5	1	6	4	4	2	2	7	2	4	5	6	7	3	4,8
9) In this organization, foreign managers should be encouraged to be: Assertive vs Non assertive	1	1	1	3	4	3	3	7	2	4	3	1	4	4	2	5	5	2	7	4	3,3
10) In this organization, foreign managers should be encouraged to be: Tough vs Tender	1	6	5	2	3	6	5	7	6	4	4	1	4	3	3	5	5	7	7	7	4,55

Source: our empirical analysis

Data on performance orientation and assertiveness suffer a certain degree of heterogeneity (tables 3 and 4). However it's worthy to note that both local and foreign managers perceive a low degree of performance orientation (either for practices and values). Probably this results reflects the circumstance that 13 foreign managers on 15 are from SMCs and Middle East, all countries characterised by a low level of performance orientation.

For what concerns assertiveness, both local and foreign managers perceive a low level of this dimension either for as is and should be scores. However foreign managers perceive a little bit higher degree of assertiveness and they disagree more on the possibility that locals assume more assertive behaviours. In addition, they agree more than their local colleagues on the assumption that foreign managers should adopt more assertive behaviours.

Table 4: First results of performance orientation and assertiveness – foreign managers

EXPLORATION OF PERFORMANCE ORIENTATION E ASSERTIVENESS (GLOBE,2004)																	MEAN				
1) The pay and the bonus system in this organization is designed to maximize Individual vs Collective interests	7	7	3	1	3	1	3	4	2	4	2	1	5	7	4	7	7	5	6	5	4,2
2) In this organization, the pay and bonus system should be designed to maximize: Individual vs Collective interests	5	7	4	7	7	7	7	6	4	6	3	7	6	7	4	6	7	4	6	4	5,7
3) The economic system in this society is designed to maximize: Individual vs Collective interests	6	1	2	5	1	1	1	7	2	7	3	3	6	7	1	4	7	6	6	4	4
4) The economic system in this society should be designed to maximize: Individual vs Collective interests	7	7	2	7	7	7	7	7	4	6	1	7	5	7	7	6	7	5	6	6	5,9
5) In this organization, employees are encouraged to strive for continuously improved performance Strongly agree vs Strongly disagree	6	7	1	7	4	7	7	7	3	6	7	7	6	6	6	6	7	5	6	6	5,85
6) In this organization, employees should be encouraged to strive for continuously improved performance Strongly agree vs Strongly disagree	6	7	2	7	7	7	7	7	6	4	7	7	7	7	6	4	7	6	2	6	5,95
7) In this society, people are generally: Assertive vs Non assertive	3	3	3	1	4	6	5	7	2	5	7	2	3	5	4	6	5	4	4	5	4,2
8) In this society, people are generally: Tough vs Tender	6	4	3	4	7	4	6	4	6	6	5	4	3	7	2	4	4	4	5	3	4,55
9) In this organization, foreign managers should be encouraged to be: Assertive vs Non assertive	3	4	4	1	1	7	2	5	2	6	1	2	3	1	4	6	1	5	4	3	3,25
10) In this organization, foreign managers should be encouraged to be: Tough vs Tender	6	4	4	1	1	7	2	7	2	5	6	4	4	7	4	5	1	4	6	6	4,3

Source: our empirical analysis

Interesting results derive from the second empirical analysis, too. Eleven Saudi middle managers, all males, have been interview about the characteristic of the managerial team they belong to, about the way decisions are taken within the firm, and about their leadership styles. Leadership attributes were investigated through 39 statements concerning the contribution of 39 attributes to effective leadership. Managers were asked to assign a point to each item, depending on their idea about how the attribute inhibits or contributes to leadership. Answers are given on a 7 points Likert scales, where one means greatly inhibits, and 7 greatly contributes.

According to our results, Saudi managers seem to prefer protective leadership style (TABLE 4). They intend protective styles both as self-protective, and group protective. Managers say actually that intra-group competition and intra-group conflict avoider are fundamental characteristic of leadership. They consider individualist, provocateur, and domineering as characteristics, which inhibit effective leadership. The emphasis is on the group more than on individuals, and sincerity and honesty are important characteristics of effective leadership. Class-consciousness, status-consciousness, procedures, and order are indeed considered as characteristics of effective leadership, too.

TABLE 4: Characteristics of effective leadership

Q3- leadership style											MEAN	
1	AMBITIOUS	7	5	5	6	7	5	7	5	6	6	5,9
2	DECISIVE	6	6	2	5	3	5	6	3	6	6	4,8
3	CLASS-CONCIOUS	7	6	6	5	7	5	6	6	5	6	5,9
4	SUBDUED	3	1	3	2	2	2	1	3	2	1	2
5	ASOCIAL	1	2	2	3	1	2	2	1	2	1	1,7
6	ADM.-SKILLED	7	7	7	6	7	5	6	6	6	6	6,3
7	SENSITIVE	2	5	2	3	5	2	1	2	2	1	2,5
8	CUNNING	4	4	1	2	1	2	1	4	2	7	2,8
9	HONEST	7	7	6	7	7	6	4	7	6	7	6,4
10	MICROMANAGER	7	4	3	5	7	4	7	4	6	1	4,8
11	INTUITIVE	6	6	5	4	2	3	7	6	4	7	5
12	PROVOCATEUR	1	3	2	1	4	2	5	3	2	1	2,4
13	ANTICIPATORY	2	6	5	3	6	2	5	6	4	2	4,1
14	AUTONOMOUS	6	3	4	2	7	2	2	3	2	3	3,4
15	CAUTIOUS	7	4	6	6	7	3	4	5	4	2	4,8
16	COMPASSIONATE	6	5	5	3	3	4	5	4	4	2	4,1
17	DOMINEERING	2	5	3	5	6	3	4	2	4	2	3,6
18	ELITIST	5	5	2	3	5	3	4	5	4	2	3,8
19	ENTHUSIASTIC	7	6	3	5	6	3	6	7	4	6	5,3
20	EVASIVE	1	3	2	2	1	2	2	5	2	2	2,2
21	FORMAL	5	4	2	6	4	1	2	2	2	2	3
22	HABITUAL	3	4	2	4	4	2	3	1	2	2	2,7
23	INDEPENDENT	6	3	4	2	7	3	2	6	2	3	3,8
24	INDIRECT	2	3	4	2	6	2	4	5	2	2	3,2
25	INDIVIDUALISTIC	1	3	3	1	4	1	2	1	2	2	2
26	INTRAGROUP COMP.	6	5	5	5	7	3	5	7	6	3	5,2
27	INTRAGR. CONF.AVOID	7	6	3	4	7	4	4	6	6	6	5,3
28	LOGICAL	7	5	6	3	7	4	7	7	6	6	5,8
29	ORDERLY	7	6	7	7	7	5	7	6	6	6	6,4
30	PROCEDURAL	5	5	4	4	7	7	5	4	6	7	5,4
31	RISK-TAKER	5	6	2	4	1	4	4	2	2	6	3,6
32	RULER	7	6	5	6	6	7	5	5	6	6	5,9
33	SELF-EFFACING	2	3	3	2	3	3	4	2	2	1	2,5
34	SELF-SACRIFICAL	7	6	2	3	5	5	6	6	2	2	4,4
35	SINCERE	5	6	4	5	6	5	6	4	4	2	4,7
36	STATUS-CONCIOUS	6	7	5	7	7	6	6	7	4	7	6,2
37	UNIQUE	6	5	6	6	6	4	4	6	4	7	5,4
38	WILFUL	5	4	4	4	6	3	2	3	2	1	3,4
39	WORDLY	1	2	4	2	5	3	2	5	2	1	2,7

Source: our empirical results

Together with protective styles, Saudi managers show a certain prefer for autonomous style, too and some attributes are not easy to interpret if we consider the low level of both performance orientation and assertiveness. Ambition, decisiveness, administrative skill, self-sacrifice, and

wilfulness are all attributes related to performance orientation, and they are higher than expected. However their effects seem to be mitigated by some attributes typical of protective leadership style, such as the high emphasis on hierarchy and roles. In the same way, the low level of assertiveness is coherent with the importance of some leadership attributes such as intra-group conflict avoider, and with the refusal of attributes such individualist, provocateur, and domineering. However it is not coherent with intra-group competition and decisiveness.

Conclusion

As far as some contributions exist on Saudi Arabia economy and firms (Al Kathib et al., 2005; Hofstede, 1980, 1991, 2001; Ronen and Shenkar, 1985; Badawy, 1979), little is known about local business culture and of the cultural values behind it. This paper aims at highlight some cultural peculiarities of this context, which is very attractive for western firms. Different cultures and behaviours can affect firms' international performances. Two cultural dimensions are particularly important in the management of international activities: performance orientation and assertiveness, which impact on the capability to implement strategic decisions, to promote changes, and to motivate local workers.

According to this perspective, our paper highlights some interesting results. We have a first indication of the degree of performance orientation and assertiveness of Saudi managers, not yet studied so far, and the first findings about leadership styles confirm the prevalence of protective leadership styles, as it is in other Middle East countries.

Coherently with our previous results on Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia (Calza et al., 2010; Calvelli et al., 2012), national culture has a strong influence on business in Saudi Arabia. Foreign managers perceive Saudi culture as something affecting their business and their managerial practices. The first inquiry about the two GLOBE's dimensions highlight a low level of both performance orientation and assertiveness. The former can be a strong barrier to the achievement of strategic aims, and can create problems for foreign managers used to higher level of performance orientation. It can also play as a barrier towards changes and innovation. Assertiveness has some important implications, too. Employees are used to respectful communication styles, people tend to give a great importance to the way information is transferred and interpersonal relationships are crucial.

The perceptions of Saudi and foreign managers are quite similar, maybe because many foreign managers come from other SMCs or Middle East countries. However some differences exist with regards to assertiveness. Foreign managers perceive a little bit higher degree of assertiveness and they disagree more on the possibility that locals assume more assertive behaviours. In addition, they agree more than their local colleagues on the assumption that foreign managers should adopt more assertive behaviours.

This first inquiry on Saudi managerial culture is completed through the questionnaires on leadership styles. Our main results are that Saudi managers present some similarities and differences with regards to the Middle East Cluster. Like other Middle East manager, Saudi managers seem to prefer protective leadership style, meant both as self-protective, and group protective. However, the emphasis seems to be more on the group than on individuals, and sincerity and honesty are important characteristics of effective leadership. Class-consciousness, status-consciousness, procedures, and order are indeed considered as characteristics of effective leadership, too. In addition Saudi manager show a tendency towards autonomous leadership style, given that decisive and autonomous are recognised as important attributes of effective leadership.

This paper has some important limitation, too. First of all the number of questionnaires is too limited and our results cannot be generalized. Our research is still in progress and we aim at obtaining a considerable database within the next two years. Second, in order to overcome contradictions and shady-areas, once that a substantial number of data will be collected a

statistical analysis will be conducted to test the effective relationship between cultural dimensions and leadership attributes.

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