

A Conceptual Discussion of Transformational Leadership and Intercultural Competence

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Abstract

Transformational leadership has been defined as a process by which leaders and followers raise one another to higher levels of morality and motivation (Burns, 1978). This paper examines the concepts of transformational leadership and intercultural communication competence. A deeper insight is required in order to understand the effectiveness of transformational leadership in various cultural contexts (Migliore, 2011). It has been shown that national culture orientation and intercultural communication competence tend to impact both the leadership framework and transformational leadership dimensions. Further, various aspects of effective leadership and the choice of communication strategies diverge for different cultural contexts. This paper is based on Matveev and Lvina's (2007) work and reviews various intercultural studies of leadership that expound culturally-oriented leadership models. While universal and particularistic leadership components are present, it has been shown that the leadership styles involving charismatic components contribute the most to the perception of what effective leadership style constitutes.

Keywords: *transformational leadership, intercultural competence, vision, communication strategies.*

JEL classification: M12, M14, M16.

Introduction

It is well established that individuals embracing transformational leadership styles rely heavily on their oratory and rhetorical skills to articulate a vision and to create meaning for individual followers (Matveev & Lvina, 2007). It is apparent that while the content of the leader's message is significant, the *process* by which the message is communicated appears to be just as important. Indeed, the *method* (or style) of communication is a vitally important and clearly distinguishing factor in whether a leader's message will be internalized by individuals. Empirical research has demonstrated that four dimensions pertaining to the concept of transformational leadership – charisma, individual consideration, intellectual stimulation, and inspirational motivation (Barbuto, 2005) – were positively correlated with communication competence (Flauto, 1994). Thus, a leader must communicate competently to lead effectively (Barge, 1994). It has

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been further reported that emergent leaders display high levels of self-reported and other-reported communication competence (Matveev & Lvina, 2007). This finding denotes that transformational leadership hinges upon the leader's ability to construct messages in a coherent fashion and engage in effective communication practices (Keung, 2011).

Variances in national culture impose limitations on the leader's communication style and influence the leader's choice of communication tactics (Gibson, Conger, & Cooper, 2001). One must appreciate the relationship between national culture and transformational leadership to predict the role and relevance of communication competencies in successful transformational leadership across cultural contexts (Matveev & Lvina, 2007).

This article surveys approaches pertaining to transformational leadership and communication strategies that are archetypally used in a variety of cultural settings. The paper reviews various intercultural studies of leadership that expound culturally-oriented leadership models thereby re-examining and extending Matveev and Lvina's (2007) work.

1. Transformational Leadership

The research body on organizational leadership is extensive, evolving from the trait, behavioral, and contingency approaches to neo-charismatic theories of leadership (House & Aditya, 1997). Three documented neo-charismatic leadership theories are the theory of charismatic leadership (House, 1996), the strategic theory of charismatic leadership (Conger & Kanungo, 1987), and the full range theory of leadership (Bass, 1985). The full range theory of leadership identifies two renowned styles of leadership: the transformational and transactional leadership styles (Lian & Tui, 2012). It is asserted that transactional leaders use rewards as positive reinforcement when standards and objectives are reached, and punishment and negative feedback if problems occur. Transformational leaders, in contrast, have the ability to deeply influence their followers to transcend self-interest and release their full potential for performance toward the goals of their organization (Bass, 1985).

Historically speaking, Burns first introduced the concept of transformational leadership in his seminal work *Leadership* (1978) during his study of political leadership. He did not describe it as a set of specific behaviors, but as an ongoing process by which leaders and followers raise one another to higher levels of morality and motivation. It is said that transformational leaders offer a purpose that transcends short-term goals and focus upon higher order intrinsic needs (Judge & Piccolo, 2004). Burns (1978) contrasted "transforming" and "transactional leadership (Rafferty & Griffin, 2004, 330). While transactional leadership involves an exchange relationship between leaders and followers encompassing contingent reward and management-by-exception (Rafferty & Griffin, 2004), transformational leaders motivate followers to perform beyond expectations by transforming followers' values, attitudes, and beliefs (Yukl, 1999).

Transformational leadership is attained through charisma – later renamed idealized influence – inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration (Avolio, 1999). Idealized influence refers to charismatic actions of the leader that are centered on values, beliefs, and a deep sense of mission, motivating their followers to do more than what they think they are able to (Antonakis, Avolio, & Sivasubramaniam, 2003). Identification with the leader is an important characteristic of idealized influence. Among its consequences are followers' respect and trust as well as identification with their leaders and with the mission and goals of their firm.

Inspirational motivation refers to the leader's ability to articulate values and goals which cause followers to transcend their own self-interests. Again, followers identify with inspirational leaders and are ready to exert efforts in order to achieve the mutual goals promoted by the leader and to meet the leader's expectations (Bass, 1985). Transformational leaders invoke inspirational motivation by providing followers with challenges and meaning for engaging in shared goals and undertakings (Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999). Such leaders demonstrate high levels of hope, confidence, and optimism, leading their followers to be hopeful, confident, and optimistic (Keung, 2011). While some have argued that vision and inspirational motivation should be combined into a single construct, others maintain the usefulness of a distinction between the two concepts (Barbuto, 2005).

Intellectual stimulation is seen as the most underdeveloped component of transformational leadership (Rafferty & Griffin, 2004). This factor encompasses behaviors that increase followers' interest in and awareness of problems and that develop their ability to think about problems in new ways (Bass, 1985). Transformational leaders stress the importance to think outside-the-box and to build organizational cultures in which organizational members are encouraged to challenge deep-rooted assumptions, beliefs, and paradigms (Jung, Bass, & Sosik, 1995), thus stimulating creativity and innovativeness among followers (Avolio, 1999). Transformational leaders build one-on-one relationships and adapt to individual needs of followers. They pay a high degree of attention to the specific needs of followers (Modassir & Singh, 2008). Transformational leaders are frequently perceived as mentors and coaches (Bass, 1985). More tangibly, the personal attention followers receive can produce higher levels of confidence, motivation, and overall job satisfaction (Lian & Tui, 2012).

The conceptual leadership model originated and developed by Burns (1978) and Bass (1985) was re-examined and re-conceptualized earlier this millennium, yielding five distinct dimensions of transformational leadership: vision, inspirational communication, supportive leadership, intellectual stimulation, and personal recognition (Rafferty & Griffin, 2004).

First, *vision* is the manifestation of a desired future state based around organizational values. A vision results in the internalization of organizational values and goals that encourages individuals to adopt desired behaviors. House (1996) defined vision as a transcendent ideal that represents shared values.

Accordingly, charismatic leaders must demonstrate, among other behaviors, the ability to articulate an ideology that can enhance goal clarity, task focus, and value congruence (House, 1996). Second, *inspirational communication* aims to express positive and encouraging messages about the organizational entity to build motivation and confidence. Inspiration refers to the degree to which a leader stimulates enthusiasm among subordinates for the work of the group and expresses ideas to build confidence among individuals in their ability to perform organizational tasks successfully (Yukl, 1981). It has been reported that inspirational leaders have a tendency to use emotionally charged language in order to stimulate followers' emotions (Matveev & Lvina, 2007).

Third, *supportive leadership* expresses concern for followers factoring in and paying attention to individual needs. Supportive leaders tend to direct their behavior toward the satisfaction of subordinates' needs, display concern for subordinates' overall welfare, and create a psychologically supportive work environment (House, 1996). Fourth, *intellectual stimulation* aims to increase the capacity of individuals to conceptualize, comprehend, and analyze problems and to improve the quality of solutions (Bass & Avolio, 1990). Intellectual stimulation enhances employees' awareness of and interest in problems thereby increasing their ability to think about problems in new ways (Bass, 1985). Finally, *personal recognition* provides rewards, including acknowledgement of effort and praise for the achievement of pre-determined goals. Personal recognition occurs when a leader indicates that individuals' efforts are appreciated, and rewards the attainment of outcomes consistent with the vision (Matveev & Lvina, 2007).

2. Cultural Orientations

National cultures differ greatly (Tang, Yin, & Nelson, 2010). Individuals pertaining to a certain culture (or sub-culture) vary in their communication behavior, in their motivation for collecting and disseminating information, and in their need to engage in self-categorization (Gudykunst, 1997). Culture has been identified in a variety of ways. Among intercultural communication researchers, for instance, culture is viewed as a system of knowledge that allows people to know how to communicate with individuals from a different culture and how to interpret their behaviors (Gudykunst, 2004). In general, culture has been defined as shared interpretations about beliefs, values, and norms which affect the behaviors of people (Hook, 2003). As this broad definition of culture implies, diverse cultures and sub-cultures exist within every nation.

Hofstede's (1980) seminal work on culture, probably the most widely cited model determining cultural orientations, assumes a four-dimensional conceptual framework comprising power distance, individualism/collectivism, masculinity/femininity, and uncertainty avoidance. A fifth dimension, long term orientation, was added at a later stage (Hofstede & Bond, 1988).

Specifically, the first dimension, power distance, involves the extent of a society's tolerance for power structures and social hierarchy. Power distance measures the equality (or inequality) among people within a cultural group. A high power distance denotes inequalities of power and wealth within a group (Liu &

Lee, 2012). The individualist-collectivist dimension measures the relationship between personal freedom and cohesive in-groups. The individualist dimension indicates that individual rights and pursuits are of paramount importance within society, while the collective dimension reinforces families and collectives (Cullen & Parboteeah, 2005). The third dimension describes the differences between masculine societies where individuals are concerned with material success, and feminine societies where members of a societal group focus primarily on the quality of life (Liu & Lee, 2012). The fourth dimension measures the extent to which individuals tolerate ambiguity and uncertainty (Cullen & Parboteeah, 2005). The fifth dimension measures the extent of time orientation of a culture. Long-term orientation assumes a culture that supports long-term commitments, respects tradition, and supports a strong, hard-working work ethic. A culture with a short-term orientation focuses on immediate rewards, invests little in employee development, and is characterized by frequent change (Hofstede & Bond, 1988).

This study focuses on distinct cultural orientations, including the richness of the communication context, power distance, individualism, uncertainty avoidance, and performance orientations. One, in studying the role of communication within cultural contexts and distinguishing cultures and communication by the information surrounding an event regardless of the verbal message, cultures can be viewed on a continuum from low to high context (Hall, 1989). More specifically, low-context cultures utilize low levels of programmed information to provide context. Thus, the explicit code, the actual words used, carries the message, more than does the medium; in such cultures, meaning is explicit. A culture where task-centeredness prevails and where communication with relatively little information is needed about a person or a firm before business can be transacted is considered a low-context culture (Marquardt & Horvath, 2001). Conversely, high-context cultures convey messages through non-verbal context. Thus, it is the physical setting and the individual's internalized values, beliefs, and norms that carry and convey the actual message (Hall, 1989). High-context cultures, such as the Chinese and Thai culture, share meaning implicitly. Thus, the listener is deeply acquainted with the context and needs little background information. Communication and behavioral rules are implicit in the context. As a result, individuals wanting success in completing transactions need rich contextual information about a person or a firm (Marquardt & Horvath, 2001).

Two, power distance is defined as the degree to which members of a culture expect power to be distributed unequally (Hofstede, 1980) and determines how a community stratifies its members with respect to power, authority, prestige, status, and wealth (Javidan & House, 2001). Low-powered cultures favor participation, consultation, collaboration, and practicality, while high power distance cultures are characterized by autocratic environments. National cultures considered low on power distance, such as Australia and Switzerland, tend to be more egalitarian and prefer participatory decision making. Conversely, national cultures that rate high on power distance, such as Mexico, Russia, and Indonesia make the distinction between people with and people without status and power.

Three, the individualism-collectivism orientation describes whether the culture values the pursuit of individual goals or group goals (Hofstede, 1980). This positioning reflects the degree to which people of a culture are encouraged to integrate into group settings (Javidan & House, 2001). Collectivistic cultures exhibit emotional dependence upon a group and lean towards conforming, traditional, team-oriented, and particularistic settings. Collectivistic cultures value cooperation, group harmony, and group satisfaction (Tang et al., 2010). In contrast, individualistic cultures, such as New Zealand, the Netherlands, and Germany, value autonomy, self-interest, and individual performance.

Four, uncertainty avoidance refers to the extent to which people seek orderliness, consistency, structure, and laws (Javidan & House, 2001). This orientation indicates whether uncertainty and ambiguity are perceived as threatening by members within a culture (Hofstede, 1980). Low uncertainty avoidance cultures, such as Greece, Portugal, and Guatemala demand little structure and do not display great levels of concern about following rules and procedures. In contrast, high uncertainty avoidance cultures, such as Singapore, Denmark, and Germany, prefer consistency, structured lifestyles, and clearly articulated expectations.

Five, performance orientation refers to the degree to which a culture rewards its members for the improvement of performance and the attainment of excellence (Javidan & House, 2001). This categorization is comparable with Hofstede's (1980) masculine and feminine dimensions. Thus, countries, that rank low on the performance-orientation (also considered feminine cultures), such as Russia, Italy, and Argentina value tradition, loyalty, belonging, and family. In contrast, high level performance-oriented cultures (also considered masculine cultures), such as Great Britain, Hong Kong, and the United States value performance, training, development, and advancement.

3. Competence and Intercultural Communication

The nature of communication competence comprises two concepts, effectiveness and appropriateness. Effectiveness refers to a person's ability to produce intended effects through interaction with the environment (Chen & Starosta, 1996), while appropriateness implies three abilities: the ability to recognize how context constrains communication, the ability to avoid inappropriate responses, and the ability to fulfill communication functions (Chen & Starosta, 1996). The appropriateness of an individual's behavior can be judged with the elements of quantity, quality, relevance, and manner of the message sending (Yamazaki, 2007).

The leader seeking competence in relationships across cultural lines must be effective at both verbal and non-verbal communication (Matveev & Lvina, 2007). Characteristics that constitute intercultural communication competence include relationship skills, communication skills, and personal traits like inquisitiveness (Mendenhall, 2001). Intercultural communication competence is not confined to the knowledge of the culture and language, but includes affective

and behavioral skills, such as empathy, human warmth, charisma, and the ability to manage anxiety and uncertainty (Spiess, 1998). Research shows that intercultural communication competence requires not just knowledge and skilled actions, but also suitable motivation (Riggio & Reichard, 2008).

The communication literature reveals that intercultural communication competence is typically analyzed with the help of traditional conceptual models (Dean & Popp, 1990). Five abilities important to intercultural effectiveness have been identified: the ability to communicate interpersonally, the ability to adjust to different cultures, the ability to adjust to different social systems, the ability to establish interpersonal relationships, and the ability to understand others (Abe & Wiseman, 1983). Scholars have identified five dimensions of intercultural effectiveness: interpersonal skills, social interaction, cultural empathy, personality traits, and managerial ability (Cui & Awa, 1992). Finally, the frequently cited intercultural communication competence model includes four dimensions: interpersonal skills, team effectiveness, cultural uncertainty, and cultural empathy (Matveev & Nelson, 2004).

1. In the *interpersonal skills* dimension, an individual member acknowledges differences in the interactional styles of people from various cultures, demonstrates flexibility in resolving misunderstandings, and is confident in communicating with foreigners (Matveev, 2002);
2. The *team effectiveness* dimension includes such critical skills as the ability of a team member to understand and articulate team goals, roles, and norms to other members of a multicultural team (Matveev, 2002);
3. The *cultural uncertainty* dimension reflects the ability of an individual to display patience in intercultural situations, to be tolerant of ambiguity and uncertainty, and to work in a flexible manner with others on a multicultural team (Matveev, 2002);
4. In the *cultural empathy* dimension, a culturally empathetic individual has the capacity to empathize and appreciate the world as members from other cultural backgrounds do. Generally, the culturally sensitive and culturally empathic individual has a deep sense of inquiry about other cultures its prevailing communication patterns (Matveev, 2002).

4. Communication Competence in Transformational Leadership

Transformational leaders rely heavily on their oratory skills in order to articulate a vision and to create meaning (Howell & Frost, 1989). They are skilled at communicating and using language, images, symbols, and metaphors. They utilize nonverbal behaviors to influence their followers. It is clear that the ability to craft and communicate an inspirational vision is critical to the success of a firm. Still, leaders need to be aware of the fact they can communicate the same message and identical communications can generate varied responses among different followers. Frames are the snapshots that leaders take of their firm's purpose and

use to draw a map for action. Values and beliefs that reinforce commitment and provide guidance for daily actions are essential components in creating a meaningful frame for a mission. As stated previously, while the leader's message is critical, the process by which it is communicated is just as important. The style of communication is a distinguishing factor in whether the message will be internalized. It is here where the art of rhetoric and communication competence enters the language of leadership (Migliore, 2011).

Matveev and Lvina (2007) reported on a case study which examined communication competence in firms within the framework provided by transactional/transformational leadership and leader-member exchange theories. Participating individuals described their leaders and were asked to report a leadership event and a communication occasion exemplifying their leader's behavior. It was found that charisma, individual consideration, and intellectual stimulation were positively correlated with communication competence (Flauto, 1994). This insight supports the notion that leadership exists in the interaction between individuals of both transactional-transformational and leader-member exchange theories (Den Hartog & Verburg, 1997). A subsequent study examined the process of transformational leadership with a specific emphasis on the interplay between leaders and followers resulting in a positive relationship between interpersonal communication competence and the preferred leadership practices of participating managers (Matveev & Nelson, 2004). These studies provide support and corroboration of previous studies in that leadership manifests itself in a proactive process of interaction (Bass, 1999). Thus, transformational leadership depends at least partly on the leader's ability to engage competently in interpersonal communication (Lian & Tui, 2012).

5. The Adoption of Transformational Leadership in Various Cultures

The transformational-transactional leadership dichotomy is universal (Tang et al., 2010) and people's prototype of leadership is a transformational one (Matveev & Lvina, 2007). The much-cited Global Leadership and Organizational Behavioral Effectiveness Program (GLOBE) found both universal transformational characteristics of ideal leadership and characteristics reflecting cultural specificity within and between the identified clusters (Scandura & Dorfman, 2004; Matveev & Lvina, 2007). The GLOBE study involved managers of 62 cultures who reported on cultural practice as well as societal values thereby rating effective leadership practices. Culturally endorsed implicit leadership theories were utilized to identify the leadership behaviors and attributes universally deemed to contribute to effective leadership.

Empirical work has shown that charismatic and value-based leadership dimensions contain the greatest number of attributes universally perceived as contributors to effective leadership, while the charismatic leadership quality of self-sacrifice/risk taking is not universally endorsed (House, Hanges, Javidan, Dorfman, & Gupta, 2004). Other studies have determined that Eastern European

cultures preferred leaders who were visionary, charismatic, decisive, diplomatic, and collaborative (Bakacsi, Gyula, Takacs, Karacsonyi, & Imrek, 2002). The reported elements of successful leadership in Eastern Europe were composed mostly of transformational/charismatic and team-oriented leadership. The most deeply admired leaders were visionary, inspirational, and decisive. Interestingly, the paternalistic leadership aspect that was historically so prevalent and dominant in Eastern Europe has been supplanted by participative leadership (Matveev & Lvina, 2007).

Although transformational leadership studies have centered on the Anglo-Saxon context, studies in the Australasian, Eastern European, and Russian contexts do exist. Sarros and Santora (2001) examined the value orientations and leadership behaviors of Australian, Chinese, Russian, and Japanese executives. They found that leaders whose values were grounded in fundamental human virtues, such as benevolence and honesty, but who also retained a need for personal gratification and success, were closely associated with transformational leadership behaviors. The relationships between leadership style and value orientations showed a positive correlation between transformational leadership behaviors and values that encouraged personal and professional development. It was found that Russian values were ordered with the need to maintain social stability and self-direction. Participating managers identified with security as a motivating value as Russia had continued with its transition from a socialistic-style to a capital-market, democratic environment (Sarros & Santora, 2001).

The impact of transformational and transactional leadership behaviors on organizational performance was studied. It was reported that transformational leadership positively predicted organizational performance in Eastern European and Russian firms. It was further revealed that transactional leadership had a positive relationship with the achievement of organizational goals. Support for innovation meaningfully moderated the relationship between transformational leadership and organizational performance (Elenkov, 2002), and group cohesiveness was positively correlated with transformational leadership (Matveev & Lvina, 2007). It was also reported that entrepreneurial leaders with a deep sense of mission and high levels of persistence, resilience, and emotional intelligence had been emerging in Russia. It was determined that these leadership dimensions resemble the transformational leadership style (Kets de Vries, Shekshnia, Korotov, & Florent-Treacy, 2005).

Conclusions

The study of leadership has informed us that transformational leaders must develop and clearly articulate a vision that they want their followers to attain. Empirical studies have shown that the perception of leadership effectiveness and the ensuing enactment strategies are influenced by societal values and cultural context. The leadership styles that are fitting with the broader culture are reinforced and encouraged by followers (Tang et al., 2010). This paper has presented several

intercultural leadership studies that illustrate culturally-bound leadership models. Interestingly, while universal and particularistic leadership attributes are present, it has been shown that the charismatic leadership styles contribute the most to the perception of what effective leadership constitutes.

Assessment of the effectiveness of leadership varies depending on the prevailing cultural context. The Anglo-Saxon culture, for instance, views effective leaders as charismatic, team-oriented, participative, and humane. Leaders in this cultural cluster focus on the display of care and individual consideration. Russian leaders, unlike their North American counterparts, stress the need to display autonomous leadership and value participative leadership styles to a reduced degree. How can this be reconciled? The variance can be explained in that the preferred leadership styles are entrenched in the broad national culture. The Russian culture measures high on the power distance dimension. Thus, an effective leader is seen as an individual with the required authority to make decisions unilaterally thereby ensuring a perception of a higher status (Matveev & Lvina, 2007).

Finally, the dynamic process of leadership exists in the interaction between the leaders and their followers. The study of transformational leadership has unveiled a positive relationship between leadership dimensions, individual and organizational performance outcomes, and a leader's self-reported and other-reported communication competence. Furthermore, the frame of intercultural communication competence can be helpful in analyzing and predicting effective communication strategies and influential transformational leadership strategies across different cultural contexts (Migliore, 2011).

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