



IMPACT OF DEMOGRAPHIC, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL VARIABLES ON LEADERSHIP – A STUDY

Lingala Mounika

Ph.D Research Scholar, Rajiv Gandhi National Fellow(RGNF), University College of Commerce & Business, Management, Kakatiya University, Warangal.

Abstract

This paper conceptualizes the base for understanding the impact of 3 select variables on leadership. The variables considered for the study include the Demography, society and culture. As these 3 variables are mutually interdependent, the study which is based on the secondary data sources makes a crystal clear analysis on the each variable interdependence on the leadership. The study is descriptive research oriented which is mainly depended on the secondary data sources. The study makes an attempt to synergize various researches done on these 3 variables focusing on the leadership.

Key Words: Culture, Demography, Economy, Society.

Introduction

Leadership history is as long as human history. It has shown itself inseparable to mankind. Since the inception of society before the dawn of civilization, leadership has been a very important aspect. Leadership can be considered as the lighthouse for a ship. Leadership in political, economical, cultural, artistic, social, scientific and educational dimensions has its own characteristics that leader should have necessary abilities based on structural dimension and goals and natural features. Leadership paradigm has changed over the last decades: it has transited from the traditional leadership to the new perspectives.

Bryman (1996) wrote that a leader “defines organizational reality through the articulation of a vision which is a reflection of how she or he defines an organization’s mission and the values which will support it” (p.280). The two approaches, Burns (1978), and Bass (1985) are clearly categorized under the 15 new leadership classification according to Bryman’s (1996) classification approach. Bass and Avolio (1990) argue that this century will require leadership that is flexible, developmentally-oriented, willing to accept diverse points of view and capitalize on them, and that has the ability to challenge a better educated workforce. The leadership required to address the changes in organizations during the coming century is referred to as transformational leadership.

Schermerhorn et al. and Hoy and Miskel (2001) categorize trait, behavioral and situational or contingency theories under traditional leadership perspectives, and charismatic and transformational leadership theories under the new leadership perspectives. The focus of all theories of leadership is to determine organizational effectiveness. Beginning with the leadership studies of Lewin and Lippitt in 1938, there have been numerous studies of leadership and numerous leadership theories developed.

Major theories posited include Trait theory, Situational/ Contingency Theory, Power and Influence Theory and Transactional and Transformational leadership. Important leadership theories beginning from the personality theory, through behaviorist and contingency theories, to the theory of transformational and transactional leadership, most are the works of McGregor, Argyris, Likert, Blake and Mounten, Fiedler, House, Hersy and Blanchard, towards the more 5 current research of Taffinder, Crosby and Daft have shown that leadership styles influence the efficiency and effectiveness of the organizational on one hand, and performance and satisfaction of the subordinates on the other.

The exploration of the leadership style between leadership styles and performance and work efficiency starts from Likert, who was the first to stress the importance of different leadership styles for performance and work efficiency and who has based on empirical research reached the conclusion that all leadership styles are the cause, and not consequence of work efficiency. Technical expertise, superior performance, and established experience are no longer only criterion of effective leadership. Today effective leaders are defined by inspiring and motivating others, promoting a positive work environment, understanding and managing emotions, building bonds, communications, influence, and so forth.

Leadership is a concept that does not refer to one specific idea but carries shades of meanings pointing towards two sets of ideas. Gardener as quoted in Fullan (2000) sees leadership as “the process of persuasion or example by which an individual (or leadership team) induces a group to pursue objectives held by the leader or shared by the leader and his or her followers” (p. 3).

Thorndike, H. Gardner explored the mind of an individual using the construct of social intelligence in terms of independent cognitive abilities rather than general intelligence. Gardner included interpersonal and intrapersonal intelligences that are closely related to social intelligence in his theory of multiple intelligences. In Gardner’s theory of multiple intelligences,



intelligence is defined as “a biopsychological potential to process information that can be activated in a cultural setting to solve problems or create products that are of value in a culture” [40].

Historical Perspective on Leadership

Scholars and researchers have been interested in leadership for thousands of years (Cantu, 1997). Leadership has been widely discussed, written about, and practiced for thousands of years and still remains an active area of inquiry (Goleman, Boyatzis and McKee, 2002; Kouzes and Posner 2002, Yukl 2002; Kotter, 1999; Bass, 1997; Bass, 1990; Bennis, 1989). According to Burns (1978), “Leadership is one of the most observed and least understood phenomena on earth (p. 2). Leadership is identified by researchers in the manner that fits their perspectives of leadership and contains the factors of interest to the researcher (Yukl, 2002). Beginning with the leadership studies of Lewin and Lippitt in 1938, there have been numerous studies of leadership and numerous leadership theories have already developed. Major theories posited include Trait theory, Situational/Contingency theory, Power and Influence Theory, and finally Transactional and Transformational theories.

Need for the Study

In today’s global economy where outsourcing, downsizing and acquisitions are common, companies must compete to find, attract, develop, and retain the best talent. Since personnel turnover can directly impact a corporation’s bottom line, it has now become an important concern of organizational leaders. Strong leadership is essential for an organization. Leaders in organizations create the vision, support the strategies, and are the catalysts for developing & retaining the workforce to move the organization forward. Therefore developing leaders to their full potential remains one of the great challenges for organizations today. The priority placed on leadership is evidenced by the billions of dollars spent on leadership development each year. Goleman et al. posited that leaders use emotional intelligence develop relationships that are in-sync with their organization by forming “emotional bonds that help them stay focused even amid profound change and uncertainty.” Boyatzis concluded that emotional, social and cognitive intelligence competencies predict effectiveness in professional, skilled, management and leadership roles in different sectors of society.

Objectives of the Study

The study undertakes the analysis on the impact of 3 select variables including demography, society and culture on the leadership. The study conceptualizes and examines the studies made by various researchers to thoroughly understand the variation and assumptions made on these 3 variables centralizing the leadership. The study is based on the secondary data sources collected from the studies made by the researchers pertaining leadership.

Analysis on the Significance of Demographic Variable in Leadership

This section provides conceptual understanding on the impact of demographic variables such as age, gender, occupation, qualification on leadership. In this regard, an attempt is made to thoroughly investigate the studies made by various researchers on select demographic variables and its impact on leadership.

The value of gender in leadership is recognized in the studies of Ijeoma, according to the study, it is observed that the underlying reason was to use gender as a measure for understanding the fact that women do not behave like men in all situations, and most importantly, that the position of women in society varies considerably.

Social demographic factors in this research comprises of gender, race, marital status and level of educational. Previous researches on the influence of social demographic factors have study the phenomenon from different perspectives, however this study will provide detailed explanation on the nature of these differences and the impact it has on organizations. Therefore, in this study one of the social demographic factors is gender. While research on Gender refers to social-psychological categories of masculinity (male related characteristics) and femininity (female related characteristics).

Previous research on gender as it relate to organizational leadership has revealed that the main reason why women are underrepresented in organizational top management position has to do with specialties in gender roles (Larocca, 2003). Research conducted over the years has revealed that women are generally expected to endorse the idea of affirmative action than their male counterpart (Eddy, 2008; Harrison et al 2006) In their comparative study between women and men leaders in rural Nigeria, Deji and Makinde (2006) have found that women leaders had a higher level of external orientation and leadership skill than men. However the goal of transformational leaders is to set high standard of moral by promoting ethical policies and procedures which help followers establish a basis for moral and action (Avolio, 1995) Gibson (1995) found male leaders to display more transformational leadership behavior than their female counterpart in terms of goal settings. In addition to gender, another variable in this study is race.



Race in this study refers to distinctive characteristic used to distinguish between groups of people. These basic features which differentiate races include color of skin, color of hair, language and facial features. Organizations are now diverse comprising of people from different racial background, ethnicity and culture. The importance of understanding the role race plays in organizational leadership is paramount given the nature of workplace in contemporary world which is diversified. Despite the abundant literatures on race-ethnicity especially in organizational leadership, understanding the connections have been a difficult task to researchers mostly because of the dynamic nature of race which require different study and methodology. In this regard literature on race has used methodology from sociological perspective mainly looking at the issue as it relate to discrimination and stereotyping (Ospina and Foldy 2009, Alba 1990, Nancy and Robert 1996).

According to Eddy (2008) the complex natures through which diverse organizations operate nowadays require a practical solution hence the need for diversity management due to composition of many races working together. As such, diversity management include a range of policies adopted by organization such as diversity policy statement, active recruitment, training and development which are all consider to be effective in managing diverse employees (Eddy, 2008). Besides this, evidence from the literature that marital status of an individual might influence his or her leadership style is also a bit contradictory. In fact there is no sufficient research to support the assumption whether single or married individuals are perceive to display appropriate leadership styles in organizations. However, there is a unanimous agreement that the goal of transformational leadership is to influence followers to achieve organizational objective through change of behavior therefore the issue of marital status is of little significance.

Leadership is about developing people, leaders share their responsibility and authority with others (Russell, 2001). Furthermore, educational qualification is another social demographic factor in this study, however there is no sufficient research also to justify that leadership styles might be influence by educational qualification. In other words, the employees can argue, make decision and give their opinions as a contribution to the organization without estimating their level of education. Therefore, educational qualification is more relevant in terms of goals accomplishment that required more expertise.

The influence of leadership style on job performance, organisational commitment and satisfaction has been well established (Breckenridge, 2000; Vries et al., 1998; Cairns, 1996). While leadership style has an impact on organisations, department, and teams, as well as work climate and atmosphere, leaders who want the best results should not rely on a single leadership style (Goleman, 2000). Empirical evidence has been produced whose demographic variables such as years in organisation, age, level of education and the duration of leadership (Chen & Francesco, 2000; Mathieu & Zajac, 1990) can have significant impact on organizational commitment. Sommer et al. (1996) revealed that position, tenure and age were significantly related to employee commitment for korean subjects, which were consistent with the western results.

Whereas Social theory argues that society prescribes different roles to members of different groups, and such roles generally coincide with power and status norms. When work roles break with social roles or traditional hierarchies, this conflict can lead to discomfoting environment for the manager (Eagly, 1987). ON the one side, when employees are older than their mangers, such employees are more likely to resent and to disrespect their managers. On the other side, younger managers may defer older employees and may refrain from exercising their authority in order to avoid discomfort and disapproval.

Impact of Society on Leadership

Leadership is instrumental to achieving social change. All through history, whether it was for abolishing social norms, overcoming social evils or modernizing history, social change has been impossible without the right kind of leadership. When it comes to mobilizing the masses, igniting passion in people towards a common goal and motivating people to act towards the said common goal, it isn't possible to unite the people and inspire action without leadership. One person has to spear the movement, and he may not professionally be a leader, and does not have to be a political leader, but he should have the charisma to inspire people and motivate them. A great example from recent times would be that of Anna Hazare, and Indian citizen who inflamed thousands of Indians against the injustices of the Indian political system and the rampant corruption in society and politics and launched one of the biggest civil movements Asia has seen in a long time. In terms of social change, the leader is the face of the movement as well as the backbone of it, while the people from the heart and soul. It is quite remarkable that even when leadership is effective in the social, not corporate, context, it has an impact on people's professional lives. When a society is led by a powerful, positive and forward-thinking leader, one of the main areas of focus is people's professional development. It goes without saying the professional progress is required for economic growth and no society can do well without financial stability. Hence, good leaders are those that take all factors into consideration, even if their role is ostensibly limited to one niche. A positive leader will always be mindful of the fact that people need to be achieving something in their professional capacities in order to lead the society forward, and hence the leader will emphasize the importance of education, picking the right career, working hard and focusing on performance.



Culture Influence on Leadership

According to Gill(2006), culture is the way the things are performed. It is characterized by overt and covert rules, values, guiding principles, habits and psychological climate. Culture refers to those learned behaviours characterizing the total way of life of members within any given society and cultures differ from one another just as individuals differ from one another. Culture is collective programming of the mind, collective soul or some type of social glue that holds people together (Warner and Joynt, 2002). A popular and simply way of defining culture is; how things are done around here.

Culture is socially learned and transmitted by members; it provides the rules for behavior within organizations. The definition of organizational culture is of the belief that can guide staff in knowing what to do and what not to do, including practices, values, and assumptions about their work. The core values of an organization begin with its leadership, which will then evolve to a leadership style. Subordinates will be led by these values and the behavior of leaders, such that the behavior of both parties should become increasingly in line. When strong unified behavior, values and beliefs have been developed, a strong organizational culture emerges. Leaders have to appreciate their function in maintaining an organization's culture. This would in return ensure consistent behavior between members of the organization, reducing conflicts and creating a healthy working environment for employees. For people interacting within organizations, culture assumes a multi-focal role that combines personal, national, ethnic, professional, religious, and corporate characteristics.⁸⁵ Since cultural influences derive from individual cultural values, people often experience difficulty defining their cultural influences.⁸⁶ Not only is culture manifested externally, but also resides within the person; it is not separate from other learned experiences.

There are several ways to identify how culture influences leadership. Primarily, culture shapes the image of the ideal of a particular nation or organization.⁸⁸ Cultural groups vary in their conceptions of what is important for effective leadership.⁸⁹ Culture influences the personality traits and work values of leaders and followers in a country or organization. Personality appears as the outcome of a lifelong process of interaction between individuals and their environment, resulting in systematic differences in the person-typical behavior of people who grow up in different cultures. To a significant extent, culture determines the actual pattern of leadership behaviors in a country or organization. Cultural values and norms likely influence the attitudes and behaviors of leaders in ways unconscious to them. In addition, cultural values reflect societal norms in the relationships between individuals. These norms specify acceptable forms of leadership behaviors. For example, the norms appear as societal laws limiting the use of power to influence the decisions and actions of others. Intercultural leaders must balance commercial and cultural concerns. Commercial imperatives focus on the salient leadership capabilities that corporations must possess to respond successfully to customer needs and competitive threats. Globalization increases the need to understand the impact of diverse backgrounds and philosophies. Leaders in the early 21st century need to look at the world with a local-global perspective and develop products and strategies that work within as well as across borders. The current reality is that the forces of globalization are drawing all cultures into a virtual and time-independent global business zone.

Given the increased globalization of industrial organizations and increased interdependencies among nations, the need for better understanding of cultural influences on leadership and organizational practices has never been greater. Situations that leaders and wouldbe leaders must face are highly complex, constantly changing, and difficult to interpret. More than ever before, managers of international firms face fierce and rapidly changing international competition. The trend toward the global economic village is clear, and the 21st century may very well become known as the century of the "global world" (McFarland, Senen, & Childress, 1993). Since effective organizational leadership is critical to the success of international operations, this globalization of industrial organizations presents numerous organizational and leadership challenges. For instance, the cultural diversity of employees found in worldwide multinational organizations presents a substantial challenge with respect to the design of multinational organizations and their leadership. Unfortunately, though the need for such information clearly exists, little if any help is available at this time (House, Wright, & Aditya, 1997; House & Aditya, 1997).

Cross-cultural research and the development of cross-cultural theory are needed to fill this knowledge gap. From a scientific and theoretical perspective, compelling reasons exist for considering the role of societal and organizational culture in influencing leadership and organizational processes. Because the goal of science is to develop universally valid theories, laws, and principles, there is a need for leadership and organizational theories that transcend cultures. There are inherent limitations in transferring theories across cultures. What works in one culture may not work in another culture.

As Triandis (1993) suggests, leadership researchers will be able to "fine-tune" theories by investigating cultural variations as parameters of those theories. In addition, a focus on cross-cultural issues can help researchers uncover new relationships by forcing investigators to include a much broader range of variables often not considered in contemporary theories, such as the importance of religion, language, ethnic background, history, or political systems (Dorfman, 1996). Thus, cross-cultural



Research may also help to develop new theories of leadership and organizational processes and effectiveness, as well as to fine-tune existing 7 theories by incorporating cultural variables as antecedents and moderators within existing theoretical frameworks. While the research literature on cross-cultural leadership has blossomed in the last fifteen years (House, Wright, & Aditya, 1997), it is often atheoretical, fraught with methodological problems, and fragmented across a wide variety of publication outlets (Dorfman, 1996). More important, far more questions than answers exist regarding the culturally contingent aspects of leadership. Project GLOBE is intended to contribute theoretical developments and empirical findings to fill this knowledge deficiency.

Given the increased globalization of industrial organizations and increased interdependencies among nations, the need for better understanding of cultural influences on leadership and organizational practices has never been greater. Situations that leaders and wouldbe leaders must face are highly complex, constantly changing, and difficult to interpret. More than ever before, managers of international firms face fierce and rapidly changing international competition. The trend toward the global economic village is clear, and the 21st century may very well become known as the century of the “global world” (McFarland, Senen, & Childress, 1993).

Since effective organizational leadership is critical to the success of international operations, this globalization of industrial organizations presents numerous organizational and leadership challenges. For instance, the cultural diversity of employees found in worldwide multinational organizations presents a substantial challenge with respect to the design of multinational organizations and their leadership. What practical knowledge and advice does the management literature provide to assist leaders in adapting to cultural constraints? Unfortunately, though the need for such information clearly exists, little if any help is available at this time (House, Wright, & Aditya, 1997; House & Aditya, 1997). Cross-cultural research and the development of cross-cultural theory are needed to fill this knowledge gap. From a scientific and theoretical perspective, compelling reasons exist for considering the role of societal and organizational culture in influencing leadership and organizational processes. Because the goal of science is to develop universally valid theories, laws, and principles, there is a need for leadership and organizational theories that transcend cultures.

There are inherent limitations in transferring theories across cultures. What works in one culture may not work in another culture. As Triandis (1993) suggests, leadership researchers will be able to “fine-tune” theories by investigating cultural variations as parameters of those theories. In addition, a focus on cross-cultural issues can help researchers uncover new relationships by forcing investigators to include a much broader range of variables often not considered in contemporary theories, such as the importance of religion, language, ethnic background, history, or political systems (Dorfman, 1996). Thus, cross-cultural research may also help to develop new theories of leadership and organizational processes and effectiveness, as well as to fine-tune existing theories by incorporating cultural variables as antecedents and moderators within existing theoretical frameworks. While the research literature on cross-cultural leadership has blossomed in the last fifteen years (House, Wright, & Aditya, 1997), it is often theoretical, fraught with methodological problems, and fragmented across a wide variety of publication outlets (Dorfman, 1996). More important, far more questions than answers exist regarding the culturally contingent aspects of leadership. Project GLOBE is intended to contribute theoretical developments and empirical findings to fill this knowledge deficiency.

Conclusions

From the study, it is clear that the demography, culture and society are inter related to each other. It is in society both demography and culture exist and society gets its credit through demography and culture. From the study, it is observed that leadership style though unique to each other; the leadership behavior is influenced by demographic variables especially the back ground of the family, gender, age, occupation and educational qualification. Further, the culture which is a learned belief also gives the edge to the leader in his ability to think and sometimes this may create a tincture of cultural based decision making by the leader. Finally, the leadership including the effects of demographic, culture and society will make the leader to be unique in his approach and in his decision making.

References

1. Breckenridge, M.B. (2000). An exploration of the Factors that Influence Leadership Effectiveness in a Corporate Environment. Indiana University of Pennsylvania, Indiana, PA.
2. Bryman, A. (1996). Charisma and leadership in organizations. London: Sage.
3. Burns, J. M. (1978). Leadership. New York, NY: Harper & Row.
4. Eddy, S. W. (2008). Why Organizations choose to manage Diversity? Toward a Leadership- Based Theoretical Framework. Human Resource Development Review, 7(1), 58-78. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1534484307311592>
5. Goleman, D. (2000). Leadership that gets results. Harvard Business Review, March-April, 78-90.



6. Hoy, W. K., & Miskel, C. G. (1996). Educational administration, theory, research and practice (5th ed.). New York: McGraw-Hill.
7. Kouzes, J. M., & Posner, B. Z. (1955). The leadership challenge: How to keep getting extraordinary things done in organizations. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.
8. Lewin, K., Lippitt, R. & White, R. K (1939). Patterns of aggressive behavior in experimentally created social climates. *Journal of Social Psychology*, 10, 271-279.
9. Mathieu, J., and Zajac, D. (1990). A review of Meta-analysis of the Antecedents, correlates and consequences of Organizational Commitment, *Psychological Bulletin*, 108(2), 171-94
10. Ospina, S., & Foldy, E. (2009). A critical review of race and ethnicity in the leadership literature: Surfacing context, power and the collective dimensions of leadership. *The leadership quarterly*, 20(6), 876-896. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2009.09.005>.
11. Thorndike, E.L., "Intelligence and Its uses", *Harper's Magazine*, No. 140, pp. 227-235, 1920.
12. Yukl, G. (2002). *Leadership in organizations* (5th ed.). New Jersey: PrenticeHall International.