

# Transformational leadership: Its relationship to culture value dimensions

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## Abstract

This study examines the relationships between overall transformational leadership, as well as its five aspects (challenging the process, inspiring a shared vision, enabling others to act, modeling the way and encouraging the hearth) as identified by Kouzes and Posner, and Hofstede's culture value dimensions by investigating the responses of Pakistani, Kazakh and Turkish business students. The evaluation of the responses indicates that a significant and negative relationship exists between the uncertainty avoidance culture value dimension and overall transformational leadership. Further analysis revealed that some aspects of transformational leadership are found to be common, whereas others are culture-specific. The transformational leadership aspects such as challenging the process and enabling others to act were not found to be related to any of the culture value dimensions. Inspiring a shared vision and modeling the way were significantly and negatively related to uncertainty avoidance while encouraging the hearth was positively related to power distance.

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## 1. Introduction

Considerable research on leader behavior has been done in a variety of disciplines and in recent years, scholars and practitioners have increasingly focused on the emotional and symbolic aspects of leadership (Zagorsek, 2004). These aspects are built around similar leader behavior and are called as “neocharismatic theories” (House & Aditya, 1997), or simply “transformational theories”. This new leadership theory expands the role of the charismatic leader who has considerable emotional appeal to followers and great power over them. Transformational leaders increase their followers’ self-efficacy, which is an important motivational construct increasing followers’ belief in their capability to organize and execute the actions required to attain a given goal (Shamir, House, & Arthur, 1993). In fact, it is generally accepted in transformational leadership that leaders persuade other members of the organization to provide support for the innovation (Hofstede, 2001). Transformational leadership theories seem to be the most advanced in the sense that they expand the scope of leadership theory by recognizing the importance of symbolic, emotional and highly motivating behaviors that appeal to follower’s minds and hearts and account for results over and above ordinary leadership.

Transformational leadership principles appear first in the work of Weber (1923/1963) on charismatic leadership. Then, Burns (1978) specified the distinction between transactional leaders who attempt to satisfy the current needs of followers by focusing attention on exchanges and transformational leaders who attempt to raise the need of followers and promote dramatic changes of individuals, groups, or organizations for the first time in 1978 (Yammarino & Bass, 1990).

Bass (1997) asserts that as transformational leadership is universally effective across cultures, this century’s dominant workforce consists of knowledgeable employees who need the envisioning and empowering which transformational leaders can provide. With increasing globalization, it is quite understandable that common technological imperatives, common industrial logic, and global technologies and institutions serve to harmonize management practices (Zagorsek, 2004). Therefore, global managers need universally valid leadership theories and principles that transcend cultures. Thus, it is expected that there will be some similarities in beliefs regarding effective leaders’ behavior across cultures. However, some studies in many different societies show that transformational leadership is closer to perceptions of ideal leadership (Bass & Avolio, 1990), and some writers claim that there are universal tendencies in leadership, which support the culture-universal position (Bass & Avolio, 1993). On the other hand, many researchers support the argument that the application of leadership theories may differ around the world and theories developed in the United States are limited in their applicability to other cultures (Hofstede, 1980, 1993; Smith & Peterson, 1988).

In some studies, partial evidence was found for transformational leadership universality (Den Hartog, House, Hanges, Ruiz-Quintanilla, & Dorfman, 1999; Posner & Harder, 2002; Zagorsek, Marko, & Stanley, 2004). Thus, some researchers suggest that leadership is both a universal and a culture-specific phenomenon (Bass, 1997; Dorfman & Howell, 1997; Peterson & Hunt, 1997). House, Wright, and Aditya (1997) asserted that there are some universal leadership phenomena but that there are also differences in culturally approved implicit theories of leadership. According to the GLOBE’s project, each culture develops its own culturally implicit theory (CLT) of leadership. In summarizing their

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