

The interplay between leadership and organizational culture in the Turkish construction sector

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Abstract

Organizational culture and leadership are purported to be deeply integrated and intertwined within an organization. Although there is a substantial amount of research demonstrating the importance of the interplay of culture and leadership, there exist few empirical examinations of the nature of this link. To examine this link, based on Cameron and Quinn's Organizational Culture Assessment Instrument and Hofstede's Values Survey Module, a questionnaire survey was conducted. The sample consists of 499 managerial personnel out of 107 contracting firms. With the aim of achieving a better understanding of how leadership style is influenced by organizational culture, Multinomial Logistic Regression was used. The findings demonstrate that managers in the contracting companies with different cultural characteristics tend to adopt different leadership styles to lead their employees to succeed in their business. Information contained in this paper will feed into country-specific understanding of leadership and organizational culture within the construction industry.

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1. Introduction

A review of the literature in many parts of organizational theory shows that leadership studies are unlikely to be of any additive value unless they take into account organizational culture. Schein (1992, 2010) proposed that “the unique function of leadership that distinguishes from management and administration is ... concern for culture”. Similarly Hunt and Dodge (2000) noted the need for understanding of which leadership practices influence specific organizational cultures. The authors argued that in the area of leadership, more attention had been given to “relationship between leaders and their immediate followers” whereas “the

organizational and environmental context in which leadership is enacted had been almost completely ignored” (p. 435). Likewise, Block (2003) pointed out:

“Despite numerous references to a relationship between leadership and organizational culture in the academic and popular literature, little systematic research has been conducted to examine the specific nature of this relationship.” (p. 319)

Alongside this view Huczynski and Buchanan (2007) state that organizational culture has not been seen as an important variable in the context of leadership styles in relation to contingency theories. Also, Walker (2011) citing Fincham and Rhodes (2005) believes that although culture has always been on the agenda of management theorists, it has not been enduringly linked to leadership. Indeed, leadership styles and organizational culture are not independent of each other and each plays an important role in determining organizational effectiveness.

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Bearing in mind that leadership and organizational culture are linked, the question of which comes first, leadership or culture remains an open issue. Uncovering the relationship between organizational culture and leadership depends on how culture has been conceptualized in organizational theory. Some researchers view culture as a variable that can be manipulated. They suggest that organizational culture can be directed and changed, depending on the skills and abilities of leaders (Nicholls, 1988; Quick, 1992; Simms, 1997). Other researchers view it as ‘a root metaphor for conceptualizing organization’ (Smirchich, 1983, p.342). They follow the view that organizational culture is a part of what an organization is rather than something an organization has and that thinking, feeling, and responses of leaders are molded by the cultural climate of the organization (Bass and Avolio, 1993; Schein, 1992, 2010).

In his seminal work, Schein (1992, 2010) illustrated the relationship between leadership–organizational culture in the context of the organizational life cycle. He argues that leaders of new organizations create and shape the cultural traits of their organizations. However, as the organization develops and gets older, the established culture of the organization begins to define the leadership. Bass and Avolio (1993) supports the argument of Schein (1992) by suggesting that the relationship between the two concepts represents an ongoing interplay in which the leader shapes the culture and is in turn shaped by the existing culture. Also, Bass (1996) demonstrates the relationship between leadership and culture by examining the impact of different styles of leadership on culture. He claims that transactional leaders tend to work within their organizational cultures, whereas transformational leaders change the organizational culture in line with their vision. However, Morgan (1997) believes that even though leaders can influence the evolution of culture by attempting to foster desired values, they can never control culture in the sense that management writers advocate.

Furthermore, the examination of the literature in the fields of organizational culture and leadership reveals that aside from the role of leaders in “creating” and “maintaining” particular types of organizational culture (Kavanagh and Ashkanasy, 1996; Schein, 2004, 2010), the ability to understand and work within a certain culture is a prerequisite to leadership effectiveness (Bass and Avolio, 1993). In the light of the above contradictory views and debates, there is still much to be learned regarding the relationship between leadership and organizational culture. The growing interest in this field may stem from the fact that leadership is not simply a rational or technical activity and that what leaders do must fit what is appropriate for their organization.

Yet, the absence of construction management literature exploring the empirical implications of the links between organizational culture and leadership is surprising given the importance of cultural differences in international construction. As Ozorovskaja et al. (2007) point out; international construction is well known for its high levels of differences in both organizational culture and leadership styles. The globalization of the construction industry has enforced both practitioners and researchers to deal with the cultural limitations of particular organizational and leadership practices. This is evidenced by a cross-cultural research on organizational and managerial

practices in comparable samples of construction organizations from more than 15 different countries. The original idea for the work was developed by CIB W112 (Working Commission W112 of the International Council for Research and Innovation in Building and Construction) and was then examined empirically employing the same methodology and approach in the participating countries. Hence, this study originated from the premise that the construction industry has a culture, shared understandings about what is expected of relationship between leadership and organizational culture.

Our work contributes to the field in the following ways. The first objective is to find out more about the interplay between organizational cultures and leadership styles in the context of construction industry. It is important to know which styles of leadership are found in specific types of organizational culture. It is an advantage for contracting firms to identify which styles of leadership are more likely to be successful in their culture. Knowledge of leadership styles used by managers from different cultures will improve our understanding of organizational effectiveness. Second, the present study has the purpose of providing evidence for the nature of the leadership–organizational culture connection for other cultures with a similar make-up.

2. Previous studies

Although a number of researchers have investigated leadership and organizational culture independently, not much has focused on the interplay between the two concepts, and, there exist few empirical examinations of the nature of this link. The earlier review of the literature on the relationship between leadership and organizational culture is beyond the scope of this paper and the reader is referred to Yukl (1998, 2012) and Block (2003) for a thorough treatment of the subject. For this reason we preferred to concentrate our review on relatively recent empirical literature in order to understand the nature and extent of attention to the leadership–culture relationship. Thus, we utilized the time period from 2000 onwards.

Generally, the studies reviewed below were conducted at different levels of analyses (for example, individual level versus firm level) using different methodological approaches (quantitative and qualitative) and a variety of associated constructs. Some researchers demonstrated the relationship between the two constructs by examining the impact of different styles of leadership on organizational culture while others aimed at predicting leadership behavior by organizational cultural values.

Focusing on organizational culture, leadership style and organizational performance, Ogbonna and Harris (2000) provide empirical evidence which suggests that organizational culture mediates the association between leadership style and performance. They argue that leadership style is not directly linked to performance but is merely indirectly associated to it. Furthermore, this study reveals that ‘leadership styles are strong predictors of both competitive and innovative cultures, which in turn are strong predictors of performance’ (Ogbonna and Harris, 2000). Lok and Crawford (1999, 2001, 2004) studied the leadership–culture relationship by using Wallach’s (1983)

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