Culturally-linked leadership styles

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Abstract

Purpose – This paper seeks to examine whether cultural context facilitates the emergence of different leadership styles. The key objective of the paper is to consider whether leadership styles are culturally-linked and/or culturally-biased.

Design/methodology/approach – A multifactor leadership questionnaire was utilised to measure differences in leadership styles and to offer explanations as to why the "one size fits all" view is not appropriate. Analysis of variance and *t*-tests were utilised to compare means for more than two managerial groups.

Findings – The analysis found significant differences between leadership styles and cultural groups, hence, supporting the argument that culture and leadership interact in different ways in diverse contexts. Transactional leadership was found to be strongly aligned with the ratings of managers from Malaysia, and transformational leadership scales correlated with the Australian respondents' mean ratings.

Practical implications – Variations in leadership styles are due to cultural influences because people have different beliefs and assumptions about characteristics that are deemed effective for leadership. Therefore, it is fundamental to know what leadership skills and knowledge are valued most by managers on a global level. This information is critical as it offers insight into developing competencies in different workplaces, especially as organisations expand their geographical boundaries into international markets.

Originality/value – The findings of the study provide empirical understanding for culturally-linked leadership styles. The paper contributes to understanding the importance of workforce diversity and attention to other cultures and, thus, enhances our appreciation of today's "global village".

Keywords Leadership, Questionnaires

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

Are leadership styles culturally-linked? What do leaders do to be effective in their cultures? Why is culture "the software of the mind?" While many leadership styles, attributes, traits and philosophies account for the extensive literature surrounding leadership (House *et al.*, 2004; Howell and Costley, 2006; Javidan *et al.*, 2006; Jogulu and Wood, 2006; Jogulu and Wood, 2007; Jogulu and Wood, 2008b; Judge and Piccolo, 2004; Kennedy, 2002; Mandell, 2003; Eagly *et al.*, 2003; Carless, 1998; Hofstede, 1980), this paper focuses entirely on personal styles and attributes of leaders and how culture can influence styles of leadership.

The aim of this paper is to examine the regional contexts that shape our understanding of leadership. The paper examines what leaders do and how styles of leadership are perceived in different cultures. By studying culturally-linked leadership styles and drawing conclusions about the relationship between leadership and culture, this article contributes to understanding the importance of workforce diversity and

attention to other cultures and, hence, our appreciation of today's "global village" when organisations operate in many various locations.

The nature of the interdependent relationship between leadership styles and cultural underpinnings cannot be ignored or underestimated. The approach taken in this paper is grounded in an assumption that cultural values, beliefs and expectations influence leadership styles through a complex set of behavioural processes involving culture-specific roles and responsibilities that are deemed appropriate for leadership. This assumption suggests that leadership styles exhibited by individuals who act in ways which reflect cultural nuances, sensitivities and values, establish meaning for subordinates and the leaders themselves.

This paper is organised as follows. In the next section, a literature review for the study is provided to give an overview of theoretical perspectives with regard to leadership styles. Subsequently, a description of the survey methodology and the main characteristics of the sample are presented. Then an examination of the results is revealed. The paper concludes with a discussion of the implications of the culture-biased leadership approach and limitations of the study.

Leadership styles and approaches

"Leadership is one of the most observed and least understood phenomena on earth" (Burns, 1978). Fortunately, much of the leadership research completed over the past several decades has assisted us to gain better insight into the history of leadership styles and approaches and their impact on society. For instance, research in recent years has been aimed at a better and more thorough understanding of what makes an effective leader (Eagly *et al.*, 2003; Eagly, 2007; Holt *et al.*, 2009). Although, leadership was regarded as an inherent ability to influence others by controlling the behaviour of other members of a group, leadership styles have evolved and extended beyond influence, to include motivation and enabling of others to help achieve organisational goals (House *et al.*, 2004; Rosette and Tost, 2010; Caldwell and Dixon, 2010).

In contemporary research the focus is on an exploration of the behaviours that constitute effective leadership. This philosophy underpins the emergence of transformational leadership and transactional leadership in the late 1970s. Burns developed a comprehensive theory to explain the differences between the behaviours of political leaders by using the terms "transactional" and "transformational". Burns defined transactional leaders as people who emphasise work standards, and have task-oriented aims (Burns, 1978), while transactional leaders perform their leadership within the organisational constraints and adhere to the existing rules and regulations. They aim to make sure that all the regular organisational tasks are completed on time. Power, authority and control are rooted in this behaviour because organisational targets are achieved by rewarding or disciplining subordinates in the style of a transaction. The implicit understanding was of a task needing to be carried out and, if satisfactorily completed, a reward would be forthcoming. Such reward-based action was intended to influence and improve employee performance (Burns, 1978).

However, much of the research that contrasted transactional approach is transformational style. Here communal traits with inspirational values are ascribed to define leadership. Transformational leadership attributes are associated with nurturing and caring; the role is typically viewed as an ability to show consideration and develop the followers to achieve their fullest potential. Leaders are inclined to lead

in ways that are encouraging and motivating (Burns, 1978) because communal
characteristics are largely beneficial in producing and fostering self-worth and
self-confidence amongst subordinates.

Bass and his colleagues built on the early work of Burns, and concluded that a
transactional leadership style was one which utilised a transaction between leaders
and followers, who were then rewarded or disciplined based on work performance
(Bass and Avolio, 1994; Bass *et al.*, 1996). Agentic traits and autocratic style in which
power and control are essential are often utilised by leaders. They identify individual
strengths, and set up agreements with subordinates explaining the rewards, incentives
and outcomes that will be achieved when tasks are completed (Avolio and Bass, 2004).
Transformational style is, however, comprised of behaviours consistent with
communal traits which are, primarily, characteristics that enhance team work,
development of subordinates' skills and supporting others towards achieving goals.
These attributes are imperative for an authentic transformational leader because they
help in obtaining the commitment and productivity of organisational members.

A thorough development of transactional and transformational leadership
understanding was based on the multifactor leadership questionnaire (MLQ). Using
leader and rater forms on the MLQ survey, transactional and transformational
leadership is measured in order to provide a concise evaluation to individuals of their
own leadership style or behaviour. There are three subscales on transactional
leadership style: contingent reward, management by exception active and
management by exception passive (Sarros *et al.*, 2002; Avolio and Bass, 2004; Bass
and Avolio, 1989). The specifics to encapsulate transformational leadership are the four
main subscales: idealised influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation
and individualised consideration (for discussion on each subscale please refer to Avolio
and Bass (2004), and Bass and Avolio (1989)).

Many leadership theories today indicate that leadership styles are transforming at a
rapid pace to keep up with globalisation and flattening organisational hierarchies.
Leaders operating in such a turbulent environment are required to possess a specific
set of skills. Of the two leadership styles measured by MLQ, the transformational
leadership approach has repeatedly shown the benefit of using a communal approach
to leadership (Rosette and Tost, 2010; Lowe *et al.*, 1996; Eagly, 2005). In particular,
communal leadership behaviours which are spread through transformational traits,
such as inspirational motivation and individualised consideration, are increasingly
regarded as effective leadership (Eagly and Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001; Mandell and
Pherwani, 2003) because they are essential for developing subordinates and creating
environments that encourage continuous learning. To achieve a more complete and
accurate view of leadership styles in an expanding global environment, we need to
understand different cultures and their beliefs about leadership perspectives. The next
section focuses entirely on the cultural attributes that people expect in leaders, the ideal
leadership styles and how cultural underpinnings are an imperative part of the role.

Culturally-linked leadership styles
There are explicit differences between cultures, particularly in terms of the values,
attitudes and behaviours of individuals, and this divergence has implications for
leadership in organisations (Hofstede and Hofstede, 2005; Alves *et al.*, 2006). Previous
leadership studies have concentrated on the leaders themselves, including their

actions, styles and philosophies, and the acceptance and appropriateness thereof for various leadership styles. Increasing numbers of studies also reveal that different leader behaviours and actions are interpreted and evaluated differently depending on their cultural environment, and are due to variations in people's ideas of the ideal leader (Jung and Avolio, 1999; Yamaguchi, 1999; Yokochi, 1989; Jogulu and Wood, 2008a), with some approaches being favoured and others perceived as less effective. These variations exist because the meaning and importance given to the concept of leadership appears to vary across cultures (Wood and Jogulu, 2006; Dorfman, 2004; Jung and Avolio, 1999). With globalisation and the expansion of organisations across borders, numerous challenges and opportunities exist for leadership. With differing cultural beliefs and values, there is a greater necessity for understanding and acknowledging culturally-linked leadership styles. Being receptive towards cultural sensitivities which may be radically different from one's own values and beliefs, is crucial for leadership effectiveness.

Leadership theories traditionally developed in individualistic societies represent effective leadership as an action of producing greater and better financial results, which encompasses the outcome from a leader's behaviour rather than a particular type of behaviour. These theories are drawn on manifestations of self-interest such as mentoring, networking and other personal initiatives which prevail in individualistic cultures. However, it is anticipated that leaders in collectivist cultures will view leadership effectiveness as a long-term goal resulting from subordinate loyalty, extra effort and satisfaction with the leader. Furthermore, collectivist cultures prioritise the needs of the group, family and overall community when engaging in leadership actions. Therefore, values of mutual obligations require leaders to give followers protection and direction in exchange for loyalty and commitment.

Similarly, leadership theories typically advocate a democratic view of attaining leadership roles, arguing that "anyone can get to the top". However, again, this concept draws from an individualistic perspective based on the cultural variable of low power distance (Hofstede, 1980). Small power distance cultures believe that roles and responsibilities can be changed based on individual effort and achievement, and that someone who today is my subordinate, tomorrow could be my superior (Hofstede and Hofstede, 2005). Yet, in high power distance cultures, social status, titles and positions are highly regarded because they dictate the way others treat and behave towards you, thus, leaders and their subordinates consider each other as unequals. Therefore, it is anticipated that leadership styles in high power distance cultures will seek to demonstrate tolerance, respect for age, compromise and consensus in working out rules for working together which are acceptable to all.

The present research tackles the issue of culturally-linked and culturally biased leadership styles in the realm of management studies, leading to the first research question:

RQ1. Are leadership styles culturally-linked?

In terms of different approaches to leadership styles, researchers have found that Asian students, who were originally from collectivist cultures, generated more ideas and worked more effectively with a transformational leader compared to Caucasian students. Based on these findings, the researchers proposed that transformational leadership will be more valued in collectivist cultures because subordinates would

identify with and be drawn towards the traits of transformational leadership, especially those traits that emphasise collective organisational goals and the sharing of a common workplace mission. However, the validity of Jung and Avolio's (1999) study was challenged because the Asian students in the sample had a mean age of 21.5 years and had been living in the US for an average of 10.6 years (half of their life) and, thus, were hardly representative of a collectivist culture. The weakness in the methodology of Jung and Avolio's (1999) study suggests that it is not necessarily generalisable.

Despite the limitations of Jung and Avolio's (1999) study, there has been a view that transformational and transactional leadership theories will have a universal application because these models have the capacity to be adapted in different cultural settings (Avolio and Bass, 2004). Some management writers advocate that transformational leadership promotes greater participation within collectivist cultures because followers are more likely to accept and identify with their leader's ideology due to high power distance and acceptance for authority (Jung and Avolio, 1999). Given the research findings of senior managers in Japanese organisations (Yokochi, 1989), as well as from a sample of secondary school principals in Singapore, researchers are convinced that, in collectivist cultures, the emergence of transformational style is associated with leadership success (Koh, 1990). However, more exploration is required in order to develop a strong and consistent picture of the generalisability of culturally-linked leadership styles. It is likely that leadership styles are perceived, evaluated or enacted differently in diverse cultures because the meaning and importance given to the concept of leadership vary across cultures. By comparing and contrasting two cultural frameworks of leadership styles, and drawing conclusions as to a relationship between leadership styles and culture, a more holistic understanding can be attained, signifying the following research questions:

RQ2. What style of leadership will be most commonly practised by middle managers in Malaysia?

RQ3. What style of leadership will be most commonly practised by middle managers in Australia?

Relatively few studies have taken into account the possible cultural influences on leadership styles, the differences in leadership approach that are practised in other countries, and how generalisable the leadership styles are. Reliance and generalisation based only on limited research raises significant research questions for studying differences in leadership styles across cultures. International studies are necessary to uncover new relationships by forcing research to broaden the cultural variables. From a managerial perspective, variations in leadership styles pose difficult challenges for organisations, especially when expanding their operations internationally. These corporations may often have to contend with diverse cultural values, norms and behaviours in conditions much different from the host country. Hence, it is critical that we examine the influence of culture-specific forces on differences in leadership styles.

Methodology
Sample
The research study involves the question of whether people in different cultures demonstrate different styles of leadership. This study was performed through middle managers from two different cultural backgrounds and working in four similar

industries (manufacturing; transport, postal and warehousing; finance and insurance services; and information media and telecommunications) in Malaysia and Australia. Samples from Malaysia and Australia were selected because they reflect different cultural traditions, with Malaysia representing an Asian culture and Australia representing an Anglo-Western culture. This was apparent in Hofstede's (1980) research where, in power distance, Malaysia scored 104 while Australia scored 36, indicating that Malaysian respondents prefer hierarchy, and direction to be provided by superiors, while Australian employees prefer a participative style of interaction and decision-making. On the individualism index, Malaysians scored 26 and Australians scored 90, which shows that Australians are highly independent of their workplace, favouring freedom, autonomy and personal time, while Malaysian employees have a greater sense of group, and organisational belonging and attachment.

Procedure and manipulations

Participants anonymously filled out the multifactor leadership questionnaire. Broad definitions of middle managers and their responsibilities were used in sampling. Only middle managers were invited to participate in the current study to control for sample equivalence in both countries. In addition, the middle managers were recruited from equivalent industries across both countries to enable comparison of cultural aspects within similar organisational contexts. A covering letter using official university letterhead and the "leader form" were administered through the human resources departments of the participating organisations. The survey was in English for both samples. A total of 324 respondents participated in the study – 191 completed surveys from Malaysia, and 133 from Australia were received. Of these responses, 231 useable MLQ forms were analysed. The combined response rate for both countries was 71 per cent.

The study administered a multifactor leadership questionnaire because transformational and transactional leadership theories were argued to have a universal application, and these models have the capacity to be adapted to different cultural settings (Avolio and Bass, 2004). Seeing that there are no single academic publications, journal commentaries or books that have utilised MLQ in assessing leadership styles in Malaysia, the decision was made to adopt the instrument, hence, underscoring the unique contribution being made by the current research. Furthermore, MLQ is widely utilised and is the most rigorously developed measurement tool for field experiments and research studies (Javidan and Carl, 2005). MLQ has also been extensively administered to study leaders in multiple organisations and across different levels of organisational hierarchies, including senior, middle and junior management (Lowe *et al.*, 1996), affirming the reliability, suitability and scope of the tool for the present study.

Measurement instrument and reliability analysis

The MLQ-5x short consists of 45 statements (items) which are rated on a five-point scale – 0 = "not at all", 1 = "once in a while", 2 = "sometimes", 3 = "fairly often", and 4 = "frequently, if not always". The 45 items on the MLQ measure five subscales of transformational leadership: idealised influence (attributed), idealised influence (behaviour), inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation and individualised consideration; as well as three subscales of transactional leadership: contingent

reward, management by exception (active), and management by exception (passive); and one subscale of non-leadership: *laissez-faire*.

The MLQ-5x short was developed as a tool to measure "full range" leadership dimensions. To achieve "full range", survey items which varied from highly positive (transformational) on one end of the spectrum to negative on the other end of the spectrum (*laissez-faire*), were developed. In examining the construct validity of the original MLQ items in 1999, the publishers acknowledged that the "full range" measure was not possible due to high inter-correlations between transformational items, scales of management by exception, and laissez-faire. In this first confirmatory factor analysis, goodness of fit (GFI) and root mean square residual (RMSR) were 0.73 and 0.10, respectively, with a chi-square of $p < 0.0001$ ($\chi^2 = 13,378$, df = 2889), suggesting that, statistically, there is a lack of fit between the factor structure and the MLQ items (Avolio and Bass, 2004). To eliminate items that were violating the statistical validity, the publishers used modification indices (MI) to adjust the model to fit the parameters on the basis of theoretical fit (Avolio and Bass, 2004). Presumably, confirmatory factor analysis is theory driven; however, using modification indices suggests that the data controls the decision-making process. Although it can be argued that this is exploratory in nature and not confirmatory in any case, the publishers have justified this approach based on conceptual fit and for empirical reasons.

There is a scoring key based on the factor structure; the 45 items on the MLQ form are summated to measure a particular leadership profile. Theoretically, summated scales represent a quicker and less accurate means of finding a single measure that reflects items that presumably share a common core. The MLQ items that load strongly are averaged together to produce a single, new variable to represent the subscale. A summated scale for every subscale was developed by calculating the mean indicator items for each MLQ subscale. Means from the computed data was compared by running a *t*-test and an ANOVA analysis. A *t*-test was performed to report the *t*-value and significance level between two groups, that is, national culture and MLQ subscales. An analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to compare means for more than two groups, that is, Malaysian and Australian female and male respondents and the MLQ subscales.

Demographic characteristics
Table I illustrates that the samples from both countries have generally different demographics. Overall, women are more loyal to an organisation than men, staying longer in one organisation and in their current position. Women spend longer than men in one organisation in their current position in Malaysia and Australia. Women and men have similar educational attainments, although Australian men have a slightly less likelihood of having as high an education as Malaysian men. Australian female managers are more qualified (especially at postgraduate level) compared to their male colleagues. Australian middle managers are slightly older than Malaysian middle managers, in both sexes. More female managers in both countries are single and without children compared to their male counterparts.

Results
A significant difference was found in how respondents from different backgrounds viewed intellectual stimulation ($F = 3.924$; df = 3; $p < 0.01$). Furthermore, the *post-hoc*

Sex		Malaysia (%)		Australia (%)	
		Male	Female	Male	Female
Age	Under 30	25	28	16	20
	31-39	33	38	36	35
	40-49	32	25	30	36
	50-59	10	8	18	9
Education level	TAFE or college/diploma	17	24	14	9
	Undergraduate degree	51	34	37	25
	Postgraduate degree	19	21	22	40
Marital status	Single (including divorced, separated, widowed)	18	49	15	23
	Married or partnership	81	51	84	74
No. of children	None	34	60	32	46
	1 or 2 children	40	29	46	40
	3 or more children	26	11	22	14
Tenure in current position (mean) (years)		6.6	7.9	4.8	5.9
Tenure in current organisation (mean) (years)		4.7	6.2	3.3	3.2

Table I.
Characteristics of the sample

Tukey HSD correlation showed significant difference. Malaysian males reported higher mean rating than Malaysian females on this subscale, and Malaysian female respondents showed weaker correlation than Australian female participants. Overall, the Australian female managers reported the strongest mean value on intellectual stimulation.

On the individualised consideration subscale, the study found a significant difference between the self-ratings of respondents in both cultural groups ($F = 11.628$; $df = 3$; $p < 0.01$). When the Tukey HSD test was performed, respondents in Australia reported significantly higher mean ratings than participants in Malaysia. For example, Australian female respondents reported substantially higher ratings (standardised mean rank 0.43) than the Australian male participants (mean rank 0.17); Malaysian female respondents (mean rank -0.25) and Malaysian males (mean rank -0.15). These results indicate that Australian managers are more likely to exhibit individualised consideration behaviours than their counterparts in Malaysia.

There was, again, a significant relationship observed between Malaysian female and Australian male respondents on the idealised influence (attribute) [$F = 2.459$; $df = 3$; $p < 0.1$]. The inspirational motivation subscale reported strong significant relationships on the one way ANOVA ($F = 2.159$; $df = 3$; $p < 0.1$) in both cultural groups. For example, Australian male respondents rated significantly higher than the Malaysian female managers.

In terms of transactional leadership subscales, in management by exception (active), the one-way ANOVA indicated a strong positive and significant relationship between the ratings of respondents in both countries ($F = 21.593$; $df = 3$; $p < 0.01$). For instance, the standardised mean value for management by exception (active) was stronger for the Malaysian sample (0.29) than for the Australian participants.

When the contingent reward subscale was calculated, a strong positive relationship was reported ($F = 2.733$; $df = 3$; $p < 0.05$). For example, Australian female respondents showed significantly higher standardised mean ratings (0.24). This

finding suggests that female managers in Australia are more likely to provide their subordinates with assistance in exchange for their efforts and compliance with organisational tasks.

The final analysis in this study was to calculate the mean value based on perceptions of leadership styles and cultural background. All the subscales representing each leadership style on the MLQ form were computed by cultural grouping. The results indicated a strong positive significant relationship between the respondents' cultural background and transformational leadership style ($t = -2.772$; df $= 229$; $p < 0.01$). For example, the Australian participants were more likely to exhibit transformational leadership characteristics than their counterparts in Malaysia.

There was also a strong and positive significant relationship between the participants' cultural background and transactional leadership style ($t = 3.069$; df $= 229$; $p < 0.01$). The test confirms that Malaysian managers are more likely to exhibit characteristics aligned with transactional leadership style than their counterparts in Australia. The *laissez-faire* style did not reveal any significant difference.

In summary, the analysis found significant differences between leadership styles and cultural groups, suggesting that respondents see leadership in different ways. Based on the evidence, this research proposes that perceptions on leadership differ according to cultural backgrounds, hence providing empirical data for the three research questions proposed. Table II shows a numerical representation of the findings that are deemed most notable.

Discussion and conclusion

In answer to the first research question, this study found that transactional leadership was strongly aligned with the ratings of managers from Malaysia, and transformational leadership scales correlated with the Australian respondents' mean ratings. This finding supports other research that proposed a direct impact of culture on leadership styles (Ardichvili and Kuchinke, 2002; Smith and Peterson, 1988; Javidan and Carl, 2005; Ayman and Korabik, 2010; Cheung and Chan, 2008; Hanges *et al.*, 2006; Jepson, 2009; Russette *et al.*, 2008).

In Malaysia, the high power distance is argued to have determined the leadership style because strong power distance cultures prefer an autocratic leadership approach (Hofstede, 1980). The culturally contingent leadership style in Malaysia also suggests interesting possibilities. First, there appears to be a strong culture-specific influence in the nominated style of leadership. This is because in collectivist cultures, people like to pay greater attention to in group harmony and maintaining relationships. Subordinates tend to avoid direct debate and get through tasks quietly because leaders set clear expectations of how roles should be enacted. Managers are viewed as authority figures in organisations and open discussions on conflicts are not encouraged. Such role expectation creates a propensity for Malaysian managers to lead in a transactional manner, because their values and beliefs influence their behaviours and identify leadership actions that are legitimate and acceptable.

Second, the emergence of transactional leadership in the Malaysian context underscores the acceptance of a paternalistic style of a leader-subordinate relationship which is culture-specific. Managers feel comfortable in leading in a transactional manner by being more directive or setting clear limits and expectations to their

| | Malaysia | | | | | | Australia | | | | | |
| | Male (A) | | | Female (B) | | | Male (C) | | | Female (D) | | |
	Mean	SD	Rank	Mean	SD	Rank	Mean	SD	Rank	Mean	SD	Rank
Idealised influence (attributes)*	−0.06	0.61	8	−0.13^C	0.71	4	0.14	0.49	3	0.10	0.53	4
Idealised influence (behaviour)	0.07	0.71	4	−0.11	0.75	3	−0.05	0.74	8	0.07	0.75	6
Management by exception (active)***	0.29^{CD}	0.68	1	0.29^{CD}	0.64	1	−0.38	0.72	9	−0.50	0.52	9
Management by exception (passive)	0.10	0.68	2	−0.13	0.63	5	−0.01	0.58	6	−0.05	0.64	7
Inspirational motivation*	−0.02	0.77	6	−0.20^C	0.73	7	0.16	0.71	2	0.08	0.79	5
Intellectual stimulation***	0.09^B	0.63	3	−0.25	0.72	9	−0.03	0.67	7	0.18^B	0.60	3
Individualised consideration***	−0.15	0.63	9	−0.25	0.73	8	0.17^{AB}	0.54	1	0.43^{AB}	0.56	1
Contingent reward**	−0.05	0.80	7	−0.19	0.79	6	0.09	0.75	4	0.24^B	0.55	2
Laissez-faire	0.01	0.77	5	0.11	0.79	2	0.01	0.71	5	−0.18	0.68	8

Notes: Results are based on two-sided tests assuming equal variances with significance level 0.05. For each significant pair, the key of the smaller category appears under the category with larger mean. Tests are adjusted for all pairwise comparisons within a row of each innermost sub-table using the Bonferroni correction; *$p < 0.10$; **$p < 0.05$; ***$p < 0.01$; A = Malaysian male managers; B = Malaysian female managers; C = Australian male managers; D = Australian female managers

Table II.
Mean ratings between managerial groups for MLQ subscales

followers because of the identified societal value of "paternalism". This assertion supports other empirical studies (e.g. Abdullah, 2001; Redding, 1990) where paternalistic leadership is perceived positively. In collectivist cultures managers are expected to act as parents of extended family members and protect the wellbeing of their staff. Organisations are managed as families where father is the head of organisation and employees are the children. The paternalistic approach within the transactional style is "contemporary" and more considerate than directive, controlling, commanding would imply.

Third, in high "power distance" cultures such as Malaysia (Hofstede and Hofstede, 2005), followers are expected to accept orders and direction more readily from superiors out of respect for people in power. It is the implicit leadership theory which argues that followers have specific assumptions about what constitutes effective leadership. These followers utilise such beliefs and assumptions to recognise and distinguish their leaders and non-leaders (Lord and Maher, 1991; Javidan and Carl, 2005). Therefore, in the Malaysian context, leaders who are exercising status, power and authority are accepted and tolerated; they are not questioned or challenged because the society acknowledges the fact that inequality between people exists and such behaviour should be expected (Jogulu, 2008; Hofstede, 1980; Mansor, 1994; Dorfman and Howell, 1997). The importance of power, status and hierarchical differences and its influence on leadership styles are reported in this study. In addition, the finding that Malaysian respondents evaluate themselves as transactional leaders reflects the cultural environment, and the manifestation of attitudes and behaviours over time, in explicit or implicit ways that suit such a setting, hence, providing an answer to the second research question.

In answering research question three, the Australian self-ratings showed a preference for a transformational leadership style, suggesting there is a culturally-linked preference. This closer match between one's leadership style and cultural profile is open to interesting interpretations. Since leadership is a process of influencing others to agree about what needs to be done and how it can be completed effectively, managers' behaviours facilitate the outcome and efforts for accomplishing shared goals. In the Australian context where freedom and autonomy is fundamental, transformational characteristics serve this purpose. The value of low power distance result in a more egalitarian leadership approach amongst the Australian respondents in the present study which emphasises individual preference and freedom with relationship between superior and subordinate viewed as contractual rather than paternal.

The Australian cultural context brings about a harmonious and equal leader-subordinate relationship because the role of a manager is typically viewed as a co-ordinating role. Here leaders encourage direct disagreement and choose more open discussion procedures to resolve problems and disputes to avoid risk of being misunderstood. The cultural norms and values are internalised as managers and subordinates grow up in an egalitarian environment such as Australia, suggesting that managers who are in charge of other staff are only seen as someone who co-ordinates and delegates work.

In addition, leaders in egalitarian cultures are most concerned about progress and individualism. Therefore, they are mindful of being a visionary leader to provide intellectual stimulation and articulate goals to subordinates and identify with

employees. The Australian culture shapes managers' attitudes and behaviours into someone who is able to be participative, consultative and co-operative in making decisions when dealing with staff. Thus, it is important to recognise that different cultures maintain different sets of norms and beliefs towards leadership styles because they reflect different concepts of how reality should be viewed and practised.

Limitations and implications for future research

This paper argues that leadership styles are culturally-contingent and that cultural expectations constrain the role of leadership, making it culture-specific. In doing so, the paper argues that variations in leadership styles are attributable to cultural influences because people have beliefs and assumptions about characteristics that are deemed effective for leadership. The data from the present study highlight an awareness that culture plays an important role in influencing leadership behaviours. It is evident that cultural norms and beliefs exert an influence on the views and expectations of individuals in a given society with respect to the way things ought to be done. These influences have implications for organisational behaviours in different workplaces.

The findings of this study point towards several areas for future research. Since this study was only based on two cultures and four industry types, a similar study focused on a larger sample of countries and industry types would strengthen the generalisability of this research. Furthermore, this study did not focus on the outcome of the leadership styles or their actual behavioural manifestation. Therefore, an important next step is to examine to what extent culturally-linked leadership styles, identified here, are associated with effective leadership and how they are enacted by leaders. Studies that shed light on this question will enhance and expand our cross-cultural understanding.

Of course, the other side of the debate is upheld by those researchers who argue that leadership styles are universal and beyond cultural boundaries because of the generally-accepted management practices, accounting fundamentals, similarities in educational training and industry-specific logic. In fact, Javidan and Carl (2005) argued that leadership styles are a common set of attributes because of human nature and the need for self-actualisation and achievement (McClelland, 1961; Maslow, 1954). The present study raised the possibility that leadership styles are culturally biased and that there is a need to learn new behaviours and skills when leaders operate in new cultural environments. However, it is acknowledged that further research is required to systematically examine this possibility.

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