

## The impact of culture and gender on leadership behavior: Higher education and management perspective

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### ABSTRACT

The study of culture, gender and leadership behavior has received much interest from researchers during the last three decades. This paper attempts to propose a conceptual framework consisting three human resource management (HRM) practices (culture, gender and leadership styles) and to explain the relationship among these variables. Culture plays an important role to adopt different leadership styles because it influences the way in which individuals, groups and teams interact with each other and cooperate to achieve organizational goals. The seven cultural elements are measured in the current study i.e., i) member identity ii) rewards criteria iii) team emphasis iv) means-end orientation v) control vi) unit integration and vii) risk/ conflict tolerance. Results show that the culture has a significant influence on male leaders to adopt different leadership styles, but female leaders likely participative in their leadership positions and try to adopt democratic leadership in different cultures.

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## 1. Introduction

The objective of the study is to investigate and analyze the influence of culture on human resource management practices. The research is expected to answer the importance question: Are HRM practices influenced by organizational culture or not? It is generally accepted that the practices of management is considered to be universal until Hofstede (1980) published the seminal work: *Culture's Consequences: International Differences in Work Related Value* in 1980.

For more than two decades, a number distinguished management and social scientists have questioned the applicability of Western, especially American management theory abroad (Hofstede, 1980, Laurent, 1986). Hofstede, for example, argued that American management theories reflect the cultural environment in which they were written. Therefore, it can be concluded that American management cannot be separated from American culture. Meanwhile, Laurent (1986) stated that: “a comparative analysis across national culture brings the startling evidence that there is no such thing as Management with a capital M. The art of managing and organizing has no homeland”. In additions,

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Laurent (1986) said that every culture has developed through its own history some specific and unique insight into the managing of organization and their human resources. Every culture has also developed specific and unique blind spots in the art of managing and organizing. There lie the still largely undiscovered opportunities and threats of international management.

Gender and leadership behavior is a matter of great concern for the organizations in the recent years. Research on gender differences in leadership behavior proved that women are more democratic or participative in their leadership behavior and men tend to adopt a more autocratic or directive leadership style. In addition, women are more concerned with both the maintenance of interpersonal relationships and task accomplishment than men do. In a review of 86 studies about gender and leadership effectiveness, result showed that men and women do not differ in organizational effectiveness, but men were more effective in roles defined as masculine and women are more effective in feminine roles (Eagly et al., 1995). Likewise, organizational culture is another factor that can influence on leadership behavior. Organization culture and leadership have been theoretically and empirically interlinked. A considerable number of researchers have argued that there is a constant interplay between organizational culture and leadership (Bass & Avolio, 1993; Schein, 1992; Waldman & Yammarino, 1999).

The literature associated with the gender and leadership studies are inconclusive due to small sample sizes, reliance on data or immature observers, and uncontrollable differences between groups and organizational culture. This paper bridges the gap in the literature by using the adequate sample size and structured questionnaire in the specific context of higher educational institutes of Pakistan.

In this paper, an analysis has been carried out to find a statistical relationship between culture, gender and different leadership styles by using primary data of 150 managers of higher education institutes of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) province of Pakistan. This paper does not include all dimensions and factors of the culture, gender and leadership styles but limited to the following variables:

- *Culture*: Jones and George (2003) define organizational culture as the set of values, norms, standards for behavior and shared expectations that influence the way in which individuals, groups and teams interact with each other and cooperate to achieve organizational goals. These cultural elements and their relationships create a pattern that is a distinctive part of an organization, as personality is unique to the individual.
- *Leadership*: Chemers (2002) defines leadership as the process of social influence in which one person can enlist the aid and support of others in the accomplishment of a common task. Leadership is the ability to get participants in an organization to focus their attention on the problems that the leader considers significant.
- *Gender*: Gender refers to the distinctive culturally created qualities of men and women apart from their biological differences (Brandser, 1996). The construct of gender implies the way meaning associates with sex in members of a culture in terms of expected learned behaviors, traits, and attitudes (DeMatteo, 1994; Northouse, 2004). The concept of gender role is constructed in organizations based on different aspects such as masculinity involving aggression, independence, objectivity, logic, analysis, and decision, and; femininity involving emotions, sensitivity, expressiveness, and intuition (see, Fernandes & Cardoso, 2003).

The objectives of this paper are to empirically investigate:

- i. the relationship between cultural elements and leadership styles;
- ii. the impact of culture on gender differences in the different leadership styles;
- iii. the behavior of female leaders' and male leaders in the organization culture.

The paper is organized as follows: after introduction which is provided in section 1 above, literature review is carried out in section 2. Methodological framework is explained in section 3. The estimation and interpretation of results is mentioned in section 4 and section 5 concludes the paper.

## 2. Literature review

The notion that human resource practice is universal has been questioned. A number of human resources policy that successfully practiced in a certain country, may not successfully applied in another country. National culture also influenced the strategic decision making though leadership style (Schneider & DeMeyer, 1991:308), and human resource management practices such as performance appraisal (Luthans et al., 1993:743).

In culture with high power distance, loyalty and obedience to superior is required. Therefore, management usually uses performance appraisal based on the behavioral criteria rather than results criteria. Employees or subordinates have a minimal risk when they follow the established procedure rather than make a new breakthrough which may cause failure. Basically, performance appraisal can be differentiated based on its orientation i.e. behaviour orientation or results orientation (Schuler et al., 1996:125).

Organizational culture and its environment factors in which organization exist determine the way of managing the organization (Saffold, 1988:547). Organizational culture is a set of assumptions, beliefs, values, and norms shared by members of an organization and is influenced by its past, environment, and industry (Rutherford, 2001; Stoll, 1999). Organizational culture also applies to communication, codes of behavior, processes, and policies (Still, 1994). Schein (1992) and Normore (2004) offer compelling arguments that each new leader needs to understand and analyze the particular organizational culture into which she or he is placed, emphasizing that leadership is intertwined with each particular organizational culture. Goffee and Jones (1996) interpreted the meaning of organizational culture in terms of the "community" of the organization and particularly in terms of how people relate to one another. The latter implies that the culture of the organization can be viewed through a lens of sociology, which results in the two distinct human relations: sociability and solidarity. On the basis of above discussion, the present study seek the objective i.e.,

*Hypothesis A: There is a significant relationship between culture and leadership behavior among genders*

Research by Newman & Nollen (1996:753) indicated that organization performance is better in the companies where there is congruency between national culture and human resources practice. In the unit business level, where its manager consciously practice human resource policies in accordance with country's value, the performance of business unit i.e. return on assets (ROA), return on sales is better and employee bonus is bigger. While discussing relationship of culture and leadership behavior different researchers indicates the complexity of organizational life. Schein (1992) argues that although the culture of an organization cannot easily be manipulated by managers, leadership remains intertwined with culture formation. This means that culture can be influenced by leaders and is thus embedded and strengthened by effective leadership. Research confirms the leadership-culture relationship as it exposed that the participants clearly attributed their experiences of the company culture to the leadership style of their immediate supervisors (Niemann & Kotze, 2006). The relationship between organizational culture and leadership can also be extended to the performance of

the members in the organization. Keup et al. (2003:1) provided some insight into the effect of the culture of the organization and state that “culture clearly affects the way the members of the organization perceive and attempt their work. A strong organizational culture does not just happen — it is cultivated by management, learned and reinforced by employees and passed on to new employees.” Kruger (2003) opines that the organizational culture has the potential to enhance organizational performance and individual satisfaction. As a result, culture influences the leadership styles predominant and accepted in a particular organization. On the basis of above discussion, the present study seek an objective i.e.,

#### *Hypothesis A<sub>1</sub>*

*There is a direct relationship between culture and leadership behavior among male leaders*

Researchers have great interest the way woman adopt leadership behavior, with the considerable increased number of women leaders in society, particularly to determine if women have their own ways of leading. The real issue in leadership differences lies in the equity in selecting the right person with the appropriate skills and qualities to ensure the effectiveness and success of the organization (see, Barker, 2000; Bass & Avolio, 1994). The integration of women in leadership roles is not a matter of “fitting in” the traditional models, but “giving in” the opportunities for them to practice their own leadership styles. The differences in men’s and women’s leadership styles are important considering the trends towards flatter organizations, team-based management, and globalization (see, Evans, 2001; Helgesen, 1990; Rigg & Sparrow, 1994; Rosener, 1990).

Trend indicated that women seen as having feminine characteristics in their leadership behavior. The point of examining these differences is not to say one approach is right and one is wrong, but rather to help us understand that males and females may be coming from very different perspectives, and that unless we understand these differences, we are not likely to work well together (see, Bass & Avolio, 1994; Freeman & Varey, 1997; Stanford et al., 1995; Van der Boon, 2003). Feminine leadership styles are described in general terms as interpersonal-oriented, charismatic and democratic (Eagly & Johnson, 1990; Freeman & Varey, 1997) and related to gender because of stereotypes of women as being sensitive, warm, tactful and expressive (Olsson & Walker, 2003; Van Engen et al., 2001). On the basis of above discussion, the present study seek an objective i.e.,

#### *Hypothesis A<sub>2</sub>*

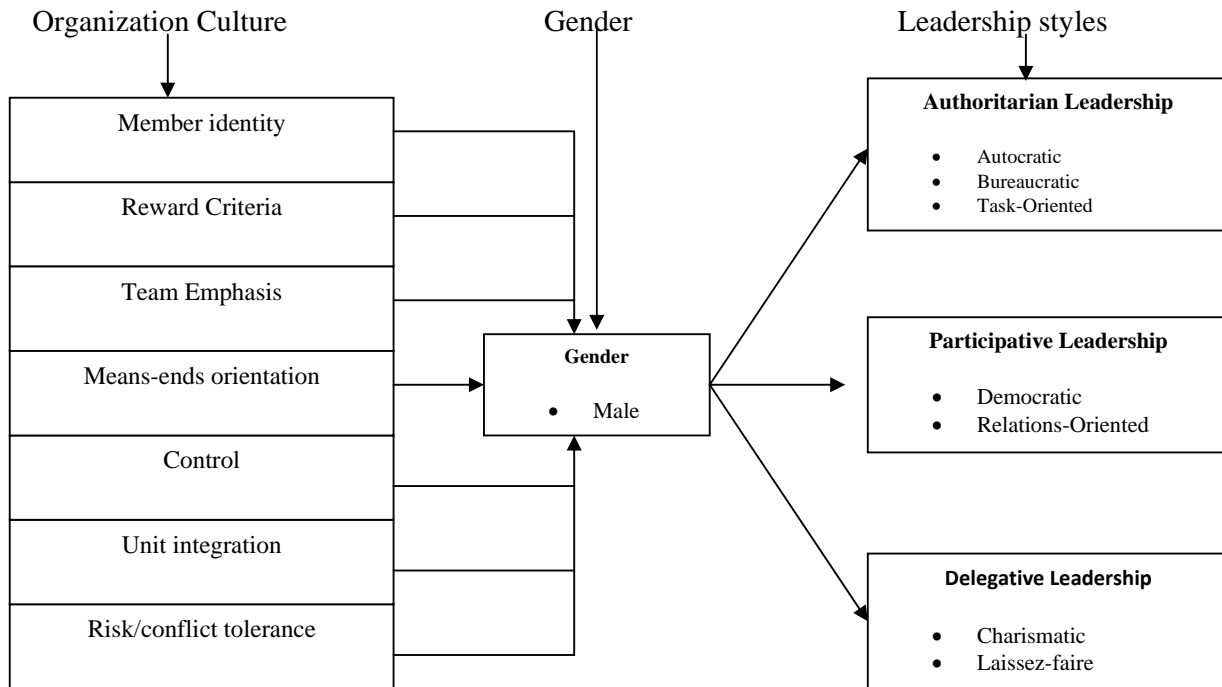
*There is a direct relationship between culture and leadership behavior among female leaders*

Culture, gender and leadership theories have been increasing in developed and developing world, hence there is a pressing need to evaluate and analyze the culture, gender and leadership styles and to find out their inter relationship. In the subsequent sections, an effort has been made to empirically find out the relationship among culture, gender and leadership styles in the context of higher educational institutes of Pakistan.

### **3. Methodological framework**

A convenient sample of 150 leaders from 10 private and public universities in KPK-Pakistan participated in the study namely, University of Peshawar; Fatima Jinnah Women University, Peshawar; Sarhad University of Information Technology, Peshawar; Hazara University, Mansehra; COMSATS Institute of Information Technology, Abbottabad; UET Peshawar; Institute of

Management Sciences, Peshawar; Iqra University, Peshawar; CECOS University, Peshawar and Mardan University. A total of 112 filled-out questionnaires were returned, of which 38 were filled out by female leaders and 74 by male leaders, forming a rate of 74.6% of total distributed questionnaires. A 5 point Likert scale structured questionnaire is filled by the sample to test the relationship between gender, organization culture and leadership styles. The framework of the study is given in Fig. 1.



**Fig. 1.** Research framework

The study based on the seven cultural elements, which can influence leaders to modify their leadership behavior have the following elements,

1. Member identity
2. Rewards criteria
3. Team emphasis
4. Means-ends orientation
5. Control
6. Unit integration
7. Risk / conflict tolerance

The study focused on the following leadership behavior and each style consists of following leadership theories.

#### Authoritarian

- Autocratic
- Bureaucratic
- Task-Oriented
- Transactional

#### Participative

- Democratic
- Relations-Oriented
- Servant

#### Delegative

- Charismatic
- Laissez-faire
- Transformational

Gender refers to the distinctive culturally created qualities of men and women apart from their biological differences (Brandser, 1996). The Cronbach's Alpha reliability coefficients for the sample are given in Table 1.

**Table 1**  
Cronbach's Alpha reliability coefficients

Items	Cronbach's Alfa (r)
Member Identity	0.745
Reward Criteria	0.713
Team Emphasis	0.805
Means-ends orientation	0.799
Control	0.691
Unit Integration	0.789
Risk/Conflict tolerance	0.918

These values can be considered satisfactory and confirm the reliability of the instrument.

#### 4. Findings

A total of 112 questionnaires were received, of which 33.9% were female and 66.1% were male. Correlation for the male leadership styles on organizational culture were computed and reported in Table 2.

**Table 2**  
Correlation matrix of male leadership styles and organizational cultural

	Leadership	Member identity	Reward Criteria	Team Emphasis	Means-ends orientation	Control	Unit integration	Risk/conflict tolerance
Leadership	1							
Member identity	0.721	1						
Reward Criteria	0.530	0.557	1					
Team Emphasis	0.434	0.347	0.535	1				
Means-ends orientation	0.389	0.137	0.023	0.0726	1			
Control	0.156	0.038	0.100	0.3184	0.273	1		
Unit integration	0.677	0.561	0.407	0.0465	0.191	-0.133	1	
Risk/conflict tolerance	0.294	0.166	0.104	0.0000	-0.068	0.221	0.307	1

The results of correlation indicate a strong positive relationship between member identity and leadership behaviour of male leaders as correlation coefficient value indicates 0.721. Similar results have been obtained with reward criteria and unit integration on leadership behaviour with correlation coefficient values are 0.530 and 0.677, respectively. The correlation between team emphasis and leadership is 0.434 while means-end orientation and leadership correlate with a value of 0.389. Both results are direct in nature which significantly concludes medium correlation with leadership styles.

Control and risk tolerance both have low impact on leadership behaviour as correlation coefficient values are 0.156 and 0.294, respectively. Now this is important concern to know that how female's leadership reacts in different types of organization's culture shown in Table 3.

**Table 3****Correlation matrix of female leadership styles and organizational culture**

	Leadership	Member identity	Reward Criteria	Team Emphasis	Means-ends orientation	Control	Unit integration	Risk/conflict tolerance
Leadership	1							
Member identity	0.031	1						
Reward Criteria	0.034	-0.303	1					
Team Emphasis	-0.081	0.012	0.044	1				
Means-ends orientation	-0.022	0.170	0.012	-0.296	1			
Control	-0.094	-0.218	-0.164	0.114	0.324	1		
Unit integration	0.569	0.361	0.051	-0.035	-0.010	-0.388	1	
Risk/conflict tolerance	-0.038	0.005	-0.411	-0.134	0.465	0.123	0.123	1

The result reveals that organization's culture has not significant contributor to influence female's leadership behavior, except unit integration, as correlation coefficient value is 0.569. However, if we analyze in between cultural components of organization, we observe that reward criteria for females are not truly represented female's identity in the organization as it is reflected with the coefficient value of 0.303 with negative sign. However, unit integration has a moderate effect on females' member identity as coefficient value is 0.361. Risk tolerance factor increases in females as means ends orientations increases in the organizations and the coefficient value is 0.485. The rest of the inter-cultural components are insignificant or very low with each other. The overall conclusion emerges that female leadership style except unit integration are weak contributor to enhance female's leadership qualities. Unit integration may lead to enhance female's leadership styles in the organization.

Results do not conclude the effectiveness of leadership behavior of gender differences. It only focuses on the cultural influence on genders. It has already been admitted that effectiveness of male and female leadership is higher under different circumstances (e.g., Sperry et al, 1997; Brewer et al, 1996; Berdahl, 1996; Cassell & Walsh, 1997; Dodge et al, 1995; Forsyth et al, 1997; Hooijberg & DiTomaso, 1996; Kolb, 1997; Lauterbach & Weiner, 1996; Luthar, 1996; Maher, 1997; Payne & Cangemi, 1997; Moss & Kent, 1996; Pratch, 1996; Rosenthal et al, 1996; Sakata, 1996).

The aforementioned hypotheses were tested and results are provided in Table 4 below.

**Table 4****Summary of hypothesis results**

Hypothesis	Results
A There is a direct relationship between culture and leadership behavior among genders.	Partially supported Supported
A <sub>1</sub> There is a direct relationship between culture and leadership behavior among male leaders.	Not Supported
A <sub>2</sub> There is a direct relationship between culture and leadership behavior among female leaders.	Supported

The results only partially supported the first hypothesis (i.e., A) that culture has a significant positive impact on genders to adopt leadership styles. The study supported the second hypothesis (i.e., A<sub>1</sub>) that male leaders are more influenced by the organizational cultures. Study rejects the influence of culture on female leadership behavior (hypothesis A<sub>2</sub>) i.e., females are more likely to be participative and resist changing their leadership behavior under the influence of organizations culture.

## 5. Conclusion

Based on the result of data analysis, we have found that the culture influence male leaders to adopt more authoritarian leadership style because male leaders represent the belief of strong individuality and conform to the ideals of masculinity in the workplace. They are more likely to be autocratic, focused on directing performance and finding solutions by considering wins and losses. Their competitive nature and cultural influence can make them appear less practical and friendly. Study rejects the influence of culture on female leadership behavior. The findings were consistent with prior research (i.e., Bass & Avolio, 1994; Freeman & Varey, 1997; Stanford et al., 1995; Van der Boon, 2003) which found that female leaders in different organizational cultures try to adopt leadership styles which are more participative and accommodative and trend indicated that women seen as having feminine characteristics in their leadership behavior. The research shows organizational culture positively influence on HRM practices. Therefore, it is important for practicing managers to consider cultural factor in formulating and adopting HRM concept from other countries especially from Western countries. The reason is that HRM concepts always contain unspoken assumption that is underlying values in the certain society.

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