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ABSTRACT

There is little research by social psychologists in the areas of leadership and social organization, especially from a cross-cultural perspective, though such research offers an understanding of both leadership and culture. Existing cross-cultural management studies suffer from a lack of understanding of important social and cross-cultural psychological principles. Leadership research across cultures provides the opportunity to test the universality of leadership theories and also the opportunity to broaden those theories through the inclusion of a wider range of variables than are available in a single society. While the study of social organization at the "macro" level is not usually within the scope of social psychologists, an examination of the leadership theories of the behavioral scientist-anthropologists, political anthropologists, sociologists - yields valuable insights for cross-cultural leadership research. Leadership and social organization represent a fruitful area of study for cross-cultural psychology. (MCF)

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Social Organization and Leadership in Cross-Cultural Psychology

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Harry Triandis spoke to us about neglected variables in cross-cultural research. I'd like to talk about a neglected area, leadership and social organization. The leadership researcher is one of the marginal persons of psychology. Often nurtured and raised, as I was, in a traditional social psychology program, he or she wanders from discipline to discipline in search of their literature. From organizational behavior programs in business schools to public administration programs in departments of political science to sociology, and on they search. Often only to return to social psychology and to find that leadership may be of little interest to his/her closest colleagues.

If this leadership researcher is interested in a cross-cultural perspective the road is that much longer and more convoluted. In his recent chapter on Group Processes for the Handbook of Cross-Cultural Psychology, Leon Mann devotes a scant two pages to studies of leadership. The studies cited, most of which are ten to twenty years old, deal exclusively with the universality of the effects of Lewin, Lippitt and Whites' authoritarian and democratic leadership styles, an issue long dead in the U.S. leadership literature. Arnold Tannenbaum's chapter on Organizational Psychology in the same Handbook devotes more space to leadership and supervision, but the coverage lends corroboration to my earlier assertion. Much of the research on cross-cultural management is being done by individuals with a limited background and interest in psychology.

This abdication of responsibility for the study of leadership by social psychologists is unfortunate, for many reasons. The questions being asked by other researchers are not centered in the areas of greatest interest to psychologists. Their potential for illuminating our understanding of

psychological phenomena is, therefore, limited. Also, most of this research and the theorizing which arises from it, suffers greatly from a lack of understanding of important social and cross-cultural psychological principles.

A case in point is the recent furor over Japanese management styles. The study of Japanese organizations is one of the hottest research topics in management and organizational behavior programs today. The most prominent theorists in this topic are Professors of Management.

The work is, typically, methodologically flawed; but far more serious is the scant attention paid to the vast cultural differences between the Japanese and U.S. societies. Several authors have recommended the incorporation of Japanese management principles into U.S. organizations without consideration of the socialization practices, normative influences, and social structures which make such a transfer, dubious at best.

As an aside, it is somewhat amusing to see the United States as the victim of an "imposed etic."

However, if all I had to talk about, today, was the fact that some questionable research in topics of minimal interest to us is being done, I would not have wanted to make this presentation. What does excite me and what I want to discuss, is the potential for some very interesting and important research in leadership and social organization, which can be of great value to cross-cultural social psychologists.

I would argue that leadership and group process should be a motherlode of useful information. By virtue of the central role of normative processes in group interaction, cultural influences should be extremely strong in group phenomena. Thus, cross-cultural research on leadership offers a richer understanding of both leadership and culture.

Let us look at why we do cross-cultural research; The two most often stated benefits of cross-cultural research are, on the one hand to assess the generalizability of theories beyond the culture in which they arose, i.e., the universal validity of theory, and on the other hand to broaden and extend our theories through the incorporation of a wider range of variables than can be found in any single society. Leadership research stands to benefit from both of these opportunities.

{ I would like to look first at the issue of the generalizability of our current findings. The question of the universality of contemporary leadership theory is extremely timely. Organizational practitioners, both in America and in other countries, are rushing to develop training programs for developing nations. These programs are based on empirical findings and theoretical conjectures which arise from research done primarily in the United States and Western Europe. Not nearly enough attention has been paid to the question of the generalizability of those theories and practices.

Because of the scarcity of research in this area, the question of universality of leadership theories must be approached with caution. My own view is that the question of universality depends largely on the level of analysis chosen. {I believe that at the most abstract levels, our theories travel well. It is my observation that Hollander's principle that those individuals who have demonstrated competence and loyalty to the group are given greater responsibility and freedom to innovate, is likely to be found in most cultures. Likewise, the contingency theories which argue that the effects of leadership are determined by the match between the leader's personal characteristics and the parameters of the leadership situation have broad applicability.

However, I think we can expect to see dramatic cultural differences at the level of the specific behaviors which reflect competence and loyalty and the specific situational characteristics and leadership styles which interact to produce productivity and subordinate satisfaction. Furthermore, the determination of those specifics will help to clarify the more abstract principles underlying our theories. An couple of illustrations may help to make this point.

In 1967, I conducted a study of leadership and communication processes in Iran. One of the measures that I employed in that study was a shortened and translated version of the Leader Behavior Description Questionnaire. Iranian students were asked to rate American leaders after a small group exercise. An interesting finding was that the factor analysis of those leader behavior ratings did not yield the two factors of consideration and initiation of structure found with most U.S. and European samples. Rather a single factor emerged containing both considerate and structuring items.

My understanding of Iranian culture led me to regard that factor as a cultural ideal and I labelled the factor Benevolent Paternalism. Just prior to the Iranian revolution, Roya Ayman and I conducted a study of managerial effectiveness in a large home appliance factory near Tehran. We administered a back-translated version of the Leader Behavior Description Questionnaire to 120 foremen who rated their supervisors. Once again, the Benevolent Paternalism factor emerged, incorporating both socioemotional and goal directed behaviors. Two new items which we had added to the scale also loaded very strongly on this factor. These were "My supervisor is a good leader", and "My supervisor is like a father to me." This Benevolent Paternalism factor was strongly related to subordinate satisfaction scores and to ratings of effectiveness taken from superiors.

These findings are interesting in two ways. They suggest that the factor structure of leader behavior is not universal, and they imply that subordinate expectations moderated by culture are critical in determining the effects of leader behavior on performance and satisfaction. While, in no way earthshaking, these results may help to direct our attention in potentially fruitful directions. Ms. Ayman and I are presently carrying out replication and extension of the Iranian study with a sample of Mexican managers.

Another example of the need to incorporate cultural variables in leadership theory arises from the previously alluded to research on Japanese management styles. One of the greatest differences between American and Japanese leadership styles relates to decision making. In contrast to the fast-paced, individually oriented decision styles of American managers, Japanese managers typically follow a slower, more cautious, collective style in which inputs from a large number of people are integrated into a group decision. As a cross-cultural psychologist the differences in these decision styles is less important than the conditions which have given rise to and maintained each style. The scarcity of exploitable resources in Japan places a premium on decision strategies which minimize errors. In the United States, with its vast resources and highly competitive atmosphere, decision strategies which maximize speed and efficiency are more adaptable. Further, the high value placed on individual responsibility and individual achievement in the U.S. is in direct contrast to the traditional Japanese concern for collective action and responsibility. The more participative and consensual style of Japanese managers helps to ensure acceptance and commitment to decisions by all relevant parties. Our understanding of leadership and the broader phenomena of social organization can be enlightened by placing organizational practices into an integrated cultural context.

The second benefit of cross-cultural research is that it provides the investigator with a broader range of variables than are available in a single society. The study of social organization at the macro level is not typically undertaken by social psychologists. However, our sister disciplines in the behavioral sciences offer some valuable food for thought.

Some excellent theorizing by anthropologists and sociologists like Elman Service, Marshall Sahlins, Gerhard Lenski among others may point psychologists in a useful direction. These writers have addressed the question of how changes in economic subsistence patterns affect status and leadership. The evolution of food production strategies impacts on the status systems which facilitate the production, storage, and distribution of surpluses. Anthropologists identify four basic food-getting technologies. These are hunting and gathering, primitive horticulture or gardening, advanced horticulture, and agrarian involving field crops. Each technology makes certain demands on the society as a whole and individuals in the society. Congruently, the assignment of status and authority in each system serves a dual purpose. At the level of the society, the status system provides for a pattern of authority and responsibility which allows the society to meet its demands. At the level of the individual, the awarding of status and its attendant rewards, encourages and channels the ideal adult personality such that individuals are better able to meet the demands of their environment.

For example, hunting and gathering societies are confronted by an often unpredictable and equivocal environment. The finding and collecting of food does not follow patterns regular enough to provide hard and fast rules to follow. Socialization patterns mold the adult for the traits of independence and resourcefulness. The need for high levels of cooperation and the fact that little surplus food is generated for distribution engenders a political system which is egalitarian and fluid. Leaders are chosen for competence and generosity and typically show leadership styles characterized participation

and consideration.

Simple horticultural technologies offer the opportunity for a dramatic increase in food production. Thus, leadership styles which foster an intensification of the economic base are adaptive. In a study of the so-called "big men", or leaders, in Melanesian society, Marshall Sahlins draws a portrait of a charismatic leader. Through a combination of shrewd bargaining and charismatic influence, the Big Man exhorts his followers to produce large amounts of food which are given away at feasts which raise the status of the Big Man and his group. However, because the social structure gives the Big Man no formal power over his followers, his leadership style tends towards structuring within a considerate and participative framework.

Advanced horticultural societies, like the Polynesian cultures before European influence, produce much larger surpluses which must be stored and distributed. A typical adaptation is the centralized storage of surpluses administered by a special class or royalty. The leaders, kings or chiefs, can employ some of those stored surpluses to establish courts, police forces, and small bureaucracies. These factors combined with the forced isolation associated with living on an island give the leader unprecedented power. In such societies, we see the beginnings of rigid class systems, the concept of divine right, and leadership styles heavily tilted toward the autocratic mode.

In large scale agrarian societies like those of China, Mesopotamia, and Mesoamerica, a new set of ecotechnological demands arises. Large groups of individuals must be organized for collective work on regular schedules. Children are socialized for obedience and responsibility. The political system must organize itself for reliability and control. The often repeated

result is the imperial bureaucracy. The leadership style being task-oriented and directive, but considerate enough to maintain cooperative working relationships. The Benevolent Paternalism leadership style identified in Iran may be common to many agriculture societies.

Some interesting cross-cultural research might flow from this analysis. The attempt to understand adult personality patterns and leadership styles within the ecotechnical context might proceed along lines very similar to those employed by Berry and Witkin in their study of cognitive style. We might also effect a useful marriage between the theories of the political anthropologists like Service and those of the cross-cultural developmentalists like Barry, Bacon, and Child, the Whittings, the Munroes, and others.

Likewise leadership and organizational psychologists can integrate similar culture contexts in their work. For example, the need to organize and control the efforts of large numbers of people in collective tasks, like building irrigation networks, necessitates the development of hierarchical authority systems which tend toward autocratic leadership styles. Similarly, ecological circumstances which provide highly uncertain and equivocal outcomes often give rise to decision making systems which tend to be cautious and conservative, as in the Japanese case.

Recently, John Thibaut and his colleagues at the University of North Carolina published an experiment based on Service's redistribution theory of social evolution. Using a production and trading game, these researchers found that the patterns for the emergence, maintenance, and rewarding of leadership, over several generations were affected by economic and communication advantages enjoyed by certain groups of subjects. Although that research is too complex for full discussion here, the paper does indicate that a rich store of hypotheses for experimental research exist in

the anthropological literature on social evolution. Also important to note is that findings by the North Carolina researchers help to provide causal paths and explanations for observations in the anthropological literature, a useful two-way street.

In conclusion, the examples I have chosen were meant to be suggestive, not exhaustive. There may be lines of research in cross-cultural leadership of which I am not aware. I do feel, however, that leadership and social organization represent a really fruitful area of study for cross-cultural psychology.

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Notes

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