Leadership and Culture: Application of a Western Leadership Theory in the Organizations of Bangladesh

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Leadership is an important feature of everyday and organizational affairs. Since 1950s, the body of theoretical and empirical studies of question of organization and culture in developing countries has grown considerably. These studies have confirmed the significance of national and organizational culture to explanations of organizational performance in such settings (Blunt, 1991 cited in Blunt & Jones, 1997: 7).

Cross-cultural research emphasizes that different cultural groups likely have different conceptions of what leadership should entail. There is a continuing debate as to how best to conceptualize the process of leadership. What should be the cultural characteristics of an effective leadership style? Is he someone who follows the same cultural attributes of the society in which the organization belongs to or he is someone who is practicing a new leadership approach developed in and requires different type of cultural attributes?

We should take culture into account when we are going to apply any leadership theory develops in different socio-economic or cultural background. In this respect I will try to critically discuss the possibility of applying the transformational leadership theory in Bangladesh.

> This article is guided by two hypotheses. First, the transformational leadership theory is not possible to apply in organizations of Bangladesh on the basis of the cultural features of the country. Second, the cultural features of the country direct to hierarchical organizational set up and encourage more personal power of the leaders.

The Concept of Leadership

Leadership is an important notion in many aspects for a long time. But it has become a topic for sustained formal analysis by scholars and researchers in the twentieth century. Many theories of leadership have been developed in the last 50 years.

Leadership is not an easy concept to define. Its wide spread currency and use in everyday life as an explanation affects the way it is defined and

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indeed probably makes it more difficult to define as a concept (Bryman, 1996:276). Stogdill(1950:3) considered leadership as the process(act) of influencing the activities of an organized group in its efforts toward goal setting and goal achievement. According to Bryman (1986, cited in Thomas: 1993, 112) a widely used working definition of leadership is that it "involves a social influence process in which a person steers members of the group toward a goal".

Leadership has often been associated with the process of influence but the influence differs in many respects, including who exerts influence, the intended purpose of the influence, the manner in which influence is exerted, and the outcome of the influence attempt.

Burns (1978) viewed on the normative account of leadership. According to this normative concept, the leader's fundamental act is to induce people to be aware or conscious of what they feel—to feel their true needs so strongly, to define their values so meaningfully, that they can be moved to purposeful action. A main focus of the work of a leader is to direct his followers to achieve purposeful action. He transforms his followers from the selves that they are into to the selves that they should be.

In sum, there is not only one definition of leadership and, also, there is no "correct" definition. In the concept of leadership, I will talk about leaders who occupy formally defined positions of authority at the head of a social organization or institution (Thomas: 1993, 113).

The history of leadership theory can be broken down into four main stages. The trait approach dominated the scene up to the late1940s. The style approach held away from then until the late 1960s, the heyday of the contingency approach was from the late 1960s to the early 1980s, and the new leadership approach has been the major influence on leadership research since the early 1980s (Bryman, 1996:277). The trait approach distinguishes leaders from non-leaders based on physical character (e.g. height or appearance), personality characteristics (e.g. dominance or self-confidence) and ability characteristics (e.g. intelligence or knowledge). On the latter view, what makes for effective leadership is heavily dependent on circumstances (Thomas, 1993: 110).

> The new leadership approach labels revealed a conception of the leader as someone who defines organizational reality through the articulation of a vision, which is a reflection of how he or she defines an organization's mission and the values that will support it. It viewed leader as a "manger of meaning" and the pivotal role of vision in that process. The transforming leader raises the aspirations of his or her followers such that the leader's and the follower's aspirations are fused. The importance of articulating vision was found to be a central

element of the leadership concept that invariably involved the transformation of followers and often of organizations in correspondence with their vision.

The Concept of Transformational Leadership in Management Literatures

Bass (1985) and Burns (1978) described the transformational leader as one who empowers the followers and motivates them to work on transcendental goals instead of focusing solely on immediate interests. It elevates the followers' level of maturity and ideals. It places great importance on developmental processes; such as empowering followers and helping them become autonomous and competent individuals who reach self-actualization and high levels of morality; it regards these processes as critical for distinguishing transformational leadership from other forms of leadership (Burns, 1978).

Bass (1985, cited in Bryman, 1996: 280) conducted a research on Transformational leadership. It is made up of four components:

Charisma - developing a vision, engendering pride, respect and trust,

Inspiration- motivating by creating high expectations, modelling appropriate behaviour,

and using symbols to focus efforts,

Individualized consideration- giving personal attention to followers, giving them respect and responsibility,

Intellectual stimulation- continually challenging followers with new ideas and approaches.

The research, which has been conducted on different level of leaders, shows charisma and inspiration to be the components of leader behaviour that is mostly associated with desirable outcomes such as performance of subordinates. Individualized consideration and intellectual stimulation typically come next.

But different scholars have critically examined the approach. Bryman (1992) blamed it for a) concentrating excessively on top leaders, b) saying little about informal leadership process and c) situational analysis is inadequate. Bryman et al. (1996) showed from a multiple case study of specialized transportation organizations in England how such factors as pre-existing levels of trust and resource constraint can have a pronounced impact on the prospects of transformational leadership.

Leaders, particularly transformational leaders, are seen as progenitors of positive culture and catalysts of constructive change. He shapes and shares a vision that provides direction, focus, meaning and inspiration to the work of others (Blunt, 1991: 65). Vision is seen to be crucial to effective transformational leadership. According to Handy (1989, cited in Blunt & Jones, 1997: 11) the vision should:

- Be different- that is, it should reconstitute or reconceptualize the known or familiar;
- Recognize that its own realization depends on the contribution of others, without which it will remain simply a dream;
- Be a vision that the leader lives, one that he or she believes in and is seen to believe in.

The visions of leaders were seen by many writers as making a distinctive contribution to cultures. In Bass's (1985) model, changing organizational culture is an outcome of transformational leadership that in turn has an impact on the follower's level of effort and performance. Leader's who follow in the founder's footsteps often see their role as that of maintaining and reinforcing the early culture.

Transformational leaders pay particular attention to the building of trust, which ensures reliability and predictability of employee responses and reduces the need for supervision and control. They set also the organization's direction and shape employee behaviour by outlining a vision, which is sufficiently persuasive to inspire and energize others in its pursuit (Kotter, 1990, cited in Blunt & Jones, 1997: 11). This idea assumes that employees will take initiatives of their own once the broad goals have been set (Blunt & Jones, 1997: 11).

Transformational leadership suggests that its underlying values attach considerable importance to (Blunt & Jones, 1997: 12):

- relative equality of power and status between leaders and followers;
- high tolerance of ambiguity and uncertainty on the part of all concerned;
- high level of trust and openness;
- a desire to share feelings and emotions;
- a willingness to confront personal conflict and difference of opinion, and to take risks; and
- strong beliefs in the virtues of team working.

The Bangladesh Context: Social and Political Features
Bangladesh is a developing country of South Asia with approximately 130 million populations. The economy of the country is fragile. Its total area is 55,126 square miles. About 80 percent of the total population lives in rural area. About 88 percent of the population is Muslim and most of the remaining population, about 10.5% is Hindu.

The country was independent in 1971. After 1975, it was experienced the military regime for 15 years. From 1991 the democracy was restored. Compared to the most developed countries, however, Bangladesh is religiously, ethnically, linguistically, and socially extremely homogenous. But the political culture is highly fragmented. Despite its cultural

homogeneity, Bangladeshi political culture is highly fragmented at both the elite and mass levels. This fragmentation is a result of structural factors and conflicting values. Structural conflicts result from the patron-client character of Bangladeshi peasant society. Value conflicts emerge from the diverse influences of highly traditional social order and colonial rule (Kochanek, 1993:17).

It is impossible to speak of Bangladesh culture without making reference to conditions of politicization in the country. Jamil's (1994: 284) observation of developing country is also true for Bangladesh that politics is characterized by instability, military interventions were not so infrequent, modernizing elitist leadership, accompanied by a wide political gap between the rulers and the ruled were common.

Bangladesh has had a very difficult time creating and sustaining a legitimate, stable, and effective political order. In the absence of the social cohesion, political consensus, strong ideological commitment or effective organizational structures, charisma, patrimonialism, and patronage have become the only mechanisms for building and sustaining political support (Kochanek, 1993:53).

Organizations in Bangladesh: According to Henry Mintzberg (1983, cited in Hofstede, 1994:151) most organizations show one of five typical configurations:

1. The simple structure: The key part is the strategic apex (top management) and the coordinating mechanism is direct supervision.

2. The machine bureaucracy: The key part is techno structure (people in staff roles supplying ideas) and coordinating mechanism is standardization of work processes

3. The professional bureaucracy: The key part is the operating core (people who do the work) and the coordinating mechanism is standardization of skills.

4. The divisionalized form: The key part is the middle line (hierarchy in between) and the coordinating mechanism is standardization of outputs.

5. The Adhocracy: The key part is the support staff (sometimes with the operating core) and the coordinating mechanism is mutual adjustment.

Hofstede tries to link Mintzberg's typology of organizational configurations to national culture profiles based on the IBM data. The link establishes that, other factors being equal, people from a particular national background will prefer a particular configuration because it fits their implicit model.

The organizations of Bangladesh do no match properly with any single type of Mintzberg's organization configuration. The organizations have

more similarity with "simple structure" because top management is the key part of Bangladesh organizations and the subordinates of those organizations work under direct supervision by a hierarchical superior. The higher educated specialists are also an element of the key part that termed as techno structure by Mintzberg. Contents of work are also specific. These are the characteristics of "machine bureaucracy". So it is better to say the organizations of Bangladesh combine both the "simple structure" and the "machine bureaucracy"[1].

The relationship between the state and the institutions, between the State and organizations, and the society in general, can be defined in the following dimensions:

Patron-client relationship: Bangladeshi society has come increasingly to be based on a subtle and intense network of interpersonal patron-client relations. The strength of patron-client network makes it difficult to develop horizontal relationships and larger corporate ties. This dependency relationship based on reciprocal exchanges in which people of higher rank are accorded the right to extract labour, services, and respect from people of lower rank. People of lower rank in turn can expect material and other forms of support from their patrons. (Kochanek, 1993:44). This exchange allows the client and the patron to get the access to the resources, which either due to scarcity or inefficiency, and is not easily available, even in cases in which the client has the right to have them. The patron-client relationship strengths a system of individual traditional patrimonial leadership based on charisma, patronage and corruption. It arises general distrust in bureaucratic authority of the country and lack of confidence in the efficiency of the state apparatus, or the fairness of legislation and rules.

Corporatism: Corporatism is different from a pluralistic form of social organization. The state encourages the formation of limited number of officially recognized groups that interact with it within pre-established and controlled parameters. It reduces the possibilities of groups being spontaneously formed by defining the groups that can interact with the State and by designating leaders of sanctioned organizations (Del, 1998: 3). Bangladesh is essentially a peasant society in which corporate interests are specific and transient. The first government after independence attempted to create a one-party, corporatist state in which all sectors of society were to be absorbed into a single political

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[1] China is fall in "simple structure" and France in "machine bureaucracy" when Mintzberg's five preferred configurations of organizations projected onto power distance-uncertainty avoidance matrix by Hofstede (1994:152). China has high power distance and low uncertainty avoidance and France has high power distance and high uncertainty avoidance.

organization. The later military governments also did not fundamentally alter corporatist character of state (Kochanek, 1993: 350).

Bureaucratic Authoritarian state: The consequences of colonization in many developing countries like Bangladesh were a strong public administration and a weak political system. (Jamil, 1994: 284). The country has weak political institutions, an authoritarian and unresponsive bureaucratic culture, and highly factionalized political parties and associations that are no real threat to the pattern of dependence on charismatic and patrimonial leadership (Kochanek, 1993:49).

The state always has an important role in every aspect of the country and the most important actor in the social, cultural and economic aspects of society, no matter what political regime. It acts as a great force that has influenced upon the institutions and performance of the organizations.

The main features of institutional activity are bureaucratic and formal procedures. Bangladesh experienced a low level of interest group activity. Organized political movement is rarely seen except the political movement in 1990 to overthrown the authoritarian military regime.

Patrimonialism: Bangladesh's society is a highly traditional, individualistic, atomized society in which a weak, poorly organized and factionalized set of social forces confronted an almost equally weak, poorly organized patrimonial state (Kochanek, 1993: 350). It is a form of political domination that adds the domestic power to the bureaucratic apparatus, and in which the power of the master is extended into various territories and spheres of the subordinate's life. The senior-junior relationship is not bound within office walls but goes beyond it (Jamil, 1998: 7).

In a patrimonialistic organization, the power of the superior stems from the norms created in private domains to enforce obedience and conformity by subordinates. Generally the patriarch stimulates and creates dependency relationship with his employee who is usually unable to obtain sufficient resources to support him. This relationship is paternalistic in the sense that protection is exchanged for compliance and loyalty.

Thus these dimensions imply hierarchic separation, dominant/ subordinated social relations. They involve centralization of decisions and protective attitudes by power holders who expect submission and loyalty in return. These dimensions are working as a mixture in private and public organization.

Transformational Leadership and its Applicability in the Organizations of Bangladesh:

The concept of culture has become a tool in the study of organizations. Studies linking culture and organization have proliferated in the last decade or two. In the context of organization, culture is used to explain

organization events and human behaviour that are beyond the explanations based on rational and economic theories (Jamil, 1994, 276). Transformational leadership, which developed in the west, is not an effective type of leadership for the organizations in Bangladesh. Bangladesh has a different cultural dimension that differs from the cultural features transformational leadership requires to apply.

In Hofstede's cross-cultural studies (1994:4) culture is defined as mental programming, which is developed in the family in early childhood and reinforced in schools and organization. Organization culture is mere reflection of societal culture. These mental programmes contain a component of national culture. Hofstede classified four dimensions of national culture: power distance, uncertainty avoidance, individualism, and masculinity. He argued that along these dimensions, dominant value system in different societies could be ordered which affect human thinking, organizations, and institutions.

The values of transformational leadership can be translated into Hofstede's well-known dimensions of national culture as follows (Jaeger, 1986, cited in Blunt & Jones, 1997: 12) :

- *Low Power Distance:* The less powerful individuals in society are unwilling to accept an unequal distribution of power without question and are unwilling to regard as normal.

- *Low Uncertainty Avoidance:* People are not made nervous by situations they consider to be unstructured or unclear or unpredictable, and they do not try to avoid such situations by adopting strict codes of behaviour; they tend not to believe in absolute truths.

- *Low Individuality:* People place relatively high value on group membership and less on individual identity.

- *Medium Masculinity:* Roles in a culture for either sex are defined somewhat differently, meaning that men are expected to be relatively assertive and to compete, and women to serve and to care for children and the weak, and to have regard for the non-material quality of life.

Guided by the definition of dimensions of national culture by Hofstede it can be said that the dimensions of Bangladesh culture is high Masculinity, Collectivism, high Uncertainty avoidance and large Power distance.[2]

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[2] India and Pakistan are the two countries from South Asia like Bangladesh. Those countries experienced the same political rule in the past and also have similarity in some social, cultural and administrative characteristics with Bangladesh. India is a big country. West part of India that has the same language Bengali like Bangladesh is more similar to Bangladesh. Though Bangladesh was not included in the IBM study, so it is little bit difficult to identify its dimensions of culture. But I will try to find out something on the basis of the dimensions of culture of India and Pakistan. According to the indexes of dimensions of culture founded by Hofstede (1994:26-113) India is a country of large power distance, masculinity, collectivism, and low uncertainty

- *Large power Distance:* The less powerful members of institutions and organizations expect and accept that power is distributed unequally.
- *High uncertainty avoidance:* People feel threatened by situations they consider to

  be unstructured or unclear or unpredictable and they try to avoid such situations.
- *High Masculinity*: Social gender roles are clearly distinct. Men are supposed to be

  assertive, tough, and focused on material success. Women are supposed to be

  more modest, tender and concerned with the quality of life.
- *Collectivism*: People place high value on group membership and less on individual identity.

So it is seen here the cultural dimensions require for the transformational leader and the cultural dimensions of Bangladesh are very much different. To practice any kind of leadership style leaders should take into consideration that he is working in what type of cultural features. Because, leaders cannot choose their styles at will; what is feasible depends to a large extent on the cultural conditioning of one's subordinates (Hofstede, 1980 : 7, cited in Blunt & Jones, 1997: 13). Why transformational leadership is not properly applicable for the organizations of Bangladesh is discussed below on the basis of each dimension of culture by Hofstede.

Power Distance

For *transformational leadership*, subordinates and superiors consider each other as existentially equal. Organizations are fairly decentralized, with flat hierarchical pyramids and limited supervisory personnel. Superiors should be accessible for subordinates, and the ideal boss is a resourceful democrat. Subordinates expect to be consulted before a decision is made that affects their work, but they accept that the boss is the one who finally decides. A major responsibility of leader is the maintenance of harmony. This is achieved more easily where social and organizational relationships are well ordered and power is distributed unequally.

In contrasts, Bangladesh is a country of large power distance. According to Hofstede(1994: 27-38) and Jamil (1998:3-11) in this country inequalities among people are both expected and desired. Less powerful people should be depended on the more powerful. Subordinate expect to be told what to do. There are a lot of supervisory personnel, structured

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avoidance. Pakistan is a country of large power distance, masculinity, collectivism, and high uncertainty avoidance. The low uncertainty avoidance of India is different from the assumption. But we can call Bangladesh a country of large power distance, more masculinity, collectivism, and high uncertainty avoidance.

into tall hierarchies of people reporting to each other. Contacts between superiors and subordinates are supposed to be initiated by the superiors only. Employees in similar jobs are less likely to prefer a consultative boss. Instead many among them express a preference for a boss who decides autocratically or paternalistically. Subordinates are unlikely to approach and contradict their bosses directly. The way power is distributed is usually explained from the behaviour of the more powerful members, the leaders rather than those led.

Transformational leadership allows empowering followers and helping them become autonomous, give followers respect and responsibility or open challenges to the leader. But in a large power distance country like Bangladesh these are improper and undesirable. The leader can expect to receive obedience, deference and compliance. In return, he shows care and concern to the follower. A less negative attitude towards authoritarian leadership will likely be found in large power distance societies like Bangladesh. In such societies dominance and ostentatious displays of power might be appropriate for leaders.

Uncertainty Avoidance

Uncertainty avoidance was originally discovered as a by-product of power distance (Hofstede, 1994:111). Transformational leadership requires low uncertainty avoidance. Transformational leader challenges followers with new ideas and approaches that may be in some cases arise ambiguity and uncertainty. In different situations risks need to be taken. There should not be more rules than is strictly necessary. Innovative ideas are offered from the workers.

Bangladesh is a high uncertainty avoidance cultures, with the resulting emphasis on rules, procedures and traditions may place demands on leaders. Innovative ideas are resisted because they may cause uncertain and ambiguous situation. Fear is found to the unfamiliar risks. What is different seems to be dangerous.

In Bangladesh culture an appropriate leader is he who can create a stable situation with no risks, no uncertainty and ambiguity.

Individualism vs. Collectivism

According to Jaeger (1986, cited in Blunt & Jones, 1997: 12) transformational leadership requires low individualism. Virtues of team working are important. Management is management of groups. Individualism is not encouraged here. These characteristics are similar to the collectivist country Bangladesh. Bangladeshi people learn to think and work together from the childhood. So the cultural dimension low individualism of transformational leadership has no confrontation with Bangladesh culture.

Jaeger identification of low individualism can be questioned here. Low individualism does not encourage competition that is the most common feature of western firms. In this respect transformational leadership also

questioned its application in the western firms and how the scholars of this theory perceive team working and competition all together.

Masculinity

According to Jaeger (1986) medium masculinity is required for transformational leadership that is little bit in between the masculine and feminine culture. Bangladesh is a country of more masculinity. In a feminine culture more consultative and considerate leaders are preferable. In a more masculine culture more strong, directive leaders are preferable. Leader expected to be decisive and assertive. For transformational leadership the in between characteristics of the leader is necessary who may be consultative and considerate. But in Bangladesh leaders are not consultative and considerate. They are directive and authoritative.

Trust

Trust societies are not identified clearly in the cultural dimensions of Hofstede. But trust is an important requirement for practicing transformational leadership. From the cultural dimensions of Hofstede I can try to say something about the trust society. For little bit homogeneity in the score rank dimension of power distance can help me more than other dimensions. In the power distance index (Hofstede, 1994: 26) most of the Latin American, Asian and African countries have the high score. In contrasts Australia and most of the European countries have low score. We know the developing countries of Latin America, Asia, and Africa are not in a level to be termed as trust society whereas we can termed developed Australia and Europe as trust societies. Though it is not fit well but we can tell large power distance countries have low trust society than low power distance countries. Bangladesh is a large power distance country and also has low level of trust in society.

A transformational leader trusts his followers and the followers also need to trust the leader. Trust is very much necessary among the leaders and followers to practice the ingredients of transformational leadership. Otherwise this leadership style will not work properly.

Bangladesh is not high level of trust society. Although a highly personal sense of trust exists in homogenous groups, it does not extend to larger social relationships and the society at large. In general, there exists a very low level of trust in Bangladeshi society, which further compounds the development of larger corporate relationships. Low levels of trust are believed to contribute to a lack of cooperation and industrial growth, and promote the development of factionalism (Kochanek, 1993:45). So if we want to practice transformational leadership style in Bangladesh the ingredients of this leadership style will be mostly hampered.

Conclusion

European imperialism is visible in all parts of the globe, in every aspect of cultural, social and economic life. The imperialist countries in some cases encourage and in some cases forced to carry out their ideologies.

Bangladeshi students especially those who studied in the western world gathered knowledge about the western leadership theories and other aspects of human resource management. They have come back home and joined in different firms and trying to apply western leadership theories without concerning their cultural requirement. May be they assume that organizational dysfunction in Bangladesh is for our traditional management practices. They are susceptible to suggestion.

Replication of transformational leadership theory is not possible in Bangladesh. The major reasons have to do in values concerning authority, group loyalties, taking risks, innovative ideas, trust in society and interpersonal harmony. Transformational leadership is more participative, innovative, risk oriented, and trust worthy. It is not possible to found in the organizations of Bangladesh. So the applicability of transformational leadership is unlikely in these organizations.

Among the cultural dimensions of Hofstede large power distance and high uncertainty avoidance can be termed as the most dominant barrier to replicate transformational leadership theory in Bangladesh. But it is also true Educational opportunities have been improved in many countries including Bangladesh, and we have seen that power distance scores within countries decrease with increased education level. According to Hofstede, class values are different in a society. Middle class with highest education level and status show low power distance index. Where as lower class with lowest status and education level show highest power index values. For this power distance difference in difference classes, leadership style for the middle mgt and workers may be different (Hofstede, 1994:46). Though there is difference among the power distance of classes also in Bangladesh, transformational leadership may be little bit applicable to top and middle management but not for the lower level working class.

Management of organizations in Bangladesh actually functions in the way of patron-client. The paternalistic and patron-client way of manage can explain to us many features of corruption and bad performance of many organizations. Social fragmentation, patron-client traditions, and personalized characteristics of leadership are combined in working a system. The position of leader is maintained by intra and extra organizational structural arrangements, in some cases with deep historical roots, not by follower recognition. The existing type of leadership working in Bangladesh is not rational according to the classical theories of management and this irrational style of leadership is the cause of dysfunctional work of organizations. May be we should search for leaders who can provide clear direction and targets, accompanied by a paternal and supportive management style, who modelling what he is saying to the followers, in his own concern and who can see future well and helps his followers also to see it well.

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