Limits of Western Leadership in Bangladesh's Organizational and Cultural Context: A Theoretical Overview

Nusrat Jahan Chowdhury
Department of Public Administration, Rajshahi University , Rajshahi-6205, Bangladesh

Abstract: This study attempt to examine the limits of Western leadership in a developing country like Bangladesh considering the different environment and work culture of both societies. Social scientists working in the field of organizational behaviour proposed many theories and techniques to manage the organization effectively but most of these had their origin in the industrialized countries of the West. Countries in the developing world are advised and feel themselves that they must strive to apply Western thought and practices to achieve economic prosperity within in shortest possible time. So it had been realised that the applicability of theses western concepts in a totally different setting needed to be focused if the desired results to be achieved. Realizing the influence of cultural context in the management practices.

Key words: Western leadership, cultural context, limits, Bangladesh

INTRODUCTION

In view of the success in the Western industrial countries and relatively poor performances in the developing countries, controversy arose as to whether the developing nations should adopt the style of developed countries management to catch up with the development fed. Whatever may be the reason, the question that looms at large is whether the adoption of Western leadership in these countries can achieve the desired success. Knowing the fact that there exists a high degree of differences between cultures of these two groups, still multilateral organization and management consultant argue in favor of applying the western management and leadership practices in developing countries. The increased globalization, and drive for economic development further spurs the interest on leadership that gains momentum more than ever. But of the leadership theories are originated and certified by the Western developed countries having a cultural context different from the developing nations. Similarly the source of most functionalist theorizing about management and leadership in the West is the USA, though such theories in practice varies greatly within USA as well as other part of the world.

The analysis presented here follows a pattern which is reasonably well established in the literature. The xinfluence of values and culture on organization and management has been widely studied ever since the study of Hofsteds in 1980s. Since then bodies of theoretical and empirical studies have confirmed the significance of national and organizational culture in explaining the organizational performance in the developing countries. The purpose of this paper is to identifying and developing critical insights by examining the western leadership and comparing it with the patterns of leadership observed in a developing country like Bangladesh. The central theme of the paper is that a western leadership theory promotes a culturally determined and North American view of the world of work which can not be applied universally.

In order to make the discussion coherent and logical, first section discusses the concept of Leadership theory, in the second section culture is defined in terms of external and internal organization. In the third section contextual factors of Western and Bangladesh are highlighted to understand the influence on leadership. The forth section draw a more general picture of differences between the leadership ideas in Western and Bangladeshi organization. The fifth section examines the inherent problem of Bangladeshi leaders to adopt western one.

The central concern of this study is to know the basic components, salient features of western leadership theory. To understand the relationship between cultural context and leadership a general discussion on culture is deem necessary. Then in line with the discussion; so far, we attempt to identify the existing the leadership behaviors in the cultural context of Bangladesh and West. Also to understand the influence of cultures on the leadership practices we focus on the dominant leadership concepts both in Western and Bangladeshi organizations.

Finally, we indicate some basic problems that would be faced by the leaders trying to replicate western ideas and values in Bangladesh.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

The work is done entirely on the basis of secondary sources that include review of books, journals, periodicals, research reports and other secondary material. The methodology is purely descriptive and explanatory in nature.

Leaders in organization: Who they are and what they can make others do?: The term leadership has been the subject of much debate and essay for many years and many theories of leadership have been developed in the last 50 years. The widely believed notion is that by studying leaders one can understand the behaviour of group, organization and even societies. The literature in management and organization indicates a widespread recognition of the leadership and organizational success. Management in Western organizations have looked at corporate culture and leadership as the key to organizational success. According to Hall, most important for the organization is the leadership that occurs at the top of the organization[1]. The prevailing western views about leadership are closely bound up with the question of organization culture and asserted that culture of an organization can be moulded, changed or even replaced by top management. That might be the reason that US mangers have attained the status of cultural heroes and US management theories become a cultural and ideological imperative.

For this particular discussion, the term leadership will imply only that occurs at the top of the organizations or members of what Giddens has called elite groups that consists of those individuals who occupy formally defined positions of authority at the head of a social organization or institution[2]. In fact, Leadership is the most obvious form in which organizations are shaped or structured and leaders have both direct and indirect effects (Hunt1991).

The most direct effect of leaders includes a leader's decisions and actions that have immediate impact and can be measured by outcome, such as the leader can influence the subordinates for faster or better work (e.g. offering special incentives), increasing the ability to work (e.g. by clearing the confusion), organize and coordinate activities in a more efficient way (e.g. finding better ways to use the resources) and obtain resource needed immediately to do the work (e.g. information equipment) etc.

Where as the indirect effects of a leader includes decisions and actions mediated by more intervening variables in the causal chain. They have slower but more durable effects, such as changing the culture of the organization (e.g. strengthening values for quality), developing long term skills of subordinates (e.g.

implementing training programmes) changing the technology (e.g. by acquiring new equipment), etc.

Thus in the management of organization, the role of the leader has immense influence both over organization and employee performance.

Culture: What we are or what we have?: Let us begin the discussion with the concept culture deliberated by Thompson who argued that myriad definition of culture can be reduced to two groups. One view culture as composed of values, beliefs, norms, rationalization, symbols, ideology, i.e., mental products. The other sees culture, as referring to the total way of life of people, their interpersonal relations as well as their attitudes[1]. Hofstede[3] also defined culture as the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes one group from another. Culture has three levels: basic assumptions and premises, values and ideology and artifacts and creations. The first two levels are in a sense the ideational base of culture and reflected in the components of the third level. But it is the third level that is observable and is the first area in which management is played out. First, the management behaviour, which might be said to be occurring naturally, reflects the values of local culture. Individual behavior is guided by the outside culture from which they come. The cultural values from the environment are brought into the work place and have very strong impact on the behavior of persons within the organization. And secondly culture influence the perceptions of individual about the world around them including both internal and external organizational environment and affect the evaluation what is being perceived.

Therefore to understand the influence of culture on the leadership behaviours, we need to explain different cultural dimensions that have profound impact on constructing and moulding leadership in an organization. They are:

Economic and political environment: The economic condition and political system as a part of broader culture have both direct and indirect impact on the individual as well on the leaders' behaviours and practices. To understand the impact of economic and political environment on leaders following two factors need to be analysed.

- The degree of predictability of future political environmental events that refers to the stable political system and culture.
- The degree of difficulty in obtaining resources from the environment refers to the level of economic

development and scarcity of human, natural and financial resources.

Socio cultural environment: To connect culture to management we shall apply the empirical model of culture developed by Hofested[3]. The Hofstede's four cultural dimensions model the dominant value systems in different societies can be identified that affect human thinking, interpersonal relations, organizations and institutions in predictable ways.

- **Power distance:** The extent to which a society accepts the fact that power in institutions and organizations is distributed unequally.
- **Uncertainty avoidance:** The extent to which a society feels threatened by uncertain and ambiguous situations providing career stability, establishing more formal rules, not tolerating deviant ideas and behaviours and believing in absolute truths and attainment of expertise become the tool for uncertainty avoidance
- **Individualism and collectivism:** Individualism implies a loosely knit social framework in which people are supported to take care of themselves and their immediate families only. While a tight social framework characterizes collectivism in which people distinguish between in groups and out groups to look after them and in exchange for that they feel they owe absolute loyalty to it.
- **Masculinity and femininity:** The extent to which the dominant values in society are masculine that is assertiveness, the acquisition of money and things and not caring others or the quality of life or people as in femininity.

Internal work culture: The external environmental forces shape people's assumptions beliefs and values about different aspects of their world and internal work culture. In reality the leadership ideas and practices reflects internal work culture of an organization. The internal culture comprises the basic assumptions and principles that are commonly nurtured, nourished, shared, believed and practiced by the members of an organization. It underlies the rules that determine the ways the organizations functions and justify the behaviour of leaders and members. To understand the influence of internal work culture we focus on two attributes:

Descriptive assumptions about human nature that includes causality and controls of out comes, creative potentiality, malleability, time perspective and units for action and Prescriptive assumptions about guiding

principles include task, success, people and environment orientation[4].

These whole range of cultural elements both internal and external, influence the leadership ideas and behaviour in particular settings and also being a product of the culture leader carries own set of values, norms, and assumptions in the work place, which also influences leaders' behaviour and pattern in the organization.

Among the abovementioned dimensions, power distance directly related to the leadership in organisation but other dimensions and internal work culture also play a significant role in shaping the personality and practices of the leader in organization

Leadership in western developed countries: Sesame of success?: The current ideas of leadership and leadership rhetoric in West is based on so many attributes such as high level of trust, openness, fairness, acceptance and willingness to admit mistakes, productivity, commitment to the organization, quality customer service, team work, empowerment, performance management., rationality, delegation listening and learning . Leadership in the western developed world entail that leaders are special people who are capable and confident of organizing structure, developing harmonious and cooperative relationships, maintaining the optimum level of motivation, adapting the organization to the environment, gathering and interpreting information, making the best use of the available resources and finding the appropriate amount of structure and control. The underlying values of Western leadership ideas and practices attach considerable importance to,

- Relatively 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.

It is widely accepted that, these underlying values and norms are mainly derived nurtured and practised in a specific cultural setting of western countries which are different in many aspects from other contemporary culture. Both the structures and behaviours of the leaders and members are strongly influenced by conditions external to them. Hence it becomes necessary to briefly describe the dimensions of culture to understand its impact on leaders and leadership behaviours with

reference to western developed countries and developing countries.

Western leaders: Self-made or product of culture?: Now let understand the influence of culture on western leadership behaviours, the central concern of this paper. In the arena of economic and political environment, western countries have high rate of economic development and stable political system and democratic culture along with strong military power. Such environment made it possible for the leaders to predict the future events, obtain the resources easily and initiate changes through risk taking. On the other hand, the findings of Hofested and others show that, in western developed countries socio- cultural values are based on the assumptions of relatively low uncertainty avoidance, relatively low power distance, relatively high individualism and masculinity.

At the organizational level the internal culture of the organization holds positive view about people and has guiding principles supportive for success in the long run. The dominant descriptive assumptions i.e. unlimited creative potential of people, malleability, future oriented time perspective, long term time units for action and causality and control of outcomes can be internally determined provide leaders the incentive and inner motive to strive for the success with long term future plan. Where as the prescriptive guiding principles stress on pragmatism, proactive ness, collegial and peoples participation and control over environment and context independent which give prominence to popular participation in political and organizational decision making , empowerment , team work rationality , delegation etc.

The above cultural characteristics of these countries make it clear that the leader in western culture will be capable of long term planning due to the high degree of predictability of the environmental events, value high risk taking, exercise low control mechanism, and encourage participation, performance. They are goal oriented and proactive. Since the power distance is low superior-subordinate relationship is more open, democratic and lesser psychological distance is evident. Advancement and success are main goals of leader due to the existence of high masculinity in the society. Thus successes of western leaders are subject to both external and internal culture and can not be credited in isolation from the surrounding culture.

Bangladesh, its culture and leaders: An anatomy: Bangladesh as a developing country has lack of stable democratic political culture and economic underdevelopment. Other than those, experiences of military-bureaucratic and one party ruling in Bangladesh resulted in the unstable political environment. In these regions the role of the state can be defined as the major protagonist of development and has influenced the relationship between the state and institutions and institutions and individual. Predictability of environmental events is as low as it is highly difficult to obtaining resources due to economic underdevelopment.In Bangladesh, the politico-administrative characteristics as well as of the political culture of Bangladesh society such as, corruption, nepotism and favoritism, abuse of rule and regulation, bureaucratic loyalty to the political parties, conflict between party in power and oppositions, affect the performance of the public organizations.

In spite of religiously, ethnically, and linguistically homogenous, the social system of Bangladesh is steeply hierarchical with roots in economic disparities e.g., unequal distribution of land and income, and the religion-philosophical and cultural heritage. These factors influenced higher power distance, collectivism, uncertainty avoidance tendency and low masculinity.

The existing cultural context influenced the internal work culture where the dominant assumptions are limited creative potential of people, rigidity, past and present oriented time perspective, short term time units for action and external determinant of causality and control of outcomes which limits the individual and leaders incentive and inner motive to strive for the success. Where as, the prescriptive guiding principles like moralism, reactive ness, authoritarian and paternalistic orientation about people and dependence on context in fact hinder the organizational performance to a large extent.

Due to such cultural context in public organizations of Bangladesh, there is a high degree of power distance. Subordinates feel comfortable to work under superiors rather than with equals. Peer group relationships entail more responsibility that induces anxiety. Interpersonal relationships in Bangladesh are personalized, based on family relations rather than social contracts. Collectivism in this regard, is replaced by fatalism and blessing of supernatural power. In Bangladesh society, personalized relationships blur official and personal life and often this personal connection is used for materializing personal gain even by eroding organizational norms and values and even sometimes at the cost of organization mission.

At the organizational level interpersonal relationship is built on the base of interpersonal low-trust. Such kind of low trust produces minimal co-operation and promotes factionalism. In the public organizations, low level of trust debars the delegation of power and responsibility to the juniors by their superiors.

All these factors has contributed to the growth of an

administrative culture that is highly authoritarian, eliticist, centralized, change resistant, rigid, and corrupted in nature[5]. In addition, there is absence of accountability, transparency and respects for people and commitment to provide services. The existing tension between the generalist specialist group, different batches, EPCS and CSP, highest rate of corruption, political patronage and contractual services, forced retirement and transfer, nepotism in the process of recruitment and promotion and selection of training, etc are the common symptoms of our highly centralized, authoritarian and politically patronaged administration where leaders hardly can see beyond their own and group interest.

Considering the cultural context of Bangladesh, what kind of characteristics will define the leaders in organization? Would it be logical if we portray the leaders with same features of western leaders? Since the cultural context of the countries under discussion falls in the two different cultural groups. Therefore it is expected that in such context, the leaders in Bangladesh would posit set of characteristics different from the western leaders such as low in taking risk, reactive, unable to adopt long term planning, people oriented rather than performance, and exercise centralised control mechanism. Due to high power distance superior subordinate relation ship become autocratic or paternalistic. Also resource scarcity and unstable political environment would resist them from being proactive, creative and participative.

Leadership in Western countries and Bangladesh: A snapshot: The political, socio-cultural and work culture of western societies and Bangladesh influences the development of leadership ideas and practices differently and result in two different kind of leadership. The identification of some crucial aspects of leadership in both Bangladesh and Western societies would be in compliance with such notion.

Bangladesh's leaders with western behaviours: Tilting the balance: The existing Western leadership ideas and practices assume that people and organization as rational economic actors - meaning that people are assumed to respond in ways designed to optimise economic rewards lie close beneath the surface of this approach as do certain cultural assumptions regarding the merits of individualism and competition. These assumptions are potentially problematic because they contradict important values held by the people in developing countries like Bangladesh. The western leadership values are absent in the cultural context of Bangladesh. As for example we do not place high value on over individual and group competition rather we are collective and value group over individual. This actually an indication that one faces difficulty for applying the western leadership practices in the organizations of developing one. Even if the leaders are willing to replicate the western leadership behaviour

Element	Leadership in West	Leadership in Bangladesh
Influences on leadership practicel	Paramount concern for organizational performance. Drive for efficiency and competitiveness	Maintenance of status quo, respect to seniority age and experience, highly centralized power structure, high degree of uncertainty, bureaucratic resistance to change, individual concern for basic security, emphasis on control, importance of extended family and networks.
Authority	Relative equality of authority and status, Delegation and decentralization, teamwork and empowerment	Little autonomy given to the lower level. Leadership from the top, authoritarian and paternalistic leadership, acceptance of the wide power and status difference, centralization and preoccupation with rules and procedures, empire building and eliticism.
Managing uncertainty	High degree of tolerance of ambiguity. Continuous change viewed as natural and desirable.	High degree of conservatism, change resistant, hierarchy and conformity stressed deep-rooted shared religious beliefs and values provide security and certainty.
Managing relationships	High degree of trust and openness valued, open confrontation of differences, conflict valued as potentially creative. Drive to secure Commitment and high morale.	Maintenance of harmony in a patron client manner and compromise, avoidance of open conflict and confrontation

Source, M.Khan[5] and M. Morshed[6]

for economic efficiency of the organization, they would encounter some difficulties to do so due to the long cherished valued and beliefs held and shared by the members of the organization as well the society. The limitations of western leadership when applied to Bangladeshi leaders are exposed in the following discussion. For the convenient of our discussion we will focus on different aspects of western leadership behaviour which are difficult to replicate in Bangladeshi organization.

Leader followers' orientation: Leaders in Bangladeshi organization will find it difficult to replicate the western leadership behaviour i.e. participative, democratic and peer-relation with the subordinates. Resistance will come from both side, the leader and followers. The higher power distance and hierarchical pattern of relationships deeply rooted in the culture and history are in complete contrast with western culture. In Bangladeshi organizations interpersonal relationships are based on positions status, seniority and gender. Senior junior relationship is termed as patron- client and hierarchical, junior respect and obeys seniors while the seniors take care and nurture the juniors. It can be termed as patrimonialism. In such context, leaders will find it difficult to change themselves from authoritarian, paternalistic to participative leader.

On the other hand, subordinates have their own sets of values will impose resistance on the leaders to practice participation and treat them as peer or equal. Since the expectations of subordinates i.e. preference for a personalized over a contractual relationship with the leader, tendency to depend on a leader for guidance direction and support and willingness to accept the superior status of the leader i.e. a preference to work in a superior subordinate rather than a peer relation, shape and mould the leaders role as paternalistic or authoritarian. They will find it difficult to work independently and take decisions. Followers will have problem to accept the freedom and exercise their own judgement and experience and accept responsibility.

Although it is generally argued that the effectiveness of a leadership style is contingent on both the task and subordinates characteristics, the former has been found to be less crucial than the latter. Therefore, Bangladesh's leaders need to respond to the demand and expectation of the follower and become paternalistic rather participative or democratic.

People orientation: First of all, we can note that the values, which have been presented to address two dimensions that directly affect leadership and follower ship behaviour namely, power distance and people orientation. The low power distance and participative people orientation of western leadership is congruent with theory Y leadership, a participative approach, which believes that individual, must be given the opportunity to unlock their creative potential for their own good as well as for organization. It leads to high morale of the employee and success

On the other hand the relatively high power distance and authoritarian and paternalistic people orientation of developing countries imply a certain type of leadership behaviour and leader follower relationship that is more congruent with the theory X leadership. That presupposes limited and fixed human potential in contrast to theory Y. Here the leader's strict adherence to rules and regulation, control and domination, exercise of authority and power, higher uncertainty avoidance tendency can not be easily replaced by listening, learning, openness and trust of western leaders.

Trust: Difference is particularly evident in interpersonal trust. In western countries, the degree of interpersonal trust is high and it contributes to a congenial and harmonious working environment.

Bangladeshi situation, in this respect, is opposite what we have described earlier. Trust is confined within family. Low level of interpersonal trust inhibits cooperation and institutional growth and promotes factionalism. Trust is confined within a few. Minor problems are sorted out at higher level. Lack of trust consolidates hierarchy in organizations.Besides political patronage and grouping along with the conflicts and rivalry between different cadre, group and batches is so rampant that highly inflicted the working environment. Moreover, excessive politicization of administration contributes to higher level of distrust in organization and consequence is too much decision making layer, red tapism and delay. In such situation it is difficult to place trust on subordinates or on others.

Decision-making: Related to leadership is the area of decision making. Listed here is a technique called brainstorming. It is mostly advocated to use when creativity is called for solving difficult problems and making difficult or complex decision. It is carried out in a group where the participants essentially share ideas concerning the issue. This is only fit with the ratings assigned to developed countries. But this contradicts with many of the values of the developing countries.It clashes with the passive reactive task orientation with a perception of an external locus of causality and view of human nature with limited creative potential. It also contradicts with an authoritarian /paternalistic people orientation and high power distance if people from different hierarchical levels need to present to address a problem properly.

Representative of the area of decision-making is the normative model of Vroom and Yetton. Depending on the characteristics of the decision to be made the model recommends either an autocratic, consultative or participative decision-making. Participative decision-making process of western leadership can't be applied in Bangladeshi organizations. In high power distance the subordinates will accept autocratic decision where leaders depend on family, friends and colleagues for information.

Decentralization and delegation: Practices of Decentralization and delegation of Western leaders can't be applied in Bangladesh, since creative potentiality of individual, low level of trust, tendency to avoid uncertainty and paternalistic people orientation are dominant in the internal work culture. Besides low level of trust, resistance to change, self interest, obsession for position and power and above all political interference are major obstacles towards decentralization and delegation. Research finding shows that all the decentralization efforts in Bangladesh became unsuccessful and remained merely a panacea due to the central control and lack of willingness of the elite civil servants of Bangladesh. For example, Upazila is the principal tier through which government is trying implement the decentralization programme but the control of higher level officials over the field level officials has an adverse impact on decentralization policies and process[6].

Task orientation and planning: In contrast to the western leaders, scarcities of resources in Bangladesh compel the leaders to avoid taking risk and future oriented. Unstable political environment, absence of democratic values, high level of politicization, culture of intolerance, avenge and obsession for power and prestige have bar the leaders to become future oriented, proactive and context independent . Due to the unstable political system and resource dependency, leaders are unable to long term future planning. Rather they concentrate on short term plan with past and present orientation and avoid taking risk that might otherwise cost them their fortune and career. Experimentation with new ideas and projects will be subdued by experience and reactionary measures.

Performance and Commitment: Management in Western organizations have looked at corporate culture and leadership as the key to organizational success. In the western countries managers have attained the status of cultural heroes a status that managers do not enjoy in our country. The leaders in western countries due to high masculinity culture are performance and success oriented. They are capable of exploiting and manipulating the environment to acquire money success, and asset. On the contrary, due to low masculinity, competitiveness,

achievement, etc are hardly found in leaders of Bangladeshi organizations. Rather hey weigh maintaining social relationships and affiliations with different groups for advancement and security.

Where as the western leaders are committed to the work and organization and value quality customer services, the commitment and loyalty Bangladeshi leaders are cadre based rather than organization. Also strong loyalty to family and kin is a common feature. Traditional values such as ascribed status and honours are more important motivational factors for bureaucratic action rather than goals or results. Often the social norms influence the bureaucratic neutrality in exercising their duties. Unfair means are often used to meet the social familial obligation and material needs.

Partiality is observed in case of dealing with citizens who are viewed as subject or children with little choice opportunities. In practice public good and public service do not go beyond the level of personal benevolence and charity of the bureaucrats. The high level of corruption in public service as reported by TIB, and elitist frame of mental makeup clearly indicate the lack of commitment to high standard of customer services and service minded approach among leaders.

These limitations of exercising Western leadership behaviour in the Bangladeshi organizations reveal two facts that,

- Culture matters a lot to adopt new ideas and practices and leadership behaviour vary between regions and between cultures.
- Western leadership style can not be applied across space and time.

CONCLUSIONS

This growing demand to be effective as a leader in multiple settings and in a constantly transforming public services seems to suggest that the he leaders of the developing country rather than adopting Western leadership ideas and practices need to concentrate on the development of new values and behaviours consistent with current and future realities within society. They need to remember that, it will be less and less possible to rely on simple management and leadership concepts. This means continuous learning's of new skills and knowledge and concomitantly with this the learning of old recipes.

The leaders have to learn to manage dilemmas and expand their repertoire and include in their tool box the know how of classical, modern and post modern theatre in order to be effective leaders of today and potential leaders for tomorrows uncertainties.

It should be considered that leadership development and leadership training module have to reflect the

increasing complexities of contemporary life and provide support for leaders. It should be flexible enough and accommodate tomorrows certain uncertainties.

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