

## Culture Influences and Leadership Theories, a Case Study: Egyptian Culture

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**Abstract:** Culture influences people of a certain region leading to behavioral norms that not only affect people on an individual level but also rather affects the interrelations among them. In this article the author explores how culture might shape or influence the leader as well as the interrelation between the leader and his subordinates. The author argues that in order to adequately understand a given leader's attributes, these should be examined in terms of a specific structural context across cultures. Thus, there is a growing need for understanding the way in which leadership enacted in various cultures and that is the main purpose of this review.

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### 1. Structural context and cross cultures

Culture influences people of a certain region leading to behavioral norms that not only affect people on an individual level but also rather affects the interrelations among them. In this article, the author explores how culture might shape or influence the leader as well as the interrelation between the leader and his subordinates.

The author argues that adequately understand a given leader's attributes; these should be examined in terms of a specific structural context across cultures (Elsaid & Elsaid, 2012). Thus, there is a growing need for understanding the way in which leadership enacted in various cultures.

### 2. Cultural dimensions

Minkov and Hofstede (2011) list four distinctive cultural dimensions:

- Power distance: Social inequality, including the relationship with authority.
- Individualism-collectivism: The relationship between the individual and the group.
- Masculinity-femininity: The social implications of having been born as a boy or a girl. (Later editions of the book replaced the word "social" using the word "emotional" instead).
- Uncertainty avoidance: Ways of dealing with uncertainty, relating to the control of aggression and the expression of emotions. (Later editions of the book refer to "the extent to which the members of a culture feel threatened by ambiguous or unknown situations").

Later pragmatism and indulgence added to the original dimensions and defined as follows:

- Pragmatism: "This dimension describes how every society has to maintain some links with its own past while dealing with the challenges of the present and future" (Hofstede, 2014)

- Indulgence: "This dimension is defined as the extent to which people try to control their desires and impulses" (Hofstede, 2014).

Power distance, individualism and pragmatism especially in Small and medium enterprises where the manager/owner and employees interact more than in large firms (Parnell & Hatem, 1999) are of particular interest to the Egyptian context. This is particularly relevant to leaders in companies and how the relation with subordinates can shaped. Moreover, Parnell and Hatem (1999) remark that in Egypt SMEs have less formal rules as opposed to other countries and that mainly leaders/owners determine the rules to achieve the firm's goals.

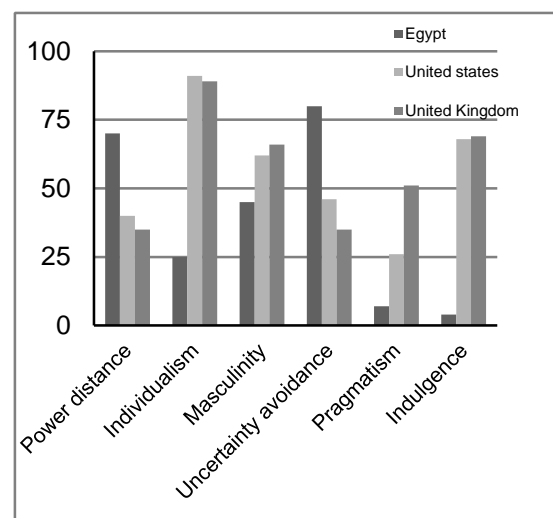


Figure 1. Egypt in comparison with the United States and United Kingdom in a cultural context. Source: (Hofstede, 2014).

El-Kot and Leat, (2005) cite a classification done by Hofstede (1980) concerning Arab speaking countries, including Egypt, that demonstrate such countries as having high power distance and low

Table 1. Brief Overview of Leadership Theories, from 'Great Man' to 'Complexity' Leadership.

Great man theories. The great man theory evolved around the mid-19 <sup>th</sup> century (1840).	Based on the belief that leaders are exceptional people, born with innate qualities, destined to lead. The use of the term 'man' was intentional since until the latter part of the twentieth century leadership thought of as a concept, which is primarily male, military and Western. This led to the next school of Trait Theories.
Trait Theories (1930s-1940s).	The lists of traits or qualities associated with leadership exist in abundance and continue to produce. They draw on virtually all the adjectives in the dictionary, which describe some positive or virtuous human attribute, from ambition to zest for life.
Behaviorist theories (1940s-1950s).	These concentrate on what leaders actually do rather than on their qualities. Different patterns of behavior had observed and categorized as 'styles of leadership'. This area has probably attracted most attention from practicing managers.
Situational leadership theory (1960s).	Situational: This approach sees leadership as specific to the situation in which exercised. For example, whilst some situations may require an autocratic style, others may need a more participative approach. It also proposes that there may be differences in required leadership styles at different levels in the same organization
Contingency theory. Proposed in 1967 by Fred Fiedler.	This is a refinement of the situational viewpoint and focuses on identifying the situational variables which best predict the most appropriate or effective leadership style to fit the particular circumstances
Substitutes for leadership theory. First developed by Steven Kerr and John M. Jermier in 1978.	In some circumstances, leadership does not needed or its importance does minimized.
Charismatic leadership theory (early 1980s).	Leaders have a divinely inspired gift (charisma) that inspires followers via special relationships.
Transactional theory (1960s).	This approach emphasizes the importance of the relationship between leader and followers, focusing on the mutual benefits derived from a form of 'contract' through which the leader delivers such things as rewards or recognition in return for the commitment or loyalty of the followers
Transformational theory. The term transformational leadership was first coined by J.V. Downton in "Rebel Leadership: Commitment and Charisma in a Revolutionary Process" (1973). James MacGregor Burns first introduced the concept of transformational leadership in his book "Leadership" (1978).	The central concept here is change and the role of leadership in envisioning and implementing the transformation of organizational performance
Distributed leadership theory. Grom (2000) cites Gibb (1954) as the first author to refer explicitly to distributed leadership theory. He proposes that "leadership is probably best conceived as a group quality, as a set of functions which must be carried out by the group" (Bolden, 2011).	Leadership is a process that occurs in groups and involves many leaders.
Shared leadership (Pearce & Conger, 2003).	Described as "a more robust, flexible and dynamic leadership infrastructure." Though a relatively new concept in organizational literature, shared leadership has recently become the subject of several serious and rigorous studies.
Complexity leadership theory. First mentioned in the Journal Emergence: Complexity and Organization. Issue 8.4, 2006.	Leadership in complex systems is an emergent phenomenon that is an outcome of interactions between many people

Individualism. Moreover, Hofstede (2014) classifies Egypt as low in pragmatism. Figure 1 illustrates the above in detail. They interrelate in such a way that shows the importance of leaders when shaping their companies' strategies. This has been further explained where discussed power distance, referred to as the acceptance of inequality as the norm.

The above adds more insight on the role of the leader and his/her relation with subordinates by including the effect of dimensions such as individualism and pragmatism and their interaction with the power distance dimension.  
As figure one shows, Egypt tends towards being a culture of collectivism, as opposed to individualism, and a culture of very low pragmatism. Collectivists tend to give more

importance to group interests than individual interests where they tend as well to view themselves as part of a bigger family (Blodgett et al., 2008).

This is therefore a significant factor in the Egyptian culture and combining this with what the power distance dimension refers to leads us to believe that leaders, owners and top management, tend to have more influence and control on company strategies and control more than the power distance dimension alone suggests.

As mentioned above, pragmatism refers to maintaining some links with the past (Hofstede, 2014). Cultures with low pragmatism such as the Egyptian culture, exhibit great respect for traditions demanding unquestionable compliance and respect for the superiors in rank or the elderly. Being a religious country, both Muslim's and Christians, who make up the totality of Egyptians; treat higher powers with reverence and high respect. Combined with power distance and collectivism, it can be easily suggested that leaders in Egyptian companies, especially in small and medium ones, should be the focus of this research if a significant contribution to be nurtured when we focus on change or development in SMEs in Egypt (Lin and Sung, 2017).

### 3. Brief Overview of Leadership Theories

This section lists different historical theories mentioned in the literature reviewed and illustrated in table 1 below concerning leadership in general as a necessary introductory step towards better understanding the leader in particular.

*Table 1.* Brief Overview of Leadership Theories, from 'Great Man' to 'Complexity' Leadership. Adapted from "The role of leadership for environment and sustainability. Perspectives on environment and sustainability" by Taylor, 2011.

### 4. Conclusion

According to Taylor, (2011) transformational leadership theory is still the dominant leadership theory, but it is better to use several theories to help understand an aspect of leadership. Some theories are nevertheless more useful in different context such as the complexity leadership theory for environmental leadership. Distributed leadership has become a popular leadership theory whereby leadership conceived of as a collective social process emerging through the interactions of multiple actors (Fitzsimons, James and Denyer, 2011). From this perspective it can be suggested that an individual to others does not do distributed leadership; it is a group activity, rather than individual action. Bolden (2011) asserts that besides the notion or approach of *distributed leadership* there are other notions as well that help reframe how we understand group leadership. The

notion of *shared leadership* has also been in use for some time, as have those of *collective leadership*, *collaborative leadership*, *co-leadership* and *emergent leadership*. The common factor across all these accounts is the idea that leadership is not the monopoly or responsibility of just one person, with each suggesting a similar need for a more collective and systemic understanding of leadership as a social process (Fitzsimons et al., 2011).

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