

## Navigating Cultural Dimensions: The Impact of Leadership Styles on Workforce Diversity in Higher Education Institutions

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### Abstract

This study seeks to explore the intricate relationship between national culture and leadership styles within higher education institutions (HEIs). It also examines the pivotal role that leaders play in navigating workforce diversity within this context. Conducting in-depth interviews with 35 participants from seven different nationalities across six universities in North Cyprus, from August 2020 to June 2021, we employed a descriptive thematic analysis to extract relevant themes from the qualitative data. Our findings reveal that transactional and transformational leadership styles predominantly shape the leadership landscape in these HEIs. Moreover, we aimed to validate the applicability of transformational leadership within managerial frameworks in multicultural university settings, particularly in the context of effectively managing workforce diversity. The results illuminate how national culture significantly influences leadership styles, with a notable emphasis on transactional leadership approaches. The study contributes to the understanding of cross-cultural leadership dynamics in higher education, highlighting the importance of cultural considerations in leadership effectiveness and diversity management.

**Keywords:** National culture, leadership, sustaining workforce diversity, higher education institutions, organizational culture

## 1 Introduction

Globalization leads to diversification within society and the workforce. To sustain the advancement of higher education institutions (HEIs), it is essential for them to accurately reflect and manage this diversity while training the industry leaders and managers of the future. The diversity in HEIs extends beyond student demographics. HEIs are robust global enterprises that originate from diverse cultures in their workforces. Consequently, managing and sustaining workforce diversity in HEIs significantly influences organizational culture and performance. Moreover, it is essential to consider that a country's policies, laws, and national culture significantly impact its institutions (Delgado-Márquez et al., 2012).

Organizational cultures differ from national cultures because they are formed through specific practices, whereas national cultures are formed through shared values (Hofstede & Fink, 2007). Hofstede and Fink (2007) introduced the concept of cultural dimensions, which enables the ranking and comparison of different cultures. Their study, assigning scores to these dimensions, made it possible to predict and analyze cross-cultural variations at a specific level. Many

cultural studies have conclusively demonstrated that individuals from diverse cultures have distinct perceptions of things. Research has developed models of national culture that can be used in the field of organizational research, specifically in the areas of management and leadership. These models have employed different approaches to assessing national culture, as demonstrated by the studies conducted by Gaganis et al. (2019), Minkov (2018), Bilsky and Schwartz (1994), House et al. (2004), Schwartz (1992, 1994). Moreover, significant scholarly attention has been paid to the correlation between leadership and culture in various contexts (Akanji et al., 2019; Janićijević, 2019; Maamari & Saheb, 2018; Manikutty et al., 2007; Tierney, 1988; Wolfe & Dilworth, 2015). In addition, national culture is believed to influence the behavior of managers and leaders, especially during organizational change (Moonen, 2019). In their study, Jimenez-Luque and Trimble (2020) suggested that rapid and unpredictable changes in the world require leaders to respond to changing conditions and diversified populations in the workforce. Hence, leadership plays a vital role in understanding how organizations adapt to this process. Consequently, the existing literature on leadership and culture lacks universal applicability, prompting the authors to conduct this study. HEIs encounter new challenges (Ayman et al., 2020) as they grow in importance, complexity, and multifunctionality. HEIs frequently interact with individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds and nationalities in their operations, more so than in other industries that also conduct business activities (Davies et al., 2001).

Given the international composition of their academic and administrative staff, students, and competitors, they must effectively handle a diverse workforce from various cultural backgrounds and national identities and employ appropriate leadership strategies for the sustainability of HEIs. Therefore, effectively managing this workforce requires a robust organizational culture and strong leadership. Moreover, amidst the complex global challenges faced by HEIs, leaders who actively embrace diversity and adjust their leadership styles accordingly are most effectively positioned to lead their institutions to success. However, as HEIs become more intricate, it becomes necessary to reassess the leadership and cultural dimensions.

Comprehending the cultural dimension that influences leadership style can enhance the ability to effectively and sustainably manage dynamic and intricate organizations. Nevertheless, the influence of Hofstede's cultural dimensions on leadership styles in HEIs must be adequately elucidated in the literature (Gumus et al., 2018). The existing literature has revealed only a limited number of studies on school leadership and cultural dimensions. Research papers and scholarly articles discussing Hofstede's dimensions and leadership have been found in various disciplines, excluding HEIs (Bissessar, 2018). Bissessar (2018) suggests that future research should investigate the correlation between Hofstede's five dimensions and leadership style. Based on the authors' understanding, studies have examined the relationship between national culture and leadership. However, previous studies have yet to specifically investigate the impact of national culture on leadership style in HEIs.

Recent studies indicate that transformational leaders substantially impact the environment of leading innovative universities in developed countries, such as the United States of America, the United Kingdom, Japan, Germany, and Sub-Saharan Africa (Bissessar, 2018; W. Li et al., 2018). Therefore, it is essential to examine the precise aspects of Hofstede's national culture

and understand the transactional and transformational leadership styles in HEIs to make a valuable contribution to the existing literature on developing countries.

Furthermore, leadership in work organizations relies predominantly on research conducted in the Western world, with limited comparable studies available from developing countries. In national culture studies, Turkish culture is typically considered part of Eastern culture (Ronen & Shenkar, 1985; Tanova, 2003). To fill this gap in the existing body of knowledge, this study explores the relationship between national culture (NC) and leadership styles by analyzing qualitative data obtained from universities in North Cyprus. The authors aimed to provide fresh perspectives on this gap in knowledge by investigating the influence of national culture on leadership styles, as perceived by academic staff in HEIs. However, to our knowledge, this is one of the first qualitative studies in this particular research context.

This study uses Hofstede's cultural dimensions to understand how national culture influences leadership styles and focuses on academics with intercultural workplace experiences regularly exposed to unfamiliar national cultures. The study is significant in examining the predominant leadership style, either transactional or transformational, about the influence of national culture in HEIs within diversified workforce environments. Based on the objective of this study, the following research questions were used to guide our research:

- (1) What is the description of national culture and its influence on the management of HEIs?
- (2) What is the impact of Hofstede's cultural dimensions on the transformational and transactional leadership styles of HEIs?
- (3) How do HEIs administrators manage their workforce to sustain a multicultural working environment?

The main novelty of this paper lies in its context-specific qualitative investigation of how Hofstede's cultural dimensions influence leadership styles—particularly transactional and transformational approaches—within higher education institutions in North Cyprus. Unlike most existing studies that focus on Western or developed nations, this research provides a rare empirical insight into a multicultural academic environment shaped by Eastern cultural norms. By analyzing perspectives from 35 participants across seven nationalities, the study highlights how national culture shapes leadership behaviors and decision-making processes in HEIs. Moreover, it addresses an under-researched area: the direct relationship between national culture and leadership in higher education, rather than in general organizational contexts. This contribution is especially significant for developing countries seeking culturally adaptive leadership strategies to manage diverse academic workforces effectively. The findings not only enrich the theoretical discourse but also offer globally relevant implications for inclusive and sustainable leadership practices in internationalized educational institutions.

The initial section of this study comprises a comprehensive examination of the existing literature to establish Hofstede's cultural dimensions, workforce diversity, and leadership styles. The subsequent section outlines the methodology employed in this study, followed by a comprehensive presentation and discussion of the findings.

### 3 Theoretical Background

#### 3.1 Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions in HEIs

Hofstede's cultural dimensions -power distance, individualism versus collectivism, masculinity versus femininity, uncertainty avoidance, long-term versus short-term orientation, and indulgence versus restraint—provide a fundamental framework for sociologists to describe how culture influences individuals' values and how these values impact people's behavior within a particular culture (Hofstede, 1980). Through these dimensions, Hofstede aimed to elucidate the relationship between a society's culture and its members' values, the subsequent influence of these values on their behavior, the dynamics of intercultural communication, the definition of cross-cultural communication, and its significance (Nickerson, 2023). In addition to sociology, Hofstede's research is relevant to cross-cultural psychology, international management, and communication (Minkov & Kaasa, 2020; Nickerson, 2023).

Power distance refers to the acceptance of unequal power distribution within institutions and organizations. Individuals averse to uncertainty are more likely to endorse beliefs that offer certainty and promote conformity. Individualism is a social structure characterized by a loose connection between individuals who are expected to care for themselves and their immediate families. Collectivism refers to an inclination towards a cohesive social organization. Relatives and other groups can anticipate steadfast allegiance. Masculinity and femininity are evident in society, where men are expected to exhibit greater assertiveness and materialism than women are. In a society characterized by ambiguous gender roles, both men and women must exhibit humility, compassion, and genuine interest in their lives. Power and inequality are fundamental elements of any society (Hofstede, 2011), and followers and leaders support inequality (Minkov, 2018). Long-term versus short-term orientation refers to how well a culture prepares its members to accept delayed material, social, and emotional satisfaction (Arrindell, 2003).

### 4 Previous Studies

Globalization has also increased the number of educators from various cultural backgrounds (Hecht & Kahrens, 2021). Meanwhile, considering the management of workforce diversity is crucial because of its characteristics that set apart contemporary HEIs. However, leadership styles substantially impact the results of diversity initiatives. Although both transformational and transactional leadership styles have advantages, adaptive leadership, combining elements of both, can be especially effective in fostering inclusive, innovative, and supportive academic environments (Northouse, P. G., 2018). Despite the time when HEIs are confronted with complex global challenges, leaders who embrace diversity and adjust their approaches accordingly are most effectively positioned to steer their institutions towards success. Recent studies have been conducted in higher education institutions regarding teaching methods, teachers' efficacy, virtual learning environments, succession planning, and readiness for IoT (Table 1) (Hecht & Kahrens, 2021; Sofyan et al., 2021; Sabri et al., 2020; Rahman Ahmad et al., 2020; Jimenez-Luque & Trimble, 2020). The current study examines leadership styles in higher education institutions as service organizations across different national cultures to address the gap in the existing literature.

**Table 1.** Previous Studies

| Author(s)                      | Study Area                                                                                 |
|--------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Hecht & Kahrens (2021)         | The impact of national cultural differences on teaching styles and student experiences     |
| Sofyan et al. (2021)           | Teachers' efficacy and the factors that impact it in Asian higher education institutions   |
| Sabri et al. (2020)            | Impact of Hofstede Dimensions on Saudi universities' preparedness to adopt IoT technology. |
| Rahman Ahmad et al. (2020)     | The influence of national culture on succession planning in Malaysian public HEIs          |
| Jimenez-Luque & Trimble (2020) | Key elements for the work of interculturally diversified workforce and peace leadership.   |

**Source:** Developed by authors

#### 4.1 Leadership and Workforce Diversity in HEIs

Diversified cultural backgrounds can result in divergent expectations regarding leadership and management methodologies. HEIs must deal with diversity in their work more than other sectors. Due to their international nature, with their academic and administrative staff, students, and competitors, they are forced to manage a diversified workforce with a proper leadership style. Diversity is the value of the differences and inclusion of all organizational members (Chin & Trimble, 2014) and a framework to foster a sense of belonging among all members (Wolfe & Dilworth, 2015). Understanding Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions can assist leaders in adjusting their approach to align more effectively with the cultural expectations and norms of the individuals they lead (Bass & Riggio, 2006).

Moreover, managing a diversified workforce requires an influential organizational culture and leadership. Leadership in multicultural or international environments necessitates a vital amalgamation of cultural comprehension and efficient execution. Dajani and Mohammad (2017) identified a relationship between leadership style and organizational culture in the context of higher education. Hannay (2009) asserts that leadership theories have evolved to encompass transactional and transformational models, emphasizing traits, contingency theories, skills, and abilities. According to Avolio and Bass (2004), the relationship between transformative and transactional leadership styles and an organization's learning ability is highly correlated. Transformational leadership is highly compatible with promoting workforce

diversity in HEIs. These leaders prioritize the importance of diverse viewpoints and backgrounds, fostering an environment of transparent communication and teamwork (Avolio & Bass, 2004). Meanwhile, heterogeneous teams can greatly benefit from transformational leaders, who foster innovation, flexibility, and dedication to diversity and inclusiveness. Therefore, they advocate a culture that promotes fairness and equality, following the principles of inclusivity. Nevertheless, they inspire faculty and staff members by connecting their work to a more comprehensive vision and common values. This can result in an increased involvement and dedication. In contrast, relying solely on a transactional approach may not fully exploit the benefits of diversity, as it primarily focuses on task-oriented interactions and may not foster the desired levels of innovation and inclusivity in HEIs (Montano et al., 2023). Wahab et al. (2016) found that most academic leaders in Malaysian public universities are transformational and actively foster knowledge exchange among educators. Education studies have also revealed the importance of maintaining a healthy balance between work and personal life for university professors. Sekhara Rao et al. (2018) study establishes a correlation between transformational and transactional leadership styles and their influence on job satisfaction and security.

#### **4.2 Transformational and Transactional Leadership**

A leader who can motivate and provide a distinct vision for subordinates is imperative for efficient team management (Chakraborty & Banerjee, 2023). Not all leaders necessarily support their teams to achieve efficient work through motivation or inspiration. Transactional leadership emphasizes the use of rewards and punishment to motivate and oversee employees. Unlike transformational leadership, it prioritizes operational efficiency over acquisition of new capabilities (Xu & Wang, 2019). Transactional leaders aim to influence employee behavior as their primary objective. Employees' efforts and potential are adequately rewarded or penalized by their performance (Judge & Piccol, 2004). This refers to setting goals, allocating resources, monitoring performance, and rewarding employees for their contributions (Kuntz et al., 2019).

Furthermore, employees prioritize culture over innovation (Xenikou, 2017) and adhere to established policies, procedures, and standards (Bass and Avolio, 1993). Transactional leaders establish explicit expectations and implement a structured system for exchanging commitments and resources in exchange for their assistance. In addition, they engage in resource negotiation, offer assistance in return for effort, and praise their followers for successful performance. Nevertheless, they refrain from intervening in a manner that could potentially result in conflict.

On the other hand, transformational leadership is characterized by its ability to inspire and motivate followers to achieve their highest potential and exceed their expectations. Moreover, it enhances motivation and morale among leaders and followers by instilling a profound sense of urgency in subordinates to accomplish organizational objectives (Schweitzer, 2014). Moreover, leaders can motivate and sway their teams, leading to significant organizational changes and enhancing their ability to adapt and respond to new challenges (Schweitzer, 2014). Baba (2019) defines transformational leadership as a dynamic process that not only brings about changes in individuals but also influences the beliefs of subordinates. Furthermore, a transformational leader motivates and enables others to accomplish exceptional goals.

To accomplish these goals, it is essential to imbue them with energy and enthusiasm (Amanchukwu et al., 2015).

Nijhof and Jeurissen (2017) discovered that when leaders transform, it positively impacts employees' emotional connections to the organization, leading to improved performance. Embracing transformational leadership leads to decreased power distance, increased team performance, and advancements in cultural dimensions (Budur and Poturak, 2021). The cultural context influences the selection of transformational, transactional, and other leadership styles (Dickson, 2003; Ilie & Schnurr, 2017). Hence, there is a need for further investigation of HEIs regarding the relationship between transformational leadership and the national culture. Transactional leadership focuses on utilizing incentives and penalties to inspire and supervise employees.

In contrast to transformational leadership, this approach places greater emphasis on operational efficiency rather than on acquiring new capabilities (Xu & Wang, 2019), and the performance of employees is appropriately acknowledged or penalized based on their efforts and potential (Judge & Piccol, 2004). In addition, employees place higher importance on culture than on innovation (Xenikou, 2017).

## 5 Methodology

This study employed qualitative research as a data-processing method that is exploratory and inductive to generate novel ideas (Wolfe & Dilworth, 2015). Therefore, it is centered around human beings and is directly relevant to studying leadership and national culture. The objective of cultural analysis is to ascertain, interpret, and implement the culture of a particular group. This definition usually relies on culturally distinct ideas, procedures, and understandings (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2006). This study is ethnographic and examines cultural elements, such as social behavior, structure, values, and norms (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2006), as well as individual perceptions and behaviors (LeCompte & Goetz, 1982). We used data from HEIs in North Cyprus. Studies on North Cyprus provide a unique ethnocultural context (Goby, 2007). The state functions on a secular basis despite the predominance of Islam among its population. Various influences, including a significant Greek population, British colonialism, and diverse international nationalities residing, working, or studying in the country, have shaped the country's culture over centuries (Goby, 2007). The presence of international students and lecturers in higher education (Ayman et al., 2020) and the benefits of a multicultural environment on the island enhance economic development driven by universities (Katircioglu et al., 2020).

HEIs in North Cyprus primarily recruit scholars from the Middle East, Africa, and Europe. Research conducted in North Cyprus HEIs has focused on the effectiveness of team leaders in terms of their role and significance in team leadership, and the extent of quality in managing these institutions. Additionally, this study examines the leadership styles in multicultural organizations and their connection to national culture, which is crucial for the sustainability of HEIs for managing the diversified workforce in the study context.

## 6 Research Participants and Sampling

The HEIs were selected based on criteria such as student population and years of operation. Consequently, the researchers eliminated educational institutions established after 1997 that had fewer than 20,000 students from their analysis. The study encompassed

Two public and four private HEIs were established between 1979 and 1997, respectively. The researcher conducted comprehensive interviews with 35 individuals of seven nationalities selected from six HEIs in North Cyprus (refer to Table 2). To maintain anonymity and confidentiality of the participants, dummy codes such as P1 and P2 were employed for identification purposes. Most participants had been employed in HEIs in North Cyprus for at least fifteen years. We deliberately chose study participants and employed the snowball sampling strategy as one of our sampling strategies to access participants who were believed to possess a more extensive and valuable pool of information (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2006).

**Table 2.** Demographic Profiles of Participants

| Participants | Years Of Experience | Nationality | Gender | Academic Title | Position/Role  | Type Of HEI |
|--------------|---------------------|-------------|--------|----------------|----------------|-------------|
| P1           | 13                  | Palestine   | Male   | Dr.            | Academic Staff | Private     |
| P2           | 25                  | TRNC        | Male   | Assoc.Prof.Dr. | Dean           | Private     |
| P3           | 5                   | Palestine   | Male   | Assoc.Prof.Dr. | Academic Staff | Private     |
| P4           | 5                   | Libya       | Male   | Assoc.Prof.Dr. | Academic Staff | Private     |
| P5           | 21                  | TRNC        | Male   | Dr.            | Academic Staff | Private     |
| P6           | 21                  | TRNC        | Female | Assoc.Prof.Dr. | Academic Staff | Private     |
| P7           | 15                  | TRNC        | Female | Prof. Dr.      | Academic Staff | Private     |
| P8           | 14                  | TRNC        | Male   | Assoc.Prof.Dr. | Academic Staff | Private     |
| P9           | 25                  | TRNC        | Male   | Prof. Dr.      | Academic Staff | Private     |
| P10          | 38                  | TRNC        | Male   | Prof. Dr.      | Academic Staff | Public      |
| P11          | 21                  | TRNC        | Male   | Prof. Dr.      | Vice-Rector    | Private     |

|     |    |         |        |                        |                |         |
|-----|----|---------|--------|------------------------|----------------|---------|
| P12 | 15 | TRNC    | Male   | Assoc.Prof.Dr.         | Vice-Rector    | Private |
| P13 | 7  | TRNC    | Male   | Assoc.Prof.Dr.         | Academic Staff | Private |
| P14 | 6  | TRNC    | Male   | Assoc.Prof.Dr.         | Academic Staff | Public  |
| P15 | 8  | TRNC    | Female | Assist.Prof.Dr.        | Academic Staff | Private |
| P16 | 39 | TR      | Male   | Prof. Dr.              | Academic Staff | Private |
| P17 | 5  | Latvia  | Female | Assoc.Prof.Dr.         | Academic Staff | Private |
| P18 | 15 | TRNC    | Male   | Assoc.Prof.Dr.         | Academic Staff | Private |
| P19 | 3  | Romania | Female | Assist.Prof.Dr.        | Academic Staff | Private |
| P20 | 2  | TRNC    | Female | Dr.                    | Academic Staff | Public  |
| P21 | 29 | TRNC    | Male   | Prof.Dr.               | Academic Staff | Public  |
| P22 | 28 | TRNC    | Male   | Prof. Dr.              | Academic Staff | Public  |
| P23 | 20 | TRNC    | Male   | Prof. Dr.              | Academic Staff | Public  |
| P24 | 28 | TRNC    | Male   | Prof. Dr.              | Dean           | Public  |
| P25 | 30 | TRNC    | Male   | Prof. Dr.              | Academic Staff | Public  |
| P26 | 35 | TR      | Male   | Dr.                    | Academic Staff | Public  |
| P27 | 6  | Iran    | Female | <u>Assist.Prof.Dr.</u> | Academic Staff | Private |
| P28 | 15 | TRNC    | Male   | Dr.                    | Academic Staff | Private |
| P29 | 12 | TR      | Male   | Dr.                    | Academic Staff | Public  |
| P30 | 15 | TRNC    | Female | <u>Assist.Prof.Dr.</u> | Academic Staff | Private |
| P31 | 25 | TR      | Male   | Assoc.Prof.Dr.         | Academic Staff | Private |
| P32 | 15 | TRNC    | Male   | Assoc.Prof.Dr.         | Academic Staff | Private |

|     |    |      |        |                |                |         |
|-----|----|------|--------|----------------|----------------|---------|
| P33 | 8  | Iran | Female | Assoc.Prof.Dr. | Academic Staff | Private |
| P34 | 15 | TRNC | Male   | Assoc.Prof.Dr. | Academic Staff | Private |
| P35 | 15 | TRNC | Male   | Prof. Dr.      | Academic Staff | Private |

## 7 Data Collection and Analysis

After conducting a comprehensive literature review, primary data were gathered through semi-structured interviews. These interviews were designed to obtain individual perspectives and enhance the overall comprehension of the issue (Creswell, 2013; Thiétart, 2001). The primary goal of qualitative approaches is to comprehensively comprehend a specific phenomenon through the perspective of individuals who have directly encountered it (Vaismoradi et al., 2013). The study's themes were derived qualitatively from the data using descriptive thematic analysis. To conduct a comprehensive thematic analysis, it is essential to include data on personal experiences, such as interviews or narratives, as a compulsory element (Sundler et al., 2019). The investigation employed comprehensive interviews with academic personnel to extract prevalent themes and patterns. By applying this methodology to all 35 transcripts, we identified and classified themes and patterns based on their similarities and differences.

QSR NVivo Release 1.5.1 (940) software was employed to assess the reliability of the study. Every interview transcript was carefully reviewed and analyzed using NVivo software. A small sample size was tested to confirm that respondents comprehended the questions, given that leadership is a complex topic to grasp. Subsequently, an interpretive process was conducted on the entire data set. To maintain the study's rigor and uniformity, linguists and subject matter experts scrutinized and assessed a minimum of five interviews.

We conducted interviews at six universities from August 2020 to June 2021. The average duration of interviews was 45-60 minutes. The interviews were recorded using a tape recorder and converted into written form. The transcriptions underwent multiple rounds of rereading to ensure precision. This framework was built using transcriptions and includes both anticipated and unforeseen codes. The coding frame was implemented on the remaining transcripts in the study using QSR NVivo Release 1.5.1. Hofstede's five cultural factors encompassed individualism-collectivism, gender, power distance, and uncertainty avoidance.

To establish the national culture, we requested participants to respond to inquiries regarding North Cyprus' values, beliefs, traditions, societal roles, and methods of dealing with challenging situations. We also inquired about their perception of the national culture concerning coping with adversity. The second category focused on determining which leadership styles to utilize. Two predominant leadership styles -transactional and transformational- were identified during the interviews. Following are some sample interview questions asked the participants to ascertain their understanding of leadership: (a) *How would*

*you characterize the leadership style of the leader of your institution? (b) Elaborate on the organizational structure of this institution, specifically focusing on the established management approach and the chain of command/authority (c) How would you describe your leader's method of promoting agreement and cooperation among his/her faculty members? (d) How do you evaluate your leader's general attitudes towards their faculty members from different nations' cultural backgrounds? (e) How do you describe North Cyprus Culture?*

Seven significant themes emerged following the completion of the analyses of the transcriptions and nodes (Table 3).

**Table 3.** An overview of themes

|                |                                                   |
|----------------|---------------------------------------------------|
| <i>Theme 1</i> | Culture                                           |
| <i>Theme 2</i> | Society's Goals                                   |
| <i>Theme 3</i> | The Role of Gender                                |
| <i>Theme 4</i> | Perception of Power                               |
| <i>Theme 5</i> | Uncertainty and Risk                              |
| <i>Theme 6</i> | Influence of National Culture on Leadership Style |
| <i>Theme 7</i> | Managing Workforce Diversity                      |

## 8 Results

The study's findings suggest that national culture influences individuals' preferred leadership styles. These findings have been assessed using six themes derived from qualitative analysis.

### 8.1 Theme 1: Culture

Individualistic cultures prioritize the pursuit of personal actions necessary to attain a certain level of performance (Rhee et al., 2020). This emphasis is placed on individual goals and rights. In contrast, collectivist cultures are motivated by group objectives, valuing the well-being of the collective over that of the individual. In our study, only a few participants perceive individualism as pervasive across all aspects of life.

Although strong relationships and familial ties hold importance in society, individuals primarily prioritize their own personal growth, ambitions, and interests. Their loyalty is primarily limited to their immediate family group. For example, P5 has stated that "everyone is responsible for one," while "individualistic people prioritize their own benefits." Additionally, institutions prioritize personal goals over collective decision-making objectives. Consequently, based on the definition of North Cyprus culture, the majority of participants

share similar perspectives, with 24 out of 28 participants agreeing that North Cyprus culture can be characterized as individualistic (e.g. P12, P6, P30, P35, P5, P7, P29, P32, P8).

P8 described the current situation as one in which individuals are solely focused on ensuring their survival. Consistency is important when it comes to personal or family matters rather than on a societal scale. They prioritize their own self-interests.

*"Everyone is primarily concerned with their own survival, rather than focusing on social interactions. They prioritise their own personal benefits." (P10). "... As individuals, we prioritize our own interests and well-being. However, we do not actively advocate for social benefits" (P6).*

## 8.2 Theme 2: Society's Goals

Individuals with a long-term perspective are encouraged to consider, strategize for, and allocate resources towards the future while delaying immediate gratification and actively preparing for what lies ahead. According to Hofstede, this "long-term orientation" cultivates practical values such as perseverance, frugality, and flexibility. Conversely, in societies that prioritize short-term thinking, values such as stability, adherence to tradition, maintaining one's reputation, reciprocation, and fulfilling social responsibilities are emphasized (G. G. J. Hofstede et al., 2005).

Short-term-oriented societies prioritize leisure time, freedom, short-term achievements, and individualism (Bissessar, 2018). Similarly, when examining participants' responses, individuals in North Cyprus primarily focus on the present in their social and managerial lives. They lack long-term plans and are generally motivated by short-term goals, emphasizing income and survival. Turkish Cypriots prefer quick solutions and are not efficient or motivated to implement long-term plans. They prefer immediate action and moving on to the next task. Participant 11 expressed this as "people are becoming more individualistic, there is uncertainty in the country, and they cannot foresee the future, so they are focused on preserving the present." Out of the 35 participants, 29 responded similarly to the question: "How do you perceive North Cyprus in terms of the society's values regarding short- or long-term orientation?"

As culture is oriented towards the short-term, none of the participants mentioned having a long-term orientation. The majority of participants held the belief that society prioritizes short-term values. They expressed this by stating that our actions are focused on a brief period of time and we only make short-term plans. Cypriots lack a reputation for engaging in strategic foresight. According to participant 20, people are not concerned about the medium or long term. Participant 12 explained that short-term plans are made based on the current time, focusing on saving the day. Participant 19 emphasized that they do not prioritize long-term plans and prefer to focus on the present. Participants 12, 19, 20, and 21 all expressed similar ideas. The relevant literature also suggests that a society with a short-term focus values leisure time, freedom, short-term achievements, and individuality (Bissessar, 2018).

### 8.3 Theme 3. The Role of Gender

In societies characterized by masculinity, there is an expectation for men to display assertiveness, a challenging nature, and a strong focus on achieving material success. On the other hand, women are expected to exhibit modesty, sensitivity, and a concern for the overall quality of life. Additionally, the pursuit of material success and a reverence for everything grand, intense, and fast-paced are highly valued in masculine societies. Women are expected to fulfil roles of service and care for those who are vulnerable, such as children and those in need. In contrast, feminine cultures emphasize aspects of life beyond financial success, such as interpersonal relationships and a concern for the well-being of the vulnerable. Consequently, men tend to hold dominant positions in political and labor organizations, regardless of whether the society is masculine or feminine.

The findings of the present study suggest that the society in North Cyprus is characterized by a masculine orientation, where individuals in positions of leadership, subordination, and management prioritize material success. Traditionally, women are expected to prioritize the quality of their lives over ambiguity, assertiveness, or financial success. Women assume responsibility for the care and well-being of the family, including managing interpersonal connections, providing assistance, and overseeing the intangible aspects of children's and families' quality of life. For example, P2 stated that in their family, their father always made the final word or decision. It is possible that discussions took place between their parents beforehand, but ultimately, the father had the final say. My father was emotionally reserved and inflexible, which is why he was reluctant to let my mother make decisions, as she was more emotionally expressive. P6 highlighted that culture influences managerial approaches, resulting in a higher representation of male leaders compared to female leaders. This disparity may be attributed to cultural factors that hinder women from advancing and promoting themselves. Additionally, women's responsibilities towards their children often impact their ability to balance work and home life. The organizational structure at HEI mirrors these cultural dynamics. Several participants noted that despite the absence of workplace discrimination, their advancement and promotion opportunities were hindered due to their gender. Male leaders believed that women could not allocate the required time for their work. Women's lives should primarily focus on their family rather than work. (P2) stated that there is a lack of women's cooperation in society, citing the absence of any female presidents in North Cyprus as an example. North Cyprus exhibits a prevailing dominance of masculinity. Furthermore, it is worth noting that there is also an absence of female rectors in universities here. Another prevalent aspect in society and managerial life is the apparent proximity of interpersonal relationships, yet our culture does not widely embrace the expression of emotions. Participant P5 stated that men occupy the rectorate office, vice-rectors, and other administrative roles in their company, while women are predominantly in academic positions. We typically recruit individuals from Turkey, and Turkish men tend to have higher levels of education. Therefore, our hiring decisions are not based on gender bias. Both men and women have equal opportunities, but men generally have greater availability. Furthermore, due to the additional domestic obligations that women typically have, it is possible that some women may not appreciate taking on additional tasks if they lack support in the workplace.

#### 8.4 Theme 4. Perception of Power

Power distance encompasses various factors, such as the hierarchical structure of a society, individuals' attitudes towards authority, and the expectations and acceptance of power by different cultural members. The present study's findings indicate that individuals' endorsement of unequal power distribution among non-governmental organizations, governments, and private or public institutions is influenced by the small size of North Cyprus and the interpersonal connections that shape societal values. The older generations of the family are anticipated to demonstrate deference towards their parents and elders. Consequently, various nationalities and cultures have established themselves on the island, gradually eroding unique cultural identities and influencing the native cultures.

Consequently, traditional practices have diminished, leading to a re-evaluation and redistribution of familial authority concerning previous times. Discussing the high-power distance in North Cyprus society is challenging because of the amicable nature of Turkish Cypriots and their strong interpersonal connections. Furthermore, the island emphasizes the importance of authenticity and trust, ensuring everyone is easily accessible and approachable, therefore minimizing power distance. P24 describes the situation: "My wife and I went to a restaurant for dinner last week. Coincidentally, we encountered one of our government ministers and his spouse at the same establishment. After exchanging pleasantries and engaging in conversation, they kindly invited us to join them at their table, and we proceeded to have dinner together."

In addition, it is customary and permissible for Turkish Cypriots to communicate directly with a minister or deputy, either by calling them directly from their personal phones or by visiting their office without scheduling an appointment. Upon examining power distance in HEIs, we found a situation that deviated slightly from the cultural norms observed in society.

Many participants indicated that in HEIs, the relationships between top management and subordinates are hierarchical, with leaders focusing more on tasks than people. Each individual has a defined and limited role determined by rules and regulations. Subordinates have a limited degree of involvement in decision-making processes. P1 states that the success of a situation depends on the familiarity and trust between individuals rather than their qualifications or positions. Managers select options based on their familiarity, as they believe it will simplify their lives. We are impervious to criticism; our intention is to retain control. Instead of assessing the suitability of the qualifications for the job, the focus is on determining their familiarity. They believe that they can more readily control someone they are familiar with. Participant P29 stated that there is a narrow power distance, particularly in the state, but a wider power distance exists in large companies within the private sector due to the presence of a hierarchical order. HEI leaders who effectively convey this message to employees through the rector hold significant influence and are granted special privileges and symbols of high status. However, favouritism has increasingly become an accepted social practice, particularly in the realms of politics and higher education institution management. Despite society's low power distance, research indicates a preference for it to be high.

### 8.5 Theme 5. Uncertainty and Risk

The level of perceived threat experienced by individuals in situations characterized by uncertainty and risk influences the extent to which a culture tends to avoid uncertainty. Cultures respond to uncertainty by actively avoiding it. Individuals have a tendency to favor established regulations and protocols, and they may be willing to tolerate known risks but not unfamiliar hazards. Consequently, they often resist change and innovation. Authorities who provide accurate answers are highly regarded. Cultures that exhibit aversion towards uncertainty and embrace diversity need help managing these challenges effectively. Deviation is only sometimes efficacious or indispensable, and rules can be modified if they prove ineffective.

Many participants mentioned the island's ambiguity and the lack of economic and political security felt by its residents. P2 described the situation as one of uncertainty on the island, which hinders the ability to make long-term plans. The study findings indicate that Turkish Cypriots exhibit risk aversion, a dislike for insecurity, and a fear of the unknown. In addition, they characterize the culture as conservative, suggesting that even managerial strategies are cautious and averse to risk; investments are highly restricted or cautious. P15, a European citizen, described uncertainty avoidance as a result of her observations that the country in question is an island nation with a small, conservative society that is resistant to change. The island's inhabitants exhibit a strong resistance to change and a preference for maintaining a state of uncertainty. However, society needs a significant number of individuals who are innovative or entrepreneurial in nature. A similar attitude towards uncertainty avoidance is observed in Higher Education Institutions (HEI), where there is an expectation for teachers or subordinates to possess comprehensive knowledge. Despite any disagreement with the rules and regulations in their institutions, individuals still value their presence. A participant describes this as a desire for a faculty with well-defined boundaries and stricter adherence to rules, stating "they prefer an autocratic leader rather than confronting risks or uncertainty...." (P28). Consequently, the findings indicate that HEIs tend to avoid uncertainty, and there is a strong emotional desire for rules and formality to organize their social and managerial activities. There is a significant similarity in the level of uncertainty avoidance between society and higher education institutions.

### 8.6 Theme 6. Influence of National Culture on Leadership Style

The leader-follower relationship is established through either bargaining or reward systems, as discussed by Bass in 1985 and Bass and Avolio in 1993. Transactional leaders place a high priority on ensuring the safety and security of their subordinates. The transactional leader maintains control by operating within the established system or culture, minimizing risk, prioritizing time constraints and efficiency, and prioritizing process over substance. Delegate tasks to subordinates and provide incentives for their successful completion while imposing consequences for undesirable behavior. Transactional leaders emphasize management and only intervene when deviations from established procedures and standards exist. The leader oversees and scrutinizes instances of rule and standard infractions and subsequently takes appropriate measures. Transactional leaders expect their followers to adhere to the established rules and accomplish the predetermined objectives. They possess a strong focus on completing

tasks and prioritizing their individual goals. They anticipate the process to remain under their control. Several responses from the participants affirmed that the leaders in their institutions exhibit autocratic tendencies. The subsequent excerpts from interviews providing support for this assertion are as follows:

The current leader focuses on transactions and exchanges. The individual described is autocratic and self-centered, as stated by participants: "The top management exhibits dictatorial tendencies, with leaders displaying autocratic behavior" (P5). They handle administrative and academic matters in an autocratic manner" (P13).

Contrarily, most participants believe that their leader is solely focused on their job. Furthermore, the participants have explicitly stated that the leadership styles in HEI in North Cyprus are transactional leadership styles. For example, the responses provided were as follows:

"My leader's primary focus is on completing the task. They are only interested in the task, whether it is completed or not. The quality of the task is another issue. While the task may be completed on time, the quality is not satisfactory." (P11)

According to P25, most leaders perceive written rules and regulations as prescriptive and prohibitive, enforcing their actions in accordance with the law and placing their jobs as the highest priority. However, life does not solely revolve around work, as everyone is engaged in an extensive amount of work hours. The participant stated this as "He adheres to the rules, avoids taking risks, consistently opts for a cautious approach, remains within the boundaries of established regulations, and lacks proactive behavior."

### 8.7 Theme 7. Managing Workforce Diversity

Visible commitment from leadership is essential in fostering trust among employees, showing that inclusion is a core organizational value and not just a superficial goal. When diversity and inclusion are woven into the very fabric of an organization's culture, they become more sustainable, leading to long-term benefits in performance, employee engagement, and innovation. Building on Hofstede's work, Cay (2024) conducted a recent study that highlights how Hofstede's dimensions, particularly Power Distance and Individualism vs. Collectivism, play significant roles in shaping job satisfaction and work-life balance within culturally diverse teams. P38 explain this as *"even if the culture is different, it does not treat people differently, everyone behaves the same, but there is not much cultural difference. For example, all decisions are sent to the employees in Turkish. That is why I don't think cultural diversity can be managed. There is only the Middle Eastern and African culture in the school as a different culture."*

P18 *"His approach to the person is not variable according to cultural difference. His relationship with a Cypriot is the same as with an Iranian. If that person has a negative attitude towards the organization, he may take a different attitude towards that person."*

P29 *“Aware of their cultural differences and tries to exclude or allow them to live the values they have in their culture. This principle refers to those who are not residents, who have been here temporarily, and whom they believe will return as foreigners. We have prejudices, especially those with a color difference; we make individual discrimination.”*

P7 *“He treats everyone equally and does not act according to his culture. Cypriots are not very open or moderate towards foreigners.”*

P1 *“Deans and heads of department don’t show any differences according to the nationality of the staff. We are very diverse in the university; we have at least 5-6 different nationalities in every faculty. Lower management doesn’t show any difference in attitudes towards different nationalities. But top management prefers overseas over locals, and this is a problem. They are giving priority to overseas over locals. They have a priority over foreigners because top management believes foreigners to keep their position foreigners will listen. It’s an avoidance from challenge.”*

Cay (2024) argues that organizations need to adopt a culturally sensitive approach to diversity management, ensuring that diversity initiatives are not perceived as externally imposed but rather integrated into the broader cultural framework of the organization. The integration of Hofstede’s dimensions into diversity and inclusion strategies allows organizations to tailor their approaches to the specific cultural contexts in which they operate, ensuring that diversity efforts are sustainable and effective. P1 states this as: *“Deans and heads of department don’t show any differences according to the nationality of the staff. We are very diverse in the university; we have at least 5-6 different nationalities in every faculty. Lower management doesn’t show any difference in attitudes towards different nationalities. But top management prefers overseas over locals, and this is a problem. They are giving priority to overseas over locals. They have a priority over foreigners because top management believes foreigners to keep their position foreigners will listen. It’s an avoidance from challenge.”*

## 9 Conclusion

This study confirms that national culture plays a significant role in influencing leadership style. Most participants agreed that leaders in North Cyprus tend to adopt transactional leadership styles. This can be attributed to the differences in managerial strategies employed by the individuals compared to the characteristics of the national culture outlined by the participants. Their viewpoints corroborated that leaders exhibit autocratic tendencies, prioritize job-related matters, adhere to bureaucratic practices, assert dominance, discourage self-motivation, and have limited creativity. These leaders are also associated with individualistic, short-term-oriented, high-power distance, high uncertainty, and masculine national culture characteristics. Furthermore, a mere seven individuals out of 35 believe that their leaders prioritize the well-being and development of employees over the completion of specific tasks or job-related goals. Out of 35 respondents, 14 reported that their leader solely focuses on promoting task management rather than fostering self-development. The respondents perceive only a few leaders as transformational.

## 10 Discussion and implications

Dickson et al. (2003) argue that cultural differences result in varying leadership preferences. This study aimed to investigate the influence of national culture on leadership styles in HEIs and the role of leaders in managing workforce diversity to sustain HEIs. Our research suggests that transactional leadership is more commonly found in HEIs in North Cyprus. This aligns with Hofstede's observations regarding cultural dimensions such as uncertainty avoidance, power distance, short-term orientation, masculinity, and individuality.

The findings indicate that the predominant leadership styles in the HEIs of North Cyprus are transactional. Transactional leadership fosters an environment that enhances organizational and human capabilities, providing tangible and intangible employee benefits. This leadership style hinders creativity and innovation, leading to employees needing to meet the organization's expectations (Arokiasamy & Hon Tat, 2019). The transition from transactional to transformational leadership will likely significantly impact motivational and attitudinal outcomes, such as engagement, rather than operational outcomes, like alignment (Kuntz et al., 2019).

The current study has two implications, namely theoretical and managerial. The study enhances comprehension of the national culture of North Cyprus by examining it through Hofstede's national culture dimensions. The results of our study align with the previously mentioned literature on organizational behavior. However, HEIs would benefit from enhancing the literature by incorporating studies from comparable and contrasting contexts. The influence of Turkish culture, classified as Middle Eastern culture (Tanova, 2003), on the leadership styles of HEIs is evident. The foreign workforce also identified this as transactional leadership that arises due to cultural factors. The impact of national culture on organizations with a significant level of workforce diversity, such as HEIs, has been shown to align with Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory and empirical studies in the literature.

Furthermore, we aimed to validate the suitability of the transformational leadership style in managerial roles within multicultural universities and how leaders manage workforce diversity in HEIs. As emphasized by Kiradoo (2022), the success of diversity and inclusion efforts is most likely when they are part of a long-term cultural strategy rather than being implemented merely as compliance requirements or as a public relations move. This means leadership needs to be visibly committed to these initiatives, demonstrating genuine support for diversity through actions such as the development of inclusive policies and flexible work arrangements.

## 11 Limitations and Future Research

Our study sought to understand how national culture affects leadership styles, specifically focusing on Hofstede's cultural dimensions. The study was conducted among academicians with intercultural workplace experiences who regularly encounter unfamiliar national cultures. However, our study does have certain constraints. Firstly, researching a solitary island nation imposes limitations on this study. It is possible to conduct comparable studies in other island nations to analyze and differentiate their cultures and the impact of national culture on leadership. In addition, we have not incorporated Hofstede's GLOBE cultural dimensions into

our current study. However, it may be explored in future research to examine the impact of leaders' behavior on the performance and humane orientation of societies.

Furthermore, our study findings indicate the need to examine whether these results stem from human behavior or the impacts of cultural dimensions. To establish the connection between personality traits, cultural dimensions, and leadership styles in HEIs, using personality traits in conjunction with Hofstede's cultural dimensions is advisable. Studying the impacts of it is thought to contribute to the understanding of the field. Furthermore, our study utilized a qualitative methodology and involved a small number of participants. To enhance the study's usefulness for future researchers, conducting the research in a broader context using quantitative methodologies would be advantageous. This would allow for the generalization of the results for the population under study.

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