

PROSPECTIVE ROMANIAN LEADERS' VIEW ON LEADERSHIP DIMENSIONS

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This study deals with Romanian prospective leaders' perspective on outstanding leadership dimensions (styles). It is a part of a European research project, GLOBE Students, dealing with the interrelations between societal culture and leadership. The basic theoretical constructs and methodological framework of investigation are those developed by GLOBE international research project. The sample consists in 429 students in business/economics and engineering, belonging to three Romanian universities. The findings show that the most preferred leadership styles are team oriented and charismatic (value based). Only a few leadership styles seem to have weak, but statistically significant correlations against a sig. = 0.50 probability threshold with important socialization agents for the students.

Keywords: leadership dimensions; Implicit Leadership Theory, Culturally endorsed Leadership Theory

JEL classification: M19

Introduction

In trying to explore and develop the leadership skills and abilities in the Romanian students, both teachers and students could use as starting point the findings of different *field inquiries*. Here there are some of them. A *Gallup* inquiry discovered that in 2009 one in four Romanian employees believed that his role in the company is of a "simple doer". At the same time, the majority of managers do not know how to assume a strategic role (Mihai, 2009a). For the same year, *Hart Human Resource Consulting* showed that more than 67% from 100 executives in large local companies had a narcissistic and arrogant behaviour, 60% did not share the outcomes with their teams and 58% took excessive risky decisions (Mihai, 2009b). According to *Institute for Leadership & Management*, about one third of employees lost their confidence in organizational management and leadership and 46% would live the company along with the first offer from another organization (Mihai, 2009c). *Hay company* asserts that two third of Romanian managers constantly create a negative working climate, making the employees to feel frustrated and offended (Mihai, 2009d). When asked about "how are Romanian managers in power positions", a foreign consultant of *Hermes Advisors*, answered: "You address to a boss with *long live* greeting. He is the one taking decisions and telling you when to stop talking. The boss does not develop people because this would threaten his position. Is authoritarian and acts being obsessed by power. Even though they are creative and determined, the Romanians choose too often to play the role of *boss* in the detriment of manager or leader role". (Cum sunt romanii la putere, 2008).

With such a "helicopter view" on management and leadership practice, our study aims at answering the following questions: 1. Which are the leadership dimensions (styles) valued by Romanian students? 2. Which are (if any) the significant correlations between students' opinion on outstanding leadership dimensions and the socialization agents influencing their *cultural* beings? The answers to these questions will help us in imagining *quo Vadis* the next generation of Romanian leaders is oriented.

Theoretical remarks

The term *leadership* does not have a univalent understanding. Our study shares the meaning given to it by GLOBE research: "the ability of an individual to influence, motivate and enable others to contribute

toward the effectiveness and success of the organizations of which they are members” (House et al.2004:15).

The leadership theories are fascinated by the cultural approach in the last two decades. Explicitly or not, their aim is to study the correlations between cultural dimensions (at societal and organizational levels) and effective leadership dimensions. It seems that the members of a given society or group possess in their minds a package of dimensions (features, styles) characterizing an effective leadership and assess successful leaders based upon these dimensions. In short, this is the core idea of *Implicit Leadership Theory* (ILT) (Lord, Maher, 1991). In other words, an individual cannot be an effective leader if the others do not *perceive* him as being such. This perception springs from the societal culture (Schein, 1992). GLOBE project extended ILT paradigm at the community culture level (society, organization, group), setting up the *Culturally Endorsed Leadership Theory* (CLT) (House et al.2004; Javidan et al. 2006). The central idea of CLT is that the cultural *expectations* of a given community can be predicted from *perceived* leadership dimensions (styles, attributes) in that community. A leadership style is a reflection of a certain societal culture (Kopelman et al, 1995), meaning that cultural values influence the leadership practices (Lombardo, 1983; Trice and Beyer, 1984; Schneider, 1987; Schein, 1992; Schneider et al. 1995) and both are found in the group perception about successful leadership (CLT). Leader acceptance by the followers depends on the interactions between *CLT* attributes and leader behaviours. Leadership effectiveness essentially depends on leader behaviour and CLT attributes. In other words, in group members’ perception, a leader is the most effective if applies CLT dimensions. This means that successful leadership dimensions are normative in group members’ perception, reflecting how should be a successful leader and not how he actually is.

On a solid theoretical basis and using 112 personality and behavioural descriptors, GLOBE research developed 21 first order, and then 6 second order universally accepted leadership dimensions: charismatic, team oriented, participative, humane, self protective (narcissistic) and autonomous. The definitions and theoretical basis of these dimensions are found in GLOBE books (House et al.2004; Chhokar et al. 2007).

The six dimensions are *universal* but always and anywhere *culturally dependent*. This means they have different *sizes* in different societal cultures. In fact, the differences concern the way in which they are applied by leaders. In the end, we deal with some theoretical constructs, useful ideals in modelling behaviours. They help us to understand the leadership success sources. But the universality of the six leadership dimensions should not be taken as meaning optimum leadership, as universal leadership pattern.

In developing students’ leadership abilities, some authors distinguish between *traditional leadership* and *shared leadership approach*. For instance, Glen Omatsu argues that in traditional leadership approach the leader is a rare, strong and powerful person, using his charisma when deciding, commanding others and communicating. In shared leadership approach, the leader is a part of the team, leadership is embedded in leader’s ability to work well with others to get things done, and it is based upon commitment to dignity, equality, democracy and transformation in human beings (Student leadership training booklet). It is our belief that shared leadership concerns a leadership style in convergence with students’ cultural values

Research methodology

In performing our study on Romanian students’ opinion about leadership dimensions we used the methodological framework created by the GLOBE project. Leadership dimensions were measured using the scales in sections 2 and 4 (leadership attributes and behaviours). These scales ask the students to value if the attributes and behaviours stated in the items *inhibit or contribute* to outstanding leadership.

To adapt the study to the population of interest, in section 5 (importance of decisional criteria) seven new scales were added for measuring the influence of important reference groups (family, teachers, friends, managers, TV/radio stars, models from society and science) on students' value system and leadership expectations. All the answers are assessed with seven points Likert scales, where 1 = this behavior or characteristic greatly inhibits a person from being an outstanding leader and 7 = this behavior or characteristic contributes greatly to a person being an outstanding leader. Some items were reverse coded, following the GLOBE Culture and Leadership Scales Guidelines and Syntax for the GLOBE Leadership and Culture (2006).

Data collection run between November 2008 and April 2009. The sample consists in 429 students attending business/economics and engineering in three Romanian universities. The sample is structured based upon the following criteria: gender (55.7% female, 44.3% male), age groups (62.5% belong to the age group of 18-22 years, 34.5% to 23-27 years and 3% to 28 and over), field of study (39.2% is enrolled in business/economics and 60.8% in engineering), level of study (64.8% bachelor, 35.2% master), interest in management career (67.1% Yes), and interest in founding a business venture (73.9% Yes). The basic assumption in choosing the sample was that majority of the future managers and leaders will be economists and engineers.

Findings

Which are the leadership dimensions (styles) valued by Romanian students?

Table 1 displays the rank (mean values and standard deviations) of students' preferences in assessing the second order leadership dimensions (from GLOBE model).

Table 1. Second order leadership dimensions
(N=429)

Leadership dimensions	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Team-Oriented	2.07	6.83	5.8940	.64304
Charismatic/ Value Based	1.16	6.91	5.7605	.67109
Humane orientation	1.75	6.88	4.7270	.83871
Participative	2.25	6.75	4.7264	.82644
Self-Protective	2.39	5.86	3.7159	.53216
Autonomous	1.00	6.75	3.6608	1.09483

Team oriented leadership (5.89) and charismatic leadership (5.76) are the most preferred leadership dimensions. The low standard deviations for these dimensions (0.643 and, respectively, 0.671) show the relative high homogeneity of the answers. The third preferred styles are humane oriented (4.727) and participative leadership (4.726) with mean values situated on the middle band of the scale and higher standard deviations. Finally, the students do not prefer, but tolerate protective (3.71) and autonomous leadership (3.66). The answers are homogeneous in the case of protective leadership (standard deviation 0.532), but not homogeneous in the case of autonomous style (standard deviation 1.09).

Table 2 shows the students preferences for more detailed leadership attributes and behaviours (questionnaire items and first order leadership dimensions). This data is congruent with that displayed in Table 1, all of examples belonging to the first two preferred leadership styles.

Table 2. Selected leadership items (top 10)

Item	Mean	Belongs to	
		First order leadership dimension	Second order leadership dimension
Effective bargainer	6.38	Diplomatic	Team oriented
Diplomatic	6.34	Diplomatic	Team oriented
Intelligent	6.33	Malevolent (reversed)	Team oriented
Communicative	6.28	Team integrator	Team oriented
Administratively skilled	6.25	Admin. competent	Team oriented
Coordinator	6.19	Team integrator	Team oriented
Inspirational	6.19	Visionary	Charismatic
Motive arouser	6.18	Inspirational	Charismatic
Trustworthy	6.17	Integrity	Charismatic
Decisive	6.17	Decisive	Charismatic
Informed	6.15	Team integrator	Team oriented
Team builder	6.13	Team integrator	Team oriented
Dependable	6.13	Malevolent (reversed)	Team oriented

Correlations between leadership dimensions and socialization agents influencing the students' life

Data in Table 3 portray the correlations between leadership dimensions valued by student's community and the socialization agents influencing their value system.

The dominant note is the lack of significant correlations. In the cases the correlation is statistically significant against a sig. = 0.50 probability threshold, it is very weak. Self protective style has positive correlation with models from society, politics, economy and sports (Pearson coefficient = 0.095; sig. = 0.049) and negative correlation with the education got in family (Pearson coefficient = -0.102; sig. = 0.035). Participative leadership has negative correlation with models from society, politics, economy and sports (Pearson coefficient = -0.104; sig. = 0.031) and with examples from science and research (Pearson coefficient = -0.104; sig. = 0.031). Autonomous leadership is positively correlated with models from science and research (Pearson coefficient = 0.097; sig. = 0.044).

Conclusions and future research

Due to the fact that space constraints do not allow discussing the findings, we only focus on general conclusions and future research options.

The students' first two leadership preferences are *team oriented* leadership and *charismatic/value based* leadership. Some of leadership dimensions correlate with certain socialization agents which influence students' cultural and leadership expectations. Universities and government could use our findings in designing the strategies aiming at preparing the students for the market of next elites in economy, for creating and developing a leadership culture among young generations, for setting up national mentorship networks in educating and developing managers and leaders. Students themselves could take into account our findings in clarifying their options for own business or management positions.

The findings and conclusions should be taken in the context of an ongoing research. Certainly, they could be influenced by the sample size, structure and geographic location. At the same time, it is probably that certain perceptions and expectations had been influenced by the fact that the data collection took place in full economic crisis. Additional, the students form a specific population, still in molding process. They are influenced by a lot of social factors which were left out of our attention. The methodological limits should be also, mentioned. Some of them might be diminished in future research, pursuing two major objectives: a) performing comparative studies based upon the data collected in GLOBE students research for other European countries and b) comparative studies based upon Romanian students population and middle managers (GLOBE II research).

Table 3 Correlations between second order leadership dimensions and agents of socialization

Second order Leadership dimensions	Pearson coefficients and significance level						
	Parents/ family	Teachers	Friends	Superiors	Radio/ TV stars	Examples from society	Examples from science
Charismatic/ Value Based	-0.004 (0.938)	0.054 (0.268)	-0.008 (0.866)	0.082 (0.090)	-0.053 (0.272)	0.072 (0.136)	0.036 (0.454)
Team-Oriented	0.012 (0.806)	0.037 (0.446)	-0.027 (0.578)	0.049 (0.307)	-0.062 (0.200)	0.030 (0.538)	0.001 (0.987)
Self-Protective	-0.102* (0.035)	-0.043 (0.370)	-0.007 (0.885)	-0.023 (0.642)	0.082 (0.090)	0.095* (0.049)	0.080 (0.099)
Participative	0.032 (0.507)	0.082 (0.088)	-0.083 (0.087)	0.035 (0.469)	-0.065 (0.181)	-0.104* (0.031)	-0.104* (0.031)
Humane oriented	-0.047 (0.335)	-0.002 (0.970)	-0.006 (0.907)	0.011 (0.826)	0.010 (0.836)	0.020 (0.676)	0.031 (0.526)
Autonomous	-0.013 (0.784)	-0.045 (0.354)	-0.024 (0.622)	-0.040 (0.412)	0.076 (0.114)	0.093 (0.054)	0.097* (0.044)

* Pearson Correlation is significant at .005 levels (two tailed)

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