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## Cultural Influences of Leadership Curriculum: A Literature Analysis Between Western and Eastern Leadership Curriculum

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# Cultural Influences of Leadership Curriculum: A Literature Analysis Between Western and Eastern Leadership Curriculum

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## **Cultural Influences of Leadership Curriculum: A Literature Analysis Between Western and Eastern Leadership Curriculum**

### **Introduction**

With globalization, the business environment becomes more volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous. Organizations are trying to adapt to challenges and rapid changes with different methods such as leadership training. Jung et al. (2003) concluded that prior research has suggested that top managers' leadership styles can significantly impact an organization's creativity and innovation ability, and the result shows that there is a direct and positive relationship between transformational leadership and organizational innovation. However, when trying to implement a leadership curriculum in different organizations the outcome is not always ideal. For example, Fox and Bourgeois (2022) examined the impact of leadership courses across Western and Eastern cultures and found that there is difficulty for students in Eastern countries to fully understand leadership styles due to cultural differences in the leadership curriculum design. Course design is critical because each culture has a set of values that affect the concept of leadership education. This literature analysis aims to determine if Western or Eastern cultures affect leadership training or curriculum design, given that each culture has its own set of values that shape the notion of leadership education.

### **Literature Review**

#### ***Cross-Culture Leadership Development***

Today's globalization encourages and fosters cross-cultural collaboration and progress across nations; thus, leadership development has become a crucial aspect of success. Research by Brocklehurst et al. (2013) demonstrates that Eastern countries share a great percent of common leadership development traits from Western countries. For example, Khattab and Wong (2019)

find that executives in Arab countries favor a leadership development program which encompasses 80% of Western and 20% of Arabic practices. Conversely, the leadership style of Chinese Communist Party provincial chiefs are classified as being assertive with an authoritarian style that prioritizes policy successes above interpersonal interactions and collaborative style that values coalition building (Jiang & Luo, 2012). Additionally, Vu and Gill (2019) found that effective leadership must be context-specific rather than a one-size-fit-all concept, which makes cultural consideration crucial when identifying transformational leadership education in a specific context.

Cultural factors in leadership are still prevalent among non-western countries (Bonsu & Twum-Danso, 2018; McDonald, 2012). The Eastern societal structure generally emphasizes a hierarchy system where leaders hold significant power distant with subordinates (Ahlstrom et al., 2010; Lam et al., 2012; Liden, 2012), resonant a similar relationship “between parents and children in non-western countries (Pellegrini et al., 2010), which leads a significant dissimilar on leaders’ practice in decision making. Leaders who hold a majority of power will be expected or assumed to make major decisions and deliver the result of the decision to subordinates while in the U.S and Canada, leaders tend to share the power of decision making to subordinates (Bassett, 2020).

In a study focusing on cross-cultural partnerships between Western and Eastern countries, Bassett (2020) revealed multiple key distinctions from leadership perspectives. Cultures review conflict in dissimilar ways. Western cultures encourage openness and proactivity in addressing conflict in the workplace. Bassett describes conflict as a normative interaction and people rarely carry conflict to the personal level. However, this does not mean that people in Eastern countries will choose to avoid communication and conflict at all costs when it happens, but they do have

slightly different ways of addressing the problems (Guo & Cionea, 2017). For example, individuals in Chinese organizations do not necessarily avoid conflict but advocate appropriate and mature handling of such situations. Individuals will try a mixed direct and indirect communication approach and follow a set of procedural guidelines that include self-reflection, perspective-taking, a positive attitude, and a positive attitude when dealing with workplace conflicts, as well as thinking holistically (Guo & Cionea, 2017).

In the analysis of Chinese leadership styles and traits, a predominant topic of Western research has been focused on Confucianism (Rowley & Oh, 2019). Western scholars have a longstanding argument that the Chinese leadership model has been heavily influenced and shaped by Confucianism (Hui, 2022). Collectivism has also been frequently mentioned in studies related to Chinese business models and leadership development (Lin & Huang, 2012). Collectivism highlights the prioritization of group interests over individual benefits. However, Rowley & Oh (2019) argued that China has undergone decades of revolution and modernization and that the underlying reason for using Confucianism and collectivism to summarize China's leadership development trajectory is a “biased paradigm perfected by the system of prejudice developed from a Western perspective” (p.4). As a result, scholars lament the challenges and innovations in further discussing the concept.

On the other hand, Western leadership styles have been greatly influenced by growth mindset, emotional intelligence, conflict resolution. As McClellan (2022) concluded that the idealistic, western-centric, and prescriptive nature of many leadership theories makes it difficult to apply them to training and development in foreign leadership situations. In Howard and Irving's (2020) research, they found that Americans and Germans had similar performance levels in measuring resilience. Compared to their Indian sample, western samples indicated a

significant correlation between obstacles and leader resilience. In a study of Asian American leaders, Sy et al. (2010) indicated that the standards for assessing effective leadership in USA were based on western values and norms, which might be connected with assertiveness, dynamism, enthusiasm, and so forth (Festekjian et al., 2014). These factors can be the benefits of western leadership style, but they are also the barriers to applying the curricula in foreign contexts.

Moreover, Filatotchev et al. (2020) discussed the strategic leaders from the West focused more on value-based and humane-oriented leadership, while eastern leaders were high in self-protective leadership. As Haslam et al. (2022) discovered, the ability to represent, advance, build, and entrench a social identity with whom leaders lead was the core of research in identity leadership. In Fotso's (2021) review of western studies on leadership competencies for the 21st century, the results showed that leaders were expected to be self-aware, entrepreneurial change initiators and implementers who could bring together a strong concern for people, customer experience, digitalization, financialization, triple-bottom-line, handling crises, and the general good in a collaborative work environment.

Modern conceptualizations of effective global leadership recognize the significance of recognizing cultural factors in diverse contexts, particularly in cross-cultural leadership models (Bassett, 2020). Vu and Gill (2019) propose the concept of "fusion leadership" (p. 141) to enhance effective global leadership. At the core of fusion leadership is the requirement for leaders to combine Western and Eastern leadership practices of choice that have proven to be effective and incorporate different cultural elements.

### ***Comparison Between Western and Eastern Leadership Training and Curriculum***

Despite the gap, the leadership curriculum or leadership competency development may be universal across cultures, since students from many cultures express their appreciation for the usefulness of leadership principles and the acquired information (Fox & Bourgeois, 2022). To further understand the difference between the Eastern and Western leadership curriculum or training design in a cultural context, a short scoping review is employed in this section using databases such as EBSCO. Scoping reviews are commonly used to clarify conceptual boundaries of a topic or a field or study; it is a useful tool when the body of literature has not been comprehensively reviewed (Peters et al., 2015). This scoping review aims to see the critical cultural terms valued by different regions and their relationship with leadership curriculum and training. Results only include peer-reviewed journal articles published after Jan 1, 2012. The scoping review excludes all articles that are not relevant to leadership curriculum and training, book chapters, conference presentations or proceedings, thesis, dissertation, gray literature, non-peer-reviewed articles, magazine articles and newspaper articles, and articles that ranked after 50 in the result page, sorted by relevance.

The preliminary research that focuses on existing leadership curricula in both Eastern and Western countries suggests that most of the leadership curricula designed in medical (Xu et al., 2022; Malhotra et al., 2022; Lv et al., 2022; Mantha et al., 2016; Yin et al., 2015), military (Elavarasan et al., 2021), and corporation (Khdour et al., 2020) touches the concept of leadership. Although the benefit of leadership is identified in all aforementioned literature, curriculum integration lags behind its Western counterparts. While stating the nursing leadership curriculum in China, Xu et al. (2022) state that several guidance frameworks that relate to leadership competency in nursing have been developed by Western countries. The early

development and establishment of Western curriculum might affect the later development of Eastern leadership curriculum. Eastern countries did develop their leadership curriculum and training, and recognized the value of leadership training early on, such as the Chinese government's leadership training for school principals; newly promoted principals are required to undergo an acceleration program where they get certificates (Xue et al., 2020). However, those nationally owned certifications, with their 100% passing rate and lack of practice side of the curriculum, are criticized. Furthermore, research by Xue and Bush (2021) found that principals in China were dissatisfied with the leadership development curriculum because it did not place sufficient emphasis on practice-based knowledge and skills; thus, making it difficult for them to apply what they learned in their leadership positions.

While there are differences between Western and Eastern culture, there are similar understandings in the general concept of leadership. For example, Brocklehurst et al. (2013) found similarities between Japanese and UK participants in which the participants value charisma and team-oriented attributes in the medical field as important leadership characteristics. Despite their inherent features, individuals described distinct perspectives on leadership. In comparison to Japanese participants, who perceive leadership as a culturally and structurally rooted phenomena, UK participants place a higher importance on intellect, extraversion, and honesty as leadership attributes. Additionally, Brocklehurst et al argues that Eastern leaders might be viewed as a combination of authoritarian and transformational, and Western leaders may be more adaptive and transformational. The aforementioned leadership styles could suggest that specific leadership competencies are more culturally favorable.

Drawing on the idea that some leadership styles are more culturally favorable, Wang et al (2022) found that servant leadership is regarded differently between Brazil, Canada, China,



Pakistan, and the US. Additionally, Lin et al. (2015) recognize a direct link between culture and a leader's behavior, but imply that different cultures have mixed values, and those cultural aspects could be avoided with rigorous organization procedures. In addition, Kang et al. (2015) find that culture plays an essential role in leadership and leading outcomes for expatriate leadership. Cultural values might not receive adequate attention considering few peer-reviewed articles published in the past 10 years. The results from this section suggest that the development of leadership curriculum or leadership training should be tailored to a specific industry, and the cultural training might be more helpful to leaders if they are going to be stationed in a different cultural environment (Kang et al., 2015; Lin et al., 2018).

## **Findings**

The findings from the literature analysis indicates that leadership training and curriculum is influenced by regional culture (Bassett, 2020; Vu & Gill, 2019; Bonsu & Twum-Danso, 2018; McDonald, 2012); however, it is noticed that Eastern leadership curriculum is influenced by Western leadership curriculum (Khattab & Wong, 2019; Xu et al., 2022), partially due to the late development of leadership training in Eastern countries (Xu et al., 2022). Additionally, the developed Eastern leadership training program may not fully support the end goal (Xue et al., 2020), as it is overly focused on the theoretical aspects and ignores practice-based knowledge and skills (Xue & Bush, 2021). The late recognition of the importance and practice of leadership training might explain why there are only 29 literature reviews on leadership training or curriculum in Eastern countries, compared to 173 in Western countries under the same Boolean search. This discovery suggests that the leadership training or curriculum in Eastern countries requires additional research.

Although the literature does not explicitly mention developed leadership styles developed in Eastern or Western training or curriculum, it does mention that Eastern leadership styles are a combination of authoritarian and transformational (Brocklehurst et al., 2013) with high power distance (Bassett, 2020). Conversely, Western leadership styles tend to be adaptive and transformational (Cho & Jung, 2014; Brocklehurst et al., 2013). Brocklehurst et al. (2013) describes Eastern leadership as a blend of authoritarian and transformative, however, Cho and Jung (2014) describe China-based enterprises from Eastern nations as preferring transactional leadership. An interesting difference between Western and Eastern cultures that affect leadership is that Western leaders tend to resolve conflict when presented while Eastern leaders tend to avoid conflict altogether (Bassett, 2020). Literature attributes the conflict manifestations to the deep underpinning cultures of those regions, and Eastern leadership is deeply influenced by Confucianism, whose essence is the focus of humanism (Rowley & Oh, 2019). Western leadership is influenced by Western norms and values, such as the agentic advantages like assertiveness, dynamism and enthusiasm (Festekjian et al., 2014). McClellan (2022) describes that many leadership models coming from western traditions failed to align with the practical context. Such a cultural context gives a distinctive character to leadership programs in the West, especially in the United States.

If taken into consideration, McClellan's (2022) findings imply that leadership training or curriculum under cultural influence should also reflect on the training context itself because of how much culture is affecting a leader's behavior (Lin et al., 2018). Despite the fact that Eastern and Western cultures desire different leadership styles, it does not mean that someone should create countless instructions to fit the exact needs of a particular region or culture. Although tailored leadership training or curriculum (Howard & Irving, 2020) and context-specific

leadership training (Vu & Gill, 2019) are highly desirable, nevertheless, there are commonalities between cultures (Wang et al., 2022; Brocklehurst et al., 2013). Further, from the literature findings, a theme of "fusion leadership" appears, which requires global leadership to combine all leadership practices regardless of region but focus on their effectiveness (Vu & Gill, 2019).

## **Conclusion**

Globally, leadership competencies facilitate competitiveness (Reichard & Johnson, 2011). As leadership fundamentals are integrated in academic settings, challenges in interpreting these concepts have been identified. This literature analysis has shed light on the influence culture and religion has on leadership concepts and adoption. Furthermore, this literature analysis has identified the differences between Eastern and Western leadership and how these disparities impact academic and professional internalization of these concepts. Lastly, this study reveals the impact globalization has had on adoption of Western practices internationally.

The significant influence of Confucianism throughout Eastern pedagogy and leadership has culminated in a manager-driven emphasis. This ideology underscores Chinese and South-East Asian leadership (McDonald, 2012). However, studies identified the challenges and limitations in an Eastern leadership focused training program where the curriculum lacked leadership skill implementation and application (Xue & Bush, 2021). Furthermore, Western practices continue to be adopted and integrated into Eastern pedagogy and leadership (Khalifa et al., 2016; McDonald, 2012).

Additionally, this literature analysis identified the core characteristics of Eastern and Western leadership models. Research indicated that effective leadership strategies are developed to support the uniqueness of each situation (Vu & Gill, 2019). Moreover, Eastern leadership

practices, both in Middle Eastern and East Asian contexts, were found to be significantly influenced by Western practices. Leaders in Eastern regions leveraged a combination of Western and native cultural practices, where hierarchy was prevalent, resulting in leaders driving decision-making. In contrast, Western countries were noted to share decision-making power. Furthermore, Western culture focuses on addressing conflict in an open and proactive manner, whereas in Eastern culture, conflict was perceived negatively and associated with failure (Bassett, 2020). In Eastern pedagogy, Confucianism has a major influence in the academic environment, leading to a teacher-centric focus (Fox & Bourgeois, 2022; Ryu, 2015). In contrast, Western pedagogy gives the student a greater degree of independence by establishing a focus on student learning. While influences of Western academic and leadership practices were found in Eastern settings (ElKaleh, 2019; Fox & Bourgeois, 2022), it was noted that the regional differences between leadership principles impact students' ability to comprehend leadership curriculum.

This literature analysis demonstrates a significant adoption of Western leadership practices in Eastern regions (McDonald, 2012). The literature discusses that Eastern regions adopt these practices in conjunction with local cultural norms and influences. However, the regional differences in leadership practice result in students' being challenged with absorbing this material in an academic setting. This is an indicator that instructional design may be more effective by incorporating the needs of the wider audience when designing curriculum. Additionally, this study found that fewer such programs existed in Eastern regions than in Western regions.

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