

IMPLICIT LEADERSHIP THEORIES OF BULGARIAN MANAGERS: CROSS-CULTURAL COMPARISON WITH 62 SOCIETIES

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Implicit leadership theories can be considered as cognitive schemata or prototypes which enable a person to categorize the behavior of the leader. Successful leader performance depends on how the leader is perceived and then accepted by the followers. In the present study the implicit leadership theories of Bulgarian managers are compared to a large sample from 62 societies studied by the GLOBE project. Special attention is the comparison with the managers from the European countries. The implicit theories of Western European vs. Eastern, post-socialist managers and the relation of the Bulgarian sample to this division are studied. In general the results show closeness of the Bulgarian implicit theories to the ones of countries with which Bulgaria shares common past and has similar cultural-historical background. The practical and social implications of the findings are discussed.

Introduction

The issue of leadership is considered as of central importance for organizational sciences. It is generally accepted that behavior of leaders shapes directly the processes inside organizations. In the light of the contemporary managerial theory two determinants of leadership deserve special attention: influence of followers and influence of organizational and societal culture. It is important how followers perceive their leaders. The concept of implicit leadership theories (ILT) assumes that leaders who are perceived as corresponding to leadership prototype are more likely to be accepted and positively appraised by the followers. That is why studying implicit leadership

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theories is important. It is also expected that ILT are shaped by the organizational and societal culture. This study tries to clarify some issues related to implicit theory of leadership that prevails in Bulgarian context.

Bulgarian society has been going through a difficult economical and social transition for more than twenty years following the break from socialist political system and planned economy. In recent years global crisis effects are complicating the macro economical situation of the country even more. In the present moment uncovering the factors underlying leader (in)efficiency in Bulgaria is important not only for particular organizations but for the society as a whole. A cross-cultural approach might be useful to hint at possible directions for altering the acceptance of certain leadership patterns of behavior in the country.

Leadership categorization

The implicit theories are also referred to as naive, lay, commonsense and folk theories (e.g. Heider, 1958; Furnham, 1988; Sanders, 1989; Borman, 1987). The concept represents knowledge which people hold about and apply to certain phenomena but which is not scientific and formally verified. The implicit leadership theories (ILT) can be defined as beliefs about the relation between certain constellation of individual characteristics and performance in a managerial role. The concept implies that cognitive prototypes are used to distinguish leaders from non-leaders, effective from ineffective ones or some other mutually exclusive leadership cognitive categories (Lord, Maher, 1991).

The model is based on Rosch's categorization theory (Rosch, 1979). Thus an important concept is the leader prototype which denotes the most typical instance of the category to which all the other ones are compared. The schema concept could be suggested as a better representation of the implicit leadership theories in the way they are commonly studied. A schema has fewer details, permits some features to be unspecified and is more focused on the essential attributes (Anderson, 1980; Fiske, Taylor, 1984). The notion of role schemata in particular is similar to implicit leadership theories construct (e.g. Kinder et al., 1980).

ILT are a determinant of the selection, legitimacy and (perceived) efficiency of leaders (e.g. Lord, Foti, De Vader, 1984, Cronshaw, Lord, 1987; Engle, Lord, 1997; Lord, Maher, 1991; Hanges et al., 1997). Lord et al. (1978) estimated that about 40 percent of the variance in leadership ratings could be attributed to the preconceptions built into the ILT of the followers. The appraisal of the leaders' performance is biased by the leadership schemata of the subordinates. Moreover, when a person matches the leadership schemata of organizational members, both sides — the perceived and the perceivers — tend to behave consistently with it. A mutually satisfying leader-follower relationship is more likely to be formed. Early proponents of the view that leaders emerge in group situations because they fit the followers' shared conceptions are Hollander and Julian (1969).