GROWING TOGETHER: EVIDENCE OF CONVERGENCE IN AMERICAN AND SINGAPOREAN SOURCES OF SATISFACTION WITH LEADERS

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Leadership matters, but since there is no single best way to lead (Fiedler, 1971; House, 1971; Kouzes & Posner, 2012), scholars have examined how context influences leaders and followers (Cole et al., 2009; Hunter et al., 2007; Liden & Antonakis, 2009; Wang & Rode, 2010). In particular, due to advancing technology, travel, and globalization, there has been a growing focus on understanding the potential role of culture in leadership (Dickson et al., 2003; House et al., 2011; Walumbwa & Lawler, 2003). Our paper extends this tradition by examining which leader behaviors contribute to follower satisfaction and whether national culture influences these expectations.

Many studies suggest that culture can influence how followers think about and respond to leadership (Ergeneli et al., 2007; Gerstner & Day, 1994; House et al., 2011). For example, one recent study found that Chinese cultural values moderate what followers expect from their leaders: Chinese followers with relatively modern values demanded more integrity from their leaders than did followers with traditional Chinese values (Zhang et al., 2013). As others have noted, follower expectations of leaders can vary greatly by county or region (House et al., 1999). Followers may be more responsive to transformational leadership in collectivistic cultures (Jung, Bass & Sosik, 1995), and those from high power distance cultures may be more satisfied with authoritarian leadership (Smith, Peterson & Misumi, 1994; Den Hartog et al., 1999).

At the same time, globalization, and its homogenizing effect on business practice, is potentially a powerful countervailing force (Guillen, 2001; Mitchell, 2001). There are studies
suggesting that national culture does not have much influence on individual behavior in organizations (Dorfman et al., 1997; Javidan & Carl, 2005; Shin, 2004; Sparrow & Wu, 1998). In fact, it has been suggested that the influence of culture is decreasing as globalization advances (Chiang & Birtch, 2007).

Taken together, the empirical results seem to suggest that followers’ expectations of their leaders are being shaped by two opposing forces. On the one hand, local cultural values will influence followers to view leadership in idiosyncratic or culture-specific (emic) ways; followers from country X may be more satisfied with one style of leadership, while those from country Y expect their leaders to behave differently. At the same time, globalization and the international standards that it creates should move follower expectations toward more universal (etic) norms.

In this paper, we use data from followers in the United States and Singapore to examine the influence of both culture and globalization. The US is the largest national economy in the world, typically the default category when discussing Western values, and the culture in which most theories of leadership were developed (House & Aditya, 1997; Zagorsek et al., 2004). Singapore offers a useful comparison case in which to examine the competing forces of local cultural values and global business practice, because of its unique similarities and differences with the US. Like the US, Singapore has a fully developed, modern economy with all the institutions of modern business, significant international trade, and a high-level of per capita GDP (CIA, 2013). At the same time, as we describe below, there are important cultural differences between the two countries that might be expected to influence what behaviors followers expect from leaders. Singapore and the US are both full and important participants in the global economy, but with different cultural values, which makes comparing them ideal for
our purposes. As described below, we examined whether national culture or global norms had more influence on followers’ expectations by comparing which leader behaviors contributed to follower satisfaction in the two countries.

**THEORETICAL BACKGROUND**

**Leadership Model**

In this study, we used Kouzes and Posner’s (2012) framework of the Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership as our model. Their framework reflects the common themes found in thousands of reports of exceptional leadership from a range of diverse, international sources. The leadership practices are:

*Model the Way* (MTW): Leaders must exhibit the behavior they expect of followers. Leaders need to articulate the organization’s values and act in accordance with them, because leaders represent the organization. Leaders set the example through their enactment of values.

*Inspire a Shared Vision* (ISV): Leaders need to have a vision for the future. To motivate followers, that vision must be shared and it must engage others. To inspire a vision in others, the vision must be linked to their motivations and their interests, so that it becomes truly shared and inspires others to follow.

*Challenge the Process* (CTP): Leadership involves challenge to the status quo. Leaders must guide followers through innovation or change. Leaders must be willing to face the unknown, and more importantly, they must encourage their followers to do the same. Effective leaders create a climate of experimentation.

*Enable Others to Act* (EOA): Leaders must empower their followers by fostering collaboration and building trust. Leaders who are willing to share power and to help followers
grow the confidence and capabilities necessary to succeed promote teamwork. A leader’s focus should not be on personal accomplishment, but on how the group can work together to perform.

**Encourage the Heart (ETH):** Leaders must demonstrate genuine concern for followers. Contributions should be recognized; sincere encouragement should be given. By linking rewards to performance, leaders help followers to understand how their behavior is linked to the values of the organization.

The Five Practices framework has been in use for over thirty years, both in applied leadership development and more than 600 research projects (www.leadershipchallenge.com). More than five million participants, representing over 70 counties, have completed instruments associated with the framework. For our purposes, the Five Practices provided a parsimonious and well-established means of conceptualizing leadership that was applicable across cultures (Posner, 2013; Zagorsek et al., 2004).

**Effect of National Culture**

Culture refers to the fundamental beliefs and ways of thinking that members of a group use to make sense of the world (Matsumoto & Juang, 2011). To characterize national culture, we adopted Hofstede’s (2001) five-factor model. Although it has been criticized, Hofstede's cultural values model continues to be the most influential in cross-cultural studies (Chiang & Birtch, 2007; Newburry & Yakova, 2005; Sagie & Aycan, 2003; Sondergaard, 1994). Hofstede argued that culture could be usefully represented by five dimensions: power distance, individualism-collectivism, masculinity-femininity, uncertainty avoidance, and long-term orientation. Of particular importance to our interests are the three dimensions where the US and Singapore are
most different, specifically power distance, individualism-collectivism and uncertainty avoidance (both countries have moderate values on the masculinity-femininity dimension, and slightly low ones on long-term orientation; Hofstede, 2001).

*Power distance* may be particularly influential in shaping expectations of leaders, because it is the cultural value that defines the correct relationship between leaders and followers (Hofstede. 2001; Ramaswami et al., 2013). The study mentioned earlier, by Zhang and colleagues (2013), proposed that power distance was an important factor in explaining the difference between traditional and modern Chinese followers expectations of leaders. Those authors argued that followers subscribing to a belief in high power distance may not demand as much integrity from their leaders. In regard to our study, Singapore’s high power distance score, relative to the US’s moderately low one, suggests that the two countries’ followers might have quite different expectations of leaders. High power distance followers might be expected to accept large differences in status and treatment between leaders and followers. They should be less likely to desire participation and consultation from their leaders.

*Individualism-collectivism*, as a cultural value, concerns the relative importance that is assigned to individual versus group goals (Hofstede, 2001; Triandis, 1995). Individualist cultures place greater value on individual wants and needs, whereas collectivist cultures expect individuals to transcend or sacrifice their personal interests to work toward group goals. As a result, followers from collectivist cultures are more likely to support and obey leaders, for the sake of harmonious solidarity. In addition, collectivist followers should be less concerned with participation and individual achievement, as their cultural values base success on group results.
Therefore, consistent with its high observed correlation with power distance (Hofstede, 2001),
collectivism should affect follower expectations in a fashion similar to that of power distance.

Uncertainty avoidance refers to the level of a culture’s desire to control the future, or at least to avoid suffering from its unpredictability (Hofstede, 2001). High uncertainty avoidance cultures are more likely to create rules and institutions meant to increase their control over experiences and outcomes; they feel more anxious and are less willing to be subject to forces outside their control. In contrast, members of cultures that are low on uncertainty avoidance are more secure, less concerned about controlling the future and less threatened by the views and actions of others. In terms of leadership, these differences suggest that followers from high uncertainty avoidance cultures will want greater participation in the leadership process. Rather than trusting in a leader or being willing to accept what comes of the leader’s actions, these followers should desire input and control in order to reduce uncertainty (Zagorsek et al., 2004). High uncertainty avoidance followers should prefer leaders who give them greater power and participation.

Taken together, the above discussion suggests that Singaporean followers, being from a culture that is higher in power distance, higher in collectivism, and lower in uncertainty avoidance than the US, would expect to be less directly involved with leadership. That is, they are more likely to be content obeying traditional hierarchical authority; whereas, American followers will be more satisfied with leaders who involve their followers more, encouraging them to take part and have influence. As a result, the types of leader behaviors that increase follower satisfaction should be different in the two countries.
H1: American and Singaporean followers’ satisfaction with their leader is influenced by different leadership behaviors.

Effect of Globalization

Hypothesis 1 derives from the influence of traditional national culture, without taking account of possible homogenizing effects from globalization. However, the failure to consider value convergence created by globalization is problematic, as there is increasing evidence of its power. That is, although we believe that the culture in which one is raised will have a powerful influence on what one expects from a leader, we also expect that the forces of globalization are acting to reduce the differences created by national culture. For example, one study found that experienced Singaporean managers reported power distance and collectivism levels that were more similar to those of Americans than is the norm in Singapore; the managers’ values were still different from American ones, but less so than one might expect based on their national culture (Chew & Putti, 1995). Others have similarly found that cultural differences in leadership beliefs and reactions among experienced workers were relatively small (Posner, 2013; Zagorsek et al., 2004).

As such, while globalization is doubtless acting through popular media and other channels (Miller, 1998; Mitchell, 2001), we suspect that organizational practice is the strongest agent of globalization. In fact, evidence from the international GLOBE study shows that organizational culture is at least as strong a predictor of leadership expectations as is national culture (Dickson et al., 2003; House et al., 2011). If one assumes that the forces of globalization are acting on all businesses, then work experience means exposure to global culture norms and a
reduction of culture-based differences. We therefore predict that followers’ expectations will become more similar as a result of work experience.

*H2: The differences between the expectations of American and Singaporean followers are reduced by work experience.*

**METHODS**

The data for this study were collected using the Student Leadership Practices Inventory (S-LPI; Kouzes & Posner, 2005). The S-LPI is an instrument specifically developed to measure leadership behavior for participants in formal educational programs. The survey is completed online as part of a 360-degree assessment. Individual leaders select the followers from whom they would like feedback, and these followers provide an anonymous evaluation of the leader. The S-LPI includes six items to measure each of the five leadership practices, as well as a five-item scale that measures followers’ satisfaction with the leader (e.g., “Overall, how satisfied are you with the leadership exhibited by this person?”). All items are measured using 5-point scales.

We used followers, not the leaders themselves, in this analysis. Specifically, we had four groups: 232 American followers aged 18-23, 235 Singaporean followers aged 18-23, 234 American followers aged 28-33, and 199 Singaporean followers aged 28-33. The older Singaporean group represented all of the available responses; the other three groups were selected randomly from the larger pool so as to maximize statistical power without creating undue imbalance among group sizes (Neter et al., 1996).

These groups were assumed to reflect each nation’s relatively inexperienced followers (18-23 years of age) and their somewhat more experienced followers (28-33 years). We used a 16-year range in our sample because that is less than the 25-30 years associated with a generation
Growing Together (Berger, 1960). Our sample should therefore exclude any significant generational differences, allowing for a clearer test of our predictions concerning work experience. The respondents are all young people, among whom work experience should be the most important difference. The overall sample was 40% male.

To assess the measurement properties of the scales, we conducted a maximum likelihood estimation confirmatory analysis. We tested our hypotheses using ordinary least-squares regression in each group, using satisfaction with leader as the dependent variable. We used the satisfaction score as an indicator of expectations, assuming that followers would be more satisfied with leaders who met their expectations (Shondrick et al., 2010). The five leadership practices were entered as predictors, so that significant values would indicate which leader behaviors were associated with greater follower satisfaction in each group. Participant gender was included as a control variable, because gender has been shown to influence responses to leadership (Alimo-Metcalfe, 1995; Eagly, Karau, & Makhijani, 1995).

RESULTS

Table 1 provides summary statistics. The confirmatory factor analysis yielded a satisfactory fit with the data ($X^2=2472.21$, df=$579$, CFI=.90, RMSEA=.06), and all items loaded significantly on the appropriate construct at .57 or above. These results suggest that the measures performed well (Bagozzi & Edwards, 1998). Because some of the correlations among variables were large, we assessed multicollinearity diagnostics in all regression models (see Table 2), but the largest variance inflation factor (VIF) was 5.8. VIF values up to 10 are considered acceptable (Neter, Kutner, Nachtsheim, & Wasserman, 1996), suggesting that multicollinearity was not a threat to these analyses.
Model 1 shows that inexperienced American followers’ satisfaction was predicted by four types of leader behavior: ISV, CTP, EOA and ETH. That is, the more of these behaviors followers saw in their leader, the more satisfied they were with that leader. In contrast, Model 2 shows that inexperienced Singaporean followers’ satisfaction was predicted by only two types of leader behavior: ISV and ETH. There were some shared expectations between the two countries: inexperienced followers from both countries were more satisfied with leaders who provided an inspiring vision (ISV) and who recognized accomplishment (ETH). However, there were also differences: inexperienced American followers were more satisfied with leaders who also fostered innovation (CTP) and who empowered followers (EOA), while their Singaporean counterparts showed no evidence that they expected or valued these behaviors from leaders. The differences between these Model 1 and Model 2 support H1. Followers from the two countries have different expectations of leaders.

However, comparing all of the models provides support for H2, that follower expectations converge with work experience. In Model 3 (experienced American followers) and Model 4 (experienced Singaporean followers), the same behaviors predicted satisfaction. Both groups seem to expect their leaders to set an example (MTW) and to empower followers (EOA). Moreover, within-country comparisons (i.e., Model 1 versus Model 3 and Model 2 versus Model 4) show different predictors. In both countries, the satisfaction of the more experienced group (28-33 years) is based on different behaviors than that of the inexperienced group (18-23 years). In sum, the more experienced followers are more like each other than they are like their less experienced country-mates.
DISCUSSION

Our aim in this study was to test for evidence of convergence among leadership expectations caused by the globalization of business practice. In particular, we predicted that relatively inexperienced followers would hold expectations consistent with their cultural values, but that work experience would reduce these international differences. We tested these predictions using four groups of followers which contrasted work experience (based on age: 18-23 years old versus 28-33 years old) and national origin (United States versus Singapore). The results supported our predictions. The less experienced, younger groups had different expectations of their leaders, and those differences were consistent with the cultural values of their home nation. The two more experienced groups did not have different expectations. These findings extend our understanding of leadership in the global era, and have important implications.

From an etic, or universal, perspective, our findings suggest that leaders who model the way and who enable others to act will have the most satisfied followers. That is, leaders who serve as an example and who empower others to take action will better meet the expectations of their followers. Interestingly, in a different, but related analysis, Zagorsek and colleagues (2004) also found that these two practices were the most highly rated among moderately experienced MBA students in the United States, Nigeria, and Slovenia. While we do not doubt that all five practices can contribute to follower performance (Kouzes & Posner, 2012), it may be that some practices are more popular than others. The consonance between our findings and those of Zagorsek and colleagues (2004) provide some evidence of an international convergence in which followers expect leaders to set an example and to empower their subordinates.
However, our findings also revealed some *emic*, or culture-specific, results. There were differences in the sources of leadership satisfaction between inexperienced Americans and inexperienced Singaporeans. While both groups expected leaders to inspire a shared vision and to encourage the heart, young Americans also preferred their leaders to challenge the process and enable others to act. Thus, both groups of inexperienced followers preferred inspiring and caring leaders, but unlike the Americans, the Singaporeans did not expect their leaders to be particularly empowering or change-oriented. The differences between these two groups are consistent with the general differences between American and Singaporean national culture, which suggests that the inexperienced followers’ expectations varied based on culture.

Taken together, these findings suggest that while there is an emerging global consensus about what followers expect from leaders, it takes time for followers to adopt those expectations. We believe that this perspective offers reconciliation between those studies claiming that culture powerfully influences leadership and those studies claiming that it does not. Both groups may be correct, and to integrate them, we need to take account of the process and time period in which globalization acts. Our data suggest that leaders may need to be most culturally adaptable when dealing with young or inexperienced followers. There appears to be relatively rapid convergence of expectations (i.e., approximately five years), but those formative years may represent an important leadership challenge.

However, our study includes three important limitations that should be taken into consideration and which offer promising directions for future research. The first of these limitations is that we were not able to measure actual work experience. We used age groups (18-23 and 28-33) as a proxy. This approach is a reasonable one, since most young people in both
nations have relatively little work experience. Nonetheless, we cannot preclude the possibility of exceptions in our sample (e.g., individuals who did undergraduate, masters and doctoral studies with little work experience). Future studies should measure work experience more directly. Doing so would eliminate possible confounds, and also allow for a more precise estimate of the speed at which expectations converge.

The second weakness of our study is that we did not measure personal values, but instead used national norms. While this approach is not uncommon in cross-cultural studies, it does have limitations. Experience and evidence show that individual members of every culture vary in their personal values (Hofstede, 2001; House et al., 2011). The most individualistic people in Singapore are almost certainly less collectivistic than the most collectivistic Americans, for example. As others have shown, individuals within in a country can have quite different levels of belief in the prevailing norms (Zhang et al., 2013). It will be useful in future studies to include measures of individuals’ personal values (e.g., the extent to which each person endorses power distance or uncertainty avoidance), which will provide a more accurate representation of their beliefs and expectations.

The third limitation in our data is that they are from only two nations. We noted that America and Singapore did provide a useful comparison, and that our results appear to be consistent with those from other nations (Zagorsek et al., 2004). Nonetheless, we cannot assume that our findings are generally representative. In order to define the content of the global consensus about effective leadership, it will be necessary to sample more broadly across nationalities. It may be particularly useful to also choose nations that differ on the two values that were not relevant to our study, to include any effect they may have on follower expectations.
Our results raise an interesting question in finding that three of the five practices were non-significant predictors of experienced followers’ satisfaction with their leaders. We can imagine two possible explanations for this result. One explanation is that the three non-significant practices genuinely do not contribute to follower satisfaction; experienced followers may not expect these behaviors from leaders. An alternative explanation would be that the practices are important to followers’ satisfaction, just not in a monotonic fashion. That is, there may be some threshold level of those practices that is required and sufficient. For example, it may be that leaders need to engage in a moderate level of challenging the process and doing any more does not further improve follower responses. Further investigation is required to fully understand these results.
REFERENCES


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Table 1. Summary statistics*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>α</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Satisfaction with leader</td>
<td>4.16</td>
<td>.81</td>
<td>.91</td>
<td>.91</td>
<td>.91</td>
<td>.91</td>
<td>.91</td>
<td>.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Model the way</td>
<td>3.80</td>
<td>.71</td>
<td>.83</td>
<td>.67</td>
<td>.67</td>
<td>.67</td>
<td>.67</td>
<td>.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Inspire a shared vision</td>
<td>3.71</td>
<td>.82</td>
<td>.88</td>
<td>.68</td>
<td>.85</td>
<td>.68</td>
<td>.85</td>
<td>.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Challenge the process</td>
<td>3.72</td>
<td>.79</td>
<td>.86</td>
<td>.68</td>
<td>.84</td>
<td>.68</td>
<td>.84</td>
<td>.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Enable others to act</td>
<td>4.06</td>
<td>.67</td>
<td>.85</td>
<td>.62</td>
<td>.67</td>
<td>.61</td>
<td>.65</td>
<td>.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Encourage the heart</td>
<td>3.84</td>
<td>.82</td>
<td>.90</td>
<td>.62</td>
<td>.73</td>
<td>.74</td>
<td>.73</td>
<td>.73</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Statistics are for the entire sample (N=900). All correlations $p<.05$. 
Table 2. Regression tests of leadership practices predicting satisfaction with leader in four groups †

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Model 1 US 18-23 years</th>
<th>Model 2 Singapore 18-23 years</th>
<th>Model 3 US 28-33 years</th>
<th>Model 4 Singapore 28-33 years</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Follower gender</td>
<td>-.13*</td>
<td>-.02</td>
<td>-.04</td>
<td>-.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Model the way</td>
<td>-.07</td>
<td>.16</td>
<td>.29*</td>
<td>.23*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inspire a shared vision</td>
<td>19*</td>
<td>.34*</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenge the process</td>
<td>.21*</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.14</td>
<td>.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enable others to act</td>
<td>.28*</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>.35*</td>
<td>.18*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encourage the heart</td>
<td>.19*</td>
<td>.17*</td>
<td>-.08</td>
<td>-.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( R^2 )</td>
<td>.53</td>
<td>.48</td>
<td>.47</td>
<td>.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( (F=45.25, \text{df}=6, 225) )</td>
<td>( (F=37.63, \text{df}=6, 228) )</td>
<td>( (F=35.32, \text{df}=6, 227) )</td>
<td>( (F=32.08, \text{df}=6, 192) )</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>232</td>
<td>235</td>
<td>234</td>
<td>199</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

† Dependent variable = Satisfaction with leader. Gender was coded as Female=1, Male=2.

* \( p<.05 \)