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Delegation Styles and Leadership Perceptions:

A Comparison of Malaysian and American Managers

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Abstract

Can managers be perceived as good leaders through a culture of empowerment in

multinational settings? This question was answered by employing a 3 (delegation styles:

advisory; informational; extreme) x 2 (manager gender: male; female) x 2 (country:

Malaysia; USA) factorial design--with the first factor as within-subjects and the last two as

between-subjects. A sample of 218 was drawn from one semiconductor multinational firm--

118 from one Malaysian site and 100 from three US sites. The analysis revealed that both the

US and Malaysian managers almost equally favored informational delegation style, but they

differed significantly in terms of attributing extreme and advisory delegation styles: the US

managers outperformed Malaysian managers in attributing extreme delegation style, whereas

Malaysian managers outperformed the US managers in attributing advisory delegation style.

This finding was more pronounced for female than for male managers. Key implications of

the findings both for theory and for practice are discussed, potential limitations are specified,

and directions for future research are suggested.

Delegation Styles and Leadership Perceptions:

A Comparison of Malaysian and American Managers

Leadership has attracted much interest among scholars and practitioners for a long time. However, scientific research on leadership did not begin until the twentieth century and the focus of most research has been on the determinants of effective leadership (Bass, 1990). The twenty-first century has brought about new challenges and issues in this area of research. Among the key trends of the new century are increasing globalization, new technologies, changing composition, and values and needs of the workforce. Some of the substantive leadership issues are leadership styles, criteria of effective leadership, multinationalism, and workforce diversity (Bass, 1990). While some of these issues have been recurring from the past, they are and will still figure significantly or even more significantly in the present and the future.

In the past few decades, a growing number of leadership researches have advocated empowerment as a source of motivation and higher performance. Followers are empowered when their leaders increase their autonomy, discretionary opportunities, help them obtain the resources to reach higher goals, and give support for their efforts (Bass, 1990). One of the most important aspects of empowerment is the participation of employees in decision-making. Participative leadership can take on many forms, but most theorists working in this area concede that there are four distinct decision-making styles: autocratic, consultation, joint decision, and delegation (Yukl, 1998). The present study focuses on the styles of delegation.

Delegation occurs when the manager gives an individual the authority and responsibility for making a decision, where prior approval may or may not be required before the decision can be implemented (Yukl, 1998). According to Bass (1990), delegation remains a relatively unexplored management option despite evidence of its importance to

organization effectiveness, and deserves future research with more fine-tuning of delegation as a style of leadership.

In addition, there is the question of how subordinates perceive managers who delegate. Studies on preferences for idealized styles of supervision or leadership style abound, but hardly has any focused on a direct link to delegation. Thus, the leadership perceptions of subordinates toward the practice of delegation are still unclear. There is a need to conceptualize delegation as a process and to research what makes it effective or ineffective.

Culture is an important element in this study. In a classic study of culture, Hofstede (1980) identified four dimensions on which various cultures could be classified. They are individualism/collectivism, power distance, uncertainty avoidance, and masculinity/femininity. Later, he (1993) added long-term/short-term orientation as a fifth dimension. There is overwhelming evidence from various cross-cultural studies (Alpander, 1991; Gill, 1998; Offerman, 1997; Randoph & Sashkin, 2002) that cultural differences persist from country to country. Therefore, cultural constraints still apply to management theories. The trend of multinationalism raises many questions on how managerial decision-making practices can be transferred from one country (or culture) to another.

With the influx of women into the workforce, there is a need to study women in leadership positions--more so in a developing country such as Malaysia. Performance and effectiveness appraisals of female managers are mixed and inconclusive (Bass, 1990). While Bass noted that there might be a bias toward men in leadership positions, no significant differences were found in various studies reviewed by Bass. Therefore, there is still a lack of understanding if gender of managers affects the leadership perceptions of their subordinates.

In short, the problems discussed indicate the lack of research on the effects of delegation and culture on leadership perceptions, and inconclusive findings on whether

gender of managers affects the leadership perceptions of their subordinates. Also, we are aware of no empirical research that has specifically compared Malaysia and the United States of America in terms of delegation styles. As the trend of multinationalism increases, all these issues are relevant to how managerial practices can be transferred from one country (or culture) to another. Thus, this study aims (a) to examine the impact of delegation styles on leadership perceptions; (b) to examine if gender of the manager moderates the relationship between delegation and leadership perceptions; and (c) to examine if country moderates the relationship between delegation and leadership perceptions.

Theoretical Framework and Development of Hypotheses

Implicit theories of leadership state that subordinates have expectations regarding leadership behavior, as do the leaders themselves (Bass, 1990). In addition, subordinates attach their own value-laden meanings to the actions of their supervisors. Thus there may be many factors that may differentiate subordinates' leadership perceptions. Studies conducted by Ansari (1987) and Ansari and Shukla (1987) found that ratings on leadership perceptions were significantly influenced by leader behavior. In particular, participative and nurturant-task managers produced more favorable ratings in terms of leadership attributes, present performance, and anticipated performance. Acting autocratically had a strong negative impact on evaluation ratings. Cellar, Sidle, Goudy, and O'Brien (2001) investigated if the personality of agreeableness interacted with leader gender and leader style (autocratic *vs.* democratic) to affect subordinate reactions to the leader in terms of leader evaluation, future effort, and future interest. A three-way interaction was predicted, such that leaders will be penalized most for behavior that was inconsistent with gender roles by participants low in agreeableness. Results generally supported interaction hypothesis for effort and interest variables, but not for leader effectiveness.

Delegation Styles and Leadership Perceptions

Delegation involves the level of hierarchy at which a given activity may be initiated, independent of clearance from above, with respect to that activity (Whyte, 1969). It refers to the process by which a supervisor gives the subordinates the authority to do his or her job (Hicks, 1972). Thus delegation occurs when the manager gives an individual or group the authority and responsibility for making a decision; the managers usually specifies the limits within which the final choice must fall, and prior approval may or may not be required before the decision can be implemented (Yukl, 1998).

It is important to understand where delegation stands in the conceptual distinctions of leadership. One thing is clearly evident is that, on a continuum of superior-subordinate decision-making authority, delegation is on the opposite end of autocratic decision-making. Although delegation is sometimes treated as a variety of participative leadership, delegation differs from other decision-making processes like consultation and joint decision in two primary ways. First, it typically involves decision-making by an individual subordinate rather than by peers, a group of subordinates, or a supervisor-subordinate dyad. Secondly, delegation stresses subordinates' autonomy in making decisions (Leana, 1986).

Some researchers have attempted to examine relative degrees of delegation. According to Yukl (1998), there are varying degrees of delegation involving the aspects of the variety and magnitude of responsibilities, the amount of discretion or range of choice allowed in decision-making, the authority to take action and implement decisions without prior approval, the frequency and nature of reporting requirements, and the flow of information. A manager who practices total delegation widens the amount and scope of responsibilities for his or her subordinates, allows discretion in decision-making, gives authority to subordinates to take action without prior approval, requires minimal reporting from the subordinates, and gives performance information directly to subordinates.

Schriesheim and Neider (1988) identified three forms of delegation: advisory, informational, and extreme. In advisory delegation, the subordinate makes the decision after first getting a recommendation from the leader. In informational delegation, the subordinate makes the decision after first getting needed information from the leader. In extreme delegation, the subordinate makes the decision without any input from the leader.

Researchers have also investigated the antecedents and consequences of delegation. Leana (1986) examined the predictors and consequences of delegation through the study of supervisors and claims adjusters employed by a large insurance company. Leana found that supervisors' perceptions of subordinates, the volume of supervisors' workload, and the importance of decisions were significant predictors of delegation. When supervisors had favorable perceptions of their subordinates and had more workload, they delegated more. Subordinates' job competence and congruence between supervisors' and subordinates' goals moderated the effects of delegation on subordinates' job performance. However, supervisors' predispositions to share authority and subordinates' satisfaction were not significantly related to delegation.

Schriesheim, Neider, and Scandura (1998) examined subordinate and supervisor leader-member exchange (LMX) as correlates of delegation and as moderators of relationships between delegation and subordinate performance and satisfaction. Their analysis of data (106 dyads) showed both to be significantly related to delegation and to have similar main and moderating effects for subordinate performance and satisfaction. Positive correlates were found for LMX and delegation, and delegation also showed positive main effects on subordinate performance and satisfaction.

Yukl (1998) cited various studies that suggest that delegation has positive effects on subordinate performance and organizational performance in terms of sales and profitability. He also suggested that other advantages of delegation include improvement of decision

quality, greater subordinate commitment, and job enrichment. Howard (1997) postulated that empowered employees have higher levels of motivation, increased learning, and higher stress tolerance. At the same time, empowering leaders are shown to have greater commitment to the organization, more job satisfaction, less role ambiguity, and less role overload. This increases the overall flexibility and performance of the organization.

Studies (e.g., Ansari & Shukla, 1987) suggest that leader behavior (leadership style) affects how leaders are viewed or regarded by others, how members of the organization treat them, and how their future behavior is perceived and/or attributed. Past studies (e.g., Leana, 1986; Schriesheim et al., 1998) have found that delegation positively affects subordinate job performance and subordinate satisfaction. Yukl (1998) suggested that other advantages of delegation include improvement of decision quality, greater subordinate commitment, and job enrichment. However, no empirical research examining the impact of these three styles of delegation on leadership perceptions could be found. Nevertheless, past studies have pointed to the direction that more delegation would yield positive effects on subordinates. This suggests that delegation, as one of the leadership styles under participative leadership, should also produce favorable leadership perceptions. Thus, we hypothesize that:

> *H1: Leadership perceptions (in terms of leadership attribution, present performance, and anticipated effectiveness) will vary significantly as a function of the styles of delegation received by the subordinates. Specifically, advisory delegation will yield the least favorable ratings, while extreme delegation will yield the most favorable ratings.*

Gender and Leadership Perceptions

The second objective of the present research was to determine if gender of the manager moderates the relationship between delegation styles and leadership perceptions. It has been found that the same leadership style displayed by a female and male manager may

have different effects on subordinate satisfaction with their supervision (Petty & Lee, 1975; Rosen & Jerdee, 1973). Jago and Vroom (1982) found that females who were perceived to be autocratic received negative evaluations, while autocratic males received positive evaluations.

This trend can be explained by role congruity theory toward female leaders (Eagly & Karau, 2002). The theory proposes that perceived incongruity between stereotypical female gender roles and leadership roles leads to perceiving women less favorably than men as leaders, and evaluating behavior that fulfils the prescription of a leader role less favorably when it is enacted by a woman. The consequences are less positive attitudes toward female leaders, and more difficulty for women to become leaders and to achieve success in leadership roles.

Performance appraisals of female managers are inconclusive. Bass (1990) commented that field studies conducted by Dobbins and Platz (1986), AT&T Assessment Center (Ritchie & Moses, 1983), and Schwartz and Waetjan (1976) concluded that subordinate ratings of female managers were not significantly different from their male counterparts. On the other hand, Petty and Lee (1975) found that the lack of consideration behavior by female managers is likely to result in subordinates' dissatisfaction. In other studies, Patterson (1975) and Rice, Instone, and Adams (1984) found that female leaders received lower overall ratings than males on evaluations of performance and promotability. Various attitudinal polls across time such as the Gallup Poll and surveys conducted by the Harvard Business Review show that a preference for male bosses over female bosses was present for both sexes at all time points (Eagly & Karau, 2002).

The effectiveness ratings of female managers versus male managers are also mixed. Eskilson and Wiley (1976) found that female-led groups were more productive. Smith (1986, cited in Bass, 1990) reached the same conclusion. On the other hand, a laboratory study

conducted by Rice et al. (1984) found that groups with male leaders out-performed those with female leaders. Studies by Bartol (1978) and Larwood, Wood, and Inderlied (1978) showed no significant effect of sex of the leader on productivity and effectiveness. A meta-analysis of 96 studies comparing the effectiveness of male and female leaders showed that female leaders were less effective relative to the extent that leadership positions were male dominated, female leaders were less effective as the proportion of male subordinates increased and as the number of male rater increased, women were substantially less effective in traditionally masculine environments, women were modestly more effective than men in the domains of education and social service, and women fared well in middle management as opposed to line or supervisory positions (Eagly & Karau, 2002).

Delegation is a participative leadership style, as opposed to autocratic style. A review of the literature suggests that male leaders who are perceived as autocratic receive more favorable ratings than female leaders who are perceived as autocratic (Jago & Vroom, 1982). This is in synch with Eagly and Karau's (2002) role congruity theory, which proposes that the incongruity of stereotypical female gender roles and leadership roles lead to less favorable perceptions of female leaders. Cellar et al. (2001) also predicted the same effect. Hence, we offer the following hypothesis:

> *H2: Gender of the manager moderates the relationship between delegation styles and leadership perceptions.*
>
> *H2a: Female managers who practice extreme delegation style will receive more favorable leadership perception rating than male managers.*
>
> *H2b: Male managers who practice advisory delegation style will receive more favorable leadership perception rating than female managers.*

Country Culture and Leadership Perceptions

The third objective of this research was to determine if country (United States of America vs. Malaysia) moderates the relationship between delegation and leadership perceptions. An examination of a range of definitions of culture indicates that culture is reflected in shared cognitions, standard operating procedures, and unexamined assumptions (Triandis, 1996). According to Hofstede's (1980, 1993), cultural differences between nations could be to some extent explained using five bipolar dimensions: power distance, individualism/collectivism, masculinity/femininity, uncertainty avoidance, and long-term/short-term orientation. He found that countries with the highest reported power distance included Malaysia, Indonesia, Singapore, and the Philippines in Southeast Asia, several Spanish-American countries, India, the Middle East, and West African countries. At the lower end of the spectrum were the Anglo, Nordic and Germanic countries, followed by Israel and Costa Rica. Individualism was found to be very high in the Anglo cluster of countries while the lowest was reported in some Far East countries, Latin America, and Pakistan. It is interesting to note that Malaysia ranked first in terms of power distance while the United States ranked thirty-eighth. Conversely, Malaysia ranked thirty-sixth in terms of individualism while the United States ranked first.

Kennedy and Mansor (2000) reported that Malaysia clusters with other countries in the highest scoring band for uncertainty avoidance, humane orientation, collectivism, and performance orientation. The rating for power distance was high, but not in the highest band, suggesting that managers do not consider the Malaysian society to be as strongly supportive of power inequalities as has been found in past studies. Bass (1990) stated that national boundaries did make a considerable difference in managers' goals, competence, effective intelligence, emotional stability, and leadership style. Bass also reported that national boundaries affected the degree to which these attributes were associated with the speed of promotion. According to him, countries with low power distance favored and accepted

participative management while those with high power distance favored and accepted autocratic styles.

Understanding the cross-cultural aspects of leadership styles and behavior may help in achieving international understanding and success in politics and business (Gill, 1998). Gill found that Southeast Asian managers are significantly more directive, more negotiative, and less delegative than American managers, but about the same in respect of consultation and participation. The United Kingdom managers were also more delegative than Southeast Asian managers. Gill suggested that Southeast Asian managers may find their subordinates more dependent and they are overloaded as a result of lack of delegation, while Americans are notably more individualistic, independent, and self-sufficient than people in other cultures. Therefore, delegation is not only a way of allocating work rationally but also a way of developing people.

According to Offerman (1997), the United States has a culture that is consistent with empowerment because of low power distance, low uncertainty avoidance, and high individualism. For both leaders and followers from high power distance and authoritarian societies, empowerment is at best strange and at worst unfathomable. She further stated that cultural views of what good leadership is may vary as followers from authoritarian societies may view the delegation of responsibility typically advocated as empowering as neglect of leader duty and responsibility, or a shortcoming of leadership. She concluded that it may be critical to entertain the question of whether the entire idea of empowerment is too distinctly Western to be successful in diverse environments, or what issues and implications need to be considered in implementing empowerment with diverse followers.

Cultural differences in leadership have serious implications for multinational firms. Alpander (1991) found within a single multinational corporation that a similar amount of control over work and the work environment fulfilled Japanese workers more than their

Australian and German counterparts. Some evidence suggests that the leader's background may influence his or her willingness in empowering others as well. Offerman and Hellman (1995) presented evidence from a multinational organization that leaders from high uncertainty avoidance societies were perceived by subordinates as controlling more and delegating less.

Randolph and Sashkin (2002) concur that creating a culture of empowerment in a multinational setting is, to say the least, complex, and ignoring this complexity can easily lead to a failed empowerment effort. They found that high power distance in certain countries inhibits sharing of information, and managers had to be directly involved in initial sharing of information to show employees that sharing information did not eliminate the chain of command. High power distance culture inhibits movement to replace hierarchical thinking with self-managed teams. On the other hand, low power distance employees see the need for and desirability of sharing information, welcome collaborative creating of autonomy via boundaries, and replacing hierarchy with self-managed teams. Randolph and Sashkin also observed that highly individualistic people want information sharing that relates to individuals, preferring direct control to matters that affect them. Individualistic people react best to boundaries for autonomy that focus on individual-based responsibilities, and have problems adapting to self-managed teams. On the other hand, highly collectivistic people want information sharing that focuses on the team, react positively to team-based boundaries for autonomy, and easily accept self-managed team. In line with these studies, we offer the following hypotheses:

> *H3: Country moderates the relationship between delegation styles and leadership perceptions.*

> *H3a: Advisory delegation will yield more favorable leadership perceptions in Malaysia than in the United States of America.*

H3b: Extreme delegation will yield more favorable leadership perceptions in the United States of America than in Malaysia.

Method

Research Site, Respondents, and Procedure

The experiment was conducted on a sample of 218 managers from a single US manufacturing concern, a widely known semi conductor company. One hundred managers came from three US sites and 118 managers from one Malaysian site. Tables 1 and 2 show the demographic profile of the respondents. American managers were significantly older, $F(1,211) = 31.53, p < .01$, and had longer work experience, $F(1,216) = 9.41, p < .01$. Data were collected via electronic mail. The study material (vignette) contained a personally signed letter stating the objective of the study and an assurance of complete anonymity of individual responses.

Insert Tables 1 and 2 about here

Experimental Design

This was a mixed 3 (Delegation Styles: Advisory; Informational; Extreme) x 2 (Country: US; Malaysia) x 2 (Leader Gender: Male; Female) factorial design. Delegation style (a repeated-measure factor) and manager gender (between-factor) were experimentally manipulated variables, and country (between-factor) was a non-manipulated variable.

Experimental Manipulations

We used a 5-page study material for data collection that was divided into three sections. In Section 1, the respondents were given three different scenarios of delegation. After reading each scenario, the respondents were required to rate each item measuring leadership perceptions. Section 2 contained items measuring individualism/collectivism and

power distance that were independent of the manipulated settings in Section 1. The final section, Section 3, required respondents to provide their demographic profiles.

Delegation. Schriesheim and Neider (1988) tested and developed 3-item scales to produce three types of delegation: advisory delegation, informational delegation, and extreme delegation. Data analyses from five separate samples have shown these measures to be temporally stable, demonstrating strong convergent and discriminant validity, as well as good criterion-related validity--both concurrent and predictive (Schriesheim et al., 1998). Based on these items, three scenarios were written for each delegation type, incorporating these elements to distinguish the different types of delegation. The first paragraph introduced a fictitious character as manager of a business unit in a multinational firm, supervising 10 subordinates. This paragraph was common to all conditions. The second paragraph described the manager's style of delegating tasks to subordinates for each scenario. The three delegation styles conditions were as follows: (a) *Advisory* (the subordinate makes the decision after first getting a recommendation from the leader), (b) *Informational* (the subordinate makes the decision after first getting needed information from the leader, and (c) *Extreme* (the subordinate makes the decision without any input from the leader) (Schriesheim & Neider, 1988). Thus each respondent was exposed to all three delegation style conditions.

Gender of the Manager. Gender of the manager was manipulated by changing the name of the manager described in the scenarios. The name John was used to indicate that the manager was male, while the name Mary was used to indicate that the manager was female.

Country Culture. Half of the total number of study materials sent out was for Malaysian respondents, while the other half was for American respondents. Items to measure individualism/collectivism and power distance were used. Both these dimensions are deemed to be more relevant to delegation relative to the other cultural dimensions, because while individualism/collectivism refers to the preference to work individually or collectively, power

distance refers to the distribution of power. This is congruent with the nature of delegation, which emphasizes decision-making by an individual subordinate, and the autonomy granted to that individual. Another reason why these two cultural dimensions are studied in the Malaysian and American context is because many studies have consistently found that Malaysian culture has high collectivism traits while American culture has high individualism traits. At the same time, Malaysian culture is found to be high in power distance while American culture has low power distance (Hofstede, 1980, 1993; Gill, 1998; Kennedy & Mansor, 2000).

Measures

All measures in the study material, except for personal data, employed a 7-point scale. We asked the respondents to indicate (1 = *strongly disagree*; 7 = *strongly agree*) the degree of their agreement or disagreement with each statement.

Leadership perceptions. The leadership perceptions measure was derived from Ansari and Shukla's (1987) study, which was based on works by Bartol and Butterfield (1976), Butterfield and Powell (1981), Graves (1985), and Staw and Ross (1980). They used nine statements to tap the dependent variables. A varimax rotated principal components analysis showed that the items loaded cleanly into three factors: attributions of leadership, anticipated effectiveness, and present performance. The internal consistency of the scales was assessed with Cronbach's coefficient alpha, the reliabilities of the scales were within acceptable range, and indicated a reasonable level of scale independence (Ansari & Shukla, 1987). For use in this research, the items were converted from questions to statements form and modified. Also, three additional items were included to obtain a consistent number of items for each dimension. Our varimax rotated principal components analysis confined to just one factor. Thus leadership perceptions were conceptualized as a uni-dimensional measure

(Cronbach's alpha = .97)--the extent to which the manager displays ideal leadership qualities and is effective in terms of present and future performance.

Country culture. The measures for country culture were derived from Dorfman and Howell's (1988) study. These measures were created as an ongoing effort to extend Hofstede's work to the individual level of analysis, so that it can be used at both the micro (individual) and macro (national) levels. Evidence regarding reliability, validity, and usefulness of the scale was found for research studies conducted in Taiwan and Mexico (Dorfman & Howell, 1988). There was a total of 12 items: six items were used to measure individualism/collectivism (Cronbach's alpha = .72), and six items were used to measure power distance (Cronbach's alpha = .83).

Demographic-personal data. A series of single-statement items to assess the respondents' demographics such as age, sex, job level, and length of service were used.

Results

Check on Experimental Manipulations

Prior to testing the main hypotheses, we examined if our experimental manipulations were successful. Built into the stimulus material was a manipulation check item for delegation. The respondents were asked to describe the manager depicted in the scenario on a 7-point bipolar scale (*autocratic* = 7; *participative* = 1). The analysis revealed that the scenario was understood as intended, $F(2,417) = 1584.54, p < .001$: advisory delegation condition received the highest rating on autocracy ($M = 6.07; SD = 0.76$), followed by informational delegation ($M = 3.26; SD = 0.89$) and extreme delegation ($M = 1.75; SD = 0.90$) styles. Thus our manipulation for delegation treatment was successful. We next examined if Malaysian and American managers were significantly different in terms of individualism and power distance scores. The analysis indicated that Malaysian managers ($M = 5.31; SD = 0.74$) were significantly ($t(216) = 12.54, p < .01$) higher than American

managers (M = 4.54; SD = 0.85) on collectivism. Similarly, they (M = 2.55; SD = 0.87) were significantly ($t(216)$ = 8.23, p < .01) higher than American managers (M = 2.03; SD = 0.76) on power distance. This evidence was critical to suggest that American and Malaysian managers were different in terms of cultural dimensions and that the two could be compared on attributing styles of delegation.

Hypothesis Testing

We tested our hypotheses with a 3-factor mixed *ANOVA*--types of delegation as a within-subjects factor, and manager gender and country as between-subjects factors. Table 3 displays a summary of *ANOVA*.

Insert Table 3 about here

The significant main effect of delegation (p < .01) indicated that informational delegation yielded the highest scores (M = 4.58; SD = 1.11), followed by extreme delegation (M = 3.30; SD = 1.69), and advisory delegation (M = 2.78; SD = 1.23). Informational delegation style received the highest rating and advisory delegation received the lowest rating on leadership perceptions.

Insert Figures 1 and 2 about here

Of interest was a significant interaction among delegation, manager gender, and country (see Figures 1 and 2). As expected (H2), manager gender was found to have a significant moderating effect. However, one of the sub-hypotheses was not substantiated: female managers received higher ratings for both extreme delegation and advisory delegation. Country also appeared to be a significant moderating factor—thus substantiating H3.

Malaysian managers received significantly higher rating on leadership perceptions for

advisory delegation, while the US managers earned higher rating for extreme delegation.

Taken together, the three-way interaction suggests that male managers received

significantly higher scores on advisory delegation and informational delegation in Malaysia,

while the rating was higher on extreme delegation in the United States. On the other hand,

female managers received higher scores on advisory delegation in Malaysia, while scores on

informational and extreme delegation were significantly higher in the United States of

America. It was also found that female managers in Malaysia received higher scores than

male managers on advisory delegation, while male managers received higher scores than

female managers on both informational and extreme delegation styles. In the United States of

America, female managers received higher scores than male managers on all three styles of

delegation.

Discussion

Taken together, the main effect of delegation was apparent. However, as expected, the

impact of delegation styles was moderated by the gender of the manager and country culture.

Consistent with previous studies (Ansari, 1987; Ansari, Jayasingam, & Aafaqi 2000; Ansari

& Shukla, 1987), autocratic behavior was found to be detrimental to leadership perceptions.

Advisory delegation, which is the most autocratic delegation style, yielded the least favorable

leadership perceptions, for both male and female managers, and also in both countries. It was

the informational delegation style that yielded the most favorable leadership perceptions, by

gender and by country.

The results suggest that while autonomy and discretion are desirable in the workplace,

subordinates may be uncomfortable with too much. Subordinates still require their

supervisors to first study and review relevant information on any issue, and then download

the information to them. Therefore, it is assumed that subordinates still require their

supervisors to play some part in the decision-making process, rather than to leave everything to the subordinates.

Interestingly, most studies reviewed advocated in favor of more delegation in the workplace (Ciulla, 1996; Howard, 1997; Kouzes & Posner, 1987; Yukl, 1998). However, some have also identified conditions in which delegation would work best. For example, Schriesheim et al. (1998) found that delegation resulted in high performance ratings for high leader-member exchange (LMX) groups, but performance ratings were lower when delegation was high for low-LMX groups. Wall, Cordery, and Clegg (2002) reported that the effectiveness of empowerment practices is contingent on the degree of operational uncertainty that prevails, with high empowerment working best when operational uncertainty is high. Yet other researchers (e.g., Stogdill et al., 1956; Webber et al., 1985) have discussed the negative effects of too much delegation, such as subordinates might feel overburdened and anxious with too much responsibilities. Some subordinates may also resist delegation if they lack self-confidence and ability, and if they want to avoid criticism.

Gender of manager was found to have a significant main effect and moderating effect on leadership perceptions. Female managers received higher leadership perceptions ratings than males for extreme delegation and advisory delegation, while male managers received slightly higher leadership ratings for informational delegation. This differs from Eagly and Karau's (2002) role congruity theory that autocratic behavior will yield unfavorable leadership ratings for female leaders due to incongruity with female gender stereotypes. The present results suggest that respondents preferred males to use informational delegation style, and preferred female managers to use the extreme delegation. However, while an aversion to autocratic behavior is apparent for both genders, it appears that respondents preferred female managers to use the advisory delegation style.

Country culture was found to have a significant moderating effect on leadership perceptions. As expected, the US managers had higher scores for extreme delegation and informational delegation, while Malaysian managers had higher scores for advisory delegation. This finding is consistent with that of previous researchers (e.g., Bass, 1990; Gill, 1998; Offerman, 1997; Randolph & Sashkin, 2002)--given that Malaysia is higher on collectivism and power distance than the United States of America.

Although not predicted, a significant interaction was found among delegation, gender, and country. While it is interesting to be able to thoroughly examine each interaction effect, it does complicate matters to some extent. Therefore, the general results from hypotheses testing have to be interpreted with some caution. Male managers received higher scores for advisory delegation and informational delegation styles in Malaysia, while the scores for extreme delegation were higher in the United States. This is consistent with the expectation from various studies (Gill, 1998; Offerman, 1997; Randolph & Sashkin, 2002) that extreme delegation is favored in the United States of America due to its adherence to high individualism and low power distance traits. Female managers received higher scores on advisory delegation in Malaysia, while scores on informational and extreme delegation were higher in the United States of America. Again, this is consistent with the expectation that more participative behavior is favored in the United States of America due to its high individualism and low power distance culture (Hofstede, 1980, 1993).

In addition, it was found that female managers in Malaysia received higher leadership perception scores than male managers on advisory delegation, while male managers received higher rating than female managers both on informational and on extreme delegation styles. This contradicts role congruity theory, which states that autocratic behavior will yield unfavorable leadership ratings for female leaders due to incongruity with female gender stereotypes. Carli (1999) stated that female leaders who do not exhibit exceptional ability

would have their competence questioned by subordinates of both genders. It might be possible that, in Malaysia, female managers who practice a lot of delegation may be perceived as incompetent. Perhaps Malaysian subordinates expect their female managers to prove their abilities by being actively involved in the decision-making process.

In the United States of America, female managers received higher rating than males on all three styles of delegation. Again, this contradicts role congruity theory, and also disputes previous studies (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Patterson, 1975; Rice et al., 1984) that female leaders receive lower overall ratings than male leaders. Studies by Eskilson and Wiley (1976) and Smith (1986) found that female-led groups were more productive. A meta-analysis of 96 studies on the effects of gender on leadership effectiveness (Eagly & Karau, 2002) included findings that women fared well in middle management as opposed to line or supervisory positions. The character described in the study material was a manager of a business unit. It is likely that respondents thought of the character as a middle manager, and may have reacted more favorably toward the female character.

In summary, two obvious trends can be inferred from the results. One is that in delegation styles, autocratic behavior yielded the least favorable leadership perceptions, while participative behavior yielded more favorable leadership perceptions. In particular, the informational style was the most preferred for both genders and in both countries. The second one is that country culture did affect leadership perceptions, as the country with high collectivism and high power distance (Malaysia) had higher tolerance for autocratic behavior. On the other hand, the US managers with high individualism and low power distance strongly favored more participative styles, such as informational and extreme delegation. While gender of the manager was found to have a significant moderating effect, the direction of effect was not consistent when interactions among delegation type, gender, and country were closely examined. Thus, the elusive truth of gender effect remains an unsolved mystery.

This study has many obvious theoretical and practical implications. While we are aware of no theory that specifically links styles of delegation to leadership perceptions, many theorists have suggested that participative leadership will have more benefits than autocratic leadership. In this sense, this study contributes to the body of research that supports participative leadership styles. More importantly, it also significantly contributes to the body of research on delegation, which is still a relatively unexplored area of leadership. At the same time, this study supports the theory that there are differences in leadership across cultures. It may be concluded that, more often than not, national boundaries do make a considerable difference in leadership styles and perceptions. Therefore, the idea that Hofstede (1980) had put forth about two decades ago still holds true. While this study contributes to the body of literature on gender and leadership, it fails to sufficiently support or disprove the role congruity theory. As a review of the literature in this area has shown, results from various studies have also proven to be inconclusive. Therefore, more research is still needed to come up with plausible theories on gender and leadership.

Many empowerment schemes in organizations today advocate the practice of delegation, without specifying the different types of delegation. In fact, delegation is included as one of the management task cycles in the organization that was studied. Generally, most empowerment advocates point to extreme delegation as the way to go. This study found that informational delegation was the most favored type of delegation style, not extreme delegation. This implies that subordinates still preferred their managers to be directly involved in initial sharing of information, and not to completely eliminate the chain of command.

The findings from this study are also highly applicable to leadership in multinational organizations. While globalization is becoming a reality, it does not necessarily mean that everyone shares the same values and ideas about leadership. As evidenced in this study,

dominant national cultural values still influence the way people perceive leadership. Therefore, it may be detrimental for one organization to standardize management practices across countries, and expect them to produce the same results. It is also imperative for expatriate managers to undergo cultural training before they work in host countries. It also probably points to the fact that as economy and politics become more global, countries put in more efforts to hold on to their cultures as a means of retaining their identity.

While it was generally found that females scored higher than males in extreme delegation, further examination of interactions among types of delegation, gender, and country showed some inconsistent patterns. Therefore, the general guideline would be for managers of both genders to practice informational delegation, until the type of delegation that works best for a particular gender can be clearly established.

This study is not without potential limitations. First, data were obtained from only one multinational organization and specific departments for control purposes. This may limit the generalizability of the findings. In terms of sampling, it is clear that the sample from Malaysia was predominantly Chinese, while the sample from the United States of America was predominantly Caucasian. Therefore, the findings may not be reflective of the multi-racial societies in both countries. For example, the study by Saufi et al. (2002) showed that preference of leadership styles in Malaysia differed by the subordinates' ethnicities. Another limitation is that the study only analyzed the effect on manager gender as described in the study materials, not the gender of the respondents. In order to obtain a bigger picture of gender effects, the gender of the respondents should also be studied. Data for this study were collected using the opinions and observations of respondents in manipulated settings. It cannot be ascertained if this is representative of actual leadership perceptions in work settings, as there are many other factors that cannot be controlled in reality.

Yet another limitation is the small number of study variables. As evident in the past literature, studies have found several other factors that can influence leadership perceptions, such as subordinate maturity, leader-member exchange, subordinate personality, and the level of operational uncertainty in the company. In addition, this study examined culture at the macro, or national level. Researchers such as Triandis (1994) and Sinha and Tripathi (1994) have supported the view that individualist and collectivist orientations coexist within individuals and cultures. Therefore, the results of this study tend to gravitate toward the dominant culture of countries, but may not always be applicable at the individual level. Finally, Kinnear and Gray (1999) warned that in complex factorial experiments, there is a heightened risk that some interactions will be found significant by chance alone. More experiments are needed to determine of the pattern is really robust. Therefore, patterns found in the various interactions, particularly those involving gender should be researched further.

Thus future research could incorporate a number of other variables, such as the gender of respondent and gender of the respondents' immediate supervisor. This is to investigate if there are any relationships among these gender variables. Another very plausible replication of this study is to bring it to the individual level of analysis. Instead of studying culture at the macro level, it can be studied at an individual level. While general guidelines are very helpful, this may have more practical implications because managers should be flexible enough to adapt their management style to suit the individual expectations of their subordinates. Other methods may also be employed in future research on delegation and leadership perceptions. This research only uses data from the subordinates' point of view. Perceptual measures from both supervisor and subordinate perspectives, as well as non-perceptual measures, could be incorporated in the future research.

Back to the question asked at the very beginning: Can managers be perceived as good leaders through a culture of empowerment in multinational settings? The answer is a

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Table 1

Demographic Profile

Variables	Category	Number of respondents		Percentage (%)	
		Malaysia	USA	Malaysia	USA
Gender	Male	71	60	60.2	60.0
(Respondent)	Female	47	40	39.8	40.0
Gender	Male	80	74	67.8	74.0
(Supervisors')	Female	38	26	32.2	26.0
Race	Malay	5	0	4.2	0.0
	Chinese	102	0	86.4	0.0
	Indian	10	0	8.5	0.0
	Caucasian	0	80	0.0	80.0
	African	0	4	0.0	4.0
	Hispanic	0	7	0.0	7.0
	Asian	0	7	0.0	7.0
	Other	1	2	0.8	2.0
Nationality	Local	115	81	97.5	81.0
	Expatriate	3	19	2.5	19.0
Management level	Lower	26	14	22.0	14.0
	Middle	21	13	17.8	13.0
	Senior	2	3	1.7	3.0
	Individual contributor	69	70	58.5	70.0
Job type	Administrative	68	69	57.6	69.0
	Technical	50	31	42.4	31.0

Table 2

Means and Standard Deviations of Demographic Profile

Variables	M		SD	
	Malaysia	USA	Malaysia	USA
Age (Years)	30.4	35.8	5.2	8.7
Years of supervisory experience	2.5	3.2	3.5	5.0
Number of subordinates	2.7	3.7	5.8	16.4
Length of service (Years)	5.7	7.9	4.6	5.9

Table 3

Summary of Analysis of Variance

Source	df	SS	MS	F
1. Between blocks	217			
2. Manager gender	1	19.25	19.25	11.75**
3. Country	1	4.87	4.87	2.97
4. Gender X Country	1	13.45	13.45	8.21**
5. Block w. Gender X Country	214	350.65	1.64	
6. Within blocks	436			
7. Delegation	2	380.37	190.18	123.91**
8. Delegation X Gender	2	9.90	4.95	3.23*
9. Delegation X Country	2	153.79	76.90	50.10**
10. Delegation X Gender X Country	2	11.85	5.93	3.86*
11. Delegation X blocks w. Gender X Country	428	656.89	1.54	
12. Total	653			

$*p < .05; **p < .01$