

The Moderating Effect of Religiosity and Vertical Individualism on Transformational Leadership Style and Ethical Reasoning in the Nigerian Public Sector.

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Abstract: Leadership and management scholars have investigated moral reasoning and decision processes both in public and private organization reporting conflicting models. Few studies suggests that moral reasoning is linked to leadership behaviour in a given culture without exploring the cultural specificities and religiosity. This paper examines the effect of religiosity, individualism and collectivism on transformational leadership and on one basic aspect of ethical reasoning and decision making. Major findings indicate that vertical individualism and religiosity significantly moderates the relationship between transformational leadership and post-conventional reasoning ($\beta = .115$; $t = 1.758$, $P > .040$) and ($\beta = -.128$; $t = 2.013$, $P > .023$). We argue that individualism and collectivism provide an explanatory insight into understanding variability of leaders moral judgment and behaviour in most part of the world as the three schemas used in moral reasoning are significantly related to individual beliefs and societal approval.

Keywords: Ethical reasoning, Religiosity, Individualism/Collectivism, Transformational leadership,

I. Introduction

The impact of religiosity and other cultural values on leadership styles are crucial and vital in developing countries, especially Nigeria with the conflicting debate on transferability of administrative styles and skills. A better classification was made between transformational and transactional leadership styles (e.g., Burns, 1978; Bass, 1985, 1998), the former harmonizes collective vision for group interest while the latter is about the exchange between leaders and followers. Leaders with higher cognitive, moral development go beyond self-aggrandizement for collective benefits. However, despite increased awareness in ethical reasoning, little attention has been paid empirically in examining the complexities of religiosity, individualism and collectivism with leadership style as grounded in the prevailing culture, norms, traditions, customs, fairness, transparency and moral justice which has taken centre stage nowadays.

Scholars argue that social pressure activates ethical or unethical behaviour in conformity with cultural standards, especially moral-religious values, but this might conflict with personal held leadership, values and beliefs (Brown & Trevino, 2006), thus, group's uniqueness which are embedded in a broader IND-COL culture needs to be narrowed down to more manageable dimensions of culture that affects how interpersonal activities are handled in an organization and differentiate one group from another (Triandis&Gelfand, 1998). Few studies evaluated the effects of religiosity, individualism and collectivism on ethical reasoning and leadership style, but there exist a body of literature on culture and leadership.

This paper examines religiosity, individualism and collectivism in order to gain more insight and to broaden our knowledge of them as factors that might have an impact on leadership style and behaviour in a public sector organization. It is an uphill task for leaders to be able to maintaining their personal beliefs, as well as blending same with different cultural value systems, as moral integrity is exposed to external factors which influence the behaviour (Bandura, 1993). Thus, Transformational leadership have been widely studied as scholars are interested in a leader's degree of moral development. Burns (1978), posited that transformational leaders blend self-development and that of their followers while other leaders are interested in personal goals with little regards to subordinate's development (Bass &Steidlmeier, 1999)

II. Leadership style:

One vital function of administration is decision making by leaders who avail to themselves of several approaches, including ethical reasoning which exerts tremendous influence on decision making processes. Few empirical studies have considered the influence of a leader's ability to balance held beliefs and that of the organization in carrying out obligations that are central to the collective goal. The capacity to impact on others positively through as idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation and individualized

consideration are all associated with the leadership values either his spiritual beliefs or religious commitment (Miles & Naumann, 2007). Ethical reasoning connotes the determination of what is right when confronted with ethical dilemmas. Burns (1978), exposed a new concept in leadership study relating to moral and human values known as transformational leadership, its linkage to ethics was empirically examined by scholars (Bernett & McCormick, 1994; Brown & Trevino, 2006). It was equally argued, that ethical practices of leaders enable them to make moral decisions.

2.1 Nigerian public sector leadership: There are significant numbers of organizational leadership studies in Nigeria both conceptual and empirical in nature. Basically, Nigeria is a religious country comprising of both Christians and Muslims with some traditionalists which implies that public leaders are expected to be prudent and honest by exhibiting higher moral reasoning in the discharge of their responsibilities. Culturally, Nigerian citizens and government employees appreciate and value a moderate power distance and reasonable societal individualism and collectivism, hence they expect their leaders to show a high level of integrity which transformational leadership can promote by inspiring, and motivating followers for mutual benefits.

Although, empirical study suggest that transformational leadership has more impact on private sector organizations while autocratic leadership style triumph more in the public sector and this is the situation in Nigeria due largely to centralization of power and authority (Felix, Halim & Arshad, 2015). The reality on the ground, according to recent literature indicate that transformational leadership style is usually preferred by public sector employees as well as those in the private sector (Bernett & McCormick, 1994; Conger & Kanungo, 1988).

2.2 Religiosity: It traditionally provides an Individuals avenue to assess their lives, by examining and answering the essence of their living. Miles et al., (2007) posited that, religiosity provides a guiding standard of ethical behaviour as well as comfort and solace with regards to mortality. Religiosity equally connotes the level of an individual's commitment to the doctrines or principles which could be accessed through behavioural indicators as participation and attendance to obligations (Miles & Naumann, 2007), as the first factor perceived to impact on leadership decisions. It comprises of a personal value system of beliefs linked to an ultimate source of divine authority. Religiosity is now being associated with organizational and leadership behaviour (Berson & Avolio, 2004; Brown Trevino, 2006).

2.3 Ethical reasoning: Ethics are the road map of moral conduct and moral judgment is about conflicting rights (Bandura, 1993; Barnett, Bass & Brown, 1994). The individual has to take a decision using one philosophical theory or a combination of theories. The human capacity to endorse and justify unethical reasoning and behaviour necessitated a demarcation of right and wrong conducts. Individual and contextual elements are involved in ethical judgment (Brown et al., 1986, 1992, 2005), some of the commonly applied moral principles are the Egoism, Utilitarianism, Deontology, Ethics of care, Justice, and rights ethics. For example, Utilitarian's believe that the outcome of an action determines whether it is right or wrong while the deontologists believe that right actions are based on duty or obligation to the moral law.

Literature evidenced that social or societal approval has always been cited as pivotal in leadership decision making and moral behaviour. Moral reasoning is the ability of using one's belief and value to determine or endorse a course of action (Rest, 1979). Stajkovic and Luthans (1997), created a social cognitive model using personal values, institutional constraints and organizational circumstances. Working on Trevino's (1986) model, societal culture acts as a group level construct an individual's value is shaped by the values of his cultural group, or individual's belief versus group interest (Dibie, 2007; Dungan & Komives, 2007). Thus, if values are seen as goals, the pursuit of an individual motivational value might be in conflict with the collective

2.4 Individualism and collectivism: The primary focus of individualism is on personal rights above obligations, and in a collectivistic culture, group goals are paramount over individual objectives which influences moral decisions as it shapes the way individuals perceive, think, reason, behave on personal beliefs, and attitudes in respect of group norms and duties. In an individualistic culture, people rely more on personal beliefs and rights, while in a collectivist culture, group norms, and duties are important in making decisions by the interdependent self. Achieving personal goal is more important in an individualistic culture than maintaining harmonious relationships (Hope & Ronald, 2005; Dunn, 2006). Leaders in individualistic cultures are more capable to withstand social pressure more than those in a collectivist culture as a people sacrifice personal goals for group welfare. However, leaders are confronted with retaining morally appropriate behaviour in diverse cultures and value oriented public sector organization.

Hypothesis 1: Religiosity significantly moderates the relationship between transformational leadership style and cognitive moral development as perceived by the subordinates

The finding of existing studies on the relationship between leadership style and cognitive moral development has been mixed and conflicting (Ferrell & Fraedrich, 1991; Fletcher & Arnold, 2011). Subordinates' perception of their leadership style has been variously examined (Fraedrich & Ferrell, 1992).

Leadership is crucial to changing and influencing subordinate behaviour. Literature evidenced some universally held views about integrity, honesty and trust as core components of effective leadership (Jones, 1991; Felix, Halim & Arshad, 2015). However, moral principles and moral appropriate behaviour differ across cultures and must agree with societal norms and values. The capacity to reconcile personal values and organizational culture may give us an insight into the relationship between ethical reasoning, and transformational leadership processes (Goodling, 2003; Grant, 2012) The proposition is that the nature of the influence of moral reasoning on leadership style is more likely to vary due largely to the level of individualism and collectivism (Hofstede, 1993; Hatter, 1998). Nigeria as a developing economy experience significant ethical problems which manifest especially in the public sector with a workforce of multi-ethnic and religious background.

Hypothesis11: vertical individualism moderates the relationship between ethical reasoning and transformational leadership behaviour as perceived by subordinates.

III. Method and Technique

The target populations of this study are the employees of the Kebbi State public service, a questionnaire was used to collect data from 285 sample population. The unit of analysis remains the individual employees of the state public service. A stratified sampling method was adopted due to the diversity of ministries mandate and the likely diversity equally in style of leadership and individual belief system. Four ministries were randomly selected from the ten ministries that were not affected by the recent mergers and equally are the core ministries with the largest population based on statistical report

A survey questionnaire was used to collect data from respondents to achieve the desired objectives. This is in respect to the nature of the formulated hypotheses in this study. For cognitive, moral development (CMD) (Rest, 1990,1994, 1999), the DIT-2 questionnaire, which is in two parts containing the instructions and stories of ethical, social problems, as well as questions on ethical issues raised was used, respondents were to rate and rank most important arguments that influenced their decisions (P score). The dimensions of transformational leadership style were measured using the MLQ X5 (Bass & Avolio, 2004). The instrument was divided into three sections, namely: Demographic factors, ethical reasoning, and the transformational leadership style. Respondents were required to answer questions on ethical reasoning and value orientation (CMD) using a 5 Likert-type scale adopted from a series of ethical dilemmas and value estimates and scenarios developed by eminent scholars(Triandis & Gelfand, 1998)

Partial Least Square – Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) software (Ringle et al., 2014) was used for the analysis of the collected data in this study. In addition, Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) was used for the descriptive analyses of the respondents. To measure the significance of linear bivariate between the cognitive moral development (CMD) and transformational leadership a regression analysis was used to meet the objective of the research (Coakes, 2005). The choice of PLS-SEM in this study is based on the fact that PLS suits complexities of models, due largely to its flexibility in development and validation of models (Akter et al., 2011). Therefore, PLS was chosen to establish, construct, measurement and structural models in this study.

IV. Measurement Model

Descriptive Analysis of the Latent Constructs. In this section of the study, the descriptive statistics in form of the means, the standard deviations for the latent variables are computed and shown. Descriptive statistics details of the independent variable (leadership styles) are shown below in Table: 4.7 and that of the constructs are below.

Table 1Descriptive Analysis

Variable	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
CRD	285	-.000004	1.0017573
INFB	285	.000002	1.0017690
INM	285	-.000015	1.0017505
IST	285	-.000001	1.0017568
MBA	285	-.000002	1.0017510
POSTCONV	285	-.000004	1.0017629
RELIGION	285	.000003	1.0017702
TRANSACTIONAL	285	-.000005	1.0017573
TRANSFORMATIONAL	285	.000001	1.0017597
VCM	285	.000004	1.0017683
VIM	285	-.000005	1.0017688

Descriptive analysis of latent constructs

4.1. Measurement Model

The measurement model was evaluated by assessing the convergent validity, which is measured by loading, the average variance extracted (AVE) and the composite reliability (CR) result. The result revealed good items loading above the recommended threshold (0.5) by Hair et al., (2014). Also, the result of the average variance extracted (AVE) indicates good values for transformational leadership style, and significant values for Cognitive Moral Development (POSTCONV) other constructs loaded and measured well. Concerning the composite reliability result which measures the internal consistency the measurement instrument, the analysis found a significant value for transformational leadership style. The values of the composite reliability a greater than the threshold value of 0.7 recommended by Hair et al., (2014), which indicate a good reliable measure of the measurement instrument. The table below shows the average variance extracted statistics of the constructs (AVE),

Table 2 Item loadings, average variance extracted (AV) and reliability

Construct	Item	Loadings	AVE	Composite Reliability
TSL	CRD1	.828	0.554	0.711
	CRD2	.651		
	MBA3	.760		
	MBA4	.764		
TFL	INFB2	.784	0.550	0.709
	INFB4	.697		
	INM1	.774		
	INM2	.768		
	IST1	.491		
	IST3	.886		
RELIGION	RLS_1	.503	0.567	0.706
	RLS_2	.939		
POSTCONV	STAGE5A	.745	0.519	0.683
	STAGE5B	.695		
VCM	VCM_1_13	.899	0.679	0.808
	VCM_2_14	.742		
VIM	VIM_3_7	.835	0.605	0.753
	VIM_4_8	.716		

Note: Composite Reliability > 0.70; Average variance extracted (AVE) >0.50: Item Loadings > 0.5

As depicted in Table 3 and Figure 1 the result found a significant relationship between; 1) religiosity and post-conventional reasoning ability (RELIGION -> POSTCONV: $\beta = -.130$; $t = 2.319$, $P < .011$); 2), transactional leadership style and post-conventional reasoning (TRANSACTIONAL -> POSTCONV: $\beta = -.342$; $t = 6.099$, $P < .000$); 3), transformational leadership style and post-conventional reasoning (TRANSFORMATIONAL -> POSTCONV : $\beta = .240$; $t = 4.009$, $P < .000$) and vertical collectivism and post-conventional reasoning ability, (VCM-> POSTCONV: $\beta = -.096$: $t = 1.663$, $P < .049$), and vertical individualism and post conventional reasoning (VIM -> POSTCONV: $\beta : .071$; $t = 1.285$, $P < .100$). However, was not found to be significant. Hence, hypotheses H1 H2, H3, H4 were accepted, while H5 was not.

Table 3

Hypothesis	Relationship	Beta value	Std. Error	t value	p value	Decision
H1	RELIGION -> POSTCONV	-.130	.056	2.319	.011	Supported
H2	TRANSACTIONAL -> POSTCONV	-.342	.056	6.099	.000	Supported
H3	TRANSFORMATIONAL -> POSTCONV	.240	.060	4.009	.000	Supported
H4	VCM -> POSTCONV	.096	.058	1.663	.049	Supported
H5	VIM -> POSTCONV	.071	.055	1.285	.100	Not supported

Note: the decision on the above hypotheses are taken based on their recorded t-values & p values

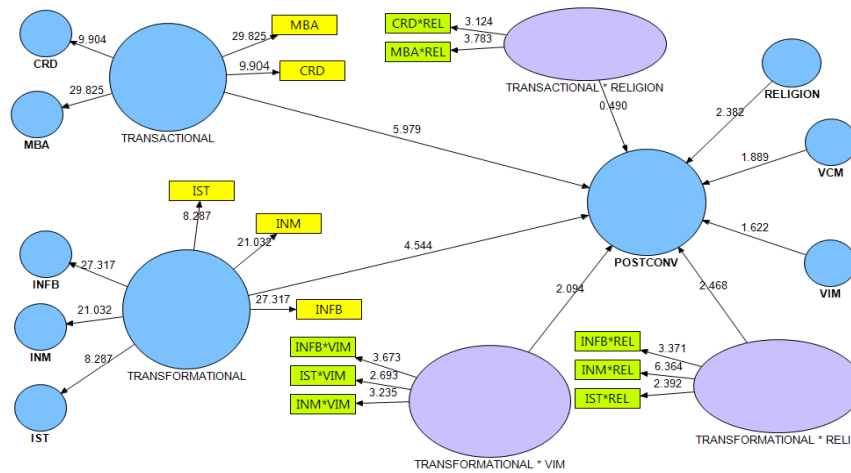


Figure 1 Moderating hypotheses bootstrapped

Table 4 Hypothesis Test with Moderation

Hypothesis	Relationship	Beta value	Std. Error	T-Value	p-Value	Decision
H6	TSL * REL-> POSTCONV	.020	.060	.324	.373	Not supported
H7	TFL * REL -> POSTCONV	-.128	.064	2.013	.023	Supported
H8	TFL * VIM -> POSTCONV	.115	.065	1.758	.040	Supported

As depicted by Table 4 and Figure 1 the moderating hypotheses formulated between transactional leadership (TSL) and post-conventional reasoning (POSTCONV) was found not to be significantly moderated by religiosity (TSL* REL-> POSCONV : $\beta = .020$; $t = .324$, $P < .373$), while transformational leadership style (TFL) and post-conventional reasoning indicated as follows (TFL * REL -> POSTCONV: $\beta = -.128$; $t = 2.013$, $P > .023$), have a significant moderating effect on the relationship between cognitive moral development (POSTCON) and transformational leadership (TFL). Also, concerning the relationship between transformational leadership (TFL), and post-conventional reasoning, vertical individualism was found to possess a significant effect on their relationship (TFL * VIM -> POSTCONV: $\beta = .115$; $t = 1.758$, $P > .040$). Hence, hypotheses H3b, H4a and H4b were supported, while hypotheses H3a, H3c and H3d were not supported.

V. Findings

The above findings indicates that religiosity and vertical individualism significant has significant moderating relationship with transformational leadership style and post-conventional reasoning (Felix et al., 2015). The findings indicated how vertical individualism culture affects the perception and moral judgment leaders in an organization and that these set of cultural factors and religiosity had positive significant statistical relationships with transformational leadership style after the bootstrapping. Empirical results of previous studies are inconsistent (Pearce & Sims, 2002; Pauchus & Williams, 2002) largely due to factor optimal structure which requires further confirmatory analysis.

VI. Discussion

This paper contends that though, there were previous works on both variables either the relationship between leadership style and ethical reasoning, their findings remain contentious suggesting that a moderator might likely help to modify or strengthen the relationship better, thus, we identified religiosity, individualism as moderators, having previously established a weak relationship between the two variables (Sarros & Santora, 2001; Turner et al., 2002). The outcome of the study indicated that the moderating variables had statistically significant role, especially leadership style in explaining the variance in moral reasoning and behaviour exhibited by various leaders as perceived by their subordinates. With these findings, it lends credence to earlier postulations about the universality of transformational leadership theory and practice (Trevino, 1986; Rest et al., 1999; Yukl & Mahsud, 2010)

Transformational leadership style both in theory and practice exhibits more influence on subordinate developmental processes (Bass, 1997; Ofori, 2009; Sorkaa, 2003) by encouraging followers to be creative and innovative when faced with an ethical dilemma. Although, studies that have examined the specificities of individual values and cognitive moral development on leadership behaviour are scanty, but transformational leadership behaviour across-culture is found to appeal to subordinates aspirations regardless of culture and religious beliefs (Muenjohn & Armstrong, 2001; Schwartz & Bilsky, 1990). Moreover, transformational

leadership dimensions are intone with ethical values and universally held view of an effective leader and development of moral judgment is associated with an increase or decrease in the use or application of lower or higher stages of moral reasoning scores (P-score).

VII. Conclusion

This study suggests that religiosity, vertical individualism effect moral decisions and leadership style in a given culture and this has positive impact with transformational leadership and post-conventional reasoning which indicated support for the study's hypotheses. This seems to buttress or confirm earlier findings on the influence of cultural dimensions on leadership style and behaviour, especially the transformational leadership paradigm (Triandis, 1993; Bass, 1997; Yukl, 1999). Irrespective of the acclaimed universality, leadership behaviours are still subjected to cultural and religious values based on societal expectation and definition of an effective leadership style. Although transformational leadership blends properly in a given culture, but this study was able to provide an insight into how internal and external elements propel it to universal acceptance across diverse cultures.

Despite the contributions of this paper, an observed limitation and recommendations has to be made. Specifically, the theoretical application of leadership, ethics, religious and cultural frameworks are still contentious and established linkages between them remains inconclusive. It remains to be seen whether a combination of similar or other theories in a different environment will yield the same results which further compounds the issue of universality of transformational leadership paradigm. Future studies could narrow the variables to specificities of other core individual values and transformational leaderships or specific factors that impact on personal attributes of the leadership which equally depends substantially on societal approval.

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