Bridging the Gap? 
Leadership Theories Applied in Distance Settings

Masters Thesis in Business Administration

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Abstract

The current global context is full of both increasing opportunities, and increasing demands that are placed both on the corporations and the employees working within them. As the physical distances between leaders and followers widens, more emphasis will need to be placed on applying traditional benchmark leadership approaches and theories to this context. The study explores and highlights the following issues connected to distance management:

How is the full range leadership model, including transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire leadership styles between the leader and followers affected when applied in a distance setting?

How effective is the use of different information and communication technology mediums in closing the gap created through physical distance as a mediating factor between a leader and a follower in many situations?

The researchers concluded that distance has a profound effect on a leader’s ability to display the characteristics of transformational leadership. Passive avoidant styles also tend to manifest themselves more strongly in a distance setting than an office setting with daily contact. The transactional leadership characteristics of contingent reward and management by exception (active) seem to be more dependent on individual leadership style and do not seem to be as affected by distance as a primary influencing variable.

The effects of the frequency of the use of information and communication technology on the distance sample was also examined in relationship to its affect on perception of leadership by individuals being managed in a distance setting. The affects from the use of more simpler forms of ICT have a medium correlation. Richer forms of ICT medium (video conferencing and tele-links etc.) were not reported as used although these could be necessary to attempt to lessen this gap between leader perceptions in closer vs. distance settings.

For those respondents already being managed at a distance, there seems to be only a medium level of correlation between the amount of contact that each of the respondents have had with their supervisor through mail or phone and their perceptions of the leader. This medium correlation is positive for both transformational and transactional leadership characteristics. When it comes to the passive avoidant characteristics the correlation is a medium negative one- as the amount of contact with the supervisor increases the perception that the supervisor employs these characteristics decreases.

As companies spread out across the globe, more attention will need to be paid to distance as a moderating factor. The skills of transformational leadership will have to be assessed in more detail to find out how these leadership characteristics can still be both developed and applied so that they transfer over in a distance setting. Only then can the gap of distance be bridged, with technology most likely to play a key role in making this possible.
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Introduction

“You’re history, Donohue. You think countries run the fucking world! Go back to fucking Sunday school. It’s ‘God save our multinational’ they’re singing these days.”

- John le Carré, The Constant Gardener

Thomas Friedman, the renowned columnist for the New York Times and the author of a few books on the subject provides us with a concise and concrete definition of globalization:

“The simple definition of globalization is the interweaving of markets, technology, information systems, and telecommunications networks in a way that is shrinking the world from a size medium to a size small. It began decades ago, but accelerated dramatically over the past 10 years, as the price of computing power fell and the world became an ever-more densely interconnected place. People resist this shift... because they think it primarily benefits big business elites to the detriment of everyone else. But globalization didn’t ruin the world—it just flattened it. Whatever people’s fears of change, globalization is here to stay—and, if properly managed, it will be a good thing.”

As Friedman so eloquently illustrates, the current trend of globalization has had a large impact on the structure of many large companies. No longer confined to geographical or country boundaries, many multinational companies span the globe with head-quarters based in Western Europe, production facilities in Asia and sales globally around the world. Globalization is a phenomenon that can not be reversed but only be embraced.

Globalization has often also been associated with outsourcing, a strategy of relocating business, services, production and work to overseas locations where it makes most business sense by capitalizing on the market opportunities, skill pool, communication technologies and the benefits of cost. Countries and companies who do not embrace both of these trends will fall behind, while those who jump in head first and “ride the wave” will be forced to come up with new strategies to address the complexities created by the increasing size of the playing field.

This current global context is full of both increasing opportunities, and increasing demands that are placed both on the corporations and the employees working within them.
Background

One area that is affected by the change in a company structure is also the company’s approach to management and the demands placed on its leaders. In the past, managers have often been confined to leading a team located on the same floor or in the same building. Some managers may have had teams spread out in regional offices within the same country that would come together to meet periodically throughout the year but still with the same background, culture, and values.

This landscape has drastically changed for many companies however. Now a manager may have teams composed of members based all over the globe, with different cultural backgrounds, working styles, and expectations. Gathering everyone periodically into one central location is no longer realistic or economically feasible in many cases or it can only happen on a few select occasions.

This type of working environment is drastically different from what existed even twenty or thirty years ago, and requires managers to be even more aware of the leadership skills and tools necessary to perform their roles effectively.

Companies are realizing more and more that effective leaders are necessary to be able to lead their organizations through these sometimes harsh adjustments that can occur as the world “flattens”. The globalization or flattening of the world has also flattened many organizational structures as well. As companies and corporations spread out around the world, more effective leaders will be necessary in order to maintain an effective and satisfied work force in all levels of the organization.

As the physical distances between leaders and followers widens, more emphasis will need to be placed on applying traditional benchmark leadership approaches and theories to this context. Leadership approaches that may have automatically worked with minimal effort in close office environments may need to be replaced with consistent and targeted efforts to develop those same leader-follower bonds as teams spread out around the globe.

One of the first steps will be to study further the effects that distance as a variable has on the application of the full range of leadership model that includes both transformational, transactional and laissez-faire styles of leadership. A better understanding of these concepts will assist leaders to be able to minimize distance as a moderating factor. Leaders can identify and focus on adapting the best practice approaches to leadership to fit this new globalized context. This includes the increasing reliance that managers have on different forms of technology for communication.
Problem Discussion

According to the majority of the literature reviewed by the authors that will be discussed in more detail below, a transformational leadership style is considered to be one of the generally accepted benchmark standards for ensuring leadership effectiveness. Transformational and LMX leadership theories have been studied in a conventional context, but few studies have examined more specifically how the same leadership theories are affected by distance as a moderating factor, when applied in a distance setting.

Distance is often considered to be a mediating factor in the development of a relationship between a leader and followers. However, the authors suspect that the introduction and use of various types of information and communication technology equipment would provide an opportunity to at least partly bridge this gap.

The initial theory can be illustrated in the following simple diagram:

![Figure 1.1: Physical Distance as a Moderating Factor](image-url)
Problem Formulation and Purpose

The model above illustrates the following research questions or hypothesis that this study hopes to explore and highlight:

How is the full range leadership model, including transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire leadership styles between the leader and followers affected when applied in a distance setting?

How effective is the use of different information and communication technology mediums in closing the gap created through physical distance as a mediating factor between a leader and a follower in many situations?
De-limitations

There are many other mediating factors that could also affect the leader and follower relationship, especially in distance settings. A globalized world also means that many other variables are being incorporated into corporate culture like never before.

These additional variables can include cultural and societal differences, language barriers, operational cultures and approaches to working in a team environment. Gender differences and gender roles can also be contributing factors. Globalization increases both the variety and complexity of all of these issues which could prove to be an equally interesting focus areas of study.

It is difficult to condense complicated processes of interaction into simple theories and explanations. In a real world context it must be acknowledged that there will always be variables that may not be fully accounted for. The authors of this study choose to exclude many of these other variables from this study due to time and focus constraints. This does not mean, however, that they are irrelevant. Many of these variables could and should be included in further studies of a greater scope.

Corporate culture also plays a large role in an organizations approach to management and leadership activities. Generalities and conclusions drawn can not be expected to apply to all specific contexts, as different variables can still be at play.

However, identifying general trends can still be considered useful as it contributes to a greater understanding of the common underlying themes that concretely affect our constructs and paradigm for viewing the world around us.
Thesis Structure

In order to examine the research questions in further detail, attention must first be paid to the current relevant literature and thinking surrounding the subjects.

First will be a review of the current trends regarding different leadership theories including transformational, transactional and laissez-faire styles of leadership including the leader membership exchange model or LMX theory of leadership and how it is connected to transformational leadership.

Current thinking surrounding distance as a mediating factor will also be considered, along with the role that information and communication technology can play in context.

This review of the literature will then set the stage for the research questions to be examined in further detail.

First hand research results will then be presented, including a presentation of data collection methods, analysis, conclusions, and recommendations for future studies.

For a more detailed outline and summary of this thesis’ structure please refer to the table of contents on page four.
Theory / Literature Review

As the world becomes more globalized, companies are realizing that it is becoming more and more necessary to have a workforce composed of strong leaders on every level of the organization in order for their organizations to survive and prosper. This is especially true as companies grow larger and more spread out. Human resource managers and head hunters are developing more and more specific tools to assess potential leadership capabilities in the staff that they hire, and psychological profiling is becoming more and more common as well (Jung, 2009).

All of these trends point toward the need for formal managers and informal leaders in all levels of an organization to become more aware of their leadership style including where their strengths and weaknesses lie. Conscious effort can be made to improve these skills and to apply skills in new ways once self awareness has been created.

It is also helpful for leaders to understand the current theory surrounding leadership styles and how they function and can be applied in different situations (Poutiatine, 2008).

One of the individuals that have contributed a great deal to this field of study is late Bernard Bass, a distinguished intellectual and professor in industrial psychology.

Bernard Bass can be considered one of the leading gurus on leadership theory, models and practice. He has been involved with research on the subject for over 25 years, and many of his theories provide the basis for current leadership best practices today.

He has developed a concept he describes as the full range of leadership model. This model seeks to quantify and define different leadership styles, including transformational, transactional and laissez-faire styles of leadership.

This model has been developed and defined over the past three decades and will provide the basis for further research conducted in this study. But first we will explore in greater detail the concepts and different leadership styles illustrated in this model, including examining how they interact with each other.

Transformational Leadership

In 1978, Burns first made the distinction between transformational and transactional leadership styles. This distinction was made by doing an analysis of different political and visionary leaders and identifying common traits that made them successful leaders. Bernard Bass further developed and refined these two different leadership styles in the 1980s building upon Burns’ initial work.

According to Yammarino and Bass, (1990) the definition of a transformational leader is one who:
“Articulates a vision about the future that can be shared by peers and subordinates, intellectually stimulates subordinates, and pays high attention to individual differences among people.”

In Bass’ research, transformational leaders are contrasted with transactional leaders. Transactional leaders on the other hand are more likely to give out rewards in exchange for behaviour that they approve of or encourage. These rewards are based on the willingness of the follower to display the desired behaviours.

Most if not all leaders have the tendency to use both styles of leadership in different situations. It is also important to note that these are not two mutually exclusive styles and leaders most often use a combination of both. However, transformational leaders are considered to be those who spend the majority of their time influencing their followers within the three areas that constitute a transformational leadership style (Bass et al 2003).

Bass identified and developed five areas that can be used to define the characteristics of transformational leadership (Bass 1985). These include:

Idealized Influence (both Attributes and Behaviours (IA & IB): defined as a leader instilling faith, pride and respect among those that are following. This also involves transmitting a sense of mission.

Inspirational Motivation (IM): Ways in which a transformational leader motivates those around them by providing meaning and challenge to their followers’ work, arousing individual and team spirit.

Individualized Consideration (IC): A transformational leader treats each subordinate on an individual level according to their unique set of circumstances. This includes taking opportunities for coaching and delegating projects that the leader knows would be relevant and of interest to develop the followers capacity.

Intellectual Stimulation (IS): The third characteristic is perhaps the least studied, but connected to the second. This is when the leader encourages the follower to think in new ways and develop new methods of reasoning before moving an issue forward.

Through extensive research, Bass claims that the most successful leaders are those that employ the characteristics of a transformational leadership style. This claim has been substantiated by many additional studies conducted by others that build upon his work (including Podsakoff et al. 1984 & Yagil 1998). According to the majority of the literature reviewed by the authors, a transformational leadership style is considered to be one of the generally accepted benchmark standards for ensuring leadership effectiveness and employee satisfaction.

Effectiveness in leadership can be empirically linked to the extent to which a leader is able to employ a transformational leadership style. Bass has developed a sophisticated measurement tool called the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) to analyze the
various components of both transformational and transactional leadership styles which are then linked empirically to effectiveness.

**Leader-Membership exchange (LMX) Theory**

The Leader-Membership exchange theory (LMX) can also be considered a useful approach for studying and understanding leadership approaches as it focuses on the direct relationship between the leader and the follower. The theory was first proposed and developed by Graen and his colleagues and has been further refined since then (Danserau, Chasman and Graen, 1973, Graen, 2006). However, the basis of the principle has stayed basically the same. The difference between the LMX exchange theory of leadership and other leadership theories is that it focuses on the direct interaction between the leader and the follower. This relationship, or interaction, called a dyadic relationship is used to explain leadership as a function of both the characteristics of the leader, and the specific interaction or situation with the follower.

The concept behind the LMX theory is perhaps easiest explained in the following diagram:

![Figure 1.2: Dyadic Distance in the Leader-Follower Relationship](image-url)
After more than 25 years of further research and numerous studies the LMX theory of leadership is still considered to provide a stable basis and foundation for approaching leadership directly as an operative paradigm.

The tool developed for measuring LMX has been revised and expanded on a few different occasions and there has been some discussion as to its “ambiguous” nature at times, but the currently most used and most recently developed scale is the seven item LMX measure.

**Connection between Transformational and LMX Leadership Theories**

Although the two leadership theories of transformational leadership and LMX leadership have developed separately along side each other in beginning, more recent research has established the benefits of acknowledging the strong linkages between the two concepts.

More recently researchers have drawn the connection that both transformational and LMX theories of leadership can be used along side each other to provide a conceptual basis that explains the effectiveness of individual leaders.

For example, in 1992, while conducting a study of naval officers, Deluga tested the theory that a high LMX was also related to transformational leadership and found a strong positive correlation (Deluga, 1992). His study found that individualized consideration and charisma (two aspects of transformational leadership) were also predictors for quality of the LMX relationship. Basu (1992) also found a similar strong positive correlation between LMX and transformational leadership scales.

Graen and Uhl-bien (1995) and Gerstner and Day (1997) have also both proposed that there is a theoretical integration between transformational and LMX theories of leadership. According to these researchers:

“High-quality leader-follower relationships, defined by mutual trust, respect, internalization of shared goals, and the willingness of followers to exert extra effort, are aligned with transformational leadership, in which leaders inspire followers to transcend their own self-interests for the broader collective purpose (Gerstner & Day, 1997, Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995).

Howell and Merenda (1999) also attempted a recent empirical study to test the linkages between transformational and LMX models of leadership, and reported similar findings that LMX and transformational leadership are positively related.

All of these studies support the idea that there is a strong connection between LMX and transformational leadership, especially in the situations where both are used effectively.

Due to the already strongly established connections between these two concepts, the researchers have chosen to focus there attention more on transformational leadership as it seems to embrace common underlying themes in both theories.
Distance as a moderating factor

Distance in leader-follower relationships is also an interesting concept of study that will be considered as a factor during the research design process. Napier and Ferris (1993) have examined in depth the different types of distance that can arise in the dyadic leader-follower relationship.

Connected to their research, Napier and Ferris (1993) present an interesting model for dyadic distance in the leader-follower relationship. This model integrates many types of distance identified by the researchers including dyadic, psychological, structural and functional distance. In the course of their study, Napier and Ferris attempt to connect the different constructs that are usually studied individually into a cohesive diagram which reflects their interrelationships.

![Figure 1.2: Dyadic Distance in the Leader-Follower Relationship](image)

The concept of distance can also be connected back to the LMX leadership model. Graen (1976) has contributed a lot in this area as well with the development of his theory based on “in-group” and “out-group” measurements. According to Graen’s theory, members of the “in-group” enjoy more benefits and rewards through interaction with their supervisors, an also express greater satisfaction with their jobs and relationships with their supervisors than do members of the “out-group”, although each supervisor and subordinate relationship is different.

This phenomenon of functional distance is described by Napier and Ferris (1993) as the amount of closeness and quality in the working relationship between the employer and the employee. The authors proposed that there are four dimensions that can be used to comprise functional distance including, “affect, perceptual congruence, latitude, and relationship quality.” Basically these factors are used to determine how distant the follower is from the leader in regards to their working relationship.
Although there are many different concepts and definitions of distance that can affect the leader-follower relationship, the aspect that is of most interest for the study that follows is that of physical distance.

Clauss and Bass have developed a way to measure physical distance between followers and managers using a numbered scale.

A number of different studies have examined the relationship of leadership and physical distance. These studies have no doubt been motivated by the changing business landscape, where changes in organizational structure, size, location and complexity have led to more and more leaders being responsible for managing followers from a distance.

A number of our new favourite authors, including Bass, Aviolio (1990) and Howell and Hall-Merenda (1999) have presented the argument that physical distance has a negative affect on how well leaders and followers are able to interact with each other. These authors hypothesize that distance naturally adds to a decrease in the quality and quantity of interactions between the leader and the follower. Thus the leaders and followers are not able to create the high quality relationships that are based on spending time and energy communicating with each other. These high quality relationships like the ones defined by Graen & Uhl-Bein (1995 and Graen 2006) in his LMX model are the ones that have the potential for followers to receive high levels of support and consideration from the leader.

According to Sparrowe & Liden (1997) High quality relationships are quantified in terms of social interaction that is best fostered with physical proximity and face to face interaction.

An even more pessimistic conclusion was proposed by Kerr and Jermier (1978) where they claim that “physical distance creates circumstances in which effective leadership may be impossible, as it tends to neutralize both relationship-oriented and task-oriented leadership behaviours.”

We know of one such empirical study, conducted by Howell and Hall-Merenda (1999) that was designed to examine how both leader-member exchange relationships and transformational and transactional leadership theories were moderated by physical distance. One of the conclusions in this study was that distance does play a moderating role in all leadership theories, although the transformational leadership approach was the one of the least affected models.

**Use of different levels of information technology**

A relatively new field of study within the leadership arena is the area of e-leadership. Technology use has spread rapidly through businesses around the world linking them both internally and externally with other partners. This trend has radically changed the way that business is conducted and that staff members interact with each other internally and with the outside world.
Advanced Information Technology is defined as tools, techniques, and knowledge that enable multiparty participation in organizational and inter-organizational activities through sophisticated collection, processing, management, retrieval, transmission, and display of data and knowledge (DeSanctis & Poole, 1994).

In more layman terms, advanced information technology includes email systems, message boards, video conferencing, and billing and supply chain management systems just to name a few.

This advanced information technological environment has also created a new context for leadership theories and practices as well. According to Drucker (1993) the key characteristics of an Advanced Information Technology (AIT) enabled economy are “real-time information availability, greater knowledge sharing with stakeholders, and the use of this information and knowledge to build customized relationships.” Another result of this new environment is that organizations are able to act in a more global sphere. This is made possible by the ease of which information is able to flow freely (Drucker 1993).

It is suspected that leadership structures have also adapted and changed to fit this new environment. Avolio and Dodge (2001) coin the term e-leadership to explain this phenomenon. Their definition of e-leadership is:

“A social influence process mediated by AIT to produce a change in attitudes, feelings, thinking, behaviour, and/or performance with individuals, groups, and/or organizations.”

Basically, AIT provides a new realm in which leadership theories can be practiced. Considering that such a fundamental shift has happened in regards to the adaption of information technology, it can only be expected that new theories and areas of research will need to be explored in order to better understand how these tools affect organizational structures, and more specifically for the terms of this research, the effects that they have on approaches to leadership as well.

**Changing World and Globalized Context**

Napier and Ferris (2001) acknowledged that current world trends including globalization, workforce diversification, downsizing and decentralization are all leading to a process of change where the distance between leaders and followers is steadily increasing.

An increase in physical distance can also lead by default to increases in social distance between leaders and followers as well.

**Fundamental Research Questions and Area of Focus**

The previous literature references provide the background and foundation for further studies into the relationship between different leadership theories, distance, and the use of information and communication technology.
This in turn leads us back to the following two research questions or hypothesis that this quantitative study hopes to explore and highlight:

How is the full range leadership model, including transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire leadership styles between the leader and followers affected when applied in a distance setting?

How effective is the use of different information and communication technology mediums in closing the gap created through physical distance as a mediating factor between a leader and a follower in many situations?
Method

In order to examine the previously listed research questions and areas of interest the authors will conduct research based on the following research design. The following approach was selected after a thorough review of different methodology approaches and the suggested literature on the subject. Sources consulted include Research Methods for Business Students (Saunders et al. 2003) Business Research, a Practical Guide for Undergraduate and Postgraduate students (Hussey and Hussy, 1997) and Researching and Writing a Dissertation for Business Students (Fisher, 2004).

Research Philosophy

According to Saunders et al (2003). The literature is dominated by three different views about the research process. These views include: positivism, interpretivism and realism. They are different views about how knowledge can be developed and then be judged as being acceptable.

Like most research conducted, this study is not expected to fall neatly into any one category but will most likely involve elements of all three. However, the results will reflect an emphasis on the interpretivism approach. The authors agree with the tenants of the interpretivism approach that suggests that “not only are business situations complex, they are also unique and are a function of a particular set of circumstances and individuals” (Saunders et all, 2003). Thus it may be difficult to completely generalize any findings as being a universal phenomenon. However, the purpose of the research is to examine the details in order to further understand the possible reality or concepts behind specific behavioural patterns within the organizations studied. These results will still contribute to further understanding in the area of business and management research, even if many aspects of the subjective reality have the possibility of changing in the future.

Research Approach

The authors have also decided to take an inductive approach examining three different variables and their relationship to each other. These three variables include leadership styles, distance and information technology. Theoretically, based on information gathered through the literature review, distance can be considered a mediating factor on all leadership styles. Information technology may also be able to bridge or lessen the gap that distance can create between leaders and followers, allowing leaders to employ the same variety of leadership approaches that they would use in a close setting. The authors will examine the relationship between these three variables, including which different aspects of leadership styles are affected most by distance. The authors will explore how the different leadership approaches defined by the full range leadership model can be affected by today’s setting that involves distance management and the use of information and communication technology.
The inductive approach is appropriate for the proposed study as it will provide the researchers with a more flexible structure in which the research emphasis and structure can evolve as the research progresses. It will also allow a closer understanding of the research context and the collection of both qualitative and quantitative data. This data will allow the researchers to gain a better understanding of how different leadership theories are applied in context without having to necessarily generalize to all possible different settings, as in many cases it could still be considered context-specific.

**Research Strategy**

The authors have chosen to take a case study approach for doing research which will involve the study of one or two companies in context. Robson (2002, as quoted in Saunders et al.) defines a case study as “a strategy for doing research which involves an empirical investigation of a particular contemporary phenomenon with its real life context using multiple sources of evidence.” The authors have chosen this approach as they feel it is the best way to be able to examine the relationship of the three variables in question in a real life context. This will allow the authors to examine the three different variables identified in a specific context. The data collection process will include both surveys and semi-structured interviews in order to gather the information necessary for the case study.

**Time Horizons**

Due to the time constraints that the thesis must be completed under, and the other approaches chosen for the research design, the authors have chosen to take a cross-sectional approach, studying the company selected at a specific moment in time.

The authors will adopt the role of practitioner-researchers in their own organizations as well. This role is positive because the researchers will not encounter many problems surrounding organizational access. However, the researchers also acknowledge that they must be conscious about the preconceived notions and assumptions that they may be carrying with them before they start the research. The researchers acknowledge that taking a practitioner-researcher approach can involve both positive and negative elements. The researchers have been committed to preserving the quality of their data and trying to maintain objectivity and appropriate distance throughout the research process.

**Data Collection Procedures**

The study will employ both a survey component and semi-structured interviews with key individuals within the organization. This will enable triangulation to take place. According to Saunders et al. (2002) triangulation uses more than one data collection method in order to “ensure that the data are telling you what you think they are telling you.”
Sample Selection

The authors began their research by assessing the organizational structures of their respective organizations and identifying potential candidates for the study. These candidates were selected based upon the criteria that they work together both with colleagues based in the same office that they meet on a regular basis and that they also manage colleagues that are based off-shore on different continents (distance management).

Two supervisors (project managers) were selected for the study along with a group of their colleagues. This group can be subdivided into two groups where a portion of them are managed from a distance, and the other portion of them have contact with the same selected supervisor in an office setting on a daily basis. A total of 24 participants were selected to participate in the survey process.

The same questionnaire was administered to all identified participants and a 100% response rate was achieved.

Questionnaire Development

The authors designed a questionnaire to examine the three different variables that they wanted to examine, namely distance, the use of different ICT communication methods, and leadership styles.

The scales to measure distance and the use of different ICT methods was developed by the authors themselves. The approach to measuring different leadership styles was adapted from the benchmark tool developed by Avolio and Bass (1995, 2000, 2004) on the subject, the multifactor leadership questionnaire (MLQ Form 5x Short). For more information on the construct validity of the MLQ 5X please refer to the Manual for the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (Bass and Avolio 2004). This manual is not included in the appendix due to copyright reasons but is available online from Mind Garden, Inc.

The MLQ 5X is a tool designed to measure the full range of leadership styles including transactional and transformational leadership styles. It is not designed to label a leader as transformational or transactional because most leaders exhibit characteristics of both depending on a given situation. The tool is better suited to define a leader as being “more transformational that the norm” or “less transactional than the norm”. Norms have been established based on the data that has been collected using the tool in numerous studies over a fifteen year period. The majority of the data comes from the United States but data has also been collected in many other different countries as well. The current MLQ 5X tool has been developed after a number of revisions and critiques over a long period of time since the concept was first proposed back in the 1980s. The tool is considered a benchmark for studying the full range of leadership model in different contexts. Thus the authors feel that it is a solid tool that can be used to assess leadership styles and how they interact with the variables of distance and the use of ICT.
Bridging the Gap: Leadership Theories Applied in Distance Settings

Bass and Avolio have categorized the more overarching concept of transformation leadership into more specifically defined areas termed the “5 I’s”:

- Idealized Influence (divided into idealized attributes (IA) and idealized behaviours (IB))
- Inspirational Motivation (IM)
- Intellectual Stimulation (IS)
- Individual Consideration (IC)

Transactional Leadership is also divided into the following categories:

- Contingent Reward (CR)
- Management by Exception: Active (MBEA)

Contingent reward is associated with constructive transactions and management by exception active is associated with corrective transactions.

The last broad category explored by Bass and Avolio is passive/avoidant behaviour. This form is much more passive and “reactive”. This involves the following sub-categories:

- Management by Exception: Passive (MBEP)
- Laizzez-Faire (LF)

The MLQ5x Short is designed to measures these different attributes of both transformational, transactional and passive/avoidant (laissez-faire) forms of leadership. This is what constitutes the full range of leadership model. This is done by the selected participants assessing how well a carefully selected set of statements fits the person that they are rating. The rating scale is from zero to four with zero being “not at all” and four being “frequently if not always.”

The MLQ5x Short is also designed to measure the outcomes of leadership in terms of extra effort, effectiveness and satisfaction with the leadership. Both transformational and transactional leadership can be related to the success of the group as a whole.

Results of the questionnaire are compiled by calculating an average of scores for each statement that falls under the broad categories identified by Bass and Avolio. These scores can then be compared to the norm values established for the questionnaire.

The two other variables introduced by the researchers are distance and use of information and communication technology (ICT). Distance is simply measured by how close or far the supervisor is from his or her other colleagues. The use of different types of information and communications technology equipment (ICT) is measured by both the different types of ICT used (on a scale from less to more enriched forms) and then how
often these different tools are used in an average one week period. More frequent use of these tools would be thought to narrow the gap that physical distance creates.

**Administration**

The questionnaire was administered in different settings during the course of one week's time to the sample groups identified to participate in the survey. The usual ethical rules were applied during administration. This includes that the purpose of the survey was explained and everyone gave their informed consent to participate. Responses were collected on a volunteer basis and no one was forced to participate against their will. The survey was administered anonymously, and information will only be used for the purposes stated from the beginning, and exclusively for this assignment. All names and other identifying information were removed when the data was aggregated.

Once the surveys had been collected, each was individually processed using the MLQ scoring key. Averages were calculated for all of the different leadership approaches that were to be measured. This was done by adding all the scores for the responses to the individual items and then dividing that by the total number of responses for the item.

These values were then compared to the norm tables and percentage values were assigned for each of the different items, based on where the individual rated fell on the scale.

These percentage values were averaged for the two separate groups, the ones interacting by distance and the ones interacting in a normal office setting on a regular daily basis. The difference in these numbers were then compared to see the effects that distance can have on a single leader’s ability to influence the group they are working with.

The results of one of the groups being managed by distance was also compared with the measured factors of distance and use of ICT functions to check for any positive or negative correlations.

**Statistical Analysis**

In order to determine the statistical significance of the results obtained, the two independent sample means were compared using a T-test. Assumptions made in order to conduct the T-test included the following. The sampling was indeed random and based on interval/ratio level data. The two samples are also considered independent.

The first sample consisted of respondents who interact with the identified leader (project manager) on a daily basis. The second sample consisted of respondents who interact with the identified leader from a remote, distant location.

The null hypothesis is that there will be no statistically significant difference between the perception of leadership characteristics between those in the same location vs. those in a distant location.
For the 2-tailed hypothesis test, there would be a statistically significant difference in the perception of leadership characteristics by colleagues working with the identified leader (project manager) on a daily basis when compared to the perceptions measured for respondents who interact with the identified leader from a remote, distant location.

Criteria set for the rejection of the Null Hypothesis:

Degrees of freedom = \((n1 + n2) - 2 = 16 + 8 - 2 = 22\)

Critical values (alpha .5) are for T-values greater than or equal to:

One tailed: 1.717
Two Tailed: 2.074

The standard error and test statistic were then calculated using the standard accepted formula.

The following t values were calculated to determine the statistical significance of observations and differences observed. In all but four cases the null hypothesis could be rejected.

Table 1.1: T-Values for Bivariate Data Collected to Measure the Hypothesis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Leadership Characteristic</th>
<th>Test Statistic (t-value)</th>
<th>Stat. Significant (≥ 1.727)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>II(A)</td>
<td>3.394</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II(B)</td>
<td>4.12</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IM</td>
<td>1.895</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IS</td>
<td>2.388</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IC</td>
<td>3.246</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CR</td>
<td>.749</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MBEA</td>
<td>.89</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MBEP</td>
<td>-2.55</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LF</td>
<td>1.29</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EFF</td>
<td>3.112</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EE</td>
<td>.532</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SAT</td>
<td>2.756</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Findings

The results for the two identified leaders for each of the leadership factors measured, in percentage form, with distance being the variable factor between the two comparisons can be seen in the tables below.

Table 1.2 – Percentage differences in Leadership Characteristic Perception (Leader 1)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Leadership Characteristic</th>
<th>Distance Colleagues</th>
<th>Localized Colleagues</th>
<th>Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>II(A)</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>-35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II(B)</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>-17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IM</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>-51%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IS</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>-60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IC</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>88%</td>
<td>-63%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CR</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>No Statistically Significant Difference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MBEA</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>No Statistically Significant Difference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MBEP</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>+38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LF</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>No Statistically Significant Difference</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1.3 – Percentage differences in Leadership Characteristic Perception (Leader 2)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Leadership Characteristic</th>
<th>Distance Colleagues</th>
<th>Localized Colleagues</th>
<th>Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>II(A)</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>-45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II(B)</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>-53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IM</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>-23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IS</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>-37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IC</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>-50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CR</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>No Statistically Significant Difference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MBEA</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>No Statistically Significant Difference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MBEP</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>+30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LF</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>No Statistically Significant Difference</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 1.4 – Average Difference in Distance vs. Localized Ratings of the Same Leader

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transformational</th>
<th>Transactional</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Individual Consideration (IC)</td>
<td>Contingent Reward (CR)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-43%</td>
<td>No Statistically Sig. Difference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intellectual Stimulation (IS)</td>
<td>Management by Exception - (Active) (MBEA)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-32%</td>
<td>No Statistically Sig. Difference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Idealized Attributes (IIA)</td>
<td>Passive Avoidant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-39%</td>
<td>Management by Exception – Passive (MBEP)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inspirational Motivation (IM)</td>
<td>+30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-22%</td>
<td>Laissez-Faire (LF)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Idealized Behaviours (IIB)</td>
<td>No Statistically Sig. Difference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-42%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Values are expressed as percentiles as compared to the norm tables in Appendix B of the MLQ manual. For example a score in the 40% means that 40% of the normalized population scored lower, and 60% scored higher than the actual score received. For example, the MLQ can identify a leader of a group as either more transformational or less transformational than the norm depending on in which percentile they fall.

As illustrated in Table 1.4 above, distance has a profound effect on a leader’s ability to display all identified characteristics of transformational leadership. The passive avoidant style of Management by Exception – Passive (MBEP) tends to manifest itself more strongly in a distance setting than an office setting with daily contact. The transactional leadership characteristics of contingent reward and management by exception (active) seem to be more dependent on individual leadership style and do not seem to be affected by distance as a primary influencing variable. Laissez-Faire (LF) also does not seem to be significantly affected by distance.

### Outcomes

The MLQ questionnaire also has a separate section for measuring the outcomes of leadership. The concept of outcomes is divided up into three different measurable characteristics including Extra Effort (EE), Effectiveness (EFF) and Satisfaction (SAT).
Two of these three variables were also significantly affected by the variable of distance. With both effectiveness and satisfaction decreasing in a distance setting. No significant difference was found in regards to the variable of extra effort.

The percentage differences in these results can be seen in the table below:

Table 1.5 Effect of Distance on Leadership Outcomes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Leadership Outcome</th>
<th>Distance Colleagues</th>
<th>Localized Colleagues</th>
<th>Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Effectiveness (EFF)</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>88%</td>
<td>-34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extra Effort (EE)</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>No Statistically Sig. Difference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfaction (SAT)</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>-36%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Effects of Communication on Leadership in a Distance Setting**

The effects of the frequency of the use of information and communication technology on the distance sample was also examined in relationship to its affect on perception of leadership by individuals being managed in a distance setting.

The hypothesis of the authors was that there may be a correlation between the amount of contact that a person being managed by distance has with their leader and the leadership ratings assigned to their supervisor.

This hypothesis was tested by performing an analysis to measure association between the two variables using Pearson’s correlation coefficient (r). This parametric technique gives a measure of strength of association between two variables. The variable can be interpreted by use of the following scale:

- $r = 1$ represents a perfect positive linear association
- $r = 0$ represents no linear association
- $r = -1$ represents a perfect negative linear association

Thus the values in between can be divided roughly as follows:

- $r = .90$ to $.99$ (very high positive correlation)
- $r = .70$ to $.89$ (high positive correlation)
- $r = .40$ to $.69$ (medium positive correlation)
- $r = 0$ to $.39$ (low positive correlation)
The same scale with negative values represents the strength of negative correlations as well.

The results of the correlation coefficient (r) for the perception of the nine different leadership characteristics compared to the average amount of contact had with the leader on a weekly basis can be seen in the table below:

Table 1.6: Relationship between Leadership Characteristics compared with Frequency of Contact with Supervisor

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Pearson's (r)</th>
<th>Level of Correlation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>II(A)</td>
<td>.5047</td>
<td>Medium Positive Correlation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II(B)</td>
<td>.7643</td>
<td>High Positive Correlation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IM</td>
<td>.3924</td>
<td>Low Positive Correlation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IS</td>
<td>.4187</td>
<td>Medium Positive Correlation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IC</td>
<td>.4947</td>
<td>Medium Positive Correlation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CR</td>
<td>.4777</td>
<td>Medium Positive Correlation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MBEA</td>
<td>.5740</td>
<td>Medium Positive Correlation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MBEP</td>
<td>-.50</td>
<td>Medium Negative Correlation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LF</td>
<td>-.4379</td>
<td>Medium Negative Correlation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As illustrated in the table above there appears to be a medium correlation between the amount of communication had with the leader (self reported) and the followers increased perception of most leadership characteristics. The correlations between increased communication and increased perception were positive both for transformational and transactional styles of leadership. Passive avoidant characteristics appear to have a medium negative correlation, decreasing perception with increased communication.

**Focus Interviews**

Focus interviews with selected staff were also conducted to explore the relationship between these variables further. Below are some of the relevant factors identified during these discussions.

**Communication with Remote teams:**

There is no one way or tool to communicate with remotely located teams. Leader has to rely on all form of communication to get response from remote teams. Phones are for immediate and direct reply but they are not always useful for detailed discussions. Mail and online chat tools are good for detail discussion but there is not guarantee that person located on remote location will reply immediately. Discussion forums, wikis etc are also good tools for communication but they take more time to get response from the engineer.
There is no single tool to fit into all situations, leader have to smartly use these tools to make best use to situation and get required response from remotely situated engineers.

Motivating Remote Teams:

Another issue was about motivating resources located on remote sites. Due to distributed responsibilities between onsite and offsite management teams, it's always a challenge for leader to keep remotely located engineers motivated. Few managers rely on frequent visit of offshore locations; few managers rely on rotating engineers between onsite and offshore teams. Others rely on sending some kind of weekly newsletter to offshore teams listing all achievements.

Capacity Building

Competence build up for offshore teams was another tricky area mentioned by managers. In this case they rely on making sure that all required documents are available for offshore teams. Most of the offshore teams are located in developing countries where iteration rates are very high. Keeping an experienced engineer in a remote environment is always a challenge.
Analysis

Table 1.4 above lists the characteristics of transformation leadership, and the percentage differences or changes in range between the rankings received by a leader in a localized setting where daily face to face contact is the norm, vs. a distance setting where contact is much more infrequent. Percentile changes range from 57% to 35% with the characteristics of individual consideration and intellectual stimulation being affected the most by the introduction of distance. This is followed by idealized attributes, inspirational motivation and idealized behaviours. Since the same leaders were analyzed in both distance and localized settings, it would be logical to conclude that distance does appear to be a mediating factor when it comes to the ability of a leader to convey and manifest transformational leadership characteristics.

For those respondents already being managed at a distance, there seems to be only a medium level of correlation between the amount of contact that each of the respondents have had with their supervisor through mail or phone and their perceptions of the leader (See table 1.6). This medium correlation is positive for both transformational and transactional leadership characteristics. This means that as the amount of contact with the supervisor increases so does the ranking of perception of these leadership characteristics. When it comes to the Passive Avoidant Characteristics (Management By Exception Passive (MBEP) and Laissez-Faire (LF) the correlation is a medium negative one. As the amount of contact with the supervisor increases the perception that the supervisor employs these characteristics decreases.

Although the tendency for correlation is there the values are not very high, thus the results of the correlation would need to be confirmed through a larger study with more identified participants in order to confirm this initial analysis.
Conclusion and Implications

The results of this study suggest that distance is a definite mediating factor in the relationship between a subordinate and a supervisor. Leaders appear to be much more transformational when measured by their peers who are in close contact with them every day, vs. those based on another continent which causes the loss of opportunities for communications and interaction.

Transactional leadership does not seem to be as affected by distance and may possibly be more dependant on the leaders own approach. This along with an increase in the tendency for the application and perception of laissez-faire leadership styles including management by exception (passive) (MBEP) may account for the decrease in followers perception of their leader as transformational when they are placed in a distance setting.

As the perception of the use of transformational leadership decreases in a distance setting, a natural gap will be created that will most likely be filled by the application of both transactional and passive avoidant leadership styles. By default, a leader who leads in a distance setting will become more transactional and passive avoidant even if they ultimately possess the inherent skills to be a more transformational leader when leading people at close range.

It is also interesting to note that the amount of perceived weekly contact with the leader through telephone and email seems to have a possible effect on the follower’s perception of the leader. More contact seems to lead to the leader being perceived as both more transformational and transformational. At the same time more contact also leads to a decrease in perception of tendencies to use Passive Avoidant approaches. However it is also important to note that in the study, all of the followers/respondents surveyed rely mainly on e-mail contact with an occasional phone call. None of the richer forms of ICT communication solutions were used by the followers surveyed. It is possible that the introduction of more rich forms of communication could affect leadership perceptions in a positive way. More extensive research in the area would be necessary before further conclusions can be drawn.

As companies spread out across the globe, more attention will need to be paid to distance as a moderating factor. The skills of transformational leadership will have to be assessed in more detail to find out how these leadership characteristics can still be both developed and applied so that they transfer over in a distance setting. Only then can the gap of distance be bridged, with technology most likely to play a key role in making this possible.

Future employers will also need to work harder to increase interaction and contact that managers and subordinates have with each other when they are based on different sides of the globe. It has become apparent that these types of interactions and approaches do not seem to happen naturally. Leaders that may have been identified by the human resources department as transformational leaders may still need additional training as to how they can strengthen the use of the different areas of transformational leadership.
Limitations

The authors acknowledge that there are a number of limitations in the study conducted.

Perhaps the most evident limitation is sample size. It is difficult to identify leaders that have both distance management positions and interaction with localized colleagues as well. Since the majority of managers only manage a limited number of people it is difficult to identify larger sample studies to compare.

The current study was conducted as a case study with a limited numbers of subjects and respondents. It is not certain that all leaders would follow the same tendencies as the leaders studied in this case study. However such strong distinctions can lead to the assumption that distance is a mediating factor in businesses, with transactional leadership characteristics being the ones most negatively affected by the introduction of distance as a mediating factor. Further research with larger sample sizes would be necessary to confirm that the conclusions of this research are correct when applied to larger sample sizes as well.
Further Research

There are many interesting aspects that could lend themselves to further research, time and methodology permitting.

Factors that were not considered during this study, including cultural, ethnical, and gender differences, could also influence the ability of a leader to be able to perform well in a distance setting. These factors could also influence difference in group dynamics and effectiveness, and have the potential to be studied individually as well.

It would also be interesting to examine if the introduction and use of more media rich forms of information and communications technology (ICT) would lessen the communications gap and allow leaders to exhibit stronger characteristics of transformational leadership qualities in a distance setting. None of the participants questioned actually used a more media rich means of interacting with their distance leaders. The possible introduction of video cameras and video conferencing might help to recreate more face to face like situations that would help to bride the gap created by distance.

It would also be interesting to study or conduct a survey to see what measures different companies have taken to introduce technology into the every-day working environment of those being managed from a distance.

Through focus interviews, the authors also have a hypothesis that as the connection between a leader and a follower becomes weaker (either due to distance or other mediating factors) something else will most likely surface to take its place. For example, in the current working environment, it could be that when those being managed at a distance have little or no contact with their direct supervisor. Instead they will then look to other members in the team around them for the additional support that they otherwise would expect from a more traditional leader. Instead of tight hierarchal relationships forming, more decentralized and informal networks can emerge within the company structure. When this occurs companies will have to start focusing on leadership qualities not only in formal managers but also for other members on the team who may be expected to assume a managerial type role but in a different, more informal setting. More exploration into this phenomenon could also produce interesting results for future study.
References


Bridging the Gap: Leadership Theories Applied in Distance Settings


