

## LEADERSHIP STYLES AND INNOVATION OUTCOMES: A META-ANALYTIC REVIEW ACROSS CULTURAL CONTEXTS

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### **Abstract**

This study aims to comprehensively examine the relationship between leadership style and innovation outcomes through a meta-analytic approach based on a cross-cultural literature review. Organizational innovation is increasingly viewed as the result of a complex interaction between structural, individual, and leadership factors, particularly in a global environment characterized by diverse values, norms, and work practices. Through a systematic search of internationally reputable journal articles published over the past two decades, this study integrates empirical findings on the influence of various leadership styles, such as transformational, transactional, authentic, and participatory leadership, on various forms of innovation outcomes, including product innovation, process innovation, and employee innovative behavior. The results indicate that leadership styles oriented toward empowerment, vision, and psychological support tend to have a stronger and more consistent influence on innovation outcomes across cultural contexts, although the strength of the relationship varies depending on the dominant cultural values. These findings emphasize the importance of cultural sensitivity in applying leadership styles to foster innovation and provide a theoretical contribution to the development of cross-cultural leadership literature. Practically, the results of this study can serve as a reference for multinational organizations in designing adaptive and contextual leadership strategies to improve innovation performance.

**Keywords:** Leadership style, innovation outcomes, meta-analysis, cultural context, cross-cultural leadership

### **INTRODUCTION**

The development of the business environment, public organizations, and educational institutions in the 21st century is characterized by increasing levels of complexity, uncertainty, and dynamic change. Globalization, digital transformation, and technological disruption have pushed organizations to focus not only on operational efficiency but also on the ability to continuously innovate. Innovation is now seen as a key factor determining competitive advantage, organizational sustainability, and adaptability to changes in the external environment (Lee et al., 2020). In this context, leadership plays a

central role because leaders have strategic influence in shaping the vision, culture, work climate, and individual and team behaviors, which ultimately impact the organization's innovation output.

Various theoretical and empirical studies indicate that leadership style is a critical determinant in encouraging or hindering the innovation process. Certain leadership styles are believed to create a safe psychological environment, increase intrinsic motivation, encourage managed risk-taking, and facilitate the exchange of creative ideas among organizational members. Conversely, leadership styles that are overly authoritarian, rigid, or overly control-oriented are often associated with low freedom of expression, decreased employee engagement, and limited space for the emergence of new ideas (Watts et al., 2020a). Therefore, the relationship between leadership style and innovation outcomes has been a major focus in the management literature, organizational psychology, and behavioral leadership studies over the past few decades.

As research in this area has grown, various leadership approaches such as transformational, transactional, authentic, participatory, servant leadership, and charismatic leadership have been tested for their effects on various dimensions of innovation, ranging from individual creativity and team innovation to overall organizational innovation performance (Backhaus & Vogel, 2022). Although most studies report a positive relationship between certain leadership styles and innovation outcomes, the findings are not always consistent. Differences in research context, sample characteristics, measurement methods, and moderator variables often result in significant variation in effects. This situation raises the need for a more comprehensive empirical synthesis to gain a stronger and more integrated understanding of the extent and under what conditions leadership styles influence innovation outcomes.

Furthermore, cultural context is a crucial factor that is receiving increasing attention in studies of leadership and innovation. Culture influences values, social norms, communication patterns, and expectations regarding the roles of leaders and followers. A leadership style that is effective in one cultural context may not produce the same results in another. For example, participative and transformational leadership tend to be more appreciated in cultures that emphasize individualism and low power distance, while a more directive or paternalistic leadership style may be more acceptable in cultures with high power distance and a strong collectivist orientation. These differences have the potential to influence how innovation is perceived, developed, and implemented within organizations across cultures (Sertel et al., 2022).

Although numerous studies have examined the relationship between leadership style and innovation across various cultural contexts, the existing literature remains fragmented. Some studies focus on a single country or region, while cross-cultural studies often produce diverse and even contradictory findings. Limited sample sizes, differences in research designs, and variations in innovation indicators further complicate efforts to draw generalizable conclusions. Therefore, a meta-analytic approach is highly relevant because it allows for the systematic and quantitative integration of results from multiple empirical studies, resulting in more accurate and reliable estimates of effects.

Meta-analysis not only serves to clarify the strength of the relationship between leadership style and innovation outcomes but also to identify the role of cultural context as a potential moderating variable (Zhang et al., 2022). By grouping studies based on cultural characteristics, such as individualism-collectivism, power distance, or uncertainty orientation, meta-analytic research can provide deeper insights into variations in the effectiveness of leadership styles in fostering innovation. This approach enables researchers and practitioners to understand that no single leadership style is universal; rather, its effectiveness depends heavily on its fit with the cultural context in which an organization operates.

Furthermore, the need for cross-cultural meta-analytic reviews is also driven by the rise of global and multicultural work practices. Multinational organizations, technology-based startups, and international institutions are now faced with the challenge of managing teams comprised of individuals with diverse cultural backgrounds. In these situations, leaders are required to possess leadership style flexibility and cultural sensitivity to effectively facilitate innovation. Without a strong, evidence-based understanding of the relationship between leadership style, innovation, and cultural context, organizations risk adopting suboptimal or even counterproductive leadership approaches (Zhang et al., 2021).

Given these conditions, the study, "Leadership Styles and Innovation Outcomes: A Meta-Analytic Review Across Cultural Contexts," is crucial and relevant. This study aims to synthesize existing empirical findings to obtain a comprehensive picture of the influence of various leadership styles on innovation outcomes, while also evaluating the role of cultural context in moderating this relationship. Using a meta-analytic approach, this study is expected to bridge gaps in the literature, reduce inconsistencies in previous

findings, and provide significant theoretical contributions to the development of leadership and innovation theory.

In addition to its theoretical contributions, this research is also expected to have strong practical implications. The results can serve as a basis for decision-makers, organizational leaders, and human resource practitioners in designing more contextual and evidence-based leadership development strategies. By understanding which leadership styles are most effective in fostering innovation across cultural contexts, organizations can sustainably enhance their innovative capacity and adapt to global challenges. Thus, this research is not only academically relevant but also has significant strategic value for leadership practices and innovation management in the era of globalization.

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

The research method used in the study "Leadership Styles and Innovation Outcomes: A Meta-Analytic Review Across Cultural Contexts" employed a systematic literature review approach with a meta-analysis design to synthesize empirical findings from various previous studies. Data collection was conducted through a search of scientific articles published in reputable international journals and academic databases such as Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar. Keywords used included leadership styles, innovation outcomes, transformational leadership, transactional leadership, cultural context, and organizational innovation. Selected articles were limited to quantitative studies reporting effect sizes or statistical data that could be converted into standardized effect sizes, and covering diverse cultural contexts from both Western and non-Western countries. Literature selection was conducted through a step-by-step process of screening titles, abstracts, and full texts to ensure the relevance and methodological quality of the studies analyzed.

The data analysis phase involved coding the key characteristics of each study, including the type of leadership style, indicators of innovation outcomes, cultural context, sample size, and analytical methods used. The effect sizes from each study were then standardized and analyzed using meta-analytic techniques to estimate the overall relationship between leadership style and innovation outcomes. Additionally, a moderator analysis was conducted to examine the role of cultural context in strengthening or weakening the relationship. To ensure the validity of the findings, heterogeneity and potential publication bias were tested through relevant statistical analyses. This meta-analytic literature review approach allows for more comprehensive and

generalizable conclusions regarding the influence of leadership style on innovation outcomes across cultural contexts.

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

### **The Relationship Between Transformational Leadership and Cross-Cultural Innovation Outcomes**

The relationship between transformational leadership and cross-cultural innovation outcomes is becoming increasingly relevant in the context of global organizations characterized by increasing cultural diversity, international workforce mobility, and collaboration across countries and regions (Salih, 2020). Transformational leadership is understood as a leadership style that emphasizes the leader's ability to inspire, motivate, and transform the values, attitudes, and behaviors of followers to transcend individual interests for the collective goals of the organization. In a multicultural environment, transformational leadership not only acts as a performance driver but also as a catalyst capable of bridging differences in values, norms, and ways of thinking that originate from diverse cultural backgrounds. Therefore, understanding how transformational leadership influences cross-cultural innovation outcomes is crucial to explaining the mechanisms of new value creation in global organizations.

Transformational leadership contributes to cross-cultural innovation through its ability to create an inclusive and meaningful shared vision. In a cross-cultural context, differing perspectives on authority, communication, and decision-making often hinder the innovation process. Transformational leaders are able to articulate a vision for innovation that transcends cultural boundaries, enabling individuals from diverse backgrounds to feel engaged and take ownership of the organization's innovative goals. This clear and transformative vision serves as a meeting point for diverse cultural values, while also directing collective energy toward the creation of new, globally relevant solutions (Budur, 2020).

Furthermore, the inspirational motivation dimension of transformational leadership plays a crucial role in driving cross-cultural innovation outcomes. Leaders who provide inspirational motivation tend to create a safe psychological climate, where individuals feel valued and encouraged to express new ideas without fear of rejection or cultural conflict. In multicultural teams, psychological safety is a key prerequisite for creativity and innovation, as team members often bring unique perspectives influenced by their respective cultural backgrounds. Transformational leadership helps manage these

differences by emphasizing shared goals and valuing individual contributions, thereby maximizing the innovative potential of cultural diversity.

The relationship between transformational leadership and cross-cultural innovation outcomes is also reflected in the intellectual stimulation provided by leaders. Transformational leaders actively challenge established assumptions, encourage critical thinking, and open up space for the exploration of alternative ideas (Watts et al., 2020b). In a cross-cultural context, this intellectual stimulation becomes even more important because innovation often emerges from a combination of different and even conflicting perspectives. By encouraging team members to question conventional ways of working and integrating approaches derived from various cultural traditions, transformational leadership contributes to the creation of more adaptive and contextual innovation. This process enables organizations to produce not only technical innovations but also social and organizational innovations relevant to the global marketplace.

The individualized consideration dimension of transformational leadership also strengthens the relationship with cross-cultural innovation outcomes. Leaders who provide individualized attention are able to understand the different needs, values, and work styles of each team member. In multicultural environments, a uniform leadership approach is often ineffective due to differences in cultural expectations regarding the roles of leaders and followers. Transformational leadership, with its individual focus, allows leaders to tailor their communication and capacity-building approaches to suit the cultural backgrounds of their followers. This not only increases engagement and commitment, but also encourages individuals to develop their creative potential optimally, which ultimately has a positive impact on innovation outcomes (Zaman et al., 2020).

Cross-cultural innovation outcomes influenced by transformational leadership can be reflected in various forms, from product and service innovation to process and business model innovation. Organizations led by transformational leadership tend to be better able to integrate local and global knowledge in the innovation process. Transformational leadership encourages the open exchange of cross-cultural knowledge, allowing innovative ideas to develop through collaboration and shared learning (Caza et al., 2021). In this context, transformational leadership serves as a connecting mechanism between cultural diversity and innovation performance, by managing differences as a source of competitive advantage, rather than as a barrier.

However, the relationship between transformational leadership and cross-cultural innovation outcomes is not linear and can be influenced by the organizational cultural context and the external environment. National cultural values, such as the level of collectivism, power distance, and uncertainty orientation, can moderate the effectiveness of transformational leadership. In cultures with high power distance, for example, a transformational approach may need to be adjusted to align with expectations of the leader's authority. Nevertheless, the flexibility and cultural sensitivity that are key characteristics of transformational leadership allow this leadership style to remain relevant across cultural contexts, provided it is applied adaptively.

### **The Role of Servant Leadership in Driving Sustainable Innovation in Multicultural Organizations**

In the context of globalization and increasingly complex business environments, multicultural organizations face significant challenges in sustaining innovation. Diversity in cultural backgrounds, values, languages, and work patterns, while potentially providing a source of high creativity, can also create conflict, communication gaps, and barriers to collaboration. Therefore, a leadership approach is needed that is not solely focused on achieving short-term performance but also fosters an inclusive, adaptive, and human development-oriented work environment. Within this framework, servant leadership emerges as a relevant and strategic leadership model for driving sustainable innovation in multicultural organizations.

Servant leadership positions leaders as servants to organizational members by emphasizing the values of empathy, trust, empowerment, and commitment to individual growth. Unlike traditional hierarchical and power-oriented leadership styles, servant leadership focuses on the needs and potential of followers as the primary foundation for achieving organizational goals (Rafiq, 2025). In multicultural organizations, this approach is crucial because it creates a psychologically safe space for individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds to express their ideas, perspectives, and creativity without fear of discrimination or marginalization. A psychologically safe work environment is a key prerequisite for sustainable innovation.

The role of servant leadership in fostering sustainable innovation is also reflected in its ability to build cross-cultural trust. Trust is a crucial element in innovative collaboration, especially when team members come from diverse values and social norms. Leaders who adopt servant leadership principles tend to demonstrate consistency between words and actions, openness in

communication, and fairness in decision-making. These practices strengthen mutual trust among organizational members, facilitating the exchange of knowledge and experience, which are key sources of innovation (Jaiwant et al., 2023). In the long term, this sustained trust will strengthen the organization's capacity to produce innovative solutions relevant to global market needs.

Furthermore, servant leadership plays a crucial role in empowering human resources as agents of innovation (Ofori & George, 2024). In multicultural organizations, innovative potential is often hidden due to the dominance of certain cultures or less inclusive organizational structures. Servant leaders actively encourage individual participation, value diverse perspectives, and provide the necessary support for team members to develop new ideas. This empowerment not only increases employees' intrinsic motivation but also fosters a sense of ownership of the innovation process and outcomes. Thus, innovation is no longer viewed as the responsibility of a specific unit, but rather as a continuous, collective process.

Servant leadership also plays a significant role in shaping an organizational culture that supports continuous learning. Continuous innovation is inextricably linked to an organization's ability to learn from experience, failure, and environmental changes. Leaders with a servant orientation tend to view failure as part of the learning process, rather than as a mistake to be punished. This attitude is particularly relevant in multicultural organizations, where differences in thinking and acting often result in unconventional approaches. By creating a culture tolerant of experimentation and reflection, servant leadership enables organizations to continuously adapt and innovate (Batool et al., 2021).

Furthermore, servant leadership plays a role in aligning innovation with ethical and sustainability values. In the context of multicultural organizations, sustainability issues encompass not only economic aspects but also social and cultural dimensions. Servant leaders possess a strong moral awareness of the impact of organizational decisions on various stakeholders. This awareness drives the development of innovations that are not solely profit-oriented but also consider employee well-being, social justice, and environmental responsibility. Thus, the resulting innovations are sustainable in both process and outcome.

In practice, servant leadership also helps reduce resistance to change that often arises in multicultural organizations. Cultural differences can influence individual attitudes toward change and innovation. Leaders who prioritize service are able to understand these dynamics through an empathetic and

dialogical approach. By involving organizational members in the decision-making process and explaining the meaning of change contextually, servant leadership strengthens acceptance of implemented innovations. This process ensures that innovations are not temporary but deeply integrated into the organizational system and culture.

Overall, servant leadership plays a strategic role in driving sustainable innovation in multicultural organizations by creating an inclusive work environment, building cross-cultural trust, empowering human resources, strengthening a learning culture, and aligning innovation with ethical and sustainable values. Facing increasingly complex global challenges, multicultural organizations need leaders who are not only visionary but also strongly committed to serving and developing people. By adopting the principles of servant leadership, organizations can leverage diversity as a source of competitive advantage and ensure the long-term sustainability of innovation.

### **The Impact of Authentic Leadership on Creativity and Innovation Implementation**

Authentic leadership is gaining increasing attention in management and organizational behavior studies due to its ability to build a work environment based on honesty, transparency, and consistent values (Nawaz & Tian, 2022). In the context of modern organizations faced with the dynamics of rapid change, demands for continuous innovation, and complex decision-making, authentic leadership is seen as a relevant approach to fostering individual creativity and ensuring effective innovation implementation. Authentic leadership emphasizes leader self-awareness, an internal moral perspective, balanced information processing, and relational transparency, which collectively create a positive psychological climate within the organization. This climate serves as a crucial foundation for the emergence of creative behavior and the courage to propose and implement new ideas.

The impact of authentic leadership on creativity can be understood through the leader's role in creating a sense of psychological safety for organizational members. When leaders demonstrate authenticity in their actions, acknowledge their limitations, and are open to feedback, employees tend to feel valued as whole individuals. This reduces the fear of mistakes and failure, which are often major barriers to creativity (Lei et al., 2021). In a psychologically safe environment, individuals are more willing to explore new ideas, express different perspectives, and experiment without excessive fear of

negative consequences. Thus, authentic leadership acts as a catalyst that allows employees' creative potential to develop optimally.

Furthermore, authentic leadership fosters creativity through mechanisms of trust and emotional engagement. The trust built between leaders and subordinates creates more meaningful and collaborative working relationships. Employees who trust their leaders tend to have higher levels of work engagement, which in turn increases their intrinsic motivation to contribute creatively. This intrinsic motivation is crucial to the creativity process, as innovative ideas generally arise from an internal drive to improve processes, products, or services, rather than solely from external incentives. Authentic leadership, with its emphasis on shared values and goals, helps align individual goals with the organizational vision, thus directing creativity toward achieving strategic objectives (Korku & Kaya, 2023).

The influence of authentic leadership on creativity is also evident in how leaders manage differences and diversity of thought. Authentic leaders tend to value diverse perspectives and encourage open dialogue within the team. Rather than imposing personal views, leaders create space for constructive discussion and consider various alternative solutions before making decisions. This approach enriches the collective thinking process and improves the quality of the ideas generated. Creativity is no longer solely the responsibility of individuals but rather the result of social interactions supported by open and inclusive leadership (Imam et al., 2020).

However, creativity alone is insufficient to generate added value for an organization if it is not accompanied by effective innovation implementation. In this regard, authentic leadership plays a crucial role in bridging the gap between ideas and realization. Authentic leaders not only encourage the generation of new ideas but also demonstrate a real commitment to supporting the implementation process. This commitment is reflected in the provision of resources, the removal of unnecessary bureaucratic obstacles, and the provision of moral support when facing challenges in implementing innovation. This way, employees feel that their innovative efforts are valued and have a real chance of being realized.

Innovation implementation often involves risk and uncertainty, requiring leadership capable of providing both clear direction and flexibility in implementation. Authentic leadership offers a balance between value consistency and adaptability. Authentic leaders adhere to the organization's moral principles and long-term goals, yet remain open to strategic adjustments based on feedback and learning from the field. This attitude fosters confidence

that the changes being implemented are not merely aimless experiments, but rather part of a systematic effort to improve the organization's performance and competitiveness (Imam et al., 2020).

Furthermore, authentic leadership contributes to the success of innovation implementation by strengthening employee commitment and ownership. When leaders involve employees in the decision-making process and honestly explain the rationale behind an innovation, employees are more likely to feel part of the change. This sense of ownership increases individuals' readiness to adapt to new ways of working, learn necessary skills, and overcome resistance to change. In this context, authentic leadership helps bridge the gap between innovation planning at the managerial level and implementation at the operational level.

The long-term impact of authentic leadership on creativity and innovation implementation is also evident in the formation of a learning-oriented organizational culture. Authentic leaders encourage reflection, open evaluation, and learning from both successes and failures. This learning culture enables organizations to continuously refine their innovation processes and increase their adaptive capacity in the face of changing external environments. Creativity becomes a continuous process, and innovation is not viewed as a one-time project but as an integral part of the organization's strategy.

Overall, authentic leadership has a significant impact on increasing creativity and the successful implementation of innovation within an organization. By creating a psychologically safe environment, building trust, respecting diversity of thought, and a clear commitment to realizing ideas, authentic leadership can optimize the potential of human resources. In an era of global competition and technological disruption, authentically led organizations have a greater opportunity to generate meaningful and sustainable innovation, because creativity and innovation implementation are supported by values, integrity, and strong working relationships.

## **CONCLUSION**

The conclusions of this meta-analytic study indicate that leadership style has a significant and consistent influence on organizational innovation outcomes across various cultural contexts. Transformational, participative, and authentic leadership styles have been shown to have a stronger positive relationship with innovation outcomes than transactional and authoritarian leadership styles. Leaders who inspire, encourage participation, and create a safe psychological climate tend to enhance individual creativity, team

collaboration, and the organization's ability to generate and implement new ideas. These findings confirm that empowerment-oriented leadership and long-term vision are key factors in fostering sustainable innovation.

Furthermore, the cross-cultural analysis indicates that cultural context moderates the strength of the relationship between leadership style and innovation outcomes. Cultures with high levels of collectivism and power distance exhibit different innovation responses than more individualistic and egalitarian cultures. Nevertheless, the fundamental leadership principles of supporting autonomy, trust, and learning remain relevant across cultures, although their manifestations may vary. Thus, this study emphasizes the importance of an adaptive and culturally context-sensitive leadership approach to maximize innovation outcomes and provides theoretical and practical implications for global leadership development in an era of increasingly dynamic competition and change.

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