

## Compare Participative Leadership Theories in Three Cultures

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**Abstract:** Much has been written about leadership in the United States and in other nations. Participative leadership is one of the most well-discussed and closely-examined concepts in contemporary American scholarly literature. To understand leadership communication in the global context, this paper reviews and compares participative leadership theories in three cultures, the United States, Japan, and Taiwan. Empirical studies related to these theories are also summarized and discussed. The results of this comparative study demonstrate that participative leadership communication is a culturally-bounded phenomenon. American participative leadership theories emphasize situational variables. Japanese participative leadership theories focus on the leaders' communication function organizations. However, traditional Taiwanese leadership theories stress the authoritarian leadership style. After reviewing participative leadership theories in three cultures, a new theoretical model is proposed. The theoretical implications for the comparative analysis are also discussed. [China Media Research. 2006;2(3):19-30].

**Keywords:** Participative leadership; leadership in US; leadership in Japan; leadership in Taiwan

### Introduction

Leadership is one of the most well researched topics in the United States and in other nations. According to Bass (1990), "there are as many definitions of leadership as there are persons who have attempted to define the concept" (p. 11). Since many previous scholars have devoted their research to studying leadership, many leadership theories have been generated. However, most of these theories were formed in the Western Countries. According to Hofstede (2001),

with empirical support, the generally accepted U.S. theories such as those of Maslow, Herzberg, McClelland, Vroom, McGregor, Likert, Blake and Mouton, might not apply, or only very partially apply, outside the borders of their country of origin—assuming they did apply within those border. (p. 374)

Hofstede (2001) further proposed that "ideas and theories about management and organization are often exported to other countries without regard for the values context in which these ideas were developed" (p. 374). He argued that "there is no single formula for developing successful managers that can be used in different cultures" (Hofstede, 2001, p. 390). Dorfman, Howell, Hibino, Lee, Tate and Bautista (1997) also argued:

while the phenomenon of leadership is widely considered to be universal across cultures, the way in which it is operationalized is usually viewed as culturally specific. Conflicting viewpoints exist in the leadership literature concerning the transferability of specific leadership behaviors and processes across cultures. (p. 233)

House, Hanges, Javidan, Dorfman, and Gupta (2004) also made a similar point: "Leadership is culturally contingent. That is, views of the importance and value of leadership vary across cultures" (p. 5).

Hofstede's (2001), Dorfman et al.'s (1997) and House et al.'s (2004) statements have raised an important research issue: a better understanding for international leadership theories is needed. In order to better understand leadership theories established in different cultures, the primary purpose of this article is to compare participative leadership theories that have been developed in different cultures since "making decisions is one of the most important functions performed by leaders" (Yukl, 2002, p. 80).

This paper includes: (a) a review of one of the dominant views of leadership in contemporary American scholarly literature, (b) a discussion of the major participative leadership communication theorists/researchers in three different cultures, (c) an evaluation of the strengths and weakness of these participative leadership communication theories, and (d) conclusions drawn from reviewing and comparing these participative leadership communication theories.

### Dominant Views of Leadership in the United States

After reviewing a great deal of contemporary scholarly literature, it is apparent that there are several dominant views in the field of leadership study. These dominant views which are well-studied by American scholars include participatory leadership theories (e.g. Deetz, 1992; Hackman, & Johnson, 1996; Tannenbaum & Schmidt, 1958; Vroom & Yetton, 1973; Vroom & Jago, 1988), transformational leadership theory (Burns, 1978; Bass, 1990), and contingency theories of leadership (Dorfman et al., 1997; House, 1996). The

dominant leadership view chosen from contemporary American scholarly literature for examination is the concept of participative leadership which has received extensive attention in the scholarly literature in many fields including communication, management, organizational leadership, and organizational psychology. For example, Yukl (2002) discussed the benefits of participative leadership from an organizational leadership perspective. According to Yukl (2002),

participative leadership offers a variety of potential benefits, but whether the benefits occur depends on who the participants are, how much influence they have, and other aspects of the decision situation. Four potential benefits include higher decision-making quality, higher decision acceptance by participants, more satisfaction with the decision process, and more development of decision-making skills. (p. 83)

Miller (2006) also discussed the effect of participative leadership from an organizational communication perspective. According to Miller (2006), “the most widely studied attitudinal effect of participation is job satisfaction” (p. 180). Although the relationship between participative leadership and job satisfaction has been frequently studied by previous scholars, the results of previous empirical studies were inconsistent. According to Yukl (2002), “after more than 40 years of research on participation, we are left with the conclusion that participative leadership sometimes results in higher satisfaction, efforts, and performance, and at other times it does not” (p. 86). Why the results of participative leadership studies are inconsistent? There might be situational variables which affect the effectiveness of participative leadership. The author argues that participatory leadership needs to be examined from a cultural perspective because this style of leadership is viewed as culturally bounded and incorporates the concept of two-way communication.

The next section includes a brief review of the definition of leadership defined by American scholars and a comparison of the American views of participative leadership with the Japanese and Taiwanese views of participative leadership in order to explore the applicability of this leadership theory in the cross-cultural context.

### **Participative Leadership in Three Cultures**

After reviewing prior leadership literature, Dorfman and House (2004) have noticed that the field of leadership study is “western-dominated” (p. 56). According to Yukl (2002), most of the leadership research in the past five decades was conducted in the

Western countries, including the United States, Canada, and Western Europe. House (1995) also noted the “need for a better understanding of the way in which leadership is enacted in various cultures and a need for an empirical grounded theory to explain differential leader behavior and effectiveness across cultures” (pp. 443-444). In order to bring in international perspectives on leadership communication, Japan and Taiwan have been chosen in this article as comparison cultures due to their relevance for a broader understanding of communication phenomena in cultures which are highly divergent from the United States. According to Hofstede (2001), the United States is a highly individualistic culture. However, both Japan and Taiwan are collectivistic cultures. Japanese management and leadership styles have received extensive attention in both the scholarly and popular management literature in the United States. For example, Ochi (1981) proposed Theory Z based on the principles of organizational management in Japanese organizations. He proposed that some Japanese organizational management principles could be adopted by American organizations. Thus, Japan provides a comparison culture that is familiar to scholars studying communication within organizations. Taiwan provides a cultural setting that is less familiar to U.S. scholars and that has undergone a recent change from a more authoritarian structured society to one that is more democratic. Both of these cultures, thus, provide opportunities to compare participative leadership theories in different cultural settings.

### ***Leadership in the United States***

#### *Definitions of leadership and major researchers.*

In the United States, scholars tend to define leadership by identifying leaders’ functions in organizations and categorizing leadership into different leadership styles. For example, Yukl (2002) defines leadership as:

leadership is the process of influencing others to understand and agree about what needs to be done and how it can be done effectively, and the process of facilitating individual and collective efforts to accomplish the shared goals...Leadership is treated as both a specialized role and a social influence process. (p. 5)

Yukl’s (2002) definition of managerial leadership clearly defines leaders’ roles and responsibilities, and reveals the importance of leadership effectiveness in organizations. Yukl (2002) further argued that decision making is one of the most important functions that leaders perform. Hence, the methods that leaders choose for making decisions have become an issue to be discussed. Participatory leadership is a way for making effective decisions. According to Yukl (2002),

many of the activities of managers and administrators involve making and implementing decisions, including planning the work, solving technical problems, selecting subordinates, determining pay increases, making job assignments, and so forth. Participative leadership involves efforts by a leader to encourage and facilitate participation by others in making important decisions. (p. 80)

Most American scholars highly recognize the value of participative leadership. According to Stewart, Gudykunst, Ting-Toomey and Nishida (1986), participative decision making has been well-researched in North American organizations. Because workplace participation is a well-discussed concept in the United States, Seibold and Shea (2001) discussed five types of participation program in the workplace, including quality circle (QC), quality of work life program (QWL), employee stock ownership plans (ESOPs), scalon gainsharing plans, and self-directed work teams (SDWT's) in a chapter of *the new handbook of organizational communication: advances in theory, research, and methods*. These five types of participative decision making programs can provide organizational leaders frameworks to encourage employee participation in the workplace. Miller (2006) also noted that "in the past decade, communication scholars (e.g., Cheney, 1995; Deetz, 1992; Harrison, 1994) have become increasingly interested in a participative ideal in organizations-workplace democracy" (p. 182). Deetz (1992) argued that "in the modern period, participation has been recovered as an

issue in the everyday social construction of meaning and society" (p. 159). Deetz (1995) further proposed that workplace democracy involves multiple stakeholders, such as employees, investors, consumers, and community residents. In order to promote workplace democracy, shared decision-making among the multiple stakeholders is important in contemporary workplace. It is obvious that participative leadership style is one of the most preferable leadership styles in American organizations. Several American theorists (e.g., Seibold & Shea, 2001; Tannenbaum & Schmidt, 1958; Vroom & Yetton, 1973; Vroom & Jago, 1988) have developed participative decision-making models. Tannenbaum and Schmidt (1958) were the pioneers who created a continuum that described different decision-making styles. These different styles, ranging from boss-centered leadership to subordinate-centered leadership, provide alternatives that organizational leaders can choose from when making decisions. They also present three factors/forces that managers should consider in deciding which leadership styles to use, including forces in the manager, forces in the subordinates, and forces in the situation. The forces in the manager include the manager's value system, confidence in subordinates, and feelings of security. The forces in subordinates are the subordinates' needs for independence, tolerance level for ambiguity, and expectation for sharing in decision making. The forces in the situation include organizational style, group effectiveness, the problem, and the pressure of time.

Figure 1 presents Tannenbaum and Schmidt's (1958) leadership decision-making continuum.

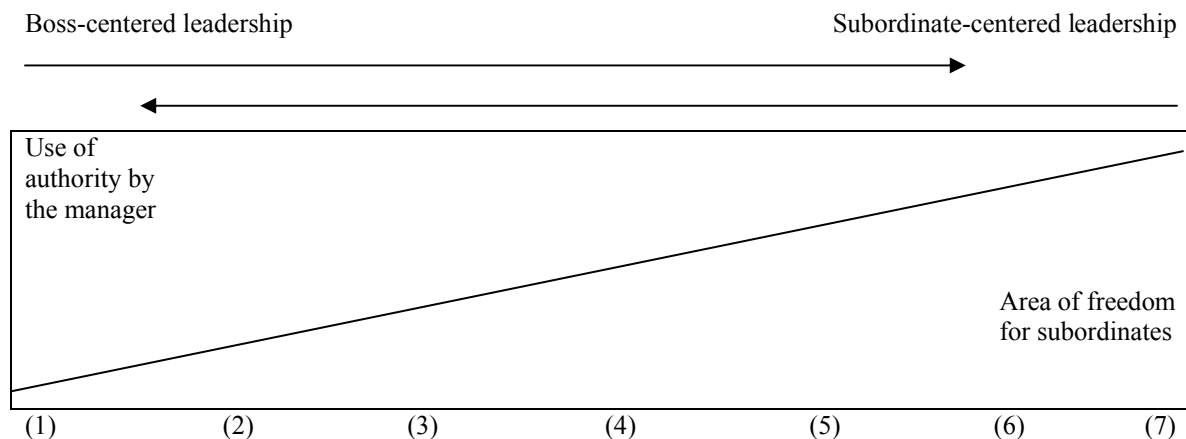


Figure 1. Tannenbaum and Schmidt's (1958) Continuum of Leadership Behavior. Adapted from Tannenbaum, R., & Schmidt, W. H. (1958). How to choose a leadership pattern. *Harvard Business Review*, 36(2), 95-101.

Note:

(1) Manager makes decision and announces it.

- (2) Manager "sells" decision.
- (3) Manager presents ideas and invites questions.
- (4) Manager presents tentative decision subject to change.
- (5) Manager presents problem, gets suggestions, and makes decisions.
- (6) Managers define limits, asks group to make decisions,
- (7) Manager permits subordinates to function within limits defined by superior.

In summary, Tannenbaum and Schmidt's (1958) theory provided a classification for leadership styles and suggest that the effective leader is the one who adopts a style which is consistent with the demands of the subordinates and the situation. This continuum theory is frequently cited by contemporary leadership book authors (e.g., Bass, 1990; Yukl, 2002; House et al., 2004) and frequently used by researchers throughout the world (e.g., Hofstede, 1984; 2001).

*Empirical studies.* Based on Tannenbaum and Schmidt's (1958) continuum, Hofstede (1984, 2001), a Netherlands researcher, distinguished four types of decision-making styles: (1) autocratic (tells), (2) persuasive/paternalistic (sells), (3) consultative (consults), and (4) democratic (participative). The first two styles are autocratic decision-making styles. The last two styles involve more of the subordinates' participation in the decision-making process. But, only the fourth style is considered to be the real participative leadership style. The participative style is rarely used by managers, but is desirable for organizational development purposes. Hofstede (2001) used these four styles to measure organizational employees' preferred leadership styles and organizational managers' actual leadership behaviors in 40 different countries. The statistical results of his study indicate that the autocratic leadership styles (autocratic and persuasive styles) are correlated with a culture's power distance index. The results of Hofstede's (2001) study demonstrated that subordinates' expected leadership decision-making styles are associated with their cultural values. This finding confirms Tannenbaum and Schmidt's (1958) statement that forces in the subordinates affect leaders' decision-making styles. It also demonstrates that forces in the subordinates is an important situational variable which determines what's the effective leadership style.

### **Leadership in Japan**

*Definitions of leadership and major researchers.* The Japanese concept of participative leadership is also noteworthy. Due to the high level of economic productivity of Japanese organizations, many American scholars began to be interested in the Japanese style of participative leadership communication (e.g., Keys & Miller, 1982; Pascale & Athos, 1981; Stewart et al., 1986). According to Keys and Miller (1982), Japanese

leadership is effective because the Japanese style of participative decision making has resulted in "higher levels of motivation, delegation of decision making, commitment, and intrinsic job satisfaction" (p. 6). Ochi (1981) also argued that Japan is a collectivistic culture. Thus, Japanese organizations would emphasize collective decision making and collective responsibility.

Hirokawa (1981) used a communicative perspective to define the Japanese style of participative leadership communication. Japanese organizational leaders should act as effective communicators in organizations. Japanese organizations become effective systems because managers encourage and facilitate the flow of information among organizational members. Japanese leaders make efforts to maintain harmony within the organization and to adopt a "bottom-up process of decision-making" to be available to their employees.

Similar to Hirokawa, Misumi (1990; 1995) discussed the participative decision-making process in Japanese organizations when proposing PM leadership theory. According to Misumi (1990),

the PM leadership is a theory of leadership behavior based on two groups of functions. The first function is oriented towards goal achievement or problem solving, and the second function is oriented towards the continuation or maintenance of the group itself. A leadership that fulfils the former is referred to as a P-type (P standing for Performance) leadership (or behavior), and leadership that fulfils the second function is called M-type (M standing for Maintenance) leadership. (p. 832)

Misumi (1990; 1995) believed that effective leaders should perform high performance (P) function and high maintenance (M) function. According to Misumi (1995), there are four combinations which categorize leadership styles, including (1) high performance and high maintenance (PM), (2) high performance and low maintenance (Pm), (3) low performance and high maintenance (mP), and (4) low performance and low maintenance (pm). Misumi (1990; 1995) argued that the high performance and high maintenance (PM) style is the ideal leadership style. Since facilitating participative decision-making process is an important task which Japanese organizational leaders should perform, Misumi (1990) discussed the traditional participative decision-making process in Japanese organizations. According to Misumi (1990),

In the Japanese *ringi* procedure, a proposal is initiated by a leader in a lower echelon, and sent up to the top for approval through the chain of command, eventually to be brought back to the lower echelon on a top-down basis after having been approved. The proposal thus approved is ready for execution by the initiator.

In this procedure, the person who handles the process of initiating a proposal is performing the function of the staff and he turns into a leader of the line organization at the point at which the proposal is executed. In other words, the same person performs the function of both staff and line people. (p. 929)

*Empirical studies.* Hirokawa (1981) does not quantitatively operationalize his theory. However, his communicative view on Japanese participative decision making has been well received. For example, Stewart et al. (1986) used Hofstede's (1984; 2001) four decision-making styles to evaluate Hirokawa's (1981) statement about Japanese leadership. The relationships among preferred decision-making style, perceived decision-making style, openness of communication, and communication satisfaction are examined in this study. The results of this study demonstrated that "Japanese workers clearly prefer persuasive and consultative decision-making styles over the participative style" (Stewart et al., 1986, p. 250). The results of this study differed from the more popular literature that discusses the Japanese concept of participative leadership (e.g., Ouchi, 1981; Pascale & Athos, 1981). The discrepancy between the empirical results of Stewart et al.'s (1986) study and the Japanese theories may imply that "managers may prefer to use a more consensual style among themselves while their subordinates prefer them to use a more persuasive or consultative style" (Stewart et al., 1986, p. 248). The results of Stewart et al.'s (1986) study are noteworthy for illustrating the difference between subordinates' expectations and leaders' perceptions in Japanese organizations and imply that Hirokawa's (1981) theory was established based on managers' perspective, instead of the employees' perspective.

Different from Hirokawa (1981), Misumi (1995) operationalized the PM leadership theory. Misumi (1995) used quantitative scales to measure employees' perceptions about their leaders' leadership styles. In order to test the applicability of Misumi's (1990; 1995) PM leadership theory in a different cultural setting, Ehigie and Akpan (2004) adapted Misumi's (1995) leadership scales to study perceived leadership styles in total quality management (TQM) organizations in Nigeria. The results of their study demonstrated that "high maintenance and low performance leadership styles were the best combination for TQM practice" (Ehigie and Akpan's, 2004, p. 24). In addition, Ehigie and Akpan argued:

contrary to the findings of Misumi (1995), performance was worst under high maintenance high performance leadership style. This implied that the efficacy of the performance-maintenance leadership style in

enhancing productivity is a function of the management philosophy put in place, since Misumi recommended high performance-maintenance leadership style based on his findings in non-TQM organizations. (p. 38)

It is interesting to see that the results of Ehigie and Akpan's (2004) study were different from Misumi's (1990; 1995) argument that high performance and high maintenance (PM) is the best leadership style. The discrepancies between the empirical results from Ehigie and Akpan's (2004) Nigerian study and Misumi's (1990; 1995) Japanese study probably are due to national cultural differences and organizational cultural differences. Japan and Nigeria do have different cultural values. TQM organizations and non-TQM organizations also have different organizational communication patterns. In TQM organizations, teamwork is very important. Thus, the maintenance function becomes even more important than performance functions.

### **Leadership in Taiwan**

*Definitions of leadership and major researchers.* After reviewing many cross-cultural psychology books and journal articles, it is clear that the articles that discuss Taiwanese leadership are very rare. However, there are some articles which are written by Taiwanese scholars explored the concept of Chinese leadership based on Taiwanese experiences. This section contains a brief review of the views of Taiwanese/Chinese leadership.

Different from the American view and Japanese view of participative leadership, most literature that discusses Chinese leadership stresses the concept of authoritarian leadership. According to Bond and Hwang (1986), "it seems that Chinese prefer an authoritarian leadership style in which a benevolent and respected leader is not only considerate of his followers, but also able to take skilled and decisive action" (p. 251). According to Redding and Wong (1986), "leadership style within Chinese companies is directive and authoritarian" (p. 278).

Hwang is a prominent Taiwanese psychologist who studies psychology as well as Chinese people's leadership behavior in organizations. According to Hwang (1986), most Chinese organizations are family businesses. The leaders of these family-owned organizations tend to be authoritarian leaders. In order to maintain their authoritarian status in their organizations, these leaders withhold most of the information in organizations from their subordinates. They only let their subordinates know very limited amounts of information. The amount of information that a subordinate can get depends on whether the leader trusts the subordinate or not. In these organizations, there is a power distance between leaders and followers.

According to Wu, Taylor, and Chen (2001), Taiwan has experienced dramatic political and societal changes after martial law was abolished in 1987. After martial law was abolished, Taiwan has moved dramatically toward democracy. Although democracy has replaced authoritarianism in Taiwan after 1987, Huang (1999) kept arguing that “authoritarianism: paternalistic management” (p. 635) is the typical leadership styles in Taiwanese organizations. According to Huang (1999),

The top manager in the organization is usually the owner of the enterprise. This person is the decision-maker who holds supreme power in the organization and assumes all the responsibility of success or failure in running the business. The manager usually prefers a paternalist or autocratic style of management, assigning family members important positions such as financier, accountant etc. The manager supervises subordinates, pushes them to achieve the organizational goals, and maintains a vertical power distance with them. (p. 635)

Similar to Huang (1986, 1999), Kao (1987) also proposed that Chinese organizational leaders tend to adopt a supervisor-centered, authoritarian leadership style. In family-owned organizations, organizational leaders are not elected to be leaders; they become organizational leaders because they are the owners or the owners’ relatives. Chinese people stress *Guanxi*, interpersonal relationships, in their social lives. Therefore, Chinese leaders pay a great deal of attention to maintain interpersonal relationships among their in-group members.

To summarize, Chinese leadership theories all illustrate that the Chinese style of leadership is authoritarian, which is different from American and Japanese views of participative leadership. Chinese leaders tend to control information and restrict subordinates’ participation in order to maintain their status in the organization. However, these authoritarian leaders allow very few subordinates who they trust to share corporate information and participate in some decision-making processes. Thus, two characteristics can describe the Chinese view of leadership. First, traditional Chinese leadership style tends to be authoritarian. Second, the Chinese style of participative leadership is affected by *Guanxi*, which means interpersonal relations between leaders and subordinates.

*Empirical results.* This section reviews the empirical results of several Taiwanese leadership studies, although these studies all adopted theories and used measurement scales that have been designed in Western countries.

Bond and Hwang (1986) reviewed several leadership studies which were conducted by Taiwanese psychology students. These studies used a Chinese version of the Leader Behavior Description Questionnaire (LBDQ), the Supervisory Behavior Questionnaire (LOQ), or the Leader Opinion Questionnaire (LOQ) to study the relationship between perceived leadership behaviors and subordinates’ job satisfaction. Participants in these studies included female government employees, elementary school teachers, junior high school teachers, labor workers, and accountants. The results of these studies were very similar and all demonstrated that Taiwanese employees preferred an authoritarian leadership style. In addition, the authors of these studies emphasized that leaders should maintain a harmonious and considerate relationship with their subordinates. The results of these previous studies were consistent with Hwang’s (1986) views of Chinese authoritarian leadership. However, all studies reviewed by Bond and Huang (1986) were conducted about 20 years ago. When these studies were conducted, Taiwan was under strict control of Martial Law and an authoritarian political system. As discussed earlier, martial law was abolished in 1987, and Taiwan has made a significant improvement in democratization. According to Myers (1996), authoritarianism has been replaced by democracy in Taiwan. Taiwan “enjoys a modern lifestyle, freedom, and political democracy” (p. 1072). In addition, the Taiwanese culture has been affected by the synergy of Chinese culture, Japanese culture, and American culture. To investigate the impact of cultural changes on leadership behaviors in Taiwan, updated empirical studies should be conducted. For example, Wu and Stewart (2003) conducted a study to compare university employees’ expected leadership styles in Taiwan and the United States. They surveyed three hundred university employees in Taiwan and the United States. The results of Wu and Stewart’s (2003) study demonstrated that the democratic (participative) leadership decision-making style is the most preferable leadership style from the Taiwanese and U.S. participants. Thus, the validity of Huang’s (1987; 1999) autocratic leadership theory has been challenged by Wu and Stewart’s (2003) updated empirical study.

After reviewing participative leadership literatures and empirical results in the United States, Japan, and Taiwan, the following section of this paper will evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the participative leadership theory in these three cultures.

### **Strengths and Weakness of Participative Leadership Theories in Three Cultures**

Previous literatures and empirical studies clearly demonstrated that the concept of participative leadership is a widely discussed concept in different

cultures. It is interesting to note that while these participative leadership theories appear to be similar, they differ in significant ways. They are similar because they all focus on leaders' decision-making role in organizations, but they differ in the ways they view participative leadership. American participative leadership theories combine an emphasis on *situational variables* in choosing effective leadership patterns. Japanese theories focus on the leaders' communication function in the organization. Successful Japanese leaders should facilitate intra-organizational communication and encourage subordinates' participation. Different from the American and Japanese views, traditional Chinese theories stress the authoritarian leadership style. Traditional Taiwanese leaders restrict subordinates' participation in order to maintain the leaders' own authority in the organization.

In the next section, Littlejohn's (1992) and Wu's (1998) criteria will be used to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the participative theories in the three cultures. It is important to evaluate these leadership theories because it will help future researchers to combine the strengths of these theories and avoid the weaknesses of these current theories when establishing new leadership theories or models in the global context.

#### **Criteria for Evaluating Theories**

Different theorists have different criteria for evaluating theories. Littlejohn (1992) proposed five criteria for evaluating theories, including (1) theoretical scope, (2) appropriateness, (3) heuristic value, (4) validity, and (5) parsimony. First, theoretical scope refers to its comprehensiveness or inclusiveness. Second, appropriateness refers to the logical consistency between a theory's claims and its assumptions. Third, heuristic value means the potential for the theory which can generate further studies and additional theories. Fourth, "validity is the truth value of a theory" (Littlejohn, 1992, p. 35). One kind of validity is generalizability, which means to which extent a theory can be applied across situations. Finally, parsimony means logically simple. In addition to these five criteria, Wu (1998) proposed four additional criteria for evaluating theories. These four criteria are (1) simple, (2) practical, (3) testable, and (4) accurate. First, simple means that a good theory should be easily understood and communicated to other scholars. With this characteristic, a theory tends to be frequently used by other researchers. Second, practical means a good theory can be applied to the real world. This criterion refers to a theory's functions and practical implications. Third, testable is an important criterion for a good theory. A good theory should be able to be tested through empirical studies. Finally, accurate means that a theory can help scholars understand and predict human behaviors.

#### **Evaluation of American Leadership Theory**

American participative theories tend to categorize different types of decision-making procedures and emphasize *situational variables* that leaders should consider when making decisions. Tannenbaum and Schmidt's (1958) Leadership Decision-Making Continuum has dramatic heuristic value for future leadership theories. Many distinguished American leadership theories, such as Vroom and Yetton's (1973) Normative Decision Model and House's Path-Goal Theory (1971, 1996), are combinations of participative theories and contingency theories. There are several strengths of Tannenbaum and Schmidt's (1958) theory. First, the main merit of this theory is its heuristic value as discussed above. Second, this theory is parsimonious and easy to understand. The typologies Tannenbaum and Schmidt (1958) created are very clear and nicely categorized different decision-making procedures. Third, this theory has practical values. This theory provides organizational leaders alternative procedures which they can choose from when making decisions. Fourth, the theory is testable because it operationalizes different types of leadership styles. For example, Stewart et al. (1986) adopted the typologies to study Japanese organizational employees' preferred leadership styles. The main weakness of this theory is its narrow theoretical scope. Tannenbaum and Schmidt (1958) mentioned three forces that will affect a leader's decision-making procedure. The situational forces that were discussed by Tannenbaum and Schmidt (1958) did not include culture. However, empirical studies (Dorfman et al., 1996; Hofstede, 2001) demonstrated that participative leadership is a cultural-specific phenomenon.

#### **Evaluation of Japanese Leadership Theory**

Hirokawa's (1981) analysis of Japanese leadership behaviors is noteworthy because his theory emphasizes the important communication functions that Japanese leaders perform in organizations. The main merit of his theory is its heuristic value. Most previous leadership theories only discussed leaders' management functions in organizations and neglected leaders' communicative functions in organizations. This theory brings a new perspective on leadership behaviors. However, the main weakness of this theory is that the theory is not testable. Scholars who are interested in Japanese leadership communication styles should use other theories as a basis for their research. In addition, the theoretical scope of this theory is not broad enough. This theory only explains Japanese managers' perspectives on participative decision making, whereas Japanese employees' expectations are often neglected. Misumi's (1990; 1995) PM leadership theory is also prominent because the PM theory is testable and has

heuristic values. Scholars (e.g., Ehigie and Akpan, 2004) from different countries still use his theory as theoretical framework to study leadership styles in contemporary organizations. However, Misumi's (1990; 1995) main argument that high performance and high maintenance (PM) is the ideal leadership style can not apply to TQM organizations in Nigeria probably due to cultural differences. Thus, it demonstrates that the theoretical scope of Misumi's (1990; 1995) PM theory is not broad enough because it neglects the fact that situational variable, such as national culture or organizational culture, will affect the effectiveness of certain leadership styles. The PM leadership is generated based on Japanese experience. The applicability of the PM leadership theory in other cultural settings should be evaluated by more international studies.

### ***Evaluation of Taiwanese Leadership Theory***

Traditional Taiwanese leadership theories all emphasize that Chinese leaders tend to use an authoritarian style to make decisions in order to maintain their own power and control in organizations. Subordinates' participation is restricted and intentionally prohibited by these leaders. However, these authoritarian leaders still try to maintain a good interpersonal relationship with their subordinates. In the past, Chinese leaders were selected by their status in the family business, instead of their abilities. The main advantage of Hwang's (1986; 1999) theory is its theoretical scoop. His theory explains how Chinese leaders are elected, why traditional Chinese leaders tend to be authoritarian, and how relational factors affect leader-subordinate relationships in the traditional Chinese/Taiwanese culture. However, Hwang's (1986; 1999) theory can not effectively apply to contemporary Taiwanese society. Taiwanese society has gone through dramatic changes due to major political and economical reforms. The organizational structures of many Taiwanese organizations were also changed from a family-owned style to public trade corporations. Due to these cultural and societal changes, the result of a contemporary Taiwanese leadership study (e.g., Wu and Stewart, 2003) was opposite to Hwang's (1986; 1999) autocratic leadership theory. To better explain contemporary Taiwanese leadership behaviors, a new Taiwanese leadership theory should be formulated and empirically tested.

### **Theoretical and Practical Implications**

After comparing the concepts as well as the empirical studies of participative leadership theories in three cultures, including the United States, Japan, and Taiwan, several theoretical and practical implications are identified. First, participative leadership is a culturally-bounded phenomenon. The effectiveness of

participative leadership varies from culture to culture. According to Hofstede's (2001) study, employees' preferred decision-making styles are determined by their cultural value of power distance. However, the relationships among participative leadership and Hofstede's (1990; 2001) other four cultural dimensions have not been empirically tested. Future studies may investigate what cultural values affect employees' preferred leadership styles. Second, most leadership theories developed in these three cultures all focus on leaders' perceptions about effective leaderships. However, "leadership can only exist as a complement to subordinateship" (Hofstede, 2001, p. 82). New theories should be built based on both the leaders' perceptions and subordinates' expectations. Third, leadership theories in Taiwan are outdated and can not reflect current Taiwanese leadership patterns due to the recent cultural and societal changes. In addition, most Taiwanese leadership studies used theories that were established in other cultures to measure and examine Taiwanese leadership. To gain more knowledge about the Taiwanese style of leadership, new Taiwanese leadership theories should be established and tested by researchers. Fourth, most researchers who study leadership effectiveness use participative decision making as the independent variable to investigate employees' satisfaction and employee performance. However, the factors that affect participative leadership are not well researched. To gain more empirical evidence, future studies should quantitatively investigate this issue.

Finally, after evaluating participative leadership theories in three cultures, the author argues that participative leadership theories reviewed in this paper all have their own merits. American theory provides the idea that participative leadership is affected by situational factors, which provides a contingency perspective to study participative leadership. Japanese leadership theory creates a communicative framework to discuss participative decision making. Taiwanese leadership theory emphasizes that participative leadership is affected by cultural values. For instance, large power distance can decrease participative decision making in organizations. New theories may combine the advantages of leadership theories from different cultures. To combine the merits of participative leadership theories in these three cultures, participative leadership theorists may include the contingency perspective, communicative perspective, and cultural perspective in their theoretical models. The author would like to propose a theoretical model which incorporates these different perspectives. As discussed earlier in this paper, the relationship between participative leadership and job satisfaction is a popular research topic. Therefore, the model which will be posed in this paper would describe the relationships

between participative leadership, cultural values, communication satisfaction, and job satisfaction.

Kim (2002) argued that “in line with the research on participative management, participative decision making has been emphasized in relation to job satisfaction” (p. 232). However, Kim (2002) further argued that “the evidence regarding the impact of participative decision making on job satisfaction has not been consistent. The relationship between participative decision making and job satisfaction could be nonlinear and contingent on individual and situational variables” (p. 232). Kim’s (2002) argument has revealed the importance of situational variables that may affect the effectiveness of participative leadership. This paper would like to propose a cultural contingency model of participative leadership communication. The key point of this contingency model is that culture is the most important situational variable that affects leadership effectiveness. Yukl (2002) stated that “most researchers evaluate leadership effectiveness in terms of the consequences of the leader’s actions for followers” (p. 8). The author believes that subordinates’ communication satisfaction and subordinates’ job satisfaction can be the indicators of leadership effectiveness because follower’s communication satisfaction and previous studies demonstrated the importance of communication between leaders and subordinates. For example, Infante, Anderson, Herington, and Kim (1993) argued that “subordinates’ satisfaction in communicating with their supervisors

predicted subordinates’ job satisfaction” (p. 307). Schnake, Dumler, Cochran and Barnett (1990) also discussed the importance of leadership communication. They argue that the quality of supervisor-subordinate communication will affect subordinates’ communication satisfaction, work motivation, perception of warmth and support, and perception of job performance. According to the human relations approach of organizational communication, there are links between satisfaction of higher order needs, job satisfaction, and productivity (Miller, 2006). Therefore, when subordinates are satisfied with the leader-subordinate communication, they have higher job satisfaction and produce higher productivity. Thus, leaders can be viewed as effective leaders if they can effectively communicate with their subordinates.

To combine the leadership literature reviewed in this paper and previous scholarly literature, the relationships between leadership communication, cultural values, and subordinates’ job satisfaction are defined (see Figure 2). When participative leadership communication is viewed as the independent variable, the outcome variable is subordinates’ communication satisfaction. Cultural values is the mediating variable between participative leadership communication and subordinates’ communication satisfaction. Subordinates’ communication satisfaction will then affect subordinates’ job satisfaction. Subordinates’ job satisfaction can be regarded as an indicator of leadership effectiveness.

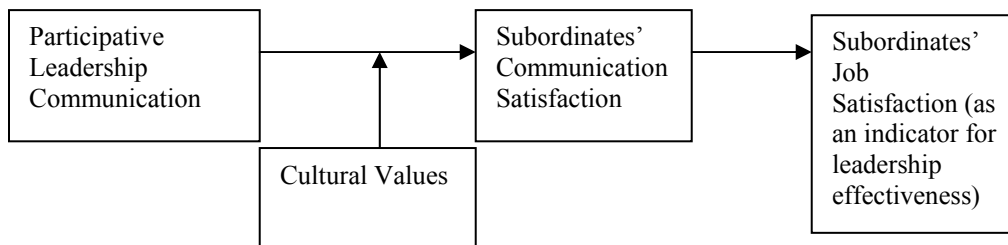


Figure 2. Cultural Contingency Model of Leadership Process

Taiwan may provide an example to explain the model. As reviewed earlier in this paper, in the traditional Taiwanese society, empirical studies demonstrated subordinates preferred the autocratic leadership communication style. However, after the Taiwanese cultural values have been dramatically changed due to the changes in the political system after 1987, a contemporary Taiwanese leadership study (e.g, Wu and Stewart, 2003) demonstrated that Taiwanese participants would expect a participative leadership communication style because the changes of power distance value. In Hofstede’s (1984; 2001) study,

Taiwan had a medium/high power distance value. However, in Wu and Stewart’s (2003) recent study, Taiwan had a medium/low power distance cultural value. When a leader’s communication style matches subordinates’ expectations, subordinates will have higher communication satisfaction with the leader. Thus, participative leadership style was viewed as ineffective in the traditional Taiwanese society; however, it was viewed as effective in the contemporary Taiwanese society due to the changes of the power distance cultural value. Thus, cultural values can be the mediating variable between participative leadership and

subordinates' communication satisfaction. Based on Infante et al.' (1993) argument, when subordinates have high communication satisfaction, they will have high job satisfaction.

### Conclusion

In summary, this article reviews and compares participative leadership communication theories and empirical studies in three different cultures, the United States, Japan, and Taiwan. The similarities and difference of participative leadership theories which were developed in these three cultures are discussed. The strengths and weaknesses of participative leadership theories in these three cultures are also evaluated. Most important of all, a new theoretical model is also established by combining participative leadership theories from different cultures. Future studies can be designed to test and expand the cultural contingency model provided in this paper in order to investigate participative leadership across cultures. The example of Taiwan demonstrated that power distance could be an important mediating variable in the leadership process model. However, Hofstede (1984; 2001) proposed five work-related cultural dimensions, including power distance, uncertainty avoidance, masculinity/femininity, collectivism/individualism, and long-term orientation/ short-term orientation. How the other four of Hofstede's (1984; 2001) cultural dimensions may serve as a mediating variable between participative leadership and communication satisfaction has not been studied yet. Future leadership studies may explore this research issue. Multicultural organization leaders may also carefully think about the issue that effective leadership style is culturally bounded and become more culturally sensitive to their employees' needs and expectations. For example, when subordinates have a high power distance value and expect a participative leadership style, organizational leaders may use a more directive leadership communication style to communicate with their subordinates. In high power distance cultures, participative leadership communication style could be viewed as weak and ineffective leadership style. However, in low power distance cultures, participative leadership communication style is viewed as desirable and effective.

The result of the comparative analysis is significant because this study reviews literature across cultural boundaries and synthesizes the literatures and empirical results from previously published scholarly works. The applicability of the American participative theory, Tannebaum and Schumit's (1958) leadership continuum was tested by Hofstede's (2001) cross-cultural study. The applicability of Misumi's (1990; 1995) PM leadership theory in different cultural settings was evaluated and challenged by Ehigie and Akpan's (2004)

study in Nigeria. The applicability of Huang's (1986; 1990) Taiwanese leadership theory was challenged by the result of Wu and Stewart's (2003) updated study on Taiwan and the United States because their recent study demonstrated that Taiwanese participants preferred a participative leadership decision-making style, instead of an autocratic leadership decision-making style. It demonstrated the need for creating new Taiwanese leadership theories because of the dramatic political and societal changes in Taiwan. It is interesting to see the cross-cultural validation of the participative leadership theories which were generated in three different cultures. It's also noteworthy to see that participative leadership decision-making is a cultural-bounded phenomenon. Some theories, such as Tannebaum and Schumit's (1958) leadership continuum, could be applied to other cultures if the theoretical scope is broad enough. However, some participative leadership theories, such as Misumi's (1990; 1995) PM leadership theory, seemed to be more cultural specific.

Because of the process of globalization and internationalization, many organizations have evolved into multinational organizations. Thus, organizational leaders must have sufficient knowledge about expected leadership styles in other cultures and develop cross-cultural leadership competence. Leadership theories generated from other cultures can definitely provide organizational leaders frameworks and guidelines for leading their employees in different cultures. Thus, more leadership theories should be generated from other cultures and empirically tested in different cultural settings. The author also believes that cross-cultural leadership studies should go beyond the empirical study stage to a comparative analysis stage in order to contribute to the understanding of leadership theories in the global context.

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