

LEADERSHIP, ADAPTABILITY AND PERFORMANCE OF BULGARIAN ORGANIZATIONS – CULTURAL REFLECTIONS ON EMPIRICAL DATA³

This article interprets data from several empirical studies in Bulgaria in three areas of research interest – transformational leadership, adaptability, and organizational performance. The first study examines transformational leadership's influence on adaptability and organizational performance. It formulates two hypotheses and tests them by using data from a broader study on organizational capacity for change among employees and managers in organizations in Bulgaria. Two hierarchical regression analyses confirm the direct and positive influence of transformational leadership on adaptability and organizational performance. Results from an additional set of research studies are used to expand the context for understanding and exploring the three areas of interest. The empirical data for these were collected through five observations on the national and organizational cultures according to Hofstede's methodology. Thus, the article's combined approach of looking at the data from unrelated studies is believed to strengthen the cognitive possibilities in the interpretation of the researched areas and established regularities. The main results point at high values observed for all three variables in Bulgaria. Cultural interpretation of some of the indicators through the years confirm these results and point at unidirectional and stable trends for some (such as growing care for employee development as part of the transformational leadership scale and weakening uncritical following of rules as part of the adaptability scale). There is reason to argue that training is more valuable to employees than job security (both part of the organizational performance scale).

Keywords: transformational leadership; organizational ambidexterity; adaptability; organizational performance; behavioural and cultural reflection

JEL: L10; L29; M10; M14

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³ This paper should be cited as: Mladenova, I., Davidkov, T. (2023). Leadership, Adaptability and Performance of Bulgarian Organizations – Cultural Reflections on Empirical Data. – Economic Studies (Ikonomicheski Izsledvania), 32(7), pp. 93-113.

1. Introduction

In order to survive and be successful in the dynamically changing environment, organizations need to look for new business and work models and strategies. These endeavours are often accompanied by the implementation of changes of varying scope and depth. However, change is rarely an isolated event. Organizations implement different initiatives at the same time or initiate new ones before previous ones have been completed. Meyer and Stensaker (2006) refer to this phenomenon as multiple change.

The ability of an organization to adapt, to change continuously, is key to its survival (Probst, Raisch, 2005). However, the focus on the future should not come at the expense of the present; achieving future sustainability must be balanced with achieving at least sufficiently good current performance (Meyer, Stensaker, 2006). The concept of organizational ambidexterity seeks to explain precisely this balancing act. Organizational ambidexterity considers two different, seemingly contradictory goals (and corresponding activities) that organizations need to balance to be successful in increasingly dynamic and competitive markets. One is exploration (search, experimentation, variation, adaptation, creation of new knowledge), and the other is exploitation (refinement, selection, efficiency, control, security, reduction of variation) (Luger, Raisch, Schimmer, 2018; O'Reilly, Tushman, 2013). Leaders have a significant role in crafting this balance and changing the weight of one or the other activity in response to environmental cues (Havermans, Den Hartog, Keegan, Uhl-Bien, 2016). Leadership style has a critical role in innovative work behaviour in the organization (Akıncı, Alpkan, Yıldız, Karacay, 2022; Rosing, Frese, Bausch, 2011).

Transformational leadership is associated with change-oriented behaviours, adaptation to external stimuli (Yukl, 2012), innovation (Rosing, Frese, Bausch, 2011; Yukl, 2012), learning at the individual, team and organizational levels (Lundqvist, Wallo, Coetzer, Kock, 2022). However, adaptation activities are often ineffective and can lead to worse performance in the short term and threaten the long-term prospects of the organization if not balanced by alignment activities (Gibson, Birkinshaw, 2004).

On the other hand, transformational leadership theory attributes outstanding organizational performance to a sense of mission and new ways of thinking and learning (Lord, Day, Zaccaro, Avolio, Eagly, 2017). Several empirical studies confirm that leadership behaviour has a strong influence on organizational performance in a dynamic environment context (Jansen, Vera, Crossan, 2009).

Certain approaches and regularities, however, are known to be effective in one cultural and behavioural environment (mentality, way of thinking; values, notions of good and bad, etc.), but they do not produce the same results in a different cultural and behavioural environment. Interpreting the two areas of research interest through cultural lenses is treated in this article as beneficial in at least two ways. First, it demonstrates the synergies between different approaches to researched phenomena. Second, it gives a specific cultural context that enables better understanding and discussing the results obtained in the context of previous studies in different cultural contexts.

This article aims to contribute to the body of transformational leadership research, and in particular in the context of Bulgaria. It poses the following research question: what the

influence of transformational leadership is on adaptability and organizational performance. The empirical results obtained are used as a basis for cultural and behavioural reflections. The main idea behind employing these two related narratives is to problematize cultural and behavioural contexts. In this way, it delineates the limits of applicability and the limitations of the states and dependencies presented in the main narrative.

In the main narrative, two hypotheses are formulated about the direct and positive influence of transformational leadership on adaptability (H1) and organizational performance (H2). A partial data set from a quantitative empirical study on the capacity for organizational change in Bulgarian organizations is used to test the two hypotheses.

The results are then interpreted based on observations on behavioural and cultural features in organizations in Bulgaria (Davidkov, 2019) – the related narrative. For this purpose, there are three "inclusions" made in the main narrative to allow a behavioural and cultural assessment of essential aspects of the researched areas. The first "inclusion" follows the presentation of the transformational leadership indicators. The second one is after the presentation of the adaptability indicators. And the third one adds to the organizational performance. Thus, the related narrative strengthens the cognitive possibilities to interpret the observed state of the researched areas and established regularities and helps to outline the applicability and limitations of the states and dependencies derived in the main narrative.

The rest of this article is organized into four sections. Part 2 reviews the literature on leadership and the relationship of transformational leadership to adaptability and organizational performance. Part 3 presents the research methodology, sample, and indicators. In Section 4, the obtained results are presented and discussed. The related narrative makes three inclusions in the text to add new knowledge through behavioural and cultural reflection. Part 5 concludes.

2. Literature Review

Identifying the determinants that contribute to the development of an open-to-change, innovative, and supportive organizational culture will reflect such a culture's importance not only in the process of implementing a specific change but also in the development and maintenance of a capacity for change. Schneider, González-Romá, Ostroff and West (2017) argue that interventions that aim at (planned) climate and culture change must focus on *leadership* and make the connection between the two:

"It may be time to focus leadership training and development on the implementation of policies and practices that will build the traditions, symbols, socialization experiences and everyday behaviours to achieve both the processes and subsequent outcomes desired." (Schneider, González-Romá, Ostroff, West, 2017).

Schein (1988) emphasizes identification with leaders as one of the mechanisms for creating organizational culture – organizational members identify with leaders and internalize leaders' values and assumptions. Schein further develops these ideas into the concept of three subcultures based on occupational communities, emphasizing the need to align the culture of CEOs, the culture of engineering, and the culture of operators to facilitate learning and

innovation (Schein, 1996, p. 13). This alignment of subcultures is at the heart of adaptive and thriving (high-performing) organizations.

The role of leaders and leadership styles and their relationship to organizational culture have been addressed by many authors. Cameron and Quinn (2011) emphasize the role of the founder of the organization and the conscious efforts of the management team to create and change the organizational culture. Through such efforts, external challenges are met, and the desired performance is maintained. [Managing] leaders formulate and align the organizational mission, strategy, and culture with the external environment; they give a vision of the future and change the goals (Burke, 2011). Most authors single out leadership as one of the key success factors of change initiatives (Burke, 2011; Kotter, 2007).

The topic of leadership is multi-layered and multi-disciplinary; its identification, explanation, and description require the simultaneous use of different approaches and conceptual frameworks (Davidkov, 2005). One prevalent perspective in literature distinguishes transactional from transformational leadership (Lord, Day, Zaccaro, Avolio and Eagly, 2017). Defining what distinguishes transformational leadership still sparks researchers' interest (for a more detailed review, see Lord, Day, Zaccaro, Avolio, Eagly, 2017). Avolio and Bass (1999) conceptualize it through the following factors: charisma, inspiration, intellectual stimulation, individualized consideration, contingent reward, management by exception, and laissez-faire leadership. Many authors associate it with expectations for high results (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Moorman and Fetter, 1990), innovative behaviour (Carless, Wearing and Mann, 2000), communicating a vision (Carless, Wearing, Mann, 2000; Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Moorman, Fetter, 1990), which are also associated with the concept of transformation as a large-scale change in the organization. The role of transformational leaders is significant when the environment is dynamic, poses challenges to the survival of the organization, and requires rapid and large-scale changes. A relationship can be hypothesized between transformational leadership and an organization's ability to adapt to an uncertain environment as well as to achieve high performance.

Adaptability and alignment are the two elements of contextual organizational ambidexterity that Gibson and Birkinshaw (2004) propose and test. They view organizational ambidexterity as the behavioural ability to simultaneously achieve organizational alignment and adaptation. This behavioural ability is positively influenced by an organizational context characterized by a combination of stretch, discipline, support, and trust. Adaptability activities are often the focus of organizations in times of dynamically changing internal and external environmental demands (Mladenova, 2022).

Organizational leaders have a significant role in balancing adaptation and alignment; by providing guidance and encouraging employees to share good practices, leaders can encourage experimentation in dynamic settings that require adaptation (Tarba, Jansen, Raisch, Lawton, 2020).

Transformational leadership is also associated with followers' change commitment (Herold, Fedor, Caldwell, 2007) and the ability of the organization to adapt.

Thus, the following hypothesis is formulated and tested: **H1. Transformational leadership directly and positively influences organizational adaptability.**

One way to define an organization's competitiveness is through its ability to achieve and sustain higher *organizational performance* than those of competitors. Performance can be defined in many ways and may reflect the imperatives faced by the organization.

Transformational leadership theory suggests that exceptional results are created when there is a sense of mission and new ways of thinking and learning (Lord, Day, Zaccaro, Avolio, Eagly, 2017). Transformational leaders succeed in inspiring employees to internalize the goals of the organization, to commit to and pursue these goals persistently, and to exceed expectations (Pillai, Schriesheim, Williams, 1999).

In relation to organizational performance, the following hypothesis is formulated and tested:
H2. Leadership directly and positively influences organizational performance.

3. Method

The main narrative in this article presents partial results of a quantitative study on adaptability, organizational performance, and organizational capacity for change, of which transformation leadership is a factor (Mladenova, 2021). The empirical data for the three variables were collected in the period November 2020 – January 2021 among employees and managers in organizations operating in Bulgaria. The questionnaire was distributed online (via Google Forms). The sample was formed based on convenience and snowball principles. The collected data allows for outlining some important interrelationships, which are then interpreted through the results of another set of studies (the related narrative).

3.1. Sample

Main characteristics of the empirical study. A total of 204 valid, filled-in questionnaires were received during the data collection period. Four observations were excluded as outliers. Thus, the results presented below are based on a sample of 200 observations.

Profile of the respondents: 60% female; 74% aged under 40; nearly 90% have higher education (bachelor's or master's degree); 63% have worked in the organization for less than 5 years. 58% have no managerial role, 35% are at the middle management level and 7% are members of the top management team (incl. executive director or deputy, member of the management board).

Profile of the organizations (in which respondents work). Sector: services (53%), manufacturing (26.5%), trade (11%), government (6%), and construction (3.5%). Organization size, determined by the number of employees: 57.5% of the respondents work at large, and 42.5% – at small and medium-sized enterprises. 65% of the respondents work at privately owned, 20.5% – at predominantly privately owned, and 14.5% – at state-owned organizations. 45% of the respondents work at wholly or predominantly Bulgarian-owned, and the rest – at foreign or predominantly foreign-owned organizations. 45.5% of the organizations work only on the Bulgarian market, while the rest are export-oriented.

3.2. Measures

The short questionnaire Global Transformation Leadership (GTL) developed by Carless, Wearing and Mann (2000) is used to measure the independent variable *transformational leadership*. The short GTL consists of seven indicators regarding vision, employee development, supportive leadership, empowerment, innovative thinking, leading by example, and charisma, assessed on a 5-point Likert scale. The scale range is 1=very rarely or never, 5=very often or almost always. Carless, Wearing and Mann (2000) report Cronbach alpha of 0.93.

The first dependent variable, *adaptability*, is considered here as one of the two elements of contextual organizational ambidexterity. Three indicators applied by Gibson and Birkinshaw (2004) are used to measure it. The indicators are assessed on a 7-point scale ranging from 1=strongly disagree to 7=strongly agree. Gibson and Birkinshaw (2004) report Cronbach's alpha of 0.80.

To measure the second dependent variable, *organizational performance*, seven indicators applied by Judge, Naoumova and Douglas (2009) are used. These indicators are assessed on a 7-point scale ranging from 1=strongly disagree to 7=strongly agree. Judge, Naoumova and Douglas (2009) report Cronbach's alpha of 0.93.

The indicators (Table 1) have been translated into Bulgarian and a uniform 5-point Likert scale (1=disagree, 5=agree) has been applied to all.

Table 1. Variables and indicators used.

| Variable | Indicators | Source |
|-----------------------------|---|------------------------------------|
| Transformational leadership | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. My leader communicates a clear and positive vision of the future. 2. My leader treats staff as individuals, supports and encourages their development. 3. My leader gives encouragement and recognition to staff. 4. My leader fosters trust, involvement and cooperation among team members. 5. My leader encourages thinking about problems in new ways and questions assumptions. 6. My leader is clear about his/her values and practices what he/she preaches. 7. My leader instills pride and respect in others and inspires me by being highly competent. | Carless, Wearing and Mann (2000) |
| Adaptability | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The management systems in this organization encourage people to challenge outmoded traditions/practices/sacred cows. * 2. The management systems in this organization are flexible enough to allow us to respond quickly to changes in our markets. 3. The management systems in this organization evolve rapidly in response to shifts in our business priorities. | Gibson and Birkinshaw (2004) |
| Organizational performance | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Profit 2. Growth in revenue (assets) over the last 3 years 3. Customer satisfaction 4. Product (service) quality 5. Efficient use of the organization's resources 6. Process improvement 7. Secure jobs 8. Providing training for employees | Judge, Naoumova and Douglas (2009) |

* The indicator is excluded after applying a reliability test.

Source: Own research.

Data were analyzed using SPSS v.25.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Impact of transformational leadership on adaptability and organizational performance

Transformational leadership is one of the factors extracted through factor analysis (principal components method with Varimax rotation, eigenvalue > 1) during the analysis of the data sample of the main narrative study. It is composed of all the seven originally included indicators. Cronbach's alpha is 0.956 – slightly higher than that reported by Carless, Wearing and Mann (2000). A new complex variable is calculated as a mean value of the seven indicators included. Bivariate distributions show a weak relationship between transformational leadership and two control variables: *sector* (Cramer's V=0.218; Approx. Sig.=0.001) and *ownership* (Cramer's V=0.189; Approx. Sig.=0.045).

The dependent variable *adaptability* composes two of the initially included three indicators proposed by Gibson and Birkinshaw (2004). After excluding one of the indicators, the reliability test gives satisfactory results (Cronbach's alpha 0.861). This value is slightly higher than the original Gibson and Birkinshaw scale (Cronbach's alpha 0.80), but the limitation here is the reduced number of indicators. A new variable is calculated as a mean value of the remaining two indicators. Bivariate distributions show a weak relationship between adaptability and three control variables: *sector* (Cramer's V=0.242; Approx. Sig.=0.000), *ownership* (Cramer's V=0.230; Approx. Sig.=0.007) and *organization size* (Cramer's V=0.184; Approx. Sig.=0.039).

The dependent variable *organizational performance* includes all the eight indicators proposed by Judge, Naoumova and Douglas (2009). The reliability test gives satisfactory results (Cronbach's alpha 0.858) and allows further analyses. A new variable is calculated as a mean value of the eight indicators included. Bivariate distributions showed a weak relationship between organizational performance and three control variables: *sector* (Cramer's V=0.201; Approx. Sig.=0.039), *ownership* (Cramer's V=0.187; Approx. Sig.=0.007), and *ownership origin* (Cramer's V=0.221; Approx. Sig.=0.003).

Two linear regression analyses were performed to test the hypotheses.

Hypothesis 1: Testing the relationship between the independent variable *transformational leadership* and the dependent variable *adaptability* is done through linear regression analysis. The relationship between the two variables is statistically significant (Sig.=0.000; $p < 0.05$). The analysis of coefficients shows that *transformational leadership* is statistically significant ($b=0.390$, Sig.=0.000 at $p < 0.05$). The values of $R=0.357$ and the adjusted $R^2=0.123$ indicate a weak relationship (Ferguson, 2009; Schober, 2018) between the studied variables.

Additional analysis was performed to identify control variables that influence adaptability. For this purpose, new binary variables are calculated for each of the 16 control variables and are included in a stepwise regression with the dependent variable *adaptability*. The evaluation of the resulting model shows a weak influence of two of them ($R=0.306$; adjusted $R^2=0.085$): *ownership-private* and *age of respondents-above 41 years* (Sig.=0.000; $p < 0.05$). Private ownership of the organization ($b_1=0.783$, Sig.=0.000) is directly and positively related to adaptability. The age of the respondents – above 41 years ($b_2=0.500$, Sig.=0.003) also directly and positively affects the adaptability of the organization.

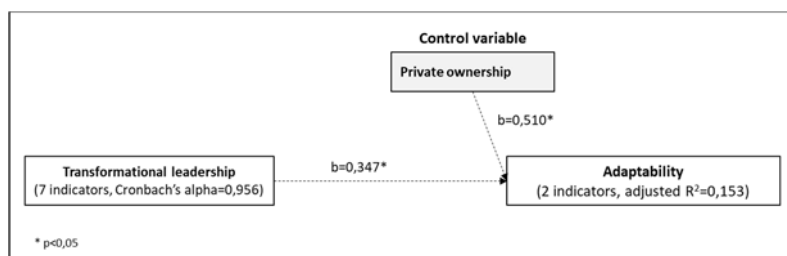
These control variables are included in a hierarchical regression analysis as a second model (the first model included *transformational leadership* only). However, an analysis of the coefficients shows that only *ownership-private* is statistically significant. The model that includes *transformational leadership* and the control variable *ownership-private* is statistically significant (Sig.=0.000; $p < 0.05$). The values of $R = 0.407$ and adjusted $R^2 = 0.153$ indicate a weak relationship between the studied variables. The values of $VIF = 1.032$ and the Condition Index = 10.218 indicate that there is no multicollinearity in the resulting model.

Hypothesis 1 is confirmed. *Transformational leadership* directly and positively affects the dependent variable *adaptability*. The independent variable explains only partially (12.3%) the variance of the dependent variable, which is expected. The inclusion of one control variable (*ownership-private*) marginally improves the explanation of the dependent variable. *Adaptability* would depend on more factors, including contextual (Gibson and Birkinshaw, 2004), and cannot be explained solely by the factors investigated here.

These results align with the findings of previous studies on the topic. Jansen, Vera and Crossan (2009) argue that the two activities of organizational ambidexterity (exploration and exploitation) require different leadership behaviours, especially in dynamic environments. Based on empirical research in the automotive sector, they prove a positive influence of transformational leadership on exploratory innovation activities and a negative influence of transactional leadership. On the other hand, transactional leadership has a positive influence on exploitative innovation activities. A positive relationship between transformational leadership and exploration is also found by Baškarada, Watson and Cromarty (2016).

The resulting model is illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Influence of transformational leadership on adaptability



Source: Own research.

Hypothesis 2: Testing the relationship between the independent variable *transformational leadership* and the dependent variable *organizational performance* is done through linear regression analysis. The relationship between the two variables is statistically significant (Sig.=0.000; $p < 0.05$). The analysis of the coefficients shows that *transformational leadership* is statistically significant ($b = 0.324$; Sig.=0.000 at $p < 0.05$). Values of $R = 0.515$ and adjusted $R^2 = 0.261$ indicate a moderate to weak relationship (Ferguson, 2009; Schober, 2018) between the studied variables.

Additional analysis was performed to identify control variables that influence organizational performance by stepwise inclusion of binary variables in a regression to *organizational*

performance. The evaluation of the model shows a weak influence of three of them ($R=0.306$; adjusted $R^2=0.085$): *sector-public*, *size-large*, and *export orientation* (Sig.=0.001; $p<0,05$). The *public sector* ($b_1= -0.546$; Sig.=0.003) has a negative influence on organizational performance, as well as *export orientation* ($b_3= -0.178$; Sig.=0.042). The size of organizations (*large*: $b_2=0.206$, Sig.=0.018) has a positive influence on organizational performance.

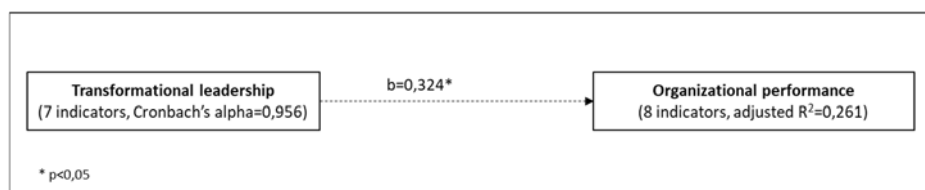
These control variables are included in a hierarchical regression analysis as a second model (the first model includes *transformational leadership* only). However, an analysis of coefficients shows that none of the control variables is statistically significant.

Hypothesis 2 is confirmed. *Transformational leadership* directly and positively affects the dependent variable of *organizational performance*. The independent variable explains only partially (26.1%) the variance of the dependent variable, which is expected. *Organizational performance* would depend on more factors and cannot be explained solely by leadership style.

These results confirm the findings of previous studies. Summarizing in a meta-analysis of 117 independent samples of 113 empirical studies, Wang, Oh, Courtright and Colbert (2011) confirm the positive influence of transformational leadership on performance at all three levels: individual, group, and organizational.

The resulting model is illustrated in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Impact of transformational leadership on organizational performance.



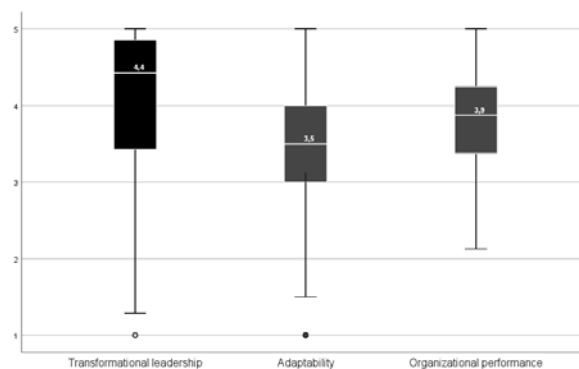
Source: Own research.

The above results answer the research question posed in this article. The analyses confirm the direct and positive influence of *transformational leadership* on *adaptability* and *organizational performance*.

4.2. Empirical results for organizations in Bulgaria in the three areas of research interest – transformational leadership, adaptability, and organizational performance

The analysis of the three variables' values presents a snapshot of the sample of organizations in Bulgaria, with the level of analysis being individual. The evaluation of the respondents is summarized in Figure 3. All three variables are rated relatively high, above the average "neutral" level. The very high average score on the *transformational leadership* factor is to be noted.

Figure 3. Three areas of research interest: mean values for the sample



Source: Own research.

The text below examines and comments on the data obtained for each of the three research areas. First, the main narrative provides details on the mean values for the indicators of each of the variables. Then, the related narrative provides cultural and behavioural reflections using some of the indicators from the main narrative and expanding them with a dataset from other studies.

4.2.1. Transformational leadership

Transformational leadership here reflects seven behaviours: communicating a vision, developing staff, providing support, empowering staff, being innovative, leading by example, and being charismatic. A more detailed look at the respondents' assessment of each of the indicators is presented graphically in Figure 4.

Figure 4. Transformational leadership – mean values of indicators.



Source: Own research.

Related Narrative 1: In the main narrative thus far, transformational leadership has the status of an independent variable (area of research interest; “scale”). The assessment of transformational leadership is represented by seven indicators (statements) as in Figure 4. Below, the cultural and behavioural context is built as a continuation of one of the statements, namely: *2. My leader treats staff as individuals, supports and encourages their development.*

The data, based on which behavioural and cultural reflection is made, were obtained during five observations on national and organizational cultures in 1995, 2001, 2008, 2014, and 2021 (Davidkov, 2019; Davidkov, 2022a). Hofstede’s (2001) methodology is used, and the following indices are calculated: Power Distance Index (PDI), Uncertainty Avoidance Index (UAI), Individualism Index (IDV), and Masculinity Index (MAS). The questionnaire (Davidkov, 2019, p.399) includes a set of indicators for work values (goals); a set of indicators for satisfaction with the state of the working environment factors; a set of indicators for evaluating managerial behavior, etc. Depending on the approach to the studied phenomena, the empirical data are processed and interpreted in accordance with the specific research approach, model, and strategy. The 1995 study is based on a sample of 377 respondents; 2001 – 1,200 respondents; 2008 – 1,200 respondents; 2014 – 900 respondents; 2021 – 2,651 respondents.

Reflection on this element of transformational leadership is carried out based on indicators that answer the following questions:

- To what extent does the manager care about the development of the subordinates?
- How do subordinates perceive their immediate manager?
- What type of manager would subordinates like to work with?

The empirical indicators through which data are collected to answer the above questions are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Empirical indicators.

| What question are we looking for an answer to? | Empirical indicator/response scale used |
|--|---|
| To what extent does the leader care about the development of the subordinates? | How often would you say your immediate manager is concerned about helping you get ahead? (1 – Always; 2 – Usually; 3 – Sometimes; 4 – Seldom; 5 – Never) |
| How do subordinates perceive their immediate manager? | To which of the following four types of managers would you say your own manager most closely corresponds? (1 – Manager 1; 2 – Manager 2; 3 – Manager 3; 4 – Manager 4; 5 – I currently have no manager) |
| What type of manager would subordinates like to work with? | For the four types of managers, please mark the one which you would prefer to work under (1 – Manager 1; 2 – Manager 2; 3 – Manager 3; 4 – Manager 4) |

Source: Hofstede (2001); Davidkov (2019).

Four types of managers are predefined as follows (Hofstede, 2001; Davidkov, 2019):

Manager 1. Usually makes his/her decisions promptly and communicates them to his/her subordinates clearly and firmly. Expects them to carry out the decisions loyally and without raising difficulties.

Manager 2. Usually makes his/her decisions promptly, but, before going ahead, tries to explain them fully to his/her subordinates. Gives them the reasons for the decisions and answers whatever questions they may have.

Manager 3. Usually consults with his/her subordinates before he/she reaches his/her decisions. Listens to their advice, considers it, and then announces his/her decision. He/she then expects all to work loyally to implement it whether or not it is in accordance with the advice they gave.

Manager 4. Usually calls a meeting of his/her subordinates when there is an important decision to be made. Puts the problem before the group and tries to obtain consensus. If he/she obtains consensus, he/she accepts this as the decision. If consensus is impossible, he/she usually makes the decision him/herself.

To what extent does the manager care about the development of the subordinates? In 2021, 59% of the respondents in organizations in Bulgaria claim that their immediate manager takes care of their development and helps them (answers: 1-Always; 2-Usually). Historically, the relative share of this type of manager has increased as follows: 1995 – 40%; 2001 – 50%; 2008 – 54%; 2014 – 56%; 2021 – 59%. The trend is unidirectional and sustainable. There are grounds to assume that the manifestation of this component of transformational leadership is enhanced and stabilized in the 55-60% interval.

How do subordinates perceive their immediate manager? – the results by year are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Perception of immediate manager (1995 – 2001 – 2008 – 2014 – 2021).

| To which of the following four types of managers would you say your own manager most closely corresponds? (Please indicate only <u>one response</u>) | 1995 | 2001 | 2008 | 2014 | 2021 |
|---|--------------------|------|------|------|------|
| | (% of respondents) | | | | |
| Manager 1 | 36 | 29 | 27 | 30 | 25 |
| Manager 2 | 26 | 28 | 30 | 26 | 31 |
| Manager 3 | 28 | 32 | 31 | 32 | 30 |
| Manager 4 | 10 | 11 | 12 | 12 | 14 |
| Total | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 |

Source: Davidkov (2019); Davidkov (2022a).

During the period 2001 – 2021, a stable distribution of the types of managerial behaviour was observed in the organizations in Bulgaria. Authoritarian management (Manager 1 + Manager 2) is extremely stable (2001 – 57%; 2008 – 57%; 2014 – 56%; 2021 – 56%). Consultative management (Manager 3) is also extremely stable as a share (31%, 31%, 32%, 30%). This resilience is also characteristic of the democratic managerial style (Manager 4) – 11%, 12%, 12%, 14%. There are grounds for asserting that managerial behaviour is value- and culture-determined. Such an assertion could be one of the possible explanations for the highly stable manifestation of managerial behaviour types over a relatively long period (2001 – 2021). In the context of the above, it can be assumed that a similar distribution will be reproduced during future observation (within the next 5-10 years).

Preferences for the type of managerial behaviour are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Preferences for managerial behavior types (1995 – 2001 – 2008 – 2014 – 2021)

| For the four types of managers, please mark the one which you would prefer to work under. (Please indicate only <u>one</u> response) | 1995 | 2001 | 2008 | 2014 | 2021 |
|---|--------------------|------|------|------|------|
| | (% of respondents) | | | | |
| Manager 1 | 6 | 9 | 7 | 9 | 9 |
| Manager 2 | 25 | 20 | 23 | 20 | 22 |
| Manager 3 | 50 | 47 | 47 | 44 | 41 |
| Manager 4 | 19 | 24 | 23 | 27 | 28 |
| Total | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 |

Source: Davidkov (2019); Davidkov (2022a).

The distribution of responses related to preferred managerial behaviour over the period 2001 – 2021 is also markedly stable. There are reasons to argue that the motivations for choosing the preferred type of manager are value- and culturally determined.

In Hofstede's approach, the two indicators – perception of the actual and preferences for a certain type of managerial behaviour – are constituent elements in the calculation of PDI. The high relative share of authoritarian behaviour (Manager 1 + Manager 2) results in higher PDI values (Hofstede, 2001; Davidkov, 2019). A strong preference for consultative management leads to lower PDI values. A series of studies (Davidkov, 2019) show that PDI values for Bulgaria are permanently high. From here, many results of significant cognitive value can be derived, as follows (see Table 5).

Table 5. Observed trends at low and high values of PDI

| Low values of PDI | High values of PDI |
|--|--|
| Hierarchy means inequality of roles – it is established for convenience | Hierarchy means existential inequality |
| A latent harmony between those with more and those with less power | A latent conflict between those with more and those with less power |
| More modest expectations about the benefits of new technologies | High expectations for the benefits of technology |
| Decentralized decision-making structures; less concentration of power | Centralized decision-making structures; stronger concentration of power |
| Less managerial (supervisory) personnel | Large managerial (supervisory) personnel |
| The ideal boss is a resourceful democrat; sees self as practical, orderly and supportive | The ideal boss is a well-meaning autocrat or "good father"; sees self as the benevolent "decision maker" |
| Managers rely on their personal experience and subordinates | Managers rely on formal rules |
| Subordinates expect to be consulted | Subordinates expect to be told (what to do) |
| Consultative leadership leads to satisfaction, good task performance and good productivity | Authoritarian leadership and close supervision lead to satisfaction, good task performance and good productivity |
| Subordinates are influenced by bargaining and reasoning; the management-by-objectives approach works | Subordinates are influenced by formal authority and sanctions; the management-by-objectives approach does not work |
| "Good champions" are needed for innovation | Innovation requires strong support from the hierarchy |
| Openness with information, incl. with subordinates | Information exchange constrained by hierarchy |

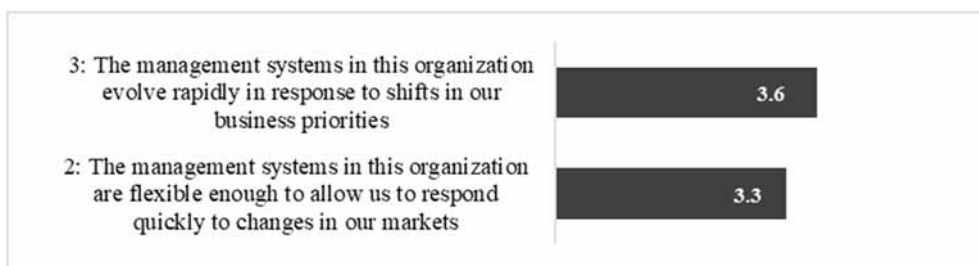
Source: Hofstede (2001); Davidkov (2019).

Given the high and sustainable values of PDI recorded for the organizations in Bulgaria, there is reason to claim that, in general, the situation in the observed organizations is more accurately characterized by the descriptions in the right column (high values of PDI). Each of the specified characteristics has a more direct or indirect explanatory value in terms of the ability of organizations to adapt and achieve results beneficial to the organization. As well as with regard to the specific mechanisms through which managers and teams interact; the decision-making process; working and non-working management practices, etc.

4.2.2. Adaptability

The dependent variable *adaptability* reflects the organization's ability to change in accordance with environmental shifts. Adaptability suggests that in dynamic environments, organizations focus more on exploration as part of change efforts. A more detailed look at the respondents' assessment of the two indicators included in the main narrative is presented in Figure 5.

Figure 5. Adaptability – mean values of indicators



Source: Own research.

Related Narrative 2. In the main narrative, adaptability has the status of a dependent variable. The assessment of adaptability is represented by two indicators (statements) as in Figure 4. Below, the cultural context is built as a continuation of one of the statements, namely: 2. *The management systems in this organization are flexible enough to allow us to respond quickly to changes in our markets.*

Reflection on this indicator is based on the rule orientation item, used in the set of studies on national and organizational cultures: *To what extent do you agree with the statement 'Company rules should not be broken – even when the employee thinks it is in the organization's best interest'?* (1 – Strongly agree; 2 – Rather agree; 3 – Undecided; 4 – Rather disagree; 5 – Strongly disagree). The results of five observations in organizations in Bulgaria on this indicator are presented in Table 6.

Table 6. Univariate distribution of responses (1995 – 2001 – 2008 – 2014 – 2021).

| To what extent do you agree with the following statement: “Company rules should not be broken – even when the employee thinks it is in the organization’s best interest”? | 1995 | 2001 | 2008 | 2014 | 2021 |
|---|--------------------|------|------|------|------|
| | (% of respondents) | | | | |
| Strongly agree | 31 | 26 | 22 | 27 | 19 |
| Rather agree | 29 | 27 | 27 | 31 | 28 |
| Undecided | 8 | 20 | 29 | 27 | 34 |
| Rather disagree | 28 | 23 | 17 | 12 | 15 |
| Strongly disagree | 4 | 4 | 5 | 3 | 4 |
| Total | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 |

Source: Davidkov (2019); Davidkov (2022a).

Over the entire period studied (1995 – 2021), uncritical following of rules weakens (“Strongly agree”). The search for a different point of view (“Undecided”) is visibly increasing.

The indicator thus presented (named *rule orientation*) is used in measuring UAI (Hofstede, 2001; Davidkov, 2019). A strong orientation to following rules results in higher UAI values. (For additional discussion on the norms and practices related to UAI see Davidkov, 2019, p.491; Hofstede, 2001, p.145).

The choice concerning rule orientation is determined by several related judgments. These are subject to the understanding of personal, group, and organizational interests and their hierarchy, including the cultural situation of the actors (for example, in the context of individualism-collectivism). Such judgments are considered in a different time context (short- vs. long-term orientation). They also relate to the ability of people in the organization to influence the issues that matter to them; to the control mechanisms – to what extent deviation from the norms is possible, and what is the price to be paid for not following the rules.

In another related context, the attitude towards rules is a prerequisite and a guide in the process of building a strategy for workplace behaviour. In the context of the organization, each employee (manager) strives to build a winning behaviour. The attitude towards rules is an essential element in justifying (and choosing) a behavioural strategy of the individual. Interpretation of rules and rule compliance is highly dependent on the behavioural and cultural practices at work.

4.2.3. Organizational performance

Achieving and maintaining *organizational performance* above the competitors' average level is associated with the organization's competitive advantage. A more detailed view of the respondents' assessment of the indicators included in the main narrative is presented in Figure 6.

Figure 6. Organizational results – mean values of indicators



Source: Own research.

Related Narrative 3. In the main narrative, *organizational performance* has the status of a dependent variable. The assessed state is represented by eight indicators (statements) as in Figure 5. Below, the cultural and behavioural context is built as a continuation of the following two indicators: 7. *Secure jobs* and 8. *Employee training*.

Reflection on these elements of organizational performance is made based on two pairs of indicators (see Table 7).

Table 7. Indicators of job security and employee training.

| Pairs of indicators | Indicators |
|---------------------|---|
| Security | For <i>value</i> (significance) of <i>job security</i> To what extent it is important to you to have the security that you will be able to work for your organization as long as you want to? (1 – very important; 2 – important; 3 – neither important nor unimportant; 4 – not important; 5 – not important at all) |
| | For <i>satisfaction</i> with <i>job security</i> How satisfied are you with your current job in terms of security that you will be able to work for this organization as long as you want to? (1 – completely satisfied; 2 – rather satisfied; 3 – neither satisfied and nor dissatisfied; 4 – rather dissatisfied; 5 – very dissatisfied) |
| Training | For <i>value</i> (significance) of the <i>training</i> To what extent is it important to you to have training opportunities (to learn or improve your skills and acquire new skills) at the job? (1 – very important; 2 – important; 3 – neither important nor unimportant; 4 – not important; 5 – not important at all) |
| | For <i>satisfaction</i> with <i>training</i> To what extent are you satisfied with your current job in terms of training opportunities (to learn or improve your skills and acquire new skills)? (1 – completely satisfied; 2 – rather satisfied; 3 – neither satisfied nor dissatisfied; 4 – rather dissatisfied; 5 – very dissatisfied) |

Source: Hofstede (2001); Davidkov (2019).

Table 8 presents the results related to the *job security indicators*.

Table 8. Job security indicators – main results

| Indicator | Mean value of the indicator (2021) |
|---|------------------------------------|
| To what extent it is important to you to have the security that you will be able to work for your organization as long as you want to? (1 – very important; 2 – important; 3 – neither important nor unimportant; 4 – not important; 5 – not important at all) | 1.81 |
| How satisfied are you with your current job in terms of security that you will be able to work for this organization as long as you want to? (1 – completely satisfied; 2 – rather satisfied; 3 – neither satisfied and nor dissatisfied; 4 – rather dissatisfied; 5 – very dissatisfied) | 2.13 |

Source: Davidkov (2022a); Davidkov (2022b).

Table 9 presents the results for *training opportunities*.

Table 9. Training opportunities indicators – main results

| Indicator | Mean value of the indicator (2021) |
|--|------------------------------------|
| To what extent is it important to you to have training opportunities (to learn or improve your skills and acquire new skills) at the job? (1 – very important; 2 – important; 3 – neither important nor unimportant; 4 – not important; 5 – not important at all) | 1.61 |
| To what extent are you satisfied with your current job in terms of training opportunities (to learn or improve your skills and acquire new skills)? (1 – completely satisfied; 2 – rather satisfied; 3 – neither satisfied nor dissatisfied; 4 – rather dissatisfied; 5 – very dissatisfied) | 2.35 |

Source: Davidkov (2022a); Davidkov (2022b).

Tables 8 and 9 characterize two of the important organizational performance indicators – job security and employee training opportunities. These are presented in two sections, according to the respondents’ assessment of their *significance* (value) and *satisfaction* with their current job (with the current organization). In order to understand the attitude of people in the organization to a specific factor (therefore – how this factor affects them), it is not enough to limit the analysis only to the significance attributed to it. Comparing the significance with the assessment of its actual state guides a better understanding of the motivational potential of a specific factor. In the general case, it is assumed that the absence of a substantial difference between the significance and the level of satisfaction with a specific factor can be interpreted as the absence of a significant motivational potential (Davidkov, Gourbalova, 2018; Davidkov, Vedar, Petkova-Gourbalova, Mihaylova, 2021). The presence of a substantial difference indicates greater motivational potential.

According to the framework thus outlined, the analysis of the two results may be summarized as follows:

- There are grounds to argue that *employee training* (here viewed as an element of organizational performance) is more valuable to employees than *job security*. The formal basis is the comparison of the attributed significance of the two outcomes (job security – 1.81, see Table 8; employee training – 1.61, see Table 9). The logic of the response scales

suggests the following: the closer to 0.00 the mean value of a given indicator, the higher the significance attributed to it; the closer to 5.00 – the weaker its significance.

- The difference between the mean values of *job security* indicators (Table 8) is 0.32; the difference between the mean values of the *employee training* indicators (Table 9) is 0.74. This underpins the argument that the organizational outcome of *employee training* contains a stronger motivational potential (providing appropriate training opportunities to employees boosts motivation).

5. Conclusion

This article aims to deepen the understanding of transformational leadership by formulating the following research question: what the influence of transformational leadership on adaptability and organizational performance is.

The approach applied to answering the research question combines empirical data from research on the relationship between the three variables with a series of studies on national and organizational cultures in Bulgaria. This allows the cultural and behavioural context to be problematized. Thus, the results of the presented studies are complemented to better outline and interpret specific conditions and interdependencies. As a result, several conclusions and directions for future research may be outlined.

First, the main narrative confirms the two hypotheses. Transformational leadership directly and positively influences adaptability. The analysis of a sample in Bulgaria supports previous research that links transformational leadership with innovation, change, and adaptability in a dynamic environment, as well as with a culture that promotes learning in the organization (Nemanich, Vera, 2009). Jansen, Vera and Crossan (2009) show empirically that transformational leadership can significantly contribute to creative thinking and the pursuit of exploration strategies. Transformational leadership directly and positively affects organizational performance. Such a relationship also supports previous research (Judge, Piccolo, 2004; Lord, Day, Zaccaro, Avolio, Eagly, 2017). Several studies have examined leadership styles and their relationship to balancing the two elements of organizational ambidexterity – exploration and exploitation – in other national contexts (Jansen, Vera, Crossan, 2009; Nemanich, Vera, 2009). As the results presented here for the Bulgarian context consider only one of the elements of contextual ambidexterity (adaptability), including the other element (alignment) in future research would enrich the understanding of these variables and their relationship.

Second, the results presented show that for the covered sample in Bulgaria, high values are observed for all three investigated variables – transformational leadership, adaptability, and organizational performance. Some of the indicators used are interpreted through similar ones from the related narrative (a series of observations on behavioural and cultural features in organizations in Bulgaria, see Davidkov, 2019). A unidirectional and sustainable trend over the years (1995-2021) is recorded for the transformational leadership indicator *Care for employee development* – it strengthens and stabilizes at a relatively high level. The types of observed and preferred leadership behaviours are also markedly persistent over a long period

of time, as well as the high level of Power Distance Index (and authoritarian leadership behaviours). This raises further questions about the relationship between the observed high values of authoritarianism on the one hand, and transformational leadership on the other. A deeper examination of the specific mechanisms by which leaders and teams interact, the decision-making process, and the leadership practices that are effective and ineffective would help to clarify these observations.

The uncritical following of rules by organizational members weakens over the observed period presented in the related narrative (1995-2021) at the expense of strengthening the tendency to search for alternative solutions. Attitudes toward rules can be interpreted through an understanding of personal, group, and organizational interests and their hierarchy. The conditional attitude toward rules is associated with lower values of the Uncertainty Avoidance Index; a relationship with adaptability in the organization can be explored.

Interpreting organizational performance through cultural and behavioural observations covers two of these outcomes – employee training and job security (in the workplace). There is reason to argue that training is more valuable to employees than job security; as well as that training contains a stronger motivational potential.

These conclusions are obtained through a related interpretation of two separate sets of empirical data. The integration of cultural and behavioural aspects in the methodology of future research would help to interpret empirical results in a more thorough way. This article finds support for the proposition that leadership behaviour is value- and culturally determined. Understanding the extent to which national and organizational cultures establish, predetermine the context in which transformational leadership and organizational adaptability unfold would allow more definitive conclusions on the observed variables. This could enable the formulation of recommendations better targeted to organizations operating in the Bulgarian national context – and culture.

The fourth direction for future research also relates to the formulation of recommendations. Replicating such research at an organizational level would enable profiling of successful and less successful organizations, and thus serve to draw conclusions about which behaviours and practices are effective and applicable in the Bulgarian cultural context.

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