Perspectives of Individualism on the Role of Transformational Leadership in Humanitarian Organisations: The Case Study of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, Africa Zone

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Abstract

Purpose

To explore the role of transformational leadership in humanitarian organizations with a focus on the IFRC, Africa Zone with a view of assessing how individualism may influence transformational leadership in humanitarian organizations.

Objective

To determine whether individualism affects the role of transformational leadership at the IFRC, Africa Zone.

Methodology

The research utilized descriptive survey by methodology, which was considered appropriate since would enable rapid gathering of reliable and accurate data in a case study context focusing on IFRC, Africa Zone. An online questionnairethrough Survey Monkey system was administered to a sample of IFRC staff. The questionnaire was adapted from the Global Transformational Leadership Scale (GTLS) developed by Carless *et al*. (2000). Measurement items were opinion

statements such as "My leader supports and deals with matters that defend the organisation." Using a five-point Likert scale, response categories ranged from 1 (I do not know) to 5 (strongly agree).

Findings

Using a 1 through 5, Likert scale adopted from Bass and Avolio's (1995) leadership measurement tool, results suggest that the highest ranked person was a coordinator/manager with a mean score of 4.24, followed by a director at 4.19, and then the secretary general with a score of 4.01 (Table 2). People perceived least as leaders were volunteers and staff members, with mean scores of 3.72 and 3.42, respectively

Results indicated a positive relationship between individualism and transformational leadership (r=0.77; p<0.01), and 60% of the variation in transformational leadership was explained by individualism ($R^2 = 0.60$).

Implications

Theories of individualism indicate that some organisational challenges are because of individualism value as well as the fact that not all successful leaders are as a result of individualism. There are organizational and a part of individual that also emanates from the fast changing global trends and quick technological progressions.

Conclusions

Transformational leaders should manage individualism by facilitating a dependency of each other and requiring higher commitment, connection, and institutional vitality.

This study demonstrates that leadership in humanitarian organisations should encourage an individual's capacity to manage fairly and by the rule of law when serving beneficiaries and that right individual should be hired and developed to lead organisations.

Introduction

Hofstede (2001) argues individualism is one of four intercultural dimensions, among power distance, uncertainty avoidance, and masculinity. Individualism orients the self, manifesting independently versus identifying with a group. Rothwell (2010) adds that individualism emphasizes not only personal achievements, but also a rational assessment of beneficial and detrimental aspects of relationships. In spite of attention given to leadership and management—and the application of these concepts in organisations—there is little evidence to suggest how growing individualization in society influences leadership broadly (Lawler, 2005). Thus, a growing concern with individual leaders in organisations occurs simultaneously with the question of whether the leadership phenomenon resides in particular individuals.

At the organisational level, individuals are neither entirely nor comfortably independent. Hence, relationships with trusted individuals are all the more important as other, traditionally structured organisational relationships decline in influence and importance. Those relationships—in organisations and elsewhere—are characterised in the first stages of modernity by establishing roles and following rules, procedures, and structures that limit uncertainty (Sturges, 2004). Increasing complexity and chaos experienced in the second stage are more concerned with rule finding than providing rules, a perspective that mirrors development of contemporary management theories, highlighting recent recognition that dealing with uncertainty and unpredictability is the primary activity of most managers and leaders (Bryman, 2004).

A major consequence of individualization for organisations is that expectations of leadership and individual leaders in the work context particularly are higher than ever before. Hence, there is a need to consider the tradition of leadership research and to examine whether other, less traditional approaches merit attention. Stacey (2006) suggests leadership research objectifies leadership and identifies essential characteristics of individual leaders as study variables.

The IFRC

The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) is the world's largest humanitarian organisation, providing assistance without discrimination based on nationalities, races, religious beliefs, classes, or political opinions. Founded in 1919, the

organisation is comprised of one-hundred eighty-six (forty-nine in Africa) Member Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, a Secretariat in Geneva, and more than sixty delegations located strategically to support worldwide operations. The Africa Zone Office and the Regional Representation for Eastern Africa are located in Nairobi, Kenya, with other offices in Dakar, Yaoundé, Gaborone and Abidjan, and ten Country Offices in the Republic of South Sudan, Sudan, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Somalia, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Chad, Niger, Zimbabwe, Nigeria, Ivory Coast, and Madagascar. The Africa Zone provides membership services to forty-nine National Societies in Africa, with about four hundred staff comprised of international and national staff.

IFRC conducts relief operations to assist disaster victims, with development initiatives to strengthen the capacities of member National Societies. Its operations are conducted through the Disaster Response Emergency Fund (DREF), a pool of funds created by IFRC to ensure immediate funding is available at the time of a disaster. DREF fills the gap between disaster outbreak and donor response, within hours of an emergency or in response to a humanitarian disaster. Apart from DREF, three other mechanisms the organisation uses include Field Assessment and Coordination Teams (FACTs), Emergency Response Units (ERUs), and Regional Disaster Response Teams (RDRTs). IFRC's mission includes four areas: promoting humanitarian values, disaster response, and preparedness, healthcare and national society development coordinated by a Geneva-based Secretariat, and worldwide offices (IFRC, 2012).

According to Geleta (2011), lack of transformational leadership deprives the IFRC Africa Zone of the necessary strategy of scaling up and doing better to address the many humanitarian challenges in Africa. Duncalf (2012) argues there is exponential population growth in sub-Saharan Africa exceeding the growth of agriculture production, a situation that is on-going and likely to produce conflicts and enforced migrations, serious outbreaks of viral and contagious diseases, slow onsets of chronic food shortages, and increased urbanisation and climate changes. These challenges deprive communities of services and benefits necessary to cope and survive. Such crises as the Horn of Africa and the Sahel Food Crisis, population displacement in the Ivory Coast, and Ebola outbreaks in Uganda and Democratic Republic of the Congo worsen the

situations the Red Cross and Red Crescent stand to serve, and that require transformational leadership (IFRC, 2012).

The Problem

Since proposed by Burns (1978) and improved on by Bass (1985), transformational leadership has not been institutionalised across African humanitarian organisations. Lack of transformational leadership during periods of transformation and humanitarian crises denies African humanitarian organisations the opportunity to respond and manage many humanitarian challenges (Geleta, 2011).As a key humanitarian player, IFRC leads responses to meet some of these African humanitarian needs, but IFRC Africa Zone continues to face challenges in delivering humanitarian responses and development in Africa. For example, Emergency Appeals launched in 2010/2011 failed to generate substantial donor support to finance responses. Appeal funding dropped from CHF 75 million in 2009/2010 to CHF 51 million in 2010/2011. Requests for DREF increased, with over 65 DREFs launched in 2010/2011 in comparison to 35 Emergency Appeals in the same period (Majid, 2011), attributed, among other reasons, to donor fatigue and inherent logistical challenges of managing relief operations.

Underlying factors emanate from the fact that most of the disasters are a consequence of natural, recurring events, which defeat the sudden, large-scale relief operations that address long-term challenges of supporting communities to become more resilient to disaster cycles. Humanitarian response has become so sophisticated that Red Cross and Red Crescent interventions are not significant when responding to many natural disasters. Lack of investment in advocacy for community resilience influences the credibility of African disaster response negatively. In addition, IFRC experienced a period of major restructuring and development of its strategic framework (i.e., Strategy 2020), creation of unusual Regional Appeals, and creation of structures for coordination of operations that lack adequate consultations within IFRC circles. This resulted in considerable tension and confusion within IFRC in terms of its relations with National Societies, which are detrimental to IFRC's capacity to respond and mitigate disasters.

Majid (2011) observes that low technical, logistic, coordination, and donor relations capacity at

the zone level contribute to slow and occasionally uncoordinated responses, with low impact on community resilience. Geleta (2011) corroborates these findings and argues IFRC leaders failed to mobilize adequate resources—financial and human—for effective coordination of humanitarian response and development during increasingly cyclic African humanitarian emergencies. Berson and Avolio (2004) suggest that since humanitarian organisations rely on donors for funding, they require transformational leadership to meet changing priorities and expectations, and receive donor support. According to Riaz and Haider (2010), organisations must find efficient leadership to position themselves to meet stakeholder expectations and continue to attract requisite financial and social political support in an increasingly globalised and competitive world.

The role of transformational leadership in humanitarian organisations is both wide and dynamic. This study explores the impact of individualism on the role of transformational leadership in humanitarian organisations by focusing on IFRC Africa Zone. The hypothesis tested is:

H: Individualism and the role of transformational leadership in IFRC Africa Zone correlate positively.

The study was open to select staff members who held an opinion on transformational leadership in relation to their areas of operation. In addition, a review of reports from the IFRC regional and country offices was conducted. By focusing on humanitarian organisations and assessing whether individualism influences the role of transformational leadership, this study's findings provide insights that might assist organisations in several ways. First, the findings provide information to IFRC officers in their quest to achieve global operations policy reforms. Second, it contributes to legislation and policies on humanitarian response. Third, it contributes to the education and training of leaders and managers of humanitarian organisations. Fourth, it encourages development partners, governments, and other stakeholders dealing directly or indirectly with IFRC in the ten country offices and five regional representations in Africa to pursue transformational leadership. Findings should help IFRC and other humanitarian actors improve humanitarian service delivery, in line with Ritz *et al.* (2009) and Davenport's (2010) conclusion that studying the role of transformational leadership leads to efficient service delivery

in a majority of humanitarian organisations.

Theoretical Review

Northouse (2007) argues that if there is one issue about which everyone has an opinion it is leadership. House (2004) defines leadership both organisationally and narrowly as an individual's ability to influence, motivate, and enable others to contribute to the effectiveness and success of an organisation of which they are members. Northouse (2007) defines leadership as the art or process of influencing people so they strive toward achievement of a group's mission willingly and enthusiastically. Since effective organisational leadership is critical to the success of international operations, organisational globalization presents numerous leadership challenges (Kouzesand Posner, 2002). The primary challenges include threats to humanitarian principles of impartiality, neutrality, and independence, the relief-development gap about which countless papers have been written, conferences organized, and recommendations formulated. Nevertheless, the most appropriate operating formula has not been found, though the humanitarian field is crowded with many humanitarian actors with increasingly disparate mandates (Hugo, 2002). Transformational leadership promises to be effective by reshaping service delivery (Northhouse, 2007).

According to Russell (2002), transformational leaders emphasize new possibilities and promote a compelling vision of the future. Transformational leaders manifest passionate inspiration (Klenke, 2005) and visibly model appropriate behaviours (Kouzesand Posner, 1987).The goal is change that uplifts organisations to new, exciting possibilities. To reach that goal, organisations must receive new energy and vision from leaders. The process of transformational leadership stems from a sense of vision and energy, and is comprised of four components; idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration (Bass, 1985), which involves motivating people, establishing a foundation for leadership authority and integrity, and inspiring a shared vision of the future (Chatman and Cha, 2003).

Northouse (2007) argues individualism plays an important role in shaping leadership, entrenched in the n-arch theory of leadership in which traits of leadership are innate, not acquired. Whereas

individualism is a little-realized value in bourgeois society—and at best confined to a privileged few—under late-modern conditions, individualization is a necessity, experienced as liberating yet simultaneously an obligation, increasingly so for the many. Through individualism, a person becomes responsible for what they do, and thereby personally culpable for failures. Individualisation is not just about rewards, it is also about penalties. Sociology is society's primary institutionalized source of alternatives to hegemonic individualism. Like all things in social life, assuming individualism or types of individualism as opposed to commitment leads to misperceiving the complex ways in which people use individualism to heighten social commitments. Individualism understanding advances by investigating it more deeply both as a practice and discourse (Spears and Walker, 2009).

Individualism relates to commitment, connection, and institutional vitality in practice, and people use it to navigate social life. It is a collectively shared experience no matter how lonely it seems (Lawler, 2005).It is as though the ethical dilemmas of existentialism are normalised for everyone in a modern social formation in which risk is endemic at societal, global, and personal levels, producing predictable existentialism in personal conduct and working life. Individuals must take personal responsibility in their everyday lives, and are obliged to make agonistic choices routinely. As Oysterman (2006) remarks, individualisation means each person's biography is removed from given determinations and placed in his or her own hands, open and dependent on decisions. The proportion of life opportunities, closed to decision-making fundamentally, is decreasing, and the proportion of the biography that is open and must be construed personally is increasing. According to Susan (2003), individualisation of life, situations, and processes become a socially prescribed biography transformed into a biography that is self-produced and continues to be produced. Decisions concerning education, profession, job, residence, spouse, number of children, etc., with all the secondary decisions implied, can no longer be made. Hofstede (2001) theorized that societies accord different weights to individualism in leadership, with America, Australia, and Britain considering it one of the highest aspects of leadership, in contrast to Asia, Latin America, and Africa.

Research Design

This study used a descriptive survey through quantitative methods, an appropriate design since it enabled rapid gathering of reliable and accurate data in a case study context. Variables were not controlled or manipulated, but were measured as naturally as they occurred. The method of data collection was by interviewing or administering a questionnaire to a sample of individuals. Descriptive surveys are used often to collect information about people's attitudes, opinions, habits, or other social issues. According to Kothari (2006), a descriptive design distinguishes small and large sample groups while easily generalizing results. This method also enabled tapping both latent factors and relationships among variables.

Population

The population of this study included 431 employees of the IFRC Africa Zone, distributed in 17 offices comprised of 343 local staff members and 88 international expatriates (i.e., delegates). Table 1 shows the population distribution.

Table 1.Study Population

Africa Zone Staff July2011	Local Staff(Federation/NS Contracted)	Delegates
Sudan	12	5
Zimbabwe	38	4
Somalia	14	2
Chad	50	5
Nigeria	18	5
Ethiopia	10	4
Liberia	10	6
Eritrea	10	1
Mauritius	5	1
DRC	7	2
South Africa Zone	10	15

Senegal	40	6
Niger	14	4
Cameroon	30	6
SA Regional office	26	10
Madagascar	4	2
EA Regional office	65	10
Sub-totals	343	88
Grand Staff Totals	**431**	

Sample

A sample was culled from the population using stratified sampling to include all regions of the organisation. According to Robson (2002), this technique produces estimates of overall population parameters with greater precision, and ensures a sample is derived from a relatively homogenous population. The formula Kothari (2006) and Sekaran (2006) suggest is:

$$n = \frac{z^2 pq}{d^2}$$

Where *n* is the desired sample size if the population is greater than 10,000, *z* is the degree of confidence (i.e., 95% confidence level), *p* is the population with desired characteristic (50%), *q* is the population without the characteristic (i.e., 1-p or 0.5), and *d* is the degree of accuracy required (i.e., 5%) as referenced from z (i.e., 95%).Given the target population was fewer than 10,000, a smaller sample required adjustment to offset inaccuracy. In line with Kothari (2004), an adjustment to *n'* was made from n:

$$n' = \frac{n}{1 + \frac{n}{N}}$$

A sample of 160 staff members from across IFRC Africa Zone was selected through proportionate sampling. Stratified sampling ensured employees and managers were selected with

equal probability. Therefore, selected staff members represented the organisation, leading to equal participation. According to Cooper and Schindler (2006), this stratification technique produces estimates of overall population parameters with greater precision, and ensures a more representative sample is derived from a homogenous population, without bias. If only one stratum is targeted, biases in responses and observations are likely (Nachmias and Nachmias, 2008). The sample represented 37% of the population, above the minimum recommended sample threshold of 30%. Lewis (2003) defines sample size as a function of logistics and population homogeneity or heterogeneity. According to Sekaran (2006), adequacy means the sample should be large enough (i.e., at least 30 % of the population) to enable reasonable estimates of variables, capture response variability, and facilitate comparative analysis. Since the sample was larger than 30% of the population, it was sufficient to address this study's purpose.

Collection Instrument

According to Nachmias and Nachmias (2008), a data collection tool is a document containing questions presented in a systematic, highly precise fashion. The instrument of data collection for this study was an online questionnaire. The questionnaire was adapted from the Global Transformational Leadership Scale (GTLS) developed by Carless *et al*. (2000).Measurement items were opinion statements such as "My leader supports and deals with matters that defend the organisation." Using a five-point Likert scale, response categories ranged from 1 (I do not know) to 5 (strongly agree). Respondents reported the extent to which they perceived their leader matched each item under the individualism scales of leadership qualities.

Data Analysis

Statistical inference was conducted using Pearson's correlation rank and product coefficient, a non-parametric test suitable when applied to large samples Kothari (2006).Probable error (i.e., 0.5 of the coefficient of correlation)served as a guide for the analysis. If the value of r were about 0.5 and less than 0.6, the relationship was mild or moderate. If the value of r were greater than zero, the relationship strong and significant. The hypothesis would fail if the value of r^2were below 0.196.

Results

One-hundred thirty-four staff members, representing 84% of the targeted sample, responded to the online questionnaire. Respondents selected who they perceived was a transformational leader in the IFRC Africa Zone, a question that established who among employees were recognized as leaders. Using a1 through 5,Likertscale adopted from Bass and Avolio's (1995) leadership measurement tool, results suggest that the highest ranked person was a coordinator/manager with a mean score of 4.24, followed by a director at 4.19, and then the secretary general with a score of 4.01 (Table 2). People perceived least as leaders were volunteers and staff members, with mean scores of 3.72 and 3.42, respectively. Rankings and scores of the leadership rubric are shown in Table 2 and 3.

Table 2. Respondent Perceptions of Transformational Leaders

Perceived Leader	Mean Score	Standard Deviation	Max	Min
Coordinator/Manager	4.24	1.34	4.73	3.24
Director	4.19	0.19	4.18	3.97
Secretary General	4.01	1.11	4.61	2.78
Staff	3.72	0.26	4.15	2.14
Volunteer	3.42	1.08	4.12	2.89

Table 3.Type of a Leader

Question: Whom among the following do you consider a leader in your operation/delegation?		
	Answered question	126
	Skipped question	8

Question: Whom among the following do you consider a leader in your operation/delegation?							
	I Don't Know	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Rating Average	Response Count
Secretary General	6.9% (8)	2.8% (3)	11.1% (14)	40.3% (49)	38.9% (47)	4.01	122
Director	1.4% (2)	2.7% (3)	9.5% (11)	48.6% (58)	37.8% (45)	4.19	120
Coordinator/Manager	0.0% (0)	3.7% (7)	3.7% (7)	57.3% (72)	35.4% (45)	4.24	126
Staff	2.9% (3)	1.5% (2)	29.4% (33)	52.9% (59)	13.2% (15)	3.72	112
Volunteer	9.7% (11)	4.8% (5)	33.9% (37)	37.1% (41)	14.5% (16)	3.42	110

The primary question captured perceptions concerning individualistic values that a leader ought to possess. From scores shown in Table 4, the most significant quality was "My leader relies on himself most of the time, rarely on others," with a mean score of 3.41, followed by "Believes to be a unique individual," and "My leader's personal identity, independent of others, is important to him," both of which scored 3.35 on the 4-point,Likert scale. The lowest score was associated with "Would rather depend on himself than others," which had a mean score of 2.74. These results accord with what Schein (1990) and Owusu (2005) suggest in their studies on individual considerations in public- and private-sector leadership. Tucker and Russell (2004) also theorize transparent and accountable behaviours support individualism when serving followers.

Table 4. Perceived Individualism Values

	Individualistic Qualities	Mean Score	Max	Min	Standard Deviation
1	Supports and defends organisation	2.89	3.11	2.77	0.07

2	Is reliable and trustworthy	2.94	3.17	2.84	0.11
3	Would rather depend on himself than others	2.74	2.82	2.71	0.06
4	My leader's personal identity, independent of others, is important to him	3.35	3.49	3.31	0.82
5	My leader relies on himself most of the time, rarely on others	3.41	3.51	2.73	0.17
6	Enjoys being unique and different from others in many respects	3.06	3.12	2.87	0.21
7	Believe to be a unique individual	3.35	3.70	2.43	0.09
8	Winning is everything	3.11	3.64	2.98	0.26
9	Believes competition is necessary to have a good society	2.94	3.17	2.64	0.19

Summary of Major Findings

A major finding of this study was that the characteristic "My leader relies on him most of the time, rarely on others" influences transformational leadership. Johnson and Scholes (2003) argue workplace equality either hinders or encourages good leadership. Two more individualistic characteristics found to be significant were "My leader's personal identity, independent of others, is important to him" and "Believes to be a unique individual." Several scholars such as Tucker and Russell (2004) and Kelleher (2004), and earlier Hofstede (1980) and Schein (1990), emphasize the need for transparency and accountability, while ensuring individual characteristics do not interfere with important decision-making.

When leaders develop their own and others' individualistic and social group identities, they increase self-awareness and improve interactions with others. These skills are effective for building emotional intelligence linked to competencies in high-performing leaders who foster strong performance. As Kellerman (2007) suggests, leadership is about leaders being close to

followers. This study supports these findings and accords with Nyachae (2010), who describes a chronology of power corridors in public organisations and demonstrates need for good leadership in public and private organisations.

Test of Hypothesis

The primary purpose of this study was to examine whether individualism influences the role of transformational leadership. Results indicated positive relationship was found between individualism and transformational leadership (r=0.77; p<0.01), and 60% of the variation in transformational leadership was explained by individualism ($R^2 = 0.60$).

Conclusion

Transformational leadership should manage individualism, requiring all organisational members to perceive dependency on one another to succeed as both individuals and an organisation. As Riaz and Haider (2010) argue, non-discrimination and protection of marginalised groups are key characteristics of transformational leaders in humanitarian organisations, and they are necessary to serve people with rules, procedures, and laws to enhance an organisation's image. This study suggests leadership in humanitarian organisations encourages a culture of transparency, fairness, and rule of law when serving beneficiaries. According to Shan and McIver (2011), corporate governance guidelines dictate that management should both be aware of discriminatory practices and deal with them since they can undermine an organisation.

This study suggests individualism relates to transformational leadership. Humanitarian organisations need to develop and nurture programmes that create an atmosphere of shared common values. Gratton (2007) recommends people should develop a self-drive that builds group objectives. Humanitarian organisations seeking leadership change and organisational reforms need to manage a high level of individualism among employees to support organisational development. This study demonstrates that leadership in humanitarian organisations should encourage an individual's capacity to manage fairly and by rule of law when serving beneficiaries. Wang (2008) argues human resources should ensure that the right

talent or individuals for leadership positions are selected and developed to lead an organisation by managing each employee's unique behaviours.

Implications of the study

Individualism studies have shown that some organisational problems are due to individualism trait. Therefore further studies should be carried out to determine how leaders are developed to reach where they are, their experiences, achievements as well as managing both their own tenure and succession for organisation's continuity.

The results also indicate that there is need to find out how organisations have contributed to the development of individuals into leadership positions since not all individuals fare well to leadership positions. It is also implied that not all successful leaders are because of individual development. There is a part that organizations must play emanating from the fast changing global trends and quick technological progressions.

Study limitations

Caution should be exercised in the interpretation of results because of a number of limitations. Data for the study are subject to the usual limitations of a survey research, as they were obtained from self-reporting instruments. Although study instruments are valid and reliable measures, this may not entirely rule out some under/over reporting by respondents. Again, the leadership instrument (GTLS) was modified to make it context-specific. This action may have potential implications for validity. However, there is a remote chance of this possibility given that reliability and validity evidence were obtained for the scales in the present study. Second, the study examined the predictive value of individualism perceptions on the role of transformational leadership while controlling for the influence of relevant covariates in the sampled population. The findings of this study do not imply that variance in transformational leadership behaviour is totally accounted for by this variable. Other factors not examined in this study may emerge from research as equally relevant variables for transformation leadership. Third, this study is exploratory; therefore data from employees in the Africa zone of the IFRC may not typify

humanitarian organisations in general or indeed the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies. Indeed, findings on individualism in this study, which may contrast with other results in the literature, may well be the consequence of sample differences. This calls for caution in generalising study findings to include employees in other contexts. Additional studies in other sectors could confirm or deny whether the current findings can be supported. Despite these limitations, the findings suggest a positive relationship between individualism and the role of transformational leadership, further suggesting humanitarian organisations should develop policies that enhance individualistic values that foster teamwork growth.

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