

## **Implicit Leadership Theories: A Qualitative Study in an Iranian Organization**

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### **Abstract**

This research aims at discovering the traits and abilities which characterize ideal leaders in the minds of employees in an Iranian context. After employing the strategy of phenomenology to reach the components of ideal leadership, 15 tenured middle managers and employees possessing decent management knowledge in the context were interviewed and after theme analysis, global, basic, and organizing themes were extracted. The results showed that the whole themes could be categorized into two groups of prototypes and anti-prototype. Five of the themes are the prototypes labeled as charismatic, humane oriented, employee's servant, emotionally mature, and decisive and three of them are the anti-prototype labeled as selfish, deceptive, and narrow-minded. Although some of the components of Implicit Leadership Theories (ILTs) are generalizable, the context can produce some distinct features of ILTs. This research tried to discover implicit leadership theories in an Iranian context. According to the available themes in the literature of ILTs, employee's servant, emotionally mature and decisive are the three novel prototypes and deceptive and narrow-minded are the new anti-prototypeanti-prototype. Moreover, this is the first study using interview to discover ILTs with the inclusion of data retrieved from participants' semantic memory.

### **Keywords**

Implicit leadership theories, Iran, Prototypes, Anti-prototypeanti-prototype.

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## **Introduction**

The chronology of leadership research has shown differences in the focal points of studies. Early studies mainly focused on leaders' actions and styles. By the 1970s, researchers turned their attention to leader-member relationship and then in the 1980s, the new shift caused the understanding of leadership through the perspectives of followers (Felfe & Peterson, 2007). Basically, this approach transcends the notion that effective leadership is manifested in leaders' behaviors and underscores followers' cognitive schemas as frameworks to differentiate leaders from non-leaders (Lim et al., 2012). These cognitive frameworks, or schemas, which help people to recognize leaders, are called implicit leadership theories (ILTs) (Lord & Maher, 1991).

Evidence from the literature of leadership demonstrates that there are two approaches towards leadership evaluation, emic and etic approaches. An emic approach mentions that the evaluation of leaders is impacted by some constructs developed within a culture while the etic approach claims that some schemas are global and developed in other cultures (Ayman et al., 2012). In the last 15 years, researchers have pointed out that ILTs are distinct in different countries (e.g., Subramaniam et al., 2010; Holmberg & Akerblom, 2006). To elaborate, the generalizability of ILTs is challenged by different factors impacting ILTs such as culture (House et al., 2004; Sy et al., 2010), age (Gordon & Arvey, 2004), gender (Epitropaki & Martin, 2004) and religion (Holritz, 2009).

The essence of this research is threefold. First, Iran is a country with its exclusive amalgamation of culture and religion. This has the potential to cause the birth of novel perceptions about leaders. Second, with an increasing importance of geopolitics of Iran, a closer observation of Iranians' image of a leader seems to be of great value (Ayman et al., 2012). Last but not least, ILTs provide a framework for sensemaking (Weik, 1995), which in return can impact factors such as the ratings of leaders' effectiveness (Bass & Avolio, 1989), collegiality ratings (Nye & Forsyth, 1991), perception of leadership

style (e.g., Martin & Epitropaki, 2001; Sy et al., 2010), Leader liking (Nye & Forsyth, 1991), leaders' respect (van Quaquebeke et al., 2011), task performance (Topakas, 2011), leader-member exchange, followers' organizational commitment, job satisfaction and well-being (Epitropaki & Martin, 2005).

Social-cultural environment has a profound impact on ILTs (Rydberg, 2016); thus, the content of implicit Iranian leadership is likely to be different from that of Western theories; therefore, the objective of the present study is to discover how Iranian people in National Iranian Oil Products Distribution Company (NIOPDC) in Kerman think about a leader, and to identify the dimension of the Iranian implicit concept of leadership.

### **Theoretical background and Literature review**

Implicit theories is the term applied to address a group of cognitive constructs embodying informal beliefs a person has about typical characteristics of people or objects (Mohamadzadeh et al., 2015; Epitropaki et al., 2013). Implicit theories are rooted in cognitive schemas, which include "the attributes, images, feelings, and ideas associated with a particular category of an individual" (Goodwin et al., 2000, p. 770). One of these implicit theories is implicit leadership theory which bridges leadership and information processing in the dyadic level of analysis and has received the second largest amount of interest in the new millennium (Dinh et al., 2014).

Lord and his colleagues defined implicit leadership theories as some cognitive structures or schemas which specify the traits, behavior, and abilities differentiating leaders from non-leaders (Lord & Maher, 1991; Lord et al., 1984). These prototypes are formed and shaped due to prior experience and socialization with leaders and then stored in memories of people and once individuals interact with those leaders possessing those characteristics, they are triggered and retrieved (Epitropaki & Martin, 2004). In contrast with implicit theories, which represent subjective reality and are constructed by laypeople and scientists, explicit theories are subjective and generated by scientists (Levy et al., 2006). The core proposition of ILTs is that

leadership is shaped in the “eyes of beholder”. While ILTs show subjective reality and perceptions, (explicit) scientific theories tend to explain objective reality (Sternberg, 1985). The essence of implicit theories lies in the fact that they establish an interpretative frame in which information is processed (Chiu et al., 1997). Therefore, leaders are labeled by followers as leaders or non-leaders and it may or may not have any scientific basis. Since ILTs are shaped in the minds of people from all walks of life, different cultural, religious and environmental factors can impact the contents of them and it implies that ILTs are context specific.

Some research on ILTs has been about generalizability. It focused on gender, culture and different employee groups (e.g., House et al., 2004; Epitropaki & Martin, 2004). In terms of gender, it is shown that the content of ILTs does not differ significantly but females and males rate leaders differently (Deal & Stevenson, 1998). Moreover, a meta-analysis advocated the masculinity of leader’s prototypes although it faded over time (Koenig et al., 2011). The generalizability of ILTs over different cultures has been investigated by different researchers. In brief, it is shown that although there are some identical prototypes and schemas in different cultures; however, some unique and different expectations exist for a leader to be called effective (van Quaquebeke & Brodbeck, 2008). Research has shown and bolstered similarity of factor structure across various employee age ranges, organizational positions, and tenures (Epitropaki & Martin, 2004). They emphasized that work positions and different work life stages can be distinguishing factors in the content differences of ILTs. As an important point, it implies that some combinations of ILTs in definite contexts can demonstrate better fit than others.

### **Explored ILTs**

Despite the endeavor of researchers to measure ILTs, it seems that few measures are developed and researches in different contexts have applied them even though it is shown that ILTs are context variant. In this regard, direct and indirect measures are produced. While direct measures rely on self-report scales, indirect measures aim at capturing

psychological attributes while the awareness is minimized. A large share of research by the 20<sup>th</sup> century revolved around the hinge of using scales which gave limited information about their psychometric properties (Epitropaki et al., 2013).

Lord and his colleagues (1984) pioneered the generation of a list containing 59 leader attributes and developed Akron Leadership Questionnaires (ALQ). Offermann and his colleagues (1994) developed a measure with eight dimensions of ILTs grouped under the labels of prototypic (dedication, sensitivity, attractiveness, intelligence, charisma, and strength) and anti-prototypic (Masculinity and Tyranny). Epitropaki and Martin (2004) reduced the number of traits into almost half and reached six prototypes of sensitivity, intelligent, dedication, dynamism and anti-prototypes of tyranny and masculinity. The most widely applied measure is the one used in the GLOBE studies (House et al., 2004). They specified six global dimensions which accommodated 21 positive and 8 negative leader attributes. Talking about a culture specific measure, Ling, Chia and Fang (2000) developed Chinese Implicit Leadership Theories scale with four first-order factors (goal effectiveness, personal mortality, versatility, and interpersonal competency). Based on the literature, the prototypes and anti-prototypes of leadership are juxtaposed in Table 1.

**Table 1. The summary of explored ILTs measures**

Traits	Categories	Explanation	Reference
For example: Intelligent, honest, happy, authoritarian	-High on prototypicality -Neutral -Low on prototypicality	59 leadership traits	Lord et al. (1984)
Sensitivity, dedication, tyranny, charisma, attractiveness, masculinity, intelligent, strength	-Prototypes -Anti-prototypes	-41 leadership traits -Six prototypes -Two anti-prototypes	Offermann et al. (1994)
Sensitivity, intelligence, dedication, dynamism, tyranny, masculinity	-Prototypes -Anti-prototypes	-21 leadership traits -Four prototypes -Two anti-prototypes	Epitropaki & Martin (2004)

Continue Table 1. The summary of explored ILTs measures

Traits	Categories	Explanation	Reference
Charismatic/ value-based, team-oriented, self-protective, participative, humane, autonomous	-Universal positive leader attributes -Universal negative leader attributes -Culturally specific attributes	-Culturally endorsed implicit leadership theories (CLTs) -21 positive universal attributes -8 negative universal attributes -35 Culturally specific attributes	House et al. (2004)
Personal morality, goal effectiveness, interpersonal competency, versatility	No categories	- 40 items categories equally in 4 groups	Ling et al., (2000)

### ILTs and Iranian culture

Research has shown that ILTs are impacted by culture (e.g., Gerstner & Day, 1994; Offermann et al., 1994). For instance, performance orientation and gender egalitarianism are related to the interest in participative leadership in different societies (Dorfman et al., 2004). Moreover, culture can direct the types of qualities perceived for an outstanding leader (Javidan et al., 2006). Based on the etic and emic of leadership, there are some generalizable and differentiating aspects of leadership (Dastmalchian et al., 2001). According to GLOBE research, in Iran, the levels of in-group collectivism, power distance and performance orientation are high while the levels uncertainty avoidance and societal collectivism are low. Moreover, there is a moderate focus on human orientation and moderately low emphasis on assertiveness and future orientation (Dastmalchian et al., 2001; Javidan & Dastmalchian, 2003).

Iranian managers consider seven factors of considerate, dynamic, positive, fair, tactful, collaborative, and modest as the characteristics of supportive leaders and self-important, deceitful, vindictive, individualistic, and willful were labeled as the features of dictatorial leaders (Dastmalchian et al., 2001). Additionally, Iranians prefer performance oriented, decisive leaders who have integrity and are willing to make personal sacrifices (Javidan & Dastmalchian, 2003).

Researchers have already pointed out that altruistic love, friendship, forgiveness, care, and compassion are among the important cores and values in Iran in addition to the fact that interactions of Iranian people have obviously formed low assertiveness and high levels of courtesy (Javidan & Dastmalchian, 2003).

According to Mackey (1996), leadership in Iran is intertwined with charisma and possession of super natural powers and exceptional qualities setting them apart from ordinary humans. Furthermore, the impact of religious beliefs on leadership has always prevailed in Iranian culture. During the period between the ancient Zoroastrian time and Islamic era, leadership and charisma have been related to the signs bestowed upon the leader by the Zoroastrian's force of good and Sire of truth, Ahura Mazda, or profound notions in religion (Shia Islam) (Forbis, 1980; Mackey, 1996). Considering Zoroastrianism, the destroyer and Ahriman are closely associated with deceitful, vindictive and self-oriented which are all against the good. Accordingly, good spirit which is the father of trust acts against wrong and deception.

## **Methodology**

### **Research design**

This research uses qualitative research design and acquires data through semi-structured interviews to unearth the social construction of ideal leadership in followers' minds. The justification of this method lies in its decency to cause the extracting of major themes from the data (Hoption, 2015).

Phenomenology is categorized in the group of qualitative research because of its philosophical roots (Merriam, 2009). Phenomenological research aims at describing lived experiences and shared meanings of participants based on a particular concept or phenomenon, summarizing individual experiences to a description of the essence lying behind the phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). Phenomenological research seeks to explore the "inner essential nature" and "true being" of the focal phenomenon (Van Manen, 1990, p. 177).

The use of phenomenology in the study is appropriate because the researcher will evaluate the participants' thoughts and interpretation about an ideal leader. Ajjawi and Higgs (2007) stated that phenomenology provides a means of interpreting the lived experiences of participants. The participants described in detail the traits, features, and characteristics that developed their respective leadership style. The choice of the phenomenological design stems from the background of the design use. The phenomenological design is an effective method to learn about the lived experiences of people (Ajjawi & Higgs, 2007; Groenewald, 2004). The interpretation of the participants' lived experiences may increase the level of understanding of effective leaders. Qualitative research designs such as grounded theory designs and ethnographic designs lack the fit for what the researcher desires to accomplish in the study. Grounded theory designs are appropriate for exploring individual experiences to develop a theory (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). In this research, no theory is developed. Despite having the name of implicit leadership theories, the term *theories* in this paper is not attributed to explicit theories and there is no intention of finding a generalizable theory since these theories are implicit not explicit. Ethnographic designs are appropriate for exploring a cultural group's shared native beliefs or point of view (Neuman, 2006). The purpose of the study is to discover individuals' experiences to learn about the pivotal phenomenon.

In this research, thematic analysis was utilized for data analysis to reach findings. Regarding the strategy applied, in the seminal work done by Braun and Clarke (2006), it is clearly stated that "thematic analysis should be seen as a foundational method for qualitative analysis. It is the first qualitative method of analysis that researchers should learn, as it provides core skills that will be useful for conducting many other forms of qualitative analysis." In terms of method, thematic analysis is essentially autonomous from theory and epistemology, and is utilized for a wide range of theoretical and epistemological strategies (Braun and Clarke, 2006).



**Participants**

To interview participants, a pool of qualified middle managers and employees was selected to give us the most comprehensive picture of an ideal leader. They were asked to answer the questions as the subordinate of higher level management. To do it practically, the individuals were asked to think of their immediate supervisors, managers or directors during the last years. The selection criteria were: a) high organizational tenure since it can significantly increase the prior experience of working with different leaders; b) amongst those leaders, the ones who had some theoretical knowledge of management gained the first priority to be interviewed to minimize the misunderstanding of questions. Moreover, exposure to the knowledge of management may increase the reservoir of leadership traits and give more readiness to make them explicit. There are some reasons to select NIOPDC as the research field. First, this organization has tenured and experienced personnel who have taken part in different business courses and also have seen different leaders during their work life. Second, in the policies of oil and gas industry, the second goal is the improvement of employees’ physical and psychological health. According to the literature, ILTs can impact well-being. This research hopefully can help the research context. The average tenure of participants with their current organization was about 18 years ( $SD= 7.2$ ) and average duration of working with their current supervisor was approximately 3.6 years ( $SD= 3.15$ ). In Table 2, the demographics of the sample are shown.

**Table 2. The demographics of participants**

<b>Features</b>	<b>Options</b>	<b>Number of participants</b>
Gender	Male	8
	Female	7
Education	Master’s degree	3
	Bachelor’s degree	7
	Associate diploma	3
	Diploma	2

Continue Table 2. The demographics of participants

Features	Options	Number of participants
Age	25-35	2
	36-45	6
	46-55	5
	56-65	2
Tenure	1-6	1
	7-12	7
	13-18	2
	19-24	3
	25-30	2

The level of interactions between the participants and their corresponding leaders was assessed in three ways. First, the participants were asked to score the number of hours per week they spend on the interactions with their immediate manager. According to the answers, more than 80% of them chose 5-12 hours, about 12 percent chose 12-25, and the rest selected more than 25 hours. Second, to check that the leaders worked in the place as the followers did, based on the interview answers, we found out that 92% of them worked in the same immediate location. Finally, to calculate the level of leaders' empowerment to the participants, the interviewees were asked to identify how much the leaders were involved in task and activity delegation. The results showed an average of 3.12 in a 6 point Likert-scale ( $SD= 1.58$ ).

Moreover, in order to control for gender equality of the sample with no gender biased findings, a sufficient number of male and female participants were selected.

### Procedure

This research tries to discover followers' implicit leadership theories and both managers and employees were told to talk about leadership through the lens of followers. According to the criteria mentioned in the participants' section, 20 of the managers and experienced employees were selected as the initial pool to be interviewed. The

selected individuals were met in person during three weeks and were invited to participate in an interview to explore their perception of an ideal leader. For the interview, after asking basic questions about her or him (things such as name, hometown, etc.) as a way of initiating the interview with the participant, twelve questions were asked. The interview started with a broad question of “Tell me about your perception and definition of an organizational leader?” Then the questions were asked step by step. The first step was inquiry about the traits and characteristics make a person an ideal leader (e.g., “tell me about which traits and characteristics describe an ideal leader?”). The second step was to ask about the traits and characteristics which do not describe ideal leaders (e.g., “tell me about which traits and characteristics do not an ideal leader have?”). The third step tried to use the semantic memory of the participants about an ideal leader. In this step some questions about some memories and events related to ideal and non-ideal leaders were asked (e.g., “tell me about some events or memories which highlighted a person in mind as an ideal leader?” and “tell me about some events or memories which caused a person in mind not to be an ideal leader in your mind?”).

The interviews took 35 to 78 minutes and the designed questions had the goal of extracting data about the views of participant about the traits, behaviors and abilities of an ideal leader according to the definition given by Lord and his colleagues (e.g., Lord et al., 1984; Lord & Maher, 1991). In this regard, according to the suggestion of the recent research (Shondrick et al., 2010), this research for the first time tried to use questions related to the episodic memories of the participants with their leaders to enrich the findings.

Theoretical saturation happens when further interviews do not add novel ideas and new variance to the coding categories generated from the previous interviews (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). After interviewing 12 participants, saturation point was reached. Nevertheless, three more interviews were done to ensure the acceptable range of respondents.

Qualitative content analysis starts with deep and careful readings of the text to discover less obvious or hidden contents, when analyzing qualitative data such as handwritten interviews, the analysts creates

codes (Given, 2008). In theme analysis, these codes are then summarized and grouped in three classes of basic, organizing and global themes (Attride-stirling, 2001). Identification of category contents is an iterative process; therefore, the researcher spent much time to review the categories already identified and to merge or divide them to resolve contradictions (Given, 2008).

The interviews were translated into English by an expert since most qualitative data analysis (QDA) computer software work the best in English and the transcripts were given to three independent English coders. The results were obtained in Nvivo program. Utilizing Cohen's (1960) inter-rater reliability, the reliability of the codes was computed and yielded an acceptable coefficient of 0.82. Several researchers recommend the exclusion of the codes not receiving enough support (Anderson, 2007). After the elimination of extra codes, finally, eight first-order categories describing qualities and traits perceived as those of ideal leaders were identified from the transcripts of the interviews.

In this study, self-monitoring and peer debriefing were used to increase validity (Andreas, 2003). Also, three techniques of choosing participants with different experiences, selecting accurate codes, and coding with different coders (four coders in this study) were carried out to gain more valid results (Roberts, 2006). In terms of measuring reliability in qualitative research, Lincoln and Guba (1985) proposed dependability which was introduced and explained in the previous part. Additionally, in this regard, interviewing is considered as a measurement tool which can increase the trustworthiness of qualitative research since in qualitative research it is essential to measure dependability to guarantee reliability. Also, if the researcher records interviews and writes them down in words to acquire descriptive notes about the field, reliability increases (Creswell, 2013). Moreover, using multi-coders to undertake the entire process of coding can increase reliability (Miles & Huberman, 1994). During this process, the coders met the first researcher several times and the lack of compromise in the final codes was discussed with the invitation of the coders to submit their cogent reasons.

**Results**

After using theme analysis, 28 first-order themes were extracted. Among these themes, 18 of them were the prototypes of ideal leaders and 10 of them were categorized as anti-prototypes of ideal leaders. These 28 first-order themes were grouped into 8 second-order themes. See Table 3 for themes and subthemes.

**Table 3. Global, Organizing and Basic Themes of ILTs**

Global themes	Organizing themes	Basic themes
Prototypes	Charismatic	Charismatic
		Motivational
		Energetic
	Humane oriented	Friendly with employees
		Grateful of employees
		Fair
	Employee’s servant	Empowering
	Emotionally mature	Attentive to employee and unit’s progress
		Keeping unit’s problems secret
		Supportive of employees
Knowing employees well		
Emotionally and logically balanced		
Skillful in communication		
Decisive	Having high power of decision making	
	Determined	
	Dutiful	
Anti-prototypes	Selfish	Having high work knowledge
		Autocratic
		Self-centered
		Discriminating
	Deceptive	Conflict inducer
		Flattering
		Liar
	Narrow-minded	Hypocrite
		Narrow-minded
		Prejudging
		Prejudiced

## **Leadership prototypes**

### **Charismatic**

According to the acquired codes, three first-order themes of charismatic, motivational and energetic were categorized under the label of charismatic. Charisma is a Greek word meaning “divinely inspired gift” including the power to act miraculously or foretell what happens in the future. Based on Chamorro-Premuzic (2012), influencing people is accomplished by force, reason or charm, and charismatic leaders influence others through charm. Since influence is part and parcel of leadership, charisma seems to be an important contributor to ideal leadership. However, the questions in the interviews tracked ideal leadership as a general term dependent upon other attributes of the person (e.g., personality, context) to deviate from a humane leader to a dictator one. Several interviewees articulated that ideal leaders are happy and energetic in a way that they inject their energy in the veins of others. Some employees asserted that leaders’ energy can cause positive feelings of employees and bring about peace and motivation. Two quotes of the interviewees are listed below.

“Being full of energy and causing the employees to have the best time of life at work place is a precondition of being ideal. Work is not a torture. It should be full of excitement.”

“I remember we had a manager whose voice was so loud that, although our office was on the second floor, his voice was heard. He was awesome and no one dared to be late or do wrong. However, he did not bother anyone.”

### **Humane orientation**

This theme comprises of being friendly with employees, grateful of employees and fair. Humane orientation has the core of friendliness, compassion and fairness. This theme shows that employees prefer democratic, humane and fair leaders where group members are not discriminated and rewards and punishments are based upon merit. This theme demonstrates the high value of helpfulness, cooperation,

empathy and tolerance in the eyes of employees. An interviewee mentioned:

“After the earthquake in Bam, I lost my colleagues and suffered from depression. I told my husband to leave Bam and go to Kerman to be away from Bam and my bad memories. My manager (her ideal leader) told and asked me to stay there, but because he knew my mood, he accepted my resignation.”

### **Employee’s servant**

This theme includes being empowering, attentive to employee and unit’s progress and keeping unit’s problems secret. Among the themes in the category of employee’s servant, supportive of employees has the most frequency. Leaders who are employee’s servant make persistent effort to protect employees and the unit. For instance, one said:

“My first manager (ideal leader) was a man who always told me to study hard and not to kill my time reading newspapers and magazines. He put emphasis on continuing education and caused me to continue my education and my master’s degree.”

### **Emotionally mature**

This theme comprises of three items: knowing employees well, emotionally and logically balanced, and skillful in communication. The most frequency is for knowing employees well. Based on Chamberlain (1960), a person who is emotionally mature can control his emotional life well. Emotionally mature people are less self-centered and more caring about other people. They possess more self-control and emotion stability. They are receptive to criticism. On the whole, their cognitive moral development is high. Consequently, leaders who are emotionally mature can establish and maintain more cooperative relationships with subordinates, peers, and superiors. A quote of the participants regarding the items is shown below.

“Nowadays, the complexity of workplaces from one side and frequent problems happening in the families and workplaces entail having some effective leaders who can control their emotions and apply their logic to handle hard situations.”

**Decisive**

This theme includes four items of having a high power of decision making, determined, dutiful, having high work knowledge. Among the acquired first-order themes, having high work knowledge has the most frequency. It shows that special knowledge regarding the theoretical and practical knowledge, processes and the tasks done in the unit is very important to the employees. This theme has the core of conscientiousness and special knowledge related to the processes and details of his job which cause him to decide well.

“Because my current manager is not good enough, I am going to leave Kerman. Although I am not originally from Kerman, I have lived here for a long time. To change my workplace, I phoned the manager of NIOPDC in my hometown and he talked to me for half an hour. After getting some information about me and my commitment, he gave me the letter saying that I was allowed to work in my hometown. However, my current manager in Kerman has been thinking for six months to find one to do my job in Kerman.”

**Leader’s anti-prototype****Selfish**

Selfish encompasses being autocratic, self-central, discriminating, and conflict inducer. Among these codes, autocratic has the highest frequency. In the research context, selfishness is perceived to inhibit effective leadership. It emphasizes on ensuring the safety and security of the individuals at the price of overlooking others’ value. High level of selfish behavior for a leader would sanction open conflict and controversy (to the benefit of saving face), as a result, it would also hinder and reduce true participation.

**Deceptive**

Deception includes the sub-themes of flattering, liar and hypocrite. Liar was repeated the most in the interviews. Deception is a malaise in the workplaces and can be used as a tool in the hands of psychopaths. They will utter diverse things to different people. They flatter the ones having higher positions and mistreat subordinates. They can seem trustworthy but use trust against the patsy.



“One of my managers appreciated me a lot and spoke highly of me in front of other colleagues but he did not help me to improve and, as his close friends at work say, he castigated my activities and performance and backbit. This behavior is irritating and disgusting to me.”

### **Narrow-minded**

This theme has three subthemes of narrow-minded, prejudging and prejudiced. Among the subthemes, narrow-minded has the most frequency. A narrow-minded manager may experience failure in influencing the subordinate. It manifests itself in decision making and can cause lack of trustworthiness. Upper-echelon leadership leaves no position for narrow-minded people. Great leaders require the ability to see the big picture, be receptive of different ideas, and select the best ones.

“Some managers get their information from others and, unfortunately, sometimes that information is not correct and it is biased and they do not seek to examine the validity of that information. I believe that a real manager does not depend on raw data.”

### **Discussion and Conclusion**

The results revealed various factors (Table 3), recommending that experts in NIOPDC (Kerman branch) can use these eight separate dimensions to conceptualize an ideal leader.

The results converged around the acquisition of five leader prototypes and three anti-prototypes. The prototypes included charismatic, humane oriented, employee's servant, decisive and emotional maturity. The anti-prototypes comprised of selfish, deceptive and narrow-minded (Fig. 1). The present outcome varies significantly from the eight leadership factors by Offermann et al. (1994) for the American participants and the four factors of implicit Chinese leadership theories by Ling et al. (2000). However, aligned with the claim by House et al. (2004), some of the traits are global for ideal leaders in the minds of employees.

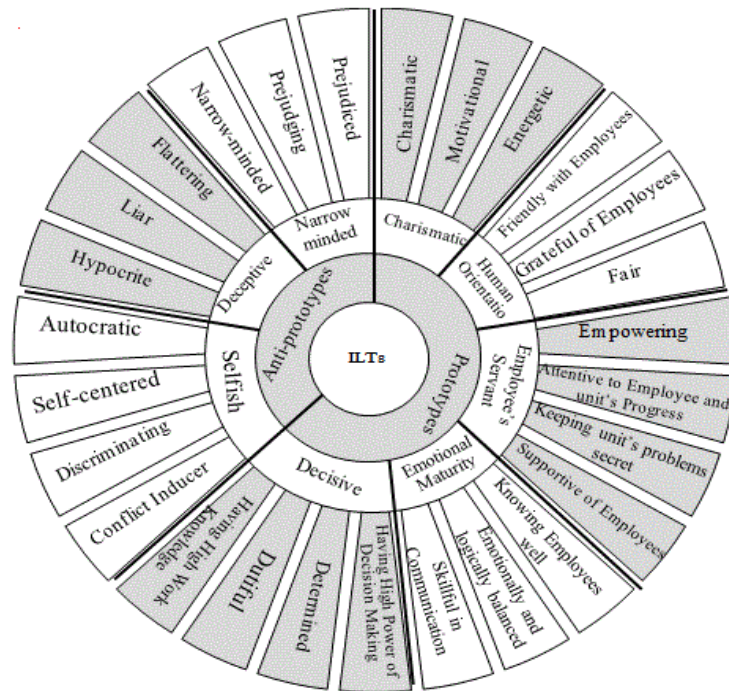


Fig. 1. Prototypes and Anti-prototypes in this study

The first factor is Charismatic, suggesting that the Iranian participants expect an ideal leader to be charismatic, motivational and energetic. Charisma can be categorized under the label of change oriented behavior (Yukl, 2013). Charisma in leaders manifests itself with strong emotions such as enthusiasm, optimism and motivation (Sy et al., 2005). Moreover, charisma has already been shown to be a determining factor of leaders' effectiveness (e.g., Awamleh & Gardner, 2003; Jacquart & Antonakis, 2015). This factor is seen in different scales developed by Offermann et al. (1994), House et al. (2004) and Ling et al. (2000). In addition, Dastmalchian et al. (2001) found out that the favorite leaders of Iranians are charismatic and value-based. The culture of Iran is attributed with a high level of performance orientation and low level of uncertainty avoidance (Dastmalchian et al., 2001), which can contribute to the selection of charismatic leaders as ideal ones (Javidan & Dastmalchian, 2003). In comparison with the traits selected by U.S. and Chinese participants

for leaders, in the eight factors earlier by Offermann et al. (1994), there seems to be an overlap in the perceptions of Iranian and American people. In contrast, the word charismatic is not seen among the four factors of Chinese implicit leadership theories. However, in that scale, some sub-factors such as charming, glamorous and cheerful are included under the labels of interpersonal competency and versatility.

The second factor is humane orientation, which consists of being friendly with employees, grateful of employees and fair. Humane orientation is the high level of concern for the welfare of others and the tendency to sacrifice one's benefit for the sake of helping others (Yukl, 2013). Based on Iranian culture, humane orientation is one of the strong norms and values in Iran, consisting of altruistic love, friendliness, forgiveness, care and compassion (Dastmalchian et al., 2001). GLOBE research showed that humane orientation is one of the features of effective leadership (Yukl, 2013). Among the Chinese factors, the words do not show clear matches for the term humane orientation although in the factor of personal morality, the phrase of willing to be a public employee's servant is close to humane orientation. In the eight factors discovered by Offermann et al. (1994), there seem to be nothing among the U.S. participants that resemble the factor humane orientation among the present Iranian participants. Perhaps the term sensitivity comes closest to the Iranian factor of humane orientation. As pointed by Ling et al. (2000), people in the U.S. seem to focus on task ability and individual characteristics as intelligence, attractiveness, masculinity and strength. This finding demonstrates, even today, thousands of years after the introduction of Islam, which emphasizes altruistic love, compassion, and justice, its prescribed behavioral codes contribute to have tremendous impact over Iranian people.

The third factor is employee's servant. The Iranian participants expected the leader to be empowering, attentive to employee and unit's progress, keeping unit's problems secret, and supportive of employees. These characteristics represent the breadth of leaders'

activities which demonstrate the leader prioritizes followers' needs, welfare and success. This definition is commensurate with the nature of servant leaders who prioritize employee development to be their best in the realms of community stewardship, self-motivation, task effectiveness, and future leadership capabilities (Chen et al., 2015). Servants of employees nurture a caring relationship which in turn boosts up cooperation, active listening, trust, and shared performance (Rai & Prakash, 2012). Servants of employees are wise in a way that they are aware of their surroundings and can predict the consequences (Beck, 2014). Iran is a country with a high level of performance orientation (Dastmalchian et al., 2001). This cultural feature proves the attraction of employees and units' progress to leaders through empowering and supporting. No correspondence was found among the U.S. (Offermann et al., 1994) and the four Chinese factors (Ling et al., 2000).

The fourth factor is being emotionally mature. The Iranian participants expected an ideal leader to know employees well, be emotionally and logically balanced, and skillful in communication. The personality traits of leadership effectiveness are various and different in research. However, there are some fairly consistent characteristics across different research methods. Emotional maturity is one of those traits (Yukl, 2013). The results of this research substantiated the crucial role of emotional maturity from the perspectives of interviewees. In his book, Yukl (2013) mentions that an emotionally mature person is less self-centered and has more self-control, emotional stability and cognitive moral development which are the key factors in the heart of managerial effectiveness and advancement (Bass & Bass, 2009). Emotional intelligence which is a constituent of emotional maturity has been shown to highly impact leader's effectiveness (Kerr et al., 2006). In hierarchical organizations, such as the research context, communication is distorted and the power distance widens the gap between people. Therefore, those leaders sustaining good relationships through their honed communication skill are favored. For a good communication, logic and emotion should work in tandem. In terms of culture, interactions

of Iranian people have obviously formed low assertiveness and high levels of courtesy (Javidan & Dastmalchian, 2003). This entails a high level of emotional maturity not to disturb others. In Iran, the level of assertiveness is low and it is in line with the culture of “complimenting” (Javidan & Dastmalchian, 2003). It might be the indication of some rituals and behavioral codes in relationships which underscores the importance of skill in communication. Sensitivity is the closest to U.S. factors despite their lack of emotion. In Chinese implicit leadership theories, some factors such as maturity, verbally and socially skilled can be the closest factors to emotionally mature found in the results. In GLOBE study, some factors such as being diplomatic and power to communicate in two categories of team integrator and diplomatic can be good corresponding factors.

The fifth factor is decisiveness. This factor includes having a high power of decision making, determination, feeling dutiful, and having high work knowledge. Research has shown the knowledge of the business is among the six traits listed in the traits of leaders (Kirkpatrick & Locke, 1996). Effective leaders possess special knowledge related to the company, industry, and technical matters. In depth, knowledge provides a solid background to make well-informed decisions and provides the conditions to well-predict the implications of these decisions. In a strategic organization like NIOPDC, one wrong decision can mean a catastrophe. Decisiveness is highlighted in highly hierarchical organizations since the responsibility of leaders is high and the consequences of wrong decisions can negatively impact employees who have relatively lower power. Considering culture, a high level of appeal for performance orientation in Iran (Javidan & Dastmalchian, 2003) we can justify that decisiveness is an important trait of ideal leaders, because deciding well is one of the main factors of performance. In comparison with the factors characterizing leaders in the U.S., there is no explicit term synonymous with decision making, but intelligence includes wisdom, knowledgeability and intelligence which are the important parameters in decision making. In the implicit theories of the Chinese, goal effectiveness includes the

term decisive, implying that decisiveness is an important feature of a leader in both cultures and countries.

The sixth factor is selfishness. This factor has the constituents of autocratic, self-centered, discriminating and conflict inducer. Iran is among those countries in which power distance is high; however, Iranians do not accept it as their value (Javidan & Dastmalchian, 2003). Selfish and overambitious managers are unsuccessful managers and one of the antecedents of this trait is conjecture to be leader's fear, which is categorized among the four main types of destructive emotions (Daft, 2014). In comparison with the items in the American implicit leadership theories discovered by Offermann et al. (1994), some factors such as domineering and power hungry are seen which are grouped under the label of tyranny. Chinese Implicit leadership theories do not show antiprototypes and only prototypic characteristics of leaders are listed.

The seventh factor is deceptiveness. This factor is formed by the juxtaposition of being flattering, liar, and hypocrite. When followers become aware that leaders have told a lie or lies, leaders lose their credit (Yukl, 2013). Integrity, as the congruence between words and actions elevates the level of leaders' effectiveness (Simons, 2014). This anti-prototype is reasonably chosen because it has been proved that honesty and leaders' effectiveness are positively and significantly correlated (Hassan et al., 2013). Before the introduction of Islam, the dominant religion was Zoroastrianism and had been the main religion of Iranians and influenced them significantly (Shaked, 1995). Most of the anti-prototypes such as being liar and selfish have roots in self-orientation shown in the analogy to Zoroastrian's destruction force, the spirit of darkness, and the Destroyer: Ahriman (Dastmalchian et al., 2001; Ebrahimi et al., 2013). Based on the perception of U.S. participants (Offermann et al., 1994), being manipulative which is the closest to this factor can be considered as anti-prototypic. In GLOBE study, in the factor of malevolent, the term liar is used, indicating that telling lies is a globally unacceptable trait for leaders' effectiveness.

The last factor is narrow-mindedness, which includes narrow-mindedness, prejudgment, and prejudice. This factor is germane to the

perceptions causing bad judgments and biased thoughts about something or somebody. Judgment and decisiveness are two characteristics of leaders categorized under the labels of intelligence and abilities (Daft, 2014). Perceptual distractions, such as stereotypes, halo effect, projection, and perceptual defense can provide blind spots which hinder the development of ideal leaders (e.g., Robbins & Judge, 2013; Daft, 2014). Among the U.S. factors, there is no factor close to this factor. Moreover, in GLOBE study, this anti-prototype is not mentioned. However, in other contexts such as Germany and Switzerland, open-mindedness is mentioned as the attribute of effective leaders because such people can reduce uncertainty (Kabasakal et al., 2008).

This research aimed at identifying the traits and abilities characterizing ideal leaders from the viewpoints of a sample from NIOPDC in Kerman. After interviewing them and analyzing the transcripts through utilizing theme analysis strategy, five prototypes (charismatic, humane oriented, emotionally mature, employee's servant and decisive) and three anti-prototype (selfish, deceptive and narrow-minded) were extracted to illustrate the constituents of ideal leaders in the research context.

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