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What is happening just below the CEO?

Iain Densten

School of Business, Monash University Malaysia, Subang Jaya, Malaysia

Abstract

Purpose – The executives, just below the chief executive officers represent an important but rarely investigated senior executives. The purpose of this paper is to investigate their need for social acceptance and the impact of culture on the perceived use of transformational and transactional leadership behaviors.
Design/methodology/approach – A cross-sectional, multi-instrument design was used to investigate 439 Australian executives at the apex of their organization.
Findings – The results suggest that these executives identified a prominent need to self-deceive themselves when assessing their perceived use of transformational and transactional leadership behaviors. In addition, the cultural dimensions, such as supportiveness and performance orientation, were identified as influencing specific leadership behaviors, in order to produce competitive advantages. However, the cultural dimension of emphasis on rewards uniquely decreased the perceived use of several leadership behaviors (i.e. articulates vision, fosters the acceptance of group goals, and provides an appropriate role model).
Research limitations/implications – The study provides further evidence of how the social context impacts on leadership behaviors and thinking
Practical implications – The development of executive requires insights into how their personal need for social acceptance and culture alter their use of leadership.
Originality/value – Social desirability and specific culture dimensions do not uniformly influence the perceived use of transformational and transactional leadership behaviors.
Keywords Culture, Leadership, Executives, Australian executives, Social desirability, OCP
Paper type Research paper

Executive research has largely focussed on the chief executive officer (CEO) ignoring the significant leadership role played by executives just below them. The current study aims to focus on these just below CEOs executives, in order to build a further understanding of their use of leadership behaviors, in two ways, how their need to be socially accepted by others moderates their perceived use of leadership behaviors; and by investigating what aspects of culture are influencing their perceived use of leadership behaviors. This study positions the organizational level, cultural, and social contexts, in which these executives lead, as the primary source of investigation and information, and seeks to understand what is influencing the choice of transformational and transactional leadership behaviors by these executives. While a few studies have investigated the impact culture has on transformational leadership (Byrne and Bradley, 2007), research on how culture influences leadership at the second most senior organizational level is even sparser. This study seeks to address and overcome the unexpectedly little amount of empirical research that determines or predicts leadership behaviors observed by Lim and Ployhart (2004).

Literature review

The CEO is not the only executive operating at the pinnacle of their organization, who plays a key leadership role. Such executives differ from CEOs by being more directly involved with the integration of various business units and the forming of strategies

and policies. Our understanding of these executives is limited. Research into what happens at different organizational levels has largely been overshadowed by the motivation to understand what occurs when we take organizational hierarchical roles and responsibilities of executives out of the performance equation (e.g. shared leadership, teamwork, and a flatter organizational structure). However, these executives have survived their non-inclusion in performance and organizational studies and now constitute a "forgotten" and unrepresented group of key individuals within organizations. Even though impression management has been shown to be important during organizational decline (Chng *et al.*, 2015), leader member exchanges (Weng and Chang, 2015), the creation of reciprocity among corporate leaders (Westphal *et al.*, 2012), and the strengthening of the association between prosocial motives and affiliative citizenship (Grant and Mayer, 2009). Why is this study important? According to Flinkelstein *et al.* (2009), how executives recognize and shape their image is one of the most promising and interesting areas of research that has previously been dominated by content analysis research methods (e.g. Abrahamson and Park, 1994).

Social desirability
Culture is not the only embedded context that influences behavior. In most situations, social demands will also shape the behaviors of individuals. For example, when individuals experience social demands (e.g. the need for them to fit in) they alter their behaviors, in order to express themselves in a more socially desirable manner (Ziegler and Buehner, 2009). In the past, individuals' responses to these social demands or needs were viewed as a systematic measurement error (see Schmidt *et al.*, 2003) and an inhibitor to understanding what was actually occurring. This complex social effect was "simply trivialized," by viewing individuals or leaders as essentially overstating the recording of desirable behaviors (e.g. rewarding followers), while understating less desirable behaviors such as punishing followers (Ferrando and Anguiano-Carrasco, 2010). However, understanding this social need for leaders to present themselves in a socially desirable manner provides additional information about the situation or context in which executives and leaders must act. In other words, social desirability research provides an opportunity to learn how different environments may require leaders to oversell or undersell their abilities to adapt to the established expectations of their organization. The amount of pressure on executives to maintain socially desirable behaviors and attitudes gives a valuable indication of the demands on them to adapt to organizational expectations. To date, the only research investigating the relationship between social desirability context and leadership behaviors has been a single study of CEOs (Densten and Sarros, 2012).

According to Flinkelstein *et al.* (2009) remarkably few studies have even explored executives' impression management practices. As high-status group members, they are unlikely to get constructive or challenging feedback from other group members, particularly lower status ones, while according to Flinkelstein *et al.* (2009), they are experiencing self-reinforcing cycles of "executive efficacy." These feedback inhibitors, along with others, distort the perceptions of executives about their ability to be successful, at a time when they want to project confidence. Such combinations of feedback inhibitors create potentially threatening psychological thoughts and feelings among executives, and these feelings are what Uziel (2010) believes that self-deception measures.

Social desirability can provide insight into these practices, which occurs when individuals deny common faults or exaggerate personal strengths in order to create a

more positive image (e.g. Tatman *et al.*, 2009). The most frequently used instrument to measure social desirability is the Marlowe-Crowne social desirability scale (MCSDS). The MCSDS was developed by Crowne and Marlowe (1960) and been validated by several studies (Tatman *et al.*, 2009; Zerbe and Paulhus, 1987). This self-reporting instrument seeks to uncover hidden motivations (Paulhus and Vazire, 2007) investigating two aspects of social desirability, i.e., impression management and self-deception. Sackeim (1983) and Zerbe and Paulhus (1987) have defined self-deception as a dispositional or unconscious tendency of individuals to have an unrealistic or overly positive self-image. Rosenfeld *et al.* (2002, p. 117) have described impression management as "the tendency to deliberately over-report desirable behaviors with the aim to control the perceptions of others by influencing the information that others receive." Kulas and Stachowski (2012) and Fleming (2012) suggest that social desirability is a worthwhile phenomenon to study.

Social desirability and leadership
Social desirability acts as a moderating variable for the evaluation and subsequent prediction of leadership (Ganster *et al.*, 1983), which poses the question, why should executive leaders remain concerned with the social demands they encounter in different situations and adjust their behaviors? This is a difficult question to answer. Most leaders would be unlikely to "openly" reveal how they altered their behaviors, in order to fit into a particular social group, and therefore, we are trying to decipher hidden motives as to why they would require such social acceptance. Behaving in a socially desirable manner assists executives to start a complex influencing process involving increasing their status and position within groups. Increasing such status enables leaders to earn idiosyncratic "credits" from group members or their followers, which they can "cash in" to instigate change (Hollander, 2009), and to be seen as matching the in-group prototypes (i.e. leaders "being one of us") and to be recognized as representing the group (Haslam *et al.*, 2011).

Executives are unlikely to get constructive or challenging feedback from other group members, particularly lower status ones, while according to Flinkelstein *et al.* (2009), they are experiencing self-reinforcing cycles of "executive efficacy." These feedback inhibitors, along with others, distort the perceptions of executives about their ability to be successful, at a time when they want to project confidence. Such combinations of feedback inhibitors create potentially threatening psychological thoughts and feelings among executives, and these feelings are what Uziel (2010) believes that self-deception measures. Impression management and self-deception operate quite differently in terms of utilizing the social desirability process. While both concepts evaluate the pressure to meet social expectations, impression management focusses on how much leaders perceive they "need to" adhere while self-deception focusses on how much leaders believe they "have already" adhered to the pressures. Social desirability measures the context, in terms of leaders' reactions to the social pressures. How socially desirable executives respond, will depend on the group (or the leadership context) and what they are trying to achieve. A study of 635 CEOs (who are also strategic and systems leaders) by Densten and Sarros (2012) found that impression management moderated only two of six transformational leadership behaviors (i.e. fosters the acceptance of group goals and provides individual support) and only one of two transactional leadership behaviors (i.e. contingent punishment). The current study aims to clarify how these just below CEOs are responding to the

social desirability pressures of impression management and self-deception. Therefore, the following hypotheses were examined:

H1. Impression management moderates the perceived use of a range of transformational and transactional leadership behaviors.

H2. Self-deception moderates the perceived use of a range of transformational and transactional leadership behaviors.

Culture
Chatman (1991) suggests that culture can be understood by investigating the characteristics of this person-environment (i.e. P-E). Such characteristics can also include the distribution of financial, physical and psychological resources, and task-related and interpersonal opportunities (Kristof, 1996). This approach to understanding culture has maintained a central position within organizational behavior research (Edwards, 2008). The organizational culture profile (OCP) is the most frequently used instrument to investigate culture (e.g. Adkins and Caldwell, 2004) and investigates the P-E fit. Edwards (2008) summarizes the advantages of the OCP in terms of its capacity to conceptualize the environment as the organization rather than a specific job, evaluate differences between individuals and organizations, identify moderators that affect P-E fit, and clearly define constructs. This capacity enables the OCP to record the extent to which an individual believes his/her organization is recognized for certain organizational characteristics and values. Liden and Antonakis (2009) suggest that the OCP is specifically related to internal organizational activities.

The relationship of culture with leadership
Since the majority of culture-leadership research has focussed primarily on the impact of leadership on culture (e.g. Byrne and Bradley, 2007; Weiss and Cropanzano, 1996), it is not surprising how little research has focussed on how culture predicts leadership behaviors (Lim and Ployhart, 2004). Currently, the leadership literature provides little guidance on how different cultural dimensions would affect the perceived use of individual transformational and transactional leadership behaviors among just below CEO executives. Transformational leadership behaviors can comprise of four to six different types, which are theorized to represent leadership behaviors that influence values and attitudes of followers, with the objective of sustainable improvement and change (see Podsakoff *et al.*, 2006). According to Quinn *et al.* (2007), behaviors that emphasize motivation, commitment, and challenging goals are transformational and externally focussed. As previously identified the externally focussed OCP dimensions are performance orientation and innovation, which logically would more likely influence the transformational than transactional leadership behaviors.

Transactional leadership behaviors can comprise of two to four different types (Bass, 1985), which are theorized to embrace the leadership behaviors that emphasize leader exchanges with followers, which alter their behaviors (House, 1996) and have similarities with negotiation theory, as both incorporate a contingency interaction between leaders and followers (Densten, 2006). Quinn *et al.* (2007) would describe leadership behaviors that focus on task completion and efficiencies as transactional and internally focussed. As previously identified, the internally focussed OCP dimensions are emphasis on rewards and supportiveness, which logically would more likely influence the transactional than transformational leadership behaviors. A trend

in the leadership literature has been to use global factors (e.g. transformational leadership), rather than individual leadership behaviors. This approach has the potential to mask how individual leadership behaviors can have a unique influence on outcomes (Hardy *et al.*, 2010) or how individual leadership behaviors are being uniquely influenced by the context. The current study aims to overcome this limitation by investigating each leadership behavior separately, in order to fully investigate, the impact of cultural dimensions. Therefore, the following hypotheses were examined:

H3. Performance orientation and innovation will positively influence the perceived use of individual transformational leadership behaviors.

H4. Emphasis on rewards and supportiveness will not influence the perceived use of individual transformational leadership behaviors.

H5. Emphasis on rewards and supportiveness will positively influence the perceived use of individual transactional leadership behaviors.

H6. Performance orientation and innovation will not influence the perceived use of individual transformational leadership behaviors.

Method

Participants

A stratified random sample of 6,500 members was selected from the population of 20,563 members of the Australian Institute of Management. A final total sample of 2,376 useable responses was achieved, which represented a response rate of 37 percent. This current study focussed on the 439 respondents, who were executives and upper middle executives involved in managing or leading at a company or business level from the government and public sector (17.6 percent), the private sector (70.3 percent), and non-profit sector (12.1 percent). The majority of respondents were male (77.9 percent) and aged between 40 and 59 years (70.7 percent). A large percentage of respondents had a bachelor or master's degree (58.9 percent), and had worked in their current position for an average of 5.2 years. Respondents worked in a range of different sized organizations, which included one to four employees (12.2 percent), 5-19 employees (20.9 percent), 20-99 (23.4 percent), 100-499 (24.3 percent), 500-999 (6.8 percent), 1,000-4,999 (8.2 percent), 5,000-9,999 (1.4 percent), and 10,000+ (2.9 percent).

Procedure

The current study was a cross-sectional, multi-instrument survey that collected data on culture, leadership, and social desirability. Multi-regression models were used to investigate the impact of social desirability (i.e. self-deception and impression management), background variables, and cultural dimensions. The social desirability constructs were first entered to separate overlapping variance. The control variables were entered after the social desirability constructs, since previous research has identified that no stable influence from variables such as gender, age, and education have been identified in relation to social desirability (e.g. Verardi *et al.*, 2010). Finally, the cultural dimensions were entered last.

Measures

The OCP was used to assess culture. This instrument was originally developed by O'Reilly *et al.* (1991) but later modified by Sarros *et al.* (2005) to include a Likert scale

from 1 = not at all, 2 = minimally, 3 = moderately, 4 = considerably, and 5 = very much and they identified a seven cultural factors structure. Four OCP factors (i.e. supportiveness, emphasis on rewards, performance orientation, and innovation) were investigated and each had four items. The validity and reliability of each factor were identified as having adequate one-factor congeneric models. See Table I for the Cronbach's α of each construct. A series of confirmatory factor analyses also confirmed the construct validity of the OCP. The social desirability of respondents was measured using a selection of ten items from the MCSDS (Crowne and Marlowe, 1960), which has two constructs: impression management, i.e., "the tendency to deliberately over-report desirable behaviors" (Rosenfeld *et al.*, 2002, p. 117), and self-deception, i.e., "the unconscious tendency to see oneself in a favorable light" (Zerbe and Paulhus, 1987, p. 253). A series of confirmatory factor analyses supported the construct validity of the social desirability scales' two factors, i.e., impression management and self-deception.

We used these two established leadership instruments to record the observation of respondents and from these instruments; the following leadership factors were selected. Six transformational factors from the transformational leadership inventory (Podsakoff *et al.*, 1990) and two transactional factors from the Leader Reward and Punishment Questionnaire (LRPQ, Podsakoff *et al.*, 1984) were used. Respondents were asked to evaluate statements on a Likert scale from 1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree. Recently, Schriesheim *et al.* (2009), which demonstrated the importance of ensuring that the appropriate level of analysis was applied to leadership factors. The TLI measures six transformational leadership factors, i.e., articulates vision (five items), fosters the acceptance of group goals (four items), intellectual stimulation (four items), provides individual support (four items), high performance expectations (three items), provides an appropriate role model (three items) and the LRPQ measures two transactional leadership factors, i.e., contingent reward behaviors (five items) and contingent punishment behaviors (five items). A series of higher order confirmatory factor analyses confirmed the construct validity of the transformational leadership factors from the TLI, the LRPQ's two transactional leadership factors (i.e. contingent reward behaviors and contingent punishment behaviors).

The upper echelon theory suggests that demographic variables could be predictors of top executives' decisions and outcomes (Hambrick, 2007), and therefore, the following control variables were used in this study, i.e., gender, age, education, years in current position, annual salary, and number of employees (Tosi and Greckhamer, 2004).

Construct validity

The current study investigated the constructed validity of the OCP, and identified a robust four OCP structure ($\chi^2 = 324.10$, df = 147, GFI = 0.94, CFI = 0.95, TLI = 0.93, RMSEA = 0.05, $\chi^2/\text{df} = 2.21$). The validity of this factor structure was further tested by randomly splitting the sample, which produced adequate fit indices (Sample A = $\chi^2 = 267.99$, df = 147, GFI = 0.91, CFI = 0.93, TLI = 0.91, RMSEA = 0.06, $\chi^2/\text{df} = 1.82$, $n = 242$; Sample B = $\chi^2 = 232.73$, df = 147, GFI = 0.92, CFI = 0.95, TLI = 0.94, RMSEA = 0.06, $\chi^2/\text{df} = 1.58$, $n = 259$). A series of confirmatory factor analyses supported the construct validity of the social desirability scales' two factors, i.e., impression management and self-deception ($\chi^2 = 33.90$, df = 18, $p = 0.01$, GFI = 0.98, CFI = 0.90, TLI = 0.84, RMSEA = 0.07, $\chi^2/\text{df} = 1.88$). The validity of this factor structure was further tested by randomly splitting the sample which produced adequate fit indices (Sample A: $\chi^2 = 30.15$, df = 18, $p = 0.04$, GFI = 0.97, CFI = 0.79,

Factors	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
Culture[a]																
1 Supportiveness	3.73	0.71	(0.78)													
2 Emphasis on rewards	3.64	0.73	0.74**	(0.74)												
3 Performance orientation	3.74	0.65	0.72**	0.70**	(0.70)											
4 Innovation	3.58	0.74	0.57**	0.64**	0.63**	(0.74)										
Leadership[b]																
5 Articulates vision	5.74	0.70	0.25**	0.24**	0.28**	0.28**	(0.74)									
6 Fosters' e acceptance of group goals	6.00	0.66	0.22**	0.11*	0.18**	0.09*	0.57**	(0.76)								
7 Provides an appropriate role model	6.03	0.65	0.23**	0.15**	0.26**	0.17**	0.45**	0.55**	(0.68)							
8 Intellectual stimulation	5.76	0.70	0.16**	0.08	0.13**	0.16**	0.53**	0.57**	0.46**	(0.75)						
9 Provide individual support	5.84	0.82	0.26**	0.23**	0.26**	0.19**	0.23**	0.39**	0.39**	0.32**	(0.64)					
10 High performance expectations	5.66	0.77	0.15**	0.14**	0.16**	0.08	0.39**	0.41**	0.42**	0.43**	0.17**	(0.74)				
11 Contingent reward	5.29	0.54	0.18**	0.18**	0.21**	0.18**	0.44**	0.49**	0.34**	0.42**	0.33**	0.28**	(0.78)			
12 Contingent punishment	4.75	1.03	−0.04	0.05	0.05	0.02	0.19**	0.20**	0.14**	0.25**	0.00	0.47**	0.26**	(0.85)		
Social desirability[c]																
13 SD self-deception	3.79	0.55	0.19**	0.15**	0.16**	0.06	0.23**	0.35**	0.26**	0.26**	0.35**	0.12**	0.21**	0.10*	(0.71)	
14 SD-impression management	2.89	0.59	0.17**	0.11*	0.11*	0.10*	0.14**	0.14**	0.13**	0.08	0.16**	−0.01	0.07	−0.15**	0.15**	(0.73)

Notes: Reliabilities are in parentheses along the diagonal. [a]Original response categories for OCP: Likert scale 1 to 7: 1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree; [b]original response categories for leadership factors: Likert scale 1 to 7: 1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree; and [c]original response categories for Social desirability: Likert scale 1 to 5: 1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree. *$p < 0.05$; **$p < 0.01$

Table I.
Means, standard deviation, and correlations for level VI

TLI $= 0.89$, RMSEA $= 0.05$, χ^2/df $= 1.68$, $n = 247$; Sample B: $\chi^2 = 30.53$, df $= 18$, $p = 0.03$; GFI $= 0.97$, CFI $= 0.89$, TLI $= 0.83$, RMSEA $= 0.05$, χ^2/df $= 1.68$, $n = 254$).

A series of higher order confirmatory factor analyses confirmed the construct validity of the transformational leadership factors from the TLI ($\chi^2 = 644.77$, df $= 299$, $p = 0.00$, GFI $= 0.91$, CFI $= 0.91$, TLI $= 0.90$, RMSEA $= 0.05$, χ^2/df $= 2.94$). In detail, articulates vision, fosters the acceptance of group goals, and provides an appropriate role model loaded onto a second order factor called "core transformational leadership," which then loaded onto an overall transformational leadership factor. The remaining factors of intellectual stimulation provides individual support, high performance expectations also loaded onto the overall transformational leadership factor. The validity of this factor structure was further tested by randomly splitting the sample which produced adequate fit indices (Sample A: $\chi^2 = 506.73$, df $= 294$, $p = 0.00$, GFI $= 0.87$, CFI $= 0.91$, TLI $= 0.90$, RMSEA $= 0.06$, χ^2/df $= 1.67$, $n = 231$; Sample B $= \chi^2 = 461.61$, df $= 293$, $p = 0.00$, GFI $= 0.89$, CFI $= 0.91$, TLI $= 0.90$, RMSEA $= 0.05$, χ^2/df $= 1.58$).

A series of confirmatory factor analyses confirmed the construct validity of the LRPQ's two transactional leadership factors (i.e. contingent reward behaviors and contingent punishment behaviors ($\chi^2 = 235.76$, df $= 65$, $p = 0.00$, GFI $= 0.94$, CFI $= 0.92$, TLI $= 0.90$, RMSEA $= 0.07$, χ^2/df $= 3.63$). The validity of this factor structure was further tested by randomly splitting the sample which also produced adequate fit indices (Sample A: $\chi^2 = 136.40$, df $= 66$, $p = 0.00$; GFI $= 0.92$, CFI $= 0.94$, TLI $= 0.91$, RMSEA $= 0.07$, χ^2/df $= 2.07$; Sample B: $\chi^2 = 135.82$, df $= 65$, $p = 0.00$, GFI $= 0.93$, CFI $= 0.93$, TLI $= 0.91$, RMSEA $= 0.07$, χ^2/df $= 2.12$). The construct validity of the transformational leadership and transactional leadership factors are consistent with previous findings (Gray and Densten, 2007; Podsakoff *et al.*, 1990) The Cronbach's α are reported in Table I for the TLI and LRPQ factors, which were acceptable, along with the correlations between OCP factors that are below 0.7.

Results

Table I presents the means, standard deviations, and correlations. This table demonstrates that executives perceived that they used a higher level of transformational leadership behaviors than transactional leadership behaviors. This finding appears to confirm the role theory idea (Katz and Kahn, 1978) that executives should be more focussed on the transformational leadership behaviors (i.e. articulates vision) and less on reward and punishment (i.e. transactional leadership behaviors). An examination of the correlations between factors identified no evidence of multicollinearity, which suggests that undertaking multi-regression was appropriate (Tabachnick and Fidell, 1996).

Table II shows the result of eight hierarchical multiple regression models that predict transformational and transactional leadership behaviors among 416 executives, who operate at the just below CEO organizational level.

H1, impression management was a unique predictor of only one leadership behaviors contingent punishment ($\beta = -0.19$, $p < 0.001$). These findings suggest that the context in which these executives lead is influencing them to deliberately over-report one desirable leadership behaviors. *H2*, self-deception was a unique predictor for seven leadership behaviors:

(1) articulates vision ($\beta = 0.22$, $p < 0.001$);

(2) fosters the acceptance of group goals ($\beta = 0.31$, $p < 0.001$);

	AV	FAG	PAM	IS	PIS	HPE	CR	CP
SD self-deception	0.22***	0.31***	0.28***	0.35***	0.28***	0.08	0.19***	0.10*
SD-impression management	0.03	0.04	0.05	-0.02	0.08	-0.12*	0.00	-0.18***
Gender	0.01	-0.07	0.05	0.01	0.17**	0.03	0.11*	-0.07
Age	0.01	0.06	0.02	0.08	0.10*	0.01	-0.00	-0.01
Education	0.01	-0.07	0.01	0.02	-0.15**	0.05	-0.09	0.01
Years in position	-0.06	-0.07	-0.01	-0.08	0.03	-0.17***	-0.06	-0.15**
Annual salary	0.22***	0.12*	0.04	0.15**	-0.03	-0.17***	0.00	-0.11*
Number of employees	0.03	-0.03	0.05	0.03	-0.03	-0.05	-0.01	0.06
Supportiveness	0.12	0.26**	0.09	0.14	0.06	0.09	-0.01	-0.18
Emphasis on rewards	-0.15*	-0.20**	-0.16*	-0.13	0.06	0.02	-0.03	0.04
Performance orientation	0.16*	0.11	0.24**	0.01	0.04	0.11	0.14	0.17*
Innovation	0.18**	-0.05	0.04	0.11	0.03	-0.06	0.10	-0.04
ΔR^2	0.18	0.16	0.10	0.10	0.19	0.08	0.09	0.07
F	8.50***	7.39***	4.67***	4.68***	5.16***	3.81***	4.31***	3.55***
df	415	415	415	415	415	415	415	415
Durbin	1.954	1.98	1.95	1.94	2.11	1.95	1.79	2.01

Notes: $n = 439$. AV, articulates vision; FAG, fosters the acceptance of group goals; IS, intelligential stimulation; PIS, provides individual support; PAM, provides an appropriate role model; HPE, high performance expectations; CR, contingent reward; CP, contingent punishment. *$p < 0.05$; **$p < 0.01$; ***$p < 0.001$

Table II.
Multiple regressions for transformational and transactional leadership behaviors, self-deception, impression management, selected background variables, and culture dimension for VIs

(3) provides an appropriate role model ($\beta = 0.28$, $p < 0.001$);

(4) intellectual stimulation ($\beta = 0.35$, $p < 0.001$);

(5) provides individual support ($\beta = 0.28$, $p < 0.001$);

(6) contingent reward ($\beta = 0.19$, $p < 0.001$); and

(7) contingent punishment ($\beta = 0.10$, $p < 0.05$).

These findings suggest that the context in which executives lead is causing them to unconsciously over-estimate or inflate seven leadership behaviors. Three characteristics of executives were unique predictors of provides individual support and these were:

(1) gender ($\beta = 0.17$, $p < 0.01$);

(2) age ($\beta = 0.10$, $p < 0.05$); and

(3) education ($\beta = -0.15$, $p < 0.01$).

Two characteristic of executives were predictors of contingent punishment, i.e., year in current position ($\beta = -0.03$, $p < 0.001$) and annual salary ($\beta = -0.10$, $p < 0.001$), and only one characteristic of executives was a predictor of contingent reward, which was gender ($\beta = 0.11$, $p < 0.05$). Two characteristics of executives were predictors of high performance expectations, i.e., years in current position ($\beta = -0.17$, $p < 0.001$) and annual salary ($\beta = -0.18$, $p < 0.001$). In addition, to annual salary be predictors of contingent punishment and high performance expectations, annual salary was also a predictor of articules vision ($\beta = 0.22$, $p < 0.001$), fostering the acceptance of goals ($\beta = 0.12$, $p < 0.001$), and intellectual stimulation ($\beta = 0.15$, $p < 0.001$).

These results demonstrate that only five out of possibly six transformational leadership behaviors and both transactional leadership behaviors were influenced by the characteristics of executives and suggest the following: annual salary had a greater chance of influencing an executive's positive use of articulates vision, fostering the acceptance of goals and intellectual stimulation, while a greater negative chance of influencing an executives negative use of high performance expectation and contingent punishment. Female executives were more likely to provide individual support and contingent reward than male executives. Executives were less likely to use high performance expectation and contingent punishment the longer they in their position. The less educated executives were, the greater the chance that they would provide individual support, and the older the executives were the more likely they would provide individual support. Interestingly, the number of employees was not a predictor of any transformational or transactional leadership behaviors.

H3, the cultural dimension of performance orientation was a unique predictor of articulates vision ($\beta = 0.17$, $p < 0.05$), provides appropriate role models ($\beta = 0.23$, $p < 0.01$) and contingent punishment ($\beta = 0.26$, $p < 0.05$). In other words, executives' judgment of how recognized their organization is for being performance orientated, predicted their own perceived using vision, providing a role model, and contingently punishing their followers. Executives used more vision, role modeling, and contingently punishing behaviors, the more their organization was recognized for being performance orientated.

H4, the cultural dimension of emphasis on rewards was a unique positive predictor of fosters the acceptance of group goals ($\beta = 0.15$, $p < 0.01$), and a unique negative predictor provides an appropriate role model ($\beta = -0.14$, $p < 0.05$). In other words, executives' assessment of how recognized their organization is for emphasis on rewards predicted their own perceived use of fostering group goals and being a role model. Executives would use more of these group goal fostering and less role modeling behaviors the more their organization was recognized for an emphasis on rewards. In terms of *H3* and *H6*, the cultural dimension of innovation was only a unique predictor of articulates vision ($\beta = 0.20$, $p < 0.001$). In other words, executives' assessment of how recognized their organization is for innovation predicted their own perceived use of articulates vision. In other words, executives used more of these visioning behaviors the more their organization was recognized for innovation. *H4*, the cultural dimension of supportiveness was a unique predictor of fosters the acceptance of group goals ($\beta = 0.23$, $p < 0.001$). In other words, these executives' judgment of how recognized their organization was for supportiveness predicted their perceived use of fosters the acceptance of group goals. These executives used less fostering the acceptance of group goals, the more supportive they believed their organization was recognized.

Discussion
The current study examined the impact of how the context, in terms of social desirability and culture, influenced the use of leadership behaviors by executives at just below the CEOs. The current study identified the need of executives to self-deceive themselves about their use of a range of leadership behaviors, with the exception of high performance expectations. This finding demonstrates the influence of context, in terms of the social dynamics of organizations and the need to believe that your behavior are socially accepted by others, no matter which ever level you inhabit. Executives' provision of individual support was uniquely influenced by only three

characteristics of executives (i.e. gender, age, and education), all other leadership behaviors were not influenced by these personal demographics.

Interestingly, high performance expectations were only influenced by impression management, which suggests that perhaps executives at this level do not see themselves as personally responsible for expressing such expectations. In other words, these executives may feel that they are only communicating organizational and not their personal expectations of performance at a high level. These executives may not conceptualize their roles of overseeing of direct operations of subordinate divisions, allocation of resources, and application of policies as relating to any personal agenda to improve performance. The study also identified that the use of high performance expectations, along with contingent punishment by executives decreased the longer executives were in their current position.

The annual salary paid to executives had a positive influence on several transformational leadership behaviors (i.e. articulates vision, fosters the acceptance of group goals, intellectual stimulation, high performance expectations, and contingent punishment), which potentially reflects the need for executives to cope with the greater performance risk that accompanies high salaries within individualistic countries, like Australia (see Tosi and Greckhamer, 2004). This relationship may reflect the broader competitive and cultural factors that these executives experience (Conyon and Murphy, 2000) and provides evidence of how the executives reduce their perceived risk of failure by gaining greater commitment and engagement through the transformational leadership behaviors, and linking rewards to performance via contingent reward, a transactional leadership behavior.

The current study confirms previous research, which identified that the cultural context experienced by executives has an impact on their behaviors (e.g. Kotter and Heskett, 1992). However, the study extends this conclusion by identifying that transformational and transactional leadership behaviors were not uniformly influenced by the cultural dimensions examined, even though these executives believed that they were deploying high levels of transformational and transactional leadership behaviors. Several specific relationships between cultural dimensions and leadership behaviors were identified, which have important implications for these executives who oversee the direct operation of subordinate divisions, allocate resources, and apply policies. For example, comparison judgments about their organization's emphasis on rewards tended to reduce executives' perceived use of articulates vision, fosters the acceptance of group goals, and provides an appropriate role model. This finding suggests that the cultural dimension of emphasis on rewards may act like a substitute for executive leadership by reducing the need for vision, collective goals, and personal commitment (i.e. role modeling). Therefore, at this level, a relationship between organizational rewards and these transformational leadership behaviors is apparent, which suggests that the motivational process influencing followers involves some form of exchange relationship. A similar situation may exist with the relationship between supportiveness and fosters the acceptance of group goals, in that supportive culture may require less effort to encourage collective goals.

However, the cultural dimensions of innovation and performance orientation act like signals for executives to increase the use of leadership behaviors. For example, this study identified that innovation predicted executives' use of articulates vision, which suggests that this leadership behavior is fundamental to improving innovation at this organizational level. In others words, to improve innovation, these executives activate positive imagination about the future. The use of a single leadership behavior in

response to the need for innovation may be an example of these executives employing a limited range of higher cognitive functions and behavioral capacity, in order to manage the boundary between an often diverse, complex, and dynamic environment and the organization. The current study also identified that performance orientation predicted executives' role modeling behaviors, visioning behaviors, and contingent punishment which suggests a link between executives thinking that their personal demonstration of performance improvement and excellence, creating positive future imaging, and punishing lack of performance would have an impact on organizational effectiveness. Interestingly, the transformational behaviors provide individual support, intellectual stimulation, and high performance expectations, and the transactional leadership behaviors of contingent reward had no relationships with any cultural dimensions.

Implications for research and practice

While senior executive research is dominated by North American samples (Hambrick, 2007), this study offers a uniquely different context in which the relationships among social desirability, culture, and leadership constructs has been investigated. Therefore, while the findings obviously require further investigation in different countries, the study does add to the literature by investigating the construct validity of factors and inter-relationships outside a North American context. Several concerns about the MCSDS need to be mentioned. It is a non-conventional instrument that unlike others, indirectly measures it's constructs, i.e., self-deception and impression management (Paulhus and Vazire, 2007) and has not previously been used to investigate culture or leadership. Social desirability is not culturally neutral (Crowne and Marlowe, 1960; Dunn and Shome, 2009) and the study assumes that all constructs are equally influenced by national culture.

The study used a modified scale, rather than the normal yes/no format and thus comparisons with other studies maybe limited. However, the construct validity of the instrument was confirmed. The study identified that self-deception influenced a large number of leadership behaviors at this level, which has several implications for future research. For example, at this level, why are executives at this level prone to high levels of self-deception? Does self-deception influence positive or negative emotional states? What is the impact of self-deception in terms of accepting negative feedback? Does self-deception benefit long and/or short term achievements of executives?, and What are the national and cultural influences on self-deception?

In terms of practice, the study found that even though these executives are very senior and powerful within their own organizations, the need to self-deceive themselves about their use of certain leadership behaviors was true for six out of the eight leadership behaviors measured by this study. This finding raises interesting issues about how these executives are experiencing the need to conform to social pressures within their organization. For example, survival at this level may necessitate the need for these executives to deceive themselves in order to be successful in interpersonal interactions (Ones *et al.*, 1996), enhance self-perception to preserve a positive self-image (Stocké and Hunkler, 2007), and maintain mental health and functional status (Morey *et al.*, 2002). This sub-conscious drive to see themselves in a favorable light (Zerbe and Paulhus, 1987) and possibly to maintain an unrealistic or overly positive self-image (Sackeim, 1983) probably relates to their need for self-efficacy to effectively function. In contrast, contingent punishment and to provide individual support were the only leadership behaviors to be influenced by the need to manage others' impressions. The executives' need to understate the use of contingent punishment is quite

understandable, since to be a punisher is not something that endears you to others. However, this study does confirm that executives do punish contingently and perhaps they fear some backlash from others, but deceive themselves about such actions.

In conclusion, the impact of social pressure on these executives will most likely come as no surprise to them, however, social norms or the need to protect their status, may represent lessons learned, which are rarely talked or even acknowledged. This study highlights that these senior executives, and subsequently, their behaviors are not uniformly influenced by the culture they experience, and should take time to reflect upon how their assessment of culture may be more complicated than they have previously considered. Also, such executives need to appreciate how this social phenomena (i.e. social desirability) is impacting upon individuals they lead at the levels below them and above them.

Limitation and future research

While this study provides new insight into how executive leadership is influenced by social desirability and cultural dimensions at the pinnacle of Australian organizations, it is not without limitations. For example, the use of an Australian sample does raise concerns about whether the findings are generalizable to other countries. The cross-sectional design obviously inhibits the generalization of the findings of this study; however, this study does provide new insights into a very important but neglected organizational level, and places context at the center of investigation. The self-assessment design of the research limits the investigation into the perceptions of executives. Future research could incorporate 360 degrees, longitudinal and cross-cultural design elements but the major hurdles of confidentiality and accessing a large number of executives with their superiors, peers, and subordinates, would need to be overcome.

The study used two versatile and robust leadership instruments (i.e. TLI and the LRPQ) that measure perceived leadership behaviors. However, two factors were not included (i.e. non-contingent reward and punishment) due to limitations on survey size and this slightly reduces the capacity of the study to be compared with others. Future research could easily overcome this particular limitation and further investigate leadership at other levels. In addition, the study has identified that substitutes of leadership and behavioral complexity have an influence at this particular stratum, and thus further research is needed to clarify and expand our understanding of these two issues. Finally, the current study aims to investigate a specific stratum within organizations and thus views these executives as distinctly different from other executives. However, we contend that these executives have experienced a collective phenomenon that is approximately shared by all members within this stratum and therefore can be distinguished from members in other groups (Hofstede, 2001; Lehman et al., 2004; Leung and Van de Vijver, 2008).

The study used the MCSDS and OCP instruments, which have been validated by the current and previous research (Sarros et al., 2005), however, many other versions of these instruments do exist with different labels, which will hinder comparison with previous studies. The OCP has emerged from the P-E fit literature and "fit" could have a range of meanings (Edwards, 2008). Therefore, we accept that the P-E fit within this study has no meaning beyond the person and environment and refers specifically to how executives at just below CEO level judge their own organizations "fit" in comparison with other organizations. While this subjective assessment of organizational reputation is an important source of information (Treadway et al., 2009),

future research would benefit from the inclusion of more objective measures. The current study adds to our understanding of the higher organizational echelon by identifying how different cultural dimensions influence environmental scanning processes and boundary spanning activities at just below CEO level.

Conclusion

The current study adds to the limited literature on executives at senior level by investigating how the cultural and social need contexts they experience influence their own perceived use of leadership behaviors. The study identifies that the executives who run departments, work in a context that requires them to deceive themselves about their use of leadership behaviors, but does not really require them to engage in impression management about their use of leadership behaviors to others. The current study confirms the impact that culture has on executives' leadership behaviors, however, this influence was not consistent across the range of behaviors examined. An unexpected finding was the negative effect that emphasis on rewards had on several transformational leadership behaviors, which suggests that this type of cultural influence can act like a substitute for leadership among executives at this organizational level. The study also identified how executives might use a combination of behaviors to respond to issues influenced by innovative aspects of culture; furthermore, the cultural dimension of performance orientation was linked to executive role modeling behavior. Finally, several leadership behaviors were not influenced by any cultural dimension. The current study provides new insights into the impact of cultural and social needs on executives' leadership and should be the first among many to advance our understanding of this under represented body of knowledge.

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Corresponding author

Iain Densten can be contacted at: iain.densten@monash.edu