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2019

Fostering Transformational Leadership in Asian Americans: How to Reach the C-Suite

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Fostering Transformational Leadership in Asian Americans:
How to Reach the C-Suite

submitted to
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for
Senior Thesis
Fall 2018
December 10, 2018

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Acknowledgments:

Thank you to Professor Riggio, without whose pioneering research on transformational leadership this thesis would never have been possible.

Thank you to my friends for the laughs, the encouragement, and a general acceptance of my strange ideas.

Thank you to the people who I consider family, whether near or far, at some point during this semester - I felt your love and encouragement.

Finally, and most importantly thank you to my Dad, Mom, and Sakina. Without your support, I would not be here today. There are not enough words to thank you for the life you have given me.

Abstract

This paper investigates what has caused a lack of Asian American leadership in the corporate space and how transformational leadership can be the solution for these people by using their culture to their advantage. This was accomplished through a comprehensive review of transformational leadership and the personality traits associated with it, as well as psychological research on Asian American issues in the workplace and the role of Asian American culture. Stereotyping and discrimination play a role in the workplace, but usually, what a person can do to combat these issues is not explicated. This thesis aims to fill in that missing information and gives evidence from research that shows that Asian people can take proactive measures against prejudice. They can try to reduce that stigma through a couple different techniques. Transformational leadership is the most effective form of leadership and the style that Asian people should use to become effective leaders. Luckily there are aspects of their culture that already helps them become competent leaders, so it is paramount for companies to nurture those positive qualities. By fixing these issues companies will promote the best personnel which will lead to higher productivity as transformational leaders increase output. Asian Americans will not feel like they are limited by their ethnicity. This will result in greater worker productivity and an actual diversity in the leaders of the company which will lead to higher revenue and a positive public image.

 Keywords: *transformational leadership, Asian Americans, stereotypes, personality traits*

The Situation Right Now for the Most Educated Ethnic Group: Asian Americans

Asian Americans have made the news recently for their lawsuit that revived the discussion about Harvard's affirmative action policy. The Asian Americans who filed the lawsuit are arguing that Harvard's admission policies are discriminatory because Asian Americans perform so well on standardized tests, the bar is set hirer for them. This past Winter, Chloe Kim won an Olympic gold medal as the youngest snowboarder in history and Asian women consistently dominate in the Ladies Professional Golf Association. In the past 10 years every spelling bee has been won by an Indian child. In the science, technology, economics and mathematics community it seems like Asian people far outnumber everyone else. Indian people also have the highest median salary (Statistical Atlas, 2018). Despite all of this incredible success, there only 7 Asian American CEOs in all of the Fortune 500 companies.

Asian Americans are the most educated people yet hold the lowest number of executive leadership positions in the United States (Gee & Peck, 2018). The situation for Asian Americans in the United States is complex because 44% of them have a bachelor's degree in comparison to 26% of the White population (Economist, 2015). Even though they are highly educated, there are few Asian Americans in executive leadership roles. As the United States becomes more ethnically diverse and college educated, it seems natural that corporations would promote many of these minorities to higher levels of executive leadership. Unfortunately the conversation around Asian American minority rights is lacking and largely ignored by the mainstream social justice dogma (Gee & Peck, 2018).

Asian Americans make up 12% of the workforce, but are only 5% of the general

population, and diversity initiatives tend to ignore issues concerning Asian Americans

because they are not perceived to be under-represented (Bruckmüller & Branscombe,

2011). Reports have found that in Silicon Valley, Asian people are the most likely to be

hired for technology jobs, but the least likely to be promoted to management positions

within those companies, when compared to Black and Latinx individuals (Bruckmüller &

Branscombe, 2011). This also applies to non-tech fields, as the same situation has been

found on Wall Street, where Asian individuals are highly represented in associate

positions and then missing in partner positions (Gee & Peck, 2018). The Asian

population has grown by 72% in the past 15 years and includes, Chinese, Indian and

Filipino people (DeWolf, 2017). Since extensive individualized research has not been

done on these specific groups, the umbrella term of Asian American will be used for

these ethnic groups. Even though the percentage of minorities in the United States is

increasing, and social beliefs about women are changing, executive leadership for Asian

people and Asian women are lacking. The number of women in the corporate space is

growing but the same situation exists for them as well. Of the Fortune 500 CEOs, only 25

are women, which puts the female CEO rate at 6.4% despite the fact that women

comprise roughly 40% of the workforce (DeWolf, 2017). Of senior managers, about 20%

are women and 73% of those female executives are White (Jones, 2017). A challenge to a

comprehensive review of leadership is a lack of narrow and detailed research. Only 16 of

the 500 Fortune companies have publicly available demographic information about their

employees, such as race, gender and immigration status (Jones, 2017). Another challenge

is that many of the current minorities that are CEOs have not completed their tenure as

executive leaders and a detailed look into the entirety of their leadership achievements is

not feasible. As companies promote diversity and inclusion, they must consider diversity

in both thought and background. Companies are not doing enough to support their

occupational minorities, but when they do, these minorities hone their skills and become

successful and motivational leaders (Gee & Peck, 2018). Many challenges prevent Asian

Americans from attaining high-level leadership positions, which are due to biases rather

than competency issues. This thesis examines how discrimination against Asian

Americans manifest, the techniques that are used to dissipate the discrimination, and a

review of the qualities of transformational leadership that are needed to get to executive

leadership positions. There are several concepts that are important to understand

regarding the situation that these minorities are faced with. These are terms that are used

only in reference to minorities and are important in understanding the common reasons

that minorities are promoted. In this paper there will be an exploration of these terms and

the psychological factors that impede Asian Americans on their pursuit of executive

leadership. Then, a guide for how Asian Americans can dissipate the stigmas they face.

After, a discussion about traits of transformational leadership, and how Asian Americans

can adapt their personalities to fit the norms required to lead effectively. Finally, a

recommendation for future studies and tactics companies can use to increase their levels

of Asian American leadership.

Stereotyping and Discrimination Experienced in the Workplace

The groups subjected to workplace discrimination are women, Asian Americans, Latinx Americans and Black Americans in the United States. Women of color will also face additional discrimination because they face two stigmas, one about their ethnicity and one about their gender. Discrimination is a prejudiced outlook on a person or situation (Hebl, Moreno & King, 2016). This section will describe the unique issues faced by Asian Americans, men and then women, in regards to employment. The stereotyping that they face can become discriminatory due to long-held beliefs about these cultural groups and can have unintended workplace consequences. In addition, women who belong to these groups have multiple stereotypes in comparison to men of these backgrounds.

A burden that occupational minorities consistently face is the effect that stereotypes have on them. Starting from the interview process to hiring to promotions, occupational minorities face more challenges than White men do. One issue that all of these minority groups face is with their names. For example, research has found that people with anglicized White names got more responses for initial interviews than did the names of Black individuals (Watson, Appiah & Thornton, 2011). This is an important finding because there is no evidence that a person's name influences the quality of work they can do. This can also be applicable to Asian Americans because similar situations have happened. Non-anglicized names always face a possibility of discrimination. This is one example of prejudice that minorities may face before they even have a conversation

with a hiring manager. This is also why Asian Americans will adopt more anglicized

name as their school or workplace name and reserve their real name for people who know

them or their community. This feels disingenuous to the Asian American, yet according

to this research it seems like, in the current workplace climate in the United States, it is a

necessary change. Another finding showed that when Black applicants and White

applicants had comparable credentials, the White applicant was hired a significant

number of times over the Black applicant (Cohen, Broschak, & Haveman, 1998). This

means that even when all other aspects of the study were controlled other than the

applicant's race, race was the determining factor for which person was hired. This finding

should be concerning for companies who are looking to hire the best candidates because

it could affect their productivity which ultimately hurts revenue. This indicates that even

when the qualifications of the individuals are the same there is a high likelihood that

racial bias will skew the hiring process.

     Asian women face multiple stereotypes when it comes to the hiring process, they

are a minority both in ethnicity and gender. Research has found that during the interview

process an interviewer might unconsciously ask women harder questions or expect more

stringent responses than they would expect out of men (Heilman, 2001). This could be

due to a stereotype that women are less educated than men or that they lack the skills

needed for more analytical roles that have been usually male-oriented. This can have

adverse consequences because companies are hiring based on unconscious attitudes and

bias rather than on quantitative skills and abilities. Another issue with hiring women is

the role of a nation's culture and expectations of women, as well as the personality traits

that a culture celebrates (Chhokar, 2012). In the US women are usually the primary

caregivers of children, and men are the breadwinners. Those expectations are also put on

women during their hiring process.

The most problematic part of these specific behaviors is that interviewers are

doing this implicitly. This means that the interviewer does not recognize the difference in

treatment and are unconsciously altering the interview process in a way that affects

outcomes for a specific group. The implication for this behavior is that the company ends

up passing over qualified candidates, which is an ultimate loss in quality personnel for

the company. This entire process works without the interviewer recognizing that it is

happening, so education for the people who make these decisions is paramount.

A major issue that plagues all minority groups is the influence of stereotypes that

leads to discrimination. Stereotypes are unfavorable beliefs held about different groups

and this has been documented about almost every group classification (Hebl, Moreno &

King, 2016). Discrimination is the behavior of using prejudice to make decisions which

are usually informed through stereotypes (Hebl, Moreno & King, 2016). Another issue

that is intrinsic to the stereotype bias that occupational minorities face are the personality

traits associated with each gender. Women are considered to be friendlier and more

collectivistic, whereas men are more likely to be seen in agentic roles with authority and

a take-charge attitude (Huszczo & Endres, 2017). Many of the communal traits do not

align with the agentic ones so even a subtle inclination for one side or another can change

the perception of one's actions. These perceptions of certain stereotypes are difficult to

challenge because in resisting a stereotype, a minority can end up confirming another

one. There is a falsely held stereotype that women are more emotional and fragile than

men. To try and compensate and show that this is a false belief many women, will take

on a fiercer and more unsympathetic role when operating in a leadership position

(Goudreau, 2011). Trying to negate these stereotypes about women's emotional state can

be detrimental. It can prevent inspiring and motivating their employees, since amplifying

these personality traits means that these leaders can end up being unapproachable or

combative. Another stereotype that has been perpetuated is the idea that men are smarter

than women. In a study conducted on high-stakes decision making, researchers found that

the general cognitive ability for men and women was about the same, as well as general

intelligence with men having a greater variability within their scores (Hough, Ployhart &

Oswald, 2001). Trying to invalidate stereotypes while trying to still convey their point is

a classic bind that occupational minorities are placed in when trying to navigate how to

get to the executive level.

Another stereotype is the way that ethnic minorities face ethnic discrimination

and the intricacy of how the two play off of each other. The issues that Asian Americans

face are not unique to minorities but there are cultural stereotypes that restrict the rise of

Asian Americans more than other minorities (Akutagawa, 2013). These include the

stereotypes that Asians face that are in direct opposition to the qualities that are usually

associated with people in the c-suite. Then they will also have opposing stereotypes that

negate the other. Research has shown that there is a stereotype that men of color are warm, relational and controlling (Akutagawa, 2013). This is difficult to reconcile since relational and controlling are seen as two traits that work against each other. "We're brought up to be humble," says Ms. Wong, an executive and former partner at KPMG. "My parents didn't want to rock the boat. It's about being quiet, not making waves, being part of the team. In corporate life, you have to learn to toot your horn" ("The Model Minority is Losing Patience", 2015). This distinction is important because it shows that there is a cultural push for being humble in the Asian American community but that is in direct opposition to a corporate environment, so Asian people must teach this value to themselves. Studies done on students' personality traits have shown the characteristics that White children score higher on are dominance, autonomy, and aggression which leads teachers to find these children more challenging (Wong, 1980). The study showed that teachers favored Asian students, but it also illuminated that people find White students more dominant and autonomous, which are generally considered valuable traits in leaders. This confirms Janet Wong's theory that the valued characteristics of Asian societies causes the perception that Asian people are not leadership material.

Glass Cliffs and the Rise of Minority Leadership in Times of Trouble

Glass cliffs, and the way that minorities deal with them has been an area that has received research support. Glass cliffs refer to the pattern where women and minorities are considered for leadership positions in companies that need a major overhaul or are suffering a financial crisis (Bruckmüller & Branscombe, 2011). The glass cliff is the idea that these people have broken through all the other roadblocks to executive leadership, and now are at the top of their career but stare down an abyss because they have been chosen for a possibly insurmountable task (Bruckmüller & Branscombe, 2011). In a study conducted about Fortune 500 CEOs, women were chosen more often than men when the company was in financial trouble or was having personnel issues (Cook & Glass, 2015). This is a representation of the glass cliff as it is a precarious position that the minority leader is placed in and have a higher likelihood of failing, not because of their intrinsic characteristics and leadership styles, but because they assumed leadership in a failing company. Transformational leaders are favored during times of trouble, especially ones that have charisma and the ability to increase their employees' output (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Uber, the rideshare app, put their new CEO on a glass cliff when it was under a public relations storm due to their CEO, Travis Kalanick's practice of covering up major workplace fairness violations (Kerr, 2018). While searching for a new CEO, Uber's board emphasized their interest in hiring a woman or someone with a different background than Kalanick's "tech-bro" personality and leadership style. They chose Dara Khosrowshahi, an Iranian-American, to lead the company. Since then Khosrowshahi has

implemented a "listen first" policy and has been more transparent about the company's

policies. He announced that in 2013 Uber had been hacked and Uber paid the hackers

$100,000 (Kerr, 2018). During his short tenure, he has already secured a $9.3 billion deal

with a Japanese telecom company, a company that wants to become the world's largest

internet conglomerate (Shinozaki, 2014). Uber recently filed for an IPO (initial public

offering) which is expected to value the company at $120 billion. (Clark, 2018).

  This practice of putting minorities on the glass cliff disappeared when the

previous CEO was also a woman. This seems to indicate that when companies are

accustomed to seeing their top leadership positions filled by women, they do not need to

make bold moves. This shows that when women are in high levels of leadership within a

company, there is less of a need to resort to try these bold moves. Research has found that

CEOs who have "open, visible, and proactive support" for diversity initiatives tend to

lead companies that emphasize these programs and will dedicate money to them (Gee &

Peck, 2018).

Bold Moves Using the Promotion of Minorities to Change Public Perception

"Bold moves" is another term associated with the rise of women and minorities in leadership positions. This refers to the processes behind selecting a woman as CEO and how members of the board of directors might be motivated by the potential public relations boost that a new, "diverse" CEO could bring. When Pepsi chose Indra Nooyi, an Indian American woman, as their CEO, one of her main assignments was restructuring the company ("PepsiCo under Indra Nooyi", 2018). Restructuring of a company is a careful process and is quite challenging to even experienced CEOs. According to Harvard Business School there are three aspects needed to restructure a company: design, execution and marketing ("How to Make Restructuring Work for Your Company", 2001). Because of the level of attention and thought needed for each part of restructuring this is an arduous and careful process. Although her previous position as CFO at Pepsi may have given her an advantage in understanding the company's culture, this was still a monumental task. This would be considered a bold move since Indra was the first woman and Indian person to lead PepsiCo. PepsiCo made the right decision with regards to Nooyi, and her ability to restructure the company, since revenues rose by 80% during her tenure. She also saw the trend for healthier options and steered many of PepsiCo investments in a healthier direction ("PepsiCo under Indra Nooyi", 2018). According to transformational leadership principles, it also makes sense that these leaders are chosen in times of turmoil because transformational leaders can lower stress amongst workers, as well as propagate a vision of prosperous times to come (Bass & Riggio, 2006). However,

bold moves are also a form of discrimination because these people are placed on a glass cliff in an attempt to revamp company image at the expense of the minority leader. Yahoo hired Marissa Mayer to revitalize the company and unfortunately the tech company was not able to get back to its previous glory. The media refers to her as the "least likable CEO in tech" as well as using her as an example for poor leadership (Myatt, 2015). These could all be valid points, but she is an example of a minority placed on a glass cliff.

Techniques to Battle Workplace Discrimination through Dissipating Stigma

Discrimination can lead to several negative psychological effects, such as issues with self-satisfaction, lower self-esteem and a general distrust of the people that they work with (Hebl, Moreno & King, 2016). These psychological issues affect a person's ability to lead, since their cognitive capacity is being used up. A way to change the norms in the workplace is for Asian people to try and mitigate these effects. There are several ways to counter these discriminatory practices that include the use of allies, but for the purpose of focusing on the Asian American individual themselves, techniques for the individual and through the organization will be discussed. Focusing on the minorities actions and not the majorities appeals to the American mindset of individualism and achievement through one's own merit, so this review will not include majority group actions.

The way that the stigma is presented and dealt with is one way that the stigmatized individual can control the perceptions of the other person. Stigmas are "attributes that are deeply discrediting and reduce a person from a 'whole and usual person' to one that is a 'tainted, discounted one'" (Hebl, Moreno & King, 2016). Stigma is something that is carried for any group, for example having a drug addiction has an associated stigma with it that the person with the drug addiction may carry but not emulate. For example a drug user may be characterized as lazy, lacking morality, unambitious and a threat to society. The two methods that have an influence on the level of stigma associated with it are controllability and visibility (Hebl, Moreno & King,

2016). Controllability refers to the level at which the target individual can control how their stigma is expressed and visibility refers to how noticeable their stigma is. In regards to controllability, people who have a disease where there is a belief that there is a degree of control involved, like a person with a drug addiction, get a much harsher reaction from people than when it is not readily apparent what caused the issue, like in the case of cancer (Crandall & Moriarty, 1995). This line of thinking is incorrect since for mental health illnesses like drug addiction, the behavior is uncontrollable by the individual. This fact does not matter because it is about the perception of the situation or person. To mitigate this the individual must think about how they are perceived and if there is a way to actively deny that stigma that is associated with them. In social situations it manifests as an obese person drinking diet coke instead of a milkshake as an indication that they are trying to become healthy (King, Shapiro, Hebl, Singletary, & Turner, 2006). This finding shows that when a person has to make a lot of justifications for their behavior the perceiver's prejudice is likely to be activated. This can manifest in the workplace at lunchtime. Indian food is known to be quite spicy and gives off a distinguishable odor, so in an attempt to lessen any prejudicial action on the part of the perceiver, the Indian person should make an effort to not bring in odorous food. Although this seems disingenuous to an Indian person's identity, it may be necessary to reduce the stigma associated with them. To increase their transformational leadership ability, since Asian people are considered to be less open minded, they can mitigate this stigma by trying

their best to receive ideas and shape their responses to be clearly open minded and less critical.

Another aspect of stigma reduction is the degree to that stigma is visible. The way this manifest is between the person and the perceiver. For example, a perceiver may think that the person they are talking to is gay but is not publicly out. They will then exhaust their cognitive capacity in an attempt to not bring up the subject with the gay person. This can bring issues like the perceiver unintentionally saying something offensive or avoiding interaction later since this interaction is draining to their cognitive capacity (Hebl, Moreno & King, 2016). This means that the onus of making the other person feel comfortable falls on the person who is perceived as being "different". There is also a differentiation between visible and invisible stigmas. For people with invisible stigmas, like a chronic but not visible disability, they have some more options than the person with the visible stigmas (Hebl, Moreno & King, 2016). For a person with Crohn's disease, they can choose to avoid the topic of their disability entirely at the workplace. The disease attacks the intestinal lining and many Crohn's patients experience pain, stomach ulcers, lesions throughout their gastrointestinal tract as well as other life-threatening symptoms, but none of them are outwardly and immediately visible. The symptoms of the disease may only need to stay between the employee and the manager. On the other hand, for a person who is blind, they do not have the ability to hide their disability. A blind person will walk with a cane or seeing eye dog and will require special computers to get their work done. This example shows the difference between a visible and invisible

stigma that are both a physical disability but have different outcomes for stigma management.

This explanation of visibility shows how people can vary between visible and invisible quite easily but also how different it is from controllability. People who can easily make their stigma invisible have a much easier time avoiding discrimination, and have controllability of how their stigma is expressed (Hebl, Moreno & King, 2016). That being said, ethnicity is not easy to hide, and so these techniques will focus on visible stigmas since those are the ones that seem to change the perception of Asian people in the workplace. Racial stigmas work the same way, and mitigating stigmas is vital for Asian Americans to be able to ascend to higher levels of leadership.

There are ways that individuals and the corporation can mitigate the negative effects of stereotypes that are the most pervasive in lowering the perception of occupational minorities. One of the most important actions that workplaces can take to fix this issue is implementing programs within the workplace that can help eliminate a lot of the unconscious biases that people express. Research has shown, even people who think that they do not carry bias, actually do, so recognizing these biases will be imperative to educating non-minorities about how their behavior limits the upward mobility of people without them being aware (Greenwald & Banaji, 1995). There is evidence that this has been implemented in larger companies like Google, Facebook and Microsoft to try and address these specific issues (Hebl, Moreno & King, 2016). There are wording choices that affect how people perceive the bias training. When people are

told that everyone holds stereotypes, they are actually more likely to display their

stereotypes, but when people are told that most people try to overcome their stereotypes

they react well and will work to change their behavior (Duguid & Thomas-Hunt, 2015).

This finding suggests that only specific types of bias training are effective, meaning that

companies must be careful while searching for programs to fulfill this role within their

companies. It also implies that some types of training might be detrimental and will cause

more issues than it will solve.

Laying the Foundations of Transformational Leadership:

        Minorities face gargantuan psychological factors that prevent their promotion. The key to their future success is having effective leadership styles after they reach executive level. Research has found that transformational leadership is the most effective form of leadership in the United States, where events happen quickly and a leader must adapt just as fast (Bass & Riggio, 2006). This style of leadership is also the most appealing because the world is more technology oriented, with less regimented styles of work which all benefit from transformational leadership (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Transformational leadership is the most effective leadership style for these individuals because it "emphasizes intrinsic motivation and the positive development of followers" (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Research has also found that transformational leadership is universal and this leadership style is effective in an international context too (Bass, 1997). There is a possibility then that an American leader could be just as effective in other countries.

        The traits associated with transformational leadership are "intellectually stimulating, considerate, idealistic and inspiring" (Bass, 1999). Transformational leadership is applicable to several specific fields. Transformational leadership was originally studied through the military and its structure but has been shown to be effective in business, industrial, medical, and educational settings (Bass, 1999). A key feature of transformational leadership is having a corporate goals that are in line with employees' goals (Bass, 1999). It highlights the development of followers, or in this case, employees,

which is crucial as transformational leaders usually were followers at some point. Furthermore, research has found that this leadership style leads to higher levels of job motivation for employees which translates into greater productivity output for the company (Bass & Avolio, 2004). Transformational leadership styles have also been shown to increase psychological empowerment which leads to higher levels of job satisfaction (Bass & Avolio, 2004). A study regarding telecommuters versus in-home workers showed that job satisfaction is an important metric. In this study, higher levels of job satisfaction led to higher levels of productivity for repetitive tasks (Dubrin, 1991). These findings indicate that corporations would operate more efficiently under leaders who employ transformational leadership techniques. This also signals that ethnic minorities should pursue the development of these techniques when looking to deploy their leadership skills.

Personality Traits of a Transformational Leader - Focus on the Big 5:

Transformational leaders are intellectually stimulating, considerate, idealistic and inspiring (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Intellectually stimulating behavior is when the leader understands their follower's strengths and uses those to promote thinking and creating (Bass & Avolio, 2004; Bass & Riggio, 2006). Consideration is demonstrated through caring about their employees' needs (Bass & Avolio, 2004). Idealism is exemplified by pushing their followers to perform further than their expectations and inspiring usually suggests role model behavior where the follower believes that the actions made by the leader are qualities they want to emulate (Bass & Avolio, 2004). These behaviors can manifest in different ways depending on the group the leader belongs to. Transformational leadership in a woman may not look the same as in a man but they will share important characteristics (Eagly, Johannesen-Schmidt & van Engen, 2003). It is important to note that these personality traits of transformational leaders are not unique to an ethnicity and are traits that people can have regardless of their background or socioeconomic status.

Most of the research on transformational leadership uses the Five Factor Personality scale, also known as the Big 5, to try and pinpoint the qualities that makes a person a leader (McCrae, 1992). These qualities are also helpful in exemplifying how transformational leadership expresses itself in the real world. These 5 personality traits are neuroticism, extraversion, openness to experience, agreeableness, and conscientiousness (McCrae, 1992). It is important to note that the traits that make good

leaders are sometimes used as a negative for Asian American people. The stereotype of being agreeable for Asian people is expected, and when an Asian person is considered less agreeable they may be labeled as stuck up or not a team player whereas someone else may be perceived as being confident because they have stood by their decision. These social conventions are important to consider, since the perception of the same action bears the consequence, not the action itself. In this next section, each personality trait will be summarized including the role it plays in effective transformational leadership.

Neuroticism is emotional instability, and the higher the person's score the more likely they are to be emotionally unstable. The traits associated with emotional instability are fear, sadness, defensiveness, insecurity, and guilt while someone who is not high on neuroticism is more likely to be more relaxed (Costa & McCrae, 1992; McCrae & Costa, 1991). Even though these traits seem harmful, they are all feelings that every human has faced and only high levels of these traits make it problematic. High levels of neuroticism can result in leaders who are too insecure to have a vision that can inspire their followers (Bono & Judge, 2004). Their high levels of fear may prevent them from taking bold actions that could benefit their whole team (Bono & Judge, 2004). Conflicting research seems to indicate that some elevated levels of neuroticism can help a leader (Deinert, Homan, Boer, Voelpel & Gutermann, 2015). This could manifest in being more insecure about their followers feelings causing them to overcompensate which ends up being the correct level of attention that the follower needs, or that there is greater fear of them losing their jobs which in turn reflects job saving behavior. It could also mean that the

leader spends a lot of time thinking through potential pitfalls of their plan which can make them more thoughtful with their decisions.

Extraversion is the behavior of being talkative, friendly and outgoing with enthusiasm and assertiveness being the key factors in determining one's extraversion score (DeYoung, Quilty, & Peterson, 2007). Assertiveness is displayed through standing up for one's self and beliefs, and the belief that a free exchange of ideas can be done in a respectful manner (House, 2014). Being too assertive can manifest as a propensity to bully or an obsession with being always right, which leaders need to weigh when talking to their employees (House, 2014). This ties closely with idealism that transformational leaders have to have. To be an idealistic leader one must be able to confidently talk about their vision and persuade people to join into it, so it makes sense that someone who is a transformational leader must be highly extroverted and assertive. People with high extraversion scores also value intellectually stimulating material since findings show that these people enjoy and can embrace change (Costa & McCrae, 1992). According to research by Bono and Judge (2004) extraversion is the strongest correlate and most consistent with transformational leadership. This indicates that it is quite difficult to be a transformational leader without having a strong extrovert personality.

Openness to new experience is a trait that sounds like its name. McCrae (1994) describes people who are high on openness to experience as creative, autonomous, unconventional, curious, flexible, and thoughtful. He also warns that openness to experience is a difficult personality concept to grasp and that it is a controversial

dimension to the entire Big 5 personality traits (McCrae & Costa, 1997). This relates

directly to transformational leaders being able to give a vision that their followers can see

since they are open and creative which directly translates to inspirational motivation

(Bass, 1999). It is also easy to see that people who are high on openness to experience are

more likely to be intellectually stimulated since creativity and different modes of thinking

are directly linked with openness to new experiences (House, 2014). Openness to

experience can be exemplified through a leader's flexibility which is shown by following

rules that make sense as well as an ability to experiment with new ideas that can make the

company better (House, 2014). In times of organizational trouble, dissatisfaction with a

job can lead to better ideas from employees for how to change the structure of the

company. This finding is not without the caveat of needing organizational support for

creative ideas and a need for change.

Agreeableness is represented as being able to be warm, generous, kind, and gentle

(McCrae & Costa, 1997). These are traits that most people would consider positive in a

social connotation but there is an idea that leaders and business people are directly the

opposite. For transformational leaders, agreeableness seems to cause some issues. Being

too agreeable could lead to not having a diversity of ideas which could them lead to

stagnation, which gives evidence that the creative side of openness to experience may

mitigate some of the pitfalls people who are too high on agreeableness face (Van Kleef,

Homan, Beersma, & van Knippenberg, 2010). The emphasis on extraversion and

assertiveness changes the way that agreeableness is exemplified for transformational

leaders and research shows that modesty and self-sacrificial behavior is not as important for a good leader (House, 2014).

Recognizing the behaviors of these traits is important for Asian Americans, not only so they can learn to develop these skills, but also to measure how they are perceived by their followers. It also seems that these traits need to be emphasized while Asian American children are growing up, as personality is created and nurtured from the moment children are born. It also is important to recognize that the socialization of Asian children in comparison to White children is quite different which can lead to differences. Thus, it seems that mitigating many of the potential stereotype issues will be the best way for Asian individuals to prove themselves as leaders.

Culture & Transformational Leadership: Asian Americans Using it to Their Advantage

The Big 5 is a universal personality concept, as is the efficacy of transformational leadership. As China opens its borders, there is more opportunity for economic progress, which includes American companies commencing operations in China. When talking about the culture of Asian people, especially Chinese people, it is important to emphasize the role that Confucianism plays because it has influenced the social structure of China. It is also imperative to detangle the differences that men and women face. The four virtues that the adherents of Confucianism hold which are class system, obedience, doctrine of the mean and *renqing* (Wang & Pak, 2015). *Renqing* loosely translates to mean maintaining favor within society and personal relationships with others (Wang & Pak, 2015). The issue that arises with the perception of American Chinese leaders is the role of agreeableness in transformational leadership. Being agreeable leads to idea stagnation, which could mean that because the stereotype is that Chinese people are agreeable, they have difficulty being promoted. Interestingly enough, research has shown that Chinese men are actually more assertive and dominant than American men (Chhokar, 2012). It seems that the Confucian values are the moderating factor for the way that Chinese men express their assertiveness. Because of the influence of *renqing*, saving the relationship between two people is more important than being right. The concept of *renqing* seems quite similar to being considerate, as considerate leaders are attuned to the needs of their employees (Bass & Avolio, 2004). Another issue that has been found in Asian American leadership, here in the United States, is that Asian Americans are viewed as less sociable

and less authentic than Caucasian leaders, with Asian people also concurring that they find Asian American leaders antisocial (Burris, Ayman, Che & Min, 2013). This could be the case for several reasons but in regards to *renqing* it seems that personal relationships are not as paramount to Asian American leaders in the workplace. An issue with relying too heavily on Confucianism to predict how Asian Americans will act in leadership is problematic because many Asian Americans are now 2nd or 3rd generation, meaning that they have little to no connection with China. They have been be influenced by the capitalistic mentality that exists in the United States. Furthermore, research has shown that second and third generation Asian students purposely conceal parts of their ethnic identity and have a high acculturation to the White standard (Sue, 2009). This finding indicates that Asian kids are well versed in the American way of life, which means that their ability to fit in socially should be fairly high. Despite this, research has found that even with Asian Americans that are raised with stereotypically American values, many unintentionally receive different messages through their parents' teachings, so even though parents are trying to raise leaders in the conventional American way, it may not be as effective as they think (Akutagawa, 2013). This indicates that socially, Asian Americans have the skills to become successful transformational leaders.

    Women may have an easier time becoming and excelling at transformational leadership. An anecdotal study conducted by Riggio (2006) found that of the 12 leaders in a company, two of the three women scored the highest on their measures of charismatic leadership potential. Later, these two individuals left the office for a

competitor which demonstrates that transformational leaders may have an ability to recognize when a project is no longer worth pursuing. Females leaders also scored the highest on the four components of leadership: charisma, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration (Bass & Riggio, 2006). These findings bolster Asian women's ability to become transformational leaders, because these findings suggest that women are predisposed to be better transformational leaders than men. The research on this aspect of transformational leadership still needs to be expanded to detangle which traits and to what extent gender plays a role in all of this.

Where Do We Go From Here

The situation for Asian Americans is hopeful. Asian Americans have already crossed a gigantic hurdle and have become educated and successful members of American society. Corporations needed to do a better job at identifying potential Asian leaders and fostering the qualities that they have. They also need to make sure that their hiring managers and leadership developers are aware of the biases that exist and their unconscious perpetuation of these prejudices. That being said though, Asian Americans can be proactive about diminishing stigma within their workplaces. Once this is established, Asian Americans can focus on becoming successful transformational leaders and hone in their personality traits to motivate and inspire their employees. Future psychological research can further look into the specific effects of Asian stereotypes on their workplace promotions. Research can also look into improving the organizational dynamics to be more outcome based instead of perceptions about leadership quality. The future for Asian American leadership is bright because their culture already has important aspects of transformational leadership, it just needs to be refined.

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