

# Styles of Educational Leadership for Modernist and Postmodernist Approaches

Sirous Tabrizi, Glenn Rideout  
University of Windsor, Canada

## Abstract

*Some researchers have identified differences in educational approaches depending on whether a modernist or postmodernist worldview is used. Furthermore, societies in different countries can also take a predominantly modernist or postmodern worldview, with Western countries being primarily postmodernist. Given that situation, there may be leadership styles that are more appropriate to an educational context that is predominantly modernist or postmodernist. Even though postmodernism suggests no “best” style of leadership is possible, since that requires being able to objectively measure leadership effectiveness, there may still be approaches that are most consistent with the postmodernist worldview. This paper explores such a possibility, examining differences between the worldviews and what factors are appropriate in each for educational leadership. Then, two case studies of different countries -- Canada for a postmodernist education, and Iran for a modernist education -- are briefly presented so that the exploration becomes more concrete.*

There are various forms that leadership can take, each of which may be more or less appropriate for different educational contexts. Furthermore, education has seen various conceptual shifts as the attitude has changed from a modern to a postmodern outlook [33]. It is quite likely that, due to this shift, the appropriateness of various kinds of leadership have also changed. Thus, the goal of this paper is to explore one style of educational leadership appropriate for a postmodern society. Since there are many possible forms of leadership that could be explored, only two such styles will be examined: transactional and transformational leadership. This paper will first look at these styles of leaderships in more detail and then examine differences between modern and postmodern societies. Afterward, the differences between these two leadership styles in an educational setting will be discussed through comparing two contexts: schools in Canada and Iran. With Canada representing a postmodern society, and Iran a modern society, it will be easier to see how these two leadership styles play out in such contexts.

## 1. Introduction

There have been various ways of thinking about leadership, but one definition is the ability to influence people to achieve some objective or goal [8]. Leaders thus exercise their leadership to get others (their followers) to accomplish the goal set by the leader. Although it is the leader who defines this goal, it does not have to be a goal that benefits him or her [8]; it could be a goal that benefits the broader organization or system, or that benefits all of the individuals involved. Leadership can also be differentiated from management [11], in which leaders have followers while managers have employees; “follower” implies that there is a willingness and inherent desire to be there, while “employee” implies the loyalty is from payment expected for services or work rendered. Although a successful organization requires strong leadership and management [15], there is greater interest in developing leadership than mere managership. This is particularly true when it comes to education.

## 2. Literature Review

This section will first explore two leadership styles - transactional and transformational - then examine what is meant by modern and postmodern society.

### 2.1. Transactional leadership

In transactional leadership, a leader attempts to motivate followers to act in a particular way through a system of reward and punishment [21]. When followers act in a way that agrees with what the leader wants to encourage, a reward is given. Likewise, a punishment is given in the opposite case. In order to clarify what behavior is desired, and to have consistent reward and punishment, leaders require a set of rules and/or procedures [4]. Furthermore, leaders require some way of monitoring the behavior of their followers (or at least identifying when good/bad behavior has occurred) and a method of enforcing the rules and/or procedures so that the appropriate reward

and punishment can be given. Hence, this style of leadership is meant for maximizing efficiency and conformity, and is very effective at getting people to accomplish specific tasks [21]. However, the need to define specific expectations makes this style of leadership poor at adapting to change, especially rapid change, and handling complex or dynamic problems for which goals and necessary tasks are poorly defined.

### 2.2. Transformational leadership

In transformational leadership, a leader attempts to identify what changes are needed in individuals and the group, and encourages others to transform their attitudes and behaviors so as to bring about that change [5]. In this style, followers are not motivated through reward and punishment but through a sense of self and connection. For example, a leader could motivate another person by being a positive role model or giving him/her tasks that would enable personal growth. Although a leader could work with each individual follower, typically he or she creates a vision that describes the desired end state and means by which that state can be reached and then uses that vision to guide everyone else [21]. Thus, this style of leadership is meant for individual and collective growth, and is good at handling complex or poorly defined tasks for which creativity is required [24]. Since each follower may require a different path for bringing about the necessary personal change, this style of leadership is not good at encouraging standardization or conformity to a set of rules or structures.

### 2.3. Leadership and power

One way of defining power is a relationship through which influence can travel [13]. For example, power in terms of leadership can be analyzed in the relationships formed between a leader and his/her followers. Since any relationship can be used as a means of influence, there is always a dimension of power in leadership [31]. The dynamics of power in small-scale power structures, such as a single school or small group of people, can be analyzed using micropolitics [7]. Micropolitics takes into account political circumstances on a micro-level, such that any formal or informal authority individuals may have is analyzed. For example, a leader may exercise some power over his or her follower and this exercise of power could be considered an example of the leader’s authority. Hence, identifying the various forms of authority given to an individual, and the relationships that exist between people, can help to create a better picture of the overall power structures in the group.

### 2.4. Types of power

Relationships between people may lead to different kinds of power. Rowlands [28] has identified four types of power: power over, power with, power to, and power within. “Power over” occurs when someone takes power from another and/or uses power to prevent others from gaining it. Although often negative, this type of power is typically expressed when there is a lack of alternative power structures or positive relationships [31]. “Power with” occurs when people find a common ground and use it to build collective strength. This type of power can lead to growth in an individual’s knowledge, talent, and ability to collaborate as well as resolve conflicts between people with competing interests [2]. “Power to” occurs when an individual attempts to change his or her perspective on life. As people begin to recognize and understand their own strengths and weaknesses, “power” to represents the power that is used to bring about personal growth through developing and acting on this understanding. Lastly, “power within” occurs when an individual attempts to develop his or her own sense of self-knowledge and self-worth. This type of power is used by people to change their view of themselves and others, as well as the ability to find hope and fulfilment [10]. Table 1 shows several examples of how these four types of power can manifest through different kinds of relationships.

Table 1. Examples of expressing power through different capabilities in a variety of contexts (individual, household, group, etc.) [22, p. 161]

Context	Power Over	Power To	Power With	Power from Within
Economic Capacity	Women increase control of their income through loans, saving, and household production.  Ethnic minorities increase their ability to challenge discrimination against resource and market access.	New immigrants have increased access to income earning opportunities.  Women have reduced burden from unpaid work and childcare.	International women’s groups work together to collectively challenge discrimination.	Increased desire from women for equal rights to resources.  Immigrant groups have increased self-esteem and recognition of their individual economic contributions to the wider society.
Human / Social Capacity	Women increase control over personal and household decision making.	Struggling students have increased literacy skills.	NGOs develop coalitions so they can jointly work for increased public	Increased desire by disabled individuals to have agency in decisions

		People with HIV have improved health and nutrition status.	welfare provision.	about themselves and others.  Increased desire by informal workers for fairer treatment.
Psychological / Cultural Capacity	Immigrant groups can better challenge cultural perceptions and expectations within the community and household.	Disabled individuals have increased access to places outside their home.	Increased cooperation between marginalized and dominant groups.	Sex workers increase their assertiveness, self-esteem and sense of autonomy.
Political Capacity	Involvement of minority groups in formal decision making.  Engagement of people in lower social classes with authority figures.	Uneducated and lower social classes have increased knowledge of political processes.	Non-unionized workers participate jointly in movements to challenge subordination.	Increased desire from immigrant groups to engage in cultural, legal and political processes.
Protective Capacity	Children become better able to defend themselves against violence.	The elderly have reduced risk, vulnerability and insecurity.	The disabled have increased access to networks that provide support in times of crisis.	People in lower socio-economic classes increase their resilience to shocks, disasters, and economic crises.
Agency for empowerment	Inter-household power relationships change to enable increased role for decision-making and bargaining power.	People have increased access to, and control over, income and resources.	The less powerful become better organized, for enhanced ability to change power relations and participate.	People increase their confidence, awareness of choices and rights, and ability to realize their goals.
Transforming structures for empowerment	People increasingly respect rights of others and challenge inequality.	People increase their ability to challenge injustices inflicted on others.	Increased organizational support for those who can challenge injustice, inequality, and discrimination.	People change their attitudes and outlooks, and are committed to positive change.

## 2.5. Empowerment

Although these power relationships can be identified in terms of “who has power,” we can also think about empowerment, which is the increasing or giving of power to an individual. Just as there are different kinds of power that a person could have, a person could also be given different types of power. Thus, empowerment could also take on different forms. However, creating empowerment is closely tied to removing structures or processes that cause disempowerment. Such disempowerment can be the result of how existing power relationships have influenced choices, opportunities, and resource distribution such that some are so disadvantaged that they have become disempowered [22].

When empowerment is viewed in terms of “power over” it is effectively reduced to participating in the existing power structures so as to change the distribution in one’s favor, but no significant changes to the power structures will occur [22]. Since this form of power requires someone to have that power and someone else to lack it, empowerment involves taking some power from those who have it and giving it to those who do not. For example, in a classroom setting a teacher may have the power to make decisions about what material is going to be covered in class. The students could be empowered by allowing them to have a say in what material they want to study, taking away some of the teacher’s control over that decision. It is possible that power could be given to a person or group without necessarily taking it away from another [e.g., see 18], but this requires taking a positive-sum instead of zero-sum approach to redistributing the power relationships.

When empowerment is instead viewed in terms of “power with,” no loss of power occurs. When someone gains power it results in more power for others in a group, rather than the loss of power for the others as is the case with “power over” [e.g., 17]. From the perspective of “power with” then, there is an increasing need to distinguish between personal (or individual) and collective empowerment. Collective empowerment can occur as a result of individual empowerment, but it can also occur as a result of increasing collaboration between groups. For example, a student may be struggling with his or her classes because of pressure at home to engage in other activities. It is particularly common for boys of poor families in developing countries to also be working part time to help the families’ income [32], and so they cannot participate to the same degree as other students in school activities. Thus, these students cannot empower the collective at the school, nor benefit from increasing power of that collective,

until their own individual constraints (requirement to work for the family) have been removed.

## 2.6. Empowerment and context

In conceptualizing empowerment, it is important to discuss the role that the surrounding context can play. This is because power relationships can be identified in such a way that the emphasis is strongly placed on the individual, and external factors are ignored. For example, in the 1990's empowerment of individuals was thought to occur as a result of improving self-esteem or self-respect: "There is a core to the empowerment process which consists of increases in self-confidence and self-esteem, a sense of agency and of "self" in a wider context, and a sense of dignity (being worthy of having a right to respect from others)" [28].

Another example of individual empowerment can be seen in various projects to improve economic prospects, such as providing microcredit to women of poor families as a means of increasing their decision-making power [26]. In these projects, the goal is empowering individuals (often in terms of "power over") through directly affecting the individuals and not the surrounding circumstances. In the example of microcredit though, this intervention was largely ineffective because the existing power structures were not changed (the microcredit was given and managed by other males, such that there was no resulting increase in the women's decision-making power [1].

Ignoring the context, or attempting to change power distribution without changing the existing structures, is just one extreme. The opposite extreme involves changing the environment without doing anything for the individual. For example, promoting equality in access to political participation merely gives others the opportunity to participate; individual conditions could still prevent people from realizing this opportunity, such as poor health preventing engagement or limited finances requiring long work hours [20].

What seems necessary then is a combination approach. It is important to provide individual empowerment while also attempting to change the structures and processes so that this empowerment can be realized on a larger scale [22]. However, the degree to which empowerment strategies emphasize the individual, collective, or context may depend on whether one takes a predominantly premodern, modern, or postmodern view.

## 2.7. Modern and postmodern societies

There are many different ways of describing or categorizing societies, and one that has been particularly common in the West is "modern." As a society industrializes it changes from premodern to

modern, and then to postmodern; although structural and economic changes occur, these terms are primarily used to describe the changes that occur in the way that the people within a society view themselves [23]. A modern society views itself in terms of order and chaos. Order is the goal, or desired state to achieve, while chaos is the source of problems that need to be fixed. As people intervene in the chaos they attempt to manage and overcome it to bring about order. Such intervention can be peaceful and gradual or it can be violent and destructive (i.e., revolutionary). In contrast, a postmodern society views itself as being independent of metanarratives [23]. A metanarrative is a broad narrative meant to encompass and explain history and various goals; it creates a foundation for the society's cultural and social practices, and is the context for future goals. For example, one of the Christian metanarratives is that people are born with inherent sin and the Christ interacted with humanity so as to remove this sin and lead others to eternal peace. In a postmodern society, all metanarratives are rejected as being incomplete and incorrect ways of looking at the world. Instead, multiple competing narratives are gathered and each studied so that people can follow whichever one they want or use each to provide alternative ways of understanding the same situation [23]. Table 2 below provides a brief summary of some other differences between modern and postmodern societies.

Table 2. Brief differences between modern and postmodern societies [9, p. 203, cited in 23].

	Modern Society	Postmodern Society
Goals of strategies	Specialization	Integration
Functional arrangement	Bureaucracy	Democracy
Coordination and Control	Disempowerment	Empowerment
Compute	Organizational	Internalized
Labor relations	Structured	No structure
Motivation	Encouragement and Punishment	Ensure commitment
Quality	External	Internalized (culture)
Performance-reward relationship	Individual	A team approach
Personal relationships	Continue to decline	Creator

## 3. Discussion

Bergquist [35] examined leadership structures within premodern, modern, and postmodern societies. In premodern society, leadership was primarily through a great person [6] who is a man or woman that became a leader due to individual strength relative to the rest of society. This strength

typically arose due to background: circumstances of birth led them to be in positions of power or access to elite training, education, and mentorship. Since the background was necessary, it was not possible to systematically encourage or produce a great person.

In modern societies, the circumstances for creating a great person became embedded within social structures. Hence, structures, processes, and procedures are available for creating a more balanced and widespread expression of leadership [35]. Since it is the events and structures of society that enable people to lead, instead of individuals' backgrounds, the emphasis changed to the system itself; for modern societies then, the goal is not to create a great person but a great system [35]. As a consequence, leaders began focusing on improving the quality of the system, through better regulation and efficiency. In other words, the style of leadership that was often adopted was transactional leadership.

In postmodern societies, the circumstances for creating leaders in modern and premodern societies are highly analyzed and criticized. The goal shifted to not creating leaders but instead finding ways of aligning the abilities and goals of individuals with the current needs and circumstances, the outcome being the search for the great context in which the best use of people's abilities can occur [35]. Leaders can then be in any position, arise from any circumstance, be developed through any type of system, but they are most effective when their skills and abilities are applied to the most relevant problems. As a result, the big challenge for postmodern leadership is determining one's own strengths and weaknesses and that of others, identifying what is needed to solve particular problems, and having the desire for personal growth [35]. In other words, transformational leadership is most appropriate for a postmodern society; in particular, using transformational leadership to identify the best style of leadership to use depending on the circumstances (e.g., see Table 3).

Table 3. Comparison between Premodern, Modern, and Postmodern leadership [35].

PREMODERN	MODERN	POSTMODERN
<b>Great Person</b> elite birth and/or education	<b>Great System</b> produced by and maintains system	<b>Great Context</b> person and system interacts; right person at right time in right place
<b>Wisdom</b> knowledgeable and experience; challenges involve planning & growing competencies of others	<b>Delegation/Supervision</b> <b>Teacher/Mentor</b> Sharing wisdom with others	<b>Learner</b> no enduring wisdom; goal is to continually acquire new wisdom
<b>Bravery</b> enemy is outside the	<b>Empowerment</b> enemy is inside the	<b>Entrepreneur</b> enemy is inside

organization; has more courage, skill, and effectiveness at creating and executing strategy and tactics than others; loyalty must be maintained to keep solidarity	organization; has more skill at communication, conflict management, problem solving, and decision making	oneself; has more persistence and capacity for risk-taking
<b>Vision</b> more inspiring than others; has clearer, more compelling image of goal; challenges involve unrealized goal, or constant creation of new goals	<b>Motivating, Goal-setting, Monitoring</b> translating goal into practical steps; creating accountability	<b>Servant</b> support and assist others in the realization of their own personal, and accomplishing goals

Given what has been discussed so far about leadership, power, and postmodernism, it seems that transformational leadership is more appropriate for a postmodern society than transactional leadership. Should this be the case, there may be various factors that could be used to identify whether a group is capable of implementing transformational leadership. These factors would be more useful if they were independent of whether a society is postmodern, as it is theoretically possible to use transformational leadership in a non-postmodern society. Bass and Riggio [5] have suggested four major factors which, when present, suggest transformational leadership is being used and/or is appropriate to use: idealized influence (II), inspirational motivation (IM), individualized consideration (IC), and intellectual stimulation (IS). II refers to the emotional component of leadership, such that a leader with II is a strong role model for others and others have a desire to identify with and emulate him or her [3]. IM refers to the ability for a leader to inspire and motivate others. IC refers to the genuine concern for the needs and feelings of others, such that a leader with IC gives personal attention to others and brings out their best efforts [13]. Lastly, IS refers to the concern for innovation and creativity, such that leaders with IS challenge others to become more creative in their solutions to problems [25].

Hence, a group could be examined in terms of whether the four listed factors are present, what kind of power their leadership emphasizes, and whether they have generally adopted a modern or postmodern mindset. This examination could identify whether transformational leadership is more appropriate and whether there is more overlap between the type of society (modernist, postmodernist) and leadership style used (transactional, transformational). Two examples of such an examination will now be conducted.

Table 4. Transactional and transformational leadership [16].

Transactional Leadership	Transformational Leadership
Leadership is responsive	Leadership is proactive
Works within the organizational culture	Works to change the organizational culture
Objectives achieved through rewards and punishments	Objectives achieved through higher ideals and values
Motivation through appealing to self-interest	Motivation through encouraging group-interests
Maintain the status quo and stress correct actions to improve performance	Individualized consideration (IC): Personalized consideration and support for each follower Intellectual stimulation (IS): Promote creative and innovative solutions to problems

### 3.1. Iran, modern society example

The first example will look at the society of Iran, and its educational leadership in particular. In the first half of the twentieth century, Iran was primarily functioning with Islam; in the second half, Islamism was the stronger force [27]. The difference between these two concepts is highlighted in Table 5. At the same time, Islam and modernity are interrelated, in that both are responses to traditionalism: the message brought by Muhammad had the goal of rescuing individual freedom from the powerful hold of tribalism, just as modernity had the goal of rescuing individual freedom from the powerful grip of the church and feudalism [27]. As the Muslim world began transforming itself into a modern society, through the process of modernism, it simultaneously began the transformation from Islam to Islamism. Thus, the dialectic between Islam and modernity produced the path of: revival, revolution, Islamism, and post-Islamist restoration [27].

Table 5. Islam and modernity [27].

	Islam	Islamism	Modernity	Modernism
<b>Political basis</b>	Faith & Freedom	Ideology	Responsibility & Freedom	Power
<b>Economic basis</b>	Ingenuity	Expropriation	Ingenuity	Exploitation
<b>Cultural basis</b>	Reasoned Obedience	Absolute Obedience	Reason	Utilitarian Rationality
<b>Goal</b>	Salvation	Homogenization	Emancipation	Gain

As From Table 5 it is apparent that Islam and Modernity share the same economic basis, just as Islamism and Modernism do. As part of the modernizing process, modernity began to take root. In addition, secularization began, in the form of social differentiation and imposition of external structures on the country from the top-down [19]. The process of secularization was partly intentional: state leaders marginalized traditional

Islamic leadership, organizations, and structures to emphasize Western models, while at the same time transforming traditionally Islamic organizations and services into governmental bureaucratic ones. However, the goal of this was to make their society more competitive in the modern world and not simply to erase religion [19]. As a reaction to such secularization, the current circumstance in Iran has emphasized religion over Western models while still mostly maintaining the same structures: there is still a top-down hierarchical structure in government, particularly in the education system [30]. Similarly, looking at the political basis, the main difference between Islam and Modernity is the presence of faith and limited responsibility. Although a political system based on faith is likely to lean more towards theocracy, as Iran moved from Islam to Islamism the increasing emphasis on ideology ensured that the government would become more theocratic (and definitely not democratic). Likewise, as the country moved to Islamism the cultural basis moved from rational obedience to absolute obedience, losing both the rational element and the way that element is realised in the political sphere (i.e., a more democratic approach). Again, as Iran moves from Islam and modernity to Islamism, the goal of freedom (i.e., salvation or emancipation) is changed into homogenization; this has found expression in cultural homogenization, through emphasizing one culture over others and diffusing a wide array of cultural symbols – not only physical objects, but customs, ideas, and values [29]. In the education system, one example of such a goal is emphasizing the Persian language over others, even though the use of other languages in schools (particularly in native localities) is allowed in the constitution [29].

When applying these four factors to the two case studies, we can see that the example for Iran reflects the transactional leadership style much better than transformational. The concept of reward and punishment for leadership motivation is the best example. A promotion may be offered to someone who surpass their goals, and this is an example of transactional leadership. Similarly, in a classroom setting, teachers are following the transactional leadership style when they emphasize grades (i.e., rewarding good work with a higher grade). Leaders in the education system are quite capable of showing II and IM; however, there is evidence that the leaders lack the IC and IS factors, possibly due to the highly vertical structure of their administrative system [30]. The principles of leadership in Islam are generally gathered from the Quran, the hadiths (the habits and sayings of the Prophet Muhammad), and the personality and conducts of great Muslim leaders. Based on previous sections, the Iranian education system can

be further seen as following the transactional leadership style. In contrast though, consider a teacher who is following a transformational leadership style. In case, the teacher attempts to engage others to understand their strengths and weaknesses (e.g., recognize the topics and skills they struggle with) and encourage personal growth (e.g., assigning appropriately challenging material, providing hope and encouragement where necessary, providing additional support for those who need it, etc.). In other words, this teacher would be encouraging the development of “power within” in his or her students.

### 3.2. Canada, postmodern society example

Canada is very much a postmodern society, in terms of identity and behavior. Canadians themselves cannot define clearly what it means “to be Canadian,” though there are plenty of examples of what it means to *not* be Canadian [12]. As a result, the Canadian identity is very much postmodern: various individuals and groups all have their own idea, and these ideas are intermingled but never merged. This is not purely at the level of national identity; regional Canadian groups consider themselves unique in a particular way and this uniqueness is identified, legalized, included in the education system, and allowed to co-exist with many other such identities (e.g., Quebecois, the Roman Catholic school system). This is very much an example of postmodernism, a plurality of co-existing and potentially competing narratives.

The educational institutions in Canada are also in the midst of a radical change from modern to postmodern [33]. This is to be expected, since educational institutions are never disconnected from their wider socio-cultural context. However, as a vast array of possible methods for leadership in a postmodern educational situation have been suggested, it is quite likely that they are not appropriate [33]. The leadership approach that works best in a postmodern situation is one that requires innovation and creativity, as well as adapting to the regularly changing circumstances of the school and wider socio-cultural context [33].

Such an approach is the kind suggested by transformational leadership, in that the leader needs to adapt to the wider circumstances as well; such a method for leadership is one suggested as being appropriate for Canadian schools, acknowledging the postmodern context [34]. Likewise, this requirement to be innovative is the IS factor mentioned above, which the Iranian context does not actively promote.

## 4. Conclusion

As discussed in this paper, leaders may need to follow different styles of leadership depending on the surrounding circumstances. For education in a postmodern society, transformational leadership seems to be more appropriate both for being consistent with postmodern mindset and with postmodern countries who have the necessary factors to realize it. Since transformational leadership pushes for ‘power within,’ it can be used to develop a person’s sense of self-knowledge and self-worth. This includes a capacity to identify and respect diversity of backgrounds and opinions. Coghlan and Brydon-Miller state that: “‘Power within’ is associated with the capacity to imagine and to have hope; it affirms that there is a common human endeavour for dignity and fulfilment” [10]. With this kind of educational leadership, teachers would have more capacity for empowering their students and this would remove pressure from administrators, allowing them to find other structural ways of improving student outcomes.

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