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## **TASK AND RELATIONSHIP ORIENTATION OF AFGHAN AND THAI CITIZENS: TRAINING RECOMMENDATIONS FOR EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP**

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### **Abstract**

The purpose of this paper is to analyze the leadership orientation of Afghan and Thai respondents by exploring their task and relationship orientations to glean best practices for application in the war-torn nation of Afghanistan. While there are many published studies on the Thai work culture and leadership practices, research about Afghan citizens is limited. Using the Style Questionnaire, we compared the leadership orientations of 400 respondents from each nation based on their citizenship on the task and relationship-orientation continuum. To gain some insights, we reflect and explore the Afghan orientation of getting along and compare it with the cultural practices of people in Thailand, where politicians have managed their political affairs more peacefully with their neighbors. Both Afghanistan and Thailand's cultures are high-context and collective; therefore, people are presumed to be more relationship-oriented, and this study found statistically significant support for this presumption. While respondents from both countries do have a stronger focus on their relationships, in comparison, data shows that their task orientation is significantly lower. Analysis, recommendations for inclusion training, dealing with societal / workplace mobbing, and the study's limitations are presented toward the end of the paper. The findings are useful for managers, political leaders, and expatriates working in these two South and East Asian countries.

*Keywords:* Afghan leadership orientation, Thai cultural orientations, relationship-orientation, task-orientation, inclusion, societal mobbing; training

### **Introduction**

The leadership tendencies of modern managers and working professionals can be researched using their task and relationship orientations. To explore the behavioral tendencies of working adults in the Afghan and Thai workplaces, we review the traditional norms of each country's rich cultural practices while assessing their leadership similarities and differences. The Afghan and Thai cultures both have a rich history with strong traditions and norms which provide good learning opportunities for application in the modern workplace (Huang, Mujtaba, Cavico, and Sims, 2006; Scagliotti and Mujtaba, 2010; Molz and Mujtaba, 2011; Nguyen, Mujtaba, Tran, and Rujis, 2013; Nguyen, Mujtaba, & Pham, 2013).

Afghans and Thais are likely to be relationship-oriented because their cultures are collectivistic. Perhaps because of this relationship-oriented society, people in Thailand seem to be more tolerant, internationally diverse, and inclusive of world's cultures which have enabled their politicians and entrepreneurs to benefit from globalization trends and foreign direct investment opportunities. On the other side, despite their collective and relationship-oriented culture, the people of Afghanistan have had political upheavals, widespread corruption, and several regressive political regimes over the past four decades, which has hurt their economy (Mujtaba, 2013, 2012, 2011 and 2005). Afghans can learn from the Thais best

practices to improve their work environment and political economy, since there are links and connections between cultural leadership practices and a nation's economic performance (Misumi and Seki, 1971; Misumi, 1986; Mujtaba, Tajaddini, and Chen, 2011; Mujtaba, 2014; Hughes, Ginnett, and Curphy, 2019). As such, our research question is, are the leadership styles of Afghans and Thais similar or different? Consequently, we review the literature on traditional leadership as well as the general management styles of managers in Afghanistan and Thailand, along with their cultural norms. Then, we explain our methodology, research hypotheses, and the results. Finally, we discuss general implications, limitations, training opportunities, and conclusions of the study.

### **Culture and Behavior**

Modern workers living in a globalized work environment have been exposed to many diverse cultures as people travel abroad for global education or work (Karadjova-Stoev and Mujtaba, 2009) and through the use of modern technology. As such, there might be a convergence, divergence, and crossvergence of cultural practices and leadership styles present in their behaviors (Nieves, Mujtaba, Pellet, and Cavico, 2006). *Convergence* describes the merging of different cultures due to the influence of globalization and other factors that bring them into close contact with one another. *Divergence* is the extent to which distinctiveness is exhibited by a specific culture despite interaction with other cultures. Finally, *crossvergence* is the development of a new culture with its own characteristics that result from cultures interacting with each other over time (Dastoor, Roofe, and Mujtaba, 2005).

Most importantly, modern Afghans and Thais living in rapidly growing cities of Kabul and Bangkok tends to exhibit individualistic values that are associated with western economies. Similarly, Westerners have adopted many high-context cultural practices as employers encourage employees to work collectively in achieving organizational goals and understand that in "highly competitive, rapidly changing environments, caring and appreciative leaders are the ones to bet on for long-term success" (Kouzes & Posner, 2003, p.78). The call for participative management and continuous improvement practices through concurrent engineering and teamwork has been advocated in Western industries for many decades (Kreitner, 2007). In essence, the forces of globalization is inducing changes in all cultures (Adler, 1986), especially democratic nations like Thailand, which has welcomed scholars, entrepreneurs, and investors from all over the globe.

Culture is a prominent factor in the differences people share. Such differences can be critical in effectively managing workplace diversity and inclusion. Additionally, culture is essential because shared values tend to regularize human behavior and make individuals more predictable. Knowing how others perceive and value their environment provides a guide for managers to anticipate behavior and respond effectively. This point is becoming increasingly more important as globalization brings distant peoples into closer contact while they face cultural, economical and legal challenges (Scarborough, 1998; Cavico and Mujtaba, 2008); and the growth in international trade has dramatically increased people's understanding of the similarities and differences between diverse cultures (Gardenswartz, Rowe, Digh, & Bennett, 2003; Ishii & Bruneau, 1994; **Mead, 2005; Cavico and Mujtaba, 2008**).

Afghanistan is a country trying desperately to recover from decades of ethnic conflicts; it is a cultural plunder that was initially created during the Afghan-Russian war in the late 1970s and 1980s (Mujtaba, 2007b). The lack of progression in Afghanistan and the presence of widespread corruption is partly due to cultural disintegration; Sims and Mujtaba (2005) warn that corruption can greatly damage and slow the growth process of an economy. It is not the people of Afghanistan that are corrupt; rather, the realities of low paying jobs and a terrible economy has conditioned some people to accept inappropriate actions such as drug

trafficking, theft, and bribery as an essential element of day-to-day survival. Sims and Mujtaba's research conclude that ongoing corruptive practices within the public sector have enormous implications on the security of the Afghan government. Citizens unhappy with the unfair, inequitable, and untimely distribution of public services can resort to revolts and other negative behaviors; such behaviors play a major part in the regression of a nation and its demographics. As such, an awareness of the people's leadership orientation toward tasks and relationships may help in understanding such long-lasting conflicts and corrupt practices in Afghanistan. Strong leaders should be "guided by a commitment to work for justice and equality, among those who are disenfranchised and underserved" (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2000, p. 83).

Some studies on cultural differences (Munene, Schwartz, and Smith, 2000; Mujtaba, 2008) conclude that Asian cultures like Thailand and Afghanistan tend to emphasize hierarchy, paternalism, and mastery in contrast to egalitarianism, autonomy, and harmony (Huang, Mujtaba, Cavico, and Sims, 2006). Moreover, Asian managers often stress reliance on formal rules and superiors in reaching decisions as compared with the cultural profile of people in Canada, the United States and most European countries. People of an individualistic culture tend to value the needs, concerns, and identity of oneself above the needs of the community, which are contributing to the traditional Asian norms. As concluded by Mujtaba, Luk, Murphy, and Saowakul (2009), a collective culture's members tend to focus more on world peace, being helpful to others and group interests, instead of an individual's needs.

Today's competitive environment of global competition has changed many aspects of work in dramatic ways; however, peoples' thinking regarding violence, indulgence, and greed still tends to drive their behaviors about the accumulation of wealth through moral and amoral means in society. It has been said that ineffective or bad management theories and concepts, which are widespread both in the private and public sectors of Afghanistan and Thailand, tend to lead to bad practices and often do more damage than what is apparent to the naked eye (Ghoshal, 2005). Reischl, Cavico, Mujtaba, and Pellet mention that "Although the natural sciences paved the way for advancement in the quantity of life, little has changed in the way of advancement in the quality of life" (2010, p. 7). Afghan officials should emphasize that effective leadership means doing the right tasks at the right times while building long-term relationships with all relevant stakeholders in organizations, communities, region, and society (Mujtaba, 2007a).

This study seeks to expand our knowledge of Afghanistan's leadership culture by directly comparing the task and relationship orientation of Afghans and Thais. While the scope of this study is limited, the ultimate goal is to expand our knowledge of leadership across cultures through the systematic collection of data and empirical analysis. This knowledge can then be used to improve the international community's understanding of these Asian cultures and facilitate their continued stability and economic prosperity in the coming years and decades (Oyserman, 2002; Schwartz, 1994, 1999).

### **Afghan and Thailand's Culture**

Culture is "The collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one human group from another....Culture, in this sense, includes systems of values; and values are among the building blocks of culture" (Hofstede, 1980, p. 21). The behavior of Thais and Afghans reflects their years of socialization and native roots based on their various beliefs, norms, and cultures. We know that cultures regularize human behavior, thereby making decisions more predictable. As such, culture plays an important role in acting as moral leaders and being perceived as ethical managers locally, nationally, and globally (Sanyal, 2005).

The Thai culture differs from the Afghan culture in many ways. Afghan managers often use more directive leadership styles, while Thais tend to be more democratic and participative in their management and decision-making approaches. While Afghanistan has a growing population of about 37 million inhabitants as of December 2019, Thailand’s population is about 70 million. Furthermore, while there are millions of Muslims in Thailand, the majority of people are Buddhists. Thais enjoy much more freedom and pragmatism, as people are economically in a better position, flexible and more open-minded toward new ideas compared to the average person in Afghanistan. As can be witnessed, Thais have adopted many western practices, perhaps due to the constant evolution of culture and widespread availability of technology and information over the cyberspace highways. Similarly, in search of a better economy and a peaceful country, Afghans have adopted many diverse Western and Asian practices to encourage employees to work more collectively to achieve the organization’s goals in a very competitive and globally open society. In essence, modern practices and focus on competitiveness along with high expectations from the international communities have induced positive changes in both Afghan and Thai cultures.

In Thai culture, where collectivism is high, and individualism is low (as can be seen in Figure 1), the group is the primary unit of social organization as a consequence of people living in extended families; thus, this explains why it is easier for them to work cohesively as teams and groups. Similarly, power distance and uncertainty avoidance are high, while achievement and long-term orientation are on the lower side as people have become more indulgence-oriented.

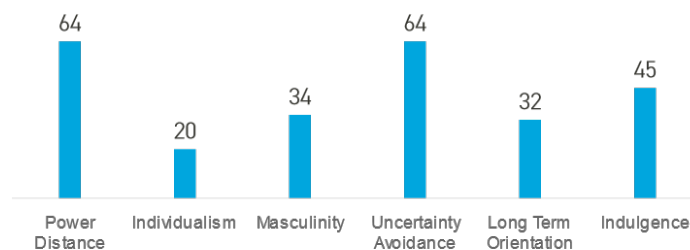


Figure 1: Thai Cultural Dimensions Scores

(Retrieved on November 10, 2019 from: <https://www.hofstede-insights.com/>)

While there is no published empirical research data available based on Hofstede’s cultural dimensions as of yet for the culture of Afghanistan, there are some practical explanations from researchers (Entezar, 2008). In general, based on two decades of socialization and personal observations of the first author along with the results of qualitative interviews with educators and leaders in Afghanistan, power distance between workers and managers is high for Afghans since formal position title and rank tend to have a high level of importance both on the job and in the community. Both masculinity and uncertainty avoidance are relatively high in Afghanistan as the concept of “*guzaara*” conditions people to “play it safe” and not take too much risk. Since Afghans do put their faith into God, some authors believe that many individuals have low uncertainty avoidance tendencies (Entezar, 2008). However, Afghanistan, as a country, is a culture of cautious optimists and calculated risk-takers; consequently, most people avoid unnecessary uncertainty and risk. As a society, Afghans learn early on to “reach for the stars”; as such, they are highly achievement-oriented. On the other side of the continuum, individualism, and long-term orientation are in the

medium range. Finally, Afghan’s indulgence score is likely to be in the low range since people are conditioned by the local norms of uncertainty avoidance as well as other cultural traditions to avoid extravagant expenditures and to save for a “rainy” day (see Table 1). Due to the collective nature of people in Afghanistan and a history of tribalism, most individuals learn to socialize and respect members of the community, especially their elders. While Afghans do restraint themselves from acting upon their impulsive indulgences, some of their decisions are short-term oriented as the years of political instability, widespread corruption, and ethnic conflicts have conditioned many toward a survival mode of making it through the day, month or even the current political regime.

Table 1: Cultural Dimensions Range for Afghans and Thais

Cultural Dimensions	Thailand	Afghanistan
1. Power distance	high	Very high
2. Individualism	low	medium
3. Masculinity	low	high
4. Uncertainty avoidance	high	medium
5. Long term orientation	low	medium
6. Indulgence	medium	low

Hall (1976) divides culture into two extreme types: high context and low context cultures. In high context cultures, people share their way of thinking, feeling, and acting; therefore, they often use non-verbal communication. On the contrary, in low context cultures, people utilize verbal communication. Thailand, similar to Afghanistan, is a high context society. This partly explains why the Thai and Afghan people tend to avoid uncertainty. Afghans and Thais try to build strong and stable relationships with others; as such, because of their high-context and homogenous cultures, people can more effectively communicate with each other.

Thais and Afghans have thousands of years of Asian culture and history, which still drives the behavior of people in achieving their goals while maintaining strong work relationships. The cultures of these countries are somewhat paternalistic due to strong relationship orientations and the reciprocal expectations of loyalty and favoritism linked with it. Culture is important because shared values tend to regularize human behavior while making politicians and managers more predictable, and this has important implications for work (Schwartz, 1999; Mujtaba and Kaifi, 2008; Mujtaba, 2010). Knowing how others perceive and value their environment provides a guide for managers and politicians to anticipate behavior and respond effectively as leaders in their departments and societies (Gardenswartz, Rowe, Digh, & Bennett, 2003; **Mead, 2005; Cavico and Mujtaba, 2008**).

**Leadership Orientations**

*Leadership* requires influencing others while providing an environment where organizational objectives can successfully be achieved (Mujtaba, 2019; Kaifi, Mujtaba, and Xie, 2009; Mujtaba and Kaifi, 2010). Afghans believe that effective leadership (or *rahbariat*) requires good human skills (*guzaara*) and technical skills (*edaara*) while a person exerts influence over one or more individuals to inspire, motivate, and direct their behaviors toward the achievement of organizational goals. The individual or person who exerts any form of influence that guides behavior is the leader (*rahbar*).

Buckner (2019, p. 315) mentions that “Higher education institutions (HEIs) are increasingly being called upon to educate youth for global labor markets and societies.”

Buckner states that many HEIs “have integrated international and intercultural ways of knowing into their work, a phenomenon known as internationalization” (2019, p. 315). Afghanistan has a young population that should be trained, developed, and socialized toward critical thinking leadership skills and economic development through the global education of best practices from around the world. Baha (2019, p. 5) believes that “it is predicted that the number of students will increase by approximately 12% annually for the next four years” in the higher education section of Afghanistan, which originally was initiated in the 1930s. The fact is that while about 50,000 students were annually entering higher education in 2008, today nearly 400,000 students are expected to be enrolled during 2020 in the higher education institutions of Afghanistan (Baha, 2019, p. 5). Research shows that university graduates now need a variety of intercultural competencies to participate in the global labor markets (Buckner, 2019, p. 317). Consequently, the training and development of modern students, educators, political leaders, and entrepreneurs for effective leadership become important as future leaders begin their higher education journey.

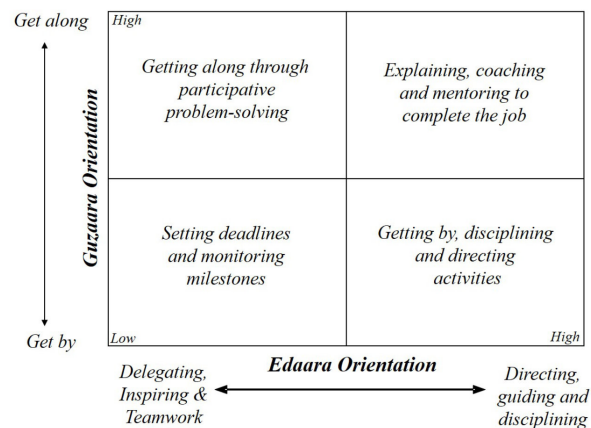


Figure 2: Leadership / Rahbariat Continuum (Mujtaba, 2019)

Ultimately, as explained by Mujtaba (2019), effective leadership (rahbariat) is about the successful implementation and achievement of guzaara and edaara through a balanced application approach based on the needs of the situation and the readiness of followers or employees (see Figure 2). For example, managers should lead using low levels of guzaara and edaara with employees who have successfully completed the job in the recent past and are motivated to perform the job; in such cases, one should appropriately delegate the job, set deadlines, and periodically monitor results by providing relevant feedback as needed.

Afghan leaders must keep in mind that certain aspects of the Afghan culture, such as strong bonds among friends and reciprocal expectations of loyalty, tend to lead to favoritism among all public and private sector professionals. This cultural foundation associated with loyalty to one’s friends and colleagues or even cronyism in Afghanistan has evolved over the years out of necessity since one can trust his or her closest friends in times of turmoil and political conflicts. While some elements of favoritism and cronyism are prevalent in most cultures, including Thailand, it is especially true in Afghanistan since there is a diverse range of ethnic groups and tribes that have been divided through political animosity by foreign influences in this land-locked country. As such, this study seeks to identify the extent to which the leadership orientations of Afghans are similar or different by examining their task and relationship orientation scores while also learning best practices from other nations for benchmarking purposes.

Leadership is a science as it can be partly quantified and documented as a study, and it is an art since one can get better at it through experience over time (Hughes, Ginnett, and Curphy, 2019; Mujtaba, 2019). Barnard (1948) explains that leadership is a function of at least three complex variables: the leaders, the followers, and the situational conditions. Bass (1990) pointed out that the focus of leadership research has shifted from leaders to the relationship of the leaders and the followers, and then to the interaction between the leaders and situational or cultural conditions. In the leadership literature, the behaviors of leaders are discussed in terms of initiating structure (task-orientation) and consideration (relationship-orientation) components (Halpin and Winer, 1957; Fleishman, 1967). Bass (1990) found that relationship-oriented functions are associated with subordinate satisfaction, and task-oriented functions are linked with performance. Similarly, the relationship functions are positively associated with group performance, which explains why Afghans and Thais work well in teams. Overall, one dimension of each person's leadership style is the extent to which he or she is people-oriented or task-oriented. Since cultures influence people through years of socialization, this study will aid in determining and confirming whether people of high-context culture are more relationship-oriented or more task-oriented.

Maintaining healthy relationships in a group is a top priority in both Thailand and Afghanistan; consequently, leaders tend to avoid stressful disagreements and try to effectively manage dysfunctional conflicts in their organizations as quickly as possible (Nakane, 1970). To avoid conflicts in department and group meetings, the leader and their followers in most Asian cultures exchange their opinions informally until a common understanding has taken place (Xu, 1987). After negotiating and reaching consensus, formal decisions are made. Generally, the Thai manager will not unilaterally decide until followers who will be affected have had sufficient time to offer their views, feel they have been fairly heard, and are willing to support the agreed-upon decision even though they may feel that it is not the best one (Ouchi, 1976; 308). However, this is not always the case for managers in Afghanistan, as they tend to be more directive and authoritarian.

To sum up Afghan and Thai leadership behaviors, the role of leaders in these Asian cultures is to maintain relationships, using autocratic, directive, authoritarian, democratic, and participative leadership approaches.

### **Methodology**

Paul Hersey (2008) states that *leadership* is the process of influencing others to achieve organizational objectives. Leaders use various amounts of task and relationship behaviors to achieve their goals. Northouse (2007) provides the Style Questionnaire, which can be used to obtain a general profile of a person's leadership behaviors regarding task and relationship orientations. This instrument was selected because the short statements leave little room for misinterpretations. The statistical output for the reliability data has shown that the Cronbach's alpha is 0.887, which means that the questions are good for tests, and they are acceptable in social science research (Mujtaba, 2019; Mujtaba and Isomura, 2012; Mujtaba and Balboa, 2009; Mujtaba, Afza, and Habib, 2011; Mujtaba and Isomura, 2012; Nguyen, Mujtaba, Tran, and Rujis, 2013; Nguyen, Mujtaba, & Pham, 2013).

To determine one's personal leadership characteristics, the respondent circles one of the options that best describe how he or she sees himself or herself (or the person that is being evaluated) regarding each statement. For each statement, the person indicates the degree to which he or she (or the person being evaluated) engages in the stated behavior. A rating of 1 means "never," and a rating of 5 means "always" with the person demonstrating the specific behavior. To determine one's scores for the leadership styles questionnaire, one can add the responses for the odd-numbered items to determine the score for task-orientation behaviors, and add the responses for the even-numbered items to determine the score for relationship-

orientation behaviors. Northouse's (2007, p. 87) scoring interpretation is presented in Table 2.

Table 2 - Task and Relationship Score Interpretations

- 45-50 Very high range
- 40-44 High range
- 35-39 Moderately high range
- 30-34 Moderately low range
- 25-29 Low range
- 10-24 Very low range

This study targeted Afghan and Thai citizens, workers, and managers. To increase both accuracy and response rate, the original questionnaire was translated into the Thai and Persian languages so that those who were not fluent in English could easily respond to each question. The Thai and Persian versions of the survey were back-translated into English, by two other individuals, to confirm their accuracy with the original instrument. The printed surveys were offered in Thailand and Afghanistan to individuals who volunteered to complete it. The online version of the survey was only available in English. The surveys were distributed and collected physically and sent electronically to working adults, graduate students, colleagues, and friends who live all around the globe. Mujtaba (2019) explains that the self-administered questionnaire offers anonymity, which is important when conducting research related to the leadership and management characteristics of respondents or their superiors.

### Research Hypotheses

The research question is to determine if the leadership styles of Afghans and Thais similar or different. To answer this question, the specific focus for this research is to determine whether Afghan and Thai respondents have similar or different scores on the relationship orientation and task orientation dimensions of leadership.

The specific hypotheses for this study are as follows:

1. *Hypothesis 1:* Afghan respondents will have similar scores for relationship and task orientations.
2. *Hypothesis 2:* Thai respondents will have similar scores for relationship and task orientations.
3. *Hypothesis 3:* Afghan and Thai respondents will have similar scores on task and relationship orientation.

For the purpose of this study, 400 candidates' responses were selected for analysis from each nation. The convenience sample was obtained through educational organizations, businesses, entrepreneurs, and private and public sector institutions. A paragraph explaining the purpose of this research and guaranteeing confidentiality were included with the survey. The respondents were asked to voluntarily complete the questionnaire, using print or online format.



**Task and Relationship Orientation Results**

The results of data analysis demonstrate that Afghans are highly task-oriented and highly-relationship-oriented. While the average score of Afghan respondents for task orientation (*edaara*) falls in the “high range,” and their relationship orientation (*guzaara*) average fell in “high range,” there are statistically significant differences among them.

As seen in Table 3, and using the t-test for differences in the two means at a 0.05 level of significance, the first hypothesis is rejected because the calculated t value (-5.67) does not fall within the critical value of t for statistical significance. In other words, since the t value does not fall within the critical values (+1.96 and -1.96), the alternative hypothesis is supported. Furthermore, since the p-value of 0.00000002 is smaller than alpha ( $\alpha$ ) = 0.05, there is sufficient evidence to reject the hypothesis. Therefore, it can be said that Afghan respondents have dissimilar scores for relationship and task orientations as they are more highly focused on their relationships. Based on the results, the task orientation and relationship orientation scores of Afghan respondents do not appear to be similar. As such, one can conclude that the Afghan respondents have significantly higher scores on the relationship orientation. Perhaps because of their *guzaara* socialization (relationship-orientation) as well as high context and collective nature, Afghan respondents seem to be putting significantly more emphasis on maintaining their relationships perhaps to “save face.”

Table 3  
*Afghan Task vs. Relationship Orientations*

Sample - <i>Task Orientation</i>	400
Sample Mean	41.0825
Sample Standard Deviation	7.353
Sample - <i>Relationship Orientation</i>	400
Sample Mean	43.87
Sample Standard Deviation	6.523
t-Test Statistic	-5.67
p-Value	0.00000002

Thai respondents appear to have high scores in both their task and relationship orientations. While the average score of Thai respondents for task and relationship orientations falls in “high range,” there are statistically significant differences among them.

As seen from Table 4 and using the t-test for differences in two means, at a 0.05 level of significance, the second hypothesis is rejected because the calculated t value (-10.04) does not fall within the critical value of t for statistical significance; the alternative hypothesis is supported. Furthermore, since the p-value of 0.00000000 is smaller than alpha ( $\alpha$ ) = 0.05, there is sufficient evidence to reject the hypothesis. Therefore, Thai respondents have dissimilar scores for relationship and task orientations as they are more highly focused on their relationships. Based on the results, the task orientation and relationship orientation scores of Thai respondents do not appear to be similar. As such, one can conclude that Thai employees and managers have significantly higher scores on the relationship orientation. Perhaps because of their high context and collective nature, Thai respondents are putting significantly more emphasis on their relationships. These results are similar to those of the Afghan respondents; it means that both Thai and Afghan respondents demonstrate a significantly higher focus on their relationships, as compared to their task-orientation.

Table 4  
*Thai Task vs. Relationship Orientations*

Sample - <i>Task Orientation</i>	400
Sample Mean	41.51
Sample Standard Deviation	2.86
Sample - <i>Relationship Orientation</i>	400
Sample Mean	43.36
Sample Standard Deviation	2.324
Intermediate Calculations	
Difference in Sample Means	-1.85
<i>t</i> -Test Statistic	-10.04
Lower Critical Value	-1.963
Upper Critical Value	1.963
<i>p</i> -Value	0.0000000

Regarding the task orientation and relationship orientation of Afghan and Thai respondents being similar, the third hypothesis cannot be rejected because the calculated *t* value (1.08) for task orientation does fall within the critical values of *t* (-1.963 – 1.963) for statistical significance. Also, since the *p*-value of 0.279 is larger than alpha ( $\alpha$ ) = 0.05, there is sufficient evidence to support the hypothesis. Furthermore, analysis on the relationship orientation of Afghan and Thai respondents demonstrated that the calculated *t* value (-1.47) falls within the critical value of *t* for statistical significance; in other words, the hypothesis is supported. Furthermore, since the *p*-value of 0.141 is greater than alpha ( $\alpha$ ) = 0.05, there is sufficient evidence to support the hypothesis. Therefore, Afghan and Thai respondents have similar scores for task and relationship orientations.

### Discussion and Limitations

It was hypothesized that Afghan and Thai respondents would have similar scores for relationship and task orientations; however, our research did not support this hypothesis because both Afghans and Thais are more focused on the relationship element of their leadership. This study's result supports previous literature on the Thai and Afghan cultures, organizations, and management practices that they lead and manage by maintaining harmony in their relationships as "face-saving" is so essential for harmony in these Asian cultures.

Thais and Afghans are more relationship-oriented than task-oriented; however, their task orientation falls in the high range as well. Global managers should pay attention to the reality that Afghan and Thai management practices are based on their relationship orientation and getting along with all relevant stakeholders through effective teamwork, participative decision-making, and cooperation. Overall, the findings of this research are consistent with previous studies conducted with Thai working adults (Mujtaba, 2019; Sungkhawan, Mujtaba, Swaidan, and Kaweevisultrakul, 2012; Murphy Jr., Mujtaba, Manyak, Sungkhawan, and Greenwood, 2010; Mujtaba, Luk, Murphy, and Saowakul, 2009; Mujtaba, 2008), and Afghan respondents (Mujtaba and Sadat, 2010; Mujtaba and Kaifi, 2010).

Learning and benchmarking leadership best practices can take place from any country or culture. The hope for every leader is that between birth and death, we make a positive difference in the lives of those around us. Afghans should learn from their own positive and negative trends in the past, as well as the positive and negative patterns of other cultures and countries. As the proverb goes, those who do not know history are likely to repeat it. As such, we should learn from the past to positively influence our lives in the present and future.

The political leaders of Thailand have been able to use their high relationship-orientation in a positive manner with the international community by keeping a strong bond with their neighbors as well as other nations both in the west and east. Consequently, the people of Thailand have enjoyed a better quality of life through a sustaining peaceful work environment, inclusion, democracy, and a stronger and progressively developing economy (Senathip, Mujtaba and Cavico, 2017). While Thailand has people of diverse ethnic backgrounds, they seem to be more inclusive and effective at synergizing because of their differences. Thais have less blatant forms of ethnic animosity, conflict, gender discrimination, and workplace mobbing of those who are different from everyone else. Perhaps Afghan leaders should take advantage of their relationship orientation element of leadership to build strong bonds and connections within the country's diverse tribal groups, as well as with their neighbors and other influential nations around the globe. Author Jordan Raynor (2020) states that most individuals spend their days, weeks, and years making little progress in a million different directions; as such, they become competent at many things but exceptional at none of them. Raynor (2020) recommends that modern leaders explore, choose, eliminate, and master the "one thing" that will make a long-lasting, impactful, and sustainable positive difference in their lives. This is exactly what the father of scientific management, Frederick Taylor, emphasized at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century when he said managers and leaders should find employees who are "*First-Class*" at doing each specific task. Taylor believed that everyone is a "first-class" worker in something and managers should match employees with the right jobs (Mujtaba, 2014). Afghan leaders should focus on their strong points while also studying the Thai culture of politics and business practices in order to implement the relevant ones in Afghanistan. One critical area for immediate improvements in Afghanistan is to offer more opportunities for females to get quality education at all levels, while also battling the devious societal mobbing (group bullying of those who are different) practices based on ethnic, religious and/or political differences.

In any culture, influential leaders are ultimately responsible for establishing ethical strategies that the country should implement in the present (Mujtaba, Tajaddini, and Chen, 2011) in order to create a better and ideal future. It is imperative in Afghanistan that leaders become ethical role models and deliver what they promise to others in the community, country, region, and society by reducing and eradicating the existence of mismanagement. It is the responsibility of all public officials and private sector leaders to be culturally competent, ethical role models. It is a fact that specific training and educational programs can greatly enhance the level of human development and critical thinking. Educated critical thinkers should be trained to be open-minded and self-directed as they discipline and monitor their own views before implementing a major decision. Critical thinkers purposely and explicitly go beyond their intuition or gut feelings to analyze and assess all the facts in a given situation so they can be consistently fair to all stakeholders in a decision. Critical thinkers live fairmindedly while internalizing and promoting universal values.

Like all studies, there are a number of limitations to this study. First, the small number of responses from a convenient population is one of them. Future studies should compare specific populations in different parts of each country with similar working backgrounds and demographic variables. While both Afghan and Thai populations seem to have a significantly higher focus on the relationship orientation, this might be true simply because they understand the importance of maintaining good connections with others in society due to the economic necessities and not necessarily years of cultural socialization. Researchers should also note that the quality of education might also be an important variable or factor in the scores of respondents. Therefore, future studies should test "sub-cultures," "gender," and "education" to see if these are significant variables in the task and relationship orientation scores of respondents in each culture.

### **Implications for Practice**

Afghanistan's population will soon be reaching 40 million people, and their current literacy rate is about 30 percent. Since their population is growing rapidly, leaders must focus on the education of all diverse Afghans, especially the young and upcoming leaders to help them become globally competent. Sadly, about 70 percent of Afghans have no formal schooling experience due to the poor economy, lack of proper security, and several decades of war (Mujtaba, 2014b). The starting point for progress can be the strengthening of the government branches in Afghanistan so all managers and representatives can be effective role models of cultural inclusion, continuous learning, and education to enforce high ethical standards (Mujtaba, 2019; Cavico and Mujtaba, 2018; Mujtaba, 2007b; De Maria, 2008).

For centuries, an overlooked and under-represented group in Afghanistan has been the female population (Karahalios and Mujtaba, 2006). The agony for Afghanistan's women must come to an end if the country is going to benefit from the talent of its entire population from all minority groups (Haidari, 2010). Luckily, according to Haidari (2010), the Afghan Parliament continue to convene with a higher percentage of female representatives (27.3%) than the legislative bodies of most established democracies, including the U.S. Congress (15.2%) and British Parliament (19.7%). Despite some progressive advances, sadly one woman dies every 29 minutes in childbirth in Afghanistan. Food shortages have resulted in malnutrition among young children and adults, and 48% of women in Afghanistan are said to be iron-deficient.

Furthermore, only 12% of females 15 years and older can read and write at the basic levels, compared to 39% of men in Afghanistan. The overall literacy rate for women between the ages of 15 and 24 stands at 24%, compared to 53% for men in Afghanistan. Haidari emphasizes that this troubling situation is a legacy of decades of war and state collapse in the country. Unfortunately, with a weak government and lack of appropriate infrastructure developments in the country, such statistics will continue to be realities in Afghanistan for the next few decades to come. Afghans have a long way to go before they can provide a fair, just, and secure environment for everyone in Afghanistan. The Afghan government officials must continue to create, lead, and implement culturally inclusive and sustainable policies (Wolf and Mujtaba, 2011), while simultaneously functioning as agents of social change in order to ameliorate the traditional views that prevent the female and other minority populations in Afghanistan from becoming full contributors in the development process. In order for women and all diverse Afghans to be fully empowered to make a significant contribution to Afghanistan's long-term development, the international community must continue to help the Afghan government become stronger and more focused on cultural inclusion, as well as the leadership training and equal treatment of all individuals in the country (Cavico and Mujtaba, 2018).

### **Societal Mobbing and Inclusion Training**

Training and development of everyone in the Afghan society should be strategic to socialize them to become more inclusive, sort of like the Thai culture where diverse groups work together toward common goals. For example, in most place in Thailand, men and women of diverse backgrounds are able to cohesively live and work together without anyone being blatantly discriminated based on their different gender, ethnicity, religious beliefs, or appearances. Afghans need to be educated, trained and developed to adopt similar inclusive mindsets in the context of their own culture and religious beliefs. Sadly, stereotypical views and prejudices based on gender and ethnicity have been widespread in Afghanistan for decades and often it is not internationally bad. However, some politicians, warlords, and gangs seem to have used existing prejudices for sinister purposes all the way to terrorizing people simply because they are different from the majority. We call this concept "societal

mobbing,” where an innocent victim is regularly bullied by members of the community, by gangs, and through like-minded colleagues in the workplace. For example, Afghan minorities of all ethnic backgrounds (Hazaras, Hindus, Uzbeks, etc.) have been physically hurt, ostracized, abused, and often consistently harassed with stereotypical jokes in the workplace; similarly, qualified females are not afforded opportunities and privileges that available to men. The popular book and movie entitled “*The Kite Runner*” by Khalid Hossieni provide some examples of how prejudices, biases, and stereotypical norms in the Afghan culture can lead to societal mobbing.

While development focuses on the educational needs of the audience, training is the process of teaching everyone the basic skills they need to immediately function as productive members of the department, community and society at large. Training has an impressive record of influencing organizational effectiveness and its effect on productivity tends to be higher than performance appraisal and feedback and just below goal setting (Noe, Hollenbeck, Gerhart, and Wright, 2019). As such, it should have similar outcomes when it is targeted toward the needs of communities and society as well.

One area where Afghans need training is diversity and inclusion so people can avoid the use of stereotypes and bullying (mobbing) of women and minority members in the community and workplace. While diversity is about having members of all ethnic backgrounds from the community being represented in the workplace, inclusion relates to making sure that they are all equally engaged in the major decisions of the organization and society. Diversity is about being invited to an event or party, while inclusion is having an active part in it as per one’s area of responsibility and competence without being isolated, bullied, or harassed due to one’s gender, ethnicity, religion, disability, or appearance.

*Societal mobbing* (also known as “workplace mobbing,” “systematic soldiering,” “group bullying” or “bullying on steroids”) can involve two or more like-minded individuals, friends, colleagues, and/or employees ganging up to target or consistently bully a person through isolation, humiliation, and aggression. The victim is often selected because he or she has a unique view or is somewhat different from everyone else based on his/her gender, ethnicity, religion, body size, appearance, age, leadership style, rank, sexual orientation, etc. Compared to individually bullying another person, societal mobbing involves a group of individuals against a specific target who is different from everyone else in regards to his/her views, thoughts, and/or some dimension of diversity. If there is not effective intervention for workplace or societal mobbing, it can lead to continued conflicts, suicides and/or the voluntary or involuntary turnover of qualified employees. “Mobbing always includes organizational dynamics and involvement, whereas bullying does not” (Duffy & Sperry, 2012, p. 30). “Workplace mobbing behaviour has been described as ‘group psychological harassment’, where the behaviour includes ‘ganging up’ against someone or ‘psychologically terrorizing’ others at work” (Shallcross, Sheehan and Ramsay, 2008, p. 57). In other words, mobbing assault is about consistently and regularly intimidating, insulting, harassing, and/or ignoring someone because he or she is different from everyone else or thinks differently. The behaviors involved in mobbing can include gossip, verbal abuse, ostracizing, and/or physically harmful acts like aggression and violence, all of which can cause psychological trauma to the victims and observers in the department or community (Baillien, Camps, Van den Broeck, Stouten, Godderis, Sercu & De Witte, 2016).

Extreme forms of peer pressure, bullying, mobbing, and systematic soldiering can cause much undue conflict in the workplace, especially in diverse departments and organizations (Baillien, Camps, Van den Broeck, Stouten, Godderis, Sercu & De Witte, 2016; De Cieri, Sheehan, Donohue, Shea, & Cooper, 2019; Wall, Smith, & Nodoushani, 2018). Conflicts among colleagues and coworkers are inevitable, and healthy conflict can be beneficial to creativity and productivity. However, sinister conflicts using “mobbing” toward

specific individuals can amount to psychological terrorism and distressful anxiety for the victim. Bullying and mobbing may occur more often in firms and departments that do not regularly and fairly evaluate performance and individual behavior. It is said, “When a company tolerates an employee who is unpleasant to work with, does not follow office policies or who fails to complete his or her work, other employees may become resentful. This can lead to the mobbing of the underperforming or disliked employee. Unfortunately, office morale has likely decreased significantly by the time workers take matters into their own hands” (Petersen, 2019, para. 18). As such, managers and human resources professionals must become aware of and effectively deal with employee bullying, and “workplace mobbing”.

The impact of workplace mobbing can be very destructive on community and it can be very serious legally for business as it can be seen as harassment. As such, political leaders, organizational behavior experts, human resource professionals, and managers should be aware of workplace mobbing and take proactive and reactive training measures to foster a healthy work environment that is just and fair for all employees (Noe, Hollenbeck, Gerhart, and Wright, 2019; Petersen, 2019; Huang, Ryan, and Mujtaba, 2015).

Training and development practices are important for a healthy society, department, and organizational culture (Quinn, Spreitzer & Lam, 2012; Ray, 1986; Ouchi, 1979). It should be noted that the cultural control and the leadership role of change agents, as connectors or transitional agents, play a critical role in investigating, communicating, and regularly assessing managers and employees so they can internalize the organization’s desired values and expected norms (Merchant and Van der Stede, 2007; Malmi and Brown, 2008). Change agents, connectors, or transitional agents are those formal and informal individuals with the continuous drive, means, motives, and opportunities to develop healthy relationships with others and between groups of people. These change agents, or transitional connectors, can prevent and correct unhealthy societal and organizational behaviors among teams and groups of individuals (Mujtaba, 2014a; Kashima & Hardie, 2000; Orbell & Dawes, 1991). By the nature of their personal drive, influence, and social networks, change agents and connectors tend to have access to relevant resources to meet various departmental, organizational, and societal demands. As such, connectors have more resiliency than non-connectors do, even when dealing with excessive situational demands imposed upon them to bring about relevant changes in the organization and society. Afghan managers and politicians need to become transitional connectors and change agents who can help people move toward peace and progress in the economy by demonstrating patience and cultural inclusion at all levels of the society.

### **Conclusion**

This research provided a cursory overview of the culture and people of Afghanistan and Thailand. The paper also discussed the Afghan culture’s norm of *guzaara* or getting along, which influence their relationship-orientation. *Guzaara* is an attitude of cooperating, getting along, showing restraint, win-win thinking, avoiding unnecessary risks, being sustainable, and doing whatever is necessary to preserve important relationships and “save face.” While the Thais may not use the word *guzaara* in their language, their culture and daily behaviors seem fully aligned with this concept since it implies that one’s actions should always be one of cooperating, “saving face”, getting along, and being sustainable.

Today’s global and competitive work environment, especially in developing economies such as Afghanistan, needs educated and strong leaders and change agents who think critically about their decisions based on current facts and developmental needs. As such, since both countries have similar cultural orientations, Afghan leaders and managers can better educate themselves by learning many of the relevant best practices, such as

inclusion of all diversities, which have made Thailand successful, and apply them to their own country in Afghanistan.

Overall, this study explored the basics of Afghan and Thai leadership orientations based on quantitative research and also provided information for local and global managers about the mechanism of their behavior by more closely exploring the culture of guzaara or getting along in Afghanistan. Recommendations for discussion, reflection and training related to inclusion and workplace mobbing are presented.

### **References**

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