Abstract
The study of leadership styles is advanced in developed countries; however, in developing countries such as Ecuador studies on this topic are scarce. This study aims to describe the leadership styles of managers of SMEs in Ecuador and the relation between the different styles. The demographic characteristics of the leaders are taken into consideration in order to establish if they have an impact on the pattern used.

Keywords
Business Management – Corporate Culture – Leadership

Resumen
Se ha avanzado mucho en el estudio de los estilos de liderazgo en los países desarrollados; sin embargo, en países en vías de desarrollo como el caso de Ecuador, investigaciones sobre este tema son escasas. El presente estudio tiene como objetivo describir los estilos de liderazgo de los administradores de pequeñas y medianas empresas de una región de Ecuador y la relación entre los diferentes estilos. Las características demográficas de los líderes se han tomado en cuenta para determinar si tienen un impacto en el patrón utilizado.

Palabras Claves
Administración de Empresas – Cultura Corporativa – Liderazgo

Para Citar este Artículo:
Introduction

Business leaders start and implement changes in organizations, practice the role of an influencer, resulting of the compromise from the enthusiastic followers. They achieve to line up the business’ vision, according to the individual interests of every member of the organization, inspiring the ones who follow through example and motivation, and promote changes, with the aim of these being innovative. The style of leadership used by the companies’ executives, allows understanding how these leaders share the vision, inspire commitment, and achieve trust and motivation from the followers and how they get the cooperation of their subordinates.

There are three leadership styles that we explore in this article. First, the transformational leadership; which focus on rising up the motivation and performance of the followers to high standards of goal aiming. These leaders tend to build a personal and social identification among the subordinates and the mission and goals of the organization. Second, the transactional leadership: This style assumes that the subordinates accept to accomplish their leader’s dispositions in exchange of praise, rewards, and resources or to avoid being sanctioned. This style implies a close supervision to prevent the failure of achieve the goals, control of errors, and taking immediate corrective actions; the third style is the passive style or so called laissez-faire, where the leader waits until things happen to take action or even do nothing; these leaders avoid specifying agreements, but clarifying the expectations and providing goals and aims to be achieved by their teams.

Leadership itself is a cultural phenomenon, how people lead is a product of their own philosophy and the result of their activities and customs. In cultures like Ecuador, there are only scarce studies about leadership. Given the importance of this phenomenon in a country where SME are growing, the present study explores the leadership styles in Ecuador. Particularly in this study different demographic factors that can cause impact in the leadership style of the managers is analyzed. The objectives established are the following:

1.- Make a theoretical description of the leadership styles in the cultural environment of Ecuador.
2.- Analyze from an empirical approach the use of transformational, transactional and passive leadership styles in the same leader.
3.- Analyze demographic factors that can influence the frequency of each leadership style.

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Theoretical Framework

Leadership styles

Recent studies have shown that leaders who work committed with their team create a significant impact to their followers. This commitment is related to the performance and to reduce the intentions of turnover, creating an environment that eases the work, as well as managing relations with the employees. Managing flexible, dynamic and changing organizations allow managers to apply an ideal model of leadership in functions that are interpersonal, informative and decision making, that take in great energy and disposition inside companies. The leader should focus in the interests of the members of the group including within itself human relations. As a result, it is possible to manage conflicts or create a team spirit. In many organizations, leaders tend to apply a basic model of leadership in pursuit of treating their followers collectively. However, it is not possible to define what type of leader one must be in an organization. There are multiples responsibilities and often specific characteristics in every organizational environment. It also depends on the perspective of the leader. Below we describe the three styles of leadership analyzed in this work.

The transformational leadership has been highlighted as very beneficial in recent leadership studies, nevertheless its effectiveness still remains under discussion according to the context. This leadership style improves the performance of the followers; it takes them to think in ways they aren’t used to, keeping always the moral standards that guide their actions, increasing their creativity and innovation.

Optimize individual consideration, since it boots the feeling of self-sacrifice of the leader under the perception of the followers. This style considers the importance of the role of emotions, values, positivity and creativity inside the company as it leads to

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motivación de la empresa con la misión y los objetivos, así como para aumentar la identificación con la organización. El liderazgo transformativo se considera esencial para la efectividad en equipos de trabajo y ayuda a reducir conflictos entre ellos. Un líder transformativo puede liderar equipos en contextos interculturales. Estudios muestran que este estilo de liderazgo adapta la inteligencia cultural a sus habilidades y produce un impacto en sus equipos.15

El estilo de liderazgo es aún más importante en tiempos de crisis; un líder transformativo se adapta a las circunstancias y consulta con sus subordinados sus opiniones para tomar decisiones de consenso, piensa estratégicamente, puede crear un panorama del problema y establecer causas y efectos. Sin embargo, este tipo de líder no es el más apropiado en casos de decisiones inmediatas porque necesita tiempo para establecer acuerdos.16

En resumen, el estilo de liderazgo transformativo inspira motivación en subordinados, ya que trabajan mano a mano para lograr un mejor desempeño aplicando la tarea de equipo como la clave del éxito. Este tipo de liderazgo involucra a las personas con sus propias necesidades y habilidades sin compararlas con los demás miembros para mejorar sus propias actitudes y habilidades. Los líderes transformativos generan gran importancia para los miembros del equipo porque crean una visión colectiva que pone el énfasis en la diversidad individual.17

En contraste, el liderazgo transacional, la percepción predominante es la gestión por excepción activa y el incentivo del rendimiento.18 Este estilo de liderazgo define que las recompensas se ganan a través de méritos, lo que permite a los subordinados plantearse sus propias habilidades, lo que lleva a la segregación de los subordinados según sus logros. Por lo tanto, este estilo se basa en objetivos individuales en lugar de colectivos. Esto reduce la cooperación entre los equipos de trabajo. Los líderes transaccionales practican el principio de escasez en la organización con el fin de que durante un proceso evaluativo, los subordinados puedan mostrarse sus habilidades competiendo entre sí. Tomando un enfoque financiero, el líder debe crear incentivos para que los seguidores actúen de acuerdo con los intereses institucionales, como beneficios, promociones y compensaciones para mejorar su desarrollo. Estas características pertenecen a un estilo de liderazgo transaccional.19

El núcleo de este estudio es...
transactional leadership is to create relations between the leader and the subordinates with clear rules, specifying responsibilities, clarifying recognitions and rewards as well as penalties to achieve the expected performance, specifying expectations and negotiating contracts. The transactional leader will focus on details and will follow the rules and protocols until reaching the aim. However, we will need to be cautious in emergent crisis because a transactional leader won’t look for alternatives furthermore than the current regulations he has.

Last, we describe the laissez-faire leadership style that is characterized as absent leadership, given the avoidance of decisions, doubts in acting, lacking responsibilities, and without control and follows-up, making decisions late and resistant to express their views. Leaders using this style are described as introverted, passive and distant from their subordinates. This leadership style tends to omit rewards and punishments, and depending on the point of view of the subordinates this leadership style can be seen as negligent or as a strategy of the leader for his employees to develop their creativity and common sense. Finally, research suggests that this style is counterproductive in the workplace since it affects job satisfaction.

Every leader must base their goals according to their subordinates with the aim of creating a precise vision of the organization and at the same time that directions of the organization are established. Currently, there’s an existing debate to know which leadership style is better to be used in organizations: transformational and transactional leadership. However, recent research concludes that it is convenient that most of the leadership styles are used in order to meet the best results and better commitment for everyone involved. This way an empowerment and an effective desire of learning rise up.

22 Bernard Bass and Bruce Avolio, Transformational Leadership Development...  
Transformational and transactional styles are related and in some occasions are difficult to separate them because they are not mutually exclusive\(^{29}\). Therefore, we consider that leaders in Ecuador will use transformational and transactional styles simultaneously.

**Hypothesis 1. Leaders use different leadership styles simultaneously**

**Culture and leadership**

According to House\(^{30}\), culture are values, beliefs, identities and interpretations or shared manifests from significant events, as a result of common experiences of community members transmitted generation to generation. Societies develop patterns of behavior based in supposed values and symbols shared among them to tackle challenges and achieve common goals. Culture at the same time, creates an impact on the leader’s behavior\(^{31}\). And it is because culture has dynamic characteristics that can lead workers to do their job with enthusiasm, with the influence of their leader, whom increase motivation and knowledge of the teams while improving the work environment\(^{32}\). In hierarchical cultures, social status means social power. The group who are socially superior have power and privileges. The socially inferior are forced to supply the social superiors and command their petitions. However, the ones who are at the top of the hierarchy have to look after the needs of the ones below them. There’s no such obligation in equal societies, where social boundaries are easy to cross and the high social status could be of short duration.

According to Brett\(^{33}\) culture is the unique character of a social group, including values and standards shared by the members of that group. Culture includes shared patterns of behavior, standards, values, attitudes, beliefs and it is an important factor to consider because it allows the leader to a proper managing of conflicts in the organization\(^{34}\).

It is important in the global context that the leader can understand and operate effectively in different cultures, and the style shall adapt to the group working with. A society mainly hierarchical will require a leader with authoritarian characteristics meanwhile a society with clear standards and self-control processes will require a non-


\(^{30}\) Robert J. House; Paul J. Hanges; Mansour Javidan; Peter W. Dorfman and Vipin Gupta.. Culture, Leadership, and Organizations The GLOBE Study of 62 Societies (Edited by Inc SAGE Publications, 2004).


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coercive leader\textsuperscript{35}. Recently a study by Meyer\textsuperscript{36} indicates that what might be an appropriate behavior or simply common sense in a cultural context could mean simultaneously otherwise to another particular culture or organizational context. These differences affect how people work together, mutual understanding, the interpretation of the situational environment and the interactivity between people. Thus, culture influences in choosing the style, because in some cases being transformational can be misunderstood by the followers as an example of weakness from the leader\textsuperscript{37}.

The culture impacts the leadership style, and under the actions of the leader the employees perceive what really matters to the company, their values and how effective is the leader motivating and trying to get the best of everyone\textsuperscript{38}. An effective leadership is integrated and defined for each level of the organization, which aims to build a community that works harmonically, united, structuring activities to involve people and resources effectively. The leader should manage plans and programs in a disciplined way, in an effort to improve the social impact, meanwhile assuring the economic sustainability desired\textsuperscript{39}.

Leadership in Ecuador

Ecuador is a country located at the northeast of South America, bordered by Colombia and Peru, has 16.4 million people\textsuperscript{40} with a multiethnic and pluricultural society. Culturally Hofstede’s study places Ecuador in the 78\textsuperscript{th} place with high distance of power. According to this, the culture in this country accepts that inequalities are part of the daily life. Because this distance of power is accepted, it is expected that the most used style would be the transactional. In societies where there’s a considerable power distance, subordinates tend not to question their leaders and wait until they serve them as guidance, accepting that the power is not shared equally\textsuperscript{41}. According to the study Globe, Ecuador scores 5.6 is power distance, being 1 very low and 7 very high.

In Ecuador, studies about leadership are very limited. The only research found indicates that leaders are mostly transactional or passive-avoidant as a second option, leaving in last place the transformational leadership. According to the arguments described, the following hypothesis is presented:

Hypothesis 2. Leaders of Ecuadorian SMEs use mostly a transactional leadership style

Leadership styles and gender

Different studies have concluded that leadership has no significant differences between men and women, education, dedication or professional preparation. Eagly considers that in occasions it is difficult to exert leadership, especially in communities where there are huge differences in gender, social classes, education and ethnics. Thus, conclusions that previous research found are divergent. Some studies concluded that in SMEs, gender is not a relevant factor in the use of leadership style, and both genders tend to show themselves as transactional style managers, and both can present characteristics of an “ideal leader”. It is also said that the leadership style is adapted by women depending the managerial position they are in. If the position is normally occupied by women then a transformational style is adopted. If the position is generally occupied by men, a transactional style is adopted, adapting to the context. Although other researches concludes that female leaders use different styles when it comes to planning and establishing goals, showing more openness and involving the subordinates.

Studies which have found gender differences highlight that organizations lead by women tend to present more effective results comparing to men leaders, benefiting financially the organization, besides being more philanthropic and generating real processes of social responsibility. In addition, they create more labor satisfaction on the employees and motivation to work, wellbeing and health. According to this, many authors affirm that the difference between leadership styles and gender in an organization is a reality. Women tend to show more a transformational leadership style research. Research also concludes that women lead organizations in a more sustainable way, focused in the development of a culture of trust, optimism and respect inside an organization and with a great interest in the well being of their employees. Companies lead by men use new distribution channels through new technologies and establish contact networks while simultaneously take drastic decisions to reduce costs and fire staff; meanwhile companies lead by women, strengthen their relation with clients and add value while keeping their work teams with social benefits as much as possible, while having a direct correlation with productivity at the same time.

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48 Nessrin Shaya, and Rawan Abu Khait, “Feminizing Leadership in the Middle East”, Gender in
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Women tend to be more transformational because of the support and consideration they show to others, gathering these elements with the aim of building relations and empathy in contrast with more aggressive characteristics and hierarchical associations used by men\(^49\). When gender roles and leadership styles are related, the transformational leadership style is associated to superior levels of performance and competitiveness and includes the concern of people from their levels of “individual consideration”. This leadership style is associated directly with features and roles stereotypically feminine, alleging that women tend to use transformational leadership in greater extent than men\(^50\).

In addition, recent research indicated that women have better qualities in the variables of idealized influence, inspirational motivation and individual consideration\(^51\).

**Hypothesis 3. Women leaders tend to use the transformational leadership style more than men leaders**

**Leadership styles and level of education**

In the 21th century, organizations require that leaders manage and at the same time transform organizations into an entity of high performance in the competitive market\(^52\). A factor that bears considerably in decision making or even on how executives manage organizations is the level of education. Recent research show that knowledge and leadership are related according to the quality of the teaching received and the results of the studies achieved, affecting positively in the improvement of the leader’s behaviors\(^53\). Leaders who present an intrinsic growing in their level of education use the intellectual stimulation component to reconsider problems and to deal with old situations in new ways\(^54\). This intellectual stimulation means that the capacity to challenge the status quo of the employees and at the same time to develop creative and innovative solutions to problems. As a result, employees do extra efforts to solve problems and forecast ideas that improve teamwork and achievement of the organizational goals\(^55\).

**Hypothesis 4. The level of education of the leader is positively related to the use of transformational style**

**Leadership styles in service companies**

Companies need strong leaders to obtain a competitive advantage with each other. Studies have found that transformational leadership is positively correlated with the

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\(^{52}\) Olayide Abosede Aina, “Effect of Leadership Style on Organizational Commitment” (2016).


\(^{55}\) B. M. Bass and Ronald E. Riggio, Transformational Leadership...
effectiveness of the organization, specially having a great impact on service companies. At this point, leaders provide a more charismatic environment allowing an inspirational motivation, individualized consideration, and intellectual stimulation. This style provides more effectiveness and satisfaction for its followers. For service companies it was found that transformational leadership strength the sense of belonging of the employees and satisfies their needs and finally, improves the employees’ productivity.

Consequentially, in the service sectors leaders and employees are in more direct contact with clients and they need to promote empathy, manage emotions and relations. In that, the use of transformational leadership is shown as the most adequate. On the other hand, in industrial or production companies, the leader tends to be more technical, expert in solving specific issues, communicates with transparency the tasks and procedures, and is oriented to the results; characteristics conceived in the transactional leadership style.

Hypothesis 5. Leaders from the service sector tend to use more a transformational leadership style than leaders in the production sector

Method

Sampling and procedure

The sampling was conforming by (N=296) leaders of small and medium companies from Ecuador. The sample consisted of 37% women and 63% men. All leaders were over 18 years old at the moment of answering the survey. The data collection was carried out between September and December 2017.

Instrument

Leadership styles. To measure the leadership style, the research team used the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire – MLQ in its Spanish version. The questionnaire is composed by 36 items, aimed to identify the use of the three leadership styles: transformational, transactional and passive-avoidant. An example of an item for


transformational leadership is: “I make others feel good to be around me”. An item example for transactional leadership is: “I am satisfied when others meet agreed-upon standards”. An example of a passive-avoidant leadership style item is: “I am content to let others continue working in the same way always”. The scale was measured using a Likert style from 1 to 5, 1 being strongly disagree and 5 strongly agree. The scale shows a good reliability with a Cronbach alpha of 0.88 in the whole scale."}

Demographic variables. Gender, level of education and the sector are included in the survey.

Results

Data was analyzed using SPSS 21 Edition.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men</td>
<td>186</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level of Education</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School</td>
<td>167</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tertiary Degree</td>
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<td>63</td>
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<tr>
<td>Postgraduate</td>
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<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type of Enrollment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Owner Manager</td>
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<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Manager</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hired Manager</td>
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<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Company’s age</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 to 5 years</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 to 10 years</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over 10 years</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organization's activity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Services</td>
<td>277</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Production</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Numbers of employees</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 to 5</td>
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<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 to 30</td>
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<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31 to 100</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over 100</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1
Distribution of the sample

Table 1 shows the distribution of the sample. The three styles present similar averages. Table 2 shows the correlation between the variables of the study. Both transactional and transformational styles are significantly correlated. A cluster analysis was carried out in order to analyze the first hypothesis.

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The cluster analysis identified 5 patterns of leadership styles, when taking into consideration the combinations of the 3 styles. The first pattern is formed by leaders who present mostly a transformational leadership style and to a smaller extent the transactional and passive-avoidant styles. The group is composed by 82 leaders (27.7% of the total). The second pattern is formed by leaders who use mostly the transactional leadership style and to smaller extent the transformational and passive-avoidant style respectively. The group is composed 94 leaders (31.8% of the total). The third pattern is formed by leaders who use mostly the passive avoidant leadership and to a smaller extent the transformational and transactional leadership. The group is composed by 68 leaders (23% of the total). The fourth pattern is formed by leaders who have the same weight between the transformational and transactional leadership and who use to a smaller extent the passive avoidant style. This group is composed by 14 leaders (4.7% of the total). And lastly the fifth group is composed by leaders who use the three leadership styles equally. The group is composed by 38 leaders (12.8% of the total). Leaders of Ecuadorian SMEs do not use a unique leadership style but a mix of styles. Hypothesis 1 is supported.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Patterns</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Leader mainly transformational</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>27,7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Leader mainly transactional</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>31,8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Leader mainly passive</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>23,0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Leader with equal transformational and transactional</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>4,7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Leader with equal in three styles</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>12,8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>296</strong></td>
<td><strong>100,0</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This analysis also shows that most leaders (31.8%) use the pattern with higher transactional style. Hypothesis 2 is supported.
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Table 4 shows that male leaders use mostly the pattern with higher level of transactional leadership style (36% of the total). While female leaders use mostly the pattern with higher level of transformational style (28% of the total). Chi-squared analysis ($\chi^2 = 0.218$) confirms a significant difference between gender and the pattern. Hypothesis 3 is supported.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Clusters</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>186</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>296</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. 1 = leader mainly transformational; 2 = leader mainly transactional; 3 = leader mainly laissez faire; 4 = leader with equal balance transformational and transactional; 5 = leader with equal balance in three styles.

Table 4
Gender and Leadership styles

Table 5 shows the pattern leaders use according to the level of education. The pattern of leadership style with a predominant use of laissez faire style is the one with greater influence on leaders with secondary education (30% of total). Leaders who have a third level of education use mostly the pattern with higher level of transactional style (35% of the total). Leaders, who have obtained a postgraduate level, use mostly the pattern with higher level of transformational style (35% of the total). Chi-squared analysis ($\chi^2 = 0.360$) confirm a significant difference between the level of education and the pattern. Hypothesis 4 is supported.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Clusters</th>
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<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
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<tr>
<td>P</td>
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<td>0%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>12%</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>P/G</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>296</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. 1 = leader mainly transformational; 2 = leader mainly transactional; 3 = leader mainly laissez faire; 4 = leader with equal balance transformational y transactional; 5 = leader with equal balance in three styles; P = primary; S = secondary; T = third level; P/G = postgrad

Table 5
Level of education and leadership styles

Table 6 shows that the pattern of transactional leadership style seems to be the preferred pattern for leaders in the services sector (67% of the total). In the production sector the same results is obtained. This shows that leaders use a pattern with high level of transactional style in both sectors. Hypothesis 5 is not supported.
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### Table 6

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Clusters</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
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<th>4</th>
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<tr>
<td>Services</td>
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<td>82</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>296</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. 1 = leader mainly transformational; 2 = leader mainly transactional; 3 = leader mainly leader with equal balance transformational and transactional; 5 = leader with equal balance 3 styles.

### Discussion

This study shows that leaders in Ecuador use a pattern that includes different leadership styles, instead of a unique style. Five patterns of leadership styles were found from the sample object of study: a) leaders using mostly the transformational leadership style with fewer features of transactional and laissez faire; b) leaders using mostly the transactional leadership style with less features of transformational and laissez faire; c) leaders using mostly the laissez faire leadership style and fewer features of transformational and transactional; d) leaders with equal shares of transactional and transformational leadership style and fewer features of laissez faire; and lastly e) leaders with equal shares of the three styles.

This result supports the line of research followed by Karadakal and colleagues. In their study, they concluded that all leadership styles must be used to obtain better results in the organization and improve the commitment of the subordinates. Besides, results of the present research confirm previous studies that indicated that in Ecuador most of the leaders use the transactional leadership style. However, this is integrated into a pattern including also other styles. Regarding gender differences in leadership styles, this study supports that indeed differences exist, following the conclusion of previous research. Results shows that women leaders use mostly a pattern with higher level of transformational leadership style in contrast with men who use mostly a pattern with higher level of transactional leadership style. Finally, the results obtained show that in Ecuador the higher the level of education, the more the leaders tend to use mainly a transformational style. Thus, concluding that gender and education have an impact of the leadership pattern.

### Theoretical and practical implications

This study provides information about the leadership styles used by Ecuadorian leaders. It reveals that even if the most preferred style is the transactional, leaders in Ecuador use a mix of styles. This result contributes to the leadership literature by showing that indeed leaders do not follow a default style. This needs to be taken into account when giving leadership training. In that, future research can focus on understandings which are the circumstances that impact a leader decision to use one or another style. In this study we also show that gender and education have an impact on this decision.

At practical level, it is important for leaders to know and practice a leadership pattern that suits the organization, encouraging the productivity and the harmony towards their followers. Another practical contribution for organizations and for the selection process is to understand that the level of education of the leaders impacts the style used.
Limitations and future research

A first limitation of the study is that only SME were taken into account and results can change for big organizations. Future studies can analyze if these clusters also appear in other type of organizations. A second limitation is that the data are self-reported. Self-reports appear as a key tool in organizational research, and although it presents advantages it also contains disadvantages. A main disadvantage is related to the social desirability biases. In this study, leaders were maybe not aware of the style they actually use and may have ended up reporting responses which present the person in a favorable light. Future research should also analyze the leadership style perceived by the followers. This study is being executed by the same authors.

Conclusion

This study analyses the leadership patterns used by leaders in Ecuador. In particular, it is highlighted that leaders don’t use one style but a pattern of styles. This is considered to be relevant as it indicates that leaders are capable of using different styles and do that naturally. This study also concludes that gender and educational level have an impact on the preferred pattern. Leadership training programs can benefit from these results by understanding that leaders use patterns of styles and no single styles, which can improve their efficacy.

References

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