

Relevance Of Leadership Theories In Promoting Effective Leadership Practices

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Abstract

In today's volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous environment, survival has become a crucial challenge for almost all kinds of organisations. Shrinking product life cycles, globalisation, rapid technological changes, and workforce diversity have forced organisations to move away from conventional approaches towards more dynamic ones. Transformational and situational leadership theories must be adopted in organisations in order to address these vibrant changes and to create customer oriented differentiation as well as attainment of sustainable competitive advantage. The study adopted the mixed method research methodology to assess the relevance of transformational, transactional, style and behavioural, trait and situational leadership theories. A 5-point likert scale was used to collect quantitative data and documentary analysis was used to analyse qualitative data. A sample of 60 respondents from organisations in the manufacturing sector was used. Manufacturing sector was selected as it play a great role in transforming countries. The study revealed that leadership theories plays a critical role in the exploitation of creative resources in an organisation as it helps in narrowing down the gap between level of individual creative potential and actual amount of individual creativity practiced within an organisation. Managers should introspect and examine their own leadership styles and practices and should adopt those which suit best in their respective climates in order to enhance overall organisational effectiveness. The study concluded that leader's attitudes towards the important determinants of creativity and control over them impacts the way creativity is being utilized and implemented in an organisation.

Key words: *Leadership theories, creativity, organisation*

Introduction

In today's turbulent and ever changing economies, survival has become a crucial challenge for almost all kinds of organizations (Hampson & McGoldrick, 2017). Shrinking product life cycles (Landoni et al, 2020), globalization, rapid technological changes, workforce diversity, massive acquisitions and joint ventures have forced organizations to move away from conventional approaches towards more dynamic ones. Creativity must be brought in at individual as well as at organizational level for adoption of these vibrant changes and to create customer oriented differentiation (Darvishmotevali et al., 2020).

Creativity has become imperative at all levels of the organization. Ultimately, an organization's competitive advantage is driven by continuous creativity and innovation so that new ideas should be executed more quickly before competitors exploit them first.

In all this maze of complexity, leadership plays a critical role in exploiting creative resources in an organization. This is because leadership helps in to narrow down the gap between level of individual creative potential and actual level of individual creativity practiced within an organization (Novak et al, 2020). Different leadership behaviors, practices and styles had been identified by various scholars that may enhance creativity in their followers. Managers should introspect and examine their own leadership styles and practices and should adopt those which suit best in their respective contexts in order to enhance overall organizational effectiveness. Leader's attitudes towards these important determinants of creativity and control over them influence the way creativity is harnessed in an organization. The objective of this paper is to examine the relevance of leadership theories in promoting effective leadership practices.

Literature Review

The concept of leadership theory

Rauch and Behling (2012, p. 46), define leadership "as the process of influencing the activities of an organized group toward goal achievement." Leadership theories are the explanations of how and why certain people become leaders and practice particular styles of leadership. The theories focus on the traits and behaviors that people can adopt to increase their leadership capabilities. Different leadership theories seek to create stronger and more effective leadership, helping followers become encouraged to be leaders themselves.

Relevance of leadership theories

Trait theories: One of the main leadership characteristics is using human talents in performance development, integrity and trust in workers as well as the organisation. Personality refers to a combination of personal characteristics or a trait classifying the behaviour of a person, and it affects one's conduct, insight and attitudes (Daft, 2014). Trait theories, which claim that effective leaders share common personality traits, also play a crucial part in effective leadership. Although people have moved from this idea that leadership is innate, trait theories help in identifying different traits and qualities (House et al., 2012). For instance, people are able to identify decision-making skills, integrity, assertiveness, empathy, self-control, creative problem-solving and even likability, factors that a crucial in leadership (Mind Tools, 2014). The characteristics of leadership refer to the core values as well as behaviours that will be observed by others, which can easily be translated into action (Mikoluk, 2013).

Trait theories ignored the assumptions about whether leadership traits were genetic or acquired. Jenkins (2014) identified two traits which include emergent traits and effectiveness traits. Emergent traits include height, intelligence, attractiveness, and self-confidence whilst effectiveness traits include charisma, as fundamental component of leadership (Ekvall & Arvonen, 2004). Max Weber termed charisma as “the greatest revolutionary force, capable of producing a completely new orientation through followers and complete personal devotion to leaders they perceived as endowed with almost magical supernatural, superhuman qualities and powers.” This initial focus on intellectual, physical and personality traits that distinguished non-leaders from leaders portended a research that maintained that only minor variances exist between followers and leaders (Burns, 2003). The failure in detecting the traits which every single effective leader had in common, resulted in development of trait theory, as an inaccessible component, falling into disfavor. According to trait leadership theory, effective leaders have in common a pattern of personal characteristics that support their ability to mobilize others toward a shared vision. These traits include dimensions of personality and motives, sets of skills and capabilities, and behavior in social relationships. Using traits to explain effective leadership considers both characteristics that are inherited and attributes that are learned. This approach has been used to differentiate leaders from non-leaders. Understanding the importance of these traits can help organizations select, train, and develop leaders.

Style and behavior theory: The behavioral leadership theory focuses on how leaders behave, and assumes that these traits can be copied by other leaders (Larsson & Vinberg, 2010). Sometimes called the Style Theory, it suggests that leaders are not born successful, but can be created based on learnable behavior. Behavioral theories of leadership focus heavily on the actions of a leader, that is, this theory suggests that the best predictor of leadership success is viewing how a leader acts. Action rather than qualities are the focal points of behavioral learning theory. Patterns of behavior are observed and categorized as “styles of leadership” in this theory. Some of the styles of leadership include task-oriented leaders, people-oriented leaders, country club leaders, status-quo leaders, dictatorial leaders, and more. At the end of the day, the actions and actual behaviors of a leader are what defines success in this theory.

The style theory acknowledges the significance of certain necessary leadership skills that serve as enablers for a leader who performs an act. In this instance, a parallel is drawn with previous capacity of the leader, prior to that particular act while suggesting that each individual has a distinct style of leadership with which he/she feels most contented. Yukl (1989) introduced three different leadership styles and these include (1) the employees serving with democratic leaders displayed high degree of satisfaction, creativity, and motivation; working with great enthusiasm and energy irrespective of the presence or absence of the leader; maintaining better connections with the leader, in terms of productivity

whereas, (2) autocratic leaders mainly focused on greater quantity of output and (3) laissez faire leadership was only considered relevant while leading a team of highly skilled and motivated people who excellent track-record, in the past.

Feidler and House (1994) identified two additional leadership styles focusing on effectiveness of the leadership. These researchers opined that consideration (concern for people and relationship behaviors) and commencing structure (concern for production and task behaviors) were very vital variables. The consideration is referred to the amount of confidence and rapport, a leader engenders in his subordinates. Whereas, initiating structure, on the other hand, reflects the extent, to which the leader structures, directs and defines his/her own and the subordinates' roles as they have the participatory role toward organizational performance, profit and accomplishment of the mission. Different researchers proposed that three types of leaders, they were; autocratic, democratic and laissez-faire. Without involving subordinates, the autocratic leader makes decisions, laissez-faire leader lets subordinates make the decision and hence takes no real leadership role other than assuming the position and the democratic leader accesses his subordinates then takes his decision. "He further assumed that all leaders could fit into one of these three categories".

The behavioral theory has many significant advantages since leaders can learn and decide what actions they want to implement to become the kind of leader they want to be. It allows leaders to be flexible and adapt based on their circumstances. Another great benefit of this leadership style is that it suggests anyone is capable of becoming a leader. Some disadvantages of the behavioral theory are that while it allows flexibility, it doesn't directly suggest how to behave in certain circumstances. There are dozens of leadership styles that stem from the behavioral theory, but there isn't a right one for every circumstance.

A great example of the behavioral theory is looking at a task-oriented leader vs. a people-oriented leader. If there's a problem with a team, a task-oriented leader will look at the process to see if something needs to be adjusted with the workflow. A people-oriented leader will look at the individuals and go right to them, asking what the issue is. Whatever behaviors you choose, the behavioral leadership theory helps leaders focus on their actions and utilize their decisions to be a great leader.

Contingency theories (situational): The theories of contingency recommends that no leadership style is precise as a stand-alone as the leadership style used is reliant upon the factors such as the quality, situation of the followers or a number of other variables. "According to this theory, there is no single right way to lead because the internal and external dimensions of the environment require the leader to adapt to that particular situation. In most cases, leaders do not change only the dynamics and environment,

employees within the organization change. In a common sense, the theories of contingency are a category of behavioral theory that challenges that there is no one finest way of leading/organizing and that the style of leadership that is operative in some circumstances may not be effective in others”(Greenleaf, 1977).

The effectiveness of the leader as per this approach is mainly determined by three organizational contingencies. The first one is the degree to which the leader will be accepted and even supported by his or her group members (leader-member relationship). The second one is the ability of the leader to maintain and control subjects through punishments and rewards (leader positional power). Lastly, is the extent to which the tasks are organized, structured and with clearly defined goals and procedures (task structure) (Sampson, 2012). According to the proponents of contingency theory, the combinations of these contingencies can create favourable or unfavourable conditions for the leader, that is, situations whereby the leader can have an influence over the subjects. The most favourable conditions to exert influence over the group members are provided by high levels of task structure, leader-member relationships and positional power and vice-versa. Significantly, it has been affirmed that the most effective style that is applicable in situations where the leader has very much or extremely little influence is a task-oriented style (House *et al.*, 2012).

Contingency theorists assumed that the leader was the focus of leader-subordinate relationship; situational theorists opined that the subordinates played a pivotal role in defining the relationship. Though, the situational leadership stays to emphasis mostly upon the leader, it creates the significance of the focus into group dynamic. “These studies of the relationships between groups and their leaders have led to some of our modern theories of group dynamics and leadership. The theory of situational leadership proposes that style of leadership should be accorded with the maturity of the subordinates” (Bass, 1997). The situational leadership model theorized that leaders to be effective, must adapt to the situation and transform their leadership style between task-oriented and relationship oriented (Bass, 1997).

The contingency leadership theory, sometimes called situational theory, focuses on the context of a leader. These theories look at the situational effects of the success or failure of a leader. A leader’s effectiveness is directly determined by the situational context. While a leader’s personality is a small factor in their success, the most important factor is the context and situation of the leader. This theory takes the specific leadership styles and suggests that effective leaders can adjust their leadership style situationally. It also suggests that it may be best to find the right kind of leader for a specific situation.

The contingency theory has great advantages, including that leaders are able to be effective no matter their situational context. However, this theory is not without criticism which suggests that there insufficient detail that goes into the context of any situation. Contingency theory focuses on the

importance of a situation, but may not focus enough on the psychology of the employees or the company itself. It also may not focus enough on how leadership styles can change over time.

There are internal and external factors that impact a leader and their situation. The type of company, the size of the team, and the innate leadership style of an individual are internal factors. External factors may include the customer feelings and the marketplace. All of these situations play a factor into the contingency theory.

Task-oriented leaders have been highly recognized on getting their jobs or tasks completed since they actively define the task and the required roles, place structures, organize and monitor their subjects. Moreover, they are renown in forming and maintaining performance standards. One of the main advantages of such leaders is that they ensure deadlines are met. A relationship-oriented leader will be more effective in situations that have moderately favourable influence (Marturano & Gosling, 2008). Relationship-oriented leaders are mainly focused on organizing and developing people on their groups. Remarkably, these leaders treat every person in the group equally, and they are friendly, alongside paying attention to everyone's welfare (House *et al.*, 2012). The main benefit brought by these leaders is that they create a group that is admired by everyone, and as a consequence, the members become more productive and willing to take risks due to the support they get from their leader. As a result, this theory sums up that it is easier for any leader to change a certain situation in order to achieve effectiveness, instead of changing the style of leadership (Singh, 2009).

Transactional theory: Transactional leadership theory is described as the one in which leader-follower associations are grounded upon a series of agreements between followers and leaders (House & Shamir, 1993). The transactional theory was "based on reciprocity where leaders not only influence followers but are under their influence as well". Some studies revealed that transactional leadership show a discrepancy with regard to the level of leaders' action and the nature of the relations with the followers. Bass and Avolio (1994) observed transactional leadership "as a type of contingent-reward leadership that had active and positive exchange between leaders and followers whereby followers were rewarded or recognized for accomplishing agreed upon objectives". From the leader, these rewards might implicate gratitude for merit increases, bonuses and work achievement. For good work, positive support could be exchanged, merit pay for promotions, increased performance and cooperation for collegiality. The leaders could instead focus on errors, avoid responses and delay decisions. This attitude is stated as the "management-by-exception" and could be categorized as passive or active transactions. The difference between these two types of transactions is predicated on the timing of the leaders' involvement. In the active form, the leader continuously monitors performance and attempts to intervene proactively (Avolio & Bass, 1997).

Transformational theory: Transformational leadership distinguishes itself from the rest of the previous and contemporary theories, on the basis of its alignment to a greater good. This is because transformational theory entails involvement of the followers in processes or activities related to personal factor towards the organization and a course that will yield certain superior social dividend. The transformational leaders raise the motivation and morality of both the follower and the leader (House & Shamir, 1993). It is considered that the transformational leaders “engage in interactions with followers based on common values, beliefs and goals”. This impacts the performance leading to the attainment of goal. As per Bass, transformational leader, “attempts to induce followers to reorder their needs by transcending self-interests and strive for higher order needs”. This theory conform the Maslow (1954) higher order needs theory.

Transformational leadership is a course that changes and approach targets on beliefs, values and attitudes that enlighten leaders” practices and the capacity to lead change. The literature suggests that followers and leaders set aside personal interests for the benefit of the group. The leader is then asked to focus on followers’ needs and input in order to transform everyone into a leader by empowering and motivating them (House & Aditya, 1997). Emphasis from the previously defined leadership theories, the ethical extents of leadership further differentiates the transformational leadership. The transformational leaders are considered by their capability to identify the need for change, gain the agreement and commitment of others, create a vision that guides change and embed the change (Bums, 2003). These types of leaders treat subordinates individually and pursue to develop their consciousness, morals and skills by providing significance to their work and challenge. These leaders produce an appearance of convincing and encouraged vision of the future. They are “visionary leaders who seek to appeal to their followers” better nature and move them toward higher and more universal needs and purposes” (Bums, 2003).

Transformational leadership is achieved when leaders and followers motivate each other for higher motivation as well as morality. Transformational leaders are relevant in bringing best leadership practices because of the following;

- “transformational leaders have better relationships with their supervisors.
- they help the organization more than leaders who act transactional
- they create more value for the organization.
- transformational leaders motivate their employees to do more than what is sited in their employment contract and they focus on the employees’ higher level needs.

- these leaders act as mentors and advisors and pay attention to personal development, learning, and supplying the needs of the employees.
- they provide challenge, a sense of mission, broader perspectives, respect, and trust for the employees, and they act as role models for their employees.
- they create an atmosphere of trust and motivate employees to work for the organization beyond their self-interests” (Khorshid & Pashazadeh, 2014, p. 7).

Leaders who make use of transformational leadership seek to create ideas and new perspectives to create a new path of growth and prosperity in front of the organization. “By developing commitment, passion and loyalty among managers and staff, they mobilize organization’s members to make fundamental changes in fundamentals and basis of the organization in order to be prepared and to gain necessary capabilities for moving in new directions and reaching higher ideal performance peaks” (Mirkamali et al., 2014, p. 23).

Methodology

The study adopted the pragmatism philosophy which makes use of both quantitative and qualitative methods. A mixed method approach was used so as to provide an opportunity for triangulation. By triangulating the data meant that the researcher attempted to provide “a confluence of evidence that breeds credibility” (Brown 2009, 110). As part of qualitative research, documentary analysis was used and descriptive survey was used for quantitative data collection. Document analysis is defined as a systematic procedure for reviewing printed and electronic documents. It is an analytical qualitative research method which requires that data be examined and interpreted in order to elicit meaning, gain understanding, and develop empirical knowledge (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). The researcher reviewed prior literature as part of the study and information obtained was incorporated in the study. As part of quantitative data collection, a questionnaire was drawn using a 5 point likert scale. A total of 60 questionnaires were distributed to respondents to manufacturing organisations in Harare, Zimbabwe. Closed ended questions were asked to allow respondents to indicate their opinion on the relevance of leadership theories in maintaining or establishing best leadership practices.

Presentation and discussion of results

The study results were analysed used IBM Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software.

Gender in leadership

Table 1: *Gender of respondents*

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Male	33	66.0	66.0	66.0
	Female	17	34.0	34.0	100.0
	Total	50	100.0	100.0	

From Table 1 above, the majority (66%) of respondents were male. This is supported by Morgan (2016), who argued that there is gender inequality in manufacturing industries. The results from the survey indicates that most leadership positions in manufacturing organisations are held by men. “Men are stereotyped with agentic characteristics such as confidence, assertiveness, independence, rationality, and decisiveness; whereas women are stereotyped with communal characteristics such as concern for others, sensitivity, warmth, helpfulness, and nurturance” as indicated by Heilman (2001). These gender stereotypes of women as warm, nurturing and caring and the corresponding stereotypes of men as cold, competitive, and authoritarian may have contributed to the perception by some that women may be less effective than men in leadership positions although they can be, in fact, equally effective (Engen, 2001).

Age groups of respondents

Table 2: *Age of respondents*

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	21-30	10	20.0	20.0	20.0
	31-40	23	46.0	46.0	66.0
	41-50	11	22.0	22.0	88.0
	Above 50 years	6	12.0	12.0	100.0
	Total	50	100.0	100.0	

The majority of the respondents from Table 2 above were in the age range of 31 to 40 years of age with 46% representative of the sample. This is followed by age range of 41-50 years. The age range helped to validate the results as it indicates the work experiences of the respondents. Work experience helps to show that a participant has a better understanding of leadership theories.

Dimension if leadership theories promote best leadership practices					
<i>Table 3: Responses on the relationship between leadership theories and leadership practice</i>					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1	47	94.0	94.0	94.0
	2	3	6.0	6.0	100.0
	Total	50	100.0	100.0	

In the survey, a question was asked about the position of leadership theories in promoting best leadership practices. The results indicates that approximately 94% of the respondents believe that understanding of leadership theories is important if a company wants to promote best leadership practices. It is important that leadership trainings be conducted at organisations so that managers and leaders are aware of how their actions and behaviours influences leadership best practices.

Table 4: *Leadership theories*

Indicate your best leadership theory					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Trait theory	3	6.0	6.0	6.0
	Style and Behaviour Theory	5	10.0	10.0	16.0
	Situational theory	17	34.0	34.0	50.0
	Transactional	6	12.0	12.0	62.0
	Transformational	19	38.0	38.0	100.0
	Total	50	100.0	100.0	

From the table 2 above, approximately 38% of respondents indicated that transformational leadership is outstanding in terms of establishing best leadership practices. This is followed by situational leadership theory with approximately 34%. The results from the survey indicates that a total of 72% of leaders believe that situational and transformation leadership theories are the best for manufacturing organisations so as to attain sustainable competitive advantage.

The survey indicates that transformational leadership theory play a significant role in making an effective leader. This is supported by Kets de Vries & Korotov, (2010) who argued that the leadership theory fixes leadership traits and simple dichotomies in a manner of task- or relationship-oriented.

Leadership effectiveness is mainly determined by the completion of vital tasks and attainment of goals and objectives. In this sense, a leader has to create relationships alongside forming bonds with his or her subjects so as to mobilize his or her followers to successfully complete the tasks (Garner, 2008). Consequently, any leader has to find a balance between relationship management and task. “Transformational leaders explain organization’s future prospects and provide the model consistent with the prospects, improve acceptance of group goals, provide a wide range of support for individuals in the organization and encourage them to pursuit organization’s goals” (Mortazavi & Nikkar, 2014, p. 105).

The results indicates a total of 6% with respect to the relevance of leadership theory to establishing best practices. In literature trait theory has been observed to have a limited application to leadership development and management. This is supported by Lunenburg, (2012) who indicated trait theory have a limited role in developing leadership due to rising innate or unchangeable personality characteristics. This resulted in the emergence of new leadership theories such as behavioural theories, contingency along with power and influence theories. All these theories provide a practical advice on how a person may become an effective leader (Lunenburg, 2012). Contingency theory is viewed in key in developing best leadership practices. This was also supported by Robert et al. (2001) who argued that contingency theory addresses the weaknesses of the great man and behavioural theories. From the organizational point of view in systems theory, it is observed that the administrative and organizational processes are contingent upon the nature of the business itself, hence it is key in developing best leadership practices. This is also supported by Marturano & Gosling, (2008), who indicated that the business’ environment is dynamic, hence the applicability of contingency theory. In other words, different environments are observed to contain differing needs on businesses, as well as differing needs on the leaders of such organizations.

From the perspective of the leader, which is rooted in behavioural theory, contingent proponents claim that there is no specific way of leading since a leadership style may be effective in a certain situation and ineffective in another. In this sense, the ability of any person to lead is contingent upon different situational factors, for example, the preferred style of the leader, the ability and behaviour of his followers, among other situational factors. According to this approach, the effectiveness of any leader is a function of several organizational contingencies in terms of task, subordinate or group variables (Marturano & Gosling, 2008). In short, the effectiveness of any leader is determined by the situation and environment. The leader can change his or her style to fit different situations, observing the style he or she may use, the motivation of his or her followers, skills and the nature of the task.

Conclusion And Recommendations

The function of leadership is to produce more leaders and not followers. This is considered transformational leadership where a leader can alter the perspective or psychology of a follower and shift them to want to become a leader too. This suggests that at the end of the day, leadership should be elevating and inspiring. Leaders should push the people they lead to new heights, helping them to grow into what they know they can become. Transformational leadership is an important psychological perspective for leaders to study and understand if they want to really influence and impact others. With the changing volatile, uncertainty, complex and ambiguous environment, strategic leaders in organisations must make use of situational and transformational leadership theories in building best leadership practices.

From an employer point of view, the imperative to improve the capability of leadership arises from the changing work nature. It is imperative to note that this has been facilitated by a change of leadership from the conventional directive and performing nature, to a more enabling, distributive and participative nature. In this sense, this occurs mainly in the need to cope with the elevating competition alongside the continuous mayhems in the firms, demanding intellectual flexibility along with relevant skills, self-awareness and abilities. As a result, businesses as well as individuals have actively sought competitive advantage through investment in education, training and development processes. As noted, people may become successful leaders naturally as explained by the trait theory whereby one may have some traits that may lead him or her into leadership roles. The great event theory also affirms that an ordinary person may have leadership qualities after a certain occurrence or experience while transformational leadership model, which states that an individual may choose to become a leader and learn the skills, remains to be the most accepted leadership model. Advocates of transformational leadership have confidence in that the arrangements of the past should not be the guide for the future. They believe that successful transformational leaders create clear and compelling visions for the future. The transformational leaders focus their energies on vision, long-term goals, aligning and changing systems and developing and training others. Though, the situational leadership stays to emphasis mostly upon the leader, it creates the significance of the focus into group dynamic. For good work, positive support could be exchanged, merit pay for promotions, increased performance and cooperation for collegiality.

In summary, the study revealed that leadership theories plays a critical role in assisting the exploitation of creative resources in an organisation as it helps in narrowing down the gap between level of individual creative potential and actual amount of individual creativity practiced within an organisation. Managers should introspect and examine their own leadership styles and practices and

should adopt those which suit best in their respective climates in order to enhance overall organisational effectiveness. The study concluded that leader's attitudes towards the important determinants of creativity and control over them impacts the way creativity is being utilized and implemented in an organisation.

For future studies, the author recommend that the same study be carried out using a different industries, using large sample sizes and consider other leadership theories.

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