

The Influence of Leadership on Employees' Behavior

Anca Alexandra PURCAREA, Elena FLEACA, Dan DUMITRIU

Management Department, University Politehnica of Bucharest, 313 Splaiul Independentei St.,
060042, sector 6, Bucharest, Romania;

apurcarea@gmail.com, elenafleaca@yahoo.com, dumitriud@gmail.com

Abstract. The paper explores the social and behavioral science through a theoretical thinking in the field of leadership and influence within the organization. The aim is to develop a theoretical model of leader-employees relationship by capturing the relevant insights from the leadership research literature. In this context, the authors have reviewed the psychologists and sociologists researchers' efforts on leadership phenomenon and the results of the authors' researches on quantifying the power and influence within organizations. Finally, the authors have proposed a model based on a holistic view of influencing employees' behavior through leadership. The main insight of the model is that it could support leaders to solve the complex problems – economical, technological, social, and ecological –, which we are facing today.

Keywords: leadership, influence, employees' behavior, organizational performance

INTRODUCTION

The advent of 21st century has introduced significant changes within the workplace environment. The organizational leaders are dealing with many pressures created by the globalization, technology advancement and social changes. In today's turbulent and chaotic environment, the real power to act comes from recognizing the pattern of change and seizing the windows of opportunity. Consequently, leaders' jobs have changed from mainly supervising and giving orders to subordinates to forming and leading cross-functional teams, providing services to subordinates, and developing sustainable relationships with the clients in the field.

In this kind of environment, the organizational leaders need many competencies to survive. This means that leaders have to learn to manage complex situations by integrating all the interactions with their subordinates, peers, and superiors into a cohesive whole. As each individual represents a unique conglomerate of knowledge, skills, weaknesses, and strength, this aspect represents a challenging issue and organizational leaders must address all this diversity to accomplish the performance objectives of the organization.

Therefore, the authors have applied a structured approach, summarizing the leadership literature, and providing a model that enables leaders to understand and apply different leadership styles toward an effective improvement of the organizational performance.

LITERATURE REVIEW

There is a noticeable distinction in the flourishing literature on leadership phenomenon. Traditionally, the scholars have distinguished between management and leadership. Although these two concepts are both paths of leading, they have many

similarities and differences. Both concepts involve influencing, working with people and effective goal accomplishment. According to Kotter (1990), the overriding function of management is to provide order and consistency to organizations by planning, organizing, staffing, controlling and decision-making. Other scholars viewed management as a discipline emerged from the advent of the industrialized society as a way to reduce chaos in organization and make them to function more effectively and efficiently (Northhouse, 2001).

Whereas the management concept is viewed as a task-oriented approach, the researchers highlighted that the leadership means building vision, aligning people, communicating and inspiring them. As Bennis and Nanus (1997) have stated, “managers are people who do things right and leaders are people who do the right things”. Thus, management is about coping with complexity, by seeking order and stability, whereas leadership is about coping with change, by seeking adaptive and constructive change.

As Manning and Curtis (2007) suggested in their work, there is often an overlap between the two concepts that captures the essence of leading: being an outstanding manager often requires to be a good leader, and being an outstanding leader requires one to be good at planning, organizing, decision-making, and controlling.

Within the scientific literature, plenty of researchers have paid attention to the leadership field in attempting to define the concept, exhaustively. The various definitions of leadership can help to appreciate the multitude of factors that affect this concept, as well as different perspectives from which to view it.

Some leadership researchers have focused on studying the personality and physical traits of the leader. They indicated that many cognitive abilities and personality traits are at least innate and may offer certain advantages or disadvantages to a leader (McGue & Bouchard, 1990). Further developments have argued that formative experiences may also influence many sorts of behavior, nurturing and suppressing different leadership qualities (Huges, Ginnett, and Curphy, 2006). Although a list of universal leadership traits was not provided, some of these traits were consistently identified such as intelligence, self-confidence, determination, integrity and sociability. Thus, each organization should define its own leadership profile and try to select and develop its leaders according to that profile.

Other valuable efforts were focused on studying the behavior of leader determining two general kinds of behaviors: task behavior and relationship behavior. The Managerial Grid, which has been renamed the Leadership Grid, is one of the most well known models of leadership. It appeared in the early 1960s and since then it has been refined for several times (Blake and Mouton, 1985). The Leadership Grid shows concern for production and concern for people, and illustrates five major leadership styles such as dictatorial style (9,1); sound style (9,9); status quo style (5,5); accommodating style (1,9); indifferent style (1,1). In addition to these five leadership styles, the researchers have added two other styles that incorporate multiple aspects of the grid. The opportunistic style refers to leaders who adopt whichever behavior offers the greatest personal benefits, and the paternalist style refers to leaders who discourage challenges to their thinking but support and praise their subordinates (Blake and McCauley, 1991).

Interestingly, based on the Stogdill (1974) observation, some of the scholars viewed leadership as a dyadic relationship among members of the working group. The relationship developed between the leader and the follower is often complex and multidimensional in nature being filled with perception, cognition, affect, behavior tendencies and actual behavior. One of the most well known theory of leadership as a relation is the LMX theory – Leader Member Exchange developed by Graen and Cashman (1975). The theory noted that leaders develop separate exchange relationships with each of their followers based on the group

affiliation. Subordinates become in-group members based on how well they get along with the leader and whether they are willing to expand their role responsibilities. Anyway, the selection of the people from the leader's in-group is based on personal compatibility, perception of subordinates competence, and dependability. According to Graen and Uhl-Bien (1995), in-group members receive extra opportunities and rewards, while out-group members receive only standard benefits.

In addition to seeing leadership as a working relationship where two or more individuals in differentiated roles work to accomplish a goal held in common, leadership is often view as a power and influence relationship (Hollander, 1985). The conceptualization of leadership as a social influence process has been taken into accounts the taxonomy of power and the interpersonal influence tactics (Raven, 1965; Kipnis, Schmidt &Wilkinson, 1980). In the area of power and influence, the researchers have yielded nine generic interpersonal influence tactics, ranked in diminishing order of use in the workplace: rational persuasion, inspirational appeal, consultation, ingratiation, personal appeals, exchange, coalition, pressure, and legitimization. Afterwards, other authors have structured the first five influence tactics in soft tactics because they are friendly and not as coercive as the last four tactics. Exchange, coalition, pressure, and legitimization are called hard tactics because they involve more overt pressure (Barry & Shapiro, 1992).

Finally, the literature research on leadership issues reveals a strongly increased interest in these matters, both in terms of the theoretical thinking and in terms of empirical research. Besides rigorous empirical testing, suggesting possible models, solutions to social problems that leaders are confronting with, will be the major test for the progress made toward better understanding of employees working behavior.

THE FRAMEWORK OF THE APPROACH

Obviously, defining the leadership concept is a real challenging task because the scientific literature encompasses hundreds of definitions, and it seems very difficult to find any widely accepted approach among leadership theorists. Based on our research, even though the literature is fully of leadership studies and theories, there are lacks of clear concepts and good definitions of leadership. This is probably the scholars in the behavioral and social sciences are not paying enough attention to accurate and systematic definitions.

Despite of this, developing clear models could enable to gain great insights in the study and practice of leadership. Today, more then ever, it is needed to develop integrated leadership approach that focuses all leaders' effort toward achieving the organizational objectives. An integrated approach is one in which all of the parts are inter- related. A change in any one of the parts will influence the whole. Every organization has specific goals with the aim to best meet the needs of its market. This requires a deep analysis of all internal and external environmental factors entailing designing the strategies to accomplish the objectives.

The root of our approach is the contingency theory that assumes that there could not be a one best way for leadership within organization. The various aspects of organizational performance are dependent on the internal and external situations. As researchers stated the most appropriate leadership qualities and actions vary from situation to situation, and effectiveness depends on leader, follower, and situation (Fiedler and Gracia, 1987). Fiedler's contingency model postulates that the leader's effectiveness is based on 'situational contingency' that is a result of interaction of two factors: leadership style and situational favorableness. Therefore, leadership results when there is an appropriate match between a leader's style (essentially a trait measure) and the demands of the situation. Fiedler considered

situational control the extent to which a leader can determine what his or her group is going to do to be the primary contingency factor in determining the effectiveness of leader behavior (Pierce and Newstrom, 2006).

In attempting to comprehend the complex phenomenon of influencing employees' behavior through leadership, the authors have proposed a structured model that put all pieces into a cohesive whole. The model could help leaders to gather, manage, and use organizational knowledge in an adequate manner so that various aspects of performance could be increased (Fig. 1).

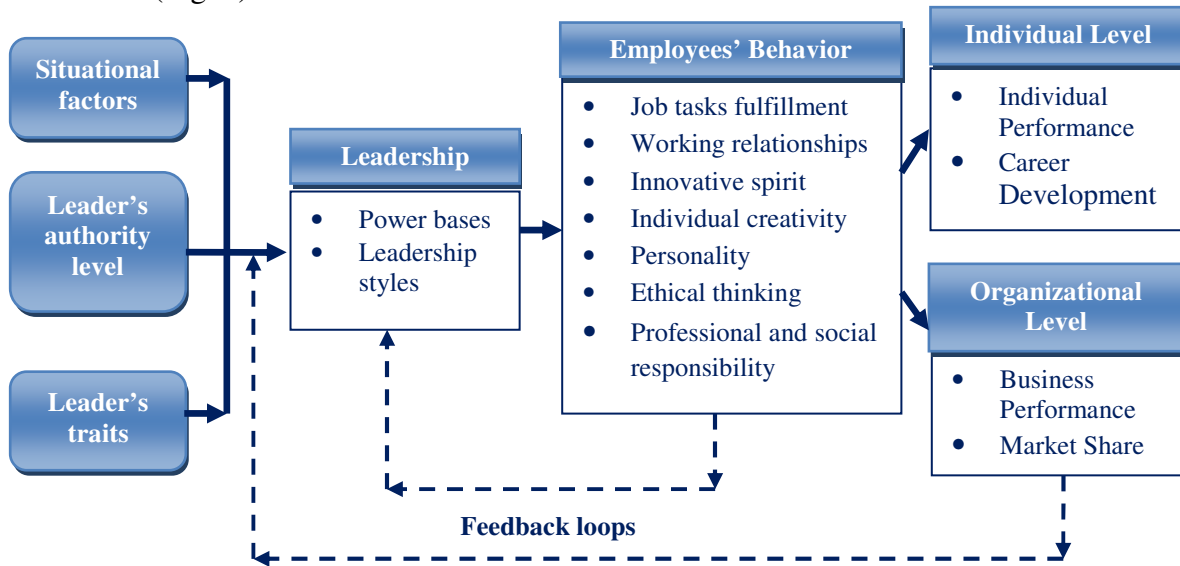


Fig. 1. The Model of the Leadership Influence on Employees' Behavior

Understanding the leadership as an interactive and dynamic process requires being aware of the complex context in which the leadership takes place. The authors have defined as the input variables: situational factors, leader's authority level, and leader's traits.

The situational factors encompass a broad range of environmental elements that could influence the leadership process such as social climate, types of employment, and the size of organization. The new pattern of workforces that support an organization – full-time employees, working at home, independent contractors, networks of professionals, and virtual offices and companies – is part of the today's work that adds to the challenges of leadership. Moreover, according to Manning and Curtis (2007) the size of an organization demands a certain type of leadership skills. A small organization needs a leader who is both a salesperson and an operation manager, whereas leaders of large organizations think in broad terms about the marketplace and the community towards achieving the best place within both ones.

The leader's authority level is tightly linked to the organization structure that set up the chain of command, the span of control, and all features of decision-making process. Every organization has its own structure, culture and values, and the leaders should be flexible enough to apply the leadership behavior to the features of the organization. Consequently, as studies have shown there must be a certain fit between the leader and the organizational environment (Boyatzis, 1982).

Obviously, the leader's traits have paid attention to a plenty of scholars. Firstly, it was believed that people were born with these leadership traits, but further approaches suggested that it was not possible to define general leadership traits, which fitted to every situation. According to Stogdill (1974) the major leadership traits are achievement, persistence, insight,

initiative, self- confidence, cooperativeness, tolerance, influence, and sociability. In the same light, Kirkpatrick and Locke (1991) included drive, motivation, integrity, confidence, cognitive ability, and task knowledge in the sphere of leadership traits. Finally, although a list of universal leadership traits is not provided, individuals could gain insight whether or not they have important leadership traits and they could pinpoint their strengths and weaknesses.

The act of leadership is multidimensional in nature and consists of using different power bases – legitimate, reward, coercive, referent, and expert power - and influencing the subordinates through a wide range of leadership styles (Blake and Mouton, 1985).

Leadership viewed as a relationship should be seen as a psychological connection between the leader and the follower that could stimulate the employees' behavior. As studies suggested, the quality of the relation is predictive of the outcomes that will be attained in terms of employees' commitment, satisfaction, performance, and ultimately leader effectiveness (Gerstner & Day, 1997). Moreover, other scholars suggested that one's personal identity is expressed and enhanced as a result of the relationship between the leader and the subordinates (O'Reilly & Chatman, 1986). Consequently, there are numerous ways that this relationship can be visualized starting with employees' commitment and finishing with the way in which the leaders develop an ethical thinking among their subordinates.

As today's business community is fraught with unethical behaviors, the authors included the professional and social responsibility as a significant aspect of the quality of the leadership relationship. More exactly, the true leadership appears only when leaders are capable to set high standards for their selves and others and aspire to meet these standards in all aspects of the lives – at work, at home, and at society.

Finally, the outcomes of the leadership influence on employees' behavior can be seen at two different levels: individual and organizational. The individual level outcome can be described by individual performance – the degree to which the employees fulfill their working tasks - and the career development - how individuals manage their careers within and between organizations and how organizations structure the career progress of its employees.

The organizational level outcome is referring to the fact that, finally, the organizations leaders are evaluated and rewarded through the business performance standpoint. The business performance is monitored through the key performance indicators aligned to the organization's strategy. Moreover, as the market share of the company is one of the most important objectives used in business, the organizational leaders should carefully take into consideration the effects of their leadership relationships on employees' working behavior.

CONCLUSIONS

The role of this theoretical study has been to apply system thinking on the leadership and influence phenomena. The authors have proposed a new framework of leadership influence on employees' behavior seeing leadership as a wider process that takes place in the organization. From the theoretical standpoint, the model is important because it seeks to clarify the key interactions between the leadership variables that all affect each other.

Despite of the model shortcomings in terms of empirical evidence, there will be many interesting theoretical and practical areas of research emerging from this study. Therefore, the further research objective is to test the theoretical model in different kinds of organizations active in Romanian business environment. Moreover, through practical follow-up studies the model of leadership influence on employees' behavior should be developed by capturing those variables, which are representative for Romanian business culture.

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