

# Leadership style adaptability



### **Overview of Leadership theories in Consideration**

Situational leadership theory (SLT) is developed by Hersey and Blanchard (1968) and is based on the leader's task behaviour, relationships and the maturity or ability of the employees. Task behaviour is based on how the leaders define role, how and what to do. Relationships are based on how leaders maintain relations with followers by supporting them. Maturity shows the followers experience, willingness and ability to do the task. Based on this, 4 types of leadership styles s1, s2, s3, s4 are identified by Hersey and Blanchard (1996). SLT is useful in understanding the relationship between leadership style, level of maturity of follower and importance of leadership style adaptability. Several other researchers worked further to develop the model for application on various platforms.

Transformational theory is the latest theory which developed in the last two decades and is of high relevance and practice. The idea was first developed by Burns (1978) through Transformational leadership theory. Bass (1985) further developed the theory. The Transformational leaders put passion and energy into the work atmosphere. They develop a vision for their followers and the followers try to achieve the goal via the energy from the excitation. Leaders have to constantly convey or sell the vision to their followers. They will be always with the followers in charge of the task and have solution to most problems. Bass (1985) suggested that transformational leaders try to increase the task awareness, motivates followers to work for the team and organisation and makes the followers to aspire for needs. He proposed 5 factors or transformational leadership factors, Charismatic leadership, idealized influence, inspirational motivation, Intellectual stimulation and

individualized consideration. Based on these factors large number of researcher has studies the relevance of transformational leadership in various fields and have tried to develop the model further.

### **Objective of the review**

The review tries to relate the various studies that have happened in the current decade on situational leadership and transformational leadership. Various authors who have studied the relevance of situational leadership theory and Transformational leadership theories are considered and their findings are taken into account for the development of the theories. The review checks the adaptability of both the theories in various work environment which helps to find the areas which require further studies on the models.

### **Situational Leadership Theory**

#### **Situational Leadership Theory-Supporting Views**

Several studies by various researchers were conducted on the application of the SLT in organisational contexts. (Arvidsson et al. 2007) contend that leadership style adaptability vary according to group and individual situations and situations where success and hardship is present for the employees. The author further asserts that the leadership was relationship oriented and supportive in success and group situations and task oriented in hardship and group situations. This requires variability of leadership styles of the leader according to the situation, task and ability of the followers. Silverthorne & Wang (2001) further supported this finding by asserting that leadership adaptability by managers requires better task behaviour and relationships and this increases productivity. They asserts that this require

different leadership styles which vary according to situations. This requires managers to exhibit different leadership styles according to the task and ability of the followers. Arvidsson et al (2007) further contend and support this showing the importance of varying leadership style according to the ability of the followers. They should be able to guide on the task, and have successful and influencing relations with the followers. As far as my experience, this view holds in many sales environments where the influencing leadership styles give the focus and motivation to the followers. These leaders also understand the maturity or ability level of the followers and support them in various situations and thereby creating a strong rapport. My managers are seen to be exhibiting task behaviour more towards junior managers whom are new to the job. They guide them and tell them how to perform the task and thereby create a strong rapport with the followers. All this shows light to the ability of the leader to adapt to the situation according to the various needs and motives of the followers and situation which supports the SLT by Hersey and Blanchard (1996). Successful leaders thus vary their leadership styles and ability of the leaders to be adaptive to the environment leads to the success of organisation Silverthorne & Wang (2001). (Silverthorne & Wang (2001): Arvidsson et al. (2007)) state that leadership adaptability and exhibiting of different leadership styles depending on task, relations and ability of followers are important and thereby supports the SLT. My personal work experience as a leader supports this finding and thereby supports SLT. I have experienced the importance of task detailing, relationships and the ability of followers to execute the task as an important factor for success.

**Situational Leadership Theory -Against**

There was also some findings which goes against the SLT. Papworth et al (2009) questions the applicability of SLT of Hersey and Blanchard (1996). They contend that their findings and research gave little support to the SLT model. They argue that the level of supervisor behaviour was independent of the supervisee experience. Support to SLT was only found when the supervisee is highly experienced and skilled and the supervisor have to do less task behaviours which were supported by Silverthorne & Wang (2001). Butler & Rees (1991) was also against the SLT model. They argue that the leadership style adaptability had little relations with the performance of the employees in a highly competitive sales environment (Insurance). They asserts that there are more factors that may affect the performance and readiness of the salesperson like followers perception of managerial style , the difficulty of task involved in the sale process and difference in follower readiness. Silverthorne & Wang (2001) argues and supports SLT by asserting that leadership styles should vary according to situations and depending on follower readiness. The finding of Butler & Rees (1991) are quite relevant because from my own experience in the Insurance industry over 2 years, I do understand that the varying perception of managerial style and difficulty of the task in hand do have an impact on the performance. Even though the managers vary their style according to situations of task and ability, the factors proposed by Butler & Rees (1991) do contribute to the performance of employees. I would like to add that leadership adaptability is only one among many factors that determine performance in competitive sales environment. The objectivity and the provenance of the finding of Papworth et al (2009) are really questionable based on the type of the research and

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the area of research they conducted. They used clinical sessions and tapes from a very low sample and made all the assessment about the situational leadership theory. The relationships and tasks in these sessions were compared to leadership and task of SLT. This causes wide criticism and questions the relevance of their finding on SLT. Moreover Papworth et al (2009) gives only some theoretical evidence instead of an actual research result.

All these studies point to the fact that SLT may not be widely accepted in all fields of study and industries. This also points that SLT may be suited to certain industries and may not be fitted into some other. There are external and internal factors which are to be considered depending on the type of industry and environment, like task involved and external factors.

### **Situational Leadership Theory-Alternate Views**

Johnson (1998) proposes an alternate or modified model of SLT. The author combines SLT model which uses directing and supporting styles of leadership. He also takes stage theory of group development by Tuckman & Jensen (1977) and the stages of development of the followers by Blanchard (1985) along with the SLT. This model varies from SLT by considering "each of the four leadership styles may be appropriate some of the time, the most broadly applicable style combines structure and empathy" Johnson (1998). The author further asserts that the model can be applied to individuals and only to the groups which are performing at the same level. VanderVen (1998) further supported this modified situational leadership model. The model tries to overcome some of the shortfalls of SLT. But my management experience shows that managers do tend to show situational approach based

on the varying levels of their follower performance. It is not likely that in real world you will get a team of followers (groups) who perform in the same level.

### **Discussion of Situational Leadership**

The findings of Arvidsson et al. (2007) and Silverthorne & Wang (2001) favouring the SLT was across different cultures (Swedish & Taiwanese) . They also researched in different industries of Information technologies and air craft. Butler & Rees, (1991) and Papworth et al (2009) found no support to the leadership style adaptability and SLT in their respective studies. All these findings makes and echo to the fact that situational leadership varies according to industries and cultures. This calls for further studies on the modification and application of the SLT across various environments. The efforts put forward by Johnson (1998) is commendable and more research work should be done on further rectifying the limitations of the SLT model . One of the key areas which require research is the heterogeneity of the levels of subordinates and the behaviour of leaders accordingly.

### **Transformational Leadership Theory**

#### **Transformational Leadership Theory-Favourable factors**

Purvanova et al. (2006) conducted further studies on the impact of Transformational Leadership Theory (TLT) on job perception of the employees. Transformational leaders irrespective of the type of different jobs they were involved in exerted a positive influence on the employees perception of jobs. Employees with transformational managers found their job as, meaningful, challenging and inspiring . The studies further supported Bass (1985) views that transformational leaders inspire followers to see their

jobs as important and seeks them to perform beyond expectations which they does. Chan & Chan (2005) asserts that leaders with high usage of transformational leadership factors have more positive influence of job perception and performance. He further contend and support that, all the transformational leadership factors in the Bass (1985) TLT has direct impact on the leader effectiveness, performance of employees , their perception of job and its satisfaction. Schyns & Sanders (2006) contend that solidarity of follower with colleagues and leader is related highly to Transformational leadership style of the leader. Higher the transformational style perception of the employees , better solidarity to the leader and the team was found. Panagopoulos & Dimitriadis (2009) contend that a positive TL behaviour of managers will cause increase the performance of the sales person, high satisfaction due to their supervisor and creates or increases commitment to the organisation. This was predicted in a behaviour based control sales environment rather than an outcome based sales environment.

The works by these authors are related and focuses on the impact of TL styles on the followers and their behaviour in work . These works support that a high TL style surely increases the behaviour, focus, job satisfaction, and performance and commitment levels of the followers. Purvanova et al. (2006) and Chan & Chan (2005) argue that exhibition of TL causes higher positive job perception of the employees. . Chen & Baron (2006) further supports this by highlighting the impact of one of the TL style which causes higher job perception to the followers. I personally have experienced transformational leadership styles (factors) from my manager during my work as a junior sales manager. This caused an increase in motivation and

commitment towards the organisation and manager resulting in high performance and achievements. ( Purvanova et al. (2006); Panagopoulos, & Dimitriadis (2009)).

All these findings (Purvanova et al. (2006); Chan & Chan (2005); Panagopoulos & Dimitriadis (2009)) shows that transformational leadership styles of leaders do have an impact on the employees perceptions of their own jobs. TL style increases the responsiveness, satisfaction, performance, inspiration, meaning and a vision for the follower's jobs. TL motivates followers to perform beyond expectation of the employer and thereby creating more successful persons and organisations. Further TL creates a commitment and focus in the followers for the job and leader. TL generates a feel for team work and solidarity to colleagues among the followers. Thus TL as a whole helps in creating a focussed and motivated atmosphere where people work enthusiastically. My view is that, the application of TL in an organisation will lead to a motivated and successful organisation subjected to other factors. These calls for the ability of managers and leaders to adapt learn and implement TL style for a better and successful work environment.

### **Transformational Leadership Theory – Limited favourability.**

Although the majority of studies showed support to the TLT model, there were some findings that offered limited support to the model and questioned the universality of the TLT model. Mannheim & Halamish (2008) tested the TL model in the context of army training camps. They conclude that the only in the beginners learning culture the TL style is related to group result. The authors found little support for the leadership styles, group outcome and cohesion in other higher levels. This lead to the moderation of TLT in various

contexts and also this may be due to many other factors which require further research. Barnett et al. (2001) supported this view by suggesting that the TL behaviour have a negative association with student learning culture. Kelloway et al. (2000) argued that leadership training and feedback together will have little effect on the TL style perception, where in the mean time both individually can have an impact on the TL perception. Chen & Baron (2006) echo a similar but slightly variant view. They argue that the leaders do tend to show high transformational leadership skills. But only the idealised influence style of TL increases the job satisfaction of the followers and if the leader don show this aspect of TL style, the level of satisfaction may be low. These findings do questions the variability of TL styles and the impact of each style over different situations, work environment and cultures. The findings of Mannheim & Halamish (2008) and Barnett et al. (2001) questions the usage of TL style in the learning and training culture. Both of them conducted their studies in an environment where training has an important role to play.

The arguments of Mannheim & Halamish (2008) and Barnett et al. (2001) clearly indicates that the TLT applicability in the learning and training culture is questionable as they found little evidence in favour of that in higher experienced levels. My personal experience supports this finding as experienced followers find it difficult to adapt to TL model due to their exposure to other styles of leaderships, whereas beginner can be trained and moulded to the desired form initially as they are fresh in mind. Chen & Baron (2006) asserts that only one type of TL style have an impact over job satisfaction of followers. All these views calls for further research for the

application of TLT in these areas and the factors which causes this effect on TL should be found and due consideration must be given for this.

### **Transformational Leadership Theory -Alternative views**

Mitchell & Boyle (2009) developed a model based on TL “ for mitigating against destructive emotional barriers to group effectiveness” Mitchell & Boyle (2009 ). Their model was based on TL impact on knowledge creation in diverse groups and how TL will help in doing this. The model tries to explain the variation of diverse team performances through the impact TL has on knowledge creation. Dunn (2007) developed a modified leadership model which was different from the TL model. They found a difference in leadership style changes according to the gender of the leaders. Author argues that this moderated model will be advantageous to the organisation. Both Mitchell & Boyle (2009) and Dunn (2007) tried to develop a model in order to adapt TL to the varying environments and to develop the model to a new level.

### **Discussion of Transformational Leadership**

To conclude, Most of the researchers do found favourable factors for TL even though there are limited support findings for the TL. Purvanova et al. (2006), Chan & Chan (2005), Schyns & Sanders (2006) and Panagopoulos & Dimitriadis (2009) underline the fact that TL increases job perception, satisfaction and performance among employees. Mannheim & Halamish (2008) and Barnett et al. (2001) contend that TL have impact on learning culture in beginners level only and TL don't have much impact in higher experience employee learning culture. Chen & Baron (2006) highlights the impact of one TL style higher than other styles. Mitchell & Boyle (2009) developed TLT further for applicability for diverse team performance. TL has

found to have a high impact on the job perception of employee and their applicability in the learning and training culture requires further research. Also the impact of TL on cultures and team diversity requires further research.

### **Conclusion**

Arvidsson et al. (2007) and Silverthorne & Wang (2001) studied and supported the SLT. Their studies in these fields are commentable and is of high relevance. They together assert the need for adaptability of leadership and variation of leadership style. I would also like to view up on Butler & Rees (1991) who drew on the leadership adaptability of competitive environment. There are many factors apart from leadership adaptability and styles which need consideration in such an environment. Johnson (1998) tried to study in the aspect of groups and the idea of SLT requires further research and studies on factors from external environment which effect the followers and environment. Purvanova et al. (2006), Chan & Chan (2005) and Panagopoulos & Dimitriadis (2009) finding on TL supported and is of high significance in the industry. They show the effect of TL on job perceptions of followers. It also shows the significance of TL style in organizations. Their finding shows the relevance of TL in the business world. Mannheim & Halamish (2008) and Barnett et al. (2001) question the adaptability of TL in training culture of highly experienced employees leading to limitations in applicability of TLT in all work environments. Mitchell & Boyle (2009) modified the TL model and tried to study and implement the impact of TL on knowledge creation and thereby impacting the diversity in team performance. Further research is recommended on TLT for application on

learning cultures and its variance over cultures. All the above studies are of high relevance to the leadership studies and helps in the development of situational and transformational leadership theories. In general situational and transformational leadership styles have high impact on the employees and work environment and requires further studies for application in various work environments.

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