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Leadership Focus in Modern Expert Organization

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Abstract. Leadership is a concept proven troublesome to unambiguously define and its effectivity to assess in certain situations. There still is no clear consensus what leadership is. Nevertheless of academic discussions between different definitions, practical questions still arise and leadership is one of the most interesting research issues in organizations. What is the role of leadership in modern expert organizations and how do the leaders themselves experience it? How can it be measured and visualized? In this paper, we aim to find the leader's conscious awareness towards the different leadership competencies, by building the ontology for leadership focus and using it as the theoretical frame. Paper also presents the assessment of the model, and a survey utilizing creative tension, as tool to study the leader's competencies regarding leadership focus and enhancement needs of these competencies. Our findings show that while study itself gave positive results about the function of the survey and creative tension, it points out the needs for further development. The competence level self-evaluation part is revealing that even when there is possibility to create a realistic evaluation of the respondent's mind set towards his/hers leadership style in current situation, the research tool should be developed further when comparable magnitudes of answers are needed. Future research needs are also to be discussed in this paper.

Keywords: Leadership · Focus · Situationality · Expert · Management · Competences · Organization

1 Introduction

Good leadership is like good quality; we can recognize it when we see it. But just as quality, leadership can be difficult to define unambiguously. Whether it actually exists or can its effectiveness be defined, is still much debated in the organizational behavior discussion. [1] [2] [3] [4] [5]

The idea for this study was triggered by the wide discussion about the meaning and effectiveness of leadership in general. Former study which was executed in 1997-2014 regarding 239 Finnish SME companies, found leadership to be the most important inner organizational factor which has a direct impact on companies' outcomes. [6] Example from a large company, Nokia, shows that fears in middle and top-management led to a loss of leadership and resulted degeneration in innovation capability. This led to rapid

downfall from market dominant and innovative organization to company which just lost the game. [7]

The purpose of the study was to find out how well the set of propositions, regarding leadership focus domain of the management windshield [8] [9], can reveal leadership competences and enhancement needs regarding leadership style. To evaluate the most significant leadership competencies with the tool, all the competences were broken down to factors and then propositions were created to best describe those factors. The respondent self-evaluated their own leadership competencies, by answering the propositions. These answers were analyzed by the researchers. Leadership focus ontology were built by literature review in order to make a visual upper level map to show what scholars have said about leadership style and what the concept of leadership comprises. Particularly how it should be approached, and whether it has an effect on organizational outcome and if so, how it can be measured. For this reason, the metaphor of the managerial windshield [8] [9] was chosen to represent the frame for this study.

The concept of leadership and a classification of major leadership approaches: 1) trait 2) behaviour 3) power-influence 4) situational and 5) integrative approaches [5], is used. Focus needs of leadership is studied from its situational nature. Leadership focus comprises such leadership theories and skills as transactional leadership, transformational leadership, servant leadership and emotional intelligence. [8] [9]

2 Leadership definitions

“Leadership is one of the world’s oldest preoccupations”. [10] The history of scientific leadership research starts in the twentieth century and could be timed to an era of management boom after World War II, but it has been the interest of humankind since the beginning of recorded history [11]. In the context of organizational behaviour, leadership has been defined in numerous ways. According to Stogdill [12] *“there are almost as many definitions of leadership as there are persons who have attempted to define the concept”*. Glynn & DeJordy [13] found that Harvard Business Review alone has published around 500 articles that reference leadership in their abstract. The consensus of the meaning of leadership still remains mostly unachieved. There is work done towards consensus, e.g. Mackenzie & Barnes [14] found seven items: 1) leadership is a good thing and more of it is better, 2) leaders are presumed to be rational actors, 3) leaders tend to be solid citizens, 4) leaders do not actually perform work, 5) leaders do not manage technologies, 6) a measure of leadership is leadership itself, and 7) organizational place is not important. Researches tend to define leadership mirroring their own interests to the phenomenon. New definitions of leadership have been done since Stogdill made his observation [5]. Leadership literature includes, but is not limited to, these exemplars: Katz & Kahn [15] defined leadership as *“the influential increment over and above mechanical compliance with the routine directives of the organization”*, where Hersey & Blanchard [16] defined it as *“leadership is the process of influencing the activities of an individual or a group in efforts toward goal achievement in a given situation”*, and later *“...leadership occurs whenever one person attempts to influence the behaviour of an individual or group, regardless of the reason”* [17]. Bass & Stogdill [10] takes a broader approach to the definition of leadership by stating: *“leadership is*

an interaction between two or more members of a group that often involves a structuring or restructuring of the situation and the perceptions and expectations of the members. Leaders are agents of change – persons whose acts affect other people more than people's affect them. Leadership occurs when one group member modifies the motivation or competencies of others in the group --- with this broad definition, any member of the group can exhibit some amount of leadership, and the members will vary in the extent to which they do so". Pardey states that "Leadership is something that people see or experience personally. It is above all about the relationship between the leader and those people being led" [18]. Because of the vast amount of different definitions of leadership and so many different meanings to people, some theorists and critics argue that the effects of leadership might not exist at all [1]. Meindl et al. [2] were either not able to generate common view towards leadership that would have been both "intellectually compelling" and "emotionally satisfying". Alvesson & Sveningsson [3] argued that leadership could be non-existent as distinct phenomenon.

Although most drastic critics tend to point out that leadership is no more than a romanticized illusion, [2] most organizational behavioural scientists seem to consider it real phenomenon which impacts on the organizational effectiveness. [5] Mackenzie & Barnes [14] stated that "*interest in the phenomena of leadership knows no geographical, political, or temporal boundaries. Leadership is widely acknowledged to be important to groups, organizations, and even societies.*" Despite the fact that external forces can impact the performance of an organization, they still attribute success to good leadership and failure to poor leadership. Leaders make difference and social and political movements and seem to be the most critical factor in the success in business and industrial sector [10]. If the competence of leadership is lacking, it seems to be the single most remarkable barrier when increasing the productivity of companies [6].

2.1 Leadership approaches

Broader theoretical milieu of every time period had naturally influenced leadership theories as well as major events or specific needs of time in which the theoretical models have been developed. [13] There are many ways to classify and organize leadership theories and approaches. Yukl's [5] classification provides means to classify leadership according to most emphasized variable e.g. characteristics of leader, follower or situation. Key variables by, Yukl [5] is divided the leadership approaches 1) trait, 2) behavior, 3) power-influence, 4) situational and 5) the integrative approach. Traits alone don't guarantee the success as leader, [10] [13] and attention was set to what the managers actually do when working i.e. behavior. [5] Behaviour of people was seen to be stable, but lack of situationality urged to develop situation specific approaches [13]. Power-influence approaches underline that power influence much in relations, not only between subordinates, superiors and peers, but also others outside the organization e.g. customers or partners. The amount way to use power determines effectiveness of leadership. [5] A great leader is seen as a result of time, place and circumstance (check also definition for experienced time [9] and Kairos time [19]). The leaders should possess a toolbox for behavioral styles and other leadership attributes, which could be used adaptively depending on the situation. [10] [13] Integrative approaches includes several types of leadership variables in the same approach. [5] The leadership research focus has shifted from the significance of decision-making to the significance of economic

performance in the last fifty years. [20] This is seen in approaches also and other ways to classify the theories and approaches. [21] Mackenzie & Barnes [14] found consensus between 11 approaches. Dinh et al. [22] identified a 66 different leadership theory domains in their review research.

Transactional and transformational leadership was first introduced by Burns. [23] Bass described transactional leadership as “a relationship between leader and follower to meet their own self-interests”. [24] Transactional leadership is an approach which is based on trading between the leader and the follower, where the follower’s needs are satisfied and work performance for leader is achieved in return [25]. Transactional leadership doesn’t highlight or appreciate values, although it may involve issues such as honesty, fairness, reciprocity and responsibility. These values are relevant only in the exchange process [5]. For transactional leadership competency assessment, this study utilizes four forms or factors: 1) contingent reward (clarifying negotiating and use of material and psychic rewards) [5] [24] [26] [27], 2) active management-by-exception (actively monitoring and tracking errors in order to take initiative action to prevent errors) [5] [24] [26] [27], 3) passive management-by-exception (focus is on failures, includes corrective actions, but only after the deviations from the desired performance.) [5] [24] [27] and 4) laissez-faire (the absence of leadership, actually a non-leadership approach). [5] [24] [27] [28]

In transformational leadership work is done towards a certain common goal that represented both leaders and followers. [23] One of the definitions is that it is “the product of past experience to future course of action through innovative ideas, views and intellect” [30]. Transformational leadership is a manageable process to change followers’ self-vision. Transformational leaders are capable in turning followers to leaders by making them to go further from their own needs towards the good of the organization. [5] [10] [31] Transformational leadership can be seen as one of the most effective approaches in organizational change and it can have a positive impact on follower’s commitment towards change [32]. The 5 forms 1) idealized influence attributes [24] [28] 2) idealized influence – behavior [24] [28], 3) inspirational motivation [24] [28], 4) intellectual stimulation, [24] [26] [28] and 5) individualized consideration interest towards followers [24] [28] [29], of transformational leadership are utilized in assessing the levels of transformational competences in this study. Alternative five levels could be found from e.g. Maxwell: 1) Position, 2) Permission, 3) Production, 4) People development and 5) Pinnacle [33], but former ones are chosen to be utilized because their closer nature compared to competences. Adaptive leadership was formulated by Heifetz and extends leading beyond routines and procedures. Adaptive leadership approach deepened the view from leading in difficult situations and adaptive problem solving. [34] Since it is an insufficient approach for leadership focus purposes and most of it is included also in transformational leadership, it was not regarded in the questionnaire of this study, even than it is situated to ontology between transactions and transformation.

Servant leadership firstly introduced in by Greenleaf with statement: “True leaders are chosen by their followers. [35] Servant leadership in organizations puts the followers’ needs first and helping them to reach goals. This could result in better atmosphere and service in the organization, but doesn’t automatically improve performance [36]. Servant leader builds an environment that serves the needs of the followers and enables them grow and develop, and encourages them to take new responsibilities. A servant

leader focuses on long-term relationship building with followers. [5] [37] Ten characteristics that well describe a servant leader: listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, commitment and building community [21]. Compassionate love or just compassion in organizations could also be linked to servant leadership. [38] The research on servant leadership is still limited [5] and criticism towards it has also been set that it is too vague to be its own approach [14]. The seven distinguishable factors of servant leadership could be set as: 1) conceptual skills, 2) empowerment, 3) helping subordinates to grow and succeed, 4) putting subordinates first, 5) behaving ethically, 6) emotional healing and 7) creating value for the community [37].

Emotional intelligence (EI) was introduced in mid-90's [39] and it is rather is a managerial competency model than a leadership theory [5] EI is described as individual's ability to identify, understand and control his/her own emotions and recognize these in others [40]. An emotionally intelligent leader is skilled in self-awareness, self-management, social awareness and skills, empathy and motivation. [5] [41] Ethics and morality are stated to missing from EI model. [42] Also criticism for the reliability of the whole model has been raised [43]. Besides of critics the model is seen as one of the promising models [44], it is utilized in this study. There are 4 major factors, 18 sub-factors. These are: 1) self-awareness, with sub-factors: emotional self-awareness, accurate self-assessment and self-confidence, 2) self-management, with sub-factors: self-control, transparency, adaptability, achievement, initiative and optimism, 3) social-awareness, with sub-factors: empathy, organizational awareness and service, and 4) relationship-management, with sub-factors: inspiration, influence, developing others, change catalyst, conflict management and teamwork & collaboration. [41] [45]

2.2 Ontology for leadership focus

Hence we are able to introduce Leadership focus ontology. As seen Leadership focus ontology consists of 5 different issues for leaders to focus on at upper level. These issues are transactions, adaptations, transformation, servant, and emotional intelligence. All of these are linked to the conscious awareness of holistic manager whose origin is in Holistic concept of man [46]. Conscious awareness from oneself i.e. managing oneself is the starting point for all good managers [47].

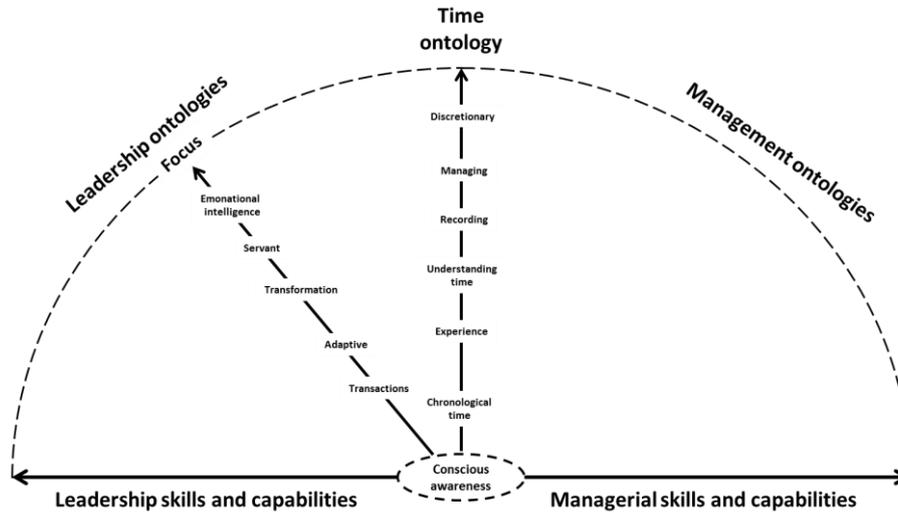


Fig. 1. Leadership Focus ontology situated in Management Windshield metaphor.

As a result, Management windshield, firstly introduced by Vanharanta [8] and further developed by Reunanen [9], consists of now also leadership focus ontology. And because The Management windshield consists of only upper-level knowledge model of leadership and management ontologies strengthened with time ontology, it should not be considered to possess all different possible options of managers' focuses, but upper level approaches. Research part of this paper clarifies more about sub-factors of these approaches.

3 Research setting

3.1 Data collection

The main approach and mind set for this study is Evolute approach by, applying ontology engineering, precision of meaning, and usage of soft-computing methods and fuzzy logic in order to found out what is and how to cope with uncertainty and imprecision in human knowledge inputs.[49] This study is based on a quantitative research and the research data was acquired by using a structured survey questionnaire, with Webropol. The propositions were derived to the questionnaire from the factors of leadership theories and focused on consisting the competencies of transactional leadership, transformational leadership, servant leadership and emotional intelligence, each theory and competency was opened to factors and sub-factors totally creating 30 propositions. These factors then profiled each theory and competence, so that they could be measured using in a self-assessing structured questionnaire. In addition to the propositions drawn from the factors, demographic questions were put to the questionnaire to gather data for statistical purposes from the respondents. These questions comprised

age, gender, education, leadership experience in years, leadership education and voluntary contact details.

Each proposition was divided into two parts to assess the respondent's current status, the present level, and target status, desired level. Therefore respondents answered to each proposition twice. This revealed the respondents' creative tension i.e. direction and magnitude for development need by showing the difference between the target and current status. This creative tension can be thought as competency gaps. Answer scale was Likert scale and all answers were handled as integers between 1 and 6.

The target organization of the research was the Turku University of Applied Sciences Faculty of Technology, Environment and Business. The online questionnaire was sent to 27 recipients from Turku University of Applied Sciences Faculty of Technology, Environment and Business steering group. Recipients contained dean, Education and Research Managers and Leaders. All together 11 answers were got in asked timeframe.

3.2 Data analysis

The gathered data was quantitatively analyzed partially using Webropol Professional Statistics tool, IBM SPSS statistics tool and Microsoft Excel. SPSS was used in finding the Pearson's and Spearman's correlations and Microsoft Excel was used then to count the number of statistically significant correlations, as illustrated in Table 1.

The research data consisted of all 11 respondents' 65 answers: each respondent giving 30 answers of the current state, 30 answers of the target state, and five answers concerning demographic questions. This resulted altogether in 660 different variables. To find out whether the gaps in the current and target states correlated, a correlation gap variable was calculated from their difference in every answer. Demographic data, as gender and accomplished leadership courses and certifications, were not used in this study, but they were gathered due to possible future study.

The statistical significance of correlations in every case was tested against the null hypothesis, which was the assumption that correlation exists between the respondent's answers. All cases were analyzed using Pearson's product-moment correlation for its linear nature and also Spearman's rank correlation which is a monotonic relationship coefficient and less restrictive than the linear coefficient. All answers from all respondents were compared with all other answers from all respondents.

3.3 Results

The results of the study were at the same time expected, interesting and vague. As expected, there are positive correlations between the respondents answers and the leaderships focus factors that were used in this study. Table 1 illustrates all the cases that were tested in this study. The first column represents the highly significant positively correlating answers and their percentage of all possible comparisons, the second column represents the significant positively correlating answers, third column represents the non-significant correlation in answers, fourth column represents the highly significant negatively correlating answers and the fifth represents the negatively correlating answers.

Table 1. Percentages of correlation between all respondents.

Tested cases		Positive correlation $p < 0,01$	Positive correlation $0,01 < p < 0,05$	Non-significant correlation $p \geq 0,05$	Negative correlation $p < 0,01$	Negative correlation $0,01 < p < 0,05$
Current state analysis	Pearson's	7,3 %	10,9 %	78,2 %	0 %	3,6 %
Target state analysis	Pearson's	5,5 %	16,4 %	78,2 %	0 %	0 %
Competency gap analysis	Pearson's	5,5 %	16,4 %	78,2 %	0 %	0 %
Current state analysis	Spearman's	7,3 %	10,9 %	80,0 %	0 %	1,8 %
Target state analysis	Spearman's	5,5 %	12,7 %	78,2 %	0 %	0 %
Competency gap analysis	Spearman's	3,6 %	16,4 %	80,0 %	0 %	0 %

As illustrated in Table 1, there seems to be some amount of statistically significant positive correlation between all answers of all respondents. Although, the amount of highly significant positive correlation is quite low, the significant positive correlation compensates it. Both, the Pearson's and the Spearman's analysis of the current state show a total of 18,2 % of significant positive correlation between all answers from all respondents. In target state Pearson's analysis, the total positive correlation is 21,9 % and in Spearman's analysis 18,2 %. In competency gap analysis, Pearson's analysis gives 21,9 % and Spearman's analysis 20,0 % of positive correlation. Although the non-significant correlation is fairly high, over 78 %, in all cases, it does not mean there is no correlation. Correlation can be found in most answers between the respondents, but it just cannot be declared statistically significant. Also, there is very little significant negative correlation between the answers. Only current state Pearson's analysis gives 3,6 % and current state Spearman's analysis gives 1,8 % of negative correlation. The rest of the answers have no significant negative correlation. All this implies that the factors and respondents' answers correlate positively well.

The diagram in Figure 2 shows means of all answers to propositions of this study. Diagram is consorted so that above every numbered proposition there are current state and target state for each proposition. Diagram also shows creative tension in group via differences between current and target status. Propositions 1-4 are the transactional leadership factors, 5-9 are transformational leadership factors, 10-13 are servant leadership factors and 14-30 are emotional intelligence leadership factors.

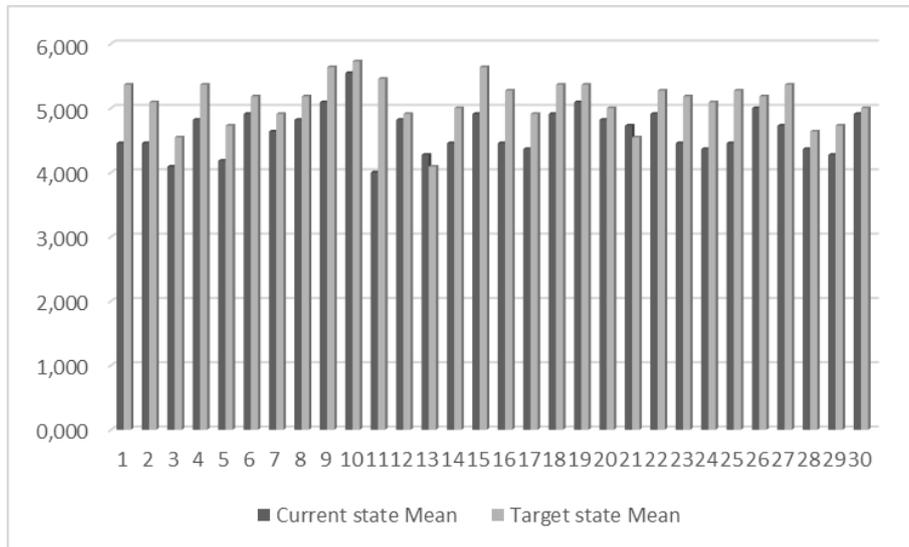


Fig. 2. Mean values for propositions.

As can be seen from Figure 2, the most of the respondents evaluate their competencies to be on a high level regardless of their age, education or leadership experience. This implies that the questionnaire used in the study may not be ideal and it may lead the respondent to answer in a certain manner. One major reason may also be the difficulty of self-evaluation although some researchers imply that it could be done effectively and it can be learned and improved [48]. Parallel to that, all of the respondents were long-term professional with the average experience of 16 years on leadership and management which supports the confidence of respondents' skills.

4 Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to examine the feasibility of building a survey tool to get reliable results about the respondent's leadership competencies regarding leadership focus. The competencies themselves were derived from the leadership focus domain of the management windshield. The study was conducted by first building an ontology for leadership focus, based on the findings of the literature research. From this research a set of best describing propositions were created to build a survey tool in order to evaluate the respondent's point of view towards their focus.

The survey was executed by sending it to 27 of the leaders in Turku University of Applied Science's Faculty of Technology, Environment and Business. Eleven of the recipients, consisting of dean, education and research managers and leaders, answered the survey. Although the sample size was not very reliable yet, the survey was founded to be usable, although some reliability issues were found, which should be addressed in possible later studies. There is good amount of positive correlation in tested factors and a clear gap between the positive and the negative correlations. Most of the assessed factors of the respondents were somewhat homogenous and there was low deviation

from the average levels of factors. This implies a reasonable trust in the survey tool. Another side is the actual reliability of the results of the survey. The rather small sample size can also be seen problematic and while the creative tension in factors were positive as expected, there was also negative tension. That might indicate that some propositions may easily be misinterpreted or they are not assessing the factor correctly. Also, the low number of propositions per factor available in this study can be seen as reliability issue.

Judging by these research results, there definitely is a need for future research on leadership through the leadership focus of the management windshield. The number of factors and especially the number of propositions describing the factor is to be improved. The respondent might be led to answer the propositions in an eagerly positive manner, thus not reflecting the true essence of their leadership capabilities. Also, the use of interviews and other suitable qualitative research methods combined may give better possibility to an in-depth evaluation of the leader's focusing capabilities. The interview could take place directly after the survey and concentrate on propositions with the respondent to really get an understanding about the answers and complement the data acquired with the survey. Another usable approach may be that the respondent could be interviewed in a more in-formal way to give possibilities to explain the need with their own words. Also, a 360-type of approach, where the respondent's peers, followers and superiors would be asked to evaluate respondent, if the reliability of self-evaluation is seen insufficient.

Another issue for future research would be the coverage of the theoretical model of leadership focus. Even that the research coverage of the leadership focus domain is already quite extensive, more research may be needed, especially in order to found combinations and relations of leadership focus domain with other leadership domains.

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