

STRIKE A CHORD: UNDERSTANDING AND IMPROVING THE EFFECTS OF SITUATIONAL REQUIREMENTS AND LEADERSHIP PREFERENCES OF SUBORDINATES IN THE SPORTS SECTOR

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Aim of paper

Chelladurai's (1978) multi-dimensional model of leadership (MML) proposes that the satisfaction of lower ranked individuals is a by-product of congruency between required, preferred and actual leadership behaviours. The primary aim of this research is to revisit the underlying aspects with a particular focus on the wider sports sector and to further investigate the relationship between preferred and required leadership behaviours in the construction of subordinate satisfaction using an alternative methodological perspective.

Theoretical background

Much of the behavioural leadership literature is dominated by transactional and transformational comparisons, with some of this literature concluding that transformational behaviours have a positive effect on organisational performance and subordinate worker attitudes (e.g. Lowe et al, 1996). Furthermore, research also indicates that subordinates prefer transformational leadership, where leaders motivate by appealing to their ideals and intrinsic motives, as they believe it aids their ability to achieve their goals within their organization (e.g. Singer and Singer, 1990). However, there is a need to understand the extent to which preferences for transformational leaders are affected by situational requirements. Situational theories of leadership propose that under various task structures, and leader-subordinate relationships, different styles of leadership are required for group effectiveness (Fiedler, 1967; Hunt and Leibscher, 1973).

Chelladurai's (1978) MML is a useful analytical tool applicable across a variety of contexts, despite its origins within athlete-coach relationships. MML proposes that subordinate satisfaction is a by-product of congruency between required, preferred and actual leadership behaviours (as perceived by the subordinate). Many researches have investigated the relationship between these factors across a variety of contexts (e.g., Hunt and Leibscher, 1973; Singer and Singer, 1990). The majority of these studies are positivistic, using quantitative methods. This research presents an alternative qualitative exploration of the extent to which subordinate preferences can be compromised, as a result of situational task requirements, before satisfaction is affected.

Methodology

The focus of this research is on understanding the emotions of satisfaction that are formulated by particular subordinates. Consequently the research is anti-positivist, taking a social constructivist position to interpret and

understand the nature of the phenomena; that leadership behaviours are socially constructed and given meaning by individuals in particular situations. Given this position, qualitative data was collected from open-ended, face-to-face interviews from subordinates representing a variety of group environments. The environments were chosen with comparison in mind and represented two sport event companies, a public hospital, a secondary school and a sports PR company. Data was gathered during March 2013 and analysed using systematic thematic coding.

Implications

The findings of the research have conceptual and practical implications. For example situational aspects that motivate subordinates to prefer leadership behaviours that are flexible enough to mirror particular situational requirements, suggests that subordinates possess an element of leniency that lessens the impact upon satisfaction of discrepancies in preferred and actual leadership behaviours. For managers in sports organisations this sheds light on the flexibility in subordinate's preferences in relation to a transformational leadership environment where subordinates are engaged with the organisation's missions and values. An additional finding indicated a relationship between past leadership experiences of a subordinates and their construction of preferences. For managers in sports organisations this inference suggests that there are benefits to be obtained from understanding employee's previous leadership experiences.

References

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