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## Leadership Styles and Organizational Performance: A Case Study of LG Finances, Bindura, Zimbabwe

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### **Abstract:**

*This research sought to find the link between leadership styles and organizational performance. The research used a case study approach in which a sample of 60 employees out of a population of 100 employees was used. The targeted population was stratified into departments from which a simple random sampling procedure was employed to come up with departmental representatives who were then summed to make the final 60 sample elements. Questionnaires and interviews were used in triangulation to collect data on the sample. An analysis of the collected data revealed that autocratic leadership style used by LG Finances managers influences subordinates through negative motivational methods and leads to malicious obedience to orders that will have a negative effect on both individual and organizational performance. However, the research also found that there are some factors which affect the performance of a company besides leadership style namely poor employee performance, poor motivational strategies, reduced staff morale and unavailability of resources.*

**Keywords:** Leadership styles, Organization, Performance and Autocratic

### **1. Introduction**

Leadership is a complex research area across all sectors be it private or public. There is ambiguity over which styles and behaviors are the most effective for organizational performance. There are difficulties in linking LG Finances leadership styles with organisational performance since LG Finance's performance measures are affected by multiple confounding factors. This research however, aims to see whether there is a link between leadership styles and LG Finance's performance.

For the past five years LG Finances has been experiencing a decrease in output due to factors such as poor employee performance, poor motivational strategies, reduced staff morale, and unavailability of resources. It was assumed that the decreased output might be as a result of the leadership styles being used by LG Finances. Given such a background, researcher saw it possible to carry out a research to see whether there is a link between leadership styles and organizational performance.

In a bid to improve performance, managers at LG Finances employed a combined and coordinated system of managing human resource and their performance to accomplish the goals of the organisations. However, this seemed not to have changed anything as it was observed by the researcher that the organization was experiencing slow growth rate due to rapid staff turnover. Performance management approach was adopted in order to monitor employees' performance in line with the goals of the organization. Performance Standards were measured in terms of efficiency and effectiveness based on discipline, punctuality, quality of work, quantity of work and time taken to accomplish a task. It was also measured by the number of complaints from Customers, compliments from the Customers, time taken to attend to Customers by employees.

### **2. Theoretical and Conceptual Issues**

Stoner and Friedman (2003) define leadership styles as the various patterns of behaviour favoured by leaders during the process of directing and influencing workers. Mullins (2010) defines leadership style as the way in which the functions of leadership are carried out, the way in which the manager typically behaves towards employees of the group. Cole (1995) in support asserts that an individual's leadership style refers to their preferred manner of tackling task and personal issues in delivering the goals set for the group or team. Mullins (2010) notes that, attention given to leadership style is based on the assumption that subordinates are more

likely to work effectively for managers who adopt a certain style of leadership than for managers who adopt alternative style. Mullins (2008) argues that leadership style is related to motivation, interpersonal behaviour and the process of communication. He goes on to say that keeping people motivated is key or central to the organisational performance. This therefore suggests that the leader-follower relationship is reciprocal and effective leadership is a two way process that influences both individual and organisational performance. In motivating employees, leaders design effective organisations. The business world is dynamic today, so managers must understand the change process if the organisation is to survive in the competitive environment.

Levine quoted in Mullins (2008), says leaders focus on moving people and organisations forward by increasing the competency of staff and cooperation of teams in order to improve the organisation. In other words, leaders today creates an environment that encourages the development of skills, learning, and openness. This has the effect of fostering teamwork that participates in the development of organisation's financial and human resources, which will positively affect the overall organizational performance. To make front-line responsibility effective, leadership must give subordinates the opportunity to develop quality decision-making skills and learn to trust them (Kouzes and Posner, 2007) so that they may perform above expected levels knowing that they will be executing their ideas. Management researchers have long held the belief that performance is unattainable without enduring commitment of employees of the organization. According to Stroke (1999) as mentioned by Ricards and Clark (2006), leadership is a human psychological characteristic that contributes to a person's degree of performance. It includes the factors that cause, channel and sustain human behaviour in a particular direction.

Various models were put forward to try to explain the nature of leadership that exists between leadership styles and performance. These are Trait theory which Robbins and Coulter (2005), argue that they focus on the leader and how the leader interacts with his/her group employees. Researchers agreed that traits alone were not sufficient to explain effective leadership, since these explanations ignored the interactions of leaders and their group employees as well as situational factors. Behavioural theories, which according to Newstrom and Davis (2002), look at the total pattern of explicit leaders' actions as seen by employees. These behavioural theories have autocratic leadership style, Democratic leadership style and Laissez-faire leadership style as the essential elements. There are also situational contingency theories of leadership which Mullins (2008) suggests that the situational approach to leadership is ideal to promote effective organisations. The situational approach emphasizes the situation as the dominant feature in considering the characteristics of effective leadership. There are also contemporary leadership styles like Creative, Corrective, Change, Intelligence, Multi-cultural, Pedagogical, Bridging and Purposeful.

There are some styles like servant leadership that is a practical philosophy focusing on people who choose to serve first and then lead as a way of expanding service, Transformational leadership style of which the followers' goals are broadened and elevated. In this approach, subordinates are motivated to go beyond expectations, as they become confident (Griffins, 2002). It is based on motivating followers to do more than what they intended and often more than what they thought possible. This style, guides, influences and inspires people to excel and to contribute towards the achievement of organizational goals. According to Griffins (2002), charismatic leadership style is another leadership style that is similar to transformational leadership style. This occurs when a leader is able to influence employees to follow him/her based on his/her personality. There is Transactional leadership style that involves daily exchanges between leaders and employees and is necessary for achieving routine performance on which leaders and employees agree. Transactional leadership is a situation where a leader guides or motivates his/her followers in the direction of established goals by clarifying role and task requirements (Robbins and Coulter, 2005). However, evidence indicates that transformational leadership is strongly correlated with lower labour turnover rates, higher levels of performance and higher employee satisfaction as compared to transactional leadership. The researchers found it very suitable to use House (1971)'s Path Goal theory in this study which explains various leadership styles employed by managers.

### *2.1. Path goal theory*

Path-goal theory was initially developed by Robert House (1971) to explain workplace leadership. The theory builds heavily on two theories of motivation that is the goal setting and expectancy theory. Goal-setting theory suggests that an effective way to motivate people is to set challenging but realistic goals and to offer rewards for goals accomplishment. Expectancy theory explains why people work hard to attain work goals. People will engage in behaviours that lead to goal attainment if they believe that goal attainment leads to something they value for example increase in pay, status, promotion, and the behaviours they engage in have a high chance of leading to the goal. Hoy and Miskel (1987) called the theory path-goal for it explains how facilitators influence their subordinates' perceptions of work goals, personal goals and paths to goal attainment. House and Mitchell (1974) identify four leadership styles or behaviours from path goal theory as;

### *2.2. Directive Leadership Style*

This style involves letting subordinates know exactly what is expected of them by offering specific directions. Subordinates are expected to follow rules and regulations. House et al (1974) concur by writing that the facilitator explains what should be done and how it should be done giving appropriate guidance along the way. This includes providing work schedules for specific jobs to be done at specific times. This is most suitable and may be used when the job or piece of work is unstructured and complex and sometimes when the subordinate is not experienced in the field of work. This approach thus increases the subordinate's sense of security and control and thus it is appropriate to the situation.

### 2.3. Supportive Leadership Style

This style considers the needs of the subordinates, by displaying high concern for their welfare and creating a friendly climate in the work group. Hellriegel and Mullins (1989) wrote that the facilitator does this being friendly and approachable. This therefore includes increasing the follower's self-esteem and making the job more amusing. This approach by a leader is most appropriate to the work which is stressful and hazardous or when the job is nauseating or boring.

### 2.4. Participative leadership style

Consulting with followers and taking their ideas into account when making decisions and taking particular actions. Most suitable or best applicable to subordinates who are experts or professionals in their own accord whose advice is also needed by the leader and these subordinates will be able to give it. House et al (1974) wrote that a participative leader consults with the subordinates, solicits for their suggestions and takes these suggestions seriously into consideration before final decisions are reached at.

### 2.5. Achievement-oriented Leadership Style

This style involves setting challenging goals for subordinates by seeking improvement in their performance and showing confidence in subordinates' ability to perform well. Hoinstein, Heilman, Mone and Tartell (1987) concur with House et al (1974) by arguing that this style emphasises subordinates' attainment of high standards of performance. House et al (1974) postulate that this leadership style can be practiced by the same person at different times in varying situations. For example, it is recommended that the principal can adopt the achievement-oriented leadership style for both simple and complex problems depending on situations (Storm and Shou, 1980). Hunsaker and Hunsaker (1981) claim that the choice of an appropriate leadership behaviour from among the four alternatives should be determined by the situational factors, that is, the nature of the subordinates and the nature of the task, especially its structure and clarity. Thus, the path-goal's clearest advice concerns the choice between directive and supportive leadership behaviour (Hoinstein et al, 1987). When a task is unstructured, suffering from lack of formal routine, and when subordinates are inexperienced, the principal needs to employ a directive leadership style. Supportive leadership style by contrast is thought to be accepted and successfully confronted by structured tasks which are routine and unpleasant. Thus clearing all the ambiguities in the work situation, positive outcomes are thought to occur because the supportive leadership style increases initiative and psychological reward (Hornstein et al 1987). Hornstein et al (1987) argue that the path-goal theory is concerned with subordinates motivation and satisfaction. They argued that the theory's basic claim is that by motivating subordinates in the form of encouraging them, the style improves their performances. Putman (1989) in support of the goal-path theory, argues that principals who employ these styles, should be people who know what to do, and how to do it, as well as how to listen, encourage, develop and reward subordinates (Putman, 1989).

### 2.6. Discussion on Path Goal Theory

The theory assumes that leaders are flexible and that they can change their leadership styles to the dictates of the situations. The theory suggests two important contingency variables which are the follower and the work environment which act as a catalyst to moderate the behaviour of the leader. Martin (1970) argues that environment is outside the control of the follower-task structure, authority system and work group. Environmental factors determine the type of leader behaviour required if the follower outcomes are to be maximised. He also argues that follower's characteristics are the locus of control, experience and perceived ability. These behaviours or attributes exhibited by followers therefore determines how the environment and the leader are interpreted. Martin (1970) notes that effective leaders clarify the path to help the subordinates achieve goals and make the journey easier by reducing roadblocks and pitfalls. Research on [www.webcitation.org](http://www.webcitation.org) demonstrates that employee performance and satisfaction are positively influenced when the leader compensates for the shortcomings in either employee or the work situation or setting. The theory is therefore, very useful as it reminds leaders that their main purpose is to help subordinates define and reach their goals in an effective and efficient manner.

Leaders who direct and show the path and help followers along the way are the effective leaders. The path-goal theory seems to assume that there is only one right way of doing things to achieve intended goals and that the leader can see it and subordinates cannot see it. This automatically places that leader as the knower and the subordinate as a dependent. It again suggests that the follower is completely rational and that the appropriate methods can be deterministically selected depending on the situation at hand. In contrast to the Fiedler's Contingency model, the path-goal model states that the four leadership styles are fluid to an extent that the leaders can adopt any of the said four leadership styles depending on what the situation demands.

## 3. Research Methodology

The researchers employed a case study approach in order to collect data. The research adopted a case study research design in which both qualitative and quantitative techniques were used. The case study was chosen because the researchers had insufficient funds to carry a census of all Micro Finances in Zimbabwe. The approach allowed the researchers to concentrate on a real scenario, thus proffering solutions to any business that may want to use the stated findings for improving a real situation. Researchers find it possible to give their own judgments and opinions since they were actually interacting with the participants under study. Permission to carry out the research at LG Finances was granted by the station's human resources manager. Appointments with respondents were made by letters and through the telephone where applicable. The researcher hand-delivered and collected the questionnaires from the sample elements on the same day. Face to face interviews afforded the researchers the privilege to read facial expressions of respondents and their body language.

### 3.1. Study Site

The case study was conducted at LG Finance Bindura Zimbabwe. LG Finances Bindura was chosen because, just like the Harare headquarters, it houses all the information pertaining to all employees of LG in Zimbabwe. It was also a convenient study site since one of the researchers was once employed at the organization therefore; access to vital information was easy.

### 3.2. Sampling Method

The study used a sample of 60 employees from a population of 100 employees. Sixty employees comprises of 10 managers and 50 non managerial employees who were used as a sample size. The sample size comprised of 11 employees from human resources, 10 operations, 13 production, 20 marketing and 25 employees from finance and administration. This sample size was representative which gave a true reflection of the findings of the study. The researcher used a random sampling technique to ensure that every member had an equal chance of being selected. This was done by numbering small cards written "yes" or "no" in a sampling frame. The individuals of the sample then selected one card from the sample frame manually from the box.

DEPARTMENT	POPULATION	SELECTED SAMPLE	USABLE SAMPLE
Human Resources	17	11	11
Operations	16	10	10
Production	22	13	13
Marketing	20	12	12
Finance and Admin	25	14	14
Total	100	60	60%

### 3.3. Data Collection Instruments

The research instruments used in this research were formal questionnaires and key informant interviews. Questionnaires were used as appropriate research tools to reveal sensitive issues which respondents would otherwise feel uncomfortable to talk about in an interview. A pre-test survey was conducted in order to evaluate the validity and reliability of the questionnaire. Questions that proved to be unclear to the respondents were modified, rephrased or discarded. Edwards (2003) posits that pretesting of instruments in the field can serve as a reality check indicating to the researcher how well conceptualization of the problem matches the actual experience of the practitioner. Self-administration of the formal questionnaire was maintained to ensure total response to all questions as there was a chance for probing techniques. Since the questionnaire was designed in English, there was chance to translate it into Shona to ensure that respondents understood what was being required of them. Key informant interviews were used because they give the interviewer room to adjust questions as necessary, clarify and ensure that the questions are properly understood by repeating or rephrasing them (Monton, 1996). Interviews also make it possible for the researcher to take note of non-verbal clues from the respondents, for example, frowns and nervous tapping which can be used to determine the final result.

## 4. Findings and Discussion

The data gathered showed that LG is a male dominated organization as 37 respondents were male employees while female employees in the study were 23. This may be attributed to the historical background of the organization that used to employ only male employees only since its establishment. Furthermore, this implied diverse views from males and females on the relationship between leadership styles and the performance of the organization which were obtained.

Employees gain knowledge and experience at different stages of their service. The majority of the employees were in the 20-30 years category that means they had gained knowledge and experience to achieve organizational goals. Thus, their contribution was critical to the research as it also provided mature responses. Furthermore, these workers had been in the organization for a period that LG was facing a sharp decrease in its performance, thus their contribution was of paramount importance in this research.

### 4.1. Leadership styles being practiced at LG

According to the responses through questionnaires and interviews, the researcher concluded that to a greater extent autocratic leadership style was commonly used at LG as indicated by participants' responses that they are usually not consulted by their bosses when decisions that affect their day to day operations are being made. House and Mitchell (1974) on path-goal theory noted that directive leadership involves telling the subordinates what they should be doing. They also pointed out that the directive leadership is most appropriate when the task is unstructured and complex and is most suitable for employees who are inexperienced. House and Mitchell (1974) also noted that this type of leadership style is most ideal when subordinates know what needs to be done but these subordinates would be unwilling to perform and also when subordinates do not know what to do but willing to perform.

Democratic leadership style was also used as indicated by 30 respondents who noted that they are consulted when there is a visit by senior executives from Head office. This indicates that when there is a visit, there is need to plan for the event in advance and advice by expert subordinates may be needed by leaders and this is in agreement with House's (1971) path-goal theory which he termed participative leadership. He noted that the participative leadership is best when the followers' ideas need to be taken into account and when their expert advice is needed before taking a particular action and also when the followers know what is required and when they are willing to perform. This concurred with Marcouse et al (2007) who posit that the style of leadership which people adopt depends on many factors, such as their personality and particular circumstances at a time.

However, Mullins (2005) argues that autocratic leadership style results in low motivation which leads to poor performance. Other leadership styles are also being used in different situations. The choice of non-accommodative leadership style by a boss may have advantages for example that decisions are executed without delay as there is no room for discussions as indicated by Rao (2000). Kanter (1993) brought another dimension on why leaders employ autocratic leadership as she asserts that when leaders feel inferior, insignificant, or helpless, they do not tolerate disagreements and in trying to restore their ego, they become autocratic to their subordinates. In this case, the leader always influences subordinates through negative motivational methods, that is, through criticizing subordinates, imposing penalties and so forth so that the leader's position remains secured. This may lead to malicious obedience to orders that will have a negative effect on both individual and organizational performance.

#### *4.2. The type of boss preferred by respondents*

Thirty of the participants who are mainly attached to sections which require autonomy on the part of employees indicated that they prefer to work under the leader who takes his/her subordinates' suggestions or a boss who does not think he is always right thus this can mean a leader who practices democratic leadership. This may be so because these respondents are attached to sections which demand them to make meaningful decisions through consultations with their bosses. House (1974) supports that when he noted that participative leadership should be employed where subordinates are experts in their field of work. Usually, in the LG finance these specialist sections are manned by experienced employees of staff as indicated by the respondents' length of service which was above ten years.

The other 10 respondents of which six were between the ages of 30-40 years and four who had a service below five years preferred a boss who does not waste time discussing or consulting with the subordinates. The respondents noted that LG work does not want consultations but subordinates must only obey orders from their superiors. This translate to mean that they prefer an autocratic leader and this supports House (1971)'s assertion that directive leadership approach is most suited for inexperienced subordinates as indicated by the service of these subordinates which is below five years in service. Surprisingly six respondents with the longest service also opted for autocratic leadership style. Four out of these six were Junior employees which also indicate that these employees feel secured when they are being directed by the leader as it seems that they could not make meaningful decisions on their own as indicated by their longevity in the organization without being promoted or they might be knowing what their jobs require but they would be unwilling to perform their duties. This supports House and Mitchell (1974)'s argument that some subordinates need to be told what to do and if they are not directed they will not perform.

Evidence by this research indicated that workers who favour directive leadership and role-clarification are mostly those individuals that have a disposition to prefer external direction and control (and who are less self-motivated) and those who are less experienced in their jobs. It can be concluded that those four old employees who preferred an autocratic leader are the ones with a disposition to prefer external control and those below five years of service who also preferred an autocratic leader may be lacking in experience. Leadership styles have to sustain performance through the development and growth of the employees to become future leaders of the organisation. The study indicated that democratic leaders encourage creativity and innovation, risk taking, worker performance and morale rebuilt. In addition, it has been revealed from the study that leader's behaviour is the most prominent contributor to performance, which implies the need to adopt effective leadership behaviours. Therefore, leadership jointly and relatively contributes to performance, which implies that leadership effectiveness is synonymous with bringing effective performance within the organisation.

In addition, questionnaires and interviews responses revealed that a consultative (democratic) leadership style must be implemented at LG. Oluseyi et al (2009) concurs with Bates and Dean (2002) that democratic leader achieves high performance by being both employee centred and production centred. However, some of the employees said that there is no one effective style of leading subordinates. Wood and Froholtz (2006) share the same sentiments with Griffins (2002) that situational leadership style requires the leader to develop capabilities to diagnose the demands of the situation, choose and then implement the appropriate leadership style. This observation was also made by research participants who stated that leadership style should be chosen after the leader would have studied the situation first.

#### *4.3. Link between boss's behaviour and individual's performance*

As indicated in the data presentation, 50 respondents out of 60 indicated that there is a strong link between leader's behaviour and the subordinates' performance. Respondents noted that if a boss practices favouritism and if he/she is not considerate then the subordinates' zeal to perform is thwarted and this concurs with Kalyani (2006) who stated that leader's behaviour is the strongest predictor of subordinate's performance.

According to the studies carried out by Kouzes and Posner (2007) there is a positive relationship between leadership styles and organisational performance because they argued that many events that happen to an individual or around an individual and many things which employees do can either increase or decrease their level of performance depending on various leadership styles being used. Leadership style employed in an organization is the strongest predictor of performance, which means that there is a positive correlation between leadership styles and organizational performance. House (1971)'s Path-Goal Theory argued that subordinates' motivation, satisfaction and work performance are dependent on the leadership style chosen by their superior depending on the type of employees and the environment.

#### 4.4. Other Possible ways that enhances performance

Interviews and responses to the questionnaire revealed that both subordinates and management must be equipped with communication skills and training in order to execute their leadership roles efficiently and effectively towards organisational performance. Research by CIPD (2004) revealed the importance of communication and specifically of dialogue in which leaders are supposed to get prepared to listen to employees' opinions to secure their co-operation leading to enhanced organisational performance. This supports the observations by the respondents in this current study as they put more emphasis on communication.

Respondents in this study showed that they need to be allowed to develop themselves even using their own resources. This concurs with CIPD (1994)'s study on British employees where the researchers commended on the element of employability that leaders or employers must recognize the employees' need to build up a 'portfolio' of skills and competencies that will make them more marketable. Employees can be helped to develop occupational and personal skills so that they take responsibilities in their own duties without being guided continuously which will in turn motivate them to perform even better. This is also being advocated for by the LG's policy documents.

The respondents in the age group between 20-30 years indicated that they want to work using state of the art technology which may indicate generational differences as also noted by CIPD (2004)'s study on psychological contract. It was noted that younger employees whom it called generation X or millennials want excitement at work. It is in concurrence with the findings in this study where there was the mentioning of surveillance cameras and computers for use at work. These young employees are interested in training and development, opportunities for promotion, interesting tasks, recognition for innovation or new ideas, respectful treatment and a sense of community and life outside work as compared to the older generation which valued job security (job for life). Professor David Guest of Kings College London in 1999 commented on psychological contract that the contract is based on subordinates' sense of fairness and trust and their belief that the employer is honouring the 'deal' between them and where the psychological contract is positive, it increases employee commitment and satisfaction which will finally impact positively on the overall organisational performance.

#### 5. Conclusion

The research findings show that there is positive relationship between leadership style and organizational performance. It was also observed that autocratic leadership style demotivates employees and this goes a long way in affecting the performance of the company. It was also observed that autocratic leadership is productive when dealing with inexperienced subordinates and those that need to be always directed like juniors and seniors who need to be pushed. It is also ideal when dealing with nauseating jobs.

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