

Full Length Research Paper

Perceived leadership style and employee participation in a manufacturing company in the democratic republic of Congo

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This study examined the relationship between the perceived leadership style (measured by the leader behavior descriptive questionnaire) and employee participation (measured by the employee participation survey), and looked at how individuals differ with respect to these variables in terms of demographical factors such as gender, age, educational level and functional department. A cross-sectional survey was conducted with a convenience sample of 200 employees from a manufacturing company in the Democratic Republic of Congo. The results indicated that the participants' perceptions of a leader's behavioral style have a significant influence on their perceptions of employee participation. The study further found that male participants perceived their leader's style significantly more positive than their female counterparts. Participants' with master's and doctoral degrees were significantly more positive about the level of employee participation than the participants with undergraduate levels qualifications. Participants in the exploitation management department were significantly more positive about their leaders' style than those in the other functional departments. The findings add new knowledge that may be used to inform human resource practitioners in the development and coaching of leaders and employees in manufacturing companies.

Key words: Leadership, leadership style, employee participation.

INTRODUCTION

The term 'leadership' has become a buzz word in the context of both nation states and corporations. Leaders play an essential role in ensuring that the workforce and resources are integrated in order to achieve organisational goals. According to Ngambi et al. (2010) and Ngambi (2011), leadership is a process of influencing others' commitment towards realising their full potential in achieving a value-added, shared vision with passion and integrity. The nature of this influence is such that the members of the team cooperate voluntarily with each other in order to achieve the objectives which the leader has set for each member, as well as for the group. The

relationships between the leader and employee, as well as the quality of employees' performance, are significantly influenced by the leadership style adopted by the leader. However, the culture in which leaders find themselves also plays a significant role in terms of how they will lead their organisations. For instance, Robbins and Decenzo (2008) posit that national culture affects leadership style because leaders cannot choose their styles at will. Leaders are constrained by the cultural conditions that their followers have come to expect.

In this regard, Moran et al. (2007) state that culture has an impact on behavior, morale and productivity at work. The differences in culture cause leaders to adopt different styles of leadership, with the objective of influencing their subordinates and satisfying the latter's expectations. According to Drago and Wooden (1991), employees value good pay and working conditions, as well as

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employment security, but they also value the opportunity to use their abilities, good relationships with leaders, and jobs that allow them to use their initiative. Ramsey (1977) indicates that organizations are operating in the midst of the fourth wave and are interested in employee participation. Marchington (1995) aptly comments that "employees are attracted to the general concept of involvement and participation; indeed it will be remarkable if they were not, given that the alternative is to argue for autocratic and non-communicative management style." In spite of this, international leadership theories consider the role of employees to be one of a passive nature. Hollander and Offerman (1990) point out that "although the study of leadership has always presumed the existence of followers, their roles were viewed as essentially passive". Thus, Van Vugt et al. (2008) stated that leaders tend to ignore the essential role of employees. In today's context, people are no longer expected to accept decisions without having some opportunity to influence the final outcome (Marchington, 1980).

Blumberg (1968), in a classic review of international experiences with various forms of participation, concludes that they were very positive in terms of their impact on attitudes and performance. Walton (1985), Rose (1989), and Gallie et al. (1998) have sought to link increased skills with employees' growing propensity to seek greater influence in the workplace, as well as pointing to the negative consequences for commitment and performance if traditional control strategies fail to change in line with changing employee priorities. More specifically, Busck et al. (2010) confirm that the tendency towards increased participation leads to an increase in employees' control at work, that is, their ability to influence decisions and use their skills or competencies.

According to Marchington (1980), the success of participation depends on the behaviour and attitudes of leaders. Bučiūnienė and Škudienė (2008) confirm that employee participation within an organisation is affected by leader's behaviour. It is therefore essential to examine, in some detail, the way in which leaders react to increased employee participation in areas which have traditionally been located within the management's preserve.

Although numerous studies have been conducted with regard to leadership and employee participation in developing countries such as the United States of America and Europe, a similar study has not yet been conducted in the context of the Democratic Republic of Congo. This study set out to add empirical research to the existing body of research with regard to perceived leadership style and how it relates to employee participation. More specifically, the aim was to investigate the relationship between perceived leadership style and employee participation in a manufacturing company. In addition, the aim was to determine whether or not employees differed in terms of the perceived leadership

style and employee participation with regard to biographical variables such as gender, age, educational level and functional department.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Leadership style

Leadership is extremely important, both as a social phenomenon and a subject for scholarly investigation. Many authors have studied this topic, but there is no generally accepted definition of what leadership is, no dominant paradigm for studying it, and little agreement regarding the best strategies for developing and exercising it (Bennis, 2007; Hackman and Wageman, 2007; Vroom and Jago, 2007). Korabik and Ayman (2007) view leadership as a transaction between one person (leader) and another person (subordinate), while Ngodo (2008) perceives leadership to be a reciprocal process of social influence, in which leaders and subordinates influence each other in order to achieve organisational goals. For instance, a leadership style is viewed as the combination of traits, characteristics, skills and behaviours that leaders use when interacting with their subordinates (Marturano and Gosling, 2008). According to Humphries (2003), there are many ways in which to conceptualise leadership. One of the best and most relevant ways is through the analysis of behaviour in leadership situations. Leadership is therefore viewed as a set of behaviours by individuals in the context of the group or organisation to which they belong (Humphries, 2003). The concept of leadership implies that leaders are individuals who, through their actions, facilitate the movement of subordinates or group towards common or shared goals. Thus, Hersey et al. (2008) also perceive leadership as a function, which mean that leaders are viewed as individuals who create an environment that encourages trust, and build a culture in which accountability enables the public disclosure of a leader's behaviour (Wood and Winston, 2005).

Research has indicated that leadership seems to be a reflection of two schools of thought in organisational theory - scientific management and human relations. The first school of thought emphasised tasks, and was criticised for viewing employees as instruments or machines to be manipulated by their leaders. The second school of thought focused on relationships with people. Smit et al. (2007) indicate that it is people who can give a temporary competitive advantage to the organisation, and who constitute its intellectual value.

In this regard, the fact is that employees are the life force that drives companies forward. Recognising the way in which these behaviours are combined in order to influence subordinates is the central purpose of leadership style. According to Puccio (2007), leadership style therefore, refers to the way in which leaders use

their influence to lead those with whom they work through formal and informal interactions. The behaviour that leaders use to interact with and lead their followers is developed over a period of time, depending on the experiences, education and training to which leaders have been exposed. According to Nelson and Campbell (2006), the behavioural perspective arose from the leadership research programme conducted at the Ohio State University. The Ohio State University studies identified two main types of leadership behaviour: task-oriented and relationship-oriented (Euwema et al., 2007). The leadership styles associated with these leadership behaviours are initiating structure and consideration (Bass and Bass, 2008). These two forms of leadership styles have received considerable attention in most cross-cultural studies (Judge et al., 2004). Researchers such as Yukl et al. (2002) regard initiating structure (task-oriented leadership) and consideration (human-oriented leadership) as the best classification of a leader's behaviour and the most stable form of leadership styles. Both these styles have been found to have a positive impact on employee satisfaction, performance, productivity and commitment (Dorfman et al., 2004). In this regard, Judge et al. (2004) conclude that researchers should include these two styles of leadership in contemporary research. Below is a description of each of these styles (Judge et al., 2004).

The initiating structure style refers to the extent to which leaders define and structure their subordinates' role for the purpose of goal attainment. The leader using this style becomes heavily involved in directing and monitoring the group's activities by devoting the members' time to the processes of planning, scheduling and communicating information (Yukl, 2002).

The consideration style refers to the extent to which leaders focus on the comfort, well-being, respect, needs and satisfaction of their followers. This style reflects the leader's behaviour towards group members, which is characterized by mutual trust, development of good relations, sensitivity towards the feelings of group members, and openness to their suggestions (Drenth et al., 1998).

Dale and Fox (2008) indicate that the initiating structure and consideration styles are positively related to organisational commitment. The correlation between the consideration and initiating structure leadership styles and employee satisfaction showed that the most positive correlation was between supervision and the consideration style. Secondly, a negative correlation was found between supervision and the initiating structure leadership style (Mosadegh and Yarmohamadian, 2006). Judge et al. (2004) found that the consideration style is related to employee satisfaction, and the initiating structure style is related to employee performance. However, in a recent study, Van Emmerik et al. (2008) found consideration and initiating structure to be negatively correlated with satisfaction and performance.

Research has also indicated, in the joint effects of gender and culture, that women are higher in terms of both initiating structure and consideration than men. However, a study conducted from the social interaction leadership perspective, by comparing the leadership behaviour of men and women, indicated that men and women do not differ in terms of their initiating structure and consideration behaviour (Ayman and Korabik, 2010).

Employee participation

The concept of employee participation represents a popular theme in the analysis of the world of work among scholars in the field of industrial and organisational psychology, industrial relations, as well as management. It refers to any arrangement which is designed to involve low-level employees in important decision-making within the workplace. According to Noah (2008), this implies that rather than saddling only a group within the enterprise (for instance, management) with the responsibility of making decisions, all those who are to be affected by these decisions (including low-level employees) would be involved in its formulation and implementation. Keith (1981) defines employee participation as the mental and emotional involvement of individuals (employees) in group or organisational situations that encourage them to contribute to the group's or organisation's goals and to share responsibility. Participation in this regard means mental and emotional involvement, rather than mere muscular activity or the use of one's skills. For instance, involvement is perceived to be psychological, rather than physical.

The motivation to contribute is important, in that, it gives employees the opportunity to release their potential and apply their own resources, by taking initiative and acting creatively in order to achieve organisational goals. Employees who participate are encouraged, most of the time, to accept responsibility for their group's activities and become involved in the organisation. Nerdinger (2008) indicates that human beings are fundamentally active and strive for responsibility, which leads to the valuing of participation in the organisation. Nel et al. (2005) posit that employee participation programmes recognise employees' right to be individually and collectively involved with leaders in the areas of organisational decisions, beyond those usually associated with collective bargaining. This means that employees claim the right to have a greater say in matters that affect their working lives. In this study, the employee participation variable included the following dimensions (Berman, 1997):

i. Job: This refers to the extent to which employees understand the purpose and duties of their jobs, have the freedom to make decisions about the best way to get the

job done, and have sufficient time to produce quality work.

ii. Quality of work life: This refers to the extent to which a work environment is based on mutual respect, which supports and encourages employee participation and open communication in matters which affect their job.

iii. Decision-making and problem solving: This refers to the extent to which an employee follows a conscious process to reduce the differences between the actual situation and the desired situation – this also has an influence on the decision-making process.

iv. Ideas, suggestions and change: This refers to the extent to which employees propose ideas and suggestions for change within the organisation to their leaders.

v. The business: This refers to the extent to which employees understand the various ways in which their jobs impact on profitability and influence costs, as well as the impact of their functional department on the organisation's financial position.

On a practical level, Kuye and Sulaimon (2011) indicate that employees must be involved if they are to understand the need for creativity, and if they are to be committed to changing their behaviour at work in new and improved ways. Employee participation in matters that concern their job serves to create a sense of belonging among workers, as well as a conducive environment in which both leaders and employees voluntarily contribute towards good and healthy industrial relations (Noah, 2008). In order to increase employee satisfaction and commitment, and to humanise the workplace with the aim of improving work performance and promoting good citizenship behaviour, leaders need to choose a style which permits a high degree of participation by employees at all levels in the organisation. In this regard, employee participation could be viewed as the tool that facilitates motivation, helps employees to develop a positive work attitude, and ensures a high level of productivity.

Research on employee participation shows that it increases positive employee attitudes and behaviour. Langan-Fox et al. (2002) found that employee participation is related to satisfaction, performance, productivity, organisational effectiveness and commitment. Kahnweler and Thomson (2000), who examined the three individual factors that play an important role in the success or failure of participation programmes, namely age, educational level and gender, found that these factors have significant effects on employees' desire for participation in decision-making. However, Freeman and Roger (2006) found that educational level was not a factor in the wish to participate. Studies on various forms of employee participation, conducted by Wilkinson et al. (2010), found that participative decision-making, as well as consultative and delegative participation, had a positive impact on employee attitudes and performance.

Joesson (2008) found that employee participation is correlated with independent variables such as the perceived influence of an individual and team or group of employees. Scott-Land et al. (2004) found employee participation to be correlated with task characteristics, rewards and performance efforts, as well as outcomes such as job satisfaction and affective commitment. Studies have been conducted with regard to initiating structure and consideration leadership styles, as well as work-related attitudes such as job satisfaction and performance. In addition, studies have been done on employee participation and work-related attitudes such as commitment, satisfaction, productivity and effectiveness. Nevertheless, there is a lack of empirical studies that investigate the relationship between the perceived leadership style and employee participation in the context of the Democratic Republic of Congo. Based on the aforementioned discussion, the following research hypotheses were formulated for the present study:

H₁: Perceived leadership style is significantly related to employee participation

H₂: Perceived leadership style significantly predicts employees' perceptions of employee participation

H₃: Employees from different gender, age, educational level and functional department groups differ significantly with regard to perceived leadership style and employee participation.

METHODOLOGY

For this quantitative study, a cross-sectional research design was used to achieve the research objectives (Cohen et al., 2007).

Participants

The sample consisted of a convenience sample of 200 permanently employed staff members of a manufacturing company in the Democratic Republic of Congo. The sample was represented by 60% males and 40% females. In terms of age, 46% of the respondents were between 40 and 55 years of age, about 43% of the respondents were between 25 and 40 years of age, 6% were 25 years old and younger, and 5% were above 55 years of age. With regard to educational level and functional department, 61% were in possession of a Bachelor's degree and 21% in possession of a Masters' and Doctoral degree. In terms of functional department, 17% of respondents respectively were working in human resources, distribution and sales, technical and project management and 16% were working in exploitation management functional department.

The questionnaires were directly distributed to an initial sample of 300 employees and collected by hand. A total of 201 completed questionnaires were returned. One questionnaire was returned in an incorrect format, which made it impossible for it to be encoded, so only 200 could be used for data analysis, thus yielding a response rate of 67%.

In terms of ethical considerations, permission to conduct the research was obtained by the management of the company. Participants completed an informed consent form, and it was indicated to the participants that the completion and return of the questionnaires, and consent forms signified that they had granted permission for their questionnaires to be utilised for research

Table 1. Means, standard deviations and Cronbach alpha coefficients (n = 200).

Variable	Mean	SD	α
Leader behaviour descriptive questionnaire (LBDQ)			
Leadership style	71.63	9.54	0.75
LBDQ 1 Consideration	34.19	5.27	0.55
LBDQ 2 Initiating Structure	37.44	5.70	0.71
Employee participation survey (EPS)			
Employee participation	75.44	8.38	0.75
EPS 1 Job	9.46	1.74	0.51
EPS 2 Quality of work life	14.40	2.71	0.57
EPS 3 Decision making and Problem solving	21.47	3.97	0.65
EPS 4 Ideas, suggestions and change	14.40	2.51	0.55
EPS 5 Business	15.71	2.63	0.63

purposes. The researchers were available to answer questions and address any concerns. The confidentiality of the participants was maintained. Completed questionnaires were kept secure.

Measuring instruments

The leader behavior descriptive questionnaire (LBDQ) (Stogdill, 1963) was used to measure the perception of leadership behaviour by subordinates. The LBDQ consists of 20 items, which are measured on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Schriesheim and Stogdill (1975) reported the following internal consistency Cronbach Alpha coefficients: 0.90 for consideration and 0.78 for initiating structure. Test-retest reliability studies reported coefficients ranging between 0.68 and 0.78 (Greene, 1975). As shown in Table 1, the Cronbach Alpha coefficients for the total perceived leadership style and both initiating structure and consideration sub-scales (as obtained for the sample in this study) varied between 0.55 (medium) and 0.75 (high).

The employee participation survey (EPS) (Berman, 1997) was used to measure the participants' perceptions of employee participation. The EPS consists of 26 items, which are measured on a four-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly agree) to 4 (strongly disagree). Berman (1997) reported Cronbach Alpha coefficients as high as 0.70 for the EPS sub-scales. Test-retest reliability studies found Cronbach Alpha coefficients ranging between 0.60 and 0.85 (Berman, 1997). Table 1 shows that the following internal consistency Cronbach alpha coefficients were obtained for the present sample: job (0.51), ideas, suggestions and change (0.55), quality of work life (0.57), business (0.63), decision-making and problem solving (0.65) and total employee participation (0.75).

According to Nunnally and Bernstein (2010), a desirable reliability coefficient would be between 0.70 and 0.90. Clark and Watson (1995) however argue that anywhere between 0.50 and 0.80 is acceptable. Since the objective of this study was not to make individual predictions based on the instruments, but rather to investigate broader trends and certain relationships between variables, the instruments were considered to be acceptable.

Data analysis

The data was analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 18.0 for Windows software. The first stage involved determining the means, standard deviations and

Cronbach Alpha coefficients. In the second stage, Pearson correlation coefficients were calculated to specify the relationship between the LBDQ and EPS variables. In terms of statistical significance, it was decided to set a cut-off alpha value at the 95% confidence interval level ($p \leq 0.05$), with a practical effect size of $r \geq 0.30$ (medium effect) (Cohen, 1988). The third stage entailed determining which biographical groups differed significantly in terms of the means of the most significant relationship identified during the second stage. In the third stage, standard multiple regression analyses was performed to determine whether the LBDQ variables act as significant predictors of the total EPS variable. For the purposes of this study, R^2 values larger than 0.13 (medium effect) at $p \leq 0.05$ (Cohen, 1992) were regarded as practically significant. The final stage involved an independent samples t-test and ANOVAs to identify the differences between biographical groups with regard to the LBDQ and EPS variables. The cut-off was set at F ($p \leq 0.05$).

RESULTS

Descriptive statistics

The descriptive statistics and internal consistency reliability coefficients of the measuring instruments are reported in Table 1. In terms of the LBDQ variables, the initiating structure variable obtained the highest mean score ($M = 37.44$; $SD = 5.70$). The EPS decision making and problem solving variable obtained the highest mean score ($M = 21.47$; $SD = 3.97$) and the EPS job variable obtained the lowest mean score ($M = 9.46$; $SD = 1.74$).

Correlations

The significant correlation coefficients between the LBDQ and EPS variables are reported in Table 2. As can be observed from Table 2, the inter-correlations range between $r \geq 0.20$ (small practical effect size) and $r \geq 0.38$ (medium practical effect size). Table 2 indicates that total employee participation, decision-making and problem solving, and ideas, suggestions and change were

Table 2. Significant Pearson-product moment correlations for LBDQ and EPS (n=200).

Variable	LBDQ Total	LBDQ Initiating structure	LBDQ Consideration
EPS Total	0.38***+	0.32***+	0.34***+
EPS Your job	0.26**	0.21*	0.25**
EPS Quality of work life		0.20*	
EPS Decision-making & problem solving	0.25**	0.22*	0.21*
EPS Ideas, suggestions & change	0.27**	0.22*	0.25**
EPS Business	0.21*		

*** $p \leq 0.01$, ** $p \leq 0.02$, * $p \leq 0.05$; + $r \geq 0.30 \leq 0.49$ (medium practical effect size); ++ $r \geq 0.50$ (large practical effect size).

positively and significantly related to both the LBDQ initiating structure and consideration leadership variables (p values range between $p \leq 0.001$ and $p \leq 0.05$). The EPS business variable did not relate significantly to the LBDQ initiating structure and consideration leadership variables. The EPS quality of work life variable related significantly to only the LBDQ initiating structure variable. These results provided support for the alternate hypothesis that perceived leadership style is significantly related to employee participation.

Multiple regressions

As can be seen from Table 3, the LBDQ initiating structure and consideration independent variables produced a statistically significant regression model ($F_{(6,193)} = 16.27$; $p < 0.00$), accounting for approximately 13% ($R^2 = 0.13$; medium practical effect) of the variance in the EPS dependent variable. More especially, initiating structure ($\beta = 0.23$; $t = 3.04$; $p < 0.00$) and consideration ($\beta = 0.20$; $t = 2.59$; $p < 0.01$) contributed significantly in explaining the proportion of variance in the total EPS variable. In terms of the collinearity statistics, the tolerance values were close to 1.0 and the variance inflation factor (VIF) values were lower than the cut-off of > 4.0 . These values imply that multicollinearity could be ruled out in interpreting the results. In this regard, the results from the regression results provided support for the alternate hypothesis that perceived leadership style significantly predicts employees' perceptions of employee participation.

Test for significant mean differences: Gender

Table 4 reports only the significant results. No statistically significant differences were observed in terms of the ESP variables. However, statistically significant differences were observed between the male and female participants with regard to perceived leadership style. Table 4 indicates that the male participants scored significantly higher than their female counterparts on perceived

leadership style ($M = 71.73$; $SD = 10.46$; Cohen $d = 0.03$). However, the Cohen d value indicates that these differences were practically trivial.

ANOVA: Age

No statistically significant differences were observed in terms of the participants' age with regard to the perceived leadership style and employee participation variables. These results are therefore not reported.

ANOVA: Educational level

Table 5 reports only the significant results. No statistically significant differences were observed in terms of the participants' educational level with regard to the perceived leadership style variables. However, statistically significant differences were observed between the participants' educational level and employee participation. Table 5 indicates that participants who possessed an undergraduate qualification scored significantly lower on the employee participation variable ($M=74.58$; $SD = 8.12$) than those with masters and doctoral degrees ($M = 78.24$; $SD = 8.89$), secondary education ($M=76.07$; $SD = 8.08$) and primary education ($M = 76.14$; $SD = 7.18$). However, the partial eta square value (partial $\eta^2 = 0.05$; $F_p \leq 0.03$) shows that the proportion of total variation attributable to the difference in educational level was practically trivial (5%).

ANOVA: Functional department

Table 6 reports only the significant results. No statistically significant differences were observed in terms of the participants' functional department with regard to employee participation. However, statistically significant differences were observed between participants working in different functional departments with regard to the total perceived leadership style variable. Table 6 shows that participants working in the exploitation management

Table 3. Multiple regression analyses: LBDQ, EPS (n = 200).

Variable	Un-standardised coefficient		Standardised coefficient	t	p	F	Adjusted R ²	R	Collinearity statistics	
	b	SE b	β						Tolerances	VIF
Employee participation (constant)	51.76	4.19		12.35	0.00	16.27	0.13 ⁺⁺⁺	0.38 ^{***}		
Initiating structure	0.37	0.12	0.23	3.04	0.00				0.74	1.36
Consideration	0.29	0.11	0.20	2.59	0.01				0.74	1.36

***p ≤ 0.001, **p ≤ 0.01, *p ≤ 0.05 +R2 ≤ 0.12 (small practical effect size) ++R2 ≥ 0.13 ≤ 0.25 (medium practical effect size) +++R2 ≥ 0.25 ≤ 0.30 (large practical effect size).

Table 4. T-test for significant mean differences (n=200).

Gender	Group	N	Mean	SD	F	t	df	Sig	Cohen d
Perceived leadership Style	Male	120	71.73	10.463	3.982	0.2	198	0.05	0.03
	Female	80	71.46	8.030					

***p ≤ 0.01, **p ≤ 0.02, *p ≤ 0.05.

Table 5. ANOVA results for significant mean differences between employee participation with educational level (n = 200).

Educational level	Groups	N	Mean	SD	F	p	Partial Eta squared
Employee participation	Primary	7	76.14	7.175	3.062	0.03	0.05
	Secondary	29	76.07	8.084			
	Bachelor’s Degree	122	74.58	8.123			
	Masters and Doctorate	42	78.24	8.892			

***p ≤ 0.01, **p ≤ 0.02, *p ≤ 0.05.

Table 6. ANOVA results for significant mean differences between perceived leadership with functional department (n=200).

Functional department	Groups	N	Mean	SD	F	P	Partial Eta squared
Perceived leadership style	Human resources	33	73.15	10.211	2.428	0.04	0.06
	Financial management	33	71.61	9.601			
	Distribution and sales	34	69.71	8.827			
	Technical management	34	68.53	11.114			
	Project management	34	71.32	8.434			
	Exploitation management	32	75.72	7.570			

***p ≤ 0.01, **p ≤ 0.02, *p ≤ 0.05.

functional department scored significantly higher on the perceived leadership style variable ($M = 75.72$; $SD = 7.57$) than the financial management ($M = 71.61$; $SD = 9.60$), project management ($M = 71.32$; $SD = 8.43$), distribution and sales ($M = 69.71$; $SD = 8.83$) and technical management functional departments ($M = 68.53$; $SD = 11.11$). However, the partial eta square value (partial $\eta^2 = 0.06$; $Fp \leq 0.04$) shows that the proportion of total variation attributable to the difference in functional department was practically trivial (6%).

It is evident from these results that the tests for significant mean differences provided only minimal support for the alternate hypothesis that employees from different gender, age, educational level and functional department groups differ significantly with regard to perceived leadership style and employee participation.

DISCUSSION

Overall, the results suggest that the participants' perceptions of their leaders' behavioural style are significantly related to their perceptions of employee participation. Moreover, their leaders' behavioural style was shown to significantly predict the participants' perceptions of the level of employee participation. Differences between the various biographical groups in term of the perceived leadership style and employee participation were only minimal. In interpreting the results, it is important to note that the participants were predominantly males.

The relationship between perceived leadership style and employee participation

The significant relationship observed between the perceived leadership style and employee participation suggest that both the task-driven and human-oriented leadership styles influenced the participants' perceptions of employee participation, especially with regard to the job, decision-making and problem solving, and ideas, suggestions and change. Judge et al. (2004) found that leaders who display the task-driven (initiating structure) leadership style clearly define their own duties and those of others. However, leaders who demonstrate the human-oriented (consideration) leadership style participate in two-way communication - that is, listening, facilitating interaction by means of involving employees in decision-making, problem-solving and taking suggestions into account (Judge et al., 2004).

Participants' participation in quality of work-life issues seemed to be significantly influenced by the initiating structure (task-driven) leadership style. The quality of work life being characterized by the work environment that promote mutual respect, which supports and encourages employees to be involves and openly

communicate in matters that affect their job. This may be influenced by initiating structure (task-driven) which attempt to establish and define channels of communication, and encourage employees to be focused on the tasks. Initiating structure (task-driven) is concerned with improving efficiency and process reliability (Yukl and Lepsinger, 2005).

The regression analysis also indicated the task-driven leadership style (initiating structure) to be a significantly stronger predictor than the human-oriented leadership style (consideration) of the participants' perceptions of employee participation. These results suggest that the degree to which leaders structure their own roles and the roles of their subordinates to attain formal goals may have influenced the participants' level of mental and emotional involvement, and motivation to take the initiative and act creatively in achieving organizational goals. Initiating structure includes criticizing poor work, emphasising the importance of meeting deadlines, and monitoring the degree to which subordinates follow rules and procedures (Yukl, 2002).

However, the results also indicated that the consideration leadership style also contributed significantly in explaining the variance in employee participation. As a human-oriented leadership style, consideration refers to the degree to which leaders display supportive behaviours which include acting in a friendly manner, being concerned with their subordinates and their welfare, consulting subordinates when important decisions have to be made, finding time to listen to subordinates' problems and treating subordinates equally (Yukl, 2002). In this regard, the results seem to suggest that a balanced approach to leadership (task-driven and human-oriented behaviour) may lead to significantly higher levels of employee participation. Kuye and Sulaimon (2011) state in this regard that employees who feel involved generally have a better understanding of the need for creativity in goal achievement. Cabrera et al. (2003) found that an employee who is willing to participate in his/her work will increase his/her effort, which subsequently improves efficiency, productivity and commitment. Dolatabadi and Safa (2010) found that an employee is less likely to adopt organisational or managerial values when the leader is directive and excludes him/her from the decision-making process. Since this leadership style (directive) excludes employees from the decision-making process, employees will be less likely to accept organisational goals and be committed (Bass, 1981).

Perceived leadership style and employee participation with regard to gender, educational level and functional department

The male participants perceived their leader's behavioural style significantly more positively than the

female participants did. Similar to these findings, a study conducted by Osuola (2002) revealed a significant difference between initiating structure and consideration leadership styles with regard to males in a comparative study between the United States and Nigeria. Moreover, Mulla-Feroza and Krishnan (2000) argued that the perceived consideration and initiating structure leadership styles are the basic attributes in terms of which males and females differ in male-dominated organisations.

In terms of educational level, and contrary to the findings reported by Ekmerikçi (2011), the results of this study showed that the participants with master's and doctoral degrees scored significantly higher on the employee participation variable than participants with primary, secondary and bachelor's educational levels. This suggests that participants with a higher level of education may tend to have a better understanding of the purpose of the job, as well as the freedom to make decisions regarding how to perform their job and produce quality work than participants with low educational levels. With regard to the functional department, the findings show that the participants working in the exploitation management department scored significantly higher on the perceived leadership style variable than those working in the other functional departments (human resources, financial management, project management, distribution and sales, and technical management). It appears from the results that the participants working in the exploitation management department perceived their leader's style to demonstrate high levels of trust and respect for employees, and allow them to participate in decision-making. Al-Omari (2008) found that leaders who display the human-oriented (consideration) leadership style demonstrate a high level of friendliness, mutual trust, respect and warmth in their interactions with employees.

LIMITATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This study had various limitations. Firstly, employees' participation was voluntary and the study was conducted with a relatively small sample at one manufacturing company in the Democratic Republic of Congo. These factors limited the researcher's ability to generalise the findings. Secondly, there was the issue of translating the two instruments from English to French. Marais (1997) explained that this could possibly mislead the participants in terms of the original meaning of the question. Secondly, the differences observed between the biographical groups in terms of the perceived leadership behavioural style and employee participation were practically trivial. These results should therefore be interpreted with caution.

This study may serve as a foundation for future studies in different public and private organisations in the Democratic Republic of Congo. The results of such

studies could be of benefit to human resource practitioners and leaders in terms of selecting the most appropriate leadership style to improve employees' participation in decision-making, productivity and commitment to the organisation. For further research, a few suggestions can be made. A longitudinal study of the relationship between other leadership styles, such as transformational and transactional leadership, may be better for capturing the dynamic in terms of the relationship between leaders and subordinates. It is suggested that more research be conducted to examine the relationship between leadership styles and work-related attitudes, which are currently lacking in the Democratic Republic of Congo's context.

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