

Full Length Research Paper

Leadership model for appraising employees' readiness within solidarity trade union in South Africa

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South Africa has become an integral part of the 'global village' which is characterised *inter alia*, by industrial and commercial interaction, as well as by substantial competitiveness. Business organisations in South Africa should concomitantly pursue means to become more efficient and productive in order to avoid being overwhelmed by products and services from other countries at competitive prices and better quality. Some of the competitive disadvantages include cooperation in labour-employer relations, scarce skills, skills outflow, hiring and firing practices, employment rules and trade union contributions to productivity. It is also generally understood that the successful integration of these factors is dependant, almost exclusively, on effective leadership. Organisational leaders are the agents that integrate all the forces at play in organisations, and ultimately ensure their competitiveness, sustainability and survival. Whereas it is obvious that the Solidarity Trade Union is a unique organisation within a business environment of active trade unionism, it is projected that the application of Hersey and Blanchard's approach will secure a unique style of leadership, which can be successful within the context of its unique strategic imperatives, whilst being a competitive trade union. Hence, some research problems were postulated with regard to the Solidarity Trade Union. In order to meet the objectives of the study, a combination of qualitative and quantitative research methods, also known as triangulation, were used to enable the researcher to cross-check the findings and increase the validity and reliability of the findings. Face-to-face individual interviews were conducted with respondents and a self-administered questionnaire was employed to collect data from members of the Executive Committee and National Executive of Solidarity. Documents were reviewed, as a source of secondary data, to obtain information regarding the background of the union in terms of decisions made within the managerial structure of the organisation.

Key words: Executive committee, leadership model, national committee, solidarity trade union.

INTRODUCTION

It is common knowledge that efficiency and productivity, characterised as cost effectiveness in terms of delivery of products and services, are achieved through the complex dynamic interaction of raw materials, funding, manufacturing process, application of technology, and a variety of other factors. The World Economic Forum (2005) rates South Africa poorly in terms of its (international

competitiveness. According to Barker (2007), some of the competitive disadvantages include cooperation in labour-employer relations, scarce skills, skills outflow, hiring and firing practices, employment rules and trade union contributions to productivity. It is also generally understood that the successful integration of these factors is dependant, almost exclusively, on proper and effective management, which is often described in the management sciences as business leadership.

Collins (2006) believes that legislative leadership, which refers to the fact that no individual leader has the

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power to make decisions by him/herself, relies more on persuasion, political currency and shared interests to create the conditions for the right decisions to be effectively taken. According to Collins (2006), top leaders differ from any other type of leader based on the fact that they are ambitious for the cause, the movement, the mission and the work (not for themselves). Top leaders have a compelling combination of personal humility and professional will, which are key factors to create legitimacy.

Whereas, it is axiomatic that the Solidarity Trade Union is a unique organisation even within a business environment of active trade unionism, it projected Hersey and Blanchard's approach, which suggests that it will necessarily require a unique form of leadership to be successful within the context of its unique strategic imperatives, will as well be most appropriate for a competitive trade union.

Research assumptions

The following research assumptions have been postulated namely:

1. The Trade Union Solidarity is a unique operational system owing to its historical background
2. It has complex strategic objectives, structures and diverse services, which it renders to its diverse membership.

Research problem

Solidarity is a unique and diverse operational system and will, therefore, require a unique mix of leadership characteristics to ensure its sustainability and cost effectiveness in the rendering of services to its membership within the competitive environment in which it operates. This unique mix of leadership characteristics that are required for sustainability, cost effectiveness and competitiveness in the achievement of the unique strategic objectives of solidarity has not been properly explored. Therefore, it becomes necessary to explore a unique set of leadership characteristics, which is necessary for solidarity trade union to be sustainable and competitive in meeting the requirements of each department within the union and effectively render the unique services to them based on their strategic goals.

Research questions

The aforementioned statement led to the following research question:

1. What is the current leadership style utilised within the

solidarity trade union?

2. Is the leadership style applied within solidarity trade union effective in rendering the required services to its members?
3. What is the readiness level of followers of solidarity trade union's executive management?
4. To what extent is the current leadership styles of solidarity's executive management in accordance with the readiness and demands of its followers?

Research objectives

The objectives of the study were:

1. To appraise the current leadership styles utilised within solidarity trade union;
2. To determine whether the leadership style is effective in rendering of the required services to its members;
3. To evaluate the readiness levels of the followers of solidarity's executive management;
4. To determine whether the current leadership styles of solidarity's executive management is in accordance with the readiness and demands of its followers.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Solidarity Trade Union

Trade unionism is not a new concept to the world, and especially not to South Africa. The concept of trade unionism was well defined in the past and comprises characteristics that have stood the test of time. British Political and Economic Planning (1955) believed that the two main reasons for varied types of trade unions are due to the different industries where their members are constituted and the historical development of a particular union. These two factors still contribute to the existing character and nature of solidarity. Solidarity's history is embedded in the history of the Afrikaner, which is its reason for being. It developed after two revolutions, namely economic and political upheavals in the early 1900's and in 1994, when it faced another political and economic revolution. In 1997, when Flip Buys took over as the general secretary, the Mineworkers Union was essentially financially bankrupt, which brought about a need to redesign the union with new ideas, staff issues, repositioning, new systems and structures, as well as to establish management and leadership systems (Visser, 2006), which may be relevant to the nature of solidarity.

Solidarity is a trade union, which was duly registered in terms of *Section 96 of the Labour Relations Act*. Du Toit et al. (2006), in describing a trade union, correctly refer to *Section 213 of the Labour Relations Act*, which defines a trade union as an association of employees whose prime purpose is to regulate relations between employees and

employers, including any employers' organisation. Trade unions are voluntary associations and, according to Grogan (2007), nothing prevents trade unions from pursuing objectives other than those strictly relating to the regulation of relations between employers and employees. Trade unions may, therefore, administer retirement, medical and other schemes for their members, offer advisory services and may advance and promote their members' socio-economic interests (Hermann, 2009). Solidarity trade union has been playing this role for its members in terms of its value chains. *Section 25 of the Labour Relations Act* gives a right of existence to these activities by making provision for agency shop fees that may not be used for any purpose that does not advance and protect the socio-economic interests of the employees.

Solidarity, as every other organisation, is faced with a fictitious gap between the strategy and the successful execution thereof, and this gap can be bridged by effective leadership styles and accordingly the readiness by subordinates of both the Executive Committee and the National Executive, which comprises the senior management of Solidarity. The Executive Committee comprises the General Secretary, together with four Deputy General Secretaries. The National Executive comprises Departmental Heads who report to the Deputy General Secretaries. The main difference between the Executive Committee and the National Executive is the fact that the Executive Committee is primarily responsible for a strategy for the solidarity movement, while the latter has more functional responsibilities within Solidarity Trade Union. The organisation's control lies with the Executive Committee, while divisional control lies with the National Executive. Another distinction is the fact that the Executive Committee is characterised by the general management of solidarity, while the National Executive is characterised by specialist management within the organisation. The next area will explore the varied leadership styles.

LEADERSHIP THEORY

The researchers embarked on an extensive consultation of various literatures to obtain a relevant leadership theory appropriate for the study. Some of the literatures consulted include the Trait theory of leadership, the Behavioural School, McGregor's Theory X and Y, Blake and Mouton's Managerial grid, Fiedler's Contingency Model, Tannenbaum and Schmidt's Leadership Continuum, Adiar's Action-Centred Leadership model, and finally the Hersey and Blanchard's Situational Leadership model. The Hersey and Blanchard's situation leadership model seems more favourable for the purpose of the study. Hence, the research is based on Hersey and Blanchard leadership Model.

The Hersey-Blanchard leadership model is a situational

perspective of leadership, which suggests that the readiness levels of a leader's subordinates play the utmost role in determining, which leadership style is appropriate. According to Bolden et al. (2003) and Hersey et al. (2008), Hersey and Blanchard's theory is based on the amount of direction, or task behaviour, and socio-emotional support, or relationship behaviour that a leader must apply in a given situation, according to the readiness levels of the followers, as explained in Figure 1. Hersey and Blanchard also distinguish between a model and a theory. According to them, a theory attempts to explain why things happen as they do, while a model is a pattern of already existing events that can be learned and, therefore, repeated. Hersey et al. (2008), therefore, refer to situational leadership as a model and not a theory, because its concepts, procedures, actions, and outcomes are based on tested methodologies that are practical, easy to apply, and repeatable.

The continuum of performance readiness, as illustrated in Figure 1, can be divided into four levels whereby each level represents a different combination of follower ability and willingness or confidence (Hersey et al., 2008):

Performance readiness level 1 (R1): The follower is unable and insecure and, therefore, lacks confidence, commitment and motivation. It also includes behavioural indicators such as not performing a task to acceptable levels, being intimidated by tasks, being unclear about directions, postponements of tasks or not finishing tasks, asking questions about the task, engaging in task avoiding techniques and being defensive or uncomfortable.

Performance readiness level 2 (R2): The follower is unable and lacks ability, but is confident as long as the leader is there to provide guidance. He is also willing, motivated and makes an effort. This performance readiness level is also characterised by the fact that the follower is anxious or excited, interested and responsive, demonstrates moderate ability, is receptive to inputs, attentive enthusiastic and has no experience.

Performance readiness level 3 (R3): The follower is able, but insecure and unwilling. The follower has the ability to perform that task, but is insecure or apprehensive about doing it alone and might not be willing to use that ability. The follower also demonstrates knowledge and ability, but appears hesitant to complete a task or to take the next step, seems scared, overwhelmed and confused, seems reluctant to perform alone and needs frequent feedback.

Performance readiness level 4 (R4): The follower is able and confident or willing and has the ability to perform, is confident about doing it and committed. The follower also keeps the leader informed of the task's progress, can operate autonomously, is result-oriented, shares both good and bad news, makes effective

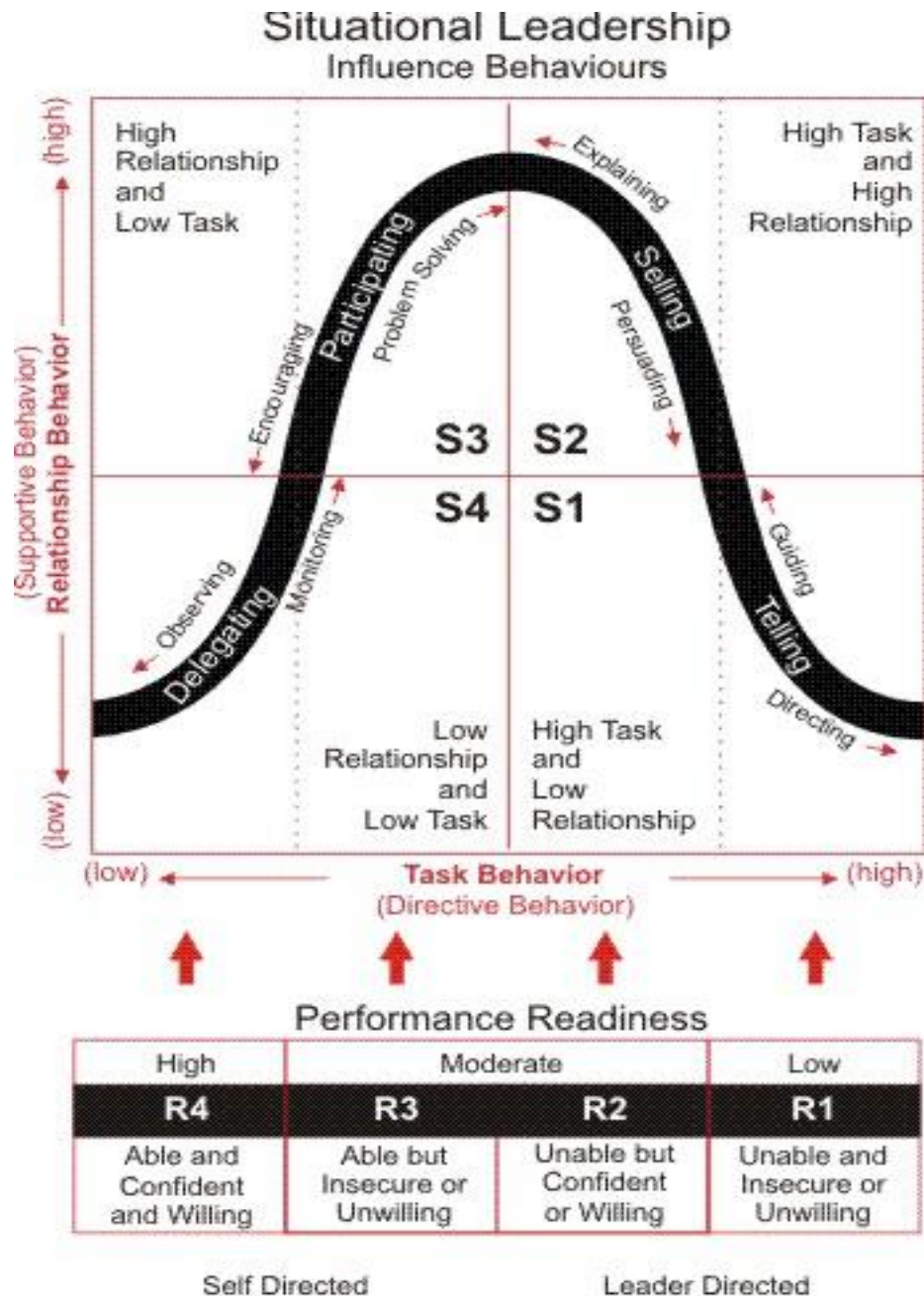


Figure 1. Situational leadership model. Source: Hersey et al. (2008).

decisions regarding the task, performs to high standards and is aware of expertise.

As followers move from low levels of performance readiness to higher levels, the combinations of task and relationship behaviour, which are appropriate to the situation, begin to change. However, in order to use the model, there is a need to identify a point on the performance readiness continuum that represents follower performance readiness to undertake a specific task. This is followed by the construction of a perpendicular line

from that point to a point where it intersects with the curved line, which represents the leader's behaviour. This point indicates the most appropriate task behaviour and relationship behaviour for that specific situation. The curved line never goes to either the lower left or the lower right corner. In both quadrants 1 and 4, there are combinations of both task and relationship behaviour. Style 1 always has some relationship behaviour and style 4 always has some task behaviour, and it is not an option to have zero or no amount of task and/or relationship

behaviour demonstrated.

Style S1: Is referred to as the telling style because the leader should tell the followers what to do, where to do it, and how to do it. This style is also appropriate when an individual or group is low in ability and willingness, and needs direction. The leader should provide specifics by referring to who, what, when, where and how. The leader should further define the role, inform the follower by means of one-way communication, rely on leader-made decisions, closely supervise the tasks, take accountability, give incremental instructions, and keep the instructions simple and specific (Hersey et al., 2008).

S2 style: Is selling. It is different from telling, since the leader provides not only the guidance, but also the opportunity for dialogue and for clarification in order to help the person “buy in” to what the leader wants. The follower might tend to ask questions and seek clarification even though the leader has provided the guidance. The leader should provide who, what, when, where and how. The leader should also explain decisions, allow opportunity for clarification, allow for two-way dialogue, rely on leader-made decisions, explain the follower’s role, ask questions to clarify ability, levels and reinforce small improvements (Hersey et al., 2008).

Style S3: Is the participating style, and in this case the appropriate behaviour would be high levels of two-way communication and supportive behaviour, but low levels of guidance, and since the group has already shown that they are able to perform the task, it is not necessary to provide high levels of what to do, where to do it, or how to do it. Discussion, support, and facilitating behaviours tend to be more appropriate to solve problems or soothe the apprehension. In participating the leader’s major role becomes encouraging and communicating. According to Hersey et al. (2008), the leader should encourage input, listen actively, rely on follower-made decisions and encourage two-way communications and involvement. The leader should further support the follower in taking risks, complimenting the follower’s work and praising and building confidence amongst the followers. The leader will be successful in giving instructions when he/she engages in participating, encouraging, supporting and empowering, but will be unsuccessful if he/she patronises, placates, condescends and pacifies.

Style S4: According to Hersey et al. (2008), is the delegating style, where it is unnecessary for the leader to provide direction about where, what, when, or how, because the followers already have the ability to do so based on their own abilities. Similarly, above-average levels of encouraging and supportive behaviours are not necessary because the group is confident, committed, and motivated. The appropriate style involves giving them the ball and letting them run with it and, therefore, the

style is called delegating. Hence this leadership style includes observing and monitoring. However, the leader cannot completely do away with all forms of relationship and some relationship behaviour is, therefore, still needed, but tends to be less than average. It is still appropriate to monitor what goes on, but it is important to give these followers an opportunity to take responsibility and implement instructions independently (Hersey et al., 2008).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research adopted a combination of qualitative and quantitative research methods in order to gain a better understanding of the research problem that was identified, in order to obtain trustworthy and valid results. This combination of research approaches is also known as triangulation. Bryman and Bell (2007) define triangulation as the use of more than one method or source of data in a study of a social phenomenon, so that the findings may be cross-checked. Singleton and Straits (2005) collaborate on the definition by adding that the word triangulation stems from the field of navigation, which helps to describe the use of multiple approaches to a research problem. The methods of data collection included official documents; interviews, and the distribution of closed-ended questionnaires. A pilot study was undertaken with the aim of ascertaining the quality and validity of the questions asked in the questionnaire. The questionnaire was amended based on feedbacks from the pilot study before it was distributed to respondents. The study was conducted amongst senior management members at solidarity, in order to rationally determine the performance readiness of the subordinates of Executive Committee and the National Executive, in addition to the leadership style of the Executive Committee and National Executive.

Data collection

The aforementioned data were collected by means of a structured questionnaire, which solicited responses from employees and members who were willing to participate in the investigation on a voluntary and anonymous basis. The means of data collection through questionnaire were by e-mail and physical contact depending on the respondents’ choice.

Pilot study

A pilot study was conducted on five people, namely the Chief Executive Officer of Solidarity, two Deputy Chief Executive Officers of Solidarity, a member of Solidarity’s National Executive and the researcher’s study leader. The aim was to address the quality and validity of the questions in questionnaire. Ambiguous and complex questions were amended before the questionnaires were floated to respondents.

Interviews

The interview undertaken was meant to obtain reliable information from the interviewees. It was done through a semi-structured conversation based on a pre-arranged set of questions, which differentiate it from ordinary daily conversations. This Face-to-face semi structured interviews were conducted with the Chief Executive Officer and the three Deputy Chief Executive Officers of Solidarity. The interviews took approximately 50 min to complete.

Structuring the questionnaire

A self-administered questionnaire was constructed to solicit data with regard to various variables that would be examined in the investigation such as the biographical data of respondents, but excluded names or any other means of identifying respondents. The questionnaire relied on a 6-point Likert type evaluation scale, which was attached to each question.

As already mentioned, the purpose of this research was to evaluate the current leadership styles within solidarity and to determine whether it is sufficient and effective in order to render the required services to its members; to evaluate the readiness levels of the followers of solidarity's executive management; and to determine whether the current leadership styles of solidarity's executive management is in accordance with the readiness and demands of its followers. An electronic mail was sent to respondents prior to the distribution of the questionnaires, informing them about the intended study, the purpose of the study and the contribution that the study can make to their workplace. The drafted questionnaire included a total of 108 questions in all four sections, together with subsections. The questionnaire began with profile questions and then moved to specific closed ended questions, which addressed the research objectives. Although the use of closed-ended questions might lack depth and variety owing a lack of discussion and explanation, it provided clear and more reliable answers.

Review of official document

Minutes of Executive Council and National Executive meetings, as well literature listed in the bibliography, were reviewed as a source of secondary data, to obtain information regarding the historical background of solidarity, as well as decisions made regarding the managerial structure and the nature of the organisation. The next area focuses on the data analysis.

Data analysis

The output of this study's descriptive statistics was interpreted from box plots. Leonard (2009) describes *abox plot* as a graph that portrays the distribution of a data set by reference to the values at the quartiles as location measures and the value of the interquartile range as the reference measure of variability, and is a relatively easy way of graphing data and observing the extent of skewness in the distribution. Leonard also refers to the box plot as a "box-and-whisker plot". Pallant (2007) states that the output from box plot provides a lot of information about the distribution of the continuous variable and the possible influence of the other categorical variables. Each distribution of scores is represented by a box of protruding lines called whiskers. The length of the box is the variable's interquartile range and contains 50% of cases. The line across the inside of the box represents the median value, and the whiskers protruding from the box go out to the variable's smallest and largest values.

Analysis related to the performance readiness of the subordinates of the National Executive

As Figure 2 shows, the participants believe that the performance readiness levels of the subordinates of the National Executive are more likely to be on level R2 and level R4, while the subordinates are the least likely to be on levels R3 and R1. Figure 2 also shows that the median of the level R2 is the highest and that the box, which represents 50% of the answers, is the shortest. This means that 50% of the answers are mostly concentrated in level R2. The whiskers of the box plot of level R2 are also more equally

distributed on both sides and the standard deviation is also the lowest, which is indicative of less deviation from the mean of the group or, in other words, less members of a group differ from the mean value of the group. Although level R2 scored the highest rating, level R4 was also evaluated as high.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The box plot shows that the subordinates of the National Executive are the least likely to be on readiness levels R1 and 3. Both levels R1 and 3 scored a much lower rating in relation to levels R2 and 4, and it is difficult to make an exception between levels R1 and 3. Followers on level R1 are unable and insecure and, therefore, lack confidence, commitment and motivation. It also includes behavioural indicators such as not performing a task to acceptable levels; being intimidated by tasks; being unclear about directions; postponements of tasks or not finishing tasks; asking questions about the task; engaging in task-avoiding techniques; and being defensive or uncomfortable. It is also observed from the box plot that followers on level R3 are able, but are also insecure and unwilling. The followers have the ability to perform a task, but are insecure or apprehensive about doing it alone and might not be willing to use that ability. The followers also demonstrate knowledge and ability, but appear hesitant to complete a task or to take the next step; they seem scared, overwhelmed, confused and reluctant to perform alone. They also need frequent feedbacks.

It was also indicated that the readiness level of the subordinates of the National Executive results in the fact that they are most likely to be confident, as long as the leader is there to provide guidance, while they are also willing, motivated and make an effort to perform a task. They also tend to be anxious or excited; are interested and responsive; demonstrate moderate ability; and are receptive to inputs. The followers may be attentive, enthusiastic and may have a lack of experience; be able to keep leaders informed of the task's progress; be able to operate autonomously; are result oriented; share both good and bad news; and make moderate to effective decisions regarding their tasks.

Inferences drawn from the face-to-face interviews revealed that the interviewees disagreed with the assumption that the subordinates were insecure in the execution of their duties and tasks. They believed that the subordinates of the Executive Committee were rather positive; excited about their jobs; can make effective decisions; and were neither overwhelmed, nor confused about their responsibilities. The interviewees further agreed that the senior subordinates of the National Executive did not show insecurity, but some of the more junior and newly appointed subordinates may have shown some insecurity. They stated that this tendency was owing to the challenging nature of trade unionism and the fear of disappointing or failing their constituencies in representing them during workplace forums, litigation processes, collective bargaining, retrenchment

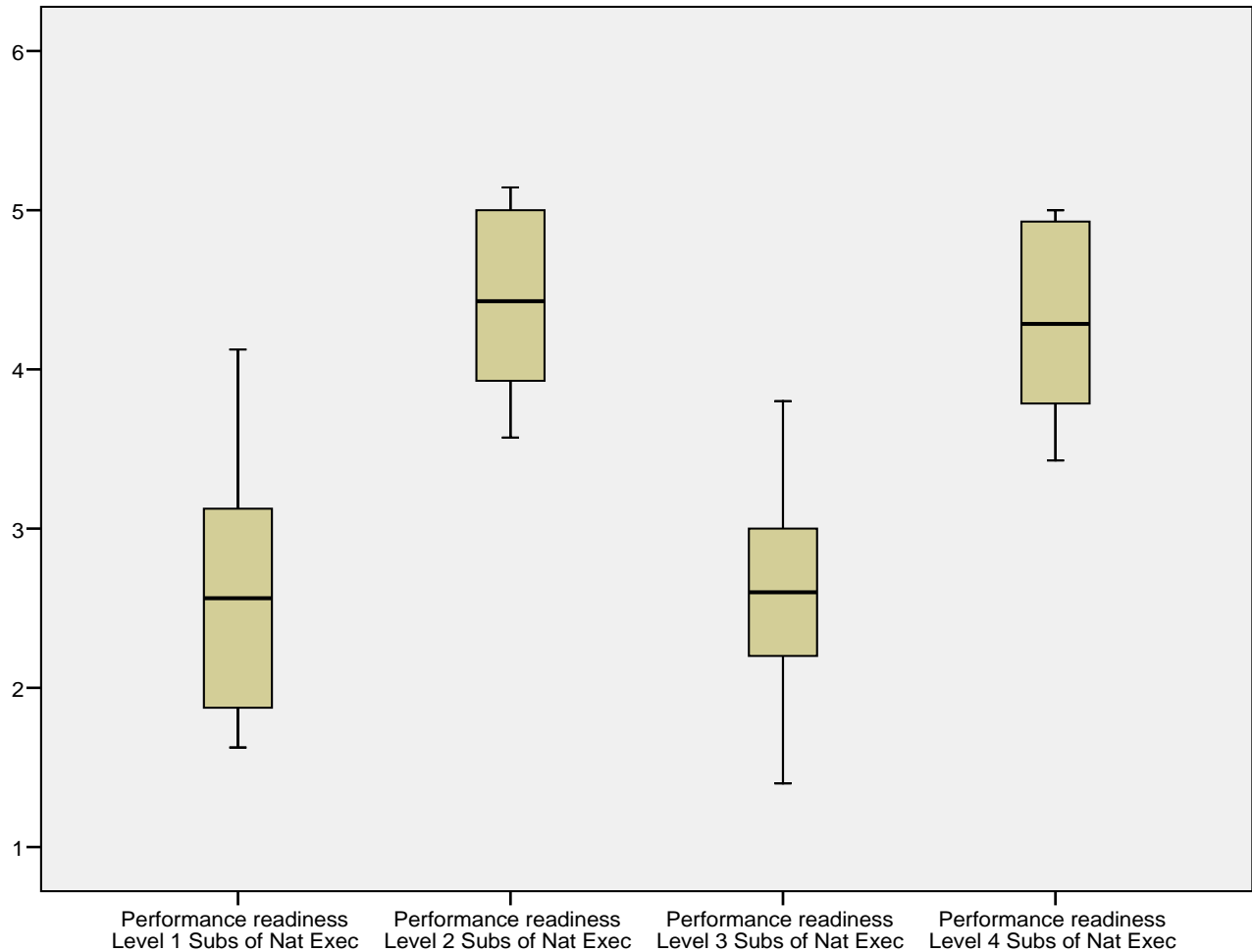


Figure 2. Performance readiness of the subordinates of the National Executive.

consultations, wage bargaining and negotiations, which relate to changes in the members' conditions of service. Hence, in these circumstances the subordinates required a lot of guidance and support until they gained the necessary self-confidence in order for them to execute their duties independently without hesitation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the aforementioned analysis, it is worthwhile to chart out some few tangible recommendations in the conclusion as under:

Match performance readiness level 1 with the leadership style 1 – Telling

For a follower or a group of subordinates that is at performance readiness level 1 (R1) for a specific task, it is more appropriate to provide a high level of guidance,

but little supportive behaviour. Style R1, also referred to as the telling style, because the leader should tell followers what to do, where to do it, and how to do it. This style is also appropriate when an individual or group does not have much ability or willingness and requires direction. To adopt style S1, the senior management of solidarity should provide specifics by referring to who, what, when, where and how. They should further define the role; engage with followers by means of one-way communication; rely on leader-made decisions; closely supervise the tasks; take accountability; give incremental instructions; and keep the instructions simple and specific. The findings indicate that the subordinates of both the Executive Committee and the National Executive are least likely to be on level R1, but it emerged from the study that some individuals might be on readiness level R1 and that senior management will, therefore, be successful in giving instructions when they engage in telling, guiding, directing and establishing, but will be unsuccessful if they demand, demean, dominate and attack the individual follower that is at performance

readiness level 1.

Match performance readiness level 2 with the leadership style 2 – Selling

The next range of performance readiness is performance readiness level R2, which refers to an individual or group that is still unable, but are willing or confident. The high-probability styles are combinations of high levels of both task and relationship behaviour. The task behaviour is appropriate because people are still unable, but since the followers are trying, it is important to be supportive of their motivation and commitment. The performance readiness of the subordinates of the National Executive scored the highest rating on level R2. The National Executive should, therefore, engage with an S2 style, namely the selling style. It is different from telling, since the leader not only provides the guidance, but also an opportunity for dialogue and clarification in order to help the person “buy in” to what the leader wants. The subordinates might tend to ask questions and obtain clarification, even though the leader has provided the guidance. The National Executive should provide who, what, when, where and how and also should explain decisions; allow opportunity for clarification; allow for two-way dialogue; rely on leader-made decisions; explain the follower’s role; ask questions to clarify ability levels; and reinforce small improvements. Finally, the National Executive will be successful in giving instructions when engaging in selling, explaining, clarifying and persuading, but will be unsuccessful if he/she manipulates, preaches, defends and rationalises with subordinates who are at performance readiness level R2.

Match performance readiness level 3 with the leadership style 3 – Participating

Performance readiness level R3 would include a person or group that is merely able but have not had an opportunity to gain confidence in doing things on their own, and could also be a person or group that is able and willing, but for one reason or another, lacks motivation. Perhaps the person is upset, annoyed at the supervisor, or is merely tired of performing this behaviour and therefore, becomes unwilling. In either case, the appropriate behaviour required from senior management would be high levels of two-way communication and supportive behaviour, but low levels of guidance, and because the group has already shown that they are able to perform the task, it is not necessary to provide high levels of what to do, where to do it, or how to do it. Discussion, support, and facilitating behaviours would tend to be more appropriate to solve problems or soothe the apprehension. In the participating style, the leader’s major role becomes encouraging and communicating. Although the subordinates of both the Executive

Committee and the National Executive are the least likely to be on level R3, senior management should engage in an appropriate style S3 to accommodate those individual subordinates who might be on readiness level R3. Senior management should encourage input, listen actively, rely on follower-made decisions and encourage two-way communication and involvement. Senior management should also support followers in taking risks; compliment the follower’s work; and praise and build confidence amongst followers. Senior management will be successful in giving instructions when they engage in participating, encouraging, supporting and empowering, but will be unsuccessful if they patronise, placate, condescend and pacify.

Match performance readiness level 4 with the leadership style 4- Delegating

Performance readiness level R4 is where the individual or group is both able and willing or able and confident. The subordinates of the Executive Committee were most likely to be on performance readiness level R4, which means that they have had enough opportunity to practice, gain experience and feel comfortable without the leader providing direction. It is unnecessary for the Executive Committee to provide direction about where, what, when, or how because the followers already have an ability to do so based on their own abilities. Similarly, above-average levels of encouraging and supportive behaviours are not necessary because the group is confident, committed, and motivated. The appropriate style involves giving them the ball and letting them run with it and, therefore, the style is referred to as delegating. In other words, this leadership style includes observing and monitoring. The leader cannot completely do away with all forms of relationship, while some relationship behaviour is indeed needed, it should be less than average. It is still appropriate to monitor what goes on, but it is important to give these followers an opportunity to take responsibility in the overall performance of the tasks. The aforementioned is what is known as empowered employees.

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