

Full Length Research Paper

Self-leadership: The way forward for African managers?

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Upon examination of African history, changes, controversial issues, new directions and difficulties are typical life events that every person in Africa should adapt to. Self-leadership among African leaders is one method of coping with difficult circumstances. A comprehensive leadership contingency model is described. In this model, important leadership approaches are described, and the application possibilities and outcomes of each leadership approach are explored. From the aforementioned discussions, it is clear that the self-leadership approach to leadership focuses on self-influencing processes in contrast to other leadership processes where more focus is placed on the leader; the work environment in which the self-leadership approach is applied is equivalent to the work environment of high achieving African organizations; the self-leadership approach has the most positive outcomes (particularly in the African living and working contexts). Due to this, the self-leadership approach to leadership is therefore proposed and comprehensively discussed as a way for leaders in the African context to lead in future.

Key words: Self-leadership, leadership, leadership contingency model, management.

INTRODUCTION

Africa faces many challenges in a continually evolving world. One such challenge is globalisation, and African leaders in the political, business and community sectors must compete with leaders from around the world (Alam et al., 2010; Mbigi, 2005). In order to do this, the talents of all employees and leaders are required to create an environment in which all, including the elites, the talented, and the hardworking are willing to make a contribution to Africa's future. For this to take place, trust is a prerequisite, as is the belief that better is possible. This requires overcoming the voices of the past (Khoza, 2005).

Upon examination of African history, changes, controversial issues, new directions and difficulties are typical life events which every African should adapt to. Changes/difficulties/new directions (for instance adaptation to western ways of thinking/living, poverty, new legislation and affirmative action, inequalities, urbanization, and HIV/Aids) result in feelings of inferiority, anxiety, insecurity and fear (Van Zyl, 2007, 2009; Dorasamy, 2010; Agumba and Fester, 2010).

Serious and numerous incidents of corruption and crime, as well as the emigration of African individuals to different overseas destinations, are also indications of self-neglect, self-dissociation and difficulty in coping

with circumstances.

What is required therefore is that individuals in Africa (and African organisations) address self-neglect and self-dissociation in order to cope with difficult circumstances. Self-leadership among leaders in Africa is one method of coping with difficult circumstances. Mbigi (2005) indicated that self-leadership amongst leaders in Africa should also incorporate typical African values and beliefs.

The aim of this qualitative literate discussion therefore is to discuss an appropriate and relevant leadership approach for leaders/managers in the African working situation which could serve as a guideline in most leadership situations.

LEADERSHIP IN THE AFRICAN CONTEXT

Leadership defined

Various researchers and practitioners defined leadership differently, of which the following are examples:

- i) The capacity of a person to influence people (Kouzes and Posner, 1993).
- ii) The process of influencing an organized group towards

Broad Environment

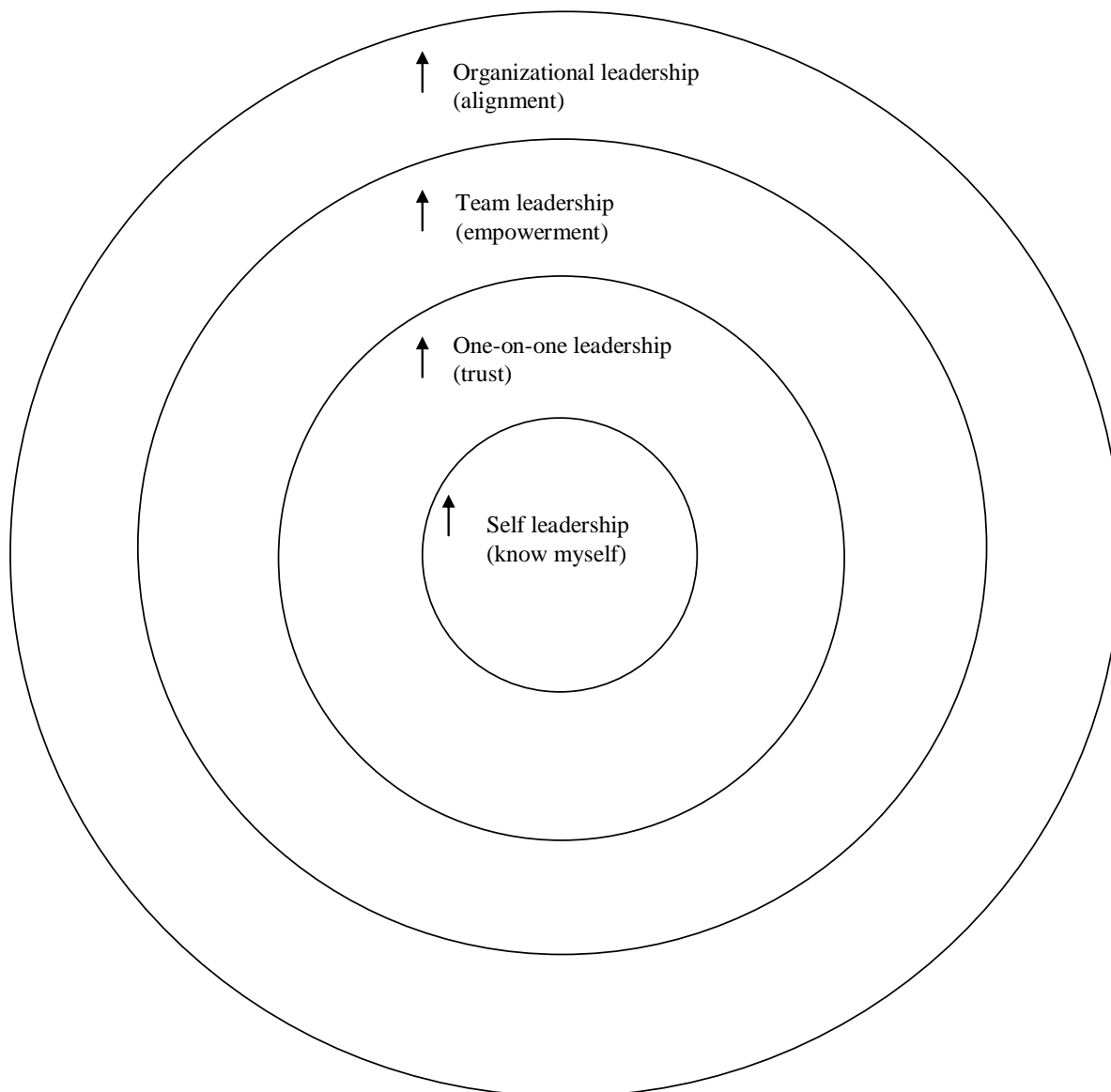


Figure 1. Four levels of leadership in organizational context (Blanchard, 2007).

accomplishing goals (Avolia and Luthans, 2006).

iii) An interpersonal relation in which others comply because they want to, not because they have to (Covey, 1996; Irving, 2011).

Blanchard (2007) summarised the aforementioned definitions of leadership as the capacity to influence others by unleashing their power and potential to impact upon the greater good. Blanchard (2007) however indicated that the aforementioned process can take place on four levels, as indicated in Figure 1. According to

Blanchard (2007), effective leadership in an organizational context follows the sequence as set out in Figure 1, namely, self-leadership (one must lead oneself before one can lead others), followed by one-on-one leadership, team leadership and lastly organizational leadership. Covey (1996) indicated that leaders can move to a higher standard of leadership using an inside-out based approach. However, this self-leadership (inside-out based) approach should, according to Covey (1996), include a principle-centred character based on the development of values and the internal power inside

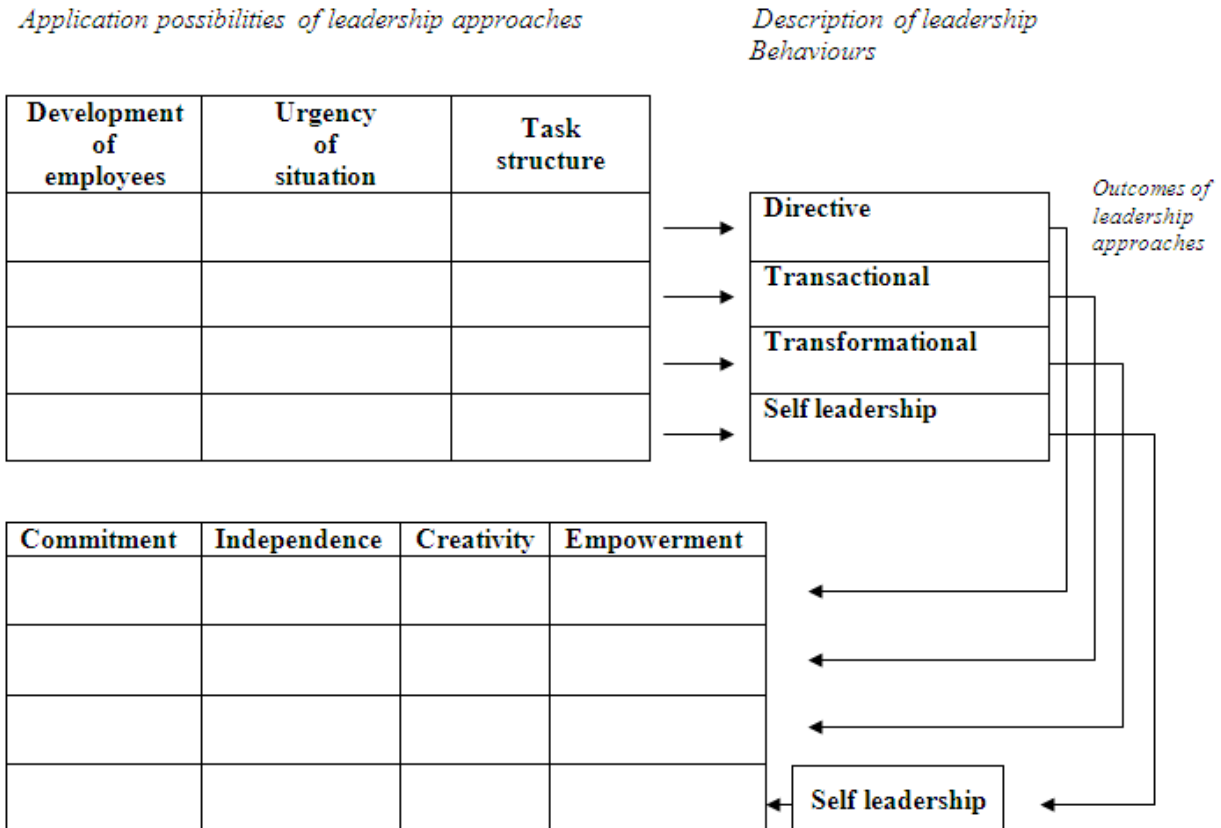


Figure 2. A leadership contingency model (Houghton and Yoho, 2006).

oneself.

Important leadership approaches

Over the years, leadership researchers described various leadership approaches and styles. A large number of approaches were summarized in a typology of leadership approaches by Manz and Sims (1991) and identified by other researchers (Chodhury, 2003; Pearce, 2004; Irving, 2011; Shastri et al., 2010) as follows: directive, transactional, transformational and self-leadership approaches. Houghton et al. (2006) developed a comprehensive leadership contingency model, in which important leadership approaches are not only described, but the application possibilities and outcomes of each approach are also discussed. From Figure 2, the application possibilities of the various leadership approaches include the following: level of development of subordinates, urgency of the situation, and the degree to which the task is structured. The outcomes of the different leadership approaches include the degree of subordinate commitment, dependency, creativity, and levels of empowerment (Houghton and Yoho, 2006).

The most important leadership approaches, the working environment in which the various leadership approaches can be implemented effectively, and the

outcomes of the various leadership approaches, will subsequently be described.

Description of leadership approaches

Within the leadership contingency model, the description of the most important leadership approaches Figure 3 can be represented thus:

1. Directive leadership approaches include giving specific task-focused direction by means of direct orders, direct supervision and constant follow-up (Houghton and Yoho, 2006). With this approach to leadership, power bases are utilized (French et al., 1959) to influence subordinates. The theoretical origin of the directive leadership approach is situated in initiating behaviour as defined by the Ohio leadership studies (Stogdill and Coons, 1951), and task-oriented behaviour as identified in the Michigan studies (Katz et al., 1950).
2. In transactional leadership approaches the focus is on creating remuneration systems to obtain the co-operation of subordinates (Bass, 1985). The idea of a transactional approach to leadership reflects a considerable amount of research, including the expectation theories (Vroom, 1964), equality theories (Homans, 1958) and reinforcement theories (Skinner, 1953). The expectation

Application possibilities of leadership approaches

Description of leadership Behaviours

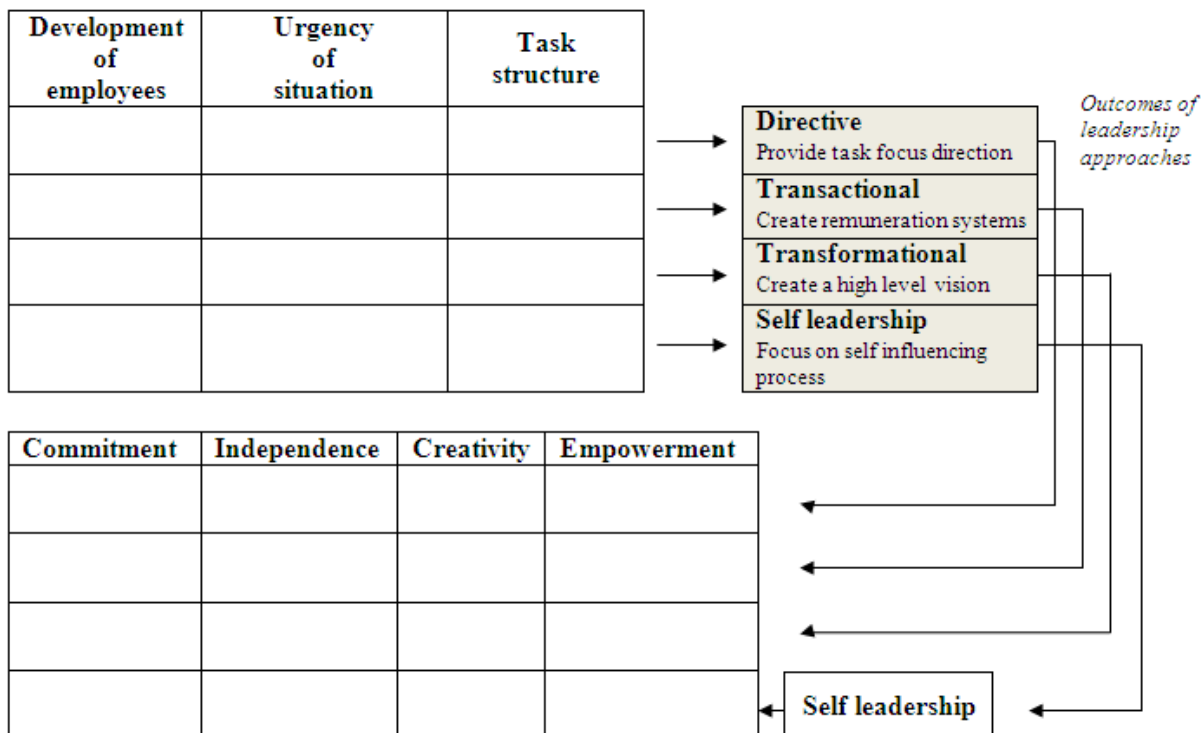


Figure 3. Description of the most important leadership approaches as part of a leadership contingency model (Houghton and Yoho, 2006).

theories imply that individuals will evaluate behavioural choices on the basis of three variables: valence (the attractiveness of the outcome associated with specific behaviour); instrumentality (the subjective probability that specific behaviour could lead to a certain outcome); and expectation (the subjective possibility that a certain attempt will lead to a certain level of behaviour). Equality theories imply that individuals strive to obtain equality between input and output. In reinforcement theories behaviour is reinforced by achieving a certain income.

3. Transformational leadership approaches are often compared to transactional leadership approaches. In transformational leadership approaches a vision is created in a charismatic manner and communicated to all subordinates. This vision creates an emotional response and ensures the involvement of subordinates (Houghton and Yoho, 2006). The theoretical foundations of the transformational leadership approach include the concept of charisma (Weber, 1949), charismatic leadership theory (Conger and Kanungo, 1987; Irving, 2011), and transformational leadership (Bass, 1985). Typical transformational leadership behaviours include charismatic influencing, creating a vision, inspirational communication and motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individual consideration.

4. In self-leadership approaches, the focus is on self-influencing processes rather than hierarchical control processes. The focus is also on self-observation, self-discovery and self-development strategies (Houghton and Yoho, 2006; Bud West and Bocarnea, 2008). In the self-leadership approach the modelling of self-leadership behaviour is emphasized to enable subordinates to learn the behaviour (Elloy, 2004). In contrast to the directive leadership approach, where objectives are set for subordinates, participative objective-setting is encouraged in the self-leadership concept, in other words, subordinates establish and try to achieve their own objectives (Manz and Sims, 2002).

Application possibilities of different leadership approaches

From Figure 4, it is apparent that the directive leadership approach would be most effective in situations where the development of subordinates is low (or where the possibility of development in the long run is low), the urgency of the situation is low and tasks are structured. The transactional leadership approach would be most effective in situations where development of subordinates

Application possibilities of leadership approaches

Description of leadership behaviours

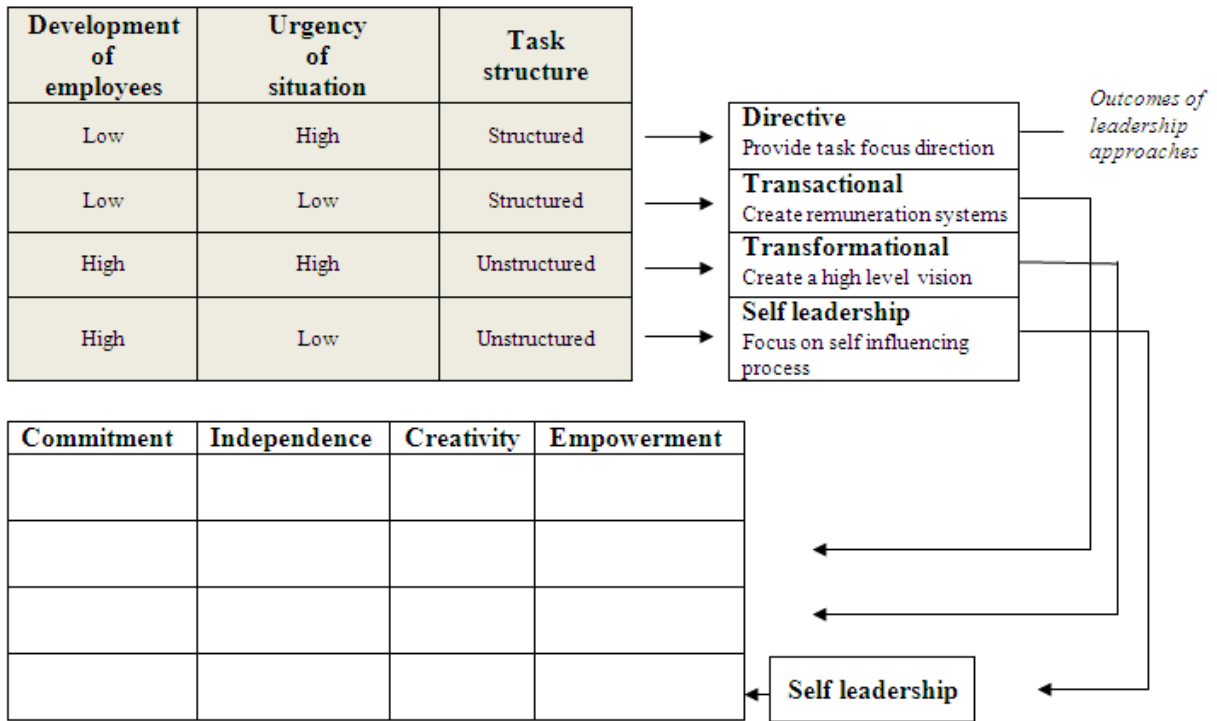


Figure 4. Application possibilities of the different leadership approaches as part of a contingency leadership model (Houghton and Yoho, 2006).

is low, the urgency of the situation is low and tasks are structured. On the other hand, the transformational leadership approach would be most effective in situations where the development of subordinates is high, the urgency of the situation is also high and the tasks are unstructured (in other words interesting and varied). The self-leadership approach would be most effective in situations where the development of employees is high, the urgency of the situation is low (in other words where there are not on-going crisis situations) and the tasks are unstructured (are complex in other words).

As a matter of interest, the environment in which self-leadership can be applied is compared to high-achievement African organizations. Schreuder and Theron (2001) identified a number of characteristics of high achieving African organizations as follows: the learning organization concept which means on-going learning of employees, strategic vision balanced by flexible planning for turbulent competitive environments, extensive responsibilities focused on work broadening, work expansion and work deepening, and finally work organized around processes and not functions. The learning organization concept therefore corresponds with the high development level of subordinates, strategic vision balanced by flexible planning for turbulent

environments corresponds with low urgency (low crisis) in the situation, and extended responsibilities as well as the organization of work around processes correspond with unstructured (complex) task environments. The environment in which self-leadership is applied therefore agrees with the work environment of high achieving African companies.

Outcomes of different leadership approaches as part of a contingency leadership model

As shown in Figure 5, the directive as well as the transactional leadership approaches would result in low subordinate commitment, dependent behaviour, and low levels of creativity and empowerment. The outcomes of the transformational leadership approach would include high commitment, dependent behaviour and average levels of creativity and empowerment. Finally, the self-leadership approach would imply high levels of commitment, independent behaviour, and high levels of creativity and empowerment. The earlier discussion of the outcomes of the different leadership approaches demonstrate that the self-leadership approach reflects the most positive outcomes.

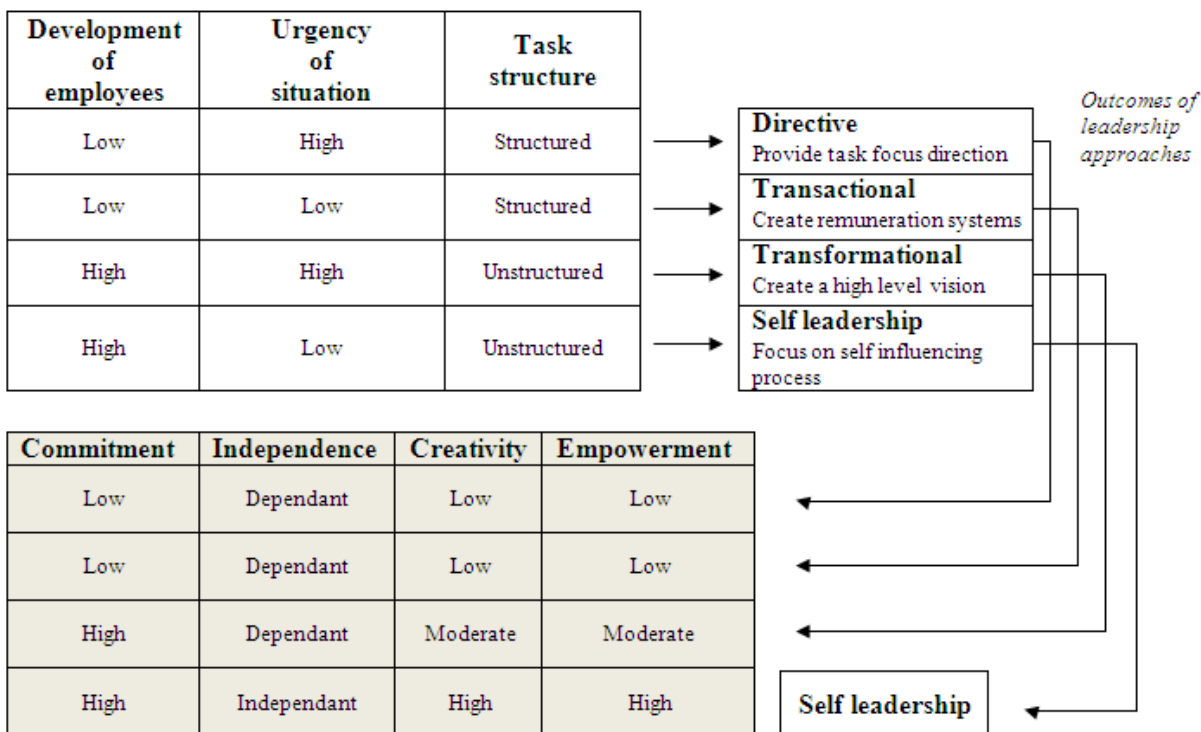


Figure 5. Outcomes of the different leadership approaches (Houghton en Yoho, 2006).

Evaluation of the outcomes of the different leadership approaches within the African context

It is important that African leaders and workers be independent, psychologically empowered, creative/innovative, and committed, specifically in the African living and working set-up. It is also important that employees originating from typical African traditions should be able to conform and identify with these outcomes.

Manz (2001) indicated that the process of independence begins with the individual, who identifies strong and weak points and develops further. By being aware of ‘who I am’ and ‘what I need to develop’, feelings of self-worth and self-respect will be promoted and feelings of inferiority, anxiety, fear and uncertainty will be countered (Coetzee, 2001). Mbigi (2005) and Agumba and Fester (2010) indicated that independence in the sense of self-knowledge and self-worth can be utilized in the best interest of fellow Africans.

Shonhiwa (2006) however emphasises that if independence is applied for personal preference and not for the advantage of the group (African traditions focus on group functioning), employees with typical African traditions will not identify and conform. According to Kouzes and Posner (1993), whose research focused on principle and value-centred leadership, individual performance should always be assessed according to the

contribution to group performance. By doing this, personal preferences will always be inferior to group interests, and to the best interest of the organisation.

However, in order to be independent, leaders/employees have to be empowered. Blanchard (2007) as well as Zaidi et al. (2010) described empowerment as the passing of decision-making authority and responsibility from managers to group members. Lee and Koh (2001) indicated that feelings of empowerment lead to perceptions of meaningfulness, purposefulness, self-determination and competency. Psychological empowerment starts with leadership, and self-leadership is most likely the best way of achieving this. Empowered individuals would very likely live less prescriptively and follow their own preferences.

Van Rensburg (2007) indicated that it is important that empowered employees help co-workers to accept responsibilities. He indicated that responsibilities within the traditional African culture are easily shifted to the group as a whole. By doing this, the group’s responsibility easily becomes nobody’s responsibility. If empowered individuals utilized purposefulness and self-determination to the advantage of the group, each group member would readily accept responsibility and act on it. Once more, group objectives and group performance however should be emphasised.

To merely experience feelings of independence and empowerment, however, will not be sufficient to adapt to

Application possibilities of leadership approaches

Description of leadership Behaviours

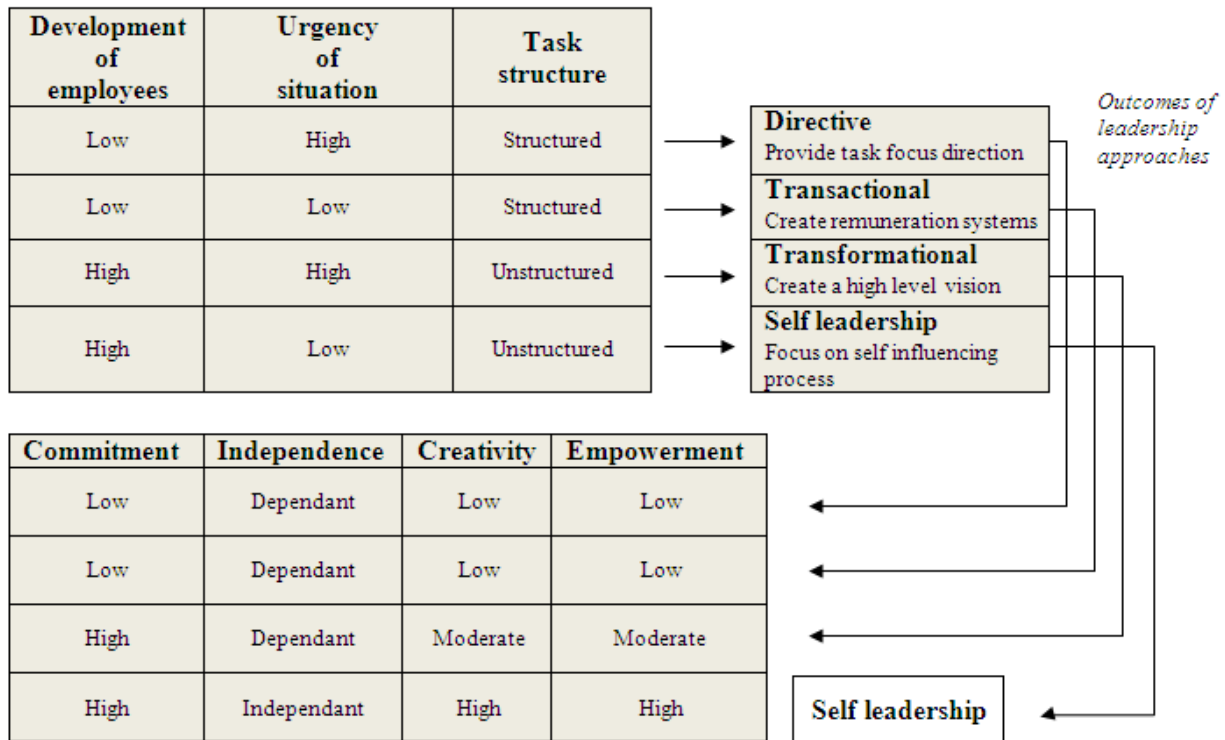


Figure 6. Description, applicability and outcomes of different leadership approaches in a contingency leadership model (Houghton and Yoho, 2006).

difficult/pressurizing work demands. Grobler et al. (2006) indicated that high achieving African companies such as De Beers, and certain large African banking groups found that workers/groups who showed creativity/innovation displayed better quality, cost control and speed in finalizing tasks. Grobler et al. (2006) stated that African companies found that innovation led to greater flexibility, lower operational costs and more rapid adjustment to technological changes. Van Rensburg (2007) indicated that employees from typical African traditions will accept the advantages of creativity if they can express their feelings of innovation by means of poetry, stories, dramas and song. By doing this employees feel in contact with their past and ancestors.

Apart from being independent and empowered, as well as being creative, it is also important for African workers to be dedicated. Houghton and Yoho (2006) pointed out that individuals involved in self-leadership practices developed a feeling of ownership regarding their tasks, the group they were working in and work processes. As a result, the assumption can be made that high self-leadership individuals will display higher levels of dedication to tasks, objectives, teams and organizations than individuals who do not exercise self-leadership practices. Dedicated employees will therefore work

harder than other workers, based on internal and self-motivation theories (Manz, 2001). Van Rensburg (2007) indicated that if team functioning and performance is emphasized, employees from typically African traditions will be self-motivated, which will support them in being dedicated workers.

Work satisfaction and trust can be the outcome of dedicated workers' corporations. Houghton and Yoho (2006) demonstrated the relation between work satisfaction and dedication to work, and how this can result in trust among employees.

Description, applicability and outcomes of different leadership approaches

From the mentioned model (Figure 6) and previous discussion, it is clear that:

- i. The self-leadership approach to leadership focuses on self-influencing processes in contrast to other leadership processes where the focus is more on the leader;
- ii. The work environment in which the self-leadership approach is applied concurs largely with the work environment of high achieving African organizations; and

iii. The self-leadership approach has the most positive outcomes (particularly in the African living and working contexts).

METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

As already discussed, the aim of this qualitative literature discussion is to discuss an appropriate and relevant leadership approach for leaders/managers in the African working situation which could serve as a guideline in most leadership situations. Based on previous discussion, this study presumes that the self-leadership approach to leadership has the most positive outcomes (particularly in the African living and working context). In view of this, the self-leadership approach will now be presented thus.

Self-leadership

Recognizing self-control systems

Abelson (1998) indicated that while organizations provide employees with certain values and beliefs packaged into cultures and corporate visions, individuals too possess their own systems of values, beliefs and visions for their future. Organizations provide an organizational control system that influences individuals, but these systems do not access individual action directly. Rather, the impact of organizational control mechanisms is determined by the way they influence, in intended as well as unintended ways, the self-control systems within individual organization members.

Van Rensburg (2007) indicated that the meaning Africans obtain from cultural values and beliefs are a vital part of their self-control system and how they will act in different situations. He indicated that with the traditional African culture and beliefs (Ubuntu), the focus is primarily on the community and then the individual. With Ubuntu therefore, the focus is on communal fellowship, on the notion that personal survival and salvation lies in the shared destiny with others. Opposed to that, the modern western culture and beliefs are focused primarily on the individual, and secondly on the community or social relationships. Van Rensburg (2007) indicated that the abovementioned cultural impact will have a major effect on how Africans respond to their self-control systems.

The aforementioned perspective suggests that the self-influence system is the ultimate system of control. In addition, it suggests that this internal control system must receive significant attention in its own right before maximum benefits for the organization and employees are realized (Carver and Scheier, 1991).

From an organizational perspective, recognizing and facilitating employee self-regulating systems poses a viable and more realistic view of control than views centred entirely on external influence. Over-reliance on external controls can lead to a number of dysfunctional employee behaviours such as rigid bureaucratic behaviour which eventually leads to work dissatisfaction and lower performance (Manz, 2001).

Definitions

According to Manz and Sims (2002) as well as Manz and Neck (2004) and Manz (1986), self-leadership is a philosophy and a systematic set of actions and mental strategies for leading oneself to higher performance and effectiveness.

Houghton and Neck (2002) defined self-leadership as a process through which individuals control their own behaviour, influencing and leading themselves through the use of specific sets of behavioural and cognitive strategies. Manz and Neck (2004) defined self-leadership as the discovery and maximizing of self-

potential. This should be done so that the individual can lead a preferential and not a prescriptive lifestyle (Coetzee, 2001).

Blanchard (2007) provides a summarized definition of self-leadership as follows: it is a systematic set of actions and mental strategies which individuals apply in order to discover and know themselves better. This information could be used to develop themselves and others (by means of self-influence and other approaches) to maximize their abilities which eventually will lead to higher performance and effectiveness.

Towards a model of self-leadership

Theoretical contents

Self-leadership is rooted in several related theories of self-influence behaviour including self-regulation (Kanfer, 1990; Houghton and Neck, 2002), self-control (Thoresen and Mahoney, 1974) and self-management (Luthans and Davids, 1998). Self-leadership is generally portrayed as a broader concept of self-influence that subsumes the behaviour-focused strategies of self-regulation, self-control and self-management, and then specifies additional sets of cognitively orientated strategies derived from intrinsic motivation theories (Deci et al., 1985), social cognitive theories (Bandura, 1991) and positive cognitive psychology (Seligman, 1991). Thus, drawing from these well-established theoretical foundations, self-leadership comprises specific sets of behavioural and cognitive strategies to shape individual outcomes.

General self-leadership strategies

Self-leadership strategies are often divided into three basic categories consisting of behaviour-focused strategies, natural reward strategies and constructive thought patterns (Anderson and Prussia, 1997; Manz and Neck, 2004; Manz and Sims, 2002; Prussia et al., 1998).

Behaviour-focused strategies: This strategy involves the self-regulation of behaviour through the use of self-assessment, self-reward and self-discipline (Manz, 1986; Manz and Neck, 2004). These strategies are designed to foster positive desirable behaviours while discouraging ineffective behaviours. These strategies include self-observation (for instance the observation and collection of information regarding personal behaviour in order to identify development areas), self-goal setting (for instance the setting of objectives in order to develop development areas), self-reward (for instance providing a personal reward if objectives are reached), self-correcting feedback and practice.

Manz and Sims (2002) indicated that self-observation and self-assessment processes (for instance, feedback from colleagues, subordinates and supervisors and own reflections) are the most important behaviour-focused strategies. By means of self-observation and self-assessment, development areas can be identified and improved upon. Dolbier et al. (2006) stated that self-observation and self-assessment helps leaders to get into contact with the real self. This can include the identification of personal thoughts, emotional needs, beliefs and personal preferences. The contact with the real self helps leaders to act according to that which can enhance satisfaction and significance (Dolbier et al., 2001).

Constructive thought pattern strategies: This strategy includes the evaluation and challenge of irrational beliefs and assumptions as well as mental imagery of successful future performance. Positive self-talk and evaluation of existing habits and ways of thinking (for instance 'am I a problem thinker or an opportunity thinker') can enhance constructive thought patterns (Manz and Neck, 2004).

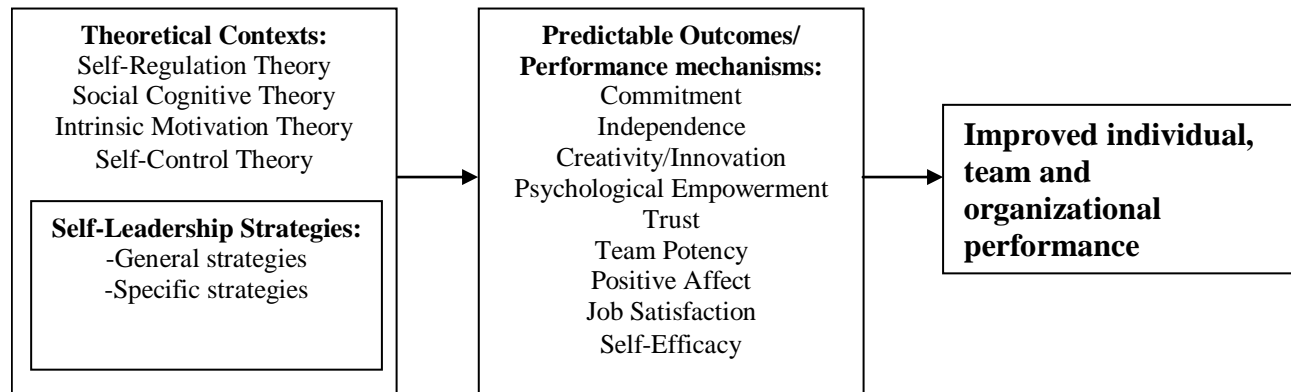


Figure 7. A model of self-leadership (Houghton and Neck, 2002).

Natural reward strategies: This strategy involves seeking out working activities that are inherently enjoyable (Manz, 1986; Manz and Neck, 2004). This set of strategies also includes the focusing of attention on the more pleasant or gratifying aspects of a given job or task rather than on the unpleasant or difficult tasks. Naturally, rewarding activities tend to foster feelings of increased competence, self-control and purpose.

Specific self-leadership strategies

This strategy includes time management, assertiveness training, creativity development and self-motivation. The implementation of general strategies is a pre-requisite for the implementation of specific strategies (for instance, self-assessment should be done in order to determine what specific strategies to use).

Outcomes

According to Houghton and Neck (2002), improved individual, team and organizational performance will be the outcome of applying the self-leadership approach (Figure 7).

RECOMMENDATIONS AND DISCUSSION

Van Rensburg (2007), Manz and Sims (1991) as well as Van Zyl (2009) identified seven steps that African managers can utilise in practise to promote self-leadership practices. They are presented thus:

Step 1- Become a self-leader: Observe and gather information about yourself (including your good points and aspects which can be developed). Focus on those aspects which should be developed, but constantly be aware of your good points;

Step 2 - Model self-leadership: Words should be followed by actions. By setting the example (for instance to control behaviour in difficult situations), will help a lot for followers to do the same;

Step 3 - Encourage setting of self-objectives: Realistic behavioural and cognitive goals/objectives connected to

specific time frames, should be set (for instance to improve time management I am going to compile a 'to do list' first thing every morning and start each day with the most important task. I am going to evaluate my weekly efforts every Friday afternoon before leaving for home);

Step 4 - Create positive thinking patterns: Try to be aware of your own self-talk. If you have constant negative thoughts or patterns of thinking, try to change this. Search for opportunities rather than obstacles. Practise visualising yourself performing well. Work on changing any negative beliefs and assumptions you have about yourself. Utilise positive self-talk (for instance, I am capable of achieving my goals if I am willing to work hard);

Step 5 - Develop self-leadership by means of self-reward/self-correcting behaviour: Self-reward means giving yourself a reward when you have attained an objective. Rewards could include buying a nice book, taking the afternoon/day off or going to your favourite getaway for the weekend. Self-correcting feedback includes to acknowledge it when you did not achieve your goals. Try to understand the reasons for this, seek advice from other people or a professional if needed, and then try again;

Step 6 - Promote self-leadership by means of team work: Be aware of the traditional African culture and beliefs (Ubuntu), and that the focus is primarily on the community (group). Encourage everyone in the group to express their needs and wants and try to accommodate that in group context; and

Step 7 - Facilitate a culture of self-leadership: top management should be committed to a culture of self-leadership and should set the example. Regular communication sessions on successes achieved as well as problems experienced, can be implemented.

It is important to realize that the practical implementation of self-leadership in the current African society will not be easy. Employees who have not discovered and

developed their potential (and may never reach that stage) will find the application of self-leadership strategies particularly difficult. Africans should be exposed to self-leadership concepts such as self-evaluation, self-knowledge and self-development from an early age. In this way, a self-leadership culture can be created which could establish an improved and more productive African labour market. It should be endeavoured to create an environment in which self-leadership can be applied, particularly in the African organizational context (Van Zyl, 2007).

If more Africans can become self-leaders, servant leadership (in other words leaders serving others to achieve their goals) can be implemented successfully in the African organizational context. Rather than wanting individuals to please their employers, leaders will want to make a difference in the lives of other people, and in the process, impact on the whole organization (Van Rensburg, 2007).

Conclusions

From the foregoing discussion, it is clear that researchers and practitioners are challenged to reconsider their assumptions regarding leadership and organizational thinking. Self-leadership should be seen as a central element in organizational processes such as leadership, control and management in general. By implementing self-leadership practices, and integrating traditional African values and beliefs into that, all African employees will be aided in the achievement of their working potential.

Manz and Sims (1991) therefore indicated that employee compliance is not enough. Leading first and then serving others to lead themselves (servant leadership), is the key to tapping the intelligence, the spirit, the creativity, the commitment and most of all the tremendous unique potential, of each individual.

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