

Transformational Leadership and Attribution Theory: The Situational Strength Perspective.

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Abstract: The objectives of this study were to study transformational leaders behaviour in manufacturing organisations with respect to situational strength and attribution theory. The methodology employed for this research was the “Concurrent nested strategy”, a mixed method approach. The mixed approach included a quantitative stage as the first phase for this study. This stage utilised a questionnaire based on the transformational leadership questionnaire developed by Podsakoff, et. al.[1], which segregated a sample of transformational leaders and qualitative interviews. The qualitative interviews were conducted to obtain an insight into the concepts of situational strength and attribution made by manufacturing leaders for the causes of poor performance. The second phase of the research involved a questionnaire using Likert *scale ranging from 1 to 5*. Results from the research show that transformational leaders tends to make weak situational strength to their followers and tend to make external attributions for the causes of poor performance in their organisations, and assume that follower’s mistake as a learning experience.

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1. Introduction

The style of the leader is considered to be particularly important in achieving organizational goals, with research consistently demonstrating the benefits of transformational leadership style over the more traditional forms, such as transactional leadership style, in terms of achieving organizational goals (Awamleh 1999; Conger 1999, Dubinsky and Yammarino 1995). The leader's style is also considered important in being able to evoke performance among followers (Barling 1996, Zacharatos and Berson 2000).

Transformational leadership is believed to be one of the demanding requirements for industries in the present era. Transformational leadership has become a necessity in the post-industrial world of work [4]. It has been specified as an important mechanism for introducing organisational change and has received substantial research attention over the last two decades. It, however, has also generated several conceptual issues, such as the need for more knowledge about the relationship of transformational leadership with business contextual issues, as several researchers noted [5], [6] that, transformational leadership research is at a stage where its conceptual examination is important.

2. Research Context

The challenges faced by the organisations have become increasingly complex because business and other organisations are changing their structures, reducing layers of management control, and striving to become more agile and responsive to their environments. The results of these ongoing transformations are that there is a pervasive need for people at every level to participate in the leadership process. No single leader can possibly have all the answer to every problem, especially if those problems are in the form of new challenges, those problems for which an organisation has no pre-existing resources, tools, solutions, or sense-making strategies for accurately naming and describing the challenge, Heifetz (1994). Consequently all organisational members need to be leaders and all leaders need to be better prepared to participate in leadership.

Burns (1978) noted the level of mediocrity or degree of irresponsibility of many in the positions of industrial leadership. According to him, we fail to grasp the essence of leadership that is relevant to the modern age. Leaders in today’s organisations are continuing to face competitive forces. In addition, the impact of trying to keep up with the fast pace of technological change, combined with serious technical work-force shortages and never knowing when an external force is going to make a bid for a company that is vulnerable, are just a few of the

problems today's industrial leaders must face on a daily basis, Scarborough (2001).

Manufacturing is the most difficult and demanding fields. It is also the most critical part of industry as well as, the most critical to a country's economy, and demands the highest skills of its leaders. According to Woodgate (1991, p-xii) manufacturing problems appear to be much more a matter of leadership than of technology. There has been cases, where companies have gone from poor to excellent and from red to black due to either excellence in leadership and vice versa. The search for and identification of behaviours that increase a leader's effectiveness, has been a major concern for practicing managers and leadership researchers alike for the past several decades [7-13]. Traditional views of leadership effectiveness have focused primarily, although not exclusively, on what Burns [14] and Bass [15] have called transactional leader behaviours. According to Burns[14], transactional behaviours are founded on an exchange process where the leader provides rewards in return for the follower's effort. The leadership behaviour research found that the strongest determinant of follower's satisfaction with the leader is considerate-supportive behaviour. Favourable leader-follower relations are much more likely for leaders who act friendly, open, sympathetic, and helpful towards followers feeling, and do things to advance their follower's careers [16, pp.275]. More recently, however, the focus of leadership research has shifted from one examining the effects of transactional leadership to the identification and examination of those behaviours exhibited by the leader that make followers more aware of importance and values of task outcomes, activate their higher-order needs, and induce them to transcend self-interests for the sake of the organization [12,13,15]. These transformational or charismatic behaviours are believed to augment the impact of transactional leader behaviours on employee outcome variables, because "followers feel trust and respect toward the leader and they are motivated to do more than they are expected to do" [13, pp. 272]. Transformational leaders provide vision and direction to the organisation, and are able to energise and inspire other members of the organisation in the pursuit of organisational objectives. Other researchers who focus on the same concepts are House, [18], Bass, [15]; Bennis & Nanus, [19]; Tichy & DeVanna, [20], Bass, Avolio, & Goodheim, [21]; Bass. Waldman, Avolio, & Bebb, [22]; Conger & Kanungo, [23]; Boal & Bryson, [24]; House, Woycke, & Fodor, [25]; Avolio & Bass, [26]; Shamir, House, & Arthur, [27], House, Spangler & Woycke, [28]; and Howell & Frost, [29]. However the approaches of these researchers differs somewhat in the specific

behaviours they associate with transformational leadership, although all of them focus on the same perspective that effective leaders transform or change the basic values, beliefs, and attitudes of followers so that they are willing to perform beyond the minimum levels specified by the organisation. The empirical results, for example, Bass [15] cites a variety of field studies demonstrating that transformational leader behaviours are positively related to employees' satisfaction, self-reported effort, and job performance, that have verified the impact of transformational behaviours on employee attitudes, effort, and "in-role" performance.

3. Situational Strength

Situations impose particular requirements for effective leadership, and relative importance of different behaviours depends on the situation [12]. By 'situation' in situational leadership theory, [37] it means: the willingness and ability of people to do their work assignments, , the nature of the work they do, and the climate of the organisation. Fiedler's [38,39] Least Preferred Co-worker (LPC) contingency model describes how the situation moderates the relationship between leader traits and effectiveness. The relationship between leader LPC score and effectiveness depends on a complex set of situational variables called situational favourability variables (or situational control). Fiedler defines favourability as the extent to which the situation gives a leader control over followers. Favourability is measured in terms of leader-member relations, position-power, and task structure, i.e., relations with followers are friendly or otherwise, the leader has the authority to administer rewards and punishments, and standard operating procedures to accomplish the task, a detail description of the finished product is available or not.

The concept of situation strength has been used to study the effect of various concepts of leadership behaviour, some of these focused on variables such as: perceived managerial discretion, (Carpenter, Golden, [40] relation between personality and contextual performance, (Beaty, Cleveland, Murphy, [41] role of individuals in initiating proactive change (Mullins, & Cummings,[42]), environmental uncertainty [(Carpenter, Fredrickson,[43], Sutcliffe, Huber,[44]. Another stream of research deals with the personality of the leader and the organizational strategy that the leader prefers to implement (Wright Peter & Parnell [45]). The situational strength concept by Mischel [46] is defined in terms of a strong and a weak situation. A strong situation can be conceived as a red traffic light where behaviour is generally controlled by the situation – everybody stops at the red light

irrespective of his or her personality. A strong situation can result from technological constraints and rules (like the traffic light) or be a system of tight regulation of behaviour (target measures and standard operating procedures) or where a team exerts powerful group norms, for example in a manufacturing context, the implementation of a lean manufacturing system. An amber light is rather more ambiguous – whether to go or whether to stop – and an individual's personality can influence behaviour. This is an example of weaker situational strength, for e.g. in a manufacturing context, the implementation of flatter organizations and agile systems providing employees with more opportunities for participative decision making [47] (Dani, Burns, Backhouse, 2003). The Trait approach defines the situation as, how people behave in novel, ambiguous, or what is called “weak” situations. Situations that are governed by clearly specified rules, demands, or organisational policies are called “strong” situations. It is also likely that the type of employee in the strong situation company will have adapted to that strong situation and will not challenge the system. This is not true of the weak situation where the individual is probably more used to, and accepting of, ambiguity and a lack of a strong company policy, and is likely to deliver an individual response akin to their own ways of behaving in the particular situation. Leaders and followers should understand that the situation strength is not set in concrete, they can change the situation for people to be more satisfied and productive (Hughes, Ginnett, & Curphy, [48,pp.347]. An essential element of good leadership is not only the direction of followers, but their personal development as well. Coaching and guidance become more important than direct targeted supervision as the follower becomes more capable.

The leader's success in moving a follower toward greater autonomy and intrinsic motivation depends on the leader's ability to recognize the form of supervision needed at a particular time in the follower's development and the follower's readiness for graduation to the next level.

Solid empirical evidence (e.g., Green & Mitchell, 1979; Mitchell & Wood, 1980) suggests that judgments of a follower's capabilities, needs, and personality follow the logic of attribution theory (Jones & Davis, 1965; Kelley, 1967). Leaders try to act as “naive scientists,” assessing the follower's current and past work behaviour, comparing it to that of others in the group or organization, and arriving at a course of action based on judgments of the role of internal and external factors in performance. Further research is required to explore the attribution dynamic that constructs charisma, and to explore the limits of charisma in leadership.

In short, success enhances the perception of leadership, while failure limits perceptions of leadership. Causal ascriptions to leaders are a basic part of this process. As traditional attribution theory implies (Kelley 1973), if people are seen as being more causal in determining favourable outcomes, then the perception that they are leaders is enhanced; if they are seen as being less causal for good performance, their leadership ratings are not as high. Causal attributions are also crucial in explaining observers' interpretations of poor performance. Sutton and Callahan (1987) point out that filing for bankruptcy under Chapter 11 of the Federal Bankruptcy Code stigmatizes both the organization and its management. One tactic for managing such stigmatization is for leaders to deny responsibility for poor organizational performance by attributing causality to the environment. Although this tactic often proves difficult to implement because top managers are expected to exercise control over their organizations and such control is expected to produce organizational success (Sutton and Callahan 1987, 406).

3. Attribution Theory:

As it was pointed by Levine & Moreland (1990) that attribution was most active as an area of organisational behaviour research in the 1980s, and the importance of the role of attribution theory in organisational settings was further emphasised in Martinko (1995a). Recently, there has been a resurgence of research based on attribution theory. A further unexplored area that is the beginning to attract attention is the role of attribution in motivation, Martinko (1995b); Weiner, (2000).

Some leadership theories, seek to clarify the construct of leadership by examining what leadership consists of (e.g., traits, behaviours). Others are more concerned with the process of leadership; that is, how leaders decide what action to take and the impact of those actions on others (e.g., the path-goal model). This distinction is applicable to the attribution leadership research. For example, one line of research has demonstrated how descriptions of leader behaviour are affected by such factors as knowledge of group performance (Butterfield, Powell, & Mainiero, 1978; Farris & Lim, 1969; Lord, Binning, Rush, & Thomas, 1978; Mitchell, Larson, & Green, 1977; Rush, Thomas, & Lord, 1977). A second line of attribution research, rather than attempting to tap these implicit leadership theories, seeks to determine their effects on the leadership process. At the forefront of this line of inquiry is a two-step attributional model of leadership proposed by Green and Mitchell (1979). This model suggests that leaders, given evidence of follower performance, infer the cause of the performance (i.e., make

attributions) prior to determining the appropriate action to take. This model has evoked a series of direct empirical tests (Green & Liden, 1980; Ilgen, Mitchell, & Fredrickson, 1981; Mitchell & Kalb, 1981; Knowlton & Mitchell, 1980; McFillen & New, 1979; Mitchell & Wood, 1980; Mitchell & Liden, 1982; Mitchell, Green, & Wood, 1981; Wood & Mitchell, 1981).

Attribution theory describes how individuals develop causal explanations for behaviours and outcomes, and how their causal explanations influence subsequent reactions (Martinko, 1995). Although there are many variations of attribution theory, research on attributions has primarily focused on two conceptual approaches; (1) achievement motivation models (e.g., Weiner, 1986) which emphasize how individuals explain their own successes and failures; and (2) observer models (e.g., Kelley, 1973) which emphasize how individuals explain the behaviours and outcomes of others.

The attributional leadership model also posits that leaders evaluate follower behaviours by using classification schema such as the classical two-dimensional model of Weiner et al. (1972). The Weiner model is composed of (1) a locus of control dimension which delineates whether the primary cause of the behaviour is a characteristic of the follower (an internal attribute) or a characteristic of the situation (an external attribute); and (2) a stability dimension which delineates whether or not the follower's behaviour is likely to remain constant (stable) or change over time (unstable). The crossing of the locus of control and stability dimensions produces a 2 by 2 matrix of four causal factors that a leader can utilize to explain a follower's behaviour: stable/internal (ability); stable/external (task difficulty); unstable/external (luck/chance); unstable/internal (effort).

As a leader determines the causal factor(s) for a follower's performance, the ascribed attributions influence both the leader's expectations for future performance and his or her behaviour toward the follower. Leaders are more likely to take corrective action toward the situation when performance problems are attributed primarily to external causal factors. In contrast, leaders are more likely to take corrective action toward the follower when a performance problem is primarily attributed to internal factors (Mitchell & Wood, 1980). In addition, corrective action is more likely to be punitive in nature when the leader attributes poor performance to a lack of effort, as compared to a lack of ability.

Attribution theory suggests that we observe the behaviour of others and then attribute causes to it. Initially put forward by Heider (1958), attribution

theory focuses on the inferences that are used to deduce someone else's disposition or traits, from observations of their behaviour. It has the advantages and disadvantages of being tied to a relatively small number of core theoretical statements (Heider 1958, Jones & Davis 1965, Kelly 1967). Central to Heider's theory is the proposal that people see behaviour as being caused either by the individual in question (i.e. dispositional), or by the environment (situational). It makes a distinction between internal and external causes - that is, whether people initiate actions themselves, or purely react to the environment in which the action takes place

The question is: how do we decide what type of attribution to make? Kelley's Co-variation Model (1967) extends the work of Heider and attempts to explain exactly how we make judgements about internal and external causes. The principle of co-variation states that an effect is attributed to one of its possible causes, with which over time, it co-varies' (Kelley, 1967). That is to say that if two events repeatedly occur together, we are more likely to infer that they are causally related than if they very rarely occur together. Kelley's model suggests that if the behaviour to be explained is thought of as an effect of something, which has occurred, the cause can be one of three kinds. The extent to which the behaviour co-varies with each of these three kinds of possible cause is what we actually base our attribution upon. Fischhoff (1976) has noted, psychologists - especially those interested in attribution theory should read some philosophy. Many, perhaps most, of us lack a training in the conceptual analysis that characterizes philosophy, but we can benefit from the attention philosophers have devoted to such questions as what is 'behaviour' (Dretske, 1988), what is an 'event' (Pachter, 1974), what is a 'disposition' (Rozeboom, 1973) or, what is a 'cause'? It is, to say the least, ironic that an idea so fundamental to attribution theory - the concept of causality - has received so little attention in the social-psychological literature (Shaver, 1981).

The classic approach is that of David Hume, his prototypical example of causality was one billiard ball striking another - the collision is followed by movement of the previously stationary ball, but is not seen as producing it. Many definitions of cause are to be found in Hume's work, but perhaps the clearest is the following:

A cause is said to be an object followed by another, and where all the objects similar to the first are followed by objects similar to the second, where, if the first object had not been, the second had not existed. (Hume, 1748/1975, pp. 76-7)

Hume's causality is typically referred to as 'constant conjunction' (e.g., Ayer, 1980, p. 68), and

the definition above certainly conveys the meaning of covariation between cause and effect, which is fundamental to Kelley's (1967) theory of causal attribution.

John Stuart Mill's (1872/1973) conception of cause has significantly influenced attribution theory, via Kelley's (1967) theory. Mill wrote that the cause is the sum total of the conditions positive and negative taken together which being realized, the consequent invariably follows' (quoted by Davidson, 1967, p. 692). As Davidson noted, is whether the true cause must include all the antecedent conditions that were jointly sufficient for the effect. Mill argued that what people ordinarily call the cause is one of these conditions, arbitrarily selected, which becomes inaccurately labelled 'the cause'. To distinguish between the cause and mere conditions Hart and Honore use two factors or contrasts, these are the contrasts between what is abnormal in relation to any given subject-matter and between a free deliberate human action and all other conditions' (1956/1961, p. 332). For example, what is the cause of a railway accident would assume until corrected that the train was moving at normal speed, carrying a normal weight, that the driver stopped and started, accelerated and slowed down at normal times. To mention these normal conditions would obviously provide no explanation of the disaster, for they are also present when no disaster occurs; whereas the mention of bent rail does provide an explanation. Accordingly, though all the conditions mentioned are equally necessary, the bent rail is the cause and the others are mere conditions. It is the bent rail we say which 'made the difference' between disaster and normal functioning. (Hart and Honore, 1956/1961, p. 334).

If a leader attributes a follower's poor performance to internal factors such as low effort or a lack of ability, he or she may reprimand, dismiss, or provide training for the employee concerned. If, however, poor performance is attributed to external factors such as a lack of material, or to work overload, the leader would need to concentrate on these factors and improve the situation instead of giving negative feedback to the employee.

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Research shows that people do have a strong tendency to attribute others' actions to internal, dispositional factors when evidence to the contrary is lacking (Shackleton, 1995).

Leaders attribute to the causes of poor performance defined by the researcher in terms of manufacturing organisations are defined as either internal or external attributions. Internal attributions include follower's lack of interest, inexperienced followers, absenteeism by followers, or any other cause due to follower's side. External causes include, poor performance mainly due to machines break down, tool break down, material inventory problem, material quality problem, or any other cause by external factors, which are beyond control of followers.

5. Research Methodology

Data was analysed using the mixed methods integration concurrent nested strategy by Creswel [59]. According to Creswel, integration of the two types of data (qualitative and quantitative) might occur at several stages in the process of research, the data collection, the data analysis, interpretation, or some combination of places. The concurrent nested model may be used to serve a variety of purposes. Often, this model is used so that a researcher can gain broader perspectives as a result of using the different methods as opposed to using one predominant method alone. This research studies the behaviour of transformational leaders in manufacturing organisations with respect to situational strength, and attribution made by leaders. It was necessary to have a sample of transformational leaders and then probe further into the aspects of situational strength, and attribution. The concurrent nested strategy thus provided a method for integrating quantitative and qualitative research methodologies by using the quantitative method for generating the sample of transformational leaders and the qualitative method to study the aspects of situational strength, and attribution. Data collection was started from the bottom level of the organisation structure, i.e., from shop floor worker by using Podsakoff's transformational leadership questionnaire for rating their leaders about transformational leadership characteristics. Questionnaire was translated into Urdu language, which is the Pakistan national language for understandable by lower-level hierarchy followers. Once all the questionnaires were returned back by the followers, the questionnaires were analysed and leaders were categorised on the basis of transformational leadership characteristics rated by

their followers. Leaders were interviewed about their ideas of situational strength and attribution they made about the causes of poor performance.

Data Collection and analysis was done in two phases. In the first phase, the leaders were interviewed regarding the research questions, leaders responses were noted on contact summary sheets as described by Miles and Huberman (1984) and analysed using the technique of interview analysis by Fink, (2003). For further confirmation/in-depth clarification of the data collected in the first phase, a questionnaire was designed regarding research questions. The same leaders were approached again for a secondary data collection as phase-II, to respond on the questionnaire by rating their choice on a Likert scale ranging from 1 to 5, i.e., where 1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree. The data was analysed using the technique of the quantitative data analysis procedure described by Fink, (2003). The duration between phase-I, primary data, and phase-II, secondary data was eight months to escape the problems of practice effect, i.e., to confirm the original response of phase-I.

6. Data Analysis

The sample selected for this research were a total of 254 followers consisting of leader-follower dyads at middle and lower levels of management for 50 leaders from five manufacturing organisations in Pakistan in phase-I. Transformational leadership characteristics were measured using the 23-item questionnaire based on the measures of transformational leadership utilised by [1] for their research on transformational leadership. The measure includes six transformational leadership behaviours: articulating a vision, providing an appropriate model, fostering the acceptance of group goals, high performance expectations, individualized support, and intellectual stimulation. A 7-point scale ranging from 1=strongly disagree to 7=strongly agree was used. All the 254 respondents completed the questionnaire in phase-I. The responses were then clustered for each of the 50 leaders and the mean calculated. All the leaders, receiving a mean score greater than 4 were termed to have transformational characteristics more than the rest of the sample. Out of 50 leaders the test identified 23 leaders as being transformational in behaviour. The range of the mean scores for transformational leaders ranged from 4.49 to 5.31 out of 7. The sample of 23 transformational leaders were then interviewed to get an insight into the behaviour of transformational leaders with respect to the situational strength in their respective organisations, and attribution they made about the causes of poor performance. The interviews were recorded using "Contact Summary Sheet" procedure for data representation as explained by Miles and

Huberman (1984). The interviews were conducted in a semi-structured format, with the researcher first explaining to the respondent the concept of situational strength and then asking some questions on the aspects of discretion given to followers in decision-making and the procedures the followers had to follow in the organisation to get their job done. The followers of the respective sample of transformational leaders were also asked questions about discretion they received for taking decisions and working. This exercise improved the validity of the results by comparing the data from the leaders and their followers. The data represented in the "Contact Summary Sheets" was then coded into themes, which represented the variables of situation strength viz. discretion given to the followers and working procedures for followers.

7. Discussion

As mentioned earlier, from a sample of 50 leaders, 23 leaders had the scores termed as transformational. When these leaders were interviewed to get more information about their organisations and their insights into the situational strength of their organisations, it was noticed that 21 out of 23 transformational leaders, believed in giving some form of discretion to their followers to take decisions. According to the leaders they created a weak situation for their followers, even if the situational strength of the organisation was strong. Hence, even though the organisation had set out rules and regulations for the employees to follow and the shop floor had been provided with drawings and process sheets, the leaders had given the followers discretion to deviate from the standard processes if it helped them to complete the job. The leaders said that they were more concerned with the end results than with the processes implemented to achieve the results. The amount of discretion given differed for each leader.

When comparing these results with the views of the sample of 10 leaders who have shown the most non-transformational behaviour it is evident that non-transformational leaders prefer to work in strong situations and create strong situation for their followers without giving them any discretion.

In phase-II of data analysis and from the comparison of responses for all the organisations, it was observed that, all types of leaders (leaders with low, high or normal transformational leadership characteristics) prefer to have strict working discipline among the followers. They had clear standards on praise and punishment. The response range was from 3.50 to 4.29, which is a more positive response of the question, since a score more than 3 shows a positive response to a question whereas a

score less than 3 shows a negative responses to the question by the respondents.

Most of the leaders defined the situation in their organisation as strong as noted by the responses to question (operating a highly structured and disciplined system); the response range was from 3.49 to 3.84.

In order to determine the amount of discretion leaders favour for their followers, it was observed that; leaders with a low score on the transformational leadership scale, set more clearer goals for their followers i.e., 3.44 on the scale ranging from 1 to 5. While, leaders with high score on the transformational leadership scale, set less clear goals for their followers, i.e., 2.74. Leaders with a low score on the transformational leadership scale, prefer to make decision themselves as 3.31 on the scale, whereas, leaders with high or normal score on the transformational leadership scale delegate decision making to followers as the overall average score was less as 2.42.

Leaders with a low score on the transformational leadership scale, closely monitor their followers as the overall average score is 3.27 on the scale, whereas, leaders with high or normal score on the transformational leadership scale give more freedom to followers as the overall average score is less as 2.36.

The study thus showed that, transformational leaders created a weak situation for their followers even if the organisational situational strength was strong.

To look into behaviours of transformational leaders and the attributions they made about the causes of poor performance in manufacturing organisations, data was collected from the leaders of five manufacturing organisations used in the sample.

In phase-I of qualitative data analysis, from a sample of 50 leaders, 23 leaders had the scores to be termed as transformational on the basis of Podsakoff et al (1990) questionnaire. When these leaders were interviewed to get information about the causes of poor performance, it was observed that 18 out of 23 transformational leaders, attributed the causes of poor performance to external factors, i.e., material supply problems, material quality problems, excessive tool break downs, or power failures.

According to the leaders, their followers were hard working and took interest in performing their jobs, but due to unforeseen circumstances, for example, machines break down or material problems, sometimes they have to face poor performance. These leaders said that most of the times causes of poor performance were due to material quality problems, material inventory problems, and machines break downs.

In phase-I of the qualitative data analysis, 30% of the leaders with high transformational leadership characteristics, attributed the causes of poor performance either to the follower's lack of interest in performing their jobs, or due to inexperienced followers (internal attribution). Whereas 80% leaders with low transformational leadership characteristics attributed the causes of poor performance either due to followers, lack of interest in performing their jobs, or due to inexperienced followers (internal attribution). However 50% leaders with high transformational leadership characteristics and 58% with normal leadership characteristics attributed causes of poor performance either to machines break down or tool break down (external attribution) and only 10% leaders with low transformational leadership characteristics attributed the causes of poor performance to either machines break down or tool break downs (external attribution). With respect to the nature of the jobs of low transformational leaders, they were mostly shop floor leaders concerning manufacturing operations or assembly operations, and leaders with high transformational leadership characteristics were mostly from higher management hierarchy, i.e., General managers, Deputy General Manager, Officers-in-chargers or Managers and some shop floor supervisors too.

To verify the leader's responses about the attribution they made for the causes of poor performance, the researcher further investigated the causes of poor performance. Leaders who said that their followers took less interest in doing their jobs, or they are inexperienced, was examined by the researcher, and it was found that some followers had a bad record of explanations or warning issued to them by their leaders, and some were newly appointed followers with less than one years experience. With reference to the external attribution made by the leaders, machines break down history and material supply procedures were examined, and it was noticed that machines, and tool breakdowns reports were excessively high.

Further analysis of data of phase-I indicate that, 60% leaders with high transformational leadership characteristics and 50% with normal leadership characteristics attributed causes to poor performance either to material or tool inventory problems (external attribution) and 10% of the leaders with low transformational leadership characteristics attributed to these causes. With respect to the nature of job of the leaders (transformational and non-transformational), the jobs of all the leaders were concerned with manufacturing operations, but some leaders were more related to fabrication operations, some with assembling operations, and some of them were related to manufacturing management. It was

noted that leaders made attribution (internal as well as external) in all types of jobs, whether it is related to fabrication, assembly, or management. The type of attribution (internal or external) made by the leaders was not dependent upon the nature of the job; it was observed that, leader's attribution towards the causes of poor performance was dependent upon their leadership style. However, Dobbins and Russell (1986), suggested that if poor performance is attributed towards internal factors, which may result in resentment, dissatisfaction, absenteeism, and sabotage by followers, and Wood and Mitchell, (1981), observed that if a follower had a poor work history, the likelihood of an internal attribution is greater. The previous poor work history makes it more likely that the follower will be blamed for the causes of poor performance rather than other factors. If the effects of poor performance are serious or harmful, the internal attributions are even more likely. However, if followers make excuses or apologise for the poor performance, the leader is less likely to make internal attributions.

Attribution theory is a cognitive theory that has been used to explain how a leader interprets information about the poor performance and decides how to react to the poor performance. Green and Mitchell (1979) described the reaction of a leader to poor performance as a two-stage process. The first stage is to determine the cause of poor performance, and the second stage is to select an appropriate response to correct the problem. The type of attribution made by a leader influences the response to the problem. When an external attribution is made, the leader is more likely to respond by trying to change the situation, such as providing resources as required. When an internal attribution is made and the leader determines that the follower had insufficient ability, the likely response is to provide detailed instruction, monitor the follower's work more closely, set easier goals or dead lines, give warning or reprimands to the follower. The assumption considered while answering the question was that, what results if leaders make internal or external attribution? Podsakoff et al (1990) defined transformational leaders behaviour as, to demonstrate the leader's expectations for excellence, quality, and/or high performance on the part of followers and he/she respects followers and is concerned about their personal feelings. Transformational leaders behaviour challenges followers to re-examine some of their assumption about their work and re-think how it can be improved. For example, if leaders tend to make external attributions for the causes of poor performance, although, it is on the part of follower's mistakes (internal causes), but when an external attribution is made, followers had the chance to

improve their performance. When leaders make external attributions, and take appropriate steps to solve the external factors causing poor performance, followers were left with no excuse but to improve their performance. Therefore making external attributions by transformational leaders for the causes of poor performance is observed as one of the behaviour of transformational leadership effectiveness.

It was further noted in the data analysis of qualitative data, that a quarter of the population of leaders of the sample with transformational leadership characteristics attributed their followers as hard working and efficient. However none of the leaders with low transformational leadership characteristics attributed their followers as hard working or efficient. This show that transformational leaders respect and concern for the personal feeling of their followers. Transformational leaders don't let their followers down, but showing themselves as a parent, who ignore the mistakes of the child and always appreciate the child as hard working, although there have been some deficiency in the followers and leaders have not high-lighted them, and favours their followers as hard working. Popper and Mayseless, (2001) reviewed studies dealing with parenting, and compared them with studies with transformational leadership. This comparison reveals a strong similarity between the developmental effects of good parents and those of transformational leaders. It was further noted that none of the leaders with high transformational leadership characteristics attributed the causes of poor performance to technical problems or delays in procurement. Only 10% leaders with normal transformational leadership characteristics attributed the causes of poor performance either to technical problems or delays in procurement and none of the leaders with low transformational leadership characteristics attributed to these causes.

From the data obtained in phase-I (qualitative data), it was further noted that leaders with high or normal transformational leadership characteristics, attributed the causes of poor performance to external factors, i.e., material/tool problems, or technical problems etc. However leaders with low transformational leadership characteristics attribute causes of poor performance to internal factors, i.e., follower's inefficiency, follower's lack of interest or inexperienced followers. It may be noted that in phase-I, leaders were selected for personnel interviewing on the basis of transformational leadership characteristics rated by their followers using Podsakoff et al (1990) transformational leadership inventory questionnaire. 10 leaders were selected on the basis of highest score on transformational leadership characteristics, another

10 leaders were selected on the basis of lowest score and 13 leaders on a mean normal score.

In phase-II, quantitative data collection, the sample size was extended to study the whole organisation, since in phase-I of qualitative data collection, 33 leaders were selected on the basis of transformational leadership scale for interviewing. In phase-II, a total of 76 leaders, 43 leaders whose score were more towards transformational leadership characteristics, 29 leaders attributed the causes of poor performance more towards external factors in some form or the other.

Examining the attributional aspect of the leaders in more detail, it was observed in the data analysis of phase-II that most of the leaders, irrespective of transformational leadership characteristics (more than 80%) were concerned about the opinion of their followers or concerned about the opinion of their leader. When they responded to the question "I should be concerned about the opinion that my followers have about me" as a leader and when they responded to the question, "I should be concerned about the opinion that my leader has about me" as a follower. The logic behind asking this question was to observe the attributions they had about each other and, whether followers and leaders were respecting feelings of each other, if they are respecting each other feelings, they will also pay attention towards the attribution they made about each other. Data showed that both (leader and follower) were concerned about the opinion of each other, i.e., leaders to followers and followers to leaders. According to Fiedler contingency theory, (1967), leadership behaviour is a personality trait. According to Fiedler, how positively the leaders views his or her least preferred co-worker (LPC) depends upon LPC score. High LPC leaders are classified as relationships or people oriented (they tend to feel fairly positive even about people they don't like very much) and low LPC leaders are classified as task oriented. Fiedler's research indicates that when the situation is either favourable to the leader or highly unfavourable group performance was the best if the leader had a low LPC score (i.e., task oriented leaders) whereas in situations of moderate or low favourability to the leader, high LPC score (i.e., person oriented leader) had the best group performance. Favourable or unfavourable situations refer to the extent to which the leader has control over the situation; According to Shackleton (1995) it is more sensible to match the leader's style with the situation, rather than the individual to change to adapt to different situations. Fiedler suggests that a leader should deliberately try to change the situation favourableness by enhancing relations with followers, changing the amount of

structure in a task or gaining more formal power. The results of data analysis shows that transformational leaders respect the concerns of their follower's more than non-transformational leaders do. Leaders irrespective of transformational leadership characteristics are generally trying to establish good relations with followers to improve performance.

However, when the leaders response was analysed for the question about the attribution they had about their followers for the causes of poor performance in phase-II of data analysis, for the question, "My followers are the cause, when things do not go as planned". It was observed that leaders with a low score on the transformational leadership scale made more attribution towards the followers for the causes of poor performance or failure in achieving targets. While, leaders with a high or normal score on transformational leadership characteristics agree less for the causes of poor performance towards the followers.

To look further into the attributions made by leaders to external environment (e.g., vendors problems, material shipment or customs clearance problems) when leaders were asked the question "The external environment of the firm plays a major role in failure or success of the planned processes" as the causes of poor performance. The general response of the leaders irrespective of transformational leadership characteristics was on the neutral side, that is, it may be or may not be, and it depends upon the circumstances of the situation they had at that particular time.

As the aim of the research question about attribution was to look into the behaviour of transformational leaders and to find if they attribute the causes of poor performance to internal or external issues? This study has provided some insights into understanding transformational leaders behaviours with respect to their followers, that is, how transformational leaders exert influence on their followers to perform beyond the leaders expectation for excellence, quality, and/or high performance as described by Podsakoff et al (1990). The data collected from the leaders of manufacturing organisations, indicate that transformational leaders tend to make external attribution for the causes of poor performance. The cause of making external attribution by transformational leaders, show that transformational leaders respect followers and are concerned about the personal feelings of their followers, which is defined as one of the transformational leadership characteristics by Podsakoff et al (1990). As there is yet no direct measurements available in the literature for the attribution made by transformational leaders, however literature on attributional research states that

leaders generally make internal attribution for the causes of poor performance, and followers make external attribution for the causes of poor performance, Shackleton, (1995). This is a general tendency of human nature, to blame others for the causes of failure, and take credit for the success. By making external attribution for the causes of poor performance transformational leaders see followers mistakes as a learning opportunity, and they tend to improve the external environment, provide better opportunities for the performance of the job, and leave behind no clue through which performance may be affected. As a result of leader’s actions, followers modify their behaviours towards the job performance because there was no reason to blame performance to the external environment.

The findings of the research question are consistent with the characteristics of transformational leadership as described by Bass, (1990) that transformational leaders elevate the desires of followers for achievement and self-development, while also promoting the development of groups and organizations. Instead of responding to the immediate self-interest of followers with either a carrot or a stick, transformational leaders arouse in the individual a heightened awareness of key issues, of the group and organization, while increasing the confidence of followers, and gradually moving them from concerns for existence to concerns for achievement, growth and development. Irrespective of actual circumstance making external attributions for the cause of poor performance even when an internal attribution would have been equally valid, transformational leaders for the follower development and confidence, tend to attribute causes of poor performance to external factors. They are leaders who tend to ignore follower’s mistakes, and convert mistakes into a learning experience of followers.

The findings from data analysis shows transformational leaders generally make external attributions for the cause of poor performance in manufacturing organisations.

The study has showed that, transformational leaders tend to make external attributions for the causes of poor performance in manufacturing organisations.

8. Research Model

To see if transformational leadership is context-free, context specific, or context-dependent, does the key driver of the emergence and success of transformational leadership lie in strong vs. weak situation, or strong vs. weak leaders, or both? (Avolio & Yammarino,[36]). Research into the attribution theory of leadership is still in its infancy, Shackleton,

(1995) but now there is evidence to reveal the type of attributions made by transformational leaders in a manufacturing environment and the effects that these can have. As indicated by Kark & Shamir, (2002) research on transformational leadership has not fully explored the mechanisms by which transformational leaders exert their influence on followers and ultimately on performance. It is thus necessary to gather data from manufacturing leaders to gain further insights into transformational leadership in manufacturing organisations. Figure 1 presents a framework that represents the type of attribution made by leaders, leadership style and situational strength in a cohesive structure. It comprises of 4-quadrant grid organised around two factors: leadership style and attribution theory.

- Quadrant I - Transformational leadership and External Attribution
- Quadrant II - Non- transformational leadership and External Attribution
- Quadrant III- Transformational leadership and Internal Attribution
- Quadrant IV- Non- transformational leadership and Internal Attribution

The framework suggests that a combination of Transformational leadership with external attribution (Quadrant I) would generate a weak situational strength in the organisation providing more discretion and capability to the followers to manage their tasks. The combination of Non-Transformational and internal attribution (Quadrant IV) would generate a strong situational strength in the organisation providing strict guidelines and structure to the followers for completing their tasks.

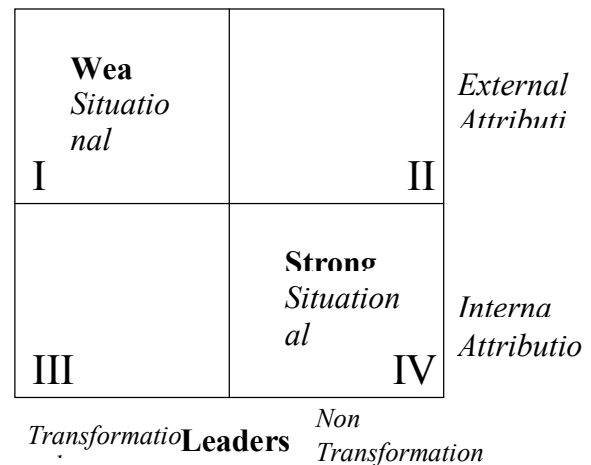


Figure1: Framework depicting the effect of situational strength on Transformational leadership and Attribution made by leaders.

From this model it can be hypothesised that:

- Transformational leaders prefer to make external attribution for the causes of poor performance.
- Non-transformational leaders prefer to make internal attribution for the causes of poor performance..
- Transformational leaders prefer to create working environments with a weak situational strength for their followers.
- Non-transformational leaders prefer to create working environments with a strong situational strength for their followers.

After analysing the questionnaires, the data was inserted into the research model (figure 2). It can be clearly seen that the preference of transformational leaders is to create a working environment with a weak situational strength for their followers. It can also be inferred that Non-transformational leaders would generally prefer to create working environments with a strong situational strength for their followers. It can also be seen that the results did not provide a complete correlation between type of leadership and situational strength. 65% of the transformational leaders showed a preference for a weak situational strength, whereas 35% showed a preference for strong situational strength. Studying each variable affecting the situational strength and the leaders preference could rectify the discrepancy in these results. Similarly, 74% of the non-transformational leaders showed a preference for a strong situational strength, whereas 26% showed a preference for a weak situational strength. 78% transformational leaders tend to make external attribution for the causes of poor performance and 61% non-transformational leaders tend to make internal attribution for the causes of poor performance.

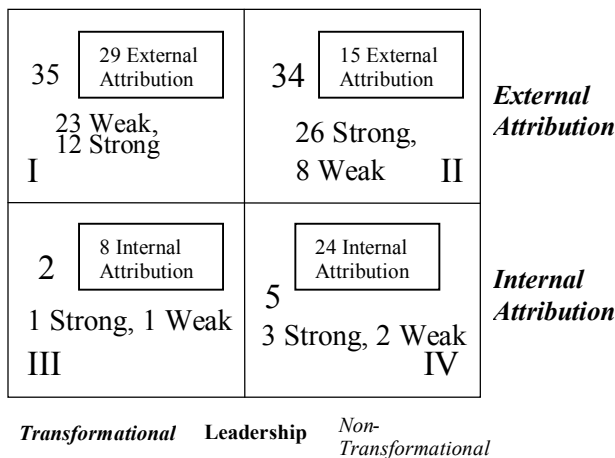


Figure 2: The research model incorporating the results

The research model is particularly useful for deciding whether it would be possible to transform leadership style without considering attribution made by leaders. As shown in figure 3, we can hypothesise that if the leader is in quadrant III and would like to maintain his/her transformational style of leadership; he/she should consider attributing to the causes of poor performance to external factors. If the leader is in quadrant II, and would like to maintain his/her non- transformational leadership style, he/she should consider attributing to the causes of poor performance to internal factors.

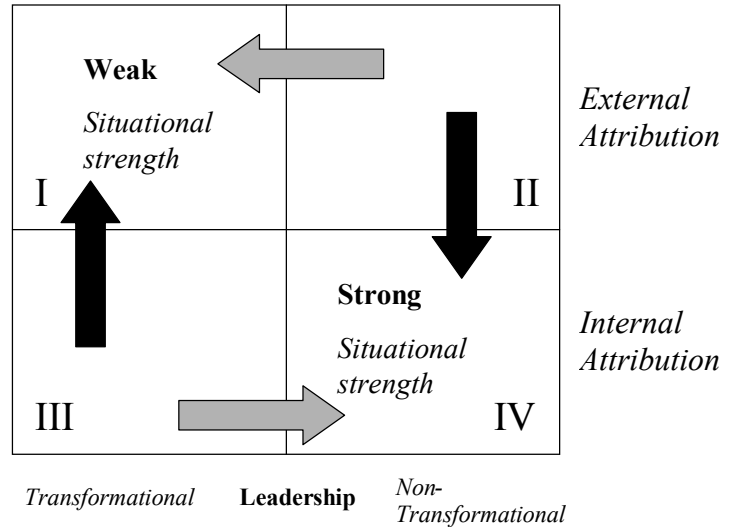


Figure 3: The Alignment model of Leadership

9. Conclusion

The study has been successful in knowing about the psychological substructure, the internal world of transformational leaders, namely what “make them tick” and how they developed this way and transformational leadership with the concepts of situational strength and attribution theory. The importance of the study stems from the argument that transformational leadership behaviour influences to a significant degree how followers work and is given freedom to work in organisations. This is useful when issues of motivation, job satisfaction, employee morale, employee training are studied by human resource departments of manufacturing companies. Knowing that the leadership is transformational can make it easier for change and innovation in organisations as it is now known that transformational leaders will thus try to create weak situations where employees are given discretion and freedom to take decisions in their work hence increasing employee morale, and confidence. In addition, the external attribution associated with weak situations promotes confidence among followers. One of the major limitations of

generalising these results is that all the organisations selected for the study were based in Pakistan, and the effect of the national culture may be significant. Since we do not have any other sample of organisations for comparison, at this moment we would like to suggest that the results and discussion are valid for the selected sample and we can assume that it would be valid for other organisations and leaders in that culture.

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