

IN CHENGDU INSTITUTE SICHUAN INTERNATIONAL STUDIES UNIVERSITY (CISISU), P.R.C.

Lifan Chen
Graduate School of Education,
Assumption University of Thailand

Abstract. This study was conducted to identify and analyze the relationships between situational factors and leadership styles in the Chengdu Institute Sichuan International Studies University (CISISU), China. This study uses a sample of 196 administrators, taken from a population of 400 administrators. The sample was selected from 198 respondents who returned completed surveys using purposive random sampling technique. The instrument content was based on literature reviews, related research and experiences. Questionnaires were used to identify demographic information and to measure the situational factors (Leader-Member-Exchange, Task Structure, and Position Power) and the perceived leadership styles for effective leadership (transactional and transformational leadership styles). The research found a model “Optimal Choice of Leadership Styles for Effective Leadership” for the studied university based on the research results of relationships between situational factors and leadership styles and gives corresponding suggestions for application and further research based on related research objectives and results.

Keywords. Situational Factors, Leadership Style, Transactional Leadership, Transformational Leadership, Leader-Member Exchange, Task Structure, Position Power.

Introduction

The universities in China are undergoing a changing social context, changing educational context, and changing organizational context, based on the national reform in economics and education. Effective leadership is an important process element that has critical influence on products of the school system (Slovacek, 1996). “Transactional and Transformational Leadership” is a kind of important category that represents the post-behavioral science era and is the newest leadership theory in the last twenty years (West et al., 2005). According to Bass et al. (1988), it was a popular opinion that “transformational leadership is a more effective method than transactional leadership.”

To improve effective leadership and improve the satisfaction level of lecturers and students, Chengdu Institute Sichuan International Studies University (CISISU) adopted popular management opinion in China and advocated “shifting from transactional leadership to a transformational leadership style.” The problem was that the extent of satisfaction was still kept at a lower level and the administrators felt it sometimes difficult to really adopt the transformational leadership style. This study tried to analyze the relationship between situational factors and transformational/transactional leadership styles.

The contingency theory (Fiedler, 1997), suggests that no single model of leadership style is appropriate for all employees, in all organizations or contexts. There exists a gap in models or theories about the relationship between situational factors and transformational/transactional leadership style. Fiedler’s contingency model offers a good reference about situational factors influencing leadership style, but is limited to analyzing leadership about tasks or relationship orientation. On the other hand, James MacGregor Burns, Bernard Bass, and other experts who focused on doing research about “transactional and transformational leadership style,” were able to produce some models of transformational leadership with an analysis of its internal factors.

There is a dearth of studies about situational factors in relation to transactional/transformational leadership style. A review of related literature did not reveal studies that focused on the relationship between situational factors and transactional/transformational leadership style, with a view to guiding leaders to choose appropriate leadership styles and approaches to adapt situational demands toward the efficient and effective achievement of organizational goals, especially in the higher education system.

Moreover, it is recognized that models or theories that resulted from transformational/transactional leadership studies in Western societies may not be applicable to Chinese culture because of specific cultural concerns (Ho et al., 2002).

This study attempted to link the relationship between situational factors, based on Fiedler's contingency theory, and transactional/transformational leadership style, based mainly on Bass and Burn's theories and models, by studying CISISU in China as the target university. The study tried to seek the functions of adjustment of the two leadership models by analyzing situational factors. This study is based on Fiedler's contingency model theory, which suggests that no single model of leadership style is appropriate for all employees in all organizations or contexts (Fiedler et al., 1987).

The research objectives are: 1) to determine the situational factors and the leadership style of administrators in Chengdu Institute Sichuan International Studies University (CISISU); 2) to examine the relationship between situational factors and leadership style in Chengdu Institute Sichuan International Studies University (CISISU); and 3) to examine the effect of the situational factors on each leadership style in Chengdu Institute Sichuan International Studies University (CISISU).

Given the main findings of Fiedler's Contingency Theory (1964-1990s) and Bass' leadership theory (1985-2000s), the author hypothesized that there are associations between Leader Member Exchange (LMX) and leadership style (transactional and transformational) in CISISU (H1); there are associations between Task Structure (TS) and leadership style (transactional and transformational) in CISISU (H2); there are associations between Position Power (PP) and leadership style (transactional and transformational) in CISISU (H3); the three main situational factors (LMX, TS, and PP) affect transactional leadership style (H4); the three main situational factors (LMX, TS, and PP) affect transformational leadership style (H5).

Method

Participants

One group of participants was studied, administrators (population 400, sample 198, from 9 academic departments and 10 administrative service offices, covering all different work years) in CISISU who were divided into three levels: Independent level leaders including the president, deans, division heads, class administrators, team leaders, and program directors (28.3%); b) assistant leaders, including vice-presidents, associate deans, and dean assistants (62.6%); and c) regular administrative officers (also called normal administrators, 8.1%).

Instrumentation

In this study, a survey questionnaire was adopted to be the research instrument and the researcher interviewed some administrators, before the main interviews, in order to improve the quality of the questionnaire, which was employed to measure situational factors and leadership style. It was divided into two sections, described briefly as follows:

Part 1) Demographic Information Questionnaire. This included categorized questions about the selected demographic variables: gender, faculty or service office, position, and work experience. This part served as reference information in this study.

Part 2) Situational Factors and Leadership Questionnaire (total 52 items). This part is the core of this study which served to collect information from the participants about situational factors and leadership style. It included two sections: 1) A Situational Factors Questionnaire for surveying three kinds of situational factors: LMX (LMX 7 Form), task structure and position power (Task Structure and Position Power Form); and 2) A Leadership Styles Questionnaire for surveying participants' transformational and transactional leadership style (Multi-factor Leadership Questionnaire -MLQ). All items are rated on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1-5, in which different questions were set in different scale ranges.

Procedure

After five experts confirmed the content validity of the instrument, another expert on language and education, confirmed the constructive validity, the researcher pretested the reliability (Alpha=0.843) of the instrument by asking 30 respondents outside the research sample to answer the questionnaire.

Based on "stratified random sampling" and Krejcie & Morgan's abbreviated table of sample sizes (1970), the researcher randomly asked respondents to fill in questionnaires without using names. To

maximize the quality of the answers on the questionnaires, the researcher interviewed some respondents, asking them to explain their answers to the questionnaires and to document their true thinking in more detail.

The collected data was statistically analyzed by using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Descriptive Statistics were used to analyze the respondents' demographic characteristics and to meet Objective 1; Inferential statistics was employed for hypothesis testing to meet Objectives 2 by using Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient and Objective 3 by doing a Regression Analysis of this study.

Results

Altogether, the main findings derived from the process of data analysis are summarized as follows:

1. Demographic Analysis

1.1 Gender: balanced proportion between male and female respondents.

1.2 Position and Work experience: The outstanding group has the position "assistant leaders," with most of them having 5-10 years work experience.

2. Situational Factors

There exist both high/low situational factors. The situation of most administrators was a low LMX (58.6%), high task structure (84.3%), and moderate position power (53%).

3. Leadership Styles

It was found that administrative leaders in CISISU often tend to adopt both transformational and transactional leadership styles in their current work situation with similar mean scores (3.657 and 3.548, Std. Deviation .484 and .582, defined by "often times" by means of a 5-point Likert scale from "never" to "always"). Moreover, it was also found that the details of a transactional leadership style (3 main contents) and a transformational leadership style (4 main contents) were assigned similar weight, in terms of attention, by administrators in CISISU. Results indicate that 72-74% of respondents have moderate scores (2.1-4.0) and 20-28% of respondents have high score (4.1-5.0) on all factors of both transactional and transformational leadership styles. Only 1-8% respondents rarely used some methods and only 8% of respondents never used Management-by-Exception (passive)

4. Relationship between Situational Factors and Leadership Styles.

Based on the SPSS (16.0) results using the *Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient* research method (** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)), LMX (transactional and transformational leadership style: $-.718^{**}$ and $.625^{**}$), TS (transactional and transformational leadership style: $.579^{**}$ and $-.702^{**}$), PP (transactional and transformational leadership style: $.830^{**}$ and $.110^{**}$), the study found that there exists a strong negative or inverse association between LMX and transactional leadership style; There exists a weak positive association between LMX and transformational leadership style; There exists a weak positive association between TS and transactional leadership style; There exists a strong negative or inverse association between TS and transformational leadership style; There exists a strong positive association between PP and transactional leadership style; There exists little or no association between PP and transformational leadership style.

Based on all of the above, the current researcher developed a model to easily guide administrators to adopt optimal leadership style in CISISU and, as reference material, may serve to enlighten other administrators in other universities or organizations. The model is presented in the Figure 1.

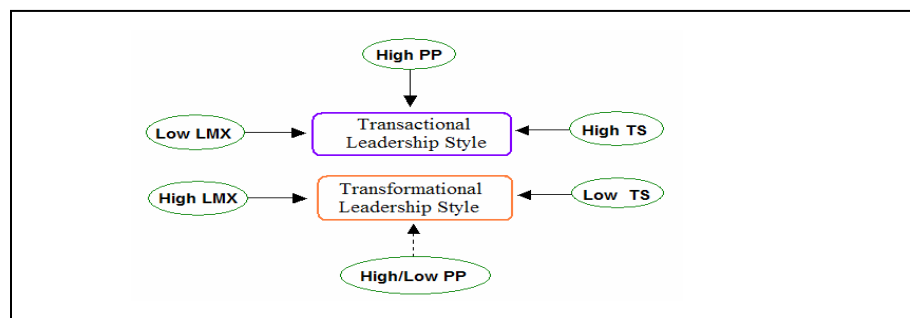


Figure : Model of optimal choice of leadership styles in different situations.

Figure 1 illustrates that, under different situations, administrators can implement corresponding leadership styles for more effective leadership. Circles stands for situational factors whereas squares represents leadership styles or methods. For instance, when in a low LMX situation (leader-member exchange is relatively negative), the optimal choice of leadership is transactional leadership; this implies that it is better for administrators to adopt “not personal considerations, but rules to manage” by using “contingency reward” or “management-by-exception” methods. Contrarily, when the situation is “Low LMX”, the administrators might be best advised to adopt “not ‘punishment or contingency reward,’ but ‘personal consideration’ to manage” by using “idealized influence’, or “inspiration motivation”, or “intellectual stimulation” and “individual consideration” methods of transformational leadership. Another example, when the situation is low structured tasks (low TS), it is difficult for the administrators to use the “contingency reward” method of transactional leadership, but the “inspiration motivation” or “intellectual stimulation” methods of transformational leadership can improve the fulfillment of tasks, and function as effective leadership methods. This model offers a shortcut way for administrators to adopt corresponding leadership styles or methods depending on the situational demands to achieve effective leadership.

5. Influence of Situational Factors on Leadership Styles

1. There is a high positive influence of organizational situational factors on leadership style; however, LMX and task structure have no significant influence on either transactional leadership or transformational leadership style in CISISU. Moreover, position power plays a key role in the situational factor vs. leadership style equation.

2. Position power has around a 33% extent or capacity to influence administrators’ leadership styles to attain effective leadership by the authorized position. Among the positions, 62.6 % of middle level administrators perceived 53% of position power, and 28.3% of independent level administrators perceived 40% position power; the two groups played important roles in position power situational factors. It was also found that, to achieve effective leadership, for the whole university, the leaders in CISISU needed to pay high attention to the middle level administrators’ group, as well as, the independent level administrators’ group.

Based on the data analysis of hypothesis 4 and the SPSS (16.0) results with research method *Coefficients of Multiple Regression* (Constant B.2.546, Sig..000, LMX: Beta-.150 and Sig..402, TS: Beta-.048 and Sig., .473, PP: Beta .732 and Sig.000), and based on the data analysis of hypothesis 5 with the same research method (Constant B.2.817, Sig., .000, LMX: Beta -.184, Sig.,.302, TS: Beta -.045, Sig..302, PP: Beta .766, Sig..000), it was found in this study that power positions are key roles to influence position power, which plays a key role to influence leadership style for effective leadership. Linked with the demographic data, it was found that administrators’ position distribution is important to help leaders think and improve administration effectiveness (See figure 2).

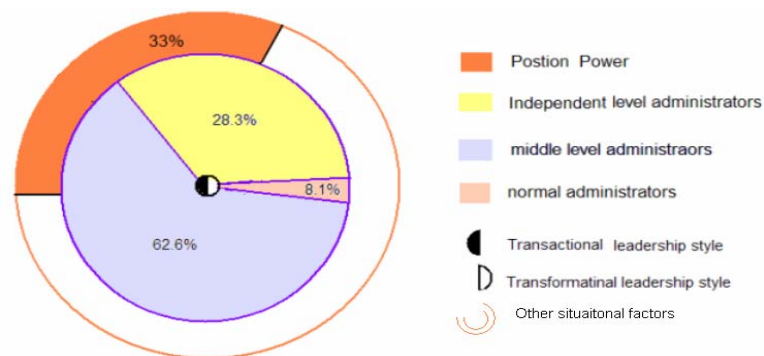


Figure 2: The distribution of power positions and the influence of position power

Position power is mainly from “position”, the distribution of power position of administrators is: 62.6% of administrators have middle level positions (vice-president, assistant president, vice-dean, associate dean, assistant dean, assistant director and so on); 28.3% of administrators own independent level position (relatively independent decision power such as president, deans, team leaders, class administrators, etc.); 8.1% of administrators own normal administrative positions.

It was found that to reach effective leadership for the whole university, the leaders in CISISU needed to pay high attention to the middle level administrator and independent level administrator groups.

Linking the research objectives with the results, the researcher found that:

For Objective 1: *To determine the situational factors and the leadership style of administrators in Chengdu Institute Sichuan International Studies University (CISISU).* There exists both high/low situational factors; the situational factors of most administrators are low LMX, high task structure, and moderate position power. Administrative leaders in CISISU tend to often adopt both transformational and transactional leadership styles in their current work situation. The details of transactional leadership style (3 main contents) and transformational leadership style (4 main contents) were paid similar attention by administrators in CISISU in order to attain effective leadership.

For Objective 2: *To examine the relationship between situational factors and leadership style in Chengdu Institute Sichuan International Studies University CISISU.* There exists a strong negative or inverse association between LMX and transactional leadership style; there exists a weak positive association between LMX and transformational leadership style; there exists a weak positive association between TS and transactional leadership style; there exists a strong negative or inverse association between TS and transformational leadership style; there exists a strong positive association between PP and transactional leadership style; and there exists little or no association between PP and transformational leadership style.

For Objective 3: *To examine how the situational factors influence each leadership style in Chengdu Institute Sichuan International Studies University (CISISU).* There is a high positive effect of organizational situational factors on leadership styles; however, LMX and task structure have no significant influence on either transactional or transformational leadership styles at CISISU, where position power plays a key role; position power influenced administrators’ leadership styles around 33% to attain effective leadership by the authorized position. The two groups (middle and independent level administrators) play important roles in position power situational factors.

Conclusion

This research determined the situational factors and the leadership styles of administrators in CISISU and found that the current situation in CISISU has a higher percentage of low Leader-Member Exchange (LMX), high Task Structure (TS) and moderate Position Power (PP) situations. Fiedler (1993) found that the “most favorable” are those having high LMX, high TS and high PP in his contingency theory research. This researcher suggested that CISISU rebuild better situational factors for effective leadership by improving LMX and empowering administrators with higher position power.

When examining relationships between situational factors and leadership styles at CISISU, some findings in this study are different from other studies, and some are similar. Bass (1998) found that LMX has a positive association with both transformational and transactional leadership. This study found that LMX has a negative association with transactional leadership style; Royhn (2007) found that Task Structure has a positive association with transformational leadership style, and this study found that Task Structure has a negative association with transformational leadership style; Fiedler (1994) found that Position Power has a positive association with transformational leadership, and this study found the same result, but others found that position power has no association with transformational leadership style.

In current theories about the effect of situational factors on leadership styles, the researcher did not find any research about how the three situational factors (LMX, TS, PP) influence transactional and transformational leadership style. This research found that PP has an averse influence on leadership styles in CISISU. LMX and TS have no significant effect on leadership styles. This research can help enlighten top leaders to pay higher attention to the distribution of power position and empowerment to related administrators with corresponding position power. It also offer a prediction of the function and causal-effects of position power on leadership styles.

This university research discovered that a couple of key problems exist at CISISU: 1. Lecturers and students complained that administrators’ leadership styles were focused on subjective factors while

ignoring objective factors, particularly, situational factors; 2. Top leaders advocated the opinion that if there is a “shift from transactional leadership to transformational leadership,” the satisfaction of followers and the effectiveness of leadership will be lower. Based on the research results, the researcher made the following suggestions to the top leaders and administrators at CISISU:

1. CISISU should give up its current advocating for a “shift from transactional leadership style to transformational leadership style,” and instead, advocate “not only paying close attention to the use of transformational leadership style, but also the selective use of transactional leadership style, based on analyzing the specific situation.” CISISU is not yet ready to focus only on “use people, manage people” (transformational leadership style), but rather needs to use both transactional and transformational leadership style to adapt to the needs of the situation to produce more effective leadership.
2. It is better for CISISU to adopt the recommendations from this research to rebuilt its own administrative system based on the findings of this research to: a. improve the situational factors to a higher LMX and adjust the position power among power positions and empower administrators; b. use the model “optimal choice of leadership styles under different situations” to improve the administrative effectiveness and efficiency.

There are several suggestions for further research. This research only focused on administrators’ ideas for studying situational factors and leadership styles, a larger sample might be used to get a more dependable and generalized result. e.g. lecturers and students as respondents, or study more universities in China or different countries; also the model “optimal choice of leadership styles for effective leadership” offers a shortcut for administrators who need to save time to make decisions or who lack experience in administrative work. This model can be developed further to test the relationship between integrated high/low situational factors and leadership styles, and to determine the “favorableness of various situations in organizations.” This research also offers a new finding about “position power’s” effect on transformational and transactional leadership styles for future researchers who are interested in studying situational factors and leadership styles.

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