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SRIJANI KUNDU

DEPARTMENT OF LIBRARY AND INFORMATION SCIENCE, UNIVERSITY OF CALCUTTA, srish97@gmail.com

PARIKSHIT MONDAL Dr.

DEPARTMENT OF LIBRARY AND INFORMATION SCIENCE, UNIVERSITY OF CALCUTTA,
parikshit.cu@gmail.com

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Luminance of Contingency Theory in revealing the leadership style of the academic librarians

Srijani Kundu

**UGC-Senior Research Fellow, Department of Library and Information Science,
University of Calcutta**

9883597156, srisnh97@gmail.com

Dr. Parikshit Mondal

**Assistant Professor, Department of Library and Information Science, University of
Calcutta**

9432989848, parikshi.cu@gmail.com

Abstract

The purpose of this study is to identify the compatibility of the inborn leadership style of the librarians to their situational leadership style using Fiedler's Contingency Theory of Leadership; to find how the changes in situational variables affect one another; to investigate the degree of correlation between situational variables and LPC score obtained by the librarians. The head of the libraries of Dr. V. S. Krishna Library of Andhra University, Knowledge Resource Center of GITAM University, Osmania University Library and Ramesh Mohan Library of The English and Foreign Language University have been selected using purposive sampling technique. In order to investigate the leadership style of the library officials, survey and interview method was adopted. The result of the study shows that all the librarians are identically inherited relationship-oriented leaders but they are task oriented leaders in the regular situations of the library. The evidence of both positive and negative covariance has been found where power position seems to be playing the pessimistic role. It can also be found that the relationship between task structure and leader member relationship is the strongest whereas that of LPC scale and task structure is lowest. The originality of the study lies in the determination of leadership style and situational favourableness in the practical situation.

Keywords- least preferred co-worker scale, academic libraries, leader member relations, task structure, position power, situational favourableness.

1. Introduction

The librarians play the key role in leading and maintaining a well resourced, healthy and organized library environment. However, the leadership style of the librarians may not remain the same always as there is no best way of leading. A leadership style which is effective in one situation may not be successful in others (Fiedler, 1972). Fred Edward Fiedler's (1972) Contingency Model emphasized that, the leadership style of a person is fixed and it can be measured using a scale he developed called Least-Preferred Co-Worker (LPC) Scale. Fiedler's interpretation indicated that the score is a measure of hierarchy of needs on the part of the leader. It indicates the psychological distance which the leader maintains between himself and his co-workers (Hackman, 1965). The scores are interpreted as a measure of cognitive complexity as the part of value attitude dimension (Mitchell, 1988). Fiedler (1972) indicated two kinds of leaders-

High LPC leader

The score of 64 or above characterizes high LPC score. Fiedler (1972) viewed the High LPC leader as a person who "obtains need satisfaction or reinforcement as a consequence of having experienced success in interpersonal relations". The high LPC leaders are relationship-oriented and focus primarily on interpersonal success than task success. They score their subordinates based on inter personal factors. They react and interact emotionally and intellectually with the co-workers (Fiedler, 1972). They are less effective in organizing groups but are good at avoiding and managing conflict and are better able to make complex decisions. They gain the trust of the subordinates negotiate and renegotiate with the work

group for goal achievement. They are permissive, non-directive and considerate (Fiedler, 1972).

Low LPC leader

The score of 57 or below designates low LPC score. Fiedler (1972) viewed the Low LPC leader as an individual who "obtains his need satisfaction or reinforcement through his achievement (or participation) in assigned group". The low LPC leaders are task-oriented and focus primarily on task success than interpersonal success. They think LPC as obstacles to their work and value them negatively (Fishbein, Landy & Hatch, 1969). They are socially distant and aloof. They are very effective in situations of crisis, spontaneous change and goal oriented institutions in organizing a group to complete the tasks and projects as quickly as possible. They act professionally and achieve the organizational goal regardless of the nature and quality of consequent relationship with the work group. They gain the trust of the subordinates negotiate and renegotiate with the work group for goal achievement. They are controlling, managing and directive (Fiedler, 1972).

These leadership styles reflect the traits with which a person is born. Regardless of the basic leadership style, the leading ability of an individual is contingent upon various situational factors which include the leader-member relationship, task structure and position power of the leader (Fiedler, 1972). According to Fiedler, there are 3 kinds of situations- Very Favourable Situation: when all three situational elements are high, Intermediate Favourableness: when some of the situational elements are low and others are high and Unfavourable Situation: when all three situational elements are low (Peretomode, 2012; Furnham, 2005). The degree of these elements also helps to understand the situational leadership style of any individual.

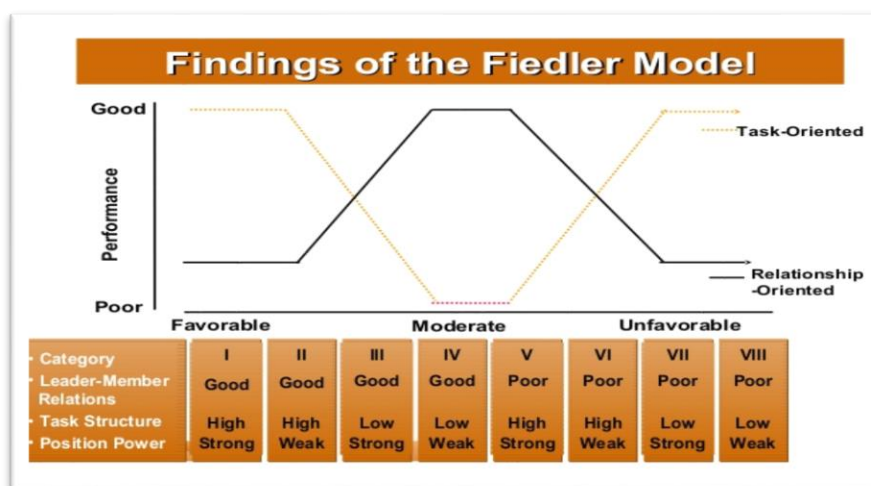


Figure 1: showing the situational control of the elements

This study aims to see whether the innate leadership style of the librarian is different from the leadership style with which a librarian manages the regular situation of the library. It is important to focus on the leadership ability of the librarian to understand his/ her flexibility, professionalism and social/educational relevance.

2. Literature review

Leadership style of the librarian influences a library's effectiveness, institutional role, and adaptability. Weiner (2003) synthesized the characteristics and leadership style of university librarians and academic library directors. He lamented that the leadership of the librarian determines whether a philosophy and vision are articulated and to what extent they are implemented. Fadehan (2010) established the dearth of the application of Leadership Principles in the running of the Library and Information environment. According to him, leadership skills and competencies create a niche for the manager in the workplace and collectively serve as a variable in corporate success.

Tuai (2011) ascertained that interpersonal differentiation can be measured using Fiedler's (1964) "Least Preferred Co-worker" instrument. This instrument is used for testing for agreement among library co-workers about the interpersonal orientations that they prefer; lack of agreement indicates differentiation among co-workers. Development of the behavioural measures presented issues with the Least Preferred Co-worker showing inter-unit homogeneity.

Vorwerk (1979) supported the Contingency Theory of Fiedler but also identified some drawbacks that can affect the leadership style of the library administrators. He stated that the inference given by Fiedler may not be applicable in the libraries. He pointed on the leadership training of the library administrators and also focused on the feasibility of Fiedler's theory that may not be applicable in all the situations.

Kuhn (2007) ascertained that Fiedler's model partially works in public library and it is extremely robust in predicting group performance. She also asserted that though the Fiedler's model talks about primary and secondary goals but most public librarians do not have serious secondary motivational goals – seriously. According to Kuhn, though Fiedler's model could perhaps be applied to the daily mechanical workings of a public library, it does not correlate to the individual humanity of the workers or the nature of the mission of a library. Position Power is the more significant dimension in public libraries. The study by Mullins (2004) illustrated that varying leadership styles are practised by the interviewed librarians, and that there are no universal or common traits, even within national boundaries, for effective public library leadership.

In 1987, Mitchell measured the leadership style of the library administrators of the academic libraries through Fiedler's Contingency Theory. He did a survey based research on library officials of 278 academic libraries of various departments in the U.S. universities to know their leadership effectiveness. He used different hypotheses to prove the leadership effectiveness based on Fiedler's octants.

3. Objectives of the study

The major objectives of the study are as follows-

3.1 to assess and compare the innate leadership style of the librarians to their situational leadership style;

3.2 to find the how the changes in situational variables affect one another;

3.3 to investigate the degree of correlation between situational variables and LPC score obtained by the librarians.

4. Scope and coverage

This study encompasses the four most prestigious academic institutions in Andhra Pradesh and the newly formed Telengana region.

Table 1: List of Libraries

Library	University
Dr.V.S.Krishna Library	Andhra University, Visakhapatnam, Andhra Pradesh
Knowledge Resource Center	GITAM University, Visakhapatnam, Andhra Pradesh
Osmania University Library	Osmania University, Hyderabad, Telengana
Ramesh Mohan Library	The English and Foreign Language University, Hyderabad, Telengana

5. Methodology

Purposive sampling technique was used to select the sample population which consisted of 3 Librarians and 1 Assistant Librarian who hold the highest position in the library of the chosen institutes. 5 library personnel were also chosen from each library. Survey and interview method was adopted to conduct the study.

Table 2: List showing the library and the respondents

Library	Respondents
Dr.V.S.Krishna Library	Librarian
Knowledge Resource Center	Librarian
Osmania University Library	Librarian
Ramesh Mohan Library	Assistant Librarian

Questionnaire was prepared based on Fiedler's contingency theory. Fiedler developed an octal scale with ratings from 1 for the least favourable attribute to 8 for the most favourable one. The instruments used are as follows-

LPC scale

The LPC scale requires a person to rate the one individual they would least want to work with along an octal scale of 16 bipolar adjectives. The LPC score is then computed by totalling all the ratings. The LPC scale was used to survey the 4 library professionals.

Situational favourableness

The favourableness of a situation, according to Fiedler, is determined by a leader's hierarchy of personal need and motivation factors, and is measured by the degree to which the situation permits the leader to exercise influence over the group. Situational control is measured through the following elements-

Leader-Member Relations

A leader-member relation is defined as the degree of confidence, trust, and respect subordinates have in their leader. Good leader member relationship helps to remove the insecurities (Gupta, 2009) and trust issues and reflects upon the increase in the quality of service. Leader-Member Relations are measured in two ways:

- a) A sociometric preference scale on which consists of six 8-point items to be answered employees indicates whether they accept a superior (Fiedler, 1972; Vorwerk, 1979);
- b) A group atmosphere scale which consists of ten 8-point items to be answered by employees (Fiedler, 1972; Vorwerk, 1979). Group members' support, trust, confidence, coordination, loyalty, motivation and dependability are the major determinants of leader-member relations (Furnham, 2005; Gupta, 2009).

Task Structure

Task structure refers to the degree to which the job assignments are structured i.e. the clarity of rules, regulations, and procedures for getting the work done. It depends on the nature of the task and the knowledge of the leader to structure them. Highly structured tasks are unambiguous, relevant and independent from any influence of relationship or power. In these tasks, the leader and the co workers know the ways to conduct the tasks properly (Fishbein, Landy & Hatch, 1969). Unstructured tasks are ambiguous where the team and leader have little knowledge of how to achieve. Task structure is measured from the responses of the library personnel which includes the following components each with four 8-point items indicating the degree to which employees jobs are either routine or non routine.

- a. Goal clarity refers to the group members' understanding of a task's requirements. (Vorwerk, 1979)
- b. Goal-path multiplicity is an index of the degree to which the task can be completed by various procedures, methods or alternate solutions. (Vorwerk, 1979)
- c. Decision verifiability targets the degree to which appropriateness of the solution can be demonstrated either by appeal to authority, logical procedures or feedback. (Vorwerk, 1979)
- d. Decision specificity refers to the degree to which there may be more than one correct solution (Vorwerk, 1979).

Position power

Leader's Power position is the amount of power the leader has to direct the group, provide reward or punishment, power to hire, fire, maintain discipline and promote. Legitimate, reward, co-service, expert resource and referent power are the major determinants of the element power position (Furnham, 2005). Fiedler (1972) identified power as being either strong or weak. Sixteen 8-point items have been used to survey the library professionals to understand the position power.

6. Data collection and Analysis

The data was collected based on the regular situation of the libraries of the academic institutions. The data has been integrated by calculating the means of the responses of the survey.

Table 3: comparison of leadership style

	LPC scale			Situational control				
	Score	Mean (N=4)	Leadership style	Leader-member relationship	Task structure	Power position	Situational favorableness	Leadership orientation
				Mean (N=5)	Mean (N=5)	Mean (N=4)		
Dr. V. S. Krishna Library	65	3.87	relationship oriented leaders	4.82	4.51	4.43	Very favorable	Task motivated
Knowledge Resource Center	81	5.06	relationship oriented leaders	4.51	4.65	5.68	Very favorable	Task motivated
Osmania University Library	69	4.31	relationship oriented leaders	4.96	5.08	3.25	Very favorable	Task motivated
Ramesh Mohan Library	69	4.31	relationship oriented leaders	4.98	5.33	3.87	Very favorable	Task motivated

Table 1 shows the difference in the innate leadership style to the practical situation. To assimilate the differences in leadership style of the library professionals, covariance analysis has been performed between the situational variables as they are apparently responsible for the leadership change of the librarian.

Table 4: Covariance of the situational variables

Situational variables	Leader- member relationship	Task structure	Power position
Leader- member relationship	0.035319		
Task structure	0.042856	0.107919	
Power position	-0.16088	-0.19234	0.802119

Table 4 shows the evidence of both positive and negative covariance where power position seems to be playing the pessimistic role. Though covariance shows the measure of how changes in one variable are associated with changes in the other, multiple correlation analysis is important to understand how the situational variables are related to the basic leadership style of the library professionals.

Table 5: Correlation analysis of the situational variables

	Leader- member relationship	Task structure	Power position	LPC scale
Leader-member relationship	1			
Task structure	0.694166	1		
Power position	-0.95584	-0.65375	1	
LPC scale	-0.72055	-0.02415	0.636486	1

From the correlation analysis shown in table 5, the evidence of positive and negative correlation can be found. Power position also plays a negative role here while; the LPC scale shares a hybrid combination. It can also be found that the relationship between task structure and leader member relationship is the strongest whereas that of LPC scale and task structure is lowest.

7. Major findings of the study

Leadership is very much crucial for any leader to perform each and every task. The paper is mainly based on the leadership qualities needed to manage an academic library. The findings from the study are as follows-

7.1 The study shows that all the librarians are High LPC leaders as they scored more than 64. They are inherited relationship-oriented leaders but their assessment through situational variables does not speak the same. Table 3 shows that 50% of the librarians are in the state of poor position power, but they work in a very favorable situation. Thus according to the inference of Fiedler they are task oriented leaders. They share good leader-member relationship and the tasks are also well structured and unambiguous. It can also be concluded that, as it was a sudden survey, the practical situation of the library has been revealed and it is identical in all the libraries. The professionalism and dedication of the library leaders towards their organization can also be noted from the flexibility of the changes in the basic leadership style. The librarians are fairly able to handle the situations with their own strategies understanding the basic need of the situation .

7.2 The result of covariance analysis shows that leaders member relationship share positive covariance with task structure, while negative correlation with power position. The task oriented leaders are better in organizing tasks and this is also visible in this study. This

means, better the leader-member relationship, more viable will be the task structure. However, as the power position is not solely in the hand of the library leader, this implies a inverse covariance with the relationship of the librarian and the members. It can also be noted that power position is also inversely related to task structure in the library sector.

7.3 As in covariance, the leader-member relationship is positively correlated with task structure but negatively correlated with the position power. Additionally, it is also negatively related with the LPC score of the librarian. With the basic leadership trait of the librarian, the librarian is unable to maintain positive relationship and lead the library. However, task structure is inversely related with both power position and LPC score. It is interesting that power position and LPC score are positively related. From these findings, it can be concluded that power position is important for innate relationship oriented library leader for structuring the tasks.

8. Concluding remarks

The application of contingency theory helps to determine the suitable type of leadership effective in particular situations in the academic libraries. Profiles of the leaders can also be known through the LPC scale (Gupta, 2009). It has broadened the scope of leadership understanding from a focus on a single, best type of leadership to emphasize the importance of a leader's style and the demands of different situations. The leadership style of the librarians is identical in all the libraries and their flexibility is very high despite having low position power. This study shows that contingency theory is quite relevant in assessing the daily situations of the library.

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