

A STUDY OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP STYLE AND SITUATIONAL FACTORS FOR SUCCESSFUL OPERATION AT ASSUMPTION SAMUTPRAKARN SCHOOL, THAILAND

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Abstract: This correlational study examined the relationship between transformational leadership style and three situational factors (leader-member exchange or LMR, task structure or TS, and position power or PP) for successful operation at Assumption Samutprakarn School, Thailand. To meet the study's objectives, all 99 administrators and academic departments of the target school were given a survey questionnaire to complete (Multi-Factor Leadership Questionnaire—to measure transformational leadership style, Situational Factor Questionnaire—to measure the three situational factors, and researcher-constructed questions aimed at depicting the demographic profile of the participants). The major findings of this study were: (1) The school administrators and academic departments perceived that they have high transformational leadership style, high leader-member relations, high task-structure, and high position power; (2) Transformation leadership style was not found to be significantly related to the leader-member relations situational factor ($p > .05$); (3) Transformational leadership style is positively and significantly related to the task-structure situational factor ($p < .01$); and (4) Transformational leadership style was positively and significantly related to the position power situational factor ($p < .001$).

Keywords: Relationship, Leadership Style, Situational Factors, Successful Operation, Assumption Samutprakarn School

Background of the Study

Thailand is involved in developing a variety of educational, economic, social, and technological networks/structures, etcetera, to keep pace with globalization standards and competitiveness. The process of implementing and developing education reform in accordance with Thai public education, through the National Educational Act of the Ministry of Education, has seen rapid changes in institutions of learning such as the new system education, or English Program Schools (EPS). Educational policy systems are rapidly shaped for “enhancing human resources” and educational knowledge, with an educational qualities ability to keep up with changes associated

with globalization in order to drive Thailand's in a very competitive global arena. The Ministry of Education of Thailand is progressing in education and school reform, and is increasingly emphasizing the use of English as an addendum in the education curriculum. One of the educational policies requires the adding of English Program (EP) in the education curriculum. It emphasizes that Thai students must have the ability to use English language in their schools as a second language. Therefore, EP educational schools are preferred for Thai students as they have the advantage of providing quality education at a lower cost than international schools. Assumption Samutprakarn School (ASS) is one of the Thai schools that meet this qualification and serves as a better choice for Thai students in the quest for quality learning and development in education (Ministry of Education, 2003).

Thai educational reforms allow schools the establishment of English Program (EP) for public education. This additional program provides an opportunity for Thai educators to enhance their teaching-learning processes to be comparable to international schools. Assumption Samutprakarn School aims to provide English proficiency to Thai students to meet qualification standards in education by remaining competitive (Maneerin, 2003). Hence, EP school education is an appropriate alternative for a new setting that meets international standard requirements (Carnoy, 1999). In Thailand, most schools are public, with Thai language as the first language, making them different from international schools that normally put English as the first language. With the new EP system, entering Thai schools in Thai language teaching and learning, Thai teachers need to cooperate with international schools. School leaders/administrators face more opportunities and challenges in the global background, and the new EP system will require different forms of leadership style that has been provided with the skills needed to meet the challenges within schools' contingent situational environment and circumstances (Usdan, 2000). It had been stressed that a skillful principal, as a qualified school administrative and academic department has to possess essential leadership style behaviors and relationships with subordinates that are flexible and appropriate to the school's goal setting (Gillis, 2001).

Statement of the Problem

Thai schools with EP system need professional teachers and qualified leaders, administrators and officers to implement successful operation and performance. These educational organizations have to

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consider and examine the critical arguments of how to provide the readiness of school administrator and academic department behavior's and relationship's needed to operate, conduct, and fulfill the global education requirements and changes. Therefore, what does a qualified and effective school leader or administrator needs to manage the contingent situational factors of the school effectively, under global educational standards, to achieve the organization's goal with success? Simply observed, it is time to consider how the leader, principal and administrative / academic department of schools in Thailand run their schools effectively and successfully in this complicated and competitive environment. It is equally imperative to analyze the situational factors involved, to ensure suitable and essential operation and performance.

In related theory fields, some researches are valuable, based on practice for many years. Fiedler (1998) proposed the related theoretical approach known as "contingency model" with appropriate leadership style, which could be favorable for superintendents to operate. This theory insists that a successful leadership in operation, as implemented in all situational contexts for English Program (EP) schools, will demand that school administrators have distinguished objective factors within contingency theory and three situational factors such as leader-member relations (LMR), task structure (TS), and the leader's position power (PP). This theory has explored that interacting group performance is contingent upon the interaction of leadership style and the favorable contribution of the situation by the leader, which can provide successful operation and relationships toward the school's goal achievement (Cheng, 1997). This

current researcher believes it is necessary to do this research to guide the leaders of Thailand's schools toward successful operation.

On one hand, colorful leadership theories showed up in recent decades to help people adjust their leadership style in order to adapt the changing world. Among these theories, transformational leadership theory has been taking an important role in modern society since the 1980s (Bass & Avolio, 1985; 2000). Leithwood and colleagues have described and assessed the effectiveness of transformational leadership in schools (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005). Therefore, it makes sense to study transformational leadership style in Thailand, also to improve the effectiveness of school operation.

Research Objective

The primary objective of this study is to examine the relationship between transformational leadership style and situational factors for successful operation at Assumption Samutprakarn School in Thailand.

Conceptual Framework

Given the research questions and objective of this study, this research attempted to examine the relationship between leadership transformational style and situational factors as the "output", from the "process" of data collection (questionnaire instrument) and data analysis (descriptive statistics and inferential statistics). The two main "input" elements are "transformational leadership" adapted from Bass and Avolio's leadership theory (2000) and "situational factors" derived from Fiedler's contingency theory (1990). The conceptual framework of the current study is illustrated as follows:

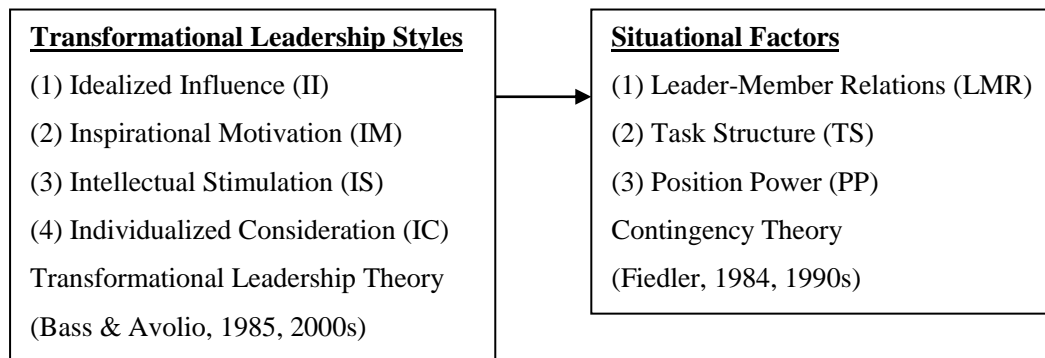


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework of the

theory is supported by related research, and that is why this study adopted the theory. However, the contingency theory was based on studies conducted in Western countries that have different cultures and backgrounds to that of Thailand. Thai EP schools need to enter into joint venture with international schools and cooperate with international teachers. The

Research Hypotheses

Based on the conceptual framework or model of the study, which focuses on the relationship between transformational leadership style and situational factors, the following hypotheses were generated for testing:

- H1.* There is a significant relationship between transformational leadership style and leader-member relations (LMR).
- H2.* There is a significant relationship between transformational leadership style and task structure (TS).
- H3.* There is a significant relationship between transformational leadership style and position power (PP).

For the purposes of this study, the variable 'transformational leadership style' was treated in a holistic manner (relating to or concerned with the whole or with the complete system rather than with the analysis of, treatment of, or dissection into parts). Hence, part of the hypotheses referred only to the general term 'transformational leadership style' rather than to its four individual components (II, IM, IS, IC).

Scope of the Study

This study explored the transformational leadership style at Assumption Samutprakarn School, in Thailand. Those administrators and academic department are working under the English Program system. The study also focused on the key essential leadership style assumed to influence and meet situational factors.

Significance of the Study

This study was conducted to examine the relationship between administrators' leadership style and situational factors for successful operation at Assumption Samutprakarn (EP) School in Bangkok. This study would greatly benefit the following individuals and groups in particular ways.

1. School leader, administrators and academic department; This study will analyze the school's situational factors to ensure school leaders' effective leadership by achieving the following: adjust and control situational factors for administrative leadership (e.g., improving leader-member relations, making tasks more structured, and release or withdraw position power); raise the awareness of the participants themselves by including the president and administrators and, in general, administrators who accepted to participate in the research. This awareness will lead them to think more about adjusting and using appropriate leadership style depending on situational factors in order to improve followers' performance as well as help administrators recognize motivating factors leading to satisfied lecturers and staff for optimized performance.

2. Followers; The present study will bring confidence and overall understanding to followers on how their administrators' leadership styles would

impact on their communication behavior as they implement their daily tasks in their work place.

3. Parents; this study would provide more knowledge and reference to teachers and administrators in the school whose profession level would directly or indirectly impact on the satisfaction of parents. Additionally, the study would give more knowledge to parents for parental leadership both at home and at school by cooperating and collaborating with school administrators and teachers.

4. Other researchers; although this study focuses on one school only, it can still benefit other behavioral researchers who are interested in the same variables and study group. The theoretical perspectives, models, and related studies presented in this study serve as valuable reference materials toward greater understanding of situational factors and leadership style.

5. The present researcher will gain valuable experience, knowledge, and skills during the process of studying theories that were created for application in Western countries and examining these for use in an Asian county as well as in the process of examining phenomena that would essentially benefit the Thai educational system.

Research Design

This is a correlational study, which aimed to examine the relationship between leadership transformational style and situational factors for successful operation at Assumption Samutprakarn School (ASS). To meet this objective, the researcher initially identified the leadership style and situational factors at ASS. The second phase in the research design involved the examination of the relationship between transformational leadership style and the three situational factors (leader-member relations, task structure, and position power) in the target school. Finally, the researcher analyzed how to improve the English Program system in Thai schools, based on the results of this investigation.

Research Instrumentation

In this study, a self-administered survey questionnaire in the Thai language was adopted to be the research instrument. In terms of the structure of the research questionnaire, it was divided into two sections, described briefly as follows:

Part 1. Personal Information Questionnaire

This first part was a researcher-constructed questionnaire, which consisted of categorized questions to collect information about the selected personal information (demographic) variables.

Part 2. Leadership Questionnaire

The second part of the instrument has two sections:

Multi-Factor Leadership Questionnaire / Leader Rater Form (MLQ 5X-Short); this is a 20-item scale which aimed to describe the participant's perceived leadership style. The Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) was designed by Bass and Avolio (1997) to describe and measure different ranges of leadership style, and also the outcomes of leadership, i.e., effective or non-effective (Antonakis, Avolio, & Sivasubramaniam, 2003). The different ranges of leadership styles are measured by different subscales for transformational leadership's "four I's" comprising of: idealized influence (II); inspirational motivation (IM); intellectual stimulation (IS); and individualized consideration (IC).

In the operational sense, the MLQ was employed to describe the perceived transformational leadership style of the school administrators who participated in the study. This researcher adopted Bass and Avolio's (1997) questionnaire with slight modifications to suit the present study.

Additionally, the items of the MLQ represented each of the four leader/administrator's behaviors in the following manner: (II—the first one to eight items; IM—the next nine to twelve items; IS—the next thirteen to sixteen items; and IC the last seventeen to twenty items).

Situational Factor Questionnaire; This is a 20-item scale which aimed to describe the participants' three perceived situational factors: leader-member relations (LMR), task structure (TS), and position power (PP), as adapted from Fiedler's contingency theory.

To determine the administrators' relationship with followers, G. B. Graen and M. Uhl-Bien (1995) developed the questionnaire LMX 7, which has a seven-item leader-member exchange measure most commonly used by researchers to explore theoretical questions. The LMX 7 was designed to measure three dimensions of leader-member relationships: respect, trust, and obligation derived from Fred Fiedler (1990). It evaluates the degree to which leaders and followers have mutual respect for each other's capabilities, feel a deepening sense of reciprocal trust, and have a strong sense of obligation to each other. Taken together, these three dimensions are the ingredients necessary to create strong partnerships.

With regard to the remaining situational elements task structure and position power, six items were designed to measure task structure and seven items were designed to measure position power. As used in this study, the Situational Factor Questionnaire assessed the degree to which the school administrators have specific work situation, structured tasks, or unstructured tasks, high position power or low position

power. Taken together, these dimensions are the ingredients necessary to measure the work situation of respondents in the target school environment.

Data Collection

Upon receiving the school executive's permission to conduct the study, the researcher collected data by distributing questionnaires (English and Thai) languages to the executive director, deputy director of academic English program, administrative, and academic departments at Assumption Samutprakarn School. The questionnaire was translated to Thai by expert translator Dr. Witchnee Kuptawathin.

To collect more accurate information and ensure that the data collection proceeded according to plan, the researcher distributed 99 (population size) questionnaires to the targeted participants as a group team member (school director and officers, administrative and academic department) and collected the completed questionnaires herself. There were no missing questionnaires on completion of the data collection process.

Data Analysis

The collected data were encoded and statistically analyzed by using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 17. The following appropriate statistical tests were utilized to meet the objective of this research:

1. *Descriptive statistics* were used to analyze the respondents' personal characteristics that were selected for use in this study, to provide a demographic profile of the respondent group. Frequencies and percentages as well as mean rank were used to examine the distribution of the respondent group across the variables: gender, nationality, administrative office, position, and length of work experience.

2. *Inferential statistics* were employed primarily to test the research hypotheses generated in accordance with the conceptual framework of this study. The main statistical methods employed were Pearson's product moment coefficient of correlation and regression analysis. Table 2 below describes a summary of the research methodology employed in the current study.

Summary of Findings

The summary of findings in this study was comprised of four parts, namely: 1) demographic characteristics of participants; 2) transformational leadership style and its influence on followers; 3) the school organization's situational factors; and 4) the relationship between transformational leadership style and the three situational factors (LMR, TS, and PP).

1) Demographic characteristics of participants

The participants' demographic characteristics were analyzed by using frequency and percentage distribution, and the summary of findings is as follows:

Gender and nationality; SPSS analysis revealed that, in terms of gender, the majority of director and officers, administrative and academic department at the target school (Assumption Samutprakarn School) were males. In terms of nationality, there were more Thais than non-Thais. The school's curriculum includes both local and English program for the main subjects. Thai administrators and instructors work collaboratively with international instructors to reach the school's goal with high standards of performance.

Administrative office, position, and work experience; In terms of administrative office and position, majority of the participants were from the academic departments, and half of the participants were class administrators, respectively. The largest group of participants, according to length of work experience, was the group that reported having worked at the school between five to ten years.

2) Transformational leadership style

As the result of the computation of the Mean and

3) Situational factors

Results of data analysis revealed that the participants (school leaders, administrators and officers) perceived that they have high leader-member relations, high task-structure, and high position power. Northouse (2004) proposed those leaders' leadership style matches with the situational tasks among followers and organizational environment.

4) Relationship between transformational leadership style and situational factors

As a result of the computation of the Pearson's Product-Moment correlation coefficients between transformational leadership style and the three factors of leader-member relations, task structure, and position power, it was found that: (1) transformational leadership style is not significantly related to the leader-member relations factor ($p > .05$); (2) transformational leadership style is positively and significantly related to the task-structure (TS) situational factor ($p < .01$); and (3) transformational leadership style is positively and significantly related to the position power (PP) situational factor ($p < .001$).

The optimal choice relationship of transformational leadership style under different situational factors (LMR, TS, and PP) is shown in the following Figure 2:

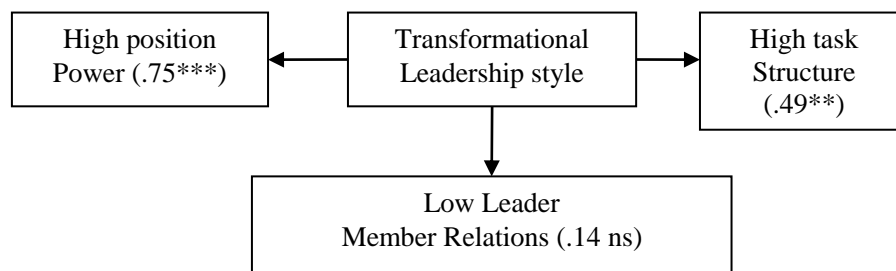


Figure 2: Optimal Choice Relationship of Transformational Leadership Style under Different Situational Factors (LMR, TS, and PP)

Standard deviation, all four main variables, namely: transformational leadership style, leader-member relations, task-structure, and position power (LMR, TS, and PP, respectively) were rated above the mid-point on their respective scales ($M \geq 3.0$). Overall, the study's participants (school leaders, administrators and officers) perceived that they have high transformational leadership style. They perceived that they are respected, trusted, and that subordinates have mutual respect for each other's capabilities and a strong sense of obligation. Referring to Northouse (2010), leadership and management ought to have a central focus on the higher level of personal commitment, influence, and powerful capacities of behavior and relationship through organizational members.

a) Referring to the effectiveness of leadership style and quality of the relationship between the director/officers and the group, the degree of members' confidence, respect, and trust will make it easier for the leader to accomplish the task. From the above Figure 4, the leaders' relationship result on LMR showed that there is a low match and that transformational leadership style was not found to be significantly related to the leader-member relations factor.

b) Task-structure depends on the nature of the subordinates' tasks. If they are structured, performance is high; if unstructured, performance is low. Results indicate that transformational leadership style has a good match with task structure and that its relationship with TS is high. This means that if subordinates' tasks are structured, the tasks are clear

and known to them. The relationship between leadership style and subordinates' task structure is positive.

c) The leader's position power (PP) possesses the ability to influence the behavior of his/her followers through legitimate rewards, hiring and firing practices, giving opportunities for promotion, and using coercive power. Results showed that the school organization's leaders/administrative have strong and high position power. Figure 4 clearly depicted that position power had the highest match with the leaders' leadership style, and that the relationship is positive and highly significant.

Based on the results of hypothesis testing with inferential statistical tools, it was revealed that the school leaders' transformational style is not significantly related to the leader-member relations situations within the school setting. In contrast, results revealed that the school leaders' administration of their members' task structure is well matched. Furthermore, the results point to a very high association between the school administrators' leadership style and situations in the school that involving the leaders' use of their legitimate power. In other words, it can be said that leaders believe that changing their leadership style would not impact on the amount of respect, obligation, and trust subordinates or followers have for them. On the other hand, the leaders believe that their capacity to manage tasks assigned to their subordinates works well in the school. The leaders of the school also believe that their legitimate position power was well understood by their subordinates. The results demonstrated that the leaders perceive their leadership style as being highly influential in changing the behavior of their members through the reasonable use of their legitimate power, by virtue of their position in the school hierarchy.

Recommendations

1) The key point for Assumption Samutprakarn School, in terms of educational reform, is to maintain a high quality of leadership among its leaders—transformational leaders inspire the team and inject enthusiasm and energy into their subordinates, leading things to getting done to high standards. Transformational leadership style, however, is not concerned much with doing things right; it is more concerned with doing the right things, apart from having vision and passion to do great things for the organization. Regarding to school's director, administrative and academic department to implement their responsibilities it is essential for them to have the right attitude and abilities, to function collaboratively, understand the implementation and consequences of globalization in introducing international educational

standards in order for the school to operate with success and remaining in competitiveness.

2) Considering the relationship of transformational leadership style and situational factors, it is necessary for leaders, administrators and officers to assign tasks that match the subordinate's ability, to explain clearly to them the nature and expectations of the tasks, to train their members to international educational standards, evaluate their performance, and motivate them through fair reward or promotion.

3) This study demonstrated the importance and advantages of transformational leadership, which, in this case, can be applied to teachers who are the leaders in the classroom setting. Parents should articulate to school administrators the necessity of training teachers to become more transformational with a view to attaining better and international standards of teaching-learning processes and delivery of educational resources for obtain and implement to higher qualify of students' performance.

4) With regard to improving and developing the school's organizational culture and developing educational strategies to international standards, it is recommended that school teachers and administrators visit schools in other countries to learn first-hand new educational techniques, teaching methodologies, and classroom resources that can be applied to the local school, as well as share their own strategies to foreign counterparts, for purposes of goodwill and technological exchange.

5) The knowledge resource and the statistic results of findings offered by this study can be useful for the future researchers, who are interested in the same field. It had been stated earlier that the precise nature and implications of the relationship between transformational leadership style and situational factors, particularly within the educational organizational context, is still not fully known. The inconsistency between the results of this study and those of related research is suggesting that more studies of this nature should be conducted for exploring answers to the relationship study.

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