

EFFECTS OF LEADER PERSISTENCE AND LEADER BEHAVIOR ON LEADERSHIP PERCEPTIONS

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The study examined, in a 2 x 3 factorial design, the effects of leader persistence and leader behavior on evaluations of the leader and attributions of leadership. One hundred twenty-six Indian engineering undergraduates responded to one-page scenarios depicting leader persistence and leader behavior. They were randomly assigned to each of the treatment conditions, with 21 subjects per cell. Results indicated that both the evaluations of leader and attributions of leadership were significantly influenced by the interaction between leader persistence and leader behavior. Certain main effects, as expected, of leader behavior and leader persistence were also observed. Implication of the findings for those in leadership roles are discussed, and directions for future research suggested.

Since leadership is being viewed in recent years as a reciprocal influence process (Hollander & Julian, 1969), the question of how leader behavior is evaluated needs to be investigated systematically. The present research attempts to address itself to the following question: How do evaluations of the leader and attributions of leadership vary as a function of the persistence of the leader and the leader's behavior?

Leader persistence is generally viewed as "the tendency to hold with one course of action without change" (Graves, 1985, p.23). Staw and Ross (1980) found that an administrator who consistently followed or stuck to one program was evaluated as more effective, more intelligent, more of a careful planner and having more potential to be a leader than an administrator who engaged in experimenting behavior. Graves (1985) examined the effects of leader persistence and environmental complexity on leadership perceptions, and found that persistent leaders were evaluated more favourably than nonpersistent leaders, regardless

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of the levels of environmental complexity. For the purpose of the present study, persistency (Graves, 1985) and consistency (Staw & Ross, 1980) are taken as synonymous and operationally defined as "sticking to or adhering to one program." It is then hypothesized that a persistent leader would be evaluated more favourably and attributed more leadership ability than a non-persistent leader.

The second factor influencing the evaluations of the leader and attributions of leadership is the leader's own behaviour. In this study, three forms of leadership behaviour—autocratic (F), participative (P) and nurturant-task (NT)—were employed. The third was introduced because it was believed to be salient of the culture from which the sample of the present study was drawn. The following typical characteristics that the Indian subordinates bring to their organizations led Sinha (1980) to the formulation of the NT style: (a) Indian subordinates tend to depend excessively on their superiors, with whom they want to cultivate personalized rather than contractual work relationships; (b) they readily accept the authority of their superior and yield to his or her demands; (c) work is not valued in itself; and yet (d) they are willing to work extra hard as a part of their efforts to maintain a personalized relationship with the superior (Kakar, 1971; Pareek, 1968; Sinha, 1970). The NT leader "cares for his subordinates, shows affection, takes personal interest in their wellbeing and above all, is committed to their growth" (Sinha, 1980, p.55). In order to be effective, however, an NT leader makes his or her nurturance contingent on the subordinate's task accomplishment. He or she helps his or her subordinates grow up, mature, and assume greater responsibility. Once the subordinates reach a reasonable level of maturity, they generate pressure on the leader to shift to the participative (P) style. From this perspective, then, the NT style is considered to be a forerunner of P style in the reciprocal influence process between a leader and his or her subordinates.

The NT is different from the predominantly self-oriented (F) leader who expects and demands complete loyalty, unconditional submissiveness and full compliance from the subordinates. On the other hand, the NT is different from the people-oriented (P) leader, although there exists a positive overlap between the two. Both emphasize high quality of work and supportive relationship. However, the people-orientation of the P style is of fraternal type, whereas the NT on this dimension is of benevolent paternal type. The effectiveness of the NT style has recently been demonstrated in a number of laboratory and field investigations by Sinha and others (e.g., see such reviews as those of Ansari, 1986; Sinha, 1983). In these investigations, this style was per-

ceived as distinctly different from other styles such as F and P, and it was found to have positive impact on several indicators of effectiveness, commitment, facets of job satisfaction and organizational productivity.

Heilman, Hornstein, Cage and Herschlag (1984) have examined the reputational consequences of various leader behaviours when viewed by others. Among other findings, they found that participative behavior was seen as effective even when prescriptively inappropriate to the situation. In addition, the favourable evaluation of participative behavior was evident not only in task effectiveness but also in the affective reactions of respondents. It is, therefore, hypothesized that a leader with participative behavior would be evaluated more favourably than a leader with autocratic behavior. The emergence of this main effect would be consistent with Heilman et al.'s (1984) findings. Although nurturant-task leader behavior was included in the present design, in view of the relative paucity of research on this leader behavior, no specific predictions about the evaluations and attributions they would elicit were made. Similarly, considering the relative paucity of research on this topic, no prediction of interaction effects is ventured.

METHOD

Subjects

The subjects were 126 male undergraduates enrolled in the introductory organizational behavior course at the Indian Institute of Technology, Kanpur, India. They were primarily engineering majors, in the age range of 20 to 23 years. They received credit toward their course grade for participation in the research. Data were collected during the spring of 1986.

Experimental Manipulations

Subjects were presented with a one-page scenario. In each condition, the first paragraph described a series of marketing dilemmas faced by Dhawan Kumar, the assistant general manager of a medium-sized computer firm. The firm was described as operating in an unstable high technology environment with rapid product change#.

Since the previous research (Graves, 1985) has demonstrated no significant impact of environmental complexity on the evaluations of leader behavior and attributions of leadership, the scenario in the present study employed only that situation which involved high environmental complexity.

The second paragraph described the manager with a particular leadership behavior (autocratic/nurturant-task/ participative). The style of the scenarios was drawn from the recent work by Sinha (1980) and Stitt, Schmidt, Price and Kipnis (1983).

Following the description of each leadership behavior, the last paragraph was added to manipulate the leader persistence. This was achieved by varying the information about the manager's behaviour, i.e., whether he stuck to one strategy for marketing a new product even though sales three- and six-months after the product was introduced were very poor (high persistence) or he switched marketing strategies at both the three- and six-month points (low persistence). A more complete description of leader persistence scenario can be found in Graves (1985).

Built into the stimulus scenarios were the five manipulation check items — three describing the leader behavior of the manager and two referring to whether the leader was persistent or nonpersistent. Subjects rated each item on a 5-point scale (1 = almost no extent; 5 = to a very great extent) thus indicating the extent to which it was true for the manager.

Experimental Design

This study was a 2 x 3 factorial with two levels of leader persistence (persistence/nonpersistence) and three levels of leader behavior (autocratic/nurturant-task/ participative). The subjects were randomly assigned to the six treatment conditions, with 21 subjects per cell. They were presented with a one-page scenario, and thereafter asked to respond to dependent measures and manipulation check items.

The dependent variables, namely evaluations of leader behavior and attributions of leadership — were measured by a series of four and two questions, respectively. The items were taken from the recent work by Bartol and Butterfield (1976), Butterfield and Powell (1981), Graves (1985) and Staw and Ross (1980). Seven-point scales were used for each question.

RESULTS

Co-efficient alpha for Evaluations and Attributions, in the present study, were found to be .78 and .64, respectively. The two dependent measures were only moderately intercorrelated, $r(124) = .41$, $p < .01$, indicating a reasonable level of scale independence.

Results regarding persistence manipulation showed a highly significant main effect of leader persistence, and none of the

other main and interaction effects were significant. The manager in the high persistence condition ($M = 4.35$) was seen as sticking to one sales strategy to a greater extent, $F(1, 120) = 640.08$, $p < .001$, $n^2 = .82$, than the manager in the low persistence condition ($M = 1.52$). Similarly, subjects perceived the manager to a greater extent, $F(1, 120) = 407.10$, $p < .001$, $n^2 = .80$, as a consistent decision maker in the high persistence condition ($M = 4.22$) than in the low persistence condition ($M = 1.70$).

The leader behavior manipulation was also successful. The ANOVA showed a highly significant main effect of leader behavior on all the three items, and neither main effect of leader persistence nor interaction reach its significant level. Subjects saw the autocratic manager to a greater extent, $F(2, 120) = 326.18$, $p < .001$, $n^2 = .84$, as autocratic ($M = 4.36$) than as nurturant-task ($M = 1.45$) or participative ($M = 1.29$) type. Similarly, they rated the nurturant-task manager to a greater extent, $F(2, 120) = 181.53$, $p < .001$, $n^2 = .74$, as nurturant-task type ($M = 4.00$) than as autocratic ($M = 1.62$) or participative type ($M = 1.79$). Finally, the participative manager was perceived to a greater extent, $F(2, 120) = 261.43$, $p < .001$, $n^2 = .81$, as participative ($M = 4.02$) than as nurturant-task type ($M = 1.64$) or autocratic type ($M = 1.19$).

Evaluations of leader Behavior

Mean scores on dependent measures as a function of leader persistence and leader behavior are reported in Table 1.

Table 1

Mean Scores of Subjects' Ratings on Dependent Measures

Experimental Condition	Evaluations of Leader	Attributions of Leadership
<i>Persistence: High</i>		
Autocratic behavior	13.76	9.19
Nurturant-task behavior	20.33	9.33
Participative behavior	19.14	9.86
<i>Persistence: Low</i>		
Autocratic behavior	12.29	6.29
Nurturant-task behavior	16.76	8.52
Participative behaviour	21.57	9.24

Note. The higher the mean scores, the more favorable the evaluations of leader, and the more attributions of leadership.

Analysis of variance revealed a main effect for leader behavior, $F(2, 120) = 44.09$, $p < .001$, $n^2 = .39$, and an interaction between leader behavior and leader persistence, $F(2, 120) = 7.00$, $p < .001$, $n^2 = .06$. Subsequent Dunn analyses indicated that leader behavior made a significant difference ($p < .01$) in the evaluation ratings depending on whether the manager was perceived to be persistent or nonpersistent. In the persistence condition, nurturant-task and participative behavior were rated significantly more favourably than was autocratic behavior. However, differences in ratings of the nurturant-task and participative behavior were not significantly different from each other. Leader behavior also significantly ($p < .01$) affected evaluation ratings in the nonpersistence condition. In this case, participative behavior was rated significantly more favourably than were nurturant-task and autocratic behavior. Also, nurturant-task behavior was rated more favourably than autocratic behavior.

Attributions of Leadership

The general pattern (Table 1), in this case, was not similar to that of leader evaluation ratings. A main effect for leader behavior, $F(2, 120) = 6.01$, $p < .003$, $n^2 = .08$, was apparent, and Dunn analyses verified that, regardless of whether the manager was persistent or nonpersistent, participative and nurturant-task behavior were attributed significantly ($p < .01$) more leadership ability than was autocratic behavior, the first two of which did not differ from each other in attribution ratings. There was additional main effect of note here that was not evident in the evaluation ratings. A main effect for leader persistence, $F(1, 120) = 11.11$, $p < .001$, $n^2 = .07$, was indicated, suggesting that the persistent leader was thought to possess significantly more leadership ability than the nonpersistent leader. However, a slight trend in the data showing interaction between behavior and persistence, $F(2, 120) = 2.86$, $p < .061$, $n^2 = .04$, and an examination of the means prompted subsequent analyses, which revealed that the three forms of leadership behavior were seen as having different attribution ratings only when the manager was nonpersistent. In this case, autocratic behavior was associated significantly less with leadership ability than was participative behavior, but the two were not significantly different from the nurturant-task behavior in attribution ratings.

DISCUSSION

The results suggest two general themes. The first, concerning evaluations of leader behavior, indicates that the subjects were discriminating between leader behavior depending on whether

the leader was persistent or non-persistent. This finding suggests that participative leaders who experiment with marketing strategies and nurturant-task leaders who stick to one strategy may receive more favourable evaluations of leader behavior. Additionally, regardless of being persistent or nonpersistent, acting autocratically has a strong negative impact on the evaluation ratings. The second theme, concerning attributions of leadership, makes it evident that judgment about these issues are separate and contradictory with judgments about leader evaluations. Acting participatively but adhering to one marketing strategy has a strong positive impact on attributions of leadership. Furthermore, there is some indication that autocratic behavior in situations in which persistence is called for receives the most negative ratings on attributions of leadership.

The results in general make it clear that how a leader's behavior is seen will depend on whether he or she sticks to one strategy (i.e., persistent) or switches marketing strategies (i.e., nonpersistent). Although the interaction effect was not predicted, it does seem to play a crucial role in leadership perceptions. The persistence effect on attributions of leadership was anticipated in this research, and it is consistent with those in the previous studies (e.g., Graves, 1985; Staw & Ross, 1980). The findings regarding the main effect of leader behavior and its interactions with persistence on leader evaluations and attributions of leadership suggest that how one judges leader behavior may depend on the context in which the judgment takes place. This implies that, instead of holding one implicit notion about effective leadership behavior, people generally seem to hold multiple notions. The present data indicate that the identical managerial behavior will be evaluated differently depending on whether the manager is persistent or nonpersistent. Further research examining the beliefs about leadership in a variety of settings is needed. It may be possible to extend such research program to actual work organizations. Further research should also focus on the status of the respondents, that is, who is judging — the boss, the subordinate, or the peer.

Of the two independent variables examined in the present study, leader behavior clearly has the stronger effect. The finding, that participative and nurturant-task behavior are found to be perceived more favourably, is quite consistent with that of Ansari and Shukla (1987), but incongruent with those in earlier studies, requires special attention. Meade (1967) replicated the classic study of Lewin, Lippitt, and White (1939) for a sample of school children in northern India. His major conclusions were that "___work done under authoritarian leadership was of a higher quality and the morale of Ss working under (these) leaders was higher than that in democratic leadership" (Meade, 1967, p. 40).

He then argued that Indian culture, by and large, is authoritarian. Therefore, authoritarian leadership would provide a match between leadership and subordinate ranks, and thus would be of much promise to promote organizational productivity in the Indian set-up. Although other observations (e.g., Lewis, 1962; Wiser & Wiser, 1963) are in contradiction with those of Meade, Sinha (1973) has expressed doubt regarding the validity of Mead's assertion that Indian culture is authoritarian in the sense Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswik, Levinson, and Sanford (1950) defined the construct. Authoritarianism, according to Adorno et al., contains two sets of components: behavioural manifestations and underlying psychodynamics mechanisms. Evidence (for an extended discussion, see Sinha, 1980) exists that the behavioural manifestations do seem to exist in the Indian personality, but the evidence for the presence of psychodynamics mechanisms is not quite conclusive. In fact, some evidence (e.g., Kakar, 1971) is in favor of democratic style of leadership. In line with these arguments, it is then quite natural to have such a trend in the present findings. It should also be noted that there is a gap of almost 20 years between this study and that of Mead's. Thus, differences in the findings may partially be attributed to the time factor.

The foregoing discussion suggests some obvious implications for managers in leadership roles. Previous studies have suggested that the manager must take the audience into account. For example, in a study by Heilman et al. (1984), it was found that whereas subordinates had a strong bias toward seeing participative behavior as effective, bosses did not. The present data suggest that people in general seem to rate the participative leaders more favorably than the autocratic ones; yet the ratings vary across circumstances. Thus depending on whether the participative or nurturant-task leader is primarily persistent or nonpersistent, his or her ratings on evaluations and attributions of leadership might differ substantially.

Finally, a word about methodology is in order. First, the present data are based on the hypothetical scenarios and highlight what a person reports he or she would do in a given situation. Secondly, the data are based on such a student sample, which is generally considered to be unusual in both ability and motivation. In view of the potential limits on the generalizability, the results should be viewed with caution. Nonetheless, some implications are obvious considering the fact that some of the findings are consistent with studies in real-life work settings. This fact may be considered as partial evidence for the external validity of the present experimental findings.

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