

PERSONAL AND ORGANISATIONAL VISION SUPPORTING LEADERSHIP IN A TEAM-BASED TRANSPORT ENVIRONMENT

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ABSTRACT

Leadership in an operational environment requires operational employees to take on responsibility as leaders. This leadership role could vary from self-leadership to team leadership with personal and organisational vision as key drivers for operational leadership performance. The research population included operational employees working in a transport environment who attended a leadership development seminar. A census was conducted using a questionnaire-based empirical research approach. Data analysis was conducted using SPSS, and the results were analysed. Responses indicate the development of an awareness of the importance of values and vision in order to establish effective leadership practices through the leadership development programme. Research confirmed the importance of vision as a key driver in operational leadership in this context. Further skill development is required on how to align personal values and vision with that of the organisation (department) within which operational employees function.

INTRODUCTION

‘Leadership is a social influence. It means leaving a mark. It is initiating and guiding, and the result is change’ (Manning & Curtis, 2007: 2). Leading involves close day-to-day contact with people, helping to guide and inspire them towards achieving individual, team and organisational goals (Bateman & Snell, 2011). ‘By their ideas and deeds, leaders show the way and influence the behaviour of others’ (House, Javidan, Hanges & Dorfman, 2002: 3). The focus on achieving the organisational vision, mission and goals requires continued influence to direct efforts of team members through leadership and self-leadership. Vision is a ‘picture of an ambitious, desirable future’ (Daft, 2005: 16). In the organisational context it refers to the establishment of a desirable future for the organisation and its teams, and in the personal context it refers to the establishment of a desirable future for the particular individual.

Leadership can therefore be described as an influence in an organisational setting or situation, the effects of which are meaningful and have a distinct impact on and facilitate the achievement of challenging organisationally relevant goals. Leadership therefore

demands vision as a driver to ensure effective individual and team performance. 'To be compelling for followers, the vision has to be one they can relate to and share' (Daft, 2005: 16). Historically the role of leadership was mostly associated with top management and had a strategic connotation. Contemporary viewpoints are shifting, whereby leadership is increasingly acknowledged on all organisational levels and spheres in human life. Although management is critical on the operational level, the importance of leadership in an operational team context should not be classified as merely secondary. As management is concerned with various contractual exchanges (reward or remuneration for work done), leadership is concerned with the reciprocal influence process to achieve a goal or realise a dream (vision). The psychological contract established through leadership is a descriptive term indicating the vast variety of leader–follower relations in an organisation (Kotter, 1996; Daft, 2005). This exact influential relationship is critical for operational performance. 'Teamwork is a way of life in the postmodern organization. Teams have become the basic structure through which work is done in organizations. Because of this trend, many more organizations are seeking operational employees who possess team leadership skills' (Lussier & Achua, 2010: 242).

This research paper focuses on establishing the importance of individual (personal) vision and organisational vision, and the alignment thereof, to ensure optimum leadership performance in a team-based environment within an operational context. A census was conducted to establish the perceptions and experiences of operational employees in a transport environment. The population considered for the research comprised operational employees attending a leadership development programme. The target organisation provides consulting and research services as well as training and development to a variety of individuals in the transport industry as well as transport organisations in the public and private sector in South Africa. These individuals and organisations, representing the customer base of the target organisation, are based in the broader transport industry in the road, rail, sea and air modes of transport for passengers and freight.

RESEARCH STRATEGY

Research problem

'A team is a unit of interdependent individuals with complementary skills who are committed to a common purpose and set of performance goals and to common expectations, for which they hold themselves accountable' (Lussier & Achua, 2010: 243). Understanding the focus of teams in the operational context brings about various requirements which should ensure not only optimum team performance but also overall organisational success as well as individual performance and satisfaction. Based on diversity and in many cases specific cultural differences, an employee in the workplace is classified many times independently from who they are as individuals in private life (House, Javidan, Hanges & Dorfman, 2002).

This non-alignment between who the individual is perceived to be as an employee vs a private individual, could contribute negatively to a person's work-related performance as an employee, as well as such a person's overall personal satisfaction with his/her achievements in work life and private life (DuBrin, 2010). George, Sims, McLean and Mayer (2007: 129) advocate this requirement of personal and organisational alignment: 'to lead you need to bring together all of its constituent elements – work, family, community, and friends – so that you can be the same person in each environment.'

As leadership is generally perceived necessary to establishing direction and motivating employees and influencing employee behaviour, it is therefore valid to investigate the need for leadership as well as the importance and attributes of leadership within an operational context. As already confirmed in a strategic context, leadership in an operational context could also utilise vision as one critical element to direct and motivate team member performance. Vision is an important driver for employee performance and is used by leaders to provide such direction and motivation (Collins & Porras, 1996; Lussier & Achua, 2010). In this context it is necessary to confirm the importance of alignment between organisational and personal vision in order to optimise operational and individual performance in a team-leadership context. The psychological focus of personal vision brings about another dimension for research. This falls outside the boundaries of operational and team-leadership research as presented in this research project. The need for research on team leadership performance is based on the three-level analysis of leadership (Lussier & Achua, 2010). The focus is therefore not on the individual level analysis or organisational level analysis, but on group (team) level analysis within an organisational context.

Considering the literature review it is confirmed that leadership is required on all levels within the organisation and is not exclusively a strategic role or task in the post-modern organisation. Furthermore, leadership is a practice relevant to the team context in an operational work environment based on the interdependence of team members to achieve a mutual outcome, goal or vision. Vision is, therefore, confirmed as a driver for leadership performance, and an employee's vision is based on personal as well as organisational (for example, team and departmental) values, purpose (mission) and a view of the future. Leadership success is therefore an expression of how well subordinates perform as interdependent members of a team in achieving their vision or goal. Aligning personal vision with organisational vision could therefore potentially contribute to team leadership performance and success.

Research approach

The article is based on a literature study comprising current and relevant articles, and empirical data. Quantitative research was done using a structured questionnaire considering four demographic factors assessed in Section A and Section B investing elements of

leadership and vision based on the literature study. A 5-point Likert intensity scale was used as the scale design for the questionnaire. Each response was assigned a numerical score to reflect its degree of favourable attitude. The frequency analysis suggested a combination of the 5-point scale in order to establish a 3-point Likert intensity scale for optimum data interpretation.

This study can be considered as exploratory research. Exploratory research is defined as 'research undertaken to expand understanding of the research dilemma, identify alternative ways to address a problem, gather information to refine the research question, and identify resources for actual research question and sample frames' (Cooper & Schindler, 2001: 762). Exploratory research is classified as reasonable when there is little scientific knowledge about a phenomenon yet there is reason to believe there are elements worth discovering (Stebbins in Grove, Fisk & John, 2003). As little research has been conducted with this focus in a transport environment, the research is exploratory in nature.

The **primary objective** for this research can be described as follows:

- To investigate and identify the existence of a personal vision and the alignment of such a vision with that of an organisational vision in an operational team context, which will support leadership in a transport operational environment.

The **secondary objectives** for this research include:

- To determine the existence of a personal vision among participants
- To determine the acceptance and support for the organisational vision among participants
- To determine the importance of vision in establishing operational leadership.

Method of data gathering

As this is an exploratory study, the research was conducted among the staff of a department (operational team) within the transport and supply chain business environment. All employees who attended the leadership development seminar were included in the census in order to ensure that all participating post levels are represented. This representation was based on staff involvement in a team-based operational context and allowed as many employees as possible the opportunity to take part in the research.

Sampling

The main focus of the study is operational employees and line managers functioning in an operational context and who are not primary, but secondary leaders in the organisation. As this is an exploratory study only operational employees committed to developing their leadership skills and abilities by attending a leadership development course are considered. The size of the population was 21 employees attending a leadership development seminar representing operational and managerial members within an operational department

functioning in a transport and supply chain management environment. For the purpose of this research project it was decided to undertake a census survey and not to only use a sample of the population. Although a census could have various restrictive implications ranging, for example, from costs to time implications, it was of greater value to include all participants in the programme by means of a census (Diamantopoulos & Schlegelmilch, 2000). Due to access to the respondents and the size of this census many of the negatives associated with a census were eliminated or minimised. Therefore all 21 participants of the leadership development programme were included in the research.

Procedure

There are several ways in which data can be collected from respondents when using the survey methodology, including personal collection, mail, the Internet and telephonic collection (Zikmund & Babin, 2007). Due to ease of access at the end of the seminar a paper-based questionnaire was made available to attendees and was completed anonymously. The questionnaire was distributed personally to each respondent and was administered after the sample group attended a one-day seminar on leadership development.

Statistical analysis of data

Statistical analysis was done using SPSS software. Statistical analysis included descriptive statistics which are statistics used to describe the data, and this is the initial phase in statistical analysis including a frequency analysis (Diamantopoulos & Schlegelmilch, 2000). Correlations were also conducted in order to establish any significant correlation between the different demographic sub-groups and their responses relating to vision and leadership (Burns & Burns, 2008). Furthermore a test for reliability was conducted to verify reliability. Reliability refers to the degree to which an instrument (or measure) is free from random error, and is thus able to provide consistent data (McDaniel & Gates, 2006). For the purposes of determining reliability, Cronbach's Alpha, which measures how well a set of items measures a specific construct, was used (Anon, 2005; Burns & Burns, 2008). If the scores are high, they are regarded as measuring the same construct, indicating that reliability exists. According to Hair, Black, Babin, Anderson and Tatham (2006), an alpha value of greater than 0.7 indicates a higher degree of reliability.

DISCUSSION

Organisational performance and success are not exclusively based on the performance of a leader versus the performance of subordinates. At the least, leadership involves four components which include the leader, subordinates, the exchange between the leader and the subordinates, and finally the context in which this exchange takes place (Hunter, Bedell-Avers & Mumford, 2007). Many organisations make use of effective teams to achieve organisational goals which support their vision. Team leadership therefore allows

operational employees to participate in the leadership process which is directed at goal achievement. The team-leadership context demands that leadership support for the vision is not exclusively based in higher management levels (Erikson-Zetterquist, Mullern & Styhre, 2011).

This implicates the role operational teams can play within a leadership context. Hunter, Bedell-Avers & Mumford (2007: 440) confirm the importance of the reciprocal relationship between leaders and team members and state that 'although leadership may at times be characterized by singular events, leadership is rarely, if ever, the result of a sole action or behaviour. Rather, leadership is a process, a series of activities and exchanges engaged in, over time and under varied circumstances'. Considering the definition of teams by Lussier and Achua (2010) presented earlier, teams consist of members who share goals, a mission and a vision for which they co-contribute skills and knowledge, based on their interdependence. DuBrin (2010: 256) confirms this view and states that a team 'must rely on collaboration if each member is to experience optimum success and achievement'. This notion emphasises the importance of alignment between individual team member behaviour and performance, which then directly influences individual perception and experience of success and achievement.

Considering this analysis of a team, an effective team is most likely to have greater potential in achieving goals. Team effectiveness is based on three components: task performance, group processes and finally individual satisfaction (Lussier & Achua, 2010). The level of group performance is therefore influenced by various functions including the organisational context, group structure, group process and group development stage. When analysing organisational context it is possible to identify various factors which impact on team performance, such as: environment, vision and mission, strategy, culture, structure, systems and processes (Lussier, 2008). The vision and mission (purpose) of an organisation is therefore confirmed as a factor for consideration when investigating team performance and effectiveness, especially in the context of transformation (Lussier, 2008; Erikson-Zetterquist, *et al.*, 2011).

Considering various definitions on leadership, many suggest that a person (a leader) can influence the behaviour of others (Ivancevich & Matteson, 1996). The definition by Ivancevich & Matteson (1996) further suggests that any individual, in any position, at any level of the organisation can exert goal-specific influence on others which is seen as shared within the team context (Rawlings, 2000). The notion confirms the reality that leadership is the influencing process of leaders and followers to achieve organisational objectives through change (Lussier, 2008; Lussier and Achua, 2010). Daft (2010: 474) emphasises that leadership is 'the ability to influence people toward the attainment of goals'. As mentioned earlier, Manning and Curtis (2007) also focus on influence to ensure goal achievement to realise a

vision and create success as a core element in defining leadership. It should be noted that within a diverse context the understanding of what managerial leadership differences and similarities entail could be based on the assumptions members of that diverse group have regarding leadership. 'According to the implicit leadership theory, individuals hold a set of beliefs about the kinds of attributes, personality characteristics, skills, and behaviors that contribute to or impede outstanding leadership' (Javidan, Dorfman, de Luque & House, 2006: 72).

Lewis, Goodman and Fandt (2003) confirm that leadership is primarily about creating new realities. Through leadership people learn how to create the future. This same leadership empowers people to no longer be victims of circumstances, but to become participants in creating new circumstances (Lewis *et al.*, 2003). These new realities refer to the realisation of vision. Personal vision and organisational vision can therefore be considered as underwriting building elements of the leadership construct. The relation between personal and organisational vision refers to shared vision as organisational elements required for collaboration (Rawlings, 2000). According to Bateman & Snell (2011: 418–19), the best leaders 'challenge the process, enable others to act, model the way, encourage the heart and finally inspire a shared vision'.

According to Daft (2010: 487) a vision can be defined as 'an attractive, ideal future that is credible yet not readily attainable'. Dyck and Neubert (2009) support the fundamentals of this definition and describe a vision as what an organisation strives to become. Bateman and Snell (2011) also describe an organisational vision as a mental picture which is an indication of where the organisation is heading and what it potentially can become in the future. The concept of shared vision therefore confirms that the members of a team such as a department or working team share the vision and its related elements. When investigating vision it is possible to identify sub-elements contributing to the formulation of a vision. According to Collins and Porras (1996) a well-conceived vision consists of two elements, namely a core ideology and an envisioned future. The core ideology refers to a person's values and purpose (reason for existence). An envisioned future refers to what a person or group of people (team, department, organisation) wants to become or to achieve (Collins & Porras, 1996). Values and purpose are therefore key contributors to vision and a potential influence on the extent to which a vision will be shared.

Individuals' behaviour is therefore influenced by their core values and purpose, creating a level of commitment for performance and acting as drivers for their convictions to perform (Sull & Houlder, 2005). In order to optimise individual performance in the workplace and individual satisfaction, it is crucial to consider the potential alignment required between personal and organisational (team) values, purpose (mission) and vision. Shared leadership among team members furthermore contributes to the ability of team members to optimise their effectiveness and ability to obtain a shared vision (personal and organisational) (Pearce

& Sims, 2002). Senge (2006) describes a shared vision as a collective focus on a mutual purpose towards the future. This requires commitment from individuals as members of the team. The team construct for the purpose of this article can be described as group of members sharing leadership while conducting interdependent jobs with individual and group accountability, evaluation and rewards (Lussier, 2008).

Demographic data

Section A of the questionnaire focused on four items in order to establish relevant demographic data regarding the respondents. The four items included: position within the department (team), number of years employed within the department (team), highest qualification, and gender.

Question 1 established the current position of the respondent within the department (team). The largest proportion of the respondents was operational team members in an administrative (28.6%) and non-management (52.4%) capacity within the department (team) which represents 81% of the respondents. Less than 20% of the respondents were within a management and academic position.

Table 1: Current position within the department

Current position	Frequency	Valid percentage	Cumulative percentage
Senior management	1	4.7	4.7
Administrative management	6	28.6	33.3
Non-management	11	52.4	85.7
Only academic	3	14.3	100
Total	21	100.0	

Question 2 established the number of years the respondent has been employed within the relevant department (team), as shown in Table 2. Less than a third of the respondents (28.6%) had been employed for less than a year. Therefore the majority of the respondents had been employed for more than a year (71.4%) and almost a third of the respondents (28.6%) are employed for more than five years at the relevant department.

Table 2: Number of years employed at department

Years employed	Frequency	Valid percentage	Cumulative percentage
Less than 1 year	6	28.6	28.6
1 to 5 years	9	42.9	71.4
More than 5 years	6	28.6	100.0
Total	21	100.0	

Question 3 established the highest qualification obtained by the respondent as summarised in Table 3. The majority of the respondents had a matric or equivalent qualification (47.6%) or a diploma (28.6%). Only 19% of the respondents had a post-degree qualification. This outcome is in line with the outcomes indicated for question 1 and as summarised in Table 1. The five respondents with degree and post-degree qualifications were senior team members.

Table 3: Highest qualification

Highest qualification	Frequency	Valid percentage	Cumulative percentage
High school and grade 12	10	47.6	47.6
Diploma	6	28.6	76.2
Degree	1	4.8	81.0
Post-degree	4	19.0	100.0
Total	21	100.0	

Question 4 established the gender of the respondents. The majority of the respondents were female (90.5%), as seen in Table 4.

Table 4: Gender

Gender	Frequency	Valid percentage	Cumulative percentage
Female	19	90.5	90.5
Male	2	9.5	100.0
Total	21	100.0	

In view of the demographic data captured, the following deductions as summarised in Table 5 can be made relating to the four items measured in Section A. Standard deviation measures the variability of all the items of the data set using the mean as reference (Wisniewski & Stead, 1996). Considering the distribution it is obvious that the kurtosis certainly varies when comparing the four demographic items. Kurtosis describes the flatness or 'peakedness' of a particular distribution in relation to another distribution (Diamantopoulos & Schlegelmilch, 2000). It is confirmed that in terms of gender there is a high level of female participants vs a low level representation of male participants. In order to consider the arithmetic average, which is the sum of the values divided by the number, the mean of the various items is considered. The means of the four demographic factors do not reflect any significance.

Table 5: Summarised demographic data

Section A Demographic factors	Current position	Years employed	Highest qualification	Gender
N Valid	21	21	21	21
Missing	0	0	0	0
Mean	2.76	2.00	1.95	1.10
Std. Deviation	.768	.775	1.161	.301
Kurtosis	.122	-1.257	-.543	7.562

Reliability

A reliability test was conducted in order to establish the level of reliability of the data set for Section B using a Cronbach Alpha test. The results indicated a rating of 0.859 for the items tested in Section B. The items, focusing on vision and leadership, were based on the literature review conducted for this article. The six items included to assess the perception of respondents on vision are:

1. (Personal vision) – I have a clear personal vision.
2. (Vision alignment) – My personal vision and that of the department are aligned.
3. (Value alignment) – My personal values and that of the department are aligned.
4. (Values) – All visions should be based on values.
5. (Purpose) – All visions should be based on a purpose.
6. (Values : behaviour) – My values and my actions are aligned.

Descriptive data on Section B – Vision

Table 6 summarises those vision aspects tested within Section B of the questionnaire in the context of leadership. The results indicate that the majority of the respondents have a clear personal vision, and furthermore that their personal vision and that of the department (organisation) are aligned.

Table 6: Vision

	Personal vision	Vision alignment	Value alignment	Values	Purpose	Values: behaviour
N Valid	21	21	21	21	21	21
Missing	0	0	0	0	0	0
Mean	2.24	2.71	2.67	1.71	1.67	2.10
Standard deviation	.831	.902	.730	.644	.658	.625

The frequencies as presented in Table 7 summarise the respondent perception on vision in general, organisational context and their personal vision. The 5-point Likert scale was regrouped to establish a 3-point Likert scale in the table.

When investigating the responses of the respondents using a frequency analysis, respondents have overwhelmingly confirmed that they believe that all visions should be based on values (90.5%) and purpose (90.5%), always to most of the time. Less than two-thirds of the respondents indicated that they, always to most of the time, have a clear personal vision. Results based on the frequency analysis indicated that a profound alignment between respondents' personal vision and that of the department they are working in does not exist. Evidence of this can be seen in the fact that 19% of the respondents perceived this alignment to exist seldom to never, and 42.9% of the respondents only sometimes perceived the existence of such alignment. More than 75% of the respondents (76.2%) indicated that their values and actions are aligned. When considering the frequency analysis it should be noted that none of the respondents (0%) indicated that they, seldom to never, perceived their values and actions to be aligned, as well as their vision to be based on values and purpose.

Table 7: Frequencies: Vision and personal vision – Section B

Statements	Always to most of the time	Sometimes	Seldom to never	Total
I have a clear personal vision	61.9	33.3	4.8	100
My personal vision and that of the department are aligned	38.1	42.9	19	100
My personal values and that of the department are aligned	38.1	52.4	9.5	100
All visions should be based on values	90.5	9.5	0	100
All visions should be based on a purpose	90.5	9.5	0	100
My values and my actions are aligned	76.2	23.8	0	100

Non-parametric tests were conducted using the frequencies obtained for a total vision and an average vision. When evaluating vision as a factor of leadership it is clear that, irrespective of the qualification of the respondent, the distribution of the total vision and the average vision are the same (0.453 Sig.) using an independent samples Kruskal-Wallis test. This is based on a significance level of 0.05.

Table 8 summarises the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test used to conduct the tests of normality in order to present levels of significance. The researcher can ascertain whether statistical significance exists. According to Hair *et al.* (2006: 16), if the P-value is above 0.05 then a significant difference does not exist when using a 95% level of confidence. All six elements testing vision indicated a level of significance. Four of the elements rated a 0.000 level of significance in terms of personal vision aligned with the relevant work department, as well as visions being based on values and purpose (mission). Respondents' responses furthermore measured significance in terms of the alignment between their values and their actions (behaviour).

Table 8: Significance: Test of normality

Vision	Kolmogorov-Smirnov ^a		
	Statistic	df	Sig.
I have a clear personal vision	.232	21	.004
My personal vision and that of the department are aligned	.243	21	.002
My personal values and that of the department are aligned	.295	21	.000
All visions should be based on values	.290	21	.000
All visions should be based on a purpose	.273	21	.000
My values and my actions are aligned	.322	21	.000

a. Lilliefors Significance Correction

Finally correlations were established in order to evaluate the existence of any correlation between the six items relating to vision on the one hand and on the other hand the respondents' perception of themselves as leaders. A summary of the correlations is presented in Table 9.

Table 9: Correlations

		Personal vision	Vision alignment	Value alignment	Values	Purpose	Values: behaviour
I would describe myself as a true leader	Pearson Correlation	.448	.105	-.302	.147	.030	-.147
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.042	.651	.183	.525	.896	.536
	N	21	21	21	21	21	21

p = 0.05

Results indicate that a significant relation (0.042) exists between the respondents' personal vision and their perception of their leadership capacity. This supports the literature review cited in this article confirming that strong leaders do have a clear vision. The other items did not indicate any significance.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In considering the data analysis it can be concluded that values are a critical element for operational leadership. Although this is emphasised in the results obtained, respondents confirmed that their personal values vary and are therefore not always directly aligned with that of the organisation. The perception of respondents is confirmed in that they support an alignment between values and purpose as well as values and actions. Although the data analysis confirms the importance of an alignment between personal and organisational (departmental) values, respondents confirmed that their perception is that their personal values as well as their vision are not directly aligned with that of the organisation (department).

Although it was not possible to confirm a correlation between purpose (mission) and vision, respondents did indicate a notion of acknowledging the importance of values and purpose in formulating a personal and organisational vision. The lack of alignment between personal values and vision on the one hand and that of the organisation (department or team) requires attention.

Although this is an exploratory study it has its limitations in terms of the impact on a transport operational environment within the broader industry and beyond. This study is also not representative of a broader base of operational environments or the transport industry as a whole. It should also be noted that the researcher is aware of the potential complication of a small sample for quantitative analysis. Therefore, the results obtained can be used to improve the planning and structure of future qualitative research on the same theme.

As a recommendation it is clear that an awareness of the importance of values and vision in order to establish effective leadership practices is essential. This is based on the assumption that organisational practices support team leadership in an operational context. If team leadership is not developed in an operational work environment that is fundamentally dependent on team performance, it requires an intensive rethink on strategic and operational levels in order to accommodate the necessary changes.

The need for team leadership development was confirmed during the leadership training programme. Furthermore, the importance of alignment between personal and organisational vision and values was also established among respondents who participated in the leadership development programme. Establishing such level of alignment requires continuous support and buy-in from team members and senior management. There is a need for further skill development on how to align personal values and vision with that of the organisation. This can only be truly effective once participants have established clarity on any issues or factors that might impact on their personal vision, which requires psychoanalysis which falls beyond the framework of this leadership training programme. Creating opportunities for enhanced leadership involvement in the operational environment could support a further improvement in aligning personal values with operational leadership behaviour and actions. Clear and regular communication of the organisational vision, through multiple media and at strategic and operational events, is required to enhance, confirm and explain its meaning and importance, allowing each individual to establish personal alignment.

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