

# LEADERSHIP COMPETENCIES IN A MANUFACTURING ENVIRONMENT

SM MOLLO

K STANZ

T GROENEWALD

*Programme in Leadership in Performance and Change  
Department of Human Resource Management  
University of Johannesburg*

## ABSTRACT

Against the backdrop of a literature review on leadership approaches, models and theories, the aim of this study was the identification of shortcomings regarding leadership competencies within a particular manufacturer. Semi-structured interviewing was used within a grounded theory research design. A stratified random sample of participants contributed to the study. Opposing perspectives about several themes emerged from the data such as, vision direction, communication channels, growth, rewarding performance, leadership-role, and change problems. Seminars and workshops towards improvement of competencies are recommended.

## OPSOMMING

Teen die agtergrond van 'n literatuurstudie rakende benaderings, modelle en teorieë oor leierskap, was die doel van die studie om tekortkominge in leierskapbevoegdheids in 'n bepaalde vervaardiger te identifiseer. Gedeeltelik gestruktureerde onderhoude was gebruik, binne 'n begrondeteorie ontwerp. 'n Gestrativeerde ewekansige steekproef van deelnemers het bygedra tot die studie. Teenstrydige perspektiewe rakende verskeie temas, soos visiegerigtheid, kommunikasiekanale, groei, prestasiebeloning, leierskaprol en veranderingsprobleme, het voorgespruit uit die data. Seminare en werksinkels ten einde bevoegdheids te verbeter word aanbeveel.

The problem of poor organisational performance is rife in the per-way (company to company transportation) industry, inasmuch as it is experienced by many organisations in South Africa. This problem is further highlighted by the annual research conducted and published by the World Economic Forum. The World Competitive Reports of 1994, 1995, 1996, 1997, 1998 & 1999 refer. These reports indicate that South African business organisations fare exceptionally poorly when compared to other developed and developing nations. Furthermore, a few of the more disconcerting facts are that the capacity of management to identify and implement competitive practices falls in the bottom 25% for all developed and developing nations and South African organisations fall in the bottom 10% for productivity when compared with other developing nations.

The above situation requires leadership of organizations in South Africa particularly to take responsibility for developing new management skills and applying these skills sensitively to their specific workforce situation. The subject of this paper, a manufacturing enterprise, is an organisation in per-way business (i.e. providing mining and railway companies with steel for rail-tracks and/or roads). The company is situated in the Gauteng Province, in an industrial area called Isando in Kempton Park. This company was started in 1976. It has exchanged several hands in terms of ownership. But the company is now owned by an Austrian. In terms of several reports and perception surveys, this company is experiencing a myriad of problems, and of particular importance for this research is that there is inadequate performance alleged to be caused by lack of effective leadership.

With a critical mass of managers within per-way industry asking for changes, it is imperative for upper management to respond and organisational policies and systems will stand a better chance of being changed. Furthermore, it takes credible managers and/or leadership who are effective in their day to day roles and who contribute to the organisation's mission and goals to influence change. Table 1 represents the desired leadership competencies.

**TABLE 1**  
**LEADERSHIP COMPETENCIES**

Competency	Description
Communication	Leadership within the manufacturing enterprise concerned should clearly define expectations for employees.
Focus	Leadership should be comfortable with issues of power and conflict and be at ease in assuming accountability.
Production	They should be clear about what they expect in terms of levels of performance.
People	Concern for production and performance should be balanced with empathy and authentic concern for employee growth and development.
Control	They should have systems in place that allow them periodic and consistent review and monitoring of employee performance.
Feedback	They should provide regular, ongoing, and spontaneous feedback concerning positive and negative aspects of employee performance.

As Rhinesmith (1996, p. 59) says "leadership is about creating the conditions where people can perform to their potential in a fashion which they and their company are comfortable. It is about creating a vision for the organisation and then articulating it so that others believe in the vision and then successfully implement it". Wickens (1995, p. 93) expresses the view that leaders have to project several years ahead to determine where the organisation is going. Leaders begin with the individual and then ensure that all in the team are working together to achieve common objectives. Tompkins (1995, p. 25) is also of the opinion that the most important role of company leadership is defining a company's vision and aligning people in the company behind this vision. It is therefore heartening to realise that the manufacturing enterprise concerned has taken the first step of defining its vision. The second step is now to get people aligned behind this vision. It is in this regard whereby Manning's (1999, p. 73) statement becomes true that: boldness and sense of urgency is also required to be effective. What is now required is that leadership of the manufacturing

enterprise concerned should now hold a view that “if they are going to get it wrong, then they would be better off failing faster so that they can learn faster”. This implies progressive leadership that has what it takes to take the risks associated with ‘breaking the mould’ and who base their thinking on all the reasons why business vision and objectives can be accomplished as opposed to why it cannot be accomplished. At this stage, it is also important to have a clear understanding of the concept ‘leadership’.

### What is leadership?

As Kreitner and Kinicki (2004, p. 595) puts it “disagreement about the definition of leadership stems from the fact that it involves a complex interaction among the leader, the followers, and the situation”. For example some researchers define leadership in terms of personality and physical traits, while others believe leadership is represented by a set of prescribed behaviours. In contrast, other researchers believe that leadership is a temporary role that can be filled by anyone. There is a common thread, however, among the different definitions of leadership. The common thread is social influence i.e. within an organisational context, leadership is defined as “a social influence process in which the leader seeks the voluntary participation of subordinates in an effort to reach organisational goals” (Leuchter, 2000, p. 45).

Peters and Austin (1985, pp. 5 - 6) describe leadership in broader terms:

Leadership means vision, cheerleading, enthusiasm, love, trust, verve, passion, obsession, consistency, the use of symbols, paying attention as illustrated by the content of one’s calendar, out-and-out drama (and the management thereof), creating heroes at all levels, coaching, effectively wandering around, and numerous other things. Leadership must be present at all levels of the organisation. It depends on a million little things done with obsession, consistency, and care, but all of those million little things add up to nothing if the trust, vision, and basic belief are not there.

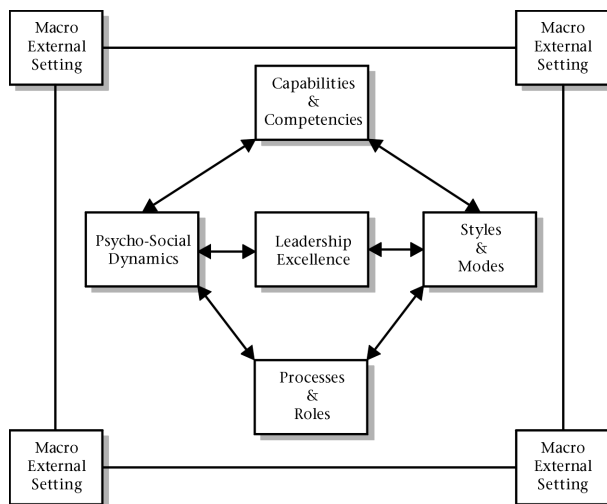


Figure 1: Leadership context

According to Veldsman (2002a, p. 78) leadership is a dynamic and organic process, as reflected by Figure 1 above, which consists of an interconnected and interdependent set of roles. A role refers to a way of doing. These roles are taken up and terminated in ever-changing combinations and priorities in concert with changing contextual circumstances and the agenda being pursued. The chosen combinations and priorities are a function of the future creation and realisation embarked upon. The roles must be performed such that the overall act of leadership forms a coherent and unified whole, in and of itself, but also with the context in

which it is embedded. The roles serve as a bridge between the leadership context and competencies.

Tompkins (1995, p. 29) identified several competencies that are necessary for the motivation of people by saying that leaders define motivation by exhibiting the five mental qualities namely integrity, credibility, enthusiasm, optimism and determination. They also define motivation by how they communicate, and in this regard Tompkins (1995, p. 32) says leaders don’t think of communication as something they do, but view it from the receiver’s end. That is to say, for them communication is not the generation of a message, but rather the receipt of the message by the receiver. Lastly, he says that leaders define motivation by how they work.

Furthermore, it would appear that for the manufacturing enterprise concerned, to achieve leadership excellence it must revisit and review its leadership psycho-social dynamics; competencies and capabilities; processes and roles and styles and modes. Subsequent discussions highlight theories around these issues.

### Leadership Approaches

Historically there have been three approaches to leadership (Carrell, Jennings & Heavrin, 1997, p.469; Hellriegel, Jackson & Slocum, 2002, p. 407; Kreitner & Kinicki, 2004, p. 597). The earliest approach sought to identify a set of traits possessed by effective leaders (*the traits approach*). The search for leadership traits, essentially involving comparisons between the characteristics of successful leaders with those of unsuccessful ones and non-leaders, ended in the 1950’s after generating negative results (Mann, 1959, p. 243). In the second approach (*the behavioural approach*) researchers then began to emphasise the behaviour patterns of the leader congruent with effective leadership. This resulted in the classification of leadership behaviour under various styles (Cogill, 1986, p. 480). With this approach, effective leaders did not need to possess magical traits but, instead, had to provide strong direction and support while encouraging subordinates to participate in important decisions (Howell, Bowen, Dorfman, Kerr & Podsakoff, 1990, p. 23; Veldsman, 2002b, p. 34).

Researchers later began to recognise that there was no single most effective leadership style for generating good performance in all situations. The third approach, *the so called situational/contingency approach* suggests that while a particular leadership style may be effective in one situation, different behaviour may be required under another set of circumstances. As early as 1948, Stogdill (1974, p. 48) had stated “it becomes clear that an adequate analysis of leadership involves not only a study of leadership but also situations”. The situational/contingency approach was, therefore, a logical extension of the behavioural approach.

### Trait approach

The trait approach assumed that “great men” or “natural leaders” were endowed with certain characteristics necessary for leadership (Siegel & Lane, 1982, p. 166). “Great-man-theories” did not persist for two main reasons. Firstly, little evidence existed for the genetic predisposition of leadership characteristics. Secondly, leaders who were found to be successful in certain situations were not necessarily successful in others (Cogill, 1986, p. 478). The search for leadership traits ended in the 1950’s after studies by Allport (1924), Bird (1940), Geien (1967), Gibb (1969), Jenkins (1947), Mann (1959) and Stogdill (1974), attempted unsuccessfully to find a consistent and strong trait or constellation of traits that differentiated leaders from followers.

Furthermore, research indicated that there was a considerable variation in personalities, abilities and skills of successful leaders. Allport (1924), for example, suggested 19 traits which were essential for leadership, while Bird (1949), in a review of

studies, compiled a list of 79 leadership traits (Stogdill, 1974). Traits generally failed to correlate with leadership in a strong or consistent manner and the types and numbers of traits listed as significant vary depending on the study cited (Cogill, 1986, p. 478). Furthermore, it is not clear how many of the differences reflect the effects of occupancy of a leadership position. For example, occupying the role of a leader may contribute to the manifestation of some of those traits rather than having those traits increasing one's chances of being selected as a leader (Vroom, 1983). Also, there is a considerable variance across situations in both the magnitude and direction of the relationship between most personality attributes and leadership status. Situational determinants such as task, structural components and social-psychological concepts such as organisational climate, play a role in leadership behaviour (Campbell, Dunnette, Lawler & Weick, 1970).

As evidence accumulates from better-designed research and new research methods, trait research is slowly discovering how leader traits relate to leadership behaviour and leadership effectiveness. Recent research has been on managerial motivation and specific skills rather than on personality traits and general intelligence. Vroom (1983, p. 535) suggests that instead of conceptualising leadership as a general trait applicable to all situations, leadership could be expressed as a set of highly specific traits each of which would be applicable to clearly defined situations.

#### *Behavioural Approach*

The trait approach provided an incomplete view of the leadership process and researchers began to focus on the behavioural correlates of effective leadership. Effective and ineffective leaders were distinguished from one another by their characteristics behaviour patterns in their work roles. These behavioural patterns were classified as leadership styles (Jackson & Keaveny, 1980, p. 26). Three main leadership styles were identified initially. These were autocratic, democratic and laissez-faire. Autocratic leadership means that a supervisor retains personal control over planning and decision making. By contrast, democratic leadership involves providing an opportunity for subordinates to have a say in decisions affecting their work. Democratic or employee-centred leadership implies concern for the satisfaction of subordinate needs and welfare. According to Cogill (1986, p. 482) the autocratic-democratic continuum has been conceptualised as a continuum of boss-centred or subordinate-centred leadership by Tannenbaum and Schmidt in 1958. Laissez-faire leaders by contrast, avoid attempting to influence their subordinate and neglect their supervisory duties. They maintain both a psychological as well as a physical distance from subordinates and are generally ineffective (Cogill, 1986, p. 484). Schein (1980, p. 39) notes that almost every leadership style theory is essentially concerned with the extent to which the leader is people-oriented and task oriented. The Michigan Leadership Studies and the Ohio Leadership Studies in the late 1940's were concerned with the behaviour of leaders in their leadership roles.

The Michigan Studies aimed initially at differentiating behaviour patterns between effective and less effective managers (Vroom, 1983, p. 1540). The researchers studied differences in supervisory behaviour of 24 work groups divided into high and low productivity categories. Highly productive supervisors were more frequently employee centred, were more likely to exercise general rather than close supervision and were more likely to differentiate their roles from those of their subordinates in terms of duties performed.

The Ohio State Leadership studies began by attempting to identify the dimensions needed to characterise differences in the behaviour of leaders. According to Vroom (1983) researchers (Fleishman, 1953; Fleishman & Harris, 1962; Hemphill, 1959) identified two independent dimensions called "consideration" and "initiating structure". "Consideration" represented the extent to which a leader was concerned with the feelings of his

or her subordinates (people orientation). "Initiating structure" referred to the degree to which the leader facilitated goal attainment (task orientation). A large number of investigations were generated by the initial findings. Fleishman and Harris (1962, p. 48) for example, found that leaders who were high on consideration tended to have lower grievance rates than those who were high on initiating structure. It was also found that leaders high on consideration to have more satisfied subordinates than those low on consideration. The relationship between consideration and rated leader effectiveness was found to vary with the research population (Bass, 1981, p. 78). For example, a negative correlation was reported for air-crew commanders in combat while a positive relationship was found for managers and office staff in an industrial organisation (Graen, Dansereau & Minami, 1972, p.112; Bennis & Nanus, 2001, p. 60).

While the Ohio State Leadership Studies had suggested that people-oriented styles, in contrast to task-oriented styles, resulted in a number of favourable work outcomes (Fleishman & Harris, 1962, p. 52), subsequent research indicated that for groups to be effective, leaders had to be concerned with both people and task dimensions (Schein, 1980, p. 97). This resulted in the emergence of two approaches. The first approach is the one-best-leadership approach. Liden and Graen (1980) contend that one of the major characteristics of contemporary leadership literature is the assumption that leaders manifest one consistent leadership style. Blake and Mouton (1964, p. 33) suggested that there need not be a conflict between production goals and personal need satisfaction (Vroom, 1983). Their model is prescriptive, pointing to an ideal leadership style in which the leader has both a high concern for production and for people. The leader attempts to combine creativity, high productivity and high morale through team action.

In contrast to the one-best-style approach, some researchers have suggested that there is no best style since leadership effectiveness is contingent upon the situation, the task or subordinates (Fielder, 1967, p. 76). They suggest that leadership style is not a constant, which can be demonstrated, in any given situation.

#### *The Situational/Contingency Approach*

The situational/contingency approach suggests that while a particular style of leadership may be effective in one situation; this may not be the case under a different set of circumstances. Situational researchers began to identify the various situational demands purported to influence leadership. Siegel and Lane (1982) identified "time-demand" as a constraint on managerial behaviour. Katz and Kahn (1966) identified "organisational level" as another situational demand (Cogill, 1986). Nealy and Fielder (1968) found that the most successful first-line supervisor was not necessarily successful at the second level of management.

On the other-hand Bass (1981) emphasises "organisational climate" as being an important dimension to be taken into account. He also viewed climate as an organisational feature that is an important situational constraint on leadership processes (Kolowski & Doherty, 1989). Vroom (1983) found that the leader's subordinates in an organisation exerted an important situational constraint on the leader's effectiveness. Some subordinates may respond more favourably to democratic employee-oriented leadership where participation in decision making is encouraged, while others have a low need for independence and a high need for authoritarianism preferring tasks to be delegated. Based on the research, it appears that the most appropriate leadership style is determined by the conditions under which the leader has to operate (Vroom, 1983). A number of researchers have put forward models pertaining to the situational/contingency approach to leadership. Subsequent discussion will explain Fielder's contingency model; the 'House path-goal model';

the Reddin 3-dimensional management style theory; the Hersey and Blanchard life-cycle theory and leader-member exchange (LMX) theory (Bennis, Spreitzer & Cummings, 2001, p. 133).

**Fielder's contingency model** – Fielder (1967) made an important contribution to leadership theory by attempting to explain the relationship between different situational factors. These factors are leadership style, leader-member relations, task structure and leader power position. The basic proposition of the model is that effective leadership is a joint function of characteristics of the leader and features of the situation. Fielder (1967) elevated the importance of situational factors to the same level as leader characteristics. The model postulates that the effectiveness of a leader is dependent upon the motivational system of the leader and the favourableness of the situation, and that group performance can be improved either by modifying the leader's style or by modifying the group task situation (Fielder, 1967).

According to Fielder (1967) the most crucial element in leadership is the leader-member relationship, that is, the extent to which the members trust and respond to the leader. Fielder (1967) defines situational favourableness as "the degree to which the situation enables the leader to exert influence over his/her group" (p.13). Eight situational combinations have been studied and classified according to data from empirical investigations. These range from a situation most favourable to the leader (good leader-member relations, structured task, and strong power position) to the most unfavourable situation (poor leader-member relations, unstructured task, and weak power position). By combining scores on each of the three dimensions, the overall situational level of favourableness is arrived at. The appropriate matching of leadership style and the degree of favourableness of the group situation determines group performance. The model suggests that group performance can be improved by modifying the leader's style or by modifying the group-task situation.

A measure of the motivational personality of leaders is provided by the "least preferred co-worker score" (LPC). Fielder (1967) concludes that high LPC leaders (those who describe their least preferred co-worker in favourable terms) are thought to place greater value on relatedness with people, while low LPC leaders are motivated by task achievement rather than interpersonal relations (Vroom, 1983). Fielder (1967) discovered that where the situation was favourable to the leader the most effective leaders were found to have been task oriented (low LPC score). This was indicated by the strong negative correlation between LPC and group performance. In moderately favourable situations, effective leaders had a high LPC score reflected by moderately high positive correlations between leader's LPC scores and group performance. Finally, in situations unfavourable to leadership, effective leaders were those with low LPC scores. This was indicated by a moderate negative correlation between LPC scores and group performance (Siegel & Lane, 1982). Fielder (1967) suggests that this has implications for selection. Individuals with appropriately high or low LPC scores, depending on the situational favourability, will, when selected, provide the optimal match for the group and result in improved group performance.

The contingency model's emphasis upon situational factors in interaction with leadership characteristics made an important contribution to leadership theory, incorporating and building on the facets of earlier models (Cogill, 1986). Other reviews conclude that the research tends to support the model, although not for every octant and not as strongly for field studies as for laboratory studies (Yukl, 1989).

**The 'House path-goal model'** – A number of leadership theories have examined leadership styles in various

situations. The Path-Goal Leadership Model (House, 1971) suggests that leaders will be effective in motivating subordinates when they are able to make rewards potentially available to subordinates depending on the accomplishment of certain agreed upon objectives. According to House (1971) the leader should be viewed as a motivator of individual workers towards goal attainment. This motivation takes place as the leader varies his/her leadership style to meet the requirements of the situation. House (1971) further identified two classes of situational variables- subordinate characteristics (ability, need for independence and self control, need for affiliation) and environmental forces (nature of the task, formal authority system, primary work group) which are hypothesised as influencing the extent to which subordinate motivation can be increased by leadership behaviour.

Path-goal research has investigated the relationship between the Ohio State leadership dimensions of consideration and initiating structure as measured by the subordinate satisfaction, performance, expectancies and role clarity. The environmental forces and subordinate characteristics are included as moderators in these studies. Grulke (2002, p. 211) concludes that research findings provide stronger support for path-goal predictions about consideration than about initiating structure and stronger support for predictions about satisfaction than about performance.

Stogdill (1974) supports the model because its cause and effects components allow it to be tested. It has been criticised because of the possibility that employees could misconstrue the intentions of the leader as he/she manipulates their level of motivation. Graen & Cashman (1975) conclude that the model needs refinement as it does not adequately explain how the leader learns about the organisational environment and adjusts his/her style across different situations with different employees (Bass, 1981). However, methodological limitations of the validation research, such as over-reliance on questionnaire data from the same respondents and difficulties in measuring intervening motivational processes, suggest that the theory has to be adequately tested before conclusions can be made.

**The Reddin 3-Dimensional Management Style Theory** – Reddin's (1970) 3 dimensional management style theory went beyond Blake and Mouton's model by identifying four basic leadership styles, whose effectiveness depended on the situation (Cogill, 1986). Reddin (1970) proposed three dimensions within the four styles: the supervisor's relationship orientation and task orientation in conjunction with effectiveness. Hollander and Julian (1969) reacted favourably to its three dimensional portrayal of leadership along with its leadership requirements for effective supervision. Although Reddin (1970) suggested that his framework explained effectiveness as a function of matching style to situation, his approach did not identify specific situational attributes that could be incorporated into predictive scheme (Vecchio, 1987). However, some authors have criticised the model for being primarily descriptive, lacking more specific and definitive descriptions and thus being largely untestable (Yukl, 1989).

**The Hersey and Blanchard life-cycle theory** – Hersey and Blanchard (1988) build on Reddin's suggestion that leader or manager effectiveness varied according to style and proposed a life-cycle theory of leadership (Vroom, 1983). According to the theory, task orientation and relationship orientation needed to be examined in conjunction with the dimension of follower maturity to account for leadership effectiveness. Then, using traditional categories of leader behaviour, initiating structure and consideration, they suggested that as the level of follower maturity increased, effective leader behaviour would involve less structuring (task orientation) and less socio-emotional

support (relation-orientation). Graeff (1983) argues that the theory correctly focuses on issues of leader flexibility and the importance of subordinate attributes as the key situational determinant of appropriate leader behaviour, but believes it makes only a minor contribution to leadership theory because it can be shown to overlap to varying degrees with other theories. Vecchio's (1987) results suggested that more recently hired employees might need and appreciate greater task structuring from their superior. A number of writers including Blake and Mouton (1982), Graeff (1983) and Yukl (1989) have pointed out conceptual weaknesses in the theory, including ambiguous constructs, oversimplification, and lack of intervening explanatory processes (Carrel, Jennings & Heavrin, 1997, p. 56).

**Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) theory** – Most of various contemporary leadership theories (for example, McGregor's theory Y, Blake and Mouton's managerial grid, Hersey and Blanchard's situational leadership theory, and Fielder's contingency theory) either focus on a "general leadership style", or only take account of the behaviour of the manager and ignore that of the subordinate. This makes such approaches conceptually unsound. Firstly, given the range of individual differences between subordinates, no single managerial style can be expected to be appropriate for all subordinates. Secondly, examining only the behaviour of managers only represents half the equation in manager-subordinate dyads (Nunns, Ballantine, Burns & King, 1990, p. 47).

Thus, within recent leadership research, the leader-member vertical dyad has been found to make a contribution in accounting for leader effectiveness criteria (Liden & Graen, 1980). The vertical dyad linkage theory, now called "leader-member exchange theory", describes how leaders develop different exchange relationships over time with different subordinates (Dansereau, Graen & Haga, 1975; Graen & Cashman, 1975). Whilst, a number of contemporary leadership theories (House's Path-Goal Model; Fielder's Contingency Model and Reddin's 3-Dimensional Theory of Leadership Effectiveness) focus on a general leadership style approach within the context of the situation, the LMX theory stresses the importance of emphasising the individual dyadic relationship between supervisor's (termed "leaders") and each of their subordinates (termed "members") according to Vecchio & Gobdel (1984).

LMX theory is based upon the concept of a developed or negotiated role (Dienesch & Liden, 1986). This theory says, within organizations, employee's roles typically are defined in an ambiguous and incomplete manner. Thus, the interpersonal exchange relationship between subordinate and supervisor are assumed to be an important mechanism in determining the type of role that a subordinate will play in his/her organisation. The leader-member relationship between supervisor and subordinate develops overtime, resulting in a relatively high or low quality exchange between the parties (Scandura & Graen, 1984). A high quality exchange relationship is characterised by subordinates receiving greater influence, autonomy and tangible benefits in return for greater loyalty, commitment and assistance in performing administrative duties. Where the exchange is of poor quality, it is characterised by a low level of trust, interaction, support and reward (Dienesch & Liden, 1986). The theory is situational only in the sense that leaders treat subordinates differently depending on whether they are part of the in-group or out-group. The theory has been extended to include a manager's upward relationships. In essence the theory suggests that: a leader who has a favourable exchange relationship with his/her own boss has more potential for establishing a special exchange relationship with subordinates.

According to Dienesch & Liden (1986) research a special upward exchange relationship is a key prediction of a

manager's advancement in the organisation in longitudinal research conducted in Japan. A special downward exchange relationship with a subordinate results in greater loyalty and performance by the subordinate (Graen, Novak & Sommerkap, 1982; Scandura & Graen, 1984; Vecchio & Gobdel, 1984). In addition, high quality exchanges have been associated with higher levels of subordinate job satisfaction and involvement.

The LMX theory has a number of conceptual weaknesses. Some important issues, such as the process of role-making, have not received enough attention, either in the theory itself or in the research conducted to test it by Dienesch and Liden (1986). There is limited research on the basis on which selection of in-group members, and it is still not clear how this selection occurs. The theory has been criticised for an inability to replicate certain results across settings (Vecchio & Gobdel, 1984). Dienesch and Liden (1986) suggest that there is a need for further refinement of the LMX scale and investigation into dimensionality of the LMX relationship. It is important to make a clearer separation between measures of the quality of the relationship (for example, perceptions of mutual trust, loyalty and respect), measures of specific leader behaviour (for example, delegating, consulting, praising and supporting) and measures of outcomes (for example, performance and turnover). Finally, further research is necessary to explore the perceptions of members regarding the nature of role differentiation within the group (Posner & Kouzes, 2001, p. 126).

All the above-mentioned theories reiterated what was said in the introduction that some researchers define leadership in terms of personality and physical traits, while others believe leadership is a temporary role that can be filled by anyone. The latter seems to be unpopular and not supported by most theories mentioned above. However, it is important to mention that there is a common thread in all the theories. The common thread is 'social influence'. There is an agreement that – within an organisational context, leadership is a social process in which the leader seeks the voluntary participation of subordinate in an effort to reach organisational goals (Leuchter, 2000, p. 45). It would appear that the social influence is not bringing the results and/or organisational goals within the manufacturing enterprise concerned, hence questions are being asked as to 'where is the problem?' and 'what should be done?' and 'by who?'

## RESEARCH DESIGN

Glaser (1992, p. 22), co-proponent of grounded theory with Strauss, cautioned against a formulation of a specific research problem because it forces the data. Both these authors emphasised theoretical sensitivity i.e. the researcher need to distance her/himself from the theory to avoid drifting into preconception and to maintain a balance between theory development and 'good science' (Dey, 1999, pp 3-4; Glaser, 1992, pp 27 & 49; Strauss & Corbin, 1990, pp. 10-27, 29, 50-55, 68 – 76).

Strauss and Corbin (1997, p. 172) commented that beginning with an interest in a substantive area, rather than a research problem, exemplifies appropriate use of grounded theory methodology. As highlighted in the previous sections the manufacturing enterprise concerned seems to be experiencing productivity problems. But because performance is a product of various factors, namely, structures, systems, procedures, organisational and interactive systems in place. At that juncture it couldn't be pinpointed as to what causes lack of and/or poor performance. Consequently, semi-structured interviews were therefore decided upon to research the problem.

The researcher allowed what is relevant to the area of study to emerge (Glaser, 1992, p. 21; Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 23). The data offered by participants was documented because grounded theory is an iterative process, described by Bryman and Burgess (1999, p. 25) as follows:

... the researcher begins to collect data guided by a rather general view of the research issue, theorises about his/her data (for example, by noting interesting general categories and their connections), examines these initial theoretical reflections by carrying out further data collection, theorises further, collects more data and so on. The idea is progressively to elaborate a more general theoretical statement about the data.

The objective of grounded theory is therefore to intimately link research to the reality of the participants and to allow findings to emerge from the 'actual words spoken by the participants, and thus truly "grounded" in them'. Although firmly rooted in the original data, the research results also involve the inductive interpretations of the data by researcher (Hurst, 1999, p. 180). The researcher also consulted a number of relevant accessible documents, both primary and secondary. Bell (1993, p. 68) defines a document as "an impression left by a human being on a physical object" and a primary source as a document which came into existence in the period under research, and a secondary source as an interpretation of events of the period under research based on primary sources. This may also include primary sources such as documents or testimonies of eyewitness accounts to an event, and a secondary source document as evidence of individuals who did not actually observe or participate in the event.

Primary sources can be deliberate or inadvertent. Bell (1993, p. 68) defines deliberate sources as those, which are produced for the attention of future researchers. They could include such documents as autobiographies, memoirs of politicians, diaries and documents of self-justification. Bell further adds that such documents are deliberately written to preserve evidence for future purposes of self-vindication or reputation-enhancement. On the other hand, inadvertent sources are those used by the researcher for a purpose other than the one they were originally intended for. According to Bell (1993, p. 69) examples of such documents include among several others: records of the legislative bodies, government departments, letters and newspapers, bulletins, handbooks and prospectus. For the purpose of this study the researcher accessed relevant primary and secondary sources from the shelves and reserve collections of both public and academic libraries. Documents accessed, include among others, books, journals, articles, abstracts, theses/dissertations, local and national newspapers. However, more emphasis will be placed on inadvertent sources, for as Bell (1993, p. 68) observes, they are produced for contemporary practical purposes and likely to be more straightforward than deliberate sources. To avoid bias and create a balanced study, the contents of all the documents used were critically analysed.

### Participants

Participants were selected through purposeful sampling. The reason is that 35% of total workforce of the manufacturing enterprise concerned qualifies to be classified as part of leadership and the rest i.e. 65% is ordinary employees. The population of staff was divided into four clearly recognisable, non-overlapping sub-populations (Welman & Kruger, 1999, p. 55) namely, operators, supervisors, middle managers and executive managers – see Table 2. The proportion of individuals from each sub-population was calculated to make up a sample of sixteen (16) participants. A table of random numbers was used (Welman & Kruger, 1999, p. 290) to identify the stratified random sample of participants.

**TABLE 2**  
**STRATIFIED RANDOM SAMPLE**

Category	Population	Sample	Gender per sample
Operators	32	8	6 males & 2 females
Supervisors	8	2	1 female & 1 male
Middle-managers	12	4	4 males
Executive managers	6	2	2 males
Total	58	16	

### Procedure

The data collection was through semi-structured interviews by means of a sensitising brief with which the researcher entered the field followed by open-ended questions (Brott & Myers, 1999, p.340). The sensitising brief was basically to explain to the participants the nature of the interview and also to allay the fears of possible victimisation. The participants were given comfort that the aim of the interview is not to determine who should be retrenched. Participants were further given assurance that their identity will not be disclosed. The information was extracted by way of purposeful discussion within the ambit of leadership competencies. The researcher identified through literature review that the following four topical areas are imperative to the discussion (Brott & Myers, 1999, p. 341):

1. Make some comments regarding the appropriateness of the vision, mission, key objectives and strategies of your organisation.
2. Comment on how the leadership of the enterprise concerned provides vision and initiate change.
3. Does leadership allow their team members to grow and to carry-out tasks without interruption?
4. Are there issues with your current leadership competencies, planning and decision making processes? Are there issues with regard to regulation (e.g. evaluation systems, reward systems, performance measures, etc)?

However, the researcher at no stage forced the discussion but engaged in a dialogue with the participants to capture their true perspectives on the four issues above. Furthermore, the researcher made use of a flipchart to record responses. Once the responses were captured on a flipchart, they were read back to the participants for confirmation. It should be mentioned that as the discussion unfolded key statements and phrases were jotted down.

### Data analysis

Grounded theory has three major components, the data, the analysis thereof (or interpretative procedures) and the written report. The reciprocal relationship between the data and the analysis (for example, coding and, categorising) has already been indicated (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, pp. 20 & 23).

The coding entails the breaking down of data, conceptualising and putting it together in new ways. The specific coding methods vary in terms of the background or training of the researcher, his/her experience and the purpose (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, pp. 20 & 57). Glaser (1992, p. 46) as well as Strauss & Corbin (1990, p. 23) indicated three major types of coding, namely, open, axial and selective. Open coding is the process of fracturing data, examining it, comparing, conceptualising and categorising. Axial coding is a set of procedures to put data together in new ways after open coding. The paradigm model is used to link sub-categories of data with categories. Simplified, the sequential steps of the paradigm model are: causal conditions, phenomenon, context, intervening conditions, action/interaction strategies and consequences. Selective coding starts after the core category has been found. It is a delimiting coding (or explicating the story line) of only those issues that relates to the core category.

During the entire coding process ample use is made of memos and diagrams. Memos are analysis notes and may include code notes (such as conceptual labels, paradigm features, etc) theoretical notes (such as summaries of potential categories and their properties etc) and operational notes. Diagrams are visual representations of the emerging relationships between concepts, it shows process, depicts lines of action and integrates. Memos and diagrams are sorted and organised to finalise the integration (Glaser, 1992; Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

The research findings based on the data collected from the participants are presented in the next section.

#### *Vision directedness*

There are two distinct groupings of views regarding the vision, mission and strategies of the manufacturing enterprise concerned that emerged. On one hand, there are those that feel very positive, and on another-hand, there are those that are negative. It would appear that those individuals in high ranks within the organisation feel positive with regard the mission and vision. To them, the organisation has a mission, vision and strategies though some work still needs to be carried-out. This is supported by the comment made: "I know we have mission, vision and strategies, but I don't see them anywhere". Among this grouping there is also a view that not only that the company has a vision and mission, these have been articulated clearly on paper ("the objectives, mission and vision of my company is very clear and neat on paper, but in practice the contrary"). Furthermore, the same group also feels that the vision and mission is helpful in providing a clear picture of the bigger picture and this situation is exciting to them. To this group, because the company has a mission and vision it implies that now the organisation is heading in new direction ("we are heading towards reaching our vision to be preferred global partner in the provision of our products").

The second group that is negative feels that the mission and vision is nowhere. This was uttered through statements such as "there is no sense of internal vision"; "no where to be seen in the offices" and "I don't know the vision and mission statements of the organisation". Furthermore, there was also one view that even though negative it seems to suggest that there is awareness of existence of mission and vision. The comment says "I however have my doubts whether the key objectives and strategic plans fully support the vision, mission statements, actual progress is another story". In the same camp, this is supported by another one, which says "I think the key objectives as it is now is a bit unrealistic".

#### *Communication: "the missing link"*

A participant remarked that "communication should be the key-word". However, contrary to one participant that voiced very positive remarks (quoted below), the majority of participants felt that communication is lacking.

Our company sends out a weekly communication from MD's desk providing information on the latest decisions made and on product delivery. It provides a clearer picture of where we fit into the company and why certain things are happening.

As it was said above, this participant went further to say "I think communication should be the key-word". However, majority of the participants was negative about how communication is conducted within the manufacturing enterprise concerned. Their statements range from saying communication is fragmented, poor, problematic, missing and needs to be improved. Somebody said:

it is a pick up in the passage exercise" and another says "no communication between working indians and managers, just load the work on you without knowing what you are doing.

#### *Growth is selectively encouraged*

On the subject of growth some participants were positive and some were negative. Individuals, who were positive, were saying that team members are allowed to grow although clear parameters are sometimes sadly lacking. To them, there are staff attending courses and some staff not attending. It would appear to them that some leaders promote growth and some don't. Positive statements such as "team members are well trained, innovative and flexible, so yes leadership allows team members to grow, enabling them to be multi-skilled" were uttered.

On the other-hand, there were individuals who felt that they never get the opportunity to attend courses to broaden their knowledge. One said "when I feel I'm in need of training, there is either no money to go, or no time, therefore there is no growth".

#### *Performance is not rewarded*

There were only two participants who gave positive remarks on performance being rewarded. To them performance is measured and evaluated against productivity, as if everything is in place. The majority of participants were negative and of the view that performance appraisals and resultant rewards are done haphazardly and inconsistently because appraisers need training. In this continuum comments range from no reward system, system not clear, system not working, measures are not a true reflection and system not accurate. A common response was:

No bonuses, no reward systems. I work hard as it is my belief to do the best I can but often feels, why I do? We all get the same increase, I really don't know whether I will ever be something higher than my current position due to lack of career-pathing.

#### *Leadership-role is questioned*

The participants' responses on the role of the leadership of the manufacturing enterprise concerned were basically negative. Their response portrays leadership failing to unite employees, initiating change poorly and more often imposing it, taking decisions unilaterally, lacking priorities and being selfish. To the participants leaders within the organisation are not only susceptible of what has just been said but they are also not focused. It was said "I am of the opinion that executive staff should concentrate on strategic issues rather than getting involved in operational issues".

#### *Change is problematic*

Except for one participant who made the remark that change is initiated via different levels, the manufacturing enterprise concerned has changed from being just a provider of few products to a modern enterprise and according to him/her, leadership should also skill employees for change. The rest of participants were negative on how leadership initiate change. It was said that changes are not communicated, you 'pick it up in the passage' or you will see it happening or being imposed without any discussion.

#### *In conclusion*

Other issues which were mentioned by two participants which are of general nature were (1) fear of being retrenched (2) and fuel allowance. One participant said "before I had a dream with my organisation because I thought is where I am going to get my pension but now I am afraid of losing my job anytime. My company is not the same as before". The second participant said in good spirit she did not get fuel allowance after the company has relocated.

The various themes that emerged from the data collected are summarised in Table 3.

**TABLE 3**  
**THEMSE THAT EMERGED FROM THE DATA COLLECTED**

	Protagonists	Antagonists
Vision directedness.	Known, clear, appropriate and good	Do not know; not seen, practices contrary; doubt is strategies support.
Communication: "The missing link".	MD's desk sends weekly communication with latest decisions. Clear picture of where fit in.	Poor communication channels; 'pick up in the passage'; breakdown between management and staff.
Growth is selectively encouraged.	Team members well trained; multi-skilling enabled; allowed to grow.	Never get an opportunity to attend courses; no money; workload does not allow for.
Performance is not rewarded.	In place on paper; measured and evaluated against productivity.	Haphazard appraisals; across-the-board increases; not working.
Leader-role is questioned.		Fragmentation; enforcing authority; operational interference; not prioritising; not proactive.
Change is problematic.	Skilled for; initiated at different levels.	Fragmented; enforced; no vision; just see; not written.

## DISCUSSION

The results mentioned-above suggest that leadership within the manufacturing enterprise concerned should make efforts to be vision focused, to improve on communication, to give employee development priority, to review the way performance is being currently rewarded and the way changed is introduced in the company. Because leadership is about creating conditions where people can perform to their potential in a fashion, which they and their company are comfortable, as Rhinesmith (1996, p. 59) said, it is therefore important that those conditions are created in the organisation. The starting point should be to let the employees of the organisation see themselves in the vision. As the results indicated, this is currently sadly missing. Secondly, the employees through leadership should be made to understand and believe in the company objectives and consider company objectives as important. Thirdly, employees should be empowered and be involved in setting the objectives and their efforts be recognised, valued and rewarded. Lastly, employees should receive prompt, supportive and accurate feedback.

It is imperative at this stage to remember some facts mentioned in previous paragraphs. Firstly, a fact was mentioned earlier on that: leadership never happens in isolation – there can be no leaders without followers, and all leadership activities take place within a particular context. It means one should consider not only personal make-up of the leader but also the make-up of the followers and the specifics of the particular situation. The make-up of the followers and the specifics of the particular situation were not studied in this research, thus the findings are confined to leadership make-up and/or competencies. As Vroom (1983) says "leader's subordinate in an organisation exert an important situational constraint on the leader's effectiveness".

Secondly, to put it differently, the most crucial element in leadership is leader-member relationship – that is the extent to which the members trust and respond to the leader. Thirdly, as the Path-Goal Leadership Model suggested 'leaders are effective in motivating subordinates when they are able to make rewards potentially available to subordinates depending on the accomplishment of certain agreed upon objectives'.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Subsequent discussions conclude by suggesting possible solutions. In the light of the above findings the following recommendations are made to improve leadership competencies:

- Seminars and workshops concerning organisational development and related matters like employee productivity, participation and organisational competitiveness should be jointly held by trade union and the manufacturing enterprise concerned. This will help to forge improvement in competencies and bring about compatible views, values and perception among all stakeholders
- The organisation concerned should consider encouraging managerial staff to take short courses concerning employment relations. Emphasis in such courses be put on the benefits of co-ordinated participative programmes and the need for managers to into customer-centred-leaders
- Managers who successfully complete above-mentioned courses should be recognised by awarding certificates to them.

It is also imperative that current leadership and people with leadership potential are continuously identified, trained and developed to become effective leaders. The main focus should be instilling the following competencies:

- Leadership with credibility i.e. the ability to foster trust by leadership by acting fairly and honestly in all relationships
- Having a sense of mission and purpose
- Ability to communicate a vision
- Ability to inspire others
- Emotional intelligence
- Ability to participate fully with people on all levels
- Ability to detect positive qualities in others, and the willingness to share responsibility in a measure appropriate to those qualities, and
- Willingness to learn, adapt and grow since change is often a step into the unknown.

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