

Leadership Styles Within the South African Police Service

A Case of National Head Office Divisions and Components

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ABSTRACT

The article investigates the leadership styles and ethical leadership at the National Divisions and Components of the South African Police Service (SAPS). The research problem for this article is that certain leadership styles negatively affect the organisational culture of the SAPS. The methodology entails online interviews that were conducted with Major Generals and Brigadiers of the Operational and Support Divisions at national level. Commanders of the Strategic Management Office were requested to complete an online questionnaire. It was deduced that the laissez-faire or delegative leadership style is the dominant leadership style practised. The article concluded that the command, and control leadership style is part of the culture of the SAPS and, as such, determines the behaviours of its leaders, managers and members, but hinders creativity. The majority of the participants felt that the culture of the SAPS makes it difficult for the organisation to adjust to internal and external changes. Recommendations were made to the SAPS to enhance ethical leadership.

INTRODUCTION

The South African Police Service (SAPS) espouses the application of ethics and

integrity as key contributors to the establishment of a capable institution. As such, the SAPS views leadership stability of critical importance for a constructive organisational culture that endorses effective performance. Ethical leadership and commitment are thus required to establish a professional SAPS. It is required from an ethical leader to act and make decisions reasonably and justly, and this is demonstrated in the way people are treated, the attitudes of leaders, and the direction in which an organisation, project or initiative is steered. At the SAPS, ethical leadership must guide decisions and actions for sustainable, effective service delivery. The consistent application of the rules that govern the behaviour and conduct of police officers and officials is critical to ensure effective policing. Against this backdrop, this article evaluated the leadership styles of the SAPS to determine the predominant leadership styles practised at the National Divisions and Components of the SAPS.

The SAPS has a critical role to play in the realisation of government's reconstruction and recovery initiatives by providing policing services to the citizens of the country. The SAPS derives its mandate from Section 205 of the *Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996* (Constitution), which specifies the objectives of policing as the prevention, combat and investigation of crime. This mandate places the SAPS at the forefront of government initiatives because a safe and secure country is a prerequisite for socio-economic development. The SAPS must maintain public order and protect the inhabitants of the Republic and their property. In essence, effective policing is to uphold and enforce the law (Constitution 1996:Section 205).

The research problem pursuit in this article is thus that certain leadership styles negatively affect the organisational culture at the National Divisions and Components of the SAPS. The overall aim of the article is to investigate leadership styles and ethical leadership in the National Divisions of the SAPS. This article therefore sought to contribute to the understanding and knowledge of leadership styles and ethical leadership in public administration through the following objectives:

- To analyse the meaning of the concepts *leadership styles* and *ethical leadership* in the public sector.
- To critically evaluate the leadership styles practised at the National Divisions of the SAPS to determine the predominant leadership style.
- To analyse the ways in which leadership influences the organisational culture at the National Divisions of the SAPS.

LEADERSHIP DEFINED

According to Meyer (2023:112), leadership plays a critical role in the success or failure of any organisation. Exemplary leadership is a non-negotiable variable in

public management. The success of public departments is easily credited to effective and ethical leadership. It is therefore expected that public managers demonstrate ethical and fair leadership practices. Leadership is the most critical element in an organisation. It has a direct and indirect impact on employee performance. Leadership creates an opportunity for transparency in private and public organisations by improving collaboration in working towards a common goal. It creates a platform for dialogue and public comment.

Smith and Cox-Smith (2023:178) explained that people are leaders by virtue of them overseeing organisations. According to Roelofse (2018:76–78), leadership is associated with personality traits, such as openness, creativity and emotional stability. In addition, leadership styles can change from being autocratic, laissez-faire and authoritative to more transformational. Some of these traits and styles are inherited, but they can also be taught and learnt.

Leadership may also be institutionalised. The type of organisation (for example, a public or private organisation, voluntary association or special interest group) for which a leader is responsible often determines the personality traits needed to steer the organisation towards success. For example, a semi-military style of management is practised in the national police force of South Africa. The command, and control leadership style determines that higher-ranked officers demand respect and recognition from junior officers. As such, when a senior officer walks into a room, all members must stand to attention to acknowledge the officer's position and rank. The senior officer may then ask the junior officers to stand at ease. This leadership style requires members to always be aware of the rank structure, seniority of personnel in a specific office or environment, and the meaning of specific commands. The command and control, leadership style is thus part of the culture of the SAPS, and, as such, determines the behaviours of its leaders, managers and members (Roelofse 2018:80).

Generally, the role of a leader is to provide direction to employees, with the intention of ensuring that the organisation reaches its goals and objectives and is successful. Success in the private sector means profits, while public institutions are focused on service delivery. Society, which is a client of government, has the right to receive equitable, fair, efficient and effective services from government departments. With the change in government from the apartheid regime to a democracy, legislation was introduced that requires leaders, as they lead organisations, to embrace the issues of equity, fair treatment, regard for the human rights of individuals, and the right to justice. Such legislation includes the Constitution, the Labour Relations Act 66 of 1995, the Human Rights Commission Act 40 of 2013, and the Batho Pele Principles. There are, however, instances where there is no regard for fair labour practices and the unfair treatment of employees thrives. Notwithstanding exposure to education and training, being an open and transparent leader does not always come easy. Many leaders find it difficult to lead

organisations, and leaders are often implicated in unethical behaviour; poor management practices and failure to establish proper systems, processes and governance structures to ensure accountability (Roelofse 2018:88–90; Hald, Gillespie & Reader 2021:461–464).

Sociocultural characteristics also influence leader effectiveness, the nature of the leadership function, and leaders' behaviours. Leadership studies of the 20th century by Western scholars focus on economics and sociology, while research done on leadership in Nigeria, Namibia, Zambia, Zimbabwe, and South Africa identified the practice of ubuntu as a key cross-cultural pillar. Colonial control in Africa contributed to a culture of corruption, poverty, tribalism and violence. A better understanding of the role historical events played in Africa and how it has influenced the leadership conversation in Africa is thus required (Bachmann 2017:23). Western studies on leadership and leadership styles have not sufficiently considered issues of African leadership. Generally, the African culture is to be respectful and loyal to elders and leaders. This is evidenced in the workplace in many organisations in South Africa where interpersonal relations form the foundation of togetherness, which is where the practice of ubuntu finds its roots. African leaders have a sense of duty to fulfil the social and economic needs of their immediate and extended families, even when resources are scarce. African leadership has indeed not sufficiently been explored, but it has the potential to provide an in-depth understanding of respect for the dignity of others, group solidarity, teamwork, service to others, and the spirit of harmony and interdependence, which is the spirit of ubuntu (Orogun 2023:2–4).

LEADERSHIP THEORIES

Several leadership theories have been developed. These theories examine the dynamics associated with leadership and the effect that leaders have on their followers. The main leadership theories are: (1) behavioural theories that focus on how leaders behave; (2) contingency theories that predict which leadership style is best in each circumstance; (3) power and influence theories that emphasise different ways leaders use power and influence to get things done; and (4) trait theories that posit that leadership emerges from traits (Hunter & Lovelace 2022:70–74).

The power and influence theory as well as the leadership trait theory are described in more detail.

Power and influence theory

Bass and Avolio (2017:9–12) described 'power' as prompting people to get things done and 'authority' as the rights that a person has by virtue of a position that they

occupy. For example, a police officer can arrest and detain a suspect involved in a crime if the elements of a crime are present, and the intention of the arrest is to secure the accused's attendance in court. Someone who is said to be powerful may not always be in a position of power or occupy a specific position, but because of that individual's ability, they can get people to do things. A leader can have one or more of seven sources of power, namely coercive, legitimate, expert, reward, referent, charisma and information power. However, not all leaders are able to use all these powers (Adams-Robinson 2021:55–58):

- Legitimate power is power one gets by virtue of a position that one holds.
- Expert power is obtained by virtue of skill or expertise and is not dependent on a position.
- Coercive power is present in many organisations but is more visible in the military. It is directed at persuading others by imparting fear and is seen as a destructive form of power.
- Reward power is when an employee is rewarded for undertaking what was requested.
- Referent power stems from the fact that the leader is honoured and venerated.
- Informational power is when a leader is in a position to share information that leads to the follower trusting the information.
- Charisma power is the ability to inspire others to do what the leader wants them to do.

In Burns (1978:19–20), a foundational work about leadership, and in Bass and Avolio (2017:12), reference is made to three of the seven management powers: legitimate, reward and coercive power. These powers seem most applicable to the transformational, transactional and laissez-faire styles of leadership.

Power plays a critical role in determining the future of organisations. Power and influence theories have to do with how leaders use power and influence to achieve organisational goals. Leaders in organisations where power and influence are part of the management style should be held in high regard by their followers, not for their qualities but for their efficacy. Furthermore, it should be for the leader's willingness to stand in front of their followers to defend and protect the organisation through difficult and trying times (Bass & Avolio 2017:12–14).

According to Benton (2003:125), leaders who radiate poise, self-control and power are immediately noticed and given recognition in an organisation. Leaders in the 21st century must thus develop a new management model, which should include information and charisma as power sources. Furthermore, leaders must be innovative and able to reach a multigenerational workforce. Traditional power sources, such as coercive and legitimate powers, are no longer effective in the world in which we live. The power and influence of an organisation's leadership should be based on inspiring people to follow – not on fear or punishment.

Followers need to believe that the leader is trustworthy and ethical and have confidence in the leader's ability to lead a successful organisation or team.

Leadership trait theory

The trait theory has been associated with leadership since 1920. In trait theory, successful leadership is associated with personal traits, such as integrity, assertiveness, intelligence, ability to adapt, standard of education, and social and financial standing in society. These traits determine how successful a leader is in the organisation (Yuki 2010:20–22).

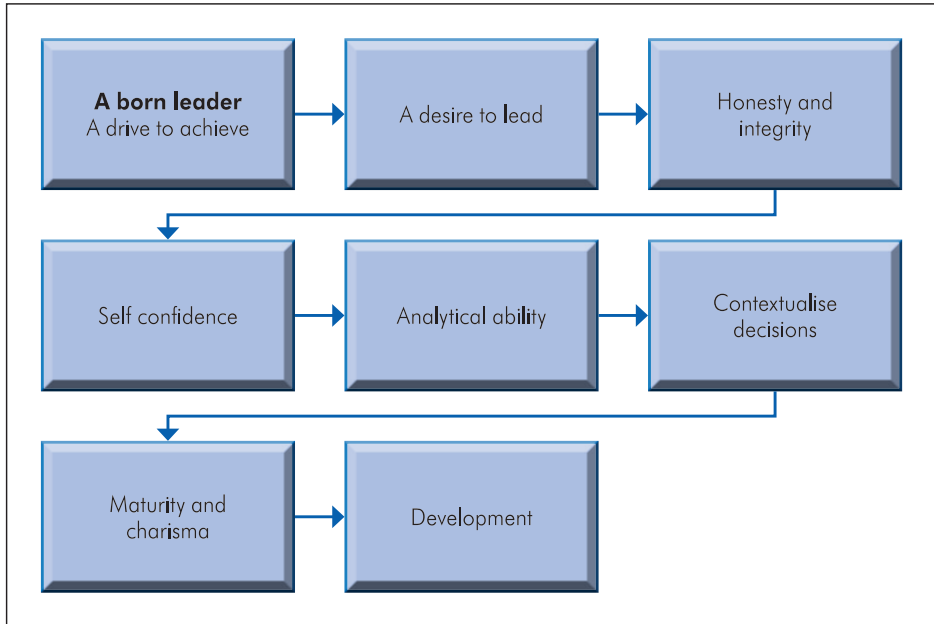
In leadership trait theory, there are defined personality traits that distinguish leaders from followers. In other words, leaders are different types of people from followers. Behavioural theories of leadership state that it is the behaviour of leaders that distinguishes them from their followers. According to Spector (2016:27–29), history is shaped by extraordinary leaders. This ability to lead was seen as something that people are simply born with – not something that could be developed. Early research on leadership focused almost entirely on inheritable traits.

According to Abu Bakar and Connaughton (2022:72–76), the traits most associated with great leadership include adaptability and flexibility, assertiveness, the capacity to motivate people, and courage and resolution. Leaders are also known for their creativity, decisiveness, eagerness to accept responsibility, and emotional stability. In addition to being dependable overall, strong leaders are able to control their emotions and avoid overreactions. Other common traits are intelligence and action-oriented judgement, the need for achievement, people skills, and perseverance. Amore, Garofalo and Guerra (2023:497) mentioned that strong leaders possess self-confidence, and because they are confident in themselves, followers often begin to share this self-belief. Great leadership is also skilled and capable. Members of the group can look to the leader for an example of how things should be done. Moreover, such leaders are trustworthy and understand their followers and their followers' needs. Effective leaders pay attention to group members and genuinely care about helping them succeed. They want each person in the group to succeed and play a role in moving the entire group forward.

A set of traits or inner qualities define a leader. Some leaders are born with effective traits, while others can learn them through exposure or study. It was believed that by identifying these traits, people who possess them could be identified, recruited and placed in positions of authority (Amore, Garofalo & Guerra 2023:499–500). The leadership trait theory is illustrated in Figure 1.

While proponents suggest that certain traits are characteristic of strong leaders, those who possess the traits do not always become leaders. This may be due to situational variables in which leadership skills only emerge when an opportunity for leadership arises (Cherry 2021).

Figure 1: Trait theory of leadership



Source: (Amore, Garofalo & Guerra 2023:499–500; Cherry 2021).

According to Meyer (2023:114–116), a relationship-centred leader provides the necessary emotional support to employees to motivate the employees. More leadership styles are identified and briefly described in the following section.

LEADERSHIP STYLES

A leader is a person who selects, equips, trains and influences one or more followers who have diverse gifts, abilities and skills and focuses followers on the organisation's mission and objectives, causing the followers to expend spiritual, emotional and physical energy willingly and enthusiastically in a concerted, coordinated effort to achieve the organisational mission and objectives. Organisations require leadership who can modify their style based on the complexities faced by the organisation, so that when changes happen in their environment, leadership is in a better position to respond to a wide range of challenges (Gandolfi & Stone 2018:263). Furthermore, Marques (2018:16) submitted that leaders must be able to model their style of leadership to be innovative in finding creative solutions to problems, and followers must be provided opportunities to shoulder a broad spectrum of responsibilities.

Organisations have a mixture of employees from different races, various cultures, and diverse ages (Demirtas & Karaca 2020:101–103). Therefore, no one

type of leadership style can be applied constantly in an evolving environment and ever-changing world. Leadership styles applied in one organisation may not be effective in another, and there is no one-size-fits-all leadership style. Marques (2018:16–19) proposed that a flexible approach to leadership styles be adopted and implemented in public organisations. Due to the complex nature of working environments, this will allow leaders to modify their style and approach to leadership based on current-day challenges. It will allow for flexibility in finding creative solutions to challenges in serving the public interest.

Autocratic leadership style

Authoritarian leadership is not suitable for high performance teams or groups. Characterised by control over followers or employees, this type of leadership demands compliance to orders, instructions or tasks delegated. It is not open to the opinions of others and expects full compliance to delegated tasks with very little room for flexibility. In essence, an autocratic leader retains power and decision-making authority. Thus, all decisions are made by a single individual. That individual has complete authority over all aspects of the organisation. The autocratic leader rarely seeks the opinion of those around them and will often insulate themselves with people they know will agree with their directives (Demirtas & Karaca 2020:295). This type of leadership is suited to a military environment because of the type of work and the fact that, at times, decision-making must be immediate with no room for consultation or the gathering of opinions or ideas from the group. This leadership style is based on one-way instructions to followers or employees (Yeboah-Assiamah 2017:558–560; Rahayu, Putri, Oktafien, Wahyuningsih & Nugraha 2021:368).

An autocratic leader limits inputs or opinions and uses threats to get results. In general, human beings want to feel appreciated, and in the workplace, they want to feel that their views are considered. Authoritarian leadership is therefore not one that can be applied in most public and private institutions (Rahayu *et al.* 2021:368–370).

According to Demirtas and Karaca (2020:95), autocratic leadership is seen in a negative light because of the lack of consultation with followers and stakeholders. The downside of autocratic leadership is that it instils fear and allows the harassment of followers to motivate them to do as they are told. This can lead to followers rejecting this type of treatment and assuming altered behaviour. However, the benefit of autocratic leadership is that in a crisis or emergency situation, when there is limited time to get a task done and a speedy resolution must be reached, an autocratic approach has proven to be beneficial. It also has the potential to enhance group effort, resulting in more work done and in cost savings.

Laissez-faire (delegative) leadership style

The word *laissez-faire* in leadership means a hands-off approach, even though the leader can be engaged when followers require guidance or direction. A laissez-faire leader provides their employees freedom of decision-making with minimum connection to the team, and engagement and support are only provided when requested (Shahid, Ibrahim & Nadeem 2022:297–298). This leadership style is not of value to a group of employees who have limited knowledge and experience to efficiently accomplish a task. For laissez-faire leadership to be successful, followers must be able to set their own timelines, plan their daily schedules, and work towards accomplishing organisational goals without difficulty and without constant support or guidance from the leader. As long as employees efficiently complete tasks, those working with laissez-faire leadership can choose how they wish to get the job done. However, although the methods used to complete each task are left to the individual employee, management must provide the tools needed to do so (Flynn 2021).

According to Thanh and Quang (2022:7–9), this type of leadership style can easily be seen as the absence of leadership – as a failure to take charge of managing and directing actions and a failure to be present and lead through decision-making. This view is supported by Flynn (2021), who further indicated that the laissez-faire leader avoids involving themselves in issues that affect an employee's responsibility to achieve organisational goals. According to Shahid *et al.* (2022:298), a laissez-faire style provides employees with freedom, as they are left to make their own decisions regarding their role in achieving organisational goals. This style of leadership is most effective when employees or followers are high performers who are very productive and require little decision-making from their leader.

Transformational leadership style

The term *transformational leadership* was coined by James Downton in 1973 (*Simply Psychology* 2024). Today, transformational leadership remains relevant and is the most noticeable leadership style in any public and private organisation in South Africa. Transformational leadership has been identified as the leadership style most fitting to the current world of work. This is because transformational leaders are able to utilise resources meaningfully, take advantage of human capital, and invest in talent. Transformational leadership is future orientated, innovative and adaptive to the changing world (Saleh, Akib, Rifdan & Malago 2021:5212–5215).

Transformational leaders have regard for the human rights of their followers and are not too concerned about leadership features. Their leadership style is

based not on material offerings, but on personal principles and ideals that guide behaviour. The ultimate goal of the transformational leader is organisational transformation by adjusting to an ever-evolving environment (Dibley 2009:16). A prominent feature of a transformational leader is the ability to cultivate and invest in the talent and skills of people by re-evaluating and redefining their roles and responsibilities. A transformational leader offers support and empathy and makes the environment conducive to trusting relations, which establishes willingness and passion (Saleh *et al.* 2021:5210).

Flynn (2021) confirmed that transformational leadership focuses on nurturing followers' growth. In addition, followers are inspired to go further than their personal interests to elevate their performance to a higher level than that expected of them. There is a trusting relationship between the leader and the followers. Meyer (2023:122–127) identified four dimensions of transformational leadership: idealised influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualised consideration. According to Saleh *et al.* (2021:5216), the outcome of transformational leadership is a shared connection between the leader and follower that features mutual respect and encouragement. In this process, followers demonstrate leadership while leaders are identified as ethical agents of change. Furthermore, Flynn (2021) found that transformational leadership relates to self-assurance, womanly traits, reasonableness, and a caring nature and sees anger and condemnation as adverse. Moreover, Dibley (2009:36) found not only that followers have a high regard for transformational leaders' emotional intelligence but also that leaders see themselves as self-aware and future orientated with the ability to be effective and add value.

Servant leadership style

Servant leadership is a philosophy in which the leader is a servant first. Servant leaders aspire to serve their team and the organisation, placing them ahead of personal objectives. It is a selfless leadership style, where a leader possesses the natural feeling to serve for the greater good (Gandolfi & Stone 2018:265).

Servant leadership is centred on the fundamental desire to be of service to others. Leaders put away their self-serving actions in favour of servanthood to the team and organisation. The philosophy is cemented by encouraging team members to perform at their best. In their interactions with team members, servant leaders emphasise and assume the role of servant. Success is therefore inevitable, as the leader serves the team by recognising and encouraging the team's abilities to achieve organisational goals. By serving the team, servant leaders acquire the respect of their teammates, which increases collaboration, leads to productive behaviour, instils harmony, and builds stronger teams. The goal of a servant leader is to ultimately serve others so that they can achieve common goodness (Brown & Bryant 2015:12).

Ethical leadership style

Ethical leadership is a form of leadership in which individuals demonstrate conduct for the common good that is acceptable and appropriate in every area of their life. It comprises three major ethical traits (Hald, Gillespie & Reader 2021:461–464):

- **Be the example:** One noble quality of a leader is leading by example. As an ethical leader, it is important to remember that actions speak louder than words. People are more likely to judge someone based on how they act than on what they say. By practising and demonstrating ethical, honest and unselfish behaviour to subordinates, ethical leaders may earn the respect of their peers. People are often more likely to follow a leader who respects others and shows integrity.
- **Champion the importance of ethics:** One role of an ethical leader is focusing on the overall importance of ethics, including ethical standards and other ethical issues and how these factors can influence society. As an ethical leader, it is important to teach peers about ethics, especially in cases where they are faced with an ethical issue in the workplace.
- **Communicate:** Successful ethical leaders tend to be good communicators. People communicate in different ways. Some may feel comfortable speaking up in public, regardless of personnel or situation, while others may be hesitant to speak with a leader because of fear, anxiousness or simply not knowing how to articulate what they are trying to say. They might be better at communicating via email rather than in person. It is an ethical leader's job to communicate with each member of the team and allow for open conversation, as followers may have questions and concerns that need to be addressed. It is important that leaders build camaraderie among their team. Quality relationships are built on trust, fairness, integrity, openness, compassion and respect.

The basic requirement for organisations to exist and function is people who have a set of values and principles and who come together for a common purpose. In the public service, this common purpose becomes beneficial to them as individuals, groups and society. The organisational structure of an organisation comprises a leader and followers. For the organisation to fulfil its purpose, the leader is obligated to provide direction, support and guidance to the followers. The clarification of roles and responsibilities is also key to ensuring that followers work towards the vision of the organisation (Hunter & Lovelace 2022:73–74).

Ethical leaders can help establish a positive environment with productive relationships on three levels, namely the individual, the team and the overall organisation. Nurturing relationships at each of these levels can lead to positive outcomes and benefits for ethical leaders. Organisational culture is one of the factors that

determines the behaviour of an organisation through the behaviour and practices of those employed there. When employees share the same values, principles, social facts and viewpoints on ethics it makes it easier for them to function and be creative (Abu Bakar & Connaughton 2022:101). An ethical leader therefore demonstrates their position as a leader to reassure employees. The ethical leadership style must be demonstrated in the leader's daily actions, opinions and messages and must also reflect in their character. When this is clear to followers or employees, it indicates that the leader has gained their trust, which makes it easier to coordinate and facilitate work. Being open-minded and non-judgemental towards employees or team members is the mark of an ethical leader (Bachmann 2017:23–25).

ORGANISATIONAL CULTURE

Organisational culture is the environment that surrounds employees at work. It is a powerful element that shapes work enjoyment, relationships, and processes and procedures. Culture comprises the traits shared by a group of people. It is the behaviour that results when a group arrives at a set of generally unspoken and unwritten rules for working together. An organisation's culture is made up of the life experiences each employee brings to the organisation. It is especially influenced by executives and other managerial staff because of their roles in decision-making and strategic direction. Positive values are associated with variables such as openness, trust, ethical behaviour, compassion, accountability and integrity, while negative values are associated with dishonesty, greed, ill-mannered behaviour and corruption (Mercadal 2022:41–42).

Establishing systems of good corporate governance takes more than policies, systems and processes; it requires ethical leadership that is consistent and demonstrated in everything that is done. This is validated through behaviours and upholding ethical values in the quest to achieve organisational objectives. Good corporate governance needs to be brought to life through ethical conduct and actions and made visible through performance reviews, recruitment, appointment and selection processes (Mercadal 2022:47–48).

According to Schubert (2022:35–37), culture is the unspoken, mutual understanding that frames what people expect from others and what is expected from them. In essence, culture is the personality of the organisation. It is where values reveal themselves through people's behaviour, attitudes and decisions. Organisational culture is shaped by many variables but can be defined through values that can be positive, negative or destructive. In organisations, effort is made to ensure that the organisation's culture aligns with its vision and mission. Vision describes the organisation's future scope or destination, while mission describes its current state and purpose. The culture of an organisation should align with its vision and mission

statements. Therefore, the behaviour that is displayed and actions of employees must be aimed at the attainment of the vision and mission. It is the responsibility of an organisation's leadership to create eagerness about the future of the organisation by developing a 'picture of what that destination looks like'. Failure to get the organisation excited about its future destination, as formulated in the vision and mission, will result in failure to achieve set objectives. Management must thus create a sense of urgency by activating and creating platforms for discussion on the future destination (Mercadal 2022:49; Schubert 2022:39).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This article built on research conducted by Masilela (2017) to find profound relationships between leadership style, organisational culture, and organisational performance in the public sector – specifically in the SAPS. To address the research problem in an effective and scientifically valid manner, a mixed methods research design was followed and implemented in two phases:

- Phase 1: Semi-structured interviews were conducted online on MS Teams with individual Major Generals and Brigadiers from the Operational and Support Divisions.
- Phase 2: The Commanders of the Strategic Management Office were requested to complete an online questionnaire.

Convenience sampling was used to select the Major Generals and Brigadiers from the Operational Division and Support Division at national level. These senior managers have years of experience in policing, and their opinions added value to this study as they have exposure to top management. The researcher continued with the interviews until saturation was reached. Intuitively, the expectation was to conduct five interviews. Regarding the Commanders of the Strategic Management Office, the entire site population of 23 Commanders was invited to complete the questionnaire. The Commanders are Strategic Management Commanders who work directly with the Heads of the National Divisions and Components. They have excellent experience in policing, and have good exposure to the top management of the divisions in which they function.

QUALITATIVE DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

Groups 1 and 2 of the participants represented senior management of the SAPS employed at the levels of Major General and Brigadier. Table 1 presents the demographic details of the interviewees.

Table 1: Qualitative data – Demographic characteristics of participants

No.	Category of participants	Category and number of participants			
1	Gender	Male	5	Female	3
2	Age group	Under 34	0	35–44	0
		45–54	6	55 and over	2
3	Years of service in the SAPS	15–20	0	20–25	0
		25–30	1	30–35	7
		35–40	0	40 and above	0
4	Rank within the organisation	Major General	2	Brigadier	6
5	Functions being performed	Group 1	4	Group 2	4
		Operational Division		Support Division	

Leadership styles

Knowing how followers or employees understand the concept of a leadership style is vital to gain insight into the type of leadership demonstrated in the SAPS. The following question was therefore directed at the participants:

Question A.1: How would you describe the leadership style of your division?

The overall aim of this question was to determine the leadership styles within the National Divisions. The answers reflect that leadership within the SAPS National Divisions comprises several leadership styles. The leadership styles support the unique type of environment in which the leadership functions. For Group 1, which is the Operational Division, the leadership style borders on autocratic and laissez-faire. This finding was clearly confirmed by the response from Participant 4 who confirmed that *“The leadership is very autocratic and can be participative at times.”* The SAPS is directed by a culture of command and control, which leaves very little room for innovation and creativity. This could be supported by the mandate of the organisation and the policing functions that must be performed. The autocratic style supports the culture of command and control. From the responses below, it was deduced that many of the leaders spend limited time participating with their staff and that compliance appears to drive this type of leadership style: *“The current leadership is autocratic and laissez-faire. Compliance drives the type of leadership style.”* and *“There is a mix of leadership styles. But can be more autocratic or laissez-faire. My manager*

spends limited time participating with staff." The response received from the participants in Group 2 reveal the use of a mixture of leadership styles in the Support Division.

Ethical leadership

To obtain confirmation of whether ethical leadership is practised at the National Divisions and Components of the SAPS, the following question was posed to the interviewees:

Question A.2: Do you believe that the leadership of the organisation is ethical and accountable?

The aim of this question was to determine whether SAPS leadership at the National Divisions is ethical and accountable. All the participants felt that the leadership of their division is not ethical and accountable. In Group 1, the participants indicated that there are leaders who are not ethical and accountable. Responses such as "... there have been a number of allegations made...", "...I do not believe that the leadership is ethical." and "...not all are ethical and accountable...", unfortunately confirmed the lack of ethical leadership. In addition, a lack of accountability was also mentioned. The participants from Group 2 also indicated that not all leadership is ethical and accountable. It can therefore be concluded that the leadership of the National Divisions is not ethical and accountable.

A leader who can set the right tone and has consistent behaviour that supports the vision, mission and goals of the organisation qualifies as an ethical leader. Ethical leadership is thus a worthy virtue to possess, especially in the SAPS. Evidence for the lack of ethical leadership was sought when this follow-up question was asked:

Question A.2.1: Please support your answer by explaining the visible indicators of your response to the above Question A.2.

The participants in Groups 1 and 2 highlighted several issues that they felt were indicators of unethical leaders and leaders who are not accountable. The participants highlighted that their managers are sometimes moved to other environments, suspended and/or charged, but that the outcomes of these cases are not made known. These responses indicate that the managers who are found to be unethical are dealt with; however, there is no certainty as to the finality of these matters. Regarding accountability, the majority of the participants were of the opinion that there are areas of poor performance, such as the crime statistics. Based on the responses, the SAPS's inability to manage certain areas of policing points to areas of "*poor performance*", "*unethical leadership*", "*corruption, fraud, nepotism*", poor decision-making ("*Decisions are made to please those asking the tough questions*") and a lack of accountability.

The participants in both groups raised concerns contrary to what the literature states as characteristics of being ethical and accountable. For example, qualities such as intelligence and being hardworking and knowledgeable in a specific field of work are emphasised as characteristics of an ethical leader. Arrogance, dishonesty, selfish acts and rudeness mark unethical leaders (Hald, Gillespie & Reader 2021:462), and these unethical elements were unfortunately reflected in the responses received from the participants.

Ethical decision-making

The aim of the following question was to determine whether the managers consider the moral and ethical consequences of their decisions.

Question A.3: Does your manager consider the moral and ethical consequences of decisions that are taken?

Two of the participants from Group 1 indicated that their managers do not consider the moral and ethical consequences of their decisions:

“No, because they do not care or have no conscience about the impact of their actions.”

“No, I do not think they look at it from an organisational perspective.”

Thus, half of the participants from Group 1 believed that their managers do not make ethical decisions. This is in line with the findings of the answers to Questions A.2 and A.2.1. Though, in contrast to the statements that the leadership is not ethical and accountable, most of the participants of Group 2 agreed that their managers consider the moral and ethical implications of their decisions. A concerning point was raised by Participant 8 with the statement: *“My manager is inconsistent in the way he deals with issues.”* This response confirmed inconsistent decision-making that might compromise the implementation of standard operating procedures. It can be concluded that decisions are not always ethical. Furthermore, there is no indication to whose benefit such decisions are taken. This could place the SAPS at risk if managers are making decisions that benefit themselves to the detriment of the organisation.

Culture of the organisation

Organisational culture is defined as the environment that surrounds employees at work all the time. It is a powerful element that shapes work enjoyment, relationships, and processes and procedures. Organisational culture is especially

influenced by executives and other managerial staff because of their roles in decision-making and strategic direction (Mercadal 2022:41–42).

The aim of the following question was to determine whether the organisational culture of the SAPS can adapt to changes in the internal and external environment.

Question A.4: *Is the culture of the organisation able to adapt to changes internally and externally?*

The majority of participants felt that the culture of the SAPS makes it difficult for the organisation to adjust to internal and external changes. The majority of participants ascribed this to the fact that SAPS culture is entrenched or institutionalised and works on the basis of command and control. This means ‘comply now, complain later’. This mindset creates very little opportunity for new ways of doing things. The participants highlighted some contributing factors for why they felt that the SAPS is not able to adapt to internal and external changes, which include:

“... the culture of SAPS is not flexible to changes.”

“... the command and control, culture is entrenched into the organisation and this makes it difficult to adapt to changes.”

“... the culture of SAPS is what limits teams and the leadership to move forward.”

“... the culture is determined by the leadership. There is no willingness to change by the leadership. Command and control is the culture that...”

“... the culture of brutality (the old police force) is still prevalent.”

“... the culture where the police defends the badge is no longer visible. There is longer accountability, responsibility and pride in the service.”

Organisations require leadership who can modify their style based on the complexities faced within the organisation, so that, when changes happen in the environment, they are in a better position to respond to a wide range of challenges (Gandolfi & Stone 2018:263). Leadership thus drives the culture of an organisation, which is also true for the SAPS. Regrettably, it was deduced from the responses that the SAPS cannot adapt to change.

QUANTITATIVE DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

The Likert-type scale used in the questionnaires is displayed in Table 2.

Table 2: Questionnaire – Agree/Disagree Likert scale

Agree/disagree Likert scale				
1	2	3	4	5
Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree

Leadership styles

A total of 22 MISP Commanders in the National Divisions and Components provided the responses. They would know if consequence management was implemented for those who did not meet performance targets. They would also have knowledge of what areas were not achieved and the degree to which this affected a division or component's performance. The MISP Commander is responsible for requesting from the line functionaries who are responsible for specific targets the successes and progress made in attaining these targets on behalf of the Divisional Commissioner or Component Head and keep track of such progress.

Consistency in applying organisational policies

The aim of the following statement was to determine whether the managers (leadership) within the National Divisions and Components subscribe to and enforce the organisation's ethics policies and ethical behaviour.

Statement B1: Your manager enforces that ethics policies and behaviour are applied consistently at all levels.

A total of 22 responses were received of which the majority, 50%, remained neutral about whether their managers enforce ethics policies and behaviour. Only 14% of the participants strongly agreed that this happens consistently at all levels, while 36% agreed. The high percentage of neutral responses raises concerns. Ethics must be driven by the manager, and that manager should set the tone from the top. If this is not being led at management level, there is little chance of ethics becoming part of the culture of the division or component. It can therefore be concluded that the implementation of ethics policies and behaviour is limited.

Regular engagement regarding organisational goals

The aim of the following statement was to determine whether staff members are consulted and are in agreement with the goals that are set for the organisation.

Statement B2: Your manager makes certain that there is widespread agreement and understanding about the goals of the organisation.

The majority of the participants, 68%, were neutral, 9% agreed that their manager does make certain that there is widespread agreement and understanding about

the goals of the organisation, and 5% strongly agreed. A total of 18% disagreed with the statement. Based on the responses, it was deduced that the laissez-faire or delegative leadership style is the dominant leadership style practised at the National Divisions and Components of the SAPS.

Accountability through consequence management

The aim of the following statement was to determine whether consequence management is implemented by managers for non-compliance.

Statement B3: Your manager holds members accountable through the application of consequence management.

Again, the majority of participants, 86%, remained neutral about the fact that consequence management is implemented to hold members accountable. Unfortunately, the remaining 14% strongly disagreed with the statement. Although consequence management is a common practice at the National Divisions, it cannot be assumed with certainty that members are held accountable for a lack of performance.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The participants from both groups felt that the leadership in the National Divisions comprises a range of leadership styles, and that the leadership styles support the types of environments in which the leadership functions. In the Operational Division, the leadership borders on autocratic and laissez-faire, while the participants from the Support Division leaned towards a mixture of leadership styles with the laissez-faire style as the predominant leadership style. Based on the responses, it was deduced that the laissez-faire or delegative leadership style is the dominant leadership style practised at the National Divisions and Components of the SAPS.

The participants identified several weaknesses in the leadership styles practised at the National Divisions and Components. They were of the opinion that the leadership of their divisions is not ethical and accountable. They highlighted the following indicators of unethical leaders and a lack of accountability: (1) managers are often suspended and/or charged, but the outcomes of the hearings are kept secret; (2) areas of poor performance, which are often even in the public domain; and (3) the SAPS's inability to manage certain areas of policing point to instances of poor performance, unethical leadership, corruption, fraud, nepotism, poor decision-making, and a lack of accountability. Conflicting opinions were received on whether the participants' managers consider the moral and ethical consequences of their decisions.

Regarding the implementation of ethics policies, the participants remained neutral about the statement that their managers enforce ethics policies and behaviour consistently at all levels. The responses received indicate that management is inconsistent in its application of ethical policies and in demonstrating ethical behaviour. Ethical standing requires not only consistency no matter how easy or how difficult a situation might be but also that a leader demonstrates this in their behaviour at all times.

Organisational culture plays a critical role in the performance of an organisation. If the organisational culture is not driven by ethical leadership, organisations fail to achieve their vision. The qualitative and quantitative data results from participants in the National Divisions and Components confirmed that there is a relationship between the leadership styles and organisational culture. An unethical leadership style supports an unethical culture. The participants responded that the organisational culture shapes the attitude of police officers and officials towards their work by promoting compliance, but that it hinders creativity. The command and control, leadership style is part of the culture of the SAPS, and, as such, determines the behaviours of its leaders, managers and members. The majority of participants felt that the culture of the SAPS makes it difficult for the organisation to adjust to internal and external changes.

Recommendations

Leadership styles that ensure employees are part of the decision-making processes must be encouraged so that performance becomes a collective responsibility. When employees feel included in high level decision-making and decisions that could affect the future, they more easily buy in, make themselves available, and take ownership of their contribution to the success of the organisation. Due to the traditional style and culture of command and control within the SAPS, leadership continues to believe that they must make decisions on their own, while everyone else should just comply or follow. Not being part of decision-making might demotivate members who are hardworking and willing to go the extra mile because they feel unaccommodated or not valued.

The managers in the SAPS National Divisions and Components must assess their leadership styles and choose more appropriate styles of leadership that are ethical and consistent with the values of the organisation. If the leaders and managers in the SAPS do not change and adapt to more transformational and participative styles of leadership, the SAPS will not be able to fully engage communities and get their support and cooperation. This can affect law enforcement and further reduce communities' trust in the SAPS. The SAPS should also ensure that those in management positions are able to adapt to change. Leaders should

therefore complete regular courses designed to assist leadership to perform in higher, more demanding positions.

In essence, a competency profile for SAPS leadership should be developed, based on research and benchmarked with international law enforcement agencies and universities. It is further recommended that the SAPS explore developing an in-house leadership course designed by a tertiary institution and presented for SAPS leadership at levels 13 to 15. This will support the development of leadership styles and critical thinking skills urgently required at the SAPS senior management level.

The leadership of the SAPS must effectively drive the organisational culture through good governance and accountability, as these seem to be very limited and inconsistently applied. Regrettably, the majority of participants felt that the vision of the SAPS does not create excitement and motivation among SAPS members. SAPS management needs to create a sense of urgency by activating and creating platforms for discussions of the vision and mission statements. The SAPS must review its planning approach to ensure inclusivity at all levels of the organisation. The SAPS Corporate Communication capability should be used to prepare the organisation, as it prepares for the planning process. The entire planning approach as well as performance management should be vertically and horizontally communicated within the organisation.

NOTE

- * This article is partly based on Ms SA Pillay's Master of Public Administration dissertation conducted at the University of South Africa, titled: Pillay, S.A. 2023. *Leadership styles within the South African Police Service: A case of National Head Office Divisions and Components*, that was conducted under the supervision of Associate Professor Corlia Alers.

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