Prevalent Leadership Styles of Black Top-managers in South African State-owned Enterprises (SOEs)

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ABSTRACT

As part of the effort to redress some of the imbalances of apartheid, Black top managers have emerged in many organisations including South African SOEs. The leadership styles that they predominantly display in the quest to discharge their responsibilities however remain unexplored and this, arguably, aids the scepticism in some quarters surrounding the nature of leadership provided by these black executives. This increases the need for the investigation of the leadership styles of black top managers.

This quantitative study utilised a survey research method and non-probability sampling to obtain primary data from 232 SOE employees in a cross-sectional manner. Though the research instrument was an established multifactor leadership scale, it was assessed with factor analysis, model-fit statistics and Harman's test. Consequently, descriptive statistical measures were utilised to summarise the data.

Results show that the component factors of the transformational leadership style were indistinguishable by the respondents but nonetheless, this style of leadership was perceived as the most displayed by black top managers. Satisfactory discriminant validity was evident for the factors in the transactional leadership construct where the contingent reward approach was displayed more in comparison to Management-by-Exception while the laissez-faire leadership style was viewed as the least displayed style by black top managers in SOES.

The findings imply that black top manager's predominant display of the transformational is reflective of the South African 'Ubuntu' philosophy.

Keywords: Leadership styles, Black, State-owned enterprises, Managers, Employees

INTRODUCTION

Leadership is a topic of interest that has been broadly studied. The somewhat amorphous nature of leadership seems to have fuelled the discourse in the field and the absence of a single systematic approach for understanding leadership, inadvertently broadens the study spectrum paving the way for the emergence of varying thoughts related to leadership behaviours. Indeed, some studies have focused on the social phenomena, drawing conclusions from laboratory experiments, observations of groups or activities of lower-level supervisors (Bass & Stodgill 1990:20). The usefulness of some of the studies, especially in a practical context remains a challenge, leading Kets de Vries (1999:4) to aver that if leadership is to be a viable area of study with findings that are relevant to stakeholders, its research should be intricately linked to interpretations of the behaviour and ensuing actions of all individuals designated for leadership positions. These behaviours and actions are in themselves, tacit expressions of a preferred leadership style.

Notably, there are large discrepancies in leadership styles, which are influenced by the environment and the region in which someone is found (Eckert, Rweyongoza & Campbell 2010:4). The African context is one that incorporates a number of factors including multiculturalism and racial diversity amongst others. This is apparent in South African leaders who were challenged to integrate diverse cultural and ethnic groups after the apartheid government required them to have unique leadership styles (Finestone & Snyman 2005:131; Howitz, Bowmaker-Falconer & Searll 1996:140; Jackson 2004:7; Cox. Amos & Baxter 2008:72).

Unfortunately, Edoho (2001:76) as well as Daglish, Du Plessis, Lues and Pietersen (2009:45) state that much of African leadership history has been captured through the lenses of colonisers who, lacking an understanding of the African culture, produced biased views. Bolden and Kirk (2009:73) also raised a concern that Western leadership studies that have been conducted in Africa were aimed at equipping Western managers to make well-versed business decisions in an African context instead of assisting African managers to enhance their own leadership styles and this is clearly problematic.

It is against this backdrop that more research needs to be conducted and documented from an African perspective to determine the leadership styles applied in different regions in order to answer some of the crucial challenges faced by African leadership (Nkomo 2006:11). Adeyemi-Bello (2001:150) argues that contextual and organisational variables also help to inform the leadership style demonstrated by a manager and so it might be interesting to determine what the case is in State-owned Enterprises in South Africa. Bartley (2013:165) and Hacker (2010:180) mention that regardless of mental aptitude,

social or educational achievements, colour as the outward indicator of race has been made the standard by which people are perceived and this is partially why the case of Blacks in managerial positions has attracted the interest of this study.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Schermerhorn (2011:234) defines leadership style as a recurring pattern of behaviours exhibited by leaders. The distinctive leadership behaviour may be tailored by factors such as philosophy, culture or values, personality, education and training as well as the experience of the leader (Huang, Davidson, Liu & GU 2008:73). Rao (2009:166) posits that the history and societal values of any country provide a backdrop for understanding leadership practices. Jackson (2004:29) as well as Bolden and Kirk (2009:74) argue that leadership practices in Africa are complex, multi-layered and shaped by centuries of cultural values and historical events. In a study of black middle managers in affirmative action programmes, Castle (1996) found that black managers generally regarded themselves as products of underfunded, poorly equipped schools that embraced the concept of *ubuntu*.

The concept of *ubuntu* is described as the philosophical approach to human relationships that elevates the importance of humanness grounded in African beliefs and shared community (Le Grange 2011:67; Nussbaum 2003:2; Murithi 2009:226; Booysen 2001:38). Values upheld in *ubuntu* include a spirit of valuing collectivism according to community-based understanding of self (Bekker 2008:19; Lutz 2009:318); understanding other's dilemma and seeking to help on the account of the deep conviction of the interconnectedness of people; sharing of resources based on mutual concern for existence; concern for the needs and interest of others (Poovan, Du Toit, & Engelbrecht 2006:18; Broodryk 2006:6); valuing the worth of others and showing respect to others' potential to make a contribution; and management's commitment to developing employees (Mangaliso 2001:32; Van der Colff 2003:260; Muchuri 2011:448). According to Khoza (2011:440), *ubuntu* is anti-individualism and pro-communalism.

Jones (1995) is of the opinion that the characteristics of leaders influenced by Ubuntu are seen in African regions such as West Africa (Ghana, Nigeria, Benin, Togo, Guinea, Niger, Burkina Faso) and Southern Africa (South Africa, Botswana, Namibia). In their comparison of cultural mythologies and leadership patterns in India, Indonesia, Pakistan and the United States of America, Wong-MingJi, Kessler, Khilji, Gopala and Krishnan (2014:92) assert that attitudes and behavioural expressions are unique to different cultures, meaning that the same behaviours have different meanings in different cultures.

Based on this, it would seem rational to project that black top managers are shaped by African values that influence their choice of leadership styles, as perceived by employees. The body of knowledge attests that perceivers use classification and match the observed person against an abstract prototype stored in the memory (Lord & Maher 1991:4; Lord, Brown, & Harvey 2001:286).

As a result of the different contexts under which leadership behaviour continues to be described and analysed, Bass and Avolio (2000) developed a full-range leadership model that consists of three themes of leadership, namely transactional, transformational leadership and laissez faire. This model has been adopted as an integral part of this study as it seeks to investigate whether black top managers predominantly display transformational leadership, transactional leadership or laissez-faire leadership styles in state-owned enterprises (SOEs).

The increasing importance of the contribution of employees to the organisation has created a paradigm shift in leadership theory that has led to the concept of transformational leadership. The transformational leadership style focuses on relationship-oriented behaviours (Manning 2002:208) and aims to develop a relationship between leaders and their followers which goes beyond pure economic and social exchange. It has been proven to result in satisfaction with the leader, trust in the leader, as well as respect for the leader (Lee 2005:657; Conger, Kanungo & Menon 2000:760). Pearce, Sims, Jnr Cox, Ball, Smith & Trevion (2003:281) describe transformational leaders as those who engage in behaviours that transmit a sense of mission, delegate authority, coach and teach, and emphasise problem solving as well as the use of reasoning.

These leaders are seen to be highly esteemed and gifted with exemplary qualities. Sarros and Santora (2001:392) write that transformational leadership is focused on the personal side of management. Bass (1995) hints that transformational leadership comprises individual consideration, idealised influence (Attributed and behavioural), intellectual stimulation and inspirational motivation. Individual consideration relates to a situation where the leader provides support to subordinates through coaching and teaching whilst and providing continuous feedback in a bid to treat each subordinate as an individual. Idealised influence which may be attributed or behavioural is often manifest when the leader acts as a role model and this causes subordinates to want to emulate the modelled behaviour. Owing to ethical conduct portrayed, the leader wins the subordinates' respect and trust. The individual consideration component relates to the fact that the leader provides subordinates with a flow of challenging ideas, sets challenging goals for their subordinates and arouses their expectations about achieving them. Finally, the component of inspirational motivation encapsulates the idea that the leader communicates

vision, promotes teamwork and behaves in ways that motivate and inspire followers by providing them with meaningful challenges.

Besides the transformational leadership style, the transactional style of leadership is also sometimes evident among managers. Daft and Marcic (2008:456) argue that the transactional leadership theory is based on a traditional management process of short-term planning, organising and controlling. Essentially, transactional leaders initiate proper structures, provide reward and incentives, and show consideration for employees. This leadership style is considered to be suitable in an organisation where problems are simple and tasks are clearly defined and repetitive (Orme 2009:10). The transactional leadership style involves a social exchange process between a leader and subordinate. The exchange is established and maintained if the benefits, according to the organisation and the employees, outweigh the costs.

The leader and subordinates perceive each other as being potentially instrumental to the fulfilment of each other's needs (Pastor & Mayo 2008:342). There is a psychological contract between the leader and follower and so the employees are managed in a relationship characterised by give-and-take dependencies (Kent, Crotts & Azziz 2001:222). The relationship maintained is such that one gives in order to receive and this is the reason why employees are provided with material or psychological rewards restricted to the fulfilment of the contractual obligations. The leader promotes uniformity by providing extrinsic, positive or negative rewards to employees and the employees' receipt of the rewards or avoidance of the punishment is contingent on their successful completion of the task (Daft 2011:73).

According to Bass and Avolio (1990), the transactional leadership style is characterised by the contingent reward, management by exception (active) and management by exception (passive) behaviours. As it relates to the contingent reward facet, the leader sets mutually agreed goals, which are linked to a reward, clarifies expectations by discussing with the subordinates what is expected of them, and provides them with resources to execute the tasks. Leaders that display management by exception behaviours tend to exercise control by closely tracking and monitoring the performance of subordinates. This may be achieved passively or actively. Typically though, the emerging deviations from the set standards are corrected to ensure good performance. When the performance falls below the threshold, the leader feeds back the information to the subordinates. The negative feedback may be accompanied by re-clarification and encouragement, disapproval, a reprimand, a formal citation, suspension or dismissal. Liu, Liu and Zeng (2011:284) contend that negative deviations from expected standards are commonly met with unsympathetic criticisms that bother employees and deflate their potential to

try innovative things. A contrary opinion is however canvassed by Camps and Torres (2011:213) who assert that the behaviour enables the leader clarify expectations and this is beneficial to employees as it helps them understand required corrections to be made in pursuit of desired objectives.

Laissez-faire leadership refers to indifference or lack of leadership towards both the followers' actions and organisational outcomes (Xirasagar 2008:602). It is non-authoritarian leadership style where leaders try to give the least possible guidance to subordinates and attempt to achieve control through less obvious means (Van Wart 2005:287). With this style, leaders believe that people excel when they are given the autonomy to respond to their responsibilities and obligations. The leader gives complete freedom to subordinates, which means that they are allowed to make decisions on their own. Even though the leader provides subordinates with the tools to do their work, he/she does not participate in their work except when asked. Laissez-faire leaders tend to provide no restrictions and generally refrain from making decisions. This style of leadership is inactive and as a result, subordinates do not know where they stand with the leader because of the absence of leadership. The laissez-faire leadership style is accompanied by a lower sense of accomplishment, less clarity about what to do and a reduced sense of group unity (Bass & Stodgill 1990:544). Sarros and Santora (2001:390) write that the style is characterised by non-commitment, laziness, complacency, avoidance and abdication of responsibilities.

METHODOLOGY

This study is grounded in the positivistic philosophical approach, which is based on the observable social reality acquired independently by the researcher. The aim of this research is to determine the leadership styles of black top managers using a research instrument. The researcher is an observer and independent of the research process as the questionnaires were sent to the participants for completion. The survey method was utilised to collect quantitative data. The process that was followed involved a systematic and structured method of gathering, collating and interpreting the numerical data in order to make inferences.

The framework underpinning this study is consistent with similar studies that followed the positivistic philosophical approach in respect of leadership behavioural studies, such as: the study by Adserias, Charleston and Jackson (2017), who examined which styles of leadership are best-suited to direct organisational change to fuel institutional diversity in higher education; Frost's (2017) study examining the impact of leadership on the vision of growth in a pharmaceutical company in South Africa; the study of George, Chiba

and Scheepers (2017), who examined the effect of leadership styles on job-related stress among South African knowledge workers; and Markiz, Margono, Wirawan and Ainur's (2017) study of the investigation of the effects of leadership style, organisational communication and job satisfaction on workers' performance in Jakarta.

Purposive sampling, which is also referred to as judgemental sampling, was utilised to select the study participants. The benefit of utilising purposive sampling is that it allows the researcher to identify the participants who can provide data that is relevant to the research (Jupp 2006:245). The details of 130 listed SOEs in South Africa across all of its nine provinces (Gauteng, Limpopo, North-West, Free State, KwaZulu-Natal, Eastern Cape, Western Cape, Northern Cape, and Mpumalanga) were obtained from the Government Communication and Information System (GCIS) published records. While all the SOEs were approached, a response rate of 39% was realised given that 596 questionnaires were distributed. Indeed, 232 respondents reporting to 38 black top managers participated in the study. This is not remarkably different from the 173-sample size used by Huang, Shi, Zhang and Cheung (2006) in their study of participative leadership behaviour in Chinese state-owned enterprise used a sample size of 173 employees and the 77-employees respondents groups utilised by Koech and Namusonge (2012) for their study of leadership styles in state-owned corporations in Kenya.

A structured questionnaire was used for data collection purposes. The leadership styles were measured by means of the latest revised version of Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) developed by Bass and Avolio (2004). The MLQ scale contains 36 items focussed on a range of leadership-style related factors namely: Idealised influence_Attributed (II_A), Idealised Influence_Behaviour (II_B), Inspirational motivation (IM), Intellectual Stimulation (IS), Individual consideration (IC); Contingent reward (CR), Management by Exception_Active (MbE_A), Management by Exception_Passive (MbE_P), and Laissez-faire–(LF). Each item in the instrument was measured on the basis of a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = not at all, 2 = once in a while, 3 = sometimes 4 = fairly often and 5 = frequently. The responses were then utilised to draw conclusions about the leadership styles predominantly displayed by black top managers in the SOEs.

According to Avolio and Bass (2004:48), the instrument has total internal consistency reliability with Cronbach Alpha coefficients in the 0.74 to 0.94 range. The use of MLQ scale by previous researchers such as Behery and Al-Nasser (2016) as well as Muenjohn and Armstrong (2008) returned Cronbach Alphas of values 0.79 and of 0.86 respectively. The reliability test for the MLQ instrument in this study produced a Cronbach alpha value of 0.9. The data collected was processed using IBM SPSS (version 24). Factor analysis, Harman's single factor test and model fit were utilised to establish the appropriate factor

composition of each of the three styles of leadership. Descriptive statistics helped in the determination of the predominant leadership styles of black top managers as perceived by the respondents. A breakdown of summary measures was provided by way of selective demographic characteristics of participants, namely gender, race and highest qualification achieved.

RESULTS

The demographic profiles presented in a study allow for better appreciation of the kinds of respondents that partook in this study. The study received responses from 232 participants and in this group, 130 (56%) were males and 102 (44%) were females. Within the SOE environment, gender representation at top management level is such that male participation amounts to 64% as compared to 36% of females (Department of Labour 2017:16). This imbalance in demographic spread is similarly depicted in this study's population.

As shown in Figure 2, the race distribution of participants is 62.1% black, 21.6% white, 7.3% Coloured and 9.1% Indian. This is not markedly different from the composition of the overall population at the top management level in state-owned enterprises, which is said to be 53.2% black, 7.5% Coloured, 10.7% Indian, 26.1% white, while foreign nationals make up the remaining percentage (Commission for Employment Equity Annual Report 2016/2017:20). Essentially, in the study as well as in the SOEs generally, black

**Figure 1:** Gender profile of sample (n = 232)
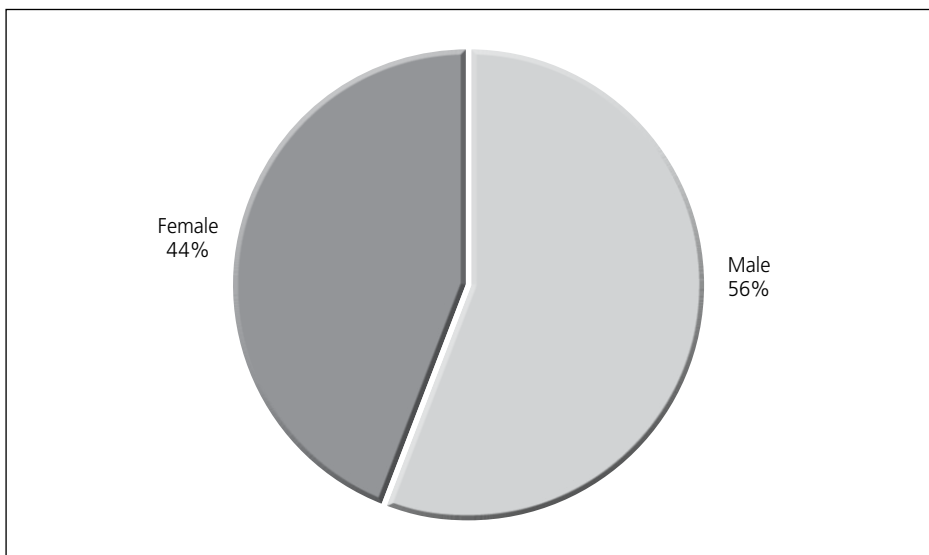
Figure 2: Race profile of sample (n = 232)
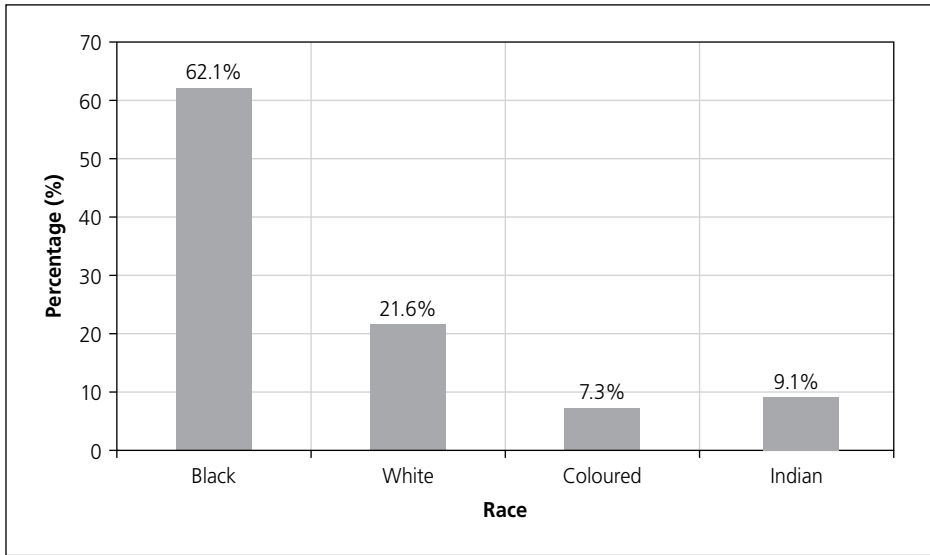
people seem to predominate other races, despite the drawbacks experienced in the previous apartheid system.

The proportional distribution of the highest level of education obtained by respondents in this study is depicted in Figure 3. The distribution spread indicates that at their highest

Figure 3: Respondent's level of education (n = 232)
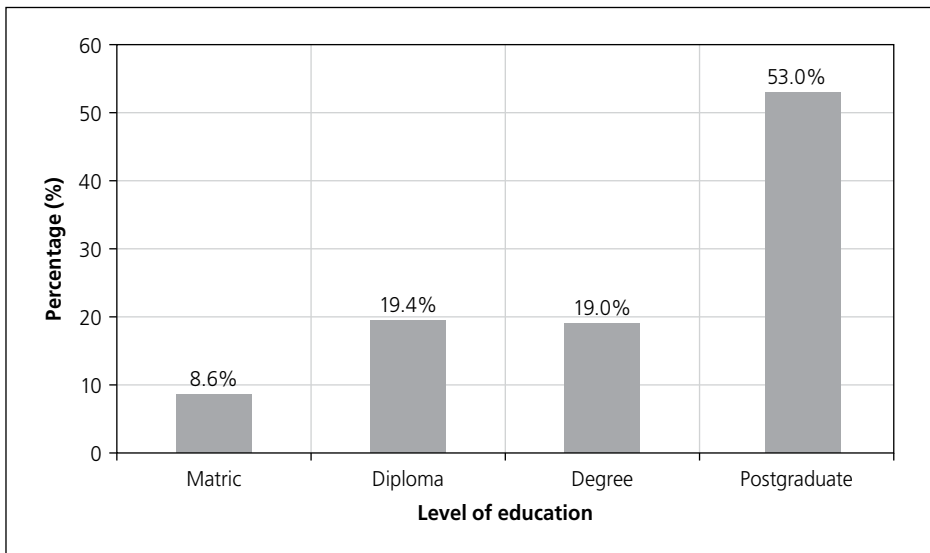
level of qualifications, 8.6% of the 232 participants have a matric certificate (National Senior Certificate), 19.4% have a diploma, and 72% have a bachelor's degree. According to Statistics South Africa (2016:44), South Africa has seen an increase in the number of persons who have attained a bachelor's degree across all ages. This improvement is evident in the respondent population of this study as more than 70% of the participants possess a bachelor's degree. More instructively, 53% of all the respondents have a post-graduate qualification. In essence, it can be argued that the participants, who directly report to black top managers, are highly qualified in their respective fields of expertise. For instance, in one of the SOEs from which respondents were drawn, 100% of the participants have a bachelor's degree.

The model-fit statistics for the leadership scales utilised in the study's instrument are shown in Table 1. The fitness is evaluated against the proposed minimum threshold values stipulated by Hair, Black, Babin and Anderson (2010). For the transformational leadership scale, the measures of CMIN/DF (2.68), CFI (0.91) and SRMR (0.05) appear to satisfy the model-fit threshold requirements. In contrast, GFI (0.83), AGFI (0.78), TLI (0.89), RMSEA (0.09) and the p-value (<0.05) do not meet the recommended thresholds. Therefore, the study's position is that the fit indices are reflective of a poor model fit. The transformational leadership CFA measurement model, showed high correlations of above 0.8 between factors, which is indicative of low discriminant validity.

Table 1: Model-fit statistics – Initial construct (scale) measures

Indices (Thresholds)*	Transformational Leadership	Transactional Leadership	Laissez-faire Leadership
# of sub-factors	5	3	1
CMIN	428.91	99.61	1.11
DF	160	51	2
P-value (> 0.05)	0.000	0.000	0.574
CMIN / DF (< 3.00)	2.68	1.95	0.56
GFI (> 0.90)	0.83	0.94	1.00
AGFI (> 0.80)	0.78	0.90	0.99
TLI (> 0.90)	0.89	0.91	1.01
CFI (> 0.90)	0.91	0.93	1.00
RMSEA (< 0.05)	0.09	0.06	0.00
SRMR (< 0.08)	0.05	0.07	0.01
* Thresholds according to Hair, Black, Babin and Anderson (2010)			

In the light of this, Harman's single-factor test was used to assess the common methods variance for the transformational leadership construct. The test involves loading all of the items in a scale into an exploratory factor analysis and examining the un-rotated factor solution to determine the number of factors that are necessary to account for the variance in the items (Podsakoff, MacKenzie & Lee 2003:889). The assessment of the common method variance revealed that of the five factors of transformational leadership, a single-factor solution accounts for more than 50% of the total variance. As such, this indicates that a single-factor solution might underlie the measurement model.

As shown in Table 1, the model fit statistics values associated with the transactional leadership appear to largely satisfy the expected thresholds. However, in the light of some dissatisfactory values such as p=0.000 obtained, Harman's single-factor test was used to assess the common methods variance for the transactional leadership construct. The assessment revealed a variance for the three factors of transactional leadership. A single-factor solution only accounted for an estimated 24.1% of the total variance. Furthermore, an assessment of the discriminant validity of the transactional leadership scale was conducted in order to verify whether the factors are distinguishable. The values between CR and MbE_A (0.11) as well as MbE_A and MbE_P (0.4) are less than 0.8, which is an indication of adequate discriminant validity.

For the Laissez-faire leadership scale, all the model-fit statistics values (see Table 1) met the threshold requirements as specified by Hair, Black, Babin and Anderson (2010). The Laissez-faire measurement scale had no constituent factors and all its items were retained given that their associated values were higher than 0.5, which is an indication of the convergence validity being adequate for the construct. However, similar assessments conducted for the transactional leadership and laissez faire measurement models reveal that both reflect reasonable model fits.

The construct mean for the leadership constructs were calculated by averaging the individual item means and this is presented in Table 2. For the transformational leadership construct, this resulted in a figure of 3.77 (SD = 0.877). This result as shown in Table 2 is supported by the outcome of the one-sample t-test that was conducted, which produced the values of t=13.327, df=231 and $p<0.000$. This p-value indicates that the mean score for the transformational leadership construct is significantly different from the scale's mid-value of 3 and is therefore suggestive of a perception that black top managers fairly often display behaviours that align with the transformational leadership style.

Demir (2017:52) declares that the transformational leadership style in the management function is more prominent at the top management level. Top managers who display

this style of leadership give attention to their relationships with employees and drive change by way of motivating and inspiring employees to change their attitudes, beliefs, values and behaviours in order to instil pride and inspire the shared vision of the organisation (Asrar-ul-Haq & Kuchinke 2016:56). In harmony with this stance, some researchers insist that this leadership style is preferable to employees (Waldman, Ramirez, House & Puranam 2001; Limsila & Ogunlana 2008; Yukl, Gordon & Taber 2002). The results of this study synchronise with this opinion as black top managers tend to display the preferred transformation leadership style as is typically expected at their level of management.

Following the results obtained with the Harman's test, the three transactional leadership component factors were treated separately. For the Contingent reward (CR) factor of transactional leadership, the results as contained in Table 2, show a mean score of 3.77 (SD = 1.181). This result is supported by the outcome of the one-sample t-test conducted which returned the values of t=12.650 df = 231 and p<0.000. This indicates that the mean score is significantly different from the scale's mid-value of three ('sometimes') and so it suggests that respondents perceive CR to be exhibited almost 'fairly often' by black top managers in the organisation. This may be so, as the black top managers may be inclined towards leveraging off the performance-rewards link to realise business expectations. Managers who display contingent reward behaviours strengthen the performance-rewards expectations and reward the task effort (Yammarino, Spangler & Dubinsky 1998:33). Indeed, Arnold, Connelly, Walsh and Martin Ginis (2015:483) assert that contingent reward is considered to be the most positive and effective facet of the transactional leadership style due to the relationship of reciprocal exchange between employees and management.

The Management by Exception – Active (MbE_A) factor implies that the leader exercises control by closely tracking and monitoring the performance of subordinates. In terms of the MbE_A factor of transactional leadership, the mean score obtained is 2.86 (SD = 1.333), indicating that the respondents perceive that black top managers 'sometimes' display the MbE_A approach of the transactional leadership style in the SOEs. The results are supported by a one-sample t-test with the values of t=-2.12612, df = 231 and p<0.035). A plausible explanation for the low mean score could be that due to the level of qualification and relatively top positions of the participants in this study, it is not necessary for black top managers to constantly be involved in the work of their subordinates. After all, Chaudry and Javed (2012:259) state that managers who display MbE_A behaviours leave their employees to perform their duties and only intervene when they notice deviations.

Table 2: Item, Factors and Construct means for leadership styles

Construct Factors	Construct Items	Item mean (SD)	Construct mean (SD)
Transformational Leadership			
	My leader displays a sense of power and confidence	3.66 (1.310)	
	My leader talks about their most important values and beliefs	3.79 (1.259)	
	My leader specifies the importance of having a strong sense of purpose.	3.80 (1.275)	
	My leader considers the moral and ethical consequences of decisions	4.08 (1.069)	
	My leader discusses in specific terms who is responsible for achieving performance targets.	3.67 (1.299)	
	My leader goes beyond self-interest for the good of the group.	3.94 (1.203)	
	My leader acts in ways that builds my respect	4.00 (1.078)	
	My leader emphasises the importance of having a collective sense of mission	3.86 (1.138)	
	My leader talks optimistically about the future.	3.98 (1,157)	
	My leader talks enthusiastically about what needs to be accomplished.	4.10 (1.055)	3.77 (0.877)
	My leader articulates a compelling vision of the future.	3.92 (1.195)	
	My leader expresses confidence that goals will be achieved.	4.03 (1.117)	
	My leader re-examines critical assumptions to question whether they are appropriate	3.79 (1.119)	
	My leader seeks differing perspectives when solving problems	3.63 (1.185)	
	My leader gets me to look at problems from many different angles.	3.60 (1.148)	
	My leader suggests new ways of looking at how to complete assignments	3.54 (1.235)	
	My leader spends time teaching and coaching	2.99 (1.275)	
	My leader treats me as an individual rather than just as a member of a group.	3.70 (1.261)	
	My leader helps me to develop my strengths	3.58 (1.363)	

Construct Factors	Construct Items	Item mean (SD)	Construct mean (SD)
Transactional Leadership			
CR	My leader provides me with assistance in exchange for my efforts	3.60 (1.185)	3.76 (1.181)
	My leader discusses in specific terms, who is responsible for achieving performance targets.	3.97 (1.085)	
	My leader makes clear what one can expect to receive when performance goals are achieved	3.60 (1.287)	
	My leader expresses satisfaction when I meet expectations.	3.89 (1.165)	
MBE_A	My leader concentrates his/her full attention on dealing with mistakes, complaints, and failures.	3.08 (1.349)	2.86 (1.333)
	My leader keeps track of all mistakes	2.65 (1.319)	
	My leader directs my attention towards failures to meet standards.	2.85 (1.332)	
MBE_P	My leader fails to interfere until problems become serious.	2.26 (1.320)	1.96 (1.222)
	My leader waits for things to go wrong before taking action	1.79 (1.141)	
	My leader demonstrates that problems must become chronic before taking actions.	1.83 (1.206)	
Laissez-faire leadership			
	My leader avoids getting involved when important issues arise	1.90 (1.294)	1.91 (0.986)
	My leader is absent when needed	1.70 (1.079)	
	My leader avoids making decisions.	1.92 (1.242)	
	My leader delays responding to urgent questions	2.13 (1.325)	

The Management by Exception – Passive (MbE_P) factor suggests that the leader does not act, except when objectives have not been met or when problems have been escalated. The associated mean value for this factor is 1.96, meaning that the MbE_P is perceived by the sample group to be utilised by black top managers, 'once in a while'. The results are supported by the one sample t-test conducted that produced values of t = -16.275, df = 231 and p<0.000. Managers who display MbE_P do not take action until deviations cannot be ignored. They do so by avoiding making decisions and neglecting workplace problems (Holts & Hu 2017:120). In their studies, Skogstad, Einarsen,

Torsheim, Aasland, and Hetland (2007) along with Aasland, Skogstad, Notelaers, Nielsen and Einarsen (2010) conclude that this behaviour has a negative effect on the employees' attitudes, behaviours and organisational performance. The results herein show that black top managers display this behaviour "once in a while" but in the light of the thoughts of Aasland *et al.* (2010), they could be better-off if they are reasonably involved with the work performed in their units and provide the necessary guidance to their employees.

The Laissez-faire leadership style implies manager indifference or lack of leadership for the actions of employees and the realisation of organisational outcomes. The mean score related to the construct is 1.91 (SD = 1.333). The one-sample t-test conducted, produced the values of t =-16.809, df = 231 and p<0.000 suggesting that the mean rating is significantly different from the Likert scale mid-value of 3 ('sometimes'). As such, the results suggest that employees perceive that the laissez-faire is displayed 'once in while' by black top managers in SOEs. Einarsen, Aasland and Skogstad (2010:338) state that managers who display the laissez-faire leadership style are physically present in their positions, but relinquish their responsibilities. This leadership style has been found to influence the employees negatively to the extent that it creates feelings of frustration, resentment and violation (Skogstad, Eirnarsen, Torsheim, Asland & Hetland 2007:85). On the strength of this, it is imperative that black top managers strive to change this perception.

DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSION

The aim of the study was to ascertain the prevalent leadership styles of black top managers in state-owned organisations as perceived by employees. The analysis and the findings show that amongst the three studied leadership styles, the perception black top managers in SOEs mostly display a transformational leadership style. This appears to be in tune with leadership expectations as Colbert, Barrick & Bradley (2014:382) contend that in order for top managers to be successful, they need to exhibit a transformational leadership style. Furthermore, the findings of the study of Yaghoubipoor, Tee and Ahmed (2013) revealed that employees in Iran generally prefer the transformational leadership style. Bass and Avolio (1997) confirm that this is also the case in the United States, Japan, Canada, Austria, New Zealand and Taiwan. These positions lend themselves to the fact that the leadership behaviour of black top managers in South African SOEs is not in disharmony with those of their global counterparts.

It is also critical to highlight that the study revealed that the contingent reward facet of the transactional leadership style is also quite prevalent, according to the perceptions of the study's respondents. While employees do not prefer this form of leadership (Vito,

Higgins & Andrews 2014:818), it nonetheless continues to be the most frequently used according to As-Sadeq and Khoury (2006:844). Its continued use by the top black managers in SOEs is therefore not strange more so given that the study of Tetteh-Opai and Omoregie (2015) reveal that the style is effective.

While being cautious not to generalise the findings of this study, principally due to the judgmental sampling technique utilised, the study nonetheless contributes to the building of a body of knowledge on African leadership within the context of management literature. This is owing to the fact that it provides invaluable insight to the leadership behaviour displayed by black top managers in SOEs within a South African context, especially from the all-important perspective of employees. Further, the study provides a pedestal which could be beneficial to SOEs in their quest for leadership development in their organisations.

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