Managers' Leadership Styles and the role of Contextual Factors in the Workplace in the Indian IT Sector: A Qualitative Study

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Abstract

An exploratory study was conducted to understand the use of emotional leadership styles by managers employed in the Indian IT sector along with the identification of workplace contextual factors that influence the use of the leadership styles. The six emotional leadership styles are classified into two categories - resonant leadership (visionary, coaching, affiliative, democratic) and dissonant leadership (pacesetting and coercive). Theories state that these leadership styles are effective in various situations and should be used interchangeably. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to collect data from managers working in the Indian IT sector. The sample consisted of 13 managers managing a team of 2 or more employees working in multinational companies and start-ups. The initial set of participants were recruited by sharing information of this study with personal networks and on social media. Subsequently, these participants referred other potential participants based on the primary requirements of managers or team leaders in a specific industry. Hence, the sampling techniques employed were convenience and snowball sampling. The data was analysed using inductive thematic analysis. The data analysis revealed two themes and seven subthemes. The first theme of 'Synchronized use of Emotional Leadership Styles' discussed the participants' use of five emotional leadership styles in a simultaneous manner rather than individually. Based on leadership experiences, the majority of participants employed characteristics of at least two leadership styles in their interactions with subordinates. The second theme of 'Influence of Team, Organisation and Client on Selection of Leadership Style' revealed the contextual factors in the workplace that are considered by managers while choosing an appropriate leadership approach. Team characteristics such as work experience of employees and employment types were highlighted as the key factors while organisational policies and changing client demands were additional factors influencing leadership behaviour. The implications of the findings of this study were for managers, HR departments and organisations categorised in the Indian IT sector to tailor and enhance their leadership development programs.

Keywords: dissonant leadership; emotional leadership; managers; resonant leadership; thematic analysis