

## **MILITARY LEADERSHIP AND IMPLICATIONS FOR BUSINESS LEADERS IN THE LIGHT OF ALTERNATIVE THEORIES**

M. Hussain and H. Hassan

FAST School of Management, National University of Computer and Emerging Sciences, Lahore, Pakistan.

Correspondence e-mail: mujahid612@yahoo.com

**ABSTRACT:** Military leadership generally performs in a highly risk taking conditions through the right combination of style relevant to the situation. The business leaders also face somewhat similar situation in today's competitive business world. Military leadership styles were analyzed in the light of alternative theories of leadership from different schools of thought. The aim was to compare and explore application of the relevant features of military leadership in the competitive business world. Despite the difference in the display of leadership styles in the two areas the generic success of leadership may stem from same set of common features. In the light of theoretical developments on the success of leadership certain features of military leadership which can be applicable in the business world were explored. The study addressed both theoretical and empirical dimensions of the research question, within the context of Pakistan. The theoretical foundation followed from the debate on the alternative leadership theories from three different schools of thought i.e. trait theories, process theories and contingency theories. The results may prove to be helpful to business leaders to improve their leadership effectiveness.

**Keywords:** Military leadership; business leadership; organizational leadership, leadership styles; situational leadership style.

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Leadership is a science to lead people towards a common goal. Whether peace or war, victory or defeat, progress or regression, leader's role remains crucial. Leadership studies can be traced back to 500 BC and even today it is one of the most researched but not much understood field. According to Plato, only a select few with superior wisdom should be leaders. Aristotle contended "From the moment of their birth, some are marked for subjugation and others for command (Stodgill, 1974). Another popular endeavor in this direction includes the Great Man Theory presented by Scottish writer Carlyle which states that the leaders are born at different times with their extraordinary traits and become leaders of their community (Carlyle, 1840). The great man theory evolved into trait theory during early 20th century. This theory stressed that leaders' characteristics are different from non-leaders without assuming whether leadership traits were acquired or inherited (Stodgill, 1974). The latest research suggested that a leader's success significantly depends upon certain core traits. Leaders having the core, also have to take certain actions for success (e.g. formulation of vision, being role model, goals setting) meaning thereby, that leadership can be developed (Yukl, 2006). This opened the door to debate and study on how future leaders should be trained and developed and the latest trend has now evolved into the idea of situation specific leadership

(Williams, 1998). Situational leadership theory given by Hersey-Blanchard, states that instead of using just one style, successful leaders should change their leadership styles based on the maturity of the people they're leading and the details of the task (Blanchard, *et al*, 1993). The contingency theory of leadership, developed by Fred E. Fiedler, also provides similar concept and suggested that leadership styles and situations are very important for effectiveness (Fiedler, 1987). Dunham and Pierce's Leadership Process Model is even more comprehensive, which shows the way in which the leader, the followers, and the context combine to affect the outcomes (Pierce and Dunham, 1987). During the same time period there came up Transformational Leadership Model, which says that leaders enable their followers to achieve higher levels of performance by setting challenging expectations (Bass, 1987).

Military has produced many outstanding leaders in the history. Out of 43 US presidents 32 were from military background and almost all of them proved to be successful presidents (Caro, 1999). Studies on the performance of armies in the battlefield provide a fertile ground to judge the effectiveness of their leaders. Other institutions and organizations can enrich themselves significantly by skills employed by military leaders. In military life, leadership occupies a special place with regards to the success in operations. It concerns with the creation of influence among members to make them work willingly and achieve the assigned objectives. Military

leaders inspire soldier's commitment and personal involvement in trying conditions. This makes leadership a constant and regular winning factor in military.

The structure of military units requires developing a rational arrangement of following the rules, procedures and coordination to maintain the formal organization in day to day matters. In order to perform for its ultimate objective - defending the country - a military organization / unit requires emotional attachment with the cause and strong commitment to do extraordinary efforts under uncertain conditions. This emotional attachment and strong commitment comes through inspiring (Bass, 1988).

Though there have been extensive studies on both military and business leadership, there has been no effort to explore qualities of successful military leaders and propose their application in the business world. In this study we will study the military leadership and propose application of relevant features in the business world. This study also identified the leadership theories pertinent to leadership concept being followed in military and suggested some implications for business leadership (Epitropaki, *et al.*, 2004).

Before we proceed further it seems pertinent to briefly explain alternative leadership theories which have been used in this paper. Trait leadership is integrated patterns of individual characteristics that reveal a variety of individual differences and advance constant leader efficiency across a diverse group and organizational situations (Zaccaro, *et al.*, 2009). Many theorists argue that leadership is exclusive to only those individuals who have certain personality traits that cannot be attained (Galton, 1869). According to trait theory certain individuals have unique inborn or innate traits that make them leaders. The process theories advocate that leadership is phenomenon and suggests that anyone can become a leader. This theory says, leadership can be experiential in leader behaviors and can be learned (Zaccaro, *et al.*, 2009). According to contingency theory of leadership, developed by Fred E. Fiedler, leadership styles and situations are very important for effectiveness (Fiedler, 1987). Leadership styles can be categorized as task motivated or relationship oriented. Task motivation means their primary concern is reaching a goal whereas relationship motivation emphasizes close interpersonal relationship. Fiedler developed the Least Preferred Coworker (LPC) scale to identify leadership style of the leaders. According to LPC scale a leader has to describe the person with whom he or she has ever worked, and would least prefer to work with him or her ever again. The score on this scale shows leader's style with respect to relationship motivation and task motivation. The high score indicates relationship motivation and low score means task motivation. Transformational leaders enable

their followers to achieve higher levels of performance by setting challenging expectations. Bass described transformational leadership as comprising four distinct factors: inspiration, idealized influence, individual consideration and intellectual stimulation (Bass, 1987).

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

This is an exploratory research in which interviews and surveys were used for data collection. In case of military focus was on unit commanders and brigade commanders who had retired from military during last 1 to 2 years and had served in fighting units, where the leadership qualities come to the lime light very frequently. In business, however, the leaders who had liberty of action and could exercise their leadership skills to lead at least 25 individuals. The sample of business leaders belonged to businesses like textile mills, banks, schools, tuition centers, and owners of big grocery/general stores. All the leaders were male, because we could not approach any female military leader except the doctors who were not appropriate for this study due to their nature of job, consequently no female leader was selected from business world also for similarity. In step-1, a sample of 50 retired military leaders (selected randomly from population of a military residential colony) and 50 business leaders (selected randomly from population of business leaders from an industrial zone of Lahore) were approached to complete a simple Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ), to ascertain their leadership behavior (transformational or transactional). Fiedler's least preferred coworker (LPC) scale was used to determine their leadership styles (relationship or task orientation). In step-2, they were requested to list down, the leadership traits which they thought were must for a leader of their field and give weightage. The leadership traits listed by one odd respondent were ignored. The response rate was 84% and 62% for military and business leaders, respectively. Semi-structured interviews with business and military leaders responsible for major organizational processes and systems were conducted to find out about the procedure in vogue for selection and development of leadership in their respective spheres. Followers of these leaders (n=200) were also involved in the study through walking interviews to confirm the authenticity of the data collected through other sources. They were asked questions regarding leader's behavior towards them and their competence as leader. The data/content was then analyzed using descriptive analysis to draw pertinent inferences. The theoretical framework is depicted diagrammatically as under:

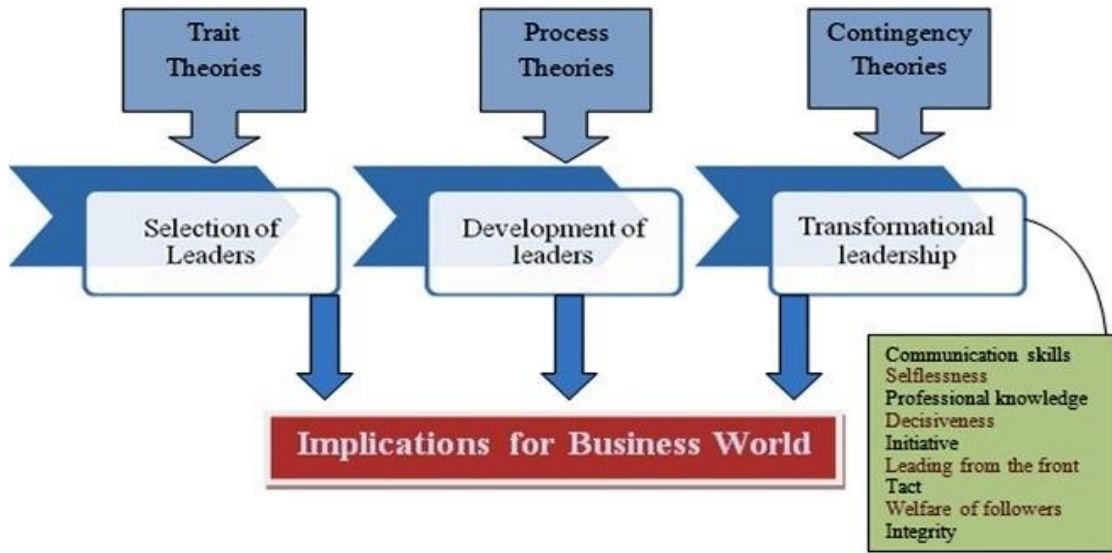


Figure 1: Study Model

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study revealed that in military only the candidates possessing essential (core) leadership traits were selected for training as a leader. The leaders at the time of selection were totally untrained with no knowledge of military working. They were then put through a comprehensive training program before giving any assignment. In case of business, candidates were selected on the basis of their technical/professional knowledge. There was no psychological test, to ascertain leadership traits (field survey, 2013). Military leadership was developed through sequential events progressing logically including very meticulously planned combat training, educational and practice based events. This results in strong commitment and relationship between officers and their subordinates. During training military leaders learnt self-discipline and how to overcome fear, stress and anxiety of combat. Strength of character and high moral values remained objectives of the leader's

development. Refresher training of leaders was a continuous process throughout the service of a leader. When soldiers have trust and confidence in their leader, they become willing and committed rather than merely compliant, agents. In case of business leaders, the training/development of the leaders was mostly on the job training which enabled them to move up the ladder of promotion. They might undergo some sort of formal training to improve their leadership skills at their own expense.

The leadership styles (transactional or transformational) through MLQ showed that military leaders were highly transformational where-as business leaders showed the tendency of transactional leadership style (Figure 2).

The results from LPC scale showed that successful military leaders (those at senior ranks) were relationship oriented, whereas average leaders were task oriented. Leadership style determined through LPC Scale are represented through following graph.

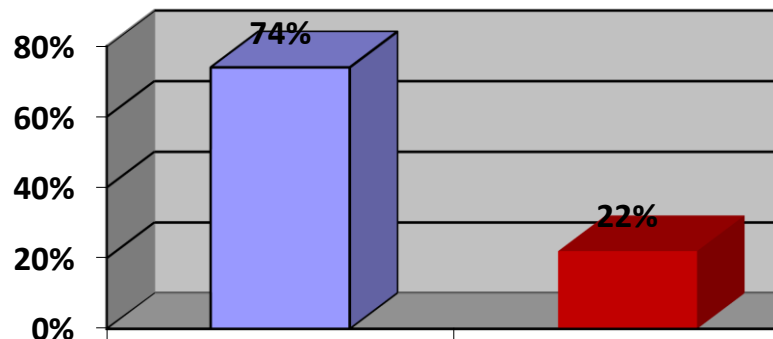


Figure-2: Leadership Styles

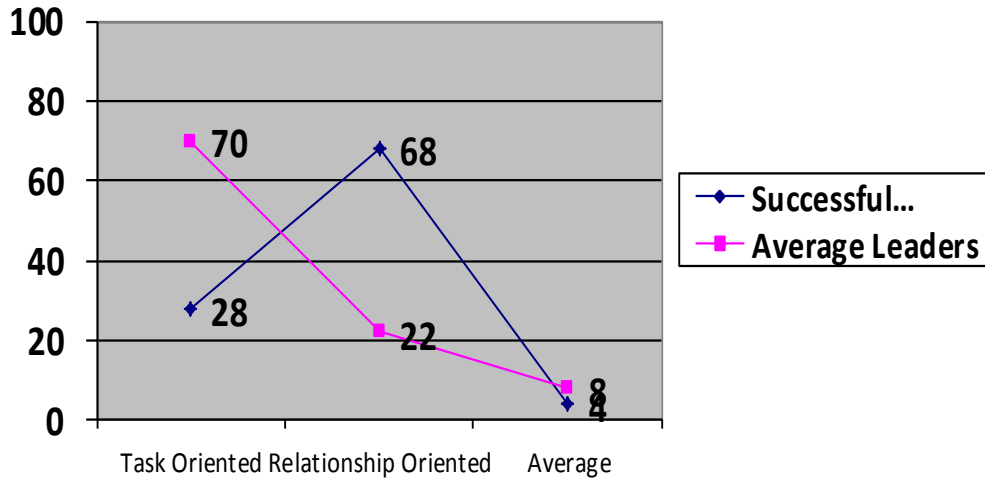


Figure 3: Styles of Military Leadership

The data showed very interesting results and validated military system of promotions. The findings showed that military system gives leadership role to those leaders whose leadership style was relationship oriented and the ones who lacked on relationship orientation are sidelined for administrative roles. The graphs clearly showed that

the successful leaders achieved their mission through relationship. In case of business the successful leaders (those leading profitable organizations) showed tendency of task orientation and the average leaders were relationship oriented.

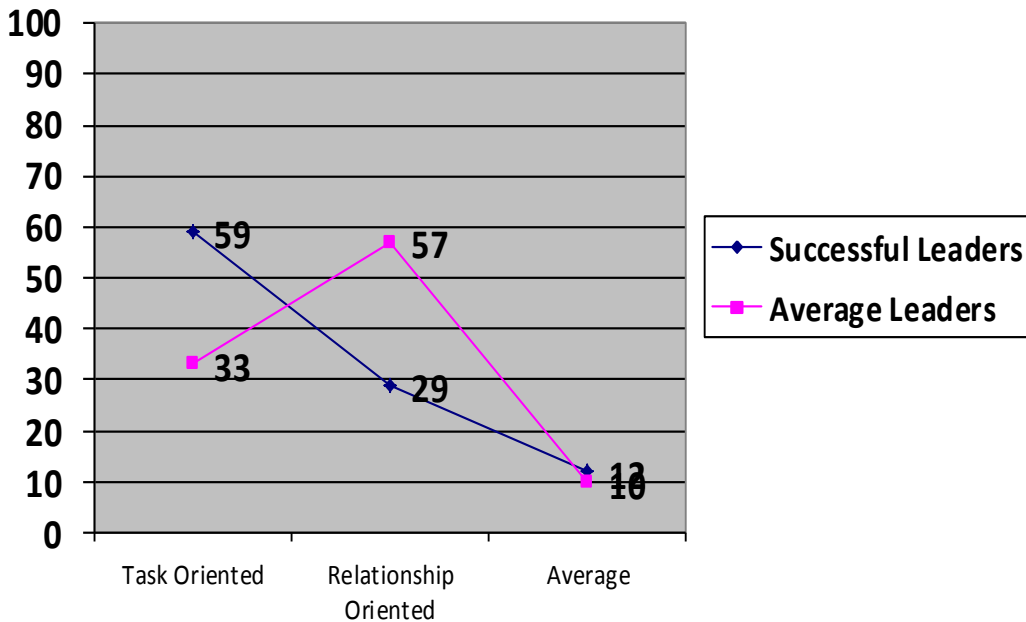


Figure-4: Leadership Style of Business Leaders

Leadership traits considered important by military and business leaders were identified through field survey. All the respondents were asked to list and prioritize 9 important leadership traits by giving value from 1 through 9. The least important leadership trait was

to be assigned the value of 9. These values were summed under the total column and subtracted from 378 to get the actual value under value column. The value was then converted into percentage and listed under percentage column (Table 1).

**Table-1 Showing Comparison of Leadership Traits (Military vs Business)**

Sr.	Qualities	Military Leadership			Business Leadership		
		Total Points	Value	Percentage	Total Points	Value	Percentage
1.	Communication Skills	332	46	12.1	96	183	65.6
2	Selflessness	98	280	74.1	222	57	20.4
3	Prof Knowledge	190	188	49.7	61	218	78.1
4	Decisiveness	187	191	50.5	169	110	39.4
5	Initiative	190	188	49.7	102	177	39.4
6	Leading from the front	141	237	62.7	217	62	22.2
7	Tact	324	54	14.3	195	84	30.1
8	Followers welfare	315	63	16.7	247	32	11.5
9	Integrity	113	265	70.1	86	193	69.1

### DISCUSSION

It was not intended to present military leaders as a panacea for all problems in business and managerial field. Rather the intent was to draw some implications for business leaders from the process of leadership selection, development and application process in military. The data was analyzed using descriptive analysis and graphs. Based on the findings that military training and development results in relation oriented-transformational leadership, the retired military leaders and business leaders (developed on similar lines) will enhance organizational performance due to strong positive correlation between transformational leadership and the organizational performance established by a number of previous studies. Transformational leadership has been positively related with the personal outcomes of the follower (Hatter and Bass, 1988; Kirkpatrick and Locke, 1996 and Barling, *et al.*, 1998) as well as organizational outcomes (Barling, *et al.*, 1996; Felfe and Schyns, 2006; Boerner, *et al.*, 2007 and Howell and Avolio, 2008). Research has shown that transformational leadership impacted employee commitment to organizational change (Leithwood and Jantzi, 2004) and organizational conditions (Lam, *et al.*, 2002). Research has also shown that transformational leadership impacted followers' satisfaction (Hatter and Bass, 1988) and commitment to the organization (Barling *et al.*, 1996). Although most correlations in social science research range from 0.00 to 0.50, the correlations between transformational leadership and positive organizational outcomes generally range from 0.40 to 0.90 with most studies reporting correlations above 0.50.

Selection of military leadership is based on trait theory to ensure that the selected leader possessed essential leadership traits. If same care is taken while selecting business leaders with some core leadership traits, like integrity and decisiveness, it may pay rich dividends (Wong and McGurk, 2003). After selection the

military leaders are put through extensive training which results in strong relationship and understanding between leaders and their subordinates. This training generated connections which bind the soldiers and ensured endurance, perseverance that authority only can't generate. The individuals progressed from enforced discipline to a complete and reliable self-discipline. Military leader is required to overcome the fear, stress and anxiety of combat. As extensive training was given to military leaders to minimize the chances of failure, the business leaders may also be trained for difficult and higher responsibilities. In the prevailing exceedingly cut-throat business environment, the business leaders may benefit from the methodology of leadership training and development being followed in military, which results in relation oriented and transformational styles of leadership. Positive correlation between transformational leadership and organizational performance (found out in a number of earlier studies mentioned above) suggested that adopting military methodology of leadership training/development would benefit business quite positively.

The data on leadership styles clearly showed that successful military leaders were relationship oriented, whereas average leaders were task oriented. The successful military leaders achieved their mission through relationship which they developed over time. The successful business leaders were more inclined towards task orientation. Analyzing the history of business recession and saving measures adopted, Colonel Thomas Kolditz (Kolditz, 2005) says, "CEOs have to start leading like generals even if that means living a lifestyle in common with their troops". Military leaders had to achieve those outcomes which command could not realize. Trust in a leader's values set and abilities transformed the followers into willing, rather than merely compliant, agents. Another important aspect about relationship orientation is that command may be applicable only for peacetime activities but during combat it is the relationship of leadership only which will

decide the outcome. Owing to the fog of the fluid operations in the battlefield the granted authority might not work and the hierarchical structure will become redundant (Utecht and Heier, 1976). When obeying them is likely to cost life, compulsory commands would lose their weight. Contingency model as developed by Fiedler seems to apply to military leaders. In military leadership a system existed to ensure best fit of leadership style and the situation. Relationship oriented leaders were groomed for leadership roles whereas task oriented leaders were sidelined towards staff, administrative and logistics responsibilities. This is because of extremes of the situations a military leader was likely to confront i.e, peace time duties and the war time leadership. In case of business leaders the difference of situations they were likely to confront were not extremes so they are, but not much sensitive to the situations.

Extensive research on defining a specific set of leadership traits for successful leaders has failed so far. Every leader and every situation demand different personality-situation fits. Data in this research on leadership traits generally pointed out similarity in case of business and military leaders with minor differences. Business leaders gave considerably higher priority to communication skills, professional knowledge and tact. Probable reasons, which came out during informal discussion, for these differences were that the business leaders had to negotiate deals with people from different backgrounds and with divergent interests. The followers of business leaders were not that much trained and disciplined as the followers of military leaders within military organizations for which they must be given a margin – though it was the responsibility of those leaders to provide such training structure to get similar output if they wanted. The same reason holds good for higher priority given to tact. They gave more importance to professional knowledge because they employed trained people or alternatively they did not pay them the salary during training period. For a leader this becomes even more important to have good professional knowledge. In case of military leaders, the initiative, decisiveness, leading from the front and selflessness emerged as the most important leadership traits. In fact these are the imperatives of military life. It is commonly said that first casualty of war is the plan so the leaders cannot wait for guidance from seniors, rather depending upon the training received; he has to take initiative according to the prevailing situation. He has to be quick in decision making; otherwise he will not survive to go into detailed deliberations. He has to think in advance about all possible contingencies and take quick decisions. Leading from the front and selflessness are essential to keep the followers moving against the aimed bullets and unexpected blasts.

As we examined the data with the relevant frameworks, particular evidence stood out. Trait theory is

followed in selection of military leaders but not in selection of business leaders. As the evidence exists that to become a good leader there are certain core leadership traits which a leader must possess the business leaders if selected according to trait theory will prove to be more successful. Based on these traits he will be considered worthy of being leader by his subordinates and will be followed whole heartedly.

Process theory of leadership is followed in development of leaders in military but no solid effort is made to develop business leaders. When a leader moves up the ladder of promotion he may require a different set of competencies which may come through proper training only (Derue and Susan, 2010). For this there has to be a system of development of leaders. Training of leaders should be ongoing process. They should be put through leadership modules to allow them to acquire leadership traits/competencies required of a leader as he moves up the ladder of promotion.

Contingency theory seems to be more in practice by leadership in military organizations as compared to business sector (Fiedler, 1978). During peace time military leaders may be able to manage assignments with task orientation leadership style but they have to develop relationship orientation for more challenging assignments and the battles. The same can bear fruits if applied in business sector also. Successful military leaders are more relationship oriented as compared to average military leaders. Similarly business leaders are more task-oriented and they do not make any effort to develop employee relationship because of poor economic situation and joblessness in Pakistan (Lazear, 2012). Employees do not leave organizations because they do not have many options out there. The business leaders are more concerned with customer relations because of competitive market. Napoleon once said, “Army marches on their bellies” (Kolditz, 2009) so welfare, good administration, and caring attitude inspire followers to do anything and go to any extent for success. Business leaders should take care of both lower and higher level needs of their employees. When their daily needs are met they will give best outputs including low turnover.

Military and business both are dealing with men therefore; human factor must remain in mind at every level. Military and business environments are different at their outcome but leadership traits are generally the same. Military leaders motivate their men lay down their lives for glory of their motherland, ideology and honor and business leadership inspires their followers to work hard for the success of their company. Both can benefit from each other’s experience to a great extent. We can conclude from above discussion that the key to leadership is selecting appropriate leaders and then developing leadership with knowledge, wisdom and practice. The world is shifting from dictation and coercion to seeking willing obedience through motivation and leading. In

military the emphasis was already on motivation because extreme sacrifice of laying one's life is not possible without inner conviction. The basic requirement of human beings remains the same everywhere and these are, respect, family and enough money. Their greed may lead them towards disaster but contended behavior will win at the end. Military invests all possible resources for welfare of its men, and demands extreme sacrifice when the time comes. It however, becomes difficult when an equilibrium between one's own and communal benefits has to be shaped in business setting. No military is likely to face defeat and no business will fail when leaders and followers are working with harmony and giving their hundred per cent performance.

Leadership is a vast subject and there is still a lot of room for future research. Military leaders can also benefit from study of skills developed by business leaders, especially in today's world of economic wars. A study to this effect is highly recommended. There is also a room for further studies to verify the importance of leader's intelligence components including mental agility, sound judgment, innovation, interpersonal tact and domain knowledge. The sample was limited to the female leaders only for similarity because female leaders are very less in Pakistan Army, especially hardly anyone among the retired ones. The policy of inducting female leaders in army is very recent.

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