Leadership Approaches in Public Owned Industrial Organisations: Evidence from a Developing Country

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims to examine the styles of leadership as practiced and desired by the management personnel within publicly owned industrial organisations in the developing country of Bangladesh. Sixty management personnel were systematically selected from three distinct manufacturing organisations for the study. Following a review of pertinent literature, a behavioural scientist assisted in the development of a questionnaire that included twenty forced-choice items. Analysis of the data was conducted using SPSS software. The findings show that perceived control in decision-making by the management personnel was much far from ideal. In the decision-making areas, such as, departmental policy making in connection with subordinates' work, determination of the techniques and methods of the department, job assignment to subordinates, participation in subordinates' activity, and maintenance of discipline, they had virtually little influence. They had to act in accordance with the systems and procedures laid down by the company. They, of course, desired much influence in decision-making in all the areas.
Keywords: Leadership styles; Bangladesh; Industrial organisations; management; Laissez-faire; Democratic leadership; Autocratic leadership; Bureaucratic leadership

INTRODUCTION

A significant critique of classical organisational theory is to the presumption that achieving organisational objectives necessitates unilateral control exerted by a singular authority at the apex of the organisation [1]. The investigation into the characteristics of democratic leadership and the advantages of involvement in collective decision-making has strengthened the critique of this authoritarian model of management. Nevertheless, it would be erroneous to construe this assault as endorsing the eradication of an organisation's power over its members. The early study on styles of leadership documented the negative consequences of morale and productivity of laissez-faire leadership [2]. The main thrust of the criterion was to advocate an organisation whose parts are all dependent upon centralised source of control.

Numerous studies have highlighted the need of a sufficiently high degree of social influence inside an organisation for the purpose of ensuring that the organisation is able to function properly [3–6]. The studies used a method called the "control graph technique" and found that, in most of the organisations they looked at, there was a link between the level of total control and good organisational performance. It thus appears that organisations require for their functioning the exertion of an adequate amount of the influence by one part on another, but this influence may take a variety of forms.

This study aims at exploring the forms of influence exercised by the managerial executives within publicly owned industrial organisations in the developing country of Bangladesh. The forms of influence are here referred to as the styles of leadership, which we may define as a pattern of interacting with subordinates.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This research defines leadership style as the practices and attitudes of a leader, manager, head, or supervisor in leading, managing, and supervising employees in the workplace. Leaders exert a

crucial influence throughout organisations. To sustain the effective functioning of the business, leaders must do crucial tasks such as establishing objectives, inspiring subordinates, engaging in decision-making, and providing feedback [7]. Nonetheless, as leadership behaviour is influenced by several dynamic elements, such as cognition and emotion, it is not unusual for leaders to experience temporary incapacitation in their organisational positions [8].

Laissez-faire leadership embodies a state of minimal intervention within organisational structures. Bass and Avolio (1995) characterize laissez-faire leadership as a phenomenon marked by "the absence of leadership, the avoidance of intervention, or both", entails a non-intrusive approach where the leader permits team members to make choices with minimal direction [2, 4, 5]. Laissez-faire leaders tend to avoid making decisions, are hesitant to express their views, show reluctance in taking action, and are frequently absent when their involvement is necessary [9–11].

However, a leader who adopts a laissez-faire approach is effectively stepping back from the situation. Lack of engagement does not imply inactivity [12]. One may interpret it as a demonstration of regard for an individual's own competency [13]. It might also be interpreted as the leader carefully avoiding the imposition of their own identity. Non-involvement and empowering leadership might be considered synonymous, as they both eliminate bureaucratic constraints [14]. The lack of engagement in laissez-faire leadership and empowering leadership is analogous [10]. A non-involved laissez-faire leader can be viewed as an alternative to traditional leadership roles. The substitution hypothesis posits that specific attributes of a worker, an employee, or a scenario influence a leader's capacity to influence personnel [15]. The concept of substitution serves as a critical factor in assessing the effectiveness of laissez-faire leadership in various contexts.

Laissez-faire leadership enables employees to exercise in the process of decision-making [16]. The leaders typically refrain from exerting influence over the activities of a group. An earlier investigation has indicated that a lack of timely intervention by managers can adversely impact the efficiency of subordinates [17]. Laissez-faire is characterized by a lack of leadership presence. Research focused on the laissez-faire style has primarily examined its association with employee job satisfaction and the resulting outcomes, revealing a negative correlation with job satisfaction [11]. This particular point of debate brought to light the fact that the laissez-faire style gives employees the ability to make decisions. It grants autonomy to employees to determine their own actions pertaining to assignments. The leaders offer the essential assistance. The laissez-faire style is regarded as the most radical option within the democratic-style continuum [18]. Research has consistently highlighted the negative impacts of laissez-faire leadership on outcomes, including reduced work performance and increased role ambiguity among team members, e.g. [4, 8, 10, 12].

Democratic and laissez-faire leadership represent two unique approaches that can be strategically utilized across different organisational and group environments. Krieg (2017) asserts that including employees in the process of making decisions is a crucial foundation of democratic leadership [19]. According to this leadership style, the leader should assume the role of a coach who has the authority to make final decisions. However, it is important for the leader to collect information from the team before engaging in decision-making [20]. Democratic leadership is a leadership style that actively involves all persons within an organization in the decision-making process [17, 19]. Democratic leadership is characterised by decentralised decision-making, where organisational choices are made via common understanding, rendering it distinct [19, 20]. This type of leadership is frequently seen as a very assertive approach that leads to increased competence and refined engagement among group members, thereby boosting the overall morale of the group [21].

Furthermore, the democratic leadership style fosters the generation of innovative solutions to challenges by encouraging people to contribute their ideas. Group participants may also desire more engagement in projects and commit themselves to these tasks, therefore displaying a higher propensity to be concerned with the ultimate outcomes of these endeavours [21].

A substantial amount of efficacy is demonstrated by the democratic approach, which encourages more contributions from members of the team, boosts production, and boosts the morale of employees [21]. The democratic leader engages in consultations with subordinates, takes their perspectives into account, offers guidance and recommendations, and fosters a collaborative and supportive workplace atmosphere for employees [17]. The characteristics exhibited by democratic leaders encompass staff development, personnel coordination, consultation, motivation, team building and management, as well as conflict management [22]. The democratic approach entails a balanced level of oversight while prioritizing dialogue and inclusivity in the processes of decision-making and problem resolution.

Numerous researchers discovered that job satisfaction is a robust indicator of organisational commitment [23–28]. Consequently, the degree of commitment to the organisation is substantially affected by employee job satisfaction, and organisational commitment positively influences organisational performance. Research conducted by Rai et al. (2020) demonstrated a significant positive effect of job satisfaction and the perceived democratic leadership style of managers on the level of organisational commitment [29]. The findings indicated a positive correlation between the managers' perceived democratic leadership style and the overall organisational commitment of the workers. When employees perceive their managers as more democratic, there is a significant increase in their overall commitment to the organisation.

The distinctions between laissez-faire and democratic leadership styles, in contrast to autocratic leadership, are significant. In the context of auto-cratic leadership, authority is exercised to guarantee that all tasks are completed in accordance with the established timeline. Research indicates that employee motivation can diminish, resulting in suboptimal performance [30]. Furthermore, studies [31] have identified a significant correlation between employee work effort and job performance. Research indicates that [7] autocratic leadership typically functions as a controlling, directing, or coercive style wherein the leader infrequently incorporates input from subordinates when making decisions. Employees experiencing pressure reported instances of autonomous supervision by their leaders. Nonetheless, Dawson (2002) indicated that the autocratic style could yield significant outcomes within a brief timeframe [32]. The autocratic leader closely observes and wields authority with minimal trust or confidence in the followers [33]. This attitude contributes to a climate of fear and mistrust among followers towards their leader [34]. This suggests that autocratic leadership is primarily suited for short-term scenarios, as there are numerous instances where this leadership style may present challenges [30].

The leadership style exhibits significant differences within a bureaucratic system. The leaders in question prioritize the systematic completion of their tasks [34]. Ojukuku et al. (2012) indicated that bureaucratic leadership adversely affects organisational performance [35]. It has been observed that bureaucratic leaders fail to motivate the employees within their job place to perform in the anticipated manner, which may result in suboptimal organisational performance [35]. A separate study presented similar results, suggesting that the bureaucratic leadership style does not significantly impact employee or organisational performance [36]. This approach proves advantageous solely when tasks are executed over an extended duration in accordance with a specified procedure [37].

The primary objective of leadership inside the bureaucracy is to effectively serve the community and public interest [38]. It is an essential instrument for ensuring that employees adhere to management orders and state regulations [39]. Lead-

ers are those who provide assistance as agents in politics and administration [40]. In his 2019 study, Lumby suggests that effective leadership in public organisations should confront criticism, preconceptions, and promote constructive interaction. Leadership exercises authority over the development, planning, and creation of reform programs and selectively implements suggestions to protect the interests of the community [41].

The aforementioned literature indicates that numerous studies have been conducted in the realm of leadership; however, a significant gap exists, as only a limited number have been undertaken in Bangladesh, and none have illustrated the impact of various leadership styles on organisational success within successful organisations.

The objective of this study is to investigate the various forms of influence exerted by managerial executives within publicly owned industrial organisations in the developing country of Bangladesh.

METHODOLOGY
Sample

A total of sixty management personnel was selected from Bangladesh Textile Mills Corporation (BTMC), Bangladesh Jute Mills Corporation (BJMC), and General Electric Manufacturing Company Limited (GEMCO). The chosen industries have established a reputation for manufacturing activity. BTMC is a public corporation responsible for management of all government-operated textile industries in Bangladesh. It oversees the operations of 18 government-owned textile manufacturing facilities. However, 78 jute mills were nationalised after Bangladesh's independence and became BJMC subsidiaries. GEMCO was founded in 1972 by the Government of Bangladesh. It was constructed with the technical assistance of M/s. Promash Export, a company from the former Soviet Union, for the purpose of manufacturing electrical equipment, such as power transformers, and was completed in 1978. In 1979, it was changed into a limited company. It possesses the greatest transformer manufacturing facility in Bangladesh.

Three manufacturing industries from distinct categories were selected to examine the attitudes of managers across various sectors concerning a consistent representation of the leadership ideal. Secondly, since the birth of Bangladesh as part of Pakistan, these three industries have had a significant impact on the domestic economy, and their leadership styles closely resemble those of contemporary organizations. The policies and administrative activities of these institutions resemble those of countries in the Asian continent, particularly in South Asia. The present investigation involved the selection of three large organisations according to two specific criteria [42]: (a) each firm employed a minimum of 200 employees and (b) each was registered under the Dhaka Stock Exchange (DSE).

Care was taken so as to include in the sample management personnel of all important functions at different hierarchies. This study employed judgemental sampling, a nonprobability sampling technique, to collect data from respondents across three distinct industries in Bangladesh. Judgemental sampling is suggested as an approach grounded in educated and knowledgeable assumptions to represent a certain target demographic [43, 44]. Judgmental sampling takes place when a sample is selected based on specific criteria. The managerial level was selected as a suitable sample population for several reasons. All interviewees for the managerial positions were department heads with substantial experience in the organisational context. The managerial level constitutes a crucial tier of organisational management, responsible for implementing policy within their respective departments. Consequently, these individuals are well-situated to observe the implementation of the organization's mission. Managers possess exclusive access to information about the organization's developing strategic plans and are cognisant of departmental sentiments concerning progress towards the organization's mission.

Instruments

A questionnaire containing twenty forced-choice items was developed with the help of a behav-

ioural scientist after a survey of the relevant literatures. Diverse types of scales were used to measure the variables parameters. Prior to the finalization of the questionnaire, expert advice was sought, after which it was administered to the samples. For each item or statement, the respondents had to indicate, first, what they perceived regarding control in decision-making related to their department on a five-point Likert-type scale ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly

Table 1

Perceived and desired styles of leadership as viewed by management personnel

Items	Actual Mean Score	Desired Mean Score
(a) Laissez-faire leadership		
In my departmental policy-making, I leave it to my subordinate to decide.	1.17	2.63
As regards the techniques and methods of my department, I take care only in formulating the basic plans and give advice when asked for.	1.83	3.47
As regards job assignments to my subordinates, I leave it entirely to my subordinates.	1.17	2.50
I do not make any deliberate attempt to participate.	2.53	3.20
I hardly take any disciplinary action against my subordinates.	1.47	2.23
Average across all items	1.63	3.21
(b) Autocratic leadership		
I have to decide practically everything in my departmental policy-making.	1.60	3.40
I have to lay down practically everything to each subordinate as regards the techniques and methods of my department.	1.67	4.03
As regards the job assignment, I have to decide practically everything.	3.67	4.83
I do not participate in subordinates' activities.	2.07	3.67
The company's rules and procedures stand in the way of maintaining discipline in my department.	2.80	3.70
Average across all items	2.36	3.93
(c) Democratic leadership		
In the departmental policy-making, my subordinates decide with my help.	1.20	3.77
As regards the techniques and methods of my department, my subordinates determine the goals by group decisions.	1.60	3.97
As regards job assignments, I leave it to my subordinates, primarily who do this with my help.	1.77	3.73
I participate symbolically in subordinates' activity.	2.77	3.73
I think it is necessary to hear both sides, collect all the relevant information, and check them before taking any disciplinary action.	2.63	4.27
Average across all items	1.99	3.86
(d) Bureaucratic rule-oriented leadership		
In my departmental policy-making, I strictly follow the systems and procedures laid down by the company.	3.33	4.43
As regards the techniques of my department, I strictly follow the company rules.	3.47	4.83
I strictly follow the company rules regarding job assignments.	3.43	4.87
It is laid down by the company rules; I participate in subordinates' work, otherwise not.	3.03	4.23
As regards discipline, I strictly follow the company rules.	3.20	4.80
Average across all items	3.29	4.63

Source: compiled by the author.

agree", and secondly, what they desired for control in such decision-making on a similar type of scale ranging from "not important" to "essential". The validity and reliability of the scale were tested through factor analysis. Cronbach alpha was 0.67.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Table 1 shows the style of leadership as perceived and desired by the managerial personnel. From *Table 2*, four types of leadership, such as laissez-faire, autocratic, democratic, and bureaucratic rule-oriented leadership, were identified and separately

presented in *Table 1*. Across all items, the perceived mean score was 1.63 and 3.21, respectively, for laissez-faire leadership and 2.36 and 3.93 for autocratic leadership. 1.99 and 3.86 for democratic leadership and 3.29 and 4.63 for bureaucratic rule-oriented leadership. This indicates the absence of the first three categories of leadership and the general presence of bureaucratic leadership in the enterprise concerned.

An examination of *Table 2* reveals that there were wide differences between the perceived and the desired mean scores in all the items, which were all

Table 2

Styles of leadership practiced and desired by the management personnel

Items*	Actual (A)			Desired (D)			$\bar{X}_A - \bar{X}_D$	t value**
	$\bar{X}$	SD	$\frac{SE}{X}$ of	$\bar{X}$	SD	$\frac{SE}{X}$ of		
1	1.60	0.66	0.09	3.40	0.61	0.08	1.80	15.33
2	1.20	0.40	0.05	3.77	0.50	0.06	2.57	30.56
3	3.33	1.14	0.15	4.43	0.50	0.06	1.10	6.82
4	1.17	0.58	0.08	2.63	1.17	0.15	1.46	8.63
5	1.67	0.79	0.10	4.03	0.41	0.05	2.36	20.48
6	1.60	0.80	0.10	3.97	0.31	0.04	2.37	21.15
7	3.47	0.99	0.13	4.83	0.45	0.06	1.36	9.63
8	1.83	0.37	0.05	3.47	0.67	0.09	1.64	16.36
9	3.67	0.75	0.10	4.83	0.37	0.05	1.16	10.75
10	1.77	0.76	0.10	3.57	0.62	0.08	1.18	14.13
11	3.43	1.05	0.14	4.87	0.34	0.04	1.44	9.94
12	1.17	0.37	0.05	2.50	0.96	0.12	1.33	9.97
13	2.07	1.06	0.14	3.67	0.75	0.10	1.60	9.29
14	2.77	1.43	0.18	3.73	0.77	0.10	0.96	4.57
15	3.03	1.05	0.14	4.23	0.96	0.12	1.20	6.50
16	2.53	1.18	0.15	3.20	0.54	0.07	0.67	3.96
17	2.80	1.40	0.18	3.70	0.64	0.08	0.90	4.49
18	2.63	0.98	0.13	4.27	0.63	0.08	1.64	10.75
19	3.20	0.98	0.13	4.80	0.60	0.08	1.60	10.70
20	1.47	0.50	0.06	2.23	0.80	0.10	0.76	6.21

Source: compiled by the author.

Note: * — The items are same as those in *Table 1*.

** — All are significant at 0.01 level.

$\bar{X}$ — Sample mean; SD — Standard deviation; SE — Standard error.

statistically significant at the 1% level of confidence. Taking a criterion of 4 (agree) and above, not a single item could achieve this level. In the desired scale, taking a criterion of 4 (very important) and above, all the items in the category of rule-oriented bureaucratic leadership (i.e., items 3, 7, 11, 1 and 19), one item (item 18) in the category of democratic leadership and two items (5 and 9) in the category of autocratic leadership were found to achieve this level. This was an in indication of the fact that although autocratic and democratic leadership were non-existent, the management personnel desired autocratic control in deciding the techniques and methods of the department and in "job assignment to their subordinates; democratic leadership in taking disciplinary action; and bureaucratic rule-oriented leadership in departmental policy making in connection with the subordinates" work, in "determining the techniques and methods of the department", in "assigning jobs to subordinates", in "participation in subordinates work" and in "the maintenance of discipline".

The available data indicate that the management personnel neither practiced laissez-faire leadership nor did they desire to practice the same. They were also not autocratic in their departmental policy making in connection with their subordinates' work as well as regarding the (i) techniques and methods of their department, (ii) job assignment to subordinates, (iii) participation in subordinates' work, and (iv) discipline. But they desired autocratic control in deciding the techniques and methods of their department and in assigning jobs to their subordinates. Democratic leadership also could not get any foothold, which, however, was considered to be quite important in all the cases except in discipline, where they thought it to be very important to hear both sides and collect all the relevant facts and check them before taking any action. Again, compared with the laissez-faire, autocratic, and democratic styles of leadership, the management personnel were actually more prone toward strict adherence to the systems and procedures laid down by the organisation, and, in the same tone, they thought it highly desirable to follow the organisation rules.

The results of the study regarding leadership styles do not conform with those of Ali and Ullah (2023), a study conducted in Bangladesh, who found that the majority of managers and employees employed in a private sector industrial organisation practiced democratic-laissez-faire styles of leadership, and they considered it also very important on-the-job conditions of work [45]. However, the finding of this study is in line with the observation of Fiaz et al. (2017) that managers in public sector organisations act largely on the basis of rules and regulations laid down by the organisation [6]. Since the present study was confined to only three organisations, findings cannot obviously be generalised.

CONCLUSIONS

The overall conclusion of the study is that the management personnel of the organisations under study act largely on the basis of rules and regulations laid down by the company rather than on the immediate requirement of the situation. While the reasons for those rules and regulations may be sound, nevertheless, they have the effect of restricting freedom of action and, consequently, the initiative of the managers in taking decisions. The prevalence of rule-oriented leadership indicates that control over certain policy matters resides maximally in the central authority. Perhaps, by the very nature of the public sector, this is inevitable.

In the public sector, organisations state-dictated rules become the organisation rules, which the people responsible for managing the affairs of the organisation are expected to meticulously follow. It might probably be one of the reasons for non-practice of either autocratic[1] or democratic leadership[2].

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[1] Autocratic leadership appears to be theoretically absent. But practically it is wholly present, which finds its expression in the strict adherence to the organisation rules formulated by the central authority. To follow the systems and procedures laid down by the organisation is nothing but the practice of autocratic leadership, unless the systems and procedures contain elements of other kinds of leadership.

[2] In Bangladesh, the jute mills, textile mills, and production of power transformers in the public sector virtually face very little competition within the country. The price of the product is fixed on the basis of the cost, not in relation to the competition in the

Labelling the manager of a nationalised organisation as solely bureaucratic and rule-oriented is an oversimplification; their function often fluctuates based on the specific situation, the organisation's nature, and the work group involved. A clear necessity exists to better investigate leadership patterns in work groups utilising more precise tools. The literature review indicates that the autocratic leadership style is the most practical among leadership styles and reveals a negative correlation with people performance, while democratic and laissez-faire styles demonstrate a positive correlation. In light of this conclusion, it is essential for leaders to embrace their responsibilities through a democratic and laissez-faire approach to leadership. The analysis presented in this study represents only a small part of what we need to learn about executive leadership style. Considerably more research is needed on how one learns about and measures leadership style.

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market. As a result, it is difficult to assess the performance of these mills. Inefficiency is covered up by an upward revision of selling prices. Consequently, management people have no opportunity of knowing how well they are doing and how much scope there is for improving performance. Under these circumstances, it is not unexpected of the managers to go by the wind.

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