

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 identification of workplace contextual factors that influence the use of leadership styles. The six emotional leadership styles are classified as resonant (visionary, coaching, affiliative, democratic) and dissonant (pacesetting, 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 13 managers managing a team of minimum 2 employees working in multinational companies and start-ups under the Indian IT sector. The initial set of participants were recruited by sharing information of this study with personal networks and social media. They referred potential participants based on primary requirements of managers. Hence, sampling techniques employed were convenience and snowball sampling. Data was analysed using inductive thematic analysis and revealed two themes and seven subthemes. The first theme of 'Synchronized use of Emotional Leadership Styles' discussed participants' use of five emotional leadership styles simultaneously rather than individually. The majority of participants employed characteristics of two leadership styles in a situation while interacting with subordinates. The second theme of 'Influence of Team, Organisation and Client on Selection of Leadership Style' revealed workplace contextual factors that are considered by managers while choosing appropriate leadership approaches. The workplace factors included team characteristics such as work experience and employment types, organisational policies and changing client demands. The implications of this study were for managers, learning and HR departments of the Indian IT sector to tailor and enhance their leadership development programs.

1. Introduction

Leaders play a pivotal role in their employees' work life by helping them develop their careers, keeping in mind larger organisational goals (Northouse, 2019). Leaders are an important resource in any type of organisation as they shape their subordinates by motivating them to contribute towards completion of group goals (Haslam et al., 2015). Many researchers have

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defined leadership but have failed to produce a universal definition, encompassing all aspects of Leadership. Rost (1991) states leadership is “an influence relationship among leaders and collaborators who intend significant changes that reflect their mutual purposes.”

Despite the lack of a singular definition, the various conceptualizations have certain commonalities that define leadership to be a process, involve influence and common goals and to occur in groups (Northouse, 2019). With this understanding of the phenomenon of leadership, a leader is identified as a person who influences and trains followers characterized by diverse gifts, skills, abilities in a coordinated effort to fulfil the organisation’s objectives and mission (Winston & Patterson, 2006).

The component of involving influence in leadership is of interest for the purpose of this study. Influence is asserted during interactions between the leaders and followers (Northouse, 2019), referred to as leadership styles. Leadership styles focus on characteristics of a leader such as attitudes and behaviours of leaders when interacting with their colleagues, i.e., how they conduct themselves, communicate and make important decisions (Arnold & Randall, 2010).

1.1. Theoretical Background

A plethora of leadership styles have been developed using the Contingency approach to leadership. Under this approach, leadership effectiveness is determined by situational factors such as the task, followers and other aspects of the environment. According to the contingency theories, a leader should be flexible and adaptable. These theories have been interpreted to suggest that there is no leadership style that is most effective, but it should be tailored to the demands of each situation (Mills & McKimm, 2016). However, contingency theories have been criticized to be too general, lack theoretical clarity, rely heavily on a leader’s decision-making abilities to utilize the range of leadership styles and downplay the complexity in relationships between organisational structure, technology and organisational effectiveness (Mills & McKimm, 2016).

Under this contingency approach, this study targets the six leadership styles, also known as emotional leadership styles, identified by Goleman et al. (2003). They state that managers adopt a leadership style according to the approach they take to carry out their roles. The approach that managers take could be either managing employees by looking after their well-being (termed resonant leadership) or by aiming to reach goals and help in the growth of the company (termed dissonant leadership).

Goleman et al. (2003) postulate that the emotional leadership styles have different effects on subordinates and produce different results. Resonant leadership encourages employees to put in their best efforts and work harmoniously while dissonant leadership leads to hostility in teams and feelings of anxiety within the subordinates (Taner & Aysen, 2013; Kaufman 2005). Hence, resonant and dissonant styles should be used interchangeably depending on situations and needs of people involved. The criticism of contingency theories being too general or lacking certain theoretical elements as mentioned above are countered by the explanation of these emotional leadership styles. There are six emotional leadership styles that have been conceptualized by Goleman et al. (2003) with various situations or contexts where they are most effective and how leaders can develop a particular style. The aspect of understanding the match between the situational context and leadership styles is crucial due to the strengths and weaknesses of the various styles in different situations. The situations in which the emotional leadership styles are most effective was determined by analysis of various case studies and anecdotes of a sample of leaders from North America, Australia, Pacific Rim, Africa and Europe (Boyatzis et al., 2005; Goleman et al., 2003). This international sample was drawn from the database of Kelner et al. (1994) study on managerial styles and organisational climate. The

emotional leadership styles are the main focus of this paper and are explained in the following sections.

1.2. Resonant Leadership

Resonant leadership is one of the two categories of emotional leadership styles and is characterised by empathy, passion, commitment and the ability of leaders to recognise attributes of subordinates and groups (Laschinger et al., 2014). Resonant leadership promotes harmony and positive outcomes. Goleman et al. (2003) categorises the Visionary Leader, Coaching Leader, Affiliative Leader and Democratic Leader into Resonant leadership.

1. Visionary Leadership - A visionary leader is empathetic and inspires people to work towards a common goal. There is some degree of freedom given to subordinates to reach their goals. This style is most effective during corporate turnarounds i.e., when an organisation needs a new vision or direction. But there is limited evidence to suggest that the characteristics of visionary style are effective in leading change in organisations (Issah, 2018). The weaknesses of this style are that it may be less effective when working with experienced employees and overbearing if used too often. Leaders can develop this style by working on their self-confidence, focussing on increasing empathy and being energetic about change.
2. Coaching Leadership – A coaching leader connects employees’ personal goals with organisational objectives by encouraging and focusing on developing others for future success. This style motivates people as it involves building rapport and trust to have a positive impact on people. It is most effective when an employee lags behind and has trouble with building long-term skills. However, researchers suggest this leadership style to be used for all subordinates and not just employees who are unable to cope with their workload (Vesterinen et al., 2013; Berg & Karlsen, 2016; Boykins et al., 2013) The style can fail if the employee does not take efforts or requires continuous feedback. Leaders can develop this style by learning informal coaching, mentoring and understanding their team’s needs clearly.
3. Affiliative Leadership – An affiliative leader promotes harmony within the team by encouraging inclusion, connecting people together and resolving conflicts. The leader should value others’ emotions, especially during team conflict and trust issues within the team. Gagnon et al. (2012) have reviewed previous literature to summarize the principles of affiliative leadership. Their review states that leaders should be able to understand multiple views, create trust and collaboration by sharing authority. Leaders can learn to be affiliative by being optimistic, learning effective ways in conflict resolution and maintaining a high focus on emotion.
4. Democratic Leadership – A democratic leader focuses on collaboration and encourages participation from team members. They listen to their subordinates rather than directing them. It is most effective in getting the team onboard with an idea, but this style is not preferred when working with an inexperienced team. A leader can develop this style by learning active listening and facilitation skills to involve their team in problem-solving and decision-making situations.

Resonant leadership styles require leaders to use their emotional intelligence (EI) in the workplace to perceive and manage their subordinates’ emotions to motivate them. Recent research on integrating EI to leadership approaches states that EI enhances a leader's emotional empathy for subordinates, helping in motivating them. Leaders with high EI can cope with challenges better and promote trusting relationships at the workplace (Caruso & Rees, 2019).

1.3. Dissonant Leadership

Contrary to resonant leadership, dissonant leadership requires managers to be focused only on tasks at hand. Dissonant leadership styles have the ability to create tension, lead to feelings of fear in subordinates and should be utilised sparingly. Kaufman (2005) identified the characteristics of dissonant leadership approach to be a top-down hierarchical management that motivates through fear rather than inspiration. Progression is often made due to fear of disciplinary repercussions rather than professional development. It creates a competitive environment based on fear and “erroneous zero-sum perceptions” rather than constructive conflict resolution and communication. Goleman et al. (2003) have categorised the Pacesetter leader and Coercive leader under Dissonant leadership.

1. Pacesetter Leadership – A pacesetter leader inherently focuses on performance and achievement of group or organisational goals. They expect excellence from their team and are highly involved in ensuring the completion of goals. It could result in burnout, exhaustion and high staff turnover. It is most effective in situations where high quality results need to be delivered in a short timeframe from a motivated team. Jasper (2018) reiterates the use of this style in the specified situation as one of the key behaviours for building an adaptive approach to leadership. Leaders can develop this style by engaging in high-performance coaching, improving motivation skills and improving the quality of a team’s work by using other techniques like Six Sigma.
2. Coercive Leadership – A coercive leader uses an autocratic approach, tight control and threats of punishment. This style can be misused and can have a profound negative impact on the team. It should be used in crisis situations and with problem employees. A leader needs to be cautious in developing this style, able to work effectively in high-pressure situations and be skilled in crisis management.

Both styles under dissonant leadership are characterised by leader’s expectation of compliance by employees and completion of the leader’s goals. Leaders set the tone and employees feel restricted and powerless under these leadership styles. However, such leadership approaches are beneficial in times of crisis where an assertive leader is required to take charge or in situations where employees resonate with the leader’s working style or goals (Pellitteri, 2022).

The present study will focus on the emotional leadership styles of managers and leaders in the Indian Information Technology (IT) sector. This sector was chosen because the Indian IT sector is a major contributor to the Indian economy, employs a large percentage of the urban population and is leadership-driven and hierarchical (Kavida & Sivakoumar, 2010; Upadhyay, 2008; Krishna et al., 2017; Deshpande, 2011).

2. Literature Review

The evidence in literature suggests the importance of studying emotional leadership. Emotional leadership enhances employee motivation, productivity and self-reported organisational commitment of subordinates and employees’ psychological safety¹ (Ouakouak et al., 2020; Young-Ritchie et al., 2009; Ralston, 2016). Based on the experiences of team members, effective leadership through relationship management, social awareness and fair decision making were other outcomes of emotional leadership (Riaz, 2024; Fianko et al., 2020). Although these studies include positive impact of emotional leadership on a wide range of

¹ Psychological safety means individuals are confident to take risks and share ideas and thoughts with their team without the fear of being rejected (Edmondson, 1999).

factors, they employ specific samples of population (public sector, banking industry and healthcare sector), leading to problems of generalizability.

Further research on resonant leadership states that a supervisor's resonant leadership behaviour resulted in lower peer incivility² in nurse faculty and had the potential to positively impact retention, job satisfaction, and recruitment (Casale, 2017). Resonant leadership styles were also linked to perceived healthy work environments (Laschinger et al., 2014), efficiently reduced workplace bullying (Faeq et al., 2022) and had a positive association with employees' job satisfaction and workplace empowerment (Bawafaa et al., 2015). A direct effect of resonant leadership was found on decreasing psychological distress and increased organisational commitment of the subordinates (Ramasamy et al., 2022).

On the contrary, dissonant leadership style resulted in lower job satisfaction as reported by a systematic review of 53 studies (Cummings et al., 2010). Research on influence of dissonant leadership on organisational outcomes states that it results in poor client-organisation relationships (Liu & Ruegg, 2012) and was found to drive subordinates towards chronic anger and feelings of resentment (Kaufman, 2005). Another study associated dissonant leadership with lower levels of efficiency, job satisfaction and morale (Setiawan et al., 2021) and higher levels of burnout (Cornelsen, 2025). However, Steckler and Theard (2024) identified a potential benefit of the pacesetter style under dissonant leadership. Their findings indicate that by modelling hard work and demanding excellence in certain situations, leaders may inspire teams to enhance outcomes and improve organisational effectiveness. Since most research on dissonant leadership is associated with adverse organisational outcomes, researchers suggest to increase resonant leadership over dissonant leadership to improve effectiveness of leadership (Runnels et al., 2023).

Some studies have been focusing on these leadership styles in the Indian context. Chawla and Lenka (2018) studied the impact of resonant and transformational leadership in the VUCA³ world in India. Their results showed that resonant leadership would thrive better than transformational leadership and would significantly impact Higher Education Institutions to sustain and develop in the VUCA world. Lenka and Tiwari (2016) also reported that resonant leadership adopted by Indian managers helps motivate employees by incorporating compassion and positive mood to achieve the triple bottom line⁴ in organisations undergoing a crisis (e.g.- downsized organisations). Another study was conducted on links between resonant leadership style of Indian IT managers and employee engagement, stating that high EI leaders can develop employee engagement and commitment during challenging times in the organisation caused by economic recession (Tiwari & Lenka, 2015). The findings also indicate that resonant leaders develop commitment among employees by providing a vision or goal to them.

However, there is insufficient recent research about the experience and nature of such emotional leadership styles, especially the use of dissonant styles in this sector. This qualitative study seeks to address this gap in knowledge. The qualitative methodology was chosen since the nature of this study is exploratory for the Indian IT sector. Studies suggest that qualitative research plays a vital role in leadership research as it aligns more effectively to the research scope, generates richer and more cohesive perspectives, facilitates deeper understanding of the

² Peer Incivility includes apathy, disrespect, and violent behaviours (Clark, 2013)

³ VUCA (Volatile, Uncertain, Complex and Ambiguous) - These aspects in VUCA are characterised by challenges faced by organisations (e.g., rapid technological developments, financial crisis) and distinct responses to manage these challenges (Bennett & Lemoine, 2014)

⁴ The triple bottom line refers to aligning employees' needs, customer service and organisational success to create a sustainable vision (Hubbard, 2009)

complex phenomenon of leadership and promotes greater acceptance of findings (Eftenaru, 2023; Bryman, 2011; Conger, 1998).

Hence, this qualitative study will focus on the emotional leadership styles of managers in the Indian IT sector and the central research questions are: (i) what types of emotional leadership styles are used in this sector and how are they understood and experienced by leaders?; (ii) what contextual factors influence the use of such leadership styles?

3. Methods

3.1. Participants

Participants for this study were managers/leaders⁵ working in organisations in the Indian IT sector. The inclusion criteria were set for managers aged 25 and over working in the Indian IT sector and managing a team of 2 or more employees. The minimum age limit was set at 25 years as employment in India begins from 22 years of age and participants would have had some experience in the leadership position. There were no restrictions placed on the job titles or departments they worked under within their organisations.

Convenience and Snowball sampling methods were employed. Recruitment of participants was done by advertising the study on the researcher's social media profiles. Personal network was encouraged to share information about the study. 13 individuals consented to participate and each participant was given a pseudonym (Interviewee 1, Interviewee 2, etc).

The sample consisted of 12 males and 1 female, aged between 30 years and 60 years. All participants were graduates in Engineering or Technology while some completed their post-graduation in Management Studies. The total work experience of participants was between 7 years and 36 years, with experience in leadership or management positions ranging from 4 years to 29 years. They were employed in multi-national corporations (MNCs) and start-ups under the Indian IT sector. Some participants had leadership experience in both types of organisations. Participants worked in technical roles (Technical Lead, Project and Delivery Managers, Directors, Associate Vice Presidents) and non-technical roles (Finance, Sales, Resource Managers).

Data saturation was perceived during the 12th interview by conducting initial analysis for similar patterns and codes. The 13th interview was taken to confirm the achievement of data saturation for the study. No new information was shared by the participants in the final interviews. Francis et al. (2010) proposed 13 interviews as an effective guide for qualitative studies undertaking a theory-based analysis. Since the underlying theory of the present study is Emotional Leadership Theory (Goleman et al., 2003), the approach of conducting 13 interviews was selected.

3.2. Data Collection

A qualitative study using semi-structured interviews was conducted. Semi-structured interviews were chosen as a method of data collection as it allows researchers to guide the conversation in interviews and gives interviewees freedom to express their opinions (Rubin & Rubin, 2004). The interview schedule was not shared with participants prior to the interview to avoid socially desirable responses. Interviews were scheduled at a time convenient for the participants through an audio call over online teleconferencing facilities and each interview

⁵ In the Indian IT sector, there is no distinction between 'managers' and 'leaders' (Upadhy & Vasavi, 2006)

lasted for an average of 35-40 minutes. The interviews were recorded and audio recordings were used to manually transcribe the interviews.

The interview schedule was developed keeping in mind scenarios specified by Goleman et al. (2003) in their explanation of emotional leadership styles. The focus of the questions were their responses and actions to such situations. Since the interview schedule consisted of specific situations faced by managers, questions included asking them whether they faced certain situations to avoid generalising and making assumptions about leadership experiences. Participants had the choice of outlining their hypothetical actions if they had not faced any scenario.

Example items to understand context –

1. Have you dealt with differences of opinion in your team?
2. Did you ever have to give a team member additional responsibilities?

Example items to understand leadership approach and interactions –

1. How did you manage your team in these situations and deal with their reactions?
2. What are the factors you considered or will consider while making important decisions related to the team you are working with?

Follow-up example item –

1. Could you describe the reasons for choosing these actions?

3.3. Data Analysis

The interviews were transcribed manually and analysed using thematic analysis (TA). TA provides theoretical flexibility to analyse qualitative data. Joffe (2012) suggests TA is a better framework to understand experiences of a certain group about a phenomenon under study. The present study focuses on the phenomenon of emotional leadership experiences of a particular group (managers in the Indian IT sector). Hence TA was chosen to conduct qualitative data analysis.

The analysis was guided by research questions and conducted using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six steps for TA. They have put forward 2 approaches to TA – inductive and deductive analysis. Inductive analysis is a bottom-up approach where themes and codes emerge from the data itself while deductive analysis is a top-down approach where the analysis is driven by theoretical background (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Soiferman (2010) suggests the use of inductive analysis for qualitative studies. Hence, data for this study was analysed using the inductive approach to suit the methodology of this study.

The first step for inductive analysis (Familiarizing yourself with your data) was done through manual transcription of the audio recordings of interviews into transcripts and re-reading all transcripts. The second step (Generating initial codes) was conducted by coding all participants' responses to summarise the content of the data. For the third and fourth steps (Searching for themes and Reviewing Themes respectively), the codes were inserted into Microsoft Excel as conveyed by Bree and Gallagher (2016) for sorting and color-coding into themes and sub-themes. The themes were verified to correspond with the information in the transcripts. There were a total of 2 themes identified from the dataset and numerous sub-themes. To complete the fifth step (Defining and naming themes), descriptive names were given to get a brief understanding of the themes and sub-themes. Some participant responses

that demonstrate the sub-theme were collated from the dataset to complete the sixth step (Producing the report).

The transcripts and initial categorization of codes were mailed to the participants for respondent validation. Respondent validation is a technique for establishing credibility of results and verifying accuracy of responses, but it should be used with other techniques such as inter-rater reliability to ensure the trustworthiness of data analysis (Birt et al., 2016). Due to time constraints, inter-rater reliability could not be calculated and the credibility of the results of this study rely on respondent validation.

4. Results

The data analysis revealed 2 themes and 7 subthemes discussed below.

4.1. Synchronised use of Emotional Leadership Styles

This theme and the following sub-themes are tied with the first research question, understanding the types of emotional leadership styles used by the participants and their experiences related to its use. It was found that most participants used a minimum of two emotional leadership styles simultaneously i.e. leadership experiences required participants to employ characteristics of at least two leadership styles in their interactions with subordinates. Hence, participants used the emotional leadership styles jointly rather than individually. The data analysis revealed 4 subthemes as discussed below.

4.1.1. Concurrent Use of Constructive Conflict and Team Cohesion

Characteristics of harmonious conflict resolution and encouraged participation from affiliative and democratic styles respectively were found to be used simultaneously in the participants' responses. There was considerable overlap in multiple participants' responses for these styles hinting that these styles work in conjunction rather than isolation.

“Ask them to sort out the jabs themselves before you intervene. That way, both guys will be very open to sharing their views about other things. If the resolution can be made by both teams after understanding each other's views, your intervention is not required. There will be a healthy confidence level in sharing between two teams. So give them freedom, guidance, objective.” (Interviewee 1)

Participants have used collaborative efforts of team members to help employees lagging behind to keep up with their tasks and get them up to speed.

“It happens that some team members cannot totally understand. Then we all pitch in, bring him up to speed and he takes over. You ask a couple of questions informally, ask key members to help, they immediately get the point. We move on.” (Interviewee 4)

4.1.2. Leader as a Mentor

Coaching style of leadership requires managers to be responsible for employees' career development and future success. Most participants acknowledged their role as a mentor. Some participants have either personally helped employees get over obstacles or made resources available to support their learning process and careers. One of the participants mentioned an initiative in their organisation for development of employees' skills while another participant held the view that organisations have to prioritise employees' growth and development instead of chasing profits.

“There is something called ‘Skill Self-Reflection’ wherein all team members must do self-reflection. Each member rates themselves on technical, behavioural parameters and their interactions with people and the organisation. It has various dimensions and, as project managers, we come up with a training and learning plan.” (Interviewee 3)

“They (organisations) just focus on profit. It is difficult if organisations have that mindset. But nowadays, organisations have the mindset to go and support an employee extra mile.” (Interviewee 9)

However, one participant was unaware about supporting and helping subordinates. This was attributed to past experiences as a junior employee and not having received the required support.

“At my level, I have not encountered any of my juniors needing support because I really don’t know to what extent I have gone to help them out.” (Interviewee 7)

4.1.3. Emphasis on Project Goals, Empowerment and Empathy Are Key Motivators

The pacesetter and visionary styles are also used in an interdependent way. Achievement of organisational and project goals was the primary motive behind most participants’ leadership behaviours. Participants used an empathetic approach to ensure teams were aligned with changed objectives. Participants would focus on getting work done by communicating the necessity of changes, guiding employees and accommodating requests of the subordinates. Participants had to ensure that teams willingly accepted any change (organisation or project-related) and continued to achieve their objectives. Most communication would revolve around working out concerns and clarifying each team members’ objectives.

“Each of us has a set of goals that we need to achieve as part of our objectives. So we use the goals’ process effectively. There will be certain outcomes you expect with this new service getting launched. It becomes part of everybody’s goals.” (Interviewee 2)

Fun activities were planned for team members as part of teambuilding exercises, keeping client requirements in mind.

“I used to propose some kind of get-togethers and picnics as teambuilding exercises. But the whole intention for me, going out of (names base location) was that it is not far, we are on 24/7 support to be given to our customers.” (Interviewee 8)

Any kind of motivation/guidance (termed as ‘handholding’ by many participants) stemmed from achieving project or organisational goals.

“For some people, you have to say I will handhold you to do this additional task which demands more effort. So different sets of people, different approaches, but ultimately you get the extra work done in a shorter period.” (Interviewee 1)

4.1.4. Dictatorial Approach is Denounced

The dictatorial approach explained by participants is similar to the Coercive style. Most participants do not recommend using a dictatorial approach (directing subordinates, using threats of punishments). Some participants think coercing employees may be counterproductive in the workplace.

“If I put pressure on that person, chances of him making mistakes are more. He is not in a state of mind to understand and he continuously thinks that management is pressurizing me. So he will write whatever he wants and deliver.” (Interviewee 12)

However, one participant felt reprimanding the team is necessary if they are found to be making the same mistakes previously solved.

“I typically tend to reprimand my team. Time should not be wasted. You make a mistake once, that mistake must not be repeated.” (Interviewee 11)

4.2. Influence of Team, Organisation and Client on Selection of Leadership Style

This theme outlines factors at the workplace which contribute to selection of leadership styles. It relates to the second research question of this study, contextual factors influencing use of emotional leadership styles. These factors can be broadly categorised into 3 sub-themes as discussed below. Every interviewee based their approach to leadership on a minimum of 2 subthemes. However, patterns in the responses included multiple combinations of the 3 subthemes to be the rationale behind choosing their approach.

4.2.1. Team Characteristics

The contextual factor resulting in selection of appropriate leadership approaches taken by leaders when managing teams through various situations (e.g., organisational change, unexpected changes in projects) depends on team characteristics such as work experience of employees or the number of years they have been in the position.

“These youngsters used to come onboard and I used mentor them. I must mould them because they are freshers. The moulding is to happen the way I want it to fulfil my units’ objectives where the terms is the company objective.” (Interviewee 8)

The employment type of employees was also found to be a factor influencing interactions between team members and leaders. The employment types could be permanent or temporary (termed as sub-contractor). Participants took a directive approach with temporary employees while more consideration is given when interacting and delegating additional tasks to permanent employees.

“There were some sub-contractors also. I don’t manage them. I know exactly what I want from them, I will simply direct them to this. But I cannot direct my team.” (Interviewee 10)

Bandwidth of employees was mentioned in some interviews where participants defined it as the current workload (tasks and responsibilities) of employees and the potential they had to take on additional responsibilities. Some reference to employees’ competencies and technical skills was made in reference to bandwidth and delegation of tasks. Bandwidth of employees was taken into account as some interviewees saw no point in overburdening and stressing out their subordinates. Bandwidth was directly related to the quality of work output.

“Convincing is based on 2 things. It is on their bandwidth, so I try to tell them that, currently you have bandwidth and you can do more work. You are good in this area so I believe you should take up this activity also.” (Interviewee 5)

“When things are pushed dramatically on them for a prolonged period, you do not get that productive output.” (Interviewee 13)

4.2.2. Management & Organisational Characteristics

Most participants highlighted the need to keep organisational goals in mind whenever they were carrying out their tasks. Majority of interviewees focused on organisation’s or department’s benefits taking precedence over individual/team interests, especially during

conflict situations within team members or interactions with clients and other important stakeholders of the organisation.

“Conflicts happen frequently. The question is how to approach conflicts. It must be a win-win situation for both. Organisation’s benefit must be prioritised, not individual or team interests. Which is beneficial for the organisation? Department? Then come individual interests.” (Interviewee 1)

Experiences during structural or policy changes were shared by participants where managers played an inactive role in its implementation. They were responsible to get their subordinates onboard the change process. Some participants had to communicate the changes with subordinates themselves while others relied on communication from senior leaders in the organisation. A specific change, related to changes in senior management, was a recurring topic of discussion. Participants had to realign their approach to suit the new management. This situation needed active involvement of participants to ensure that their approach and their team’s working style suits the new management.

“You have a new CEO come in so you can’t stay anchored in the past on the way things were done or how partnerships worked. You must build partnerships with new leaders, understand their philosophy, business strategy and expectations. What changes they might bring in? It’s going to take time to establish your rapport. They don’t know you and won’t trust you immediately. How will you establish that trust?” (Interviewee 2)

Participants were employed in MNCs and start-ups. The approach to leadership depended on the classification of the organisation. The operations and challenges of each category were different so the way of interacting and completing tasks differed.

“In a start-up, the leadership style is different. In a (names an MNC) your leadership style is different. It is captive, then it is a different problem, because you don’t have to do anything. You must follow everything coming from the parent company. You can’t do something on your own.” (Interviewee 10)

4.2.3. Client Demands and Requirements

Most participants recalled many instances in their career related to Project Management where deadlines or demands changed unexpectedly. They had to cope with the situation themselves and manage their team to successfully deliver the projects. Such unexpected changes were so frequent that participants were accustomed to such situations. Changes in client demands and requirements entailed various kinds of challenges for the participants. Shifting employees in different teams, getting additional resources, or negotiating with clients were some common challenges faced by them.

“In between the project, timelines change and it is challenging. The management, marketing team, everybody needs to know. They also pitch in to discuss and it is impossible to deliver 100%. Discussion must be open and we say, “this much is possible, here we have to put in extra efforts and not just one person.” (Interviewee 6)

5. Discussion

The findings of the present study add to the growing body of research on the emotional leadership styles. The aim of the study was to explore the use of emotional leadership styles in the Indian IT sector. Of the six leadership styles, five were utilized by managers in various situations. Two of the subthemes explain the simultaneous use of affiliative and democratic styles by combining certain characteristics of both leadership styles as one approach.

Participants relied on collaboration between team members to resolve conflicts and reinstate harmony in the work environment. Conflicts or differences of opinions was endorsed as a strategy to encourage participation and brainstorming from each team member. Leadership was recognized as a two-way process where leaders participate and work together to help each other and look for creative solutions. The perspective of using conflict situations constructively and encouraging collaboration from each team member are the attributes of affiliative and democratic leadership styles. These styles were found to have similar characteristics and were grouped into a single representative style by Hassan et al (2016). Hence, the unclear distinction of behaviours for either styles could be justified. The simultaneous use of affiliative and democratic leadership styles has been found in a different sample of managers in National Governing Bodies in Sport in the UK (Jones & Spamer, 2011).

The simultaneous use of visionary and pacesetting style could be attributed to 'Emphasis on project goals, empowerment and empathy are key motivators' theme. The characteristics of expecting high performance and being highly focused on achieving goals from the pacesetting style was used as the key motivator or was the fundamental reasoning for many behaviours. The key motivator was augmented by using characteristics of the visionary style (inspiring and empathizing with subordinates by clear communication during turbulent times). Managers in Bahrain have indicated their equal preference for Pacesetting and Visionary styles when they require updates from team members (Hajee & Hashemi, 2012).

Most participants have acknowledged their role in the career development of subordinates and adopt the coaching style where 'Leader acts as a Mentor'. Leaders were responsible for helping subordinates get promoted to senior positions and help meet their professional goals. The findings of the present study contradict the findings of Preston et al. (2015) which states that IT sector managers tend to be more task-oriented than people-oriented. According to Turk (2007), a leader is a 'people person' and provides opportunities for people to grow professionally. This aspect of a leader is manifested as participants would support and encourage continuous learning of new skills.

The coercive leadership style was the least talked about and unfavoured style. Participants discouraged the use of an autocratic approach and highlighted the negative impact of coercive leadership on the subordinates' quality of work. The discouraged use of coercive style is supported by previous research as employees in public administration and South African investment banks did not prefer coercive leadership (Zubek, 2020; Ndlangamandla, 2016). It was also the least preferred style of Generation X and Generation Y (people born between 1965-1996) employees (Kraus, 2017). Bataeva and Vavilina (2018) found the use of dissonant styles to deteriorate psychological health of employees, impacting the outcomes of their activities.

Hence, the preference of using multiple emotional leadership styles to suit the situation and not relying on a single style was also found on a different sample consisting of medical education leaders at different hierarchical levels (Saxena et al., 2017). Another aspect of the emotional leadership styles is the use of the styles in diverse situations. The scope of this study extended to explore the contextual factors influencing the use of the above leadership styles. The second theme identifies the common and recurring patterns to be the deciding factors for choosing the leadership styles.

One of the factors included team characteristics such as subordinates' work experience, seniority level in the organisation, employment types and employees' bandwidth to be the deciding factors in selection of the leadership approach. Participants would be more supportive and provide autonomy with permanent employees while being directive with temporary employees. Liu et al. (2003) tried to use human resource management literature to guide the

understanding of leadership styles based on employment types. They found that a directive approach would be taken with contract workers while an empowering approach would be taken with internal employees.

Most participants acknowledged the negative impact of overburdening employees (related to their bandwidth) on the quality of work delivered. They avoided stressing their subordinates by getting additional personnel to complete the work objectives or asking for extensions in the deadlines. This finding is similar to previous research where occupational stress was found to impact employee performance of Indian workers (Goswami, 2015; Prasad et al., 2018; Bharathi & Gupta, 2017). These team characteristics were identified as part of Johns' (2006) omnibus-level and discrete-level contexts that shape leadership decisions and outcomes (Oc, 2018).

Interactions with senior management and achieving organisational goals was another factor affecting the approach to leadership. Organisational goals and objectives were prioritised over personal or team benefits. Changes in senior management required active intervention of leaders to re-align the team's strategy with new ways of working under the changed management. These findings are similar to previous research as Chapman et al. (2014) found organisational context to be an important factor in determining the use of emotional leadership styles by medical leaders.

The classification of the organisations was found to influence the leadership style. Since the company policies and objectives are different for start-ups and MNCs as pointed out by participants, leaders have to adapt their leadership strategy based on the type of organisation they are employed in. However, the findings of this study contradict the findings of Brüggemann's (2014) study which identified the differences in the type of businesses but could not differentiate in the use of leadership styles in the two types of organisations.

Another contextual factor determining the use of the leadership approach was handling client demands and requirements to ensure successful delivery of projects. Participants have emphasized on the volatile nature of project management in the Indian IT sector resulting in frequent unexpected changes to the timelines or nature of tasks. Managers have had to tackle the changed demands and ensure the team stayed committed to the project goals. These situations demonstrated the real use of participants' leadership styles as changes in project requirements and demands would require extra efforts from employees or collaboration with different teams. The findings on contextual factors for the Indian IT sector are similar to the software industry in Oman where tasks, people and organisational characteristics influence the use of leadership styles (Chaudhry et al., 2019).

5.1. Theoretical Implications

The theoretical underpinnings of the emotional leadership styles state that each style is effective in a single situation (Goleman et al., 2003; Boyatzis et al., 2005). But findings of this study indicate that leaders do not rely on a singular leadership style in most situations and employ behaviours of a minimum of two emotional leadership styles. The findings also enhance the understanding of contextual factors whereby a combination of team characteristics, organisation characteristics and client requirements influence the use of emotional leadership styles and not just situational experiences faced by leaders.

Findings of this study are sector-specific and region-specific interpretations as the sample consisted of managers working in the Indian IT sector, based in various cities all over India. Hence, the findings cannot be generalized to managers working outside the Indian IT sector context without further research. It is possible to extend the findings to make a gender-based

interpretation i.e. to male managers in the Indian IT sector as twelve out of thirteen participants were males.

5.2. Practical Implications

Leadership development training is ineffective in the long run (Kaiser & Curphy, 2013). Hence, organisations should adopt an individualised approach to equip leaders with a variety of emotional leadership styles (Goleman, 2003; Doe et al., 2015). Leaders can be equipped with knowledge of the various leadership styles and the contextual situations where they yield better outcomes. Emotional leadership styles will be helpful in enhancing leadership effectiveness as well as foster empathetic, responsive, and trust-based leader-employee relationships. The practical implications of the present study are for organisations in the Indian IT sector to tailor and enhance leadership development programs (LDPs) as findings of this study indicate that leaders in this sector adopt five out of six emotional leadership styles. LDPs can be designed to emphasise combinations of leadership styles highlighted in this study so that leaders have a deeper practical exposure and understanding of application of multiple leadership styles. It may reduce dependency on a singular leadership approach and develop leaders to be more impactful in diverse organisational setups.

6. Conclusion

This study aimed at providing an insight into the use of emotional leadership styles of managers in the Indian IT sector and exploring the contextual factors influencing their use. Thematic analysis of the data revealed that leaders in this sector use most of the leadership styles in conjunction. The preference given to the leadership style depends on client demands, team and organisational characteristics. Organisations should focus on emotional leadership and equip leaders with the ability to switch their leadership style to suit the situation, their teams and clients.

As the present study was exploratory in nature, the data revealed some possibilities of further research on the topic in the Indian cultural context and the Indian IT sector context. Research looking at differences between leadership approaches of managers employed in start-ups versus MNCs can provide more information on the intricacies of leadership experiences in this sector. Another avenue for future research could include researching possible gender differences in leadership approaches by recruiting more female participants. Future researchers can address the limitations of this study in their research to enhance their findings and further our understanding of emotional leadership styles.

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Appendix: Interview Schedule

<p>Introduction</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Greetings. - Have you read the participant information sheet and consent form? - Are you happy to proceed with study? - Are you ok with me to record this interview? - Please let me know if you need a break at any time. 		
Research Questions	Interview Questions	Example probe questions
<p>What types of emotional leadership styles are used in this sector? Note: These questions are based on situations described by Goleman et al (2003)* in identifying the leadership styles</p>	1. Can you tell me an instance when you had to change the working practices in your team? (authoritative / visionary leadership)	<p>How frequently have you faced these situations?</p>
	2. Have you come across a team member who was unable to grasp a particular situation & needed extra support to reach their potential? (coaching leadership)	
	3. Have you dealt with differences of opinion / conflicts in your team? (affiliative leadership)	
	4. Did you have to deliver results to a timeline which was not under your control & dictated to you? (pacesetting leadership)	
	5. Have you faced unexpected changes (for example Change of Management / Change in Reporting Manager / Change in Contact person from Client’s end) in your Company / Department / Project? (coercive leadership)	
	6. Were you given additional responsibility such as a new Project/ Function / Task/ Dept? (democratic leadership)	
<p>How are they understood and experienced by leaders?</p>	<p>1. How did you manage your team in these situations and deal with their reactions? 2. Could you describe the reasons for choosing these Actions?</p>	<p>Can you describe your actions in detail highlighting some of the salient points?</p>
<p>What contextual factors influence the use of such leadership styles?</p>	<p>1. What are the factors you considered or will consider while making important decisions related to team / Project you are working on?</p>	<p>Why do you think these factors are important?</p>
<p>Conclusion</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Information on debriefing - Thank them for their participation. 		

*Goleman, D., Boyatzis, R., & McKee, A. (2003). *The new leaders : Transforming the art of leadership into the science of results*. London: TimeWarner.