

# Leadership Strategies Adopted and its Impact in Information Technology Organizations

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## Abstract

Today, leaders need to move from guiding and leading to transforming, shaping and influencing the growth by the ways in which they approach their work and interact with one another. The effectiveness of a leader will depend on the magnitude and direction of – as well as strategies used to achieve impact. The literature generally suggests that effective leaders express their need for power and influence in ways that benefit the organization and create value. Some scholars (e.g., Clements and Washbush, 1999) contend that there is a common delusion among leaders that their efforts are always well intended and that their power is benign. They believe leaders are motivated to be pro-social toward the organization and its goals rather than driven by desire for personal gain. 515 respondents representing 87 Indian, Indian multinational and multinational I.T companies were surveyed. A standardized instrument Leadership Strategies and Impact on others developed by Robert A. Cooke's (1996) was adopted with permission. The Cronbach's Alpha reliability for the scale was 0.88 and the stratified random sampling technique was adopted. IT managers preferred to use prescriptive leadership strategies more often than restrictive strategies in IT organizations. The leadership strategies had a constructive impact on IT employees. The detail findings, conclusions, implications and suggestions for further research have been discussed in the full length paper.

*Key Words: Leadership strategies, Leadership impact, Prescriptive strategy, Restrictive strategy, Constructive impact, Passive/Defensive impact, Aggressive/Defensive impact*

## Introduction

Indian information technology has come a long way since the starting from the 1990's. It has grown from US \$ 150 million in 1991-92 to US \$ 50 Billion in 2009-10. Most of its success has been attributed to accessibility of low cost technical resources, skilled manpower, lower salary, and project execution from India. Profit revenue was based on the number of projects executed and the number of resources deployed. The biggest challenge is not just attaining growth but to sustain it. Mohandas Pai and K Dinesh of Infosys who resigned from the board opined that Infosys should prepare for a challenging future and for this leadership is most vital. The new leader behavior needed to achieve this future rests with younger, more autonomous and a freeing climate for

innovation and creativity. Mr. Pai said that Infosys has become conservative and succession requires more transparency. The sacking of two CEO's by Wipro chief and appointing T K Kurien as new head are all indicators that Indian IT organizations to grow and sustain need a new leadership climate to inspire the workforce to voluntarily and creatively add value. This paper investigates the most frequently adopted leadership strategies and how it impacts employees.

An organization has the greatest chance of being successful when all employees work toward achieving its goal. Since leadership involves the exercise of influence by one person over others, the quality of leadership is a critical determinant of organizational and managerial behavior. 'Leadership is the

ability to inspire confidence and support among the people who are needed to achieve organizational goals', Kim & Mauborgne (1992). The leader has more than one person to lead, has the power to affect others and has a goal to attain. Kotter (1990) observed that managers must know how to lead as well as manage. The key point in differentiating between leadership and management is the idea that employees willingly follow leaders because they want to, not because they have to. Managerial behavior in information technology organizations is affected by leadership behavior. Conger's (1989) research suggested that empowering practices by leader include providing a positive emotional atmosphere, rewarding and encouraging in visible and personal ways, expressing confidence, fostering initiative and responsibility, and building on success, praising initiative, and practicing super leadership.

### **Literature Review**

IT organizations need to create an appropriate leadership culture for non-linear growth. Zhang & Peterson (2011) found that transformational leadership positively influences advice network density in teams and that advice network density serves as a mediating mechanism linking transformational leadership to team performance. Wallace et al (2011) found that empowering leadership climate relates to psychological empowerment climate. Yaffe & Kark (2011) has explored the importance of leading by personal example by investigating leader OCB and group OCB. Hunter et al (2011) have argued that the pursuit of innovation requires a unique leadership approach – one that may not be currently captured by traditional views of leadership. Creativity and innovation and how leadership effects team creativity has be documented by Reiter-Palmon (2011), managing the innovative process and the dynamic role of leaders and how their cognition and social behaviours

need to adapt to effectively and efficiently to manage innovation have been detailed by Stenmark et al (2011). Schaubroeck et al (2011) found that servant leadership influenced team performance through affect-based trust and team psychological safety, Boies et al (2010) found that team potency and trust were positively related to shared transformational leadership and negatively related to passive avoid-ant leadership. Sosik & Cameron (2010) proposed that leaders first create an ascetic self-construable that derives from character strengths and virtues and then project this self image through idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration behavior. Gentry et al (2011) found the biggest gaps among generations in leading employees, change management, and building and mending relationships. Colbert & Witt (2009) found that goal-focused leadership moderates the relationship between conscientiousness and job performance and that person-organization goal congruence mediates this moderated relationship. Most of the recent literature review highlights the fact that freeing, autonomous, interdependent and prescriptive leader behaviour creates the right climate for employees to be more able, willing, agile and ready to engage in meaningful and innovative behaviours at the workplace.

### **Need and Rationale for the Study**

There are no Indian studies in the IT context that has pegged the leadership strategies and what type of impact these strategies have on IT employees. The study gains importance to see if the climate is right for growth in the Indian IT firms. Business in Indian has predicted that the Indian I.T sector is a fast growing, developing and maturing sector and accounts for 5.9% of the country's GDP and export earnings as of 2009. This study is an attempt to contribute afresh with a new perspective to the field of behavioural

sciences with special reference to leadership strategies and its impact on employees in IT organizations. It is also an earnest attempt to bridge the gap especially in this area by highlighting the relevance and importance of leadership to management, individual, and organizational effectiveness and hoping this study will initiate a series of serious and productive discussions on the subject. Thus the present study becomes more meaningful as it needs to provide some new insights in the knowledge worker context and assessing its readiness to move up the value chain.

### Objectives

- To find out the most frequently adopted leadership strategies in IT organizations.
- To find out the leadership strategies impact in IT organizations.
- To find out the gap between actual and ideal leadership strategies.
- To find out if leadership strategies has a constructive or defensive impact in the IT organizations.
- To suggest whether the leadership strategies and its impact present in IT organizations are conducive for growth.

### Operational Definitions of Variables

**Leadership/Impact®** The definitions given by Cooke (1997) from the manual *Leadership/Impact®*-measuring the impact of leaders on organizational performance was adopted in this study.

**Leadership Strategies:** The extent to which managers personally act in Prescriptive versus Restrictive ways.

**Prescriptive Leadership Strategies:** those techniques that guide or direct the activities and behaviours of others toward goals, opportunities, and methods for task accomplishment.

**Restrictive Leadership Strategies:** those that constrain or prohibit activities and behaviors with respect to goals, opportunities, and methods for task accomplishment.

**Impact on Others:** The extent to which managers motivate or drive people to behave in Constructive versus defensive ways.

**Constructive Impact on Others:** Motivate people to think and behave in Achievement-oriented and cooperative ways that emphasize growth and development. Achievement, Self-Actualizing, Humanistic/Encouraging, and Affiliative.

**Defensive Impacts on Others:** Drive people to think and behave in either aggressive or passive ways to protect their status and position.

**Passive/Defensive Impact:** Possibly inadvertently, these leaders adopt strategies that lead others to feel insecure or apprehensive, controlled and constrained, and uneasy about interpersonal relations within the organizations. Approval, Conventional, Dependent and Avoidance.

**Aggressive/Defensive Impact:** Directly or indirectly, these leaders exhibit strategies that lead others to feel anxious about their status and influence, worry about how they look relative to others, and fixate on short-term (and sometimes irrelevant) performance criteria. Oppositional, Power, Competitive, and Perfectionistic.

### Sample Size & Technique

515 IT employees from 87 IT companies were surveyed for the study. The sample was drawn from all the three levels of management. 305 IT employees from the junior level executives, 148 from the middle level managers and 62 from the senior level management were administered the questionnaire. The stratified random sampling technique was adopted for the present study. Employees with minimum one year work experience and have known their boss for one year were only asked to fill the questionnaire.

### Hypotheses

H1: Prescriptive leadership strategies

adopted by managers will have a positive influence on constructive impact and Restrictive leadership strategies will have a negative influence on constructive impact on employees in IT organizations.

H2: Restrictive leadership strategies adopted by managers will have a positive influence on defensive impact and Prescriptive leadership strategies will have a negative influence on defensive impact on employees in IT organizations.

### Tool Employed

Leadership Strategies<sup>ii</sup> and Impact on Others<sup>iii</sup> Dimensions - A standardized instrument *Leadership/Impact*® developed by Robert A. Cooke's (1996) was adapted with permission; it is a description by others inventory. The inventory has two sub scales - Impact on others and Leadership Strategies. Subscale I – Impact on others: Impact on others had 96 statements for Constructive and Defensive impact. The inventory uses a five-point scale (1 = Not at all; 2 = To a slight

extent; 3 = To a moderate extent; 4 = To a great extent; 5 = To a very great extent). This measures the influence of leaders with respect to Constructive behaviors (32 statements) –the specific Constructive behaviors (32 statements that can be promoted by leaders are Achievement (8 statements), Self-Actualizing (8 statements), Humanistic/Encouraging (8 statements), and Affiliation (8 statements). The Passive/Defensive behaviors (32 statements) that can be attributed to leaders are Approval (8 statements), Conventional (8 statements), Dependent (8 statements), and Avoidance (8 statements). The Aggressive/Defensive behaviors (32 statements) that can be promoted by leaders are Oppositional (8 statements), Power (8 statements), Competitive (8 statements) and Perfectionist (8 statements). Subscale II – Leadership Strategies: Leadership strategies had 60 statements for Restrictive and Prescriptive strategies. The inventory uses a five-point scale (1 = Never; 2 = Rarely; 3 = Sometimes; 4 = Often; 5 = Always).

Domain	Restrictive Strategies (30)	Prescriptive Strategies (30)	Level
Envisioning	Delimiting (3)	Defining (3)	Personal
Role Modelling	Circumscribing (3)	Exemplifying (3)	Personal
Mentoring	Passive (3)	Active (3)	Interpersonal
Stimulating Thinking	Vertical (3)	Lateral (3)	Interpersonal
Referring	Negative Referents (3)	Positive Referents (3)	Interpersonal
Monitoring	By Exception (3)	By Excellence (3)	Interpersonal
Providing Feedback	Negative (3)	Positive (3)	Interpersonal
Reinforcing	Punishment (3)	Reward (3)	Organizational
Influencing	Unilateral (3)	Reciprocal (3)	Organizational
Creating a Setting	Constraining (3)	Facilitating (3)	Organizational

*Leadership/Impact*® variables and the number of statements measuring each variable (Leadership strategies terms: From *Leadership/Impact*® Feedback Report by R.A. Cooke, Human Synergistics. Copyright © 2008 by Human Synergistics International. Adapted by permission).

The Cronbach's Alpha reliability for the above scale on the present sample was 0.88 for part I – Impact on others scale and 0.93 for part II – Leadership strategies scale.

### Respondent Profile

The distribution of respondents along demographic variables was as follows: 60% of the respondents were junior level executives, 28% were middle level managers and 12% were senior managers. 72% of the respondents supervised more than three employees and 28% supervised two and less employees. 80% of the respondents were

male and 20% female. 52% of the respondents were below between 21 - 25 years of age, 24% were between 26 – 30 years of age, 16% were between 31 – 35 years and 8% were in the age group 41 – 45 years. 4% of the respondents were diploma holders, 64% had completed a bachelors degree, 28% masters degree and 4% other professional certificates/courses. 72% of the respondents were unmarried, 24% married, 4% divorced or widowed. 28% of the respondents had one year of work experience, 36% 1 – 3 years, 8% 3 – 5 years, 8% 5 – 7 years, 12% 7 – 9 years and 8% had above 9 years work experience.

### Findings and Discussion

**Table 1: Indicating the mean, standard deviation on leadership strategies adopted by managers actually and ideally in I.T organizations**

Leadership Strategies <sup>a</sup>	Mean (Actual)	Std. Deviation (Actual)	Mean (Ideal)	Std. Deviation (Ideal)
Prescriptive Leadership Strategies	3.49	0.734	4.82	0.872
Restrictive Leadership Strategies	3.04	0.480	1.95	0.679

<sup>a</sup> Leadership/Impact® Feedback Report by R.A. Cooke, Human Synergistics. Copyright © 2008 by Human Synergistics International. Adapted by permission.

According to Cooke (2008) the means of the actual prescriptive (3.49) and restrictive (3.04) strategies are equal then they cancel out each other and this will decrease the Constructive impact and increase the Passive/Defensive impact on others. However the ideal prescriptive (4.82) and restrictive (1.95) strategies required indicate that Prescriptive strategies are strong and do have a Constructive impact<sup>iii</sup> on others.

Indian IT managers engaged in Prescriptive leadership strategies more than Restrictive strategies. The differences between the means of prescriptive and restrictive

leadership strategies are not very great. However IT managers basically believe in strategies that guide or direct the activities and behaviours of employees toward goals, opportunities and methods as compared to strategies which constrain or prohibit activities and behaviours with respect to goals, opportunities and methods. Prescriptive leadership strategies provide employees with a direction to channel their efforts, models regarding how things should be done, positive reinforcement to encourage the repetition of desired behaviours, and a set of parameters specifying their sphere of influence. This strategy is followed by

Restrictive leadership strategies which provides employees with directions that should not be pursued, models regarding behaviours they should avoid, negative feedback to discourage the repetition of undesired behaviours, and a set of parameters restricting their sphere of influence.

Indian manager's leadership strategies have a Constructive Impact on I.T employees' behaviours. This means that the impact has encouraged and motivated employees' to relate to others and approach their work in ways that have helped them to personally meet higher order needs for growth and

**Table 2 : Indicating the mean and standard deviation for the leadership impact in I.T organizations**

Leadership Impact <sup>a</sup>	Mean	Std. Deviation
Constructive Leadership Impact	3.37	0.702
Passive/Defensive Leadership Impact	2.79	0.560
Aggressive/Defensive Leadership Impact	2.75	0.624

<sup>a</sup>Leadership/Impact® Feedback Report by R.A. Cooke, Human Synergistics. Copyright 2008 by Human Synergistics International. Adapted by permission.

satisfaction. The constructive impact was followed by Passive/Defensive Impact that drives and reinforces employees' to interact with others around them in self-protective ways that will not threaten their own security.

H1: Prescriptive leadership strategies adopted by managers will have a positive influence on constructive impact and Restrictive leadership strategies will have a

negative influence on constructive impact on employees in IT organizations.

It was found that Prescriptive and Restrictive leadership strategies significantly influenced Constructive impact. Prescriptive leadership strategy had the strongest influence followed by Restrictive leadership strategy. Together these two variables explained 98.5% (R Square = 0.985) of the variation in the

**Table 3 : Indicating (coefficients) step-wise multiple regression of Constructive<sup>a</sup> leadership impact on leadership strategies adopted**

Leadership Strategies <sup>a</sup>	Unstandardized Coefficients	Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.	
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
Prescriptive leadership strategy	0.691	0.038	0.715	18.122	0.000**
Restrictive leadership strategy	0.247	0.034	0.220	7.243	0.000**

\* Significant at the 0.05 level, \*\* Significant at the 0.01 level.

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Constructive impact on respondents.

The hypothesis was partly accepted as restrictive strategies had a constructive impact. This indicates the cancelling effect of the leader behaviour in IT organizations. It was found that prescriptive and restrictive leadership strategies are adopted interchangeably and almost equally in IT organizations. As data was collected during recession it could be possible that both restrictive as well as prescriptive leadership strategies has a constructive impact on IT employees. However in normal circumstances this will be a rare

phenomenon.

H2: Restrictive leadership strategies adopted by managers will have a positive influence on defensive impact and Prescriptive leadership strategies will have a negative influence on defensive impact on employees in IT organizations.

It was found that Prescriptive and Restrictive leadership strategies significantly influenced Passive/Defensive impact. Restrictive leadership strategy had the strongest influence followed by expert Power base. Prescriptive leadership strategy had a Negative influence on Passive/Defensive

**Table 4 : Indicating (coefficients) step-wise multiple regression of Passive/Defensive<sup>a</sup> leadership impact on leadership strategies adopted**

Leadership Strategies <sup>a</sup>	Unstandardized Coefficients	Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
Restrictive leadership strategy	1.059	0.042	1.143	25.028	0.000**
Prescriptive leadership strategy	-.258	0.047	-.323	-5.452	0.000**

\* Significant at the 0.05 level.

\*\* Significant at the 0.01 level.

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impact. Together these two variables explained 96.5% (R Square = .965) of the variation in the Passive/Defensive impact on respondents.

It was found that Restrictive, Prescriptive

leadership strategies significantly influenced Aggressive/Defensive impact. Restrictive leadership strategy had the strongest influence. Prescriptive leadership strategy had a Negative influence on Aggressive/Defensive impact. Together

**Table 5 : Indicating (coefficients) step-wise multiple regression of Aggressive/Defensive<sup>a</sup> leadership impact on leadership strategies adopted**

<b>Power Base Variables &amp; Leadership Strategies<sup>a</sup></b>	<b>Unstandardized Coefficients</b>	<b>Standardized Coefficients</b>	<b>t</b>	<b>Sig.</b>	
	<b>B</b>	<b>Std. Error</b>	<b>Beta</b>		
Restrictive leadership strategy	1.037	0.056	1.133	18.471	0.000**
Prescriptive leadership strategy	-.339	0.051	-0.430	-6.697	0.000**

\* Significant at the 0.05 level, \*\* Significant at the 0.01 level.

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these variables explained 96.2% (R Square 0.962) of the variation in the Aggressive/Defensive impact on respondents.

The hypothesis was accepted as restrictive strategies influenced defensive behaviors and prescriptive strategies negatively influenced defensive behaviors of employees in IT organizations.

### **Implications**

In the new people-economy, today's organizational credo is increasingly 'It knows therefore it is.' People drive organizations to success or failure. People as a resource have gained paramount importance in most CEOs' comments and annual reports. Organizations today are service oriented and operate in a turbulent and fast changing environment. Knowledge workers not only drive these organizations, they are its key resource. In the words of Drucker (2001), 'Every knowledge worker in modern organization is an "executive" if, by virtue of his position or knowledge, he is responsible for a contribution that materially affects the capacity of the organization to perform and to obtain results. Therefore there is a need for new methods that will make the

improvements in knowledge-worker productivity that will be required in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Drucker (2001) identifies these six major factors for knowledge-worker productivity in the future.

1. The knowledge-worker's question is "What is the task?"
2. Knowledge-workers have to manage themselves and have autonomy.
3. Continuing innovation has to be part of the work, the task and the responsibility of knowledge workers.
4. Knowledge work requires continuous learning, and continuous teaching by the knowledge worker.
5. Productivity of the knowledge worker is not primarily a matter of quantity of output. Quality is at least as important.
6. Knowledge workers must be treated as "assets" rather than a "costs". They must prefer to work for the organization, over all other opportunities.

The results of the present study indicates a more conservative and traditional way of

leading in IT organizations and this may stifle and scuttle growth. IT Managers today apart from guiding and directing need to in some way engage in transforming, shaping or influencing the organizational context of members and the ways in which they approach their work and interact with one another.

IT leaders potentially have numerous tools at their disposal for increasing effectiveness. The most important tool revolves around the strategy, skills and behaviours that have been shown through research to be related to leadership performance. IT leaders need to define and support processes for problem solving and the integration of organizational components. They should boldly create and reinforce an organizational culture that communicates constructive norms and expectations to members.

IT Leaders need to motivate people to think and behave in achievement oriented and cooperative ways that emphasize growth and development. The benefits are better performance, higher levels of personal satisfaction and lower levels of stress. They need to be visionary and future oriented, promoting empowerment and productivity, bringing out the best in people and concerned with long-term performance. Younger leaders who are open to feedback and interested in self and organization development need to be promoted to higher levels. Consciously introducing processes to increase the understanding/awareness of managers of their impact they currently are having on others should be mirrored. These include the degree to which they rely on Prescriptive and Restrictive strategies.

IT leaders must be equipped to have a significant impact on the thinking, behavior, and the performance of the people around them. They continuously intentionally/unintentionally, directly/indirectly need to motivate or drive people to behave in certain

ways. Constructive impact is helpful in meeting higher order needs for growth and satisfaction, whereas Passive/Defensive impact leads to self protective ways and Aggressive/Defensive impact to forceful ways. This is a way forward in infusing non-linear growth in IT organizations. This will also ensure voluntarism on the part of organizational members to engage in behaviours of innovativeness and efficiencies to add value as a way of life.

### **Limitations of the Study**

The sample was limited to IT firms in Bangalore city. The self-report of power bases, leadership strategies and impact, job satisfaction and response to dissatisfaction that were taken from each respondent present the problem of common method variance. This problem is reduced to an extent as the reliability and validity of the instruments were found to be high..Genuineness in self-report is taken for granted in the present study like in any other surveys and interviews. The number of items and the length of the questionnaire could have had an effect on the responses as the respondents took nearly an hour to complete the entire questionnaire. All data collected were not analyzed. The relevant and essential data has been statistically analyzed and the remaining data could be used for future studies. Although confidentiality was assured to the respondents, it is not sure whether the social desirability factor could have got reduced.

### **Suggestions for Further Research**

The limitations suggest several prospects for further research. The study could be replicated in other sectors such as the manufacturing, service and hospitality, financial sectors to ascertain if the findings hold true in all organizations. The study can also be done exclusively in only MNC's, Indian and Indian MNC,s to find out the similarities and differences in the findings.

Other instruments can be adopted to find out the power processes such as influence tactics and its impact on leadership and job satisfaction and response to dissatisfaction. Studies need to focus on effectiveness and efficiency of each power dimension to raise role innovation and positive affective responses towards job and the respective organizations. Further research to enhance the understanding of the interrelationships of power, conflict-management strategies, and propensity to leave a job could be undertaken.

Carefully designing and evaluating the effects of intervention on supervisory power bases and leadership strategies in enhancing positive conflict management strategies and reducing the destructive behaviors as a response to dissatisfaction can be investigated.

Field experiments particularly useful in evaluating the effects of enhancing the personal power base of managers on employees and organizational outcomes such as organizational citizenship behavior, productivity, absenteeism and others can be investigated.

Other human resource management and organizational behavior variables can be investigated as dependent variables. A larger sample size measuring other non managerial employees can give a new perspective in how power bases, leadership strategies and impact, job satisfaction and response to dissatisfaction is perceived.

## Conclusion

The present study pinpoints the centrality of leadership as a critical variable affecting the attitudes of IT employees. Prescriptive leadership strategies have a constructive impact and restrictive leadership strategies have a defensive (passive/aggressive) impact in IT organizations. IT organizations need to create a culture that reinforces and sustains

prescriptive leader behaviors in their employees so that they may be able to leverage its benefits and IT leaders can confidently choose methods for growth and sustainability of Indian IT organizations.

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