

Directed leadership as an alternative style in era of crisis

Liderazgo dirigido como estilo alternativo en época de crisis

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Abstract

Organizational results are achieved through teamwork, which requires effective leadership to carry out negotiations and materialize business goals, decision-makers generally knew the internal and external factors that affected their operations until the COVID-19 pandemic break out, which made them to reformulate strategies to survive in the business market and redefine medium and long-term objectives, in this sense, the leader also needs to reevaluate his actions considering the best outcome for the company and its staff, accrediting his plans with positive actions and results, therefore, the main objective of this research is to identify the presence of the leadership style defined as Directed, which is based on a shared vision with the collaborators about the future. The results of this descriptive study with a non-experimental transversal design, denote the presence of the Directed Leadership dimensions in the MSMEs that were analyzed, however, the resulting statistical reference values indicate that the actions that serve as examples for collaborators should be reinforced, as well as a reevaluation of the way in which their processes for innovation are developed.

Resumen

Los resultados organizacionales se logran mediante el trabajo en equipo, que requiere de un liderazgo efectivo que concrete negociaciones y materialice las metas empresariales, los responsables de la toma de decisiones generalmente conocían los factores internos y externos que incidían en sus operaciones hasta antes de la pandemia COVID-19, la cual obligó a replantear estrategias para sobrevivir en el mercado empresarial y redefinir los objetivos de mediano y largo plazo, en este sentido también el líder requiere un replanteamiento de sus acciones en favor de la empresa y sus actores, acreditando sus planes con acciones y resultados positivos; por lo tanto el objetivo principal de este trabajo es identificar la presencia del estilo de liderazgo al que se denominó Dirigido y que se basa en una visión compartida del futuro con los colaboradores. Mediante un estudio de tipo descriptivo con diseño no experimental transversal, se obtuvieron resultados que denotan la presencia de las dimensiones del Liderazgo Dirigido en las mipymes estudiadas, sin embargo, los valores estadísticos de referencia obtenidos indican que debe reforzarse las acciones que sirven de ejemplo a los seguidores, así como adecuar la forma en que se desarrollan los procesos para su innovación.

Leadership Styles, Construction Sector, Innovation

Estilos de liderazgo, Sector construcción, Innovación

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Introduction

The change in the social and economic scenario caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, forces those responsible for the future of any type of organization to rethink the administrative and operational strategies that were originally designed and implemented and that must be evaluated to determine whether they allow companies to survive in what has been called the "new normal". This public health problem affects any type of entity regardless of the economic market in which it participates and has led to the formulation of studies of various kinds to measure its impact, such as the one developed by Félix and García (2020), referring to the tourism sector in Ecuador, where they studied the crisis in the sector caused by COVID-19 and which is reflected in low hotel occupancy and demand for services in general, resulting in economic losses and non-payment of loans acquired before the contingency. To mitigate the effects, tourism companies reduced the prices of the services offered and increased promotions in social networks and online marketing media as channels of access to customers.

The communication sector in Zaragoza, Spain has also felt the effects of COVID-19 (Bandrés, et. al, 2021), and to reduce the impact on their business model, they have assumed a high degree of positivism in the face of this crisis, adapting quickly to a new changing and flexible organization for an uncertain environment; therefore, their strategy is based on a digital transformation to which their internal and external communication models were also adapted. Ruiz et. al (2022) consider that in this new scenario, a remote leadership is necessary for the effective management of work teams in times of pandemic, which requires coordinating schedules and distant geographical locations and in turn an effective conflict resolution.

In the restaurant sector, Sanchez and Nava (2020) used the theory of punctuated equilibrium to establish the changes in the new needs of customers, which also influences the perspective of the SMEs participating in the market, which should be oriented to innovation. Companies in Neiva, Colombia consider that having strategies that provide adequate financing is essential to support operations and thus provide the goods and services demanded by customers, with the support of the government, which can develop fiscal stimuli that contribute to economic recovery and prevent companies from continuing to declare bankruptcy (Guevara and Rojas, 2020).

In Mexico, one of the economic sectors with the greatest negative impact derived from COVID-19 is the construction sector, which contributes to the countries' Gross Domestic Product and is characterized by employing the population with the least academic preparation, therefore companies require new strategies that allow them to carry out their technical, financial, legal and administrative operations to remain in the sector, under a future-oriented leadership that allows them to survive in a constantly evolving and highly competitive market.

The federal government through Mexico's National Development Plan (2019-2024), gives a preponderant place to the construction industry through its general axis "Economic Development" and objective 3.6 which proposes to boost productive and service activities through infrastructure and communication works for the transportation of goods and services; through a safe and efficient road network, with a multimodal approach that facilitates industrial corridors the distribution of products with adequate communication routes (PND, 2019-2024).

In the state of Campeche, where the participating population is located, the Development Plan 2021-2027, contemplates through the lines of action of strategy 2 of strategic objective 5 of Mission 4 "Economic development with a vision for the future" a strategic management for connectivity, which favors the mobility of passengers and commercial exchange; to this end, we intend to develop infrastructure and equipment in the state's ports, coordinate actions to optimize the highway network, improve airport infrastructure and services, and promote the integral use of the construction of the Mayan Train, which we consider an economic trigger at the state and regional level.

Considering the problems of the construction sector, the objectives of the study are: a) To establish if directed leadership is present in the managers of the SMEs of the construction sector in the city of Campeche, b) To evaluate the incidence of the sociodemographic factors and the administrative profile of the organizations, in the dimensions of directed leadership and b) To determine the dimension of directed leadership that prevails in the directive body of the participating SMEs.

Theoretical framework

Pedraja and Rodriguez (2008) evaluated this link in Chilean SMEs and found that these have a positive impact on the acquisition and generation of knowledge based on a sense of direction that contributes to its transmission and the evaluation of the business strategies developed; it has also established its influence on organizational culture and the inherent relationship with innovation and business competitiveness whose interaction is ultimately reflected in the effectiveness of enterprises (Rodriguez, 2010).

According to Contreras and Castro (2013), leadership is the result of the organization's operability and it is necessary to understand how the power it represents, influences among followers-collaborators who trust the person who makes decisions to guide them to a shared business future and strengthens organizational commitment.

One of the most widely used instruments for the study of leadership and its transformational and transactional styles is the one designed by Kouzes and Posner (2003), who structured the questionnaire called Inventory of Leadership Practices (IPL), made up of thirty items grouped into five dimensions. When the leader challenges processes, inspires a shared vision of the future and is congruent between what he says and what he does in the organization, he will be in the presence of a transformational style and if he positively stimulates the followers, then his leadership practice is transactional.

The need for effective leadership does not establish geographical limitations since it is only characterized by motivating, inspiring and intellectually stimulating the collaborators of the companies. In Venezuela Loaiza and Pirela (2015), studied the leadership style in the educational and industrial sectors and their results demonstrate the need for leaders who raise the competitiveness of their organizations to remain and develop within the sector where they operate.

Parra et. al (2021) analyzed the relationship between organizational climate and leadership in the hotel sector in Cartagena Colombia, highlighting that the predominant style in the studied population is authoritarian and closed, which does not generate effectiveness in the actions developed nor favors the commitment, participation and satisfaction of the collaborators, which produces a feeling of tension in the organizational climate and affects the processes of providing the service expected by the customer. Romero (2022), who further discusses the leadership style in public service organizations, points out that transformational leadership has an impact on work teams if the leader carries out actions and develops strategies to promote communication and intellectual stimulation, instead of only promoting productivity that does not favor the achievement of long-term objectives.

Arias (2021) analyzed the transformational, transactional and laissez faire leadership styles and the levels of engagement (levels of dedication, vigor and work concentration) presented by executives in the financial sector, considering analysts from Arequipa as the population.

Their results showed that the style with the greatest presence in these work teams is transactional, since the functions entrusted tend to the achievement of supervised goals for the progress of the projected results; on the contrary, if the leader does not carry out actions for the reinforcement of the decisions and achievements of the objectives, the collaborators present lower levels of concentration and dedication when detecting that the leader does not take responsibility for the group or execute decisions by initiative.

The quantitative analysis of leadership factors in the public relations and communication sector in Spain was addressed by Moreno et. al (2014), aiming to identify the relationship between the development of communication professionals, their beliefs and perceptions regarding the dimensions of leadership; finding that professionals in the sector consider that the leader must face the main challenges of organizations by participating in strategic decisions, which does not affect the gender of the leader and that they have higher expectations of learning from leaders who perform excellently at work than from university educational programs.

In Mexico, studies have also been carried out to identify the styles exercised by organizational leaders and their impact on organizational results in various economic sectors, such as the one developed by Robles et. al (2008), who analyzed their dimensions in industrial SMEs in the state of Tamaulipas and concluded that the population studied needs to innovate its operational and administrative processes, which even implies delegating functions and sharing power. In the case of the service sector, the transformational style prevails, since the decision makers are characterized by being congruent in carrying out what they propose for the future of the companies (Vázquez and Pedraza, 2014).

When investigating on the perception that managers of SMEs have about leadership and their styles Padilla, et. al (2011) and Cárdenas, et. al (2014), considered as population the SMEs in the state of Colima and used as an instrument the Leadership Practices Inventory, the results obtained indicate that managers have developed an impersonal style that does not favor them to be perceived as leaders and to guide the future of organizations, as they still require greater commitment and responsibility to adequately structure their operational and administrative areas for the achievement of objectives.

Ofori and Toor (2012), consider that effective leadership promotes the use of technology for business processes, implementation of policies and standards for the construction industry and raises the productivity of companies belonging to the sector; which is reflected in the infrastructure projects developed in countries with emerging economies and provides welfare to society. Regarding the Yugoslavian construction sector, Petrovic (2002), investigated the leadership styles developed in companies in the face of the change of economic model that demands new forms of management for the achievement of higher profits, demonstrating that the adaptation and dynamism with which it is carried out are characteristics that companies can develop to remain and evolve in the face of the changes of economic paradigm.

A factor that affects the performance of the construction sector is the high rate of occupational accidents and an adequate management in the issue of safety and hygiene by the leaders contributes to raise the productivity of operational collaborators (Wu et. al 2017), a similar situation was analyzed by Torres (2018) in the Colombian territory when evaluating the management of human talent and the factors that affect their level of well-being, identifying that operational insecurity interferes in the performance of the work teams that execute the works.

Adaptive leadership was studied by Newton (2008), as an alternative to reduce the confusion between the concepts of leadership and management in the face of the social and environmental problems faced by the construction market; his results demonstrate the need for a personal change that influences the teams of collaborators and favors the generation of added value for the sector.

Quantum leadership as an innovative strategy in private companies was analyzed by Portillo and Buitrago (2015) in the Latin American region considering that, if a leader positively orients his energy in synergy with that of the collaborators, it is possible to materialize the goals proposed for the organization achieving a productive and innovative business management, the authors consider that a quantum leader does not seek protagonism since his interest is to contribute to the proposed business objectives with a humble attitude away from self-congratulation.

The construct of Directed Leadership (LD) considered for this study is based on a subscale of the transformational style of the Kouzes and Posner practices model, based on the theories of the Traits and skills of a leader (Stodgill, 1950), and House's Path - goal, (1971); to identify the attitudes necessary in a leader who shares the business future with the organization's collaborators (Quijano and Magaña, 2021).

Methodology

The study developed is descriptive by obtaining information at a single time, on the dimensions of leadership directed in the natural administrative context of the participants and without any type of intervention so its design is non-experimental cross-sectional. To obtain quantitative information, fieldwork was used as a method and the survey as a technique (Hernández, et. al 2018).

The population studied consisted of MSMEs in the construction sector in the city of Campeche, classified within the communications and transportation subsector according to the census of the state delegation of the Mexican Chamber of the Construction Industry. All 87 affiliates of the subsector were invited to participate in the study, of which 80 accepted, representing 91% of the identified population.

The construction sector is characterized by providing employment to the economically active population with less academic preparation and fewer job opportunities, and by its contribution to the state's GDP.

The survey used to generate information was designed by Quijano and Magaña (2021), who determined its psychometric properties to measure leadership practices in the construction sector and was derived from the dimensions of the Inventory of Leadership Practices (IPL) designed by Kouzes and Posner (2003). The instrument is related to the research objectives by allowing the identification of whether the managed leadership style is present in the population studied and the possible incidence of sociodemographic factors on it. The definitions of the instrument are described in Table 1.

Dimension	Operational Definition	Reactives
Guiding the way	Self-perception of the leader serving as an example of behavior consistent with organizational values.	1. I clearly communicate the positive outlook for the future of our organization.
		2. I lead by example in all my activities.
		3. I look ahead and visualize what I hope our future will look like.
		4. I am consistent with how I act and what I think about what the job should be.
		5. I question to improve how we do things in the organization.
Shared vision	Self-perception of the leader creating and sharing a positive vision of the future that appeals to members of the organization.	6. I am very clear about my own philosophy about leadership.
		7. I look for innovative ways to improve what we do in our organization.
		8. I describe to others the future I would like us to build together.
		9. I look for challenging opportunities that test my skills.

Table 1 Definitions of the survey applied to the managers of the MSMEs in the road sub-sector
Source: Own elaboration with information from Quijano and Magaña (2021)

The questionnaire considers a Likert scale score and an initial section to obtain socio-demographic information on the manager and the administrative profile of the company. Questionnaires were administered in person and electronically to the administrative leaders of the construction companies with an average duration of 20 minutes in the face-to-face cases.

To establish the validity of the questionnaire, the authors used the method of expert judgment on the subject of leadership and the reliability (Table 2) was determined by calculating Cronbach's alpha coefficient:

Dimension	Number of items	Cronbach's alpha
General	80	.691
Guiding the way	5	.680
Shared vision	4	.631

Table 2 Reliability of the instrument administered to the managers of the participating MSMEs

According to certain standards, the parameters obtained in general and by dimension may seem low, but considering Kerlinger (2002), it is possible that these values are affected by the number of items that make up the instrument and the number of subjects participating in the study, which in this particular case, nine items were considered for the two dimensions and 80 respondents, which may cause an error due to chance or the individual's interpretation of the item.

Results

The sociodemographic profile of the managers interviewed shows that the age range with the highest frequency is 53 years and older (55%), with a predominant marital status of married (65%), followed by divorced (21%) and single (14%). Forty-four percent have a bachelor's degree from private institutions and have accumulated business experience, mostly between 2 and 9 years (46%), which indicates that they started their activities when they were young in the sector.

All the interviewees confirm that they are 100% involved in the administration of the companies, with the position of owner and general manager, and belong to the male gender, which is a characteristic of the construction sector.

The main challenges they face as entrepreneurs are contributing to the region's economy (39%), obtaining financial profits for their companies (37%), and generating more jobs (26%).

Among the main elements of the business profile is that the predominant type of legal ownership is family companies (36%), and they provide employment to a range of between 32 and 53 employees (67%). The competitive level of the organizations is considered good (45%) and 26% believe that they need to improve a lot in this aspect; the main competitive advantage is the quality of the road construction services (38%), followed by the specialized type of service (33%). Among the quality policies implemented, they mention the timely delivery of contracted works (24%), the promotion of an active and participative work environment for workers that generates benefits for all the actors involved in the business dynamics (workers, suppliers and clients) (22%); the above based on effective communication between companies (28%).

On the other hand, most of the respondents do not consider that the benefits obtained from the agreements between the state government and the federal level are the best (70%), although they have good relations with the government sector, which is the main client for this subsector (81%) (Tables 3 and 4).

	Competitive level		Governmental agreements	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Good	23	29	24	30
Fair	36	45	28	35
Bad	21	26	28	35
	80	100	80	100

Table 3 Competitiveness of MSMEs in the communications and transportation subsector

	Relationship with government sector		Relationship with the private sector		Relationship with social sector	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Good	65	81	68	85	45	56
Fair	15	19	12	15	24	30
Bad	0	0	0	0	11	14
	80	100	80	100	80	100

Table 4 Business relationships of MSMEs in the communications and transport subsector

To face the most difficult obstacles in daily operations, such as increasing competitiveness (22%) and competition in the sector (17%), entrepreneurs apply strategies such as: greater promotion of services (26%), improving internal and external business communication, and applying better quality systems (20%). This was forged through business values such as transparency in administrative management (23%), professionalism and efficiency in work (21%) and respect, initiative and creativity towards collaborators (17%). In the case of construction companies with family origins, they report an excellent company-family relationship (37%), provided that they manage to combine the two spheres (26%).

The mean and standard deviation of the two dimensions of the questionnaire were determined in order to establish the items closest to and farthest from the assigned values and to evaluate the level of dispersion of the responses (Table 5).

Dimension	N	Minimum value	Maximum value	Mean	Standard deviation
Guiding the way	80	1	4	2.77	2.07
Shared vision	80	2	4	2.36	2.09

Table 5 Descriptive statistics of the dimensions of managed leadership

In order to consider the means as a measure of the intensity present in the directed leadership practices, three levels were established: a) low, for means between 0 and 1.3, b) moderate, those between 1.4 and 2.7 and c) high for cases with values between 2.8 and 4. For the two dimensions, it was observed that the measure of intensity is moderate and the highest mean corresponds to the dimension "leading the way", which indicates that the leaders of the population studied are congruent in carrying out what they preach with a shared entrepreneurial vision that includes the collaborators (Table 6).

Reactive	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard deviation
I clearly communicate the positive outlook for the future of our organization.	1	4	2.88	.891
I lead by example in all my activities.	2	4	2.98	.595
I look ahead and visualize what I hope our future will look like.	1	4	2.73	.763
I am consistent with how I act and what I think about what the job should be.	2	4	2.93	.776
I question to improve the way we do things in the organization.	1	4	2.36	.984

Table 6 Descriptive statistics of the dimension "leading the way"

The dimension "shared vision" presents the lowest mean and the greatest dispersion in its responses, which allows inferring that leaders require skills that allow them to face the challenge of innovation in their organizations, (Table 7).

Reactive	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard deviation
I am very clear about my own philosophy on leadership.	1	4	2.48	1.018
Busco maneras I look for innovative ways to improve what we do in our organization.	1	4	2.16	.803
I describe to others the future I would like to build together.	1	4	2.46	.913
I look for challenging opportunities that test my skills.	1	4	2.34	1.006

Table 7 Descriptive statistics relating to the shared vision dimension

Significant statistical differences between population groups were identified by ANOVA with respect to the level of studies, which allows us to consider that an adequate academic training of the leader influences the leadership style exercised in the population studied; in the case of independent data, Student's t-test did not show significant differences between the dimensions of directed leadership and the sociodemographic aspects of the managers.

An indicator was developed to facilitate the evaluation of the presence of the leadership style studied, which was called the Index of Directed Leadership (ILD). It was formulated by adding the values assigned by the companies to the items designed for the dimensions Guiding the way and Shared vision, and dividing them by 20 and 16 respectively, which correspond to the maximum value that each company could obtain by multiplying the number of items of each dimension by 4, and the result was multiplied by 100.

Subsector	Number of surveys	Dimension Guiding the way (%)	Dimension Shared vision (%)	Overall Index of Guided Leadership (%)
Communication and transportation	80	69	59	65
Note: ILD= Reflects the entrepreneur's vision of the future shared with the organization's collaborators				

Table 8 Index of Directed Leadership (ILD)

Source: Own elaboration based on the results of the questionnaires

Discussion and conclusions

Leadership is a determining factor in the course of organizations, and business decisions derived from the style exercised, are reflected in various aspects such as communication which is part of the strategies used by the population studied to face the problems inherent to the activity such as competition and relations with the government as the main client, which coincides with Moreno et. al (2014 and Bandrés et. al (2021), who suggest developing high levels of positivism to face crises in organizations such as the one originated by Covid-19 and which is currently present in all human activity.

Obtaining financial profits is one of the objectives declared as fundamental for the managers surveyed and an adequate leadership style directs the results towards reducing costs and increasing income, preventing the negative impact of external factors such as Covid-19, which does not originate from business decisions but which has increased financing needs (Guevara and Rojas 2020).

The directed leadership style analyzed in this work, has a moderate presence in the population studied, since its reference data does not indicate a personal leadership style that favors and guides the future of the construction companies, which coincides with what was studied by Cárdenas et. al (2014) and denotes the need for a personal change as Newton (2008) foresees, which influences the teams of collaborators that the organization has. Additionally, they must redesign strategies that are linked to the collaborators in order to materialize in a positive way the company's goals by clearly communicating the future outlined for all the organization's stakeholders (Portillo and Buitrago, 2015).

The managers of the participating companies consider themselves congruent between their way of thinking and acting, however, they require overcoming obstacles through opportunities that demonstrate their skills to lead the companies and that inspire the collaborators and stimulate them intellectually to promote competitiveness and permanence in the sector, (Loaiza and Pirela, 2015).

One of the objectives of the present study is to establish if the Directed Leadership style has presence in the surveyed population which can be affirmed, but it is necessary that those responsible for the future of these companies redesign their strategies, involve collaborators and orient their efforts towards an innovative future to face the current onslaught of the health contingency that is deriving in financial crisis for the public and private sectors.

The data obtained indicate that the sociodemographic and business profiles do not have a significant impact on the leadership exercised by managers, which opens the possibility that it is personality and other factors such as culture and power that define the style currently developed. The two dimensions of Directed Leadership: guiding the way and shared vision are present among the managers of the companies studied, but raising the intensity of each dimension requires a personal questioning of the way in which processes are being developed and conflicts are resolved; in addition to conceptualizing the philosophy of leadership to understand the need to innovate in various aspects such as integration of work teams, effective communication, synergy and new ways of conducting negotiations.

This work starts from transformational leadership towards a directed style, which focuses on a self-perception of the leader and his behavior coherent with the organizational values and a positive vision shared with the members of the company; therefore new lines of research can be oriented to identify those own or external factors of the personality that affect the congruence of the behavior of the decision-makers and that are reflected in the financial results and positioning of the organizations, creating an atmosphere of uncertainty among the followers-collaborators.

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