

# Study the relationship between leadership style of elementary and secondary schools principals and the effectiveness of schools: With emphasis on Fiedler's contingency theory

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## ABSTRACT

The aim of this study was to explore the relationship between principals' leadership style and effectiveness in elementary and secondary schools with emphasis on contingency theory of Fiedler. Research method is descriptive - survey. The population of the study is all the teachers and principals of elementary and secondary schools in District no 7, Tehran. The sampling method was clustering and the sample was 360 people including 60 principals and 300 teachers. The results show that there is a weak correlation between leadership style and effectiveness, however; it doesn't mean that leadership has no effect on effectiveness. Effectiveness as a general term is under effect of other variables which must be studied. From the other findings of the research it could be concluded that adoption quality of Fiedler's theoretical assumptions in the academic units requires more studies.

**Keywords:** Leadership Styles, Effectiveness, Contingency Theory, Fiedler, School Principals

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## 1- INTRODUCTION

### 1.1. Problem Statement

Necessity and increasing importance of education has caused that educational organizations be introduced as one of the most effective organizations in the communities. Educational organizations like the other organizations need qualified managers or leaders who act properly in planning and implementing educational policies and programs to achieve their goals and have effectiveness. In most definitions, management refers to human and works with human. In another definition, management is working with individuals and groups to accomplish identified organizational goals. According to another expert's idea, the management is art of doing tasks by others. Some consider management as making a good environment for people [1]. Management is the coordination of human and material resources in order to achieve organizational goals in a way to be acceptable to society [2]. Leadership as one of the important tasks of management is art of influencing people to achieve goals. Leadership style is a set of attitudes, attributes and skills of managers, based on four factors: system of values, believe to employees, leadership tendencies and sense of security formed in ambiguous situations [3]. There are various definitions for leadership; it has been defined as an influencing process effecting activities of a person or group to achieve goals in a given situation [4, 5]. Leadership styles are influenced by the cultural structure of the civilization [6]. Managers' leadership style reflects their interaction with staffs [7]. Effective leadership depends on appropriate leadership style and the situation in which the leader leads staffs because if the leadership styles adopted by managers consistent with organizations different situations, the organization will be much more effective [8]. Results of some studies show that the use of appropriate leadership styles to suit every situation by administrators not only can create a favorable business environment with healthy relationships within the organization but also increase willingness of staff to lead the effort and make it more efficient and effective [9]. Another problem is that the school principals of Education and Training Ministry in achieving organizational goals are not efficient; however, several factors could be involved like as the leadership style of managers [10]. One of the main aspects of management in the educational centers is leadership and regarding that, managers use leadership to look for efficiency and effectiveness in their educational centers. Answer to the question of what makes effective a leader's performance, is important for managers of the organizations. Based on the Fiedler opinion, group performance depends on the leader's motivational system, level of his/her control and influence in the special situation i.e. proper situation [11]. Thus the effectiveness of the group is the result of the leadership style and the desirable rate of the situation. Fiedler's opinions are expressed in terms of the contingency theory of leadership. In the Fiedler and colleagues studies have done at the University of Illinois between 1950 and 1964 on the effectiveness of different leadership styles, a model is presented which is called the theory of leadership effectiveness. Fiedler main assumption in this research is that group's effective performance depends on the appropriate relationship between the leadership style and the degree of the power which the prevailing circumstances give him to influence and control. This theory claims that the success of a manager actually

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depends on two factors: 1 - A manager's typical approach to the team (his management style) 2 - The amount of control that the manager has on the work situation, i.e. control members, organizational tasks and their associated outcomes [12]. According to the basic premise of the model, its two basic sections are: 1 - Understanding leadership styles 2 - Understanding leadership situations. On the ground of leadership style, it could be said that it is infrastructure of person needs which disposes his behavior in various situations [13]. In this theory, leadership styles are: Task-oriented, relationship-oriented and moderate. Fiedler believed that the manner or style of leadership results from the original situation of the manager. He developed LPC questionnaire for this purpose. LPC points determine the manager's leadership style score. The person who gets the highest score of the questionnaire somewhat is like a person who believes McGregor's Y Theory, who is more optimistic toward human nature and are willing to give people more freedom and who is called the employee-circuit (connection-oriented). And lower scores on the SF is someone who is working circuit. This leadership method gets the main content from the job a rather than relationships with others. However, as already mentioned, many people are not in the highest levels of LPC or in the lowest level of it, anyway most rankings are located in the center of the LPC. Fiedler regarding the LPC, counts them as the moderate leaders which the both work and co-workers are less important for them [13]. Also, in this theory, understanding leadership situations requires attention to three important variables. These variables include: the leader-member relationship, the task structure and position power; and these three factors affect the behavior that must be shown by the leader with creating a favorable or unfavorable environment. In each environment, considering these three situation factors and based on their taken values, a kind of behavior or a leadership style will be more effective [14]. If the conditions are quite favorable for the leader, i.e. the leader's personal power and positions are very high or, on the contrary, if the manager could not be accepted by the staffs and supported by the superiors and task is also quite new, task-oriented style will be much more effective; and if the condition is between two extremely favorable and unfavorable situations then relation-oriented style will be more operative. According to researchers, with effectiveness, the organization achieves its goals, there will be consistency and appropriateness in it and the success depends on the way things are headed, and utility of situation [11, 15, 16]. Indeed, direct relationship between leadership style and effectiveness can exist [17-20]. In some researches, the relationship shows that task-oriented leaders are more effective [21, 22], in some researches, shows that selective leadership styles are more effective [23] and some research findings suggest greater managers' effectiveness in the use of relationship-oriented leadership style [24]. And the results of some investigations indicate that a statistically significant correlation have not been observed between leadership style and effectiveness [25-28]. The researcher The researcher studied conducted researches about leadership styles and its relation to the effectiveness from Fiedler's approach and believes findings from conducted researches particularly in Iran's society have diversity and some difference that brings some ambiguity. In order to better understand the causes of the problem and explain the relationship between managers' leadership styles and their effectiveness in terms of Fiedler, carrying out more research in this area would be adequate. Therefore, this study aimed to assess the relationship between managers' leadership styles and school effectiveness using contingency theory of Fiedler.

Specific objectives: A) Comparison of task-oriented managers' effectiveness to relation-oriented in the extremely favorable situations; B) Comparison between effectiveness of task-oriented to relation-oriented managers in relatively favorable situations; C) Comparison between effectiveness of task-oriented to relation-oriented managers in unfavorable situations

### 1.2. Research hypotheses

The main hypothesis: from primary and secondary school teachers view points, there is a relationship between managers' leadership styles and their effectiveness.

Sub-hypotheses: 1) In the extremely favorable situations (appropriate), relationship-oriented leaders are more effective than task-oriented leaders; 2) In relatively favorable situations (middle), relationship-oriented leaders are more effective than leaders who are task-oriented; 3) In unfavorable situations (inappropriate), task-oriented leaders are more effective than leaders who are relationship-oriented.

## 2- MATERIAL AND METHOD

The research is for practical purposes, its type is descriptive and in its implementation survey method was used. The study in terms of data collection is quantitative and in terms of data analysis is correlation method. Collected data using descriptive statistics (percentages, frequency tables, graphs and mean) and inferential statistics (Pearson correlation, t two independent groups, Spearman correlation and one way variance) were analyzed. The study population is all principals and teachers who formally worked in primary and middle schools of Tehran 7th district, in the 2011-2012 academic years. Random cluster sampling method was used to select a sample group.

The sample using Morgan table and based on the statistical population is composed of 60 principals and 300 teachers. The instrument used in this study were 5 questionnaires; 4 Fiedler's standard questionnaires to

determine the situations and Leadership style of principals and a questionnaire made by the researcher to measure the effectiveness of the studied schools were used. With regard to validity, reliability for both questionnaires obtained 0.89 by using Cronbach's alpha.

### 3- RESULTS

#### 3.1. The main hypothesis of this study:

There is a relationship between principals' leadership styles and leadership situations and their effectiveness from Tehran 7th district primary and secondary teachers' points of view. Leadership styles and leadership effectiveness correlation is shown in Table 1.

**Table 1.** The correlation matrix of leadership styles, leadership, and effectiveness

Variable	Leadership style	Leadership situation
<b>Leadership situation</b>	Correlation Coefficient	0.172
	Determination Coefficient	2.95%
	Significance level	0.18
<b>Effectiveness</b>	Correlation Coefficient	-0.146
	Determination Coefficient	2.13%
	Significance level	0.26

According to Table 1, the general theory of the research based on the relationship between principals' leadership style and leadership situations and their effectiveness is not supported. Correlation coefficient between leadership style and effectiveness ( $r=-0.146$ ), due to the significant level of 0.26, is not significant. Whatever score of leadership style decreases, it leads to social-independent and task-oriented style, and the effectiveness increases and whatever leadership style tends to the relation-oriented style, effectiveness decreases. Correlation coefficient between leadership situation and effectiveness ( $r=0.164$ ) due to the significant level 0.21 is not significant. That means whatever leadership is drawn into proper situation, effectiveness increases.

Sub-hypothesis 1: in the extremely favorable leadership situations, task-oriented leaders are more effective than relationship-oriented leaders. Effectiveness mean of task-oriented and relationship-oriented leaders within extremely favorable situation were compared in table 2.

**Table 2.** T-test to compare the effectiveness means of two managers groups with task-oriented and relationship-oriented leadership styles in extremely favorable leadership situations

Indicators Variable	Leadership style	Number	Mean	t	Degree of Freedom	Mean Difference	Standard Error	Significance level
effectiveness	task-oriented	6	138	0.718	11	3.14	4.37	0.488
	Relationship-oriented	7	134.85					

The results of the first sub-hypothesis shows that there is not a significant difference in the overall effectiveness score of task-oriented and relationship-oriented leadership styles ( $P<0.488$ ) in the extremely favorable leadership situation. The results in Table 2 indicate that in the schools with desired leadership style, the effectiveness of teachers with relationship-oriented leadership is more than task-oriented leadership style. Although, it isn't significant statistically. So the research's first sub-hypothesis is not confirmed.

Sub-hypothesis 2: in the relatively favorable leadership situations, relationship-oriented leaders are more effective than task-oriented ones. The effectiveness comparison of task-oriented and relationship-oriented managers within a relatively favorable situation is shown in Table 3.

The results related to the study's second sub-hypothesis show that, there is not a significant difference in the overall effectiveness score of task-oriented and relationship-oriented leadership styles ( $P<0.399$ ) in the relatively favorable leadership situation. The results in Table 3 indicate that in the schools with relatively favorable leadership styles, the effectiveness of teachers with relationship-oriented leadership is more than task-oriented leadership style. Although, it isn't significant statistically. So the research's second sub-hypothesis is not confirmed.

**Table 3.** T-test to compare the effectiveness means of two managers groups with task-oriented and relationship-oriented leadership styles in fairly favorable leadership situations

Indicators Variable	Leadership style	Number	Mean	t	Degree of Freedom	Mean Difference	Standard Error	Significance level
effectiveness	task-oriented	6	132	0.85	31	4.8	5.63	0.399
	Relationship-oriented	7	136.8815					

**3.2. Sub-hypothesis 3:** in the unfavorable leadership situations, task-oriented leaders are more effective than relationship-oriented ones.

Due to the statistical population smallness the hypothesis wasn't calculate able. in the 60 samples, only one manager was in the unfavorable leadership situation so this hypothesis is removed.

### 3.3. Test new hypotheses

Then, according to managers' demographic data, researcher is faced with new hypotheses and analyzed them. Since these variables are not continuous or interval, Spearman correlation test and ANOVA were used to obtain correlation. Relevant hypotheses are the relationship existence between information including job experience, management experience, age, gender, education level and marital status of managers and effectiveness, leadership style and Leadership situation. The results are as follows. Correlation between managers' leadership style and demographic information is shown in Table 4.

**Table 4.** The correlation between leadership styles and managers demographic information

Variable		Manager gender	Manager education	Manager job experience	management experience	Manager age	marital status
Leadership style	Correlation coefficient	0.078	0.149	0.086	0.373**	-0.044	0.086
	Significant level	0.556	0.256	0.512	0.003	0.739	0.512

\*= P<0.05; \*\*= P<0.01

According to Table 4, management experience has significant relationship in the level 0.01 with managers' leadership style, i.e. whatever the management experience of the manager's increase; the managers probably take more advantage of a relationship-oriented and social- independent leadership styles. Correlation between leadership situation and managers' demographic information is shown in Table 5.

**Table 5.** Correlation between leadership and demographic information of managers

Variable		Manager gender	Manager education	Manager job experience	Management experience	Manager age	Marital status
Leadership situation	Correlation coefficient	-0.131	-0.131	0.149	-0.031	0.068	0.300*
	Significant level	0.350	0.318	0.257	0.812	0.605	0.020

\*= P<0.05; \*\*= P<0.01

According to Table 5, managers' marital status has significant relationship in the 0.05 level with leadership situation. Married managers likely have more favorable leadership situations.

Correlation between the effectiveness of school administrators and demographic information is shown in Table 6.

**Table 6.** The correlation between effectiveness and managers' demographic information

Variable		Manager gender	Manager education	Manager job experience	Management experience	Manager age	Marital status
Effectiveness	Correlation coefficient	0.141	0.121	0.378**	0.114	0.212	0.094
	Significant level	0.281	0.359	0.003	0.386	0.103	0.473

\*= P<0.05; \*\*= P<0.01

According to Table 6, there is significant relationship in the 0.01 level between job experience of managers and the effectiveness of teachers, i.e. the more managers work experience, the more teachers effectiveness is achieved.

## 4- DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study aimed to assess the relationship between managers' leadership style and effectiveness of schools using contingency theory of Fiedler. The results of this study showed that the main hypothesis of the study which investigates the relationship between managers' leadership styles and effectiveness of educational units, has been rejected and the zero hypothesis has been verified. However, no significant correlation was calculated, this does not mean that leadership style has no effect on the effectiveness but this effect is poor. It also indicates that the situation factor has effect on effectiveness. Khalili Research [29] in the administrative organizations of Iran, Hamidi [22] in the hospitals of Tehran Medical Sciences University, Samsonchy [20] in Tabriz secondary schools Tarverdzadeh [23] in universities and of higher education of Ardabil, have certified relationship between managers' leadership styles and their effectiveness. As can be seen, all the researches except Samsonchy's aren't in schools and pedagogical environments and because of their duties and missions differences, the results should be generalized with caution. Kamrooz [25] results in Isfahan's primary schools, Haddadi [28] in the Tehran girls' schools, Moein Rizi [26] in Tehran girls' high school and Oakely [17] are

consistent with the findings of the present study. In other words, all the four researchers do not endorse relationship between managers' leadership style and effectiveness in the same situations.

The study of sub-hypotheses resulted that some researches, such as Khalili [29], Aryapour [30], Hoy and Miskel [31] and Cherdlá [32] researches approved correlation between leadership styles and effectiveness of managers in appropriate leadership situations. The researcher in the investigation of aforementioned studies discovered that all except Shoreini considered the points gained from leader-member relations questionnaire as the situation score; while, based on Fiedler theory, situation is sum of the three factors' scores (leader-member relation, task structure and position power). Therefore generalization of score of one factor and attribute it to the situation score, making the test results failed. According to the above reasoning, the validity verifications of the tests because of scientific reliability lack based on the Fiedler theory are questionable. The results of Kamrooz [25], Najafi [33] and Mitchell [34] studies are similar to the results of this study which report rejecting of the three Fiedler hypotheses. Why the studied schools leadership situations only were very reasonable and moderate and just one case was in the unfavorable leadership situation. In the country, no untoward situation has been reported in all studies except in the Samsonchy [20] study and the present study. On the other hand, among the researchers in the country who have studied Fiedler theory assumptions except for two cases, have not considered the incompetent leadership situations. One reason for this could be that there is a good relationship between managers and employees. Due to created social norms in the society, staffs got power and can reduce management life of managers who are not interested in them. And managers are aware of it, so they will strengthen their relationship with employees.

Overall, according to the results, it is suggested:

1- Fiedler theoretical assumptions in educational institutions should be investigated further to find the necessary changes to these centers conditions.

2- Researchers according to the Fiedler's contingency theory, investigate the relationship between leadership style and effectiveness in relation to situational factors and not just rely on a situation factor.

3- Regarding the main hypothesis of the study, for the most effective schools, high rank education officials and administrators of the education and training ministry help managers with the activities to promote their thinking and effective leadership.

4- Managers to increase their effectiveness should consider various aspects of management and leadership; and according to them, review and improve their leadership practices. In this regard, it is suggested, school administrators with appropriate self-assessment practices evaluate their leadership style and the effectiveness of their school.

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