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SPONTANEOUS SHARING OF LEADERSHIP IN VIRTUAL TEAMS

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WHY THIS TOPIC?

Despite growing interest towards researching virtual organizations fully utilizing and leading virtual multicultural teams still fails.

Because of challenges in:

1. E-communication with low media richness
 - Attempts to develop such communication technologies / environments that resemble natural face-to-face interactive organisations
2. Multicultural collaboration
 - Investment in good language skills, disregarding role of culture in communication and leader-subordinate relationships
 - Virtual context developing into a culture of its own
3. Mastering human behaviour that has been taken away of its natural face-to-face context
 - Disregarding importance of these fundamental changes for the leadership context (lack of presence and visible symbols of leadership)
 - Attempts to apply modernist leadership theories built for traditional face-to face organisations in virtual context as such



THEORETICAL UNDERPINNINGS

- Two parallel research approaches of studying and developing virtual organizations exist
 - the information systems approach
 - puts the emphasis on the new technology and ICT solutions as the elements of virtual working context
 - the organizational behavior and leadership approach
 - focuses on the human aspects of working in virtual organization
- This paper is linked to the latter one, but takes a critical point of view to the applicability of modernist leader centered (and masculine) leadership theories in the virtual context in which the logic of natural, face-to-face organization don't apply
- We see a possibility for the rise of feminist or gender free leadership in the virtual organization that lack all visible symbols of power and only exist in the form of ICT –dependent interaction between the physically dispersed members.



PURPOSE AND SETTING OF THE RESEARCH

- In this paper we question the applicability of the modern leadership theory in the virtual context as a method for creating mutual trust within the team, identification with the team and commitment to the common goals
- Our aim is not to abandon the prevailing paradigm on loose grounds, but to test its latest development — transactional / transformational leadership theory — in virtual team setting
- How?
- Virtual team leadership experiments with dispersed teams consisting of international business students and representing workgroups / firms in an online-basis business simulation.
- Predestined leadership styles for each team by using role cards with either transactional or transformational style.

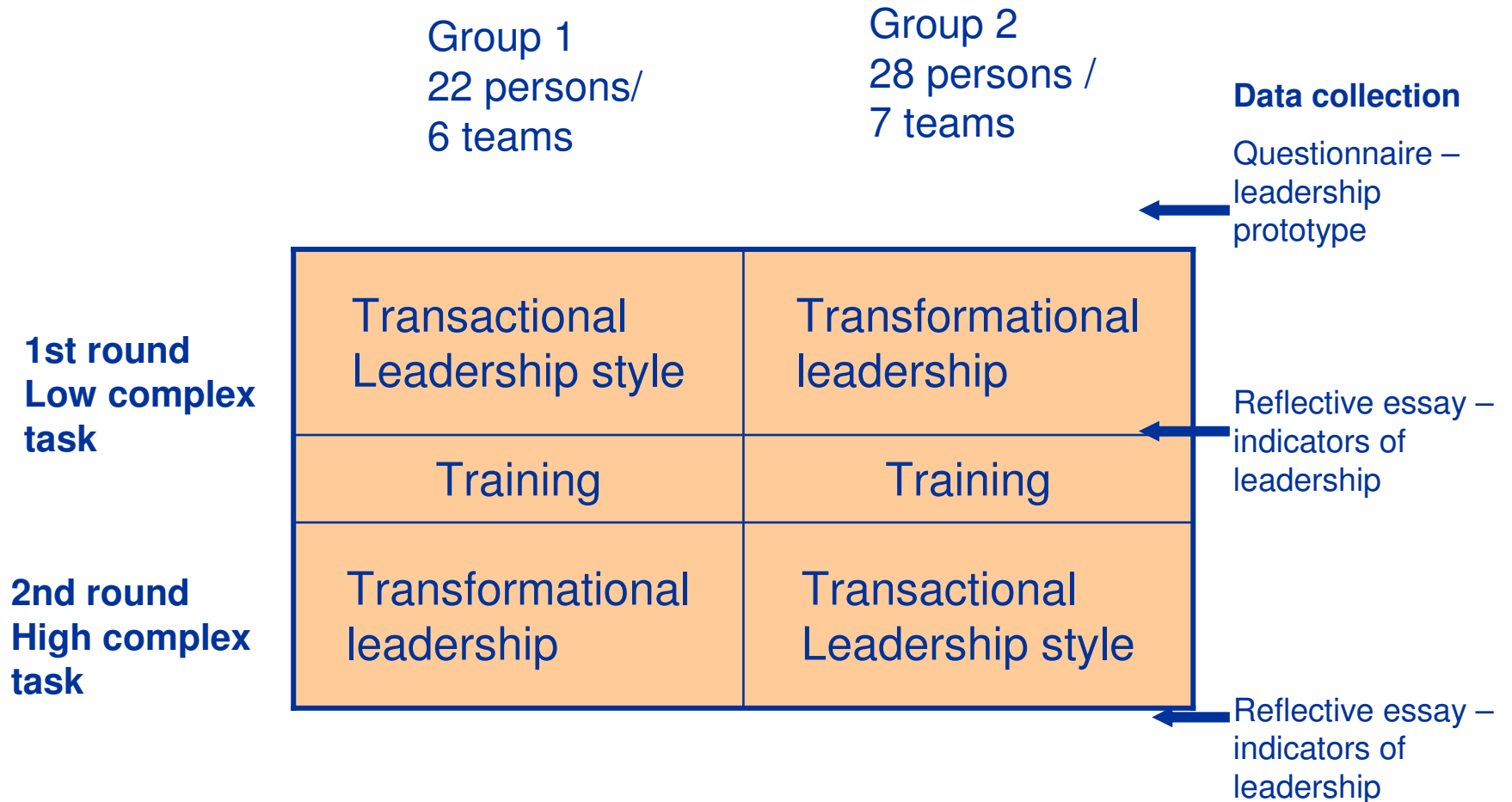


Experimental design 1(2)

- Virtual and hybrid teams consisting of
- Business students in Linz and Turku
- Involved in Business simulation game (RealGame™) (accelerated time, online decision making, co-operation and competing teams)
- 2 separate experiments (both rounds lasting 5 hours)
- Multicultural composition within the teams
- Negotiation and decision making necessitated
- E-Communication within and between teams (Skype voice mail and chat or e-mail)



Experimental design 2(2)





ROLE CARDS FOR

TRANSACTIONAL LEADERSHIP

= Exchange process between the leader and the followers.
Is based on rational utility function and long term goals of both parties including personal goals.

The leadership factors are:

- contingent rewards and management by exception.

TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP

= Interaction process between the leader and the followers which changes and transforms them as individuals
Is based on charisma and vision of the leader and appeals to higher needs, ethics and values thus making both exceed their limits

The leadership factors are:

- Idealised influence, Inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation and individual consideration



1. Qualitative study

Data

- Observation during the game
- Diary kept during the game
- Reflective essays written after each session
- two groups (22 + 28= 50), two rounds => 100 expected
- 4 people failed in completing their essays
- 92 essays analysed

Grounded theory method

- Line-by line coding of reflective essays
- Meanings, explanations, situational and contextual factors
- Focus on critical incidents

I.e. validation through triangulation and processual method



RESULTS FROM QUALI-DATA

Themes that came up as important factors for the team cooperation were

- team leadership /shared leadership
- decision-making democracy
- power distribution
- trust
- the role of language
- technical problems and
- issues associated with virtual and cross-cultural communication

As such this was noting radically new, other studies support this

Similar things have also come up in our previous virtual team experiments (research material summing up to near 500 essays)



**SURPRISING RESULTS: TEAMS WERE
ABANDONING THE GIVEN LEADERSHIP
ROLES AND SHARING RESPONSIBILITY
OR LEADERSHIP DISAPPEARING**



2. Quantitative study

Data

Reflective essays (n=92) transformed into quantitative form

Tool

MLQ Multifactorial full range leadership questionnaire (Bass & Avolio, 1997) used for the coding

Applied model for typifying

- a) leadership style (TRA-TRF-LF)
- b) team's shared and shifting leadership

Developed and validated by using parallel coding (SL and AR, spring 2008)

Analysis methods

Comparison of frequencies, X^2 -test, Group means, t-test, variance analysis



MLQ Questionnaire (1 = never, 2 = seldom, 3 = every now and then, 4 = often, 5 = almost all the time)

TRANSFORMATIONAL ITEMS (16 statements)

Idealised Influence (behaviour)
Inspirational Motivation
Intellectual Stimulation
Individualized Consideration

TRANSACTIONAL ITEMS (12 statements)

Contingent Reward
MbE (active)
MbE (passive)

LAISSEZ FAIRE ITEM (4 statements)



Example of the MLQ measures

Idealised Influence (attributed)

Macht jedes Teammitglied stolz darauf, mit ihm zu tun zu haben (10)

Jedes Teammitglied ist stolz, zu dieser Gruppe zu gehören

Nie selten manchmal häufig (fast) immer

Teammitglieder haben immer und in jeder Situation Vertrauen zu ihm
25

Teammitglieder haben immer und in jeder Situation Vertrauen zueinander

Nie selten manchmal häufig (fast) immer

Management by Exception (active)

•deckt Unregelmäßigkeiten, Fehler, Ausnahmen und Abweichungen von Vorschriften auf, damit dann wieder alles plangemäß nach Standards ablaufen kann (4)



Leadership Style	Round 1	Round 2	Mean Round 1	Mean Round 2
Transformational	11 ^{***} (20)	20 ^{***} (26)	2,753	3,253
Transactional	15 ^{***} (26)	8 ^{***} (20)	1,663	1,611
Laissez faire	12	10	1,402	1,239
Shared leadership	8	7	2,763	3,428



Discussion

Does virtual organisation by definition produce participative leadership due to the excessive need for communication?

- ‘Virtual organisations only exists in the interaction’
- In the virtual and global context communication is the clue that holds teams together

Does lack of visible symbols of power mean that leader figures don't show up in virtual context?

- Leadership can only materialize in the interaction and therefore communicational and social skills become crucial

Does virtual context make modernist leadership paradigm outdated?
Is post-modern paradigm the natural way of perceiving in the virtual context?

- ~ special interpretation of transformational leadership from post-modern perspective?
- ~ leadership being produced in the interaction
- ~ momentum for feminine leadership



Thank you for listening

Comments?