# LEADERSHIP STYLES AND ORGANIZATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS IN SMALL CONSTRUCTION BUSINESSES IN PUEBLA, MEXICO

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# **ABSTRACT**

This paper analyzes types of leadership and their relationship with organizational effectiveness in small construction enterprises of Puebla. An analysis of various literature related to the topic was examined, for a theoretical basis. Next, some aspects were measured through a Likert-scale questionnaire, using a sample of 49 small construction businesses. The goal is to describe how leadership styles, in small construction businesses located in Puebla, are perceived, along with how to determine their relationships with the organizational effectiveness. The following research question arose: What type of leadership dominates the small construction businesses of Puebla? What is the relationship among organizational effectiveness and the types of leadership? The results of the investigation show a positive and significant correlation between effectiveness, and democratic leadership, and Laissez-faire (liberal) leadership. The regression model used explains 69.1% of the variations in effectiveness. In addition, there is no statistical evidence of omitted variables (the constant test = 0.914).

JEL: L26, M5, M12

KEY WORDS: Styles of Leadership, Organizational Effectiveness, Small Businesses

# INTRODUCTION

The economy is characterized by globalization and rapid technological progress which creates challenges and problems for small businesses. Directors face these challenges and their competitors in order to prevail in the market and grow. In this context the results of strategic choices and performance are partially predetermined by the characteristics of those involved in their administration.

Texts on leadership styles include investigations by Ogbonna and Harris (2000). They examined the relationship among organizational culture, leadership styles and the performance of one thousand of UK's large and medium-sized enterprises. They found that leadership style is only indirectly linked to performance, but that competitive and innovative values and traits are linked directly, and that, contrary to what was expected, the clan and bureaucratic or hierarchical traits were not directly related to performance. Pedraja, R. and Rodriguez P. (2004) studied a sample of 42 executives belonging to 10 public institutions from the Region of Tarapacá, by observing the relation among the participatory, collaborative and instrumental leadership styles, and effectiveness. The results show that, in public organizations, participative and collaborative leadership styles which positively influence effectiveness.

Mendoza and Ortiz (2006), showed the dimensions that make up transformational leadership and how its application impacts both organization culture and organization effectiveness, resulting from the dynamic interactions that occur between the leader and the group within a certain determined context or situation. Valentín y Rivas (2006) identified the management style proposed by Bass best characterizes the Board of Directors of a business school and established the relationship with values such as: extra effort, effectiveness, personnel satisfaction, as well as the satisfaction and influence by the Board of Directors. Three directors, sixteen supervisors and 71 staff were surveyed. The results show that transformational

direction (stimulating interest among colleagues and followers to see their job with new perspectives) is predominant in business school. Transformational leadership (characterized by having a radically new vision, which is attractive and motivating to people) showed a substantial correlation to the value of extra effort. Rodriguez Ponce (2010) provides an explanatory study which uses a sample of 68 senior managers of small and medium-sized Chilean enterprises. The results show there is a relationship among the leadership styles of the transformational, the transactional and the "laissez faire" (liberal). Leadership style explains the 46.2% of innovation culture and there is a relationship between organizational culture and effectiveness.

In this context, this research describes how types of leadership in small construction businesses located in Puebla are perceived as well as their relationship to organizational effectiveness. The research question arises: What type of leadership dominates the small construction businesses in Puebla? What is the relationship between the organizational effectiveness and the types of leadership?

The research is divided into three main sections. The first discusses the theoretical aspects of leadership, organizational effectiveness, and small business; the second section discusses the methodology used in the empirical study and the third section presents the results and conclusions as well as the bibliography used.

#### LITERATURE REVIEW

# Characteristics and Leadership Styles

The term leadership has different interpretations and connotations that need to be clarified. Leadership is usually confused with that of manager; however the latter obtains results by managing the activities of others, while a leader creates a vision and inspires its followers to make it happen, beyond their normal capabilities and by promoting their development. Also, in everyday language, we talk about a leading product, of the leading company or leading person referring to the best, or the largest.

In an organization a leader is the person who has a group of people under its leadership, and the people on whom he/she exerts their influence are known as subordinates. Thus, directors, executives, administrators, managers and bosses can be leaders; the action carried out to influence on others is what we know as leadership. The leadership concept is widely used in more recent literature on leaders and leadership. Some outstanding authors in the area are: Robbins, (1999); Kast and Rosenzweig (2000); Cásares (2000) and Hughes et al. (1999).

The leadership that this study covers is by means of which it influences and inspires others to achieve the desired objectives. In the small construction businesses of Puebla this kind of leadership is presumed to be exerted by the owner, pursuant to his/her position inside the power structure. In its broader meaning, organizational leadership is defined as, according to De la Cerda & Núñez (1998): the process of directing, guiding or influencing the work behavior and the job performance through the exercise of authority. The specific characteristics of leadership are associated with culture, the personality of the leader, the type of work, and the characteristics of the followers, the subordinates-collaborators, technology and many other variables.

According to Kotter (1999), leadership is the process of moving a group in a certain direction by, usually non-coercive means. Effective leadership is the one that produces movements aimed at the long term interests of the group. According to Etzioni (1965), leadership is a special form of power that involves skill, based on the personal qualities of a leader, to obtain the voluntary subordination by his/her followers in a wide range of issues. He distinguishes leadership from that of the power concept, in which leadership's influence resides, i.e., a preference shift, while power only implies that the preferences of subordinates are put aside. Leadership involves what a person does above and beyond the basic

requirements of one's job. It takes persuasion of individuals, innovation of ideas, and decision-making to make leadership different from merely holding power.

# **Leadership Theories**

Several authors developed theories on leadership, which can be classified into three main groups. Each has different approaches and features as presented below. The theory of personality traits is the oldest on the study of leadership since its origins date back to the 1920s. Considering that a trait is a quality or distinctive feature of personality, this theory takes this concept and proposes that there are features of personality that distinguish it from others. Therefore it seeks characteristics like personality, social, physical and intellectual which differentiate leaders from non-leading people, such as: ambition, energy, the desire to be a leader, honesty and integrity, self-confidence, intelligence, judgment, common sense, a motivating personality and appropriate knowledge for the position, Krieger (2001). We infer that a leader is something superior, gifted with skills out of the ordinary. But this theory does not take into account the enormous influence of subordinates, and that not all managers have these features. Besides, the different internal and external situations that affect organizations are reflected in difficulties that sometimes are impossible to predict. This theory, when considering aspects linked only with personality, is no longer credible, though it is important to note that even when personal characteristics may not be uniform to be a good leader, these are important and must not be discarded at the time of studying them.

Behavioral theories on leadership styles focus on the behavior of managers and analyses what they do and how they behave in the performance of their duties. While the theory of traits tries to explain leadership on the basis of what being a leader is, the behavioral one explains it based on what a leader does. This theory attempts to explain leadership by means of the styles to exert authority without taking into account the characteristics of the personality. It references the following three styles of behavior: a) Authoritarian corresponds to the leader who, instinctively, tends to focus the authority; it imposes its ways towards work, it makes unilateral decisions and limits the participation of collaborators; b) Democratic corresponds to the leader who usually involves subordinates in the decision-making, it delegates authority, encourages participation to decide how to work, and uses feedback as an element of personal growth; c) Liberal (*Laissez-faire*) corresponds to the leader who, in general, gives collaborators full freedom to make decisions and to perform work in the manner which all members deem more convenient, Krieger (2001).

Situational Leadership Theories as introduced by Richard Hall, (1996) are also known as contingency theories. This theory attempts to explain the behavior of leaders more broadly. Contingency theory provides the most effective diagnosis of complex situations and increases the likelihood of appropriate actions to be taken. This approach argues that the most appropriate leadership style depends on an analysis of the nature of the situation that a leader faces, and the identification of the key factors of the situation. This theory assumes the point of view that the series of conditions at the time (the situation) defines by whom and in what manner leadership will be exerted. It also points out that, under a certain situation, an individual will emerge as a leader; in another situation, another person will, depending on the domain of the context that the person who becomes responsible has. Likewise, there is evidence indicating that the specific characteristics that characterize leadership behavior vary according to the situation.

For Siliceo et al., (2000) leaders in organizations must comply with the following tasks and basic challenges: 1) create a vision, share it with everyone and follow it. Vision is a long-term image of what can and should be achieved. 2) Define the mission and code of values of the organization; systematically communicate and reinforce it with congruent behavior by all the members of the organization. 3) Identify, enrich and channel the emotional and intellectual capital of the company based on high results of quality and competitiveness. 4) Manage change, all managers must become agents of change. 5) Give high priority to education, training and development of all staff. 6) Create and maintain a process of continuous improvement. 7) Create transparency in objectives, responsibility and functions of the staff.

Hambirk and Mason (1984), theory of higher echelons postulates that the strategic choices and the performance of the organization are predetermined by the senior management team, as well as, in a context of limited rationality, the cognitive base and the values of the senior management limit the field of vision, influencing selective perception, interpretation, and as a result, the choice of strategy. They claim that the actions and results of a company are the reflection of the values and characteristics of senior management. Under this premise the Upper Echelons Theory is developed, which proposes that managers make strategic decisions on the basis of their cognition and values. Top management decisions depend on managers' perceptions of their environment, training, experience and personal values.

# Organizational Effectiveness

Models of organizational effectiveness are defined in a different way. The resource-system model developed by Seashoe and Yuchtman, quoted by Hall (1996), defines effectiveness of an organization as the ability to exploit the environment when acquiring scarce or valuable resources to support its operation. Whereas the goals model proposed by Etzioni defines effectiveness as the degree to which an organization reaches its goals, pointing out that complexity arises when one understands that most organizations have multiple goals (Hall, 1996). As March and Sutton (1997) note: To explain variation in performance or effectiveness is one of the most prevailing issues in the study of organizational performance.

Gibson L. James et al. (1999), points out managers, and those who are interested in knowing if the organizations operate efficiently, can focus only on one or on the three perspectives of efficiency: individual effectiveness, group effectiveness and organizational effectiveness. The author emphasizes the performance of the tasks of specific employees or members of the company. The tasks are part of the jobs or positions in the company. Managers constantly evaluate individual effectiveness through evaluation processes of execution of tasks in order to determine who should receive salary increases, promotions and other types of recognition provided by the company. In general, employees work in groups, so it is necessary to have another perspective of effectiveness: the group effectiveness. Sometimes group effectiveness means just the sum of all efforts by all the members.

# The Small Business

The Small Business Administration (SBA), cited by Guillén and Pomar, (2005) defines small business (SB) as one possessed by the owner in full freedom, autonomously operated and which is not dominant in its type of business. There are many ways to classify organizations to determine their sizes. The most common are based on the number of workers and sales.

For the National Institute of Statistics and Geography and Informatics in Mexico (INEGI) the stratification used for companies in other sectors, such as Manufacture, Trade and Services, is based on the number of employed persons. It does not fit into the construction sector, mainly due to the high number of outsourced personnel, the significant variations in that number due to the part-time recruitment, and that it greatly depends on the economic cycles of the country, as well as on the varying stages of the jobs, assuming the following stratification of annual revenues reported by them, so that the ranges (thousands of dollars) are as presented in Table1.

A qualitative and simple way of classifying the SB is the Bolton Committee of Great Britain's in Suárez (2003), which is based on the following criteria: a) In economics terms, it has a relatively small portion of its market; b) in terms of property control, it is headed by their owners in a personalized way, leading to non-formal professionals; c) In terms of its independence, assuming it is not part of a consortium, so that the owners are fully responsible for its development.

Table 1: Ranges of Stratification for Construction Businesses

1		
Business	Lower limit	Upper limit
Micro	.0	12 912.9
Small	2 913.0	20 014.9
Medium	20 015.0	39 492.9
Large	39 493.0	70 766.
Giant	70 767.0	Or higher

Source: INEGI Key indicators of construction businesses

#### DATA AND METHODOLOGY

In this investigation documentary research was applied to sustain the literature review, by conceptualizing leadership and organizational effectiveness, as well as direct research by using a survey for the empirical study, Rojas Soriano (2008). For the collection of data, a questionnaire was used to determine the style of leadership described by the behavior theory (Laissez-faire (liberal), democratic and autocratic) that prevails in the small construction companies and its relationship with organizational effectiveness; an instrument was designed with 20 items on a Likert-scale (1-5).

Once having designed the questionnaire, it was necessary, before applying the survey, to pilot test it, which consisted of conducting some surveys on the segment of interest, or study group, in order to verify if the questionnaire had been properly prepared and to estimate the length of time for its application. Therefore, the questionnaire was first applied to 10 heads of small businesses. Some errors in semantics and interpretation were found and corrected immediately. The reliability of the instrument was measured. For such purpose we calculated Cronbach Alpha using the SPSS statistical program, of 0.884 which is considered very reliable.

The population, object of study, was 169 small-business construction companies in the State of Puebla, Mexico, according to the National Institute of Statistics Geography and Informatics (INEGI). The formula used to determine the sample size was:

$$n = \frac{k^2 pqN}{e^2(N-1) + K^2 pq} \tag{1}$$

### Where:

N = is the size of the population, or universe, 169 small businesses.

k = is the level of trust that was assigned. It is 90% = 1.96

e = the assigned sampling error of 10 %

p = probability of occurrence of the event 50 %

q = probability of non-occurrence of the event 50 %

n = sample size

$$n = \frac{1.65^{2}(0.50)(0.50)169}{0.10^{2}(169-1)+1.65^{2}(0.50)(0.50)} = 49$$

The sample involved 49 small construction businesses of the State of Puebla. The small businesses, which formed part of the sample, were selected randomly, taken from the directory of the Mexican Entrepreneurial Information System (SIEM, initials in Spanish). The surveys were applied from May to July 2012. Table 2 provides a summary of the sample.

Table 2: Data Sheet

Features	Survey
Universe	169 small businesses
Field of study	Puebla
Sampling unit	Small businesses (11-50 workers)
Sample size	49 small businesses
Organizational actors	Managers & property owners representing the company
Number of questionnaires applied to managers, owners.	49
Date of application	May-July 2012

This Figure shows the universe, the sampling unit, the organizational actors and the size of the sample for the research.

#### **EMPIRICAL RESULTS**

The SPSS statistical program was used to obtain results in this study. With this, some descriptive measures were calculated, such as the mean and the standard deviation of the leadership variable, and the organizational effectiveness. Different statistical tests, such as the correlations between the variables and linear regressions were performed.

Table 3 shows that 6.1% of the 49 surveyed small businesses have operated for 1-5 years; 28.6% have operated for 6-10 years; 34.7% have operated for 11-15 years; 26.5% have operated for 16-20 years, and 4.1% have operated for over 20 years. Small construction businesses do not prevail very long. Their average life span suggests that they operate in a highly volatile market. The main line of business of the small construction companies surveyed are thirty-nine percent devoted to the building of single-family housing as their main line of business; 20% of them are devoted to public works; 16% manage and monitor the building of residential homes; 11% is devoted to urbanization; 9% to building multifamily housing and 5% are devoted to installations and maintenance.

Table 3: Years in Operation

Years in Operation	No. of Companies	%	
1-5	3	6.1	
6-10	14	28.6	
11-15	17	34.7	
16-20	13	26.5	
21-25	2	4.1	

This table shows how many years the small construction businesses of Puebla have being operating. The average life of the business is 12 years.

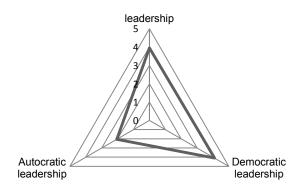
The results for leadership and organizational effectiveness variable analysis are presented in Table 4 and in Figure 1. The variables have different means and standard deviations greater than 0, indicating that respondents were consistent among themselves and had the sufficient self-criticism to ponder their answers. Thus, the prevailing leadership is democratic, with a 4.10 mean and standard deviation of 0.887. Autocratic leadership has the lowest mean with 2.05 and highest dispersion of 1.050.

Table 4: Styles of Leadership

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation
Laissez-faire (Liberal) leadership	3.95	0.887
Democratic leadership	4.10	0.641
Autocratic leadership	2.05	1.050

This table shows the Mean and the Standard Deviation of leadership styles: Laissez-faire, democratic and autocratic styles.

Figure1: Leadership Style



This figure shows the Laissez-faire (liberal), democratic and autocratic types of leadership of the owners and or managers of the small construction businesses in Puebla.

The Pearson correlation coefficient was used for the analysis of the correlations of effectiveness and leadership variables, as shown in Figure 1. There is a strong positive correlation between effectiveness and democratic leadership of 0.739. Table 5 shows liberal leadership also contributes to the achievement of effectiveness with a 0.637 correlation, and the autocratic leadership has a lower negative correlation of -0.145.

Table 5: Pearson's Correlations

	Effectiveness	Laissez-Faire Leadership	Democratic Leadership	Autocratic Leadership
Effectiveness	1	0.637	0.739	-0.145
Laissez-faire (Liberal) Leadership	0.637	1	0.314	-0.135
Democratic Leadership	0.739	0.314	1	-0.008
Autocratic Leadership	-0.145	-0.135	-0.008	1

This Figure shows the Pearson correlation among the dependent variables: Effectiveness; and the independent variable: Leadership Styles (Laissez-faire (liberal), democratic and autocratic).

Linear regression helps define the relationship among dependent variables and independent variables. When applying linear regression between effectiveness, the dependent variable, and leadership, the independent variable, (Laissez-faire (liberal), democratic and authoritarian), the following multiple linear regression model was applied:

Organizational effectiveness = 
$$a + b_1X_1 + b_3X_2 + b_3X_3 + \xi$$
 (2)

Where:

X 1 = Laissez-faire leadership

X 2 = Democratic leadership

X 2 = Autocratic leadership

Substituting the calculated values in Table 6 into the previous formula, gives the following model:

 $Organizational\ effectiveness\ =\ -0.337+0.430X_1+\ 0.698\,X_2\ +(-0.057)X_3+\ 0.514$ 

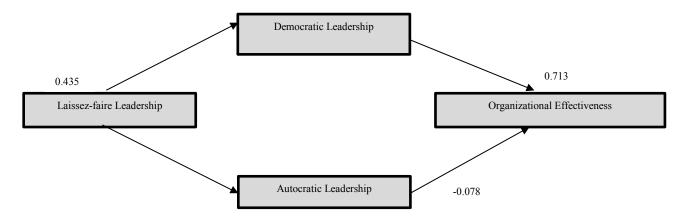
Table 6: Coefficients

Model	Non-stand	ardized Coefficients Typical Error	Standardized Coefficients Beta	t	Sig.	Adjusted R Square	Typical Error Estimation
(Constant)	-0.337	0.747		0.914	0.658		
Laissez-faire leadership	0.430	0.135	0.438	3.195	0.006		
Democratic leadership	0.698	0.158	0.601	4.422	0.000		
Autocratic leadership	-0.057	0.092	-0.081	-0.620	0.544		
Adjusted R square						0.691	
Typical error estimation							0.514

This table shows the coefficients of the independent variables: Laissez-faire leadership, democratic leadership and autocratic leadership.

The results show that: 1. There is a positive and significant correlation between effectiveness, and democratic and Laissez-faire (liberal) leadership. 2. There is a negative correlation between effectiveness and autocratic leadership. 3. The regression model used explains 69.1% of the variations in effectiveness. Furthermore, there is no statistical evidence of omitted variables (constant test = 0.914). 4. Laissez-faire (liberal) leadership is a variable that positively influences the explanation of effectiveness, t = 3.195. 5. The democratic leadership is a variable that positively influences the explanation of effectiveness, t = 4.442 and 6. Autocratic leadership is a variable that negatively influences the explanation of effectiveness, t = 0.620. Therefore, in this research, organizational effectiveness is explained by the direct effects of Laissez-faire leadership style and of democratic leadership style and, indirectly, by an autocratic leadership style, as can be seen in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Relationship among Organizational Effectiveness and Leadership Types



This figure shows the relationship among effectiveness and democratic, laissez-faire, and autocratic leadership styles.

### **CONCLUSIONS**

Finally, in order to conclude this section, we discuss the main theoretical and empirical implications arising from this research. The goal of the research posed at the beginning of the investigation was to describe how leadership styles, in the small construction businesses located in Puebla, are perceived, along with how to determine their relationships with the organizational effectiveness and which was successfully achieved as one can observe in the results of the research above. For this purpose a documentary investigation was carried out, as well as the collection of data of an empirical study with a sampling of 49 small businesses through the application of a questionnaire with the purpose of determining the leadership style that the behaviorist theory points out (liberal, democratic and autocratic) that prevail in the small construction businesses, and their relationship to organizational effectiveness, using an instrument of 20 items on a Likert-scale (1-5).

From the results we note 1.) There is a positive and significant correlation between effectiveness and democratic leadership and liberal leadership in the small construction businesses in Puebla and 2.) There is a negative correlation between effectiveness and autocratic leadership in the small construction businesses in Puebla.

Referring to the democratic and liberal leadership styles, we note these impact the small construction businesses, which is consistent with the state of the art (Pedraja-Rejas and Rodriguez-Ponce 2004; Rodriguez, 2010). In this context, leadership styles, as independent variables, impact the effectiveness (the dependent variable) of the small construction businesses, which coincides with the Upper Echelons Theory, Hambirk and Mason (1984), who postulated that the strategic choices and the performance of the organizations are determined by the senior management team.

According to the results we would expect that the rest of the firms execute a democratic leadership style, which implies: a) delegation of authority; b) involvement of subordinates in decision making; (c) support of subordinates. The authors agree with Silíceos et al. (2000), that leaders of small construction businesses must comply with the following tasks: create the vision and define the mission and the company code of values; be clear about their objectives, responsibilities and tasks of the personnel; strengthen teamwork, human processes and the work culture, and systematically improve the organizational climate. From the results we assume that these tasks are achieved by asking questions, asking for suggestions, consulting, requesting, seeking ideas, etc., from the employees or at least from those who are involved in the direction of the businesses.

Likewise leadership influences the organizational effectiveness of the small construction businesses. There are other factors such as organizational climate, organizational culture, among others, which would be the subject of another research. Finally, future investigation could resume this research to address some items that are pending to be reviewed, such as the types of prevailing culture in the conglomerate of micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) and in each specific sector of activity. Or rather, the relationship that was studied in this research could be reviewed and discussed, by taking each sector as a unit of analysis, or the size of the companies (micro, small or medium); as well as by adding control variables such as the gender of the leaders.

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