Situational Leadership Role in Enhancing Organizational Performance during Covid 19 Pandemic among a Sample of Kuwaiti SMEs

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Abstract:- COVID 19 hit the world during the end of 2019 and beginnings of 2020, the virus was deadly and fast to spread which had caused a lot of disturbance among country in terms how to avoid such crisis and make sure to get out of it with the least losses possible. The current research sought to examine the impact of situational leadership theory and its dimensions (directive, supportive and delegative) in enhancing organizational performance during COVID 19 pandemic, and how this type of leadership managed to preserve the best performance of many organizations. Depending on quantitative approach and utilizing an electronic questionnaire, researcher adopted a sample of (344) managers and leaders within Kuwaiti SMEs during the fiscal year 2021-2022. SPSS was used to analyze collected primary data, and outcomes of analysis indicated that situational leadership helped a lot during COVID 19 breakout as it saved and preserved an acceptable level of performance among SMEs, in addition to that, it was seen that the directive leadership style of situational leadership theory was the most influential in running a good and acceptable level of performance during the pandemic.
Based on such results, current research recommended the need to increase attention to the fact that one of the defects of situational leadership is its failure to identify the leadership skills required for certain situations, and thus it is necessary to identify these skills and work on developing them among individuals.

Keywords: COVID 19, Pandemic, Situational Theory, Leadership, Delegation, Collaborative, Directive, SMEs, Quarantine, Lockdown, Performance.

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1 Introduction

With the end of the 40s of the last century, the structural design of leadership and its relationship to human behavior became an essential area of study, and that the artificial distinction between formal and informal organizations was treated less than treating them in an integrated and non-separate manner. Attention has shifted towards efforts to understand the multiple roles of leadership and to identify areas through which management can effectively intervene to improve the performance of employees [1], [19].

The subsequent stage of human relations moved the leadership theory to a modern stage, which was characterized by intellectual diversity in modern leadership concepts and the information revolution related to an expanding field of the leadership phenomenon [2]. Among the most influential branches of the modern approach to leadership thought are the school of decision-making, organizational psychology, open systems theory, situational theory and the school of quantitative management.

1.1 Problem Statement

[3] Leadership is the cornerstone of an organization and especially in hard time where the organization faces sudden and unpredicted events that may negatively impact its performance. [4] and [5] argued that during a crisis, leaders do not have to apply a previously-prepared plan, on the contrary, they have to prepare ideologies and mindsets that are able to cope with changes and support their approach to manage change resistance.

From that point, current research sought to examine the impact and role of situational leadership on preserving a good organizational performance during COVID 19 pandemic among Kuwaiti SMEs. The study launched its idea from that fact that many organizations managed to preserve a good level of performance through the pandemic which helped in supporting its internal operation and protect its external share of the market.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Situational Leadership

It was seen through literature that there are many leadership strategies and styles a leader can adopt so as to be more leading in the work environment; among these strategies and styles is the situational leadership [5]. This type of leadership style suggests that a good leader is a person who is able to adjust their attitudes, behavior, feelings and thoughts in accordance with the current and present situation. Situational leadership – [6] - refers to a leadership approach in which the leader adopts and copes their leadership ideologies in order to support and uphold any emergent situation in the organization, it doesn't have to be built on certain set of skills, traits and characteristics, but rather the ability of the leader to evaluate the situation and adopt a leadership style that mostly suits the present incident [7]. From another perspective, situational leadership may also be seen in connection to Situational Leadership Theory which supports leaders to carry out evaluations to their team members within the work place [8]; [1]; [2].

Situational leadership is basically built on the fact that a good leadership has the ability to shift from one style to another as a response to changing situations [9]. In other words, it is based on leader's ability to cope with different situations and circumstances [10].

2.2 Situational Leadership Theory

Situational theory is said to be seen as the most effective leadership theories, it launches from the fact that there is no set of skills, traits or behavior that a leader must have in order to be successful, it is more dependent on a leader's ability to choose what mostly suits the situation that is happening[11]. Based on that, being a situational leader means to gather all needed information regarding the work environment, situation, incidents and team members, and choose the best practices that may help in adhering the most suitable decision making in accordance with collected data [12].

Situational leadership theory is one of the most important leadership theories that exist in the business world from an applied and academic point of view. The academic and scientist Fiedler is the first to touch on the concept of situational leadership, which contributed to imparting scientific and practical value to the concepts of leadership and contemporary management thought [13].

Situational leadership theory was distinguished for Fiedler as the type of leadership that is flexible and dynamic, and it is the type of leadership that adapts to continuous changes and demands to find solutions to deal with these changes according to their different positions [14]. [15] indicates that Fiedler divided leadership positions according to the situational leadership theory into two types as follows:

- Natural changes

It is usually the result of various natural developments on the business environment in all its dimensions and requires effective leadership capable of keeping pace with changes in order to maintain the competitive position of the organization

- Crises

And it is that which occurs as a result of the organization's exposure to a crisis, which requires the presence of a situational leadership capable of helping the organization overcome the crisis and get out of it with minimal losses.

2.3 Traits of Situational Leaders

Being a situational leadership means to have the ability to shift and change in a way that responds to the needs of work environment and incidents taking place in the organization [16]. Based on that, it can be said that situational leaders has to be flexible lean and resilient in order to assist and be able to take the right decision in order to be successful [17]. Other traits of a situational leader that helps with changing and shifting are [18; 19]:

- Directive

Being directive and having the ability to supervise and lead towards the main goal is a very important aspect of a situational leader.

- Flexible

A situational leader must be lean, flexible and resilient, they must have the ability to shift and change their personality in a way that suits the current situation.

- Delegative

A situational leader must have the ability to recognize their team members and classify them according to their ability to complete tasks alone, this can lead to delegation in which a leader can adopt so as to delegate asks and save more time.

- Regular coaching

A situational leader must have the quality of a tutor; they have to be able to teach other how to complete tasks in a mature way.

- Courage

Unpredictable situations require a leader who is courageous enough to take extreme measurements and risks. This can only happen if a situational leader is risky and welling to try new things.
- Clear vision

Choosing the most effective approach in leading requires the leader to fully and clearly understand the goal, the way the team in heading and the main aim that the team has to achieve.
- Modesty

A situational leader has to be modest, a leader is not necessarily a person who knows everything, it is a good thing that a situational leader has the ability to exploit all skills of their team and adapt these skills to the needed goal.

2.4 Leadership during COVID 19 Pandemic

It can't be denied that COVID 19 imposed a huge level of panic among many working sectors around the world, this managed to change the environment in which leaders work due to the loss in human souls, in addition to the changes that accompanied lockdowns and quarantines [28]. In that sense, the importance of situational leadership appeared as a response to the breakout of the virus and an answer to what the next more has to be [20].

[21] Leaders realizing that they are facing a crisis, they had to more into a situation where the work wheel has to continue, especially in its beginning, which almost resembled the outbreak of the "SARS" epidemic between 2002-2003, and now the Corona virus pandemic [22]. As for [23], it was emphasized that the leaders would not have been able to overcome the crisis had it not been for their first recognition of its occurrence, and their attempt to deal with it in all available ways and means, including non-traditional and non-routine ways of driving.

The leaders' interaction during the COVID 19 pandemic was represented by following extreme measures that was able to face the new situation of lockdown and quarantine in addition to the new rules and regulations regarding remote working and the avoidance of gathering [24]; [25].

2.5 Organizational Performance

Performance represents the organization's ability to reach its goals set in its strategy, i.e. the organization's ability to reach long-term goals [30]. Organizational performance is seen as the outcome of the organization's ability to work on the optimal and best utilization of the resources it has in order to be directed towards achieving the goal [31].

The distinctive capabilities of the organization, the optimal use of its resources, is what determines the efficiency of the organization in its performance, [30, 33] in general, there are two types of performance, which are financial performance, and non-financial performance, in relation to financial performance. To the organization's ability to achieve the required financial performance, as the organization that enjoys high financial performance is more able than others to exploit the opportunities that are available to it in facing the challenges it faces in its external work environment, as it is subjected to less pressure from stakeholders.

As for non-financial performance, it refers to non-financial indicators such as market share, product development, internal and external customer satisfaction, in addition to other measures that are related to the organization's level of performance [34, 32].

3 Hypotheses Development

[26] aimed to show the impact of situational leadership on the performance of working individuals. By adopting the quantitative approach, a questionnaire was distributed to a sample of workers in one of the Kenyan organizations, and the study came to the conclusion that the situational leadership contributed to improving the performance of working individuals through only one aspect, which is the incentive, whereby changing the behavior and traits of the leader to confront An exceptional circumstance that preserves employees in order to develop their performance during that period only and not their general performance.

[3] indicated in their study that the situational leadership proved its worth during the crisis period and achieved the goal that the organization aspires to, which is to maintain performance during the crisis period. It also helped in increasing the confidence of working individuals in their skills and abilities, in addition to improving the foundations of conflict resolution and maintaining a constructive work environment in the organization. In addition, situational leadership helped mitigate the severity of the crisis through a situational leader who understands the needs of others and adjusts his leadership approach to suit the current situation.

Study by [4] aimed to show the impact of situational leadership on leadership style, work discipline, and work motives within Bank Syariah Indonesia Rantauprapat. Through the quantitative approach and the application of a questionnaire to a

sample of the bank's employees, the study proved that the situational leadership contributed to changing the leadership style of leaders and maintaining a high level of organizational performance, and the evidence for this was the bank's follow-up of a number of steps that maintained business growth, such as opening Electronic banking channels, changing the work system to become remote in connection with the bank's website, and the commitment of customer service to provide answers to customers' inquiries around the clock.

Study by [5] aimed to identify situational leadership and its emergence during the period of the COVID 19 pandemic, which led to situational leadership being the new style of natural leadership. By adopting the qualitative approach, samples of school principals were interviewed within Bulakan Prefecture in Japan during the year 2020-2021. The study proved that the situational (peripheral) leadership was able to strengthen the individual's chance of remaining committed to the team, and it also helped the leader to be a vigilant decision maker and planner.

Based on above hypotheses development, following model described the relationship between variables of study:
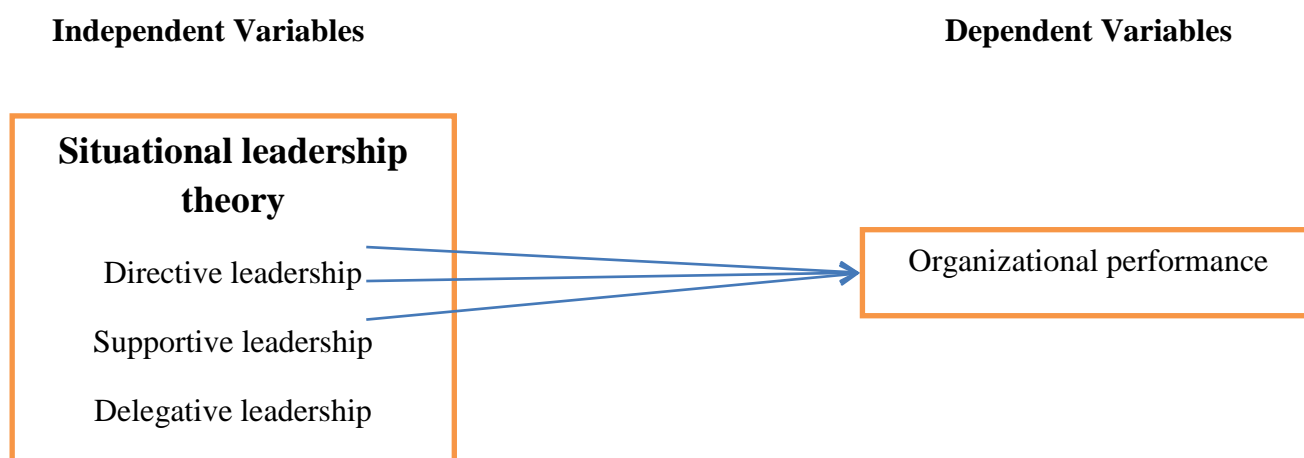
Independent Variables

Dependent Variables

Fig 1: "The Study Model"

From above model, following hypotheses were extracted:

Main Hypothesis:

H0: Situational leadership theory doesn't have a statistically significant influence on organizational performance during COVID 19 pandemic in Kuwaiti SMEs

Sub-Hypotheses:

H01: Directive leadership doesn't have a statistically significant influence on organizational performance during COVID 19 pandemic in Kuwaiti SMEs

H02: Supportive leadership doesn't have a statistically significant influence on organizational performance during COVID 19 pandemic in Kuwaiti SMEs

H03: Delegative leadership doesn't have a statistically significant influence on organizational performance during COVID 19 pandemic in Kuwaiti SMEs.

4 Methods

4.1 Methodological Approach
The current study appeared as an analytical descriptive study that adopted the quantitative approach and relied on numerical primary data, which are later translated into results commensurate with the phenomenon under study.

4.2 Study Tool
The questionnaire was adopted as a tool for the study, where the questionnaire was built on the five-point Likert scale (1) Strongly disagree; (2) Disagree; (3) Neither agree nor disagree; (4) Agree; (5) Strongly agree, using previous studies that dealt with the research idea or part of it, and included [3]; [27]; [26]. The questionnaire consisted - in its latest version - of (27) paragraphs, and it was distributed electronically through Google Forms in line with health recommendations regarding COVID 19 and the need for physical distancing.

4.3 Population and Sampling

The study population consisted of all owners of SMEs in Kuwait, which gathered 33.000 projects till 2022. A simple random sample of (384) individuals was selected, and after applying the study tool, (344) correctly filled out questionnaires were obtained and can be analyzed, which indicated that the response rate was (89.5%), which is statistically acceptable.

4.4 Statistical Processing

SPSS was used to analyze the primary data and reach the results of study, Cronbach alpha was used to test the consistency of the scale, alpha value = 0.951 was accepted since it was greater than accepted value 0.60 [29]. Other statistical tests included:
- Mean and percentages
- Frequency and standard deviation
- Multiple regression

5 Results and Discussion

5.1 Demographic Results

Analyzing demographics of study sample, table 1 below indicated that majority of respondents were males forming 74.1% of total sample, who were within age range of more than 48 years old forming 42.4% of the sample. Results also indicated that educational level of respondents was mostly BA degree 51.2% and with an experience of more than 17 years forming 57% of total sample.

Table 1. Demographics

	f	%
Gender		
Male	255	74.1
Female	89	25.9
Age		
30-35	24	7.0
36-41	62	18.0
42-47	112	32.6
+48	146	42.4
Educational Level		
BA	176	51.2
MA	87	25.3
PhD	81	23.5
Experience		
2-6	48	14.0
7-11	24	7.0
12-16	76	22.1
+17	196	57.0
Total	**344**	**100.0**

Statements of questionnaire were analyzed as according to respondents' answers to them. It was seen that all statements were well-received as they all scored higher than mean of scale 3.00. However, the highest mean was scored by statement articulated "Supportive leaders were more able to preserve good performance in their teams" scoring 4.52/5.00 compared to the least score by the statement articulated "Situational leader has staff report back after completing each step of their work" scoring 3.50/5.00 but still positive from a statistical point of view. Going deeper into analysis, and looking at results of study variables, it was seen that the dependent variable (organizational performance) scored the highest mean 4.20/5.00 compared to directive leadership which scored the lowest mean of 3.79/5.00 but still statistically positive.

Table 2. Questionnaire Analysis

	Mean	Std. Deviation
The leader demonstrates each task involved in doing the job.	3.2762	.95796
Situational leadership asks staff to think ahead and develop long-term plans for their areas.	4.0000	.84688
The leader sets down performance standards for each aspect of staff's job.	4.0000	.84688
Situational leader always explain the benefits of achieving their work goals to staff.	4.2180	.96082
Situational leader has staff report back after completing each step of their work.	3.5000	.69568
Directive Leadership	**3.7988**	**.55149**
Periodic meetings were held to show support for organization policy and mission.	3.6483	1.15104
The leader recognizes staff's achievements with encouragement and support.	4.2267	.62109
Situational leader always rotate the role of team briefer among the staff.	4.4070	.67228
The leader always checks on the team and makes sure they are on the right path	4.1105	1.09571
The leader meets with staff regularly to discuss their needs.	3.6948	.83814
Supportive Leadership	**4.0174**	**.64770**
Leadership provides staff with clear responsibilities and allows them to decide how to accomplish them.	3.7471	.75399
Leadership makes sure staff is aware of, and understands, all organizational policies and procedures.	3.9826	.93193
The leaders discuss any organizational or policy changes with staff prior to taking action.	3.7849	.90041
A situational leader expects staff to create their own goals and objectives and submit them to them in finished form.	4.1512	.82267
A situational leader always empower their teams into being more productive	3.5116	.79347
Delegative Leadership	**3.8355**	**.75130**
The pandemic caused a lot of disturbance and unstable environment for organizations	4.1221	.76145
Immediate actions were needed at the beginning of the pandemic from leaders and managers	4.3576	.83826
It was hard to preserve a good performance during distance working	3.8808	.58183
Leaders with good traits were able to manage the situation during the pandemic hit	4.1221	.76145
Shifting from real to virtual work space needed a good leader to manage	3.9942	.84341
Employees' performance was the first to be influenced by the pandemic	3.6570	.64234
Leaders with good situational thinking appeared to handle the problem in a good way	4.2035	.94415
Communications between leaders and staff helped in preserving a good performance	4.4564	.88944
Delegative leaders were more able to preserve good performance in their teams	4.4360	.94544
Supportive leaders were more able to preserve good performance in their teams	4.5262	.76315
Directive leaders were more able to preserve good performance in their teams	4.3750	1.06169
In general, leaders were ready to handle the stick during COVID 19 pandemic and preserved good performance	4.3343	1.09672
Organizational performance	**4.2054**	**.63633**

5.2 Hypotheses Testing

Table 3. Hypotheses Testing
Coefficients

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients				
		B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.	R	R Square
1	(Constant)	.608	.142		4.267	.000	.816[a]	.666
	Directive	.399	.058	.346	6.903	.000		
	Supportive	.306	.050	.312	6.185	.000		
	Delegative	.221	.036	.261	6.159	.000		

Multiple regression was performed to test the hypothesis and r = 0.816 was determined to be significant, indicating a strong link between the independent and dependent variables. Additionally, F = 226.048 was statistically significant at the 0.05 level, implying that the above hypothesis was correct, namely that Situational leadership theory had a statistically significant influence on organizational performance during COVID 19 pandemic in Kuwaiti SMEs. Additionally, the t values for each variable are significant at the 0.05 level, which means:

- Directive leadership had a statistically significant influence on organizational performance during COVID 19 pandemic in Kuwaiti SMEs , since beta = 0.346 is significant at 0.05 level
- Supportive leadership had a statistically significant influence on organizational performance during COVID 19 pandemic in Kuwaiti SMEs since beta = 0.312 is significant at 0.05 level
- Delegative leadership had a statistically significant influence on organizational performance during COVID 19 pandemic in Kuwaiti SMEs since beta = 0.261 is significant at 0.05 level

The current study aimed at examining how situational leadership managed to preserve good performance of Kuwaiti SMEs during COVID 19 pandemic. Reaching the aim was done depending on a quantitative approach, and a questionnaire which was distributed on a sample of (344) respondents among SMEs in Kuwait. SPSS was used and results of study reached following findings:

- Respondents appeared to have high level of awareness regarding situational leadership as they were able to respond to statement of study in the best way possible and with high level of knowledge and ability to determine their answers

Based on the previous literature, and in addition to the results of the above study, the study proved that situational leadership was able to maintain organizational performance during the pandemic period, because the dynamic behaviors and continuous changes in the nature of leadership in the theory of situational leadership contributed significantly to adding A lot of flexibility on the leadership, which made it smooth and able to control when the crisis entered. In addition, the situational leadership facilitated the way for organizations with all their teams to adapt to the pace of the escalating changes from the beginning of the pandemic to its climax, which was represented by complete closures and remote work, and this is consistent with [26]and [3].

On the other hand, the situational leadership was able to adapt and maintain a good level of performance because the leaders of the situational leadership style had the flexibility to adapt to any new crises in the organization, which is usually coupled with the leaders having a different style of dealing with different situations with different skills than the employees. In addition, the study has proven through its independent variables that situational leadership increases productivity because of the different characteristics and behaviors of leaders in proportion to the different new situations which agreed with what came along with [4].

In general, situational leadership is considered one of the most appropriate types of leadership used in exceptional circumstances and situations as it is able to overcome ambiguity and uncertainty, in addition to being oriented towards relationships with the team in order for the situation leader to cooperate with team members and encourage self-awareness by taking Responsible decision to support team members when needed.

6 Conclusion and Recommendations

Situational leadership is a people-oriented leadership style, so it is easy for the leader to involve the employees in his organizational aspirations to implement the company's vision smoothly and voluntarily, especially in exceptional cases and force majeure circumstances that occur suddenly and without prior warnings.

After conducting such a study of situational leadership and its importance for organizations in exceptional circumstances, the search for such leaders becomes imperative for every organization to deal with the difficult situations it faces. Therefore, situational leadership is an effective model for management in the modern business world, and in order for organizations to be leaders in this leadership style, they must learn the mechanism of adapting their leadership style by finding a balance between directing, delegating, supporting and strengthening the team, and a mediator must be found between meeting employee needs and mission requirements depending on the situation.

Based on results and discussion, current study recommended:

- The need to pay attention to the fact that one of the defects of situational leadership is its failure to identify the leadership skills required for certain situations, and thus it is necessary to identify these skills and work on developing them among individuals

- Before embarking on the adoption of situational leadership, the environment of the organization must be suitable for the application of this type of leadership. The appropriateness of the environment for situational leadership is represented in the presence of effective communication systems between leaders and subordinates, the ability to choose leaders with clear leadership skills, and that the organization's environment be more focused on Subordinates and their needs at work.

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Salah A. A. Alabduljader

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