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## Article

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## **Leadership and productivity in transition: employees' view in Serbia\***

**Mladen Pečujlija, Nedžad Azemović, Rešad Azemović, Đorđe Ćosić\*\***

Research is carried out on a sample of 300 employees in a company that went through the process of ownership change and became a shareholders' association. The study aims to find out the preferred pattern of leader's behaviour as a predictor of employees' productive behaviour. Obtained results suggest that it is essential for increased productivity that the employees show a high level of trust towards their leader but he should not hold high expectations of them. Production errors are influenced by leaders' readiness to provide assistance to the employees and his expectations of the employees. When it comes to production quality, leader's helpfulness and expectations have proved variables in their behaviour that directly influence production quality.

Diese Untersuchung wurde an einer Auswahl von 300 Angestellten in einer Firma durchgeführt, die den Inhaber wechselte und eine Aktiengesellschaft wurde. Die Studie untersucht, welches der von Angestellten bevorzugten Verhaltensmuster ihrer Führungskräfte einen direkten Einfluss auf ihre produktionsbezogenen Verhaltensweisen hat. Die erhaltenen Ergebnisse lassen vermuten, dass es essentiell wichtig für eine erhöhte Produktivität ist, dass die Angestellten ein hohes Maß an Vertrauen zu, aber keine hohen Erwartungen an ihre Vorgesetzten haben. Produktionsfehler werden durch die Bereitschaft der Führungskraft beeinflusst, ihren Angestellten zu helfen und von ihren Erwartungen an diese. Was die Produktionsqualität betrifft, haben sich Hilfsbereitschaft von Führungskräften und Erwartungen als Variablen erwiesen, die diese direkt beeinflussen

**Key words:** leadership, productivity, prediction, behaviour, estimation

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## Introduction

After the political changes in 5<sup>th</sup> October 2000, a so called transitional government was formed in Serbia which started the privatization of the approximately 500 best enterprises according to the law from 1997. On 12<sup>th</sup> February 2001 the Parliament passed the changes and amendments of the law on property transformation which temporarily stopped the privatization of new enterprises. The Serbian government in 2001 chose a somewhat modified model of classical sales focusing on corporate management in the post-privatization period and opted to sell the majority of shares (70%) of the social/state capital to a single investor, thereby allowing the single majority owner to take the full control over the enterprise in order to facilitate rather complex process of rearrangement of enterprises in the post-privatization period. The law on privatization also specified free distribution of equities, this time to the employees and citizens as well. Employees, former employees and pensioners of the subject had the right to acquire up to 30% of the equities in an enterprise sold at auction and up to 15% in the enterprise privatized by tender, while citizens could acquire not less than 15% of the subject's equities privatized by tender and of public companies with the majority of state owned capital. Hence, this law is more righteous than the previous one, and it enables all to acquire equities instead of enabling only the employees. The individual right remains the same: €200 for every year of service. Two methods of sale are granted by the law: auction, i.e. bidding for smaller and weaker enterprises and tender for the larger ones. Up to 70% of the non-privatized capital is sold (the rest of 30% distributed to the employees, former employees, pensioners and citizens). Methods of sale exclude real bargain between the state and buyer, since it is too risky and enables corruption. Weak enterprises are either restructured or bankrupted. To provide maximum transparency of the process, i.e. to eliminate corruption and other irregularities in privatization, exclusively competitive methods are used. The most important novelty is the right of the Privatization Agency to start the process of sale of the social capital in all enterprises, thereby abrogating voluntary privatization in the Republic of Serbia and enabling privatization to come to its end. The law on privatization provides that 5% of every sale is directed towards future compensation of nationalized property, thereby implicitly recognizing the claims of former owners, but the law itself fails to prejudge the solutions from the law on denationalization. Enterprises without real chances to find a buyer in their present condition will be restructured to prepare them for privatization. There are two main ideas how to help them out: the first is to divide some of them into several enterprises and to sell the attractive ones, and those without buyers to bankrupt; the second is to write off a part of the debt towards the state and thus, raise their value above zero. The Serbian Government adapted the changes to the Law on privatization that identified 31 December 2008 as the deadline for privatization of social enterprises. By this time invitation for tender or auctioneer sale had been

announced for the rest of enterprises in social ownership. Requirements to participate in the privatization procedure were tightened since individuals convicted for criminal acts or those who were under investigation for criminal acts were forbidden to compete for buying the capital or property of enterprises. Due to the changes in the law on privatization, the preparation procedure for privatization is simplified, enabling the distribution of extra incomes from the sale of property of the restructuring enterprises to the employees, after the creditors were paid off. Employees are also better protected after privatization. In the future, it will be possible to sell enterprises originating from the property of enterprises from the former SFRJ, and the money earned from sale will go to a separate account. The creditors are protected by prohibition of debt collection from state creditors in the tender and auction procedure in order to avoid confiscation and public sale of the property. It is foreseen that after the cessation of agreement in the procedure of tender sales, the runner-up bidder is invited for negotiations. In the case of cessation of agreement, state interests will be better protected since the buyer will not be able to increase the value of his capital by investments and recapitalization. There are little chances for the period of wealth to arrive immediately after the system changes, since privatization is one of the transition process strongholds and that is a fact that should be accepted.

Thus, the issue of leadership has become an important factor in this process. Researchers in Slovenia find out that there is an important connection between trust and leadership style in their companies (Kovac et al. 2010). According to Biloslavo between the factors of choice of change methods and deficiencies in the implementation of change taken as a whole, there is no direct link in transition economies (Biloslavo et al. 2009). Zagorsek found out that transformational leadership has a strong impact on organizational learning in transitional economies (Zagorsek et al. 2009). Borgulya showed in her research that there is diversity in attitudes towards superiors in the transition countries (Borgulya et al. 2008). All these results directly and indirectly show that the matter of leadership is very important in transitional economies.

The company where the research was carried out started back in 1963, when the first facility named “Standard” was established. The company produces construction bricks (blocks, facade bricks, interior blocks, etc.). According to the law on privatization, the company continued operating as a shareholders’ association until 1993. So far, the company has grown into a major business complex, so today it represents a company that exceeds Serbian borders in its production, which is reflected in exports into neighbouring countries. Such a high percentage of exploitation of production facilities is supported by good organization, expertise and training of employees.

The goal of the research was to check a commonplace view that people-oriented organizations have a positive impact on motivation, and thus on effectiveness of the organization. People-oriented organizations gain an advantage which results

in leader's loyalty, assuming there are no inherent conflicts among the organization's goals, production and people's needs. The leader of this organization conducted a successful integration of people and production, because people cooperate and contribute to production, and therefore to the organization as a whole. People and their ideas are included in the process of determining working conditions and strategies. The emphasis is on creating conditions where people understand a problem and where their ideas have real impact on working results. Managing human resources in our companies is a major problem. However, in circumstances where there is almost no market milieu, and when the surrounding conditions are very inconvenient, individual companies are more market-oriented and more successful when the leadership role is stronger.

### **About leadership**

Leadership is one of the most discussed and debated topics in the social sciences (Avolio et al. 2003; Bass 1990; Bennis 2007). Research on leadership began with a search for heritable attributes that differentiated leaders from non leaders and explained individuals' effectiveness as leaders (Galton/Eysenck, 1869). In effect, this early research was the beginning of the trait paradigm of leadership research. Subsequent studies established that individual characteristics, such as demographics, skills and abilities, and personality traits, predict leadership effectiveness (Eagly et al. 1995; Judge et al. 2002; Judge et al. 2004; Mumford et al. 2007). Both leader's traits and behaviour were investigated in scores of research studies. Despite the theoretical and applied value of these studies, leadership research is plagued by a lack of integration. In fact, scholars, dating back to Bennis (1959) and as recently as Avolio (2007) lamented over the proliferation and lack of integration of leadership theories and concepts. The primary criticism is that leadership scholars create new theories of leadership without attempting to compare and contrast the validity of existing theories. Initiating structure and selecting transactional leader's behaviours, namely contingent reward and management by exception-active (MBEA), represent task-oriented patterns of leader's behaviour. Initiating structure describes patterns of behaviour such as defining task roles and role relationships among group members, coordinating group members' actions, determining standards of task performance, and ensuring group members perform up to those standards. Similarly, transactional leaders make clear what is expected in terms of task performance and the rewards for meeting those expectations (contingent rewards), anticipate task-oriented problems, and take corrective action (MBEA). Both initiating structure and contingent reward describe leaders as being clear about expectations and standards of performance, and using these standards to shape the follower's commitment, motivation, and behaviour. Moreover, structuring and managing the company by MBEA method indicates a deviation from these standards. Transactional leadership, which is established on the



feedback system, is based on leader's care and respect for the members of the group; they are friendly, approachable, open to others suggestions and all members of the group are treated equally (Bass, 1990). Similar relational-oriented behaviours are described in research on empowering (Conger, 1989; Srivastava et al. 2006), participative (Kahai et al. 1997), and democratic (Gastil, 1994) leadership. A common theme among these relational-oriented behaviours is that the leader acts in ways that build follower respect and encourage followers to focus on the welfare of the group. It should be noted that certain aspects of transformational leader behaviours (e.g., individualized consideration) also consist of a relational orientation, which is a point that will be reconsidered later in the manuscript. However, broadly speaking, transformational leadership is conceptualized as a set of behaviours designed to create and facilitate the change in organizations, which brings us to our third category of leader behaviours in the company. Leader's behaviour oriented towards facilitating and driving a change in groups and organizations represent a third category of leader's behaviour that is conceptually distinct from task and relational-oriented behaviours. According to Yukl et al. (2002), a change-oriented leader's behaviour encompasses actions such as developing and communicating a vision for change, encouraging innovative thinking, and risk taking. For example, transformational leaders (inspirational motivation) focus on communicating a compelling vision for the future; in addition, transformational leaders (intellectual stimulation) seek different perspectives from group members, challenge assumptions, and take risks. These dimensions of transformational leadership conceptually distinguish it from the research on task and relational-oriented leader's behaviour.

## **Research**

### **Sample**

The research was carried out throughout 2010 and 2011 with a sample of 300 employees in the production process of a private company, which was representative by its features for production processes in Serbia in business parameters (net income<sup>1</sup>, market share, growth of sales, degree of utilization of production capacities). The research was anonymous and voluntary. Response rate of the research was very high, 81% and some basic sample characteristics (gender, age) are presented in Table 1.

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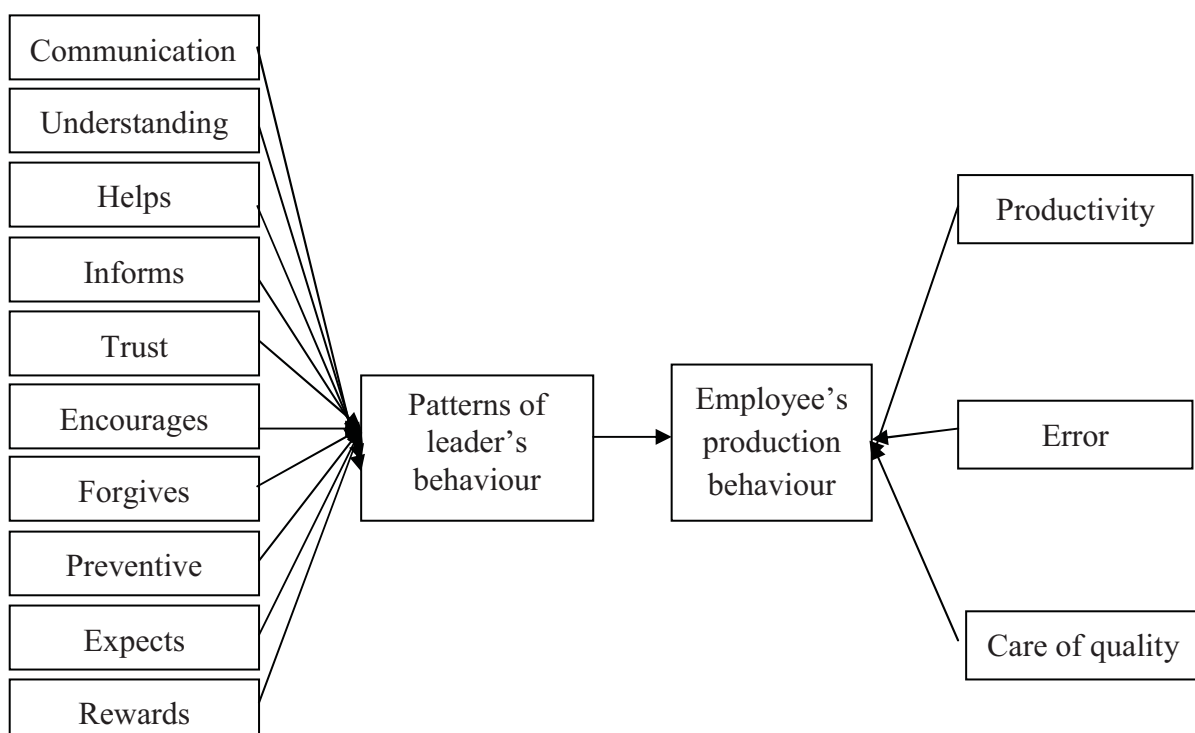
<sup>1</sup> Correlation coefficient between business results and Company profit is  $r=0.61$ , which is a relatively high positive correlation that points to efficiency of business of the Company where the research was carried out.

**Table 1: Sample characteristics**

		Gender		
		male	female	Total
Age	to 20	5	2	7
		1.8%	11.1%	2.3%
	from 20 to 30	35	3	38
		12.5%	16.7%	12.7%
	from 30 to 35	66	5	71
		23.5%	27.8%	23.7%
	from 35 to 40	77	6	83
		27.4%	33.3%	27.8%
	from 40 to 50	60	2	62
		21.4%	11.1%	20.7%
over 50	38	0	38	
	13.5%	.0%	12.7%	
Total		281	18	299
		100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

**Research hypothesis**

The scope of the research was on the relationship between workers' assessment of the pattern of leader's behaviour, i.e. how leader ought to behave towards workers, and employees' assessment of their production behaviour. Leader's behaviour was operationally defined through the following patterns: Communicates Easily, Understands and Accepts, Helps, Informs, Trusts, Encourages, Forgives, Prevents, Expects and Rewards. These patterns of behaviour fit into the theoretical concept that is related to the fact that leaders initiate changes in the group. Production behaviour of the employees was operationally defined as their subjective measures of personal productiveness, errors in production process and personal care of production process quality

**Figure 1: Research model**

Metrical features of the ad hoc instrument used in the research are highly satisfying (Cronbach's Alpha is 0.959, see Table 2).

**Table 2: Reliability Statistics**

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.95	.95	13

General hypothesis of the research is that preferred pattern of leader's behaviour towards employees directly influences subjective assessment of employees' productive behaviour.

## Results

According to Table 3 the leader trust in their followers represents a statistically significant predictor of employees' subjective assessment of their productivity ( $B=0.315$   $p=0.026$ ). The higher assessed the leader's trust in his followers, the higher is their subjective assessment of their productivity.

**Table 3: Leader behaviour and productivity estimation**

Coefficients <sup>a</sup>								
Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		t	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics	
	B	Std. Error	Beta				Tolerance	VIF
1 (Constant)	2.80	.13			20.41	.00		
Easy communication	-.02	.05	-.05		-.39	.69	.17	5.88
Understanding and acceptance	.01	.04	.01		.09	.92	.19	5.26
Helps	.07	.07	.15		.99	.31	.12	8.33
Informs	.14	.11	.35		1.27	.20	.42	2.38
<b>Trust</b>	<b>.32</b>	<b>.14</b>	<b>.73</b>		<b>2.23</b>	<b>.02</b>	.30	3.33
Encourages	-.08	.11	-.19		-.74	.45	.49	2.03
Forgives	-.01	.21	-.02		-.05	.96	.14	7.37
Preventive	-.15	.12	-.38		-1.26	.20	.35	2.83
<b>Expects</b>	<b>-.31</b>	<b>.14</b>	<b>-.73</b>		<b>-2.18</b>	<b>.03</b>	.29	3.43
Rewards	.07	.11	.15		.60	.54	.48	2.07

a. Dependent Variable: PRODUCTIVITY

Thus, leader's expectations related to his followers are statistically significant predictor of their subjective assessment of their productivity ( $B=-0.315$   $p=0.030$ ). Negative regression coefficient shows that the higher assessed the leader's expectations from the followers, the lower their subjective assessment of their productivity.

When considering subjective assessment of their errors in production process and leader's behaviour (see Table 4) it is obvious that statistically significant predictors are leader's thriving to help his followers ( $B=0.320$   $p=0.001$ ) and



Expectations from the followers ( $B=-0.589$   $p=0.002$ ). It is interesting to note that leader Prevention is on the borderline of statistical significance in being a significant predictor of employees' subjective assessment of their errors in production process ( $B=-0.297$   $p=0.066$ ).

**Table 4: Leader's behaviour and error assessment**

Coefficients <sup>a</sup>								
		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics	
Model		B	Std. Error	Beta			Tolerance	VIF
1	(Constant)	3.16	.18		17.15	.00		
	Easy communication	-.07	.07	-.14	-1.07	.28	.18	5.55
	Understanding and acceptance	-.07	.06	-.13	-1.07	.28	.19	5.08
	<b>Helps</b>	<b>.32</b>	<b>.09</b>	<b>.50</b>	<b>3.22</b>	<b>.00</b>	.13	7.63
	Informs	.16	.14	.30	1.12	.26	.43	2.33
	Trust	.20	.18	.36	1.11	.26	.30	3.30
	Encourages	-.02	.15	-.03	-.14	.88	.49	2.03
	Forgives	.34	.27	.61	1.27	.20	.14	7.32
	Preventive	-.29	.16	-.55	-1.84	.06	.36	2.78
	<b>Expects</b>	<b>-.58</b>	<b>.19</b>	<b>-1.01</b>	<b>-3.07</b>	<b>.00</b>	.29	3.41
	Rewards	.05	.15	.09	.37	.70	.48	2.08

a. Dependent Variable: ERRORS

The more the leader is oriented to help employees, the higher is their subjective assessment of their errors in production process. However, if the leader has high expectations in his behaviour towards the followers, their error assessment in production process is lower. It is the same when the leader is preventive in his attitude towards the employees (by a system of reward and punishment), and this predictor is only on the borderline of statistical significance.

According to Table 5 subjective assessment of employees' care about production process quality is influenced by leader's willingness to Help the employees ( $B=0.334$   $p=0.025$ ) and Expectations tendency ( $B=-0.813$   $p=0.005$ ). Leader's inclination to Trust in his followers is on the borderline of statistical significance as a predictor of employee's care about production process quality ( $B=0.515$   $p=0.069$ ). The higher the leader's inclination to Help his followers, the higher is his care about production process quality (it is the same when he has Trust in his followers but this predictor is on the borderline of statistical significance). But the higher the leader's Expectations towards his followers, the lower his care of process quality (negative B coefficient).

**Table 5: Leader's behaviour and quality control**

Coefficients <sup>a</sup>								
	Model	unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics	
		B	Std. Error	Beta			Tolerance	VIF
1	(Constant)	2.60	.27		9.47	.00		
	Easy communication	-.05	.10	-.07	-.51	.60	.17	5.60
	Understanding and acceptance	-.09	.09	-.12	-.99	.32	.19	5.07
	<b>Helps</b>	.33	.14	.35	2.24	.02	.12	7.73
	Informs	.01	.22	.01	.02	.97	.42	2.36
	Trust	.51	.28	.60	1.82	.06	.30	3.33
	Encourages	.17	.22	.20	.77	.43	.49	2.03
	Forgives	.25	.41	.30	.61	.54	.14	7.37
	Preventive	-.15	.24	-.18	-.62	.53	.35	2.83
	<b>Expects</b>	-.81	.28	-.94	-2.81	.00	.29	3.43
	Rewards	-.12	.22	-.13	-.53	.59	.48	2.07

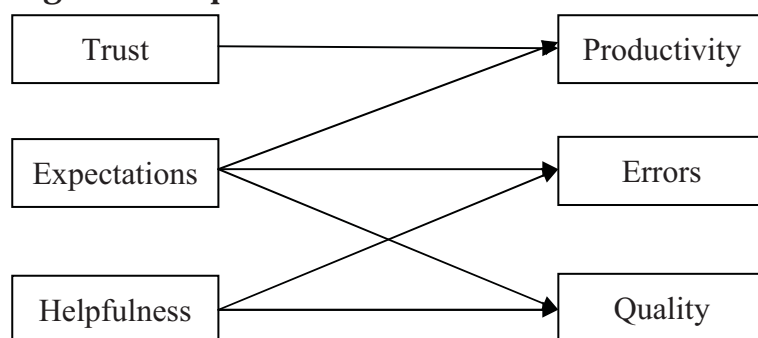
a. Dependent Variable: QUALITY CONTROL

## Discussion and conclusions

The obtained results confirmed the general hypothesis of the research. Our results support an integrated model of leader's effectiveness which considers both his behaviour and attitude towards his followers. According to the obtained results, in general, patterns of leader's behaviour related to task competence have joined leader's task-oriented behaviour, which improves task-related outcomes. On the contrary, personal attributes are related to employee's relation-oriented behaviour, which improves affective criteria such as the follower's satisfaction with the leader. As direct predictors of employees' subjective estimation of their productive behaviour, the following preferred tendencies in leader's behaviour stand out:

- Trust
- Helpfulness
- Expectations

Our model of the impact of preferred leader's behaviour towards his followers on their productive behaviour shows the subjective assessment such as (see Figure 2).

**Figure 2: Acquired model**

From the acquired model (Figure 2) and regression coefficients (Tables 3, 4 and 5) it is obvious that the subjective assessment of leader's Expectations from the employees represents a significant predictor of subjective assessment of all reviewed aspects of employee's productive behaviour. But it is very significant to note that the higher expectations from the leader, the lower assessment of employee's productive behaviour. When speaking about subjective assessment of their productivity and care about quality, it is good, but although there is a linear regression, one should expect that certain curving line of relations grows into a sort of dictatorship where a completely reverse situation happens: the employees start assessing highly their productivity and their care about quality which reflects negatively on the production process. On the other hand, excessively high expectations affect in the way that the employees increase their error assessment, which rescinds the leadership from its transformational dimension. In a situation of non-exceeding expectations, this negative relationship is good because it does not jeopardize follower's confidence. When dealing with the impact of the followers' impression that the leader Helps them and has Trust in them, it is obvious that such assessment has a positive impact towards subjective assessment of followers' productivity and care about production process quality. Thus, there is a concurrence of economic and subjective parameters, and real transformational leadership. Likewise, it represents the direction of future research where one should look for direct link between tendencies in behaviour and economic parameters of business.

### **Managerial implications of the obtained results**

The obtained results suggest that in the process of transition it is essential for every manager what his subordinates think about him. In order to become his followers due to their productive behaviour, they should be recognized as people who have Trust in their employees and who wish to help them. It is very important that the employees do not regard them as leaders with too high Expectations. It is interesting to note that the research has shown that it is unimportant for employees' productive behaviour whether the manager informs, encourages, easily communicates, understands and accepts, forgives or acts

preventively. Also, the research showed an old truth, that not every manager is a leader.

Understanding the relative importance of specific pattern of leader's behaviour as predictors of productive effectiveness can help organizations improve their selection of leader and development practices. Although contemporary organizations use a wide variety of trait-based assessments for leader selection (Dobbins/Platz, 1986; Fulmer/Conger, 2004; Phillips/Schmidt, 2004), our results suggest that the patterns of behaviour (Trust, Helpfulness and moderate Expectations) are significant predictors of success in leadership positions.

Although we acknowledge that there are patterns of behaviour that were not included in this study (e.g. Motivation to lead; Chan/Drasgow, 2001) that could also be used to select effective leaders, the obtained data suggest that organizations may benefit by focusing on certain key aspects of leader's behaviour, rather than gender or intelligence, when selecting individuals for leadership roles. The findings of the study showed the pattern of leader's behaviour in transitional situation in Serbia which facilitates that process and cannot be generalized.

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