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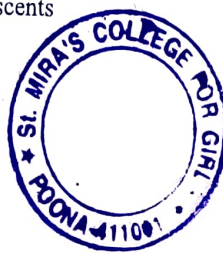
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A Qualitative Inquiry of the Behavioural Attributes of Effective Leaders in IT and ITES Sectors

Sharmin Palsetia and Jaya Rajagopalan

Department of Psychology, St. Mira's College for Girls, Pune, Maharashtra

Leadership is critical for organizational success. In order to facilitate successful performance, it is important to understand and accurately measure the behavioural attributes of a leader (Robins, Judge, & Sanghi, 2009). An effective leader should be able to handle strategy, manage resources, foresee change and still be humane. Although there are numerous studies depicting the traits of effective leaders, there aren't enough studies emphasizing their behavioural attributes. There has been very little research on leadership using the qualitative approach in the Indian context. The current study aims to explore the behavioural attributes of effective leaders. Participants of the study were 60 leaders of various organizations of IT and ITES sectors. Unstructured interview and focus group discussion method was used to elicit the dominant behavioural attributes. Thematic analysis was done using Grounded Theory. The common themes highlighted the factors of Strategic, Change, Operational, Performance and Entrepreneur (SCOPE) leadership. The research highlights cultural and gender differences in conceptualization of the themes of leadership in Indian and western context. The results obtained will be useful to recruit and promote candidates to leadership positions by using this framework of the SCOPE model. The present study will contribute to designing a psychometric tool for gauging effective leadership behaviours.

Keywords: behavioural attributes, grounded theory, effective leadership model, IT and ITES sector

Leadership effectiveness can be defined as the successful exercise of personal influence by an individual, which results in accomplishing several goals, as a result of the coordinated efforts of those who are led (Warner, 2012). It is largely recognized and accepted by scholars and researchers that effective leadership is important to organizational outcomes (Day & Lord, 1988; Kaiser, Hogan, & Armstrong, 2008). In order to facilitate successful performance, it is important to understand and accurately measure the behavioural attributes of the leader. Successful leadership depends on appropriate behaviours, skills and actions (Robins & Judge, 2011). Existing models and measures have applicability only when it helps in understanding and predicting behaviours. Thus, there is an increasing need for leadership research to focus on Behaviorometry. These techniques help in identifying and determining those key behaviours that help in critical incidents. The leader has to strategize, perform, operate at various levels, manage change effectively and have innovative ideas to expand the organization. These behaviours have to be measured and psychometric tools need to be developed.

There are several studies that mainly focus on the personality traits of leaders. Review of literature reveals that there are very few studies that focus on understanding the behavioral attributes of

effective leaders. Nijkamp, Kraaijenbrink, and Ehrenhard (2016) Yasin (2012) studied the role of strategy generation and execution in leadership effectiveness. Glynis, Eugene, and De Silva (2012) and Durga and Prabhu (2011) studied that leaders who brought about change with their visionary first-hand crucial decision making dealt effectively with the change situation. Bal and Quinn (2014) and Richard and Trovas (2014) studied that the core operations of the leader like development practices, the organization's long-term interests and its development goals reinforce leadership effectiveness. John and Chattopadhyay (2015) proved that performance of the leader leads to positive outcomes for the organization and in turn increases leadership effectiveness. Bhattacharya (2003) opined that future and innovation orientation are the utmost requirements of leader effectiveness. McDonald and Westphal (2003) found that managerial choice of innovations and competitive moves decided future direction, scope of the business and enterprise objectives. Thus, although there are few studies that have attempted to identify behavioural attributes in leadership effectiveness, these studies appear scattered and there is a gap in postulating a combined leadership effectiveness model within this context.

There is a paucity of research on behavioural attributes in India. On the basis of the review of literature in the field of leadership effectiveness there is a clear need to recognize and qualitatively analyse the behavioural attributes of effective leaders. This study aims to explore the quintessential behavioural attributes of leaders that couple with the personality traits of the leader. The results of the study could also help in constructing a test to identify behaviours for effective leadership. This test can be used in understanding, predicting and changing the behaviours of the leaders, contingent upon the situations. This tool will provide information about the leader's key behaviours and will prove to be an effective diagnostic and assessment tool. This tool will also be used in assessment centres as they have behaviourally based selection procedures.

Author Note

Sharmin Palsetia, Assistant Professor, Department of Psychology
St. Mira's College for Girls, Pune, Maharashtra
Email: sharmin.ha@gmail.com

Jaya Rajagopalan, Associate Professor and Head, Department
of Psychology, St. Mira's College for Girls, Pune, Maharashtra
Email: jaya.stmiras@gmail.com

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Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to

Sharmin Palsetia, Assistant Professor, Department of Psychology
St. Mira's College for Girls, Pune, Maharashtra
Email: sharmin.ha@gmail.com



Jaya
Principal Incharge
St. Mira's College for Girls

The present study has been initiated on the basis of the theoretical perspective postulated by Robins et al. (2009). They have stated that identifying leadership behaviours is very crucial. In this view leadership depends more on appropriate behaviours, skills and actions and less on personal traits. Traits provide basic potential but behaviours, skills and actions can be learned and changed. The three broad skills the leaders use are Technical skills, Human skills and Conceptual skills. Technical skills refer to a person's knowledge of and ability in any type of process or technique. This skill is a distinguishing feature of job performance at the operating and professional. Human skill is the ability to work effectively with people and to build team-work. It involves a wide range of behaviours like energizing individuals, giving feedback, coaching, being empathetic and sensitive.

Method

Participants

The sample for the study was procured from six IT and ITES companies. The sample for the study comprised of 60 leaders from mid and large size organizations of IT and ITES sectors. There were 30 leaders (15 male & 15 female leaders) from IT and 30 leaders (15 male & 15 female leaders) from ITES sector. The sample comprised of leaders from Mid Managerial level, CEOs to Top Management. The work experience of the sample in leadership roles ranged from 5 to 20 years. The minimum education qualification was graduation. The age range of the sample was from 35 to 55 years (mean age was 45 years). The sample was comfortable with English language. The sample was collected from across cities of Pune, Bangalore, Mumbai and Hyderabad as these cities are the prime location for the organizations of IT and ITES sectors.

Statistical Analysis

The present study used a qualitative approach that allows participants to provide information, including their knowledge, attitude, thoughts and reactions of the said topic. The method involved the identification of significant themes, data collection in an open and unstructured manner, and theory development based on the collected data. Unstructured interview and focus group discussion method was used to elicit the dominant behavioural attributes of the leader. Thematic analysis was done using Grounded Theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The process involves conducting thematic analysis on the transcripts of the participants and to determine appropriate coding and the formation of themes.

Procedure

The present study comprised of four phases-getting required permissions, conducting unstructured interview, conducting focus group discussions and consolidation and thematic analysis of the data procured.

Necessary permissions pertaining to data collection was taken from the selected organizations. The leadership team of those organizations was informed about the participation in unstructured interview and focus group discussions. Ethical considerations were taken into account. Informed consent was taken from the participants. Unstructured interview method was used to elicit the dominant behavioural attributes. Openended questions about leadership were identified before interviews. The questions were designed to understand participant's perceptions of behavioural attributes in

leaders. Participants were encouraged to discuss their experiences about the critical incidents that made their leadership skills more effective. Further probing was done based on the responses given by the participant. Each interview lasted for about an hour. The participants were further divided into groups of 10 (five from IT and five from ITES) for conducting focus group discussions. The questions were again identified before conducting focus group discussions. The aim of conducting these discussions was to affirm the ideas solicited from the unstructured interview. There were no pre-defined themes that emerged out of these discussions that were pre-incorporated and analysed further.

Thematic analysis was done using Grounded Theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). All interviews and the group discussion were transcribed verbatim and analysed sequentially. Line-by-line coding was done to identify initial descriptive themes. In the second stage of data analysis, codes were then analysed and categorised into different categories and then into themes. Relational sampling and constant comparison were used to modify, confirm and elaborate themes that were obtained from unstructured interviews and focus group discussions. Similar and related themes were combined from all data sets (unstructured interviews & focus group discussions) to investigate the relationships between them. Selective themes were then combined and aggregated into micro themes and micro themes were grouped into macro themes leading to the proposed SCOPE model of leadership. The following section presents the main results of the study and discussion followed by the conclusion and future directions for research.

Results and Discussion

The term leadership has undergone a complex metamorphosis since the time India entered the global market. This globalization is extensively seen in IT and ITES sectors. The changing trends in leadership have led to molding the behaviors of the leaders to suit the dynamic environment.

The thematic analysis of the data obtained from unstructured interviews and focus group discussions revealed various nuances and layers of behavioral attributes for effective leadership, few of which were evidently true in the Indian context of IT and ITES sectors. The nuances included the differences in context, culture and gender perspectives. Based on the grounded theory approach five major dimensions of leadership were revealed based on behavioral attributes Strategic leadership, Change leadership, operational leadership, performance leadership and entrepreneur leadership.

Theme 1

Strategic Leadership: The participants in their interviews and discussions pointed out the importance of strategizing on the part of the leader. It includes what task the employees perform, how they perform and how it affects the organizational outcome (Finkelstein, Hambrick, & Cannella, 2009). Milliken (1990) and Miller (1988) showed that strategy is something which is and will affect the organizational processes of planning, strategizing, organizing and directing at the same time there were few differences in conceptualizing strategic leadership in the Indian context. According to the study by Gupta (2012), and Gupta, Parameswar, and Dhir (2019), in western context the leaders create the environment for competition, creation and innovation whereas in Indian framework leaders provide direction to employees, generate



interest among employees to learn and grow, they develop commitment among employees. The difference was also seen between the genders. The females are in tune with the basic cultural processes while strategizing including decision making, problem solving, work-life balance, team work etc. Male leaders on the other hand look at delegation, assertion, aspiration and goal setting while strategizing (Radu, Deaconu, & Frasinianu, 2016). Based on the analysis process five major sub-themes or behavioral attributes of strategic leadership were revealed:

Being Initiatives: Participants reported initiative as one of the key components of strategic leadership. The participants believed that being proactive in working towards the welfare of the organization makes a leader an effective one. This idea was supported by male participants as they stated that, 'I am able to consider key issues as a part of strategy formation', 'I take initiatives in seeking developmental opportunities for the organization' and female participants stated that, 'I am proactive in completing the tasks by going beyond what is expected of me', 'I involve my team-members in the decision making process'.

Looking at Company as a whole: Another sub-theme was looking at the company as a whole. The participants were of the opinion that the concept of leadership and its benefits should be extended to the entire organization. One of the male participants stated 'Leader should formulate business strategies that will make the organization competitive' and female participants stated that, 'As a leader, I feel responsible for defining the right strategies for the organization', 'I believe in being authentic and transparent in my dealings to bring about success for the organization'.

Affecting Organizational Outcomes: Affecting organizational outcomes as a behavioral attribute was also considered important by the participants. They were of the opinion that a leader determines the growth of the organization. One of the female participants said, 'I generally feel confident when the outcomes of the organization are achieved' and male participants stated that, 'I ensure to focus on strategic decision which improves services of the organization'.

Team Building: The participants said a leader should be the believer in team work and should encourage the team. Male participants stated that, 'I formulate strategy to represent collective efforts', and female participants stated that 'I believe that trust and support are crucial elements for working with teams'.

Developing Strategic and Organizational Processes: For a leader to be effective he or she has to develop those strategies that help in smooth functioning of the processes of the organization. Also this behaviour was confirmed by female participants stating that, 'I determine necessary priorities and procedures to achieve the strategic planning for the organization' and male participants stated that, 'I follow a logical pattern for making decisions'.

Theme 2

Change Leadership: If the leader has to lead effectively managing minor as well as major changes would be the core responsibility of the leader. A leader can survive only if he is pro-change culture. The participants of the current study considered the ability to handle change as a crucial element of leadership. Change leadership is the ability to influence and enthuse others through personal advocacy, vision and drive, and to access resources to build a solid platform for change (Higgs & Rowland, 2000). A study by Rajagopalan and Spreitzer (1996) brought out that, change in the organization enhanced organization effectiveness. The participants also pointed

out the difference in environment in Indian and global change management scenarios. In India the reasons, opportunities and challenges to bring about a change are different than in western culture. The studies by Saini (2005) and Bhatnagar and Srivastava (2010) have discussed that in India the leader needs to create a sense of urgency to bring about a change initiative whereas in west the organizations mostly follow the learning culture (Argyris & Schon, 1978). The leaders during the discussion also discussed the difference in change leaderships among male and female managers. The basic traits of the females that make them better at communication, empathy and cooperation help them intercept in the change initiatives. Male managers initiate changes by providing challenge, articulating goals, removing old and obsolete processes etc. (Radu et al., 2016).

Based on the data analysis process five major sub-themes or behavioral attributes of change leadership were revealed:

Make it More Challenging to Team: The motivation to strive for excellence will persist in the team only when the leader challenges the team to its appropriate limits. Male participants stated that 'I provide challenges to the team that improvises innovation' and while female participants said, 'I exhibit true passion for bringing about change in the organization'.

Bring in New Process of Working: It is vital for the leader to bring in new processes that are abreast with the changing environments in the organizations. The theme was confirmed by male participants by stating, 'I take efforts to introduce new processes which are vital for the growth of the organization' and statements by female participants emphasising 'I believe that leader should act as an agent of change'.

Eliminate Practices which are Not Worth the Time and Effort: With the fast pace of changes happening in the organizations the old processes become obsolete. The leader should strive to bring about changes in the processes if they want the organization to be competitive. One of the male participants said 'I encourage removal of obsolete process and create successful transformations' and female participants stated 'I assess readiness and resistance to change'. Encourage teams to perform until they get the best- Leaders need to push the employees to give their best performance. Leader's encouragement to the employees helps them to reach their maximum potential. Male participants stated, 'I provide opportunities for my employees to learn and grow as individuals and female participants stated, 'I encourage the employees to do their best by showing trust and confidence in their abilities'.

Handling Matters or Concerns Empathetically: As a leader utilizing empathetic approach to solve the concerns of the employees was found to be a prerequisite. One of the male participants pointed to the role of empathy by reporting 'I believe that a leader must possess empathy'. This was further supported by female participants stating 'I believe that a strong leader should be thoughtful and kind'.

Theme 3

Operational Leadership: Operational leadership focuses on ensuring that organizational processes are carried out effectively on a day-to-day basis. Zaccaro, Rittman, and Marks (2001) opined that operational leadership is not only applied to team leadership but also applied to broader application of effectiveness of the leader. The discussions and the literature review highlighted the major differences between these styles of leadership in the Indian and western context. In west the followers operate on the principles of observation and imitation whereas in Indian organization the leader



has to pave the way for the followers by providing clear responsibility, precision in tasks, deadlines etc. (Sharma, Kumar, Jain, & Jain, 2017). The differences were evident in gender as well. Female leaders take the employees together in achieving the goals by providing support, cooperation and collaboration, whereas male leaders look at delegation, operation and providing framework (Nair & Thomas, 2020).

The discussions also lead to five sub-themes or behavioral attributes needed for the effective operations of the leader:

Accountability and Ownership Behavior: The participants were of the opinion that the leader takes up the responsibility to monitor the overall functioning of the organization. The statements by male participants were like, 'Leader should be accountable for the execution of the task' and statements by female participants were like 'I feel responsible for the tasks that I take up'.

SMART Work: For a leader who needs to monitor the goals and accomplish them they need to formulate SMART goals. One of the male participants reported that 'I formulate clear set of goals and take initiatives in achieving them in an orderly manner'. The SMART work paradigm was further supported by female participants who said 'I set goals with a specific purpose'. Finishing the task accurately on time- Participants believed that the leader needs to deliver the task in the given time frame. The goals which are realistic and time-bound are effectively achieved. The sub-theme was confirmed based on the statements by male participants like, 'I create achievable goals which can be accomplished within the given deadline' and statements by female participants like 'I estimate the efforts required for timely completion of the task'. Looking for precision in tasks- The clarity and precision in tasks help the leader in aligning the goals efficiently. The sub-theme received consensus from male participants where they stated that 'I think being resourceful leads to the precision of the task'. This theme was further supported by female participants who said 'Precision leads to quality work'.

Knowing Details of the Job Undertaken: The leader must accurately understand the details of the tasks undertaken. One participant explained the importance of this behavioral attribute by reporting that 'Leader must provide facts of tasks that have been undertaken'. Female participants added 'I make the task clear and concise for my team'.

Theme 4

Performance Leadership: The participants pointed out the requirement for managing leadership strategy and aligning it with the organizational goals to achieve effective performance. Performance of the leader leads to positive outcomes of the organization. Charlton (2000) studied that effective leadership has a positive sway on the performance of organizations. Behling and McFillen (1996) confirmed the link between high performance and leadership effectiveness. The data highlighted the difference in perception of performance leadership in the Indian and western context. In the western context the learning cultures are ingrained and the performance is enhanced naturally through learning process. In Indian context the learning behaviours are to be reinforced by providing timely feedbacks and rewards (Singh & Gupta, 2016). Research by Palrecha, Spangler, and Yamarino (2012) discuss gender difference for performance leadership. They state that female leaders perform based on the nurturant model whereas male leaders work on the principles of problem-solving, delegation, deadlines etc. Based on the data analysis process five major sub-themes or

behavioral attributes of performance leadership were revealed-

Make Quick and Efficient Decisions: The participants were of the opinion that the leader is the one who uses his cognitive resources and engages in quick and efficient decision making, problem solving etc. The leader should be able to make a quick decision if the need be. The statements like 'I judge the situations quickly and respond accordingly', 'I believe in factual data for making timely decisions' was stated by male participants and 'I deal with issues and concerns promptly', 'I ensure consensus of my team even for the quick decisions' were stated by female participants which depicted the importance of this sub-theme.

Delegate Work Effectively and Responding to Tasks Immediately: For a leader who needs to achieve the organizational goals has to respond to the tasks promptly. They should also be judicious in delegating the right job to the right employee. The theme was agreed upon by female participants stating the following statements 'I trust my team- mates and let them go on with their job without interference', 'I rarely tend to supervise the work of my team mates' once they are effectively delegated' and male participants stated 'I take responsibility for getting things done in the prescribed deadline', 'I believe that execution of a plan is as necessary as strategizing for the same'.

Providing Feedback and Reward: The participants believed that the leader needs to provide constructive feedback and also be prudent to provide timely rewards to the employees. The sub-theme was confirmed by female participants based on the statements like 'I believe that constructive feedback is required for improving the performance' and by male participants based on the statements like 'I ensure that employees are rewarded based on all aspects of performance'.

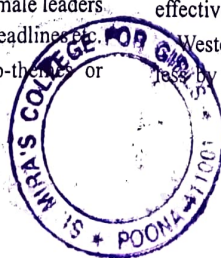
Staying Updated with the Current Developments in the Field of Expertise: If the leader has to set example for the team, he or she should always stay updated with the current developments in the field. The sub-theme received consensus from male participants based on the statements like, 'I make sure I have complete knowledge of the task that I have to get accomplished' and by female participants based on the statements like, 'I believe that staying updated with current development is possible through a thorough study of that field'.

Continuous Improvement and Learning from Failures: The leader must believe in learning from failures so that he or she can continuously improvise. Male participants supported this idea by stating that 'I look for the ways to improve the project or the task undertaken' and female participants based on the statements like, 'I proactively identify areas of improvement'.

Theme 5

Entrepreneur Leadership: The participants perceived that the leader should help the organization to reach common goals and help in innovations by optimizing risk taking behaviors. The leader should actively engage in dynamic initiatives and provide a clear vision to the team. Shamir (1999) proved that an effective leader can deal with a volatile environment and still bring about innovations. Milliken (1990) studied that the leader who leads in an uncertain environment and has the ability to predict the nature of the effect of a future state of the environment on the organization and respond appropriately is an effective leader.

Western leaders dare to tread the unpopular path that is traveled less by the herd whereas in the Indian context leaders strive for



ence, innovation and form new associations by take calculated (Sharma, Kumar, Jain, & Jain, 2017). The difference was also in the gender and the way in which they handle this role. The leaders provide goal-focused vision that is driven by anticipating problems and calculated risks. Chawla (2009) explains women are natural networkers, innovators and terrific communicators providing more opportunities for entrepreneurship.

Based on the data analysis process five major sub-themes or behavioral attributes of entrepreneur leadership were revealed-

Directed New Ideas and Innovations: The leader is the one who is to create a goal and carve the path for reaching them. New ideas and innovations help the team to be motivated too. The sub-theme of goal directed new ideas and innovations received support from male participants who stated 'I am able to give directions effectively in new areas' and female participants who said, 'I create an environment where my teammates can think outside the box'.

Anticipate Problems and Take Calculated Risks: The leader needs to see the problems that the team might face for its smooth functioning. The leader also should have the courage to take calculated risks in order to bring about new and innovative ideas. The statements by male participants were 'I can incorporate risk to significant profit for the company' and statements by female participants were 'I can deal effectively in uncertain circumstances'.

Form New Associations: The leader should be proactive in collaborative efforts to bring new business to the organization. The leader should foresee the trends in the environment and form coalitions that can bring success to the organization. Forming new associations was considered essential in entrepreneur leadership by male participants who supported it with statements like 'The leader should have the ability in generating new leads for bringing in new business for the organization. Similarly female participants said 'I am actively involved in promotional activities of my organization'.

Strive for Best Practices: Empowering the team to bring about excellent results should be fostered by the leader in the team. The theme got a consensus from female participants based on the statements like 'I try to value add on the existing processes to enhance the work quality', from male participants based on the statements like 'I formulate various techniques to enhance capacities and standards within organization'.

Thrive in a Dynamic Environment: The leader has to be flexible and needs to accommodate with the changing work environment. The importance of this adaptability was explained by the female participants who said, 'I take into consideration the global market conditions to thrive in a dynamic environment' and by male participants stated 'I adapt effectively to the volatile environment'.

The results of the study are summarized in the SCOPE leadership effectiveness model presented below-

Table 1

SCOPE Leadership Effectiveness Model

Dimensions	Interpretation	Behaviours
Strategic Leadership (Technical skill)	Unique Positioning & Differentiation	1.a Taking initiatives 1.b Look at company as a whole 1.c Affecting organizational outcome 1.d Team building 1.e Developing strategic and organizational processes
Change Leadership (Conceptual & Human skills)	Leading through resistance, Integrating new lines of business	2.a Make it more challenging to team 2.b Bring in new process of working 2.c Eliminate practices which are not worth the time and effort 2.d Encourage teams to perform until they get the best 2.e Handling matters or concerns empathetically.
Operational Leadership (Technical skill)	Flawless and Timely Execution, Anticipation and Managing Crisis	3.a Accountability and ownership behavior 3.b SMART work 3.c Finishing the task accurately on time 3.d Looking for precision in tasks 3.e Knowing details of the job undertaken (Profile/Function/company)
Performance Leadership (Conceptual & Human Skills)	Individual and team Performance, Triumphant as a thought leader	4.a Make quick and efficient decisions 4.b Delegate work effectively and responding to tasks immediately 4.c Providing Feedback & rewards 4.d Staying updated with the current developments in the field of expertise, 4.e Learning from failures for continuous improvement
Entrepreneurial Leadership (Conceptual Skill)	Networking, Launching new businesses and innovative offerings Network	5.a Goal directed new ideas and innovations 5.b Anticipate problems and take calculated risks 5.c Form new associations, 5.d Strive for best practices, 5.e Thrive in a dynamic environment.



Key Findings of the Study

This research helped in understanding and linking the behavioral attributes to effective leadership in the Indian context, especially in IT and ITES industry. The qualitative methodology offered rich descriptive data that generated the themes and the subthemes and helped identify the perceptions that leaders in the Indian workplace have about the behavioral skills that are crucial for leadership effectiveness. A major contribution of this study is to relate to the consideration of cultural awareness of differences in perceived behavioral attributes for effective leadership.

The study is a preliminary exploration of the development of the SCOPE leadership effectiveness model. It supports and strengthens earlier literature for the individual themes. In theoretical terms the study reinforced the themes explored in the literature of Strategic, change, operational, performance and entrepreneur leadership. In practical terms the study has major and significant implications for leadership development and effectiveness. The results will prove helpful in identifying the knowledge, skills and attitudes (KSAs) of leaders. The understanding of cultural and gender perspectives will inform the development of practices in leadership effectiveness. The selection of a leader is a crucial topic because it requires describing a leader's job behaviours accurately. The current study will be useful in behaviourally based selection procedures.

Limitations and Future Research

The findings of the research can be applied keeping certain limitations in mind. This research investigated effective leadership in IT and ITES sector and was conducted on 60 leaders. Although the sample size was adequate for the study, the limitation of the sector studied, may not be generalizable across all industries. A more in-depth research involving more sectors would be required.

The management is confronted with alternative courses of actions and dilemmas in making decisions pertaining to hire someone for the position of a leader. Hence, there is a need for an established psychological tool that helps the management to understand the effectiveness of the prospective leader and make the most beneficial choices. Future research can focus on constructing a psychological tool for effective leadership based on the themes that are unearthed. Also, future research can help in providing an index of performance based on critical incidents. Hence, the leaders who lack any of the competencies can be advised suitable training programs. This would be an interesting area of study.

Conclusion

The current study aimed to explore the quintessential behavioural attributes of leaders in the context of leadership effectiveness. A qualitative approach using unstructured interviews and focus group discussion method was used to elicit the dominant behavioural attributes. The common themes highlighted the factors of Strategic, Change, Operational, Performance and Entrepreneur (SCOPE) leadership. The research has significant theoretical and practical implications for leadership studies. In summary, this research explored and provided significant information from which to understand leadership effectiveness. This will lead to better appropriate leaders' assessment, selection, training, and career improvement programs.

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