

Relationship between Contingent Leadership and Employee Performance

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DOI Link: <http://dx.doi.org/10.6007/IJARBSS/v15-i12/27182>

Published Date: 06 December 2025

Abstract

In today's highly competitive environment, organizational success depends heavily on employees' performance and the appropriateness of leadership styles to situational demands. This study examines the relationship between contingent leadership and employee performance among employees of in a private organization in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. Contingent leadership is grounded in Fiedler's contingency theory, which posits that leadership effectiveness depends on the fit between leader style and situational variables such as leader-member relations, task structure, and position power. Data were collected using a self-administered questionnaire from 107 employees selected through convenience sampling. Employee performance was measured using dimensions of task performance, contextual performance, and counterproductive behavior, while contingent leadership was measured along leader-member relations, task structure, and power position. Descriptive statistics indicated a high perceived level of contingent leadership and a moderate level of employee performance. Pearson correlation analysis showed a strong, positive, and significant relationship between contingent leadership and employee performance ($r = .712$, $p < .01$). The findings underscore the importance of aligning leadership behavior with situational variables to enhance employee performance and reduce counterproductive behavior. Implications for practice and directions for future research are discussed.

Keywords: Contingent Leadership, Employee Performance, Contingency Theory, Leader-Member Relations, Task Structure, Position Power

Introduction

Organizations operating in dynamic and competitive environments increasingly rely on their human capital to gain and sustain competitive advantage. Employee performance has become a critical determinant of organizational effectiveness, and leadership is widely recognized as one of the most influential factors shaping employee attitudes, behaviors, and outcomes (Rockall & Gertsch, 2001; McGrath & MacMillan, 2000).

Leadership has been defined in multiple ways. Maxwell (2011) emphasizes leadership as influence, whereas Ciulla (1996) highlights leadership as a complex moral relationship among people. In general, leadership can be viewed as a social process through which an individual influences a group to achieve shared goals. The particular style of leadership adopted within an organization plays a crucial role in determining the effectiveness of employees and, in turn, organizational performance (Lawal et al., 2000; Robbins & Judge, 2017).

Problem Background

Empirical evidence suggests that leadership style has a significant impact on employee performance and organizational outcomes. For example, Ohunakin et al. (2016) reported a positive relationship between leadership style, employee performance, and overall performance in the Nigerian banking sector. Misalignment between leadership style and situational characteristics, however, can lead to dissatisfaction, high turnover, and reduced effectiveness (Delobelle, 2017; O'Reilly et al., 2010).

Inadequate leadership fit may increase redundancy costs (recruitment, training) and reduce efficiency—outcomes that are especially problematic in competitive environments. O'Reilly et al. (2010) note that mismatched leadership styles often undermine employee self-esteem and engagement, contributing to turnover and diminished performance.

Problem Statement

In the context of Iraqi Kurdistan, organizational leadership practices often remain underdeveloped, with many institutions relying on a limited and uniform set of leadership behaviors rather than adapting leadership strategies to situational demands. Surji (2014) observes that organizations in the region commonly exhibit a “one-size-fits-all” leadership orientation, which neglects the complex interplay between organizational context, employee characteristics, and task requirements. This stands in stark contrast to contingency theory, which asserts that no single leadership style is universally effective and that leader effectiveness depends on aligning leadership behaviors with situational factors such as task structure, leader–member relations, and positional authority (Fiedler & Chemers, 1974; Northouse, 2007). The failure to adopt a contingency-based approach has broader implications because leadership practices shape key organizational processes, including organizational culture, communication patterns, role clarity, and the functioning of the chain of command (Robbins & Judge, 2017). When leadership does not adjust to contextual complexity, employees may experience ambiguity, reduced motivation, and lower performance levels. Empirical evidence reinforces this concern: Van de Ven (2013) found that a strong alignment between leadership style and organizational context leads to substantially higher levels of employee productivity, commitment, and overall performance. Despite these insights, empirical research investigating the influence of contingent leadership on employee performance in the Kurdistan Region remains scarce, particularly within private-sector organizations where hierarchical structures and centralized decision-making are prevalent. Accordingly, this study aims to address this empirical gap by examining the relationship between contingent leadership and employee performance among employees in a private organization in Iraqi Kurdistan, thereby contributing to regional leadership literature and offering evidence-based insights for organizational practice.

Research Objectives and Questions

The study is guided by the following research objectives:

1. To determine the level of perceived contingent leadership among employees.
2. To identify the level of employee performance among employees.
3. To examine the relationship between contingent leadership and employee performance among employees.

Significance of the Study

This study contributes to the leadership and performance literature by focusing on an under-researched context (Iraqi Kurdistan) and by emphasizing the contingency perspective. Practically, the findings can guide managers in selecting and adapting leadership behaviors that fit situational variables such as leader–member relations, task clarity, and power distribution. For organizations, understanding how contingent leadership relates to employee performance can help in designing leadership development programs and performance management systems that foster higher productivity, better organizational citizenship behavior (OCB), and lower counterproductive work behavior (CWB).

Literature Review

Contingent Leadership and Contingency Theory

Contingency theories of leadership argue that there is no universally effective leadership style; rather, leadership effectiveness depends on the fit between leader behavior and situational factors (Fiedler & Chemers, 1974; Hossain & Saleh, 2016). Fiedler's contingency theory, in particular, proposes that leaders are either primarily task-oriented or relationship-oriented, and their effectiveness is contingent upon:

1. Leader–member relations: the degree of mutual trust, respect, and confidence between leader and followers.
2. Task structure: the extent to which job tasks are clearly defined, structured, and unambiguous.
3. Position power: the degree of formal authority the leader possesses to reward or punish subordinates.

Fiedler introduced the Least Preferred Co-worker (LPC) scale to classify leaders along a continuum from task-oriented to relationship-oriented (Northouse, 2007). The theory posits that task-oriented leaders perform best in very favorable or very unfavorable situations, while relationship-oriented leaders are more effective in moderately favorable conditions.

Subsequent work (e.g., Manning, 2013; Bates, 2016) reinforces the view that leadership behavior must align with situational variables to produce optimal outcomes. In developing countries, Hofstede (1983) identified cultural factors such as high power distance and uncertainty avoidance as key challenges for leadership effectiveness, highlighting the importance of contextual sensitivity in these settings.

Employee Performance

Employee performance means the extent to which individuals are able to meet the tasks, responsibilities, and expectations to their organizational functions which are aimed at accomplishing the larger organizational goals (Gibson, 1996; Torang, 2012). The researchers take the performance as a multidimensional construct that includes both behavioral dimensions, how the employees behave in the process of performing their work, and

outcome dimensions, what results the employees achieve (Viswesvaran and Ones, 2000; Campbell and Wiernik, 2015). Based on this conceptualization, both Aguinis (2013) and Koopmans (2011) believe that there are three basic dimensions of employee performance. The former, task performance, represents the essential job behaviors that are directly associated with the production of goods and services, including the ability to perform the job right and efficiently, use the technical knowledge and job-specific requirements. These actions are officially mandated and they are usually enshrined in job descriptions. Contextual performance is the second dimension and involves discretionary behaviours that assists others in social, relational and psychological operations of the workplace such as assisting others, taking up more office duties on their own free will, and showing initiative beyond the office obligations. Contextual performance is often conceived as organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) and it is necessary in promoting cooperation, flexibility, and integrated work environment. The third dimension is the counterproductive work behavior (CWB) that includes voluntary actions to the detriment of the organization or its members by acts of absenteeism, gossip, deliberately slowing down the work, or exaggerating problems at the workplace. Employee performance in terms of high levels is highly task and contextual performance and low levels of CWB (Koopmans, 2011). There is a growing research on the centrality of leadership in influencing these performance outcomes. Leadership practices that work have been linked to the enhancement of individual performance, further involvement in OCB, and minimization of counterproductive behaviors (Pulakos, 2004; Kopperud et al., 2014). Leaders who are guiding, providing feedback and support and treating employees fairly and well are likely to achieve high motivational, commitment and resilience thus improving performance at large (Harris et al., 2009). On the other hand, poor leadership or inconsistent leadership can undermine the morale of the employees, decrease the amount of discretionary effort and the chances of engaging in counterproductive behaviors. All these facts indicate the role of leadership, especially leadership that touches each situation, in determining the multidimensionality of employee performance and maintaining organizational performance.

Past Empirical Studies

The wider relation between leadership and employee-based outcomes has been covered in several studies but few of them specifically on contingent leadership as proposed in the contingency model of Fiedler. According to the existing studies, there is always an indication that leadership style is a significant factor in determining job performance, motivation and organizational behavior. As an example, Buil et al. (2018) and Dewi (2020) discovered that leadership style, organizational culture, and employee motivation have a strong positive impact on the performance of an individual, which proves that leadership behaviors, depending on the needs of employees and organizational requirements, can positively affect work results. In further extension of this question, Vidal et al. (2017) studied leadership contingency practices among Ecuadorian owner-managers in a small business and found out that contingency-based leadership behaviors were positively related to organizational productivity, which highlights the significance of situational congruence in effective leadership. Other leadership models including transformational leadership have also been noted by scholars to enhance motivation and performance of a team. Indicatively, Bachrach and Mullins (2019) observed that transformational leadership behaviors also served in the stimulation of team members engagement and team collaboration indicating that the leadership impacts do not limit to individual performances of the tasks but also to the overall

group performances. Ohemeng et al. (2018) established that employee performance in a public-sector environment is strongly dependent on leadership style, which supports the view that leadership continues to be a key factor influencing performance in any sector. Moreover, interventions that aim to improve the performance have been verified to increase the performance outcomes; Abbas and Yaqoob (2009) established that specific leadership development programs had a significant positive impact on work behaviors and productivity of employees. In spite of these significant contributions, there is little empirical evidence that specifically analyzes contingent leadership (especially in its classical Fiedlerian version) and its association with employee performance, in the Middle East and Kurdish organizational environment, in particular. The dearth of research supports the importance of investigations like the current one, which is expected to further the knowledge on the role of situationally aligned leadership behaviors in determining employee performance in a region where leaders in the past had not been contingently adapted in terms of their behaviors.

Conceptual Framework and Hypothesis

Grounded in Fiedler's Contingency Theory and supported by extensive empirical literature, this study proposes a conceptual framework that positions contingent leadership as the primary independent variable influencing employee performance. Contingent leadership is operationalized through three critical situational dimensions leader-member relations, task structure, and position power each representing a core determinant of leadership effectiveness according to contingency theory. These dimensions capture the quality of interpersonal relationships, the clarity and structure of employees' job tasks, and the degree of formal authority held by leaders to reward or sanction subordinates.

Employee performance, the dependent variable, is examined through a multidimensional lens comprising task performance, contextual performance, and counterproductive work behavior (CWB). This approach reflects contemporary performance frameworks which argue that effective performance extends beyond task completion to include discretionary behaviors that benefit the organization and the absence of behaviors that hinder organizational functioning.

By integrating these constructs into a single framework, the study seeks to empirically validate whether leadership behaviors that align with situational characteristics are associated with enhanced employee outcomes. This alignment is central to contingency theory, which posits that leadership effectiveness arises not from a universal style but from a fit between leader behavior and situational demands.

Accordingly, the study formulates and tests the following hypothesis:

H1: There is a significant positive relationship between contingent leadership and employee performance.

Methodology

Research Design

This study employs a quantitative, cross-sectional survey design to examine the relationship between contingent leadership and employee performance among employees. A self-administered questionnaire was used to collect primary data. All items were measured using a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree).

Population and Sampling

The population for this study consisted of 327 employees working in a private organization located in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. To determine an appropriate sample size, the researcher referred to Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) sampling table, which indicated that a minimum of 175 respondents would be sufficient to represent a population of this size with an acceptable margin of error. Given the practical constraints of accessibility, cost, and time, the study employed a convenience sampling strategy, a widely used non-probability sampling method that allows researchers to gather data quickly and efficiently from readily available participants (Stratton, 2021). Accordingly, 175 questionnaires were distributed to employees across various departments within the organization. Of these, 120 questionnaires were returned, yielding a response rate of approximately 68.6%. After screening the responses for completeness, accuracy, and eligibility, 107 questionnaires were deemed valid and suitable for subsequent statistical analysis. This final sample provided a sufficient basis for examining the research objectives and testing the proposed hypothesis.

Measures

Employee performance, which serves as the dependent variable in this study, was operationalized using nine items adapted from Koopmans (2015) and the widely validated Individual Work Performance Questionnaire (IW PQ). This instrument reflects the contemporary understanding that employee performance is multidimensional and cannot be captured by task completion alone. Accordingly, the measurement included three major dimensions: task performance, contextual performance, and counterproductive work behavior. Task performance items focused on employees' effectiveness in carrying out core job responsibilities, demonstrating technical proficiency, organizing work effectively, and completing assignments within expected timeframes—for example, the item "I can carry out my work efficiently." Contextual performance, often associated with organizational citizenship behavior (OCB), was assessed using items that capture voluntary and extra-role contributions that support the broader organizational environment, such as taking initiative, assisting colleagues, and assuming extra responsibilities without explicit instruction. This dimension recognizes that beyond their formal job descriptions, high-performing employees often contribute to teamwork, cooperation, and a positive workplace atmosphere. Counterproductive performance was evaluated through items designed to detect behaviors that hinder organizational functioning, including actions such as exaggerating work-related problems, engaging in negative conversations about work, or displaying behaviors that unnecessarily obstruct workflow. An example of such an item is "I made problems at work bigger than they were." Together, these dimensions provide a holistic assessment of employees' behavioral outputs and their overall contribution to the organization.

The independent variable, contingent leadership, was measured using seven items adapted from Manning (2013), which are grounded in Fiedler's contingency theory. This theory asserts that leadership effectiveness depends on the alignment between leader behaviors and situational characteristics. As such, the measurement was structured around three core dimensions central to contingency theory. The first dimension, leader-member relations, assessed the level of trust, support, communication, and mutual respect between leaders and subordinates, with items evaluating the extent to which employees feel recognized, consulted, and encouraged by their supervisors—for example, "My manager/supervisor consults me on relevant matters." The second dimension, task structure, examined how

clearly job tasks, responsibilities, and processes are defined, recognizing that well-structured tasks reduce ambiguity and help employees perform more effectively. Items in this dimension asked respondents to assess whether their duties were clearly outlined and whether supervisors provided appropriate guidance and monitoring—for instance, “My tasks and duties are clearly defined.” The final dimension, position power, measured the degree of formal authority possessed by leaders, specifically their capacity to reward desirable behavior or discipline poor performance. This item reflects Fiedler’s assertion that the degree of power embedded in the leader’s role significantly influences his or her ability to manage situational demands. Together, these dimensions allowed the study to capture how well the organization’s leadership practices align with situational requirements, thereby reflecting the essence of contingency theory.

To ensure the reliability of the measurement instruments, a pilot study was conducted involving 15 employees from the target population. This preliminary assessment examined the internal consistency of the scales using Cronbach’s alpha coefficients. The results demonstrated strong reliability across both constructs: the employee performance scale (9 items) produced a Cronbach’s alpha of .832, while the contingent leadership scale (7 items) yielded a value of .793. These coefficients exceed the commonly accepted minimum threshold of .70 for social science research, indicating that the items within each construct were sufficiently correlated and measured the intended dimensions consistently. Consequently, both instruments were deemed reliable and appropriate for deployment in the main data collection phase of the study.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using IBM SPSS (version 21). Descriptive statistics (means and standard deviations) were used to assess the levels of contingent leadership and employee performance (Objectives 1 and 2). Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to test the relationship between contingent leadership and employee performance (Objective 3). A significance level of $p < .05$ was adopted.

Results

Respondent Profile

A total of 107 respondents participated in this study, representing a usable sample derived from the original distribution of 175 questionnaires. The demographic profile reveals several noteworthy patterns with implications for the study’s findings. The sample consisted of 67.3% male ($n = 72$) and 32.7% female ($n = 35$), illustrating a workforce that is considerably male-dominated. This gender imbalance may reflect broader labor-market dynamics in the Kurdistan Region, particularly within private-sector organizations where certain roles, especially operational or technical positions, tend to attract more male employees. Such imbalance may also influence perceptions of leadership and performance, as gendered expectations of authority and work behavior can shape how employees interpret leadership actions and evaluate their own performance.

In terms of age distribution, the majority of respondents (55.1%) were between 20 and 30 years old, followed by 38.3% aged 31–40, and only 6.5% aged 41–50. This pattern indicates that the organization employs a predominantly young workforce, which is characteristic of many rapidly expanding private companies in developing regions. A younger workforce may

be more adaptable, open to new leadership styles, and responsive to structured tasks and clear direction—factors that may reinforce the relevance of contingent leadership, particularly in settings where task structure and leader–member relations play a central role. Conversely, the limited representation of older and more experienced employees may reduce the presence of deeply rooted organizational norms, allowing leadership behavior to exert a stronger and more direct influence on employee performance.

Educational background further supports the notion of a relatively modern and professional workforce, with 81.3% of respondents holding a bachelor's degree and 15.0% possessing a master's degree, while only 3.7% reported having no degree. This high level of educational attainment suggests that employees likely have the capacity to understand complex job expectations, adapt to structured tasks, and evaluate leadership practices critically. Research indicates that more educated employees generally have higher expectations of leadership—particularly regarding communication, recognition, and consultation—which may influence how they perceive contingent leadership dimensions such as leader–member relations. The strong educational profile also implies that employees may be more aware of desired performance standards and organizational goals, potentially contributing to higher levels of task and contextual performance.

Work experience patterns also provide critical insight. Over half of the respondents (55.1%) had 0–5 years of experience, followed by 35.5% with 6–10 years, while only 8.4% had 11–15 years of experience and a mere 0.9% had 16–20 years. This skew toward early- and mid-career employees suggests a relatively young organizational tenure structure, which may influence both performance and leadership dynamics. Less experienced employees often rely more on clearly defined tasks, close supervision, and supportive leader–member relations—all core elements of contingent leadership. Therefore, this demographic characteristic may amplify the relevance and impact of contingent leadership on employee outcomes within the organization. On the other hand, the limited number of highly experienced employees may reduce the degree of institutional memory and weaken peer-driven performance cultures, making leadership behaviors even more central to shaping work attitudes and behaviors.

Taken together, the demographic profile indicates a young, relatively well-educated, and predominantly early-career workforce operating within a male-majority context. These characteristics may heighten the influence of leadership practices on performance, particularly in relation to task clarity, supervisory support, and the appropriate use of positional authority. Thus, the demographic trends not only provide descriptive context but also help explain why contingent leadership may exhibit significant predictive power in shaping employee performance within this organizational setting.

Levels of Contingent Leadership and Employee Performance

The results provided descriptively suggest that the employees rated the organizational behavior of a relatively high contingent leadership ($M = 4.14$, $SD = 0.80$). Task structure and position power were the most outstanding among the three dimensions. There was a strong agreement among the employees that they had their tasks and duties defined as seen by the large mean score of task structure ($M = 4.36$) indicating that leaders were very clarifying and explicit regarding the work expectations. Position power was also found to be very high ($M = 4.50$), which is an indicator suggesting that managers are considered to possess a high

capacity of rewarding desirable behavior and punishing poor performance, which is very much in line with the anticipation of contingency theory with regard to situational favorableness. Leader member relations were also positive with items that touch on praise, recognition and consultation scoring between 3.93 to 4.04 indicating that employees overall feel supported and communicated with by their bosses. The general average was moderate ($M = 3.47$, $SD = 0.97$) in terms of employee performance. The score of task performance was high to very high (around $M = 4.02$ - 4.32), which reveals that the employees generally perform tasks effectively, remain organized and keep the knowledge about their jobs up to date. The contextual performance that relates to the organizational citizenship behavior also had a moderate score (around $M = 3.59$ - 3.96), which indicates that a considerable percentage of employees act voluntarily and fulfill extra duties to the wider organizational context. On the other hand, counterproductive performance had low to very low scores (around $M = 1.62$ - 2.00), which means that the respondents seldom indulged in undesirable behaviors at the workplace, including complaining, exaggerating, or talking about negative things about work. Collectively, these results point to the fact that the company enjoys a robust leadership climate and an overall committed and productive workforce.

Relationship between Contingent Leadership and Employee Performance

Pearson correlation analysis revealed a strong, positive, and statistically significant relationship between contingent leadership and employee performance ($r = .712$, $p < .01$). This supports the hypothesis that higher levels of contingent leadership are associated with higher levels of employee performance.

Discussion and Conclusion

Discussion

The results indicate that the employees viewed their leaders as high in terms of contingent leadership especially in terms of clear task structure and high position power. This is in line with the statement made by Fiedler that good leaders define what to do and use the role power to establish conducive working environments (Fiedler and Chemers, 1974; Northouse, 2007). The enthusiasm of the leader-member relations scores is high, which means that employees experience the support, recognition, and consultation aspects that were previously associated with a higher level of satisfaction and performance (Harris et al., 2009; Alshamrani, 2017). Overall performance of employees was moderate, and it was also found that task and contextual performance are high and moderate and counterproductive behavior is low. This trend reflects the claim by Koopmans, (2011) that good performance is one that is typified by high task and contextual performance coupled with low CWB. The low scores on counterproductive behavior can mean that the employees are overall satisfied and engaged which, in its turn, could be explained by the positive leadership practices that could be observed. Above all, the positive correlation between contingent leadership and employee performance is strong, which confirms the previous research reports that leadership style has a significant impact on employee outcomes (Ohunakin et al., 2016; Abbas and Yaqoob, 2009; Ohemeng et al., 2018). In this regard, the findings justify the perception that leaders who need to match the situational variables through clarification of tasks, power balancing, and fostering positive leader-member relationships, are capable of boosting employee performance, promoting OCB, and reducing CWB.

Limitations and Future Research

This study has several limitations. First, it was conducted in a single private organization in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, which limits the generalizability of the findings to other sectors or regions. Second, the use of convenience sampling may introduce sampling bias. Third, data were collected using self-report measures, which may be subject to common method bias and social desirability effects.

Future studies could adopt a multi-source design (e.g., combining employee self-ratings with supervisor ratings), include public sector organizations, or compare multiple industries. Qualitative approaches or mixed-method designs could also be used to explore how leaders interpret and respond to situational variables in practice, possibly incorporating direct measures of LPC scores and more nuanced situational assessments.

Practical Implications

For practitioners, the findings of this study highlight that strengthening leadership capabilities aligned with contingency principles can substantially enhance employee performance. Organizations should invest in developing managers who are able to diagnose situational variables—such as the quality of leader–member relations, the level of task structure, and the degree of positional authority—and adjust their leadership behaviors to match these conditions. Central to this approach is ensuring that job tasks and responsibilities are clearly defined and communicated so that employees understand expectations and can perform efficiently. At the same time, managers must exercise formal authority, including rewards and sanctions, in a fair and transparent manner that supports performance without fostering fear or reinforcing excessive power distance. Equally important is cultivating strong interpersonal relationships between leaders and employees; managers should be encouraged to build supportive networks, provide timely recognition, and involve employees in decision-making processes. Collectively, these practices create an environment where contingent leadership can operate effectively and contribute to sustained improvements in employee performance.

Conclusion

This research offers empirical data in a Kurdistan case of the private-sector showing contingent leadership has a positive and significant relationship with employee performance. The empirical results indicate that leaders who communicate tasks clearly, establish favorable and supportive relationships with their subordinates and use positional power in a reasonable and reasonable way can encourage better levels of task performance and contextual that of employees and at the same time curb undesired work behaviors among workers. Such tendencies directly resonate with the main assumption of the contingency theory, which states that there is no universal style of leadership style that is always effective, but rather the effectiveness of leadership is determined by the level of the correspondence between the leader behavior and situational factors i.e., leader-member relation, task structure, and position power (Fiedler and Chemers, 1974; Northouse, 2007). In the organization under study, the perceived task structure, positive supervisory relationships and proper use of power are also high, which depicts the type of situational favorableness that the contingency theory recognizes to be the key to achieving the best performance results. It is particularly relevant to the Kurdistan Region, where the practice of leadership used to be characterized as similar and not flexible enough to address the situation (Surji, 2014). The current research thus takes the empirical use of contingency theory to a regional level which the evidence has

been scarce and emphasizes the significance of responsive leadership to suit the situation in defining the behavior of employees. To sum up, this paper finds that the implementation of the leadership development strategy based on the contingency principles can positively affect organizations located in Iraqi Kurdistan, as well as in other developing settings. A strategy of training leaders to be able to diagnose, communicate effectively, develop trust-based relationships, and exercise authority wisely can become an effective road that may lead to better employee performance and enhance organizational effectiveness. With increasingly dynamic and competitive work environments, the strategic fit between leader actions and situational needs, which is highlighted in contingency theory, is an imperative factor in the success of an organization.

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