

Developing Effective Leadership Styles in the Hotel Industry: Identifying key Contextual Factors

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Abstract

The integration of situational leadership Theory (SLT) principles is acknowledged to result in a more orderly and conducive learning environment. However, SLT has placed more significance on employee readiness levels when deciding on a leadership style to influence staff development. It is however essential to examine other factors that could be considered in addition, in these decisions.

This research explored the contextual factors that need to be considered, alongside staff readiness level when deciding on a SLT leadership style among SME hotel staff. This qualitative and exploratory study adopted a multiple-case study strategy using a purposive-homogenous sample of thirty staff, from ten 2-star SME hotels and analysed data from semi-structured interviews through latent thematic analysis and presented the results descriptively with the aid of the Gioia technique.

The findings provide practical implications for hotel managers to consider contextual factors when deciding on SLT leadership styles to influence staff development, and for HRD practitioners to also incorporate context considerations into leadership training manuals that are targeted at building the capacities of SME hotel managers and leaders as contextual factors have received little attention in the leadership literature, particularly among SMEs.

Keywords

Situational leadership • contextual factors • staff readiness • SME hotels • Ghana

Introduction

The difficulty in selecting the best leadership style for effective leadership has challenged researchers (Thompson & Glasø, 2015). Some scholars suggest it is based on the followers' readiness level (Ebrahimi et al. 2016), whilst other scholars acknowledge it is a joint function of leader behaviour and situational requirements (Vecchio et al., 2006). This has led to inconclusive investigation of a general trait of leadership that is robust across all situations (Judge et al., 2014; Larsson & Vinberg, 2010; Leikas et al., 2012).

As emergent research has shown, leadership performance is highly contextual because of specific forces, both cultural, operational and organizational. Specifically, Muenjohn and Armstrong (2007) and Thompson and Glasø (2015) have led the need to re-evaluate the interaction between Situational Leadership Theory (SLT) and more intricate real-life situations of leadership, particularly in culturally diverse and resource-scarce places, like Sub-Saharan Africa. The environment of these settings makes it hard to employ the styles of SLT recommended in the literature as there is no explicit guideline

on how contextual variables such as the attributes of the workforce, institutional culture and operational uncertainty affect the level of development of the employees and their preparedness of leadership mentoring. This has raised theoretical and practical issues in different parts of the globe such as Asia (Yukl, 2011) and Africa (Dotse & Asumeng, 2014) with regards to how ill-suited the conventional leadership models are in dealing with the current issues of the modern organizations.

To enhance managerial leader's effectiveness in practice, a variety of contextual influences that are internal and external to an organization's operating environment is vital (Meyer et al., 2010) to avoid leadership practices, being tempered with especially in African to accommodate context (Gray et al., 2008), as the interplay between managerial leader roles and situational context has been shown to be significant (Dierdorff et al., 2009). The exercise and application of the right blend of attitudes and behaviours in a specific context by organisational leaders is vital in achieving positive

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organisational outcomes (Konopaske et al., 2018). Hence, clarity is needed on the impact of context on followership constructions and behaviour in the leadership process (Munchiri, 2011).

However, most leadership theories have been criticized for failing to blend attitudes, behaviours and situational specificity in the leadership process. For example, the Great Man and traits theories have been

criticized for focusing exclusively on the leader's traits, ignoring situational specificity (Germain, 2019; Gottfredson & Reina, 2019). Behavioural theories relying heavily on field data and largely ignoring the situation (Northouse, 2017; Ola, 2017) and Contingency theories are unable to combine task and relationship-oriented behaviours (Howell & Wanasika, 2012).

Emerging leadership theories including, transactional leadership is criticized for ignoring situational and contextual factors (Yukl, 2011; Yukl & Mahsud, 2010), transformational leadership's exclusion of task performance in its components (Andersen, 2018), Authentic leadership oblivious of the leader's role (Einola & Alvesson, 2021) and Shared leadership affected by internal team features (Derue et al., 2011). Other criticisms of emerging leadership theories including collaborative leadership which is criticized for its tendency of implementing a false collaborative behaviour, Leader Member Exchange lack of comprehensible and internally consistent account of leader-follower dynamics in organizations (Tourish, 2019). Distributed Leadership is criticized for its inability to conceptualise and redistribute power (Bolden et al., 2009; Lumby, 2019). Servant leadership is also criticized for its ineffectiveness in a social environment without democracy (Mcfarlane, 2011) and finally Collective leadership is criticized for its dependence on the level of cooperation and coordination of various leaders belonging to a specific network, sharing a common objective (Yukl, 2011). Whereas Transformational Leadership Theory (TLT) is moderately inflexible, Situational Leadership Theory (SLT) can work with more flexibility by adjusting leadership behaviours according to the levels of psychological and task maturity of the followers thus accommodating both task and relationship aspects. This responsiveness offers this capability of SLT to be very pertinent to complicated organizational environments, which is the case with the Ghanaian hotel industry. Empirical evidence shows that the usage of this results in a conducive learning environment (Hasanah et al., 2024) and a significant job performance (Yudiani, 2024). SLT overcomes these limitations by being able to combine both behavioural theories which (focuses on leaders' behaviours as either task or people focused) and contingency theories (portrays effective leadership as contingent on follower development). SLT also considers the varying development levels of staff, thus, job and psychological development (McCleskey, 2014)

as opposed to the other theories. The integration of SLT principles will therefore result in a more orderly and conducive learning environment (Hasanah et al., 2024) and tend to have a favourable and substantial impact on employee job performance (Yudiani, 2024) than the other theories.

The hospitality sector which is a case environment for consideration, indicates a rich agenda for researchers to pursue (Otoo & Mishra, 2018). Firms operating in the sector, especially hotels (Hyasat, Al-Weshah & Kakeesh, 2022) are acknowledged to employ low-skilled and seasonal workforce (Wikhamn, 2019) who are diverse (Sretić et al., 2019) and lack multidisciplinary competence (Appaw-Agbola, 2016). These often limit the provision of the socio-cultural needs and also influences employees' attitude towards guests, for example, those with disabilities (Adam, 2019).

Problem Statement

From an industry perspective, leadership have been found to improve service quality, customer satisfaction and employee engagement in the hotel sector (Koyuncu et al., 2014), which is dominated by Small and Medium-sized Enterprises [SMEs] (Chung & D'Annunzio-Green, 2018). However, evidence suggests limited research has explored the SME context (Alhassan et al., 2025; Cooke et al., 2020) and scholarly debate on the mechanisms through which leadership influences SME employee's behaviour, development, and performance, especially in the hotel industry is also inconclusive (Standstrom & Reynolds, 2020). Emphasis on leadership behavioural research (Hughes et al., 2018) has also side-lined the study of other leadership mechanisms relative to contextual and situational variables influencing organizations and its staff, especially among SMEs due to their size (Parida et al., 2012). It is however vital for managers or leaders to consider not only the readiness level of employees, but context as well, for what employees will accept as an ideal and effective leader style, for example, in the western world may not be the case in the Ghanaian context (Dotse & Asumeng, 2014).

There is a notable gap in the literature regarding the influence of contextual factors on SLT adoption in SME hotels, especially in Sub-Saharan Africa. Most existing studies emphasize employee readiness but overlook how contextual variables such as organizational culture, social expectations, and workforce

limitations interact with leadership style decisions. Furthermore, the existing SLT framework lacks practical guidance on how managers should accurately classify employee development levels (D1 to D4) in diverse cultural and operational environments. This gap presents both theoretical and practical challenges, and without understanding the interplay between

context and readiness, SLT may fail to achieve intended staff development outcomes. Consequently, this research seeks to answer the following research question:

What contextual factors do SME hotel managers and leaders need to consider, alongside employee readiness level when deciding on a situational leadership theory leadership style to influence Ghanaian SME hotel employees' development?

Specifically, the study primarily focuses on exploring contextual factors and not how they mitigate the limitations of the styles adopted in SLT. This research will provide useful implications for hotel managers to understand and incorporate contextual factors to effectively utilise SLT and provide guidance on how managers can support the development of their staff.

The paper begins with a comprehensive literature review on SLT and staff readiness levels. The methodology including context and data analysis is presented, followed by a description of the results. The paper ends with the conclusion, practical implications, and suggestions for future research.

Literature Review

Theoretical Background

SLT was first introduced as the "life cycle of leadership" by Hersey and Blanchard, in 1969 (Punch & Ducharme, 1972) and revised to SLT II in 1985 (Blanchard, 1997 & 2000). The concept of supportive and directive behaviours in SLT are align with four styles of directing, coaching, supporting, and delegating to support four development levels D1 (high commitment but low in competence), D2 (low commitment and low competence), D3 (high competence with variable commitment) and finally D4 (high competence with high commitment). These have remained in the SLT literature for over 35 years and is still valuable and used in current research including Cvijanović et al. (2018), Gyeltshen (2020), and Putra & Riyanto (2019) to manage and influence employees in different context.

Employee Readiness Levels Among Ghanaian SME Hotels

Fernandez & Vecchio (1997: p.68) defined employee readiness as 'the extent to which a follower has the ability and willingness to accomplish a given function'; ability as 'the knowledge, experience, and skill that an individual brings to a particular activity, while willingness is defined as 'the extent to which an employee possesses confidence, commitment, and motivation for accomplishing a given task'.

The Ghanaian hotel industry (GHI) which is categorized under the tertiary sector (Aduhene & Osei-Assibey, 2021) is dominated by SMEs (Spio-Kwofie et al., 2017) and an

occupancy rate of 59.2% of tourists' accommodation (Nartey, 2025) and contributes more to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of Ghana than the manufacturing (Aduhene & Osei-Assibey, 2021). Organisational performance has been linked to employee readiness in the GHI (Otoo & Mishra, 2018). Interestingly, vocational, and senior high school graduates who lack experience and possibly taking their first employment in the industry represent the largest segment of employees working within Ghanaian SME hotels (Appaw-Agbola, 2016). These employees who are diverse (Sretić et al., 2019) experiences intensive labour (Marneros et al., 2021) high levels of emotional exhaustion, occupational stress, long working hours, and mood swings (Tongchaiprasit & Ariyabuddhiphongs, 2016).

The first category of Ghanaian SME hotel staff consists of those without experience synonymous to D1 followers (Cvijanović et al., 2018; Thompson & Vecchio, 2009; Thompson & Glasø, 2018) characterized by a determination to learn the tenets of their role to gain the needed experience to sustain their employment. They have a passive, deferent, and obedient role orientation (Lapierre & Carsten, 2014) and belief in remaining silent and deferent to the leader's directives (Carsten et al., 2010). SLT directing style (S1), thus, low-supportive behaviour in combination with high-directive behaviour (Blanchard, 2000) leverages these employees by giving detailed guidelines.

The second category are staff with little experience, likened to D2 followers (Cvijanović et al., 2018; Thompson & Vecchio, 2009; Thompson & Glasø, 2018) characterized as disillusioned learners. They also have a passive, deferent, and obedient role orientation (Lapierre & Carsten, 2014) and belief in remaining silent and deferent to the leader's directives (Carsten et al., 2010). SLT coaching style (S2), thus high-supportive behaviour in combination with high-directive behaviour leverages these employees (Blanchard, 2000) by giving detailed guidelines but with a little latitude for their own discretion.

The third category are staff with moderately high development, synonymous to D3 followers (Cvijanović et al., 2018; Thompson & Vecchio, 2009; Thompson & Glasø, 2018) and characterized as capable but cautious performers, with variable commitment. They have a proactive role orientation (Lapierre & Carsten, 2014), articulating ideas, taking initiatives, and seeking goal-oriented more challenging and rewarding role outside the organisation (Carsten et al., 2010). SLT supporting style (S3), thus high-supportive behaviour in combination with low-directive behaviour, leverages these employees (Blanchard, 2000), through for example, recognition, motivation and exchanging ideas.

The last category are staff with professional development, synonymous to D4 followers (Cvijanović et al., 2018; Thompson & Vecchio, 2009; Thompson & Glasø, 2018) and

characterized as self-reliant achievers who are high on both development and commitment. They are most likely to exhibit an anti-authoritarian role orientation, rebellious and avoid domination by the leader (Lapierre & Carsten, 2014) and tend to focus on serving high-profile guests, diffusing staff-guest conflicts, and giving directives (Carsten et al., 2010). The use of innovative human resource practices (Kroon et al., 2013) may be practicable by adopting a low directive and low supportive behaviour through a delegating leadership style (S4), thus low-supportive behaviour in combination with low-directive behaviour, that displays the leader's confidence in the ability of the employee.

The application of these styles has seemingly failed to showcase the contextual factors in the decision-making process at the various development levels. Other organisational factors such as office politics (Sinnicks, 2018) or culture (Hartnell et al., 2016), which can also influence the adoption of a specific SLT leadership style at the various development levels has also not been highlighted. In practice, the agility of adapting the style to new circumstances in the business environment and the manager's/leader's ability to know how to assess the development of those led, to choose the most appropriate leadership style (Armandi et al., 2003; Mulyana et al., 2022).

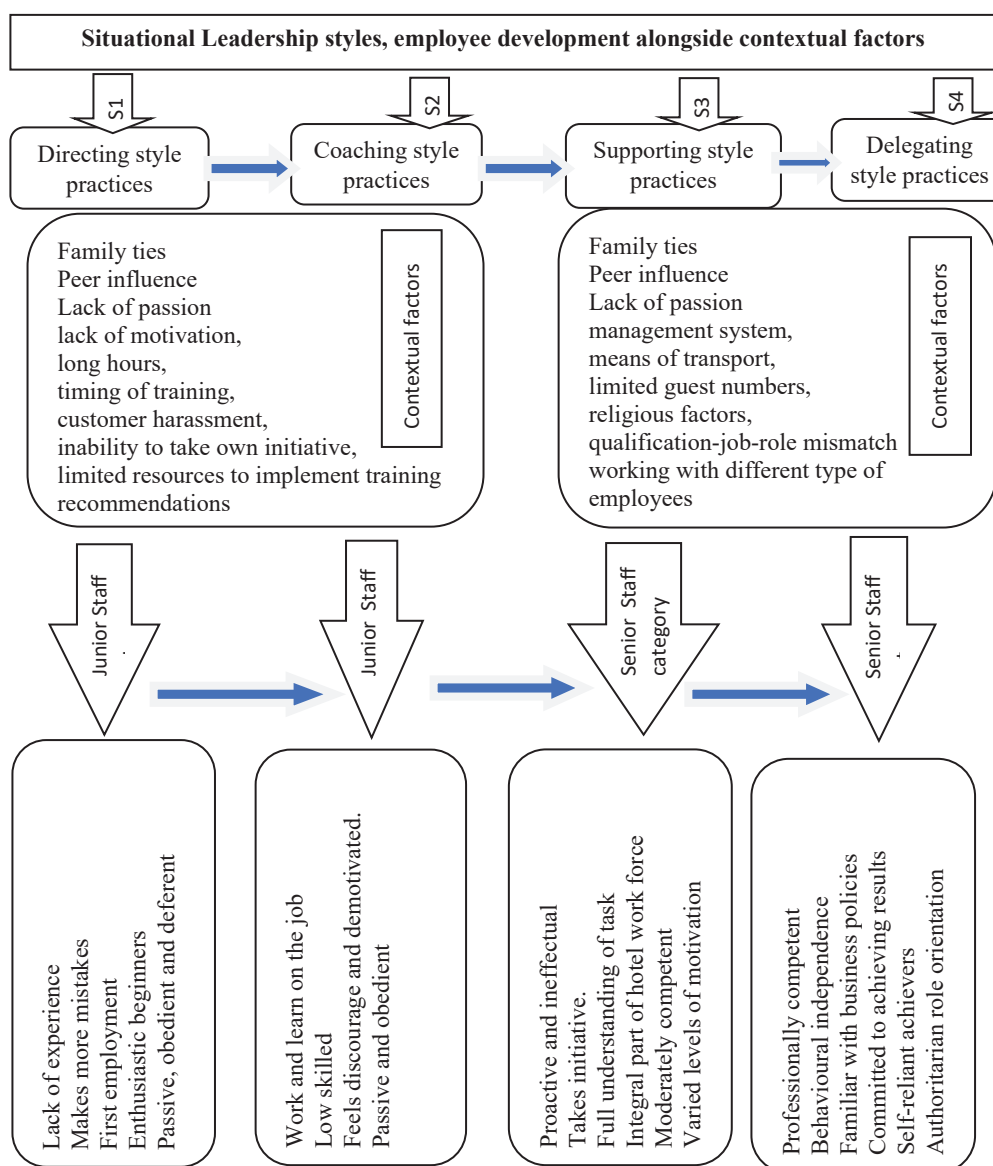


Figure 1. Situational Leadership Constructs Source: Authors' construct, 2025

The SLT constructs and contextual factors are visualised in Figure 1 above. The top part of figure represents the four SLT leadership styles. The middle part highlights the contextual factors that could be considered alongside those styles, whilst the bottom part highlights the features of the calibre of staff who are affected by those contextual factors, with the direction of the arrows from left to right showing the development levels from low to moderate (Junior) to high and professional (senior) development. As the interplay between leaders and situations are more variable than static, so will different categories of staff be affected by different contextual factors when adopting different leadership styles.

Materials and Methods

The philosophical approach taken in this study embraced the interpretivist perspective in the interpretation of how SME hotel managers and workers in Ghana experience and perceive the contextual factors of determining how to apply the Situational Leadership Theory (SLT). The choice of interpretivism was appropriate because it pays the centralized attention to the subjective experiences of the participants in their natural social and cultural environments (Blaikie, 2007; Saunders et al., 2019). This study adopted a qualitative, multiple-case study design to be used in the

Table 1. Features of Sampled SME Ghanaian Hotels

Name/ star-rating	Legal Status	Year established	No. of staff	No. of rooms	Form of business ownership	Facilities and Services	Target customers	Life cycle
Hotel-1/ 2-Star	Registered	2002	20	42	Sole proprietorship	Accommodation, bar, restaurant, Wi-Fi and conferencing services	Tourist, individuals and organizations	Growth stage
Hotel-2/ 2-Star	Registered	2017	45	11	Sole proprietorship	Accommodation, restaurant, bar, laundry, swimming pool, Wi-Fi and conferencing services	Tourist, individuals and organizations	Introductory
Hotel-3/ 2-Star	Registered	1984	24	22	Private company	Accommodation, restaurant, bar, Wi-Fi and conferencing services	Tourist, individuals and organizations	Maturity stage
Hotel-4/ 2-Star	Registered	2004	62	62	Private company	Accommodation, restaurant, bar, laundry, swimming pool, night club, Wi-Fi and conferencing services	Tourist, affluent individuals, and corporate organizations	Growth stage
Hotel-5/ 2-Star	Registered	2013	10	55	Sole proprietorship	Accommodation, restaurant, swimming pool, Wi-Fi and conferencing services	Tourist, individuals and organizations	Introductory stage
Hotel-6/ 2-Star	Registered	2008	70	126	Private company	Accommodation, restaurant, bar, laundry, swimming pool, gym, Wi-Fi and conferencing services	Tourist, individuals, and corporate organizations	Growth stage
Hotel-7/ 2-Star	Registered	2004	36	84	Sole proprietorship	Accommodation, restaurant, bar, laundry, swimming pool, gym, football pitch, volleyball and lawn tennis courts, Wi-Fi and conferencing services	Tourist, individuals, and organizations	Growth stage
Hotel-8/ 2-Star	Registered	2012	30	150	Public company	Accommodation, restaurant, Wi-Fi and conferencing services	Tourist, individuals, organizations and students	Introductory stage
Hotel-9/ 2-Star	Registered	2008	54	102	Sole proprietorship	Accommodation, restaurant, bar, laundry, swimming pool, car rental, car washing, Wi-Fi, business and conferencing services	Tourist, individuals, and corporate organizations	Growth stage
Hotel-10/ 2-Star	Registered	2015	32	30	Sole proprietorship	Accommodation, restaurant, bar, laundry, swimming pool, car rental, Wi-Fi and conferencing services	Tourist, individuals, and corporate organizations	Introductory stage

study of leadership behaviours and contextual dynamics in 2-star SME hotels. This course of action has allowed defining the problem of real-life leadership practice in different organizational environments through the method of inductive approach study (Saunders et al., 2016; Yin, 2013).

A purposive sampling method was applied to identify ten 2-star SME hotels among the 4,131 licensed hotels (Nartey, 2025). 14 2-star SME hotels were contacted to take part in the research, and ten agreed and consented to participate, representing a response rate of 71%. One manager, one senior employee and one junior employee were selected and interviewed in each hotel and a total of 30 participants became a part of the project. This was to guarantee variation in views and case study procedures (Creswell, 2013; Saunders et al., 2019). As most Ghanaian SME hotels are either owner-managed or owner-led (MOTI MSME Policy Report, 2019) using employees with limited or varied competences for service delivery (Apaw-agbalo, 2016) without a clear career development criterion (Nwosu & Ward, 2016), the principles of SLT and in agreement with Alhassan (2023), the participants (employees) were divided according to their development stages: the junior staff (D1 and D2) performed duties with little to no experience in the hotel industry, whereas the senior staff (D3 and D4) used to work in the industry with moderate to high experience. Tables 2, 3 and 4 summarise the features of the sampled SME managers, senior and junior staff respectively.

The collection of data took place through semi-structured interviews of about one hour per respondent. The study research objectives were used to guide the creation of interview questions that relied on the research objectives and the model of five Ps (Saunders et al., 2019). The interviews were done in English, taped, transcribed, and coded to provide confidentiality (Davidson, 1996). The follow-up

interviews and member checking were adopted in order to improve trustworthiness (Creswell, 2013).

Figure 2 summarises the main differences and similarities among the case hotels. Even though the cases were 2-star SME hotels drawn from the same industry with similar features (on the right side of the figure),

they still exhibited different features (left side of the figure) due to internal capabilities, policies or external factors.

The analysis of the interview data was performed using the Thematic Analysis, and NVivo software was expected to assist in systematic coding and in theme development (Bazeley, 2007; Braun & Clarke, 2013). Rigor was developed in the data analysis through two-level comparison (within and across cases) and the application of the Gioia method to help organize and present the results (Reay et al., 2019).

Table 3. Profile of sampled Ghanaian SME Hotel Senior Staff

SME Senior Staff Name	Academic qualification	Industry experience (Years)	Age Bracket
Hotel-1- SS	First Degree	11	30-35
Hotel-2- SS	Higher National Diploma	2	35-40
Hotel-3- SS	First degree	5	30-35
Hotel-4- SS	Higher National Diploma	11	45-50
Hotel-5- SS	Senior High School	9 months	20-25
Hotel-6- SS	Diploma of Business Studies	7	35-30
Hotel-7- SS	Higher National Diploma	5	30-35
Hotel-8- SS	First degree	13 months	20-25
Hotel-9- SS	Higher National Diploma	9	35-40
Hotel-10- SS	First degree	4 months	25-30

Table 4. Profile of Sampled Ghanaian SME Hotel Junior Staff

SME Hotel Junior employees	Academic qualification	Industry experience (Years)	Age bracket
Hotel-1-JS	Senior High School	7	30-35
Hotel-2- JS	Senior High School	2 months	20-25
Hotel-3- JS	First degree	5	30-35
Hotel-4- JS	Senior High School	6 months	20-25
Hotel-5- JS	Senior High School	2 months	20-25
Hotel-6- JS	Diploma	1.5	30-35
Hotel-7- JS	First degree	1year, 4 months	30-35
Hotel-8- JS	Diploma	1.5	25-30
Hotel-9- JS	First degree	1 year, 4 months	20-25
Hotel-10-JS	First degree	2	25-30

Table 2. Profile of sampled Ghanaian SME Hotel Managers

Code	Academic qualification	Industry Experience (years)	Age bracket
Hotel-1-HM	Master's degree	15	35-40
Hote-2-HM	Master's degree	30	55-60
Hotel-3-HM	First degree	38	60-65
Hotel-4-HM	First degree	6	40-45
Hotel-5-HM	Master's degree	3.5	40-45
Hotel-6-HM	Master's degree	4	35-40
Hotel-7-HM	Higher National Diploma	7	30-35
Hotel-8-HM	Master's degree	3	30-35
Hotel-9-HM	First degree	14	45-50
Hotel-10-HM	First degree	21	35-40

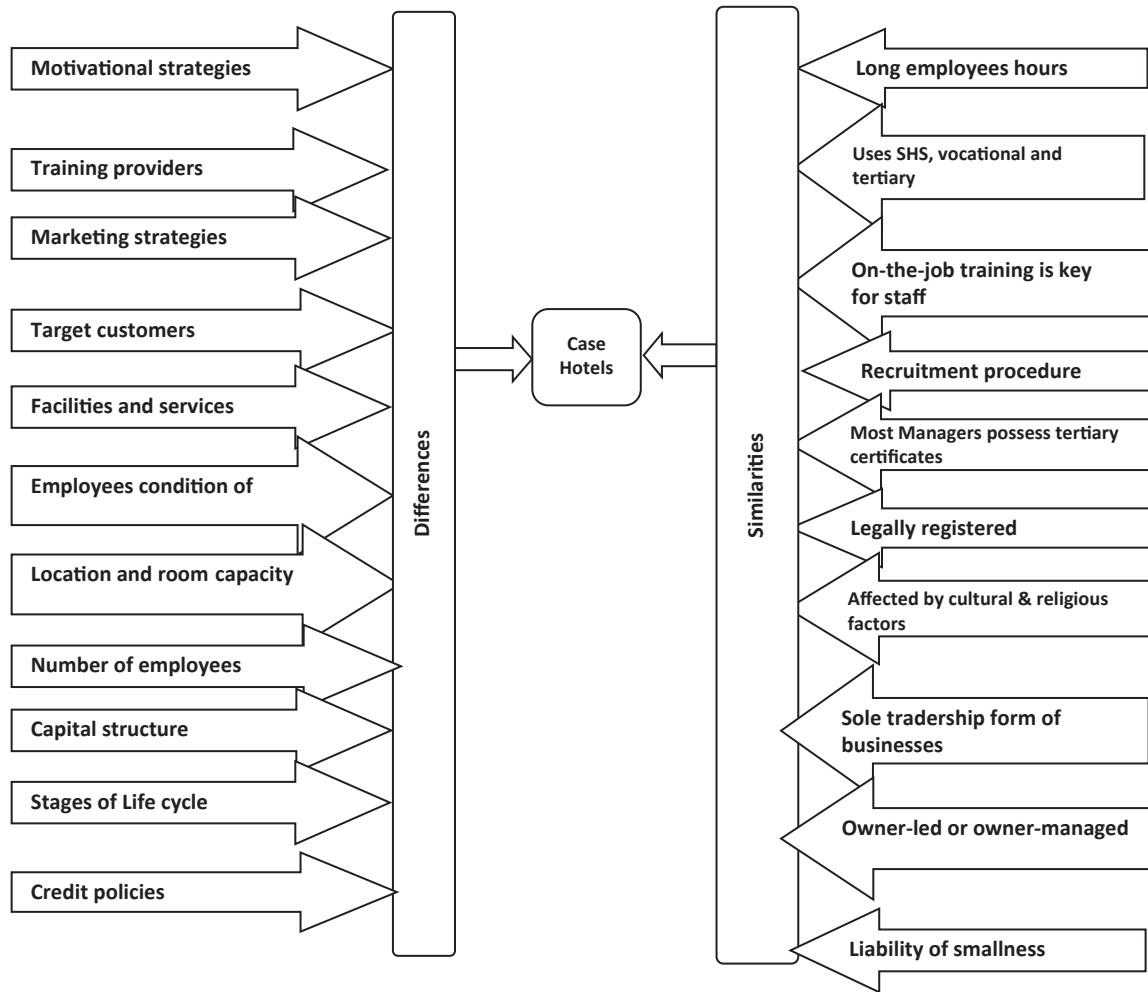


Figure 2. Differences and Similarities Among Case Hotels

Results and Discussions

This research sought to explore the contextual factors that could be considered alongside staff readiness levels when deciding on SLT leadership style to influence staff development. The research explored ten recognised cases to showcase and gain a deeper understanding of staff and managers views on these contextual factors in the Ghanaian hotel industry.

The analysis of the 30 participants' accounts revealed contextual factors from the perspective of hotel managers (HM), junior staff (JS), and senior staff (SS). The key results that evolved from the cases are presented and discussed below.

Family Ties

Family ties was identified as a contextual factor that needs to be considered alongside employee readiness. The attention of employees within Ghanaian SME hotels tends to be divided between the requirements of their job and family pressures within their homes. This is due to parental responsibilities and parent's lack of understanding of the official contractual relationship between their ward (employee) and the hotel; hence they place certain family burdens on their wards (staff) which conflicts with the requirements of their jobs.

This factor is illustrated by the following quotes: "They are torn between the requirement of the job and what is required of them from their homes. Their parent doesn't understand that their child has an employment contract with the Institution" (HOTEL-2-HM). "Sometimes, in trying to organise training, it's

difficult because employees want to rush back and pick their kids, they dropped off at school in the morning" (HOTEL-9-HM). "By the time you finish your house chores and come to work, you will be late, and your colleagues would have done something which you were not there to learn" (hotel-5 SS).

The analysis highlights that the requirement of staff job-roles does not create avenues for a balance between family and work-life. Staff tend to give priority to the welfare of their families than their job roles, which tend to affect their commitment and development. Family responsibilities sometimes surpass their commitment to which affects their readiness. This highlights the value of family within their employment life demonstrating that, the reason behind work is not entirely about a paycheck.

This result furthers our understanding of the work of Schwartz (2015) who holds the view that the priority employees give to their families gives them influence, recognition, enjoyment of the leisure of life, peace, and independence. The requirement of their job roles to a large extent do not allows for flexible working hours. Staff however tend to work long hours with efficiency when they feel managers allow them a little latitude between their roles and family-related issues. This result furthers our understanding of the conclusion of Mohanty & Mohanty (2014), that suggests that, to obtain optimal return on employees, it is important for the leader or SME hotel manager when deciding to adopt a SLT leadership style to not only consider the readiness level of employees, but also understand the interplay between work and family, as flexible working arrangements are becoming a more important aspect of the quality of working life for many employees.

Working Without Passion and Unrelated Qualifications

Staff working with unrelated job qualification and using the job as a steppingstone tend to lack the passion for the job resulting in an inability to understand their job roles and titles which influences their development and knowledge of which direction to tailor their efforts.

This factor is illustrated by the following quotes: "Most employees just work to make a living without having a passion for the job, so they see no reason to develop themselves. They just want something to do to make a living" (HOTEL-2-HM). "The lack of passion for certain roles within the hotel is a major factor influencing employee development. This makes them limited in other roles." (HOTEL-3-HM).

"Some people work as if they have no interest in the job, and for those people, no matter how you try you can't bring them on board" (HOTEL-4-HM). "Most of them just need money for school and so, they work for six months and then leave" (HOTEL-9-HM). "My qualification is not in line with the job role. I studied accounting and now I am working as a front desk supervisor" (Hotel-8 SS).

Most employees are placed on job roles with qualifications and competence that do not match those roles, which affects their passion. The lack of passion has resulted in employees self-perceived employability, hence their inability to commit and participate in staff training initiatives. This result builds on the results of De Vos et al. (2011) who concluded that staff self-perceived employability appeared to be positively related with career satisfaction and perceived marketability. The results also further our understanding of the results of Škrinjarić (2022) and Shury et al., (2010) highlighting that competence mismatch affects individual workload and increases operational cost within organizations. It is important for the leader or SME hotel manager when deciding to adopt a SLT leadership style to not only consider the readiness level of employees but also assess and match employee passion to appropriate job roles within the hotel to derive maximum output from the employee due to their self-perceived employability and career satisfaction.

Cultural and Religious Factors

Cultural and religious beliefs and orientation is another contextual factor that needs to be considered alongside employee readiness. Ghanaian SME hotel employees tend to hold the view that their managers know everything and have all the answers to problems in the hotel. This is based on their cultural and social orientation, as the manager is often the owner or leader of the hotel. Consequently, managers tend to resolve all service-issues. Religious norms and beliefs also tend to limit staff desire and commitment to learn certain services that are against their religious beliefs.

This factor is illustrated by the following quotes: "Cultural and religious set-up plays a role so, their upbringing tends to lead them to run to the manager to go and confront the issue, which does not make them learn" (HOTEL-6-HM). "Here, the culture and lifestyle affect everything. For example, hazard analysis and

critical control points (HACCP) doesn't allow long hair at work, but they don't want to understand that" (HOTEL-1-HM). "I don't feel comfortable learning alcoholic beverage names or even serving it because I am a Muslim" (Hotel-7 SS). The cultural and religious norms and rules make SME hotel employees feel reluctant to learn the practices within the hotel which conflicts with their cultural and religious beliefs. For example, a Muslim employee tasked to serve alcohol or prepare a pork dish. This tends to limit their development in those areas and also results in customer dissatisfaction. This result highlights the importance of the SME hotel leader or manager to not only consider the readiness level of employees when deciding to adopt a SLT leadership style but also have an understanding of their cultural and religious orientation as these tend to impact on their career optimism.

This result builds on the work of Manoharan et al. (2021) who found that in culturally and linguistically diverse workforce, spirituality and faith affect their career optimism in the hotel industry. The result also furthers our understanding of the results of Grobelna (2015) who stressed the need for culture and religious-oriented managerial practices to be undertaken to create competitive advantages based on diverse employees whose performance significantly influences the guests' hospitality experience to manage a successful global hospitality business.

Timing and Relevance of Training

The scheduling of relevant training is another factor to be considered alongside employees' readiness, as this mostly conflicts with their off days. Most employees also live far from work and so do not get the chance to participate in relevant trainings due to issues with proximity and scheduled times. Staff also highlighted the misalignment of certain training to their needs and the needs of the hotel.

This factor is illustrated by the following quotes: "We run a shift system, so sometimes the time of the training might not fall on your shift" (Hotel-2 SS). "I live far from the hotel, and I must take two different vehicles to work. On some occasions it takes over an hour, or more, to get to work on time" (Hotel-8 SS). "The training we are going for tomorrow is about digital marketing and here we don't do digital" (Hotel-3 JS). "We run a shift system here, and you will not be on duty and when the training will be organised, and as we live far from the hotel, you may make it (on time), but you are most likely to be late for the training" (Hotel-2 JS).

As most hotels employ the shift system of employee work attendance, employees shift pattern and their lack of transport to get to and from work as they live far from work can affect their ability to attend scheduled training programmes on time. Consequently, this affects their development with scheduled training programmes at the workplace.

It is important for SME hotel leaders or managers to not only consider the readiness level of employees in SLT leadership style to support employee development but also consider the relevance of the training programmes, as these are sometimes misaligned to services provided by SME hotels, hence demotivates employees. This result supports the findings of EL Hajjar & Alkhanaizi (2018) who found that training effectiveness is affected by training schedules and hence training schedule should be designed to address any relevant challenges and contingencies, which may occur during training.

Limited Resources and Guest Numbers

Limited resources to implement training recommendations which tend to limit guest satisfaction were identified as another contextual factor that needs to be considered

alongside employees' readiness. Ghanaian SME hotel staff uses the frequent visits of guests, their demands, and the provision of conference services as avenues to learn and build their readiness. The fulfilment of guests demands, and conferencing requirement brings out most of the hotel service activities in the hotel for staff to learn. Limited resources sometimes tend to limit the provision of and implementation of training recommendations for guest satisfaction.

This factor is illustrated by the following quotes: "Sometimes it is with the resource and most of the things you learn does not apply to every customer who comes in here." (Hotel-1-SS). "Everything should be networked but in here at the front desk, I can't check any customer bookings, emails or request except on the marketing manager's personal computer (PC) in his office" (Hotel-7 SS). "I have worked in a 4-star hotel previously, and I am working in a 2-star hotel now. Comparatively, you feel like things should be done this way based on your experience, but nobody is giving you a chance to explain it" (Hotel-10 SS). "Right now, we have only 3 guests and no conferences and it is through the guest and conferences that we learn. We have had only one conference in 5 months" (Hotel-5 JS). "We are a 2-star hotel, and we cannot pay like a 3-star, or 4-star hotel. So, employees look at the remuneration package and feel like they are being cheated, and because of that, it affects their output" (HOTEL-1-HM).

As employees learn from hotel guest demands, this result showcased the need for SME hotel leaders or managers to not only consider the readiness level of employees in SLT leadership style, but also consider the necessary systems and amenities needed to implement training recommendations to attract more guest. This motivate employees to be proactive, innovative and ability to incorporate previous experience into their current roles for effective service delivery. This furthers our understanding of the views of Parida et al. (2012) and Nwosu & Ward (2016) who reiterated that SMEs are constrained by the liability smallness and limited financial resource capabilities and opportunities at their disposal. This result also builds on Lee et al. (2019) who found evidence of an association between human resource management (HRM systems can be a key driver) and employee proactivity.

Peer Pressure and Poaching

Peer pressure among work colleagues was a common theme (from the perspective of managers) leading to staff inability to learn the tenets of their roles often resulting to poaching by other hotels and employee turnover.

This factor is illustrated by the following quotes: "Colleagues discuss among themselves and concentrate on searching for better work conditions in rival hotels, and this tend to limit their commitment within their roles in the hotel" (HOTEL-5-HM). "One colleague says let's try the other hotels, we might get

better conditions" (HOTEL-1-HM). "I have been on the same monthly salary for the last 5 years, so sometimes you are forced to look elsewhere" (Hotel-1 JS).

SME hotels co-workers tend to influence each other to seek better employment conditions in other hotels, which often lead to employee poaching by large hotels, limiting employees' ability to undergo proposed and required development training within their roles. This result furthers our understanding of co-worker influence and builds on Bufquin et al. (2017) who examined the influence of co-workers' perceived warmth and competence on employees' job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and turnover intentions in a casual dining restaurant in the USA and confirmed a statistically significant relationship between hospitality co-workers' perceived warmth and job satisfaction. It is important for SME hotel leaders or managers to not only consider the readiness level of their employees but also have an open-door policy to, discuss and provide clarification on the concerns of employees to minimise co-worker influence.

Long Hours of Work Without Motivation

Long and unbalanced working hours was also identified as a contextual factor by employees.

This factor is illustrated by the following quotes: "Honestly, they don't motivate us in anyway. Sometimes you realise you have done a lot and you need to be motivated but no, and this makes me feel bad" (Hotel-3 JS). "We work overtime, for example, during conferences, from morning until around 10pm or 11pm and the next day you must come again as early as 5am" (Hotel-4 JS). "Because we work long hours, you might not get the time to do a course outside to build your own competence" (Hotel-10 JS).

Long and unbalanced working hours with inadequate financial and psychological motivation to compensate for emotional exhaustion and customer harassment affects staff readiness. SME hotel employees tend to spend longer hours at work attending to customer demands and service delivery. As a result, emotional exhaustion, occupational stress, and mood swings sets in which affects their ability to further develop without motivation. Consequently, it is imperative for SME hotel leaders or managers to not only consider the readiness level of employees in SLT but also consider both the physical and emotional state of employees due to Long and unbalanced working hours.

This result furthers our understanding of the work of Mohanty & Mohanty (2014) and Tongchaiprasit & Ariyabuddhiphongs (2016) who contend that due to hotel employees constant and frequent interaction with customers, they become emotionally exhausted, stressed, with mood swings due to the long hours of work which influences their readiness. The result also builds on previous research (Shani et al., 2014; Pizam

& Shani, 2009) that highlighted that long and unbalanced working hours affect hotel employees greatly.

Conclusion

The literature has highlighted leadership research has placed greater emphasis on motivational processes to the detriment of other understudied mechanisms (Hughes et al., 2018), namely, situational variables and contextual factors in the light of follower readiness (McCleskey, 2014). Consequently, this offered a premise for further exploration of the essential principles of SLT (Thompson & Vecchio, 2009).

Theoretically, this research builds on SLT by highlighting that, contextual factors should also be considered alongside employee readiness in SLT styles decision process. This research concludes that, the contextual factors that could be considered, alongside staff readiness level when deciding on SLT leadership style to influence SME hotel junior staff who are classed in this research as D1 and D2 followers and influenced using directing (S1) and coaching (S2) styles under SLT include family ties, lack of motivation, long hours, timing of training, customer harassment, inability to take own initiative and limited resources to implement training recommendations.

The contextual factors that could be considered, alongside staff readiness level of senior staff who are classed in this research as D3 and D4 followers and influenced using supporting style (S3) and delegating style (S4) under SLT also include family ties, management system, means of transport, limited guest numbers, religious factors, qualification-job-role mismatch and working with different type of employees, whilst the contextual factors to be considered at the various development levels include family ties, working without passion, peer pressure and cultural and religious factors.

These contextual factors could be applied to the United Kingdom and other European countries where employment agencies play an intermediary role in recruiting temporary staff for organisations including SME hotels, who mostly require competence development support from their managers or leaders to be able to carry out their roles efficiently using adaptable leadership.

Practical Implications

The findings of this research have showed the importance of family ties as a key contextual factor that should be considered alongside staff readiness, when deciding to adopt a SLT leadership style to support staff development, as it influences staff social, moral, religious, and working

life. This creates some interesting implications for HRD practitioners, particularly those engaged in management-/leadership development (MLD) activities including trainers and executive coaches.

For SME hotel managers and leaders, a review of the family circumstances of prospective employees should be an important consideration in the recruitment process to guide them on the adjustment required when deciding to adopt a SLT leadership style to support their development.

For HRD practitioners, particularly those engaged in management-/leadership development (MLD) activities including trainers and executive coaches, the ethical procedures on how to assess employees' family circumstances should be incorporated into the leadership training process when they are engaged to design training manuals targeted at building the capacities of SME hotel managers and leaders. Long and unbalanced working hours have also been found to stimulate emotional exhaustion, occupational stress, and mood swings among SME hotel staff. SME hotel managers/leaders should collaborate with HRD practitioners, particularly those engaged in management-/leadership development (MLD) activities including trainers and executive coaches to schedule staff development training during lean periods (mid-year) where there is less pressure on staff as opposed to peak periods (Christmas and new year) where there is more pressure on staff.

Limitations

The study was conducted among Ghanaian SME hotel staff; hence the results may be associated with the specific characteristics of the Ghanaian SME hotels. Consequently, the results of the study should be generalized with caution, and future research at different geographical locations will be needed to explore different views on the contextual factors influencing SME hotel staff readiness. Also, the extent of the influences of contextual factors has not been revealed by this study, and this can be investigated with further quantitative studies that measures the impact of contextual factors on SME hotel staff readiness in SLT. The findings do not necessarily encompass the entire scope of contextual factors affecting staff readiness levels. Consequently, other factors may emerge in future studies that will be conducted under different circumstances.

In relation to the methodology, the research employed the use of qualitative cross-sectional design, using semi-structured, face-to-face interviews, and hence all the research data were collected at a particular point in time with a retrospective recall of participants feelings and experiences from their memory, which

has the tendency to be affected by recall lapses. The credibility and reliability of this research which are likely to be affected

by this can be mitigated in future research by using a mixed method or employing a longitudinal study.

Direction for Future Research

The results indicates that, family is an important tie that binds and influences individual's social, moral, religious, and working life. The identification of family ties as a key contextual factor from the perspective of managers, senior, and junior staff, indicates the significance of work-life balance in influencing staff development among SME hotel staff which is lacking. Future research can explore the interplay between work-life balance in the hospitality industry, as flexible working arrangements are becoming an important aspect of quality of working life for many employees, and the SLT practices managers or leaders can adopt to support staff development in the various quadrants of SLT.

Cultural factors were also highlighted as a key contextual factor to be considered at the various development levels. Future research could examine the dynamics in employees' cultural orientations and how it can influence a leader's decision in SLT when supporting employee development in the hospitality industry, especially among SME hotels staff.

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