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Analysis of leadership styles in Latin American managers: An approach based on the Blake & Mouton test

Análisis de estilos de liderazgo en gerentes latinoamericanos: un enfoque basado en el test de Blake & Mouton

Edixon Chacón-Guerrero[1] ✉, Rolando Eslava-Zapata[2] ✉, Verenice Sánchez Castillo[3] ✉

[1]Universidad de Los Andes, Pedagogy Department. San Cristóbal, Venezuela.
[2]Universidad Libre Colombia, Faculty of Economics, Administrative and Accounting Sciences. Cúcuta, Colombia.
[3]Universidad de la Amazonia, Faculty of Engineering. Florencia, Colombia.

Corresponding Author: Edixon Chacón-Guerrero ✉

ABSTRACT

Introduction: the study provides relevant information on the predominant leadership trends in the Latin American context, which may contribute to the development of leadership models more adapted to the organizational culture and challenges of the region. The study's objective is to analyze leadership styles in Latin American managers.
Method: the study is a quantitative study with a correlational transactional design. A sample of one hundred and thirty-nine managers from different Latin American countries was administered a questionnaire based on the Blake & Mouton test, which includes eighteen items grouped into "People" and "Tasks." Data collection was carried out through online surveys.
Results: the results reveal that Latin American managers tend to adopt a more people-centered leadership style, in line with the cultural values of the region, which privilege interpersonal relationships and collaboration.
Conclusions: it is evident that managers encourage their teams to participate in decision-making, reflecting a collaborative approach. However, a significant proportion does not prioritize personal relationships when correcting errors, suggesting a possible area for improvement in interpersonal skills.

Keywords: Leadership Styles; Latin America; Managers; Blake & Mouton Test.

RESUMEN

Introducción: el estudio proporciona información relevante sobre las tendencias de liderazgo predominantes en el contexto latinoamericano, lo que puede contribuir al desarrollo de modelos de liderazgo más adaptados a la cultura y los desafíos organizacionales de la región. El objetivo del estudio es analizar los estilos de liderazgo en gerentes latinoamericanos.
Método: el estudio es de tipo cuantitativo con un diseño transaccional correlacional. A una muestra integrada por ciento treinta nueve gerentes provenientes de distintos países de Latinoamérica, se les aplica un cuestionario basado en el test de Blake & Mouton, que incluye dieciocho ítems agrupados en dos categorías: "Personas" y "Tareas". La recolección de datos se realiza mediante encuestas online.
Resultados: los resultados revelan que los gerentes latinoamericanos tienden a adoptar un estilo de liderazgo más centrado en las personas, en línea con los valores culturales de la región, que privilegian las relaciones interpersonales y la colaboración
Conclusiones: se evidencia que los gerentes animan a sus equipos a participar en la toma de decisiones, lo que refleja un enfoque colaborativo. Sin embargo, una proporción significativa no prioriza las relaciones personales al corregir errores, sugiriendo una posible área de mejora en habilidades interpersonales.

INTRODUCTION

Leadership is a fundamental aspect of the success of any organization, as it influences employee motivation, performance, and satisfaction[1,2] likewise, it is a critical factor that influences organizational performance and work climate.[3,4] In this context, Blake & Mouton's leadership model has been widely used to evaluate leadership styles based on people and task orientation.[5] This model has been widely used to assess how managers balance these two areas in their management style.[6]

Leadership style is linked to managing people and maintaining personal relationships with them in the work environment.[7,8] There are different leadership styles, from autocratic, where the leader has full control, to democratic, where people's participation is promoted, to laissez-faire, where employees are given autonomy.[9,10] However, it is the organizational context that will determine which leadership style is adequate to achieve a balance between productivity and the well-being of employees.

Blake & Mouton's leadership model, which identifies people-oriented and task-oriented leadership styles, reflects two distinct approaches. People-oriented leadership emphasizes the employee's well-being through effective communication and motivating him/her to develop the work.[5,11] Task-oriented leadership, on the other hand, focuses on fulfilling programmed activities and seeking the best way to achieve goals.[5,12] Hence, good leadership seeks high performance with a balance between individual and team needs.[13,14]

In the Latin American context, research has found that leaders tend to deeply value interpersonal relationships, which may influence how they implement leadership strategies.[15,16] However, it should be avoided that personal relationships hinder personal recognition based on merit to avoid generating inequality and demotivation among collaborators.[17,18] Therefore, this study analyzes the leadership styles of one hundred and thirty-nine Latin American managers based on the Blake & Mouton test.[5]

METHOD

The study is a quantitative study with a transactional correlational design. The research was conducted in a Latin American organizational context, characterized by a strong tradition of leadership centered on human relations, where managers focus on the well-being of their teams and creating a collaborative work environment.[15,19]

The sample of this study consisted of 139 managers from different Latin American countries, with a distribution of 58,30 % men and 41,70 % women. The managers had a wide range of experience in the corporate environment, which allowed us to obtain a representative view of leadership styles in this region. The participating countries were Colombia, Venezuela, Brazil, Argentina, Chile, Uruguay, Costa Rica, the United States, Spain, and other Latin American countries.

A questionnaire based on the Blake & Mouton test was used.[5] It contains eighteen items grouped into two main categories: "People" (people-centered) and "Task" (task-centered). Each item was rated on a three-option scale: "Never," "Sometimes," and "Always." This instrument allows us to identify the leadership profile of managers based on the balance between their people and task orientation.

Data collection was conducted through online surveys. The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) was used for data analysis, allowing descriptive and correlational analyses.[20,21]

RESULTS

Table 1 shows the results for the category "People-centered." The vast majority of managers (84,90 %) indicate that they always encourage participation in decision-making (item 1), reflecting a tendency towards democratic and participative leadership.[3] Similarly, 86,30 % state that they always help others perform new tasks, highlighting a supportive and personal development approach (item 4) aligned with transformational leadership.[6,22]

Some 82,00 % of managers promote creativity in their teams, reinforcing the leadership trend that values innovation and critical thinking, essential characteristics of a transformational leader (item 6). Although 58,30 % of managers enjoy reading about leadership and putting what they learn into practice, a significant percentage (41,70 %) do so only "sometimes," which could indicate a gap between theoretical knowledge and its practical application.[23]

On the other hand, item 10 shows a more balanced distribution between "always" (48,20 %) and "sometimes" (42,40 %), suggesting that some managers may prioritize results over interpersonal relationships. About other aspects, 79,10 % of managers enjoy explaining complex tasks (item 12), suggesting a development-oriented leadership approach and clarity in communication, fundamental for supportive leadership.[24]

Likewise, 89,90 % stress the importance of developing a great team, reflecting a collaborative leadership approach focused on team well-being (item 14).[25] Similarly, 85,60 % show respect for others' boundaries, indicating a high level of empathy and emotional awareness, characteristics of transformational leadership, and 81,30 % of managers coach their employees to improve their performance, reflecting a coaching and talent development approach (items 16 and 17).[26]

Table 1. Items related to people-centeredness				
		Never	Sometimes	Always
I encourage my team members to participate in decision making and I implement their ideas and suggestions.	N	1	20	118
	%	0,70	14,40	84,90
I like to help others perform new tasks or procedures.	n	0	19	120
	%	0,00	13,70	86,30
I encourage my co-workers to be creative in their work.	n	0	25	114
	%	0,00	18,00	82,00
I enjoy reading articles, books, or magazines about training, leadership, and psychology and putting it into practice.	n	0	58	81
	%	0,00	41,70	58,30
I am not concerned about personal relationships when I correct mistakes.	n	13	59	67
	%	9,40	42,40	48,20
I like to explain the details of a complex task to my employees.	n	0	29	110
	%	0,00	20,90	79,10
There is nothing more important than developing a great work team.	n	0	14	125
	%	0,00	10,10	89,90
I respect the boundaries of others.	n	0	20	119
	%	0,00	14,40	85,60
Counseling my employees to improve their performance is in my nature.	n	0	26	113
	%	0,00	18,70	81,30

On the other hand, table 2 shows the results of the "People-Centered" category. It is observed that 71,20 % of managers consider that completing an objective is more important than personal relationships (item 2), which could indicate a more results-oriented approach and an authoritarian leadership style.[5] Similarly, it is revealed that 71,90 % closely monitor tasks to ensure that they are completed on time, which reflects an orientation towards efficiency and control, typical characteristics of an "authoritarian" type of leadership (item 3).[27]

Other findings highlight that 77,00 % enjoy challenging tasks, suggesting a preference for taking responsibility and making strategic decisions within a results-oriented approach, and 84,20 % of managers ensure that all complex tasks are completed with attention to detail, reflecting a systematic and rigorous approach to project management (items 5 and 7).[28]

Other characteristics that stand out from Latin American managers are being comfortable carrying out multiple complex tasks simultaneously (59,00 %), enjoying learning about their profession and applying acquired knowledge (66,90 %), demonstrating their ability to handle stress and pressure in dynamic work environments and a strong orientation towards continuous learning and constant improvement.[29]

Other skills related to managing situations indicate that 61,90 % divide large projects into manageable tasks, indicating a crucial organizational skill in efficiency and execution-oriented leadership, and 85,60 % enjoy analyzing problems, highlighting the analytical and strategic capacity of these managers in decision-making (items 13 and 15).[30]

The combined interpretation of the results of the "People" and "Task" categories reveals that most Latin American managers tend to balance both approaches, with a greater emphasis on the "People" category (figure 1). However, in certain items, such as 10 and 2, there is a tendency to prioritize results over interpersonal relationships, which could reflect the influences of a more authoritarian leadership in times of pressure.[31]

Figure 1 shows a positive correlation between the "People" and "Task" categories, suggesting that those managers who are effective at tasks also tend to be effective at managing people. The scatter plot indicates a significant relationship between the scores obtained in both categories, suggesting that the most effective leaders manage to balance both dimensions.[32]

Table 2. Items related to People Centeredness		Never	Sometimes	Always
Nothing is more important than completing a task objective.	n	2	38	99
	%	1,40	27,30	71,20
I closely monitor the duration of tasks to ensure that they will be completed on time. 4.	n	0	39	100
	%	0,00	28,10	71,90
The more challenging the task, the more I enjoy it.	n	0	32	107
	%	0,00	23,00	77,00
When I look at a complex situation or task that has been completed, I make sure all the details are correct.	n	0	22	117
	%	0,00	15,80	84,20
I find it easy to accomplish several complicated tasks simultaneously.	n	2	55	82
	%	1,40	39,60	59,00
I enjoy reading articles, books, and magazines about my profession and implementing the procedures I have learned.	n	0	46	93
	%	0,00	33,10	66,90
Breaking large projects into small, manageable tasks is like second nature.	n	2	51	86
	%	1,40	36,70	61,90
I enjoy analyzing problems.	n	0	20	119
	%	0,00	14,40	85,60
I enjoy reading articles, books, and magazines about my profession and implementing the procedures I have learned.	n	0	46	93
	%	0,00	33,10	66,90
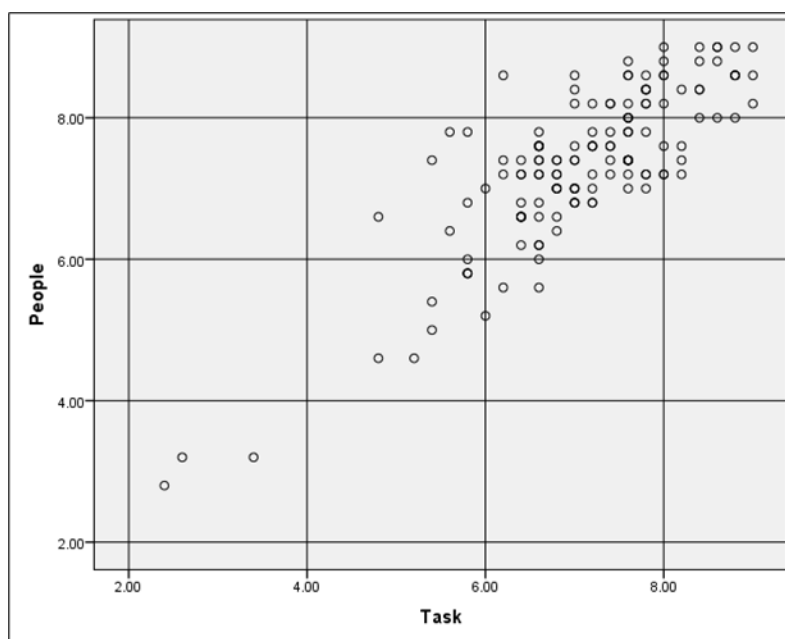
Figure 1. A scatter plot shows the relationship between the categories "People" and "Task" to define leadership style

DISCUSSION

From the results obtained, Latin American managers tend to adopt a more people-centered leadership style, in line with the cultural values of the region, which privilege interpersonal relationships and collaboration. However, the prevalence of responses in the "Task" category indicates that there is also a significant emphasis on results and efficiency, suggesting a mix of democratic leadership with a pragmatic task orientation.[33]

The results obtained in the "People" category are consistent with the transformational leadership model[3] and participatory leadership theory.[1] However, the "Task" category shows similarities with the authoritarian leadership described by Blake & Mouton[5] especially in the items related to close monitoring of tasks and prioritization of objectives. The combination of these styles could indicate an adaptation of Latin American leadership to specific contexts of high demand for results.[34,35]

The results indicate that many managers encourage their teams to participate in decision-making, reflecting

a collaborative approach. However, a significant proportion does not prioritize personal relationships when correcting errors, suggesting a possible area for improvement in interpersonal skills. On the other hand, a high percentage consider completing objectives to be paramount. It suggests that managers value efficiency and goal achievement, although there could be a risk of neglecting the human dimension of leadership. [36,37]

Both categories show a tendency toward organizational effectiveness; however, there is a tension between people orientation and task orientation. Leaders must find a balance between these dimensions to maximize team performance. The "People" and "Task" categories are dynamically interrelated in most managers, with a predominant emphasis on people-centered leadership but with a clear results orientation. The scatterplot shows how managers position themselves in the "Team Leader" quadrant, suggesting that most follow a balanced and effective approach. [38]

CONCLUSIONS

The results show that most Latin American managers are grouped in the "Team Leader" quadrant, indicating that they adopt a leadership style combining a high focus on people and tasks. This result is consistent with previous regional leadership studies. The results suggest that Latin American managers are more people-oriented and value efficiency.

Implies that additional training in interpersonal skills could further enhance their effectiveness as leaders. Compared to previous studies, this analysis reveals that Latin American managers are strongly inclined toward participative leadership. However, the lack of attention to personal relationships when correcting mistakes could be a weakness.

Latin American companies face significant challenges in balancing leadership styles to achieve employee well-being in response to the changing business environment. Leaders are responsible for promoting employees' personal development, innovation, and business practices that favor competitiveness.

Latin America, characterized by its cultural richness and diversity, requires leaders capable of adapting to business dynamism and promoting an inclusive management that favors good results. By understanding the global complexity of companies, society, and emerging technologies, leaders can empower employees to achieve sustainable organizational development.

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Research: Edixon Chacón-Guerrero.
Methodology: Edixon Chacón-Guerrero, Rolando Eslava-Zapata.
Project management: Edixon Chacón-Guerrero.
Resources: Edixon Chacón-Guerrero, Verenice Sánchez-Castillo.
Software: Edixon Chacón-Guerrero.
Supervision: Rolando Eslava Zapata, Verenice Sánchez-Castillo.
Validation: Edixon Chacón-Guerrero, Verenice Sánchez-Castillo.
Display: Rolando Eslava-Zapata.
Drafting - original draft: Edixon Chacón-Guerrero.
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