

## CONCEPTUALISING LEADERSHIP BEHAVIOURS AND ITS RELATIONSHIP WITH COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE

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### ABSTRACT

The world is changing and it seems only “change is constant in this world” though Heraclitus, a Greek philosopher, foreseen that we have to adapt to changes to survive but the magnitude and the pace of changes were not in his wildest dreams may be. We live in a VUCA world now – in an environment of volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity (Warren Bennis and Burt Nanus, 1987), and this acronym VUCA is used in the US Army War College, Harvard, Forbes, and so on. Leadership in a VUCA world has books and articles published that emphasis adapt or die. On the other hand, it is leadership that is one of the most significant factors that gives companies competitive advantage. Competitive Advantages are achieved through judicious use of resources and capabilities, and a leader is the one who makes call on use of a company’s core competence. Strategic decisions are made at top tier levels as vision and disseminated to all tiers of leaders – middle to lower echelons and broken into goals, objectives, and tasks. From vision to missions to goals to objectives and tasks the orchestration and synchronization’s require leaders at all levels to be effective.

**KEYWORDS:** Leadership Behaviours, Relationship & Competitive Advantage

### INTRODUCTION

Leader’s effectiveness and competitive advantage are positively correlated and thus while leaders becoming effective will result to achieving competitive advantage and vice versa. A company also should have leaders at its pool to fill any vacuum once created. Therefore, the concentration is on measuring leader’s effectiveness and keeping backups ready. Leadership influences employee’s well-being, job satisfaction, productivity-efficiency, retention, innovation, and coping with the inevitable change, as opposite, poor leadership resulting to stress, dissatisfaction, and employee turnover. Previous studies have mostly focused on leadership traits and not the behavioural process, as Timothy et al writes though the most rigorous and validated research on Leadership Behaviours like Ohio Studies are “the forgotten ones”. Leadership is a behavioural process and without measuring the particular or the combination of behaviours, when and how may be used by effective leaders, any study will remain incomplete.

In present study we address the issue of integrating existing theoretical frameworks and concepts, and propose a modified concept related to competitive advantages. In doing so we make a contribution to leadership literatures, and by taking into account existing LBs and its relation to CA, we tried to propose a concept for measuring LB with indicators. We also provided an integrated framework of CA and LBs by summarizing the related factors that explain how LBs and CA are correlated.

### Purpose

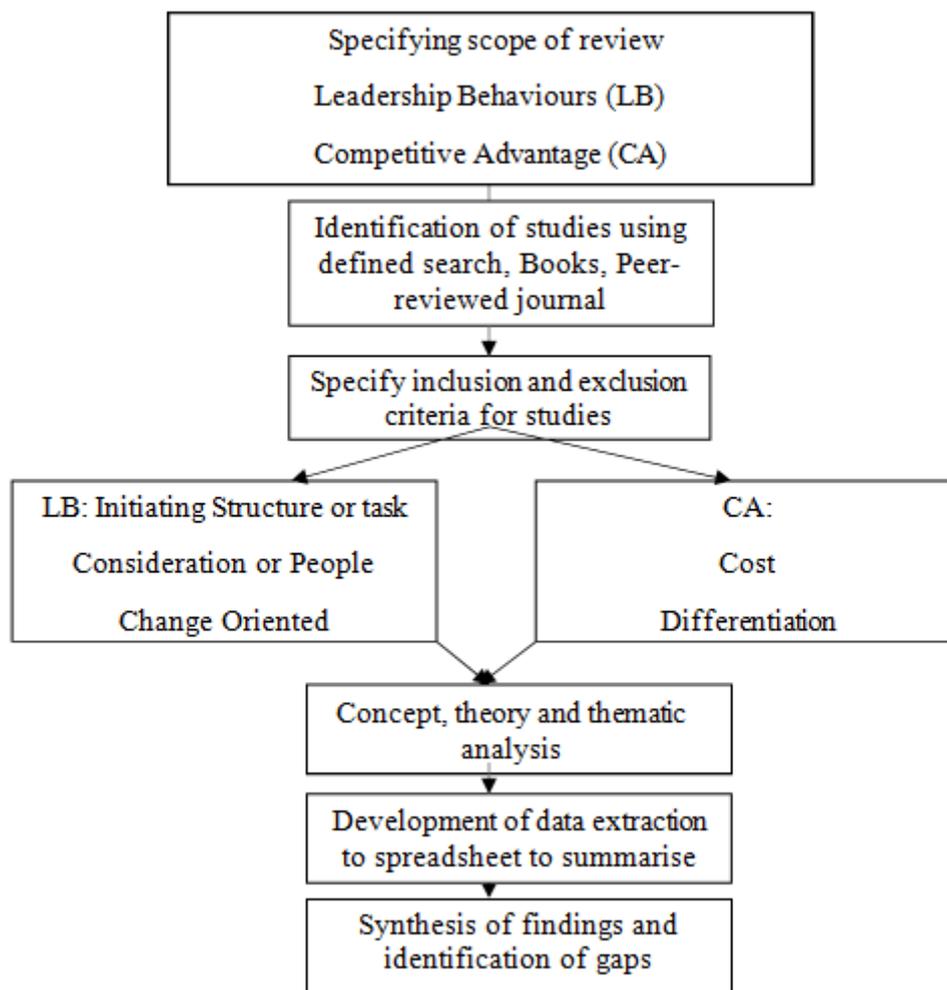
The purpose of this paper is to outline a concept to measure leadership behaviours (LB) relationship with competitive advantage (CA) for an organisation.

### The problem

Does LB relate to CA for an organisation? If so, then what are the behaviours that relate to competitive advantage?

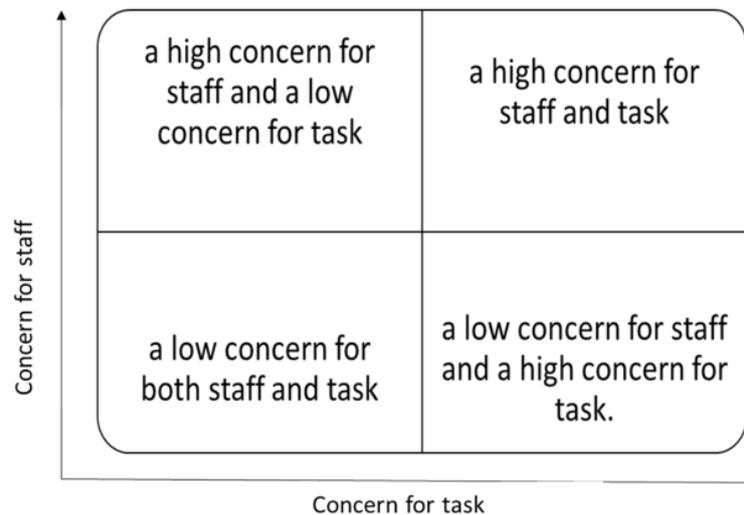
### METHOD

The paper does a systematic review of literatures linking LB with CA, and then finds out what LB relate to achieving CA for an organisation?



### LITERATURE REVIEW

We started with searching literatures on LB, and found researches on LB are based on the Ohio and Michigan Leadership studies (1950). A group of researchers at Ohio State University—led by R. Stogdill, C. Shartle, and J. Hemphill—uncovered the behavioural indicators of effective leadership (Stogdill, 1950). Ohio University researchers argued that employee and task orientation did not reside on a single continuum. This meant leader could have one of the below four leadership behaviours which are on two separate continua and each of which ran from low to high:

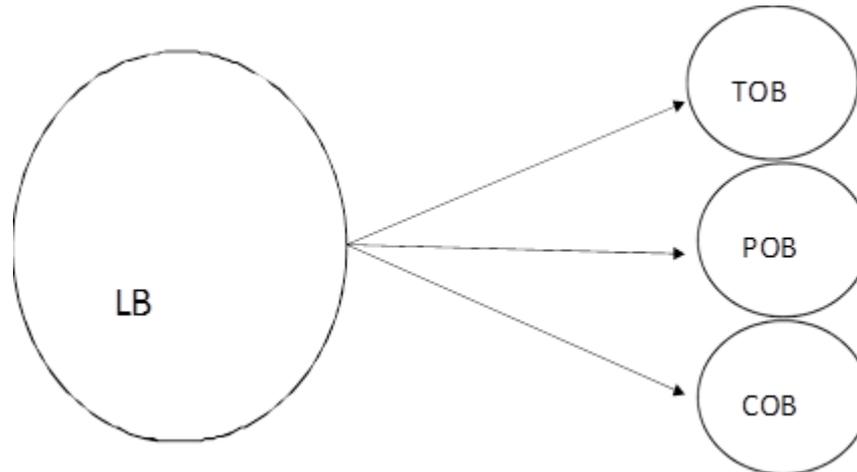


**Figure 1: Adopted from the Little Book of Big Management Theories (Bates and McGrath 2013)**

University of Michigan carried out a relatively concurrent and identical leadership research program (Likert, 1961). The Michigan dimensions of employee-centred leadership (POB) and production-centred leadership (TOB) were much less frequently studied in empirical research. Perhaps the most focal contribution of the Michigan studies was the Blake and Mouton managerial grid (Blake, Mouton, & Bidwell, 1962). Similarly, the same time, Bales and associates at Harvard studied person- and task-oriented behaviours (Bales, 1954) though these contributions have been less recognised in the literature.

In the 1940s the University of Michigan suggested that LB could be described as either person or task oriented. Person-oriented leaders are concerned with maintaining good relationships with people and believe in a participative and democratic approach to leadership. Task-oriented leaders on the other hand are more concerned with results and outputs than people's feelings. They are target driven. Michigan University depicted these two archetypes as residing at the opposite ends of a single continuum. This implied that leaders could only be concerned with people or achievement of task, but not both.

An extension of the 2-dimensional model is Change Oriented (leadership) Behaviour (COB) (Yukl, Gordon and Taber, 2002a). Exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses consistently demonstrated the three dimensions of change, production and employee-oriented LB (Arvonen 2009). Leadership has demonstrated an important role in: 1) increasing a company's CA (Nyström 1990; Pascale 1990; Peters and Waterman 1982); and 2) implementing organisational change at the strategic level (Tichy 1983). We have got a CPE (Change, Production, and Employee) model and researchers concluded that Change-oriented LB (COB) will emerge when a society or organisation needs it. When needed if organisational leaders fail to engage with COB then they are less likely to be successful (Arvonen 2009) vis-à-vis having a CA. We summarised LB taking three types of behaviours: TOB- Task/production oriented behaviour, POB – person/employee oriented behaviour and COB – change oriented behaviour. (Yukl, Gordon and Taber, 2002b; Yukl, 2008, 2008, 2012a; Taberero *et al.*, 2009; 'Task oriented behaviour', 2012; Rikkink, 2014; G. Alyusef and Zhang, 2016; Oni, 2017).



**Figure 2: Leadership Behaviours – Task, People and Change Oriented Behaviours Source: authors**

### What is leadership?

Interestingly, Rost (1991) writes that over 200 definitions for leadership were proposed in the 20th century alone. In the 21st century, scholars continued to research, observe, identify, and promote the emergence of new LB. They tried to explain the complex factors that shaped LB and how it had been practiced. A number of approaches have been used which include quantitative methods: such as surveys, questionnaires, and diagnostic tests, as well as qualitative methods: observational and ethnographic studies. 21<sup>st</sup> Century theories evaluated the relationship of the leader with organisational members and examined leadership behaviours, adding to the general knowledge of effective leadership through LB (Yukl, Gordon and Taber, 2002a; Hossan, 2012). Leadership is the most researched yet most debated topic in the world (Gil *et al.*, 2005; Bass and Bass, 2009; Harrison, 2017) as the writers and researchers could not agree to define leadership and argued that it is changing through context, perspective and time (Frederick Littrell, 2013).

The definitions and concepts are as many as the number of researchers, Dinh *et al.* (2013), conducted an exhaustive review of publications in the field of leadership in the first 12 years of this century, and concluded that there was no unified theory of leadership, instead discovered 66 separate fields of leadership. Though all agreed on one thing that Leadership is a Behavioural Process (Harrison, 2017). Research on leadership is still ongoing at the same rate with a concentration on how successful leaders behave? Thousands of investigations on leadership, in its style, behaviour and case study yet to conclude what makes a great leader? Different researches in different contexts came up with mixed findings. The situational variables and gender played modifying roles to reach different conclusions. Whatever may be the concept of leadership, companies cannot afford poor leadership if they want to succeed.

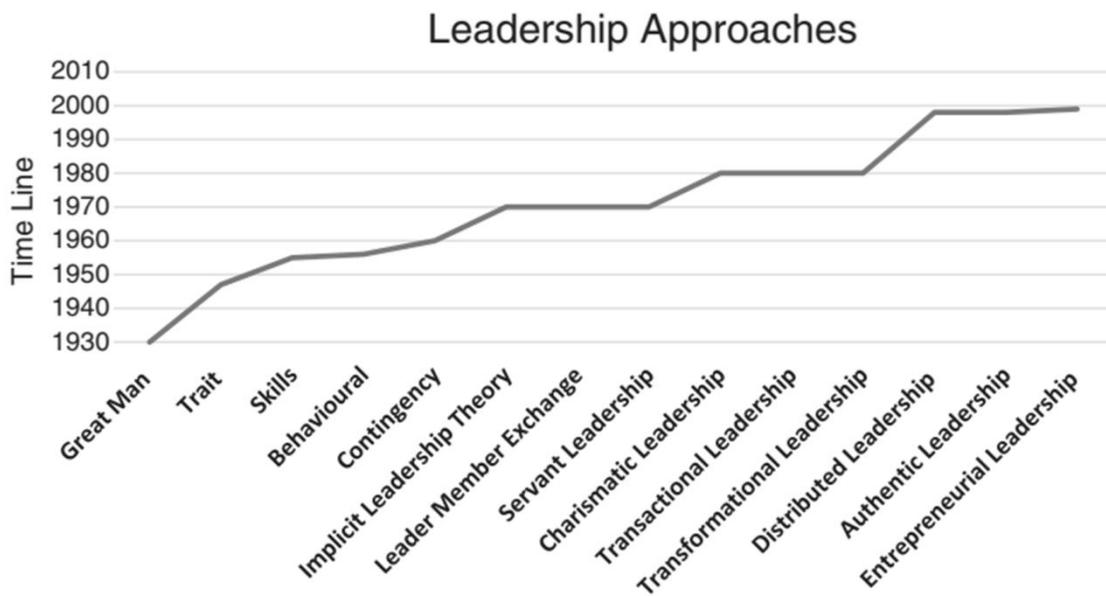
Researchers argued for other categories of leadership behaviours (Yukl, 2012), which they are calling “networking behaviours”, however we will concentrate on the three widely recognised behaviours (networking behaviours will be inbuilt in change-oriented one-COB):

- task-oriented
- people-oriented
- change oriented

Change oriented being an extension of the two-dimensional model (Ekval, Arvoren, 1991). Some of the researches used product-centred leadership replacing the task (product and task have the same implications) and related it with organisational commitment; the behavioural actions were seen through attitude, feeling to the firm and then viewed through the commitment to the company. The performance of the company, of course, occupied the centre stage (Alwi, Munira, 2016). The following table shows the number of researches leading to a citation of more than 150,000:

**Leadership Theories**

Like concepts of leadership, the theories on leadership are also widely debated along with the definitions of leadership. The volume of research interest and the numbers of citation above bears the testimony that leadership is still a mysterious and most sought concept. Harrison (Harrison, 2017), in his book “Leadership Theory and Research, A Critical Approach to New and Existing Paradigms” narrated the following timeline of theories:



**Figure 3: Leadership Theories Timelines -Adopted from Harrison 2017**

**What is Competitive Advantage?**

Before we talk about competitive advantage, we first have to understand competitive advantage as a concept. Porter (1985) explained that competitive advantage was the goal of his corporate strategies, set out in earlier books (even though the idea of competitive advantage may have come initially from Penrose (1959), as suggested by Kor and Mahoney (2003)):

Overall cost leadership (virtually the benefit of lower costs and, thus, lower prices than competitors, as Bangladesh has done in the garment industry).

Differentiation (the advantage of producing something different - or appearing to be different, e.g. a brand - from any competitor, meaning niche marketing, as Apple has done with its product: iPhones)

Focus - the advantage of total specialization as to product and customers, a kind of intensive niche marketing, that no one else can match, social media apps focus on health apps, to do apps, twitter etc.

Factors Defining Competitive Advantage

Table 1

Intangible assets and research and development (R&D) expenditure are essential instruments in a firm's competitive productivity and profitability strategy.	Bobillo, A. M., Rodriguez Sanz, J. A. and Tejerina Gaité, F. (2006) 'Innovation investment, competitiveness, and performance in Industrial firms', <i>Thunderbird International Business Review</i> , 48(6), pp. 867–890. DOI: 10.1002/tie.20126.
The dynamic capabilities, namely: adaptability, absorptiveness, innovativeness; all these have a significant impact on the competitive advantage for a firm.	Sheng and Chang (2012) Kaur, V. and Mehta, V. (2017) 'Dynamic Capabilities for Competitive Advantage', <i>Paradigm</i> , 21(1), pp. 31–51. DOI: 10.1177/0971890717701781.
Competitive advantage has been defined as “something that the firm does better than the competitors, that give it an edge in serving customers’ needs and maintaining mutually satisfying relationships with important stakeholders”	(Ferrell, 2012, p.16).
Core competency is collective learning within organisations in terms of coordinating various operations and increasing the level of integration of multiple streams of technology	Prahalad and Hamel (1990)
Researchers have theorised that when firms have resources that are valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable (VRIN), they can achieve sustainable competitive advantage by implementing fresh value-creating strategies that cannot be easily duplicated by competing firms	(Barney, 1991; Conner and Prahalad, 1996; Nel-son, 1991; Peteraf, 1993; Wernerfelt, 1984, 1995).
Resources are at the heart of the resource-based view (RBV).	(Wernerfelt, 1984; 1995; Dierickx & Cool, 1989; Hoopes, Madsen, and Walker (2003), Ireland, Hitt, and Sirmon (2003), Mills et al. (2003) and Morgan et al. (2004), following Wernerfelt (1984; 1995) and Barney (1986; 1991)
Human resources and intangible resources are deemed to be the more important and critical ones	(Oliver, 1997; Makadok, 2001, Adner & Helfat, 2003; Alimin Ismadi Ismail et al. 154 Datta, Guthrie, &

Table 2

	Wright, 2005; Abdullah, Rose, & Kumar, 2007a; 2007b; Rose & Kumar, 2007)
“Competitive advantage results when more customers become (strongly) attached to the products of the organisation.”	(Sekhar, 2010, p.51).
The cost advantage is a low-order competitive advantage that can be easily imitated by competitors with access to cheaper resources.	Boone and Kurtz (2013)
The changes in government regulations are the opportunity to gain a competitive advantage by certain private entities. Specifically, introduction of tariffs for the import of certain products, in order to support local manufacturers (thus providing cost advantages to local manufacturers) to compete with foreign multinational corporations.	Günter (2013)
Supply Chain Management (SCM)	Masdek, N.R.N.M. and Othman, M.F., 2014. Supply chain management practices as a source of competitive advantage for food processing SMEs in Peninsular Malaysia.
Changes in customer needs and the emergence of new customer need as potential sources of competitive advantage.	Loudon et al. (2010)
Total Quality Management (TQM)	(Rashid and Taibb, 2016)

Health, safety, and social compliance	(Rashid, Ahmad and Rashid, 2014; Kabir, Rashedul, 2015)
Innovation and Knowledge	Urbancova, H., 2013. Competitive advantage achievement through innovation and knowledge. <i>Journal of competitiveness</i> , 5(1).
Competitive advantage through people	Pfeffer, J., 1994. Competitive advantage through people. <i>California management review</i> , 36(2), p.9.
Table 3: CA	

Boone and Kurtz (2013) discuss the role of imitability of competitive advantages for long-term growth prospects of businesses. Boone and Kurtz (2013) recommend the adoption of strong brand image and technological innovation in various business processes as the sources of competitive advantage because these are provider of higher levels of CA due to their difficulty to imitate by competitors. Loudon et al. (2010) propose changes in customer needs and the emergence of new customer demands work as potential sources of competitive advantage. Although this idea seems appropriate in a theoretical level, Loudon et al. (2010) do not justify this opinion by mentioning relevant examples from the real-life business world. Ai and An (2018) conducted a study of competitive strategy for Vietnam Garment Companies though identified technology, product quality, human resources, and raw materials but discarded other two essential factors like design capability and innovation, whereas design and innovation are one of the significant factors for achieving CA for any readymade garments (RMG) producing country. Supply Chain Management (SCM) and innovation is an effective strategy to achieve SCA;

**Relationship: Competitive Advantage and Leadership Behaviours**

The most crucial conclusion staring us in the face from the review in the section above is the fact that CA and “leadership” used almost interchangeably. It is becoming axiomatic: you get CA by changing your LB from task-oriented to charismatic or to people-oriented or a combination. A leader makes your company. Add in confusion, and competitive advantage, and leadership did, at the new millennium, start to look like magic that could solve everything like Steve Jobs of Apple. Further, we regard the assumption that effective leadership produces competitive advantage as a hypothesis, to be proven or disproven by facts and experience, not merely taken as given. Nor will we make the illogical jump from "Task-Oriented Leadership Behaviour (TOB) produces CA (assuming, arguendo, that it is true) to “People Oriented Leadership Behaviour (POB) produces CA" unless we find facts to support it. Perhaps that is what is different about this study: we are trying to cut through all the confusion and find the facts. Then we can develop a more rational theory.

Cardona and Rey (2008), Catalonian writers writing in Spanish at the University of Navarre, specifically address the potential role of leadership in management. Not only is this paper probably the most directly relevant to the research, but it is also an oft-cited classic and comprehensive work on this subject. The nomenclature is a problem: they are talking about “management" not” competitive advantage" so, at first, it seems off-topic for us. However, we think that Cardona and Rey (2008) are, or could be, talking about competitive advantage because their output is "the mission" of the organisation. If you define "the mission" as” competitive advantage" then their analysis works and sets out a cohesive argument linking competitive advantage and leadership behaviours.

The next question we have to tackle is "What kind of leadership behaviours are Cardona and Rey (2008) talking about?" It is easiest to say what they are not talking about: they oppose traditional and hierarchical, Weberian models. Their model is more people-centred in focusing on how the organisation affects the led not the leader; somewhat

charismatic in seeking a leader who inspires rather than commands and transformational in terms of "bottom-up" change in the organisation, not "top-down". Cicero et al.'s (2007) argument is highly inferential, as they did not directly measure organisational performance. Furthermore, their conclusions are based on case studies of only one State and one private organisation in Italy. Again, we have a theoretical argument that needs testing.

Similarly, Brockner (2006) concluded that procedural fairness and even a “human” approach to dismissal for economic reasons could motivate improved performance, in the absence of which “a company can lose money”. Kidder and Geraci (2017) found that the leadership of the companies with the “highest market caps” had changed since the year 2000. In 2000, the leaders had been efficient managers who had made their old organisations maximally efficient. In 2017, the leaders were “bold”, often founders of their new organisations, who had prioritized growth over efficiency, with long-term vision and investment in growth to reach it. The new leaders had characteristics which seemed to associate with the transformational leadership type: “shift your mindset”, “don't seek consensus”, “embrace productive failure”, “use new metrics”, “develop a portfolio strategy”, while the former leaders seemed to have been task- oriented with their focus on maximum efficiency of task.

Collins (2001) suggested that organisations were being transformed by “Level 5” leaders: persons of “extreme personal humility with intense professional will”. He seemed to indicate that people-centred leaders were at Levels 1-2, task-centred leaders were at Level 3, and charismatic leaders were at Level 4, but he had found something different. Level 5 can be considered a type of transformational leader.

Valuable insight from Bain (2016) was his finding that the wealthiest garment producers were not just getting rich from low prices. They were following fashion from social media to change their garment design and delivering “hot” new trends quickly. In other words, it was their leadership, not the accountants' calculations of price and marginal cost that was not only making them personally successful, but their companies spectacularly successful. Yet what Bain (2016) did not study is the leadership behaviours of the successful millionaires within their companies: so we have another "leadership is important" article without answering the question "What kind of leadership?"

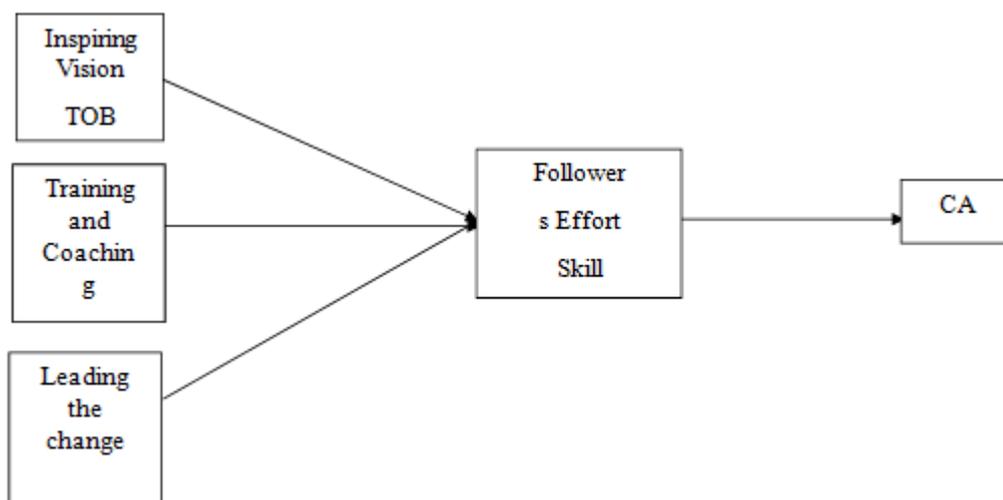


Figure 4: LB- TOB, POB and COB to CA

**Identification of Variables**

Identification of causal chain of effects of three types of Leadership Behaviours (Modified from The Nature of Leadership).

**Independent Variables (Leadership Behaviours):**

Task-Oriented Behaviours (TOB) (Nahavandi, 2015) (Taber, 1982; Yukl, 2012b) (Shodhganga, 2018)

People-Oriented Behaviours (POB) (Oni, 2017, Kouzes, J and Posner, 2012)

Change-Oriented Behaviours (COB) (Cherniss, 2000; Goleman, 2004; Yukl, 2008; Fleet and Yukl, 2015; Gordon and Yukl, 2016)

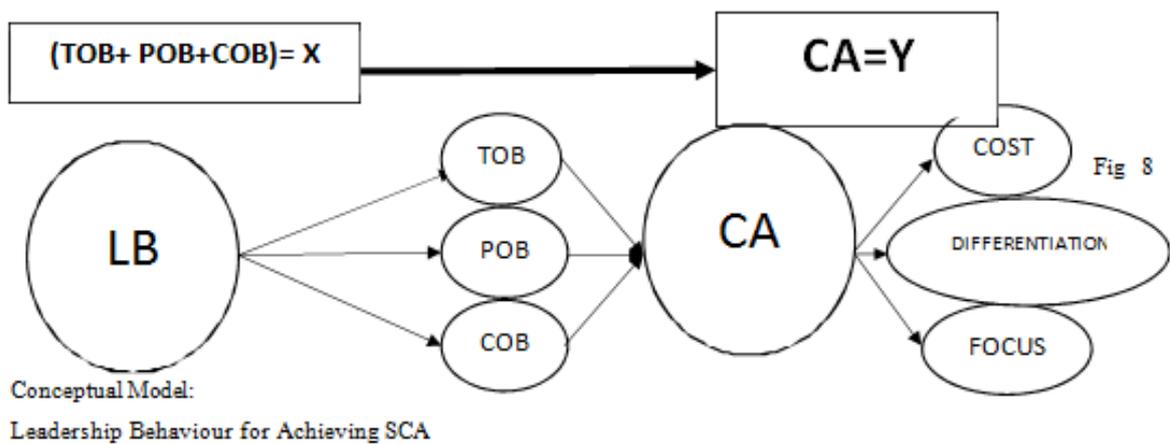


Figure 7: Conceptual Model: Leadership Behaviour for Achieving SCA

**Dependent Variable: Competitive Advantage (CA) (Porter, 2015)**

**Null Hypothesis - Ho = There is no relationship with LB and CA**

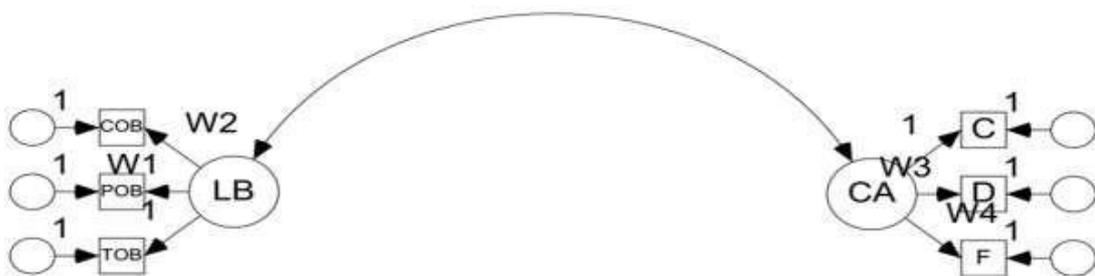


Figure 8: SEM of the Concept

TOB –Task-Oriented Behaviour, POB – People Oriented Behaviour, COB – Change Oriented Behaviour, CA – Competitive Advantage

$$(TOB+POB+COB) = X f(x) = y$$

## CONCLUSIONS

The paper proposed a hypothesized model of leadership behaviours that will lead to gaining competitive advantage for an organisation. We integrated OHIO studies, Michigan Studies, and later studies to jointly incorporate a comprehensive framework for LBs. We also not only revived the almost forgotten LBs theories rather added and contributed a new framework for measuring LBs. CA is also engaged through the lenses of Porter and his critics and discovered the links with LBs to CA. We further described this link with the extended framework and proposed both conceptual and theoretical framework that may be tested empirically.

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**Table 4: Table Showing TOB, POB COB and CA Factors**

Annex A				
Serial	TOB	POB	COB	CA
1	Planning, Aligning men Allocating resources, Emphasis on work facilitation	Focus on relationships, well- being and motivation	Proactive to identify changes needed	Introducing new services/products, our firm is often first-to market
2	Organisation and staffing, Focus on structure, roles and tasks	Emphasis on team members and communication inside the organisation	Innovation needed	Our new products/services are perceived very novel, cost- effective by customers
3	Clarifying and determining priorities. Produce desired results is a priority	Positive relationships is a priority	R&D	We are constantly improving our business processes
4	Clarifying objectives. Emphasis on a clear plan to achieve goals	Emphasis on interaction facilitation.	Networking	For the past 5 years, our firm has developed new leaders
5	Strict use of schedules and step- by-step plans, and a punishment/incentive system, emphasising efficiency	Casual interactions and frequent team meetings	Technological changes	Our products are difficult for competitors to copy
6	Coordinating activities of teams	Multitasking people	Policy changes	Robust HRM
7	Eliminate waste	Identifying redundant people	SOP changes	SCM and Logistics
8	Reduce cost, increase productivity	Use of cost effective manpower	Changes to keep market share	Trained Workforce
9	Ensuring quality	Training people to do quality job	Changes to TQM	TQM
10	Reliability	Training leaders	Changes to keep ahead	Reputation

