WHAT ARE LEADERSHIP STYLES THAT THAI ENGINEERING ORGANIZATION PREFER?

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ABSTRACT

The objective of this study was to identify Thai engineers' perspective on leadership styles that they preferred. This study focused on two leadership style transformational and transactional leadership styles because these two leadership styles were identified as the most effectiveness leadership style (e.g. Moghaddam, 2006; Moore, 2007; Robbins & Judge, 2013). This study used qualitative approach to interview eight engineers from one sampling Thai engineering organization. Qualitative approach was useful for discovering and provides result in-depth to get deeper understanding from respondents. The finding of this study showed that Thai engineering organization preferred transformational leadership style with a great benefit to the engineers. However, this study used small sample size and studied only one Thai engineering organization and captured only engineers' perspective. Future study should seek for managements' perspective on effective leadership styles for Thai engineering organization and study other Thai engineering organizations.

KEY WORDS: Transformational leadership / Transactional leadership / Rewards / Thai engineering organization.

22 pages

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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Leadership has been described as a process of social influence in which one person support and drive organization to the success in the business (Robbins & Judge, 2013). Every organization must have leader of its own. Leader is a key person to drive organization to the success. Leader or in Thailand we mostly call "manager" has to work with a lot of people under his/her command and have to handle many of working style. A great leader can lead organization to meet the goal and success together with the staffs. But bad leader might lead organization to meet the goal also but staffs would not happy to work with this leader and working atmosphere might be bad and this success of organization would not a real success. Organizations that successful nowadays in this particular world have many good leaders and they are the real success. This real success from great leadership style will make that particular organization has the sustainable success in the business. Leaders who has bad leadership style might think that they success because their organization can achieve goal but they might not realize that staffs might not feel success with them or not happy with that working environment.

A lot of organizations in Thailand try to define the best leadership style that fit with them. They try to use a lot of theory and consultant to help them to find the best leadership and implement it to their organization. The management teams try to work by themselves to create the best leadership in their organization. They consult with a famous consultant company but they do not talk or ask their staffs what is the staffs' definition of best leadership or what do staffs want from good leader? Without asking their own staffs, it is hard to create the best leadership style for the staffs because management teams would not really understand what staffs need or expect from their leader. This problem in Thailand comes from the boundary between staffs and leaders because Thailand is a high power distance country therefore leader would

not want to consult or ask staffs much and staffs also would not speak clearly what they need to leader.

Different type of business in Thailand would have different leadership style that fit with its organization. Each organization would have it own working style and working environment. Therefore, they will work well with different leadership style. The main value of leadership would be the same but there are many details different between leadership styles. Engineering organization is one of the interested organizations to study its leadership style. Engineering is one of the key economic drivers in Thailand. This research would study what are engineers' perspectives on leadership style that suitable with engineering organization?
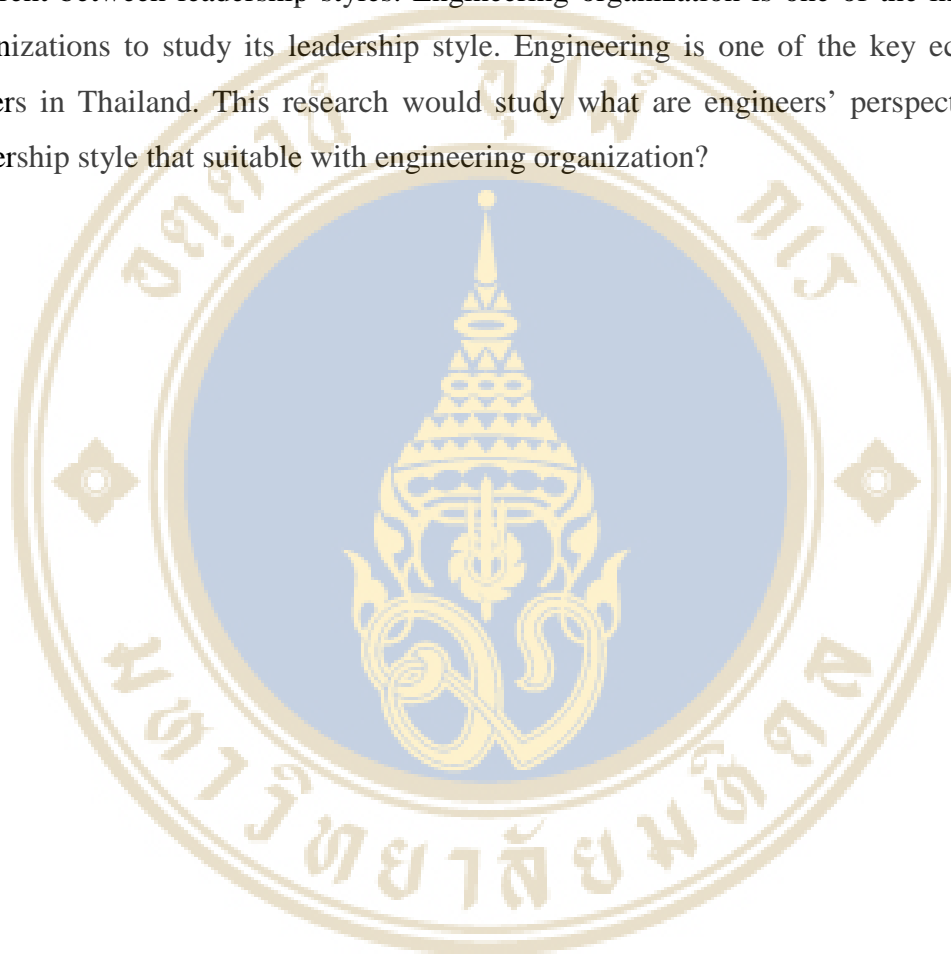
CHAPTER II
LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Framework: Leadership Theories

Leadership has been defined as the ability to influence a group toward the formal, such as that provide by managerial rank in an organization (Robbins & Judge, 2013). But not all leaders are managers and not all managers are leaders also. An organization might provide its managers with certain formal rights but there are no assurances they will lead effectively (Moghaddam, 2006). Robbins and Judge (2013) defined ability of leader that "Leader who has ability to influence staffs outside the formal structure of the organization is more important than formal influence. Organizations need strong leadership and strong management to create visions of the future, and inspire organizational members to want to achieve the visions."

This study focused on transactional and transformational theories because these 2 theories were identified as the most effectiveness leadership style (e.g. Moghaddam, 2006; Moore, 2007; Robbins & Judge,2013). However, there are other theories that have been studied from previous studies.

Trait Theories

Robbins and Judge (2013) have stated that "Trait theories are focusing on personal qualities and characteristics. Traits represent personal characteristics that differentiate leaders from followers." A good leadership would have trait style in general (Robbins & Judge, 2013). To be effective in trait leadership style, leaders must have emotional intelligence (EI). Because a major component of EI is empathy and empathetic leaders can sense follower's needs, listen what they say or do not say and can read followers mind (Moghaddam, 2006).

Behavioral theories

Behavioral theory is proposing that specific behaviors differentiate leaders from nonleaders. Leaders differ by their preference for one behavioral style over the other (Robbins & Judge, 2013). Behavioral leadership style has been also defined by

Hilaire (2008) that leader with behavioral leadership style was concerned about their followers performance and this can made followers trust their leader.

Contingency theories

Contingency theories identify the situations and conditions in which leaders are effective (Robbins & Judge, 2013). Contingency leadership style would change according to the situation and successful when fit to any particular situation (Seaborne, 2003). There are many situational factors that influence leader behavior for example leader characteristics, follower characteristics, authority of roles, company policies, norms and traditions-corporate culture, etc (Robbins & Judge, 2013). However, different leadership situations required different leadership styles. (Seaborne, 2003)

Passive-Avoidant Leadership

As Moore (2007) found a significant difference between passive and active management by exception. Passive leader will not take a systematic approach to dealing with problem, and will often wait for problems to become chronic before addressing them (Moore, 2007). This was in stark contrast to active management by exception in which the leader has systematic approach that focuses their attention on, and deals with deviations from standards in a proactive manner (Moore, 2007). Moore (2007) found the behavior of this passive leader avoided involvement in important issues and is generally not available or engaged.

Transactional theories

Garcia (2004) defined transactional leadership style as "Leaders who approach followers with a motive of exchanging one thing for another, such as jobs for votes or subsidies for campaign contribution". It like gift and take style. Effective transactional leadership was depended on relationships between leaders and followers (Garcia, 2004). Transactional leader would use both contingent reward (positive) and contingent punishment (negative) to influence follower performance (Moore, 2007).

Transformational theories

Transformational leaders inspired followers to focus their self-interests for good of the organization (Robbins & Judge, 2013). Transformational leaders would motivate followers to do more than they believed they could (Moore, 2007) and help followers to improve themselves (Robbins & Judge, 2013). Leaders with

transformational style would have a good satisfaction from subordinates and lead to organizational effectiveness (Moore, 2007).

2.2 Leadership Style for Engineering Organizations

There are many leadership styles in engineering and leadership style gives a difference outcome for each organization (Moghaddam, 2006). Most of previous studies did research outside Thailand and focused on transactional and transformational leadership styles (e.g. Silver, 2000; Moghaddam, 2006; Duerr 2009; Marques, 2011; Sidhu, 2012). Silver (2000) has specified that no specific trait and behavioral leadership style stood out as strong indicators of leadership. There were 2 majors' types of leadership styles in any engineering organization; transactional and transformational leadership styles (Duerr, 2009).

Transformational style

Moghaddam (2006) has found that engineering organizations have to allow employees at all levels to make timely decisions and respond to the problem in order to survive changes caused by the impacts of economics, business and technology. Transformational style will focus to develop staffs performance. Organizations can survive in the technical business when their staffs have high performance to create high quality of productivity. Organizations have to train their managers at all levels to make a transformation to an effective leadership mind-set and develop skills to coach team and individuals. Marques (2011) has identified trait of transformational leadership style for general organizations that should comprise of (a) mentor and coach others, (b) team orientated, (c) collaborative, (d) flexible, (e) assertive, (f) goal oriented, (g) determination, (h) facilitator of information, and (h) good communication skills. Transformational leadership style was effective and created a good organization outcome (Duerr, 2009). Organizations had staffs low turnover rate and high productivity (Moghaddam, 2006). Empowerment mostly came with transformational leadership style (Moghaddam, 2006). Silver (2000) identified that followers were happy if they could made decision by themselves. There was a positive and significant relationship between first and second level manager's

leadership and engineers' perception of psychological empowerment (Silver, 2000). Moghaddam (2006) stated that "high-performance work teams came from teams are empowered to make decisions, work on their schedules, plan, staff, and in many cases, determine their budget" (P. 58).

Transactional style

Transactional style guided and motivated followers to achieve their task by gave rewards when they met target and focused more on the result than followers' capability improvement (Moghaddam, 2006). Marques (2011) founded that transactional leadership style could make organization achieve the target faster than transformational because it was easy to implement at the started point. However, transactional leadership style was not sustainable because followers would focus only their reward after they achieved the target. Then transactional leadership style had weak correlation to the organization effectiveness (Duerr, 2009).

Moghaddam (2006) has founded that most of leaders realize that transformational leadership style was the most effectiveness. Marques (2011) finding also supported that transformational leadership style created positive correlation between leaders and followers, while transactional leadership style created negative correlation. Transformational leadership styles seemed to be more effective then transactional leadership style. However, the previous studies have been done only in U.S. (e.g. Silver, 2000; Moghaddam, 2006; Duerr 2009; Marques, 2011) and Europe (e.g. Sidhu, 2012). There were no previous studies have been done in Thailand before. Most of previous studies concluded that transformational leadership style was more effective than transactional leadership style. However, some studies mentioned that transactional leadership style was also effective and guided follower to achieve goal (Duerr, 2009). Moore (2007) also supported that transactional leadership would set high level of expectation for follower performance, and thereby organizational performance would be high too.

CHAPTER III
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The purposed of this chapter was to describe the research methodology in step by step for achieving the research's objectives "What are leadership styles that Thai engineering organizations prefer?"

3.1 Research Design

This research used a qualitative approach because a qualitative study is more useful for discovering and provides result in-depth to get deeper understanding (Marques, 2011). Qualitative approaches can describe characteristics and situations of the samplers in depth. Answers from the samplers from the interview question would respond to the nature of the problems (Moghaddam, 2006).

3.2 Population and Samples

Populations of this study were group of engineers in engineering organization joint venture with international company in petrochemical business. This organization was composed largely of engineers from varieties of department. Each department had different type of work scope and had different engineers' disciplines. There were 3 majors departments which consisted of engineers. 1) Production department which responsible for plant operation and produce product. 2) Engineering department which responsible for issue new project to increase production capability. 3) Maintenance department which responsible on maintenance job to keep plant reliable and availability.

The sample consisted of 5 senior engineers from this organization with total experience were above 10 years and 3 engineers with experience less than 5

years. All engineers of sample had bachelor's degree in engineering from different major and university. Each engineer had different leader to report to. Respondents were chosen by convenience sampling which was non-probability sampling method. Advantages of used convenience sampling were to reduce time and convenience to collect data.

3.3 Instrumentation

This study performed structure interview to collect data. Research question asked about engineer perspective about what is a good leadership style for them. Engineers would be asked 3 question as follow;

1. What is a good leadership style in your perspective?

   The intention of this question was to see what leadership style that engineers in this organization needed.

2. Are you happy with your leader in your organization? And why are you happy (unhappy) with your leader?

The intention of this question was to see perspective of engineers on their current leader and what was the reason that they feel happy or unhappy with their leader.

3. How to improve your leader in your perspective?

The intention of this question was to see more realistic about what was a good leadership style in engineers' perspective compare with answer from question 1.

3.4 Analysis

Marques (2011) pointed the following strategy should be used in qualitative research: a researcher noted patterns and themes; looks for plausibility, clusters, and counts; and compares and contrasts. The most important goal in the analysis of data collected through qualitative approach was to search for deeper meanings from within the data. Patterns and themes will emerge during the interview

process (Marques, 2011). This study sought to find the effectiveness of leadership style (transformation and transactional) that Thai engineering organization preferred.

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CHAPTER V

PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS AND LIMITATIONS

The purpose of this chapter was to provide practical recommendations to top managements of this organization and identify limitations of this study.

5.1 Practical Implications

The findings of the study revealed that this Thai engineering organization prefer transformational leadership style with an emphasis on reward. The recommendations focus on how to create transformational and transactional leadership style in order to meet engineers' expectation on these leadership styles. The recommendations focus on changing leaders' mind-set and accepting to change their leadership style. The recommendations also suggest organization to implement systems to create leadership styles that engineers preferred.

1. Provide knowledge of transformational and transactional leadership styles to all management level.

The purpose of this recommendation was to provide basic knowledge and different between transformation and transactional leadership styles. The training course would provide pros and cons of transformational and transactional leadership styles and show the best combination of these two leadership styles according to interview results to leaders. To implement this recommendation, all leaders have to attend to training program about transformational and transactional leadership styles. The result of this training program, all leaders should understand how important of transformational and transactional leadership style and know what are their leadership weak points. They should know that they have to trust, support and open-mind to all staffs under their command. Rewards giving to engineers have to be fair for them. And after training program, leaders have to initiate implementation plan for leadership

styles improvement by using the combination of transformational and transactional leadership styles.

2. Implement 360 degree feedback system.

From chapter IV, engineers needed leaders to open their mind and listened to engineers. 360 degree feedback was a good system to collect feedback from staffs and eliminated bias issues in the organizations (Silver, 2000). 360 degree feedback encouraged staffs shared their idea and organization might find of improvement from the staffs (Marques, 2011). It was a system that support transformation leadership style (Moghaddam, 2006).

3. Leaders have to validate current evaluation process of this organization.

Findings from chapter IV, engineers complained that they felt unfair on their evaluation result. Engineers needed reward after they achieved the goal. If there was no any reward for them, they would not satisfy with the organization. Therefore, all engineers should be evaluated fairly and received the reward according to their performances. Leaders should set up meeting to check and validate current evaluation process of this organization. Then, defined gaps of evaluation process and eliminated all gaps to make evaluation process fair for everybody in the organization.

5.2 Limitations of the Study

Based on available resources and information relative to the given time and geographic location, this research study comprised the following areas of limitations:

1. The selected organization and small sample size were one of the several engineering organization in Thailand. Therefore, it was not represent all of Thai engineering organization.

2. The small sample size of 8 engineers may have limited the transferability to overall engineers in this organization.

3. Only engineers have been interviewed. This study did not include leaders' perspective about leadership styles for Thai Engineering organization.

5.3 Recommendation for Future Study

The subject organization has demonstrated various points of leadership styles that Thai engineering organization preferred. In this study, it was suggested that engineers in Thai engineering organization preferred transformational leadership style with a great benefit to the engineers. Future study should seek for management positions' perspective about leadership style. Another point was the sample organization in this study was an end user company. In other Thai engineering organization that their job functions were service or sales might preferred different leadership style. Compare with previous study, transformational leadership style was the most effective leadership style (e.g. Silver, 2000; Moghaddam, 2006; Duerr 2009; Marques, 2011; Sidhu, 2012). However, the result in this study was transformational leadership style with a great benefit to the engineers. Therefore, the future study might study the possibility that transactional leadership style could be the most effective leadership style in Thai engineering organizations.

CHAPTER IV
FINDING AND DISCUSSION

The purpose of this chapter was to identify the leadership styles that Thai engineers in this organization preferred and compared the findings with those of previous studies in order to identify effective leadership style for Thai engineering organization.

4.1 Finding and Discussion

Chapter 4 reported the results of interviews conducted with eight engineers in this organization. The engineers interviewed for this study have shared their stories in an attempt to identify what leadership styles they preferred. The interviewed results created a better understanding of the leadership style that Thai engineering organization preferred.

Trust and Support

Most answers from the sample engineers; they wanted leaders to trust and support especially when they faced the problem. Some activities of engineers had to argue with other department. They were confident their decision was right then they want leader to trust them and help them to argue with other department. One of senior engineer from maintenance department said "As a maintenance engineer, we are service function to the client. However, client could be wrong and we had to argue with them. I needed my leader to trust me and help me to talk with the client." Senior engineers also mentions that they gave more their respect to leaders who trust them. Another young engineer from production department said "I have working experience only 2 years and I have to responsible for the plant productivity. I might make some mistake and lost production rate but I need my leader to trust me and give me a chance to improve myself. Once I can improve myself, I would be proud to be an engineer for

this organization." Another case for trust and support was described by another engineer. She said "I was very happy that I have been assigned to involve in a big project. It meant that my leader trusted me. But after that when I needed support from top management to negotiate with vendors or clients, he refused to help me and he said that I was my responsibility to finish all tasks in this project. That made me felt that did he really trust me or he just gave me a tasks that nobody wanted to do." Trust and support from the answers also meant that they wanted leader to empower them and allowed them to make an important decision. However, engineers preferred both trust and support from leaders.

Moghaddam (2006)'s finding also support that team could create high performance if they were empowered from leader. Followers were happy if they could made decision by themselves (Silver, 2000). Engineers in Thai engineering organization needed trust and empowerment from their leaders. Trust would make Thai engineers happy with their leaders and also made them proud with their job especially for junior engineers. For senior engineers, they needed trust from leader because this also meant that leaders respected to them also.

Rewards when followers achieved goal

Even the respondents needed their leaders to trust them but there was another important factor they needed leader to give them. It was reward when they achieve goal. When they achieve the target they would be happier if they got reward from leader. The reward could be got promotion or high evaluation score at the end of the years. "When I achieve my yearly goal, I should earn a great reward (benefit) from my leader otherwise, what should I do my goal for?" said one of engineer who had experience more than 10 years. Another young engineer said "Last year I have been assigned a lot of work from my leader. I achieved all of my assignment but my evaluation score was just fair level. It made me very unhappy and next year I would not care about my goal anymore. Leader should give me high evaluation score when I achieved my goal." Another engineers described about reward that "I got a lot of special assignments from my leader. The special assignments were out of my role and responsibility. I should be given more benefit for this special assignment but leader refused it and told me I still had to do all of these tasks anyway." These answers could be interpreted that even engineers has been trust and empowered from their leader,

they still needed benefit when they achieved their goal. Engineers felt unhappy and unwilling to work if the rewards were not satisfy. Therefore, without reward they had no energy to work with the organization.

Moghaddam (2006) found that exchanged rewards could boost up followers' performances. Giving rewards to followers could easily made them happy and easy to implement in the organizations (Marques, 2011). Even leader giving trust and support to followers, it was not enough for Thai engineering organization. The answers were clearly that engineers in Thai engineering organization also needed reward when they achieved their goal. They might gained knowledge and improved themselves through the work they had been assigned, and they also need to be rewarded.

Open-mind and respect followers' opinions leadership

Some engineers told that there were a lot of problem in this organization especially management problem. They told in the same way that as a joint venture with global company, there were management styles problem. "Career path for engineer in Thailand seems to be not clear. To reach higher level I have to be an expertise and work for the global. But there were a lot of stuff to improve in Thailand and there was no support from global team. I discuss with my leader on how to improve my career path. He still insisted that I have to work with global, it looks impossible for me. Why I could not growth in local area?" said one senior engineer. This senior engineer recommended leader to create career path in local area, but leader did not try to improve the career path for Thai engineer in this organization. Other problem was spare part availability. This group of engineer informed their leader that they were lack of spare part availability and convinced leader to set up urgent improvement plan. But leader did not set up the improvement plan and did nothing. One of engineers said "I told my leader many times that we have a big problem about spare part availability, but he did not believe me and told me that spare part system was fine. Leader supposed to listen to the problem from engineers." Another engineer gave his opinion about open-mind leadership that leaders should accept feedback from followers and improve themselves according to followers' feedback. He said "I had experience from my previous company that they purposed 360 degrees feedback. It meant that followers can evaluate and gave feedback to their leaders also. All leaders

had to open-mind and listened to feedback from all staffs under their command because it was a direction from CEO. All leaders improved their management skill and finally it created a good working atmosphere. I did not understand why this company did not implement 360 degrees feedback. It may be because our leaders did not want to hear feedback from their followers." Engineers needed leaders to open-mind and accepted what they suggested. They wanted to improve working environment and created happy work place for everybody in this organization.

Followers were happy with leaders who open-mind and listened to them (Marques, 2011). Marques (2011) pointed that open-mind leadership would listen their followers and solved the problem together with them. Engineers needed leader listen to them and improved organization work environment better. However, most topics that engineers needed leaders listened to them and open-mind were about reward giving. There were no evidences for other topics that engineers needed leader listened to them.

Fair leadership

The interviewed results have also indicated that the respondents needed fair leadership for the organization. Some engineers felt that leaders have treated each engineers unequally. However, mostly of the answers they talked about fair on evaluation process only. One engineers said "I have been work hard than every engineer in my department. But I got low evaluation score. I thought because sometime I had different ideas with my leader and had some argument with him. While other engineers always said yes to him. I felt that he biased on my evaluation score. In my opinion leaders should treat everybody fair and equal." While other engineer gave an idea of fair leadership "Leaders should be fair to everybody. Every engineer from each department should be treated. I felt that engineer from production department has been treated better than engineer from maintenance department. For example, average evaluation score of engineer from production department was higher than engineer from maintenance department." Another senior engineer said about his evaluation process that "I liked to work as an engineer for this company. I needed to help this company to improve its capability and be a well known company. But how could I do it when my leader did not honest to me. I felt that my leader always had hidden agenda with me. When I presented my work to him, it looked like he had

something in his mind and he did not told me what was he thinking about. And sometime he claimed my work to be his work. I was very disappointed on what he did." One of junior engineer supported this senior engineer's comment that "I was ok with my low evaluation score because I understood that I was young and I had a lot of room for improvement. But how could I know which part I should improve myself when my leader did not inform me what I have done wrong? He just told me the evaluation score and told me nothing about how to improve. I felt that he had something in his mind but I did not know why he did not told me. He also told me that even I got low evaluation score but I had to be professional and keep working. That made me felt very bad." The previous studies did not mention about fair leadership. However, the answers from these engineers could be interpreted about reward giving to them because most of them felt unfair with their leader only on the evaluation process.

Duerr (2009) pointed that giving rewards to followers can encourage followers to boost up their performance to get big reward. However, with reward giving style followers would focus only their reward when they achieved the target. And if reward did not satisfy to followers, then they would ignore to create high performance and high productivity (Duerr, 2009). This interview results (fair leadership) inferred that engineers needed leaders should evaluated everybody equally. So, they still focus on reward they would get at the end of the year.

Honest leadership

The task structure of engineers has to work by follow approval standard procedure (Moghaddam, 2006). Engineers needed leaders trained and guided them to perform task according to approval standard procedure (Duerr, 2009). One of senior engineer told about his work experience in this organization that "In 2011, this company had mega project to build the petrochemical plant. There were a lot of contractors and I had to control contractors to proceed all task according to all standard needed. Some contractors did not perform task according to standard then I had to intervene them and told them to fix all tasks that did not meet the standard. The rework process might impact the schedule, so my leader forces me to accept this because he wanted all task to finish on time. I was wonder what he has done but I had

to accept anyway. I thought leader should refuse all tasks that did not meet the standard."

To be honestly was a first priority for every type of leadership style (Moghaddam, 2006). Leader with great honestly would be admired as a great leader (Moghaddam, 2006). Duerr (2009) also supported leaders to give honest feedback to followers then they would feel happy to work with leaders.

4.2 Conclusion

Transactional leadership style motivated followers by exchanging one thing for another (Garcia, 2004) and focused on the outcome from followers and gave a good reward to them if they achieved the targets (Robbins & Judge, 2013). Transactional leadership style gave rewards to followers to persuade them to work with the organizations (Moghaddam, 2006). Transformation leadership style inspired followers to focus their self-interests for good of the organization (Robbins & Judge, 2013). Transformational leaders told followers to believe that they had high capability and trust in followers' performance. Trust and support were parts of transformational leadership style (Silver, 2000). Transformational leadership style listened to followers and open-mind to them (Marques, 2011). Transformational leadership style gave fair rewards to followers when they achieved the targets (Moghaddam, 2006).

The interview results indicated that engineers in this organization preferred leaders who trust and support them. They had many ideas to initiate a great performance for the organization but they could not do that if leaders did not trust and support them. Engineers also needed leaders to open-mind and listened to them because if leader listened to them, it meant that they were respected by leaders. Then they would felt happy to work with the organization. Reward giving to engineers must be fair to them. Because they believed that after hard working, they deserved fair rewards. Engineers would respect to leaders who have honest. In engineer job function, all employees in the organization had to work with honest because there were a lot of standards they had to follow. Engineers believed that working by follow all standards would improve themselves and organization. However, from the results

also showed that engineers focused too much on the rewards. If they did not satisfy to the rewards, they refused to do the task or did it unhappily. Therefore, Thai engineering organization preferred transformational leadership style with a great benefit to the engineers.