



RESEARCH ARTICLE

Effects of Transformational Leadership, Organizational Culture, and Employee Loyalty on Employee Performance of Qatari Small and Medium Enterprises

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The purpose of this review paper is to develop a proposed model which needs to be tested empirically. The review covered mainly employee performance and employee loyalty among the Qatari SMEs. For the said purpose a detailed literature review was conducted, and the model has been developed and methodology has been proposed. The model has been developed with the help of transformational leadership theory. To enrich transformational leadership theory, theoretical support of resource dependency theory and cognitive dissonance theory has been taken. The proposed methodology identified the scales that should be used for empirical testing.

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INTRODUCTION

In current era, SMEs are treated as vehicles of economic development (Asad, et al., 2024). SMEs provide employment to over 70% of the labor force (Aboelmaged & Hashem, 2019). Hence, seeking high performance from the employees of SMEs requires proper HRM practices, governance, and leadership (Asad, Haider, & Fatima, 2018; Kanaan, Alsoud, Asad, Ta'Amnha, & Al-Qudah, 2024). Employee performance has always remained an issue for leaders around the world. SMEs have a crucial impact on Qatar's economy since approximately 97% of the private sector is comprised of SMEs (Thani, 2022). Moreover, 35% of the employment generation is done by the SMEs in Qatar (Qatar Development Bank, 2020).

Despite significant contribution in employment, only 46% of the SMEs in Qatar have HR department, which shows lack of interest of leadership for managing employees in SMEs in Qatar (Al-Eida, 2020). The insignificant importance of employees can be understood from the fact that 55% of the employees are hired on Ad-hoc basis causing dissatisfaction among employees resulting lack of employee loyalty (Asad, et al., 2021). Another major issue is related to high employee turnover among SMEs which is continuously creating survival and sustainability challenges for the SMEs in Qatar (Badar, 2023).

Similarly, a study was conducted over leadership style and employee performance (Asad, Asif, Allam, & Sheikh, 2021) which also claimed that employee performance is low and there is a need to identify the factors which influence leadership behavior and employee performance (Haj, 2017; Bilal & Sulaiman, 2021). Low performance and high turnover are the major issues for the employees working in SMEs in Qatar, secondly, due to poor economic conditions at home countries of employees

(Limbu, 2023), they continue with the organization, but their productivity is very low (Lari, 2021; Salem, Alanadoly, & Sulaiman, 2023).

It has also been observed that majority of the SMEs in Qatar are services based (Komalasari, 2016; Al-Eida, 2020; Noor, Eva, & Maria, 2020; Satar, Alharthi, Asad, Alenazy, & Asif, 2024) as compared to production sector (Salaheldin, 2009; Alkhuzai, et al., 2024) which are highly dependent over employee performance (Demirkol & Nalla, 2018; Saleem, Al-Breiki, & Asad, 2024). However, Trading is the largest sector of SMEs in Qatar, as 39% of the SMEs in Qatar belong to trading followed by services which constitute 32% (Qatar Development Bank, 2020). Hence, the research will focus on the trading and services sector only as the major issue of employee performance has also been seen in these two sectors.

The major issue faced behind employee's performance is that leadership is not very nice in influencing their employees (Afshari, 2022), motion is missing (Nguyen, Mai, & Luong, 2019), intellectual stimulation is not given due importance by the leadership (Thuan, 2020), and leadership is hardly interested in considering employees at individual level (Rafferty & Griffin, 2006). Nevertheless, even though the authors make multiple assertions that Transformational Leadership (TL) exerts a potent and positive influence on EP, yet it's the TL that is the prime cause behind employee turnover. Likewise, Chen, Ning, Yang, Feng, and Yang (2018) claimed that TL has bad effects over EP. Similarly, Vipraprastha, Sudja, and Yuesti (2018) also identified that TL negatively influence employee performance because of over demanding behavior by the leaders (Asad, Asif, Sulaiman, Satar, & Alarifi, 2023).

Thus, having negative influence as per the latest studies and controversial findings over TL over EP, calls for more research into the effect of TL on employee performance to identify the root causes of the controversies surrounding this topic. According to Baron and Kenny (1986), whenever there are controversies in the findings, it is evident that there is a gap which needs to be filled by identifying the intervening variable due to which such controversies in the past literature occur (Baron & Kenny, 1986; Ta'Amnha, Magableh, Asad, & Al-Qudah, 2023).

Another issue which plays a major role in shaping the behavior of employees towards performance is organizational culture. The difference in the organizational culture is developed by the leadership (Qalati, Ostic, Sulaiman, Gopang, & Khan, 2022). Leadership is responsible for creating, managing, and at times destructing the behaviour if become mandatory for achieving certain targets (Asif, Asad, Bhutta, & Khan, 2021). Goodman (1991) affirmed that; juniors should respect seniors in their organizations. Organizational culture has the potential to influence not only employee performance but overall organizational performance, thus it cannot be ignored.

Therefore, to address these calls for further research, scholars such as Pattnaik and Sahoo (2021) have suggested the need to investigate the specific mechanisms through which TL impacts employee performance. In response to these demands, the present study employs both TL Theory (TLT) and Resource Dependency Theory (RDT) to examine the impact of psychological connection among leaders and employees in promoting performance. Organizational identification being social identification refers to employee's identification with a particular organization based on their involvement in it (Bharadwaj, Khan, & Yameen, 2021; Ajina, Ali, Zamil, Khalid, & Sulaiman, 2024).

Moreover, as Swanson, Kim, Lee, Yang, and Lee (2020) pointed out, there is a dearth of research that has substantiated the role of employee loyalty as a mediator of the relationship between TL and employee performance. Therefore, the first gap in the literature is the lack of research on the four components of TL - idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individual consideration - in the context of the Arab world and especially involving organizational culture which is under researched in the Arab context (Allam Z., Asad, Ali, & Malik, 2022). The second gap in the literature is the limited attention given to the mediating role of employee loyalty between the four dimensions of TL especially in the Gulf region (Allam, 2019).

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review covered an analysis of transformative leadership, employee loyalty, organizational culture, and Employee Performance. Initially underpinning theories that support the framework has been discussed followed by the conceptual framework and research hypotheses. The framework is based on three theories. The Theory of TL suggests that a leader works together with

their followers to identify significant changes, inspires them with a vision, and collaborates with a dedicated team to implement the changes (Asad, Asif, Bakar, & Sheikh, 2021). The goal of TL is to create a positive work environment that promotes development for the followers, which ultimately results in higher performance (García-Morales, Jiménez-Barrionuevo, & Gutiérrez-Gutiérrez, 2012). To attain a shared goal, TL works towards building consensus among their followers, thus, identifying a shared vision between the leader and the followers (Vipraprastha, Sudja, & Yuesti, 2018).

Secondly, in strategic management studies, the notion of resource dependency emphasizes the added value of human capital (Satar, Alharthi, Asad, Alenazy, & Asif, 2024). Hence, resource dependency theory is considered as most suitable theory as it talks about performance of the organization through the resources which are other than the resources identified by the resource-based view, hence employee loyalty which is supposed to be out of control of the organization is supported by RDT.

Finally, the underlying mechanisms explaining why organizational culture may affect employees' performance can be derived from the cognitive consistency theory, originally called the cognitive dissonance theory. Moreover, the cognitive dissonance theory implies a drive from within to harmonize all attitudes and beliefs and avoid disharmony. The importance of employee loyalty toward an organization and its performance is cognitive consistency. Thus, cognitive dissonance theory is considered to be most suitable to support organizational culture.

Based on the above discussion over the three theories, to support the variables, the following framework has been developed. The main independent variables in this model are TL and organizational culture and one dependent variable is EP, with employee loyalty as the mediating variable. Employee loyalty, according to several experts, has a positive mediating impact in such a paradigm (Northouse, 2021). When examining the influence of TL on administrative performance and the role of employee loyalty in this relationship, Zanabazar and Jigiddorj (2021) found a positive effect, yet it has hardly been analyzed over the SMEs in Qatar where 97% of the businesses fall under the head of SMEs.

Transformational Leadership and Employee Loyalty

Transformational leaders recognize the unique strengths and capabilities of their employees (Asif, Asad, Bhutta, & Khan, 2021). TL invest in the personal growth and development of their employees (Irshad & Hashmi, 2014; Chethiyar, Asad, Kamaluddin, Ali, & Sulaiman, 2019). By investing in their employees' professional development, these leaders demonstrate a genuine interest in their growth and success (Asad, et al., 2021). Through their vision, inspiration, individualized support, and intellectual stimulation, these leaders create a culture of high performance and engagement. Thus, there is no harm in proposing the following hypothesis.

H₁: Transformational leaders have a positive impact over employee performance.

Idealized Influence and employee performance

Transformational leaders are known for motivating and inspiring their followers through idealized influence, to act in ways that benefit the organization, rather than just their personal interests. This attribute of leadership focuses on how leaders can serve as positive role models for their followers, with the latter admiring the former's character and behavior and seeking to emulate them (Biswas, 2009). Leaders with this attribute adhere to high ethical standards, constantly striving to act in the best interest of the organization (Northouse, 2021). Thus, the following hypothesis has been proposed.

H_{1a}: Idealized Influence has a significant positive impact on employee performance.

Inspirational motivation and employee performance

The first trait of transformational leaders is inspirational motivation (Allam Z. , Asad, Ali, & Ali, 2021). The leader understands the importance of using the right words while speaking to the followers (Northouse, 2021). TL entails using symbols and emotions to inspire organizational members to develop their abilities and enhance their performance, resulting in a style that aligns with the organization's objectives (Haj, 2017). Therefore, the following hypothesis has been proposed.

H_{1b}: Inspirational Motivation has a significant impact on employee performance.

Intellectual stimulation and employee performance

TL emphasizes the importance of inspiring and motivating followers to achieve a shared vision (Northouse, 2021). By inspiring followers to give their all, the leader assures the organization's future (Otieno, Linge, & Sikalieh, 2019). A leader may motivate followers to come up with innovative ideas (Thuan, 2020). Therefore, the following hypothesis is developed;

H_{1c}: Intellectual Stimulation has a significant positive impact on employee performance.

Individual consideration and employee performance

This element represents transformational leaders who foster a supportive environment in which each follower's needs are met (Kashif, et al., 2020). These leaders recognize and seek to maximize the potential of each of their followers (Sinaga, Asmawi, Madhakomala, & Suratman, 2018). The full extent of each party's potential will be realized (Majeed, Ramayah, Mustamil, Nazri, & Jamshed, 2017). He finds it easier to delegate responsibility to them now that he understands their potential (Mansoor, Farrukh, Lee, & Jahan, 2021). Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed;

H_{1d}: Individual Consideration has a significant positive impact on employee performance.

TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP AND EMPLOYEE LOYALTY

When employees see their leaders actively working towards the vision, it fosters a sense of loyalty and a desire to contribute to the organization's success (Asif, Asad, Bhutta, & Khan, 2021). Hence, it would be right to claim that transformational leadership promotes employee loyalty by creating a work environment that is inspiring, supportive, and empowering (Khushi, din, & Sulaiman, 2020). By communicating a compelling vision, building trust, promoting employee development, providing recognition and rewards, empowering employees, encouraging collaboration, and demonstrating inspirational leadership, transformational leaders nurture employee loyalty (Allen, Eboli, Forciniti, Mazzulla, & Ortúzar, 2019). Therefore, the following hypothesis has been developed;

H₂: Transformational Leadership has a significant positive impact over employee Loyalty.

Idealized influence and employee loyalty

A variety of factors impact the formation of transformative leadership. Because they are all responsible for improving EP, considerations such as the interests of leaders and followers are critical (Chen, Ning, Yang, Feng, & Yang, 2018). TL confident in their approach to achieving certain objectives (Northouse, 2021). The behavioral component is based on followers' feedback on leaders' activities, and followers' contributions to leaders are based on their evaluations of their leaders (Zhao & Huang, 2022). Thus, it would be right to develop the following hypothesis;

H_{2a}: Idealized Influence has a significant positive impact on employee loyalty.

Inspirational motivation and employee loyalty

Leaders use symbols and emotional appeals to inspire organizational members to promote self-interest and values, create competences, and improve performance (Hammami, Ahmed, Johny, & Sulaiman, 2021). This leadership encourages individuals to function in a certain style that is in line with the organization's goals through enhancing their performance in the workplace (Khan A. A., Asad, Khan, Asif, & Aftab, 2021). As a result, followers comprehend that their actions and attitudes have a substantial influence on the organization's long-term success (Bakker, Hetland, Olsen, & Espevik, 2022). Based on the above discussion the following hypothesis has been developed.

H_{2b}: Inspirational Motivation has a significant impact on employee loyalty.

Intellectual stimulation and employee loyalty

A leader may inspire followers to come up with ideas that can assist address a specific problem in the corporation or improve employee loyalty (Fadhel, Aljalhama, Almuhanadi, Asad, & Sheikh, 2022). TL will allow the person in charge of the system to fix or replace it without disrupting the rest of the organization. By doing so, the leader fosters individual consideration and improves the overall performance of the organization. Hence based on the above discussion the following hypothesis has been proposed;

H_{2c}: Intellectual Stimulation has a significant positive impact on employee loyalty.

Individual consideration and employee loyalty

Individualized consideration means giving personalized importance to the employee. This implies that the leader will oversee a wide range of processes, all of which must be carried out in a fair and compliant manner (Singh, Giudice, Chierici, & Graziano, 2020). A transformative leader finds it easier to delegate responsibility to others since he understands their potential (Asad, Aledeinat, Majali, Almajali, & Shrafat, 2024). Upon achievement when the employee is given appreciation and are rewarded they feel more loyal towards the enterprise (Riphah, Ali, Danish, & Sulaiman, 2022). Thus, based on the above discussion the following hypothesis is proposed.

H_{2d}: Individual Consideration has a significant positive impact on employee loyalty.

Organizational Culture and Employee Performance

Of the variables that predict employee performance, organizational culture is the strongest. If employees have a high value of organizational culture, there is less workplace deviance (Ullah, et al., 2021). Both culture, strength and innovation significantly correlated with growth in business (Ullah, Latif, & Alam, 2018). Similarly, both management and supportiveness significantly correlated with growth in net profits (Satar, Alarifi, Alkhoraif, & Asad, 2023). Thus, from the above discussion the following hypothesis is proposed:

H₃: Organizational culture has a significant positive impact on employee performance.

Employee Loyalty and Employee Performance

The authors over employee performance have highlighted that employee loyalty plays a significant role in determining the overall employee performance (Salem, Alanadoly, & Sulaiman, 2023; Asad, Majali, Aledeinat, & Almajali, 2023). Employee loyalty creates a positive work environment, fosters teamwork, and ultimately enhances employee performance which consequently improves organizational performance (Xie, Z., Qalati, et al., 2023). When employees feel valued and appreciated by their organization, it creates a sense of belonging and camaraderie among employees, which positively impacts their morale and, consequently, their performance (Sulaiman & Asad, 2023). Hence, the following hypothesis is proposed.

H₄: Employee Loyalty has a significant positive impact over employee performance.

Transformational Leadership, Employee Loyalty, and Employee Performance

According to Krishnan (2001), TL is the process through which leaders and followers encourage and inspire one other by motivating them. He realized that such a leader's supporters have faith in him, adore him, are devoted to him, and are willing to work harder than expected (Krishnan, 2001). Transformative leadership, according to recent research (Maqbool, Sudong, Manzoor, & Rashid, 2017), predicts workers' commitment to their own moral values. Many research studies have examined how transformational training affects various outcomes (Haj, 2017). Changes in trainers' perceptions of their supervisors' behaviors have also been discovered to be a mechanism by which changes in safety behaviors occur because of their job loyalty's impact on TL's interactions with them in terms of motivating them to improve their performance (Ullah, et al., 2021). Hence considering the importance of employee loyalty for improving employee performance because of the transformational leadership roles, the following hypotheses have been developed;

H₆: Employee loyalty mediate the relationship between Idealized Influence and employee performance.

H₇: Employee loyalty mediate the relationship between inspirational motivation and employee performance.

H₈: Employee loyalty mediate the relationship between intellectual stimulation and employee performance.

H₉: Employee loyalty mediate the relationship between individual consideration and employee performance.

Organizational Culture, Employee Loyalty, And Employee Performance

Organizational culture is an important aspect of employee loyalty that motivates employees and could contribute to the achievement of performance (Zuhaib, Wenyuan, Sulaiman, Siddiqui, & Qalati,

2022). If the person and organization fit, it will have a positive impact on employee's loyalty to the organization and consequently to employee performance (Allam, 2019). Employees who are loyal with the organization have a more satisfying organizational culture which boosts their performance. Moreover, the difference of organizational culture may influence employees' attitudes of their organizational setting. Thus, there is no harm in claiming that employee loyalty is influenced by organizational culture which ultimately influence employee performance, therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H₁₀: Employee loyalty mediate the relationship between organizational culture and employee performance.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In this qualitative study, a framework has been developed which calls for a quantitative methodology to be used for empirical testing, which involves gathering and analyzing numerical data to represent the phenomenon being studied (Hair J. F., 2007). Because survey research offers a quick, cost-effective, and precise means of gathering information and assessing a specific population (Zikmund, Babin, Carr, & Griffin, 2013). The study focuses on collecting data from SME owner-managers in Qatar to examine the mediating role of employee loyalty between TL dimensions and employee performance in SMEs in Qatar. The researcher in this study, which is an extension of previous research on employee performance in SMEs in Qatar, has adopted cross-sectional research, as recommended by Asad, Asif, Khan, Allam, and Satar (2022), at the organizational level.

In this study, employee performance is proposed to be dependent variable, and measurement of employee performance is as the achievement of desired outcomes that directly play a significant role in achieving the organization's goals. The items were adapted from a previous study conducted by Williams and Anderson (Williams & Anderson, 1991). To assess TL, the study suggests to utilize a tool that is based on four dimensions, which are individualized consideration, intellectual stimulation, inspirational motivation, and idealized influence (Sadeghi & Pihie, 2012). These dimensions have been previously established in the literature and were also used in a study conducted by Sadeghi and Pihie (2012). Organizational culture is measured in terms of employees' attitude and attitude of the leadership for creating a flexible and outcome-oriented culture. It covers the aspects like following procedures, spreading equality, and socialization among employees (Suvaci, 2018). The items for measuring organizational culture were adopted from Suvaci (2018). Finally, employee loyalty is measured in terms of the loyalty of the employee towards his job and organization (Tomic, Tesic, Kuzmanovic, & Tomic, 2018). Employee loyalty has been measured with six items adopted from Tomic, Tesic, Kuzmanovic, and Tomic (2018). All the questions in the questionnaire utilizes a seven-point scale for respondents to rate their level of agreement or disagreement with each question (Zikmund, Babin, Carr, & Griffin, 2013).

In the context of this study, the population encompasses the SMEs that operate within Qatar, which amount to a total of 10,000 entities. Those SMEs that are in the sector of trading and services are included because they constitute the main proportion. A sample is chosen for analysis, which represents a smaller subset of the study's overall population. According to Morgan Kerjice formula 384 questionnaires would be sufficient considering the population size. For meeting the objectives of the study systematic sampling was employed over double the target sample size. Additionally in the current research, the unit of analysis is an individual working in the SMEs. The employees of the SMEs have been selected as respondents, as they are key informants.

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