

## THE LEADERSHIP DILEMMA: INVESTIGATING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN LEADERSHIP STYLE AND EMPLOYEE PERFORMANCE

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### **ABSTRACT**

**Background:** Several research studies have been devoted to the relationship between leadership and employee performance. They provided significant results that leadership styles have a positive correlation with employee performance.

**Aim:** The purpose of this paper is to examine how strong is correlation between leadership styles and employee performance in the private sector in Kosovo. This relationship between those variables has been little investigated by researchers in Kosovo, and from the research that we analyzed none of them take a laissez-faire style for research. We will consider three leadership styles: laissez-faire, transactional, and transformational leadership, along with employee performance, to provide the relationship between them. We will also discuss review papers that measured the correlation between these variables.

**Methods:** A study was conducted to determine if there is a significant linear relationship between leadership style and employee performance. The research utilized Pearson's Correlation and collected data through questionnaires distributed to employees and managers in various private-sector industries in Kosovo. A random sampling technique was used to collect 235 samples from the manufacturing, service, construction, and wholesale industries. The questionnaire was analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 27. Yousef's (2000) scale was used to measure employee performance, while the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (Bass and Avolio 1995) was used to measure laissez-faire and transactional leadership, and transformational leadership was measured using a 7-item scale from Carless, Wearing, and Mann (2002).

**Results:** According to the findings of the research, it has been confirmed that leadership styles have a low but positive correlation with employee performance. There is no statistically significant correlation between laissez-faire leadership and employee performance. Transactional leadership and transformational leadership have a low but positive correlation with employee performance. Also, the results show that most of the employees consider that personal performance is higher than their peers in the same kind of work around 5.88%.

**Keywords:** Leadership styles, laissez-faire, transactional, transformational, employee performance.

<http://doi.org/10.47063/EBTSF.2023.0016>

<http://hdl.handle.net/20.500.12188/28854>

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

Leadership is considered the most investigated organizational variable that has a potential impact on employee performance (Cummings and Schwab, 1973; Velu et al., 2017). Furthermore, a key factor for organizational success is employees. Their performance has been a long-standing interest of researchers because employee performance is an important indicator of leadership effectiveness (Shang, 2023). Leaders strongly believe that employees are an essential resource for the organization, and only by continuously improving their capabilities and quality can they drive sustainable development (Dong, 2023).

A custom that we encounter in many enterprises is that leaders point the finger at the employees themselves and blame them for poor performance. But in fact, it should also be analyzed whether the leadership style used by the leaders can affect the increase or decrease in the performance of the employees. Through this paper, it is attempted to find if there is a correlation between leadership styles and employee performance. By analyzing this correlation, we can be informed which leadership style has a positive correlation, which means that the more leaders use that style in the organization, it will affect the increase in employee performance. Meanwhile, if any style has a negative correlation with employee performance, then it means that the more that style is used by the leaders, the more the performance of the employees will decrease. If a correlation doesn't exist between those variables then means that is no relationship between those variables. Also, through this paper, it is attempted to analyze how employees evaluate their performance and that of their colleagues in comparison to their own.

The research tries to help companies in Kosovo to be informed if there is a correlation between these variables and if have which style has a positive correlation which is recommended to be used by leaders and which has a negative correlation. The link between leadership styles and employee performance is a topic that has been treated very little by researchers in Kosovo, so it is assumed that it will be a small contribution for researchers and businesses in Kosovo.

## **2. LEADERSHIP**

Napoleon Bonaparte known as the Former Emperor of the French said, "A leader is a dealer in hope" (Malik and Azmat, 2019). Leadership is one of the most widely researched and discussed topics in all areas of organizational sciences because nothing gets accomplished without it (Yammarino, 2013). The question that is often asked is what could be more important to the long-term success of an organization than its ability to cultivate leaders. In an era in which the demand for high-quality leadership exceeds the supply, exemplary organizations are those that grow leaders at all levels of the organization by developing their leadership pipelines (Spreitzer, 2006).

Luedi (2022) considers that leadership is a dedicated position. Leadership is about oneself. Leadership is about people. Leadership is about processes. Leadership is about enterprises. Leadership is about individuals. Leadership is about societies. Leadership is about serving. Leadership is about conflict. Leadership is about followership. Leadership is about change (Luedi, 2022). Research on leadership began with a search for heritable attributes that differentiated leaders from non-leaders. A style represents a distinctive or characteristic behavior, a particular method of acting (Vasilescu, 2019). Comments about leaders and leadership are first seen in the books of Confucius (Amalects), Lao-Tzu (Tao Te Ching), and Sun Tzu (The Art of War), dating to the sixth century BC (Bickes and Yilmaz, 2020). The genesis of the debate on leadership theory in modern times began with the work of Stogdill (1948) who is also considered as the first leadership theory. This theoretical work came to be known as the trait theory of leadership (Bhattacharyya and Jha, 2018). One of the first studies of leadership behavior was conducted by Kurt Lewin and his

colleagues at the University of Iowa. In their studies, researchers explored three leadership styles or behaviors: autocratic, democratic, and laissez-faire (Robbins and DeCenzo, 2012).

### **2.1. Laissez-faire Leadership**

Laissez-faire is a French expression. Leaders who practice Laissez-faire have a trusting and dependent attitude toward their workforce. They do not micromanage, become overly engaged, or provide excessive direction or instruction but they encourage their staff to utilize their initiative, resources, and expertise to further their objectives (Em, 2023). Defined as avoidance and abdication of one's responsibilities (Hinkin & Schriesheim, 2008b; Skogstad, Hetland, et al., 2014; Robert and Vandenberghe, 2021), laissez-faire has been consistently found to be the least satisfying and least effective management style (Bass & Bass, 2008; Robert and Vandenberghe, 2021). Some researchers might view laissez-faire leaders as displaying leadership skills that attract and avoid conflict management styles (Gray and Williams, 2012).

### **2.2. Transactional Leadership**

James MacGregor Burns (1978) first introduced the concept of "transactional leadership" in his book *Leaders*, positing that the leader-employee relationship is based on an exchange of power and benefits (Dong, 2023). Transactional leadership was described as that in which leader-follower associations were grounded upon a series of agreements between followers and leaders (House & Shamir, 1993; Khan et al., 2016). The transactional leader can be defined as follows: "Typically, transactional leaders set explicit, work-related goals and the rewards that can be expected as a result of performing successfully... the implication is that "this is not done proactively and in close cooperation with each team member" (Rowold, 2011, Jangsiriwattana, 2019).

### **2.3. Transformational Leadership**

Transformational leadership style is the most suitable one to be applied in the companies of the 21st century (Andreani and Petrik, 2016). Of all the studies that treated transformational leadership, the most representative is considered the study by Bass. Bass (1985) argued that transformational leaders have a very strong sense of intrinsic value and conceptual system, and they stimulate their subordinates' higher-level needs such as responsibility and honor by making them aware of the importance of the tasks they undertake so that they can put more effort into the team or organizational interests and ultimately achieve performance that exceeds expectations (Shang, 2023). This leadership sets the standard level of human interaction between the leader and follower (Banerji & Krishnan, 2000; Gray and Williams, 2012).

### **2.4. Leadership and employee performance**

People manage other resources that factor into the company's existence in carrying out their respective roles. Companies have an obligation to monitor the performance of their employees, employees are assets and their performance contributes to company goals. Organizations that fail to maintain or manage employee performance may not comply with employee performance variances which can hinder the organization's progress in achieving its goals. Companies demand maximum performance from their employees in carrying out their work (Susanto et al., 2023).

Leaders need to know the various weaknesses and strengths of members to achieve targets for improving employee performance (Susanto et al., 2023).

Employee performance is the result of work produced by employees or real behavior that is displayed according to their role in the organization. Performance or performance of employees is a

very important thing in an organization's efforts to achieve its goals so that various activities must be carried out by the organization to improve it. (Hariandjaja, 2002; Bayo, 2023).

## **2.5. Hypothesis**

H1. Leadership styles have a positive correlation with employee performance.

H1a. Laissez-faire leadership has a positive correlation with employee performance.

H1b. Transactional leadership has a positive correlation with employee performance.

H1c. Transformational leadership has a positive correlation with employee performance.

## **3. METHODOLOGY**

### **3.1 Sampling size**

According to Lund (2023), the typical sample size has grown over the past 20 years from an average of 153 in the first five years of the new millennium, to 225 in the years 2015-2019 (+72).

This study utilized a random sampling method and a total of 500 potential respondents were distributed questionnaire, from which 235 useable responses were returned.

### **3.2. Data collection**

Data was collected using two ways. In most of the organizations, the questionnaire was completed online with a Google Form (175), with the link being provided to the participants. In the beginning, the research author contacted managers in every organization that was part of the study (mainly entrepreneurs). The link was then shared by them with employees and managers of organizations. For 60 employees who had difficulty completing the questionnaire and asked for additional clarification, the questionnaires were filled in person, and administered by a person with authority in the organization who had previously been instructed by the author of the research.

Questionnaire data were automatically generated in an Excel sheet which was then imported into the SPSS (SPSS Statistics 27) database.

### **3.3. Questionnaire**

The questionnaire is divided into three sections. The first section consists of 19 questions related to leadership styles. The second section has 4 questions related to the performance of employees. The last section consists of eight questions related to demographic details such as gender, age, work experience, education, etc. Dillman (1978) recommended placing the demographics questions be the least interesting and socially important items, at the end, rather than at the (more conventional) beginning of the survey instrument (Dillman, 1978; Green, et al., 2000). Section 1 and Section 2 were measured by using a 5-point Likert-type scale, ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5).

## **4. MEASUREMENT OF VARIABLES**

### **4.1. Instrument for employee performance**

The most suitable method to collect primary data is to distribute a questionnaire (McLeod, 2008; Khudhair et al., 2022). Employee performance was measured with the Yousef (2000) scale adapted from Aslam, S., Khan, M, B., Ullah, N. (2018) and measured the quality of performance, productivity, and evaluation of the performance of the respondents and their peers.

For this study, the items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale, with options from 1-strongly disagree to 5- strongly agree. The Cronbach's alpha of the scale was 0.848.

#### **4.2. Instrument for Leadership styles**

The Laissez-Faire Leadership style was measured using a scale from the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (Bass and Avolio 1995). Four items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale, with options from 1-strongly disagree to 5- strongly agree. The Cronbach's alpha of the scale was 0.864.

Transactional Leadership Style was measured using a scale from the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (Bass and Avolio 1995). Eight items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale, with options from 1-strongly disagree to 5- strongly agree. The Cronbach's alpha of the scale for transactional leadership was 0.812.

Transformational Leadership was measured using a scale from Carless, Wearing, and Mann (2002) with 7 items. Also, for this scale were using the Likert scale. The Cronbach's alpha of the scale was 0.926.

The questionnaire for leadership styles was in rater form which means that others perceive the leader's leadership behaviors.

#### **4.3. Respondent's profile**

Participants for this study were 235 employees and managers from the private sector. Regarding gender, 146 (62.1%) were males and 81 (34.5%) were females and 8 (3.4%) of them prefer not to answer. The mean value of the age of participants is 35 years old. The youngest is 19 years old and the oldest is 64 years old. Out of the total participants, 159 (67.7%) were married, 60 (25.5%) were single, 14 (6.0%) respondents preferred not to answer and 2 of them (0.9%) were divorced. Regarding the education of 202 participants, 89 (37.9%) of participants with Bachelor, 86 (36.6%) participants with master's, 23 (9.8%) with higher education, 23 (9.8%) with middle school education, and 14 (6.0%) of participants with PhD or PhD student.

The minimum number of years of service in organizations is 1, while the maximum is 35. Participants were asked an open question about their length of service in the current organization and the results show that 1 year was the minimum of service in the current organization and the maximum was 35 years. Moreover, 137(58.3%) of the participants are in managerial positions and 98 (41.7%) are in non-managerial positions. Of 137 participants in managerial positions, 23 (9.8%) are in the top level of management, 81 (34.5) are in the middle level of management and 33 (14.0%) are part of the lower level of management. The majority of the participants are assumed to be in the service sector 72 (30.6%), 52 (22.1%) of them work in the manufacturing sector and retail sector, 31 (13.2) in the construction and 24 (10.2%) of participants in wholesale.

#### **4.4. Validity and Reliability**

For the interpretation of Cronbach's alpha, it's used the rule of thumb from George and Mallery (2003). According to George and Mallery (2003), a reliability level of  $\alpha > 0.9$  is considered excellent, 0.8-0.89 is good, 0.7-0.79 is acceptable, 0.6-0.69 is questionable, 0.5-0.59 is poor, and  $< 0.5$  is unacceptable. Cronbach's  $\alpha$  coefficient for each variable of the model and its average was higher than 0.7, which confirms the reliability of the model. Cronbach's  $\alpha$  for each variable is employee performance, Laissez-Faire Leadership style 0.864, Transactional Leadership 0.812, and Transformational Leadership 0.926.

#### 4.5. Descriptive statistics

Table 1 below presents results from descriptive statistics for leadership styles. The mean value for the laissez-faire leadership style is 2.4064 (between low and medium) and the standard deviation is 1.15528. The mean value for transactional leadership style is 3.7473 (high) and the standard deviation is .72579. The mean value for transformational leadership style is 3.9891 (high) and the standard deviation is .87788. The leadership style questionnaire was in rater form which means that others perceive the leader's leadership behaviors. Of the responses from the participants, the most depicted leadership style from leaders in organizations is transformational leadership. The less-depicted leadership style is laissez faire which means that managers do not display a level of refusal to assume the responsibilities that are part of their position.

*Table 1: Descriptive statistics of three leadership styles*  
*Descriptive Statistics*

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
LFL	235	2,4064	1,15528
TAL	235	3,7473	,72579
TFL	235	3,9891	,87788
Valid N (listwise)	235		

From 1.00 to less than 2.33 = low, from 2.33 to 3.66 medium, and from 3.67 to 5.00 = high, (Al-Daibat, 2017).

*(Source: Authors' calculation)*

Table 2 presents results from descriptive statistics for Employee performance. The mean value for productivity is 4.1840 (high) and the standard deviation is 0.61317.

*Table 2: Descriptive statistics for employee performance*

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Productivity	235	4,1840	,61317
Valid N (listwise)	235		

From 1.00 to less than 2.33 = low, from 2.33 to 3.66 medium, and from 3.67 to 5.00 = high, (Al-Daibat, 2017).

*(Source: Authors' calculation)*

In the table 3 below are presented the results from employee performance. In the question of how the respondents evaluate their quality and productivity at work from a scale of 1-5, the mean is 4.3 (high). Also, the results show that most of the employees consider that personal performance is higher than their peers in the same kind of work around 5.88%.

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics- Employees' performance

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
How do you rate the quality of your performance?	235	4,31	,759
How do you rate your productivity on the job?	235	4,37	,724
How do you evaluate the performance of your peers at their jobs compared with yourself doing the same kind of work?	235	3,91	,827
How do you evaluate the performance of yourself at your job compared with your peers doing the same kind of work?	235	4,14	,814
Valid N (listwise)	235		

(Source: Authors' calculation)

## 5. RESULTS

### 5.1. Multicollinearity

Table 4 presents the multicollinearity and variance inflation factor (VIF) between leadership styles and dependent variables (employee performance). According to Belsley (1991) cited by Shrestha (2020), the value of variance inflation factor =1 means that the independent variables are not correlated to each other. If the value of variance inflation factor (VIF) is  $1 < VIF < 5$ , it specifies that the variables are moderately correlated to each other. Also, if  $VIF \geq 5$  to 10, there will be multicollinearity among the predictors in the regression model, and variance inflation factor (VIF)  $> 10$  indicates the regression coefficients are feebly estimated with the presence of multicollinearity (Belsley 1991; Shrestha, 2020), so in this study correlation between Leadership styles (laissez-faire, transactional, transformational) with performance as a depended variable is between 1 and 5 which indicated a moderate correlation between those variables. So, none of the VIF values in this example are greater than 5 which indicates that multicollinearity will not be a problem in the regression model.

The correlation between Laissez-faire, with employee performance as the dependent variable, is between 1 and 5 which indicates a moderate correlation between those variables. So, none of the VIF values in this example are greater than 5 which indicates that multicollinearity will not be a problem in the regression model.

The correlation between transactional leadership with employee performance as a dependent variable is between 1 and 5 which indicates a moderate correlation between those variables. None of the VIF values in this example is greater than 5 which indicates that multicollinearity will not be a problem in the regression model.

The correlation between transformational leadership with employee performance as a dependent variable is between 1 and 5 which indicates a moderate correlation between those variables. None of the VIF values in this example is greater than 5 which indicates that multicollinearity will not be a problem in the regression model.

Table 4: Collinearity

Tolerance	VIF		
1	LFL	,847	1,180
	TAL	,512	1,954
	TFL	,470	2,128

a. Dependent Variable: Productivity

(Source: Authors' calculation)

According to Asuero et al. (2016), the rule of thumb scale to evaluate the strength of the correlation is 0.90 to 1.00 very high correlation, 0.70- 0.89 high correlation, 0.50-0.69 moderate correlation, 0.30-0.49 low correlation and 0.00-0.29 little if any correlation. Based on this rule its interpreted the results from the table below (Table 5).

Table 5: Correlation between leadership styles and employee performance

		Employee Performance	Laissez-faire leadership	Transactional leadership	Transformational leadership	LS
Employee Performance	Pearson Correlation	1	-,127	,317**	,415**	,341**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		,052	<,001	<,001	<,001
	N	235	235	235	235	235
Laissez-faire leadership	Pearson Correlation	-,127	1	,008	-,286**	,261**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,052		,905	<,001	<,001
	N	235	235	235	235	235
Transactional leadership	Pearson Correlation	,317**	,008	1	,667**	,891**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<,001	,905		<,001	<,001
	N	235	235	235	235	235
Transformational leadership	Pearson Correlation	,415**	-,286**	,667**	1	,779**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<,001	<,001	<,001		<,001
	N	235	235	235	235	235
LS	Pearson Correlation	,341**	,261**	,891**	,779**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<,001	<,001	<,001	<,001	
	N	235	235	235	235	235

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

(Source: Authors' calculation)

The Pearson correlation coefficient between Leadership styles and employee performance is .341. Since this number is between 0.30 to 0.49, it indicates a low positive linear correlation between the two variables. The two-tailed p-value is <.001, which is less than the accepted value of 0.05, indicating a statistically significant association between the variables.

The Pearson correlation coefficient between laissez-faire leadership and employee performance is -.127. Since this number is between -0.0 to -0.29, it indicates a low but negative linear correlation



between the two variables. The two-tailed p-value is .052. Since this value is not less than 0.05 the two variables don't have a statistically significant association.

The Pearson correlation coefficient between transactional leadership and employee performance is .317. Since this number 30 to 0.49 indicates a low positive linear correlation between the two variables. The two-tailed p-value <.001, less than the accepted value of 0.05, indicates a statistically significant association between the variables.

The Pearson correlation coefficient between transformational leadership and employee performance is .415. Since this number is between 0.30 to 0.49, it indicates a low positive linear correlation between the two variables. The two-tailed p-value <.001. Since this value is less than 0.05 indicates a statistically significant association between the variables.

## **6. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS**

The results from descriptive statistics reveal that transformational leadership is the most depicted leadership style depicted from leaders. The less-depicted leadership style is Laissez-faire which means that managers do not display a level of refusal to assume the responsibilities that are part of their position. Furthermore, the results from descriptive statistics present results from employee performance and show that the mean value for productivity is 4.1840 (high). The respondents evaluated their quality and productivity at work as high. Also, the results show that most of the employees consider that personal performance is higher than their peers in the same kind of work around 5.88%.

This paper aimed to investigate how strong is relationship between leadership styles and employee performance. The results from the study found a low positive correlation between leadership styles and employee performance which is consistent with previous research from Velu (2017) who found that exist positive relationships between leadership and performance (Velu et al., 2017), but does not support the recent studies that state that leadership style is no significant relationship to employee performance (Abdelwahed et al., 2022; Desti Febrian, 2023).

According to the results, laissez-faire leadership does not have a statistically significant association with employee performance which is consistent with a study from Shafie with colleagues (2013) who found that between laissez-faire and employee performance exists a significant negative relationship (Shafie et al., 2013). The more managers use a laissez-faire style in their leadership, the more employees' performance is reduced (Shafie et al., 2013)

Transactional leadership indicates a low positive linear correlation with employee performance which is consistent with research from Oladipo Kolapo Sakiru (et al., 2013; Anbazhagan and Kotur, 2014) who found a significant positive relationship between employee performance and transactional leadership but do not support research from authors Hoxha & Heimerer (2019) cited from (Buil, I., Martínez, E., & Matute, 2019; Desti Febrian et al. 2023) that conclude that transactional leadership style has no significant relationship with employee performance.

Transformational correlation indicates a low positive linear correlation with employee performance which is consistent with previous research conducted by Top, Abdullah Faraj (2020; Shang, 2023) and Shafie et al., (2013) who found that transformational leadership has a significant relationship with employee performance but does not support the findings from Oladipo Kolapo Sakiru et al., 2013; Anbazhagan and Kotur, 2014) who conclude that does not exist significant linear relationship between worker performance and transformational leadership

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