

# Impact of Transformational and Servant Leadership on Organizational Performance: A Comparative Analysis

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Received: 24 October 2011 / Accepted: 20 August 2012 / Published online: 7 September 2012  
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**Abstract** The purpose of this study is to examine the impact of two comparative leadership styles on organizational performance outcomes. The leadership styles undertaken is transformational and servant leadership. A sample of 155 participants is taken from profit-oriented service sector of Pakistan. Data through survey gathered on a five point likert scale from organizations. AMOS and SPSS are used for statistical analysis. The result shows that, transformational leadership has more impact on organizational learning than servant leadership. Furthermore organizational learning enhances organizational performance. Managers and leaders of corporate sector can get benefited from this study. Their main objective is to maximize the profitability of organization thus, they can choose leadership style which polishes their abilities and helps them to achieve profit maximization.

**Keywords** Servant leadership · Organizational performance · Transformational leadership

## Introduction

In the past few decades, business practices around the world have raised some serious issues to managers regarding leadership styles and policy matters. Global economic recession has provoked researchers to evolve and define new models of ethical leadership styles. Styles that in turn can solve the uprising challenges in the corporate world.

Leader, follower relation is most important discussion now a day in corporate world. If one needs to get maximum output from employees then a good leader is essential. The leadership model being used, engage ethical, moral and relational dimensions as the facet to measure leadership effectiveness, in contrast to the “input” and “performance output” conventional approach.

This study is finding answer, which leadership style helps manager to get maximum profit for them and their organization?

“It would be interesting to see if servant leadership has more impact than transformational leadership in for-profit Organizations” (Schneider and George 2011). The concept of servant leadership has gained enormous popularity in the modern age. While transformational leadership style is in use from some years. These two concepts have few similarities but some major differences which need to be checked across organizational performance.

Many researchers have worked in the realm of ethical leadership and its comparison to other leadership concepts such as spiritual, transformational, and authentic leadership style. Among the various concepts of leadership styles, servant leadership is the one that embarks various behavioral and emotional aspects in a very useful way, leaders who take leadership as an opportunity for the valuable service to employees and customers.

Transformational leadership style is an Inspirational way through which one can motivate and use that motivation thinking ability (Avolio et al. 2004; Dvir et al. 2002). Organizational performance can be measured in terms of return on asset, return on equity, net growth rate, and return on sales etc. while efficiency and effectiveness is also a measuring tool for organizational performance (Li-an 2011). To check the impact of transformational and servant leadership on organizational performance, a

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comparative analysis of both leadership styles in accordance to profitability for an organization is of vital importance.

- To check the impact of two comparative leadership styles on organizational performance outcomes through organizational learning.
- To analyze which leadership style, induce more organizational learning.

A comprehensive academic research in the area of servant leadership will increase the understanding of how leaders can achieve long term goals and make organizations successful. With more advancement in research regarding servant and transformational leadership, a clear distinction would be possible (Stone et al. 2004).

An empirical research relating to performance of an organization with the impact of ethical leadership style such as servant leadership would enrich the understanding. Research advances can also use conceptual models to test weather changes in leader's conduct affects followers and performance of an organization (Sendjaya and Pekerti 2010). Keeping in view the utmost importance of leadership in any organization, this study provides an ample chance for managers in any organization to enhance their relationships with employees and to improve their performance for the betterment of organization.

Along with other limitations, this study cannot be generalized for non-profit organization. This study is not applicable widely in manufacturing and public sector. The study undertook a limited sample size and cultural context.

## Literature Review

Leadership in relation to ethics has long been studied by researchers and scholars, most studies pertains to what leaders are supposed to do to be ethical but scientific and philosophical basis of leadership style is still scattered (Brown and Trevino 2006).

Many researchers in recent times have worked in the realm of leadership styles, transformational, and servant leadership is the most prominent among them (Dvir et al. 2002; Ehrhart 2004; Whetstone 2002).

Transformational leadership affects the overall behavior and thinking of followers in any organization, forming a unified understanding to achieve organization's learning. Transformational leadership draws intellectual consideration to problems at hand. It promotes learning and innovation thus enhancing the overall performance (Argyris and Schön 1996; Glynn 1996; Hurley and Hult 1998; Senge et al. 1994). While, Servant leadership style usually generates superior organization performance as compared to transactional leadership (Bass and Avolio 2000). Servant

leadership is another extreme case, where a leader is primarily interested with serving others. Servant leaders focus on follower's development and well being.

The difference between servant and transformational leadership is the focus of leader. Both these leadership styles focus on the followers, servant leaders pay more attention on service to the followers, while transformational leaders use their energies to engage followers toward goal attainment. Transformational and servant leaders involve followers in learning and development.

The study began by analyzing the current trends of various ethical leadership styles, their underlying procedures and methods. In this area a fundamental topic of interest is the impact of leadership on organizational performance. There is a shared belief that leadership can enhance performance of organizations (Rowe et al. 2005). Both transformational and servant leadership are people-oriented leadership styles. Their relation with organizational learning has been established by many researchers. The style of leadership is also considered to be very crucial in achieving organizational goals, learning, and performance (Barling et al. 1996; Berson et al. 2001; Zacharatos et al. 2000).

"It would also be interesting to see if servant leadership has more impact than transformational leadership in for-profit Organizations" (Schneider and George 2011).

### Transformational Leadership

Transformational leadership is an ethical leadership style that involves a leader's capability to promote intellectual stimulation through inspiration. Transformational leadership is guidance through individualized consideration, intellectual stimulation, inspirational, and idealized influence (McCull-Kennedy and Anderson 2005). Transformational leaders usually focus in following the organization goals, while doing so violate the ethical norms of employee development (Stephens et al. 1995). A transformational leader uses and convert the values of a followers and articulate them to promote the vision and goals of an organization (Bass 1985).

In this study transformational leadership is evaluated on a scale of four items. This scale is taken from Morales et al. published in 2008, which had five items four measuring transformational leadership, out of which four relevant items have been taken for questionnaire and analysis.

### Servant Leadership

(Greenleaf 1977) for the first time initiated the idea of servant leadership in the article "The servant as leaders" he proposed that a leader should see himself as a servant first. Servant leadership can be broadly defined as a desire from

leaders to motivate, guide, offer hope, and provide a caring experience by establishing a quality relationship with the followers and subordinates (Greenleaf and Spears 2002). There are two main constructs of servant leadership which are,

- (1) Ethical behavior
- (2) Concern for subordinates (Ehrhart 2004).

(Contee-Borders 2003) found that servant leaders are dedicated toward the growth and welfare of people. Altruism, simplicity, and consciousness is a servant leader's characteristic (Johnson 2001). A servant leader has a moral differentiation from transformational leader in scarifies and altruistic services toward followers high priority needs (Parolini 2007).

For this research, servant leadership is evaluated on a scale of nine items. This scale was taken from (Jacobs 2006). (Jacobs 2006) measured servant leadership on a seven point likert scale, which was converted to a five point likert scale in this research for convenience and uniformity in survey questionnaire.

#### Organizational Learning

Organizational learning can be understood as a process, in which information is gathered, shared and interpreted, promoting organization outcome. Organization learning builds a competitive environment in an organization that promotes a continuous improvement in organization structure (Slater and Naver 1995). Organization learning is conducive to employee's growth and performance (Morales et al. 2008). The scale for organizational learning is measured on four items and is taken from (Morales et al. 2008). One out of the four mentioned items was an open-ended question which was modified to a close-end five point likert scale.

#### Organization Performance

The main aim of any organization is to sustain competitive advantage. There are various facets on which performance of an organization can be evaluated, most of which are tangible. Cost reduction, profits, sales volume, asset turnover, equity turnover, and inventory turnover are most common tangible indicators. Alternatively some intangible performance indicators satisfaction of customer and product development is used fewer times (Rhodes et al. 2008). Organization performance is a measure of an organization progress, shows how well an organization is attaining its goals (Hamon 2003). Organizational performance points out the achievement in any group performance. Organizational performance in this article is measured on scale of four items. The scale for organizational performance is taken from Morales et al. published in 2008.

#### Research Hypothesis

##### *Relationship of Transformational Leadership with Organizational Learning*

Transformational leadership is vital in advancing organizational learning (Senge 1990). It provides organizational with an opportunity to learn through experimentation, dialogue, and communication (McGill and Slocum 1993). Transformational leaders increase job performance of employees (Bono and Judge 2003). Whereas, transformational leadership style undertakes individual based consideration which is essential in organizational learning (Sarros et al. 2002), Transformational leadership draws intellectual consideration to problems at hand. It promotes learning and innovation thus enhancing the overall performance (Senge et al. 1994; Argyris and Schön 1996; Glynn 1996; Hurley and Hult 1998).

**H1** Transformational leadership is positively related to organization learning.

##### *Relationship of Servant Leadership with Organizational Learning*

Servant leadership influences learning and growth in followers which in turn promotes learning in an organization (Bass 2000). Learning environment is enhanced with the help of servant leadership (Crippen 2005; McClellan 2007). When leader keeps in view the needs of an employee and educate them through training, workshops and seminars, it increases the knowledge capability of an organization, and thus increase organization's knowledge.

**H2** Servant leadership is positively related to organization learning.

##### *Relationship of Organizational Learning with Organizational Performance*

Organization learning promotes organization knowledge, learning, and fosters organization performance. Organizations better in learning shows more organizational performance. Organization learning may not always increase performance, but in most cases it does (Argyris and Schön 1996). Organizational with deep learning cultures usually performs better (Hurley and Hult 1998). Organizational learning enhances the capabilities of the organization thus increases the performance of the organization (Snyder and Cummings 1998; Morgan and Turnell 2003; Morales et al. 2008).

**H3** Organization learning is positively related to organization performance (Table 1, Fig. 1).

**Table 1** Summary of studies linking SL and TL implementation to OP with mediating effect of OL

Relationships Between variables	References
Transformational leadership → Organizational learning	Senge (1990), McGill and Slocum (1993), Senge et al. (1994), Argyris and Schon (1996), Glynn (1996), Hurley and Hult (1998), Sarros et al. (2002), Bono and Judge (2003), Morales et al. (2008)
Servant leadership → Organizational learning	Bass (2000), Crippen (2005), McClellan (2007)
Organizational learning → Organizational performance	Argyris and Scho (1996), Hurley and Hult (1998), Snyder and Cummings (1998), Morgan and Turnell (2003), Morales et al. (2008)

## Methodology

Since the study is conducted to check the impact of transformational and servant leadership in profit-oriented service sector organization, therefore the population is selected from service sectors such as hotels, telecommunication, and banking sector of Pakistan. This research has used quantitative method and structured questionnaire for collecting data. It is a descriptive research study. Survey held through personally administrated questionnaire. 400 respondents were asked to elicit their responses on the questionnaire, out of these 155 used for analysis purpose. Respondents were mainly the line managers of service sector organizations. A few top executives were also included in the survey. SPSS and AMOS were used to quantify the results.

### Sampling

The sampling method used in this research is non-probability judgment sampling. The reason for selecting this sampling technique is the nature of the study, since the research is conducted for particular sectors and profit-oriented organization, only “experts” who have the information regarding leadership styles and who are immediately affected by leader’s behaviors, were considered (Fig. 2).

### Scale

Scale for measuring variables taken from two different researches. The responses were evaluated on a five point likert scale in an order of 1 for Strongly Agree and 5 for Strongly Disagree.

The scale for measuring transformational leadership, organizational learning, and organizational performance, consisted of four items were taken from (Morales et al. 2008). Scale for servant leadership consisted of nine items was taken from (Jacobs 2006) (Table 2).

## Analysis and Discussion

The various ethical leadership styles will continue to evolve with further research, but scholars and researchers

seem to argue their link with organization effectiveness and organization performance. While some researchers are in favor of visionary leadership, suggest that there is no any single leadership style that is the most effective in generating superior organization performance. Transformational leadership improves the absorptive capacity of an organization, which enables organization to transfer knowledge in a better way thus improving organizational performance (Kogut and Zander 1996).

The aim of this research was to check the relationship with servant leadership and transformational leadership style. Both these forms of ethical leaderships have positive relationship with organizational learning. Through quantitative analysis it was found that transformational leadership has a more positive relationship with organizational learning.

The study has undertaken a second-order relationship. First, transformational and servant leadership impact is evaluated on organizational learning. Second, organization learning impact is measured on organizational performance.

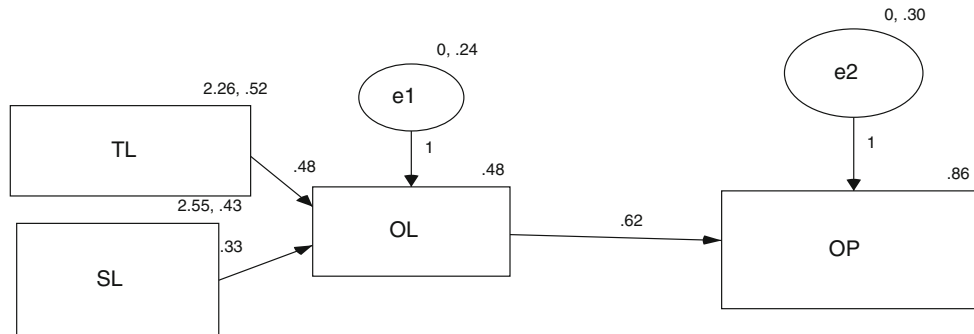
### Demographics

The sample size for the study was 400, but 155 responses considered for analysis. Out of this sample 69 % were male 31 % were female. 91 % respondents were below 35 years of age, 5.8 % were 35–50 years of age, and 3.2 % were above 50 years old. Education level of the respondents were as follows, 94.2 % were university graduates, 3.9 % were college graduates, 1.9 % were high school or below. Income level of the respondents are as follows, 7.7 % earned PKR 50,000 and above, 83.2 % earned PKR 10,000 to PKR 50,000, and 9.1 % were earning 10,000 and less (Table 3).

### Instruments Reliability

Instrument used for the study was checked for reliability. SPSS was used for this purpose. In transformational leadership cronbach alpha is 0.720 for 4 items. In servant leadership cronbach alpha is 0.842 for 9 items. Cronbach alpha for organization learning is 0.709 and for organization performance it was 0.763, reliable range for cronbach alpha ranges from 0.7 to 1, so the scale is reliable in that

**Fig. 1** Leadership styles impact on OP with mediating effect of OL



**Fig. 2** Model fit

**Table 2** Summary of scale items

Constructs	Codes	Items
Transformational leadership	TL1	The firm’s management is always on the lookout for new opportunities for the unit/department/organization
	TL2	The firm’s management has a clear common view of its final aims
	TL3	The firm’s management succeeds in motivating the rest of the company
	TL4	The firm’s management always acts as the organization’s leading force
Servant leadership	SL1	When someone criticizes my supervisor, it feels like a personal insult
	SL2	When I talk about my supervisor, I usually say “we” rather than “they”
	SL3	My supervisor’s successes are my successes
	SL4	When someone praises my supervisor, it feels like a personal compliment
	SL5	I feel a sense of “ownership” for my supervisor
	SL6	If the values of my supervisor were different, I would not be as attached to my supervisor
	SL7	My attachment to my supervisor is primarily based on the similarity of my values and those represented by my supervisor
	SL8	Since starting this job, my personal values and those of my supervisor have become more similar
	SL9	The reason I prefer my supervisor to others is because of what he or she stands for, that is, his or her values
Organizational learning	OL1	The organization has acquired and used much new and relevant knowledge that provided competitive advantage over the last three years
	OL2	The organization’s members have acquired some critical capacities and skills that provided competitive advantage over the last three years
	OL3	Organizational improvements have been influenced fundamentally by new knowledge entering the Organization over the last 3 years
	OL4	The organization was a learning organization?
Organizational performance	OP1	The firm’s performance measured by return on assets
	OP2	The firm’s performance measured by return on equity
	OP3	The firm’s performance measured by return on sales
	OP4	The firm’s market share in its main products and markets

**Table 3** Respondents profile

Frequency ( <i>N</i> = 155)		
	<i>N</i>	% age
<i>Gender</i>		
Male	107	69
Female	48	31
<i>Age</i>		
Below 35	141	91
35–50	9	5.8
50 above	5	3.2
<i>Income level</i>		
Less than 10,000	14	9
10,000–50,000	129	83.3
50,000 above	12	7.7
<i>Education</i>		
Below or high	3	1.9
College graduate	6	3.9
University Graduate	146	94.2

case. Table 4 shows the mean values of variables are between 2.2 and 2.6.

In this case, the standard deviation range of variables in between 0.62 and 0.73 and it is considered good standard deviation. That shows that data is in good form not much deviated from mean point and respondent have well knowledge of required material.

### Correlation Test

Pearson correlation test is used to check the correlation among all the variables, especially two independent variables. Pearson correlation  $-1$  to  $0$  is negative correlation,  $0$  no correlation, and  $0$  to  $+1$  positive correlation.  $+1$  is perfect correlation. The Table 5 given below shows that transformational and servant leadership have moderate positive relationship with sig. value  $0.000$  same is the case with transformational leadership and organizational learning with  $0.664^{**}$  moderate relationship. Servant leadership with organizational learning and organization learning with organizational performance also has moderate positive correlation with sig. value  $0.000$ .

### Model Fit and Hypothesis Testing

Amos is used to quantify the result from the given data. The results in Table 6, Chi-square =  $96.564$ ,  $df = 3$  and  $p$  value =  $*** \geq 0.05$ . The values of RMSEA and CFI are  $0.450$  and  $0.658$ , respectively, the criteria is  $\geq 0.9$  given by McAulay et al. (2006, Roh et al. (2005).

From Table 7 relationship of variables can be concluded with each other.

**Table 4** Description of measures

Measures	Mean	SD	Cronbach's alpha
Transformational leadership	2.2581	0.72323	0.720
Servant leadership	2.5520	0.65886	0.842
Organizational learning	2.3403	0.70070	0.709
Organizational performance	2.3839	0.69628	0.763

**Table 5** Pearson correlation table

Relationships	Pearson correlation	Sig. 2-tailed
TL-SL	0.549**	0.000
TL-OL	0.664**	0.000
SL-OL	0.580**	0.000
OL-OP	0.617**	0.000

\*\* correlation significant at level of .001

**Table 6** Index of fit of the Model

Fit measure	Value	Suggested minimum values (McAulay et al. 2006; Roh et al. 2005)
Chi-Square	96.564	
<i>Df</i>	3	
<i>p</i> value	***	$\geq 0.05$
GFI		$\geq 0.9$ or $\geq 0.95$
CFI	0.658	$\geq 0.9$
AGFI		$\geq 0.8$ or $\geq 0.95$
RMSEA	0.450	
Normed Chi-square (Chi-square/ <i>Df</i> )	32.188	$\leq 2.0$ or $\leq 3.0$

\*\*\* *P* value significant at .005

**Table 7** Hypotheses testing based on regression weights

Variables	Estimates	S.E.	Critical ratio	<i>P</i> value	Results
OL $\leftarrow$ TL	0.477	0.054	8.755	***	Accepted
OL $\leftarrow$ SL	0.326	0.060	5.453	***	Accepted
OP $\leftarrow$ OL	0.621	0.070	8.882	***	Accepted

\*\*\* *P* value significant at .005

Transformational leadership has an estimated regression weight of  $0.477$  on organizational learning. Servant leadership has an estimated regression weight of  $0.326$  on organizational learning. Result shows that transformational leadership and servant leadership have positive impact on organizational learning but transformational leadership shows more positive impact than servant leadership on organizational performance. On the other side, organizational learning has an estimated regression of  $0.621$  on organizational performance, which shows that organizational learning has a high positive impact on organizational performance. Finally, it can be concluded that

transformational leadership has a relatively more positive impact on organizational performance than servant leadership, through the mediating organizational learning.

Schneider and George (2011) in his article suggests to check whether servant leadership has more impact than transformational leadership on organization performance. Hypothesis justifies here that both transformational and servant leadership have positive impact on organizational learning, which further enhance the performance of organization in a positive way. Given in Table 7 the hypothesis results are positive and thus accepted.

## Conclusion and Recommendations

This study empirically, relates two ethical leadership styles to organizational learning and performance. Both servant and transformational leadership have many facets in common they influence followers, empower followers, encourage them for good performance, communicate, and listen to subordinates. Both the styles exhibit wonderful leadership.

In the present times, organizations have become very complex and thus require dynamic leadership (Williams 1998). Both transformational and servant leadership are diverse in nature. Through this research it has been acknowledged, that transformational leadership has more impact on organizational learning than servant leadership. The main idea that both leadership styles affect organizational leadership stands true. Empirical research and statistical results show that both leadership styles promote organizational performance through the mediating effect of organizational learning.

Keeping in view the utmost importance of leadership in any organization, this study provides an ample chance for managers in any organization to enhance their relationships with employees and to improve their performance for the betterment of organization.

## Limitation and Future Research

Along with many limitations, this study cannot be generalized for non-profit organization. This study is also not applicable widely in manufacturing and public sector. The study undertook a limited sample size and cultural context. Further research can address how these concepts apply to manufacturing sector. Research can also be extended to check how servant and transformational leadership affect innovation, and behavior of followers. Managers and leaders of corporate sector can benefit from this study. Their main objective is to maximize the profitability of organization thus, they can choose leadership style which polishes their abilities and helps them to achieve profit maximization.

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