

“The Emotional Prerequisite: A Conceptual Model of Emotional Intelligence as A Foundational Catalyst for Leadership Effectiveness”

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<https://doi.org/10.36571/ajsp8615>

Abstract:

The main aim of the study was to explore the complex interplay between the styles of leaders, emotional intelligence (EI), and the performance of workers (EP) in the crisis-affected environment of the Lebanese university system in particular. The research used the quantitative method by means of surveys targeting 317 university workers. Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) was used for the study's analysis. Perhaps the most crucial aspects of the research's findings indicated the positive impact of the laissez-faire and transactional types of leaders on the performance of workers. At the same time, negatively influencing workers' performance was the impact of the transformative leaders. Of equal importance was the revelation that emotional intelligence acted as the predictor for performance. Additionally, it was indicated in the research that emotional intelligence was the one mediating the relationship between the various types of leaders in terms of laissez-faire leaders and leaders who are transformative in their styles.

Keywords: Leadership Styles, Emotional Intelligence, Employee Performance, Higher Education, Lebanon, PLS-SEM, Mediation.

1.0 Introduction

Within the context of the increasing volatility of the global environment today, having effective leaders in the running of organizations becomes crucial for success. The ability of leaders to influence, motivate, and manage their teams of workers is directly relevant to the stability and growth of the organizations they manage. Among the concepts that have assumed importance within the context of organizational dynamics is the issue of leadership and emotional intelligence.

1.1 Background of the Study

De Pree (1989), in fact, argued, "Leadership is an art. Something to be learned over time, not simply by reading books." Such views signify the complexity surrounding the process of leadership. "Great leaders" are therefore perceived for their ability to draw on the strengths of emotional intelligence and effective communication. Needless to say, the relevance of specific types of leadership styles—the significance of which lies in their ability to influence the proactively engaged behavior of their members towards being more innovative (Gemedá & Lee, 2020; Anwar & Abdullah, 2021)—within the literature appears especially prominent. However, in recent years, the importance of Emotional Intelligence (EQ), now recognized for its significance within the context of effective leadership performance, can no longer be ignored.

1.2 Problem Statement

This research embodies the intersection of a serious socio-economic crisis in the world and the research gap in the organizational behavior field.

To begin with, Lebanon is going through its own national crisis. According to a Gallup report in 2023, the Lebanese workforce is one of the most stressed, anxious, and angry in the world in terms of daily experiences (ALRAZZAK, 2023). This is the direct effect of the catastrophic collapse the country is going through economically. According to the International Monetary Fund (2023), the collapse includes a 98% depreciation of the currency and triple digit inflation that resulted in the depreciation of GDP by 40%.

Second, the current crisis has also significantly impacted the higher education system in the country. Universities in the USA are struggling financial problems, experienced staffing losses on the assumption of retirement, and the real danger of closures (Rahhal, 2020), (Akar, 2023). Such pressure calls for more effective administration and worker performance than ever before.

Third, despite the fact that the relevance of both leadership and EQ is widely recognized, the literature gap is considerable. Despite the fact that empirical studies on the interaction of both aspects concerning the impact on the performance of the workers in the Lebanese institutions during the period of the crisis are few (Robaton, 2017), the literature generates the research question: "To what extent the leaders' style in the Lebanese institutions influence the emotional intelligence in the impact on the employees' performance?"

1.3 Research Objectives and Questions

Research Objectives

1. To identify the extent to which leadership styles are imbedded in the Lebanese higher education system.
2. To determine the relationship between of the leadership style and employees' performance level.
3. To determine the relationship between of the leadership style and emotional intelligence.
4. To determine the relationship between emotional intelligence and employees' performance level.
5. To determine the mediating role of emotional intelligence in the relationship between leadership style and employees' performance level.

Research Questions

1. To what degree are the leadership styles imbedded within the Lebanese higher institutions?
2. Is there any relationship between leadership styles and the employees' performance?
3. Is there any relationship between emotional intelligence and the employees' performance?
4. Is there any relationship between leadership styles and the emotional intelligence?
5. Does emotional intelligence mediates the relationship between leadership styles and employees' performance.

1.4 Significance of the Study

This study holds dual significance. Academically, it contributes to the existing literature by providing empirical findings on the interplay of leadership, EI, and performance in a unique, high-stress, non-Western context. This research addresses a notable gap by testing established theoretical models under conditions of extreme societal turmoil. Practically, the study offers valuable insights to managers and administrators in Lebanese higher education. It identifies leadership styles that are more effective for enhancing employee performance in a challenging environment, providing a basis for leadership development and strategic human resource management aimed at fostering organizational resilience.

1.5 Scope and Structure

This paper investigates the relationship between leadership styles, emotional intelligence, and job performance among employees in selected Lebanese universities. The research provides an overview of relevant concepts and presents an empirical study conducted within four major institutions in Beirut. The study is organized into several key sections. Following this introduction, the Literature Review examines existing theories to build the study's conceptual framework and hypotheses. The Methodology section details the research design, instruments, population, and data analysis techniques. The Results section presents the empirical findings from the statistical analysis. Finally, the Discussion and Conclusion sections interpret these findings, outline their implications, acknowledge limitations, and summarize the study's overall contribution.

2.0 Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

A strategic review of scholarly work is essential for grounding new research in established theory. This section critically examines the existing literature to define the core constructs of this study: leadership styles, emotional intelligence, and employee performance. By synthesizing key definitions, models, and empirical findings, this review establishes the theoretical foundation upon which the study's conceptual model and testable hypotheses are built.

2.1 Leadership Styles

Leadership styles refer to the characteristic behaviors a leader uses when directing, motivating, and managing groups. The literature identifies several distinct styles, five of which are central to this study:

- **Autocratic Leadership:** This authoritarian style is characterized by centralized decision-making where the leader dictates policies and procedures with minimal input from subordinates. It is associated with traits such as arbitrariness, control, self-centeredness, and power-seeking behavior, and the leader expects strict compliance and adherence to rules (Al Khajeh, 2018).
- **Democratic Leadership:** Also known as participative leadership, this style involves group members in the decision-making process. The leader encourages collaboration, relies on the input of employees, and provides objective feedback, fostering a sense of shared responsibility and empowerment among employees.
- **Laissez-Faire Leadership:** This "hands-off" style, which translates to "let it be," grants employees significant freedom in how they perform their tasks. The leader provides minimal direct supervision, delegates responsibilities, and trusts employees to manage their own work, often avoiding direct control.
- **Transactional Leadership:** This style is based on a sanction and reward model. Leaders clarify roles, task requirements, and the compensation for meeting those requirements, creating a clear, exchange-based relationship with followers that relies on extrinsic motivation to ensure performance (Hackman & Johnson, 2018).
- **Transformational Leadership:** This style focuses on inspiring and motivating followers to transcend their self-interests for the good of the organization. As role models, these leaders articulate a compelling vision, reinforce internal moral and ethical values, and challenge employees to be innovative (Buil, Martínez, & Matute, 2019).

2.2 Emotional Intelligence

Emotional Intelligence (EI) is the ability to perceive, understand, and manage one's own emotions, as well as those of others. While the ability-based model of Mayer and Salovey provided a foundational theoretical context, this study's variables align with the competency-based model popularized by Goleman (1995). Goleman's model outlines five key components of EI:

1. **Self-awareness:** The ability to recognize and understand one's own moods, emotions, and drives, and their effect on others.
2. **Self-regulation:** The ability to control or redirect disruptive impulses and moods and to think before acting.
3. **Motivation:** A passion to work for reasons that go beyond money or status; a propensity to pursue goals with energy and persistence.
4. **Empathy:** The ability to understand the emotional makeup of other people; skill in treating people according to their emotional reactions.
5. **Social skills:** Proficiency in managing relationships and building networks; an ability to find common ground and build rapport.

2.3 Conceptual Framework and Hypotheses

The theoretical relationships between the study's core constructs are outlined in the conceptual framework below. This model posits that various leadership styles (Independent Variables) influence Employees' Performance (Dependent Variable) both directly and indirectly through the Mediating Variable of Emotional Intelligence.

- **Independent Variable:** Leadership Styles (Autocratic, Democratic, Laissez-Faire, Transactional, Transformational)
- **Mediating Variable:** Emotional Intelligence
- **Dependent Variable:** Employees' Performance

Based on this framework, the following hypotheses were developed for empirical testing:

H1: There is a significant relationship between leadership styles and the employees' performance.

- H1a: There is a significant relationship between autocratic style and employees' performance.

- H1b: There is a significant relationship between democratic style and employees' performance.
- H1c: There is a significant relationship between Laissez-Faire style and employees' performance.
- H1d: There is a significant relationship between Transactional style and employees' performance.
- H1e: There is a significant relationship between Transformational style and employees' performance.

H2: There is a significant relationship between emotional intelligence and employees' performance.

H3: Emotional Intelligence mediates the relationship between leadership styles and employees' performance.

- H3a: Emotional Intelligence mediates the relationship between autocratic style and employees' performance.
- H3b: Emotional Intelligence mediates the relationship between democratic styles and employees' performance.
- H3c: Emotional Intelligence mediates the relationship between Laissez-Faire styles and employees' performance.
- H3d: Emotional Intelligence mediates the relationship between Transactional style and employees' performance.

H3e: Emotional Intelligence acts as the mediator between Transformational styles and the performance of the employees.

The next section will describe the empirical methodology that was adopted to test the hypotheses made in the conceptual model.

3.0 Methodology

This section describes the methodology used in the research in detail. It clearly describes the research methodology used in the study. It also explains the methods used for selecting the research participants. Additionally, the research uses different methods for gathering data. Various methods for analyzing the research data are also explained.

3.1 Research Design and Approach

Additionally, the research used a quantitative survey design that was both descriptive and cross-sectional in nature. This was the methodology of choice because it was ideal for the purpose of surveying the representative sample for the generation of data at one point in time. Also, the survey was ideal for the attainment of the proposed hypotheses because it allows for the generation of data in the context of the study's population.

3.2 Population and Sample

The population for the research was made up of 6,220 university employees from the four university institutions selected in Beirut, Lebanon. To ensure each individual in the population stood an equal probability of being selected for the research, the systematic random sampling method was used. Finally, the population for the research was reduced to 317 for the analysis process.

3.3 Data Collection Instruments

Data was sought through the use of a structured questionnaire consisting of proven scales for each of the primary constructs. Each response used the five-point Likert scale (from 1= Strongly Disagree to 5= Strongly Agree). The instruments used for the research are:\\

- Leadership Styles: Rated by the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ), exploring the degree of transformational, transactional, laissez-faire, autocratic, and democratic behavior.
- Emotional Intelligence: This was measured through the use of the Mayer-Salovey-Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test (MSCEIT), developed to gauge the ability-related components of emotional intelligence.

- Employee Performance: Evaluated through the Individual Work Performance Questionnaire (IWPQ), an exhaustive instrument that assesses the ‘three core components of IWP: Task Performance, Contextual Performance, ‘.

3.4 Data Analysis Data Analysis:

Data analysis was carried out in two manners. Firstly, the initial analysis involved the use of SPSS software. Here, the analysis involved descriptive statistics. Secondly, the structural model analysis was performed. This was achieved through the use of Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). SmartPLS software was used for the analysis. This was due to the software’s ability to handle complex structural models. Additionally, it was ideal for the research framework’s structural model analysis due to its predictive capabilities. The outcomes of the results are presented in the next section.

4.0 Results

This section objectively reports the results of the data analysis. It begins with a summary of the participants' demographic profiles, followed by the outcomes of descriptive and inferential statistical tests. The core of this section is the presentation of the PLS-SEM analysis used to evaluate the study's direct and mediating hypotheses.

4.1 Respondent Demographics

The final sample consisted of 317 university employees. The demographic profile reveals a diverse workforce. A majority of respondents were female (54.3%). The largest age group was between 30 and 40 years old (40.4%). In terms of education, the sample was highly qualified, with 32.5% holding a Bachelor's degree and 30.3% holding a Master's or PhD degree. The respondents were also experienced, with 42.9% reporting between 7 and 10 years of work experience in the sector.

4.2 Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive analysis of the primary variables provided initial insights into the perceptions of the respondents. On a five-point scale, autocratic leadership received the highest mean score ($M=3.69$, $SD=0.69$), suggesting it was the most frequently perceived leadership style among employees. Respondents also reported high levels of emotional intelligence ($M=3.74$, $SD=0.34$) and employee performance ($M=3.99$, $SD=0.49$), indicating that despite the challenging environment, employees perceive themselves and their colleagues as emotionally competent and high-performing.

4.3 Hypothesis Testing

The structural model was tested using PLS-SEM to evaluate the hypothesized relationships.

Direct Effects on Employee Performance

The results for the direct effects of leadership styles (H1) and emotional intelligence (H2) on employee performance are detailed below:

- **Laissez-Faire Leadership** had a significant and strong positive effect on Employee Performance ($\beta = 1.003$, $p < 0.01$), strongly supporting H1c.
- **Transactional Leadership** had a significant positive effect on Employee Performance ($\beta = 0.071$, $p < 0.05$), supporting H1d.
- **Emotional Intelligence** had a significant positive effect on Employee Performance ($\beta = 0.062$, $p < 0.01$), supporting H2.
- **Transformational Leadership** had a significant negative effect on Employee Performance ($\beta = -0.258$, $p < 0.01$), supporting H1e but in the opposite direction than is typically expected.

- **Autocratic** and **Democratic** leadership styles did not have a significant effect on Employee Performance, and thus H1a and H1b were not supported.

Mediating Effect of Emotional Intelligence

The analysis also tested the mediating role of Emotional Intelligence in the relationship between leadership styles and employee performance (H3).

- EI was found to **partially mediate** the relationship between laissez-faire leadership and employee performance. The indirect effect was significant, indicating that laissez-faire leadership enhances performance partly by fostering emotional intelligence.
- The analysis revealed that EI **fully mediated** the relationship between transformational leadership and employee performance. Specifically, the significant direct negative effect of transformational leadership became non-significant once EI was introduced as a mediator, while the indirect path through EI was significant.

The findings for all hypotheses are summarized in the table below.

Hypothesis	Path	Result
H1	Leadership Styles -> Employee Performance	Partially Supported
H1a	Autocratic -> EP	Not Supported
H1b	Democratic -> EP	Not Supported
H1c	Laissez-Faire -> EP	Supported (+)
H1d	Transactional -> EP	Supported (+)
H1e	Transformational -> EP	Supported (-)
H2	Emotional Intelligence -> Employee Performance	Supported (+)
H3	Leadership -> EI -> Employee Performance	Partially Supported
H3a	Autocratic -> EI -> EP	Not Supported
H3b	Democratic -> EI -> EP	Not Supported
H3c	Laissez-Faire -> EI -> EP	Supported (Partial Mediation)
H3d	Transactional -> EI -> EP	Not Supported
H3e	Transformational -> EI -> EP	Supported (Full Mediation)

5.0 Discussion

This section moves beyond the objective reporting of results to interpret their meaning and significance. The findings are analyzed in the context of existing leadership literature and the unique, high-pressure circumstances of Lebanon's higher education sector. The theoretical and practical implications stemming from this analysis are evaluated to provide a comprehensive understanding of the study's contribution.

5.1 Interpretation of Findings

The study's results present a nuanced and context-dependent view of leadership effectiveness.

- **Leadership Styles and Performance:** The significant positive impact of laissez-faire and transactional leadership on performance is a key finding. In a crisis environment where employees face extreme external stressors, the autonomy granted by laissez-faire leadership may be highly valued, allowing skilled professionals to manage their work without micromanagement. Similarly, the clear structure, defined expectations, and tangible rewards of transactional leadership may provide a sense of stability and predictability in an otherwise chaotic environment.

- **The Transformational Leadership Paradox:** The most striking result is the significant negative relationship between transformational leadership and both emotional intelligence and employee performance. This counter-intuitive finding suggests a major contextual boundary condition for transformational leadership theory. In the severe Lebanese crisis, an inspirational, future-focused vision may appear detached, unrealistic, or even frustrating to employees struggling with daily economic hardship and uncertainty. The call to transcend self-interest for the organization's future may ring hollow when basic needs are under threat, potentially leading to cynicism and reduced performance.
- **The Role of Emotional Intelligence:** Consistent with prior research (Koubova & Buchko, 2013), EI demonstrated a strong positive impact on employee performance. The mediation results are particularly revealing. EI serves as a crucial mechanism through which leadership behaviors are translated into performance outcomes. For laissez-faire leadership, EI helps employees navigate their autonomy effectively. For transformational leadership, the full mediation suggests that this style's impact is entirely dependent on its effect on followers' emotional states, which, in this context, was negative.

5.2 Implications of the Study

The results of the research make significant contributions to both theory and practice.

Theoretical Implications

This research offers considerable theoretical relevance in the field of leadership by validating various theories within a novel setting. This research presents the 'transformational paradox' by proving the negative consequences that might follow the implementation of 'transformative' leadership within highly stressed social systems. This paradox also verifies the importance of considering the 'macro-economic' aspect in the framework of 'contingency theories'. Other theories related to EI also validate its importance in the 'leadership to performance interface'.

Practical and Managerial Implications

For leaders and administrators in Lebanese universities and similar crisis-afflicted organizations, the implications are direct and actionable:

1. **Emotional Intelligence Must Be Prioritized:** Leadership must prioritize personal EI development. Initiatives for the enhancement of EI in the team must also be undertaken by leaders. Self-regulation, empathy, and resilience are some skills that work wonders in high-stress situations.
2. **Match the Leadership Styles to the Setting:** Styles of leadership that involve giving people direction through vision (visionary), rewards (team), or structures (transactional), allowing them to act on their own (laissez-faire), might prove more effective in the given environment during the crisis period.
3. **Re-evaluate Transformational Approaches:** Leaders aiming to be inspirational must ensure their vision is grounded in the current reality of their employees. A disconnect between a grand vision and daily struggles can be counterproductive.

5.3 Limitations and Future Research

This study is not without its limitations. Its cross-sectional design is correlational and cannot establish causality. The sample, while representative of four major universities in Beirut, may limit the generalizability of findings to other institutions in Lebanon or different cultural contexts. Furthermore, the reliance on a single data collection method (self-report questionnaires) introduces the possibility of common method bias. Future research could address these limitations by employing longitudinal or experimental designs to explore causality, expanding the sample to different industries and cultural settings, and incorporating multi-source data. Investigating the role of demographic factors as control or moderating variables would also provide a more granular understanding of the observed relationships.

6.0 Conclusion:

In response to the problem of maintaining organizational effectiveness during a national collapse, this study examined how leadership behaviors influence employee performance within the uniquely challenging environment of Lebanese higher education. The analysis produced several critical insights. First, in contrast to much of the existing literature, transformational leadership was found to have a negative impact on performance, likely due to a contextual disconnect between its visionary nature and the harsh realities faced by employees. Conversely, laissez-faire and transactional leadership styles were positively associated with performance, suggesting that autonomy and structured, reward-based management are more effective in this high-stress environment. Most importantly, the study confirmed the critical predictive and mediating role of emotional intelligence. It is not merely a beneficial trait but a core mechanism through which leadership influences outcomes. The ultimate takeaway is that emotional intelligence is not just a desirable quality but a foundational prerequisite for effective leadership, especially when navigating the immense pressures of organizational and societal turmoil.

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"المتطلب العاطفي: نموذج تصوّري للذكاء العاطفي كعامل أساسي لتعزيز فعالية القيادة"

إعداد الباحث:

علي حسن عز الدين

كلية الأعمال والاتصال

جامعة ماليزيا بيرهليس

ماليزيا

الملخص:

كان الهدف الأساسي من هذه الدراسة استكشاف التفاعل المعقد بين أنماط القيادة، والذكاء العاطفي (EI)، وأداء العاملين (EP) في بيئة الأزمات التي يمر بها النظام الجامعي اللبناني على وجه الخصوص. اعتمد البحث المنهج الكمي من خلال استبيانات استهدفت 317 من العاملين في الجامعات. وتم استخدام نمذجة المعادلات الهيكلية بطريقة المربعات الصغرى الجزئية (PLS-SEM) لتحليل الدراسة. وقد أشارت النتائج الأكثر أهمية إلى وجود تأثير إيجابي لكل من القيادة اللاسياسية (Laissez-faire) والقيادة التبادلية (Transactional) على أداء العاملين. وفي المقابل، تبين أن القيادة التحويلية (Transformational) كان لها تأثير سلبي في أداء العاملين. وبالإضافة إلى ذلك، أظهرت الدراسة أن الذكاء العاطفي يُعدّ متنبأً رئيسياً بالأداء. كما كشفت النتائج أن الذكاء العاطفي يلعب دوراً وسيطاً في العلاقة بين أنماط القيادة المختلفة، خاصة بين القيادة اللاموجهة والقيادة التحويلية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: أنماط القيادة، الذكاء العاطفي، أداء العاملين، التعليم العالي، لبنان، PLS-SEM، الوساطة.