

EXPLORING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SUPERVISOR'S LEADERSHIP AND SUBORDINATES' PERFORMANCE

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ABSTRACT

Employee performance is one of the major determinants of organizational success. It is affected by many factors arising within and outside of the organizational context. Supervisor-subordinate relationship is the primary relationship articulated by the organization and supervisor's role is very critical in an employee's immediate working environment. The purpose of this study is to investigate the relationship between supervisor's leadership and job performance of subordinates; compare immediate male and female supervisors' leadership styles. Accordingly the independent variable of the study was supervisor's leadership style whereas the job performance was the dependent variable. Democratic and autocratic leadership styles were considered as the dimensions of the independent variable and quantity and quality of work, accidents, co-operation, attendance and work related attitudes were taken as dimensions under the job performance. Data were gathered through a structured questionnaire from a sample of 138 female respondents working in operational level employees and the study was done in four selected apparel sector organizations. Data were analyzed by using the statistical test of independent sample t-test, correlation analysis and mean value analysis under descriptive statistical tools. According to statistical results, researcher found that there is a strong relationship between leadership and job performance of subordinates. Mean value analysis revealed that male supervisors are more autocratic while appearing more democratic leadership style by female supervisors. Finally in the conclusion practical and theoretical significance of the study is discussed.

KEYWORDS: Autocratic Leadership, Democratic Leadership, Employee Performance, Subordinate, Supervisor

Introduction

Employee performance is highly affected by many factors arising within the organizational context and outside the organization. Here the role of supervisor is critical in an organization since a supervisor is the person who guides the subordinate towards the organizational goals and objectives. Their involvements for the operations are highly valued. The study investigates the relationship between supervisors' leadership style and employee performance.

Afolabi, Obude, Okediji and Ezech (2008) refer job performance as the extent to which an employee is productive and achieves goals of the organization. Employees may perform their tasks, duties and other granted activities differently. As mentioned by Opatha (2009), there may

have some employees with high abilities but when performing the job there may have various defects and inefficiencies.

Afolabi et al. (2008) describe leaders as agents of change, persons whose acts affect other people more than other peoples' acts affect them, while explaining leadership as an attempt to use non coercive types of influence to motivate individuals to accomplish some goals. Further they mentioned that the nature of supervision used by leaders in an organization in the process of the daily affairs and running of the organization can have considerable effects on an individual's job performance and career commitment.

Problem Statement

Employee performance which affects directly on the success of the organization reflects the way that an employee achieves tasks, duties, and responsibilities of his/her job. The way of performing the job by an employee is affected by many factors arising inside the organization as well as factors combined outside the organizational context. Even though many organizations do not concern supervisor's gender and leadership on employee performance, the supervisor's role is very important in immediate working environment and when leading employees to achieve organizational goals and objectives through performing the assigned job well. Male and female supervisors may supervise the work group working under their guidance in different manners and the way of their supervision and the relationship of supervisor-subordinate dyad may affect on subordinate's motivation, satisfaction, relaxation, ultimately on their performance. Therefore if there is not a good supervisor-subordinate dyad, it may cause to employee de-motivation, disgusting, dissatisfaction and poor performance, etc. In Sri Lankan context, there is hardly any research done to investigate the relationship between supervisors' leadership and subordinates performance. Hence this is an attempt to fill the gap in the knowledge and followings are the issues of the study;

01. What is the relationship between supervisor's leadership and employee performance?

02. What type of leadership style that male and female supervisors hold?

Objectives of the Study

The study is carried out to achieve a few sets of objectives and those objectives are as follows.

- To examine the relationship between supervisor's leadership and job performance of subordinates.
- To investigate immediate male and female supervisors' leadership styles

Significance of the Study

Whether one is male or female would not have an important social-psychological issue, except that, for some decades now the presence of women alongside their male counterparts in the work set up has raised series of debates as to the way women and men lead, their differences and their effectiveness. Regardless gender, supervisor has to work as an instructor, facilitator and acts the role of leader.

It is very important to identify the relationship between the leadership of supervisors and employee performance in order to build and maintain harmonious work relationship between the supervisor and the subordinate. If an organization has identified the needed leadership style which affects on the job performance of employees, that organization would be able to promote the required leadership style within their work setup. Further the organization enables to recruit people as supervisors with effective demographic variables that employees are mostly preferable

to work under. The organization would be able to provide required leadership training programs for its supervisors if they know the relationship between leadership and subordinates' performance.

By understanding all of these things, an organization can recruit, select, utilize and develop needed leaders within the organization. Further this attempt will fulfill the knowledge gap hence; there is a lack of studies done on investigating the gender and leadership style of supervisors and their impact on performance of employees in the Sri Lankan context.

Literature Review and Hypotheses

How supervisors' and leadership influence on subordinate's performance are discussed in previous research studies undertaken by many scholars though there is lack of research studies in Sri Lankan context.

Kravits (2003) stated that over the past three decades, the percentage of women generally in the workforce and specifically in the managerial level has dramatically increased and these trends increase the likelihood that supervisors will be female. Carless (1998) found that managerial men and women differed on self-reports of their own leadership behaviors, with managerial women reporting significantly higher levels of "individualized consideration", "enabling others to act" and "encouraging the heart". Moore et al. cited that employees like to work under men supervisors rather than working under female supervisor since they provide good guidance to perform task. Though gender of supervisor does not make a considerable impact on subordinate's performance, the style of leadership is influenced by the gender of the leader (Ellinger, Ellinger and Keller, 2005)

Supervisor – Subordinate Dyad

As mentioned by Afolabi et al. (2008), the immediate socio economic environment is critical in career commitment and job performance. Downs et al. (1998) stated that structurally supervisor-subordinate relationship is the most important communication link in the organization. Further they cited as Shrockley-zalabak (1988), supervisor-subordinate relationship is the primary relationship articulated by the organization. Further Rhoades and Eisenberger (2002) indicate that when supervisor is supportive for his/her subordinates that leads to favorable outcomes for the employee and the organization such as reduced work stress and enhanced performance.

Supervisor

Supervisor is the first level of management where they are given major tasks and duties and responsibilities to form and lead work groups in organizations (Elangovan & Karakowsky, 1999). Ellinger et al. (2005) defined the supervisor as the lowest or most junior management position and a supervisor is responsible for the day-to-day performance of a small group. Further they mentioned that a supervisor is an experienced leader, problem solver and role model at the group level. Shanock and Eisenberger (2006) explain that supervisors tend to play a larger role in other, more individualized treatments such as informal feedback concerning job performance and the determination of the amount of merit pay since they act as agents of the organization in directing and evaluating subordinates tend to attribute the supportiveness of such treatment, in part, to the organization rather than solely to the supervisor's personal inclination.

Role of the supervisor has been defined by Ellinger et al. (2005) as an intermediary between management and operational employees. Further they have stated that supervisors often work

with their employers to design, implement and monitor the organizational policies, procedures and plans, including training programs. Rodrigues and Gregory (2005) have presented that supervisor plays an important role in determining duties and responsibilities by their employers to identify the daily, routine and short-term employee responsibilities beyond the traditional management thought.

Subordinate

Subordinate is the person who stands in order to rank below another (Ellinger et al, 2005). Subordinate is an employee on the bottom rung of a corporate ladder may be considered a subordinate to virtually everyone else, but eventually he or she may be promoted to a position with some managerial responsibilities (Pollick, 2011).

Leadership Styles

Empirical studies emphasized on several leadership styles such as transformational leadership, transactional leadership, democratic leadership, autocratic leadership etc.

Autocratic Leadership / Task Oriented Leadership

Misumi (1985) stated that task-oriented leadership is multifaceted and encompasses a diverse range of behaviors including assigning followers to particular jobs, emphasizing deadlines, checking that followers observe rules and regulations, setting deadlines, and pressuring followers to work hard. Thus, an important aspect of task-oriented leadership is pressure: that is, pressuring followers to work hard and to maintain quality standards by sampling their work, monitoring their performance, as well as setting and emphasizing deadlines. Pressure appears to be a ubiquitous aspect of leadership.

Democratic leadership / Employee Oriented Leadership

Afolabi et al. (2008) mentioned democratic employee-oriented style of leadership hold a good personal relationship with subordinates. A democratic leader takes an interest in the subordinates and likes to ensure that they achieve their goal.

Leadership and Gender

According to Birnbaum and Mintzberg (1992), Growe & Montgomery(n.d) cited that leaders as alike and genderless. Utilizing men's method of leadership is the easiest way for a woman to be hired for administrative positions or any position of leadership, especially since this approach to leadership has repeatedly been established as acceptable to the public and successful in attracting promotion and recognition (Porat, 1991).

Since men and women have different leadership styles, the variances do not mean that one has dominance over the other (see Table 01). The difference may be due in part to men seeing leadership as leading and women seeing leadership as facilitating (Schaefer, 1985).

Table 01 Leadership Styles of Men and Women

Women	Men
Emphasize relationships, sharing, and process	Focus on completing tasks, achieving goals, hoarding of information, and winning
Focus on instructional leadership	Emphasize organizational matters
Facilitative leadership	Lead from the front and stresses task Accomplishment
Interact more with teachers, students, parents, colleagues, community, etc. more than men	Lean toward majority rule and leads by rewarding and punishing adequate and inadequate work
Support contributive, consensual decision making	Emphasize the product, the goal
Emphasize the process	Utilize the traditional top-down administrative style
Encourage feelings of self-worth, active participation, and sharing of power and information, which helps to transform people's self-interest into organizational goals	
Influence teachers to use more desirable teaching methods	
Emphasize the importance of curriculum and instruction more than men	

Source: Adopted by Still (1994)

Still (1994) cited from Schaefer (1985) that the difference may be due in part to men seeing leadership as leading and women seeing leadership as facilitating. As cited by Chliwniak (1997), (Grove & Montgomery, (n.d) stated that though male and female supervisors perform many of the same tasks in carrying out their work, different aspects of the job are emphasized and women embrace relationships, sharing, and process, while men are focusing on completing tasks, achieving goals, hoarding of information, and winning.

Women lean toward facilitative leadership, enabling others to make their contributions through delegation, encouragement, and nudging from behind and stated that many women support contributive, consensual decision making and emphasize the process, but men tend to lean toward majority rule and tend to emphasize the product, the goal (Porat, 1991). The reasons are Women's main focuses on relationships and their interactions with teachers, students, parents, non-parent community members, professional colleagues, and super ordinates more frequently than men. Further men, on the other hand, stress task accomplishment and they tend to lead through a series of concrete exchanges that involved rewarding employees for a job well done and punishing them for poor job performance (Grove & Montgomery, (n.d) as cited by Getskow, 1996).

Appelbaum et al. (2003) aggregated from numerous sources acknowledges differences in a male versus female approach to leadership. A variety of descriptors attributed to males and females, reads as follows:

Male

Structure Consideration
 Transactional, Autocratic
 Instruction-giving
 Business-oriented

Female

Transformational
 Participative
 Socio-expressive
 People-oriented

Further they cited that conceptualizes a feminine style of leadership that is singularly different from its male counterpart and some theorists (Helgesen, 1990), suggest that certain feminine characteristics give the woman leader an advantage. Characteristics described as essentially feminine are, among others, heightened communication skills (especially the ability to be a good listener and to be empathetic); advanced intermediary skills (for negotiation and conflict resolution); well-developed interpersonal skills and a soft approach to handling people. Bass (1985) mention that male are more task oriented leaders than females. Further he reflects that female leaders concern subordinates welfare than male leaders. Empirical research studies provide evidence for that the leadership style of men and women is differed.

Based on the literature, following hypotheses are postulated

H₁: There is a significant relationship between leadership style of the supervisor and job performance of subordinates.

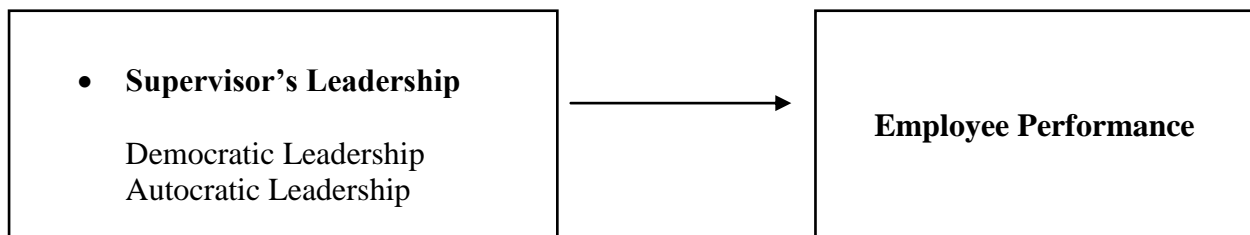
Conceptual Framework

Based on the literature the model in figure 01 has been developed by the researcher. As demonstrated in the model employee performance is directly influenced by leadership Style of Supervisor.

Figure 01: Conceptual Framework of the Study

Independent Variable

Dependent Variable



As demonstrated in the model showed in figure 01, the independent variable is leadership style of supervisor, the variable of primary interest of the researcher is employee performance.

The researcher has concentrated only on autocratic and democratic leadership styles, since a large proportion of day-to-day organizational leadership involves behaviors that can be categorized as autocratic or democratic behaviors. Accordingly democratic and autocratic leadership styles were considered as the dimensions of the independent variable and quantity and quality of work, accidents, co-operation, attendance and work related attitudes were taken as dimensions under the job performance.

Methodology

Study Setting, Design and Sampling

The aim of the research study is to investigate whether there is a relationship between supervisors' leadership and job performance of subordinates; compare immediate male and female supervisors' leadership styles and their relationship to job performance of subordinates. The researcher collected data from four apparel sector organizations. though apparel industry plays a vital role in Sri Lankan economy and there is a high absenteeism and turnover as well as operational level employees are given close supervision in the work setting of the apparel industry. The study participants were operational level female employees. The structured questionnaire was distributed among 160 female employees in operational level who were selected through random sampling method. Respondents who completed the questionnaire were 138 out of 160 and as a percentage it was 86.

Questionnaire consisted of two parts. The first part of the questionnaire was focused to gather identification data such as age, grade, service period, marital states, education, coming from etc. The second part contained a series of Likert scale questions and based on the relevance of each question in part II, five point Likert scale is weighted. This part consisted with positive statements ranging from 1 - strong disagree; 2 – disagree; 3 - neither agree nor disagree; 4 – agree; 5 – strongly agree.

Cronbach's alpha coefficient was used to examine the reliability of the scale. It was resulted a value of .853 for quantity and quality of work, .831 for accidents, .896 for co-operation, .822 for attendance and .857 for work related attitudes. As well as for leadership there was a value of 0.832. According to the above test values of Cronbach's alpha, the internal reliability of the questionnaire was satisfactory.

Data Analysis and Testing of Hypotheses

Table 02. Composition of the Sample

Variable	Numbers	%
Direct Reporting		
For Male supervisor	79	57
For Female Supervisor	59	43
Age (Years)		
Between 16 – 25	58	42
Between 26 – 35	34	25
Between 36 – 45	24	17
Above 46	22	16
Marital States		
Single	45	33
Married	93	67
Length of Service in the Present organization		
Less than 1 year	33	24
Between 1 and 5 years	44	32
More than 6 years and up to 10 years	33	24
More than 10 years	28	20
Education		
Ordinary Level	89	64
Advanced Level	49	36
Degree	-	-
Other	-	-

According to the sample composition, 57% of respondents were reporting for a female supervisor while others are for a male supervisor. Majority of the sample belongs to the age category in between 16-25 years and 67 percent of respondents are married.

This analysis includes correlation test, which were used to investigate the relationship between independent variables and the dependent variable in order to test stated hypotheses.

Relationship between Supervisor's leadership style and job performance of subordinates

In order to examine the relationship between supervisor's leadership style and employee performance, correlation analysis was done. Null hypothesis and the alternative hypothesis were formulated as follows.

H_0 : There is no significant relationship between supervisor's leadership style and employee performance

H_1 : There is a significant relationship between supervisor's leadership style and employee performance

Table 03 Correlation analysis - Leadership and Employee performance

		Leadership	Performance
Leadership	Pearson Correlation	1	.861**
	Sig. (1-tailed)		.000
	N	138	138
Performance	Pearson Correlation	.861**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	138	138

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

Source: Survey data, 2011

Pearson correlation test was used to test hypothesis. The desired level of significance is 0.01 and According to the statistical test result, Pearson correlation coefficient between two variables is 0.861 at the 99% confidence level. This shows that there is significant positive relationship between supervisors' leadership style and employee performance. Based on the statistical results of the test, the null hypothesis was rejected. It reflects that there is a relationship between supervisors' leadership style and employee performance.

Mean value analysis resulted mean value for male leaders 1.956 which is below to 3.0 and female leaders 3.592 which is above to 3.0. It reflects that male leaders hold autocratic leadership style and female leaders hold democratic leadership style.

Discussion and Conclusion

Supervisor plays a big role through guiding, communicating, evaluating subordinates in the immediate working environment while acting as a leader. Many scholars have tried to the concept of leadership using different terms such as behavior, traits, influence, role, etc. (Bass, 1990). According to Wang et al.(2005), leadership is considered as a major factor which

influence on the performance of organizations, managers and employees. Further Bass (1985) mentioned that employees select to perform tasks out of identification with the leader or with the organization.

The relationship between leadership and performance has received considerable scholarly attention (Vigoda-Gadot, 2006). The study was carried out with the purpose of investigating the relationship between supervisor's leadership and subordinates' performance while identifying the leadership style held by males and females.

The researcher examined the relationship between supervisors' leadership and job performance of subordinates. Accordingly statistical results H_1 was accepted and it shows a significant relationship between supervisor's leadership and subordinate job performance. It means that a supervisor as a leader makes a higher impact on his/her subordinates' performance. Feris and Rowland (1981) explained that the leader's behavior affects employee job perceptions, which then affect employee attitudes towards the job performance. Loke (2001) revealed that there is a 9% of productivity is defined by the leadership behavior. Bass (1985) said that leaders can stimulate their followers to perform more than expected to do. Leadership plays large role in influencing follower outcomes, regardless of individual, task and organizational variables (Dionne et al., 2005).

Furthermore researcher found that females hold democratic leadership style while males showing more autocratic leadership style (Bass, 1985; Eagly & Jonson, 1990; Chliwniak, 1997).

The study has theoretical and practical implication for all organizations. The study nurtures the existing literature on Supervisors' leadership and subordinates' job performance and their perceived leadership style of supervisors while providing empirical evidence of supervisor leadership and their styles in the Sri Lankan context.

Findings of the study imply that management should be aware on immediate superiors' leadership and their style of leading and make them more explicit while providing needed guidance, training for them. By understanding and addressing these matters correctly harmonious work relationships can be created among supervisors and subordinates.

Generally organizations like to have a better relationship with their employees. If an organization is unable to identify and satisfy what type of leadership style that employees really expect, these relationships may diminish with many negative consequences and the study helps organizations to understand these matters correctly. In order to attract and retain satisfied workforce, an organization should create a harmonious work relationship within the organization. By understanding the impact of leadership on employee performance will benefit for a harmonious relationships and individual, team and ultimately on organizational performance.

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