

Employees' Perceptions of Lebanese Managers' Leadership Styles and Organizational Commitment

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Using Bass' (1990) framework of transactional and transformational leadership, this research investigated the employees' perceptions of the prevalent leadership style in Lebanon and its impact on organizational commitment. The Lebanese society with its social complexity has much to offer to the understanding of the culture's effect on leadership style and organizational commitment. Moreover, the impact of religion and gender on leadership style and organizational commitment is examined. Data were collected in a survey on a sample composed of 158 respondents chosen among employees working and living in two different areas in Lebanon. Results showed that Lebanese leadership tends to be more transformational than transactional. Evidence supporting a positive relation between transformational leadership and organizational commitment has been found. A significant and curious difference in leadership perception and organizational commitment between religious communities has also been noted.

Compared to other parts of the world, the Middle Eastern region has less available literature related to the field of human resources management. Available references in the region focus mainly on the influence of Arab culture and Arab values on management practices and management systems (Ali & Al-Shakis, 1985; Elsayed-Elkhouly & Buda, 1997; Hunt & At-Twajjri, 1996). A number of scholars (Ali, 1992, 2004; Robertson, 2002; Tayeb, 1997) have highlighted the immense impact of Islamic values, Islamic work ethics, and Islamic principles on human resources management in Islamic countries (Budhwar & Fadzil, 2000; Rosen, 2002). However, Al Omian and Weir (2005) believed that the Middle-East region and its organizational behavior characteristics have much to offer the world of management and business in the 21st century. They insisted on the impact of Islam and the network connections called *wasta* as key indicators for understanding leadership practices and emphasized, consequently, the paternalistic figure of leadership. *Wasta* is a common Arabic term used to indicate the act of supporting, favoring, and even being generous to a specific person within families or community networks in a way that may seem unfair to others. Sometimes *wasta* is done disregarding competency.

Sabri (2005) integrated a comparative approach to study the leadership styles of Jordanian managers in the International Air Transport Association (IATA). The results revealed

that IATA managers preferred transformational rather than transactional leadership styles in Jordan. The Lebanese management style is still relatively unstudied. Neal, Finlay, and Tansey (2005) found, in a comparative study of Arab women’s attitudes toward leadership authority, that Lebanon is characterized by a relatively low level of traditional authority and a very high level of charismatic authority.

Building on (a) current theories of transformational and transactional leadership (Bass, 1985, 1999); (b) Budhwar et al.’s (2004, 2002, 2001, 1998) conceptual framework of human resources practices for cross-national or national examination; and (c) Mowday, Steers, and Porter’s (1979) model for organizational commitment measurement, I developed a conceptual framework and a set of propositions for analyzing leadership styles in Lebanon as well as their impact on organizational commitment and conducted a field investigation on a panel of 158 employees from different organizations located in two different regions in Lebanon having different cultural characteristics.

Specifically, the following research questions were addressed: To what extent is the Lebanese manager’s leadership style perceived to be either more transformational or more transactional? What is the impact of the perceived Lebanese leadership styles on organizational commitment?

Conceptual Framework for Studying Leadership Styles in Lebanon

Budhar and colleagues (Budhwar, 2004; Budhwar & Debrah, 2001, 2004; Budhwar & Sparrow, 1998, 2002) have identified three levels of variables that are known to influence human resources management policies and practices that are worth considering for cross-national or national examinations: (a) national factors (culture, religion, national institutions, business sectors, and dynamic business environment), (b) contingent variables (age, size, gender, nature of ownership, life cycle stage of organization), and (c) organizational strategies (e.g., as proposed by researchers Miles & Snow, 1978 and Porter, 1990) and policies related to primary human resources functions and internal labor markets. This conceptual framework could be adopted for understanding the determinants of the Lebanese management leadership. In this research, the focus is mainly on the impact of national culture, religion, and family business ownership.

Bass’ (1985) framework of transformational and transactional leadership was utilized to apprehend management leadership styles in Lebanon and an organizational commitment instrument developed by Mowday et al. (1979) was used to measure the impact of leadership on human resources (see Figure 1).

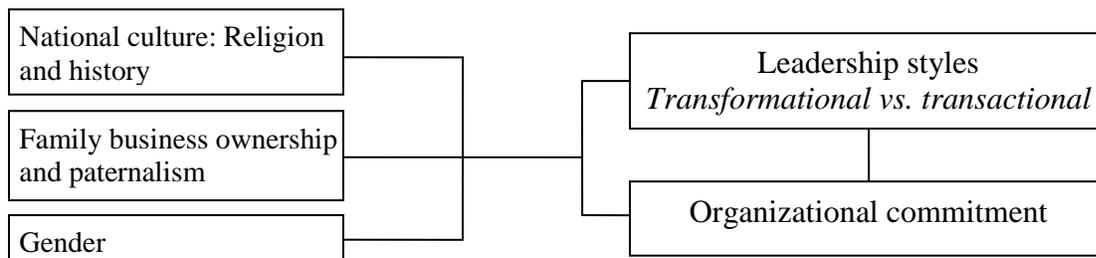


Figure 1. Conceptual framework.

National Culture: Religion and History

Hofstede (1980) defined culture as the interactive aggregate of common characteristics that influence a human group's response to its environment. There has been considerable evidence that national culture influences leadership styles and employees' behavior. Therefore, national culture is considered a key factor for understanding the Lebanese manager's leadership. The major works related to culture include power and authority, individualism versus collectivism, masculinity versus femininity, and so forth. Accordingly, House, Hanges, Javidan, Dorfman, and Gupta (2004) used Hofstede's (1980) conceptual framework to analyze the impact of culture on leaders' behavior and organizational practices. They developed a cross-cultural leadership theory based on cross-nation empirical studies in 60 countries. From the Arab world, they selected Egypt and Qatar. Culture cannot be considered as nation specific; in other terms, one nation cannot be defined with one specific culture, especially in certain countries in the Arab World. Lebanon, for example, does not constitute a unique culture, and religion should not be viewed as the only source of Lebanese national character since the Lebanese society is a mosaic of different religions and cultures. Salibi (1993), a foremost historian and specialist in Middle East modern history, considered Lebanon as the house of many mansions since religious communities had a difficult history of cohabitation. Civil wars in the 19th and the 20th centuries had a considerable impact on management and leadership. Connections or *wasta* have become the main criteria for selection and recruitment. The predominance of *wasta* could be explained by the selection of people within a circle of trust which could be circles of religion, confession, political affiliation, and/or family. *Wasta* can also imply mediation that binds families and communities for team cohesion and well-being in a hostile environment. This could benefit society as a whole as well as the parties involved (Al Omian & Weir, 2005). It could be argued that family and community based networks are developed in response to uncertainty and market failure to assure trust for transactions (Colli, 2003).

Another concept of *wasta* is the use of connections for personal interests which commonly stands for nepotism, cronyism, and corruption in general. That is a deeply rooted practice among all communities.

Another important element in the Lebanese culture is religious commitment. Islam and Christianity are the dominant religions in Lebanon. Religious social norms are deeply embedded in everyday life. For Muslims, for example, these norms and values are underpinned to a very large extent by the Koran, the sayings and the practices of the prophet Muhammad. These norms include intention (*niyat*) underlying every act, proficiency (*ihsan*), sincerity (*ikhlas*), piety (*taqwa*), justice (*adl*), truthfulness (*sidk*), patience (*sabar*), consulting (*shura*), and so forth. It is generally assumed that Islam's influence on workplace behavior may elevate concern for in-group relationship above personal concerns. Both employees and employers have moral obligations to develop relationships that lead to increased team and organizational solidarity (Bhuiyan, Al-Shammari, & Jefri, 2001; Mellahi, 2006). Therefore, Islam community is supposed to be more collectivistic. Collectivistic cultural values foster conformity in group, section, or unit behavior. Harmony within groups is more valued in collectivistic cultures; members are more likely to engage in behaviors that ensure harmony and refrain from behaviors that threaten harmony (Matsumoto, 2000). Consequently, we can easily assume that Lebanese national culture promotes relations-oriented versus task-oriented leadership.

Family Business Ownership and Paternalism

According to a report published by the Lebanese Ministry of Industry in 1999, the predominance of family business ownership is one of the characteristics of the Lebanese economy. Saidi (2004) considered that more than 90% of Lebanese small and medium-sized businesses (SMEs) are family businesses. In family firms, property and control are so firmly entwined that family members are involved in both strategic and day-to-day decision making, and the firm is shaped by dynastic motive. It is also agreed upon the presence of an identity between the family and the business given that the enterprise will generate employment and welfare for the family, while the family is the primary source of finance, labor, and knowledge for the enterprise itself. An immediate consequence of this is the upsurge of a paternalistic pattern reproducing in the firm the social relations prevailing within the community. A family business owner may behave like a dictatorial head of the family. He may even go to extremes and consider himself as the sole thinking mind of the family. Johannisson and Huse (2000) reported that as it appears in a family business, paternalism means a clan type of emotional hierarchy where hierarchical structure is based on seniority and kinship.

Moreover, in the Arab countries, paternalism does not imply a formal level of communication between managers and employees. The formal aspect of social, family, and political life is strictly preserved even in managerial settings. Thus, it is impossible to undertake any kind of meeting in an Arab organization without the ubiquitous coffee or tea rituals (Al Omian & Weir, 2005). Concerning the Lebanese family, the unique study of Fahed-Sreih and Djoundourian (2006) showed that decision making tends to be participatory with a liberal attitude toward female ownership and management. Consequently, we can assume that family business ownership promotes a paternalistic leadership style.

The paternalistic leadership is assumed to be more compatible with the transformational pattern of behavior that is generally the result of national culture, religion, and the family ownership of firms. Cheng, Chou, Wu, Huang, and Farh (2004) considered that the paternalistic leader and transformational leader do have something in common. Transformational leadership includes a style of individualized care that is similar to paternalistic leadership. Some researchers (Parry & Proctor-Thompson, 2002) have started to explore the display of integrity by transformational leaders which is similar to paternalistic leadership.

Gender

Here, the independent variable of gender has been introduced since previous studies suggested an influence of gender on attitudes toward leadership authority (Neal et al., 2005). Accordingly, gender may influence the perception of a manager's leadership style as well as organizational commitment.

Transactional Versus Transformational Leadership Style

One branch of leadership research, however, that has proven useful to the study of CEO-level management has been Bass' (1985, 1999) framework of transactional/transformational leadership. Bass' (1985, 1999) framework was developed within larger organizational contexts, and it has been successfully applied to the study of top-level managers (Lowe, Kroeck, & Sivasubramanian, 1996). The definition of transformational and transactional leadership styles

was built on prior classifications, such as relations-oriented versus task-oriented leadership (Fiedler, 1967) and directive versus participative leadership (Heller & Yukl, 1969). Transactional leadership motivates individuals primarily through contingent reward exchanges and active management by exception. Transactional leaders set goals, articulate explicit agreements regarding what the leader expects from organizational members and how they will be rewarded for their efforts and commitment, and provide constructive feedback to keep every person on task (Bass & Avolio, 1993b; Howell & Hall-Merenda, 2002). However, transformational leadership is charismatic, inspirational, intellectually stimulating, and individually considerate (Avolio, Bass, & Jung, 1999). These leaders help individuals transcend their self-interest for the sake of the larger vision of the firm. They believe in people, and they are driven by a strong set of values such as loyalty, trust, and personal attention to employees, something that could positively influence organizational commitment.

Organizational Commitment

Organizational commitment has typically been viewed as the relative strength of an individual's identification with the involvement in an organization as well as his or her willingness to exert effort and remain in the organization. Commitment as outcome has been related to leadership (Walumbwa, Orwa, Wang, & Lawler, 2005).

As previously mentioned, Lebanese managers refer to their network of trust for selection and recruitment. With this policy of selection, the firm tends to be a big family where managers are expected to develop paternalistic patterns of behavior. As a result of these practices, organizational commitment was expected to be high in Lebanese firms. This cohesiveness is also enhanced by a transformational leadership style that gives more attention to people than to tasks.

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were proposed:

- H₁: Lebanese managers' leadership tends to be more transformational than transactional.
- H₂: Transformational leadership is positively related to organizational commitment.
- H₃: Leadership styles and organizational commitment tend to differ between Lebanese religious communities.
- H₄: Leadership styles and organizational commitment tend to differ between male and female respondents.

Methods

Concepts Measurement

Bass' (1985) work constitutes the methodological basis for developing the statements of the instrument used to measure transactional and transformational leadership from an employee perception. In accordance with Vera and Crossman (2004), we used an 18-item questionnaire with a Likert scale for measuring the perception of leadership style (see Appendix A).

In order to measure the employees’ organizational commitment level, we used the Organizational Commitment Questionnaire (OCQ) developed by Mowday et al. (1979). The OCQ is characterized by three factors: (a) a strong belief in the acceptance of the organization’s goals and values, (b) a willingness to exert considerable effort on behalf of the organization, and (c) a strong desire to maintain membership in the organization (Mowday et al.). The OCQ measures a combination of employee attitudes and behavioral intentions, reflective of the moral involvement of the employee with the organization (see Appendix B).

To test the instrument’s reliability, we used Cronbach’s coefficient alpha (Cronbach, 1990) on a sample of 158 respondents. All three constructs show a high or acceptable level of reliability: transformational leadership (.88), transactional leadership (.76), and organizational commitment (.81).

Sample

Data were collected from two Lebanese universities situated in two different regions in Lebanon. The first one is located in a Christian area and the second one in a Muslim area. Since names easily can be used as a key element for identifying religious identity, only questionnaires of the Muslim students of the Lebanese university situated in the Muslim area were selected, and only questionnaires of the Christian students of the Lebanese university situated in the Christian area were selected. This selection helps us to identify the impact of religion on leadership styles and organizational commitment. During three academic semesters, more than 170 students in the masters program who had work experience were asked to fill in the questionnaire. Of those, 158 questionnaires were selected for the survey analysis. Several questionnaires were rejected due to confusion in respondent or manager religious identity.

Findings and Discussions

Table 1 provides an overview of the descriptive statistics of the respondents’ answers on transformational, transactional, and organizational commitment constructs. The results support H₁. Respondents perceived Lebanese leadership style as more transformational (*M* = 3.56) than transactional (*M* = 2.97). The results of the *t* test as shown in Table 2 indicate that there are significant differences in means between transactional and transformational leadership.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics (*N* =158)

Construct	Min.	Max.	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Transformational	1.25	5.00	3.56	.78
Transactional	1.33	4.67	2.97	.77
Organizational commitment	2.13	4.73	3.38	.63

Table 2: *T* Test Results for the Differences Between Transformational and Transactional Leadership Styles (*N* = 158)

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>SEM</i>	95% confidence interval of the difference		<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
				Lower	Upper			
Transformational– transactional	.59	1.01	.01	.44	.75	7.42	157	.00

Moreover, Table 3 shows a significant correlation between transformational leadership and organizational commitment. The correlations (Table 3) and regression results (Table 8) support H₂ that proposed a positive relation between transformational leadership and organizational commitment. Our findings, therefore, show evidence for transformational leadership being positively related to behavioral outcomes (Walumbwa et al., 2005).

Table 3: Correlation Analysis Between Leadership Style and Organizational Commitment (*N* = 158)

Construct	Transformational	Transactional	Organizational commitment
Transformational	-		
Transactional	.16*	-	
Organizational commitment	.36**	.05	-

p* < .05. *p* < .01.

As per H₃, the results shown in Tables 4 and 5 demonstrate a weak but significant difference between Muslim and Christian respondents as far as the perception of leadership styles and organizational commitment are concerned. Both of them perceived their leaders to be more transformational than transactional. Christian respondents, in comparison with Muslims, perceived their leaders as more transformational and seem to be a little more committed to their organizations. The answer of this result lies within the structure of the Muslim community in Lebanon. Actually, the period in which the study was conducted was marked by a high sectarian tension between Shiite and Sunnite. In order to obtain more accurate results, one should not put all Muslims in one basket. But, asking the respondent to reveal his or her leader’s Muslim identity is seen as an unethical question.

While the religious identity of the respondent had some significant impact on leadership style perception and organizational commitment, gender did not seem to make a difference (H₄). Female respondents seem to identify their leaders as barely more transformational in comparison to male respondents (see Tables 6 and 7).

Table 4: A Comparison Between Muslim and Christian Managers on Transformational and Transactional Leadership and Organizational Commitment

Religion	Transformational		Transactional		Organizational commitment	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Christian (<i>N</i> = 94)	3.73	.78	2.93	.78	3.49	.52
Muslim (<i>N</i> = 64)	3.33	.73	3.03	.76	3.21	.73
Total (<i>N</i> = 158)	3.56	.78	2.97	.77	3.38	.63

Table 5: Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) for Religion

Source	<i>SS</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>MS</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
Transformational					
Between groups	6.14	1	6.14	10.63**	.00
Within groups	90.08	156	.58		
Total	96.22	157			
Transactional					
Between groups	.33	1	.33	.55	.46
Within groups	93.64	156	.60		
Total	93.97	157			
Organizational commitment					
Between groups	3.05	1	3.05	8.12**	.01
Within groups	58.66	156	.38		
Total	61.70	157			

p* < .05. *p* < .01.

Table 6: A Comparison Between Gender on Leadership Constructs

Religion	Transformational		Transactional		Organizational commitment	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Male (<i>N</i> = 91)	3.42	.69	3.09	.74	3.39	.66
Female (<i>N</i> = 67)	3.75	.86	2.81	.80	3.36	.59
Total (<i>N</i> = 158)	3.56	.78	2.97	.77	3.38	.63

Table 7: Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) for Gender

Source	SS	df	MS	F	p
Transformational					
Between groups	4.17	1	4.17	7.07**	.01
Within groups	92.05	156	.59		
Total	96.22	157			
Transactional					
Between groups	3.05	1	3.05	5.24	.02
Within groups	90.92	156	.58		
Total	93.97	157			
Organizational commitment					
Between groups	.01	1	.01	.14	.71
Within groups	61.64	156	.40		
Total	61.70	157			

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

Table 8: Regression Results Between Transformational Leadership and Organizational Commitment

Construct	B	SE B	β
Transformational leadership	.29	.06	.36**

Note. $R^2 = .13$ ($p < .01$).

** $p < .01$.

Concluding Remarks

By adopting Bass' (1990) framework of transactional and transformational leadership, we aimed to determine the employees' perception of the Lebanese leadership styles and its impact on employees' organizational commitment. Considering the Lebanese collectivistic culture, religion, family connections, and wasta, the Lebanese leadership style was assumed to be more transformational than transactional. Using a sample of 158 respondents, the survey shows that the Lebanese leadership style is more transformational than transactional. Correlation and regression analysis show that transformational leadership style is related to employees' organizational commitment.

Since the Lebanese society is divided into different religious communities, we attempted to measure the impact of religion on leadership style perception and organizational commitment. The results show that there are no significant differences between male and female respondents. However, there was a significant difference between Muslim and Christian societies. Christian employees tend to perceive their leaders as more transformational. This difference is mainly due to the fact that the Muslim society is divided into different communities; moreover, political tension was running very high between these communities during the time of data collection. The impact of the religious difference may constitute a key area for research that would contribute to understanding managerial practices and leadership styles in a more detailed way in the future.

About the Author

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Appendix A

Questionnaire for Measuring Employee’s Perception of His or Her Manager’s Leadership Style

Employee is asked to give an opinion about their senior manager’s leadership style. (1) Strongly disagree, (2) Moderately disagree, (3) Neither disagree nor agree, (4) Moderately agree, (5) Strongly agree

1. Makes everyone around him/her enthusiastic about assignments	1 2 3 4 5
2. I have complete faith in him/her	1 2 3 4 5
3. Encourages me to express my ideas and opinions	1 2 3 4 5
4. Is an inspiration to us	1 2 3 4 5
5. Inspires loyalty to him/her	1 2 3 4 5
6. Inspires loyalty to the organization intellectual stimulation	1 2 3 4 5
7. His/her ideas have forced me to rethink some of my own ideas, which I had never questioned before	1 2 3 4 5
8. Enables me to think about old problems in new ways	1 2 3 4 5
9. Has provided me with new ways of looking at things, which used to be a puzzle for me	1 2 3 4 5
10. Gives personal attention to members who seem neglected	1 2 3 4 5
11. Finds out what I want and tries to help me to get it	1 2 3 4 5
12. You can count on him/her to express his/her appreciation when you do a good job	1 2 3 4 5
13. Tells me what to do if I want to be rewarded for my efforts*	1 2 3 4 5
14. There is a close agreement between what I am expected to put into the group effort and the benefit I can get out of it*	1 2 3 4 5
15. Whenever I feel like it, I can negotiate with him/her about what can I get from what I accomplish*	1 2 3 4 5
16. Asks no more of me than what is absolutely essential to get the work done*	1 2 3 4 5
17. It is all right if I take initiatives but he/she does not encourage me to do so*	1 2 3 4 5
18. Only tells me what I have to know to do my job*	1 2 3 4 5

*Reversed scale.

Note. Scale published by Vera, D., & Crossan, M. (2004). Strategic leadership and organizational learning. *Academy of Management Review*, 29(2), 222-240.

Appendix B

Questionnaire for Measuring Organizational Commitment

(1) Strongly disagree, (2) Moderately disagree, (3) Neither disagree nor agree, (4) Moderately agree, (5) Strongly agree.

1. I am willing to put in a great deal of effort beyond that normally expected in order to help this organization be successful.	1 2 3 4 5
2. I talk up this organization to my friends as a great organization to work for.	1 2 3 4 5
3. I feel very little loyalty to this organization.(R)**	1 2 3 4 5
4. I would accept almost any type of job assignment in order to keep working for this organization.	1 2 3 4 5
5. I find that my values and the organization's values are very similar.	1 2 3 4 5
6. I am proud to tell others that I am part of this organization.	1 2 3 4 5
7. I could just as well be working for a different organization as long the type of work was similar.*	1 2 3 4 5
8. This organization really inspires the very best in me in the way of job performance.	1 2 3 4 5
9. It would take very little change in my present circumstances to cause me to leave this organization.*	1 2 3 4 5
10. I am extremely glad I chose this organization to work for, over others I was considering at the time I joined.	1 2 3 4 5
11. There is not too much to be gained by sticking with this organization indefinitely.*	1 2 3 4 5
12. Often, I find it difficult to agree with this organization's policies on important matters relating to its employees.*	1 2 3 4 5
13. I really care about the fate of this organization.	1 2 3 4 5
14. For me, this is the best of all possible organizations for which to work.	1 2 3 4 5
15. Deciding to work for this organization was a definite mistake on my part.*	1 2 3 4 5

*Reversed scale.

Note. Scale published by Mowday, R. T., Steers, R. M., & Porter, L. W. (1979). The measurement of organizational commitment. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 14(2), 224-247.