

Conceptual Framework for the Effect of Transformational Leadership on the Performance of Academic Staff in Libyan Universities: The Mediating Role of Organizational Commitment

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Abstract: Employee performance is one of the most important variables for organizational survive and thrive. Majority of previous studies investigated the employee performance in business organization. However, few have investigated it in universities. The purpose of this paper is to develop a conceptual framework of performance of academic staff. A literature review was conducted as well as a preliminary interview with the some academic staff. Building on the literature, this study proposed that transformational leadership and its dimension (idealized influence, inspirational motivation, individualized consideration, and intellectual stimulation) as well as the organizational commitment and its dimension (affective commitment, continuous commitment, and normative commitment) have positive effects on the performance of academic staff. The study proposes also a mediating role of organizational commitment between transformational leadership and performance of academic staff. The conceptual framework was discussed and direction for future work was highlighted.

Keywords: Performance of academic Staff, Transformational leadership, Higher education, organizational commitment.

INTRODUCTION

Modern societies are witnessing a remarkable interest in the importance of education and its role in the revival of nations and the prosperity of the economy. Governments have attached utmost importance to education at all levels, especially at the university level.

As a result, governments have allocated large budgets for the renaissance of higher education Institutions (HEIs) and its role in providing society with an educated workforce equipped with modern science for the development of society. Universities are the most important institutions for knowledge creation and community development. It also plays an active and important role in the development process as a scientific and academic organizational structure that brings about more social and economic changes in society by providing its various sectors with the most efficient, trained and modernized graduates [1]. However, largely, the performance of a university is dependent on the efficiency and effectiveness of faculty members [2].

Faculty members disseminate knowledge and develop skills to students and have a central role in the advancement of scientific research and contribute to the development of their communities in particular and the international community in general. In addition, they provide the communities with scientific innovations that contribute to the prosperity of nations [3]. Employee

performance is defined as the function and tasks that individuals perform successfully within the context of natural constraints and available resources [4].

Due to the importance of the employee performance, researchers and the practitioners as well as the business community have been working on identifying the factors that leads to better employee performance which leads to better organizational performance. Majority of the studies focused on this factor in business organizations. For example, gender was considered effective factor of employee performance [5], age [6], salary [7], stress [8], motivation and job satisfaction [9, 10] training and development [12], and organizational culture [13, 14].

However, despite the importance of these factors, they do not reflect the academic environment, especially gender, age, and training. The faculty members have a doctorate in their specialization. They train individuals and institutions, and gender is not an obstacle to achieving better performance. Consequently,

the factors affecting performance are different and the results of previous studies cannot be generalized to the performance of the academic staff at the universities. In addition, studies in the academic framework are mostly in developed countries and although there are studies related to universities, these studies are exploratory do not examine the causal relationship between the variables. For example, Sarayra [15] studied the performance of the academic staff at Jordanian universities, but the study was limited in term of statistical tools and the sample size.

In Libya, the ranking of the universities is amongst the lowest in the world and in the region of Middle East [16]. Consequently, the purpose of this study is to develop a framework that can reflect the academic environment and the performance of the academic staff in Libyan universities. We divided this paper into seven sections. First section has presented the introduction as well as the issues and the objectives of this paper. In the next section, we discuss the related literature. Next, the conceptual framework development is given followed by research methodology, discussion and direction for future work as well as conclusion.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This section discusses the employee performance as well as transformational leadership and the organizational commitment.

Employee performance

Employee performance has become a typical issue in today's business environment, thus, organizations are conducting research to learn how to manage and improve the performance of its employees [17]. Employee performance is seen as one of the core management processes and the most important issues to be considered in planning for the development of any organization. Evaluating employee performance is essential for the organizations. It is because through which senior management is able to design and develop development programs and prepare appropriate future plans [18].

High employee performance is one of the sources of sustainable competitive advantages of organizations [18]. The knowledge of the organizations which is a cumulative account of the knowledge of the employees was considered the ultimate source of competitive advantages for organizations [19]. This has made the organizations to pay increasing attention to the performance of employees.

Theories of employee performance showed that the top management supports and involvement with employees has positive role on employee performance [20]. Leadership was frequently mentioned to have

effect on the employee performance of high skill workers such as academic staff [21-23].

Employee performance was measured using one-dimensional or multi-dimensional measurement. For example, Harwiki [24] uses three items to measure the one dimension of employee performance. Other such as Rabbanee, Burford and Ramaseshan [25]. In addition, researchers who measured the academic staff performance have used multi-dimensional measurement. For example, Al-Sarayra [26] divided academic staff performance into teaching performance, scientific research performance, behaviour, and relationship with university and community. In this study, the performance of academic staff at universities is proposed to be measured using a multi-dimensional measurement and it includes the teaching performance, scientific research performance, and serving the university and the community.

Transformational Leadership

The search for leadership and the best style in it continued. Several models and theories attempted to explain the leadership. As a result, the concept of leadership moved from the traditional theories such as the great man theory, personality traits, behavioural and situational theories to contemporary theories such as the charismatic and transformational theories [16]. Shibu [9] defines leadership as a style that inspires followers to transcend personal benefit and transform it to the benefit of the organization. Bell [5] defined it as a process of motivating followers to transcend personal interests at the expense of the interests of the team or the organization.

In fact, researchers have found that successful leadership is one of the reasons for the development of creativity in organizations [20], and that successful leadership is one of the main reasons for continuous organizational commitment and loyalty among employees [27]. In educational organizations, efficient leadership helps to improve students' participation and progress in their studies [28] and helps to set the organizational culture to achieve the best performance of teachers and students [26]. Therefore, leadership is linked to all the outputs of the institutions, regardless of the nature of these institutions.

This study is particularly interested in the transformational leadership in educational institutions and among faculty members in universities. Transformational leadership is a contemporary approach that inspires leaders and followers to transcend their abilities and increase their performance and give them self-confidence to deliver the best service or commodity using efficient resources with clear support for their social and emotional needs [6]. Transformational leadership plays a key role in making

organizational changes to achieve the organizational goals [29].

Researchers agreed that transformational leadership has four dimensions and that researchers rely on the multi-factor leadership model developed by Bass [30] and has been used by many researchers such as Nasiruddin *et al.* [31], Clocks and Meshes [32] Tajasom and Ariffin Ahmad [31], Cohen [32]. These researchers divided transformational leadership into four dimensions. First dimension is related to the idealized influence which is that behavior that encourages subordinates to look at leaders as role model. The essence of the idealized influence is to find the values that inspire and provide the meaning of work for the subordinates and it is strongly linked to the concept of charisma and charismatic leadership [33]. The charismatic leaders can be distinguished from other leaders in terms of their use of professional management practices that influence and leave a clear impression on the workers[34].

The second dimension of transformational leadership is the inspirational motivation which means stimulating employees to think of new ways to solve problems, and to use logical thinking before making any application or behavior [30]. While the third dimension is the Individualized Consideration which indicates that transformational leaders demonstrate genuine concern for the needs and feelings of followers. This personal attention to each follower is a key element in bringing out their very best efforts [35]. The last dimension is the intellectual stimulation which indicates the ability of a leader to challenge the followers to be innovative and creative. A common misunderstanding is that transformational leaders are soft, but the truth is that they constantly challenge followers to higher levels of performance [15]. In this paper we divided the transformational leadership into four dimensions following the majority of previous studies.

Organizational commitment

Organization strongly focuses on organizational commitment of its organizational member because of its importance in maintaining the integrity, continuity and survival of the organization by linking the organization with its employees, especially at times when organizations cannot provide incentives and support to their employees to work and achieve the organizational goals. Academic staff who have organizational commitment to their universities focus on the goals, values, and have faith on their universities institutions as well as committed to achieve the organizational goals and have tendency to continue to work and provide continuously positive word of mouth about their universities [36]. Therefore, organizational commitment is very important in all institutions and is

becoming more important in universities because of its role in the advancement of society and its progress.

Al-Azzawi and Jawad [37] define organizational commitment as an individual's willingness to exert high degrees of effort in favor of organization, having strong desire to remain in the organization, accepting of the main values and objectives of the organization. Accordingly, the literature indicates that there are different dimensions of organizational commitment. Although the majority of researchers in this field agreed on the multiple dimensions of commitment, they differ in determining these dimensions. Earlier researchers in this field was conducted by Meyer, Allen and Smith [38] who pointed out that organizational commitment has three dimensions namely, affective commitment, continuous commitment, and normative commitment. According to Meyer *et al.* [38], affective commitment is that dimension involves the employee's emotional dependence on the organization, the link of the employee's identity with the organization identity. In addition, this dimension also represents the degree of poetic correspondence between the individual and the organization and the unity between them, as well as the individual's interest in working in the organization, through a range of emotions such as loyalty, warmth, and happiness that the individual feels for his work in the organization.

Meyer *et al.* [38] also viewed the normative commitment as the individual feels that he is committed to an organization and remains there because of feelings of commitment. These feelings may stem from the pressure on the individual before and after joining an organization. Further, Meyer *et al.* [38] pointed out that in case of continuous commitment, the investment value controls the degree of commitment. They added that commitment of the individual towards the organization in which he works is controlled by the investment value he could achieve if he continued to work with the organization, in return for what he would lose if he decided to join other organizations.

These dimensions have been used in many studies including Al-Obeidi study [23] in which he discussed the influence of organizational justice on commitment. In addition, Altarhuni and Lakeh [39] and Dariush *et al.* [27] used these dimensions to investigate the effect of organizational commitment on employees' performance. Accordingly, in this study, the three dimensions are used as sub-variables of the organizational commitment.

Conceptual Framework Development

Consequently, the need arose to select variables related to the academic environment and the academic staff of universities. Accordingly, we conducted a preliminary interview with academic staff.

The interviewees referred to the importance of leadership especially in their department and faculty. Many researchers believe that leadership in universities has a significant role in promoting and improving performance. There are many styles of leadership. These include the democratic, dictatorship, and instructional [28, 40, 41]. Previous studies focused on these types and examined their effects while the new types such as transactional and transformational leadership were investigated slightly in literature [42]. Nevertheless the empirical studies in the educational field found that the transformational leadership is more important than the transactional leadership [26, 31, 32]

Studies also showed that organizational commitment has the potential to improve the relationships between independent variables such as job satisfaction, organizational justice, leadership, and job security, on the one hand, and employee performance on the other. For example, Awan *et al.* [43] found that organizational commitment plays a mediating role between organizational policies and employee

performance. The study of Dhar [43] found that organizational commitment of staff mediates the relationship between training and organizational performance of employees in the tourism sector in India. However, the researcher did not succeed in finding a study that investigates the mediating role of organizational commitment in the academic environment, especially in relation to faculty members.

Based on the above, this study proposes that there is a direct relationship between transformational leadership and its dimension (idealized influence, inspirational motivation, individualized consideration, and intellectual stimulation) as well as the organizational commitment and its dimension (affective commitment, continuous commitment, and normative commitment) on academic staff performance in Libyan universities. The study also proposed that the direct effect of transformational leadership is mediated by the organizational commitment. Accordingly, the conceptual framework of this paper is presented in Figure 1.

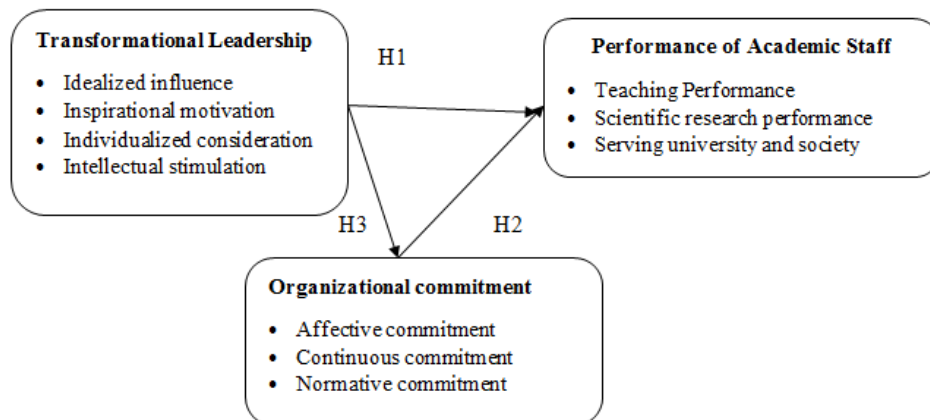


Fig-1: Conceptual Framework

Based on the framework, there are three main hypotheses as well as seven sub-hypotheses and they are listed as follows:

H1: Transformational leadership affects significantly the performance of academic staff.

H1a: Idealized influence affects significantly the performance of academic staff.

H1b: Inspirational motivation affects significantly the performance of academic staff.

H1c: individualized consideration affects significantly the performance of academic staff.

H1d: intellectual stimulation affects significantly the performance of academic staff.

H2: Organizational commitment affects significantly the performance of academic staff.

H2a: Affective commitment affects significantly the performance of academic staff.

H2b: continuous commitment affects significantly the performance of academic staff.

H2c: normative commitment affects significantly the performance of academic staff.

H3: organizational commitment mediates the effect of transformational leadership on the performance of academic staff.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research is a conceptual work aims to develop a conceptual framework that can be used by Libyan universities to improve the performance of academic staff. Accordingly, we reviewed the literature related to employee performance, performance of academic staff; factors affect the performance of academic staff, leadership, commitment, and a combination of these key words. It was found that there is shortage in the studies related to the performance of academic staff. As a result, a preliminary interview with academic staff was conducted to understand the issue and understand more the factor that might lead to better

performance of academic staff. Based on the literature and the interview, we develop the conceptual framework of this study.

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to develop a conceptual framework related to the performance of academic staff. Transformational leadership and its dimension were proposed to affect the performance of academic staff. Previous studies tested similar relationship. For example, Khalaf [5] found a positive correlation between the dimension of transformational leadership and morale of faculty members as well as between the transformational leadership as a whole and the morale of faculty members in Saudi universities. Other studies have examined the impact of transformational leadership on the outputs of the work, including the study of Jurisprudence [8], which aimed to identify the role of transformational leadership of the directors of education and its relation to the organizational effectiveness of the education departments in Saudi Arabia. The results showed that there is a significant relationship between the transformational leadership of education managers and their relation to organizational effectiveness.

Saleh [12] found that the effect of the transformational leadership is greater than the reciprocal in the implementation of the strategic objectives of the Jordanian Ministry of Environment. In a similar study, Arjeh [18] examined the role of transformational leadership in influencing TQM in the higher education sector. The study found that transformational leadership has positive and significant effects on TQM practices in selected Libyan universities. Sufian [19] found that there is a significant relationship between the total grades of transformational leadership and job satisfaction of employees. Thus, in this study we expect that the effect of transformational leadership and its dimensions to be positive and significant on the performance of academic staff.

In addition the study proposed that organizational commitment has a positive effect on performance of academic staff. Previous studies tested similar relationship. Fu *et al.* [20] found that organizational commitment has a significant effect on the performance of employees in Chinese insurance companies. Sani [29] examined the relationship between several variables, including organizational commitment with employee performance. The study concluded that there is a significant relation between organizational commitment and employee performance of Indonesian companies. Hence, we proposed that organizational commitment will have a significant and positive effect on performance of academic staff.

For the mediating relationship, previous studies such as Dahr [1] found that there is a mediating role of organizational commitment. In addition, Ahmad *et al.* [1] conducted a study aimed at identifying the effect of personal traits and organizational commitment on the performance academic staff at Pakistani universities. The study found that the personal traits have an effect on the job performance. In addition, organizational commitment affects the performance and mediates the relationship between personality traits and performance. Hence this study proposed the mediating role of organizational commitment.

Based on the above, this study believes that the universities that want to succeed and raise their international and local rankings must have active academic staff through whom, the university can achieve its goals and fulfill its objective. The universities also have to work harder to gain the commitment of their academic staff so that they stay committed and working for the university as well as their intention to leave will reduce.

Direction for Future work

This study was conducted to develop a framework to improve the performance of academic staff. As a way forward, we will test the conceptual framework using data that will be collected from academic staff in the Libyan universities. The study proposes that transformational leadership and organizational commitment affects the performance of academic staff. Future researcher is encouraged to test this framework in their respective universities or educational institution. They also can modify the sample and test the applicability of this conceptual framework for other organizations such as business organization.

The studies in the performance of academic staff are limited. Future studies are encouraging to uses this framework with modification such as to add additional variables such as job security, organizational justice, and financial and non-financial rewards. It is worthwhile to mention that this framework was developed for Libyan universities. However, futures researchers are encouraged to tested this framework in developing and develop countries and compare the findings between these countries.

CONCLUSION

This paper aimed to develop a framework that reflects the performance of academic staff in Libya. The literature was reviewed and a preliminary interview with academic staff was conducted to understand the factor that affects their performance. As a result, a conceptual framework was developed. It proposed that transformational leadership and organizational commitment has a positive effect on the performance of academic staff. The framework also proposed that effect

of transformational leadership on the performance of academic staff in Libya is mediated by the organizational commitment. A discussion of the framework was given as well as the direction of future work.

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