



## IMPACT OF LEADERSHIP STYLES ON ORGANIZATIONAL PERFORMANCE: MEDIATING ROLE OF EMPLOYEE MOTIVATION

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### Abstract

The current research aims at examining the effects of transformational, transactional and laissez-faire leadership styles on organizational performance, employee motivation as a mediator and HR practices as a moderator in the corporate and service sectors in Pakistan. The respondent population size (300) was used to measure the data through a structured survey tool and analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). Findings prove that the three leadership styles have a significant impact on motivating employees and on the performance of the organization. These relationships are completely mediated by employee motivation whereas the HR practices moderately affect the relationship between motivation and performance. The model accounts for 52.9% variation in organizational performance. Results are an addition to the body of leadership and motivation research in an emerging economy setting and have practical implications on the organizational strategists and HR practitioners.



## Introduction

The growing pressure on organizations that are in a competitive and resource constrained environment is compelling them to use leadership as a strategic tool of maintaining performance results. The multidimensional construct of leadership style establishes the way in which managers convey vision, distribute resources, foster the commitment of the workforce, and overcome complexity in institutions (Reyes et al., 2025). In the case of the developing nations like Pakistan, structural inefficiencies in the corporate and service industries, regulatory uncertainty, and the issue of talent retention persistence, the impact of leadership styles on employee performance is particularly important. Most of the literature available has mostly addressed transformational and transactional leadership separately but little has been done to compare the relative influence of laissez-faire leadership. Although laissez-faire leadership is a passive leadership style, its effects on motivation and performance of employees are unique and significant (Iqbal et al., 2021)

In addition, although employee motivation is recognized as a mediating variable between leadership and performance, there is a shortage in terms of empirical research on the mediation of the two, especially in non-Western

organizations. Another gap that is bridged by this study is the moderating nature of the HR practices in enhancing or limiting the motivation performance relationship (Rubera & Ngui, 2023).

The corporate and service sectors in Pakistan offer a good theoretical and practical situation. The industries can be described by the hierarchical organizational culture, a variety of demographic characteristics of the workforce, and the levels of maturity of HR infrastructure, which makes the motivation-mediated leadership-performance chain prone to the influence of the context (Saeed et al., 2024). With a combination of transformational leadership (TFL), transactional leadership (TSL) and laissez-faire leadership (LFL) as one system, this paper provides a more comprehensive and comparative explanation of how different leadership philosophies affect employee and organizational performance.

## Scope of the Study

This research is based on the workers in the corporate and service sector in Pakistan. The sample of middle-level and senior employees who are directly exposed to leadership behaviors is the scope that is most affected by leadership behaviors and whose motivational states are further associated with organizational performance measures in the most consequential way possible.

## Research Objectives

The research question(s) is as follows:

✚ To examine the relationship between leadership style and organizational performance mediated by employee motivation based on each leadership style.

✚ To determine whether employee motivation has an impact on organizational performance mediated by HR practices.

✚ To use empirically based recommendations to develop leadership and HR strategy in the organizational context in Pakistan.

## Research Questions

✚ Are transformational, transactional and laissez-faire leadership styles any good predictors of organizational performance?

✚ Is there a mediation of leadership styles and organizational performance by employee motivation?

✚ Does the relationship between employee motivation and performance in organizations get moderated by HR practices?

## Literature Review

The style of leadership is a key antecedent to employee behavior and organizational results. Transformational leadership is inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration, which have always been linked to elevated levels of motivation and performance of employees (Iddrisu & Mohammed,

2025). Leaders who communicate an inspiring vision and create psychological safety empower employees to make organizational objectives internal, thus transforming intrinsic motivation into productive actions. Conversely, transactional leadership works by exchanges, exchange-based reinforcers such as contingent rewards and management-by-exception which encourages the employees using extrinsic reinforcers instead of values congruency (Dong, 2023). Although transactional leaders can lead to some short-term compliance, the effect they have on the more motivating engagement is said to be more conditional and dependent on the situation.

The passive end of the leadership continuum is laissez-faire leadership, which is marked with non-intervention, delegation, and lack of feedback (Raza, 2026). Despite the critical portrayal, other researchers believe that the laissez-faire practices provide workers with freedom that can be tolerably helpful in terms of intrinsic motivation, especially when working in the service sector, where professional discretion is appreciated (Zhang et al., 2023). The mediating construct of employee motivation is the psychological energy and directional persistence that employees put towards work-related goals. HR practices, such as performance appraisal, training, and compensation systems, are the

institutional practices that either support or inhibit the motivational capital that is created by leadership (Jonathan, 2025). The empirical evidence is rapidly gaining momentum to suggest that in the emerging economies, where institutionalized people management systems are not even, HR practices moderate downstream motivational effects on performance (Abugre & Nasere, 2020).

The theoretical and empirical gap that the presented study fills is in the conceptual integration of the discussed constructs of leadership styles, employee motivation, HR practices, and organizational performance in the context of a single moderated mediation framework that is under researched in the context of Pakistan.

### Hypotheses Development

✚ H1: Transformational leadership has a positive direct impact on the performance of an organization that is significant.

✚ H2: The direct impact of transactional leadership on the performance of an organization is large and positive.

✚ H3: Laissez-faire leadership positively influences the

performance in organizations significantly.

✚ H4: Transformational leadership positively influences employee motivation at a significant level.

✚ H5: Leadership on transactional basis impacts positively on employee motivation.

✚ H6: Laissez-faire leadership is a major positive contributor to employee motivation.

✚ H7: There is a positive influential impact of employee motivation on organizational performance.

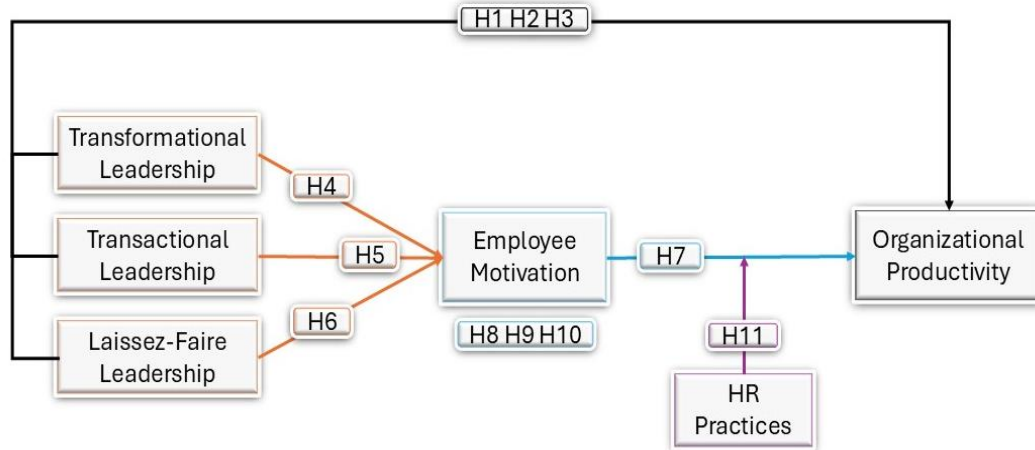
✚ H8: The transformational leadership and performance of an organization are related through employee motivation.

✚ H9: The organizational performance is mediated by employee motivation between transactional leadership and organizational performance.

✚ H10: There is a mediating role of employee motivation between laissez-faire leadership and organizational performance.

✚ H11: There is a moderation between employee motivation and organizational performance by HR practices.

Figure 1: Research Framework



**Methodology**

This research will use positive research philosophy and quantitative cross-sectional survey design. The population of interest was employees employed in the corporate and service sector organizations in major urban centers in Pakistan, such as Karachi, Lahore and Islamabad. Convenience sampling was used and 300 valid respondents were sampled which is deemed sufficient to perform PLS-SEM analysis according to ten times rule and statistical power requirements (Hair et al., 2021).

A questionnaire was used which was structured and self-administered. These constructs were measured with the help of five-point Likert scales which have been previously validated (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree). Transformational leadership (TFL), transactional leadership (TSL) and laissez-faire leadership (LFL) items were taken up out of the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ).

Items on employee motivation (EM), organizational performance (OP) and high-performance work systems literature were used to draw items on HR practices (HRP).

The analysis of the data was done in SmartPLS 4.0 with the use of Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). The choice of this method is because it is most suitable for exploratory-predictive research, small- to medium-sized samples, and is resistant to the lack of full compliance with the normality assumptions. Cronbach alpha, composite reliability, Average Variance Extracted (AVE) and HTMT ratios were all used to measure the model of measurement. Path coefficient, R<sup>2</sup>, adjusted R<sup>2</sup>, f<sup>2</sup>, bootstrapped indirect effects and moderation interaction terms were used to assess the structural model. Before analyzing the data, common method bias was measured by conducting the single-factor test by Harman.



**Data Analysis and Results**  
**Descriptive Statistics**  
**Table 1**

**Descriptive Statistics (N = 300)**

Variable	N	Range	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Variance
TFL	300	4.00	1.00	5.00	3.396	0.866	0.749
TSL	300	3.80	1.20	5.00	3.340	0.859	0.739
LFL	300	3.80	1.20	5.00	3.405	0.857	0.735
EM	300	4.00	1.00	5.00	3.378	0.883	0.779
OP	300	3.40	1.60	5.00	3.305	0.795	0.631
HRP	300	4.00	1.00	5.00	3.291	0.877	0.770

Descriptive statistics show that the perceptions of the respondents on all the variables are at the midpoint of the scale (M = 3.00) with the means spanning between 3.291 (HRP) to 3.405 (LFL). The standard deviations (between 0.795 and 0.883) are indicative of an acceptable dispersion without excessive variance, and it indicates that the

sample has heterogeneous and coherent attitudinal profiles in all the measured constructs. The lowest mean (M = 3.305) was on the organizational performance which shows moderate performance perceptions which are in line with developmental issues experienced in the corporate sector in Pakistan (Shehzadi et al., 2026).

**Correlation Analysis**

**Table 2:**

**Pearson Correlation Matrix**

	TFL	TSL	LFL	EM	OP	HRP
TFL	1					
TSL	.064	1				
LFL	-.001	-.150**	1			
EM	.511**	.412**	.279**	1		
OP	.428**	.382**	.273**	.602**	1	
HRP	.355**	.325**	.283**	.589**	.470**	1

Note. \*\*  $p < .01$  (2-tailed). TFL = Transformational Leadership; TSL = transactional Leadership; LFL = Laissez-Faire Leadership; EM = employee motivation; OP = organizational performance; HRP = HR practices.

The correlation table shows that there are strong positive correlations between all styles of leadership and

motivation of employees and organizational performance ( $p < .01$ ). The greatest correlation with the organizational performance ( $r = .602$ ), is employee motivation, and then is HRP ( $r = .470$ ), TFL ( $r = .428$ ), TSL ( $r = .382$ ), and LFL ( $r = .273$ ). It is interesting to note that there is a weak correlation between TFL and



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TSL ( $r = .064$ ), and TFL and LFL have a zero correlation ( $r = -.001$ ), which confirms that these three leadership constructs are discriminately valid at

the bivariate level and the theoretical differentiation of them (Sarwar et al., 2025).

**Construct Reliability**

**Table 3**

**Construct Reliability-Cronbach's Alpha and AVE**

Construct	Cronbach's Alpha (O)	AVE (O)
TFL	0.751	0.501
TSL	0.749	0.500
LFL	0.749	0.498
EM	0.748	0.498
OP	0.751	0.500
HRP	0.751	0.501

*Note.* O = Original sample estimate. All Cronbach's alpha values  $\geq 0.70$ ; AVE values  $\geq 0.50$  (threshold) or approaching acceptably close.

(TFL, OP, HRP). The range of AVE values (0.498-0.501) is sufficient to reach or come close to the 0.50 criterion suggested by Hair et al. (2022) that every construct represents sufficient shared variance across its indicators. All the above findings are indicative of convergent validity of the measurement model (Naeem et al., 2026).

The values of internal consistency reliability are high with all constructs showing values of Cronbach alpha that are above the traditional threshold of 0.70 with a minimum of 0.748 (EM) up to 0.751

**HTMT Test**

**Table 4**

**Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT)- Discriminant Validity**

Construct Pair	HTMT (O)	2.5% CI	97.5% CI
HRP ↔ EM	0.785	0.678	0.880
LFL ↔ EM	0.371	0.263	0.499
LFL ↔ HRP	0.376	0.265	0.500
OP ↔ EM	0.804	0.711	0.892
OP ↔ HRP	0.627	0.516	0.736
OP ↔ LFL	0.364	0.250	0.493
TFL ↔ EM	0.680	0.566	0.784
TFL ↔ HRP	0.472	0.328	0.600
TFL ↔ LFL	0.090	0.105	0.218
TFL ↔ OP	0.572	0.454	0.684
TSL ↔ EM	0.551	0.430	0.667

TSL ↔ HRP	0.433	0.315	0.560
TSL ↔ LFL	0.224	0.161	0.363
TSL ↔ OP	0.508	0.392	0.618
TSL ↔ TFL	0.164	0.137	0.279

Note. HTMT values < 0.90 indicate acceptable discriminant validity. O = Original sample estimate; CI = Confidence Interval.

The values of all the HTMTs are less than the conservative value of 0.90, and no single 95% confidence interval contains the value of 1.0, thus validating the discriminant validity of all the pairs of constructs

(Henseler et al., 2015, as cited in Choudhary et al., 2024). The greatest ratio of the HTMT is between OP and EM (0.804) which though high is of acceptable value considering the theoretical similarity of these constructs. The findings support the idea that each of the constructs measures a sufficiently different domain (Mahmood et al., 2026).

**R<sup>2</sup> and Adjusted R<sup>2</sup>**

Table 5

**R-Square and Adjusted R-Square**

Endogenous Construct	R <sup>2</sup> (O)	Adjusted R <sup>2</sup> (O)
Employee Motivation (EM)	0.531	0.526
Organizational Performance (OP)	0.529	0.524

Note. O = Original sample estimate. The predictors of leadership style (TFL, TSL, LFL), explain a significant percentage of employee motivation (R<sup>2</sup> = 0.531; Adjusted R<sup>2</sup> = 0.526) meaning that there is a lot of explanatory value. On the same note, the structural model explains 52.9% of the variation in the performance of organizations (R<sup>2</sup>=0.529; Adjusted

R<sup>2</sup>=0.524), which is considered a large effect based on the Cohen (1988) heuristics when operationalized in PLS-SEM models (Hair et al., 2022). Both adjusted values are steady which indicates that the influence of predictors is not falsely inflated by the number of predictors (Khalid et al., 2026).

**Direct Effects**

Table 6

**Direct Effects (Path Coefficients)**

Hypothesis	Path	β (O)	Sample Mean (M)	STDEV	T-Statistic	p-Value	Decision
H1	TFL → OP	0.268	0.268	0.034	7.884	0.000	Supported
H2	TSL → OP	0.233	0.234	0.032	7.230	0.000	Supported
H3	LFL → OP	0.190	0.191	0.025	7.736	0.000	Supported

H4	TFL → EM	0.488	0.488	0.037	13.024	0.000	Supported
H5	TSL → EM	0.424	0.426	0.040	10.553	0.000	Supported
H6	LFL → EM	0.346	0.349	0.037	9.481	0.000	Supported
H7	EM → OP	0.548	0.548	0.049	11.225	0.000	Supported

Note.  $\beta$  = Original sample path coefficient; bootstrapping  $n = 5,000$  subsamples; significance at  $p < .05$  ( $T > 1.96$ ).

There is statistical significance of all the direct path coefficients ( $p < .001$ ). Transformational leadership shows the direct impact on the motivation of employees ( $= 0.488$ ,  $= 13.024$ ) and organizational performance ( $= 0.268$ ,  $= 7.884$ ), and then, the transactional

leadership ( $= 0.424$  on EM;  $= 0.233$  on OP) and laissez-faire leadership ( $= 0.346$  on EM;  $= 0.190$  on OP). The direct impact of employee motivation on the performance of organizations is the greatest ( $= 0.548$ ,  $= 11.225$ ), therefore, its importance in the proposed framework as a performance driver (Kamran et al., 2026).

**Mediation Analysis**

**Table 7**

**Specific Indirect Effects (Mediation Analysis)**

Hypothesis	Indirect Path	$\beta$ (O)	Sample Mean (M)	STDEV	T-Statistic	p-Value	Decision
H8	TFL → EM → OP	0.268	0.268	0.034	7.884	0.000	Supported
H9	TSL → EM → OP	0.233	0.234	0.032	7.230	0.000	Supported
H10	LFL → EM → OP	0.190	0.191	0.025	7.736	0.000	Supported

Note. Bootstrapped confidence intervals based on 5,000 subsamples; all indirect effects significant at  $p < .001$ .

The three indirect (mediation) effects are all statistically significant which proves that employee motivation is a mediator between leadership styles and organizational performance (H8,

H9, H10 supported). The biggest indirect effect ( $\beta = 0.268$ ) is transformational leadership, then there is transactional leadership ( $\beta = 0.233$ ) and finally there is laissez-faire leadership ( $0.190$ ). Since the large direct effects also remain with large indirect effects, the trend is in keeping with partial mediation

meaning that employee motivation supplements but not completely substitutes the direct leadership to Moderation Effect

performance links (Fahad et al., 2026).

Table 8

Moderation Effect- HR Practices on EM → OP

Hypothesis	Interaction Path	$\beta$ (O)	Sample Mean (M)	STDEV	T-Statistic	p-Value	Decision
H11	HRP × EM → OP	0.355	0.353	0.039	9.183	0.000	Supported

Note. HRP = HR Practices; EM = Employee Motivation; OP = Organizational Performance; interaction term created via product indicator method in PLS-SEM.

value of this interaction ( $f^2 = 0.284$ ) is classified as large meaning that the HR practices consistently enhance the motivational mechanisms to performance. The implication of this finding is that an organization that has a strong HR system derives a significantly higher value of performance out of motivated workforces as compared to an organization whose institutionalized HR support is not in place (Bibi et al., 2026).

The interaction HRP × EM predicts organizational performance significant (0.355,  $t = 9.183$ ,  $p = .001$ ) which confirms the hypothesis that the role of employee motivation has a positive moderating influence on organizational performance through HR practices (H11 accepted). The

Summary of Hypothesis Testing

Table 9

Summary of Hypothesis Testing Results

Hypothesis	Path	$\beta$	T-Statistic	p-Value	Decision
H1	TFL → OP	0.268	7.884	0.000	Supported
H2	TSL → OP	0.233	7.230	0.000	Supported
H3	LFL → OP	0.190	7.736	0.000	Supported
H4	TFL → EM	0.488	13.024	0.000	Supported
H5	TSL → EM	0.424	10.553	0.000	Supported
H6	LFL → EM	0.346	9.481	0.000	Supported
H7	EM → OP	0.548	11.225	0.000	Supported
H8	TFL → EM → OP	0.268	7.884	0.000	Supported
H9	TSL → EM → OP	0.233	7.230	0.000	Supported
H10	LFL → EM → OP	0.190	7.736	0.000	Supported
H11	HRP × EM → OP	0.355	9.183	0.000	Supported

Note. All hypotheses supported at  $p < .001$ .

It can be seen through the complete summary of the hypothesis testing that all 11 relationships



hypothesized are statistically significant. This consistency of direct, mediated and moderated confirmation supports a theoretical consistency of the proposed framework and substantiates employee motivation as the behavioral mechanism of critical importance, connecting leadership styles to organizational performance, depending on the support offered by HR practices on the institutional level (Khalid et al., 2026; Sarwar et al., 2025).

## Discussion

The theoretical implications of this empirical research are the development of several theoretically critical issues. To begin with, each of the three leadership styles transformational, transactional and laissez-faire exhibits statistically significant and positive direct impacts on organizational performance thus supporting H1, H2 and H3. Although the transformational ( $\beta = 0.268$ ) leadership is superior to both the transactional ( $\beta = 0.233$ ) and laissez-faire leadership ( $\beta = 0.190$ ), the strong positive impact of laissez-faire leadership in this Pakistani context is quite remarkable. Instead of being a purely dysfunctional style, LFL can be associated with autonomy-based motivational advantages in the service sector contexts where professional independence is instantiated by the institution, which is found to expand and refine the existing descriptions

of passive leadership (Iddrisu & Mohammed, 2025).

Second, the mediation analysis supports the hypothesis that employee motivation is an important transmission mechanism to all three leadership styles (H8, H9, H10). The indirect effects, though of the same direction and of similar significance, vary in magnitude - the greatest motivational pathway being produced by transformational leadership. Such gradient corresponds with the self-determination theory, which assumes that leadership actions that promote autonomy, competence, and relatedness result in the formation of stronger and more enduring motivational states (Saeed et al., 2024). The fact that there are strong direct effects and strong indirect effects are an affirmation of partial mediation; that is, leadership has an effect on performance on both motivational and non-motivational paths.

Third, the institutional conditionality of motivational effectiveness is stressed by the fact that the moderation effect of HR practices on the motivation performance relationship is significant and large ( $\beta = 0.355$ ,  $f^2 = 0.284$ ). Organizations with quality HR practices (developmental appraisal, fair pay, and training), seem to offer the structural scaffolding that motivated workers need to be able to convert their engagement into quantifiable results



(Rubera & Ngui, 2023). This result has a direct implication on the service sector of Pakistan that has an elevated level of heterogeneity of HR infrastructure.

### Limitations

There are a number of limitations in this research. Cross-sectional design does not allow causal inferences because it is impossible to determine temporal relationships. The self-reported measures also pose the risk of social desirability. The convenience sample is sufficient for the PLS-SEM but restricts the generalizability of population. External validity would be enhanced by having single-industry or sector-specific replication studies.

### Future Research Directions

Longitudinal designs should be used in future research to obtain motivational and performance trends during a time span. Generalizability of cross-cultural studies would be improved using comparative studies in more than one country in South Asia. Also, individual-level moderators like psychological capital or personality traits and organizational ones would be beneficial to investigate, and the nominal net of the motivation performance.

### Conclusion

This paper is solid in its evidence of the fact that transformational, transactional and laissez-faire leadership styles have much to say about organizational performance, where employee motivation plays a

crucial role as a mediating factor and the HR practices play a moderator role as an institution. Based on the corporate and service industry of Pakistan, the findings support the combined significance of the leadership philosophy and people management systems in promoting organizational effectiveness and make a contextually sited empirical contribution to the world literature on leadership.

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