

Leadership Styles and Their Influence on Employee Performance: Evidence from Nepalese Commercial Banks

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Abstract

This study aims to investigate the impact of leadership styles on employee performance within the Nepalese banking sector. Utilizing a quantitative research design, the study surveyed 400 employees from various commercial banks in Nepal. A structured questionnaire was employed to collect data, which was analyzed through descriptive and inferential statistics. The results shows that democratic leadership and commanding leadership have a positive and significant impact on the employee performance. On other hand, laissez-faire leadership has negative impacts on employee performance. This research contributes to the existing literature by providing empirical evidence between leadership styles and employee performance in the Nepalese banking context. It challenges previous findings that presented conflicting evidence regarding this relationship and offers a comprehensive framework for understanding how adaptive leadership can enhance organizational outcomes.

Keywords: Leadership styles, employee performance, democratic leadership, commanding leadership, laissez-faire leadership

Introduction

The recognition that the human capital is more important than the physical infrastructure or technology for the organization has made the Human Resource Management to be transferred from a traditional function to a strategic role within the organization (Sakiru et al., 2013). With such changes, leadership emerges as one of the factors that could affect the performance of the organization, specifically in the high-risk areas such as banking. The banking area itself is very sensitive and affects many aspects in

terms of how efficient the operations are, how satisfied the employees are and how effective the organization would be.

Nepal's financial sector as of Mid-July 2023, consist of 20 commercial banks, 17 development banks, 17 finance companies and 57 micro finance institution (NRB, 2023). This means, that this sector can be diversified and has the potential for a large growth if the appropriate methods are applied. That shows how important this sector in the economy, in term of developing the country. However, there is still a missing link between the leaders' approaches and how it affects the workers' productivity. Some studies addressed the topic in different ways but did not provide a clear answer to how the approach of the leader can affect the productivity and the overall performance of the organization.

Since the employees' performance not just about their productivity but also includes the motivation of the employees, the job satisfaction and the environment within the organization and how all that is related to the leadership approach. Research showed that the stress that comes from the working environment can lead to a drop in the level of performance because of low morale, less teamwork, high rate of absent staff and thus, leading to the decrease in the productivity (Koech & Namusonge, 2012). Also, it showed that the leadership is more than just managing people but also being able to transform them psychologically and strategically.

Multiple research demonstrated that the styles of leadership are very important and significant in all aspects. It is well known that the leadership can be the factor that determines whether the organization would be a success or a failure. This makes it the variable that is well studied in order to see its impact on the performance of the employees (Shafie et al., 2013) (Cummings & Schwab, 1973). In the Nepalese context, it is really important to explore how the leadership within the organization should work. A study showed that the employees' expectations and what they get from the training are well linked to their personal benefits and what motivate them (Pandey, 2008). This suggests that leaders need to be adapting and respond to what the employees need as individuals and as groups.

This research is looking to address the issue of the leadership style and its impact on the employees' productivity. This research problem rose after noticing that there is a drop in the staff performance, giving performance-based bonus for a small number of staff and the lack of studies that talk about the type of leadership that would suit this sector in Nepal. To address that, three types of leadership will be evaluated in this research: democratic, autocratic and free rein. The study will contribute in two areas, the theoretical part and the practical aspect. The theoretical contribution will lie in resolving the inconsistency of some previous findings about the relation between the types of leadership and the performance. The practical aspect will provide with some recommendations and feedback to be used in the banking leadership. This study does not only look at the benefit of the banking organization but also at the contribution this study would do for the whole economy in Nepal, considering the huge role the banks play in Nepal's economy. Overall, this research is aimed to bridge the gap and provide insights in how the type of leadership can be the effective one for the organization and the employees to achieve their goal.

Literature Review

Transactional Theory

The leadership theories, by the late 1970s and early 1980s, activated to diverge from the specific perspectives of the leader, leadership context and the follower and toward practices that concentrated further on the exchanges between the followers and leaders. The transactional leadership was described as that in which leader-follower associations were grounded upon a series of agreements between followers and leaders (House & Shamir, 1993). The transactional theory was based on reciprocity where leaders not only influence followers but are under their influence as well. Some studies revealed that transactional leadership show a discrepancy with regard to the level of leaders' action and the nature of the relations with the followers.

Bass and Avolio (1997) observed transactional leadership as a type of contingent-reward leadership that had active and positive exchange between leaders and followers whereby followers were rewarded or recognized for accomplishing agreed upon objectives. From the leader, these rewards might implicate gratitude for merit increases, bonuses and work achievement. For good work, positive support could be exchanged, merit pay for promotions, increased performance and cooperation for collegiality. The leaders could instead focus on errors, avoid responses and delay decisions. This attitude is stated as the "management-by-exception" and could be categorized as passive or active transactions. The difference between these two types of transactions is predicated on the timing of the leaders' involvement. In the active form, the leader continuously monitors performance and attempts to intervene proactively (Bass & Avolio, 1997).

Contingency Theory

The theories of contingency recommends that no leadership style is precise as a stand-alone as the leadership style used is reliant upon the factors such as the quality, situation of the followers or a number of other variables. According to this theory, there is no single right way to lead because the internal and external dimensions of the environment require the leader to adapt to that particular situation. In most cases, leaders do not change only the dynamics and environment, employees within the organization change. In a common sense, the theories of contingency are a category of behavioral theory that challenges that there is no one finest way of leading/organizing and that the style of leadership that is operative in some circumstances may not be effective in others (Greenleaf, 1997).

Contingency theorists assumed that the leader was the focus of leader-subordinate relationship; situational theorists opined that the subordinates played a pivotal role in defining the relationship. Though, the situational leadership stays to emphasis mostly upon the leader, it creates the significance of the focus into group dynamic. These studies of the relationships between groups and their leaders have led to some of our modern theories of group dynamics and leadership. The theory of situational leadership proposes that style of leadership should be accorded with the maturity of the subordinates. The situational leadership model, first introduced in 1969, theorized that there was no unsurpassed way to lead and those leaders, to be effective, must be able to adapt to the situation and transform their leadership style between task-oriented and relationship oriented.

Maina and Waithaka (2018) conducted a study on Organizational Leadership and Performance of Commercial Banks in Nyeri County, Kenya. The purpose of this study was to determine the effect of

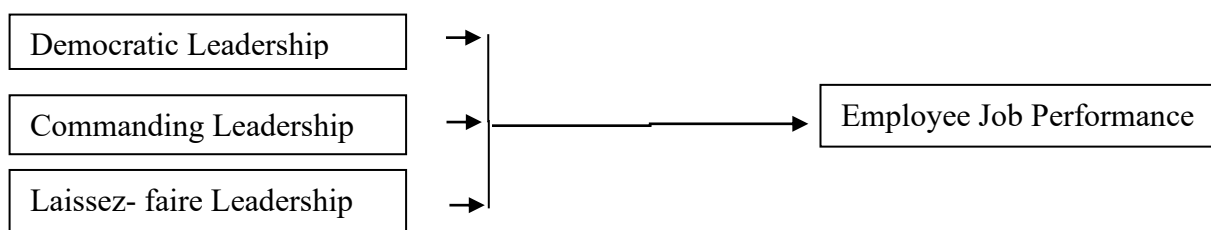
organizational leadership on performance of Commercial Banks in Nyeri County, Kenya. The study used census study approach which subjected all the 16 commercial banks in Nyeri County. The study specifically targeted Managers. Primary data was collected through questionnaires which was administered using the drop and pick method. Descriptive and inferential statistics was used to analyze data. The regression analysis indicated that a unit increase in leadership would increase performance by 0.598 units. In view of significance of organizational leadership at 5% level, organizational leadership significantly added up to performance ($P=0.002$). The findings of the study indicated that commercial bank leaders create a sense of urgency to reinforce the need for change. The findings of the study indicated that the commercial banks are led by a committed and greatly motivated class of leaders. The study also indicated that banks' leaders are competent and knowledgeable enough to drive change initiatives and that bank regularly conducts training and development programs to equip the work force to handle change initiatives and peer learning is encouraged in the organization as an important pillar to successful change introduction.

Samaitan (2016) analyzed the Leadership Styles and Performance of Commercial Banks in Kenya. The major objective of the study is to examine the impact of leadership style on organizational performance in commercial Banks in Kenya. Census survey sampling technique was adopted and relevant primary data was gathered with the aid of a structured questionnaire administered on respondents. Pearson correlation was used to examine the relationship between leadership style dimensions and organizational performance. Findings showed positive and negative correlation between leadership style and organizational performance. It was also found that leadership style behaviors jointly predict organizational performance. The study concluded that six leadership styles behaviors should be employed by the Banks' management in order to perform stronger in the competitive environment.

This leadership encourages innovation, team work, creativity and people are often being engaged in projects that lead to increased performance, job satisfaction and increased productivity (Kotter, 1988). Levine and Crom (1993) stated that democratic leaders make no suggestions, however they enquire the opinions of others. This leadership promotes all team members to participate to make final decision and develop entire process to reach their goals (Kothari, 2004). One of the major benefit of democratic leadership style is that the process facilitates in development of some additional leaders who can majorly serve the organization and have active involvement on the part of everyone in the team (Armstrong & Taylor, 2014). Democratic leaders encourage and invite team members to play a significant role in the final decision making process but the ultimate power relies in the hands of leaders and he/she guides the team on what to do, how to do, and employees communicate their suggestions, experience and recommendations (Kumar, 2005).

Figure 1

Effect of Leadership Style on Employee Job Performance



Hence, based on above theories and literature, research framework of this study has been developed by Democratic Leadership, Commanding Leadership and Laissez- faire Leadership as independent variables. Similarly Employee Performance is dependent variable. Thus, based on Kothari (2004), Kumar (2005) and Armstrong (2004) research the model can be adapted and developed.

Material and Methods

The study uses quantitative methods in the analysis of the data gathered. To achieve the objective of this study causal and descriptive research design has been used. The population of this study includes all the employees of Nepalese commercial banks. According to probability sampling 384 samples is required to analyze the data if total population is unknown. Based on Nunnally (1978), a Cronbach's alpha value of 0.70 or above is considered acceptable for the present research, as it meets the minimum reliability requirement for empirical social science studies. Thus on the basis of probability sampling sample size is determined by using following formula:

$$\text{Necessary Sample Size} = \frac{(Z\text{-score})^2 \times \text{StdDev} \times (1\text{-Std Dev})}{(\text{Margin of error})^2}$$

Here's a worked example, assuming the 95% confidence level, 0.5 standard deviation, and a margin of error (confidence interval) of +/- 5%.

$$\text{Sample Size} = \frac{((1.96)^2 \times .5(.5))}{(0.05)^2} = 384.16 \approx 384$$

384 respondents are needed for this study. Thus, 400 employees of Nepalese commercial banks were taken for sample. And judgment sampling method was used in this study. 400 questionnaires distributed to the respondents, and the response rate was 95%.

Model specification

The Impact of Leadership Styles on Organizational Performance:

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \beta_3 X_3 + \dots + \epsilon_i$$

Where, Y = Level of Employee Job Performance; β_0 = Constant parameter

$\beta_1, \beta_2, \beta_3$ and β_4 are the parameters to be estimated

X1 = Democratic Leadership

X2= Autocratic Leadership

X3= Laissez- faire Leadership

Presentation and Analysis

The overall characteristics of the 400 survey respondents demonstrate a wide distribution across several variables. The biggest age group was those 46 and over, accounting for 45% of the sample, followed by those 36-45 (33.3%), 25-35 (19.3%), and under 25 (2.5%).

Table 1

General Characteristics of the Respondents

Dimension	Frequency	Percent
Age of the Respondents (in years)		
Under 25	10	2.5
25-35	77	19.3
36-45	133	33.3
Above 46	180	45
Total	400	100
Gender of the Respondents		
Male	270	67.5
Female	130	32.5
Total	400	100
Present Position of the Respondents		
Assistant	128	32
Officer	221	55.3
Manager	51	12.8
Total	400	100
Working Experience of the Respondents		
Less than 1 year	20	5
1-3 years	153	38.3
3-5 years	168	42
More than 5 years	59	14.8
Total	400	100
Type of Employment		
Contract	28	7
Permanent	372	93
Total	400	100
Monthly Income of the Respondents		
Below 20,000	20	5
20,000-40,000	153	38.3
40,000-60,000	168	42
Above 60,000	59	14.8
Total	400	100
Qualification of the Respondents		
SLC	20	5
+2	153	38.3
Bachelor	168	42
Master	59	14.8
Total	400	100

Source: Field and Online Survey, 2025

The bulk of the participants were men (67.5%), with women accounting for 32.5%. Officers (55.3%), assistants (32%), and managers (12.8%) were the most common job titles among respondents. When it comes to job experience, the biggest group had 3-5 years (42%), followed by those with 1-3 years (38.3%), more than 5 years (14.8%), and less than one year (5%). The vast majority of responders (93%) were permanent workers, with just 7% on contract. Monthly income levels revealed that the majority of respondents earned between 20,000 and 60,000, with 42% earning 40,000-60,000 and 38.3% earning 20,000 to 40,000. In terms of educational credentials, the majority had a Bachelor's degree (42%), followed by those with a +2 qualification (38.3%), a Master's degree (14.8%), and SLC qualifications (5%).

Summary of all Variables

Table 2 presents a summary of the variables related to leadership styles and employee performance, with their corresponding means and standard deviations. The mean for commanding leadership and democratic leadership is both 3.62, indicating that respondents view these leadership styles similarly in terms of their effectiveness or prevalence, with a standard deviation of 0.67, showing moderate variation in the responses.

Table 2

Summary of all Variables

Statements	Mean		Std. Deviation
	Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic
Commanding Leadership	3.62	0.03	0.67
Democratic Leadership	3.62	0.03	0.67
Laissez- faire Leadership	3.16	0.03	0.58
Employee Performance	3.87	0.03	0.61
Valid N (listwise)	400		

Source: Field and Online Survey, 2025

Laissez-faire leadership has a slightly lower mean of 3.16, suggesting it is perceived less favorably compared to the other two leadership styles, with a standard deviation of 0.58, indicating a relatively lower variation in responses. Employee performance received a higher mean score of 3.87, implying a more positive perception of employee performance in the context of the survey, with a standard deviation of 0.61. All the variables were assessed by 400 valid responses.

Correlation Analysis

Correlation is the degree of correspondence between variables. This implies the relationship is mutual or reciprocating, but the correlation does not make any proposition that one thing is the cause and the other the effect.

Table 3

Karl Pearson's correlation coefficient

		Employee Performance	Commanding Leadership	Democratic Leadership	Laissez- faire Leadership
Employee Performance	Pearson Correlation	1	.510**	.136**	.337**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0	0.006	0
	N	400	400	400	400

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

Table 3 shows the relationship between level employee performance and democratic leadership, commanding leadership and laissez- faire leadership where by the respondents N is 400 and the significant level is 0.01. According to the correlation, the range of the output is between -1 to 1. A positive value indicates that the variables are positively related while a negative value indicates that the variables are negatively related. There is significant positive relation democratic leadership style (r=.136, sig= .006), commanding leadership style (r=.510, sig= .000) and laissez- faire leadership style (r=.337, sig= .000) with employee performance. Table intended to determine the correlation between factors of effective leadership style as implemented by all the three styles of leadership variables with employee performance. The findings have suggested that there was a strong correlation between the leadership style and employee performance.

Regression Analysis

Table 4

Results of Multiple Regressions between the Effect of Leadership Styles Variables and Employee Performance

	Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	39.929	3	13.31	48.738	.000 ^b
	Residual	108.143	396	0.273		
	Total	148.072	399			

a. Dependent Variable: Employee Performance

b. Predictors: (Constant), Laissez- faire Leadership, Commanding Leadership , Democratic Leadership
 Table 4 predicting the effect of independent factor (i.e. democratic leadership, commanding leadership and laissez- faire leadership styles) on level of employee performance had a regression value of 39.929, while residual value of 108.143. The F-test, F (3, 399) =48.738. The study established a significant value of p=0.000<0.05 showing a statistical significance relationship.

Table 5

Results of Multiple Regressions between the Combined Effect of Leadership Styles Variables and Employee Performance Indicator

Model	r	r Square	Adjusted r Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.519 ^a	0.27	0.264	0.52258

a. Predictors: (Constant), Laissez- faire Leadership, Commanding Leadership , Democratic Leadership

Table 5 shows that the R-squared statistics and the adjusted-R squared statistics of the model were 27% and 26.4% respectively. The result indicates that the changes in the independent variables explain 26.4% of the changes in the dependent variable. That is democratic leadership, commanding leadership and laissez- faire leadership styles 26.4% of the changes in employee performance.

Table 6

Regression Coefficients of the Relationship between Employee Performance and the Leadership Styles (Predictive Variables)

Model	Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	Beta		
(Constant)		11.89	0.000
Democratic Leadership	0.473	9.195	0.000
Commanding Leadership	0.112	2.241	0.026
Laissez- faire Leadership	-0.12	-2.694	0.007

a. Dependent Variable: Employee Performance

Table 6 analysis, the co-efficient value for commanding leadership style is 0.112. This means that all things being equal, when the other independent variables (democratic leadership and laissez- faire leadership styles) are held constant, employee performance increases by 11.2% if there is 100% improvement in the commanding leadership style. This was statistically significant ($0.026 < 0.05$) i.e. the variable (commanding leadership style) is making significant unique contribution to the prediction of the dependent variable (employee performance).

From the analysis, the co-efficient value for democratic leadership styles is 0.473. This means that all things being equal, when the other independent variables (commanding leadership and laissez- faire leadership styles) are held constant, employee performance increase by 47.3% if there is 100% improvement in democratic leadership styles. This is statistically significant ($0.00 < 0.05$) i.e. the variable (democratic leadership styles) is making a significant unique contribution to the prediction of the dependent variable (employee performance).

The co-efficient value for laissez- faire leadership styles was -0.12. This means that all things being equal, when the other independent variables (democratic leadership and commanding leadership styles) are held constant, employee performance increase by -12% if there is 100% improvement in laissez- faire leadership styles. This is statistically significant ($0.007 < 0.05$) i.e. the variable (laissez- faire leadership styles) is not making any unique contribution to the prediction of the dependent variable (employee performance).

Discussion

This study has been concentrated on leadership styles and its impact on employee performance. The study revealed a significant positive relationship between democratic, commanding, and laissez-faire leadership styles and employee performance, indicating that these styles contribute to higher employee performance. Unlike some previous studies, yours did not find any significant negative impact of leadership styles on employee performance. Additionally, the laissez-faire leadership style was not found to have a significant unique contribution to predicting employee performance.

Comparing your findings with previous studies, there are both similarities and differences. Similar to Anyango (2015), your study found that transformational and transactional leadership styles positively impact employee performance, which aligns with your results for democratic and commanding leadership styles. Similarly, Chua, Basit, and Hassan (2018) found that autocratic and democratic leadership styles positively impacted employee performance, consistent with your findings regarding democratic leadership. Omamo and Emanuel (2018) also reported a positive and significant effect of individualized consideration (a component of transformational leadership) on staff performance, which is similar to your findings on democratic leadership.

However, contrary to Thamrin (2012), who reported a negative relationship between democratic leadership styles and autocratic leadership style with employee job performance, your study found positive impacts for democratic and commanding leadership styles. Mwombeki (2017) found a weak positive relationship between autocratic leadership style and laissez-faire leadership style, which differs from your study's findings on laissez-faire leadership. Kariuki and Omar (2018) determined that transactional leadership style was dominant, whereas your study did not find a significant unique contribution of laissez-faire leadership style to employee performance.

The research told that there is significant positive relation between democratic leadership style, commanding leadership style and laissez-faire leadership style with employee performance. In the same way the study intended to determine the correlation between factors of effective leadership style as implemented by all the three styles of leadership variables i.e. democratic leadership style, commanding leadership style and laissez-faire leadership style with employee performance. From the regression analysis in this research democratic leadership style and commanding leadership style were making positive significant relationship with employee performance, but laissez-faire leadership style had making negative relationship with dependent variable (i.e. employee performance).

Conclusion, policy implications, and limitations

The research focused on analyzing how democratic, commanding, and laissez-faire leadership styles influence employee performance within Nepalese commercial banks. The research demonstrated a notable positive correlation between these leadership styles and employee performance, with democratic and commanding leadership styles exerting a more substantial influence than laissez-faire leadership.

The findings of this study highlighted that effective leadership, particularly democratic and commanding leadership styles, is important for improving employee performance. Active and engaged leadership styles have more significant impacts on employee performance than laissez-faire leadership style which is characterized by a passive and hands-off approach. Therefore, it is advisable that

Nepalese commercial banks need to consider democratic and commanding leadership styles to enhance performance and minimize the laissez-faire leadership style. Additionally, the research suggests that to be successful and competitive, banks need to recognize the importance of leadership at each level of the organization for the ongoing success of the business. There is no doubt that this study provides some important insights about the relationship between leadership styles and employee performance.

The study also suggests that further studies are needed to validate the findings and to broaden the scope of the study. For instance, this study focused only on commercial banks and thus, it is advisable for future research to consider other financial institutions and business organizations to examine if similar patterns are observed across different industries. In addition, future research could investigate the psychological dimensions of leadership styles and their effects on employee performance and why leadership is practiced in certain ways. Given the broad and complex nature of the topic, a meta-analysis of existing research could provide a deeper insight into the relationship between leadership styles and employee performance across different sectors.

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