



PRIMARY RESEARCH

Impact of autocratic and democratic leadership styles on employees' performance and motivation

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Abstract

The efficacy of autocratic and democratic leadership styles has been investigated on the performance and motivation of employees, predominantly in the context of the society of Pakistan. Quantitative survey technique has been used in the current research. Primary data has been collected from a diverse sample ($N=192$) of employees from various organizations in Pakistan (both public and private), which supported the hypotheses. The study is causal and has been conducted to investigate the causal effects of autocratic and democratic leadership styles on the performance and motivation of employees. Pearson correlation (zero-order bivariate correlations) was calculated between autocratic and democratic leadership styles and employees' performance and motivation. Moreover, regression analysis was carried out to test all the hypotheses. Additional variance of each outcome was also observed. The results indicate that the democratic leadership style is positively related to the performance and motivation of employees. Efforts have been made so that my current research can act as an aid for practitioners; to adopt suitable leadership styles at their place of work. This research provides clear guidance to the managers that an authoritative leadership style will create a sense of contemptuousness in the subordinates, which is not appropriate to achieve optimal performance from juniors, in today's environment. Hence, instead of intimidating the subordinates, managers of today need to motivate and encourage their under-command staff, behave in more interactive, helpful, and friendly way, and allow empowerment for problem solving.

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INTRODUCTION

Leadership is a critical factor in any organization, which acts as a main driving force for the subordinates to perform in the right direction and achieve desired objectives. Cuban (1988) has stated that "Leaders are people who shape the goals, motivations, and actions of others. Frequently they initiate change to reach existing and new goals" (Page 21). Leadership style influences the quality of work in any organization, as dynamic leadership behavior results in positive work outcomes, while poor leadership behavior leads to negative work outcomes (Ali, Jangga, Ismail, Kamal, & Ali, 2015). Several leadership styles have been identified by managers which can help the subordinates to grow and it is expected that leaders must possess good attributes to achieve desirable results (Kanwal, Lodhi, &

Kashif, 2019). Previous studies have indicated that the most significant factor in shaping up behaviors of employees is the leadership style, which may lead to a positive attitude or disappointment (Puni, Ofei, & Okoe, 2014). Few researchers consider that understanding the needs of subordinates is a major positive leadership trait to improve their efficiency because, in this case, subordinates are likely to share their problems with their managers without any hesitation (Purwanto, Wijayanti, Hyun, & Asbari, 2019). The effectiveness of these leadership styles may vary from culture to culture, i.e., one leadership style may be effective in one culture. At the same time, the other may be appropriate for another culture (N. Iqbal, Anwar, & Haider, 2015). It is presumed that leadership; has also been linked with social concerns; to accomplish organizational objectives, i.e., the

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interaction between leaders and followers.

[Gandolfi and Stone \(2017\)](#) state that numerous leadership styles exist in organizations. Few researchers think that autocratic and democratic are the most common leadership styles ([Bhatti, Maitlo, Shaikh, Hashmi, & Shaikh, 2012](#)). Few prior pieces of research have revealed that autocratic leaders exercise complete authority over their subordinates, which is widely applied in various contexts, including the military ([Zheng, Graham, Farh, & Huang, 2021](#)). In contrast to the autocratic leadership style, [Chukwusa \(2019\)](#) has mentioned that the democratic leadership style involves the participation of subordinates in the decision-making process, and such managers encourage them to contribute to set objectives and share their ideas for solutions to the problems. As per [Gastil \(1994\)](#), such managers, instead of giving detailed instructions or exercising unnecessary control over subordinates, give them the initiative to plan their work activities; hence, they can carry out effective teamwork. My research is based on McGregor's theory Y, which states that employees become more productive when responsibility is delegated to them and they are trusted more by their supervisor ([Hasan, 2015](#)). Moreover, workers are willing to accept responsibility willingly. Hence, they do not require constant supervision in the performance of their tasks ([Aithal & Kumar, 2016a](#)).

A number of researches have been conducted in the past on the analysis of different leadership styles to investigate their usefulness as well as destructive impacts; on employee's performance and motivation (e.g., ([Fiaz, Su, Ikram, & Saqib, 2017](#))). However, since a high-power distance society exists in Pakistan ([S. Iqbal & Rasheed, 2019](#)), which is also lowest in assertiveness, and gender egalitarianism ([Nadeem & de Luque, 2020](#)). Therefore, those research may only be somewhat viable for an underdeveloped country like Pakistan (in the eastern cultural context) due to our different socioeconomic and cultural environments ([Veliu, Manxhari, Demiri, & Jahaj, 2017](#)).

Based on the gaps identified above, current research is focused on drawing a comparison between the efficacy of autocratic and democratic leadership styles on employee performance and motivation, particularly in the setting of Pakistan. Here, I would review which leadership style (autocratic or democratic) is more suitable to be adopted at workplace environments; in the context of our norms and attitudes in society. Since effective leadership is dispositional and situation-oriented ([Vroom & Jago, 2007](#)); therefore, both autocratic and democratic styles can positively or negatively impact the performance and motivation of subordinates. Efforts have been made to investigate the effects

of these leadership styles on the efficiency of the subordinates and their spirit to work as a team. I would also prefer viable suggestions and recommendations to help managers (at various tiers) to decide about the leadership style to be adopted; because of the dictates of the situation. It is expected that my current research will be able to aid practitioners in exercising the most suited leadership style in the context of managerial roles.

THEORY AND HYPOTHESIS

Autocratic Leadership Style and Employees' Performance

[Demirtas and Karaca \(2020\)](#) have defined autocratic leadership; "A style of management in which the central authority is strong, decisions are taken without questioning, and subordinates are motivated by threats, punishments, and awards" (Page 296). [Choi \(2007\)](#) referred to autocratic leaders as authoritarian leaders. Such leaders believe in power centralization; hence, they make decisions single-handedly, make plans on their own, and tell their subordinates not even what to do; but rather also explain to them how to do it ([Wachira, Gitumu, & Mbugua, 2017](#)). As described by some scholars that autocratic leaders do not trust their subordinates and ponder that only rewards can motivate them in reciprocation of their attitudes; thus, subordinates have no loyalty to them and are always waiting for the moment once such leaders fail and are removed from their posts ([Veliu et al., 2017](#)). As quoted by [Sonnentag \(2002\)](#), "Performance is what the organization hires one to do and do well" (Page 5). The performance of employees is indicated by the efficient completion of the assigned tasks, their loyalty towards the outfit, and a sense of honesty or obedience towards the leader ([Chandra et al., 2016](#)). Few researchers have described that insufficient time-related binding for accomplishing a particular task causes work stress and harm job performance ([Bouckenoghe, Raja, Butt, Abbas, & Bilgrami, 2017](#)). Consequently, it is vital for the staff to complete their duties efficiently and on time and implement the instructions; otherwise, there would be a negative impact on organizational outcomes ([Veale, 2010](#)). Some experts concluded in their research that though autocratic leadership; is usually considered inapt, yet, the perception of people can change because of capabilities like strength and certainty, which has far-reaching positive effects on organizational performance, particularly in times of economic and social uncertainty ([Rast III, Hogg, & Giessner, 2013](#)). [Afsar \(2014\)](#) mentioned that authoritarian leaders may create fear amongst the subordinates, reducing the actual brain's potential, thereby drifting away from organiza-

tional commitments. Subordinates are likely to react negatively to the intimidating behaviors of antagonistic managers, which will hinder optimum output (Mohamme et al., 2014). In light of the facts mentioned above, I have made my following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1: Autocratic leadership has a negative impact on employees' performance.

Autocratic Leadership Style and Motivation

Somnai (2014) have defined motivation as: "Motivation refers to the process by which a person's efforts are energized, directed, and sustained toward attaining a goal" (Page 274). Motivation is considered a distinguishing characteristic that helps individuals to learn, acquire or apply skills and achieve their objectives, which are important for organizational success (Sousa & Rocha, 2019). In view of the global dynamic working environment, staff needs to be inspired and motivated so that they develop loyalty with the organization to achieve desired results (Veliu et al., 2017). Fairholm (2002) deliberates that being an authoritarian leader is invalid in the current supportive work environment of the organizations. Moreover, being rigid in their approach, autocratic supervisors never encourage initiative, participation, or suggestions from their staff, thereby negatively affecting their morale (N. Iqbal et al., 2015). Such leaders think that can motivate employees by offering monetary incentives (Fiaz et al., 2017). Few investigators claim that such managers exercise command over their subordinates with a set of rewards and punishments, do not feel like motivating them, and at the same time ask for the assigned task to be completed promptly (Mirayani, Kusumaningsih, Mustikasiwi, & Purwanto, 2019). Concerning the turnout of corporations, Afsar (2014) describes that coercive or intimidating behaviors of authoritative managers may make the employees feel disinterested; therefore, the organization may lose some capable employees. Based on facts as mentioned above, I have made my following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 2: Autocratic leadership has a negative impact on employees' motivation.

Democratic Leadership Style and Employees' Performance

Democratic leadership is defined as: "The leadership in which ideas are freely expressed and openly discussed and thus defines a collective style of leadership" (Page 313) (Demirtas & Karaca, 2020). Leaders must create an environment where they empower and encourage their subordinates to perform their work (Jimoh, Olayide, & Saheed,

2012). Democratic leaders trust their staff's capabilities and give them full initiative (Harris & Chapman, 2004). Democratic leaders believe in theory Y, which describes that people are naturally responsible, dependable, enthusiastic, and enjoy work (Aithal & Kumar, 2016b). Therefore, such managers are more interactive, helpful, friendly and encourage the input from team members (Fiaz et al., 2017). Subordinates under democratic top-managers respect orders more seriously, accept responsibilities willingly and put in their maximum efforts to achieve organizational objectives (Wu, Fey, & Tsai, 2006). However, some researchers have highlighted that though the democratic form of leadership; seems quite appealing mainly due to the contribution of versatile ideas by the staff; however, there may be a delay in the outcome owing to extraordinary delay in decision-making process (Jony, Alam, Amin, & Jahangir, 2019). As per Al-Malki, Juan, et al. (2018), organizational excellence is solely linked with the job performance of employees, which is possible only and only if a facilitating leader reduces job stresses, clearly defines responsibilities, and instills team spirit among their under command. Femi (2014) determined that those leaders who encourage effective (two-way) communication with their juniors implant commitment in them, which ultimately leads to enhancing their performance. Apropos, I have made my following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 3: Democratic leadership has a positive impact on employees' performance.

Democratic Leadership Style and Motivation

Leadership is truly effective only if it intensifies subordinates' motivation (Gandolfi & Stone, 2017). The study by Femi (2014) indicates that an effective leader in a present-day environment should have cordial relations with subordinates; hence, individuals working under democratic leadership do not face job stress, thereby creating a sense of participation and motivation. Nevertheless, some experts with different views have indicated that, as per general perception, the democratic leadership style is characterized by a positive impact on employees' motivation. Still, real world's bureaucratic environment hardly allows any such initiative (Fiaz et al., 2017). In the opinion of Choi (2007), democratic leaders do not make decisions in isolation; hence, such leadership is related to a high degree of enthusiasm among their under-commands. Based on the above-mentioned facts, I have made my following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 4: Democratic leadership has a positive impact on employees' motivation.

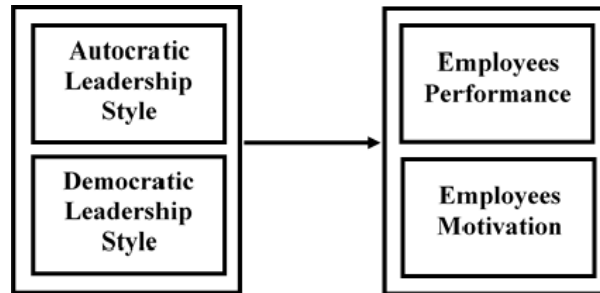


FIGURE 1. Theoretical framework

METHODS

Sample and Data Collection Procedures

Data in the research has primarily been collected from both categories of organizations, i.e., public and private. Though, there are numerous differences in both types of organizations, i.e., in terms of sizes, objectives, scopes, the context of work, competence or initiative of the managers, as well as capabilities or attitudes of the employees. However, managers at all tiers mostly possess either of the leadership styles which have been selected as IVs. Primary data has been used in the research, which was gathered from online and field surveys. For the acquisition of data, I mainly resorted to those Rawalpindi/Islamabad (two main cities of Pakistan) based organizations, which gave access to the response of their employees. Moreover, managers working at different tiers and various fractions of employees had been probed; thus, incorporating such diversity in the research has increased our confidence in the credibility and reliability of our findings.

Participation was voluntary. All the participants were intimated about the purpose of the study and were assured of the confidentiality of their feedback. Furthermore, respondents could withdraw from the research at any time. Both leaders and under command had no access to each other's feedback. I harmonized the responses of the managers and subordinates. A total of 100 questionnaires were disseminated to all possible participants. Later, I received a total of 45 responses (response rate 45%). As far as the online survey is concerned, I received feedback from 147 individuals. Hence, total feedback came from 192 individuals. The mean age of participants was 35.29 years (SD 10.72). Of all participants, 21.1% were females (11.2 % did not share their gender in online survey). Moreover, 45.2 % of whole participants belonged to private organizations as compared to 38.6 % from public organizations (16.2% of participants did not disclose about the type of their organizations).

Some researchers state that the five-times thumb rule may be used to calculate sample size, as per which "minimum sample size for any research is sufficient if the number of

all questionnaires items are multiplied by 5" (Sheikh, Ali, & Soomro, 2020). In the current research total number of items in questionnaires is 31; hence, as per the Five-times thumb rule ($31 \times 5 = 155$), the minimum required sample size is 155, and the sample size of the current research $N=188$ is sufficient to carry out statistical analysis.

Measures

An English questionnaire was prepared, comprising a total of 31 items. In response, as far as public organizations are concerned, I tried my best to mainly target administrators or administration staff. In the private sector, I surveyed Top HR managers and the varied levels of staff. Response scale was used as 1 = 'strongly disagree', 2 = 'disagree', 3 = 'neutral', 4 = 'agree' and 5 = 'strongly agree'

Autocratic Leadership Style

A 7 items scale, chosen by Cheng, Chou, Wu, Huang, and Farh (2004), was used to measure the attributes of autocratic leadership style. Respondents stated how they feel about different personality traits of an autocratic leader (e.g., forcing his opinion on others and dominating the subordinates, etc.). Example item includes the following: To what extent do you feel that "Your supervisor behaves in a commanding fashion in front of employees"? Cronbach's α coefficient for autocratic leaders came to 0.87.

Democratic Leadership Style

A 5 items scale has been utilized from the research of Mathieu, Ahearne, and Taylor (2007). Respondents mentioned how they sense about different personality attributes of a democratic leader (e.g., incorporating staff in decision-making and facilitation in the accomplishment of goals, etc.). Example item includes the following: To what extent do you feel that "Your supervisor fosters participation in decision making?". Cronbach's α coefficient for democratic leaders came to 0.80.

Employees' Performance

A 7 items scale has been applied from the research of Fields (2002). Respondents replied about how they feel about the

performance of their subordinates (e.g., the performance of tasks expected out of an under-command, etc.). Example items include the following: To what extent do you feel that “You fulfill your responsibilities, specified in the job description” and “Do you meet formal performance requirements of the job.” Cronbach’s α coefficient for the performance of employees came to 0.72.

Employees’ Motivation

A 12 items scale of Van Yperen and Hagedoorn (2003) has been used in the research. Respondents explained how they feel about motivation among their employees (e.g., feeling pleasure in tasks due to learning or doing new things on the job, etc.). Example item includes the following: To what extent do you feel that “You do the job for the intense pleasure you feel while you are doing the tasks that you like.” Cronbach’s α coefficient for the motivation of employees came to 0.94.

RESULTS

Table 1 displays the means, standard deviations, bivariate correlations, and reliability estimates (Cronbach’s alpha). Zero-order bivariate correlations between autocratic leadership style and democratic leadership style with employees’ performance and motivation were not exactly as hypothesized. Democratic leadership style has been found to be positively related to employees’ performance ($r = .371, p < .01$) as well as employees’ motivation ($r = .299, p < .01$), as expected. In contrast, the autocratic leadership style was found to be positively related to employees’ motivation, ($r = .015, p > .05$) and negatively related to employees’ performance ($r = -.020, p > .05$); but both these relationships are insignificant. Therefore, the autocratic leadership style has no relationship with employees’ performance and motivation. These results render support to hypothesis 3 and hypothesis 4 only.

TABLE 1. Means, standard deviations, correlations, and reliabilities

	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Age	35.29	10.72	-						
2. Gender	-	-	-.31**	-					
3. Organization Type	-	-	-.27**	.26**	-				
4. Autocratic Leadership Style	3.10	.88	-.02	-.19**	-.24**	(.87)			
5. Democratic Leadership Style	3.71	.70	.03	.02	-.03	-.12	(.80)		
6. Employees’ Performance	3.98	.54	.09	.04	.03	-.02	.37**	(.72)	
7. Employees’ Motivation	3.87	.73	-.09	.12	.10	.01	.29**	.46**	(.94)

Note. $N = 192$; Cronbach’s alphas presented in parenthesis; for organizational type, 1 = “Public” and 2 = “Private”; gender was coded as “1” for males and “2” for females. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

Multiple regression analysis was used to test all the hypotheses. In the first step, age, gender, and organization type (control variables) were entered, followed by the IVs. Table 2 signifies the regression results for the effect of autocratic and democratic leadership styles on employees’ performance and motivation, respectively. The results have revealed that democratic leadership style was positively related to both employees’ performance ($\beta = .37, p < .001$; $\Delta R^2 = .13, p < .001$) and employees’ motivation ($\beta = .30, p < .001$; $\Delta R^2 = .09, p < .001$). Moreover, the democratic leader-

ship style explained 13.9% additional variance in employees’ performance and 9.2% additional variance in employees’ motivation. In contrast, the autocratic leadership style was positively related to both; employees’ performance ($\beta = .02, p > .05$; $\Delta R^2 = .13, p > .05$) and employees’ motivation. ($\beta = .05, p > .05$; $\Delta R^2 = .09, p > .05$); however, both these relationships are insignificant. Thus, the autocratic leadership style has no relationship with employees’ performance and motivation.

TABLE 2. Regression results for autocratic and democratic leadership style with employees' performance and motivation

	Employees' Performance		Employees' Motivation	
	β	ΔR^2	β	ΔR^2
Step 1				
Age	.08		-.05	
Gender	.08		.09	
Organization type	.03	.01	.06	.02
Step 2				
Autocratic Leadership Style	.02	.13	.05	.09
Democratic Leadership Style	.37**	.13**	.30**	.09**

Note. $N = 192$; Standardized Coefficients are reported; for organizational type, 1 = "Public" and 2 = "Private"; gender was coded as "1" for males and "2" for females. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Summary

This research has been carried out to ascertain suitable leadership style in Pakistan's context for positive outcomes for employees, as well as enhancement of their morale at the workplace, either in a dictatorial way or in a democratic way.

Discussion

The results have revealed that the autocratic leadership style was positively related to employees' performance and motivation; however, both these relationships are insignificant. Thus, the autocratic leadership style has no relationship with employees' performance and motivation. Therefore, hypothesis 1 and hypothesis 2 did not get support from the results of this investigation.

In contrast, the democratic leadership style was positively related to employee performance and motivation. Therefore, hypothesis 3 and hypothesis 4 get support from the results of this investigation and are accepted. These results are in line with some researchers who concluded in their research that the democratic leadership styles will enhance morale of employees; hence, their voluntary behavior will improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the organization (Fiaz et al., 2017). Similarly, my results are in consonance with the researchers who concluded that the democratic leadership style improves organizational culture and significantly affects employee performance (Diana, Supriyanto, Ekowati, & Ertanto, 2021).

Contribution to Scholarship

In the results, it emerged that if a supervisor possesses traits like nurturing their staff in decision making, facilitating them for goal accomplishment, and offering them the initiative in their tasks, it will boost the morale of the subordinates. Moreover, the productivity of staff would also be increased.

Implications for Managers

Employees have the role of backbone in any organization, whether public or private; hence, it necessitates the dire need for such managers who can motivate them to get desired efficient results in routine tasks (Voon, Lo, Ngui, & Ayob, 2011). The results of this research provide managers with clear guidance that the democratic leadership style is more effective than the autocratic leadership style in achieving optimal performance from juniors in today's environment. However, the present research findings are valid in the Pakistani context only.

Limitations of the Study and Recommendation for Future Research

No research exists without limitations; likewise, the current research has numerous limitations. Firstly, the mustering data from field surveys was a challenging task in 3rd wave of the COVID-19 environment in Pakistan; hence, I mainly had to rely on online surveys. Secondly, due to time limitations, it took a lot of work to purely get feedback about the performance and motivation of employees from the same managers for whom the pattern of leadership; was described by their employees. In the future, research may be carried out so that feedback about supervisors may be sought from employees, and feedback

regarding the same employees may be sought only from the same supervisors. Thirdly, 2 reverse items were included in the questionnaire about employees' performance to intensify the investigation's validity; even then, exaggeration of own performance by employees cannot be ruled out. Fourth, though, the Five-times thumb rule (Sheikh et al., 2020) has been used to ensure the sufficient sample size necessary for statistical analysis. However, sample size 192 does not fully represent the entire population of Pakistan, whereas this research generalizes its findings to the entire population of Pakistan. Besides this, various cultures exist within Pakistan (Khatoon, Rehman, & Ajmal, 2011); therefore, to be more dynamic, future research may be conducted, keeping in view different cultural, ethnic, social, and linguistic groups, as per demographic regions of Pakistan.

Conclusion

The manager's leadership style and professional competence have a direct impact on the performance of the organization and the employees working in that organization. To achieve organizational goals, managers are required to inspire and motivate their apprentices to improve their performance by timely accomplishing assigned tasks and working as a team. Self-actualization and initiative exist in a motivated employee compared to the un-motivated one. Such person accept responsibilities voluntarily, which directly affects their productivity. It is obvious from the results that being an authoritarian leader is invalid in the organizations' current supportive work atmosphere, thereby negatively affecting their morale and performance. In a global dynamic working environment, there is a requirement to inspire and motivate the subordinates to develop loyalty to the organization to achieve desired results. Hence, the efficiency of employees is increased under a democratic leadership style; therefore, it has a favorable impact on organizational performance.

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