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MEDIATING ROLE OF TRUST IN LINKING TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP STYLE AND NURSES' PERFORMANCE

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KEYWORDS	ABSTRACT
Transformational leadership Style, Trust, Nurses, Performance, Social Exchange Theory, Hospitals, Saudi Arabia	This study aimed at investigating indirect effect of trust between leadership style and nurses performance. Population of this study was nurses working in the Qassim province in public and private sector hospitals and primary health care centers. Non-probability convenience sampling technique was used to select sample. Total 100 completed questionnaires were received and used in statistical analysis. Reliability analysis found that questionnaires used in the study were found reliable. Moreover, trust partially mediated between idealized influence behavior attribute of the leadership while fully mediated between other attributes of the transformational leadership and nurses' performance. It is concluded that leadership in hospitals & primary health care centers should create strong bond with nurses and win their trust to boost nurses' performance. It is imperious for hospital management to develop better relationship to brings better outcomes. Therefore health practitioners take benefits from this study finding. The trusted leaders' have high leadership effectiveness and they retain the productive workforce. It is recommended for the future studies to use other leadership styles as the predicting variable such as servant leadership, distributed and Ihsan based leadership styles.
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INTRODUCTION

Nurses are one of the integral parts of health sector. Developing and developed national both are facing many challenges related to nursing profession specially shortage of nurses (Mushtaq, Hussain, Kousar, 2021). In the Saudi Arabia, availability of nurses in healthcare organizations is not sufficient. Therefore, nurses worked in stressful environment (Albejaidi, Kundi, & Mughal, 2020). To deliver the quality services is main aim of health sector and for this purpose nurses' performance should be better and this only possible if hospital management create strong bond with nurses upon basis of trust (Galanis, Vraka, Fragkou, Bilali, Kaitalidou, 2021). Thus, social

exchange theory is supposed to explain positive exchange relationship between leadership and nurses. The study conducted by [Iqbal, Fatima and Naveed \(2020\)](#) stated that so as to enhance performance of nurses increase in salary and promotion is passing tactic but acknowledgement and recognition is mandatory which is non-monetary factor to enhance nurses' performance ([Khan, Busari & Abdullah, 2019](#)). The leadership is found to have positive effect on motivating, stimulating the nurses in health sector to improve the quality of their services and performance level.

Transformational leadership has emerged as most influential and effective style to foster high performance among nurses. This is a process in which leader and followers backup each other to high level of motivation and morality ([Ahmad, Ambad & Mohd, 2021](#)). The transformational leaders send salient messages to their nurses and shed light upon significance of tasks and ask them to put efforts to obtain objectives. The transformational leaders inspired their followers through their attitude and behavior ([Hasan, Islam & Chowdhury, 2020](#)). One of the main aims of the hospital leadership is to create a relationship among nurses which is based on trust and respect. Once this trust is broken nurses would show affective and behavioral resistance next time when they are given the new task. It would also negatively effects the leaders' creditability ([Kumar & Sharma 2018](#)). The leaders ensure developments and survival of organizations. In organizational perspective leaders provide impression about leadership at the organizational, team and individual level ([Hasan, Islam, & Chowdhury, 2020](#)). The main idea behind leaders is to influence the individuals in organizations as well as social context. Therefore, the leadership effectiveness is essential for both, the societies as well as organizations to obtain their desired objectives.

The followers are also considered important for organizations, because without followers there is no leadership. The leadership and followership dimensions got so much attention in recent decades after studies of [Bass and Avolio \(1991\)](#) and [Kelley \(1992\)](#) followership model. Thus, the transformational leadership is considered as most effective one ([Nawaz, Zaman & Akbar, 2020](#)). The transformational leaders in the hospitals motivate nurses to perform better and obtain the required results which are given to them with in stipulated time frame. The effectiveness of leadership style is based on situation ([Li, Wang & Wang, 2019](#)). The main aim of the current study is to investigate the mediating role of trust in hospital management on the relationship between transformational leadership style and nurses performance over lens of social exchange theory. Social exchange theory is one of best theory to explain relationship between two parties if subordinates, nurses, employees are treated well, with respect in return they would also show the positive attitude and behavior towards their management of the hospitals and vice versa ([Mughal, 2023](#)). Nursing profession create extensive workforce in health profession in whole World but still there is shortage of nurses globally especially in Saudi Arabia ([Alharbi, & Kundi, 2023](#)).

The importance of health workers has been recognized in pandemic. In near future when huge numbers of the nurses would be retired it would create huge space in the health sector globally ([WHO, 2020](#); [Patel & Bakari, 2022](#)). That is why the reason behind this study is to investigate the nurses performance. The contribution of this study lies in filling gap in SET by adding trust in management as the mediator between transformational leadership and nurses' performance. Idealized influence identify proactive actions of leaders, motivation level of medical staff can be raised by inspirational motivation characteristics of leader. To best of researchers knowledge there are limited studies conducted in Saudi Arabia on transformational leadership style and

nurses' performance with the mediating effect of trust in management. Even though, there are sufficient evidences available on the relationship with leadership and nurses performance but scholars still in quest to clarify the mechanism that link trust, transformational leadership and nurses performance. Trusted leaders are successful in retaining the hard working, talented and highly motivated health workforce in hospitals. Thus, following research question is yet to be answered:

RQ1: Does trust in management mediates between transformational leadership style & nurses performance?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Social Exchange Theory (SET)

Social exchange theory (SET) is one of most influential theory in social sciences as well as other field. This theory is better in explaining the relationship between two parties. Two parties i.e. hospital manager and nurses can negotiate outcomes and rules for better performance (Ahmad et al., 2023). It is also stated by Ahmad et al (2023) that better outcomes are results of having better relationship and trust but not result of negotiation. This is the reason SET has been used to support the theoretical framework of the current study. SET is inculcated in our daily routine lives. Exchange process is not limited to our family, relatives and friends but it is extended to our workplaces as well. At workplaces relationships are getting too difficult and complex. Thus there is need to explain relationships to understand how the leaders behave and how employees react. SET stated that action from first party is important which insists receiver to reciprocate same behavior. The leaders in hospitals through individual consideration listen to each nurse problems and issues and encourage them to develop strength to solve issues. Transformational leaders lead at time of crisis and when other needs them. There is limited literature on impact of leadership on nurses' performance with mediating role of trust in management in healthcare organizations in Saudi Arabia. Positive actions result in high drive, attainment of goals, better relationship, productive workers and negative actions results in the cynical behavior, counter productive work behavior as well as low performance (Cropanzano, Anthony, Daniels & Hall, 2017).

Transformational Leadership Style (TFL)

The transformational leaders influence their followers due to their charismatic personality. The transformational leaders in hospitals motivate their nurses and have ability to get their work done through subordinates. The emotional exhaustion and burnout leads towards low level of nurses' performance. Transformational leadership has four facets idealized influence behavior, attitude, motivation, consideration and stimulation. The studies led upon leadership styles and nurses performance have reported the positive relationship among each other (Mughal, 2023). The transformational leaders in organizations have ability to lift motivation level of employees to the high level (Gelmar et al., 2019). These leaders are visionary and flexible enough to adopt change. Idealized influence identify the proactive actions of leaders, motivation level of medical staff can be raised by inspirational motivation characteristics of leader. Intellectual stimulation of leader help medical staff to be innovative and creative (Busari, Khan, Abdullah and Mughal, 2019). They leads with vision. They create paths for their team, arrange resources for them to complete their task, listen to problems of their team members, appreciate them upon attaining goals, stimulate them to work hard and sacrifice own benefits for their followers. These leaders

set example for followers and team considers them as their role model (Ahmad, Ambad, Mohd, 2021).

Nurses' Performance

According to Shaw, McBride, Casemore and Martin (2018) nurses got motivation from their hospitals management. Hospital management with transformational leadership style inspires their nursing staff to deliver best performance through lens of the SET (Ahmad et al., 2023). In addition coping style plays significant role in increasing performance level of the nursing staff. Nurses with positive coping style are considered as innovative which use new methods to solve issues. In past little focus was given to nursing staff as leaders are considered as the most vital component in healthcare organizations (Germain, & Cummings, 2010). After Kelley's (1992), followers (nurses) got more attention in literature. The process of leadership is co-creational by social and relational connections between the hospital management and nursing medical staff. That is why followers i.e. nurses in hospital are important for hospital management. Working in healthcare organizations, nurses passed over frequent challenges, psychological, emotional, and various work related risk factors. These risk factors include stress, workload, poor physical conditions of workplace, injuries, pathogens, different work shifts. These factors lead to errors and mistakes, compromise upon safety standards and ultimately low performance. Delivery of quality services, providing privacy to patients during treatment, answering all questions for the patients is main duty of the nurses while initiating the treatment, if nurses are psychologically and emotionally are not stable then it would lead towards negative consequences (Abdi et al., 2023).

Trust

One of the most important factors in management literature is trust (Islam, Furuoka, & Idris, 2020). It is also one of the important factors in determining the organizational effectiveness. Trust in management leads to positive outcomes such as high performance, high commitment and productivity. Different authors conceptualized trust in their own ways. Employees having confidence on others' competence, moreover, trust is comprised of belief of an individual about positive outcome of others (Yasir, Imran, Irshad, Mohamad, & Khan, 2016). Trusted leaders are successful in retaining the hard working, talented and highly motivated health workforce in the hospitals. They are able to win the confidence of nurses and able to get the desired results through idealized influence behavior and attitude. They are trusted because they consider the problems of nurses and help them to solve and encourage followers to have better performance (Salman, Hamed & Faisal, 2023). In this drive, there are five degrees and stages of the trust, deterrence, calculus, knowledge, relational identification based trust (Dietz & Hartog, 2006). In the first stage there is no trust, in second phase there is suspicious trust, after that real trust starts from third stage, it is converted into knowledge based and it gets stronger with passage of time. Both parties observe behavior of each other such as reputation, habits, hobbies, goodwill and at the last phase this trust become identity of each other and two parties represents each other.

Hypotheses Development

There is positive and significant relationship found between transformational leadership and performance (Shaikh, Watto & Tunio, 2022). When leaders involve their followers in decision making their followers (nurses) feel proud to be part of the such organizations, feel obliged and valued. This enhances leadership success and nurses performance (Albejaidi, Kundi, Mughal,

2022). Khan et al., (2018) conducted study on trust, leadership and found positive relationship between variables. Research scholars are still in quest to investigate the mechanism to build a relationship amid leadership & nurses' performance by using trust as intervening & mediating variable.

H1: There is significant relationship between attributes of transformational leadership style, trust and nurses performance.

H2: There is significant mediating effect of trust on transformational leadership style, trust and nurses performance.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The existing study adopted survey approach. Self-administered questionnaire was distributed to collect primary data from nurses working public and private sector hospitals, primary health care centers (PHCCs) in Qassim province Saudi Arabia. Non-probability convenience sampling technique was used to select the sample size. Thus, a total number of 150 questionnaires were distributed among the nurses but 100 completed questionnaires were received back and used in the analysis. Transformational leadership questionnaire was adopted from Busari et al (2019). It has twenty items. The trust questionnaire was originally developed by Gillispie (2003) called behavioral trust inventory and nurses performance questionnaire was adopted from Mughal (2023).

The data was collected from nurses working in public and private sector hospitals and PHCCs. The permission prior to data collection was taken from respondents. Researcher explained the main aim of study prior to distribution of questionnaires and it was assured that data would be used only for the academic purpose. Three to four days were given to the respondents to fill the questionnaires. SPSS was used in statistical analysis. The descriptive statistics like frequency, percentage, mean and standard deviation are reported. The reliability of questionnaires was checked over Cronbach alpha. Correlation and regression analysis were also run to investigate hypotheses.

RESULTS OF STUDY

Table 1

Demographic Characteristics

Variables	Characteristics	n	%
Gender	Male	68	68
	Female	32	32
Experience	Less than 1 year	9	9
	1-5 years	55	55
	6-10 years	22	22
	More than 10 years	14	14
Education	Diploma	48	48
	Bachelor	52	52
Nationality	Saudi	29	29
	Non-Saudi	71	71
Sector	Public Hospital	52	52
	Private	41	41
	PHCCs	7	7

Findings from table 1 revealed demographic information of respondents. There were 68 males followed by 32 female respondents. Respondents were asked about their experience. Majority of the nurses participated in study were having experience of 1-5 years i.e. 55, followed by those having experience of the 6-10 years i.e. 22 and 14 nurses had experience of more than 10 years and only 9 nurses had less than one year experience. About education of nurses most of nurses had bachelor education i.e. 52 and 48 had diploma. In survey, majority nurses who participated were non-Saudi i.e. 71 and only 29 Saudi nationals participated in study. In addition 52 nurses belong to the public sector hospitals, 4q from private sector and 7 nurses were working in the PHCCs.

Table 2
Mean Standard Deviation & Correlation

Variables	Mean	S.D	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
IIB	3.47	.759	1						
IIA	3.48	.686	.550**	1					
IM	3.41	.703	.590**	.670**	1				
IC	3.34	.686	.329**	.565**	.531**	1			
IS	3.45	.659	.473**	.584**	.548**	.608**	1		
Trust	3.24	.709	.477**	.653**	.561**	.587**	.628**	1	
Performance	3.10	.618	.439**	.402**	.373**	.300**	.204*	.440**	1

Table 2 revealed the mean score of the research variables and relationship among each other. Highest mean score is recorded for idealized influence attribute i.e. $M=3.48$, $S.D=0.686$, and lowest score is recorded for performance $M=3.1$, $S.D=0.618$. the relationship between IIB and performance is found significant, positive (0.439^{**} , $p<0.01$); IIA and performance (0.402^{**} , $p<0.01$); IM and performance (0.373^{**} , $p<0.01$); IC and performance (0.300^{**} , $p<0.01$); IS and performance (0.204^{**} , $p<0.01$) trust and performance (0.440^{**} , $p<0.01$). Moreover, the relationship between IIB, IIA, IM, IC and IS with trust are also found positive and significant (0.477^{**} , 0.653^{**} , 0.561^{**} , 0.587^{**} , 0.628^{**} at the $p<0.01$) level respectively. It is noted that relationship of the predictors with mediator is found moderate while the relationship among predictors and criterion is found weak as per the given results. Henceforth, Hypotheses 1 is accepted.

Table 3
Reliability Analysis

SN	Variables	No of Items	α
1	Transformational Leadership	20	0.858
2	Trust	11	0.825
3	Performance	3	0.748

The threshold for Cronbach alpha representing the internal consistency is >0.70 (Field, 2013). Table 3 presented reliability analysis of the research variables. It found that transformational leadership reliability is 0.858, trust 0.825 as well as the performance is 0.748, three items of performance were excluded from statistical analysis as the item total correlation value was found low as per the results that further shows the desired consistency among the measures in current study.

Table 4
Indirect Effects (Mediation Analysis) IIB Trust Performance

DV	IV	R2	F	β	p
Trust	Constant	0.227	28.26		0.000
	IIB			0.476	0.000
Performance	Constant	0.261	16.85		0.000
	IIB			0.298	0.003
	Trust			0.296	0.003
Performance	Constant			0.2446	0.003
	IIB				
DV	IV	R2	F	β	p
Trust	Constant	0.427	71.53		0.002
	IIA			0.653	0.000
Performance	Constant	0.216	13.10		0.000
	IIA			0.200	0.097
	Trust			0.308	0.011
Performance	Constant				
	IIA			0.186	0.09

Table 4A
Indirect Effects (Mediation Analysis) IIB Trust Performance

DV	IV	R2	F	β	p
Trust	Constant	0.315	43.71		0.000
	IM			0.516	0.000
Performance	Constant	0.217	13.07		0.000
	IM			0.193	0.083
	Trust			0.329	0.003
Performance	Constant				
	IM			0.170	0.083
DV	IV	R2	F	β	p
Trust	Constant	0.344	48.94		0.000
	IC			0.582	0.000
Performance	Constant	0.213	12.48		
	IC			0.045	0.691
	Trust			0.433	0.003
Performance	Constant				
	IC			0.041	0.693
DV	IV	R2	F	β	p
Trust	Constant	0.394	61.14		0.000
	IS			0.627	0.000
Performance	Constant	0.157	8.6		
	IS			-0.070	0.563
	Trust			0.437	0.0006
Performance	Constant				
	IS			-0.063	0.563

The table 4 presented the indirect mediation analysis findings. It was found that there is partial mediating role of trust play between idealized influence behavior and nurses performance. As it is evident from Table 4 that all paths are found significant which implies trust partially mediated relationship between idealized influence behavior and nurses' performance in health sector. Moreover if we look at other mediating (indirect effects) of trust between idealized influence attribute, inspirational motivation, consideration, stimulation and nurses' performance, thus trust fully mediated the relationship. This implies that hospital management and leadership by using transformational leadership styles and by creating trust based relationship with nurses can significantly improvise nurses' performance. If trust is broken then it would have negative impact in form of low performance & commitment. Nurses would show behavioral affective resistance next time, if they were given the new task because creditability of the leaders is no questioned.

DISCUSSION

By using SET this study explained that how transformational leaders in the hospitals enhance their nurses' performance by having trust based relationship. Trust play significant role as full mediator between four attributes of transformational leadership style. This implies that over the attribute, motivation, consideration, stimulation and strong trust could increase the nurses' performance. Similarly the use of trust as mediator between transformational leadership style and nurses' performance has highlighted new mechanism of enhancing nurses' performance in health sector in Saudi Arabia. The findings of current study got support from findings of [Islam, Furuoka and Idris \(2020\)](#) reported significant mediating role of trust amid transformational leadership and work engagement. It was stated that leaders applying TFL style on followers (nurses) create strong bond first to enhance performance and reduce negative behavior such as cronyism, cynicism, got better performance in hard situations. Those nurses who challenged their leaders can be managed by having trust based relationship. This may engage those nurses in positive activities such as high work engagement, high performance. In the same way leaders have to take care when promoting employees to higher ranks should check that nurse exhibits leadership qualities, have vision, supportive nature and charismatic personality ([Islam et al., 2020](#)).

The findings of current study are in line with findings of [Faupe and Sub \(2019\)](#) also reported significant relations amid attributes of transformational leaders, trust & nurses' performance. Findings of current study are in line with past studies which reported significant relationship between transformational leadership styles and performance. According to [Albejaidi, Kundi and Mughal, \(2020\)](#) involving the employees in the decision making process not only enhance performance but it also increases leadership effectiveness. Moreover, [Shaikh, Watto and Tunio \(2022\)](#) leadership enhanced organizational citizenship behavior, psychological ownership and performance. Furthermore, [Patel and Bakari \(2020\)](#) also supported the notion that leadership encourages employees to solve the problems using innovative techniques. In this connection, on healthcare system should develop such mechanism so that expansion of human resources in the health sector particularly nurses could be possible ([Alluhidan, Tashkandi, Alblowi, Omer, Alghaith, Alghodaier, Alazemi, Tulenko, Herbst, Hamza, & Alghamdi, 2020](#)). In this linking, this could only be possible because of effective leadership in the hospitals who could efficiently and effectively estimates the potential of healthcare organizations ([Kamau et al., 2022; Salman, Hamed, & Fisal, 2023](#)). Consequently, On the basis of above discussion both the hypotheses are substantiated.

CONCLUSION

It is concluded that due to stressful working environment, nurses are emotionally exhausted, had high level of burnout, depression and anxiety symptoms which reduced their performance. In this situation hospitals' leadership can play their role by applying transformational leadership attributes having strong bond with them based on trust. Trust based relationship makes the nurses feel proud to be part of such organizations which has charismatic leaders who promotes positive working environment. Trust helps managers to reduce cynicism and counterproductive work behavior. In CWB nurse purposely lowers down their performance, stole organizational assets and involve in organizational politics and affects negatively performance of counterparts and promotes negative image of organizations. Leaders can make strong bond with nurses on bases of trust to promote supportive culture, friendly environment and get objectives on time. Effective leaders create trust among them and their followers. Followers exhibits more trust on the transformational leaders who understand them, and acknowledge their capabilities and potential and encourage them to work hard and motivate them for better performance. Trust is cognitive and emotional process. Trusted leaders win confidence of employees by involving them in decision making (Busari et al., 2017). Trusted leaders could easily bring change in behavior of employees. Successful change process is possible if followers exhibits trust on their leader.

Theoretical Implications

Many studies have reported effectiveness of transformational leadership style in enhancing the nurses' performance but limited empirical evidences are available in literature with mediating role of trust through lens of social exchange theory. The studies conducted on leadership have studies financial institutions but this is one of the pioneer study which was conducted on health sector in Saudi Arabia. Nurses are very important part of hospitals. Information provided by the nurses have significant role on diagnosis and treatment. If wrong information is provided by the nurses to physicians, it would lead towards wrong diagnosis and wrong treatment and in case of any injury patients have the right to claim for damages. Therefore, having strong bond and healthier relationship among leaders of the hospitals and nurses would lead towards high performance.

Limitations & Future Research

This study offered novel contribution but it is very important to highlight the limitations which could pave the way for future studies. Existing study has been conducted on nurses, working in health sector in Qassim province Saudi Arabia. Study can be further extended to other provinces of Saudi Arabia to have better understanding of subject matter. Trust is used as mediator it could be used as moderator between predictors and criterion variables. Third limitation of this study is use of single source data. It is recommended to use qualitative data as supplement in future studies. Moreover, variables like ethical climate, organizational justice and supervisor support can also be used as moderators to enhance nurses' performance. Leadership styles like servant leadership, distributed, Ihsan based leadership could be used as predicting variable in future studies.

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