

Entrepreneurial leadership: a missing link between perceived organizational support and organizational performance

Entrepreneurial
leadership:
a missing link

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Abstract

Purpose – The current research is aimed at exploring entrepreneurial leadership (EL) as a mediator in perceived organizational support (POS) and organizational performance (OP) relationship. Furthermore, it also examined the impact of POS and entrepreneurial leadership on the performance of an organization.

Design/methodology/approach – A purposively selected sample of 216 respondents from the SME sector of Oman was chosen for the study.

Findings – The results revealed that POS and entrepreneurial leadership positively and significantly have an effect on organizational performance. Moreover, the hypothesized role of entrepreneurial leadership as a mediator between POS and OP relationship was also supported.

Research limitations/implications – In spite of the novelty of the research, it was limited due to a few reasons. First, the research design is cross-sectional. Second, the research only focused SME sector. This research only focused on entrepreneurial leadership as a mediator, whereas, other mediators could have been explored as well.

Originality/value – The research on POS and organizational performance relationship is still in its exploration stage. Past research indicate that POS has an effect on different outcomes within an organization, including its performance. However, still, the research on the entrepreneurial leadership process is quite scarce. The current research will explore it in the context of Oman, where there is a dire need to establish SME sector performance. The unique combination between POS, entrepreneurial leadership and performance in the SME sector of Oman marks the novelty of the current research. This study contributes to the SME's literature and it is among the pioneer studies exploring the mediating role of entrepreneurial leadership in the relationship between POS and OP.

Keywords Entrepreneurial leadership (EL), Perceived organizational support (POS), Organizational performance (OP), SME, Oman

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

For more than a decade, the developing countries have started focusing on the small and medium enterprises (SMEs), which is among the vibrant economic sectors (Olomi, 2006). SMEs are considered to have a strong impact on a country's economy due to their major contribution. Likewise, Oman has recorded a rapid increase of SMEs, as the focus of its government is on the growth of such enterprises. Sultanate of Oman, a prominent country in the Arabia peninsula, is in its developing stage and the government is focusing on providing funds, training and guidance to the SME workforce for the desired growth and strengthening of the economy (Alalawi, 2020; Al Bulushi and Bagum, 2017; Al-Lamki, 2000; Matricano, 2019).

There are no two opinions about the importance of the SME sector; however, its sustainability is very important. It is a fact that the rate of success in the SME sector is slow. About half of the SME startups fail within five years, especially in the developing countries (Dalberg, 2011). For the SMEs to sustain the right combination of contextual factors is important. SMEs may start with enthusiasm and a strong vision, but for achieving



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performance goals, the right kind of support and leadership are the magical factors that maintain a competitive advantage (Alalawi, 2020; Ayyagari *et al.*, 2007; Matriano, 2019).

Perceived organizational support (POS) is one of the key elements contributing to positive individual outcomes (Eisenberger and Stinglhamber, 2011). Employees who sense a serious degree of organizational support exhibit better performance (Byrne and Hochwarter, 2008; Kim *et al.*, 2017a; Kurtessis *et al.*, 2017). The perception of employees regarding the organization's support yields increased performance (DeConinck and DeConinck, 2017; DeConinck *et al.*, 2018; Du *et al.*, 2018).

Entrepreneurial leaders who are flexible to the changing environment, have the ability to improve creativity, in order to maintain the organization's competitive advantage. This is a unique leadership style that put together diverse talents to perform innovatively and beyond expectation outcomes (Fontana and Musa, 2017). Such leaders exploit the environment and are able to create opportunities that result in increased organizational performance (Van Zyl and Mathur-Helm, 2007; Gupta *et al.*, 2004; Wood's, 2002). The performance of any organization is influenced by the style of leadership. However, a number of factors influence the leadership style, including the environmental factors (Kurtessis *et al.*, 2017; Lope Pihie and Bagheri, 2013). Organizational support is considered as one of the most crucial sources in advancing a leadership style that is required with consideration of the organizational situation. Thus, the establishment of entrepreneurial leadership is essentially through the organizational support (Kim *et al.*, 2017b; Kurtessis *et al.*, 2017; Kurtessis *et al.*, 2017; Mirkamandar and Malikehbeheshtifar, 2015).

The research on POS and organizational performance relationship is still in its exploration stage. Past research indicate that POS has an effect on different outcomes within an organization, including its performance (Kanten and Ulker, 2012; Rutherford and Holt, 2007; Zampetakis *et al.*, 2009). However, still, the research on the entrepreneurial leadership process is quite scarce (Kim *et al.*, 2017b). A little research in an SME sector has also indicated that entrepreneurial leadership and organizational performance have a positive association (Hayat *et al.*, 2019; Hayat and Riaz, 2011; Mgeni, 2015; Pieper, 2014; Sandybayev, 2019; Soomro *et al.*, 2019). The current research will explore it in the context of Oman, where there is a dire need to establish SME sector performance. The unique combination between POS, entrepreneurial leadership and performance in the SME sector of Oman marks the novelty of the current research.

Literature review

Perceived organizational support (POS)

For maintaining a competitive edge, organizations struggle to identify ways of retaining their talented employees. In the perspective of organizational support theory, employees develop an exchange relationship with the organization that affects their behaviors and attitudes (Eisenberger *et al.*, 1997; Eisenberger and Stinglhamber, 2011). This relationship can change the way employees relate to the organization. POS is considered important in this regard. It is defined as the perception of an employee about the consideration they get from the organization (Baran *et al.*, 2012). Moreover, POS is considered as the belief of the employees that their organization values their contributions. Furthermore, it is a belief that the organization has a special consideration of employees' well-being (Eisenberger and Stinglhamber, 2011; Rhoades and Eisenberger, 2002).

Employees' perception concerning the organization's support in the form of fair treatment and work appreciation yields various positive outcomes like increased commitment, loyalty and performance (DeConinck and DeConinck, 2017). POS is identified as the main element contributing to positive individual outcomes (Eisenberger and Stinglhamber, 2011). Employees sensing a serious degree of organizational support perceive the duty to

compensate for the beneficial treatment they experienced from the entity by exhibiting more enthusiastic conduct directed in relation to it (Kurtessis *et al.*, 2017). Employees' perception of the perceived support from the organization can lead to a higher level of organizational performance (Byrne and Hochwarter, 2008; Kim *et al.*, 2017a).

Organizational performance (OP)

Performance refers to the accomplishment of the targeted results accompanying plans; thus, the evaluation of performance is considered the center of performance management (Cardy and Leonard, 2004). In addition, both individual and organization performances depend highly on all organizational policies, applications and the structure of the organization. Moreover, organizational performance is a complementary mindset represents strategic human resources configurationally approach containing the types of HR activities, as confronted with individual activities, are necessary to accomplish enterprise goals (Anitha, 2014). Organizational performance is considered as a measurement of productivity, taking into consideration the participation of the corporation's employees (Oyemomi *et al.*, 2016). It is a criterion of organization development. It explains the extent that an organization is obtaining its aims (Choudhary *et al.*, 2013).

The key factor required to achieve organizational performance is the motivation from the organizations in the form of support. POS has an effect on various organizational outcomes, including performance (Kanten and Ulker, 2012; Rutherford and Holt, 2007; Zampetakis *et al.*, 2009). The perceived support by an organization motivates the employees to achieve the performance goals of the organization (Eisenberger and Stinglhamber, 2011). The perception of organizations support develops and obligation to repay to the organization in the form of better performance (Rhoades and Eisenberger, 2002). POS is a source of high organizational performance as it fosters individual performance, collaboration with others and identifying novel ways of doing the work (Kurtessis *et al.*, 2017; Rhoades and Eisenberger, 2002).

Presence of organizational support ensures that employees perceive that the organization is taking care of them. When employees perceive that the organization is valuing their contribution and providing them the required help, they reciprocate with efforts to increase the performance. Thus, the organizations being able to create the perception of organizational support will have a higher performance. Positive relationship of POS and performance has been proven by past researches (Cullen *et al.*, 2014; DeConinck *et al.*, 2018; Du *et al.*, 2018; Paillé and Raineri, 2015). On the basis of the above literature following hypothesis is developed;

H1. Perceived Organizational support (POS) positively effects organizational performance.

Entrepreneurial leadership (EL)

Entrepreneurial leadership is rising as a popular leadership style that describes a leader having a combination of entrepreneurial approach along with the capability to deal with vulnerable market situations, thus gaining competitive advantage for an organization. Such leaders work on creative aspects, and their responsiveness to change is higher than other styles of leadership. Entrepreneurial leadership is a combination of entrepreneurial orientation leadership and entrepreneurial management (Musa and Fontana, 2014). These qualities help organizations to maintain their competitive edge.

The development of managerial leadership, according to the requirement of the competitive environment, is one of the aims of all the organizations. Every organization is equipped with the people in entrepreneurial capabilities, which can be developed with

adequate support. Proper support from the organization nurtures the entrepreneurial behavior among their managers in leadership positions (Mirkamandar and Malikehbeheshtifar, 2015). Various factors in the organization play an essential role in developing the styles of leadership. From the entrepreneurial leadership perspective, the environment of an organization has a vigorous effect (Kurtessis *et al.*, 2017; Lope Pihie and Bagheri, 2013). Therefore, organizational support may be one of the most crucial sources in advancing a leadership style that is required with consideration of the organizational situation. Thus, the establishment of entrepreneurial leadership is essentially through organizational support (Kempster and Cope, 2010; Kim *et al.*, 2017b). The research support the notion that organizational factors affect the leadership formulation process (Bagheri *et al.*, 2013; Wang *et al.*, 2012) and POS can develop entrepreneurial leadership style (Kurtessis *et al.*, 2017; Kurtessis *et al.*, 2017; Mirkamandar and Malikehbeheshtifar, 2015). Therefore, the following hypothesis is formulated;

H2. Perceived Organizational Support (POS) positively affects entrepreneurial leadership.

Entrepreneurial leaders motivate their employees to perform better (Renko *et al.*, 2015). By moving strategically and focusing on entrepreneurial initiatives, such leaders can ensure better performance of the organization (Miao *et al.*, 2019; Rahim *et al.*, 2015). They exploit the environment to create opportunities, leverage change and develop a competitive advantage for better and long-lasting performance (Sarabi *et al.*, 2020). The research on the entrepreneurial leadership process and its prospective outcomes is quite scarce (Kim *et al.*, 2017b). Moreover, there is a scarcity of literature focusing on this specific relationship that creates a need to explore it further. Therefore, the following hypothesis is developed;

H3. Entrepreneurial leadership positively affects organizational performance.

The past research are evident of a link between POS and OP (Cullen *et al.*, 2014; DeConinck *et al.*, 2018; Du *et al.*, 2018; Paillé and Raineri, 2015), POS and entrepreneurial leadership (Kurtessis *et al.*, 2017; Kurtessis *et al.*, 2017; Mirkamandar and Malikehbeheshtifar, 2015), Entrepreneurial leadership and organizational performance (Miao *et al.*, 2019; Sarabi *et al.*, 2020). Based on these researchers, it appears that entrepreneurial leadership can play a mediating role in the relationship between POS and OP. However, this conceptualization still did not receive much attention. Current research would be among the pioneer ones conceptualizing this mediating role thus the following hypothesis is formulated;

H4. Entrepreneurial leadership mediates the relationship between organizational support (POS) and performance.

Methodology

A purposively selected sample of 216 respondents from the SME sector of Oman was taken for the research. The demographic analysis of the sample reveals there were 60% males and 40% females. The age group ranged between 20 and 31 years (60%), with experience between 3 and 6 years (75%), and holding a high school diploma (60%).

Instruments measuring the research concepts have been adapted from the literature. Entrepreneurial Leadership was measured through a multi-dimensional scale having four dimensions (strategic, communication, motivation, personal and/or organizational) with 24 item scale developed by Musa and Fontana (2014); POS was measured through a scale that was originally developed by Eisenberger *et al.* (1986). The scale consisted of nine items. Organizational performance (OP) was measured using a 4 item scale developed by Tseng and Lee (2014). All the items were measured using a five-point Likert-type scale.

Results

The instrument was in English language, which was translated into Arabic, and the final questionnaire had both statements. The researchers then contacted eight professionals (4 academicians and 4 practitioners) to fulfill the conditions of the face and content validity. By keeping the context in mind, a pilot survey was conducted. The question wordings, their understanding and sensitivity to the context were tested. Each scale was dimensionally analyzed, as well. For establishing that each item contributes to the scale, the CFA was done. Those items that were not loading with other scale items were omitted. The scale of entrepreneurial leadership was developed originally with four dimensions; however, in the Omani context, only three dimensions (strategic, communication and motivation) were found reliable and valid to use in this research. Similarly, the POS scale sustained only 4 items out of nine. The scale of organizational performance was reduced to 3 items instead of 4. The results of the confirmatory factor analysis are as follows.

Confirmatory factor analysis

Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted to measure the convergent validity, which was revealed through the standardized factor loading >0.50 (Hu and Bentler, 1999). Table 1 reveals that all the factor loadings were above 0.50. The internal consistency of constructs was judged through the values of $IC > 0.70$. All the values in Table 1 are above 0.70, thus proving the internal consistency of the scales (Hair *et al.*, 2006).

Uni-dimensionality of the construct on the other hand checks that the items in a single construct measures that same construct or not (Jackson *et al.*, 2005). In this study, the uni-dimensionality is measured through Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), Comparative Fit Index (CFI) and Square multiple correlations (SMC). The results in Table 1 reveal a good data fit.

Figure 1 illustrates results of confirmatory factor analysis, the measurement model fit indices using all constructs/variables explained good fit indices as all the values of the indices are above the acceptable range (Hu and Bentler). All the values in CFA are above the threshold level, as discussed in Table 1.

Preliminary analysis

Table 2 reveals the results of the correlation matrix, along with reliability values and descriptive statistics. The mean values range from 3.45 to 3.89 for OP and POS, respectively.

Variables	Items	Square multiple correlations (SMC > 0.30)	Standardized factor loadings (st. FL > 0.50)	CFI > 0.90	IC > 0.70
1 POS	POS1	0.701	0.837	0.97	0.82
	POS2	0.827	0.909		
	POS3	0.447	0.669		
	POS4	0.380	0.529		
2 EL	Strategic	0.504	0.710	1.00	0.85
	Communication	0.819	0.905		
	Motivation	0.737	0.859		
3 OP	OP1	0.543	0.737	1.00	0.81
	OP2	0.724	0.851		
	OP3	0.556	0.746		

Note(s): POS = Perceived Organizational Support; EL = Entrepreneurial leadership; OP = Organizational Performance, IC = Internal consistency > 0.70 , CFI = Confirmatory factor analysis > 0.90

Table 1.
Confirmatory factor analysis

Figure 1.
Confirmatory factor
analysis of the
suggested
measurement model

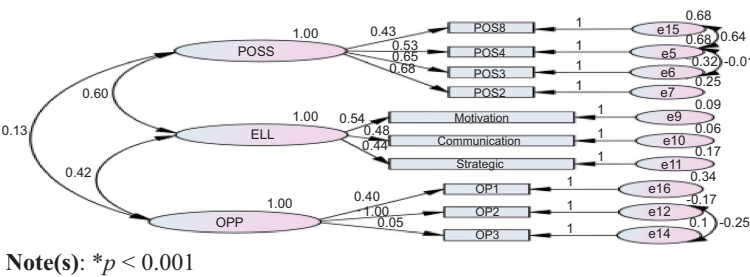


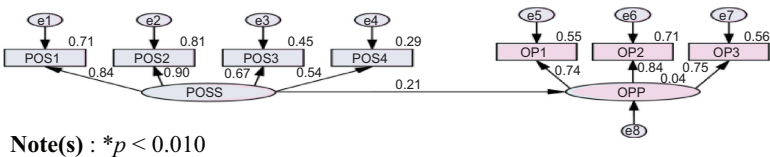
Table 2.

Correlation matrix,
reliability and
descriptive statistics of
study
variables ($N = 216$)

	Var	Mean	SD	Skewness std. error (1.66)	Kurtois std. error (0.330)	I	II	III
I	OP	3.89	0.51	-0.539	-0.393	(0.79)		
II	POS	3.45	0.73	-0.276	-0.385	0.20*	(0.83)	
III	EL	3.56	0.63	-1.349	-2.35	0.49*	0.47*	(0.93)

Note(s): * $p < .01$ The values in parenthesis represent Cronbach's Alpha.

Figure 2.
Direct path



The values skewness and kurtosis reveal data normality and are found to be in the acceptable range (-3 to +3) (Ghasemi and Zahediasl, 2012).

The correlation matrix exhibits positive and significant relationship between study variables. OP was found to have a positive and significant relationship with POS ($r = 0.20$, $P < 0.05$) and entrepreneurial leadership ($r = 0.49$, $p < 0.05$). POS was also found to be positively and significantly related to entrepreneurial leadership ($r = 0.47$, $p < 0.05$).

Structure equation modeling (direct and indirect path analysis)

Figure 2 describes the direct effect between POS and OP. The figure shows positive and significant effect between POS and OP.

Figure 3 shows the indirect effect between POS and OP, i.e. the mediation model. In this table, with the inclusion of entrepreneurial leadership, the beta value reduced from 0.21 to 0.09 and became insignificant, showing full mediation.

The Structural model was estimated, and all the results were satisfactory for the model fit in Table 3. All the indices are above the acceptable level for both the models and show good model fitness.

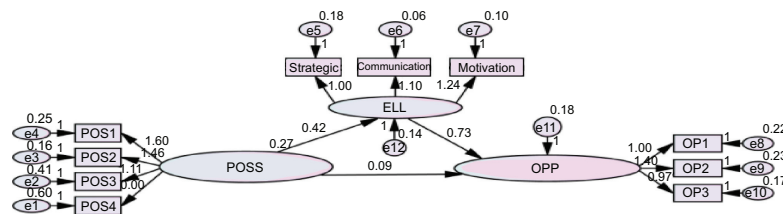
The results in Table 4 conclude the whole analysis. It reveals that POS has a positive and significant effect on OP ($r = 0.21$, $p < 0.001$) and EL ($r = 0.42$, $p < 0.001$) thus supporting first and second hypotheses. EL is found to have a direct effect on OP ($r = 0.73$, $p < 0.001$) supporting third hypothesis. The fourth hypothesis also found full support with the inclusion

of the mediator direct path and became insignificant ($r = -0.09\text{ns}$, $p > 0.001$), indicating full mediation between POS and OP.

Discussion

Leadership style, especially entrepreneurial style, is one of the most important factors that encourage employees to perform beyond expectations. If the entrepreneurial leadership style is supported by the organization, then it can result in increased organizational performance. SME sector is one of the most contributing sectors to any country's economy. The sustainability of this sector depends upon the right mix of contextual factors. An entrepreneurial leadership style can increase the performance of any SME. In order to practice entrepreneurial leadership, there should be a perception of support from the organization. The current research aims to examine the mediating role played by entrepreneurial leadership in the relationship between POS and organizational performance. A purposive sample of 216 respondents from the SME sector of Oman was chosen for the study. The results show that POS has a positive and significant effect on organizational performance. The results are in line with past literature. The organizational support may be one of the most crucial sources in advancing a leadership style that is required with consideration of the organizational situation. Thus, the establishment of entrepreneurial leadership is essentially through organizational support (Kempster and Cope,

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Note(s) : *** $p < 0.001$

Figure 3. Indirect direct path

Models	CMIN/DF	GFI	AGFI	NFI	CFI	RMSEA
Model 1	1.70/13	0.971	0.939	0.964	0.985	0.057
Model 2	3.25/32	0.918	0.859	0.907	0.933	0.10

Note(s): CFI = comparative fit index; CMIN/DF = chi-square/degree of freedom ratio; GFI = goodness of fit index; AGFI = adjusted goodness of fit index; RMSEA = root mean square of approximation; NFI = normed fit index

Table 3. Model I. Model fit indices

Hypothesis	Direct effects	Bias corrected confidence interval		Results
		Lower confidence level	Upper confidence level	
POS → OP	0.21***			Supported
POS → EL	0.42***			Supported
EL → OP	0.73***			Supported
POS → EL → OP	-0.092ns	0.21	0.43	Full mediation

Note(s): *** $p < .01$

Table 4. Results of hypothesis test

2010; Kim *et al.*, 2017b). For entrepreneurial leaders to promote higher performance behaviors organizational support becomes an issue of great importance. The organizations show the support for the entrepreneurial leaders that, in turn, can boost the performance. The messages and signals from the top management increase the commitment of the employees toward organizational outcomes. (Turunç and Altuntepe, 2015).

The results also support the hypothesized impact of entrepreneurial leadership on performance. The results are in line with past literature reviews. According to Goossen and Stevens (2013), entrepreneurial leadership is a considerable type of leadership in finding new opportunities. Entrepreneurial leadership provides its followers by the leader's visions and scenarios and employs them for organizational sustainable success and value. Entrepreneurial leadership is considered as an organizational concept. It concentrates on organizational operations, engaging in the business's vision, mission, objectives and strategies. The change or fostering current types of behavior in the business, alteration in its processes, structure, capabilities and enhancing the effectiveness of organizational culture, involving integration ethical value systems in creating strategic decisions cannot separate from this type of leadership (Leitch and Volery, 2017; Boal and Hooijberg, 2000)

The hypothesized role of entrepreneurial leadership as a mediator between POS and organizational performance relationship was fully supported. This is a relatively novel finding but can be traced down in the past literature. Employee's empowerment will strengthen employees' competence and promotes the performance of a job. To conclude, there is a positive linkage and harmony between employees' POS and job performance (Chiang and Hsieh, 2012). Employees sensing a serious degree of organizational support perceive a duty to compensate for the beneficial treatment they experienced from the entity by exhibiting more enthusiastic conduct directed in relation to it (Kurtessis *et al.*, 2017). Employees who observe remarkable estimation from their organization are more inclined to participate in proactive activities in relation to the organization's progress.

In spite of the novelty of the research, it was limited due to a few reasons. First, the research design is cross-sectional. Future research should focus on a longitudinal design. Second, the research only focused on the SME sector. Future research can replicate the study in a larger context. This research only focused on entrepreneurial leadership as a mediator. Future research can also focus on HR practices as a mediator as well.

Implications

This research contributes to the existing literature by advancing knowledge about entrepreneurial leadership as it sheds light on its mechanism. It has the following theoretical contributions for academicians and researchers. First, it has identified POS as a predictor of entrepreneurial leadership. The majority of researchers in this area are focusing on it affects ignoring its predictors. It is one of the initial studies identifying a variable that affects entrepreneurial leadership. Second, this research is among the pioneer research conceptualizing entrepreneurial leadership as a mediator. This is a significant contribution in the literature. Third, the contribution is in the SME literature. A new model is contributed to the literature for increased SME performance.

The research has some practical contributions as well. Educators, entrepreneurs and policymakers can benefit from the findings. In the context of Oman, SMEs have an important standing as they formulate the economy's backbone. The government, over the years, has introduced a number of policies directed at advancing Small and Medium Scale Enterprises. The findings of this research will help the SME sector to better understand the importance of giving proper support to the entrepreneurial leaders in order to increase the performance. The owners of SMEs can use it as a base to develop relevant policies to provide proper support. With the relevant support, entrepreneurial leadership can boost company performance for sustaining in the business environment.

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