

## **Relationship between Benevolent Leadership with Task Performance, Organizational Citizenship Behavior and Affective Commitment of Employees in a Service Organization**

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This study investigated the relationship between benevolent leadership with task performance, organizational citizenship behavior and affective commitment. Participants included 242 employees from a service organization who completed Benevolent Leadership Scale (Karakas, 2009), Task Performance (Williams and Anderson, 1991), Organizational Citizenship Behavior Scale (Podsakoff, Mackenzie, Moorman, & Fetter, 1990), and Affective Commitment Scale (Meyer and Allen, 1991). The results showed that there are significant simple and multiple relationships between subscales of benevolent leadership (ethical sensitivity, spiritual depth, positive engagement, and community responsiveness), and task performance, organizational citizenship behavior and affective commitment. In addition, the results of stepwise regression technique showed that ethical sensitivity, spiritual depth, and positive engagement have the most significant effect on criterion variables.

**Keywords:** benevolent leadership, task performance, organizational citizenship behavior, affective commitment

Employees and leaders are now faced with a workforce whose attitude is not one of loyalty, trust, and engagement, but one of skepticism, fear and cynicism (Mac Cormack & Forbath, 2008). As a result of these shifts, the old leadership models based on competition and hierarchy that served

us in the past are not well suited to the global complexity, rapid change, interdependence, and multifaceted challenges described above. There is a need for a new paradigm of leadership which is better suited to the unique challenges of the 21st century. Benevolent leadership is defined as the process of creating a virtuous cycle of encouraging, initiating, and implementing positive change in organizations through: a) ethical sensitivity, b) spiritual depth, c) positive engagement, and d) community responsiveness (Karakas, 2009).

Ethical sensitivity is defined as the ethical perspective in leadership research and practice that focuses on moral values and principles of business leaders. The emergence of the morality paradigm is visible through the call for ethics and values in organizations (Kanungo & Mendonca, 1996). Since 1980s, researchers have focused more attention on the study of ethical attitudes and behaviors of leaders in organizations and a useful body of research has been accumulated. Morality paradigm is closely bound up with ideas of honesty, integrity, responsibility, trust, and accountability. Most essential outcomes related to leadership in the morality paradigm are integrity, honesty, authenticity, trust, ethical decision making, and equity (Kanungo & Mendonca, 1996). The most important behavioral manifestations of leader morality and ethics are being accountable and equitable, respecting and preserving employee rights and consumer rights, making decisions based on ethical guidelines, not doing wrong, acting with honesty, being conscious of own values, obeying rules and laws, and promoting moral values at work (Giacalone & Jurkiewicz, 2003). The call for incorporation of morality, ethics and values in leadership and management practice has gained momentum in the last twenty years in parallel with increasing ethical concerns in organizational life (Treviño & Brown, 2004); spiritual depth through the emergence and rapid growth of the spirituality at work literature (Ashmos & Duchon, 2000; Giacalone & Jurkiewicz, 2003) and spirituality in leadership literature (Fry, 2005; Parameshwar, 2005; Kriger & Seng, 2005). Spiritual dimension embodies leaders search for simplicity, meaning at work, more

humane work places, self-expression, creativity, and interconnectedness to something higher (Marques, Dhiman, & King, 2007). The most important behavioral manifestations of leader spirituality are discovering oneself, showing compassion for co-workers, developing deeper consciousness and wisdom, integrating heart, mind, and spirit; and finally enhancing the emotional, psychological, spiritual wellbeing of oneself and other people (Ashmos & Duchon, 2000). A number of researchers argue that workplace spirituality has the potential to provide leaders a feeling of purpose, a sense of connection, and a sense of meaning at work (Giacalone & Jurkiewicz, 2003; Brandt, 1996).

Positive engagement is centered on how leaders can create and lead positive change in organizations. Research in this stream focuses on how leaders can create positive change and transformation in human systems. Positivity paradigm is closely bound up with the ideas of flexibility, positive deviance, excellence, thriving, vitality, innovation, flourishing, empowerment, vision, systemic change, and dynamic adaptation (Kriger & Seng, 2005). Most essential outcomes related to leadership in the positivity paradigm are positive impact, courage, hope, collaboration, flexibility, vitality, innovativeness, strategic vision, systemic awareness, and holistic thinking. The most important behavioral manifestations of leader positivity are instilling hope, demonstrating courage, initiating and catalyzing change, resolving paradoxes and dilemmas, synthesizing perspectives, thriving in chaos, seeing the big picture, second order learning, and having an impact in the organization (Karakas, 2009).

### **Community Responsiveness**

The reasons of the increasing importance of community responsiveness in leader behavior are numerous: First, there is increasing emphasis on societal wellbeing and quality of life (Carroll, 1999). Issues such as health, leisure time, working conditions, fresh air and water, pollution evoke much more attention. Hardly a week goes by without some news and concerns over quality-of-life in the press. Second, special interest groups

and pressure groups such as NGOs have gained power and can exert more psychological control and pressure on corporate.

Benevolent leadership model underlines the importance of taking all four dimensions into account while theorizing or researching on positive change in organizations. Most of the research to-date has focused on only one of these aspects of organizational life; while benevolent leadership model is built on synthesizing and taking into account all these four dimensions. Benevolent leadership model, therefore, integrates four paradigms of creating common good.

Several empirical studies have demonstrated the positive impact of benevolent leadership on a variety of follower outcomes, such as job satisfaction, and commitment (Cheng, Huang, & Chou, 2002; Liang, Ling, & Hsieh, 2007). The role of benevolence has been viewed as an important element of a leader to enhance follower performance. Existing studies have found a positive impact of benevolent leadership on follower performance (Farh, Liang, Chou, and Cheng, 2008).

Task performance, is defined as the completion of tasks and work role required by employees (Williams & Anderson, 1991). The Campbell model of performance offers a comprehensive framework for understanding performance in an organizational context. Campbell (1990) defines performance as a set of behaviors that are relevant for the goals of an organization. Campbell argues that performance consists of at least eight separate components: job specific task proficiency, non-job specific task proficiency, written and oral communication task proficiency, demonstration of effort, maintenance of personal discipline, facilitation of coworkers, leadership and supervision, and management, and administration. Borman and Motowidlo (1993) discussed two types of task performance. One type consists of activities that transform raw materials into the goods and services that are the organization's products. A second type of task performance consists of activities that service and maintain the technical core. Thus, task performance bears a direct relation to the

organizations technical core, either by executing its technical processes or by maintaining and servicing its technical requirements.

Organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) is defined as voluntary behaviors performed by the workforce, not explicitly evaluated nor rewarded by the company (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Moorman, & Fetter, 1990). It is also defined as discretionary behavior which goes beyond existing role expectations and benefits or is intended to benefit the organization (Organ, 1988). According to this definition, OCB refers to organizationally beneficial behaviors that cannot be enforced on the basis of formal role obligations. OCB consists of informal contributions that participants can choose to perform or withhold without regard to considerations of sanctions or formal incentives (Organ, 1990). Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Pain, and Bachrach (2000) identified five common dimensions of OCB: (a) Altruism, or helping behavior involves voluntarily helping others with an organizationally relevant task or problem; (b) Conscientiousness, namely, going well beyond minimally required levels of punctuality, housekeeping, conserving resources, and attending at work above the norm; (c) Sportsmanship, which reflects the employee's willingness to tolerate the inevitable inconveniences of work without complaining, such as not wasting time complaining about trivialities; (d) Courtesy, namely, behaviors aimed at preventing work-related problems with others, and (e) Civic virtue, which reflects responsive, constructive involvement in the organization.

Affective commitment is defined as an emotional attachment to the organization such that the strongly committed individual identifies with, is involved in, and enjoys membership in, the organization (Allen & Meyer, 1990). Affective commitment denotes a "want to" form of commitment, related to emotional need for and social interactions with other members of the organization, as well as the positive feelings that result from association with the organization.

Johnson and Chang (2006) defined affective commitment as when individuals are involved in and satisfied with their membership in an

organization. They may experience a sense of belonging or “identification with and emotional attachment to” the organization.

The goal of this study was to investigate whether the presence of benevolent leadership behaviors is related to the likelihood that increases task performance, organizational citizenship behavior and affective commitment. Considering the goal, the following three hypotheses were formulated:

1: There are positive relationships between dimensions of benevolent leadership and task performance.

2: There are positive relationships between dimensions of benevolent leadership and organizational citizenship behavior.

3: There are positive relationships between dimensions of benevolent leadership and affective commitment.

## **Method**

### **Participants**

The research population consists of individuals employed in a service organization. Participants were 242 employees that were selected via simple random sampling. Based on the employee’s agreement to participate, the questionnaires were administered to all who chose to participate. Of the total participants, 66% were male and 34% were female. Participants’ range of age was from 21 to 48. Of the 242 participants, 22% were single, and 78% were married. With regards to having children, 72% of participants reported having children. With regards to education, 72% of participants reported having a high school graduate, and 28% reported having a graduate degree. Respondents had experience between 2 to 15 years.

### **Measures**

Benevolent leadership was measured by Benevolent Leadership Scale (BLS) from Karakas (2009). The first subscale, ethical sensitivity, captures leader’s morally grounded principles and ethical rules. The second

subscale, spiritual depth, capture leader's search for meaning and self-reflection, as well as incorporation of spirituality at work. The third subscale, positive engagement, captures leader's passion for initiating and encouraging positive change in the organization. The fourth subscale, community responsiveness, captures leader's sensitivity and idealism in leaving a social legacy and contribution to community. Each subscale has 10 items. Responses were made on a 5-point scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Reliability for all dimensions has been found to be acceptable by Karakas (2009). (Ethical sensitivity,  $\alpha=0.95$ ; spiritual depth,  $\alpha=0.84$ ; positive engagement,  $\alpha=0.89$ ; community responsiveness,  $\alpha=0.81$ ). Karakas (2009) assessed the overall fit of the models to the data with the goodness-of-fit index (GFI), the Bentler-Bonett (1980) normed-fit index (NFI), comparative fit index (CFI) and non-normed fit index (NNFI). For the CFA model, the goodness-of-fit (GFI) index was .79, the normed-fit index (NFI) was .85, comparative fit index (CFI) was .92 and non-normed-fit index (NNFI) was .91. Also, this model has a RMSEA of .063; indicating a relatively good fit. The results of confirmatory factor analysis of dimensions of benevolent leadership showed a comparative fit index (CFI) of .97, goodness of fit index (GFI) of .90, and adjusted goodness of fit index (AGFI) of .89, and RMSE was .07, which indicates a good fit index for the four factor model. Additionally, in this research all internal subscales yielded an internal reliability alpha greater than 0.70 (ethical sensitivity,  $\alpha=0.90$ ; spiritual depth,  $\alpha=0.81$ ; positive engagement,  $\alpha=0.87$ ; community responsiveness,  $\alpha=0.78$ ).

Organizational Citizenship Behavior scale (Podsakoff et. al., 1990) is a 24-item measure that provides five subscales, including altruism, conscientiousness, courtesy, sportsmanship, and civic virtue. A most recent meta-analysis conducted by Bommer, Miles, and Grover (2007) showed that Organizational Citizenship Behavior scale has good reliability and validity. This scale has been used frequently on Iranian employees and results showed that the scale has good psychometric characteristics. In this

research, Cronbach's  $\alpha$  value of the scales is 0.88 which has exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.70

Affective commitment is measured using eight items from the Affective Commitment Scale (Meyer and Allen, 1991). Two example items are —I would be very happy to spend the rest of my career with this organization, and —I do not feel like —a part of the family- at my organization. Responses were made on a 5-point scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). This scale also has been used frequently on Iranian employees and results showed that the scale have good psychometric characteristics. In this research Cronbach's  $\alpha$  value of the scales is 0.91 which has exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.70. Task performance was measured by a 5-item scale from Williams and Anderson (1991) (1 = never; 7 = always). The immediate supervisors were asked to assess their followers' performance using this scale. Sample items were "He/she adequately completes assigned duties" and "He/she fulfills responsibilities specified in the job description." The Cronbach's alpha coefficient was .90. In this research Cronbach's  $\alpha$  value of the scales is .81.

## **Results**

In Table 1, the means, standard deviations and correlations of benevolent leader facets with task performance, organizational citizenship behavior and affective commitment are provided.

Hypothesis 1 anticipated that the dimensions of benevolent leadership would be related to the task performance. As shown in Table 1, the correlation coefficients between task performance and ethical sensitivity ( $r=.41$ ), spiritual depth ( $r=.35$ ), Positive engagement ( $r=.29$ ) and community responsiveness ( $r=.19$ ) were positive and significant. Therefore, hypothesis 1 was supported.

**Table 1**  
**Means, Standard Deviations and Correlations of Benevolent Leader Facets with Task Performance, Organizational Citizenship Behavior and Affective Commitment**

Variable	Mean	Standard deviation	5	6	7
1 Ethical sensitivity	30.66	9.21	.41**	.37**	.44**
2 Spiritual depth	38.87	11.23	.35**	.15*	.30**
3 Positive engagement	39.12	10.85	.29**	.34**	.26**
4 Community responsiveness	16.55	4.54	.19**	.24**	.15*
5 Task performance	28.98	9.76			
6 Organizational citizenship behavior	16.87	5.55	*P<.05	**P<.01	
7 Affective commitment	32.89	12.78			

In Table 2, the prediction of employees' task performance by facets of the benevolent leadership is provided.

**Table 2**  
**The Prediction of Employees' Task Performance by Facets of Benevolent Leadership**

Variables	R	R <sup>2</sup>	B	β	t	P
Constant			6.68		6.48	.001
Ethical sensitivity	.41	.17	.04	.33	4.57	.001
Spiritual depth	.53	.28	.13	.32	5.21	.001
Positive engagement	.55	.30	.03	.15	2.44	.03
Community responsiveness	.56	.31	.005	.04	.68	.49
<b>Stepwise</b>						
Variables	R	R <sup>2</sup>	B	β	t	P
Constant			6.70		6.48	.001
Ethical sensitivity	.41	.17	.04	.34	5.64	.001
Spiritual depth	.53	.28	.13	.33	5.17	.001
Positive engagement	.55	.31	.03	.16	2.57	.01

F=22.73, P<.001

The hierarchical multiple regression analysis findings (Table 2) indicate that the combination of ethical sensitivity, spiritual depth, positive engagement and community responsiveness were able to significantly predict task performance ( $F=22.73$ ,  $P<.001$ ). The  $R^2$  indicated that 31% of the variance in the task performance was explained by this regression model. Multiple stepwise regression analysis was conducted to predict employees' task performance. Table 2 shows that ethical sensitivity was the first and the most salient of the variables that entered the regression equation ( $\beta=.34$ ), and accounted for 17% of the variation in the task performance. At step 2, spiritual depth entered the regression equation ( $\beta=.33$ ) and accounted for an additional 11% of the variation in the task performance. At step 3, positive engagement entered the regression equation ( $\beta=.16$ ) and accounted for an additional 3% of the variation in the task performance.

Hypothesis 2 stated that there are positive relationships between dimensions of benevolent leadership and organizational citizenship behavior. As shown in the Table 1 there are significant ( $p<.05$ ) and positive correlations between organizational citizenship behavior with ethical sensitivity ( $r=.37$ ), spiritual depth ( $r=.15$ ), positive engagement ( $r=.34$ ) and community responsiveness ( $r=.24$ ). Therefore, hypothesis 2 was confirmed.

Table 3 presents the results of the full regression model containing all of the four dimensions of benevolent leadership as predictors of organization citizenship behavior. The results showed that the combination of ethical sensitivity, spiritual depth, positive engagement and community responsiveness were able to significantly predict organization citizenship behavior ( $F=21.12$ ,  $P<.001$ ).  $R^2 = 0.30$ , which means 30% of the variance of the organization citizenship behavior was attributable to the benevolent leadership facets. In order to assess which dimensions of benevolent leadership are more closely associated with the organization citizenship behavior, stepwise multiple regressions are run. Ethical sensitivity was the first and the most salient of the variables that entered the regression

equation ( $\beta=.43$ ), and accounted for 19% of the variation in organization citizenship behavior. At step 2, spiritual depth entered the regression equation ( $\beta=.29$ ) and accounted for an additional 9% of the variation in organization citizenship behavior. The other two dimensions are not significant predictors of organization citizenship behavior.

**Table 3**  
**The Facets of Benevolent Leadership Regressed on Organization Citizenship Behavior**

Variables	R	R <sup>2</sup>	B	$\beta$	t	P
Constant			6.15		5.40	.001
Ethical sensitivity	.44	.19	.05	.39	5.09	.001
Spiritual depth	.53	.28	.11	.28	4.29	.001
Positive engagement	.54	.29	.02	.12	1.93	.05
Community responsiveness	.55	.30	.02	.04	.73	.94
Stepwise						
Variables	R	R <sup>2</sup>	B	$\beta$	t	P
Constant			6.14		21.14	.001
Ethical sensitivity	.44	.19	.04	.43	7.31	.001
Spiritual depth	.53	.28	.12	.29	4.28	.001

F=21.12, P<.001

According to hypothesis 3 each of the benevolent facets was expected to be correlated with affective commitment. As shown in Table 1 there are significant ( $p<.05$ ) and positive correlations between affective commitment and ethical sensitivity ( $r=.44$ ), spiritual depth ( $r=.30$ ), positive engagement ( $r=.26$ ) and community responsiveness ( $r=.15$ ). The correlation findings confirm hypothesis 3.

**Table 4**  
**Facets of Benevolent Leadership Regressed on Affective Commitment**

Variables	R	R <sup>2</sup>	B	β	t	P
Constant			7.65		6.37	.001
Ethical sensitivity	.37	.13	.03	.23	3.34	.001
Spiritual depth	.39	.15	.04	.10	1.57	.001
Positive engagement	.45	.21	.05	.21	3.17	.001
Community responsiveness	.46	.22	.01	.12	1.60	.10
<b>Stepwise</b>						
Variables	R	R <sup>2</sup>	B	β	t	P
Constant			7.68		6.37	.001
Ethical sensitivity	.37	.13	.04	.28	4.34	.001
Positive engagement	.44	.19	.05	.24	3.66	.001
Spiritual depth	.45	.21	.06	.12	1.98	.04

F=14.13, P<.001

Table 4 shows that the overall regression model is significant (F=14.13). R<sup>2</sup> indicates that 22 % of the variance of affective commitment was explained by the regression model. Next, attention was focused on determining which of the predictive variables is most closely related to affective commitment. For this purpose the researcher employed the stepwise multiple regression technique. All the dimensions except community responsiveness turned out to be significant in explaining affective commitment. Ethical sensitivity (β=.28), positive engagement (β=.24) and spiritual depth (β=.12) were the most important variables that entered the regression equation and accounted for 21% of the variation in affective commitment.

## **Discussion**

The purpose of this research was to enhance our understanding of the effect of benevolent leadership on task performance; organizational citizenship behavior and affective commitment in a work context. Overall, the results of the current study indicate that benevolent leaders positively influence employee's task performance, organizational citizenship behavior and affective commitment.

As hypothesized, supervisors who exhibited higher levels of benevolent leadership behaviors had employees with higher levels of task performance. There are reasons to believe that benevolent leadership and task performance are positively associated. There is considerable empirical evidence that virtuous and benevolent actions at work lead to tendencies to repeat or replicate these actions and this contagion effect leads to mutually reinforcing cycles and positive spirals in human systems (Cameron, Bright, & Caza, 2004; Seligman, 2002; Fredrickson, 2001). When employees observe benevolent leadership behaviors at work, they become more inclined towards replicating these benevolent behaviors, such as spending extra efforts to help colleagues or contribute to the common good. In turn, these positive spirals lead to collective flourishing, thriving, productivity, and better organizational performance (Cameron et al., 2004). In addition, a benevolent leader can fulfill a role obligation in front of the followers, which helps followers to build a more productive work group (Pellegrini & Scandura, 2008).

A considerable amount of work in organizations is accomplished through interactions among employees as they help each other in their organizational roles. Benevolent leadership behavior is also related to organizational citizenship behavior. Employees working with benevolent leaders and getting help from them will be more likely to offer extra help to their coworkers or spend extra effort to contribute to the common good (Lilius et al., 2008). In addition, the reciprocity of the relationship between a benevolent leader and the follower takes the form of genuine gratitude, personal loyalty, or compliance with the leader's requests (Farh & Cheng,

2000; Martinez, 2003). When both benevolent leader and the follower respect each party, social harmony exists (Cheng, Huang & Chou, 2002). Additionally, in the high-quality exchange relationship, a benevolent leader gives favor to the followers and followers reciprocate by offers of expanded responsibilities, such as extra-role performance, which is represented by organizational citizenship behavior. By showing individualized concern to followers, a benevolent leader signals the value of reciprocate effort by followers who are more likely to engage in behaviors that benefit the organization (Huang, Lung, Liu & Gong, 2010).

Benevolent leadership relates to the affective commitment and employees identify with the goals of the organization and desire to remain a part of the organization. Working with benevolent leaders who contribute to their co-workers, and organization can elicit a desire in employees to be more committed to their organizations. The perception of being valued and cared about by their managers may encourage employees positive identification and membership with the organization, which in turn strengthens their affective commitment to the organization (Meyer & Allen, 1991).

In general, a benevolent leader can increase task performance, organizational citizenship behavior and affective commitment through devoting energy to take care, show concern, and encourage followers when they encounter problems (Farh & Cheng, 2000). He/she expresses interest in the personal life of the followers and takes good care of their family members (Ayca, 2006). Benevolent leadership resembles the individualized consideration dimension of transformational leadership, as benevolence provides individualized care and encouragement to the followers in the work domain (Cheng, Chou, Wu, Huang, & Farh, 2004; Farh et. al., 2008). A benevolent leader would show good care to followers for their career development, provide opportunities to learn from mistakes, and teach them how to perform better (Wang & Cheng, 2010).

A methodological limitation of the current study was that all the data were correlational due to the cross-sectional design of the study. Another

limitation of the current study was the reliance on self-report data. Future studies should include some longitudinal components to better measure changes in variables over time, testing causal hypotheses more directly.

Findings of this research suggest that it would be beneficial for organization to develop training programs for managers and supervisors to learn how to apply benevolent leadership for increasing task performance, organizational citizenship behavior and affective commitment.

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Received: 27 / 5/ 2012  
Revised : 19/ 8/ 2013  
Accepted: 21 / 8/ 2013