

# The Mediating Effect of Communication Competence on the Relationship between the Transformational Leadership and Employees` Job Satisfaction in Syrian Private Universities

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**Abstract:** Previous studies have documented the importance of the transformational leadership and communication competence of the leaders and their relationship with employees` job satisfaction. However, there was a lack of leader insight regarding this relationship in the context of higher education in Syria and very few literatures had discussed the issues. The purpose of this study was to examine the mediating role of communication competence on the relationship between transformational leadership and the job satisfaction of the employees in Syrian private universities. The quantitative method was used in data collection. A random sampling technique was conducted which comprised of 247 faculty members and staff from seven private universities in Syria. A total of three different sets of instruments were used, namely Multifactor leadership (MLQ), Communicative Competence Scale (CCS) and the Minnesota Satisfaction Questionnaire (MSQ). PLS-SEM technique was used to analyze the direct and indirect relationships between the variables in this study. The results of the study indicated that there was a significant relationship between transformational leadership and communication competence. The results show that there was a significant relationship between transformational leadership and job satisfaction. Findings had revealed that the indirect effect of transformational leadership on job satisfaction through communication competence.

**Keywords:** Transformational leadership, Communication competence, Job satisfaction

## I. INTRODUCTION

Universities usually try to achieve some set goals. The leader is the most important in order to achieve these goals and objectives. The leader who uses the human factor to guide employees to work effectively toward educational organization goals appears at the top. An effective leader plays an essential role in the accomplishment of these objectives and the majority of researchers recognize the leader`s performance over the employees as an element for success or failure of the organization.

A successful university in this millennium requires a leader who supports traits such as innovation and creativity; he must be ready to draw out the maximum potential of his subordinates and keep them satisfied. The success of an organization is usually dependent on the hard work, loyalty and dedicated managers as well as employees (Bushra and Naveed, 2011). According to (Yukl,2010), followers who perceive their leaders as effective are more confident in facing challenges, experience greater job satisfaction, demonstrate higher levels of commitment to the organization, and display healthier psychological well-being. Leadership styles and communication are some of the main characteristics of an effective leader.

This study was inspired by prior research studies that suggested that leader`s Leadership styles and communication competence influence the employee job satisfaction. Seashore and Taber (1975) stated that "Employee job satisfaction is influenced by the internal organizational environment, which includes organizational climate, leadership types and personnel relationships". The fundamental factors influencing the effective functioning of an institution are leadership and employee job satisfaction (Kennerly 1989). Leaders` Communication competence does influence the employee job satisfaction too. Madlock (2006) suggested that communication between a leader and an employee influenced employee satisfaction.

As administrative leaders of the university, these deans and supervisors often need to sustain an academic environment and take up the responsibility of encouraging research. They are involved in program development and must maintain excellence in teaching while encouraging active collaboration throughout the university (Land, 2003).

The leaders in the universities should be aware that leadership styles and communication competence play an important role in maintaining successful academic organization. Recent researchers have demonstrated a lot of interest in

discovering the role of effective leadership in contributing to the success of academic organizations. They have shown particular interest in effective leadership characteristics related to colleges and universities. McGovern, Foster, and Ward (2002), through their analysis of research papers, determined that college presidents are aware of the need to improve administrative and academic leadership in higher education, and often attempt to identify those characteristics seen as effective within colleges and universities.

On the other hand, several research studies that have questioned employers as well as professors and instructors have shown that communication skill is one of the most important areas that needs improvement while dealing with employees and new instructors (Maes, Weldy and Icenogle, 1997; Morreale, Osborn and Pearson, 2000). With regard to current happenings, most of the research concentrates on leadership practices in various organizational settings with a number of differing perspectives, which range from disciplines that include Sociology as well as Anthropology, and Management science along with organizational change (Kotter and Haskett, 1992).

This study tried to find out the relationship between transformational leadership as an independent variable, communication competence as mediator variable and employee job satisfaction which would be considered as a dependent variable.

## **II. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Transformational Leadership Style**

The first description of the concept of transformational leadership was presented in Downton (1973), while the first effective definition was presented by James Burns in 1978. Burns (1978) described the construct of transformational leadership and explained that it refers to a leadership style in which the leader tends to identify the needs of employees and then identifies suitable methods to cater to their higher needs. However, it was defined more specifically with meaningful extensions by Bass and other researchers (Bass, 1997). Transformational leadership often starts with the development of a vision, where leaders build the trust, and guide the way for their employees.

Burns (1978) defined “transformational leadership as a process in which both leaders and followers believe in inspiring and uplifting one another to higher levels of moral ethics and motivation “. Moreover, Northouse (2010) described transformational leadership as “the process whereby a person engages with others and creates a connection that raises the level of motivation and morality in both the leader and the followers”. Transformational leaders pay attention to the needs of their followers and support them so that the subordinates reach their maximum potential. Yukl (2002) defined transformational leadership as “a process of bringing about crucial changes in the members' attitudes and assumptions and obtaining their commitment for the purpose of fulfilling the organization’s mission and objectives”.

The form of leadership gets its name from the fact that it transforms the working relationship beyond lower-level material satisfaction toward higher level intrinsic fulfillment. A Transformational leader aligns the goals of the employee with the goals of the organization (Bass & Riggio, 2006; Den et al., 1997). Bass and Riggio (2006) claimed that “Transformational leaders motivate others to do more than they originally intended and often even more than they thought possible”.

In addition, Avolio and Bass (2004) indicated that the transformational leaders interact with followers and set high standards show a determination that motivates followers in order to stimulate their thinking, to inspire their performance, to move them to see themselves and the opportunities and challenges of their environment in a new way and to perform beyond expectations. Similarly, Stone et al., (2004) indicated that the leader inspires employees to achieve more than they thought possible thus increasing organizational effectiveness.

Research had shown that transformational leaders affect organizational outcomes such as organizational citizenship behaviour, organizational commitment, job satisfaction and effort (Nguni, et al., 2006). This study specifically examined the influence of transformational leadership on the personal outcome, Job Satisfaction. The relationship between transformational leadership and personal outcomes such as job satisfaction and commitment are well established (Bass, 1998). The relationship between dean/supervisor and employee are the most important, whereby predominantly democratic/participative leadership styles would be practiced in an educational setting. this style of leadership would build relationships between academic leaders and faculty member, as well as building trust and collegiality amongst staff.

### **Communication Competence**

Communication is an important concept in the organization to build relationships among its members and other parties. Fostering good relationships is necessary in order to achieve some cooperation. This in turn will result in the achievement of organizational objectives. It is important for a leader or a Supervisor to have a strong grip on communication. Awad and Al Hashami (2012) have explained that communication today has become the lifeblood of every organization and it is essential to for the health of the organization.

They stated that organizations cannot exist without communication because management in authority will not be able to receive any inputs in terms of information. In addition, they state that supervisors would come to a standstill in terms of providing instructions as there would not be coordination with regard to work. It would be impossible for employees to

work without coordination and the organization will collapse with the lack of it. However, it has been discovered that weak communication skills of leaders increase ambiguity and stress among employees (Ray, 1993).

Leaders must make an effort to communicate effectively with their employees. In other words, they must have communication competence (Cushman and Craig, 1976). Several studies have indicated that communication competence has a positive effect on many domains of the organization. If people want their relational needs to be satisfied, they need to communicate well in order to reach their goals. When a leader wants to be competent in terms of communication competence, he must be aware of all the related information, share the information, listen to people carefully, and connect with employees at all levels of the organization (Shaw, 2005).

The organization's leadership must check their view and encourage feedback in order to discover their problems and find the solution which seems to be closely associated with the communication competence of organizational members. Luthans (1973) emphasized that organizational communication must be examined behaviorally as communication effects change through both psychological and language processes. Cushman and Craig (1976) argued that communicator competence is related to the ability of individuals to show competencies in areas such as listening as well as negotiating. Subsequently, It can be said that one factor of the long term success of the entire organization depends on the quality of competencies honed by its leaders.

### **Job satisfaction**

Locke (1976) defined job satisfaction from an employee's standpoint as "a pleasurable or positive emotional state from the appraisal of one's job or experiences". Newstrom (2007) argued that "job satisfaction is a set of favorable or unfavorable feelings and emotions with roommates employees view their work". which means job satisfaction is a set of pleasant or unpleasant feelings with which employees view their work.

Job satisfaction is related to people's feelings and attitudes about a variety of both intrinsic and extrinsic elements of jobs and the organizations where they perform their jobs. These elements are aspects related to pay, promotion, benefits, work nature, supervision, and relationship with colleagues (Mosadeghard, 2003). Job satisfaction is generally recognised as a multifaceted construct that includes employee feelings about a variety of both intrinsic and extrinsic job elements.

Moreover, job satisfaction encompasses specific aspects of satisfaction related to pay, benefits, promotion, work conditions, supervision, organisational practices and relationships with co-workers (Misener et al., 1996). Schultz (1982) described intrinsic factors as including recognition, achievement, responsibility and advancement; extrinsic factors include elements related to salary, working conditions, supervision and administrative policies. Thus, intrinsic satisfaction refers to actually performing the work and experiencing feelings of accomplishment and self-actualisation, e.g. career opportunity, advancement and extrinsic satisfaction is derived from the rewards given to an individual by the organisation or superiors that can include compensation and job security.

The importance of job satisfaction is especially significant in the field of industrial/organizational psychology because there is general agreement that it can have an effect on job performance, productivity, commitment and turnover. Job satisfaction is important for both employers and their workers. in addition, Job satisfaction is important in its own right as a part of social welfare. Workers' decisions about whether to work or not, what kind of job to accept or stay in, and how hard to work are all likely to depend in part upon the worker's subjective evaluation of their work, in other words on their job satisfaction (Clark, 1998).

The leaders should enhance job satisfaction, and this should be an organizational goal. Therefore, it is clear that satisfied workers will be more productive and have additional chances of being retained within the organization for a longer period. This is in contrast to displeased workers who will be less useful and who will have a greater tendency to quit their jobs (Crossman, 2003). More importantly, it has been noticed that satisfied workers perform better and provide better service to clients. This could result in enhancing customer satisfaction.

### **III. THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE VARIABLES AND HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT**

Various empirical studies have been conducted to investigate the relationship between transformational leadership style and job satisfaction. The results of most studies have shown that there is a relationship between transformational leadership style and job satisfaction. Also, Leadership behavior is an important factor that influences employees' job satisfaction (Lian and Tui, 2012; Menon, 2014).

In the view of Howell and Dorfman (1986) leadership behaviors have a direct effect on employees' job satisfaction, organizational loyalty, work pressure, motivation, and team cohesion, all of which, in turn, affect job performance. Similarly, Lashbrook (1997) stated that transformational leadership style plays a vital role in influencing employees' job satisfaction. In educational settings, The result of the studies about the relationship between leader's transformational leadership style and faculty job satisfaction have supported (Timothy and Ronald, 2004; Silins and Mulford, 2002; Walumbwa et al., 2005).

Thus, it is suggested that academic leaders influence the job satisfaction of employees to a large extent. Mester et al. (2003) suggested that transformational leadership and transactional leadership styles are related to job satisfaction. Patricia (2002) studied transformational leadership, and how relate to job satisfaction. The participants of the study were engineers and technical support staff at an aerospace company. This study used the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) and Job Describe Index (JDI) to measure transformational leadership and job satisfaction. The study concluded that transformational leadership was positively related to job satisfaction.

In another study, Abubakari and Mohammed (2014) in their study concluded that behavioural traits of transformational leadership styles promoted staff efficiency and productivity than transactional leadership styles. The study recommended that the Polytechnic authority should encourage the practice of transformational leadership characteristics among its staff to ensure efficient performance and productivity.

Menon (2014) in a study on the relationship between transformational leadership, perceived leader effectiveness and teachers' job satisfaction. The results provide support for a three factor structure model consisting of transformational and passive avoidant forms of leadership. Teachers' overall job satisfaction was found to be significantly linked to the leadership behaviors included in the full range model of leadership. In another study, Hukpati (2009) examined the relationship between transformational leadership style among department managers and employees job satisfaction in tertiary institution in Ghana. From the description above, the researcher proposed the following hypothesis:

**H1: There is a significant relationship between transformational leadership and employees' job satisfaction.**

Previous research related to organizational communication has found positive relationships between superior subordinate communication and job satisfaction (Goldhaber et al., 1978; Madlock, 2006; Pincus, 1986; Schweiger and Denisi, 1991). Madlock (2006) investigated the relationship between supervisors' communicator competence and subordinates' job and communication satisfaction. The findings stated that there is a strong and positive relationship between the perceptions of supervisors' communicator competence and subordinates communication and job satisfaction.

Similarly, Miles et al. (1996) indicated a noteworthy relationship between leader employee in relation to communication and job satisfaction. Research conducted by Falcione et al. (1977) displayed similar results as a positive relationship between a superior's communicator competence and subordinates' job satisfaction. Additionally, research findings by Berman and Hellweg (1989) found that the communication competence of superiors increases their subordinates' level of satisfaction and there is a positive relationship between superior's communication competence and the subordinates' perceived satisfaction with their superiors. Through their research it is evident that the communication competence of the leader is an essential factor in employee job satisfaction.

Steele and Plenty (2015) revealed the results of their study on 152 respondents. Their results demonstrate a strong correlation between supervisor subordinate communication competence and job satisfaction. It has been noticed that leaders who communicate frequently with subordinates and ask them for their input might motivate employees to have a higher level of job satisfaction in the organisation. Madlock (2008b) found a moderate relationship between supervisor communicator competence and employee job satisfaction.

Also a leader's communication competence was found to be a predictor of subordinate job satisfaction. The manner in which employees perceive a superior's behavior can positively or negatively have an influence on job satisfaction. Employees who do not like their Supervisors and have negative thoughts about their superior are generally not willing to communicate. In addition, they may not have the motivation to work whereas employees that like and have positive thoughts about their supervisor will be more willing to communicate.

Based on a study by Shojaee et al., (2005) those leaders who communicated their decisions to employees clearly or created an environment of consultation at the workplace were more successful in increasing the job satisfaction of their employees. A leader's communication competence is deemed to not only increase job satisfaction but it can also improve organizational performance (Berman and Hellweg, 1989). Interpersonal communication is something that can affect the quality of services and the health of the society. Communication competence alongside with other resources has a major role in employee satisfaction. From the description above, the researcher proposed the following hypothesis:

**H 2: There is a significant relationship between a leader's communication competence and employee job satisfaction.**

The link between transformational leadership styles and communication Competence has received limited attention by business and communication scholars alike. According to Holladay and Coombs (1993), leadership is a behavior enacted through communication. Specifically, Holladay and Coombs suggested that communication shapes the perceptions of a leader's charisma, and communication can be divided into the content of the leader's messages and the presentation of those messages. Similarly, messages sent by leaders are considered to contain both affective and cognitive strategies (Hall and Lord, 1995), and when leaders effectively communicate their vision, they win the confidence of followers, which in turn aids in communication satisfaction between the leader and follower (Pavitt, 1999).

Communication is required for the leader as well as the organization to be efficient and effective (Zilhoglu,1996). Rallis ve Goldring (2000) in their study found that the leadership roles of school managers have a positive effect on their collaboration skills and communication competency. Flauto (1999) studied on a typology or taxonomy of communication competence, in which he noted that leadership, is a social process involving a relationship between individuals. This relationship is enacted through communication.

A field study of managerial dyads in a manufacturing firm (Eisenberg, Monge and Farace, 1984) examined the impact of differences in two communication rules, initiation and termination, on performance evaluations and subordinate satisfaction. The study concluded that actual agreement and accuracy is less important, particularly in regard to interpersonal evaluations, than is the perception of agreement. Restated, the perception of communication competence may be more important in managerial dyads than is actual communication competence.

Penley, Alexander, Jernigan and Henwood (1991) who looked at various communication abilities or competencies and their relationship to leadership effectiveness. They found a “fundamental link between communication and managerial performance”. They looked at communication competence from a more specific skills rather than a global skills perspective which provided more detailed analysis of the communication performance link. Also, Berson and Avolio (2004) found a communication and transformational leadership link, although they were not looking for this specifically. They studied a telecommunications firm and found that those leaders rated as transformational also 40 were rated as more effective communicators by direct reports. Previous research has linked generalized communication competence measures with leader or manager performance (e.g., Flauto, 1999; Redding, 1972; Roberts, O’Reilly, Bretton and Porter, 1974). From the description above, the researcher proposed the following hypothesis:

**H3: There is a significant relationship between transformational leadership and communication competence.**

Berson and Linton (2005) indicated that extensive research has been done to investigate the positive relationship between transformational and transactional leadership as they relate to employee satisfaction. Bass (1990) argued that, follower job satisfaction is one of the most directly impacted and important outcomes of leadership. The following studies finding show the relationship between transformational and transactional styles and job satisfaction.

Jabnoun and Al Rasasi (2005) conducted a study to measure the effect of transformational leadership style on employees’ job satisfaction in UAE hospitals. Employees were selected randomly from six hospitals in UAE. The researchers adopted a Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire ( Avolio and Bass, 2004). The researchers found that employees who rated their leaders in terms of the three dimensions of transformational leadership (i.e. charisma, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration) were satisfied with their job.

Jurado et al. (2006) also investigated the link between communication theory and transformational the leadership style. Kyoungjo et al (1991) investigated the relationships between leader-subordinate interpersonal communication and subordinate satisfaction in conjunction with leadership. Flauto (1999) also emphasized that communication competence is a prerequisite for effective leadership, as he found in his study that each of the leadership dimensions, was highly correlated with communication competency. A recent research of Penley et al (1991) showed that the higher performing managers will exhibit, the higher levels of communication skills will be revealed.

Schultz (1980) found that individuals’ use of communication behaviors, as perceived by their work group, predicted their emergence as leaders. The use of subordinate ratings of six communication variables allowed the investigator to predict which members of a classroom work group would emerge as either task or social emotional leaders.

Empirical studies have proved that superior employee communication is an important factor that influences job satisfaction at the workplace. The way in which an employee perceives a leader or supervisor’s behavior can influence job satisfaction in a positive or negative way. Research carried out earlier has reported that supportive downward communication from managers was moderately to strongly relate to subordinate job satisfaction (Eisenberger et al., 1997; Gaertner, 2000).

Infante and Gordon (1989) in their study supported the significance of communication between leaders and subordinates in discovering the impact of job satisfaction on employees. In fact, one study found that communication behaviours alone accounted for more than 60 per cent of the variance in employee job satisfaction (Goldhaber et al., 1978). Edy (2009) argued that communication is a factor that affects job satisfaction.

This researcher states that communication between supervisors subordinate is an important influence in achieving job satisfaction at the workplace. Research study by Sharbrough et al. (2006) demonstrated positive relationships were indicated between a leader’s use of motivational language and how well they were perceived in terms of effectiveness, communication competence that resulted in job and communication satisfaction.

The relationship between an employee and the supervisor is a very important aspect at the workplace. Therefore, a leader or academic head that uses friendliness and non-verbal immediacy to open communication lines is generally ready for positive feedback and can expect a high rate of job satisfaction from a subordinate. However, a superior who is antisocial and unfriendly who is not willing to communicate will generally get a lot of negative feedback and there will be a very low rate of job satisfaction from their employees at the workplace (Weiss and Cropanzano, 1996). From the description above, the researcher proposed the following hypothesis:

**H 4: Communication Competence has mediation effects on the relationship between the Transformational Leadership Style and employees` Job Satisfaction in universities.**

From the description above, we can describe the research model as follows:

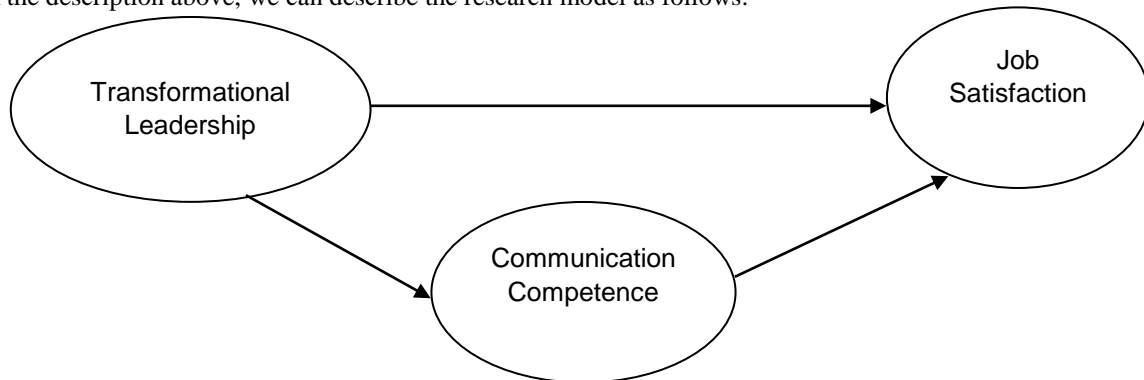


Figure.1 Framework

**IV. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

**Research Design:** This study used a quantitative research method to collect data from the respondents using three instruments which comprises of four sections. The use of quantitative methodology in educational research can be very useful when trying to determine whether or not a claim is true or false. Often times quantitative research is specific, unbiased and objective as researchers are not closely attached to the study environment (Creswell, 2005; Gay and Airasian, 2000).

**Population:** The population of the study was faculty members and staff from various colleges particularly concentrating on a random set of private universities of Syria. The researcher excluded leaders, supervisors and deans because this study was concerned with an investigation of their leadership style and communication competence, so the respondents were only faculty and staff. The employee`s rating of their leaders` leadership styles and communication competence would be more valid than the leaders` self rating.

**Sampling Design:** Seven private universities were selected from 22 private universities in total by using simple random sampling technique to give the universities equal chance of being included as a sample. These seven private universities represent different regional and socioeconomic background characteristics. The study follows Krejcie and Morgan (1970) sampling table for determining sample size; the total targeted population size was 966 possible participants. According to Krejcie and Morgan (1970), for a population size of 966, the sample size should be around 247 participants.

**V. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The results of the study show that first transformational leadership Style affects communication competence with R2 = 0.127, path coefficient  $\beta = 0.179$ , and Q2 = 0.065. second transformational leadership Style affects job satisfaction with R2 = 0.454, path coefficient  $\beta = 0.317$ , and Q2 = 0.299. third communication competence affects job satisfaction with R2 = 0.454, path coefficient  $\beta = 0.450$ , and Q2 = 0.299. This study assessed the mediating role of communication competence between transformational leadership, transactional leadership and job satisfaction in the PLS path model. The product of the coefficient approach using the bootstrapping re-sampling method has been used to examine the significance of the indirect effect (Preacher and Hayes, 2008).

In this study, there are 4 hypotheses tested and based on the results of test. The results showed that all the hypotheses are supported by the data.

Table 1. The Hypothesis Test of Research Model

Hypothesis	Hypothesis Statement	T-Value	Result
H1	There is a significant relationship between transformational leadership and employees` job satisfaction.	8.02	Supported
H2	There is a significant relationship between a leader`s communication competence and employee job satisfaction.	6.769	Supported
H3	There is a significant relationship between transformational leadership and communication competence.	3.125	Supported
H4	Communication Competence has mediation effects on the relationship between the Transformational Leadership Style and employees` Job Satisfaction in universities.	6.012	Supported

The result of testing the hypothesis found that:

**Hypothesis 1:** The first hypothesis was supported and accepted. The first hypothesis predicted that transformational leadership style will positively influence employee job satisfaction in private Syrian universities.

**Hypothesis 2:** The second hypothesis was supported and accepted. The second hypothesis predicted that communication competence will positively influence employee job satisfaction in private Syrian universities.

**Hypothesis 3:** The third hypothesis was supported and accepted. The third hypothesis predicted that transformational leadership style will positively influence communication competence in private Syrian universities.

**Hypothesis 4:** The fourth hypothesis was supported and accepted. The fourth hypothesis predicted that communication competence will positively mediate the impact of transformational leadership style on employee job satisfaction in private Syrian universities.

## CONCLUSION

overall, this study has achieved its objectives in which all the seven research questions and the seven hypotheses raised have been addressed, clarified and answered. The results of this study found that transformational leadership style had a significant relationship with job satisfaction. Also, communication competence had significant relationship with job satisfaction. In addition, the study examined the mediating role of communication competence on the relationship between transformational leadership style and employees' job satisfaction in the private universities in Syria. The primary goal of every organization should be to improve its effectiveness. Two approaches to improving the overall effectiveness of an organization is to increase the effectiveness of the leader and to enhance job satisfaction levels of employees.

Since leadership styles and communication competence are conceived as the essence of organizational behaviour, it has been suggested that one of the best ways to improve organizational effectiveness is to improve a leader's leadership styles and communication competence. Employees are one of the most important assets for an organization.

Their role is vital to the organization's success. In higher educational context for example, a faculty member plays an important role in providing quality teaching to the students, enhancing their skills and doing research. Thus, it is important for the organization to ensure that they have high job satisfaction. Also, other staff should have high job satisfaction while they provide services and complete their job tasks. This in turn could result in enhanced performance among employees, commitment, productivity, working climate and encourage employees to stay in the university and contribute to greater organizational effectiveness.

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