

# How Does Transformational Leadership Influence Employees' Creativity? Examining the Mediating Role of Perceived Organizational Support

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## **Abstract**

Creativity is an essential attribute for organizational success and sustainability in today's dynamic business environment. While employee creativity has been widely researched, the interplay between transformational leadership (TL), perceived organizational support (POS), and employees' creativity remains underexplored. Thus, the study investigates the mediating role of POS in the relationship between TL and employees' creativity in selected banks within the Puttalam Region of Sri Lanka. The quantitative study was conducted based on primary data which were gathered from 189 respondents from six selected private and public banks through well-structured questionnaires. The collected data were analyzed by using univariate, bivariate, and multivariate analyses. The mean values for TL, POS, and employees' creativity ranged from 3.50 to 5.00, indicating high levels of these variables within the sample. The study also confirms that TL has both direct and indirect effects on employees' creativity, with POS serving as a partial mediator. Furthermore, all formulated hypotheses were accepted, underscoring the strong interconnections among TL, POS, and employees' creativity. This study contributes to the theoretical understanding of how leadership and organizational support jointly drive creativity, offering valuable insights for managers seeking to foster an innovative workforce. Practical implications emphasize the importance of TL behaviours and supportive organizational climates in promoting employee creativity.

**Key Words:** Employees' Creativity, Perceived Organizational Support, Transformational Leadership

## Background of the Study

Leadership and innovation are fundamental drivers of organizational development and sustainability in today's corporate world. The ability to innovate, rooted in employee creativity, is essential for organizational survival (Krskova and Breyer, 2023). Transformational leadership (TL) plays a pivotal role in fostering an environment conducive to creativity and innovation (Celestin and Sujatha, 2024). Transformational leaders also bolster employee confidence and independence, which are essential for innovation. Inspirational motivation, such as setting clear expectations for innovation, increases employees' confidence in innovative tasks (Tan, Van Dum, and Wilderom, 2023). Moreover, individualized consideration enables leaders to demonstrate empathy, appreciation, and support for employees tackling challenges proactively, further encouraging innovation (Azim, Fan, Uddin, Abdul Kader Jilani, and Begum, 2019). These attributes highlight the pivotal role of transformational leaders in enhancing creativity and innovation within organizations in addition to intellectual stimulation and idealized influence.

Perceived organizational support (POS) is a key factor that influences employee creativity by addressing their socio-emotional needs and improving their perception of organizational value (Rhoades and Eisenberger, 2002). Employees with higher POS are more motivated to contribute and innovate, as POS fosters a sense of reciprocal support and improves intrinsic and extrinsic motivation (Kurtessis, Eisenberger, Ford, Buffardi, Stewart, and Adis, 2017). The dynamic componential model of creativity and innovation also highlights the importance of individual components, such as freedom and challenge, in fostering creativity (Amabile and Pratt, 2016).

Creativity is the development of novel and potentially useful ideas. The dynamic componential model of creativity and innovation highlights that individual idea generation primarily depends on individual components (Amabile and Pratt, 2016). Amabile and Grysiewicz (1989) identified several environmental stimulants to creativity including freedom, challenge, resources, and supervisor, and some obstacles to employment creativity. Dayanti and Yulianti (2023) emphasize the need for creativity and innovation for preserving a competitive market position. It allows an organization to use its resources more efficiently than competitors.

The banking industry plays a crucial role in modern economies, especially in developing countries like Sri Lanka, where it fosters stability and economic growth (Al-Fayoumi and Abuzayed, 2009). Given the financial crisis currently affecting the nation, understanding how banking institutions operate and how employees are supported is critical. Fierce competition and dynamic challenges require organizations to innovate and encourage employee creativity (Cekmecelioglu and Günsel, 2013). Leadership styles, particularly TL, have been recognized for fostering employee creativity (Mittal and Dhar, 2015) by empowering employees to develop innovative solutions to complex problems. POS has the potential to mediate the relationship between TL and employee creativity, particularly in high-stress environments like the banking industry (Yokozawa, Nguyen, Tran, 2021).

While previous studies have explored the direct relationship between TL and employee creativity (Iqbal, Ahmad, and Nazir, 2023; Mahmoud, Mustamil and Seng, 2024), limited attention has been paid to the mediating role of POS in this relationship (Suifan, Abdallah and Al Janini, 2018). Existing literature primarily focuses on generalized contexts, leaving a gap in understanding how these factors interplay in specific industries or regions, such as the banking sector in Sri Lanka. The lack of studies addressing the mediating effect of POS on TL and employee creativity linkage in the Sri Lankan banking sector, particularly in the Puttalam Region of Sri Lanka, highlights a significant knowledge gap.

This study addresses this gap by examining whether POS mediates the relationship between TL and employee creativity in selected banks in the Puttalam Region of Sri Lanka. As one of Sri Lanka's significant contributors to the economy, the banking sector in this region represents an ideal setting to explore how leadership styles and organizational support influence creativity. The research will contribute to the body of knowledge by filling the empirical gap and providing insights into fostering creativity and innovation in the banking industry amid challenging economic conditions. Thus, the objectives of this study are to investigate:

1. the degree of TL, POS and employees' creativity from the perspective of employees,
2. the relationships among the TL, POS and employees' creativity, and
3. the mediating effect of POS in the relationship between TL and employees' creativity.

This research paper consists of five sections. Section two (next section) reviews the literature and explores the associations among TL, POS, and employees' creativity. Section three provides details on methodology of this study. Section four provides results and discussion based on empirical evidence and finally, section five presents concluding remarks.

## **Literature Review**

### **Employees' Creativity**

The ability to express oneself freely while coming up with novel solutions to problems is referred to as creativity (Argia and Ismail, 2014). Organizations are always dependent on the creativity of workers (Arulrajah, 2017). Employee creativity is an important component of intellectual capital and it is concerned with the generation of new and valuable ideas (Kumara, Neruja, and Arulrajah, 2023). Creativity is considered as a significant facet for any employee that can be applied to the work environment in an organization because it can help achieve the purpose of the company creatively (Anggiani, 2019). Rogers (1983) operationally defined a creative individual as one who initially performs the creative work. Someone with high creativity can create something new and is characterized by originality when expressing an artistic nature. By developing creativity and sharing with other employees, the companies promote participation in innovation and ultimately they will be in positions to compete globally. Therefore, companies need

to increase their employees' creativity to contribute to creating products or offering services that are useful for companies to compete globally (Palupi, 2020). Creativity is related to innovation (Arulrajah, 2014; Asbari, Purba, Hariandja, and Sudibjo, 2021). The next share of this literature work reviews the concept called transformational leadership.

### **Transformational Leadership**

According to Opatha (2015, p. 327), leadership can be defined as a *function of influencing a certain group of people individually and collectively by a certain person toward the achievement of certain goals*. Leadership that is needed for positive change is called transformational leadership (Opatha, 2015). Danim (2011) states that TL is the capacity of a leader to modify organizational resources as much as possible while working with other team members to achieve practical goals in line with implemented achievement targets. According to Gong, Huang, and Farh (2009) TL plays an important role in providing support and encouraging motivation to employees, uniting employees, and showing creativity. According to Eisenberger and Stinglhamber (2011), the leader is an agent of the organization, and TL behavior is an indicator for subordinates of positive coping, leading to the highest organizational **perceived support**.

Moreover, Erkutlu (2008) stated that TL has been proven to be the most successful type of leadership because it raises the level of maturity and ideals of his followers and shows concern for the employee's self-actualization and welfare in the organization and the community. Moreover, it is crucial to focus on the process of developing individuals who, in turn, help companies flourish by reaching predetermined goals. The transformational style of leadership is further divided into four dimensions regarding its role and applicability. These are idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individual consideration. Although these aspects overlap in many research, they operate together to increase and develop each other's efficacy, rather than canceling each other out (Den Hartog, Van Muijen, and Koopman, 1997).

**Idealized influence** is a dimension of TL which involves the leaders acting in a way that makes them play role models for their followers. As a result, the followers come to respect, adore, and trust the leader, leading them to desire to imitate the leader (Leonard, George, Peter, and Michael, 2016). The followers also acknowledge extraordinary capabilities, persistence, and determination in their leader and the leader is evidently willing to take risks to achieve organizational or personal goals but adopts ethical and moral conduct while doing that (Gomes, 2014).

**Inspirational motivation** is the second dimension of TL, which refers to a leader's ability to inspire followers with an appealing and motivating vision (Judge and Piccolo, 2004). Leaders strengthen followers by viewing the future with optimism (Antonakis, Avolio and Sivasubramaniam, 2003) and acting in ways that motivate those around them by providing meaning and challenge to their followers' work (Bass, Avolio, Jung, and Berson, 2003). Jackson (2020) said that inspirational

motivation concerns the way to motivate employees where this allows to spread positivity towards employees to develop their performance at work.

**Intellectual stimulation** is the third dimension of the TL style, where leaders intellectually stimulate employees to perform in the workplace. Asma, Sunan, and Mahmud (2021) state that intellectual stimulation is used by leaders to develop employee capabilities of exploring and capturing opportunities to develop performance. Employees get the opportunity to think from a new perspective on an old problem, where they can consider a wide variety of opinions to make decisions. Jackson (2020) also stated that intellectual stimulation is a way of developing a challenging environment for performing tasks in the workplace. Anyhow, employees perform better at work when their assumptions are stimulated intellectually (Jen Chen and Min Wu, 2020).

**Individual consideration** is considered as the fourth dimension of TL that is the attention of leaders to the needs and the potential for the development of others. Jen Chen and Min Wu (2020) stated that, in terms of individual consideration, leaders treat individual employees based on their inter-cultural differences. Diverse workforce of any organization has to be treated in a diverse way. The next part of this literature work reviews the concept called perceived organizational support.

### **Perceived Organizational Support**

POS is the degree to which employees believe that their organization cares about their well-being, values their contribution, and supports them in terms of socio-emotional needs (Eder and Eisenberger, 2008). POS is vividly explained in the organizational support theory, which postulates that, based on the norm of reciprocity, employees trade their efforts and dedication to their organization for tangible (i.e., pay and fringe benefits) and non-tangible incentives such as socio-emotional benefits (i.e., esteem, caring, and approval) (Al-Omar, Arafah, Barakat, Almutairi, Khurshid, and Alsultan, 2019). Eisenberger, Malone, and Presson (2016, p. 3) defined POS as “*the extent to which it is perceived by employees that organizations value their contributions and care about the well-being of employees*”. Forms of organizational support that help and encourage personnel to be self-directed and self-managing will increase proactive behavior (Hashemi, Nadi, Hosseini, and Rezvanfar, 2012). Rhoades and Eisenberger (2002) suggest two major work experience antecedents of perceived organizational support: perceived supervisor support and procedural justice. In this study, these two antecedents will be used to measure the POS.

**Procedural Justice** refers to employees’ perceptions regarding the fairness of the policies and procedures used to make decisions regarding the allocation of organizational resources (Colquitt, 2001). Simply this refers to the fairness of processes and procedures adopted within the workplace for the allocation of outcomes and for making important decisions (Cropanzano, Prehar, and Chen, 2002; Greenberg, 1990). Employees feel supported by their organizations, when fair practices and policies are consistently followed (Shore and Shore, 1995). Also,

Fu and Lihua (2012) highlighted that procedural justice indicates that an organization's respect for employees' rights leads to increased support.

**Supervisory Support** is determined by how much employees believe their managers appreciate their efforts and contributions, care about their interests and well-being, and encourage and support them (Eisenberger, Stinglhamber, Vandenberghe, Sucharski, and Rhoades, 2002). In organizations, the immediate supervisor plays a crucial function in managing the diverse workforce. Since they are closest to the employee, direct supervisors are thought to be significant for their encouragement and support. As a result, the direct supervisor may successfully control the feelings of each distinct subordinate (Dawley, Andrews, and Bucklew, 2008). The next slice of this literature review formulates the **relevant** hypotheses of the study.

### **Hypotheses Development**

#### ***Transformational Leadership and Employees' Creativity***

Transformational leaders are analytical, effective, and result-oriented, and direct followers for a new set of behaviors that promote change and creativity in organizations (Abbas, Iqbal, Waheed, and Riaz, 2012). TL was more effective at encouraging followers to think more divergently and to adopt generative and exploratory thinking processes that yielded more creative ideas and solutions. Leaders can create a climate where creative ideas are more likely to emerge by stimulating followers to develop new ideas, displaying confidence, and not blaming them when new ideas fail (Herrmann and Flfe, 2014). Further, findings of the literature stated that TL translates into enhanced creative work efforts among employees, because these employees adopt an action-based approach towards work (De Clercq, and Mustafa, 2024). The synergy between leadership and innovation is critical for organizational change, as leaders play a pivotal role in guiding and sustaining innovative efforts. Celestin and Sujatha (2024) revealed that firms led by transformational leaders reported 70% successful innovation initiatives compared to 50% in firms with transactional leaders. This showcases that TL style encourages creativity, and fosters an innovation-friendly environment. Based on the empirical evidence and discussion, in this study the following hypothesis was developed:

*H<sub>i</sub>: Transformational leadership has a significant positive relationship with employees' creativity.*

#### ***Transformational Leadership and Perceived Organizational Support***

It has been argued, based on the POS theory, that there is a positive relationship between TL and POS. A leader represents the organization, and his or her TL style signals to followers that they will be treated favorably, which raises their perception of organizational support (Eisenberger and Stinglhamber, 2011; Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison, and Sowa, 1986). According to Stinglhamber, Marique, Caesens, Hanin, and Zanet (2015), the transformational leader coaches his or her followers, takes into account each one's particular requirements, and lets them thrive in a nurturing atmosphere. Such leaders also demonstrate the need for

higher expectations, challenges, and standards, and they inspire followers to use their creativity to look for new possibilities and solve difficult problems. In general, the transformative leader shows confidence in followers' skills and appreciation for their efforts. Several studies have investigated the positive relationship between TL and POS (Mittal and Dhar, 2015; Herrmann and Felfe, 2014; Hu, Gu, and Chen, 2013). Based on the empirical evidence and discussion, the second hypothesis for this study is:

*H<sub>2</sub>: Transformational leadership has a significant positive relationship with perceived organizational support.*

### **Perceived Organizational Support and Employees' Creativity**

POS plays an important role in employees' creativity because it tends to increase the likelihood of creative output (Zhou and George, 2001). Moreover, perceived supervisor support increases creative behavior by increasing employees' interest in their work (Appu and Kumar Sia, 2015). When an organization appreciates employees' contributions in ways that encourage employees to think differently, generating new ideas and solutions for important issues, then creative outcomes are more feasible to achieve. Moreover, when employees' perceptions are that the organization cares about their opinions; these supportive feelings contribute to norms of reciprocity towards the organization's goals and objectives (Aldabbas, Pinnington, and Lahrech, 2021). Based on the empirical evidence and argument, for this study the following hypothesis, i.e., the third one was formulated:

*H<sub>3</sub>: Perceived organizational support has a significant positive relationship with employees' creativity.*

### **Mediating Role of Perceived Organizational Support**

A limited number of studies that examined the interaction between POS and employees' creativity under TL have been identified. However, once staff members understand what their company offers them, in addition to the managers and leaders appreciating them, they also need assistance and acknowledgement. This acknowledgement will foster a sense of pride in their contribution and concern for their welfare. Employees have a duty to care about the success of the company and assist in achieving it in the most original manner possible (Rhoades and Eisenberger, 2002; Rhoades, Eisenberger and Armeli, 2001). Furthermore, because POS increases employees' view that their employers appreciate their attainment of organizational goals, it encourages employees' innovation (Waseem, 2010). Rhoades and Eisenberger (2002) identify three mechanisms that underpin organizational support. First, when employees see that their contributions and well-being are valued by their bosses, they feel obligated to return the favor via their actions. Second, compassion and respect contribute to the fulfillment of fundamental individual demands for affiliation and approbation at work. A third point of view is that the acknowledgment and approval of an organization can help employees believe that their performance will be acknowledged and rewarded. Employees will likely behave creatively to increase their firms' competitive edge as transformational leaders succeed in nurturing an atmosphere of organizational

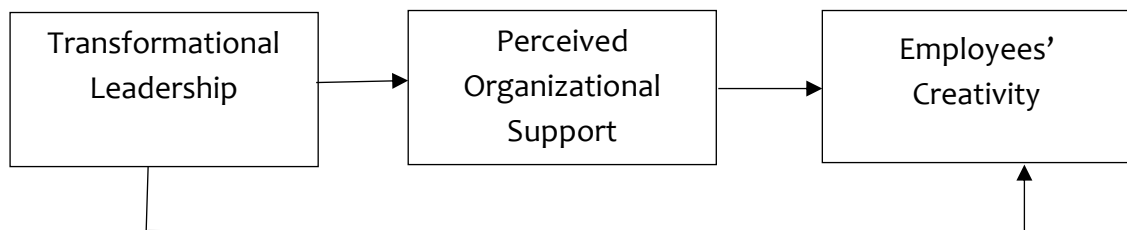
support. TL of a leader influences followers ideally, inspires them with an appealing and motivating vision, stimulates them intellectually to perform in the workplace, and pays attention individually to their needs and potential for development, followers tend to create new ideas that will be useful for innovations. This TL - employees' creativity linkage is explained by POS. Based on the empirical evidence and argument, the following hypothesis numbered 4 was developed for this study:

*H<sub>4</sub>: Perceived organizational support mediates the relationship between transformational leadership and employees' creativity.*

### Conceptual Model

Based on the review of the literature, this study proposes to test the following conceptual model illustrated in Figure 1, to examine the mediating role of POS in the relationship between TL and employees' creativity.

**Figure 1. Conceptual Model**



Source: Suifan, Abdallah, and Al Janini (2018)

### Theoretical Support for the Conceptual Model

#### Social Exchange Theory

Social exchange theory explains employee contributions to their organizations as well as employee expectations as a result of their engagement (Balu, 1964). According to social exchange theory, when someone interacts with or benefits another, that person will most likely return the favor in the future. It may be argued that an organization that meets the demands of its employees and pays more attention to their interests generates greater advantages for the organization and enhances POS. Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison, and Sowa (1986) found that if the employees have strong exchange ideologies, they show higher organizational commitment to their organization and want to give more to the organization for its success. Accordingly, the social exchange theory clarifies that an individual's interactions are often perceived as contingent and interdependent on the actions of other people, and those interdependent transactions can generate excellent relationships.

#### Organizational Support Theory

Organizational support theory is rooted in social exchange theory, which is based on the significant conceptual paradigms for understanding the workplace. Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison, and Sowa originally developed this theory in 1986. It is a psychological theory that examines the link between employees and their organizations. Employees work hard to help their organization achieve its



goals in return to the high level of support they gain in the firms (Aselage and Eisenberger, 2003). Organizational support theory demonstrates that workers build broad views about how much their employer values their contributions and cares for their well-being (Eisenberger and Rhoades, 2002). This theory conceptualizes that POS has an impact on employee motivation, job satisfaction, and performance.

### **Methodology**

The objective of the study is to identify the relationships among TL, POS, and employees' creativity and examine whether POS mediates the relationship between TL and employees' level of creativity in selected private and public banks. This study adopts a deductive approach, beginning with the development of a theory related to the research topic, which is then refined into specific hypotheses. The investigation is carried out in a natural, non-contrived environment to maintain the authenticity of the findings. This research uses the mono method, where quantitative data and data analysis procedure is used to research objectives. Quantitative research is based on the measurement and analysis of the causal relationship between variables. Empirical data were collected from leading banks known for their substantial investments in creative initiatives and recognized for achieving competitive advantage. The study specifically focuses on employees from six prominent banks operating in the Puttalam Region of Sri Lanka, selected based on their active engagement in leadership and creativity within the banking sector.

The study involves a survey of 189 employees, out of a population of 407 employees at all hierarchical levels ranging from banking trainees to managerial level people of six selected commercial banks in Puttalam Region of Sri Lanka. Given that leadership and creativeness of the employees are intertwined with all employees in the organization, this study includes all hierarchical levels of employees. Since the population of this study consisted of a small number of employees from chosen banks, the stratified random sampling technique was employed to validate and achieve the objectives.

In order to achieve the objectives of the study, this has employed univariate, bivariate, and multi-step mediation analysis to analyze the collected data in SPSS version 22.0. In order to achieve the mediational effect of POS in the relationship between TL and employees' creativity, this study has followed four steps of the mediational process of Baron and Kenny (1986), in which several regression analyses are conducted and the significance of the coefficients is examined at each step. According to the process proposed by Baron and Kenny (1986), M mediates an X-Y causal relationship when:

1. X significantly predicts Y (path c is significant)
2. X significantly predicts M (path a is significant)
3. M significantly predicts Y in the presence of X (path b is significant)
4. When M is in the model, the effect of X on Y is reduced ( $c'$  is less than c).  
With complete mediation, path  $c'$  is zero.

Complete mediation occurs when the path  $c'$  becomes zero, indicating that the effect of X on Y is fully transmitted through the mediator M. Partial mediation is present if the regression weight  $c'$  is smaller than the initial path  $c$  in the first model, suggesting that M accounts for a portion of the relationship between X and Y. If M is not statistically significant, it implies the absence of mediation. Many Sri Lankan researchers (e.g., Opatha, 2020; Iddagoda and Opatha, 2020; Thevanes and Opatha, 2022) who conducted mediation analysis in their research works deployed this method to test the mediating effects. It is not statistically too complicate, and the steps are logically understandable.

Considering this study, the researchers have contributed to ethical consideration through presenting actual information. Certainly, the researchers collected the relevant data with the permission of each bank and that the information of the banking employees was not being used unnecessarily.

### Measures

The survey items for this study to measure the variables were adapted based on existing literature. TL includes four dimensions and consists of 11 items. Among the 11 items, 04 items were used to measure the Idealized influence, 03 items to measure inspirational motivation, 02 items to measure intellectual stimulation, and 02 items to measure individualized consideration. These are adapted from Kirkbride (2006). The mediating variable is POS that includes two dimensions consisting of 6 items. Among the six items, 03 items were used to measure procedural justice adapted from Leventhal (1980), and 03 items were used to measure the level of supervisory support adapted from Rhoades, Eisenberger, and Armeli (2001). Finally, 05 items were adapted from Hur, Moon, and Ko (2018) to measure the employees' creativity (see Table 1).

The instrument's reliability and validity were examined using Cronbach's Alpha ( $\alpha$ ) coefficient, which measures internal consistency. A threshold value of 0.70 was set as the benchmark for reliability. As presented in Table 1, the Cronbach's Alpha coefficients for all variables exceed the 0.70 cut-off, indicating that the items are reliable. This confirms that the internal consistency of each instrument is satisfactory, ensuring the credibility of the measurement tool.

**Table 1. Measurement Items and Reliability Analysis for all Variables**

Variable/ Item No.	Item Description	Source	Cronbach's Alpha Value
<b>Transformational Leadership</b>			<b>0.853</b>
<i>Individualized Influence (II)</i>			0.778
<b>II1</b>	My leader has demonstrated unusual competence.	(Kirkbride, 2006)	
<b>II2</b>	My leader celebrates our achievement.		

<b>II3</b>	My leader addresses crises “head on”.		
<b>II4</b>	My leader uses his power for positive gain.		
<i>Inspirational Motivation (IM)</i>			0.811
<b>IM1</b>	My leader presents an optimistic and attainable view of the future.		
<b>IM2</b>	My leader molds expectations and shapes meaning.	Kirkbride (2006)	
<b>IM3</b>	My leader creates a sense of priorities and purpose.		
<i>Intellectual Stimulation (IS)</i>			0.726
<b>IS1</b>	My leader encourages us to re-examine assumptions.	Kirkbride (2006)	
<b>IS2</b>	My leader is willing to put forth or entertain seemingly foolish ideas.		
<i>Individualized consideration (IC)</i>			0.764
<b>IC1</b>	My leader is an active listener.	Kirkbride (2006)	
<b>IC2</b>	My leader promotes self-development.		
<b>Perceived Organizational Support</b>			<b>0.890</b>
<i>Procedural Justice (PJ)</i>			0.811
<b>PJ1</b>	Procedural justice is applied consistently.	Leventhal (1980)	
<b>PJ2</b>	Procedural justice is free of bias.		
<b>PJ3</b>	Procedural justice is based on accurate performance.		
<i>Supervisory Support (SS)</i>			0.788
<b>SS1</b>	My supervisor cares about my opinion.	Rhoades, Eisenberger, and Armeli (2001)	
<b>SS2</b>	My supervisor really cares about my well-being.		

<b>SS3</b>	My supervisor strongly considers my goals and values.	
<b>Employees' Creativity (EC)</b>		<b>0.823</b>
<b>EC1</b>	Employees in my bank try to be as creative as they can.	
<b>EC2</b>	Employees experiment with new approaches in performing their jobs in my bank.	
<b>EC3</b>	In my bank, when new trends develop, employees are usually the first to get on board.	Hur, Moon and Ko (2018)
<b>EC4</b>	In my bank, employees think creatively in performing their jobs.	
<b>EC5</b>	In my bank, employees are creative in overcoming barriers and challenges.	

## Results and Discussion

### Profile of the Respondents

Descriptive statistics was used to analyze the demographic data. The personal and organizational information consists of name of the bank, gender, age, job position, experience, and qualification. Table 2 shows the profile of the respondents of the study.

**Table 2. Respondents' Profile**

Demographic Factor	Classification	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Name of the Bank	Bank 1	37	19.6
	Bank 2	34	18.0
	Bank 3	32	16.9
	Bank 4	41	21.7
	Bank 5	22	11.6
	Bank 6	23	12.2
Type of the Sector	Private	114	60.3
	Public	75	39.7
Gender	Male	80	42.3

	Female	109	57.7
Age	25 years & below	64	33.9
	26-30 years	79	41.8
	31-40 years	33	17.4
	41-50 years	13	6.9
Education Qualification	O/L	7	3.7
	A/L	37	19.6
	Diploma	62	32.8
	Graduate	60	31.7
	Postgraduate	22	11.6
	Other	1	0.6
Job Position	Executive officer	22	11.6
	Junior executive officer	72	38.1
	Staff assistant (Gr. I & II)	51	27.0
	Staff assistant (Trainee)	26	13.8
	Other	18	9.5
Work Experience	Less than 5 years	90	47.6
	5-10	62	32.8
	11-15	37	19.6

Accordingly, out of 189 respondents, 60.3% represent the information regarding private banks and 39.7% of public banks, among the 189 total respondents, 109 (42.3%) and 80 (57.7%) are female and male respectively. The study observes that there are more female respondents than males among the 189 respondents of banking employees in Puttalam Region of Sri Lanka. As far as age is concerned the highest number of respondents who fell under the age limit between 26-30 years is 79 (41.8%) out of 189 and the lowest number of participants is between the age of 41-50 years and that is 13 (6.9%). The job position of the respondents of the sample was categorized as executive officer, junior executive officer, staff assistant (Gr. I & II), and staff assistant (trainee). Out of 189 total respondents, 72 (38.1%) are junior executive officers, 51 (27%) are staff assistants (Gr. I & II), 26 (13.8%) are staff assistants (trainees) and 22 (11.6%) are executive level officers.

Researchers could collect data from 90 respondents with less than 5 years of experience, 62 respondents with experience ranging between 5-10 years, 37 respondents with 11-15 years of experience, and no respondents with more than 15 years of experience. When we consider the age of the sample of respondents, 33.9% of respondents are below 25 years, 41.8% in the range of 26-30 years, 17.4% in the range of 31-40 years, and 6.9% in the range of 41-50. Table 2 denotes the educational qualifications of the respondents which have been categorized into six levels. It shows that 3.7% of the respondents have GCE O/L, 19.6% of the respondents have GCE A/L, 32.8% of the respondents have a diploma, 31.7% of the respondents have a Bachelor's degree, and 11.6% of the respondents have a postgraduate degree.

### Descriptive Statistics and Correlation Analysis

In order to achieve the first and second objectives of the study, researchers have used the univariate and bivariate analysis respectively (see Table 3). Accordingly, the mean value of all the variables and dimensions ranges between 3.50 to 5.00 indicating that TL, POS, and employees' creativity are at high levels.

The Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationships among the independent variable, dependent variable, and mediating variable, aligning with the second objective of the study. Additionally, the hypotheses formulated in the literature review were tested using correlation analysis. According to Gogtay and Thatte (2017), correlation coefficients ( $r$ ) are categorized as: weak (0.10 to 0.29), moderate (0.30 to 0.49), and strong (0.50 to 1.0) levels of relationships.

**Table 3. Descriptive Statistics and Correlation Results**

Variables	Dimensions	Mean	Std. Deviation	Correlation Results		
				1	2	3
1 Transformational Leadership (TL)	Idealized Influence	3.994	0.693			
	Inspirational Motivation	4.058	0.752			
	Intellectual Stimulation	4.100	0.744			
	Individualized Consideration	3.941	0.848			
	<b>Overall TL</b>	<b>4.022</b>	<b>0.567</b>			
2	Procedural justice	4.058	0.752	0.888*		

<b>Perceived Organizational Support (POS)</b>	Supervisor support	4.019	0.730		
	<b>Overall POS</b>	<b>4.038</b>	<b>0.704</b>		
<b>3 Employees' Creativity</b>		<b>4.062</b>	<b>0.651</b>	0.885*	0.915*

Based on these criteria, the correlation between TL and employees' creativity ( $r = 0.885$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ) signifies a strong positive relationship, suggesting that TL significantly enhances employee creativity. This finding is consistent with Celestin and Sujatha (2024), who reported that firms led by transformational leaders achieved 70% successful innovation initiatives compared to 50% in firms with transactional leaders. Transformational leaders foster confidence in employees' skills and recognize their contributions, thereby promoting an environment conducive to creativity and innovation. Similarly, the strong positive correlation between TL and POS ( $r = 0.888$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ) highlights the significant influence of TL on employees' perception of organizational support. Previous studies by Mittal and Dhar (2015), Herrmann and Felfe (2014), and Hu, Gu, and Chen (2013) also emphasize this relationship, demonstrating how transformational leaders' supportive behaviors enhance employees' sense of belonging and organizational support.

Furthermore, the correlation analysis revealed a strong positive relationship between POS and employees' creativity ( $r = 0.915$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ). This finding aligns with prior research indicating that POS plays a pivotal role in enhancing employee creativity. Zhou and George (2001) noted that POS encourages creative problem-solving, while Appu and Kumar Sia (2015) found that perceived supervisor support increases employees' interest in their work, thereby fostering creative behavior. Overall, the results demonstrate strong interconnections among TL, POS, and employees' creativity (see Table 3). The study confirmed the acceptance of Hypotheses 1, 2, and 3, as the p-values were all below 0.05.

### **Mediation Analysis**

In order to achieve the prime objective of the study, the mediation analysis with the four-step model was adapted. Table 4 shows the results of the mediation analysis.

**Table 4. Mediation Analysis**

Step	Path	Independent Variable	Dependent Variable	R <sup>2</sup>	B	Sig.	F-statistic
1	c	TL	Employees' Creativity	0.783	1.017	0.000	676.678
2	a	TL	POS	0.788	1.103	0.000	696.331

3	b	POS	Employees' Creativity	0.836	0.846	0.000	958.975
4	c'	TL	Employees' Creativity	0.862	0.396	0.000	580.702
		POS			0.563		

In Step 1, TL demonstrated a direct, strong, and significant positive effect on employees' creativity ( $B = 1.017$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ), accounting for 78.3% of the variance in employees' creativity ( $R^2 = 0.783$ ). This finding highlights the critical role of TL in fostering employees' creativity. The high F-statistic ( $F = 676.678$ ) further confirms the model's overall significance.

In Step 2, TL had a significant positive impact on POS ( $B = 1.103$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ), explaining 78.8% of the variance in POS ( $R^2 = 0.788$ ). This indicates that transformational leaders enhance employees' perception of organizational support. The F-statistic ( $F = 696.331$ ) validates the overall model fit, supporting the notion that TL influences employees' perceived support.

Step 3 examined the impact of POS on employees' creativity, revealing a strong and significant positive effect ( $B = 0.846$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ) with an  $R^2$  of 0.836, meaning POS explains 83.6% of the variance in employees' creativity. This substantial explanatory power highlights the importance of POS as a critical driver of employee creativity. The F-statistic ( $F = 958.975$ ) confirms the robustness of the relationship.

Finally, in Step 4, the combined effect of TL and POS on employees' creativity was analyzed. While the direct effect of TL on employees' creativity decreased ( $B = 0.396$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ), POS had a significant positive impact on employees' creativity ( $B = 0.563$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ). The  $R^2$  increased to 0.862, indicating that TL and POS together explain 86.2% of the variance in employees' creativity. This change in the path coefficient for TL (from  $B = 1.017$  to  $B = 0.396$ ) suggests that POS partially mediates the relationship between TL and employees' creativity. The F-statistic ( $F = 580.702$ ) supports the overall significance of the model. Based on these findings, there is enough evidence to reject the null hypothesis and supports the H4 confirming that POS partially mediates the relationship between TL and employees' creativity.

While the current study confirms that TL directly and indirectly influences employees' creativity, with POS playing a partial mediating role, prior research presents mixed findings. Suifan, Abdallah, and Al Janini (2018) found that POS does not significantly contribute to certain dimensions of employee creativity, nor does it significantly mediate the relationship between TL and specific dimensions of creativity. These differences suggest that the impact of POS on creativity may be context-specific, varying across industries, organizational cultures, or the specific dimensions of creativity being assessed.



## Conclusion

The study primarily aimed to examine the mediating role of POS in the relationship between TL and employees' creativity among the selected banks in the Puttalam Region of Sri Lanka. The findings revealed high levels of TL, POS and employees' creativity. Further, the study confirms that there are significant positive relationships among the study variables. The analysis confirmed that TL directly and indirectly influences employee' creativity, with POS acting as a partial mediator. All the hypotheses of the study were supported, highlighting the critical role of POS in enhancing the effect of TL on employee creativity in the banking sector.

### Contribution and Recommendation of the Study

This study significantly contributes to the understanding of the relationship between TL, POS, and Employees' creativity. By demonstrating that POS partially mediates the relationship between TL and employees' creativity, the research fills a critical gap in the existing literature, providing empirical evidence on how leadership and organizational support intersect to enhance creativity. The study highlights that TL positively influences employees' creativity both directly and indirectly, with POS amplifying this effect. This contribution is particularly relevant for understanding how leadership styles can shape employee creativity, especially in the banking sector within the Puttalam Region of Sri Lanka. Furthermore, it extends the theoretical framework by linking transformational leadership, perceived organizational support, and creativity, offering a nuanced perspective on how these elements collectively impact employee performance.

For managers, this study offers valuable insights into how to cultivate a creative workforce. It suggests that TL plays a vital role in enhancing employees' creativity, particularly when coupled with strong organizational support. Therefore, managers should focus on developing TL behaviors, such as providing vision, fostering innovation, and offering personalized support to employees. Additionally, the study emphasizes the importance of creating a supportive organizational environment that nurtures employees' creativity. This can be achieved by ensuring that employees feel valued and supported, which, in turn, can motivate them to produce more creative and innovative work. Managers in the banking sector, and beyond, can use these findings to refine their leadership strategies and develop work environments that promote greater creativity and innovation among their teams.

This study expands the literature on the interplay between leadership styles, organizational support, and employee creativity by providing a clearer understanding of how POS acts as a mediator between TL and EC. While previous studies have investigated these variables separately, the integration of TL, POS, and employees' creativity in this study offers a more comprehensive view of their interrelationships. The findings support existing theories that emphasize the importance of leadership in fostering creativity (e.g., Bass et al, 2003), while also highlighting the underexplored role of POS in this context. Additionally, the study calls for further research into the nuances of how POS impacts creativity, particularly across different industries and organizational cultures. Future studies

should investigate whether the mediating effect of POS differs across various creative dimensions and explore the long-term impacts of TL and POS on creativity in diverse organizational settings.

Future research could extend the current study by exploring additional variables, such as organizational culture, work environment, or employee engagement, to provide a broader understanding of the factors influencing employee creativity. A cross-industry comparison could be particularly insightful to determine whether the mediating role of POS is consistent across various sectors. Furthermore, longitudinal studies could offer a deeper understanding of how the relationship between TL, POS, and employees' creativity evolves over time. Research could also investigate the impact of specific dimensions of creativity (e.g., problem-solving, idea generation) and whether POS has a varying influence depending on the type of creativity being examined. Lastly, exploring the potential boundary conditions or contextual factors that might strengthen or weaken the mediating effect of POS would help refine the understanding of these complex relationships.

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