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Leadership and organizational learning culture: a systematic literature review

Lei Xie

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Abstract

Purpose – This paper aims to investigate how the relationship between leadership and organizational learning culture (OLC)/learning organization (LO)/organizational learning (OL) is measured in the literature.

Design/methodology/approach – This systematic literature review analyzes published peer-reviewed English articles that examine the relationship between leadership and OLC/LO/OL empirically. A total of 58 articles has been found in 42 journals.

Findings – This paper provides a holistic view of the types of leaderships that have been connected with OLC/LO/OL in various countries and industries. Research methods from the literature are also examined.

Originality/value – It is among the first studies to review the literature about the connection between leadership and OLC/LO/OL. This review offers constructive future research directions.

Keywords Leadership, Organisational learning, Transactional leadership, Transformational leadership, Learning organization, Organizational learning culture, Leadership characteristics

Paper type Literature review

Introduction

Leadership as a complex, multilevel, and socially constructed process, exists prevalently within groups and organizations (Gardner et al., 2010). It has been recognized as one key influence on business performance and organizational culture (García-Morales et al., 2012; Joo, 2010; Laeeque and Babar, 2016) and its influence has been featured in both early (McGregor, 1960) and more recent discussions (Schneider et al., 2005). Researchers have found that different leadership theories lead to various relevant practical applications: servant leadership focuses on serving constituents (Greenleaf, 1977); spiritual leadership tends to improve morale and reduce stress (Crossman, 2008, 2010); transformational leadership elevates mutual interests among employees and motivates followers toward a shared vision (Bass, 2000); transactional leadership facilitates individual individual learning interests, which improves performance by setting objectives and monitoring the learning process (Dumdum et al., 2013).

Literature in regard to the relationship between leadership and learning at the organizational level (i.e. organizational learning culture [OLC]/learning organization [LO]/organizational learning [OL]) does not involve an extensive list of leadership styles. Most scholars cautiously selected one or two leadership types as variable/variables and studied their correlations with OLC/LO/OL (Carmeli and Sheaffer, 2008). However, with the development of a variety of leadership theories such as altruistic, spiritual, shared, and servant leadership, etc., their connections with OLC/LO/OL are worth examining in the business setting. Despite earlier researchers recognizing the importance of connecting
leadership and OLC/LO/OL, limited empirical studies have examined this association with regard to more recent leadership styles (e.g. servant, shared, and authentic leadership). Some scholars compared transformational and servant leadership and identified the differences between the two on OL (Alimo-Metcalfe and Alban-Metcalfe, 2005; van Dierendonck, 2011). Caldwell (2012) argued that strategic leadership, a combination of transformational and transactional leadership, is conducive to LO. He revisited Senge’s (1990) LO concept and examined the critical role of strategic leadership in an LO. Some pioneer scholars have been considering what recent leadership styles tend to foster OLC/LO/OL (Kurland et al., 2010). Scholars need to shift the focus to some understudied leadership styles and examine their connections with OLC/LO/OL (Alimo-Metcalfe and Alban-Metcalfe, 2005; Yulk, 2009).

Another issue with the current research is its lack of sample heterogeneity. Based on the available related literature, the majority of empirical data were collected from large for-profit organizations. Small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) were rarely used by scholars as research samples. However, SMEs are as important as large organizations when studying the connection between leadership and OLC/LO/OL. SMEs face unique challenges that have been engendered by a lack of resources. For example, SMEs show a lack of systematic and strategic thinking because of their comparatively less educated employees (Gibb, 1997). Compared with large organizations, SMEs tend to have a higher turnover rate, which hinders them in retaining knowledge in the workplace (Desouza and Awazu, 2006). Without sufficient funding to build sophisticated knowledge management systems, many SMEs are struggling to keep up with fierce competition (Wong and Aspinwall, 2005).

**Theoretical background**

The concepts of LO and OL are different. LO is a multi-dimensional concept which consists of different organizational levels – individual, team or group, and system levels (Yang et al., 2004). OL is often conceptualized as a set of organizational processes (Easterby-Smith et al., 2000). In Örtenblad’s (2001) work, he viewed LO as “new” OL (referred to Gherardi, 1999, p. 109; Örtenblad, 2001, p. 125), which means LO and OL both viewed learning at the organizational level as key to organizational success (Argyris and Schön, 1978; Cook and Yanow, 1993). He recognized the difference between who learn in OL versus LO. The concept of OL implies that individuals within an organization learn, but the knowledge (learning result) is stored outside them, while LO indicates that the individuals learn but the knowledge is located both inside and outside them.

Although the constructs of LO, OLC and OL are different, some common characteristics can be identified. For example, both LO and OL are means to develop organizational capabilities that contribute to organizational performance in the long run (Di Milia and Birdi, 2010; Marsick and Watkins, 1999). Additionally, some argue that an LO culture or OLC is an environment that is created by OL or LO. That culture permeates the organization, which facilitates learning through individual reflection, teamwork and collaboration (Joo, 2010, 2012). Many agree that because the nature of learning is intricate and the objectives are ambiguous, it is difficult to motive individuals to participate in OL or LO activities (García-Morales et al., 2012; Sarin and McDermott, 2003; Marsick and Watkins, 1999).

Nevertheless, the leadership is key in motivating learning in a LO, and it is also important in forming an OLC or implementing OL strategies (Aydin et al., 2015; Joo, 2010, 2012; Theodorakopoulos and Figueira, 2012). As the end goal of OLC/LO/OL is to continuously improve organizational performance, an adaptive and flexible leadership that can bring out the best in the employees is required (Rijal, 2016). In the line of LO research, leaders are regarded as the crux of an LO with different leadership roles. Senge (1990) identified three leadership roles: “designers”, “teachers”, and “stewards”. Similarly,
Watkins and Marsick (1993) recognized the facilitator role of a leader in an LO. They deemed that a leader in an LO should truly support learning by distributing leadership from the top and creating a safe space in which people can challenge the status quo (Marsick and Watkins, 1999, p. 159). Marquardt (1996) required leaders to function as the “architect and designer” for an OLC, motivating followers to perform at their best. OL requires that organizations explore new ways of learning and exploit what they have learned (Crossan et al., 1999; March, 1991). Without a competent leader, OL activities are less likely to be effective.

Bass (2000) called for substantial empirical research on the relationship between leadership and learning in organizations. Therefore, with the development of leadership theories and learning theories, it is imperative to examine the relationship between leadership and OLC/LO/OL from a systematic perspective. In this systematic literature review, I selected published empirical articles that emphasized the relationship between leadership and learning at the organizational level (OLC/LO/OL).

The current systematic literature review was aimed to answer the following question:

**RQ1.** How is the relationship between leadership and OLC/LO/OL measured?

Namely, under the overarching research question, there were six questions that guided the review:

**Q1.** What methods have been used (e.g. interviews, regression, SEM or case study)?

**Q2.** Which countries/regions have been covered by the current literature?

**Q3.** In which journals are scholars publishing those articles?

**Q4.** What is the trend of this line of research?

**Q5.** What are the research samples covered by the current literature?

**Q6.** What types of leadership have been recognized as a predictor of OLC/LO/OL? What types of leadership have been less researched? Why? What are some of the leadership areas that future studies should be focusing on?

In summary, to answer the foregoing questions, this systematic literature review specifically aimed to identify how various kinds of leadership affect OLC/LO/OL in the current literature.

**Research method and coding**

Following the steps in the Matrix Method for conducting systematic literature reviews (Garrard, 2004), I used a three-step procedure to identify pertinent scholarly articles. First of all, I selected five major business/social sciences databases (ERIC, ABI/Inform Complete, PsycINFO, Sociological Abstracts, Academic Search Premier). I also used Google Scholar to search published articles that were not included in any mentioned databases above. Further, with the research focusing on the relationship between leadership and OLC/LO/OL, I used the Boolean technique and chose “leadership,” “learning organization,” “organizational learning,” “learning culture,” “learning environment,” and “learning orientation” as key
terms for the initial article search. No date was set for the literature search and only peer-reviewed English publications were included in the initial attempt. A total of 396 results were generated from the first trial. Finally, I carefully screened articles; after checking and deleting duplicates, I created a publication pool with 305 articles.

I screened these 305 articles by using several inclusion/exclusion criteria. The inclusion criteria were: for qualitative research, the research questions or the purpose of the study must be related to leadership’s role in the formation of OLC/LO/OL; for quantitative research, at least one of the hypotheses must be pertaining to the relationship between leadership and OLC/LO/OL. For the exclusion criteria: I eliminated:

- literature reviews, conceptual paper and reports;
- articles that were only focused on the link between leadership and learning practices addressed at the individual level;
- articles that focused on factors for an LO, which included leadership as a critical element but did not discuss the connection between leadership and an LO; and
- studies that did not include a direct discussion about the connection between leadership and OLC/LO/OL.

A total of 58 articles met the inclusion and exclusion criteria.

Organizing data
I developed a review matrix according to Garrard’s (2004) guiding procedures. This matrix helped me to extract information from the literature and organize it in an efficient manner. Given that the purpose of the main research question was to find what types of leadership were associated with OLC/LO/OL by scholars, and how they were examined, I abstracted publication year, authors, region/Industry, methodology/methods, leadership types, instruments, journal titles and findings from all 58 articles. Table I shows the matrix.

Results
After reviewing and analyzing the articles, I organized the results section into five categories according to my research questions in the next section. They are research design, journal titles, publication volume, research samples, geographical distribution of publications, and leadership styles.

Research design
Among all 58 articles in this review, the majority of the articles (n = 48) were quantitative research, while only eight articles designed their studies qualitatively. The rest (n = 2) adopted a mixed-methods approach. It is traditional for researchers to take a positivist stance to examine relationships among constructs (Hesse-Biber, 2017). From the matrix, we can tell that OLC/LO/OL constructs were measured with various instruments. The Dimension of Learning Organization Questionnaire (DLOQ) was the most popular one for measuring OLC/LO (n = 5). For the construct of OL, the most used (n = 6) instrument was the scale developed by Kale et al. (2000). The second most used (n = 5) instrument was the Organizational Learning Scale developed by Chiva et al. (2007). For the leadership construct, the majority of studies used MLQ (Bass, 2000) to assess transformational and transactional leadership. Structural equation modeling was the most popular technique to analyze the relationship between constructs (n = 34). Figure 1 shows this highly disproportional distribution of research methodology in the reviewed articles.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Publication year</th>
<th>Authors</th>
<th>Region/Industry</th>
<th>Methodology/Methods</th>
<th>Leadership Type</th>
<th>Instruments</th>
<th>Journal Titles</th>
<th>Findings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>Altman, Y. and, Bes, P.</td>
<td>UK/ Manufacturing (Rover Group)</td>
<td>Qualitative/Case study</td>
<td>Total quality leadership</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Journal of Management Development</td>
<td>Total quality leaders at all organizational levels acted as role models for employees in the OL process. The emphasis is on demonstrable behaviors, focusing on a team, promoting learning across the board.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>Yeo, R.</td>
<td>UK/ Not specified (For-profit firms)</td>
<td>Qualitative/Case study</td>
<td>Effective leadership</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Team Performance Management: An International Journal</td>
<td>Effective leadership is regarded as the leitmotif in driving strategic OL initiatives.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>Johnson, J.R.</td>
<td>Not identified/ Not specified</td>
<td>Qualitative/Case study</td>
<td>Generic leadership</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Leadership and Organization Development Journal</td>
<td>Leaders have positive effect on OL processes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>Lam, Y.L., Wei, H.C., Pan, H.L., and Chen, C. M.</td>
<td>Taiwan/ School education</td>
<td>Quantitative/Multiple Regression</td>
<td>Transformational leadership</td>
<td>Self-developed questionnaire</td>
<td>The International Journal of Educational Management</td>
<td>The authors found significant positive relationship between transformational leadership and OL process in schools.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>Aminay, M., Popper, M., and Lipshitz, R.</td>
<td>Israel/ Health-care organizations</td>
<td>Quantitative/Correlation and Descriptive statistics</td>
<td>Transformational and Transactional leadership</td>
<td>Leadership: Bass and Avolio, (1999), OL: Ellis and Globerson (1996) and Ellis et al. (1999)</td>
<td>The Learning Organization</td>
<td>There is a positive correlation between transformational leadership and OL. The more the clinic managers are perceived as transformational leaders, the more intensive the OL will be.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>Garcia-Morales, V.J., Llorens-Montes, F.J., and Verdú-Jover, A.J.</td>
<td>Spain/ Not specified (For-profit firms)</td>
<td>Mixed methods</td>
<td>Transformational leadership</td>
<td>TL: Podsakoff et al., 1996 OL: Kale et al., 2000; Edmondson 1999</td>
<td>Industrial Management and Data Systems</td>
<td>The authors found that transformational leadership is significant positively related to OL.</td>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>Siebenhüner, B.; and Arnold, M.</td>
<td>Germany/Not specified (For-profit firms)</td>
<td>Qualitative/Case study</td>
<td>Participatory style of leadership</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Business Strategy and the Environment</td>
<td>Findings also highlight that a participatory style of leadership is able to motivate employees and to support active research and generation of new knowledge and its transfer and diffusion.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>Singh, K.</td>
<td>India/Banking industry</td>
<td>Quantitative/Multiple regression</td>
<td>Transformational leadership</td>
<td>LO: Marquardt (1996). Leadership: Podsakoff et al. (1990)</td>
<td>International Journal of Business and Management Science</td>
<td>The study identifies the relationship between transformational leadership and learning organization in the banking sector in India and concludes that transformational leadership plays a vital role in the development of LO.</td>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>Amy. A.</td>
<td>USA/Telecommunication industry</td>
<td>Mixed methods</td>
<td>Generic leadership</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Leadership and Organization Development Journal</td>
<td>Leaders have several distinct characteristics and skills, but the learning program participants gave the most emphasis to emotionally intelligent communication, a prominent feature of facilitative leadership.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>Swift, P.E., and Hwang, A.</td>
<td>USA/Manufacturing industry (Alkaline battery making company)</td>
<td>Qualitative/Case study</td>
<td>Generic leadership</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>The Learning Organization</td>
<td>The OL process was enabled by contextual enablers such as leadership commitment to OL, teamwork and organization-wide participation in the knowledge articulation and codification processes, and multi-lateral flow of information across the organization in developing the routines.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>Limpibunterng, T., and Johri, L.M.</td>
<td>Thailand/Service industry</td>
<td>Quantitative/SEM</td>
<td>Generic leadership</td>
<td>Self-developed questionnaire</td>
<td>The Learning Organization</td>
<td>Leadership tasks performed by new service development executives significantly affect the development of OL capability, which in turn significantly affects organizational performance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>Nemanich, L.A., and Vera, D.</td>
<td>USA/Not specified (For-profit MNCs)</td>
<td>Quantitative/SEM</td>
<td>Transformational leadership</td>
<td>Leadership: Bass and Avolio (2000); LO: Edmondson (1999); De Dreu and West (2001); Bontis et al. (2002)</td>
<td>The Leadership Quarterly</td>
<td>Transformational leadership and OLC has a significantly positive relationship.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>Zagorsék, H., Dinovski, V., and Skerlavaj, M.</td>
<td>Slovenia/Non-specified (Alumni of the University of Ljubljana)</td>
<td>Quantitative/SEM</td>
<td>Transformational leadership and Transactional leadership</td>
<td>Leadership: Antonakis et al. (2003), Avolio et al. (1995); Lowe et al. (1998); OL: Dinovski (1994); Skerlavaj et al. (2007)</td>
<td>Journal of East European Management Studies</td>
<td>The total effects of transformational and transactional leadership on OL are similar, both positive and significant.</td>
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<td>Publication year</td>
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<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>Millward, P., and Timperley, H.</td>
<td>New Zealand/School education</td>
<td>Qualitative/Case study</td>
<td>Instructional leadership</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Journal of Education Change</td>
<td>It appears that the principal’s instructional leadership increased the learning capacity of this organization. These OL mechanisms appear to have facilitated the development of cognitive systems and organizational memory so that the school was able to change the way it operated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>Joo, B.K.</td>
<td>Korea/A Korean conglomerate</td>
<td>Quantitative/SEM</td>
<td>LMX</td>
<td>OLC: Yang, Watkins, and Mersick (2004) 7-item DLOQ LMX: Scandura, Graen (1984)</td>
<td>Human Resource Development Quarterly</td>
<td>The relationship between organizational culture and LMX quality were found to be strong and significant (correlation coefficient = 0.56)</td>
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<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>Hsiao, H.C., Chang, J.C.</td>
<td>Taiwan/School education</td>
<td>Quantitative/SEM</td>
<td>Transformational leadership</td>
<td>Leadership: Bass and Avolio (2006), OL: Kale, Singh and Perlmutter (2000); Edmondson (1999); García-Morales et al. (2006)</td>
<td>Asia Pacific Education Review</td>
<td>There is a significant effect on the role of mediation in OL on the relationship between transformational leadership and organizational innovation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>Camps, J., Torres, F.</td>
<td>Costa Rica/School education</td>
<td>Quantitative/SEM</td>
<td>Contingent Reward (Transactional leadership)</td>
<td>OL: Chiva et al. (2007) Leadership: Podsakoff et al. (1984)</td>
<td>Systems Research and Behavioral Science</td>
<td>There is a positive relationship between the employee’s perception of the firm’s OLC and his/her leader’s contingent reward behavior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>Joo, B.</td>
<td>Korea/Not specified (For-profit firms)</td>
<td>Quantitative/SEM</td>
<td>LMX</td>
<td>Leadership: Scandura and Graen (1984), OLC DLOQ – Yang et al. (2004)</td>
<td>Journal of Leadership and Organizational Studies</td>
<td>The moderating effects of the two dimensions (embedded system and strategic leadership) of learning organization culture on the relationship between LMX quality and in-role job performance were significant</td>
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<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>Theodorakopoulos, N., and Figueira, C.</td>
<td>UK Hi-tech industry (Small businesses)</td>
<td>Qualitative/Ethnographic case study</td>
<td>Strategic leadership</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>Thunderbird International Business Review</td>
<td>The role of strategic leadership in developing OL processes for entrepreneurial performance in small firms is positive. OL relates positively with the implementation of cost leadership strategies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>Abbasi, E., and Zamani-Mianshahi, N.</td>
<td>Iran/School education</td>
<td>Quantitative/SEM</td>
<td>Transformational leadership</td>
<td>Leadership: Bass (1997). OL: Goh and Richards (1997)</td>
<td>Higher Education</td>
<td>The findings support that transformational leadership and OLC with the effect on OL process not only improve the agricultural faculty performance, but also change them to an LO.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>Schiena, R.D., Letens, G., Van Aken, E., Farris, J.</td>
<td>Belgium/Army</td>
<td>Quantitative/Correlation and Descriptive statistics</td>
<td>Transformational, Transactional and Passive-avoidant leadership</td>
<td>LO: Di Schiena, Letens, Farris and Van Aken (2012); Leadership: Bass and Avolio (1997)</td>
<td>Administrative Sciences</td>
<td>The correlations showed that LO characteristics were highly related to transformational leadership dimensions, and also with transactional leadership based on contingent rewards; meanwhile no association was found with a passive-avoidant leadership.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>Choudhary, A., Akhtar, S., and Zaheer, A.</td>
<td>Pakistan/Service industry, Telecommunication industry, and Banking industry</td>
<td>Quantitative/SEM</td>
<td>Transformational and Servant leadership</td>
<td>OL: Morales et al. (2008). Transformational Leadership: Morales et al. (2008); Servant leadership: Jacobs (2006)</td>
<td>Journal of Business Ethics</td>
<td>The result shows that transformational leadership has more impact on OL than servant leadership.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>Tan, C.S.L., Semyrian, K.X., and Ok, C., Xiong, L.</td>
<td>Australia/Not specified (For-profit SMEs)</td>
<td>Quantitative/SEM</td>
<td>Transformational leadership</td>
<td>Leadership: Sarros et al. (2008). LO: Sinkula et al. (1997)</td>
<td>International Journal of Entrepreneurial Behavior and Research</td>
<td>Findings reveal that transformational leadership is a significant antecedent of supportive and open organizational climates, and reward and job-related HR practices. Job-related HR practices and organizational climate fully mediate relationships between transformational leadership and LO.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>Aydin, M.K., Guclu, N., Pisapin, J.</td>
<td>Turkey/School education</td>
<td>Quantitative/Multiple Linear Regression</td>
<td>Strategic leadership: Transforming, Political, Ethical, Managing</td>
<td>Leadership: Pisapia (2006, 2009). LO: Marsick and Watkins (2003)</td>
<td>American Journal of Educational Studies</td>
<td>Transforming, political and ethical leadership actions were the significant predictors of OL. However, managing actions were not found to be a significant predictor.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>Molodchik, and M., Jordon, C.</td>
<td>Russia/Manufacturing industry</td>
<td>Quantitative/SEM</td>
<td>Transformational leadership</td>
<td>OL: Yang et al. (2004); Garvin et al. (2008). TL: self-developed</td>
<td>The Learning Organization</td>
<td>Transformational leadership is positively related to OL.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>Berson, Y., Da’as, R., and Waldman, D.A.</td>
<td>Israel/School education</td>
<td>Quantitative/SEM</td>
<td>Charismatic leadership</td>
<td>Leadership: Bass and Avolio (1997). OL: Bontis et al. (2002)</td>
<td>Personnel Psychology</td>
<td>There is an indirect effect between charismatic leadership and OLC. The results indirect that there are both the direct and indirect effects of leader charisma through trust within the team on OLC and school outcomes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Publication year</td>
<td>Authors</td>
<td>Region/Industry</td>
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<td>Leadership Type</td>
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<td>Findings</td>
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<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>Dzinic, J.</td>
<td>Crotia/City government</td>
<td>Quantitative/Correlation</td>
<td>Administrative leadership</td>
<td>Leadership: Fischer and Röben (2002); Garvin et al. (2008); Moynihan and Landuyt (2009); Preskill and Torres (1999). OL: Fischer and Röben (2002); Garvin et al. (2008); Moynihan and Landuyt (2009); Preskill and Torres (1999).</td>
<td>Elkon Misao Praks</td>
<td>Participatory/transformational administrative leadership style facilitates OL in administrative organizations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>Khalifa, B; Ayoubi, R.M.</td>
<td>Syria/School education</td>
<td>Quantitative/Multiple Regression</td>
<td>Transformational and Transactional leadership</td>
<td>Leadership: Avolio and Bass (2004). OL: Lopez et al. (2004)</td>
<td>International Journal of Educational Management</td>
<td>There is a significant impact of contingent reward, as a transactional leadership dimension on OL, and a significant impact of inspirational motivation as a transformational leadership dimension on OL. CEO transformational leadership was strongly and positively associated with OL and innovation culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Publication year</td>
<td>Authors</td>
<td>Region/Industry</td>
<td>Methodology/Methods</td>
<td>Leadership Type</td>
<td>Instruments</td>
<td>Journal Titles</td>
<td>Findings</td>
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<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>Rijal, S.</td>
<td>Nepal and India/Pharmaceutical industry</td>
<td>Quantitative/ Multiple Regression</td>
<td>Transformational leadership</td>
<td>Leadership: Podsakoff et al. (1990), LO: Marquadt (1996)</td>
<td>International Journal of Organizational Analysis Global Management Journal for Academic and Corporate Studies</td>
<td>Results indicate transformational leadership and organizational culture have a positive influence in the development of LO. They further exhibited that transactional leadership interacted with LO practices, such that higher levels of transactional leadership enhanced the positive effect of LO practices on financial and non-financial firm performance. However, the moderating effects of transformational leadership were insignificant.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>Laeeque, S.H., Babar, S.F.</td>
<td>Pakistan/Telecommunication industry</td>
<td>Quantitative/ Hierarchical Regression and Multi-group Analysis</td>
<td>Transformational and Transactional leadership</td>
<td>LO: Marsick and Watkins (2003), Leadership: Carless et al. (2000)</td>
<td>Global Management Journal for Academic and Corporate Studies</td>
<td>They further exhibited that transformational leadership interacted with LO practices, such that higher levels of transactional leadership enhanced the positive effect of LO practices on financial and non-financial firm performance. However, the moderating effects of transformational leadership were insignificant.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>Nyukoron, R.</td>
<td>Ghana/Telecommunication industry</td>
<td>Quantitative/ SEM</td>
<td>Transformational leadership and Transactional leadership</td>
<td>Leadership: Wang (2000) and Bass and Avolio (1990), OL: Chang (2002) and Feng (1997)</td>
<td>European Scientific Journal</td>
<td>Leadership behaviors to cause significant positive impact on learning organizations. Business executives need to enhance their own skills in transformational leadership, setting a good example, encouraging continuous learning and innovative activities, developing the potentials of their employees, providing training and education and offering monetary incentives, as these are necessary to keep people with excellent talents.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>Rosmaniar, W., Marzuki, S.C.B.H.</td>
<td>Indonesia/School education</td>
<td>Quantitative/ Multiple Regression</td>
<td>Instructional leadership</td>
<td>Not specified</td>
<td>Higher Education Studies</td>
<td>Increased instructional leadership can improve OL process in schools.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Publication year</td>
<td>Authors</td>
<td>Region/Industry</td>
<td>Methodology/Methods</td>
<td>Leadership Type</td>
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<tr>
<td>2017</td>
<td>Megheirkouni, M.</td>
<td>UK/Sport industry (For-profit and non-profit)</td>
<td>Quantitative/ Hierarchical Regression Analysis</td>
<td>Transformational and Transactional leadership</td>
<td>Leadership: Avolio and Bass (2004). OL: López, Pén, and Ordás (2004)</td>
<td>International Journal of Organizational Analysis</td>
<td>One of the transformational leadership dimensions – idealized influence – affects OL. There is no significant impact of other behaviors: intellectual stimulation, inspirational motivation and individualized consideration on OL. With respect to transactional leadership, the study revealed that there is a significant impact of management by exception-active on OL. The results of the study also revealed that there were no significant impacts of contingent reward and management by exception-passive on OL. OL acts as a full mediator between both leaderships and organizational innovation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017</td>
<td>Louis, K.S., and Murphy, J.</td>
<td>USA/School education</td>
<td>Quantitative/ Multiple Regression and Path Analysis</td>
<td>Generic leadership</td>
<td>Secondary data</td>
<td>Journal of Educational Administration</td>
<td>(continued)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Publication year</td>
<td>Authors</td>
<td>Region/Industry</td>
<td>Methodology/Methods</td>
<td>Leadership Type</td>
<td>Instruments</td>
<td>Journal Titles</td>
<td>Findings</td>
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<tr>
<td>2018</td>
<td>Martin, L.M., Lord, G., and Warren-Smith, I</td>
<td>Europe/Not specified (For-profit MNC)</td>
<td>Qualitative/Phenomenological approach</td>
<td>Female leadership</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>The Learning Organization</td>
<td>The research found that gender was a barrier to effective OL with women’s knowledge and experience often unseen and unheard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2018</td>
<td>Khurosani, A.</td>
<td>Indonesia/Creative industries</td>
<td>Quantitative/SEM</td>
<td>Transformational leadership</td>
<td>No Access</td>
<td>Advanced Science Letters</td>
<td>The finding showed that transformational leader positively affects OLC, but does not affect employee creativity and organizational innovation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A total of 58 articles related to leadership and OLC/LO/OL have been found in 41 English journals in the fields of business, management, administration, and education (Table II). The number of articles featured in top-tier journals was relatively small (n = 25) according to the 2017 SSCI list. For instance, only two articles were published in *Journal of Business Research*: García-Morales *et al.* (2012) and Santos-Vijande *et al.* (2012). There was only one paper published in *The Leadership Quarterly*: Nemanich and Vera (2009). Six papers have been published in *Leadership and Organization Development Journal*. Seven articles related to the relationship between leadership and OLC/LO/OL have been published in one of the high-ranking journals, *The Learning Organization* (Chang and Lee, 2007; Molodchik and Jardon, 2015).

There is a clear ascending research trend with some fluctuations in the past two decades (see Figure 2). The earliest empirical study about leadership and OLC/LO/OL was conducted in 1998 and there were two papers published in 2018. This trend indicates a continuously growing research interest in the topic of leadership and OLC/LO/OL, confirming various scholars’ predictions (Fry, 2003; Vera and Crossan, 2004; Yulk, 2009).

From the matrix table, the wide geographical distribution indicates that the value of leadership in OLC/LO/OL has been recognized around the globe among researchers. In total, 57 empirical research studies have been published using samples from 28 countries and regions, with Spain leading the ranking with nine articles, followed by the USA with five articles (see Figure 3 below).

Researchers from different regions/countries tend to focus on different leadership types. As transformational leadership is the most widely studied leadership type, research has been published using samples from twenty different regions/countries. Generic leadership is the second most popular leadership type, and authors have used samples from three countries (i.e. USA, Thailand and Korea). Among those reviewed articles, seven examined the relationship between generic leadership and OLC/LO/OL, and four used American organizations. Among three servant and altruistic leadership related studies (n = 3), two employed professionals from Spanish organizations and explored the connection between altruistic leadership and OL, and one study compared the effect of transformational leadership and servant leadership on LO in Pakistani organizations.
Research samples
The research interests of scholars concerning the fields of leadership styles and OLC/OL/LO have been converging in the analysis of the relation between those variables in different types of organizations. In terms of the research samples, most of the studies did not specify the industries that the organizations reside in. For example, Zagoršek et al. (2009) administrated a survey to the alumni of the University of Ljubljana. Therefore, the research was not particularly targeted at certain industries. The most surveyed industry was education: 14 studies examined leadership and OLC/OL/LO in
the educational setting (Aydın et al., 2015; Louis and Murphy, 2017). It is worth noting that among these 14 studies, only one article provided empirical evidence regarding the antecedent role of the firm’s OLC on leader’s contingent reward behavior (one transactional leadership dimension) (Camps and Torres, 2011); the other 13 studies confirmed that leadership is significantly and positively connected with OLC/LO/OL. Four out of 58 articles selected knowledge-intensive organizations as their research samples. Large organizations were the dominant research samples in the current literature; only two studies used SMEs as their research samples (i.e. Tan et al., 2014; Theodorakopoulos and Figueira, 2012).
Leaders differ from each other in mental models and behaviors, which leads to various OL results from structure building, strategy implementing, and learning intervention guiding and monitoring. A total of 33 papers have focused on transformational leadership’s influence on OLC/LO/OL (Hsiao and Chang, 2011; Tan et al., 2014), and among those 33 papers, 12 compared multiple leadership styles. For instance, eight articles compared transformational and transactional leadership’s impact on OLC/LO/OL (Amitay et al., 2005; Chang and Lee, 2007). Six articles did not indicate which type of leadership they focused on. Instead, they discussed leadership in a general sense as a construct that differs from management (Higgins et al., 2012; Louis and Murphy, 2017). Only two papers examined the role of LMX in OLC building; Joo (2010) found that LMX and OLC were positively connected in the context of a Korean conglomerate. Two papers focused on the comparison between the influence of three leadership styles on OLC/LO/OL; transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire leadership were contrasted (Froehlich et al., 2014; Kurland et al., 2010). Two articles explored the relationship between altruistic leadership and OL and the researchers found a positive relationship between these constructs (Domínguez Escrig et al., 2016; Mallén et al., 2015). Schiena et al. (2013) compared transformational, transactional, and passive-avoidant leadership’s effects on LO. All types of leadership that have been studied in the literature are shown in Figure 4.

In the field of leadership, transformational leadership has been more frequently studied than other types of leadership in recent years. In the research regarding the relationship between leadership and OLC/LO/OL, the situation is the same. A total of 21 articles studied the effect of transformational leadership on OLC/LO/OL.
Transformational leadership. Rijal (2016) conducted cross-country empirical research in India and Nepal about transformational leadership’s effect on OLC’s formation in the pharmaceutical sector. He found transformational leadership had a positive influence on OLC’s formation. The ways in which transformational leaders stimulated and inspired subordinates to learn were the most important indicators of OLC’s formation (Rijal, 2016). Hsiao and Chang (2011) found that the principal’s transformational leadership encourages OL in Taiwanese schools.

Transformational and transactional leadership. Scholars have contradictory views toward transactional leadership. Some deem that transactional leadership focuses on supervision, organization, and performance (Kuhnert and Lewis, 1987). Compared with transformational leadership, transactional leadership is less likely to bring the most potential out of the employees. Some praise transactional leadership, as some of the management mechanisms developed from it fit most organizations. For example, in Khalifa and Ayoubi’s (2015) study, they found one of the transactional leadership dimensions, contingent reward, has a significant association with OL. They also compared the effects of transactional and transformational leadership on OL in the context of higher education, but they found no significant differences between these two leadership styles on OL (Khalifa and Ayoubi, 2015). Some recent findings may be of more interest. Laeeque and Babar (2016) compared transformational and transactional leadership in telecommunication companies in Pakistan. They found that the effect of the LO practices on firms’ financial/nonfinancial performance was moderated by transactional leadership, but the moderating role of transformational leadership was not significant (Laeeque and Babar, 2016).

Other leadership types. Other than transformational and transactional leadership, some leadership characteristics were also studied. Contrary to most research, Singh (2010) found that in Indian software firms, two organizational leadership sub-dimensions – consulting and delegating leadership styles – have a positive relationship with OL, but another two sub-dimensions – directive and supportive leadership styles – are negatively connected with OL. Other research indicated that leader’s supportive behaviors, were in general, positively correlated with employees’ learning behaviors (Montes et al., 2005). The more supportive leaders are, the better the results of learning can be. Dzinic (2015) studied participatory leadership in the context of city government and found a positive relationship between participatory leadership and OL; Siebenhüner and Arnold (2007) used large German organizations as samples and found that participatory leadership supported new knowledge transfer and diffusion. In the particular setting of educational institutions, instructional, strategic, and charismatic leadership were found positively associated with OLC/LO/OL (Aydin et al., 2015; Berson et al., 2015; Millward and Timperley, 2010).

Discussion
Scholars have shown great interest in leadership and OLC/LO/OL, answering the calling of Bass (2000). Bass (2000) argued that a good leader for an LO should be equipped with both transformational and transactional leadership characteristics with the emphasis on transformational leadership. In the past two decades, scholars have connected these two leadership constructs with OLC/LO/OL in varied business settings and national cultures (Camps and Rodriguez, 2011; Singh, 2008). However, the literature indicates that some understudied leadership styles should offer more insights into the relationship between leadership and OLC/LO/OL. In addition, the context of these studies is important for the practical implications of leadership and OLC/LO/OL. Moreover, qualitative research may discover how leadership influences learning in unique contexts. Finally, research should differentiate carefully among the concepts of OLC, LO, and OL.
First, studies have shown that various leadership styles may produce different organizational outcomes (Domínguez Escrig et al., 2016), and thus, OLC/LO/OL may be influenced by different leadership types that have not been covered by the literature. Transformational and transactional leadership styles are dominant in the research related to OLC/LO/OL. Among 58 articles, 34 articles connected transformational leadership with OLC/LO/OL. Despite some similarities between leadership styles, major differences should be noticed. For example, the core of servant leadership and altruistic leadership is serving people (Greenleaf, 1977). This is in contrast to transformational and transactional leadership. As Schneider and George (2012) stated, “It would be interesting to see if servant leadership has more impact than transformational leadership in for-profit organizations” (p. 23). While facing criticism of its difficulty to operationalize its concepts and principles, servant leadership, known for its altruism, interests more researchers (Brumback, 1999; Parris and Peachey, 2013). Van Dierendonck (2011) stressed that the lack of definition consensus of servant leadership creates confusion among researchers, as each definition of servant leadership varies in different contexts.

Servant leadership represents a group of leadership that is focused on the relationship between leaders and followers (people focused). Such a leadership group includes another less studied style–leader–member exchange (LMX). Similar to servant leadership, LMX emphasizes the interaction between leaders and their followers (Graen and Uhl-Bien, 1995). The quality of the interaction, which is often determined by:

- initial testing;
- development of mutual trust; and
- development of a mutual commitment to goals, affects the execution of overall business strategies.

However, LMX is not a foreign concept in the field of leadership. The LMX theory has undergone many refinements (Dansereau et al., 1975; Graen and Wakabayashi, 1994). The examination of LMX’s impact has increased its clarity, testability, and comprehensiveness (Graen and Uhl-Bien, 1995). But the connection between LMX and OLC/LO/OL is less examined. So far, I only found two papers discussing LMX and OLC: LMX would exert higher job performance and career satisfaction of employees with higher perceived OLC (Joo, 2010, 2012).

At the team level, leadership impacts the overall performance in the workplace, but as a team-level concept, shared leadership tends to be neglected in the current literature. Shared leadership is defined as a collective leadership process whereby members of a team participate in team leadership functions ( Pearce and Conger, 2003). Ensley et al. (2006) explained shared leadership as a “team process where leadership is carried out by the team as a whole, rather than solely by a single designated individual” (p. 220). Shared leadership has been found to be positively connected with team performance (Ensley et al., 2006; Wang et al., 2014), but overall empirical research on shared leadership’s outcome has been lacking (Carson et al., 2007; Park and Kwon, 2013). Much less is known about how shared leadership is exerted among team members or within an organization (Hoch and Dulebohn, 2017). The literature calls for the examination of the relationship between shared leadership and team learning because an LO should emphasize the learning activities of the group/team (Marquardt, 1996; Senge, 1990; Yang et al., 2004). When leadership is shared among employees, the communication process between the individuals should yield more learning behaviors, such as reflecting on the process and the communication structure of an organization (London and Sessa, 2007; Wang et al., 2017). Thus, shared leadership is likely to result in greater OLC/LO/OL.
Second, the review explored the contexts in which the relationship between leadership and OLC/LO/OL is being empirically investigated. There seems to be pronounced interest in examining the relationship worldwide, particularly in Spain and the USA. Currently, less research has focused on nonprofit organizations. Among 58 articles, 17 of them recruited participants from nonprofit organizations, and the majority of those articles employed educational institutions. Research uses nonprofit organizations to study specific leadership behaviors instead of a certain leadership type. Researchers tend to put more emphasis on how context influences leadership behaviors. Other settings such as public organizations, medical institutions, and community-level organizations have received less attention from researchers. Articles tend to publish in management, learning, education, and psychology fields. There is only a small number of studies published in the fields of sports, medical, and administration. Certain industries are worth investigating. For example, with the development of technology, virtual and augmented reality, knowledge-intensive industries where engineers are the main workforce, need more attention. Current research has shown that managers in the knowledge-intensive industry are technique savvy rather than communication gurus (Sumner et al., 2006), which hinders OL or the formation of an LO. This review helps researchers identify unexplored contexts for future investigation.

In addition, SMEs are encouraged to be used as research samples because of their fundamental differences from large organizations (Gill and Biger, 2012; Mbonyane and Ladzani, 2011). Prior research has documented the difficulty in obtaining finances for the growth of SMEs around the globe (Beck and Demirguc-Kunt, 2006; Beck et al., 2008). Some other contextual factors challenge SMEs’ growth as well: High competition, poor infrastructure (Gill and Biger, 2012), and the lack of information and technology (Mbonyane and Ladzani, 2011). Therefore, leaders in SMEs should function differently from those in large organizations, and thus they may influence OLC/LO/OL from a dissimilar perspective.

Third, this review sought to discover how researchers “see” the relationship between leadership and OLC/LO/OL. Authors’ philosophical worldviews impact their analysis of leadership and OLC/LO/OL. There are many benefits to studying leadership and OLC/LO/OL qualitatively in spite of its limited transferability (Hesse-Biber, 2017). Current qualitative studies used case studies, semi-structured interviews, and phenomenological approaches to explore best practices related to leadership and OLC/LO/OL or questionnaire development (Lam et al., 2002). Compared to quantitative research, these qualitative studies emphasized leader’s traits under certain circumstances or in depth, such as female leadership, participatory style of leadership, and instructional leadership (Martin et al., 2018; Millward and Timperley, 2010; Siebenhüner and Arnold, 2007).

For quantitative research, this review examined the tools that are used to measure OL and LO. It is indicated that researchers have not reached a consensus about the measurement tool for OL or LO. Most researchers chose Yang et al.’s (2004) DLOQ to measure LO or OLC (even though these two concepts are different). Only one paper carefully defined OLC as a unidimensional construct, and the authors used Chiva et al.’s (2007) OLC questionnaire. A total of 30 articles studied OL, and the most frequently used questionnaire was Kale et al.’s (2000) Organizational Learning Questionnaire. Therefore, the multiple quantitative measures used by current research point to the fact that there is currently not an agreed upon measurement instrument of the construct OLC, LO or OL respectively. This review can help researchers choose available measurement instruments for future foci that remain relatively underexplored.

Fourth, to measure learning at the organizational level, it is imperative to know the distinction between the concept of LO, OL, and OLC (Watkins and Kim, 2018; Turner et al., 2018). Örtenblad (2001) acknowledged that OL and LO have been used interchangeably in
the past, and more recent work still tends to use those terms without distinctions. For example, some of the reviewed articles used the term LO and OLC interchangeably (Froehlich et al., 2014; Joo, 2010). Instead of treating LO as a multi-dimensional construct, some scholars erroneously utilized the DLOQ (an LO measurement tool) to measure OLC as a unidimensional construct. Perhaps it is the nature of learning in organizations that makes it difficult to measure (Watkins and Kim, 2018). Nonetheless, researchers have made numerous attempts to clarify and distinguish those concepts (Argyris and Schön, 1996; Örtenblad, 2001; Marsick and Watkins, 1999). Örtenblad (2001) discriminated between OL and LO based on who learns (individuals or organizations) and on where the knowledge resides (inside individuals or outside them) (Blackler, 1995; Kim, 1993). Some theorists have developed and validated questionnaires for OL, LO and OLC in multiple countries or regions. Watkins and Marsick (1993) developed the LO theory, and it has been represented by their DLOQ scale (Turner et al., 2018). This review further supports Turner’s argument that the majority of LO studies used the DLOQ to measure LO practices. Thus, this review draws the same conclusion on misspecification of LO, OL and OLC concepts and calls for attention to further careful distinction between those concepts.

Implications for future practice
This review shows that current literature covers the relationship between a wide range of leadership types and OLC/LO/OL. Although there is an increasing trend of more research on the association between leadership and OLC/LO/OL, there is no indication that a more diverse inclusion of different leadership styles is going to happen soon. Additionally, the concepts of OLC, OL and LO are still needed to be clarified when studying their connections with leadership or other organizational outcomes in general.

Bass (1985, 1998) found that both transformational and transactional leadership behaviors can be learned from carefully planned training programs. This finding heavily influenced the subsequent scholars who are interested in leadership’s application in OLC/OL/LO. Concluding from the literature, a leader that supports learning should:

- embrace, tackle, and even encourage change;
- be consistent in supporting learning;
- focus on the learning process, not the learning results;
- find ways to galvanize employees to learn;
- focus on long-term development;
- be savvy at communication;
- be emotionally stable and altruistic;
- be proficient at perspective taking and show empathy; and
- be skillful at controlling cost.

However, more research in regard to leadership’s practical implications in a more diverse environment is still much needed.

At the organizational level, both managers and human resource development (HRD) professionals can support learning practices in organizations. Managers can enact structures or policies for learning to occur. HRD professionals can help managers by providing timely HR support and services regarding learning programs. In addition, HR designed learning practices should always be implemented with systems thinking, which means those learning practices should be aligned with organizational goals. When employees develop a shared mental model with a common purpose in mind, learning would
be more effective (Senge, 1990). Thus, the effectiveness of organizational level learning can be improved with a careful design and continuous support from managers and HRD professionals.

For organizations that are determined to integrate leadership and OLC/LO/OL into their organization’s profiles, HR professionals must be actively involved in the OLC/LO/OL building process. They may design those OL programs centered on the concept of continuous learning in the long run, but also need to facilitate a OLC that permeates the organization, aiming to become an LO. Leaders who initiate these learning programs, should behave as role models and maintain an environment of social support and encouragement that cultivates a learning culture.

Recommendations for future research
Several directions for future research emerged from this systematic literature view. First, the current literature shows a substantial paucity of comparisons between people-focus leadership styles’ impact on OLC/LO/OL, such as servant leadership and LMX. Current articles have examined the relationship between transformational leadership and OLC/LO/OL in different contexts. Second, it is also worth noting that other styles of leadership such as cost control leadership, instructional leadership, and altruistic leadership lead to OLC/LO/OL as well. More research regarding those emerging types of leadership is encouraged. In addition, some team-level leadership styles such as shared leadership, which is a rapidly growing body of research in the leadership realm, should also receive the attention they deserve. In contrast to traditional approaches to individualistic leadership qualities, shared leadership is broadly defined as a team-level leadership type where leader’s responsibilities are distributed among team members (Zhu et al., 2018). Third, from a theoretical development standpoint, the clarification of definitions between OLC, LO, and OL is worth noting. In the field of HRD, Marsick and Watkins’s (1999) LO theory is recognized as a formal theory, but it still has its own definitional issues (Turner et al., 2018). The concept of LO and OLC have been used interchangeably, which caused definitional confusion. Fourth, this review indicates an urgent need for study leadership and OLC/OL/LO in some understudied contexts, such as medical and sport settings. Last, to advance HRD’s theories, more qualitative studies are encouraged because they may provide new insights about the relationship between some emerging leadership types with OLC/LO/OL. As qualitative researchers are after meaning (Hesse-Biber, 2017), more qualitative researchers would find cases that offer explanations to emerging different styles of leadership in unique contexts. Further, new types of leadership theories could be developed from future qualitative research, and questionnaires may be developed from those qualitative research findings measuring new leadership constructs.

References


**Further reading**


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