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## Article

# The most effective leadership style in pursuit of resilient supply chain: Sequential mediation of flexibility and agile supply chain

Pakistan Journal of Commerce and Social Sciences (PJCSS)

## Provided in Cooperation with:

Johar Education Society, Pakistan (JESPK)

*Suggested Citation:* Taseer, Muhammad Imran; Ahmed, Alia (2022) : The most effective leadership style in pursuit of resilient supply chain: Sequential mediation of flexibility and agile supply chain, Pakistan Journal of Commerce and Social Sciences (PJCSS), ISSN 2309-8619, Johar Education Society, Pakistan (JESPK), Lahore, Vol. 16, Iss. 3, pp. 387-423

This Version is available at:

<http://hdl.handle.net/10419/266381>

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## **The Most Effective Leadership Style in Pursuit of Resilient Supply Chain: Sequential Mediation of Flexibility and Agile Supply Chain**

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### **Article History**

Received: 18 July 2022    Revised: 26 Sept 2022    Accepted: 28 Sept 2022    Published: 30 Sept 2022

### **Abstract**

This study investigates the most effective leadership style of supply chain (SC) management leaders in pursuit of resilient supply chain through the comparison of transformational and transactional leadership styles. Flexibility and agile supply chain are considered as a mechanism which can strengthen the impact of leadership styles on resilient supply chain. However, these phenomena are not addressed in prior studies. We also empirically tested cost-effective mechanism to SMEs for improving supply chain resilience. The constructs are adopted from existing literature to formulate four hypotheses to meet the study objectives. Primary data is collected by incorporating split survey method and time-lagged of two weeks from 317 supply chain professionals working in SMEs manufacturing enterprises of Pakistan via a pre-tested survey instrument. The PROCESS Macros is used to test the hypothesized model. The results reveal the positive significance of both leadership styles with resilient supply chain directly as well as the mechanism of flexibility and agile supply chain. However, the empirical investigation finds that the supply chain managers with transactional leadership style are more effective in pursuit of resilient supply chain directly and through the sequential mediation of flexibility and agile supply chain as compared with other leadership style. The results of this study empirically prove the significance of transformational and transactional leadership with resilient supply chain. The sequential mediation of flexibility and agile SC between leadership styles and resilient supply chain is also proved. The study tests the most effective leadership style which can more strongly influence the resilient supply chain through the comparison of transformational and transactional leadership styles. All of these relationships have not been previously tested. Thus, the study provides an important contribution to existing body of knowledge.

**Keywords** resilient supply chain, agile supply chain, flexibility, transformational leadership, transactional leadership, SMEs, manufacturing enterprises, Pakistan.

## 1. Introduction

COVID-19 pandemic has emerged as a challenge for many industries (Ketchen & Craighead, 2021) as it exposed the supply chain (SC) vulnerability at a global scale. Many organizations have experienced shortages in the procurement of raw materials (Wieland, 2021). Consequently, several organizations faced stock-outs as they were unable to match supplies with demand. The environmental uncertainties have been significantly related with demand (Song et al., 2018) and the organizations are fond of most effective approaches for dealing with uncertainties (Chen et al., 2018). Accordingly, many small enterprises failed to survive (Katsaliaki et al., 2021) due to their inability to respond to the dynamics of the environment. Specifically, small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) are more vulnerable to SC disruptions due to their limited capital and expertise (Pal et al., 2014). A recent report of ‘Small and Medium Enterprises Development Authority’ (SMEDA) of Pakistan has revealed that 92% of the SMEs in Pakistan have experienced SC disruptions during COVID-19 (SMEDA, 2021). Although, catastrophic events have low probability of occurrence but they can anomalously disrupt the SCs (Katsaliaki et al., 2021). SC disruption not only effects the performance of SC rather it also upsurges the total cost of ultimate SC (Craighead et al., 2007). However, climate change and population growth upsurges the occurrences of disasters in the past few decades (FEMA, 2015). For instance, a country like Pakistan has spent \$10 billion, since the last decade on disaster relief and recovery (GFDRR, 2019). Furthermore, Pakistan stands at the seventh position in the world’s most affected countries by climate change (Ahmed et al., 2019). Whereas, the traditional risk management practices are not sufficient to deal with catastrophic events (Kamalahmadi & Parast, 2016). Similarly, Katsaliaki et al. (2021) emphasized that it is impossible to avoid SC disruptions completely. Hence, all these evidences highlight the need of resilient SC.

The significance of resilient SC in dealing with SC disruptions cannot be underestimated (Ambulkar et al., 2015) as it allows the firms to anticipate, adopt and quickly respond to SC disruptions (Blackhurst et al., 2005). SC resilience has the capability to quickly recover from disruption or even better than the original state (Ponomarov & Holcomb, 2009). Disruptions have a negative impact on costs and revenues of the SC (Craighead et al., 2007). Moreover, building resilience is less costly than recovering from a crisis (Jabbarzadeh et al., 2018). Flexibility and agile SC are amongst the most commonly cited strategies, which are critical for a resilient SC (Tukamuhabwa et al., 2015). Christopher & Peck (2004) stated that flexibility is an antecedent of SC resilience. Whereas, flexibility referees to the ability of SC managers to align internal processes quickly and efficiently in accordance with market demand (Srinivasan & Swink, 2018). Meanwhile, Swafford et al. (2006) and Chiang et al. (2012) proved that agile SC is also derived from flexibility. Since, Agile SC allows the firms to quickly align tactics and operations of their SC, according to market requirements (Gligor et al., 2015). Flexibility only focuses on the alignment of internal processes and agile SC deals with the alignment of SC in response to market requirements. Moreover, agile SC has been found as a significant predictor of resilient SC

(Aslam, Khan, et al., 2020). Although, the distinctive purpose differentiates flexibility, agile SC and resilient SC (Carvalho et al., 2012). However, the confusion is still persistent to understand the complexity in relationship of these constructs as none of the existing study investigates this phenomenon in a systematic manner. The theory on the effects of flexibility, agile SC and resilient SC remains fragmented and lacks grounding to established theoretical perspectives. An empirical investigation is required to develop a comprehensive understanding of these constructs. Therefore, the first objective of this study is to empirically investigate the significance amongst flexibility, agile SC and resilient SC.

Leadership has been considered as a key enabler of flexibility (Anning-Dorson, 2021), agile SC (Piya et al., 2020) and resilient SC (Kamalahmadi & Parast, 2016; Kochan & Nowicki, 2018). Barratt (2004) suggested that compatible leadership style can successfully drive the SC. The leadership style refers to the behaviour exhibits by a leader to influence subordinates towards the right direction (Certo & Certo, 2006). The effective leadership style ensures the innovative behaviour of employees (Afsar et al., 2014; Xu et al., 2017) and innovation allow organizations to building SC resilience (Ozdemir et al., 2022). Moreover, SC resilience literature suggested that strong commitment, decisional flexibility, proactive behavior, learning and innovation are important contributors of SC resilience (Ali & Gölgeci, 2019; Sawyerr & Harrison, 2020; Scholten et al., 2020). Meanwhile, the effective leadership style ensures the learning, creativity, innovation and commitment of the employees (Afsar et al., 2014; Atitumpong & Badir, 2018; Avolio & Bass, 1995; Breevaart et al., 2014; Jong & Hartog, 2007). However, in the presence of multiple leadership styles, which is the most compatible leadership style SC managers have to adopt in pursuit of SC resilience? The current literature is silent about it. Although, a little work was done in the domain of leadership and SC but Prabhu & Srivastava (2022) indicate an upwards research trend in this domain. Thus, the current novel study will address this literature gap as the relationship between leadership styles and resilient SC has not been previously tested. Since, building SC resilience is not a mechanistic process (Ali & Gölgeci, 2019) as it depends on the decision making capabilities of SC managers (Leflar & Siegel, 2013). SC managerial leaders have to deal with multi-dimensional internal and external challenges of upstream and downstream to ensure the uninterrupted flows of SC, for the attainment of organizational objectives. Additionally, SC managers also have to deal with SC disruptions as they are responsible to minimize the impact of disruption and quick restoration of the SC. Remko (2020) suggested that COVID-19 is an opportunity for SC managers to strengthen the resilient capabilities of the SC, thus they can better deal with the crisis. Therefore, the behavioural aspects of the SC managers need to be investigated, as this perspective is ignored in current literature (Pettit et al., 2019; Polyviou, 2016). Similarly, this research gap is also highlighted by Scholten et al. (2020), Ali & Gölgeci (2019), Sawyerr & Harrison (2020) and Remko (2020); all of them suggested to investigate the behavioural aspects of SC managers in pursuit of SC resilience as this phenomena has not been addressed in existing literature. Therefore, the second objective of this explanatory study is to investigate the most effective leadership style of SC

managerial leaders in pursuit of resilient SC through the comparison of transformational and transactional leadership styles. This novel study will provide a vital theoretical contribution to current body of knowledge by exploring new phenomena which has not been addressed before. Hence, we selected the two most effective leadership styles in this study based on their significance: (1) Transformational leadership and (2) Transactional leadership. Further explanations are given in Section 2.

The literature reveals that SMEs are more vulnerable to SC disruptions (Pal et al., 2014) due to their inability to incorporate change (Ates & Bititci, 2011). The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA, 2015) reported that 40% to 60% of the SMEs never reopen after confronted with a disaster. SMEs are one of the dominant contributors in national economies however most of the times SMEs were ignored in research, particularly in the context of resilient SC (Kamalahmadi & Parast, 2016). SMEs represents 70% of the world's production (Ates & Bititci, 2011). Since, the existing literature validates that the effect of economic crises on SMEs was diminished through compatible leadership (Mcmanus et al., 2008; Penrose, 2000). Furthermore, the current literature encourages to conduct empirical studies on how SMEs can improve SC resilience (Ali & Gölgeci, 2019; Kamalahmadi & Parast, 2016; Pal et al., 2014). Hence, the third object of our study is to propose a most cost effective mechanism to SMEs manufacturing enterprises for improving their resilient SC capabilities. Resilient SC ensures that the SMEs manufacturing enterprises efficiently pursue contemporary business in uncertain environmental conditions and it can also contribute to improved operational performance (Dabhilkar et al., 2016), SC performance (Truong & Hara, 2018), competitive advantage (Kwak et al., 2018), market performance (Wong et al., 2020) service performance (Liu & Lee, 2018) and ultimately firms performance (Gölgeci & Kuivalainen, 2020). Thus, the proposed mechanism in this study will provides an opportunity to SMEs manufacturing enterprises to efficiently pursue contemporary business by building resilient SC. SMEs have weak financial muscles (Pal et al., 2014) and we believe that most of the time costly resources are not necessarily required to attain challenging objectives but the compatibility, capability and competency of SC managerial leaders can do so.

All three objectives of the study have been achieved with the sample of 317 SC professionals working in the SMEs manufacturing enterprises of Pakistan, using structural equation modelling (SEM) for constructs reliability and validity and PROCESS Macros for hypotheses testing. The significance of flexibility, agile SC and resilient SC in a systemic manner have been proved. Moreover, the effective leadership style, which can directly contribute to resilient SC and through the indirect effect of flexibility and agile SC have also been explored. The mechanism for improving resilient SC of SMEs has also been proposed after empirical investigation.

This article is organized as follows. Section 2 contains the theoretical background and hypotheses development. Section 3 illustrates the research methodology. Section 4 in concludes the data analysis and results. Section 5 contains the results discussions, practical and theoretical implications, limitations and future research directions.

## 2. Literature Review and Hypotheses Development

### 2.1. Resilient Supply Chain

Resilient SC is defined by Christopher & Peck (2004) as “the capacity of the SC to return to its original state or move to a new, more desirable state after being disturbed”. It highlights the immediate recovery of the SC from disruptive event(s) which can be caused by internal failure, or from SC partners or by the change in external environment of the focal firm. SC disruptions may occur because of climate change or human factors (Katsaliaki et al., 2021). However, fast recovery and restoration of the SC is critical to mitigate the impact of SC disruptions (Ivanov et al., 2018), as it contributes to the profitability and goodwill of the organization (Liu et al., 2020). The resilient SC is the need of current times when environmental uncertainties exposed the vulnerability of the SC. The risk of SC disruptions cannot be detached from current globalized multi-tier SCs. Thus, building SC resilience is the most effective way to manage risks and ensures the quick recovery from disruptions (Chopra & Meindl, 2014; Hora & Klassen, 2013; Jüttner & Maklan, 2011).

SC resilience was conceptualized on four principles (Christopher & Peck, 2004; Wilding, 2013). *1-SC reengineering*: refers to redesigning the SC by incorporating risk management for achieving resilience (Scholten et al., 2014). SC reengineering incorporates flexibility and redundancy. The significance of flexibility has been established with SC resilience (Yang & Yang, 2010). Whereas, redundancy has also been associated with resilience, by maintaining safety stock, surplus capacity, multiple suppliers and backups (Sodhi & Lee, 2007). *2-Collaboration*: has been considered as an important enabler of SC resilience (Soni et al., 2014). SC collaboration can enhance resilience through visibility, velocity and flexibility (Scholten et al., 2015). *3-Agility*: is the predictor of SC resilience (Carvalho & Cruz-Machado, 2011) and is ranked as a top enabler of SC resilience (Soni et al., 2014). *4-Corporate culture*: has the ability to strengthen the resilient SC (Christopher & Peck, 2004).

The SC resilience literature proposed a large number of drivers/enablers for building resilience for instance contingency planning, collaborative planning, dual sourcing or backup suppliers; SC technologies and information systems, SC visibility, redundancy, supplier development, innovation, knowledge management, empowerment, employee trainings, block-chain technologies, big data analytics (Ali & Gölgeci, 2019; Kamalahmadi & Parast, 2016; Kochan & Nowicki, 2018). Although, the current literature explicitly focuses on building and enhancing SC resilience (Karmaker et al., 2021) however the behavioral aspects of SC managers were overlooked (Ali & Gölgeci, 2019; Pettit et al., 2019; Sawyerr & Harrison, 2020). After all, the resilient capability of the SC is determined by the expertise and capabilities of SC managerial leaders.

### 2.2. Leadership and Resilient Supply Chain

Leadership is a process of influencing individuals or groups for the attainment of stated objectives (Northouse, 2006). Accordingly, leadership has the potential to convert

challenges into opportunities (Warrick, 2017) and SC disruption is the most challenging task for SC managers to deal (Remko, 2020). Leadership contributes up to 90 percent to the successful navigation for change (Kotter, 2007). Meanwhile, Ambulkar et al. (2015) referred SC resilience as ‘the capability of the firm to be alert to, adapt to, and quickly respond to changes brought by a SC disruption’. SC resilience allows the firms to align their processes quickly according to the nature of SC disruption in order to ensure the uninterrupted flow of SC. A compatible leadership behavior of SC manager can proactively navigate the desired changes at operational level and SC level to minimize the impact of disruptions by making SC more resilient. Leadership ensures the alignment and understanding of change (Sarros & Santora, 2001) and resilient SC permits the firms to anticipate, adopt and quickly respond to SC disruptions (Blackhurst et al., 2005). Thus, compatible leadership style of SC managers can make SC more resilient by aligning, anticipating and responding to change. Consequently, leadership capabilities have been associated with SC resilience (Fiksel et al., 2015) as leadership drives departmental coordination and SC collaboration (Lago, & Verma, 2017). Moreover, Leadership has been categorized as a single most critical factor to the success or failure of any organization (Bass, 1990; Chatman & O’Reilly, 2016) as the root cause of most organizational problems is its culture and leadership (Quinn & Cameron, 2019). Building SC resilience is not a one-time thing, rather it is an ongoing process (Pettit et al., 2013). Thus, a compatible leadership style of SC managers can promote the resilient SC. In lines with it, Frederico et al. (2019) suggested that the leadership expertise are required to understand the complications of SC. Therefore, in this study we are investigating the significance of TFL and TRL with resilient SC.

### *2.3. Transformational Leadership and Resilient Supply Chain*

Transformational leadership (TFL) was defined as “a style of leadership that transforms followers to rise above their self-interest by altering their morale, ideals, interests, and values, motivating them to perform better than initially expected” (Pieterse et al., 2009). TFL has been considered as the most effective leadership style due to its tendency to foster creativity and promotes a collaborative work environment (Le & Lei, 2019). Organizations have to embrace change to retain its competitiveness in an ever changing environment (Al-Haddad & Kotnour, 2015). Whereas, SC resilience is about responding to the dynamics of external environment by building survival capabilities to minimize the impact of disruptions (Ozdemir et al., 2022). The TFL has the relevant capabilities to endorse creativity and promotes collaboration amongst employees so, they can effectively deal with SC disruptions in an effective manner for building resilient capabilities of the SC. The existing literature empirically proves that the reaction of employees plays a critical role in change adoption (Bouckenoghe, 2010; Herscovitch & Meyer, 2002). Meanwhile, TFL has been identified as a strong enabler of change implementation and a critical predictor of employee’s positive response to change (Bommer et al., 2005). Every disruption event is unique in nature, which requires a change adoptive behavior of employees. Moreover, in the context of SC resilience, employees learning and development contributors to minimizing the impact of disruptions and ensures a fast recovery (Sawyer & Harrison, 2020). Similarly, the motivational perspective of TFL continually engages their

subordinates in ongoing learning and endorses a learning behaviour (Harvey et al., 2019). The learning from past disruptions can make employees more knowledgeable and it can contribute to minimizing the impact of future disruptive events. Since, employees who fail to learn are less effective (Bell et al., 2012) and organizations suffer when their employees do not learn (Wiese & Burke, 2019). SC disruption creates unique problems for SC managerial leaders (Scholten et al., 2020) and to deal with these unique problems, unique solutions are required. The subordinates of TFL are proactively prepared to deal with unique problems. Therefore, SC managers with the TFL style can more effectively control the impact of SC disruptions and they can also ensure the quick restoration of the SC after being disrupted. TFL encourages their subordinates to adopt and apply innovative tactics for problem resolution (Chi & Huang, 2014). Consequently, TFL enables employee empowerment, makes them creative and endorses learning and development, which can contribute to improve SC resilient. Meanwhile, Phung et al. (2022) empirically proved the significant positive influence of TFL on SC collaboration and risk management. Hence, TFL style of SC managers have the expertise to build and strengthen the resilient SC. Thus, the above discussions permit us to create the following hypothesis:

- **H<sub>1</sub>:** Transformational leadership has a significant positive impact on resilient supply chain.

#### *2.4. Transactional Leadership and Resilient Supply Chain*

Transactional leadership (TRL) is the exchange of work and reward. Transactional leaders provide clear guidelines to employees about expectations and on meeting these expectations, employees will be rewarded (Walumbwa et al., 2008). TRL assigns the responsibilities to subordinates and outlines rewards for the attainment of goals (Bass, 1985). TRL promotes the desired behavior and eradicates undesirable behavior of subordinates, by giving rewards and penalties (Bass & Bass, 2008). Since, contingent reward is a core source of inspiration for employees (Raziq et al., 2018). Therefore, TRL are more capable to motivate their followers (Deichmann & Stam, 2015). SC resilience literature confirms that the high duration disruptions are more harmful as they can effect SC performance drastically, so the immediate recovery is essential (Dolgui et al., 2018; Katsaliaki et al., 2021). SC disruptions create a challenging situation as diversified activities need to be performed by the employees in a limited time period in order to minimize the effect of disruption and a quick restoration of the SC to its previous condition is also required. Thus, the dependence on the work force has been increased during disruption confrontation phase. If employees have been rewarded fairly for their contributions during disruption, then the impact of disruption can be reduced and quick restoration of the SC can also be ensured. Consequently, the TRL style of SC managers can be more effective in motivating their team during disruptive event through contingent rewards. Transactional leaders enable employees learning, creativity and innovation (Gong et al., 2009; Jia et al., 2018; Ma & Jiang, 2018). Similarly, innovation allows organizations to build SC resilience (Ozdemir et al., 2022). TRL generates employee commitment which derives a feel of obligation to contribute more and employees reinforce their energies for



the accomplishment of challenging goals (Afshari & Gibson, 2016). Likewise, a stronger employee commitment is required for building a resilient SC (Sawyer & Harrison, 2020). Similarly, TRL has an inherent ability to attain challenging objectives (Podsakoff et al., 2006; Tavanti, 2016) and building resilient SC is a challenging task (Sawyer & Harrison, 2020). Therefore, TRL of SC managers has the potential to influence resilient SC and it can be a stronger predictor of resilient SC. Hence, the following hypothesis is being considered.

- **H<sub>2</sub>:** Transactional leadership has a significant positive impact on resilient supply chain.

### *2.5. Flexibility and Agile Supply Chain as Mediators*

Flexibility is the ability of an enterprise to adapt to the changing requirements of its environment and stakeholders with minimum time and effort (Erol et al., 2010). Similarly, organizational flexibility is the internal competence, which allows organizations to withstand market requirements, without suffering from any dysfunctions (Shukla et al., 2019). Organizational flexibility contributes to building survival capacity by aligning internal processes according to market requirements. Accordingly, flexibility has been considered as a critical organizational success factor (Shukla & Sushil, 2022). It enables the organizations to better deal with market uncertainties (Sreedevi & Saranga, 2017; Umam & Sommanawat, 2019) and contributes to competitiveness (Kwak et al., 2018). The operational flexibility improves cost control (van der Rhee et al., 2009) and strengthens the effectiveness of organizational operations and SC (Kurniawan et al., 2017). The literature provides the evidences about the significance of operational flexibility with SC resilience, for instance flexible production facilities, flexible capacity, flexible transportation, flexible supply base and flexible labour can influence SC resilience (Pettit et al., 2013; Tang & Tomlin, 2008, 2009; Yang & Yang, 2010). Traditionally, flexibility was observed as the single predictor of SC resilience (Colicchia & Strozzi, 2012). Therefore, flexibility is an antecedent of SC resilience (Christopher & Peck, 2004; Scholten & Schilder, 2015; Sheffi & Rice, 2005). Flexibility creates SC resilience through prompt adaptability during turbulence (Christopher & Holweg, 2011). Thus, the significance of flexibility in the attainment of agile SC and resilient SC cannot be underestimated. Meanwhile, leadership and culture were considered as a driver of organizational flexibility (Anning-Dorson, 2021). Therefore, flexibility can be a mechanism which can strengthen the relationship between leadership styles and resilient SC. A compatible leadership style can be a predictor of flexibility and through the mechanism of flexibility SC resilience can be improved. Moreover, flexibility can be applied to both firm and SC level (Stevenson & Spring, 2007). However, in this study we consider organizational flexibility.

Agile SC is defined as ‘the ability of the SC as a whole and its partners to rapidly align the network and its operations to the dynamic and turbulent requirements of the demand network’ (Ismail & Sharifi, 2006). SC agility enables an organization to respond quickly and effectively to the volatility and uncertainty of the marketplace. Agile SC is considered as flexible response towards the changing needs of the customers, by matching demand and supply (Carvalho et al., 2012; Dubey et al., 2019; Gunasekaran et al., 2008). The prior

studies emphasized flexibility as a driver of agility (Chiang et al., 2012). Swafford et al. (2008) and Braunscheidel & Suresh (2009) clarifies that flexibility is the internal ability of an organization, whereas, agile SC focuses on both internal and external perspectives. Similarly, Carvalho et al. (2012) differentiated resilient SC and agile SC: The agile SC specifically focuses on quick response to changes in markets and customer requirements, whereas, resilient SC handles the SC disruption in order to retain SCs competitiveness. Additionally, Blome et al. (2013) have demonstrated that agile SC mediates supply/demand side competence and operational performance of the firm. Similarly, Ahmed & Huma (2021) empirically proved that agile SC mediates market orientation and resilient SC. In lines with it, Aslam et al. (2020) provides evidence that agile SC positively influences the relationship of SC ambidexterity and resilient SC. Therefore, SC agility has been derived from flexibility (Swafford et al., 2006) and contributes in enhancing SC resilience (Ahmed & Huma, 2021; Aslam et al., 2020). Thus, the existing evidences indicate agile SC as a mechanism for enhancing resilient SC. Furthermore, leadership has been considered as an important enabler of agile SC (Piya et al., 2020). Hence, agile SC can be a mechanism which can strengthen the influence of leadership styles and resilient SC.

#### *2.6. Transformational Leadership, Flexibility, Agile Supply Chain and Resilient Supply Chain*

SC agility and SC resilience are the two most important attributes of the world class SCs (Gligor et al., 2015). Although, both are multidimensional and multidisciplinary concepts (Gligor et al., 2019) but agile SC with its inherent characteristics can contribute in building SC resilience (Aslam, Khan, et al., 2020). Thus, resilient SC can be strengthening by improving agile SC. Similarly, flexibility has been considered as a vital enabler of resilient and agile SC (Gligor et al., 2019). Likewise, resilient SC and agile SC can be influenced by improving flexibility. Thus, flexibility can contribute to improving agile SC and resilient SC can be strengthened by the influence of agile SC. Flexibility allows the organizations to review their strategies and practices, so they can be adoptive to change (Tamayo-Torres et al., 2010). Similarly, the organizational flexibility helps organizations to operate effectively in a dynamic environment (Ozdemir et al., 2022; Srinivasan & Swink, 2018). Whereas, TFL encourages their followers to adopt and apply innovative tactics for problem resolution (Chi & Huang, 2014), which promotes innovative capabilities of the employees (Lei et al., 2020). Through the innovative enforcement capability of TFL can strengthen the flexibility. Moreover, TFL can effectively implement change as they can gain positive response from their subordinates regarding change (Chou et al., 2013). Since, 'adoptive to change' has been considered as a fundamental characteristic of SC agility, as it was consistently highlighted in agile SC literature (Christopher & Jüttner, 2000; Gligor et al., 2019; Gligor et al., 2015; Huang et al., 2002; Lin et al., 2006). Similarly, transformational leaders often realize the need for change (Bass, 1999) and they created a shared vision which encourages employees to learn from their mistakes (Bass, 1995). The foresightedness attribute of TFL enforced learning behavior in subordinates, which can contribute to improved organizational flexibility.

Consequently, under the supervision of TFL, employees consider change in a healthy way and expecting a positive outcome (Groves, 2020). Moreover, the negative reaction of employees against changes can be eliminated and a positive attitude can be generated through TFL (Bayraktar & Jiménez, 2020; Peng et al., 2021). Therefore, TFL has the relevant capabilities to align employee's behaviors to better respond to change by building flexibility and improving agile SC. Hence, TFL style of the SC managers can endorse flexibility to enhance SC agility for the attainment of SC resilience. Thus, we can conceive the following hypotheses:

- **H3:** Flexibility and agile supply chain sequentially mediates the relationship between transformational leadership and resilient supply chain.

#### *2.7. Transactional Leadership, Flexibility, Agile Supply Chain and Resilient Supply Chain*

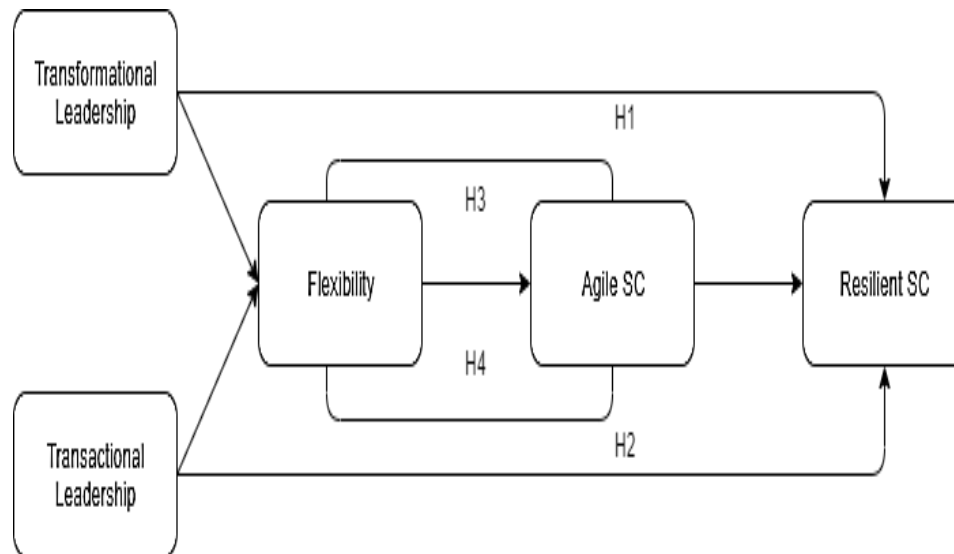
Leadership has been considered as a key enabler of flexibility (Anning-Dorson, 2021), agile SC (Piya et al., 2020) and resilient SC (Kamalahmadi & Parast, 2016). SC managers with compatible leadership style can enhance flexibility and agile SC for the attainment of resilient SC. However, a particular leadership style that can influence them is still unexplored. Whereas, the ultimate objective of both, SC resilience and SC agility, have to improve SC performance to gain and retain a dominant position in the global markets (Gligor et al., 2019). Although, the agile SC focuses on changes in customer requirement and resilient SC handles the SC disruptions in order to retain the SC (Carvalho et al., 2012). The current literature highlights SC agility as a mechanism by which SC resilience can be enhanced (Ahmed & Huma, 2021; Aslam et al., 2020). The existing literature also highlights the positive significant influence of decision flexibility, structural flexibility and proactive practices with resilient SC (Sawyer & Harrison, 2020; Tukamuhabwa et al., 2015). Similarly, flexibility has been considered as a fundamental contributor to agile SC (Li et al., 2008). Flexibility facilitates the organization to better deal with market uncertainties (Umam & Sommanawat, 2019). Thus, flexibility and agile SC can be a mechanism for improving resilient SC. Meanwhile, transactional leaders create employee commitment, which generates a feeling of obligation to contribute more and employees reinforce their energies to accomplish more challenging goals (Afshari & Gibson, 2016). Therefore, TRL can be more effective in uncertain conditions due to their expertise to influence employee's performance at desired level. After all, reward is the primary source of motivation for people to work (Russell, 2001) and TRL influences their employees through contingent rewards (Pieterse et al., 2009). Although, Zsidisin & Wagner (2010) suggested that SC managers can mitigate the impact of SC disruptions by building flexibility. However, developing flexibility in its self is a challenging task whereas, in this study we are suggesting that by adopting TRL style, SC managerial leaders can build flexibility. As, TRL has the ability to obtain results (Podsakoff et al., 2006) and it is more effective when immediate results are required (Birasnav et al., 2015). Furthermore, TRL is capable to enhance employee performance at a desired level (Masa'deh et al., 2016) by which they can attain challenging goals (Afshari & Gibson, 2016). Consequently, leaders with transactional style have significant positive impact on discretionary (flexible) behavior of employees, organizational commitment and proactive behavior of the subordinates (Breevaart et al., 2014; Chiaburu et al., 2014; Jackson et al., 2013). So, TRL

with a committed work force equipped with proactive and discretionary behavior can contribute to improving resilient SC through the influence of flexibility and agile SC. Accordingly, under the leadership of a transactional leader, employees experience high empowerment (Pieterse et al., 2009). Similarly, individual and team empowerment are the fundamental elements of flexible organizations (Englehardt & Simmons, 2002) and flexibility is a key driver of SC agility (Chiang et al., 2012). Moreover, the current literature suggests that fostering trust between SC partners can make SCs more agile (Vitasek, 2016). Whereas, TRL successfully builds trusts, dependability, and consistency among subordinates by fair and consistent honoring of the agreements (Bass, 1998). Hence, on behalf of the above arguments, we can conceive that the TRL style exhibited by SC managers can promote flexibility to influence SC agility and this mechanism can contribute in the attainment of SC resilience. Thus, we can generate the following hypothesis:

- **H4:** Flexibility and agile supply chain sequentially mediates the relationship between transactional leadership and resilient supply chain.

### 2.8. Theoretical Framework

The resilient SC has been considered as a dependent variable in this study. Transformational and transactional leadership are two independent variables. Where, flexibility is the first mediating variable and agile SC is the second mediating variable. Figure 1 represents the theoretical framework of the study.



**Figure 1: Theoretical Framework**

### 3. Methodology

In this basic to applied research, variables are quantitatively measured by adopting deductive approach. As the study hypotheses is drawn from existing literature. So, we use

survey design to measure the significance of variables in this explanatory research. Moreover, prior studies in the domain of SC frequently uses the same approach (Blome et al., 2013; Eckstein et al., 2015). The further details of population, sampling and instrument are given below.

### *3.1. Population and Sampling Technique*

The targeted population in this study is the SC professionals working in small and medium sized manufacturing enterprises of Pakistan. Since, SMEs are more vulnerable to SC disruptions (Pal et al., 2014). Moreover, 92% of SMEs in Pakistan have experienced SC disruptions during COVID-19 (SMEDA, 2021). Therefore, the proposed model is empirically tested on SMEs of Pakistan. According to SMEDA Pakistan, 5.2 million SMEs are currently operating in Pakistan. However, the details and total number of SMEs manufacturers is not available on any platform. The same problem was also highlighted by other researchers in same region (Aslam et al., 2020; Dubey et al., 2016; Ryan & Tipu, 2013). Therefore, we use convenience sampling technique instead of probability sampling because the sum of population is not available. Without a total number of the targeted population, a sampling frame cannot be generated as it is required for probability sampling. The literature also suggests that the convenience sampling technique is one of the most commonly used techniques if the targeted population is unknown (Acharya et al., 2013). Moreover, the same sampling technique was also adopted in prior researches in the same domain and same region (Ali et al., 2012; Aslam, Blome, et al., 2020; Malik & Kotabe, 2009; Russell, 2013). Therefore, 300 SMEs manufacturers were randomly targeted for the purpose of data collection.

The current literature and the council of SC professionals highlighted that; source, make and deliver are the most critical processes of SC in an organization (Huan et al., 2004; Macchion et al., 2018; McCormack, 2004). Thus, 3 respondents from each 300 SMEs were targeted for data collection ( $300 \times 3 = 900$ ), as the unit of analysis in this study is SC professionals. 1st respondent belongs from the procurement department (source), 2nd respondent from the production department (make) and 3rd respondent is from distribution (deliver). The purpose of the adopted approach is to get the actual inside of SC and to avoid common method bias (CMB). A total of 900 questionnaires were physically distributed and 317 were received back. Meanwhile, the response rate is 35.22%.

### *3.2. Measures*

The existing well-established measures have been adopted in this study. All the constructs were measured on a five-point Likert type scale, with anchors ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5) in order to ensure high statistical variability amongst survey responses (Chen et al., 2004). Further details of the measures are given in following section.

#### *3.2.1 Transformational and Transactional Leadership*

The two independent variables of our study. Transformational and transactional leadership was measured by using multifactor leadership questionnaire (MLQ), which was originally developed by Avolio et al. (1999). TFL was conceptualized with 20 items and TRL with 16

items for instance 'Proud of him' and 'clarifies rewards'. The Cronbach's alpha values were 0.86 and 0.84.

### 3.2.2 Flexibility

The four items of flexibility were adopted (Gligor et al., 2013; Jüttner & Maklan, 2011). The sample item is 'our firm allocates resources for production based on market change'. Flexibility is considered as a first mediator in this study with the Cronbach's alpha value of 0.72.

### 3.2.3 Agile Supply Chain

The measure of agile SC with 5 items developed by Blome et al. (2013) has been used in our research. The example item includes 'reacting to new market developments quickly'. Agile SC is the second mediating variable of the study. The calculated alpha value was 0.79.

### 3.2.4 Resilient Supply Chain

The measure of Ambulkar et al. (2015) with 4 items has been adopted to measure resilient SC. In our study, resilient SC is the dependent variable. The sample item which belongs to resilient SC is 'we are able to cope with changes brought by the supply chain disruption'. The calculated alpha value of this construct was 0.87.

## 3.3. Study Constructs

The five constructs of this study have been adopted from existing literature to formulate the reflective model. All of these constructs are already operationalized as reflective constructs. For instance, Gligor et al. (2013) and (Ambulkar et al., 2015) operationalized agile SC and resilient SC as reflective constructs. Moreover, we follow the three empirical considerations for assessing the reflective model as suggested by Coltman et al. (2008). 1- the alpha values, AVE and CFA shows the high internal consistency and it represents the items inter-correlation (see table 2, 3 and 4). 2- the relationship of the items with their constructs as represented in table 4 shows that the items related to their latent variable converge with each other and deviate from the items of other latent variables. 3- the indices values of one factor model (see table 3) in which we combine all the items into one variable, illustrates poor fitness of the model. Similarly, the values of multi-collinearity test (VIF) are also within the acceptable threshold. Thus, the three empirical considerations indicate that the study constructs are reflective in nature.

## 3.4. Data Analysis Procedure

We used covariance-based SEM method for analysing the psychometric properties of the measurement model and PROCESS Macros has been used to analyse the structural model. CB-SEM is the most frequently applied data analysis technique in management research (Williams et al., 2009). It is a persuasive data analysis method and mostly used with reflective constructs for estimating common factors to assess the causal relationships (Zhang et al., 2021). CB-SEM has multiple appealing features as compared with other data analytical methods. For instance, it provides a holistic solution for several multivariate

techniques, such as CFA, path analysis and regression analysis (Cheung, 2015). Moreover, CB-SEM provides more accurate estimates of the psychometric properties (Cheung & Lau, 2008). Although, PLS-SEM is also an effective method for CFA (Hair et al., 2020) but Schuberth (2021) has some concerns regarding the effective of CFA with PLS-SEM. Thus, we used CB-SEM method for analyzing the psychometric properties of the measurement model.

3.5. *Confirmatory Factor Analysis*

To ensure the validity of the instrument, Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) is being used in this current study, as suggested by Fornell & Larcker (1981). The alternative models have been developed along with the study measurement model to examine fit indices. All of the five latent variables and their indicators has been placed to correlate with each other. The results of the five-factor model indicate that the proposed model is a good fit  $p < 0.001$  as listed in table 1. The values specify the incremental fitness of the study model for instance, CFI, TLI and IFI has to be  $> 0.90$  and the analysis shows that the CFI=0.909, TLI=0.904 and IFI=0.910 (Hu & Bentler, 1995, 1999; Kline, 2015). Similarly, absolute fitness measures also indicate that the values of the model are above the required threshold level, for instance the value of RMSEA  $< 0.08$  (Kline, 2015) and the analysis shows that the value of RMSEA=0.048. The value of CMIN/DF=1.273 and it has to be CMIN/DF  $< 5$  and the value of RMR  $< 0.08$  has been considered generally a good fit. Whereas, the current model value of RMR=0.048 (Hu & Bentler, 1999). Table 1 shows that when we move from five factor model towards one factor model, the substantial variation in the indices values were detected. Hence, the indices values in comparison with alternate nested models satisfied the required criteria for the fitness of the proposed mode.

**Table 1: Confirmatory Factor Analysis**

	CFI	TLI	IFI	CMIN/DF	RMR	RMSEA
Five Factor Model	0.909	0.904	0.910	1.273	0.048	0.029
Four Factor Model	0.786	0.776	0.789	1.636	0.034	0.045
Three Factor Model	0.757	0.747	0.761	1.719	0.035	0.048
Two Factor Model	0.737	0.727	0.741	1.775	0.036	0.050
One Factor Model	0.734	0.724	0.737	1.784	0.036	0.050

Note: Five factor model: all variables individually. Four Factor model: indicators of transformational and transactional leadership combined in one factor. Three factor model: transformational and transactional leadership are merged with agile. Two factor model is generated by combing resilient SC with flexibility. One factor model: all items are combined in one variable.

3.5. *Common Method Bias*

Specific initiatives have been taken in this study to avoid common method bias (CMB). *Firstly*, split survey method with two-wave (2 weeks’ interval) time-lagged design has been incorporated by following the guidelines of Conway & Lance (2010) and Podsakoff et al.

(2003). At time-1 (T1), we collected the data of independent variables and after the interval of 14 days, at time-2 (T2), the data of remaining variables have been collected. Moreover, we also assured the anonymity of respondents by not asking for their names, contact numbers and organizational identity.

*Secondly*, we also used statistical techniques to identify CMB. For instance, Harman's single-factor test has been used to identify CMB. The results indicated that maximum variance explained by a single factor is 20.29% < 50%. Hence, there is no threat of CMB in this study. The collinearity test was also conducted on all five variables of the model. The test result indicates that the variance inflation factors (VIF) of all the study variables were < 10 (O'Brien, 2007). Therefore, we can confidently claim that CMB is not an issue in this study.

#### **4. Data Analysis**

This section represents the analysis of the data and results. In this study we use three software's for data analysis. Descriptive analysis was conducted through SPSS-26. To analyze the reliability and validity of the constructs, we used AMOS structural equation modelling (SEM) and study hypotheses were tested through PROCESS Macros.

##### *4.1. Assessment of Psychometric Properties*

The constant variance, existence of outliers and normality has been tested to qualify the assumptions before analyzing the reliability and validity of the measurement items. Moreover, multi-collinearity was not an issue in this study as variance inflation factors (VIF) of this study are in between 1.59 and 2.4, which is far less than the recommended threshold of 10.0. The Tolerance > 0.1 and in this study it is in between 0.416 and 0.627. Therefore, the assumption of multi-collinearity is adequately qualified as suggested by Hair et al. (1995).

##### *4.1.1 Means, Standard Deviation and Correlations*

Internal consistency needs to be computed in order to confirm the reliability of the questionnaire. As suggested by Nunnally & Bernstein (1994) and Bland & Altman (1997) Cronbach alpha has to be calculated to measure the reliability of the instrument. The alpha value has to be > 0.70, which has been considered as a threshold value (Fornell & Larcker, 1981; Hair et al., 2010). Our study successfully qualified this assumption as the Cronbach's alpha value of all of the five study variables are > 0.70 (see table 2). The mean and standard deviation of TFL=3.19(0.40), TRL=3.12(0.37), SC resilience=3.08(0.49), agile SC=2.89(0.49) and flexibility=3.22(0.48). Therefore, the standards of reliability have been qualified as indicated in table 2. Before testing the study hypothesis, we analyze Pearson correlation amongst study variables and p-value. The analysis highlighted the existence of correlation between all of the study variables. For instance, TFL is positively related with resilient SC, agile SC and flexibility ( $r=0.617$ ,  $p<0.01$ ), ( $r=0.574$ ,  $p<0.01$ ) and ( $r=0.518$ ,  $p<0.01$ ). Same is the case with TRL as it is also correlated with resilient SC, agile SC and flexibility ( $r=0.599$ ,  $p<0.01$ ), ( $r=0.513$ ,  $p<0.01$ ) and ( $r=0.416$ ,  $p<0.01$ ). Similarly, flexibility and agile SC are also related with resilient SC ( $r=0.587$ ,  $p<0.01$ ) and ( $r=0.622$ ,  $p<0.01$ ). Moreover, flexibility also has an impact on agile SC ( $r=0.433$ ,  $p<0.01$ ), details



are given in table 2. The overall results of the correlation analysis proved the positive relationship amongst all of the five study variables. Therefore, the positive significant correlation between study variables provide initial support to test the study hypothesis by using PROCESS Macros (Hayes & Preacher, 2014).

**Table 2: Means, Standard Deviation and Correlations**

	Variables	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5
1	Transformational Leadership	3.19	.40	(0.86)				
2	Transactional leadership	3.12	.37	.385**	(0.84)			
3	Resilient SC	3.08	.49	.617**	.599**	(0.70)		
4	Agile SC	2.89	.49	.574**	.513**	.622**	(0.79)	
5	Flexibility	3.22	.48	.518**	.416**	.587**	.433**	(0.72)

\*\**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).*

#### 4.1.2. Convergent and Discriminant Validity

The overall reliability and validity of the construct was assessed by using AMOS-SEM. Convergent validity explained the intimacy of indicators with latent variable and discriminant validity represents the deviation from each other (Cable & DeRue, 2002). In this study we evaluated the convergent validity of the measured model and discriminant validity of the structural model. Fornell & Larcker (1981) suggested method is being adopted to evaluate convergent and discriminant validity. The literature suggested that the values of composite reliability has to be >0.70 and average variance extracted (AVE) must be >0.50 (Santos & Cirillo, 2021; Farrell, 2010). The results (see table 3) indicate that the composite reliability (CR) and average variance extracted (AVE) of all the five latent variables are CR>0.7 and AVE>0.5. Thus, the study qualified the assumption of convergent validity. Similarly, the results of discriminant validity highlights that the square root of AVE> inter-construct correlations. As suggested by Fornell & Larcker (1981) the value of square root of AVE has to be > inter-construct correlations. Table 3 represents that the TFL (0.714), TRL (0.718), SCR (0.710), ASC (0.709) and FX (0.739) all are greater than the inter-construct correlations. Whereas, the maximum shared variance (MSV) of all the five study variables are < AVE. Therefore, the results indicate the existence of convergent validity as all the indicators of each latent variable collectively represents their latent variable and all the latent variables are discriminating from each other. Hence, the study successfully fulfills the requirements of convergent and discriminant validity.

**Table 3: Reliability and Validity of the Constructs**

	Constructs	Convergent Validity			Discriminant Validity				
		CR	AVE	MSV	1	2	3	4	5
1	TFL	0.953	0.510	0.380	<b>(0.714)</b>				
2	TRL	0.944	0.515	0.358	.385	<b>(0.718)</b>			
3	SCR	0.800	0.505	0.456	.617	.599	<b>(0.710)</b>		
4	ASC	0.834	0.503	0.390	.574	.513	.622	<b>(0.709)</b>	
5	FX	0.783	0.546	0.344	.518	.416	.587	.433	<b>(0.739)</b>

Note: The bold values in diagonal are the square root of AVE. TFL-Transformational leadership, TRL-Transactional leadership, SCR-supply chain resilience, ASC- Agile supply chain and FX- Flexibility.

#### 4.2. Hypotheses Testing

##### 4.2.1 Direct Path Analysis

The direct path analysis signifies the relationship between endogenous variables and exogenous variables (Gupta & Somers, 1996). We use PROCESS Macros by Hayes & Preacher (2014) with 5000 bootstrapping to test the path significance. The results in table 4 indicate the significance between endogenous and exogenous variables. Transformational leadership has a significant impact on resilient SC ( $\beta=0.318$ ,  $P<0.05$ ) with 95% CI (0.201, 0.434) in support of H1. Transactional leadership has an influence on resilient SC ( $\beta=0.386$ ,  $P<0.05$ ) with 95% CI (0.271, 0.500) thus, H2 is supported. Moreover, the lower limit of confidence intervals (LLCI) and the upper limit of confidence intervals (ULCI) of both two direct path coefficients does not contain zero, which explains the positive relationship (Hair et al., 2017; Hayes et al., 2017). Therefore, transactional leadership has the highest  $\beta=0.386$ , which is said to be a dominant predictor of resilient SC as compared with transformational leadership in SMEs manufacturing industry of Pakistan.

**Table 4: The Direct Path Analysis**

Direct Effects	Path Coefficient	BC (95% CI)	
		LLCI	ULCI
Transformational Leadership → Resilient SC	0.318***	0.201	0.434
Transactional Leadership → Resilient SC	0.386***	0.271	0.500
Flexibility → Resilient SC	0.303***	0.214	0.392
Agile SC → Resilient SC	0.335***	0.243	0.426

Note: N=317

4.2.2 Indirect Path Analysis

Mediation is the mechanism by which exogenous variable(s) influence endogenous variable(s). The results of the indirect effect are illustrated in table 5. The results reveal that the flexibility mediates the relationship between transformational leadership and resilient SC ( $\beta=0.187, P<0.05$ ) with 95% CI (0.125, 0.264). Moreover, flexibility also mediates the influence of transactional leadership and resilient SC ( $\beta=0.174, P<0.05$ ) with 95% CI (0.117, 0.255). However, the results reveal very interesting findings such as, when flexibility takes place as mediator than transformational leadership becomes more effective predictor of resilient SC. Similarly, Agile SC mediates the relationship amongst transformational leadership and resilient SC ( $\beta=0.194, P<0.05$ ) by 95% CI (0.115, 0.286). The results also proved the significant mediation of agile SC between transactional leadership and resilient SC ( $\beta=0.175, P<0.05$ ) through 95% CI (0.094, 0.285).

**Table 5: The Mediating Effects**

	Path Coefficient	BC (95%)	
		LLCI	ULCI
<b>Indirect Effects</b>			
Transformational Leadership → Flexibility → Resilient SC	0.187***	0.125	0.264
Transformational Leadership → Agile SC → Resilient SC	0.194***	0.115	0.286
Transactional Leadership → Flexibility → Resilient SC	0.174***	0.117	0.255
Transactional Leadership → Agile SC → Resilient SC	0.175***	0.094	0.285

Note: N=317, bootstrap 5000, 95% confidence intervals

4.2.3. Sequential Mediation Analysis

The sequential mediation analysis has been used to determine the collective impact of individual mediator while dealing with complex relationships (Zhang et al., 2016). We practice sequential mediation in this study to determine the collective impact of flexibility and agile SC, as mediators on leadership styles and resilient SC. The PROCESS model number 6 with 5000 bootstrapping and 95% of confidence interval have been applied to test the path significance. Moreover, the direct effect has been calculated by multiplying path (a), path (b) and path (c). Where, path-a: independent variable to dependent variable, path-b: first mediator to dependent variable and path-c: second mediator to dependent variable. The sequential mediation in this study has been conducted in two different path models. Table 6 represents the models summaries, both models have been found statistically significant with P-value<0.001 and mean squared error (MSE) of both models are between 0.1125 to 0.1276, which is >0.

**Table 6: Model's Summaries**

	Models Summery	R	R <sup>2</sup>	MSE	P-value
1	TFL → FX → ASC → RSC	0.7430	0.5521	0.1087	0.000
2	TRL → FX → ASC → RSC	0.7559	0.5713	0.1040	0.000

Note1: TFL-Transformational leadership, TRL- Transactional leadership, FX-Flexibility, ASC-Agile SC, RSC-Resilient SC.

Note 2: N=317, PROCESS model number 6, 5000 bootstrap, 95% of confidence intervals.

The study investigates the sequential mediating impact of flexibility and agile SC on the relationship between transformational leadership and resilient SC. The results shown a significant indirect effect of transformational leadership on resilient SC ( $\beta=0.0390$ ,  $t=5.3522$ ), supported H<sub>3</sub>. Furthermore, the direct effect of transformational leadership on resilient SC in presence of the mediators was also found significant ( $\beta=0.0323$ ,  $P<0.001$ ). The 55.21% of the change in resilient SC ( $R^2=0.5521$ ) is generated by transformational leadership, flexibility and agile SC. Hence, flexibility and agile SC partially mediated the relationship between transformational leadership and resilient SC. Sequential mediation analysis summery of model 1 is presented in table 7.

**Table 7: Model 1 Sequential Mediation Analysis**

Relationship	Total Effect	Direct Effect	Indirect Effect	Confidence Interval		t-statistic	Conclusion
				Lower Bound	Upper Bound		
TFL → FX → ASC → RSC	0.0713	0.0323	0.0390	0.0162	0.0733	5.3522	Partial Mediation
P-value	(0.000)	(0.000)					

Note1: TFL-Transformational leadership, TRL- Transactional leadership, FX-Flexibility, ASC-Agile SC, RSC-Resilient SC.

Note 2: N=317, PROCESS model number 6, 5000 bootstrap, 95% of confidence intervals.

The study explores the sequential mediating impact of flexibility and agile SC on the relationship between transactional leadership and resilient SC. The results shown a significant indirect effect of transactional leadership on resilient SC ( $\beta=0.0481$ ,  $t=6.6318$ ), supporting H<sub>4</sub>. Moreover, the direct effect of transactional leadership on resilient SC in presence of the mediators was also found significant ( $\beta=0.0391$ ,  $P<0.001$ ). The 57.13% of the change in resilient SC ( $R^2=0.5713$ ) is represented by transactional leadership, flexibility and agile SC. Thus, flexibility and agile SC partially mediated the relationship between transactional leadership and resilient SC. Table 7 illustrates the sequential mediation analysis summery of model 2. All four study hypotheses have been supported; further discussions of the analysis are presented in next section of the study.

**Table 8: Model 2 Sequential Mediation Analysis**

Relationship	Total Effect	Direct Effect	Indirect Effect	Confidence Interval		t-statistics	Conclusion
				Lower Bound	Upper Bound		
TRL → FX → ASC → RSC	0.0872	0.0391	0.0481	0.0233	0.0871	6.6318	Partial Mediation
<b>P-value</b>	(0.000)	(0.000)					

Note1: TFL-Transformational leadership, TRL- Transactional leadership, FX-Flexibility, ASC-Agile SC, RSC-Resilient SC.

Note 2: N=317, PROCESS model number 6, 5000 bootstrap, 95% of confidence intervals.

### 5. Results and Discussions

In lines with prior studies (Anning-Dorson, 2021; Kamalahmadi & Parast, 2016; Piya et al., 2020), leadership can influence flexibility, agile SC and resilient SC. However, the current novel study extends the scope of prior findings by empirically exploring that the SC managerial leaders can improve resilient SC by the adoption of both TFL and TRL styles. TFL and TRL have been identified as the predictors of resilient SC. Although, leadership was identified as an enabler resilient SC (Kochan & Nowicki, 2018) but a particular leadership style which can influence resilient SC was unexplored in previous literature. The results demonstrate that TRL is the most effective leadership style of SC managerial leaders due to its stronger positive significant influence on resilient SC as compared with TFL. Up till now, TFL was considered as the most effective leadership style (Le & Lei, 2019) however this is not in the case of SMEs manufacturing enterprises of Pakistan. The results of the study not only proved the direct positive impact of TRL on resilient SC but the indirect impact also shows the positive results. The indirect impact is generated through the sequential mediation of flexibility and agile SC. The flexibility and agile SC have also been proved as the mechanism which can strengthen the influence of TRL and TFL on the resilient SC. The results indicate that the TRL has more strong influence on resilient SC in the presence of flexibility and agile SC as compared with TFL. Since, these relationships were not previously tested. In lines with Birasnav et al. (2015) TRL is more effective in emergency situations, where immediate results are required. The prior studies (Podsakoff et al., 2006; Tavanti, 2016) also suggested that the TRL has the capability to attain challenge goals and our study also reveals that the SC managers can more strongly influence resilient SC through the sequential mediation of flexibility and agile SC. Similarly, the existing literature also indicates that TRL is capable to enhance employee performance at a desired level (Masa'deh et al., 2016) and it helps them to attain challenging goals (Afshari & Gibson, 2016). Accordingly, building resilient SC is one of the most challenging task and TRL has the capability to strengthen the resilient SC by improving flexibility and agile SC. TRL influences their employees through contingent rewards (Pieterse et al., 2009) as financial rewards is one of the core source of motivation for employees (Russell, 2001). Specifically, for the individuals working in Pakistan, as this

country has experienced higher inflation rate, lower GDP and per capital income. Therefore, it is not surprising that TRL has the dominant ability to improve the resilient SC.

The prior study of Abbas & Ali (2021) also compared the influence of TFL with TRL and they found TFL as strongest predictor of project success as compared with TRL. Another comparison was conducted by Chua et al. (2022) in which they also revealed the effectiveness of TFL for improving creativity in contrast with TRL. The findings of this study suggest that TFL is also an effective leadership style which can influence flexibility and agile SC towards the attainment of resilient SC. The prior researches also indicate that TFL has been identified as a strong enabler of change implementation and a critical predictor of employee's positive response to change (Bommer et al., 2005; Chou et al., 2013). TFL endorses employee leaning (Harvey et al., 2019) and encourages their subordinates to adopt and apply innovative tactics for problem resolution (Chi & Huang, 2014). Thus, transformational leaders are capability to promote learning and innovative behavior of their subordinates, which contributes to improve overall organization flexibility and agile SC is strengthened by improving flexibility which ultimately influence resilient SC. Similarly, the findings of Phung et al. (2022) shown that the TFL can influence SC integration and SC risk management practices in the manufacturing firms of Vietnam. Whereas, our study also illustrates the consistent results regarding the influence of TFL but TRL has been found as a strongest predictor of resilient SC. In lines with our results, Young et al. (2021) relates TRL as a double-edged sword due to their ability to improve task and contextual performance of their subordinates. Similarly, our findings regarding the effectiveness of TRL has also been validated by Abdelwahed et al. (2022) as they proved that TRL has the capability to improve employee performance in SMEs of Pakistan. Although, TFL has been considered as the most popular leadership style and TRL fails to gain research attention (Prabhu & Srivastava, 2022). However, this study empirically proved the effectiveness of TRL towards the attainment of resilient SC in SEMs manufacturing enterprises of Pakistan.

The results of our study demonstrate the positive significant influence of flexibility with resilient SC and it validates the findings of Christopher & Peck (2004). The positive influence of flexibility on agile SC has also proved in this study and it is consistent with prior studies (Chiang et al., 2012; Swafford et al., 2006). In lines with prior studies of Ahmed & Huma (2021) and Aslam et al. (2020), results of this study also validates that agile SC can influence resilient SC. Thus, the findings of our study indicates that flexibility is the first step towards building SC resilience, as flexibility significantly contributes in building agile SC, and resilient SC has been strengthened by improving agile SC. Thus, SC managers can adopt TFL style for building resilient SC through the mediation of flexibility and agile SC. However, the empirical investigation demonstrated that TRL style of SC managers is the most effective leadership style in pursuit of resilient SC through the sequential mediation of flexibility and agile SC. Although, prior studies proposed capital intensive solutions for improving resilient SC. For instance, Irfan et al. (2022) suggested digital technologies for improving resilient SC and Ambrogio et al. (2022) proposed industry 4.0 technologies for building resilient SC. The generalizability of these studies in

the context of SMEs manufacturing sector could be an issue because SMEs have limited financial resources and these capital intensive technological centric investments may be not feasible for them. Moreover, most of the SC studies have been conducted in the context of large manufacturing sector of the developed countries. The emerging economies and SMEs were mostly ignored in SC and leadership studies, these issue have also been highlighted by Prabhu & Srivastava (2022). Similarly, the literature indicates that behavioral aspect of SC managers in dealing with SC disruptions needs to be investigated (Remko, 2020; Sawyerr & Harrison, 2020; Scholten et al., 2020). Thus, this study addresses these gaps and suggested that SC managers of SMEs can improve resilient SC by the adoption of TRL style through the mechanism of flexibility and agile SC. Moreover, Jacobsen et al. (2022) empirically proved that TFL and TRL styles can endorsed and improved through trainings. Additionally, the proposed mechanism in this study provides an opportunity for the SC managerial leaders of SMEs manufacturing enterprises to efficiently pursue contemporary business, by building resilient SC without additional financial investments. Hence, all the study objectives have been achieved.

### *5.1. Practical Implications*

The compatible and distinctive leadership style can successfully drive the SC (Barratt, 2004) as leaders can convert difficulties into opportunities (Warrick, 2017). Whereas, SC disruption is the most difficult and stressful situation for SC managers (Dolgui et al., 2018). The internal competences permit the organizations to effectively deal with external complications. COVID-19 generated an opportunity for SC managers to move forward and strengthen the resilient capabilities of their SC, thus they can effectively deal with future crisis (Remko, 2020). Although, SC managers are mostly aware about the drastic impact of SC disruptions and the significance of a resilient SC (Scholten et al., 2020), therefore, the behavioral aspects of the SC managers needs to be explored (Pettit et al., 2019; Sawyerr & Harrison, 2020).

Since, leadership has been considered as a critical driver of resilient SC (Kamalahmadi & Parast, 2016; Kochan & Nowicki, 2018). Meanwhile, the current study empirically proves the significant positive impact of TRL on resilient SC. Therefore, we suggest that SC managers have to adopt the TRL style to improve the resilient capabilities of the SC. Moreover, the results also reveal that flexibility and agile SC is the mechanism which strengthens the influence of TRL on resilient SC. This pathway not only contributes in strengthening the resilient SC but also improves the flexibility along with an agile SC. Hence, the results recommend that SC managers have to exhibit TRL style to retrieve the benefits of flexibility and agile SC in pursuit of a more resilient SC. Additionally, the other complementary mechanisms for improving SC resilience were also revealed in this research. For instance, SC managers can also improve SC resilience by the adoption of TFL style as TFL can significantly improve resilience SC by the mediating impact of flexibility.

SMEs are more vulnerable to disruptions because of their limited financial resources (Pal et al., 2014). The proposed mechanism in this study provides an opportunity for the SC managerial leaders of SMEs manufacturing enterprises to efficiently pursue contemporary business without additional financial investments. Building and improving SC resilience is not a mechanistic process (Ali & Gölgeci, 2019), rather it also depends on the compatibility

of the leadership style. The resource constrained organizations like SMEs can improve SC resilience with existing resources by adopting the recommended mechanism. Although, TRL style is critical for the attainment of SC resilience however leadership is a skill set and it can be taught (Miner, 2006) to SC managers through trainings without much investment. Such a mechanism creates the avenue for enterprises to meet the challenges as they can be able to align strategies and leadership styles for the improvement of a more resilient SC.

### *5.2. Theoretical Contributions*

This novel study provides multiple theoretical contributions. Firstly, this study is the first to empirically test the significance of TFL and TRL with resilient SC, as these relationships were not previously tested. Secondly, our study is the first to empirically investigate the sequential mediating role of flexibility and agile SC in link between leadership styles (TFL and TRL) and resilient SC. In the best of researcher's knowledge, these relationships were not investigated in prior researches. Thirdly, this study is the first to empirically explore the most effective leadership style of SC managerial leaders, which can strengthen the resilient capabilities of the SC. Fourthly, in this study we proposed a cost-effective mechanism to SMEs for improving SC resilience. Therefore, this study provides vital theoretical contributions by addressing the gaps highlighted in literature.

The existing literature proved that leadership is a critical driver of resilient SC (Kamalahmadi & Parast, 2016; Kochan & Nowicki, 2018) and we contribute by developing further understanding that TRL is the most effective leadership style for enhancing SC resilience. Similarly, the literature indicates that behavioral aspect of SC managers in dealing with SC disruptions needs to be investigated (Remko, 2020; Sawyerr & Harrison, 2020; Scholten et al., 2020). This need was also addressed by this research. Moreover, the literature emphasized to conduct empirical studies on how SMEs can improve SC resilience, as little work was done in this domain (Ali & Gölgeci, 2019; Kamalahmadi & Parast, 2016; Pal et al., 2014). Similarly, our study contributes by proposing a mechanism to SMEs which can strengthen SC resilience. Additionally, our results also proved that flexibility contributes to agile SC, and this contribution influences resilient SC. Although, prior researches already proved the significance of flexibility with agile SC (Swafford et al., 2006), flexibility with resilient SC (Christopher & Peck, 2004), and agile SC with resilient SC (Aslam et al., 2020). Whereas, the results of this study prove the significance amongst flexibility, agile SC and resilient SC in a sequential manner. Thus, this study provides the vital theoretical contributions to existing body of knowledge.

### *5.3. Limitations and Future Directions*

The domain of resilient SC research is broader in scope and complicated in nature, therefore, our study has its own limitations. The leadership styles are not the only predictors of resilient SC. Other factors also significantly contribute to influence resilient SC for instance: SC collaboration (Soni et al., 2014), SC reengineering (Scholten et al., 2014), corporate culture (Sheffi, 2005), technical abilities (Kumar & Rahman, 2016). Nevertheless, this study was quantitative in nature therefore the respondents have to choose their opinion only from given options. Moreover, this study also has contextual and cultural



limitations because the targeted population in this study was the SME manufacturers of Pakistan. Consequently, the findings of this study cannot be applied to the service sector. Pakistan is a developing country with weak economic conditions. Thus, generalizability of this study could be an issue. Even though, SC failures is a major issue of developing countries (Tukamuhabwa et al., 2015) however the organizations operating in developed countries also face this challenge.

Diversified future research directions have been generated through this study, for instance, different leadership styles (e.g., authentic and servant leadership) can be incorporated in future studies. Lean SC has been considered as an efficient SC strategy and the effective leadership style as a predictor of lean SC needs to be investigated. Moreover, very little work has been done in the area of services SCs. SC disruption is also a major issue of service sector and future studies need to incorporate it regarding how service-oriented organizations can improve resilient SC. Furthermore, organizational culture plays a dominant role in the success and failure of the organizations. In lines with prior studies (Ali & Gölgeci, 2019; Sheffi & Rice, 2005) the contribution of organizational culture in building and enhancing resilient SC cannot be ignored and this phenomena needs to be investigated. However, longitudinal qualitative studies could be helpful to develop a deeper understanding of this construct, regarding the influence of leadership style at the time of disruption confrontation and restoration of the SC.

### **Research Funding**

The authors received no research grant or funds for this research project.

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