

Stress and Style: Investigating the Link between Leadership Approach and Employee Strain in Kuala Langat

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the relationship between leadership styles and work stress among employees in Kuala Langat, Malaysia. Leadership strongly influences employee motivation, satisfaction, and well-being, yet ineffective leadership can become a major source of workplace stress. Guided by House and Mitchell's (1975) Path-Goal Theory, this research explores how different leadership styles autocratic, transactional, transformational, laissez-faire, and democratic affect employee stress levels. A quantitative correlational design was employed, and data were collected from 250 employees across various job sectors using an online questionnaire. The survey incorporated the Vannsimpco Leadership Survey (VLS) and Work Stress Questionnaire (WSQ), both rated on a five-point Likert scale and demonstrating high reliability ($\alpha = .973$ and $.890$). Data were analyzed using SPSS version 27, applying descriptive statistics, correlation, and t-tests. Results revealed a moderate positive correlation between leadership style and work stress ($r = .378, p < .001$), indicating that certain leadership behaviors contribute to higher stress levels. Although 94.4% of respondents reported strong leadership presence, stress levels remained elevated, suggesting that leadership quality—not its presence—matters most. Authoritarian and laissez-faire styles were linked to greater stress, while transformational and democratic approaches enhanced trust and reduced tension. Gender differences in stress were non-significant ($p = .215$), indicating consistent effects across male and female employees. The study concludes that leadership style significantly affects employee stress and well-being. Organizations should cultivate empathetic, participative leadership and implement development programs focusing on emotional intelligence, communication, and inclusive management to promote healthier workplaces.

Keywords: Leadership style, transactional, autocratic, democratic, transformational, laissez faire, work stress

INTRODUCTION

The study examines the relationship between work stress among Kuala Langat employees and their leadership styles. Although stress is a normal human response, if it is not controlled, it can negatively impact one's mental and physical well-being (Zubairi et al., 2024). Employee experiences, motivation, and stress levels are significantly influenced by the leadership style of superiors in an organizational setting (Ariyani, 2021; Stevens, 2020). In essence, leadership is the process of influencing group or individual behavior to accomplish objectives. If not done well, it can be a major contributor to workplace stress. Burnout, discontent, and resignation intent are the most frequent outcomes of stress (Universari & Harsono, 2021).

Employees under bad leadership are less innovative and productive, which limits their capacity to follow their desired careers and causes them to feel uncomfortable about their work (Simanjourang and Wahyanti, 2021). On the other hand, a subpar leadership style may exacerbate workplace stress. When faced with major responsibilities and problems, stress is characterized as an emotional strain that impacts an individual's physical, mental, and emotional well-being (Heinbockel et al., 2021). According to Schafer and Stengel (2022) claim that stress occurs when an employee is confronted with a substantial task or duty that they cannot manage, resulting in a negative bodily reaction.

Poor leadership is strongly associated with increased workplace stress and decreased employee productivity, according to a number of studies (Simanjorang & Wahyanti, 2021; Stremersch et al., 2021). People experience mental and physical strain when they are faced with obligations they are not prepared to handle (Heinbockel et al., 2021; Schafer & Stengel, 2022). Leadership dynamics are also influenced by gender, with women tending toward transformational leadership and men frequently adopting transactional styles (Akanji, 2020). These factors have an impact on employee empowerment and team performance, especially in diverse teams (Martínez-León et al., 2020).

Gender variations also impact stress experiences: women are more likely to report higher levels of stress because of social expectations and work-life imbalance (Heub et al., 2024). It is clear that in order to guarantee inclusivity and the welfare of employees, leadership must be emotionally intelligent and gender sensitive (Stevens, 2020). In conclusion, the study fills a significant knowledge vacuum regarding the effects of different leadership philosophies on workplace stress, which has consequences for organizational health and leadership practice.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Based on previous empirical research and theoretical models, the literature review investigates the effects of different leadership philosophies autocratic, transactional, transformational, laissez-faire, and democratic on workers' work-related stress. By influencing motivation, communication, decision-making, and the workplace, leadership style has a big impact on organizational results (Muna, 2022; Setiawan et al., 2021). While authoritarian leadership frequently leads to unfavorable outcomes like absenteeism and low work satisfaction, democratic, transformational, and transactional leadership styles are favorably associated with employee productivity, morale, and engagement (Simanjorang & Wahyanti, 2021; Setiawan et al., 2021). Unbalances between personal capabilities and job needs lead to work-related stress. Workload, ambiguous duties, and inadequate leadership are major contributors (Schaper & Stengel, 2022; Monalisa et al., 2024). Gender, emotional intelligence, and social support all have an impact on stress, which affects both mental and physical health (Heub et al., 2024).

Employee stress and leadership style are strongly correlated. While transformational leadership typically lowers stress levels (Murugiah, 2021; Lin et al., 2020), transactional leadership has been demonstrated to do so in certain situations. Conversely, authoritarian and laissez-faire approaches are associated with higher levels of stress (Milojević et al., 2024; Ayuningtyas et al., 2022).

House's Path-Goal Theory, which holds that leaders improve followers' motivation and performance by making goals clear and removing roadblocks, serves as the foundation for the study House and Mitchell, 1975. According to the conceptual framework, employee work stress (a dependent variable) is influenced by leadership style (an independent variable).

METHODOLOGY

A quantitative correlational research approach was used in this study to examine the connection between Kuala Langat employees' work stress and leadership style. In order to test hypotheses and make predictions, correlational research was used to investigate any possible relationships between the independent variable (leadership style) and the dependent variable (work stress).

Convenience sampling is efficient and economical, it was used. Out of the 182,107 workers in Kuala Langat, a sample size of 384 was chosen (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2023). Only 250 responders, meanwhile, took part in the survey itself. An online Google Forms poll disseminated via WhatsApp and other channels was used to gather data. Three elements comprised the questionnaire: work stress, leadership style, and demographic information.

A Vannsimpco Leadership Survey (VLS) with 27 items covering nine leadership styles (Transactional, Autocratic-Transformational, Autocratic-Transformational, Democratic-Transformational, Transformational, and Laissez-faire) was used in Section B by Vann et al. (2014). Section C made use of Kristina Holmgren's

Work Stress Questionnaire (WSQ), which has 21 items covering topics like individual needs and work-to-leisure interference (Frantz & Holmgren, 2019).

A five-point Likert scale was used to measure both portions. Strong reliability was confirmed by a pilot investigation including 40 individuals, with Cronbach's alphas for VLS and WSQ being .973 and .890, respectively, and a combined dependability of .964. Using SPSS version 27, data analysis was carried out using independent t-tests, reliability analysis, descriptive statistics, and Spearman's.

RESULT

An overview of the information acquired is described as a data analysis. It involves analyzing and making meaning of gathered data in order to identify patterns, correlations, or other relationships. The researcher's data analysis for the 250 employees in Kuala Langat who responded is covered in this chapter. Researchers conduct reliability, descriptive, and correlation analyses of the findings.

Table 1 Gender among Private Sector Workers in Kuala Langat

Gender	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Male	104	41.6
Female	146	58.4
TOTAL	250	100.0

Based on Table 1, it shown the information about participants based on gender. Among the 250 respondents, 104 (41.6%) were male and 146 (58.4%) were female. This gender distribution indicates a higher participation rate among female workers in the study.

Table 2 Job Sector of Respondent

Job Sector	Frequency (N)	Percentage
Public service and administration	35	14.0
Business, consulting, and management	57	22.8
Energy and utilities	16	6.4
Environment and agriculture	6	2.4
Healthcare	14	5.6
Hospitality and events management	16	6.4
Teacher training and education	50	20.0
Transport and logistics	16	6.4
Retail and sales	40	16.0
TOTAL	250	100.0

Table 2, illustrates the distribution of job sectors among workers in Kuala Langat. The largest job sectors, consisting of 57 respondents (22.8%), where the job sectors are Business, consulting, and management. followed by teacher training and education, 50 respondents (20.0%), job sectors of retail and sales, 40 respondents (16%), and public service and administration, 30 respondents (14%). Meanwhile, for job sectors, energy and utilities, Hospitality and events management, transport and logistics, 16 respondents (6.4%). The lowest percentage represented respondents are working in the sector environment and agriculture, 6 respondents (2.4%).

Table 3 Leadership Style

Leadership Style	Frequency	Percentage %
Low	3	1.2
Moderate	11	4.4
High	236	94.4

Table 3 revealed that 236 respondents (94.4%) of Kuala Langat workers rated leadership style in their workplace as high, indicating strong leadership presence. Next, 11 respondents (4.4%) scored it as moderate, and only 1.2% rated it low, suggesting that most employees perceive their leaders as effective.

Table 4 Correlation Analysis between Leadership Styles and Work Stress

Construct	N	Correlation Coefficient	Sig. (2-tailed)
Leadership style	250	.378**	<.001
Work stress	250	.378**	<.001

The correlational study of leadership style and work stress among Kuala Langat workers shows that Pearson correlation coefficient between leadership style and work stress is 0.378**, with a significant level of $p < .001$ for both variables. This indicates a moderate positive correlation between leadership style and work stress among a sample of 250 respondents.

DISCUSSION

The purpose of the current study was to look into the relationship between Kuala Langat employees' work stress and leadership style. The results showed a strong positive relationship between work stress and leadership style (Table 4.4.2), indicating that some leadership philosophies can make workers feel more stressed. This is consistent with other research that indicated authoritarian and laissez-faire leadership styles were linked to increased job stress and emotional tiredness (Milojević et al., 2024).

According to Table 4.3.4, the majority of respondents (94.4%) said there was a lot of leadership at work. The worry that ineffective leadership styles, even when present, may contribute to unfavorable work environments is reinforced by the fact that a high level of leadership presence does not always translate into less stress (Simanjorang & Wahyanti, 2021). For example, fatigue, bullying, and a decline in motivation have been associated with laissez-faire leaders who participate little in decision-making and offer little direction (Milojević et al., 2024).

Furthermore, it was discovered that high turnover intentions and work pressure are caused by authoritarian leadership, which is typified by tight control and a lack of employee feedback (Ayuningtyas et al., 2022). Workers under such leadership may suffer less creativity and involvement, feel stifled, and be unable to express their thoughts. This explains why the study found a positive correlation between high levels of work stress and bad leadership styles.

Conversely, it has been demonstrated that transformative and democratic leadership philosophies produce better results. According to Januarharyono et al. (2025), democratic leadership fosters trust and encourages employee participation in decision-making, both of which can reduce stress at work. Similar to this, transformational leaders improve employee well-being and adaptability by offering vision, inspiration, and individualized assistance (Ausat et al., 2024). However, if other organizational issues like workload and role conflict are not addressed, even transformative leadership might not be able to completely eradicate stress (Naef et al., 2024).

Furthermore, a non-significant difference in job stress between the sexes was found by the independent

samples t-test results ($p = .215 > 0.05$), indicating that gender had no direct bearing on the sample's felt stress levels. Fida et al. (2023), who found that although certain stressors may differ by gender, total stress levels do not differ considerably, confirm this finding. However, the sample's significantly higher percentage of women might have affected how pressures like long workdays and work-life balance were perceived (Akanji et al., 2020).

In summary, the study supports the idea that there is a substantial correlation between work stress and leadership style. It also emphasizes how crucial it is to use leadership styles that are inclusive, sympathetic, and flexible enough to meet the requirements of staff members. Companies ought to think about putting in place leadership development initiatives that lower stress and improve well-being.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to investigate the relationship between different leadership philosophies and stress levels among Kuala Langat workers. Data were gathered from 250 respondents in a variety of job sectors using the Vannsimpco Leadership Survey and the Work Stress Questionnaire. The findings showed a statistically significant positive relationship between employee job stress and leadership style, indicating that the type and caliber of leadership have a major impact on how well employees are psychologically able to function.

In particular, the results showed that, in line with earlier research, authoritarian and laissez-faire leadership philosophies are linked to higher stress levels. These approaches frequently lead to inflexible management, poor communication, and a lack of support, all of which exacerbate strain at work. However, more positive effects, such as increased employee involvement, trust, and morale, all of which can reduce stress, were associated with transformational and democratic leadership styles. Even positive leadership, though, might not be enough to completely counteract stress brought on by systemic issues like excessive workloads or unclear roles.

There were no discernible gender disparities in the study population's perceptions of leadership or levels of stress, indicating that the influence of leadership styles on stress is not gender-specific. All things considered, this study advances our knowledge of how leadership philosophies affect worker stress and emphasizes the value of encouraging inclusive, compassionate, and participative leadership in the workplace. To promote healthy workplaces, it is advised that businesses fund leadership development initiatives and put stress-reduction techniques into place. Future studies should examine mediating factors including company culture and emotional intelligence, broaden the geographic breadth, and incorporate more varied industries.

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