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Project title

**Exploring the Impact of Leadership Styles on Workplace
Wellbeing: A Qualitative Study in the Saudi Arabian
Workforce**

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Introduction

Although there are many definitions of leadership, at its most basic level, it refers to the capacity to persuade people to accomplish objectives. Understanding leadership and its value in the context of advancing public health nutrition as a field and its role in our day-to-day work requires an awareness of the steps and qualities needed to influence others successfully (Hogan & Kaiser, 2005). A well-established body of literature outlines the personal qualities of leaders, such as having a broad vision that is successfully communicated and making decisions that are clear and resolute after weighing the information at hand. Leaders are courteous and consultative, but they are also prepared to make difficult choices when necessary. They are dedicated to empowering people and developing their ability. Credibility is a fundamental quality of leadership that is typically attained by exhibiting moral behavior and openness in one's practice. When necessary, leaders speak out against the status quo, take measured risks as well as move forward to assume accountability and demonstrate initiative (Silva, 2016). In real life, this kind of behavior calls for emotional intelligence, effective interpersonal communication and sound strategic thinking. Whether in academic institutes, communities or organisations, we all demonstrate and require leadership

abilities to function well in our day-to-day activities. Regardless of the level at which we function in society, we all strive to persuade others to support our goals.

Leaders assist others and themselves in acting morally. They establish goals, develop a compelling vision and produce something original. Leadership is dynamic, exciting and motivating; it involves laying out the path to "win" as a group or an organisation. Although they determine the course, leaders must also employ management techniques to smoothly and effectively bring their followers to the correct destination (Igbaekemen, 2014).

There are many responsibilities when it comes to leaders. However, in the organization their role can be determined by the value they bring in their employees and general work environment. The first and foremost role of leaders is to inspire and create a vision. A vision in business is a realistic, compelling and appealing representation of your desired future state. A vision gives you focus, establishes priorities and acts as a benchmark to let you know when you've accomplished your goals. Using methods like Porter's Five Forces, PEST Analysis, USP Analysis, Core Competence Analysis and SWOT Analysis to assess their current state, leaders concentrate on an organization's strengths in order to develop a vision (Eagly & Johnson, 1990). They consider the probable developments in their industry as well as the likely actions of their rivals. In order to thrive in upcoming markets, they consider how they may successfully innovate and mold their companies and tactics.

Along with creating vision, another compelling role played by the leader in an organization is to motivate the people to give their best and reach maximum potential. A strong vision serves as the cornerstone of effective leadership. However, the ability of leaders to inspire and encourage others is what enables them to realize that goal. For instance, when you begin a new project, you are likely to be quite enthusiastic about it, thus gaining support at the outset is frequently simple. Finding strategies to maintain your vision's inspiration after the initial fervor wanes, however, can be challenging, particularly if the group or organization wants to make big adjustments to their operational procedures. Leaders understand this and put a lot of effort into aligning their vision with each person's requirements, objectives and aspirations throughout the project (Chen & Silverthorne, 2005).

Last but not the least, the leader must also know how to translate the vision into reality. This is the leadership domain that has to do with management. The Hersey-Blanchard Situational Leadership Model states that there are appropriate times to participate, sell, tell and delegate. The secret to good leadership is knowing which strategy to employ and when. In addition to making sure that their vision is successfully realised, leaders must make sure that the work required to realise it is appropriately managed, either by themselves or by a committed manager or group of managers to whom the leader assigns this duty.

As they encourage and uplift their followers, they typically display a certain style of leadership. Accordingly, a leader's style is the way they choose to guide and engage

with their followers (Northouse, 2018). It displays how the leader influences and guides others by their actions, attitudes and behaviours. How a leader takes choices, conveys expectations, inspires followers and establishes a work atmosphere is greatly influenced by their leadership style. A leader's attitude to leadership is reflected in their style. It displays the leader's inclinations, principles and convictions regarding the best ways to guide and sway others. There are various leadership philosophies and these philosophies can have a variety of effects on the dynamics, output and culture of an organisation or group.

In any organization, leadership styles can vary greatly depending on the individuals in charge, the culture of the workplace and the goals the organization is trying to achieve (Gonos & Gallo, 2013). Different leaders have different ways of managing their teams, making decisions and communicating with their employees. These leadership styles are not fixed as they often depend on the situation, the people involved and the leader's personal traits. For example, some leaders are more hands-on and controlling, while others believe in giving their team members more freedom and autonomy.

One commonly seen leadership style is authoritative or autocratic leadership, where the leader makes decisions independently and expects employees to follow instructions strictly. This style may work well in situations where quick decisions are needed or in highly structured environments, but it can sometimes lead to low employee morale if overused. On the other hand, democratic leaders involve their team in decision-making and encourage collaboration. This often results in higher job satisfaction and motivation

among employees, although it might slow down the process when fast action is required.

Another leadership style that is becoming increasingly popular is transformational leadership. Transformational leaders aim to inspire and motivate their teams by creating a shared vision and encouraging innovation. They focus not just on tasks but also on developing their employees' potential (Nanjundeswaraswamy & Swamy, 2014). In contrast, transactional leaders emphasize performance, rules and rewards. They focus on achieving specific goals and often use incentives or penalties to manage performance. While this can be effective in task-oriented environments, it might not always encourage creativity or long-term development.

There are also laissez-faire leaders, who take a more hands-off approach and allow their team members to take the lead. This can be beneficial in teams that are already highly skilled and motivated, but it can also cause confusion or lack of direction if the team lacks experience. Similarly, servant leadership is a style where the leader prioritizes the needs of the team, focusing on supporting and empowering others rather than seeking control or authority.

Workplace wellbeing is an essential part of any successful organization. It goes beyond just physical health and includes emotional, mental and social aspects of an employee's experience at work. When employees feel valued, respected and supported in their roles they are more likely to perform better, stay committed to their tasks and contribute positively to the overall work environment (Lyons & Schneider, 2009). A workplace

that prioritizes wellbeing often experiences lower turnover rates, higher productivity and stronger team morale. On the other hand, when wellbeing is ignored it can lead to burnout, low motivation and decreased job satisfaction, all of which can harm the organization's overall performance.

In today's fast-paced work environments the importance of employee wellbeing is greater than ever. Organizations that recognize the link between a healthy workforce and business outcomes are more likely to invest in practices that promote balance, fairness and support. This can include flexible working hours, mental health resources, recognition systems or just maintaining a respectful and safe environment. Employees who feel cared for are not only more engaged but are also more creative, loyal and willing to go the extra mile for the success of their teams and organizations (Aryanti et al., 2020).

Leadership plays a major role in shaping workplace wellbeing. The way leaders communicate, support their teams and manage day-to-day operations has a direct impact on how employees feel about their work. Leaders set the tone for workplace culture and their behavior often influences whether employees feel stressed or secure. For instance, a leader who is open to feedback and genuinely listens to concerns is more likely to build trust within the team. In contrast, a leader who is overly critical or distant may unintentionally create an atmosphere of fear or discomfort.

Leadership styles affect how policies are implemented, how conflicts are resolved and how recognition is given. A leader who encourages open dialogue and collaboration can help reduce stress and increase a sense of belonging, while a rigid and controlling approach might lead to pressure and dissatisfaction. When leaders prioritize wellbeing, it reflects in their actions and decisions, which in turn encourages employees to adopt healthier attitudes toward their work. In this way leadership styles become a key influence on workplace wellbeing and can ultimately determine the success or failure of organizational goals.

Research problem

In recent years workplace wellbeing has become a growing concern for organizations across the globe including those in Saudi Arabia. As businesses evolve and work cultures shift there is increasing awareness that employee wellbeing plays a crucial role in productivity, retention and overall organizational success. However many organizations still struggle to create environments that fully support the psychological and emotional needs of their employees. One key factor that influences wellbeing in the workplace is leadership. The way leaders interact with their teams, make decisions and manage daily operations can either contribute to a positive work atmosphere or lead to stress and dissatisfaction. Despite the importance of this connection limited research in the Saudi Arabian context has

explored how different leadership styles impact employee wellbeing. Most existing studies tend to focus on organizational performance or employee motivation separately without deeply analyzing the relationship between leadership approaches and employee wellbeing from the perspective of those experiencing it. This gap highlights the need for a qualitative investigation that captures real employee experiences and provides deeper insights into how leadership styles affect workplace wellbeing in the Saudi Arabian workforce.

Significance of the Study

This research is significant because it addresses a critical but underexplored area in the Saudi Arabian organizational context. By examining the impact of leadership styles on workplace wellbeing the study aims to provide valuable insights for employers, HR professionals and leaders themselves. Understanding how different leadership approaches influence employee wellbeing can help organizations make informed decisions about leadership development, employee support strategies and workplace culture improvements. The findings may also contribute to shaping policies that prioritize not just productivity but also the mental and emotional health of employees. In a country where the workforce is rapidly diversifying and modernizing this research can help bridge the gap between traditional leadership practices and the growing need for employee-centered management. Ultimately this study seeks to

promote a healthier and more sustainable work environment by highlighting the role of leadership in shaping employee wellbeing.

Research Questions

1. How do different leadership styles manifest in Saudi Arabian workplaces?
2. What are the lived experiences of employees under various leadership styles in terms of their workplace wellbeing?
3. In what ways do leadership styles influence psychological, emotional and social aspects of employee wellbeing?
4. How do cultural or organizational norms in Saudi Arabia shape leadership behavior and its effects on employee wellbeing?
5. What leadership traits and behaviors are perceived by employees as contributing positively or negatively to their wellbeing?

Research Objectives

- 1.To explore how different leadership styles are experienced by employees within Saudi organizations.
- 2.To identify specific ways leadership styles affect workplace wellbeing, including emotional, social and psychological wellbeing.
- 3.To understand the connection between perceived leadership behavior and employee satisfaction, stress levels and motivation.

4.To examine how cultural and organizational contexts in Saudi Arabia influence the relationship between leadership and wellbeing.

5.To provide practical insights for improving leadership practices to support employee wellbeing in Saudi workplaces.

Research Hypotheses

- H1: Employees under transformational leadership styles will report higher levels of workplace wellbeing compared to those under autocratic or transactional leadership.
- H2: Leadership that includes emotional support, open communication and employee development contributes to positive psychological and emotional wellbeing.
- H3: Authoritarian leadership styles are likely to be associated with lower levels of reported job satisfaction and higher levels of stress among employees.
- H4: Workplace wellbeing is influenced not just by leadership style, but by how that style is perceived and interpreted within the cultural context of Saudi Arabia.

Research Model

The research model for this qualitative study is conceptual rather than statistical. The moderation model is used for this research. It proposes the following structure:

- Independent Variable: Leadership Style (transformational, transactional, autocratic, democratic, servant, laissez-faire)

- Moderating Variable: Organizational and cultural context of Saudi Arabia
- Dependent Variable: Workplace Wellbeing (psychological wellbeing, emotional wellbeing, social wellbeing). This model suggests that leadership style influences employee wellbeing, but this relationship is shaped by the surrounding organizational and cultural environment.

Industry analysis

For this empirical study, private sector service-based organizations in Saudi Arabia were chosen, particularly from the healthcare, finance and education sectors. These industries were considered suitable because they were characterized by high levels of interpersonal interaction, leadership involvement and employee engagement. Workplaces in these sectors were observed to be environments where leadership styles were actively displayed and where their impact on employee wellbeing could be meaningfully captured.

Saudi Arabia's organizational landscape was found to be in a state of transition due to national reforms introduced under Vision 2030. As part of these reforms, many organizations were being restructured and modernized and leadership practices were being reviewed to improve productivity and employee satisfaction. A shift from traditional, top-down leadership styles to more participative and transformational ones was being encouraged. However, it was also noted that not all organizations had

adopted these newer styles equally. In several cases, autocratic or transactional approaches were still being practiced, often influenced by long-standing cultural and managerial norms.

The Saudi labor market was observed to be diverse, with a large proportion of the workforce made up of expatriates from various cultural backgrounds. This multicultural context meant that leadership styles were interpreted differently by different individuals and wellbeing was experienced in varied ways depending on employees' expectations and cultural conditioning. These dynamics were taken into account while selecting the organizations for the study.

Urban centers such as Riyadh, Jeddah and Dammam were identified as ideal locations for the research because they housed a dense concentration of private sector organizations with diverse teams and established HR structures. These locations were chosen to ensure that rich, relevant and contrasting experiences of leadership and wellbeing could be explored in depth through employee narratives.

Methodology

Research Design

A qualitative research design was used for this study. Since the aim of the study was to explore lived experiences and personal meanings attached to leadership styles and workplace wellbeing, a qualitative approach was considered the most appropriate. A phenomenological method was chosen so that in-depth narratives could be collected and interpreted. This design allowed employee perspectives to be understood in their natural work contexts rather than being measured through fixed categories or scales.

Population and Sampling of the Study

The population for this study was made up of full-time employees working in service-based private organizations in Saudi Arabia. The sectors that were targeted included healthcare, finance and education, as these sectors were observed to have higher levels of direct leadership-employee interaction. A purposive sampling strategy was used so that participants who had relevant and rich experiences of working under a particular leadership style could be selected. Employees from different age groups, job roles and cultural backgrounds were included to allow for diverse perspectives. A total of 15 to 20 participants were planned to be interviewed until data saturation was reached.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Participants were included if they were currently working full-time in a private sector organization in Saudi Arabia and had been working under the supervision of a manager or team leader for at least one year. This was done to ensure that they had sufficient exposure to their leader's behavior and its influence on their wellbeing. Employees from both local and expatriate backgrounds were considered eligible so that the influence of leadership styles across cultural lines could be captured.

Participants were excluded if they were self-employed, part-time, on probation or in freelance roles, as they were unlikely to have consistent or long-term interactions with organizational leadership. Also, those who were in senior leadership roles themselves were excluded because the focus of the study was on employees' experiences, not those of leaders.

Data Collection Method

Semi-structured interviews were used as the method of data collection. These interviews were conducted face-to-face or via video calls, depending on the participant's preference and availability. An interview guide was used to ensure that all key themes were covered while still allowing space for open responses. Each interview was audio recorded with the participant's consent and later transcribed for analysis. The average duration of interviews was between 30 and 45 minutes. This method was

chosen because it allowed participants to speak freely about their experiences while giving the researcher the flexibility to probe deeper when needed.

Literature review

The interactions that take place within a society are essential for human beings to fulfil their diverse requirements. They require the assistance of a knowledgeable person who is capable of coordinating their efforts and assisting them in accomplishing their objectives. It is believed that these individuals possess attributes that are associated with leadership (Baltaci, Kara, Tascan and Avsalli, 2012). In the words of Nunes, Cruz

and Pinheiro (2012), leadership can be defined as the process by which an individual inspires a group of individuals to work together in order to accomplish shared goals. Leadership is the process by which an individual establishes a goal for others to follow and inspires others to pursue it effectively and fully, according to Kofman (2006, p. 9). Leadership is "the process of influencing others to understand and agree about what needs to be done and how to do it," according to Yukl (2006, p. 8). It is also the practice of supporting both individual and group endeavours to achieve common goals.

Since these categories cover influence, goals and directions, they could also be categorised as effects even if they are leader-centric. Northouse (2010) concurred with Yukl (2006) and Kofman (2006) that the primary function of leadership is to persuade others to accomplish a shared objective through a process involving the leader and followers. Thus, these criteria encompass a number of elements that characterise leadership as (a) a process, (b) influence, (c) group environment, (d) goal-attainment and (e) leaders and their followers having similar objectives. As a result, when discussing leadership as a process, for instance, the idea of leadership transcends the individual qualities or attributes of the leader.

The leader and his followers are united by a transactional element. Additionally, if leadership is viewed as a process, then anyone may become a leader not only those who are born with the ability and in this way, leadership is a skill that can be acquired.

When it comes to investigating this phenomenon, there are a lot of different hypotheses that have been used. According to Badshah (2012), contingency theories evaluate the effectiveness of a leader based on the degree to which the leader's capabilities complement a scenario or the other way around. It was said by Conger and Kanungo (1998) and Larsson and Ronnmark (1996) that charismatic leadership theory is an exceptional leadership model. The description of this model was founded on the ideas presented by Weber (1947). According to Badshah (2012), a transformational leader is one that inspires their subordinates to go beyond what was previously anticipated of them.

The literature discusses a wide range of leadership styles. Autocratic leadership is characterised by strict authority and obedience. Democratic leadership prioritises decentralisation and consultation with employees. Charismatic executives inspire and motivate personnel to complete job tasks. Transactional leadership is a technique in which employees agree to follow their leaders. Transformational leaders engage and motivate people inside their organisation (Kaleem, Asad & Khan, 2016). Many scholars agree that transformational leadership is the most desirable leadership style for managing personnel inside an organisation (Nidadhavalu, 2012).

There is a correlation between organisational leadership and the level of job satisfaction and commitment experienced by employees (Ahmad & Aldakhil,

2012). According to Alkhasawneh (2019), the explanation for this might be related to the roles that they play in leading the organisation and interacting openly with employees during their tenure. According to Akdol and Arikboga (2015), the organisational behaviours of leaders have an impact on the level of job satisfaction experienced by employees. These behaviours include fostering authenticity, demonstrating humility, giving credit to others, forgiving employees, emphasising the importance of empowerment and holding people accountable for the results that are within their control. According to Yirik and Baltaci (2014), the leadership styles that are represented in transformational leadership, interactional leadership and visionary leadership were found to have a statistically significant impact on the level of job satisfaction experienced by employees. According to Yirik and Baltaci (2014), it has been found that organisations whose leaders employ visionary and transformational leadership styles have greater levels of work satisfaction among their employees.

The term "workplace wellbeing" refers to a comprehensive, bio-psycho-social state in which employees experience a sense of being healthy, safe and purposeful in their work environment and are able to perform their jobs effectively. According to the research on occupational health, wellness is a complex concept that encompasses mental and emotional states (such as those associated with stress and positive affect), social connection and meaning, as well as physical health and safety at work. It is important to highlight that definitions differ from one field to another; however,

scholars generally agree that wellbeing is not solely defined by the absence of illness but also by how people feel and how they really operate.

The concept of workplace wellness encompasses a variety of different aspects, such as ensuring that your employees are provided with supportive working conditions, taking into consideration their mental and emotional well and promoting their physical welfare. Your employees and your company will both profit from a well-balanced and healthy working environment that is created by the combination of all of these components working together. When it comes to workplace wellness, it is of utmost importance to acknowledge the linked nature of the many facets. For instance, an employee who is physically healthy is more likely to have better mental health and an employee who is mentally well is more likely to be productive and engaged in their work. The benefits of having a company that prioritises employees' health and wellness are substantial. When employees have the sense that they are supported and cared for by their company, they report higher levels of job satisfaction and will be more likely to remain loyal to you as their employer.

Due to the fact that people are more motivated and involved in their work, this enhanced pleasure can also translate into improvements in productivity. Furthermore, an emphasis on wellness can contribute to a reduction in absenteeism, as employees are less likely to take time off due to stress, burnout, or sickness when health and wellness are prioritised. Not only does a workplace that prioritises people' well-being

provide individual benefits, but it also makes a beneficial contribution to the culture of the company.

Not all organisations have the same kind of leadership. diverse styles of leadership produce diverse settings that affect how employees feel and operate. There are many different types of leadership, such as authoritarian, democratic, transformational, transactional, laissez-faire and servant leadership. Each one affects the health of the workplace in its own way. Some approaches build trust, participation and a sense of purpose that help people feel good, while others may raise stress levels, lower morale, or make things unclear, which can make the whole experience worse for employees. Because leadership decides how much support, freedom and recognition employees get, it's important to know how various approaches affect workplace health in different organisations.

Autocratic leadership, which includes making decisions all by yourself, keeping a close eye on things and limiting employee freedom, usually makes the workplace less healthy. Workers under authoritarian leaders often say they are more stressed and have poor morale because they don't feel safe and don't have much of a say (Skogstad et al., 2007). This style can be especially bad in jobs that require a lot of knowledge or emotional support and where feedback and participation are important (Kelloway et al., 2012).

Democratic or participatory leadership, on the other hand, where employees are encouraged to share their ideas, help make choices and have a say in setting goals, tends to improve wellbeing. Participation makes people feel more independent and fair, boosts moods, lowers stress and creates social networks that support each other and protect against burnout (Somech, 2006; Deci et al., 1989). Transformational leadership, in which leaders motivate, encourage, praise and challenge their followers' minds, is strongly connected to better results for well-being. According to research, transformational behaviours increase positive affect, lower burnout and create a feeling of psychological safety and purpose. This is especially true in high-stress environments like healthcare (Bass & Riggio, 2006; Arnold et al., 2007).

The effects of transactional leadership are more complex. This style may offer structure that clears up confusion and boosts a sense of safety when it focusses on clear goals and fair benefits. But if it focusses on punishments or "management by exception," it can look like dictatorship and make things more difficult (Judge & Piccolo, 2004; Podsakoff et al., 1996). Laissez-faire leadership, which means not making choices and giving bad advice, usually makes people less happy. Studies show that this style's lack of clarity and feedback leads to role ambiguity, more conflict and stressed-out workers who feel unsupported (Skogstad et al., 2007; Bass & Avolio, 1994).

Studies done in Saudi Arabia show trends that are similar to those seen around the world. Transformational leadership in healthcare, especially nursing, has been

shown to greatly improve nurses' health and reduce stress through personalised care, supportive communication and recognition, even during times of high demand like the COVID-19 pandemic (Al-Yami et al., 2018; Al-Harbi & Al-Fawzan, 2020). In government and the public sector, participative leadership has been shown to improve performance and motivation. When employees are given more freedom to speak out and be involved, they report higher morale and better work results (Al-Mutairi & Al-Farsi, 2016; Saif & Al-Harthi, 2019).

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