Leadership Styles of Top Administrators: Determinant Factor of Principals' Job Satisfaction

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ABSTRACT: The presence of leaders and their leadership within an organization plays a crucial role in determining whether the organization succeeds or fails in achieving its objectives. A leader's leadership style is strongly linked to employees' job satisfaction. This study examines the connection between the leadership style of the highest-ranking administrator and the job satisfaction of school principals. Data were collected through a questionnaire distributed to 102 school principals from a prominent private educational institution in Indonesia.

The findings indicate that both transformational and transactional leadership styles of the top administrator positively correlate with school principals' job satisfaction. Therefore, the top administrator should encourage an active and participative leadership style that inspires, provides direction, and offers recognition, thereby supporting school principals in performing their duties optimally. In contrast, a passive leadership approach should be avoided, as it tends to be ineffective in enhancing job satisfaction and the performance of educational organizations.

KEYWORDS: Job satisfaction, leadership styles, transformational leadership, transactional leadership.

INTRODUCTION

Leadership is an intriguing topic of study, as it is a crucial element in ensuring organizational sustainability. Leaders not only influence organizational outcomes but also impact employee satisfaction (Zigarmi et al., 2005). Effective leadership is essential for ensuring the long-term sustainability of both organizations and individuals, while leaders must demonstrate team success in a reliable and trustworthy manner (Alarabiat & Eyupoglu, 2022).

As noted by Asif et al. (2019), understanding effective leadership has become a key focus for researchers, individuals, organizations, and societies worldwide. Adopting an appropriate leadership style enables leaders to enhance employee job satisfaction, commitment, and productivity (Mosadeghrad & Yarmohammadian, 2006). Leadership style encompasses attitudes, behaviors, and managerial competencies shaped by personal and organizational standards, leadership priorities, and employee circumstances in various contexts. In other words, leadership involves efforts to influence others' attitudes, beliefs, behaviors, and emotions (Spector, 2001). With economic growth, globalization, and shifting business environments, traditional leadership styles, such as authoritarian leadership, are increasingly ineffective in addressing employees' psychological needs (Fu et al., 2022).

Leadership styles have been recognized as an important factor in determining employee job satisfaction and overall organizational effectiveness (Mgaiwa, 2023). A leader is considered successful when they can provide clear guidance for the organization and direct their followers toward achieving set objectives. Similarly, employees who experience high job satisfaction are more likely to invest greater effort into their tasks and align with the organization's goals. Organizations that prioritize high levels of employee job satisfaction are also more effective in retaining and attracting skilled workers (Mosadeghrad & Yarmohammadian, 2006; Voon et al., 2011). The belief that satisfied employees are more productive than dissatisfied ones is a fundamental principle that has been taught to managers for years (Robbins, 2001).

In Indonesia, private schools are required to operate under a foundation, as mandated by government regulations. Consequently, the foundation leader (top administrator) plays a crucial role in managing and guiding the school. While the top administrator is responsible for administration and oversight, the principal focuses on leadership and ensuring school success. According to Sodoma & Else (2009), motivational factors are crucial for encouraging principals to perform at their best. The top administrator must have a clear understanding of what principals find satisfying or dissatisfying about their roles. In this context,

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the top administrator should serve as an effective leader by applying leadership functions that motivate and influence principals to work optimally and effectively.

Previous researchers have studied the relationship between leadership styles and job satisfaction across various fields. For example, in public and private organizations (Sharma & Bajpal, 2010; Voon et al., 2011), healthcare organizations (Al-Hussami, 2008; Raup, 2008; Watson, 2009), manufacturing (Hanaan, 2023), sports (Khalaj et al., 2011), nonprofit organizations (Mohd Zin et al., 2023), customer service employees (Emery & Barker, 2007), hotels (Erkutlu, 2008), restaurants and the food industry (Gill et al., 2010; Skopak & Hadzaihmetovic, 2022), high schools (Schwartz, 2024), and higher education institutions (Lu et al., 2006; Mwesigwa et al., 2020; Muttalib et al., 2023). This study aims to examine the relationship between the leadership style of top administrator and the job satisfaction of private school principals. Thus, this research will help fill the gap left by previous studies.

LITERATURE REVIEW
Importance of Leadership in Organizations

In today's rapidly changing world, Robbins (2001) emphasizes that organizations require effective leadership and management to challenge existing norms, create a clear vision for the future, and motivate members to work toward that vision. Additionally, organizations need managers who can develop comprehensive plans, design efficient structures, and oversee daily operations. In this context, Luthans (2005) notes that leaders were once perceived as calm, controlled, and organized figures, similar to ship captains. However, today's leaders must be more human—they need to connect, empathize, and engage with their teams. Leaders are no longer distant figures but integral parts of the dynamics at play.

Leadership is fundamental to effective management. Every action and attitude of a leader, whether intentional or not, influences employee behavior. A good leader understands the importance of job satisfaction and takes deliberate steps to enhance it. Leaders who successfully align the needs and motivators of their subordinates with organizational goals are often successful in achieving this (Mosadeghrad & Yarmohammadian, 2006). Effective leadership not only improves job satisfaction but also enhances productivity, organizational commitment, and the overall organizational climate (Sharma & Bajpal, 2010).

Job Satisfaction

Job satisfaction is an attitudinal factor that reflects how individuals perceive their job as a whole and its various components (Spector, 2001). It varies depending on the different elements present in diverse work environments (Issa Gazi et al., 2022). Employee job satisfaction is crucial for organizational success. Employees with high job satisfaction tend to have positive feelings when reflecting on or performing their tasks, whereas those with low job satisfaction experience negative emotions related to their tasks (Colquhoun et al., 2011). Job satisfaction improves when leaders provide freedom in decision-making, opportunities for personal development through training, career support, rewards through incentives and benefits, staff empowerment, encouragement of participation in discussions, project development, team building, and the creation of comfortable working conditions (Mwesigwa et al., 2020).

There are several key reasons why job satisfaction is important, which can be categorized based on its impact on employees or the organization. First, from a humanitarian perspective, individuals deserve to be treated fairly and appreciated. To some extent, job satisfaction reflects the quality of this treatment and can serve as an indicator of emotional well-being or psychological health. Second, from a practical viewpoint, job satisfaction influences employee behavior, which in turn affects organizational performance. Additionally, variations in job satisfaction across different organizational units can signal potential issues (Spector, 2001).

Transformational Leadership and Job Satisfaction

Transformational leadership involves behaviors that cultivate vision, inspire followers, and drive change (Easton & Steyn, 2022). Employees led by transformational leaders often experience higher levels of job satisfaction, as these leaders are more likely to inspire and support their followers in taking on greater responsibility and autonomy (Emery & Barker, 2007). This, in turn, enhances employees' sense of achievement and contentment with their work (Voon et al., 2011). Transformational leadership improves job satisfaction by fostering positive employee attitudes and providing role clarity (Gill et al., 2010). When employees witness transformational leadership behaviors, such as individualized attention and inspiration, they are more likely to feel satisfied with their work. Employees who are valued in this reciprocal exchange tend to experience higher job satisfaction and perform better (Mohd Zin et al., 2023). However, previous research on the link between transformational leadership and job satisfaction has yielded mixed results. Some studies report a significant positive relationship (Gill et al., 2010; Busra et al., 2011; Hanaan, 2023; Muttalib et al., 2023), while Schwartz (2024) found no significant connection between transformational leadership and job satisfaction.

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H1: There is a relationship between transformational leadership of the top administrator and the principal's job satisfaction.

Transactional Leadership and Job Satisfaction

Transactional leadership refers to the behavior of an individual who establishes the terms of the exchange relationship between the leader and their followers (Easton & Steyn, 2022). The relationship between leadership and job satisfaction is closely interconnected, as the "leader/follower" dynamic serves as a strong indicator of organizational outcomes (Yusof & Tahir, 2008).

Previous studies on the relationship between transactional leadership and job satisfaction have produced mixed results. Skopak & Hadzaihmetovic (2022) and Muttalib et al. (2023) identified a positive correlation between transactional leadership and job satisfaction, while Yun et al. (2007) and Voon et al. (2010) found that transactional leadership does not significantly affect job satisfaction. Watson (2009) also discovered a negative correlation between one of the dimensions of transactional leadership, passive management by exception (MBE-P), and supervisory methods. High MBE-P scores were linked to increased dissatisfaction, social conflict, excessive demands, and performance pressure (Rowold & Schlotz, 2009). Additionally, Hamidifar (2009) found that one aspect of transactional leadership, contingent reward (CR), is a strong predictor of job satisfaction as measured by supervision.

H2: There is a relationship between the transactional leadership of the top administrator and the principal's job satisfaction.

Laissez-Faire Leadership and Job Satisfaction

Laissez-faire leadership is still a relatively overlooked leadership style. One area that warrants further investigation is the comparison between laissez-faire leadership and other forms of destructive leadership (Robert & Vandenberghe, 2021). Rowold & Schlotz (2009) conducted a study with employees from a German government agency to assess the relationship between their supervisors' leadership style and the subordinates' experiences of chronic stress. They found that laissez-faire leadership was associated with high levels of dissatisfaction, social conflict, and excessive demands. Additionally, Erkutlu (2008) discovered that laissez-faire leadership had the strongest negative correlation with satisfaction with supervision, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment. Research by Watson (2009) and Hamidifar (2009) also indicates that laissez-faire leadership behavior by supervisors can significantly reduce job satisfaction. In contrast, Elizer (2011) noted that, although many directors were perceived to demonstrate a laissez-faire leadership style, most agents still reported high levels of job satisfaction.

H3: There is a relationship between laissez-faire leadership of the top administrator and the principal's job satisfaction.

The research framework can be seen in Figure 1.
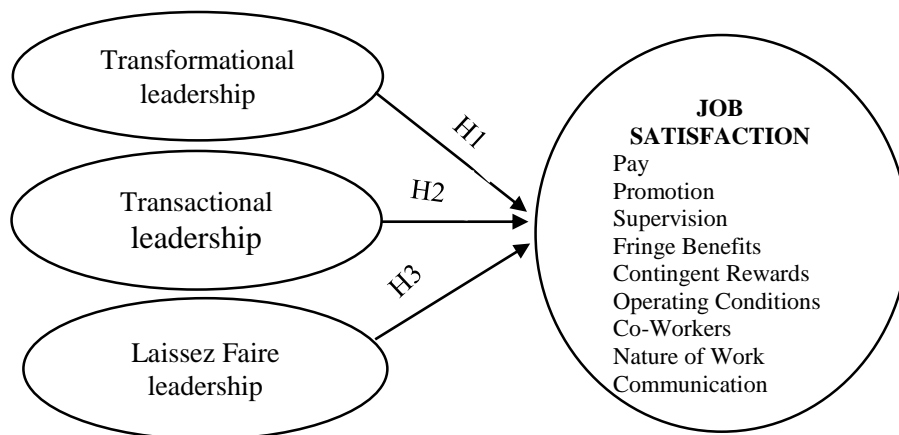
Figure 1. Research Framework

METHOD

The research design utilizes a descriptive survey method, involving 102 school principals as respondents. Purposive sampling was employed to select participants, with the following criterion: only school principals directly under the leadership of the top administrator were included as respondents. This research was conducted at a well-known private educational institution in Indonesia.

Data were collected using two standardized questionnaires: the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ-5x) developed by Bass and Avolio (1997) to assess leadership styles, and the Job Satisfaction Survey (JSS) developed by Spector (2001) to measure job satisfaction. The original MLQ-5x consists of 45 items coded from 0 to 4, but in this study, an adapted version was

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used, which includes nine subscales with 36 items. These subscales cover transformational leadership behaviors such as idealized influence (II), attributed idealized influence (AI), inspirational motivation (IM), intellectual stimulation (IS), and individualized consideration (IC), each with 4 items. Transactional leadership behaviors, including contingent reward (CR), passive management-by-exception (MBE-P), and active management-by-exception (MBE-A), also consist of 4 items each. Additionally, the laissez-faire leadership style was assessed with 4 items. These 36 items were rated using a 5-point Likert scale (1 = not at all, 2 = rarely, 3 = sometimes, 4 = quite often, and 5 = often, if not always).

The JSS contains nine factors: salary, promotion, supervision, fringe benefits, contingent reward (performance-based rewards), operational procedures (rules and procedures), coworkers, nature of the work, and communication. This questionnaire includes 36 items, with four items for each domain. Initially, a six-point Likert scale was used to measure responses (1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Moderately Disagree, 3 = Slightly Disagree, 4 = Slightly Agree, 5 = Moderately Agree, 6 = Strongly Agree). In this study, the researcher modified it to a four-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Moderately Disagree, 3 = Moderately Agree, 4 = Strongly Agree).

Quantitative data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). The alpha level was set at 0.05 ($\alpha = 0.05$), and the confidence level was 95%. Descriptive methods, such as frequency, mean, percentage, and standard deviation (SD), were used to describe the respondent data profile. To determine the correlation between leadership styles and job satisfaction, Pearson's Correlation Coefficient was applied.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Demographic Profile of the Principals

The majority of the principals are female (96.1%), with 51% aged between 41-50 years. Most principals hold a bachelor's degree (74.5%). In terms of experience, 33.3% have served as principals for less than 5 years, while 39.2% have been working at their current school for over 5 years. Regarding their tenure under the current leadership, 31.4% have served for 1 to 2 years, and 31.4% for 2 to 3 years.

Leadership Styles of the Top Administrators as Perceived by Principals

Table 1 presents the distribution of mean, standard deviation, and verbal interpretation of the leadership styles as perceived by the principals. The highest mean score for the top administrator's leadership style was laissez-faire (M = 3.16, SD = 0.76), followed by components of transactional leadership: contingent reward (M = 3.00, SD = 0.73), active management by exception (M = 2.96, SD = 0.74), and passive management by exception (M = 2.64, SD = 0.82), all interpreted as "sometimes." The lowest mean scores were observed in the components of transformational leadership, which were interpreted as "rarely." This suggests that the top administrator primarily adopts a laissez-faire leadership style, providing greater autonomy to subordinates in decision-making and task execution. In contrast to transactional leadership, which focuses on rewards and punishments, and transformational leadership, which emphasizes vision and motivation, laissez-faire leadership may arise in the foundation due to factors such as strong trust in staff professionalism, minimal direct involvement, or a more autonomous organizational culture.

Table 1. Mean, standard deviation, and verbal interpretation of leadership styles

Leadership styles	Mean	SD	Verbal Interpretation
Transformational leadership			
Intellectual stimulation	2.28	0.89	Once in a while
Idealized Influence (B)	2.03	0.87	Once in a while
Inspirational Motivation	2.42	0.87	Once in a while
Idealized Influence (A)	2.26	0.86	Once in a while
Individualized consideration	2.14	0.82	Once in a while
Transactional leadership			
Contingent reward	3.00	0.73	Sometimes
Management by exception(P)	2.64	0.82	Sometimes
Management by exception(A)	2.96	0.74	Sometimes
Laissez-faire leadership	3.16	0.76	Sometimes

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Legend : 1.00 – 1.50 (not at all); 1.52 – 2.50 (once in a while);

2.51 – 3.50 (sometimes); 3.51 – 4.50 (fairly often);

4.51 – 5.00 (frequently, if not always).

Job Satisfaction of the Principals

Table 2 presents the job satisfaction levels of the principals across nine factors, ranked from lowest to highest. The findings show that principals are slightly satisfied with salary and promotion, with mean scores ranging from 2.30 to 2.36 and standard deviations between 0.87 and 1.12. On the other hand, principals report higher satisfaction with supervision, fringe benefits, contingent rewards, operational conditions, coworkers, nature of the work, and communication, with mean scores ranging from 2.56 to 3.21 (SD = 0.76 to 1.32).

Table 2. Mean, standard deviation, and verbal interpretation of job satisfaction

Subscales	Mean	SD	Verbal Interpretation
Pay	2.30	1.12	Slightly satisfied
Promotion	2.36	0,87	Slightly satisfied
Contingent rewards	2.56	0.98	Satisfied
Co-Workers	2.70	2.03	Satisfied
Fringe Benefits	2.87	0.76	Satisfied
Operating Conditions	2.99	1.45	Satisfied
Communication	3.02	1.09	Satisfied
Supervision	3.02	1.22	Satisfied
Nature of Work	3.21	1.32	Satisfied

Legend : 1.00 – 1.50 (Not satisfied);   1.51 – 2.50 (slightly satisfied);

2.51 – 3.50 (Satisfied);   3.51 – 4.00 (very satisfied

The implications of these findings suggest that salary and promotion aspects are less satisfactory for principals, which could impact their work motivation, loyalty, and long-term retention. The low mean scores in these aspects indicate that principals feel that compensation and career advancement opportunities do not align with their responsibilities. If no improvements are made, this may potentially reduce their work enthusiasm and increase the risk of turnover. On the other hand, relatively high satisfaction with supervision, fringe benefits, contingent rewards, operational conditions, coworkers, nature of the work, and communication suggests that these factors help support the well-being and job satisfaction of the principals. This means that, although salary and promotion remain a challenge, a conducive work environment, support from colleagues, and a good system of rewards and communication still contribute to their overall satisfaction.

Relationship between Leadership Style Variables and Overall Job Satisfaction

The results of the hypothesis testing, as shown in Table 3, indicate that transformational leadership is significantly related to overall job satisfaction, thus supporting H1. These findings suggest that principals are likely to experience greater job satisfaction when led by a top administrator who adopts a transformational leadership style. A top administrator who serves as a role model, demonstrates care and appreciation for the principals' needs, supports problem-solving, and provides opportunities for learning and skill development can encourage principals to perform better. By recognizing and valuing their contributions, transformational leadership plays a key role in enhancing the principals' job satisfaction.

Table 3. Hypothesis Testing Results

Variables	Pearson correlation	Sig. (2- tailed)	Interpretation
Transformational leadership	.337*	.038	Significant
Transactional leadership	.450*	.046	Significant
Laissez-faire leadership	.189	.071	No significant

* .05 level of significance

These findings align with previous studies that demonstrate a significant positive relationship between transformational leadership and job satisfaction (Parsons & Broadbridge, 2006; Emery & Baker, 2007; Adler & Reid, 2008; Al-Hussami, 2008; Nielsen

et al., 2008; Nielsen et al., 2009; Gill et al., 2010; Bushra et al., 2011; Hanaan, 2023; Muttalib et al., 2023). Tseng & Kang (2009) suggest that leaders who are attentive, supportive, set a positive example, articulate a clear vision, and emphasize shared goals among their teams tend to have more satisfied employees compared to those who adopt other leadership styles. Transformational leaders are believed to enhance job satisfaction by making employees feel valued through personalized attention and by fostering a sense of purpose through idealized influence and motivational inspiration. Modern leaders embody attitudes that support their employees, offer a clear vision, nurture hope, encourage creative thinking, provide individualized attention, and enhance communication. These essential traits of transformational leadership empower organizations and contribute to increased job satisfaction (Bushra et al., 2011).

A significant connection also exists between transactional leadership and overall job satisfaction, thus supporting H2. Principals tend to experience greater job satisfaction when the top administrator adopts a transactional leadership style, which emphasizes clear reward systems and exchanges. This includes providing incentives for good performance and enforcing rules and responsibilities firmly. By utilizing rewards, praise, and promises, the top administrator can effectively motivate principals and enhance their job satisfaction. This suggests that principals highly value clarity in expectations, recognition of achievements, and a structured feedback system. With effective transactional leadership, principals feel more valued, motivated, and have a clear direction in performing their duties, which positively impacts their job satisfaction. According to Jamaludin et al. (2011), transactional leadership relies on exchange relationships, where leaders reward followers for good performance and penalize those who fail to meet expectations. These findings align with previous studies that identified a positive correlation between transactional leadership and job satisfaction (Alarabiat & Eyupoglu, 2022; Skopak & Hadzaihmetovic, 2022; Hanaan, 2023; Muttalib et al., 2023; Schwartz, 2024).

The research findings also suggest that there is no meaningful connection between laissez-faire leadership and overall job satisfaction, meaning that H3 is not supported. This indicates that the laissez-faire leadership style—characterized by passivity, minimal intervention, and granting full autonomy to subordinates—does not significantly affect principals' job satisfaction. In other words, whether the top administrator adopts a laissez-faire leadership approach or not, it does not substantially influence the principals' satisfaction levels. This suggests that principals may require more than just freedom in their work; they also expect support, guidance, and recognition from the foundation leader to achieve optimal job satisfaction. These results align with the findings of Hamidifar (2009), which demonstrate a negative relationship between laissez-faire leadership and job satisfaction. According to Robert & Vandenberghe (2021), laissez-faire leadership can lead to the underutilization of employees' relational potential by fostering inappropriate behavior. Therefore, organizations should train leaders to recognize, mitigate, and understand the impact of laissez-faire behavior, just as they are trained in positive leadership practices. This approach enables leaders to discern when action is required and when inaction is appropriate.

CONCLUSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND FUTURE RESEARCH.

In the ever-evolving world of education, particularly within private schools in Indonesia, it is essential for foundation leaders and school principals to possess not only strong personalities and spirituality but also professional leadership skills. This study demonstrates that the leadership style of foundation leaders in Indonesian private educational institutions significantly impacts principal job satisfaction. Top administrators who apply transformational and transactional leadership styles can enhance principals' job satisfaction. These findings underscore the critical role of foundation leadership in influencing the job satisfaction of school principals.

Transformational leadership, which emphasizes vision, inspiration, and individual development, combined with transactional leadership, which focuses on role clarity, rewards, and a system of consequences, has been shown to contribute positively to principals' job satisfaction.

Practical implications of these findings include the need for foundations to invest in leadership training for their leaders to effectively implement transformational and transactional approaches. Foundations can also adopt leadership policies that incorporate these styles to increase principal engagement and ensure optimal performance. With the right leadership, principals will be more motivated, feel valued, and work in an environment that encourages productivity and innovation in school management. Principals who are satisfied with the leadership of the foundation are generally more loyal and dedicated, which supports the sustainability and growth of the educational institution.

While principals report slight satisfaction with salary and promotion aspects, they are generally satisfied with supervision, benefits, performance-based rewards, operational conditions, coworkers, nature of the work, and communication. To improve overall job satisfaction, particular attention should be given to enhancing salary and promotion opportunities for principals. Foundations should consider increasing compensation, ensuring transparency in promotion policies, and offering non-financial incentives to retain and motivate principals.

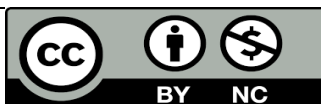**Leadership Styles of Top Administrators: Determinant Factor of Principals' Job Satisfaction**

This study focused on three leadership styles: transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire, and measured job satisfaction using nine factors from the Job Satisfaction Survey (JSS). Future research could explore additional leadership styles such as servant leadership, ethical leadership, situational leadership, inclusive leadership, and digital leadership. Furthermore, future studies could examine specific elements within transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire leadership styles within the Full Range Leadership (FRL) framework, as well as explore each component of the Job Satisfaction Survey (JSS) in greater detail.

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