

DEMOCRATIC LEADERSHIP AND EMPLOYEE JOB SATISFACTION IN MALAYSIAN PUBLIC SECTOR ENFORCEMENT AGENCIES

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Abstract: *Job satisfaction is a crucial determinant of employee performance and organizational effectiveness, particularly in public sector and enforcement-related agencies. Leadership style, especially democratic leadership, has been widely recognised as a factor that can enhance employee satisfaction through participation, trust, and shared decision-making. This study examines the relationship between democratic leadership styles and job satisfaction among employees in Agensi Antidadah Kebangsaan (AADK) Port Dickson, Negeri Sembilan. This study employed a quantitative, cross-sectional survey design using simple random sampling. Data were collected from 220 employees through a structured questionnaire adapted from established instruments. Democratic leadership and job satisfaction were measured using five-point Likert scales. Data were analysed using descriptive statistics, normality tests, and Pearson correlation analysis to determine the relationship between the variables. The findings revealed a moderate and statistically significant positive relationship between democratic leadership and job satisfaction ($r = 0.447, p < .001$). Employees who perceived higher levels of democratic leadership practices reported greater satisfaction with their jobs. Descriptive results also indicated that democratic leadership behaviours such as participative decision-making, respectful feedback, and autonomy were frequently practised within the organisation. The study concludes that democratic leadership plays a significant role in enhancing job satisfaction among AADK employees. Strengthening democratic leadership practices through targeted leadership training and policy support can contribute to a more satisfied, committed, and productive workforce within public sector organisations.*

Keywords: *Democratic leadership; Job satisfaction; Public sector*

Introduction

Leadership is widely recognised as a key factor influencing employees' attitudes, behaviour, and overall workplace experiences. In public sector organisations, effective leadership is crucial due to complex service delivery, accountability demands, and the need to balance organisational goals with employee well-being. Leadership style shapes decision-making processes, communication patterns, and employees' perceptions of fairness and support (Stamolampros et al., 2019). Job satisfaction is also an important indicator of organisational effectiveness, as it relates to motivation, commitment, and retention (Trunova-Feduleeva, 2024; Tabjan, 2024). In high-pressure environments such as enforcement agencies, supportive and participative leadership practices are particularly important for maintaining morale and fostering a positive organisational climate.

Democratic leadership is characterised by participative decision-making, shared responsibility, and respect for employees' ideas and contributions (Stamolampros et al., 2019; Riggio, 2020). Prior studies suggest that democratic leadership can create a supportive organisational environment by empowering employees and strengthening trust between leaders and subordinates (Norazmi et al., 2020). Despite the growing body of international literature on democratic leadership and job satisfaction, research focusing on this relationship within Malaysian public sector and enforcement-related organisations remains limited. This gap is particularly evident in agencies that operate within semi-enforcement and rehabilitative contexts, where leadership practices may significantly influence employees' psychological well-being and work attitudes.

Leadership has long been recognized as a critical factor influencing employee attitudes, performance, and job satisfaction within organizations. Numerous empirical studies indicate that leadership style significantly shapes employees' motivation, commitment, and workplace satisfaction (Surucu & Sesen, 2019). Among the various leadership approaches, democratic leadership has received considerable scholarly attention because it emphasizes employee participation in decision-making, open communication, and shared responsibility. Such practices are believed to foster a supportive organizational climate that enhances employee engagement and job satisfaction (Torlak & Kuzey, 2019). However, despite the growing body of literature on leadership and job satisfaction, many studies have primarily focused on private sector organizations or general administrative settings, with limited attention given to leadership dynamics within public sector enforcement agencies.

This gap is particularly significant because enforcement organizations often operate within rigid hierarchical structures, formalized procedures, and high-pressure working environments that may influence leadership practices differently. Moreover, previous studies have reported inconsistent findings regarding the effectiveness of participative or democratic leadership in structured organizations. While some researchers suggest that democratic leadership enhances employee satisfaction through greater involvement and empowerment, others argue that excessive participation may slow decision-making processes and reduce operational efficiency in highly regulated environments (Eliyana et al., 2019). These conflicting findings highlight the need for further empirical investigation to better understand the relationship between democratic leadership and employee job satisfaction within public sector enforcement agencies, particularly in the Malaysian context.

In response to this gap, the present study aims to examine the relationship between democratic leadership styles and job satisfaction among employees in Agensi Antidadah Kebangsaan

(AADK) Port Dickson, Negeri Sembilan. By exploring this relationship, the study seeks to provide empirical insight into the relevance of democratic leadership within the Malaysian public sector and to offer a clearer rationale for leadership practices that support employee satisfaction. The findings are expected to contribute to the existing leadership literature and to inform leadership development initiatives and policy considerations within public sector organisations.

Literature Review

Job satisfaction has long been recognised as a key indicator of organisational effectiveness, reflecting employees' emotional responses to their work roles and organisational environment. Numerous studies have emphasised that leadership style plays a critical role in shaping employees' perceptions of their work experiences and overall job satisfaction. Leadership behaviours influence important organisational outcomes such as trust, motivation, organisational commitment, and workplace engagement (Surucu & Sesen, 2019). In this context, leadership approaches that encourage participation, support, and open communication are often associated with more positive employee attitudes and higher levels of satisfaction.

Among the various leadership approaches, democratic leadership has been widely examined for its emphasis on participative decision-making, employee empowerment, and collaborative problem-solving. Several empirical studies have reported a positive relationship between democratic leadership and job satisfaction, suggesting that employees who are given opportunities to express their views and participate in organisational decisions tend to experience higher levels of motivation and workplace satisfaction (Eliyana & Ma'arif, 2019; Zardoshtian et al., 2020). However, other studies suggest that the effectiveness of democratic leadership may vary depending on organisational context. For instance, in highly structured or hierarchical organisations, participative leadership may sometimes slow decision-making processes or create ambiguity in authority structures (An et al., 2019). These findings indicate that the relationship between democratic leadership and job satisfaction is not always uniform and may depend on contextual factors such as organisational culture, task complexity, and institutional hierarchy.

In the context of public sector organisations, leadership effectiveness becomes particularly significant due to bureaucratic structures, accountability requirements, and the need to maintain organisational discipline. Research in public administration suggests that participative leadership can enhance employee morale and organisational commitment by promoting transparency and inclusiveness in decision-making processes (Norazmi et al., 2019). Nevertheless, some scholars argue that enforcement-related organisations often rely on clear authority structures and command-based leadership to ensure operational efficiency, which may limit the application of democratic leadership practices. This tension between participative leadership and hierarchical control highlights the need to examine how democratic leadership functions within enforcement-oriented environments.

Furthermore, empirical research focusing specifically on enforcement agencies remains relatively limited, particularly in the Malaysian public sector context. While several international studies have explored leadership styles and job satisfaction in corporate, educational, and healthcare organisations, fewer studies have examined this relationship within semi-enforcement and rehabilitation agencies such as the National Anti-Drug Agency (AADK). Given the unique work environment characterised by high responsibility, structured authority, and social service obligations, leadership behaviour may influence employee satisfaction in

ways that differ from other organisational settings. Therefore, further empirical investigation is necessary to better understand the role of democratic leadership in shaping employee job satisfaction within Malaysian public sector enforcement agencies.

Research Methodology

This study adopted a quantitative research approach using a cross-sectional survey design to examine the relationship between democratic leadership styles and job satisfaction among employees. The quantitative method was selected as it allows objective measurement of perceptions and enables statistical testing of relationships between variables.

Research Design and Population

The study was conducted at Agensi Antidadah Kebangsaan (AADK) Port Dickson, Negeri Sembilan. The target population comprised 220 employees working in AADK Negeri Sembilan. A simple random sampling technique was employed to ensure that each member of the population had an equal probability of being selected, thereby reducing selection bias and enhancing the representativeness of the sample. Based on a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error, a sample size of 220 respondents was deemed adequate and statistically acceptable.

Research Instrument

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire adapted from established and validated instruments in previous studies. The questionnaire consisted of several sections. The demographic section gathered background information such as age, gender, marital status, length of service, and educational qualification. Democratic leadership was measured using six items that assessed participative decision-making, openness, feedback, and employee involvement. Job satisfaction was measured using a scale adapted from Jordaan (2019), consisting of 20 items. All measurement items utilised a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (Never / Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Very Often / Strongly Agree). The reliability of the job satisfaction instrument recorded Cronbach's Alpha values of 0.70 and above, indicating acceptable internal consistency.

Data Collection Procedure

The questionnaire was administered electronically using Google Forms and distributed through WhatsApp to facilitate ease of access and higher response rates. This method was chosen due to its cost efficiency, time effectiveness, and suitability for respondents who could complete the survey using mobile devices.

Data Analysis Techniques

Data were analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software. Descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations, were used to summarise respondents' demographic characteristics and perceptions of democratic leadership. The Shapiro–Wilk normality test was conducted to assess data distribution. As the data were found to be non-normally distributed ($p < .05$), appropriate correlation analysis was applied. To examine the relationship between democratic leadership and job satisfaction, Pearson correlation analysis was employed, with the level of statistical significance set at $p < .05$.

Overall, the methodological approach adopted in this study ensured systematic data collection and rigorous statistical analysis, enabling reliable examination of the relationship between democratic leadership styles and job satisfaction within the AADK context.

Result

This section presents the findings of the study based on the data collected from employees of Agensi Antidadah Kebangsaan (AADK) Port Dickson, Negeri Sembilan. The results are organised into sub-sections to provide clarity, in line with the study objectives. Data are reported using text and tables, with detailed numerical values presented in the respective tables.

Demographic Profile of Respondents

The demographic characteristics of the respondents are summarised in Table 4.1. The majority of respondents were aged between 21–30 years (39.1%), followed by those aged 31–40 years (35.9%), indicating a relatively young workforce. Male employees constituted 68.2% of the sample, while females accounted for 31.8%, reflecting the gender distribution commonly observed in enforcement-related agencies. Most respondents were married (62.7%), and in terms of length of service, the largest group had served between 5–10 years (30.5%), followed by 10–15 years (25.0%). Regarding educational background, the majority possessed high school qualifications (67.3%), while 31.4% held undergraduate qualifications. These demographic characteristics provide important contextual background for interpreting perceptions of leadership and job satisfaction.

Table 1: Demographic Profile of Respondents

No	Item	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)	
1	Age	21-30 years old	86	39.1
		31-40 years old	79	35.9
		41-50 years old	45	20.5
		51-60 years old	10	4.5
2	Gender	Male	150	68.2
		Female	70	31.8
3	Marital Status	Single	82	37.3
		Married	138	62.7
4	How many years have you been in your present organization?	Less than 1 year	28	12.7
		1 - 5 years	40	18.2
		5 - 10 years	67	30.5
		10 - 15 years	55	25.0
		15 - 20 years	30	13.6
5	Qualification	High School	148	67.3
		Undergraduate (Diploma/ Degree)	69	31.4
		Postgraduate (Master/ PhD)	3	1.4

Descriptive Statistics of Democratic Leadership

Descriptive statistics for democratic leadership are presented in Table 4.2. Overall, the mean scores for all six items ranged from 3.27 to 3.59, indicating that democratic leadership practices were perceived to be practised at a moderately high level within the organisation.

Employees generally reported that leaders allowed autonomy in task execution and provided respectful feedback when mistakes occurred. Participation in decision-making and consideration of employee suggestions were also rated positively. These findings suggest that democratic leadership behaviours such as openness, trust, and participative management are evident in the organisation, although the consistency of these practices varies across leadership actions.

Table 4. 2 Democratic Leadership

No	Mean	SD*		Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Very Often
C1	3.45	1.225	n	21	26	54	71	48
			%	9.5	11.8	24.5	32.3	21.8
C2	3.27	.911	n	0	52	73	78	17
			%	0	23.6	33.2	35.5	7.7
C3	3.53	1.009	n	15	15	53	113	24
			%	6.8	6.8	24.1	51.4	10.9
C4	3.59	.885	n	6	21	51	122	20
			%	2.7	9.5	23.2	55.5	9.1
C5	3.46	.990	n	6	32	66	86	30
			%	2.7	14.5	30	39.1	13.6
C6	3.50	.785	n	0	21	88	92	19
			%	0	9.5	40	41.8	8.6

Normality Test

Prior to inferential analysis, the normality of the data was examined using the Shapiro–Wilk test. The results indicated that the distributions for democratic leadership and job satisfaction were not normally distributed ($p < .001$). Based on this outcome and the sample size, correlation analysis was deemed appropriate for examining the relationship between the study variables.

Relationship Between Democratic Leadership and Job Satisfaction

The relationship between democratic leadership and job satisfaction was examined using Pearson correlation analysis. The analysis revealed a moderate positive and statistically significant relationship between democratic leadership and job satisfaction ($r = 0.447$, $p < .001$).

This finding indicates that higher levels of perceived democratic leadership are associated with higher levels of job satisfaction among employees. The strength of the correlation suggests a meaningful relationship, supporting the study hypothesis that democratic leadership positively influences employee job satisfaction within the AADK context.

In summary, the results demonstrate that democratic leadership is moderately practised in the organisation and is significantly associated with employee job satisfaction. These findings provide empirical support for the role of participative and inclusive leadership behaviours in enhancing employee satisfaction in public sector enforcement and rehabilitation agencies.

Discussion

The present study set out to examine the relationship between democratic leadership styles and job satisfaction among employees in Agensi Antidadah Kebangsaan (AADK) Port Dickson, Negeri Sembilan. The findings demonstrate a moderate, positive, and statistically significant relationship between democratic leadership and job satisfaction, indicating that employees who

perceive their leaders as more democratic tend to report higher levels of job satisfaction. This result confirms that leadership behaviours characterised by participation, openness, and respect are important determinants of employee satisfaction within the context of a Malaysian public sector enforcement and rehabilitation agency.

The findings of this study are largely consistent with previous research conducted in both public and private sector settings. Prior studies have shown that democratic leadership positively influences job satisfaction by fostering employee involvement in decision-making and enhancing feelings of autonomy and recognition (Norazmi et al., 2020; Daud et al., 2024). Similar positive relationships have been reported in educational, healthcare, and government organisations, where participative leadership has been linked to improved morale and work attitudes (Rahman et al., 2023; Sapkota et al., 2024). The present findings reinforce this body of literature by providing empirical support within the specific context of AADK, which operates under demanding and semi-enforcement conditions.

At the same time, the strength of the relationship observed in this study is moderate rather than strong, suggesting that while democratic leadership is an important factor, job satisfaction is likely influenced by additional organisational and individual variables such as workload, organisational culture, and career development opportunities. This observation aligns with earlier studies that emphasise the multifaceted nature of job satisfaction and caution against attributing employee satisfaction solely to leadership style (Abdullah & Balakrishnan, 2016; Mokhtar & Yunus, 2023). In this sense, the present study extends existing knowledge by highlighting the relevance of democratic leadership without overstating its influence.

One notable contribution of this study lies in its empirical focus on a Malaysian enforcement-related agency, a context that has received relatively limited attention in leadership and job satisfaction research. Unlike studies conducted in corporate or educational settings, the AADK environment involves structured hierarchy, high work demands, and significant social responsibility. The finding that democratic leadership remains positively associated with job satisfaction in such a context underscores the adaptability and relevance of participative leadership even within traditionally hierarchical organisations. This represents an important addition to the literature, as it suggests that democratic leadership can coexist with formal authority structures without undermining organisational discipline or effectiveness.

Regarding hypothesis testing, the study hypothesised that there is a significant relationship between democratic leadership and job satisfaction among employees. Based on the statistical evidence obtained, this hypothesis is supported. The results clearly indicate that democratic leadership practices contribute positively to employee job satisfaction in the AADK Port Dickson context. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected, and the alternative hypothesis is accepted.

In conclusion, the discussion highlights that democratic leadership is a meaningful and influential leadership approach within the Malaysian public sector, particularly in enforcement and rehabilitation agencies. The study's findings not only corroborate existing research but also extend current understanding by demonstrating the applicability of democratic leadership in a relatively underexplored organisational setting. This emphasis on context-specific evidence represents one of the key contributions of the present study.

Conclusion

This study was undertaken to examine the relationship between democratic leadership styles and job satisfaction among employees in Agensi Antidadah Kebangsaan (AADK) Port Dickson, Negeri Sembilan, with the aim of contributing to a deeper understanding of effective leadership practices within the Malaysian public sector. By focusing on democratic leadership, the study responds to the growing need for leadership approaches that not only ensure organisational efficiency but also promote employee well-being in demanding and structured work environments.

The findings of the study underscore the importance of democratic leadership as a meaningful predictor of employee job satisfaction. The positive and statistically significant relationship identified highlights that leadership behaviours characterised by participation, open communication, respect for employee input, and shared decision-making can enhance employees' satisfaction with their work. These outcomes reinforce the view that job satisfaction is not solely shaped by material or structural factors but is also strongly influenced by how leaders engage with and support their subordinates. In the context of AADK, where employees are entrusted with complex enforcement and rehabilitative responsibilities, such leadership practices are particularly consequential.

Beyond its immediate empirical contributions, this study carries broader implications for leadership practice and policy in public sector organisations. The results suggest that democratic leadership can be effectively applied even within agencies that operate under hierarchical and rule-based systems. This indicates that participative leadership does not undermine organisational discipline; rather, it can coexist with formal authority while fostering trust, motivation, and commitment among employees. As such, the findings support the wider application of democratic leadership principles in similar public sector and enforcement-related institutions.

Importantly, this study also establishes a foundation for future research. While democratic leadership was shown to be significantly related to job satisfaction, the moderate strength of the relationship suggests the presence of additional factors that warrant further investigation. Future studies may extend this work by incorporating mediating or moderating variables such as organisational culture, workload, psychological well-being, or career development opportunities, as well as by employing longitudinal or mixed method approaches to capture deeper insights into leadership dynamics.

In conclusion, this study affirms the relevance and value of democratic leadership in enhancing job satisfaction within the Malaysian public sector. By highlighting the practical and theoretical significance of participative leadership, the article contributes to ongoing discussions on leadership reform and human resource development, and it encourages organisations to adopt leadership practices that are not only effective but also humane and sustainable.

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