

THE INFLUENCE OF LEADERSHIP STYLES ON EMPLOYEE PERFORMANCE IN STATE ADMINISTRATION

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Abstract: *Leadership style is widely recognised as a critical determinant of organisational success, especially in the context of public administration. This study examined the influence of three leadership styles—transformational, transactional, and servant leadership—on employee performance at The Kelantan State Government Secretary’s Office (KSGSO). Using a quantitative research design, data were collected through structured questionnaires from 140 employees across all departments. From the study findings, it was found that employee performance at KSGSO was low. For leadership styles, all styles showed a significant positive relationship with employee performance. In addition, transformational leadership showed a moderate influence and for transactional and servant leadership were proven to have a strong relationship with employee performance. However, servant leadership was assessed as the strongest contributor in this study. Therefore, practising empowerment promotion among employees, setting objectives, and mentoring programs are necessary for transformational leadership while digital transformation and optimising work processes are essential to improve efficiency in operations and communication in public sector organisations.*

Keywords: *Employee performance, transformational leadership style, transactional leadership style, servant leadership style, state administration*

Introduction

Employee performance lies at the heart of organisational success. It is defined by the quality and quantity of output in relation to assigned responsibilities (Adekiya, 2024; Suwatno, 2018; Wibowo, 2016), and is significantly influenced by leadership behaviour (Messick & Krammer, 2004). Ineffective leadership can lead to diminished productivity, increased operational costs, and poor collaboration among employees, ultimately undermining organisational effectiveness (Nongo, 2019). Fahmi (2016) believes that leadership and organisational culture are important for employee performance. This is because a strong organisational culture can improve leadership effectiveness. Employee performance can be produced by various sources including job satisfaction, motivation, organisational culture and leadership style. Therefore, the effects of these various factors can not only contribute to workforce productivity but also affect the overall work environment. The subsequent effects affect organisational outcomes. Meanwhile, Shirzad (2014) said that to ensure that employees remain motivated, it requires effective leadership. With this, it can encourage them to perform their duties fully, effectively and efficiently, including in line with the vision, mission and objectives of the organisation.

Where bureaucratic processes often occur in public sector organisations, effective and efficient leadership can determine the extent to which all visions, missions and objectives of the organisation can be achieved, including in organisations such as the Kelantan State Government Secretary's Office (KSGSO) which places importance on high levels of employee motivation and efficient service delivery. The Kelantan State Government's Secretary Office (KSGSO) as one of the public institutions that focuses on the main goals of the organisation to be achieved including emphasizing high levels of motivation and efficient customer delivery also faces various challenges in achieving administrative efficiency while maintaining high levels of employee performance. Employee performance is the foundation of the provision of quality public services in the public sector, including in KSGSO. However, ongoing challenges such as bureaucratic rigidity and low employee morale persist despite reforms aimed at improving public sector performance. KSGSO functions as a central administrative authority tasked with implementing state policies and ensuring efficient governance. Despite its strategic importance, the organisation has experienced a continuous decline in personnel performance. There are several key indicators of the above issues such as productivity per employee, disciplinary action and absenteeism rate. It reveals ongoing systemic inefficiency since 2020. Despite an increase in the size of the workforce, this decline in work performance occurred and symbolises that increased resources have not translated into better output.

There are also several structural and management deficiencies that contribute to this issue such as a less systematic file management system. The result is that it complicates information retrieval and delays or slows down the decision-making process, which in turn affects service delivery. In addition, the use of poor or outdated technology infrastructure contributes to frequent data storage failures, which in turn exacerbates operational inefficiencies and hinders a high-performance work culture. Not only that, unclear performance expectations, inadequate training, including a toxic organisational climate, worsen this issue and this is due to leadership factors as confirmed by Ariyanto et al. (2019) in their study. As a result, organisations face reduced stakeholder satisfaction, and reputational risks, missed deadlines, reduced output, which in turn threatens their financial and operational stability and reputation.

To support this serious issue, empirical data has been outlined to look at employee performance problems. Between 2020 and 2024, the productivity per employee at KSGSO decreased from MYR 616,766.47 to MYR 445,544.55, despite a steady increase in the size of the workforce. However, Malaysia's national labour productivity has shown consistent growth over the same period, with GDP per employee increasing from MYR 82,803 in 2020 to MYR 93,333 in 2024. This difference indicates systemic efficiency weaknesses in KSGSO, which are due to low employee morale, outdated technology, ineffective work processes, and insufficient training and development initiatives for employees for appropriate job performance. The persistence of these challenges raises critical questions about the interaction between organisational culture, employee motivation and performance outcomes in public sector institutions. These issues need to be addressed to improve administrative efficiency and ensure effectiveness in delivering the best public services.

Despite the growing body of literature on employee performance, empirical studies examining the influence of leadership style on employee performance within Malaysian public sector institutions remain limited, particularly at the state administrative level such as the Kelantan State Government Secretary's Office (KSGSO). Previous studies on employee performance have predominantly focused on private sector organisations or have examined broader organisational determinants such as human resource practices, organisational systems, and technological readiness without sufficiently explaining how specific leadership behaviours influence employee attitudes and work outcomes (Ariyanto et al., 2019; Fahmi, 2016; Nongo, 2019). In addition, many studies in the Malaysian public sector emphasise administrative reform and service efficiency while giving limited attention to the role of leadership style as a direct predictor of employee performance.

This limitation is important because public sector organisations typically operate within bureaucratic and hierarchical structures that require effective leadership to maintain employee motivation, coordination, and productivity (Shirzad, 2014; Messick & Krammer, 2004). Although factors such as organisational systems and digital infrastructure contribute to organisational effectiveness, leadership style remains a central factor because leaders influence employee behaviour, communication, decision-making, and workplace commitment. Ineffective leadership may therefore contribute to low morale, reduced productivity, weak organisational coordination, and poor service delivery despite the availability of organisational resources. Consequently, there remains a significant research gap in understanding the extent to which leadership style influences employee performance within Malaysian state public sector institutions such as KSGSO.

Therefore, this study aims to examine employee performance and the influence of leadership style on employee performance in the Kelantan State Government Secretary's Office (KSGSO). Specifically, the objectives of this study are: (1) to identify the level of employee performance in KSGSO; and (2) to examine the influence of leadership styles on employee performance in KSGSO. Through these objectives, the study seeks to contribute to the existing literature on public sector leadership and provide practical insights for improving organisational effectiveness and public service delivery within Malaysian state government institutions.

Employee performance

Armstrong (2026) describes performance of an employee as the way employees carry out their obligations and their completion of assigned work-a key source of success for the organisation. It includes productivity, quality of work, and timeliness. Employee performance is contingent

on several variables including motivation, leadership styles, rewards and work environment, amongst others (Sharif 2018; Abdullah 2018).

Leadership in public sector organisations like the Kelantan State Government Secretary's Office (KSGSO) is very crucial, in this regard it can effect on motivation, commitment and job satisfaction. Further evidence has recently been added by Thanh & Quang (2022). They concluded that transactional, transformational and laissez-faire leadership had a strong correlation with employee engagement and performance in Vietnamese civil servants of the public sector. Quadri, Anjum and Bangash (2024) also showed in their study conducted in Pakistan that transformational and transactional leadership had a positive relationship with employee engagement that positively influenced public sector performance. Furthermore, a study from Chin et al. (2024) shows the significant effects of responsible leadership qualities i.e., relational governance and relationship-building on sustainable employee performance in the Malaysian service industry. These findings do lend support to the theoretical model that emphasises how a manager's leadership style operationalizes employee performance, yet the practical execution in bureaucratic parts like KSGSO are underdeveloped. Performance-enhancing strategies like developing a supportive work culture, utilising technological tools for efficiency, and attending to your employee's wellbeing are evident particularly beneath the leadership styles of servant and transformational (Alkahtani, 2015; Rainey, 2014). Adding these factors to transformational, transactional and servant leadership will enable KSGSO to enhance service delivery and governance performance. A study by Salleh, Amin, and Mamat (2017) also explored how employee preparedness, training design, and work environment affect training transfer in academic employees working in public learning institutions. Their results showed that motivation to learn and the possibility to apply new skills to training transfer were extremely significant, and the supervisor support and error management in training design augmented this connection. The findings highlight the need to pay attention to the organisational climate and management practices in ensuring that the skills can be applied and performance is enhanced. Even though their work is based on an academic environment, its implications are relevant to the context of the public administration like KSGSO, where the leadership style transformational, transactional, and servant, is critical in the provision of a supportive environment that empowers employees, fosters the utilization of skills, and ultimately leads to performance outcomes.

Collectively, transformational, transactional, and servant leadership styles provide a comprehensive and theoretically established framework for examining how different leadership behaviours influence employee performance within public sector organisations. These three styles, derived from the Full Range Leadership Theory developed by Bass and Avolio, capture active, motivational, supervisory, and passive dimensions of leadership behaviour, thereby enabling a more holistic understanding of leadership effectiveness in organisational settings (Bass & Avolio, 1995; Bass & Riggio, 2006). Their combined application is particularly relevant in public administration because government institutions operate within complex bureaucratic systems characterised by hierarchical authority, procedural rigidity, accountability requirements, and continuous public expectations for efficient service delivery. In public sector organisations such as the Kelantan State Government Secretary's Office (KSGSO), leadership effectiveness plays a critical role in influencing employee motivation, organisational commitment, administrative coordination, and operational efficiency. Transformational leadership is important in encouraging innovation, employee engagement, and organisational change, especially in environments undergoing administrative reform. Transactional leadership supports compliance with regulations, performance monitoring, and procedural consistency,

which are essential in bureaucratic institutions. Meanwhile, servant leadership provides an important comparative dimension by explaining how the absence of active leadership may contribute to weak coordination, reduced employee morale, delayed decision-making, and declining organisational performance. Previous studies have demonstrated that leadership style significantly affects employee productivity, job satisfaction, organisational culture, and service quality in public administration settings (Caillier, 2014; Obiwuru et al., 2011; Paracha et al., 2012). Therefore, examining these three leadership styles collectively provides a suitable framework for understanding how leadership behaviours contribute to employee performance and public service effectiveness within KSGSO.

Transformational leadership style

According to Bass and Riggio (2006), transformational leadership is a leadership style whereby the leaders collaborate with a group of people with the aim of identifying changes that are needed, formulating an inspiring vision, and executing the changes using the commitment of the members of the organisation. Originally theorised by Bass (1985), this approach is aimed at encouraging employees to perform above expectations using four elements namely, ideal influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individual consideration. Research has indicated that transformational leadership is positively related with job satisfaction and organisational commitment (Wang et al., 2020). Transformational leadership has the potential to promote innovation and teamwork even in bureaucratic organisations like KSGSO, that have strict hierarchies. Leaders can facilitate the promotion of efficiency in the organisation by adopting a proactive problem-solving strategy and sharing of knowledge. Critics also believe that this style is based on charismatic individuals and therefore may not be sustainable (Mathende & Yousefi, 2021). It is effective to varying degrees as well and is also a subject of contextual variables such as whether the employees are ready to change and whether the culture within the organisation is conducive or not (Choi, 2006).

Transactional leadership style

The style of transactional leadership is the style that aims at sustaining a standardised flow of activities in the structured interaction between the leader and the followers (Burns, 1978). Pillai et al. (2019) argue that, with the help of rewards and punishment, leaders can inspire the employees to work in an environment of incentives and disciplinary measures. Such a strategy demands organisation and responsibility in the company. In the case of Couto (2007), he indicated that leaders need to establish a clear expectation, track the performance, reward the performance through achievement of the goal and use corrective actions to the poor performance. Thus, such a leadership approach is highly essential in more organized settings like KSGSO where order and the accomplishment of both short-term and long-term goals do matter. Moreover, research conducted by Hutama et al. (2024) also verified the effect of this style on the employee performance. Transactional leadership can also guarantee adherence to the laid down procedures and therefore enhance efficiency in operations of organisations. Nevertheless, globalization can be a deterrent to innovation and flexibility, even though it fosters discipline and consistency (Brahim et al., 2015). As such, to overcome this hurdle, it should strike a balance between stability and incorporation of transactional and transformational leadership aspects.

Servant leadership style

Greenleaf (1977) also proposed that in his work, servant leadership, with a particular emphasis on the role of the leader as a servant (Kauppila et al. 2022; Liu 2019), was a holistic leadership approach in which the needs, development, and welfare of followers are prioritised. This

leadership style entails an attitude that does not give the self-priority in service to the organisation, employees and community. Past research in the field of servant leadership has empirically found the beneficial contributions of this leadership style on performance in either services or manufacturing industries (Chon and Zoltan 2019; Chiniara and Bentein 2016). The discovery aligns with the nature of servant leadership that can motivate employees to deliver superior service to customers, and subsequently, this superior service will help to make organisations effective and perform well (Schwepker and Schultz, 2015). Servant leadership is culturally appropriate in the Malaysian context due to the strong levels of trust and collaboration (Ramli & Desa, 2014). Recent studies on Malaysian higher education further highlight that servant leadership enhances the engagement of faculty members, affective commitment, trust and innovation, and this takes place through mediators, which are leader-member exchange and job satisfaction (Sedhu et al., 2025). This style encourages free communication techniques, trust and organisational identification. But the perceived incompetence in crisis or fast-paced situation presents a great challenge (Goh & Low, 2013). Hence, it would be useful to balance servant leadership and strategic decision-making procedures to ensure that the former is utilised to the full extent in government agencies like KSGSO.

Methodologies

In this study, a quantitative research approach was adopted using a cross-sectional survey design to examine the relationship between leadership styles and employee performance. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire adapted and modified from established instruments. Specifically, employee performance was measured based on Williams and Anderson (1991), transformational and transactional leadership styles were adapted from Bass and Avolio (1995), and servant leadership was adapted from Liden et al. (2014). Each construct consisted of five (5) items that were carefully selected and modified to ensure relevance to the public sector context and the research objectives. The questionnaire was developed in both English and Malay to ensure clarity and accessibility among respondents. To maintain linguistic equivalence and conceptual accuracy, a back-translation procedure was employed, whereby the original English version was translated into Malay and then independently translated back into English to verify consistency and reduce translation bias.

All variables were measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). This scale was selected because it allows respondents to express neutral or moderate opinions without forcing extreme responses, thereby improving data quality (Chomeya, 2010). In addition, Dawes (2008) supports the use of five-point Likert scales, noting their effectiveness in statistical analysis techniques such as structural equation modeling and confirmatory factor analysis, where balanced measurement scales are essential for robust results. To ensure validity and reliability, both content validity and construct validity procedures were applied. Content validity was established through expert review involving academic experts in the field of organisational behaviour and public administration, as well as experienced officers from the Kelantan State Government Secretary's Office (KSGSO). Their feedback was used to refine item wording, improve contextual relevance, and ensure alignment with the study objectives. Construct validity was further supported through the adaptation of previously validated measurement scales from established literature, ensuring that the constructs accurately reflected the intended theoretical dimensions. The questionnaire was performed online to enhance flexibility and give various choices to self-evaluation. This research was aimed at the employees of Kelantan State Government Secretary's Office in which their performance is crucial to the Kelantan state administration. The sampling frame for this

study was obtained from the KSGSO Administrative Department, which provided the official list of employees for the purpose of respondent selection. Using this sampling frame, a simple random sampling technique was employed to ensure that every employee had an equal probability of being selected, thereby reducing sampling bias and enhancing the representativeness of the sample. According to the sample size determination by Krejcie and Morgan, (1970), they would need at least one hundred and forty respondents with a target population of 202. Nevertheless, the research was able to gather 75 responses which is half of the recommended sample. Although constraints caused by time and the difficulty in getting cooperation with the target population were experienced, this sample size is enough to conduct the current analysis. According to Sekaran (2003), sample size of between 30 to 500 is acceptable to use in conducting research whereas Hair et al. (2010) suggest a minimum of 50 respondents to yield adequate statistical validity.

Skewness of all variables fell within the acceptable range of values of -0.723 to -0.202 as proposed by Hair (2020). The values of kurtosis also fell within the acceptable range of a normal distribution (-7 to +7), 0.770-0.957. The data can be assumed to be normally distributed as both skewness and kurtosis reached these values (Sharma et al., 2019, Hair et., 2019). To guarantee internal consistency, Cronbach alpha was applied to measure the reliability of each construct to ascertain that this study involved previously unexplored construct in different departments at KSGSO. Internal consistency measures how much the items in every construct go with each other. Nunnally and Bernstein (1994) also state that a Cronbach alpha coefficient of 0.7 is acceptable and that any items below this value should be eliminated so that reliability could be enhanced. All the constructs in this research had acceptable reliability criteria. In the case of the dependent variable, which is the employee performance (five items), the Cronbach alpha value was 0.922, which denotes a high level of reliability of 0.8 to 0.9, and positive correlation of the items. The style of transformational leadership with five items also had a Cronbach alpha of 0.745 which is acceptable, ($0.7 < 0.8$). Transactional style of leadership was regarded as an important independent variable because it recorded a Cronbach alpha of 0.834 which was acceptable. In the case of the servant leadership item the alpha of Cronbach was 0.865 which is also a great representation of reliability ($0.8 < 0.9$). Overall, the reliability scores of all constructs were above 0.70, which proved that the constructs were reliable according to the set standards.

Results and Discussions

Demographic profile analysis

The sample consists of 75 employees. Of these, 61% are male and 39% female, with all employees being Malay. The workforce is relatively young: 16% are aged 20–29 years, 26.6% aged 30–39 years, 37.3% aged 40–49 years, and 20% aged 50 years or above. In terms of marital status, 76% are married, 7% single, and 10% divorced. Educational attainment is high, with 46% holding a diploma, 43% a bachelor's degree, and 11% a master's degree. Regarding tenure, 52% have served for 16 years or more, 31% for 11–15 years, 9% for 6–10 years, and 8% for less than 5 years. Employees are distributed across various departments, with Administration (20%) and Assets (18%) having the highest representation, followed by Finance, Technical, and Development (each 12%), while other departments have fewer than 10 employees.

Descriptive analysis

A descriptive analysis was performed to evaluate the mean scores and standard deviations for employee performance and three leadership styles—transformational, transactional, and

servant leadership. Following the interpretation guidelines proposed by Lindner and Lindner (2024), the mean scores were classified into three categories: 1.00–2.33 = Low, 2.34–3.67 = Medium, and 3.68–5.00 = High.

The findings showed that employee performance ($M = 2.23$) was in the low category, indicating that employees did not meet expected performance standards. Transformational leadership ($M = 2.35$) was in the moderate range, reflecting the implementation of several transformational characteristics, which might have explained the low level of performance given its strong association with motivation and engagement. Both transactional leadership ($M = 2.80$) and servant leadership ($M = 2.67$) were also in the moderate category, indicating moderate effectiveness in maintaining structure and addressing employee needs. However, transactional leadership tended to emphasize compliance rather than innovation, while servant leadership promoted collaboration but might have been less aligned with performance-driven objectives. Comparatively, servant leadership appeared to have a more positive influence on teamwork and morale, while transactional leadership enforced structure but offered limited motivational impact. Therefore, taking the view of Sidik et al. (2024) and Qalati et al. (2022), strengthening transformational leadership practices could have bridged this gap and improved overall employee performance, such as ensuring higher levels of HR flexibility (Dimple & Tripathi, 2024), employee motivation, and development (Sidik et al., 2024). The standard deviation values showed moderate variability across departments, underlining the need for leadership development programs tailored to address the diverse needs of the organisation, as agreed with Hurtienne and Hurtienne (2024) that leaders need to consider each employee as a complex individual with unique needs and aspirations.

Pearson Correlation Analysis

To identify the strength of the correlation and the relationship between each independent variable and the dependent variable, Pearson correlation was used. The analysis revealed a significant positive correlation between employee performance and the three different leadership styles, highlighting the important role of leadership in organisational success as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Result of Pearson Correlation Coefficient

Hypotheses	Coefficient
H1: Transformational leadership influences employee performance	0.595
H2: Transactional leadership influences employee performance	0.716
H3: Servant leadership influences employee performance	0.771

According to the table, servant leadership depicted the most significant correlation with performance ($a = 0.771$, $p < 0.001$). Evidence has provided this finding, showing that the servant leadership enhances job results including satisfaction, innovative work behaviour and organisational citizenship in terms of trust and ethical orientation. As an illustration, a banking study like that by Rashid and Ilkhaizadeh (2022) has demonstrated that servant leadership is a strong contributor in enhancing service recovery performance in the form of trust in colleagues. Its beneficial impacts on individual, team, and even organisational performance have also been confirmed by systematic reviews (Luciano-Alipio and Arevalo-Avecillas, 2023; Febrianti and Yulian, 2022). When it comes to transactional leadership, it was again significantly correlated ($a = 0.716$, $p < 0.001$) with the retained relevance of the structured systems of performance and the contingent rewards. A meta-analysis conducted by Agazu et al., (2025) involving 54 studies covering transformational leadership and firm performance from January 2016 to 2023 was

analyzed through the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analysis protocol using descriptive content analysis with relevant articles documented according to inclusion and exclusion criteria. Studies were found in the Scopus, Web of Science, Taylor and Francis, and PubMed databases. Findings from this review indicate that most studies reviewed concluded that transformational leadership has a positive relationship and influence on firm performance. Contextual empirical studies—for example, in manufacturing—highlight its influence through increased work engagement (Verma & Singh, 2025; Aburumman & Wasfi Alrweis, 2025). For the transformational leadership, it shows a moderately strong correlation ($\alpha = 0.595$, $p < 0.001$), reinforcing its recognised impact on performance and possibility of taking advantage of advancement in innovation to be geared in this organisation. Furthermore, systematic studies across firms and employees report positive effects of transformational leadership on productivity, organisational commitment, and performance (Aburumman et al., 2025). Several studies in the hospitality context such as by Buil et al. (2019) and Aftab et al. (2023) further demonstrate how transformational leadership improves work performance through increased employee engagement.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Descriptive analysis revealed that employee performance in organisations was generally low, while transformational, transactional, and servant leadership styles were all in the moderate range. Servant leadership showed the strongest correlation with performance, followed by transactional and transformational leadership. These findings underscore the importance of leadership in shaping organisational outcomes and suggest that no single style is sufficient to address performance gaps. Instead, a hybrid approach that combines the strengths of all three styles is essential. Servant leadership's emphasis on collaboration and trust appears to foster teamwork and enthusiasm, while transactional leadership provides structure and accountability. Transformational leadership, although moderately correlated with performance, offers unique potential to drive innovation and engagement. However, its effectiveness depends on complementary practices that empower employees and align the organisation's vision with individual aspirations.

To improve employee performance, this study recommends that state administrations to prioritise practices that promote employee empowerment, vision setting, and coaching, in which are essential parts of transformational leadership. These strategies can increase motivation and engagement, bridging the gap between leadership and performance. Furthermore, initiatives such as digital transformation and process optimisation should be implemented to improve operational and communication efficiency in public sector organisations. Streamlined workflows and the use of technology will reduce administrative delays and improve service delivery. Moreover, the leadership development programs must be developed in such a manner that they contribute to an amalgamation of a hybrid leadership model encompassing people-oriented approach of servant leadership, a formalized system of transactional leadership and a transformational leadership vision. This combination will enable leaders to adapt to the diverse needs of the organisation and foster a culture of trust, accountability, and innovation. Policies should also support HR flexibility and ongoing employee development, ensuring that individuals have opportunities for growth and advancement. Finally, given the diversity of performance across departments, leadership strategies must be tailored to the specific context, recognising that employees are complex individuals with unique needs and aspirations. By implementing these recommendations, state administrations can create a leadership culture that balances structure, motivation, and

employee well-being, ultimately improving overall organisational performance and effectiveness.

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