Effects of Leadership Styles on Employee Performance During Crisis: In the Background of COVID-19 in China

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Abstract
Covid-19 pandemic has had a profound impact on various industries on a global scale. The disruptions have severely affected employee performance in the organization, leading to a series chain reaction such as factory closures, disrupted supply chains, and financial strain, etc. In the content of this situation, leadership styles which considers as one of the important factor that could contributed to the employee performance in the organization. It has intensified the need for novel leadership strategies to address the pressing performance-related challenges that the organizations faced. Therefore, the main objective of this study is to investigate the impact of leadership styles (autocratic leadership, democratic leadership, transactional leadership and transformational leadership) on employee performance during crisis situation. Besides that, this study has enriched the existing literature on leadership styles and employee performance. It also provides support for the policy makers and practitioners in to improve their efforts in enhancing employee performance, as well as provides new ideas for organizations on how to manage employee performance in times of crisis.
Keywords: Crisis Management, Employee Performance, Leadership, Leadership Styles

Introduction
To achieve organizational goals in a timely manner and foster growth, effective coordination between leaders and employees is essential. This coordination should be structured to maximize output. In most business especially manufacturing-oriented businesses, motivating employees is crucial to prevent disruptions in production and ensure efficiency. Unhappiness among employees can lead to dissatisfied customers and long-term revenue loss for any organization. Therefore, leaders must carefully choose an effective leadership style to exert control over employees. Employees often work for their individual aspirations rather than the ultimate goals of the organization. Consequently, it becomes the leader's responsibility to

shape the employee's mindset in a way that aligns with both organizational and individual interests. Maxwell (2002) emphasizes that 21st-century leaders should empower their subordinates to become leaders themselves. In contemporary times, managers and supervisors need to be well-versed in the challenges, benefits, and techniques associated with leadership styles and qualities. Collaboration between employees and leaders is paramount in establishing a successful relationship that benefits both individuals and the organization as a whole (Burns, 1978). This collaborative effort ensures the well-being of both parties and contributes to the overall success of the organization.

In recent years, the global industry has encountered substantial challenges, with the COVID-19 pandemic being a particularly noteworthy issue (Okur & Ercan, 2022). This worldwide crisis resulted in a global shutdown, setting off a chain reaction in the industry (Tarigan, 2022). It instigated numerous disruptions, causing delays and uncertainties that compromised operational efficiency and the punctual delivery of products (Okur & Ercan, 2022). These challenges have created an atmosphere of unpredictability, complicating decision-making and long-term planning within the industry. Consequently, the industry is currently maneuvering through an intricate terrain of environmental and economic uncertainties, presenting significant risks to its stability and future development.

The COVID-19 pandemic has profoundly influenced multiple industries in China. The initial lockdowns in Hubei province in 2020 laid the foundation for continuous disruptions through subsequent years' regional and city-wide lockdowns. These disruptions have had a severe impact on production and employee performance, resulting in factory closures, interrupted supply chains, and financial strain (Song, 2021). Following these disruptions, the zero-COVID policy implemented by China's central government in 2022 added further strain to the cloth manufacturing industry. In light of this challenging environment, there is an increased demand for innovative leadership strategies to address the urgent performance-related challenges confronting the industry.

China, an integral part of the global economy, is grappling with acute challenges that demand a reassessment of its leadership paradigms (Kumar et al., 2020). A noteworthy decline in employee performance necessitates an urgent examination of the role of leadership in addressing these challenges and enhancing overall performance (Chamas & Hernandez, 2019). Despite the examination of various leadership styles, their impact on employee performance in labor-intensive industries like textiles remains a critical concern. The current crisis, exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, has underscored the imperative for effective leadership (Lu, 2021). Furthermore, the pandemic has served as a test for the resilience and adaptability of the textile sector, presenting significant challenges but also unveiling new opportunities for innovation (Zheng, 2020). This dynamic and challenging context provides a captivating field of study, particularly in delving into how diverse factors, such as leadership styles, influence employee performance during times of crisis (Lu, 2021).

Employee Performance
Employee performance is defined as the set of employee behaviors that contribute either positively or negatively to the accomplishment of organizational goals (Colquitt, Lepine, & Wesson, 2017). Over the past two decades, employee performance has been a highly studied area in organizational psychology and behavior, given its crucial importance to the success of an organization (Hilmi & Adam, 2015). Holtom (2015) emphasized that for an organization to operate efficiently, it requires employees who actively participate in activities aligned with organizational goals, adhere to behavioral principles set by the

organization, and demonstrate automatic devotion to the organization. These criteria characterize employees with high employee performance (Holtom, 2015).

Optimal employee performance is crucial for organizational success and longevity (Li et al., 2023). Numerous factors, both individual and organizational, contribute to shaping performance. Raveendran & Gamage (2019) underscore the importance of comprehending various performance dimensions, including job role, career role, innovator role, team role, and organizational behavior, for a thorough evaluation. Performance holds a central position in ensuring business sustainability, influencing smooth operations, and fostering growth (Likdanawati et al., 2022). Metrics for assessing performance range from tangible outcomes like task completion to softer aspects such as teamwork (Kattner et al., 2016). High-performing employees are invaluable, consistently delivering quality work and demonstrating innovation and self-directedness (Falaster et al., 2021). Such employees ease managerial responsibilities, enabling strategic focus and providing a competitive edge (Mushthofa & Handoyo, 2023).

Employee Performance during crisis
Comprehending employee performance during times of crisis necessitates a global perspective that considers diverse sectors, cultures, and types of crises. Various studies have delved into this intricate topic, each providing unique insights that can inform both theory and practice. A European study by Karneli (2023) scrutinized employee performance during the 2008 economic crisis. The research revealed a dual impact of the crisis: the threat of job loss resulted in a decline in "organizational citizenship behaviors," actions that surpass regular duties. However, core job performance, directly tied to job descriptions and tasks, remained stable or slightly improved. This suggests that while employees may retract from extra-role behaviors during a crisis, they often sustain or enhance their performance on essential job tasks, possibly as a survival mechanism. Another study, conducted in the aftermath of the Fukushima disaster in Japan by Alshoaibi (2020), explored how a natural catastrophe could affect the workplace. Intriguingly, they discovered that post-disaster social support, in the form of psychological first aid and clear crisis communication, positively contributed to employee well-being and subsequently increased performance. Employees who received sufficient social support reported fewer health complaints and higher productivity, underscoring the importance of crisis management efforts focused on maintaining employee well-being.

Zooming in on the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on employee performance in China, several studies provide a nuanced perspective. Bi et al. (2020) conducted research in the manufacturing sectors, revealing a significant decline in productivity during the COVID-19 pandemic in China. Industries necessitating substantial human interaction and physical presence, characteristics often found in the clothing industry, were particularly affected. Although direct research on the clothing sector is lacking, the findings from this study can serve as a useful proxy. The structural similarities between various manufacturing sectors offer a valuable reference point for assessing the likely impacts on employee performance within the clothing industry, especially during crisis periods. A study by Seidu et al. (2023) focused on the textile industry, uncovering that supply chain disruptions during the pandemic heightened stress among employees, subsequently leading to decreased performance. Given the close interplay between the textile and clothing industries, especially regarding supply chain mechanics, this study provides valuable insights. Supply chain issues not only impact material availability but also induce job-related stress, contributing to emotional exhaustion

and adversely affecting overall employee performance. The findings from this study could apply to the clothing industry, considering their operational and structural similarities.

Leadership and Leadership Styles

Leadership plays a pivotal role in our social life, significantly impacting performance (Afsar et al., 2019). Leaders serve as key figures in organizations, responsible for stimulating, recognizing, and motivating their followers to achieve desired results. Leadership stands out as one of the most extensively researched topics in the fields of management, organizational behavior, and organizational psychology, evidenced by the vast literature produced since its inception. Another unmistakable fact is that within every organization, multiple individuals assume leadership roles, influencing the direction and future of the organization. Despite the extensive literature, research in leadership tends to revolve around four general leadership theory paradigms: behavioral leadership theory, trait theory, contingency leadership theory, and integrative leadership theory (Cakir, 2020). These theories constitute the fundamental framework employed by researchers to gain a better understanding, explain, and anticipate various aspects of leadership.

Leadership styles have been a subject of comprehensive research over the years, and numerous frameworks have been established to identify and categorize them. One of the most universally acknowledged is Lewin's leadership style framework, which originally delineates three primary styles such as autocratic, democratic, and laissez-faire (Boukis et al., 2020). Each style presents a distinct approach to decision-making, team involvement, and task execution, impacting organizational culture and performance in unique ways. Another leadership style framework that has garnered significant scholarly and practical interest is the transformational versus transactional leadership model, which presents two contrasting approaches to leading teams (Rathi et al., 2021). Based on these two famous framework and combine the actual situation of Chinese enterprise, this study is mainly focus on autocratic leadership style, democratic leadership style, transformational leadership style and transactional style. Moreover, the effects of each leadership style on employee performance during crisis will be discussed further.

Autocratic Leadership Style

Autocratic leadership is a framework in which the leader retains sole decision-making authority, offering clear and direct instructions to subordinates without soliciting feedback or collaboration (Pounder, 2022). This leadership style has notable merits, especially in situations demanding swift and decisive actions. Autocratic leadership, often perceived as an authoritarian style, aligns closely with the concept of power distance prevalent in Chinese culture. Power distance refers to the degree to which less powerful members of organizations or societies accept the unequal distribution of power (Pounder, 2022). Chinese organizations often lean towards autocratic leadership because employees generally accept and respect a clear hierarchy and centralized decision-making process.

One of its significant advantages is the expedited decision-making process. In time-sensitive situations, such as a crisis, autocratic leadership allows organizations to respond promptly and efficiently, minimizing potential risks or losses. The strength of autocratic leadership in crises is further evidenced by its effectiveness in providing streamlined communication and coordination. When faced with urgent or complex scenarios, the need for a single point of authority becomes crucial in executing strategies effectively. This unifying element of autocratic leadership can be pivotal in maintaining a team focus and coherence during

tumultuous periods, ensuring everyone is aligned with the central action plan. In a crisis, autocratic leadership offers the benefit of centralized decision-making, which can be pivotal for organizations grappling with uncertainty. Duan et al. (2022) endorse the use of autocratic leadership as a tool for fostering high-performance work dynamics in challenging situations. During crisis periods marked by turbulence and rapid changes, the unambiguous directions set forth by an autocratic leader serve as a stable guiding light. This clarity can be particularly helpful for employees navigating the murky waters of a crisis, providing the certainty and direction needed to perform their roles effectively. Contrary to focusing solely on potential negative outcomes, it is valuable to recognize the merits of an autocratic style in specific contexts. While Jiang et al. (2017) highlight some disadvantages of this leadership style, it is worth mentioning that in circumstances where immediate, uncompromised action is required, the autocratic leader's ability to make quick decisions without the need for group consensus can be invaluable. Such rapid decision-making can prove to be a vital asset in high-stakes, fast-moving crisis scenarios.

Democratic Leadership Style
Democratic or collaborative leaders include their team members in the decision-making process, thereby nurturing a culture of collaboration, shared responsibility, and mutual respect (Ballangrud & Aas, 2022). By involving employees in decisions that affect them and their work, democratic leaders not only empower individuals but also tap into a wider array of perspectives and ideas, thereby enriching the problem-solving process. The leadership styles prevalent in China are profoundly influenced by its cultural and societal context, with traditional values of inclusion, authenticity, and balance playing a significant role. Inclusive leadership, characterized by the principles of inclusivity and equality, has deep roots in traditional Chinese culture (Fries, 2021). This leadership style is person-centered, fair, and equitable, aligning with the expectations of China's new generation workforce.

During times of crisis, the democratic leadership style provides a robust framework for fostering collaboration, equality, and active participation among team members. According to Johnson et al. (2019), this leadership style significantly encourages employees to engage in decision-making processes, positively impacting their performance. One of the most salient advantages of democratic leadership in crisis scenarios is the sense of ownership and accountability it instills within the workforce. This heightened sense of responsibility leads to intrinsic motivation, contributing constructively to overcoming the crisis, resulting in increased levels of employee engagement and output. Research by Wijayati et al. (2020) further substantiates that democratic leadership is particularly effective in bolstering creativity and innovation, critical attributes for problem-solving in crises. By promoting an environment where ideas are freely shared and discussed, democratic leaders cultivate fertile ground for novel solutions to emerge. Consequently, organizations led by democratic leaders often demonstrate heightened adaptability and resilience, crucial for navigating the complexities and uncertainties introduced by crises. Overall, democratic leadership emerges as an invaluable asset in times of crisis, elevating employee performance, engagement, and creative problem-solving. Democratic leadership proves to be a potent model for enhancing organizational performance, especially when synergized with contingent incentives. According to Hilton et al. (2021), there exists a significant positive correlation between democratic leadership and worker productivity, which is further amplified when coupled with contingent incentives. These incentives, whether financial or otherwise, serve as powerful catalysts that magnify the effects of democratic leadership on organizational effectiveness.

Moreover, democratic leadership is highly conducive to fostering organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) among employees, as stated by Abdullahi et al. (2020). The research specifies that democratic leadership positively impacts OCB in small and medium enterprises (SMEs), especially when the leader displays high emotional intelligence. Though transformational leadership may exert a stronger influence on OCB, democratic leadership is not to be overlooked, as its influence is significant and becomes more potent when the leader's emotional intelligence is high. Hence, in the face of crisis, democratic leadership, supplemented by contingent incentives and high emotional intelligence, can significantly boost both organizational effectiveness and citizenship behavior, creating a resilient and adaptive work environment.

Transformational Leadership Style
Transformational leaders stand out for their ability to inspire and invigorate their teams. They are visionaries who look toward the future and are adept at painting a compelling picture of what could be, thereby inspiring their team members to reach for higher levels of achievement (Afsar & Umrani, 2019). These leaders also cultivate an environment that encourages creativity and innovation, often challenging the status quo and encouraging team members to think outside the box. Furthermore, transformational leaders prioritize building strong, authentic relationships with their team members, creating a culture of trust and mutual respect. They are generally skillful at identifying individual strengths and weaknesses, which enables them to tailor their approach to getting the best out of each team member. Transformational leadership, characterized by the ability to inspire and motivate employees towards a shared vision, is gaining recognition in China's corporate landscape (Burns, 2021). This style emphasizes interpersonal harmony and moral modeling, resonating with the Confucian emphasis on harmony, morality, and collectivism (Li, 2018). Transformational leaders can cultivate a sense of unity, boost morale, and drive innovative thinking within the workforce, factors that are increasingly important in today's dynamic global market.

In the realm of crisis management, transformational leadership emerges as an especially effective style, adept at mobilizing teams and organizations toward extraordinary outcomes. According to Burns (2021), transformational leaders excel at uplifting followers beyond their self-interests, inspiring them to achieve remarkable goals. These leaders not only present a compelling vision of the future but also succeed in making it relatable and aspirational for their followers. This vision serves as an emotional anchor, providing stability and direction during tumultuous times, and ultimately empowering employees to rise to challenges with resilience and adaptability. In crises, the unique capability of transformational leaders to foster a culture of critical and innovative thinking becomes a cornerstone for problem-solving and adaptability. Musa et al. (2018) confirmed the strong correlation between transformational leadership and enhanced employee performance, positioning it as a particularly appropriate leadership model for modern organizations. The power of transformational leaders to instill confidence and enthusiasm among their teams not only stimulates proactive behavior but also nurtures an environment primed for learning and creativity. The transformational leader catalyzes navigating the team through crises by engaging deeply with employees, offering much-needed emotional support, and encouraging innovative solutions to unprecedented challenges (Musa et al., 2018). This leadership style thus offers a multifaceted approach to crisis management, effectively leading the organization toward resilience and long-term success. In the context of crisis management, transformational leadership positively influences employee performance and behavior,

offering a nuanced approach beyond transactional leadership methods. According to Nasra & Arar (2020), transformational leadership has a unique impact on how employees perceive their roles and responsibilities, both as workers and as corporate citizens. Their research indicates that employees are more likely to excel in their jobs when they perceive their leadership to be transformational, emphasizing the leadership style's indirect but potent influence on corporate citizenship behavior through shaping occupational perspectives. Similarly, Crede et al. (2019) provide a comprehensive meta-analysis examining how cultural values and practices intersect with transformational leadership to influence worker performance. Surveying data from approximately 57,000 individuals across 34 countries, the authors found that cultural practices could moderate the relationship between transformational leadership and employee performance. Notably, in cultures less inherently aligned with transformational leadership, the positive impact of such a leadership style on worker performance was found to be even more significant. These findings reinforce the argument for the adaptive and universally applicable nature of transformational leadership, particularly in times of crisis when effective leadership becomes critically important for navigating challenges and maintaining organizational stability.

Transactional Leadership Style
Transactional leadership, as defined by D'Souza et al. (2022), is a structured management approach that prioritizes adherence to established rules and procedures while maintaining the status quo. This leadership style emphasizes setting clear performance and objective standards. When these standards are met, employees are recognized and rewarded, but failure to meet them results in penalties. Such leadership is particularly beneficial in settings that require strict hierarchies and clear directives, like industrial setups and military environments. The success of transactional leadership hinges on setting explicit expectations and reinforcing them through a system of rewards and consequences. For example, a proficient transactional leader might delineate precise productivity levels and, upon achievement, reward employees with promotions or raises. Conversely, those falling short may face repercussions such as pay cuts or demotions. One of the significant advantages of transactional leadership is its potential to motivate team members effectively. By aligning rewards and penalties with specific actions and their outcomes, employees become more driven to achieve set objectives and optimize their performance (Turunc et al., 2018). This direct correlation can lead to heightened productivity and efficiency, coupled with an overall enhancement in job quality. However, while the structured nature of transactional leadership can prove beneficial in many scenarios, it's essential to discern its appropriateness for every organization or employee. In times of crisis, the transactional leadership style presents a robust framework for ensuring stability and control, backed by empirical findings. Hidayat et al. (2017) demonstrated that transactional leadership is predominantly utilized in government institutions in Bahrain. Their study accounted for diverse demographics, highlighting its widespread adaptability and applicability irrespective of age or years of experience in the workforce. These findings underscore the efficacy of transactional leadership in structured, high-stakes environments, where quick, error-free decisions are paramount, especially during a crisis.

Methods
After review the literatures, most of the researches were fundamentally correlational, which meant they sought to examine the relationships between the study's key variables as per the

theoretical framework established (Cooper & Schindler, 2008). In particular, past studies prefer to adopted quantitative research design, which is advantageous in providing measurable, numerical data that can be statistically analyzed for patterns and trends. The main purpose was to investigate the relationship between the predictor variable such as leadership styles and outcome variable employee performance.

Some of the researches were executed in a non-contrived setting, which refers to the employees' actual work environment. This setting choice was crucial to ensure the minimal influence of the researcher on the participants' behaviors, thereby yielding more natural and authentic data reflecting real-world interactions of the variables under study. By conducting the research in such an environment, the findings of the study are expected to exhibit high external validity, meaning that they can be generalized to other similar environments or situations.

The reason for using a quantitative research method in the study is that it allows for the collection of large amounts of numerical data that can be analyzed using statistical techniques. According to Creswell (2014), quantitative research is often used when the aim is to "measure variables, test hypotheses, and examine cause-and-effect relationships". Another reason for using a quantitative research method is that it provides a standardized approach to data collection and analysis. This can help to ensure the validity and reliability of the study's findings. According to Babbie (2016), quantitative research methods involve "standardized instruments, structured data collection procedures, and statistical analysis". This approach can help to minimize bias and increase the accuracy of the study's results.

Discussion of Findings

By reviewing the past studies, they examined the impact of leadership styles on employee performance during crisis situation. Some studies found that organizations with autocratic leadership had lower rates of unscheduled leaves and lead to increased productivity due to streamlined decision-making (Williams et al. 2022). Transformational leaders often succeed in creating an engaged and committed workforce, which directly enhanced employee performance (Lee et al. 2020). Various studies suggest that democratic leadership has a considerable impact on the quality of work. Democratic leaders who encourage employee participation generally see an increase in the quality of work, due to greater employee investment in outcomes.They found that democratic leadership leads to higher levels of job satisfaction, which is a significant predictor of performance (Bennett et al. 2019). Moreover, Anderson et al. (2019) suggest that the transactional approach, characterized by its reward and punishment system, can be effective in improving employee performance. Employees are often motivated by tangible benefits, thus ensuring their consistent performance.

However, most of the studies indicated that each leadership style (autocratic, democratic, transformational and transactional) has positive impact on employee performance during crisis situation, but there are some researchers have different views on this issue. For example, a study by Rodriguez et al. (2021) suggested that while autocratic leadership might produce high-quality results in the short term, it could hamper innovation and adaptability, which are crucial for sustaining quality in rapidly evolving industries. Similarly, Lewis et al. (2022) highlighted that the quality of work can suffer in complex proble solving scenarios where autocratic leaders may not have the necessary breadth of expertise to make informed decisions. These divergent views suggest that the relationship between autocratic leadership and quality of work is complex and may vary depending on the context. Lee et al. (2021) noting that in high-stakes or fast-paced environments, democratic decision-making could

slow down processes. Abdullahi et al. (2020) suggests that the positive impacts of democratic leadership on work quality could be negated in settings where quick, authoritative decisions are required for maintaining work quality. Moreover, Akhigbe et al. (2014) suggest that the transactional style, while potentially boosting immediate productivity, might not support sustained long-term productivity, as it does not inherently focus on employee growth or innovation.

Conclusion

The main purpose of this study is to explore the influence of leadership styles on the relationship between employee performance during crisis situation. In most cases, the findings show that each leadership style (autocratic, democratic, transformational, transactional) had a positive influence in affecting employee performance. The results make contributions to the literature on leadership styles such as autocratic leadership style, democratic leadership style, transformational leadership style and transactional leadership style.

This study has contributes by prompting the importance of each leadership style that would be an advantage for companies to enhance employees performance during crisis situation. The implications of study findings are helpful for organization and leaders. It is suggested that based on findings organization and leaders may reconsider their human resource plan in order to obtain maximum positive performance from employees. Therefore, it serves as reference for all stakeholders to have deeper knowledge on leadership and its relevance that constitutes fundamental framework for organizational prosperity. As such, it is hoped that this study may give a preliminary insight and understanding about the importance of leadership styles towards employee performance in organizations during crisis situation.

On the other hand, the theoretical significance of the research contributes to the broader academic discourse in several key ways. One of the key significance is that this study expands upon existing literature by focusing on several different leadership styles and their impacts on various facets of employee performance during a crisis situation. This multi-dimensional approach is invaluable for presenting a more comprehensive understanding of leadership dynamics during crises. Moreover, the research is significant, carried out during the unprecedented circumstances of the Covid-19 pandemic. Many conventional theories of leadership and employee performance were put to the test during this period. Hence, the study offers a rare glimpse into how varying leadership styles function, succeed, or falter during crisis situations. This can serve as a critical touchstone for future research dealing with leadership during crises, pandemics, or other disruptive events.

Subsequently, the research's focus on China adds a geographical lens that is often underrepresented in dominant, largely Western-centric, leadership studies. Cultural, social, and economic conditions can influence the effectiveness of leadership styles, and China's unique landscape offers an excellent context to examine these dynamics. In addition, by setting clear and diversified objectives, the study not only aims to describe and analyze but also to generate practical, actionable insights for organizational leaders. It serves as a framework that managers and policymakers can refer to for making informed decisions on leadership strategies during crises, thereby increasing its applicability beyond academic circles into the realm of practical implementation.

In conclusion, this research could benefit the society, business, as well as the country's economy from both academic and practical perspectives, by providing a good understanding on how leadership style effect employee performance during crisis situation.

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