

Leadership Styles and Change Readiness: Improving Employee Performance During the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic necessitated significant organizational changes, particularly in higher education institutions in Indonesia, leading to a transition to distance learning and remote working arrangements. This study examined the effects of different leadership styles, i.e., authoritarian, democratic, and laissez-faire, on employee performance, focusing on the mediating role of change readiness. Data were collected from 42 business schools in Yogyakarta using a survey method, and the results were analyzed using the SmartPLS 3.0 application. The results indicate that while authoritarian leadership positively affects change readiness, it does not significantly improve employee performance. Conversely, democratic leadership positively influences both change readiness and employee performance. Laissez-faire leadership has a positive effect on change readiness but does not significantly improve employee performance. The study concludes that change readiness significantly mediates the relationship between leadership styles and employee performance, highlighting the importance of adaptive leadership in managing organizational change during the pandemic.

Keywords: Authoritarian Leadership, Democratic Leadership, Laissez-Faire Leadership, Change Readiness, Employee Performance

Gaya Kepemimpinan dan Kesiapan Perubahan: Meningkatkan Kinerja Pegawai di Masa Pandemi Covid-19

Abstrak

Pandemi COVID-19 memerlukan perubahan organisasi yang signifikan, khususnya di institusi pendidikan tinggi di Indonesia, yang mengarah pada transisi ke pembelajaran jarak jauh dan pengaturan bekerja dari rumah. Penelitian ini mengkaji dampak berbagai gaya kepemimpinan otoriter, demokratis, dan laissez-faire terhadap kinerja karyawan, dengan fokus pada peran mediasi kesiapan untuk berubah. Data dikumpulkan dari 42 sekolah bisnis di Yogyakarta dengan menggunakan metode survei, dan hasilnya dianalisis melalui aplikasi SmartPLS 3.0. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa meskipun kepemimpinan otoriter berpengaruh positif terhadap kesiapan untuk berubah, hal ini tidak meningkatkan kinerja karyawan secara signifikan. Sebaliknya, kepemimpinan demokratis berpengaruh positif terhadap kesiapan berubah dan kinerja karyawan. Kepemimpinan laissez-faire menunjukkan dampak positif terhadap kesiapan berubah namun tidak meningkatkan kinerja pegawai secara signifikan. Studi ini menyimpulkan bahwa kesiapan untuk berubah secara signifikan memediasi hubungan antara gaya kepemimpinan dan kinerja karyawan, sehingga menyoroti pentingnya kepemimpinan yang mampu beradaptasi dalam menavigasi perubahan organisasi selama pandemi.

Kata kunci: Kepemimpinan Otoriter, Kepemimpinan Demokratis, Kepemimpinan Laissez-Faire, Readiness to Change, Kinerja Karyawan

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INTRODUCTION

A novel type of coronavirus has been identified in Wuhan, Hubei Province, China, in 2019. The disease caused by the virus is called Coronavirus Disease 2019, commonly abbreviated as COVID-19. Since its identification, COVID-19 has spread globally, leading to its classification as a pandemic. In response to the pandemic, the Indonesian government implemented several measures to contain the spread of the virus. One such measure was the issuance of Circular Letter No. 1 of 2020 by the Directorate of Higher Education of the Ministry of Education and Culture (Kemendikbud), which aimed to prevent the spread of COVID-19 within higher education institutions. This directive instructed universities to switch to distance learning and advised students to study from home. As a result, at least 67 universities in Yogyakarta switched to home-based learning to mitigate the spread of the virus (Medcom.id, 2020). Teaching and learning activities (KBM) were conducted remotely, requiring supervising by teachers, lecturers, and parents (Zaharah, Kirilova, & Windarti, 2020).

In addition to distance learning for students, universities also adapted by introducing remote working for their staff. Organizations, which always face changes, were forced by the pandemic to rapidly adopt changes that reflected individual tendencies to approve, accept, and adopt plans to survive such conditions. The success, and even survival, of organizations during the COVID-19 pandemic depended heavily on the adaptability of their employees (Nadkarni & Herrmann, 2010). Pan and Sun (2018) emphasized that organizations must embrace openness in order to change and flexibility to maintain a sustainable competitive advantage (Katsaros & Tsirikas, 2020). Madsen et al. (2005) described readiness as a cognitive indicator of behavior that can either support or hinder change efforts (Muhdin, 2018). Berneth (2004) further explained that employee readiness for change is critical to the success of business transformations. It is the key for organizations seeking to successfully adapt to changing times. Without change readiness, employees may feel overwhelmed by the pace of organizational change. Internal barriers to change readiness include introversion, a tendency to give up easily, and a reluctance to learn, while external barriers include poor leadership, inadequate education and training, lack of material support, and restrictive regulations (Astono & Rahayuningsih, 2018). An organization cannot succeed without changing its individuals or employees (Muhdin, 2018).

Several studies have examined the role of leadership in fostering employee readiness for change. Kirrane, Lennon, & Fu (2016) emphasized that leadership determines the direction of the organization and influences strategic actions. O'Reilly et al. (2010) noted that leadership focuses employee attention on specific goals. Carpenter, Sanders, & Gregersen (2001) also emphasized that leadership influences the relationship between readiness for change and employee performance, which affects the overall performance of the organization. Different leadership style have unique effects on employee performance. Tjiptono (2001) defined leadership style as the way leaders interact with their subordinates. Authoritarian leadership centralizes power in the leader, who makes decisions without input from employees (Hasibuan & Melayu, 2007). Democratic leadership, on the other

hand, values employees as key organizational factors and positively influences employee performance by involving them in decision-making processes (Yulia & Mukzam, 2017; Prinhandaka, Rohman, & Wijaya, 2022). Laissez-faire leadership allows employees to make decisions independently, which can improve their performance (Rivai, 2004; Yulia & Mukzam, 2017). This study focuses on the influence of authoritarian, democratic, and laissez-faire leadership styles on employee performance, with readiness for change serving as a mediating factor.

Authoritarian Leadership

Yukl (2004) posited that leadership emerges from the relationship between leaders and followers within each work unit. This relationship also indirectly influences employee behavior, including authoritarian leadership. Wang (2019) suggested that authoritarian leadership restricts employees' freedom to perform their duties, which leads to feelings of demoralization and stifled creativity, thus affecting performance and the willingness to embrace change. This notion is supported by Du et al. (2020), who argue that employees under authoritarianism perceive limited job mobility and are less likely to actively engage in organizational change.

Democratic Leadership

Democratic leadership, also known as participative leadership, encourages employee involvement in decision-making processes. Leaders in this leadership style work with employees to identify and solve problems, leading to increased productivity, satisfaction, engagement, and commitment (Sharma and Singh, 2013). Pinnington and Tourish (2009) cautioned that democratic leadership must maintain a high level of employee participation to avoid creating more leaders than followers. This fosters a sense of challenge and trust among employees, which enhances their creativity and ultimately improves employee performance beyond expectations (Prajogo, 2013).

Laissez-Faire Leadership

Laissez-faire leadership allows group members complete autonomy in determining their own work methods. Leaders in this style of leadership refrain from participating in decision making and rarely offer opinions. This approach can be successful when group members are highly motivated and skilled. Maswita (2019) found a positive correlation between laissez-faire leadership and employee performance, indicating that performance improves when employees are given freedom in their responsibilities. Yulia and Mukzam (2017) suggested that subordinates under laissez-faire leadership are perceived as independent in all aspects, which fosters a sense of challenge and trust among employees.

Readiness to Change

Readiness to change is essential to reduce resistance and promote supportive behaviors among employees. Kondakci (2013) emphasized that readiness and resistance are

not inherently opposing forces but can coexist constructively to facilitate employee acceptance of change. Katsaros & Tsirikas (2020) emphasized the significant influence of leadership style on readiness to change, indicating that leadership influences employee readiness to change, which in turn influences performance.

Employee Performance

Leadership style significantly influences employee performance. Siswanto and Hamid (2017) found that leadership style strongly contributes to the performance of employee performance, while Mangundjaya (2013) noted that work motivation, which is influenced by leadership style, affects employee performance. Employee performance is the abilities, skills, and work results demonstrated by an employee in performing their duties and responsibilities at work. Employee performance can be measured by achieving predetermined targets, work productivity, quality of work results, and quality of work in a team (Yuniarti, et. al., 2021). Both studies suggest that leadership decisions and actions have a significant effect on employee performance.

- H1 : Authoritarian leadership positively and significantly affects change readiness.
- H2 : Democratic leadership positively and significantly affects change readiness.
- H3 : Laissez-faire leadership positively and significantly affects change readiness.
- H4 : Change readiness positively and significantly affects employee performance.
- H5 : Authoritarian leadership does not positively and significantly affect employee performance.
- H6 : Democratic leadership positively and significantly affects employee performance.
- H7 : Laissez-faire leadership positively and significantly affects employee performance.
- H8 : Change readiness mediates the influence of democratic leadership on employee performance.
- H9 : Change readiness mediates the influence of laissez-faire leadership on employee performance.
- H10 : Change readiness mediates the influence of authoritarian leadership on employee performance.

Based on the theoretical framework, the research model is illustrated in Figure 1.

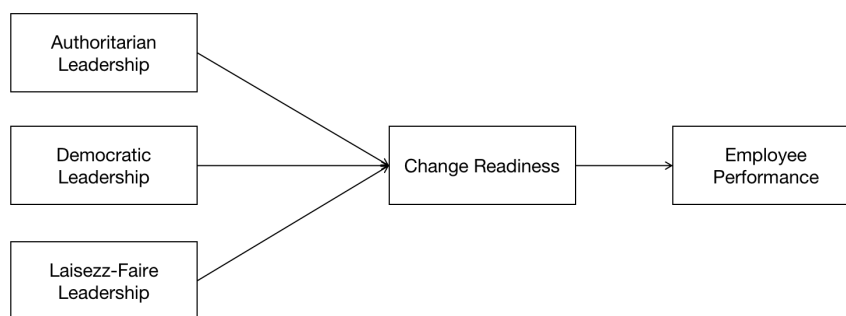


Figure 1. Research Model

METHOD

This study employed a confirmatory research design aimed at testing the influence of variables related to authoritarian leadership, democratic leadership, and laissez-faire leadership on employee performance, with readiness to change as the mediating factor. The study setting was field research. Regarding time dimension, the study adopts a cross-sectional research design in which data were collected through questionnaires at a single point in time, and the survey design is utilized as the primary data collection technique to obtain real-time information. This study's research instruments were adapted from previous researchers' original instruments. Responses to questions were measured using a five-point ordinal scale, ranging from strongly agree (5 points) to strongly disagree (1 point) (Sekaran, 2006).

Population and Sample

The population of the study comprised higher education institutions in Yogyakarta. Non-probability purposive sampling was employed as the sampling technique, which does not give equal opportunity to each variable or member of the population to be selected as a sample (Sekaran, 2006). The sample criteria include employees from 42 business schools in Yogyakarta.

Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis testing was conducted to evaluate the acceptance or rejection of hypotheses. In this study, hypotheses were tested using structural equation modeling (SEM) software SmartPLS 3.0. The analysis involved examining the paths within the model constructed for the study. The Partial Least Squares (PLS) model, which employs a variance-based approach, was used for the research employing a confirmatory structural model (Algifari et al., 2021).

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

Characteristics of Respondents

The characteristics of the respondents consisted of gender, age, length of service, and educational attainment. Table 1 provides an overview of the characteristics of the respondents, including gender, age, length of service, and education. The sample consisted of 370 respondents, with 54% male and 46% female. In terms of age distribution, 4% were between 20 and 25 years old, 14% were between 25 and 30 years old, 24% were between 30 and 35 years old, 14% were between 35 and 40 years old, and 44% were over 40 years old. In terms of length of service, 5% had worked 0 to 2 years, 12% had worked 2 to 5 years, 27% had worked 5 to 10 years, and 55% had worked more than 10 years. Furthermore, in terms of educational attainment, 32% completed high school or equivalent, 25% completed a three-year associate degree or applied bachelor's program, and 41% attained a bachelor's degree (S1).

Table 1. *Characteristics of Respondents*

Characteristic	Group	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Man	200	54%
	Woman	170	46%
	Total	370	100%
Age	20-25 years	15	4%
	>25-30 years	50	14%
	>30-35 years	90	24%
	>35-40 years	50	14%
	>40 years	165	44%
	Total	370	100%
Length of service	0-2	20	5%
	>2-5	45	12%
	>5-10	100	27%
	>10	205	55%
	Total	370	100*
Educational attainment	High school diploma or equivalent	120	32%
	Three-year associate degree or applied bachelor's degree	95	25%
	Bachelor's degree	155	41%
	Total	370	100*

Table 2. *Reliability and Validity Test Results*

No.	Var	Indicators	Outer Loadings	P-Value	AVE	Cronbach's alpha	Validity	Reliability
1	Car	Oto1	0.724	<0.001	0.588	0.824	valid	reliable
		Oto2	0.828	<0.001				
		Oto3	0.741	<0.001				
		Oto4	0.780	<0.001				
		Oto5	0.757	<0.001				
3	Dem	D1	0.779	<0.001	0.555	0.800	valid	reliable
		D2	0.741	<0.001				
		D3	0.802	<0.001				
		D4	0.714	<0.001				
		D5	0.780	<0.001				
4	Laf	LF1	0.771	<0.001	0.605	0.769	valid	reliable
		LF2	0.796	<0.001				
		LF3	0.853	<0.001				
5	Rec	RE1	0.820	<0.001	0.684	0.769	valid	reliable
		RE2	0.810	<0.001				
		RE3	0.850	<0.001				
	KK	KK1	0.809	<0.001	0.608	0.788	valid	reliable
		KK2	0.773	<0.001				
		KK3	0.787	<0.001				
		KK4	0.748	<0.001				

The results in Table 2 show that the questionnaire instruments met the requirements of the reliability test, with Cronbach's alpha coefficients all above 0.5. Additionally, the validity test confirmed that each indicator was consistent with the theories used to define the constructs (Hartono, 2008). The calculations in Table 2 indicated that each outer loading value was greater than 0.7, with a p-value of less than 0.001 and an AVE value greater than 0.5. Therefore, the criteria for convergent validity tests were met.

Discussion

The purpose of hypothesis testing is to prove the truth of the conjecture or hypothesis of the study. The correlation results between the constructs are measured by examining the path coefficients and their level of significance which is then compared to the research hypothesis included in the development of the hypothesis. The level of significance used in this study was 5%.

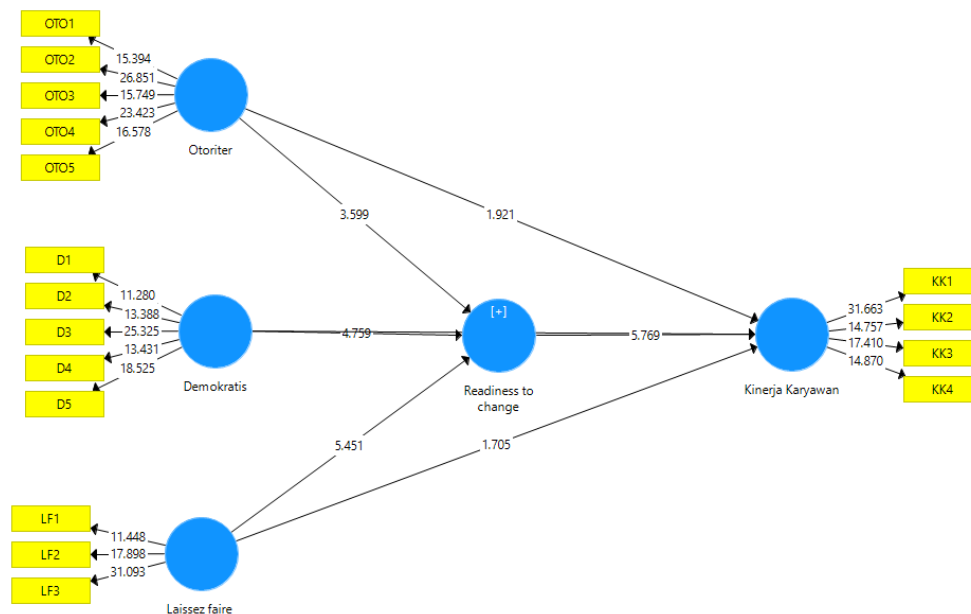


Figure 1. SmartPLS Test Results

Authoritarian Leadership Positively and Significantly Affects Change Readiness.

This study examined the influence of authoritarian leadership on change readiness. The results indicated a significant positive effect, with a p-value of 0.000, suggesting that authoritarian leadership promotes change readiness (original sample value: 0.258). This finding contradicts the initial hypothesis, which predicted a negative relationship between authoritarian leadership and change readiness. Contrary to expectations, authoritarian leadership has a positive impact on change readiness, although it may lead to less creative solutions, less openness to change, and limited readiness for organizational change (Katsaros & Tsirikas, 2020).

Table 4. *Hypothesis Test Results*

	Original Sample	Sample Mean	Standard Deviation	T-Statistics	P-Values
Authoritarian leadership -> Change readiness	0.258	0.265	0.072	3.599	0.000
Democratic leadership -> Change readiness	0.313	0.308	0.066	4.759	0.000
Laissez-faire leadership -> Change readiness	0.363	0.363	0.067	5.451	0.000
Readiness to change -> Employee Performance	0.470	0.457	0.081	5.769	0.000
Authoritarian leadership -> Employee Performance	0.137	0.146	0.071	1.921	0.055
Democratic leadership -> Employee Performance	0.216	0.220	0.067	3.242	0.001
Laissez faire leadership -> Employee Performance	0.098	0.102	0.057	3.705	0.089
Democratic leadership -> Readiness to Change -> Employee Performance	0.147	0.141	0.039	3.792	0.000
Laissez-faire leadership -> Readiness to change -> Employee Performance	0.170	0.167	0.046	3.715	0.000
Authoritarian leadership -> Readiness to change -> Employee Performance	0.121	0.120	0.037	3.261	0.001

Democratic Leadership Has a Positive and Significant Effect on Change Readiness.

This study also analyzed the effect of democratic leadership on change readiness. The results demonstrated a significant positive effect, with a p-value of 0.000 (original sample value: 0.313). This is consistent with the assertion that democratic leadership effectively promotes change readiness by leveraging the skills and talents of each team member, thereby fostering flexibility and adaptability (Katsaros & Tsirikas, 2020).

Laissez-Faire Leadership Has a Positive and Significant Effect on Change Readiness.

Furthermore, this study examined the influence of laissez-faire leadership on change readiness. The findings revealed a significant positive effect, with a p-value of 0.000 (original sample value: 0.363). Laissez-faire leadership empowers employees to be make decision independently, which increases their readiness for change. This leadership style allows employees the freedom to make decisions related to their responsibilities, fostering a culture of autonomy and innovation (Yulia & Mukzam, 2017; Katsaros & Tsirikas, 2020).

Change Readiness Has a Positive and Significant Effect on Employee Performance.

This study also examined the impact of change readiness on employee performance. The results indicated a significant positive effect with a p-value of 0.000 (original sample value: 0.470). Employees' readiness for change had a positive influence on their

performance by encouraging a proactive approach and adaptability. Transparency in leadership practices plays a dominant role in improving employee performance (Asbari et al., 2020).

Authoritarian Leadership Does not Have a Positive and Significant Effect on Employee Performance.

Regarding the effect of authoritarian leadership on employee performance, the results of this study showed a non-significant effect with a p-value of 0.055 (original sample value: 0.137). Authoritarian leadership, which is characterized by centralized decision making, did not significantly increase employee performance. This leadership style may inhibit employee initiative and lead to detrimental outcomes (Jamaludin, 2017; Apriyanto, 2018).

Democratic Leadership Has a Positive and Significant Effect on Employee Performance.

Conversely, democratic leadership exhibited a significant positive effect on employee performance, with a p-value of 0.055 (original sample value: 0.216). The democratic leadership style employed during the pandemic had a significant impact on employees, resulting in increased satisfaction among students and increased innovation and effectiveness in work practices (Djunaedi & Gunawan, 2018).

Laissez-Faire Leadership Has a Positive and Significant Effect on Employee Performance.

On the other hand, the effect of laissez-faire leadership on employee performance was not found to be significant with a p-value of 0.089 (original sample value: 0.098). This suggests that laissez-faire leadership, which is characterized by minimal guidance and autonomy for employees, did not have a significant impact on employee performance (Hardian et al., 2015).

Change Readiness Mediates the Influence of Democratic Leadership, Laissez-Faire Leadership, and Authoritarian Leadership on Employee Performance.

Finally, this study examined the mediating role of change readiness in the relationship between democratic leadership, laissez-faire leadership, authoritarian leadership, and employee performance. The results revealed a significant mediating effect of change readiness on the three leadership styles with p-values of 0.000. This underscores the importance of leadership in fostering employee readiness for change, which ultimately influences organizational performance (Katsaros & Tsirikas, 2020; Gaubatz Ensminger, 2017; Matthysen & Harris, 2018).

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, authoritarian leadership positively influences change readiness, although it may hinder creative solutions and organizational adaptability. Democratic leadership and laissez-faire leadership effectively promote change readiness and empower employees to

innovate and adapt to new challenges. While readiness for change positively impacts employee performance, authoritarian leadership does not significantly improve performance. Conversely, democratic leadership significantly improves employee performance, highlighting the importance of inclusive leadership styles in times of crisis. However, laissez-faire leadership has no significant effect on employee performance. The mediating role of change readiness underscores the critical link between leadership, employee readiness, and organizational performance. Nevertheless, this study acknowledges limitations, particularly in face-to-face interactions with respondents, which may affect the accuracy of the data.

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