



[A Meta-Analysis of the Relative Contribution of Leadership Styles to Followers' Mental Health.](#)

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Problem

It is well-established that different leadership styles are associated with followers' mental health. However, little is known about the relative strength of the relationship between different leadership styles and team mental health.

Aim

To comparing the incremental contribution of different leadership styles to the mental health of 'followers'. While the study uses the word 'follower' to describe the subject of the leaders influence, I will use the term 'team' to make the digest more relevant to the reader's context.

Methods

This study involved:

- A meta-analysis of 53 studies (with 23 distinct comparisons of leadership styles, yielding 217 correlations and a total of 93,470 participants)
- Used mixed meta-analytical regression models to examine six research hypotheses (box 1).
- Each hypothesis emerges from a literature review, which is on page 93 to 96 of the article.
- Mental health outcomes were classified as positive (i.e., well-being and psychological functioning) or negative (i.e. affective symptoms, burnout, stress, and health complaints).

Seven Leadership styles investigated:

- 1) Transformational leaders influence others through charisma, inspire through vision, and stimulate to think creatively. They consider the needs of each team member.
- 2) Transactional leaders structure rewards for those who satisfactorily carry out their job assignments, perform corrective actions and anticipate problems and plan.
- 3) Laissez-faire leaders are absent, inconsistent, avoidant and hesitate in taking action.
- 4) Task-oriented leaders focus on the assignment, and monitor performance based on tasks and goals.
- 5) Relationship-oriented leaders are respectful and supportive of team members and good at conflict-solving.
- 6) Destructive leaders are aggressive towards others, they divide teams by pitting members against encouragement each other and act in ways that oppose the interests of an organisation.
- 7) Leader member exchange (LMX) - Focuses on the individualized and dyadic relationship leaders develop with their followers. It is a theory that suggests leaders develop unique relationships with others based on their social exchanges and that the quality of these exchanges within a work environment influences employee outcomes.

Key findings

Strongest predictors of positive mental health outcomes:

- relations-oriented and task-oriented leadership, and to a lesser extent transformational leadership

Strongest predictors of negative aspects of mental health

- Destructive leadership, and to a lesser extent Laissez-faire leadership

Strongest predictor of overall mental health

- Transformational and destructive leadership

Other findings

- Negative was not stronger than positive in the leadership domain: Destructive leadership is on a par with the predictive power of transformational leadership.
- Other leadership constructs revealed an important incremental contribution (i.e the 'augmentation effect') to explained variance, especially laissez-faire leadership, relations- and task-oriented leadership, and LMX.
- The incremental contribution of transactional leadership, however, was very low, thereby providing additional support to the notion that there is strong conceptual overlap with transformational leadership.

Box 1: Results of hypotheses about the strength of the relationships between these leadership styles and team mental health.

Hypothesis	Result
<p># 1: Transformational leadership and LMX are expected to show the largest positive correlation effects with respect to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • overall mental health outcomes • positive mental health outcomes 	<p>This was compared with all other leadership constructs.</p> <p>The results indicated partial support for the first point but did not support the second point.</p>
<p># 2: Destructive leadership has the largest positive correlation effects associations with respect to negative mental health outcomes</p>	<p>This was compared with all other leadership constructs.</p> <p>The results do not support Hypothesis 1 (because the regression coefficient of destructive leadership in Model 3 is not statistically different from transformational leadership).</p>
<p># 3: The absolute values of the positive correlation effects of destructive leadership and negative mental health outcomes are larger than the absolute values of the associations of transformational leadership and LMX with respect to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • overall mental health outcomes • positive mental health outcomes 	<p>This was compared with the absolute values of the associations of transformational leadership and LMX.</p> <p>The results did not support Hypothesis 3.</p>
<p># 4: Transformational leadership and LMX each explain more variance in:</p>	<p>This was compared with transactional leadership and relations-oriented leadership.</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • overall mental health outcomes • positive mental health outcomes • negative mental health outcomes 	<p>The results <i>only</i> supported the second point about positive mental health outcomes.</p>
<p>Hypothesis 5: Transactional leadership explains a unique share of the variance in:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • overall mental health outcomes • positive mental health outcomes • negative mental health outcomes. 	<p>The results did not support Hypothesis 3.</p>
<p>Hypothesis 6: Laissez-faire, task-oriented, and relations-oriented leadership do not explain unique shares of variance in:</p> <p>Overall mental health outcomes Positive mental health outcomes Negative mental health outcomes</p>	<p>This was assessed after taking into account transformational leadership, transactional leadership, and LMX.</p> <p>The results did not support Hypothesis 3.</p>
<p>Summary of box 1 Hypothesis supported:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • #1, point one: Transformational leadership and LMX show the largest effect sizes for mental health. • #4, point two: Transformational leadership and LMX explain more variance in positive mental health outcomes than transactional and relations-oriented leadership. 	

Implications for practice

The result that various leadership styles uniquely contribute to team mental health has implications for:

1. Leadership development programs:

- To support team mental health, they should explicitly focus core behavioural characteristics associated with transformational leadership.
- Programs should also address the importance of balancing instrumental (task oriented) and psychosocial (trust and respect) needs in leader-team relationships.
- Should also explicitly improve understanding of the detrimental impact of destructive and laissez-faire leadership on team wellbeing. Also provide guidance on policies and strategies to hinder or restrain their occurrence.

2. Organisational leadership models:

To promote desirable forms of leadership organisations can develop prototypes of ideal versus negative leadership. Normative leadership models can build a:

- Prescriptive norm - of a visionary, considerate, motivating, trustful, and authentic leader.
- Proscriptive norm - to define unacceptable forms of leadership, such as a neglecting, absent, or aggressive leader.