



# The relationship between managers' leadership styles and emergency medical technicians' job satisfaction

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## RESEARCH

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## Abstract

### Background/Aims

Leadership plays a crucial role in many professions, especially in challenging positions such as emergency medical service jobs. The purpose of this study was to explore the relationship between managers' leadership styles and emergency medical technicians' job satisfaction.

### Method

This is a descriptive and cross-sectional study that was carried out in 2010. The research population included 21 managers and 87 emergency medical technicians working in 23 stations in Isfahan city, Iran. The main tools used for data accumulation were the Multiple Leadership Questionnaire for evaluating leadership styles and the Job Descriptive Index for measuring job satisfaction levels. Also, the Pearson correlation analysis test was used to evaluate the relationship between leadership style and job satisfaction.

### Results

Among both managers and technicians, the highest mean score related to the transformational management style, whereas the lowest mean score related to the laissez-faire management style. Moreover, a significant relationship ( $P < 0.01$ ) was found between the transformational and transactional leadership styles and job satisfaction.

However, no significant relationship was observed between the laissez-faire management style and job satisfaction.

### Conclusion

Considering the importance of job satisfaction in medical emergencies, it is recommended that health sector policy makers should provide the groundwork for implementing the transformational leadership style to enhance job satisfaction of the medical emergency staff.

### Key Words

Job satisfaction, leadership style, emergency medical technician

## Background

Leadership plays a crucial role in many professions, especially in challenging jobs such as emergency medical services (EMS).<sup>1</sup> The importance of leadership in health services has been emphasised by different researchers because there is abundant evidence that good management and leadership leads to better outcomes for patients.<sup>2,3</sup>

The National Medical Emergency and Accidents Management Centre, known as "Emergency 115" was established with the aim of protecting the public's health. The centre has a critical function in patient outcome, considering the huge difference that even a few fractions of seconds can make in saving people's lives. Emergency centre staff are faced with stressful conditions that make it difficult to work. This is especially true for staff who are more involved with severe crises and emergency operations.<sup>4,5</sup> The leader of the EMS must be able to influence different staff, making them capable of working in stressful conditions to save people's lives. Long working hours, the challenging nature of the care services, and working in adverse conditions are among the characteristics of this profession.<sup>6</sup>

Given such stressful conditions, the importance of job satisfaction is magnified in this profession. One of the factors relating to job satisfaction is leadership style;



according to research, some leadership styles are influential in increasing the job satisfaction of staff.<sup>7</sup>

Job satisfaction is a combination of internal and external motivations, including salary, working conditions, organisational climate, and leadership styles, amongst others.<sup>8,9</sup> Workplace satisfaction is an intuitive concept that most personnel consider as a desirable target, something which has been of interest to researchers for a long time.<sup>6</sup>

Differences in the definition of leadership are noticeable. Yet, one of the definitions that seemingly covers all others is that leadership must include the power to influence the attitudes, beliefs, behaviours, and emotions of others.<sup>10</sup> In general, several studies have referred to the relationship between leadership style (with any kind of style classification) and job satisfaction.<sup>11-13</sup> For instance, in his studies about the relationship between housemaid leadership style and job satisfaction, Upenieks found a high correlation between understanding housemaid leadership style behaviour and job satisfaction of intensive care unit nurses.<sup>14</sup> Also, Gayle's findings in surveying staff job satisfaction under the supervision of different managements with different leadership styles (authorisation style, participatory-supportive style, persuasive-discursive style, and imperative style) showed significant differences between job satisfaction levels of the staff in any of the leadership styles.<sup>15</sup> Similarly, in 2004, Sanaee studied the relationship between leadership styles and job satisfaction based on the same leadership styles and found that the highest level of job satisfaction was observed among those nurses under the management of supervisors with a persuasive-discursive leadership style. In other words, those head nurses who were using persuasive-discursive leadership style and who maintained quality relationships with their colleagues were able to enhance the job satisfaction level of their nurses and avoid any potential dissatisfaction.<sup>16</sup> In another study by Solomon, a positive relationship was observed between the supervisor's leadership features and job satisfaction of the personnel.<sup>17</sup>

According to Blankenship's findings, staff who perceive their management's leadership style as transformational and transactional enjoy higher job satisfaction.<sup>18</sup> It has also been observed that leaders who communicate more often with subordinates and ask for their input might engender a higher level of job satisfaction in the organisation. For instance, according to a study by Shojaee et al., those managers who shared and communicated their decisions with staff clearly or created a consulting environment at the

workplace were more successful in increasing the job satisfaction of their personnel.<sup>19</sup>

Transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire leadership styles are the most recent classifications of leadership styles. The initial concept of transformational leadership was first propounded by Burns in 1978; then, in 1985, Bernard M Bass suggested his new theory of "transformational leadership" based on Burns' insights.<sup>20</sup>

Bass defined "transformational leadership" as a process in which leaders and followers promote each other to a higher level of ethics and motivation. Such leaders try to show characteristics like creativity and ideals like freedom, justice, equality, peace, and humanity to the people and the environment around them. Transformational leadership can be implemented by everyone in any position within the organisation. The goal of transformational leadership is broader than meeting immediate needs. According to Burns, transformational leadership seeks to motivate followers.

Transactional leadership includes the provision of motives and incentives by the leader to attract the support of followers. The main goal of such leadership is to come to an agreement on a series of actions that meet the separate and immediate aims of both the leader and the followers. Transactional leadership is accompanied by features like immobility, self-attraction, and controlling the subordinates.<sup>20,21</sup> The transactional type of leadership would provide the followers with both positive and negative rewards based on their performance.

Laissez-faire leadership (also known as delegative, free reign, or non-communicational leadership) is a type of leadership style in which followers are given complete freedom to make decisions in the leader's absence. That is why it is considered the most passive type of leadership within the leadership spectrum.<sup>22</sup>

This study was undertaken with the aim of investigating the relationship between managers' leadership styles and emergency medical technicians' job satisfaction.

## Method

This study is a descriptive cross-sectional study, carried out during the year 2010. The research population included 21 managers and 87 emergency medical technicians working in Isfahan city, Iran, all of whom took part in this study. Due to the limited size of the statistical population in this research, the sample size consisted of all the individuals in our research population. The main tools for data collection were



the Multiple Leadership Questionnaire, which was used to evaluate the leadership styles, and the Job Descriptive Index, which was used to measure the job satisfaction level. These questionnaires have both been widely used in related research works to measure various aspects of leadership styles and job satisfaction.<sup>23-25</sup> The questionnaire was then formed by combining the questions related to the transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire leadership styles, and consisted of 36 questions measured according to a five-point Likert format, namely the “always”, “often”, “sometimes”, “seldom”, and “never” scales.

The questionnaire was prepared in two formats: one for the managers (to identify their leadership style in their own perspective) and one for the followers (to determine the leadership styles of their managers). After collection, data was analysed using the SPSS software.

In other words, the leadership style of managers was assessed in two ways:

1. Managers assessed their leadership style by answering the questionnaire prepared for managers.
2. The followers (technicians) assessed the leadership style of their managers

Then the student's t-test was applied to compare the leadership style of managers with the one determined by the followers (technicians working in the EMS).

The Pearson correlation analysis test was also used to evaluate the relationship between leadership style and job satisfaction.

## Results

With regard to demographics, most managers and technicians were in the 30–34 years (38.1%) and 25–29 years (34.5%) age groups, respectively. All the respondents were males, which is due to the fact that the emergency medical technicians and managers in the country are in most cases males. From an education major point of view, the highest frequency among the two groups belonged to the nursing major. The majority of managers (42.9%) had job experience of 5–9 years, whereas the majority of technicians (45.9%) had 1–4 years job experience (Table 1).

Before commencing any tests, normality was assessed using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test. Accordingly, the job satisfaction component (the sum of all job satisfaction aspects) and the leadership style (the mean of all the questionnaire questions) followed a normal distribution.

Both in the opinion of managers themselves, as well as in the opinion of the technicians (followers), the highest mean for the leadership style of managers belonged to the transformational management style, and the lowest mean was observed for the laissez-faire management style (Table 2).

The student's t-test results showed that there was a significant difference between transformational and laissez-faire management styles ( $p < 0.01$ ; Table 2).

Finally, correlation analysis was used to assess the relationship between job satisfaction and leadership styles. The results showed that the transformational leadership and transactional leadership styles had significant relationships with job satisfaction ( $p < 0.01$ ), but there was no significant relationship between the laissez-faire management style and job satisfaction (Table 3).

## Discussion

This study considered the relationship between leadership styles of managers and job satisfaction of emergency medical technicians. Based on the findings, among different leadership styles, only the transformational and transactional styles had a positive relationship with job satisfaction. Dahlen, who investigated the relationship between transformational leadership style and job satisfaction of nurses, concluded that there is a significant difference between leaders' and followers' perceptions about the leadership style of the managers; that is, nursing managers perceived their leadership style as mostly transformational, while subordinate nurses did not,<sup>26</sup> which is in agreement with the results from previous studies.

Shojaee et al also reached similar conclusions; they observed a significant statistical difference between the mean score of leaders and followers. That is, although managers perceived their leadership style as participatory and consulting, personnel did not agree and regarded their leadership style as despotic.<sup>19</sup> Management behaviour should be realistic, not superficial and false; for example, in cases of staff participation in decision making, such participation should be real and staff must not feel cheated by managers.<sup>27</sup>

In his 2009 research about the relationship between transformational leadership style and job satisfaction of 154 emergency medical technicians in the USA, Breaux found a significant relationship between transformational leadership and job satisfaction.<sup>1</sup> Similarly, Yang observed a significant relationship between transformational leadership style and job satisfaction.<sup>28</sup> Likewise, according



to Hu, transformational leadership had a significant relationship with job satisfaction.<sup>29</sup> In 2009, Handsome observed that job satisfaction increased by applying transformational leadership style and decreased by using laissez-faire leadership style.<sup>30</sup>

The results of the present study are in line with the findings by Long (2004) who found that nurses who worked under the supervision of managers with a laissez-faire leadership style had the lowest level of job satisfaction, whereas those working with transformational leaders felt the highest level of job satisfaction.<sup>31</sup> Other studies have also shown the existence of a positive relationship between transformational leadership and job satisfaction.<sup>32,33</sup>

In considering the relationship between leadership style and demographical features (such as age, educational major, and job experience), we reached the conclusion that none of them had any positive relationship with leadership style.

## Conclusion

Considering the importance of job satisfaction in different professions, especially in the challenging profession of medical emergency, identifying factors that influence job satisfaction is crucial. Since the results of the present study indicate the positive influential role of transformational leadership on creating higher job satisfaction among staff, it is recommended that health sector policy makers should provide the groundwork for implementing a transformational leadership style to enhance the job satisfaction of medical emergency staff. Leaders with such leadership criteria and capabilities should be preferentially selected to direct and guide people in medical emergency services.

Future studies could look into other sectors and other regions to broaden the findings for managers and policy-makers in the area.

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#### PEER REVIEW

Not commissioned. Externally peer reviewed

#### CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.



**Tables**

**Table 1: Frequency and percent of demographic parameters of participants**

Demographic parameters	Manager		Follower	
	Frequency	Per cent	Frequency	Percent
<b>Age (years)</b>				
20-24	1	4.8	12	13.8
25-29	3	14.3	30	34.5
30-34	8	38.1	16	18.4
35-39	6	28.6	19	21.8
40-44	3	14.3	7	8.0
45-50	0	0	3	3.4
<b>Education</b>				
Nurse	9	42.9	46	58.2
Emergency Medical Technician	3	14.3	8	10.1
Operating Room Technician	0	0	2	2.5
Anesthesia Technician	5	23.8	10	12.7
Rescue	0	0	12	15.2
Physician	2	9.5	0	0
Other	2	9.5	1	1.3
<b>Experience (years)</b>				
1-4	3	14.3	39	45.9
5-9	9	42.9	29	34.1
10-14	8	38.1	11	12.9
15-19	0	0	3	3.5
20-24	1	4.8	2	2.4
25-30	0	0	1	1.2





**Table 2: Comparison of mean scores of the leadership styles among managers and followers**

Leadership style	Manager		Follower		df	t
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
Transformational	4.28	0.30	3.65	0.82	90.26	5.72*
Transactional	3.61	0.38	3.45	0.68	54.98	1.51
Laissez-faire	1.98	0.67	2.60	0.91	106	-2.85†

\* P <0.01; † P <0.05.

**Table 3: Correlation between job satisfaction and the predictor variables (leadership styles)**

Variables	Mean	SD	Job satisfaction	Transformational leadership	Transactional leadership	Laissez-faire leadership
Job satisfaction	3.32	0.57	1			
Transformational leadership	3.77	0.79	0.443*	1		
Transactional leadership	3.48	0.63	0.392*	0.792*	1	
Laissez-faire leadership	2.46	0.90	-0.046	-0.273	-0.021	1

\* P <0.01.