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Responsible Leadership and Its Effects on Employee Well-Being

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Summary: Drawing upon the Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) theory, this study examines the influence of responsible leadership (RL) on employee' well-being. Furthermore, this research investigates trust in leader and organisational justice as underlying mechanisms, and transparent communication as boundary condition between RL and employee well-being. This research scrutinizes a moderated-mediation model to verify the hypotheses of the study. The empirical results based on 328 Thai employees reveals that there is a direct impact of RL on employee well-being encompassing all four dimensions, namely, psychological, social, workplace and subjective well-being. Additionally, this study uncovers the significance of RL in promoting employee well-being through the mechanism of trust in leader and organisational justice. However, transparent communication does not moderate effect between RL and trust in leader. Importantly, this study suggests that trust in leader and organisational justice are key processes through which RL influences employee well-being.

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INTRODUCTION

Employee well-being (EWB) has emerged as a significant topic of interest within organisations since the introduction of industrial revolution and globalisation (Jaiswal and Dyaram, 2019; Pradhan and Hati, 2019; Zhang et al., 2020). The nature of work and working conditions have been changed due to various factors such as technological transformation, world competitiveness, uncertainty and diversity in working environment (Kagermann et al., 2013). Employees are required to have a various set of skills and capabilities to be able to cope with the uncertainty business setting (Schwab and Sala-i-Martin, 2016). Changes may negatively lead to job insecurity and increase stress (Guest, 2017). Work-related stress may affect employee health and well-being due to the unmanageable work-overload and jobs demand (WHO, 2017). In the organisational context, it is the employer's duty to take good care and show respect for their employees as mean of establishing trust and bondage. Scholars have suggested that leadership approaches in organisations have substantial effects on employee well-being, and it includes job stress and life satisfaction (Fullagar and Kelloway, 2012; Rahimnia and Sharifirad, 2015).

Recently, the concept of human well-being has shifted from common extrinsic factors such as income and compensation toward more dynamic approaches such as the role of freedom, opportunities, and social inclusion (Hojman and Mirnda, 2018). Additionally, the relationship between leadership and perceived well-being have been confirmed in numerous studies, and several reviews have explored this association (Cummings et al., 2010; Gregersen, Kuhnert, Zimmer, & Nienhaus, 2011; Kuoppala, Lamminpää, Liira, & Vainio, 2008; Skakon, Nielsen, Borg, & Guzman, 2010). While extant literature sufficiently enhances our understanding on the important role that leadership plays in employee outcomes, this stream of research is still limited in several ways.

Empirically, few studies have addressed the influence of RL on employee well-being (He et al., 2019; Marques et al., 2021). The influence of RL can be observed from four major dimensions of employee well-being. These dimensions consist of psychological, social, workplace and subjective well-being. According to Pradhan and Hati (2019), these factors have not been specifically examined. The lack in studies has also been pinpointed by researchers such as Juniper et al. (2011) and Zhen et al. (2015). These researchers further cited that the study of employee well-being should embed both work-and non-work connected psychological experiences and health status (Zhen et al., 2015). Secondly, there is also limited research examining the relationship between trust and RL (Maak and Pless, 2009; Pless and Maak, 2011; Pless & Maak, 2021; Haque et al., 2019, 2020). As the role of responsible leader is to conduct trust and confidence among stakeholders, a complete understanding on RL should focus on how it builds trust especially on employee as a primary stakeholder. Noticeably, there is scarce research examining the relationship among RL, organisational justice, and employee well-being. Previous studies found that justice perceptions of leaders are strongly related to employee outcomes and organizational justice (Colquitt et al., 2001; Colquitt et al., 2013; Rupp et al., 2014). As a result, the impact of a responsible leader's behaviour on employee well-being through organisational justice need to be addressed. Last but not least, existing research has found transparent communication contributed to numerous positive employee outcomes including employee trust (Jiang & Luo, 2018; Rawlins, 2008). These studies revealed a direct positive relationship between transparent communication and employee trust toward

organisations. However, the interaction effects of RL and transparent communication on trust in leader remain under-researched.

This study contributes to the extend of the literature in four ways. First, this study examines all dimensions of employee well-being, namely, psychological, social, workplace and subjective well-being in relation to RL, which has not specifically been examined before. Second, this study is the first empirical study that uncovered the role of trust in leader and organisational justice in mediating the impact of RL on employee well-being. Third, the intention of this study was to shed light on RL in emerging market context which links RL and employee well-being in micro-small-medium size enterprises (MSMEs). Finally, beside its academic value, this study can be relevant for politics and leadership practices. From a political standpoint, a better understanding of the RL can lead to more targeted efforts in promoting high employee well-being which in turns supports national economic growth. Much in the same way, it can be valued to human resource management especially when well-being is cited not only for employees but also for organisations in term of employee performance and productivity. Subsequently, not only could organisations achieve their goals, employees are able to improve overall well-being. Thus, attributing to a win-win situation.

To investigate whether and how RL is related to employee well-being, this study draws on the Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) Theory by Graen and Uhl-Bien (1995). This study addresses the research question of the extent to which leaders adjust their RL behaviour based on specific situations such as crisis and uncertainty to strengthen employee' well-being. Hence, the research objectives are (1) to explore the relationship between RL and employee well-being, (2) to examine the mediating role of trust in leader and organizational justice between RL and employee well-being, and (3) to observe the moderating role of transparent communication in the relationship of RL and trust in leader.

The paper is structured as follows. First, an introduction of the theoretical background and hypotheses. Next on the methodology used and providing details of the data collection. The third step involves data analysis. This is followed by a discussion on the theoretical and practical implications. The final section states the study limitations, future directions and a conclusion.

Theoretical Background and Hypotheses

Leader-Member Exchange Theory

Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) Theory by Graen & Uhl-Bien (1995) focuses on the relationship between leaders and members. The core principle of the theory is the quality of dyadic relationships between leaders and followers (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995; Gerstner & Day, 1997; Liden et al., 1997). Leaders develop different types of exchange relationships with their followers which affect how they exchange attention, favors, and resources (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). LMX theory conceptualizes leadership as a process that is centered on the interactions between leaders and followers. Accordingly, leadership occurs when leaders and followers are able to develop high-quality relationships which are characterized by balance exchange, mutual royalty and support (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995; Uhl-Bien, 2006). The quality of the exchange relationship developed between leaders and followers applies to behaviour and emotions such as mutual trust, respect, royalty, support, openness and honesty (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995; Liden & Maslyn, 1998). According to Liden and Uhl-Bien (1995), followers with high-quality

relationships (ingroup members) are more motivated and receive greater attention and resources. They are less likely to experience role-related stress than the outgroup members (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). The low-quality relationship involves a transactional relationship which restricts employment contract (Liden and Maslyn, 1998). Researchers such as Graen and Uhl-Bien (1995), Graen and Scandura, (1987) and Wakabayashi and Graen (1984), stated that employees with high-quality exchanges with leaders (ingroup member) are more likely to be afforded additional developmental opportunities (e.g., promotion and challenging tasks) Employees would then be motivated to support the giving leader through high performance, more commitment and loyalty (Conger, 1999; Bernerth & Hirschfeld, 2016).

Responsible leadership and employee well-being

The study of Stahl and Sully de Luque (2014) offered a generalized definition of responsible leader behaviour as leaders' intentional actions and decisions in an ethical manner to multiple stakeholders (e.g. individual, group and society). The principle of "doing good" (behaviour that benefits the stakeholders of organisation) and "avoiding harm" (behaviour that avoid harmful consequences for the stakeholders) or "do less harm" and "do more good" behaviour (Longest, 2017) may generate employee psychological safety due to the ethical principles that guide responsible leaders behaviour. Yehuda (2018) and Mousa (2019) cited that responsible leaders were able to create suitable climate and positive working environment such as an inclusive diversity climate. These factors in turn generate higher quality climate in organisations. Additionally, responsible leader who generates an ethical climate in the organisation helps to reduce employee turnover and increase the efficiency of teamwork (Yasin et al., 2020). Moreover, RL bases on the foundation of ethics and democracy which considered for the inclusion of the other with fair and equal (Voegtlin 2011; Voegtlin et al. 2012). Therefore, the shaping of working environment enables the well-being of employees (Inceoglu et al, 2018). Furthermore, RL shows positive impact on employee well-being through daily communication which include consulting, coaching, supporting, and encouraging. This enables the development of mutually beneficial relationships between leaders and followers, which influence on employee well-being (Kim and Beehr, 2018; Gordon et al., 2019). As a result, positive employee experiences including happiness, hope, and self-respect leading to enhancement in the well-being of employees at work (Inceoglu et al, 2018; Kelloway et al., 2013).

Drawing from LMX theory which predicts that in higher LMX quality relationships, leaders provide their followers with helpful resources for their work (i.e. support, opportunity, mentoring). As a result, the affiliation with the ingroup member is related to employee feeling of being accepted, valued, and motivated (Gordon et al., 2019; Bernerth & Hirschfeld, 2016). These beneficial consequences of high LMX relationship develop employee well-being at work. Building on this, there is also a probability that RL could support significant influence on employee well-being. Consequently, it is proposed that RL can develop employee well-being. The following hypothesis is therefore put forth

Hypothesis 1. RL is positively impact on employee well-being.

Responsible leadership and trust in leader

In line with the LMX theory, employees with a high quality LMX relationship receive higher levels of trust, supports, and rewards from their leaders (Graen & Scandura, 1987; Harris, 2004). This is associated with the definition of RL defined by Maak and Pless, 2006, p.103) as “to build and cultivate sustainable and trustful relationships to different stakeholders inside and outside the organization and to co-ordinate their actions to achieve common objectives, business sustainability and legitimacy which ultimately help to realize a good and shared business vision”. Additionally, the core task of responsible leader is to cultivate and sustain trustful relationships to different internal and external stakeholders (Maak & Pless 2006; Pless & Maak, 2011; Voegtlin et al., 2012; Voegtlin, 2016). In applying the theory of LMX, responsible leader develops sustainable trusting relationship toward their employees and eventually fosters trustworthy business settings. In this research, it is argued that during the interaction with responsible leaders, employees perceive that their leaders behaving responsibly and they have a higher level of trust in their leaders. Consequently, the following hypothesis is put forth:

Hypothesis 2. RL is positively related to trust in leader.

Trust in leader and employee well-being

Trust in leader refers to followers’ perceptions “of being able to communicate openly with the supervisor on job-related problems without fear of negative repercussions” (Fulk et al., 1985, p. 302). According to the nature of trust, trust in leader has positive effects on employee well-being (Mayer et al., 1995; Braun et al., 2013). From the character-based perspective of followers’ perception of leaders’ characters, the feeling of harmless and comfortable may occur when followers believe that their leaders have ability, integrity, responsibility, and benevolence (Mayer et al., 1995). They would then apply these constructs to determine the level of trust in their leaders. As for the relationship-based perspective which is based on the perception of mutual obligations, the sense of feeling safe and comfortable would build up when followers believe that their leaders care and are consideration to them (Mayer et al., 1995). According to Gillespie and Mann (2004), leaders not only strengthen followers’ belief in their trustworthiness, but also reinforce their emotional trust. Therefore, trust in leader is perceived as the readiness of followers to follow their leaders. Crucially, trust acts as a key to building well-being and positive performances in an organisation (Lowe, 2019). In line with the LMX theory, employees trust in leadership can therefore reflects the quality of the leader-employee relationship. Followers trust in leaders who place priority on their well-being and this further generates an overall positive performance to the organisation (Lowe, 2019). Likewise, leaders who are concerned and address employee well-being as a primary issue are more likely to have employees who have greater capability to fulfil the leaders’ demand (Lowe, 2019). This demonstrates the leader’s interest in the well-being of employees, resulting in trust in their leader. Hence the following hypothesis is presented:

Hypothesis 3. Trust in leader is positively related to employee well-being.

The mediating role of trust in leader

Applying the LMX theory (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995), this study asserts that the interpersonal relationship between supervisors and subordinates develops as a result of work-related exchanges among them and can be either characterized as a good/high quality relationship based on trust, respect, and loyalty or a bad/low quality relationship of mistrust, disrespect, and disloyalty. The key objective of RL is thus to improve the well-being of stakeholder which include employees (Stahl et al., 2013; Inceoglu et al, 2018; Kelloway et al., 2013). RL weighs and balances stakeholders' concerns to foster trust and desirable outcomes (Doh and Quigley, 2014; Voegtlin et al., 2012), and accountability of their actions, reliable and trusted (Pless and Maak, 2011). As such, it is rational to propose that the relationship between RL and employee well-being is somewhat consistent. Based on these arguments, the following hypothesis is formulated.

Hypothesis 4. RL is positively associated with employee well-being as mediated through trust in leader.

The moderating role of transparent communication

Transparency is a significant element in strategic communication (Albu and Wehmeimer, 2014). Transparent communication is an excellent characteristic of internal communication (Men and Stacks, 2014) and has received increasing interest in the strategic communication literature (Jiang and Luo, 2018). The role of transparent communication in organisation can be explained through the LMX theory (Graen and Uhl-Bien, 1995). It suggests that interactions between two concerned parties are interdependent under the notion of reciprocity of the exchange in resources. As argued in the LMX theory, leaders can provide economic (e.g., money, goods and service) and socioemotional (e.g., love, information, status) resources in exchange for employees support in the form of emotions, cognitions, and behaviors (Graen and Uhl-Bien, 1995). Interesting, as indicated by Foa and Foa, (1980), transparent communication can be seen as a socioemotional resource which employees may repay with trust in their leaders. On the other hand, if employees do not experience leadership transparency, they may feel discouraged to return any resources (Stranzl et al., 2021). Scholars have found that transparent communication further encourages employees to believe that their organisations are accountable for their actions which leads to significant relational benefits, such as employee trust and credibility (Jiang & Luo, 2018; Rawlins, 2008; Stirton & lodge, 2001). Employees are willing to give their voices and receive feedback when they perceived sincerity and trustworthiness of information exchange from their leaders and within the organisation (Bies and Shapiro, 1987). Evidently, various studies have revealed that employee positive perception of transparent communication could foster trusting relationships with their leaders (Jo and Shim, 2005). Furthermore, Rawlins (2008) and Jiang and Men (2017) found a direct positive relationship between transparent communication and employee trust toward organisations. As stated by Rawlins (2008, p. 3), organization makes effort to be transparent as it is "a key part of reciprocal trust". Consequently, the belief that organisations can encourage employee confidence and trust through transparent communication is emphasized.

As discussed previously, RL behaviors embrace accountability, appropriate moral decision-making, and trust on business conduct with the goal of building and sustaining

relationship with multiple stakeholders of their organisations (Doh and Quigley 2014; Pless and Maak, 2011; Pless et al. 2012; Stahl and Sully de Luque, 2014). Responsible leaders require proactive dialogue with other stakeholders who would be affected by the actions of the organisation as they formulate firm strategies. As a result, this approach requires open, transparent, and confident orientation (Doh and Quigley, 2014). Therefore, it is proposed that the adoption of transparent communication in the workplace of responsible leaders demonstrate leaders' interest in maintaining or enhancing relationships with employees and it gives employees the opportunities to develop trust. Thereby, responsible leader who values such morals and ethics can align with employee point-of-views through transparent communication, which enables both parties to share a joint purpose. Thus, the following hypothesis is stated:

Hypothesis 5. Transparent communication moderates the relationship between RL and trust in leader, such that this relationship grows stronger when transparent communication is high rather than low.

The moderated mediation model

Combining Hypotheses 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5, the study therefore expects an integrative model that transparent communication moderates the mediating effect of trust in leader base on the relationship between RL and employee well-being. That is, responsible leaders with a high level of transparent communication would be more likely to receive more trusts from employee. This thereby enhances the well-being of followers. In contrast, interacting with responsible leaders who has a low level of transparent communication, the level of trust in leader would be less and, in turn, tend to have low level of well-being. On the basis of the above arguments, the study proposes:

Hypothesis 6. Transparent communication moderates the indirect effect of RL on employee well-being via trust in leader, such that the indirect effect is strengthened when transparent communication is high rather than low.

Responsible leadership and organizational justice

Leaders are presented as the legal power to manage their employees and control of organisational resources (Loi et al., 2009) and act in an exclusive position to administer justice within the organisation (Brown et al., 2005; Ruiz-Palomino et al., 2012). Numerous studies have found that justice perceptions of the leaders are most strongly related to employee outcomes and organizational justice (Colquitt et al., 2001; Colquitt et al., 2013; Rupp et al., 2014). In line with the LMX theory, employee-leader relationships are often characterized as social exchange relationships that generate trust, reciprocal behaviors, and high-quality relationships (Graen and Uhl-Bien, 1995; Mitchell et al., 2012). Accordingly, leaders act as an important source of justice (Colquitt et al., 2013). Responsible leader behaviour represents leaders' intentional actions and decisions in an ethical manner to multiple stakeholders (Stahl & Sully de Luque, 2014). In this light, responsible leaders follow ethical principles which drive the relationship between leaders and stakeholders (Pless, 2007; Hackett and Wang, 2012). Consequently, employees perceived RL as ethical and justice, which is implicit in the concept

of ethicality. Likewise, leaders are more likely to be seen as representative of organizational justice (Colquitt, 2001). The following hypothesis is stated:

Hypothesis 7. RL is positively related to organizational justice.

Organizational justice and employee well-being

It has been well established that organizational justice plays a significant role in developing employee health and well-being (Elovainio et al., 2001, 2005; Tepper, 2001). According to Elovainio et al. (2005), low level of organizational justice increases negative health effects (such as unhealthy patterns of cardiovascular and immunological response). Employee perceptions of organizational justice have three general dimensions, which include procedural justice, distributive justice, and interpersonal justice (Colquitt, 2001; Colquitt et al., 2001; Cropanzano & Schminke, 2001). Procedural justice refers to the perception of justice in the organizational process through the lens of employees, which comprise of decision-making process and organizational procedures (Leventhal, 1980; Thibaut & Walker, 1975). Procedural justice emphasis on “consistency”, mean that all employees would be treated equally. The lack of bias, on the other hand, relates to the discrimination or ill-treatment experienced. “Accuracy” refers to decisions that are made based on accurate information (Ambrose & Arnaud, 2005).

For distributive justice, it is the perceived fairness in the outcome distributions being received by employees such as resource allocation, and promotion or pay (Ambrose & Schminke, 2009; Colquitt et al., 2001). It emphasizes on both equity and equality. Equity is the rewards received based on employee contribution, equality relates to the appropriate compensation received (Cropanzano, Bowen & Gilliland, 2007). Employees under fair working climate are more likely to trust and believe the organisations and confident that the fair rewards allocated (Xu et al., 2019).

As for, interpersonal justice, it is the fairness in the interpersonal treatment that employees receive during implementation of the procedures which encompass dignity, courtesy, and respect (Colquitt et al., 2001). In other words, it is the perceptions of employees on the degree to which leaders treat them with respect and dignity (Al Halbusi et al., 2017). The study by Judge and Colquitt (2004) further reveals that interpersonal justice strongly effects employee perception of stress at work, which directly influences the well-being of employees.

Drawing from LMX theory which predicts that leader behaviours are associated with LMX and consistent with the fairness of leader (Colquitt et al., 2013). Recent meta-analytic showed that interactional and organisational justice perceptions are quite similar in strengthening a high quality LMX relationship (Colquitt et al., 2013). This close prediction of leader fair behaviors can significantly increase the perception of organization justice through leaders. This leads to the following stated hypothesis.

Hypothesis 8. Organizational justice is positively related to employee well-being.

The mediating role of organizational justice

Grounded in LMX theory (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995), employees will find themselves as valued and appreciated, and are more likely to perceive their responsible leader’s behaviour as well as a positive assessment of well-being when they have been fairly treated by their

leaders. Therefore, it is proposed that each of these justice dimensions (i.e. procedural, distributive, and interpersonal justice) be shaped by leaders' ethical behaviors. This makes it likely to mediate the RL behaviours and employee well-being. Based on the findings and theoretical explanation, the study predicts the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 9. RL is positively associated with employee well-being as mediated through organizational justice.

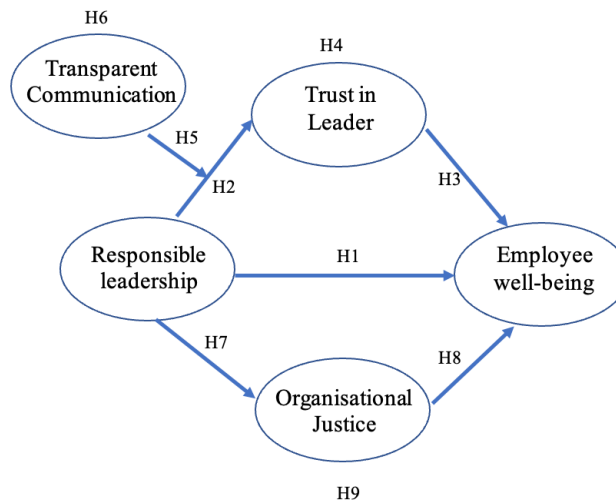


Figure 1. The research model

METHODOLOGY

Research method and Data collection

This study deployed a survey method using an online questionnaire. Data were collected by approaching employees working in various sectors in the Thailand who had a direct supervisor. The population of the study comprised of employees occupying different positions in the Thai MSMEs and who have worked in a company (not self-employed) for at least a month. The goal of the sample selection was to cover a diverse range of business communities to improve greater generalizability of the data. A total of 500 self-administered questionnaires was distributed and of which 328 usable questionnaires were returned, yielding a response rate of 65.6%.

Respondents

The demographic characteristics of the participants in the study is illustrated in Table 1 which indicated a total of 328 employees from different industries participated in the survey. There were 53.8% female and 38.4% male with 7.8% were not specifying their gender. The majority of the participants were in the age group of 36-45 years old (38.4%). While 33.7% were from the 26-35 years old age group, 23.2% were from the 56-65 years. There were only 3.1% from the 18-25 years group and 1.6% above 66 years old.

Table 1: Demographic characteristics of the participants

Demographic Variable	Category	Frequency	Percent (%)
Gender	Male	147	38.4
	Female	206	53.8
	Not specify (intersex)	30	7.8
Age	18-25 yrs old	12	3.1
	26-35 yrs old	129	33.7
	36-45 yrs old	147	38.4
	56-65 yrs old	89	23.2
	66 yrs old and above	6	1.6
Education	High School	1	0.3
	College/University	5	1.3
	Bachelor's degree	108	28.2
	Master's degree	246	64.2
	Doctoral degree	22	5.7
	Others	1	0.3
Marital Status	Single	151	39.4
	Married	198	51.7
	Divorced	24	6.3
	Widow	10	2.6
Tenure	Less than 1 year	16	4.2
	1-3 years	53	13.8
	4-7 years	130	33.9
	8-11 years	115	30
	12-15 years	42	11
	Over 15 years	27	7
Personal Income	Under 15,000 baht	9	2.3
	15,000-30,000 baht	100	26.1
	30,001-55,000 baht	111	29
	More than 55,000 baht	163	42.6
Industry Type	Agro & Food Industry	50	13.1
	Consumer Products	67	17.5
	Financials	50	13.1
	Industrials	65	17
	Property & Construction	40	10.4
	Resources	32	8.4
	Services	39	10.2
	Technology	27	7
	Others	13	3.4
Firm size	Micro Enterprise	37	11.3
	Small Enterprise	111	33.8
	Medium Enterprise	180	54.9

N=328

Dependent Variables and Mediator

Employee well-being

Employee well-being measurement scale was adapted from the version of Pradhan and Hati (2019), comprising of four dimensions with 33 corresponding items, namely psychological well-being (10 items), social well-being (10 items), workplace well-being (9 items) and subjective well-being (4 items).

Transparent communication

Transparent communication was measured by 18 items adapted from Rawlins (2009) and Men (2014). Measures for three dimensions, namely, participation, substantial information and accountability.

Trust in leadership

Trust in leadership was measured with the 10 items of both cognitive and affective trust in leader with scales developed by Yang and Mossholder (2010).

Organisational justice

Organisational justice was measured with 11 items for both Procedural Justice and Interpersonal Justice developed by Colquitt (2001).

Independent Variable

Responsible leadership

To measure RL, the study used a five-item scale developed by Voegtlin (2011).

Control Variables

For demographic factors, the researcher had included various factors such as age, gender, education level, and tenure in organisation. Age factor is included as a control variable because of the significant relationship between age and well-being (Allen et al., 2017). Empirically, individual age, gender, and tenure in organization were widely controlled in most studies of leadership and well-being (e.g., Reb et al., 2013; Sendjaya et al., 2016; Pinck and Sonnentag, 2018).

The variables used in this study are composed of items tested in previous empirical research to ensure their validity. Responses were assessed using a five-point Likert scale with weights assigned as follows: 5 = strongly agree, 4 = agree, 3 = neutral, 2 = disagree, 1 = strongly disagree.

Data analysis

Based on the proposed framework and hypotheses, SEM and AMOS 25 software suggested by Anderson and Gerbing (1988) and Marsh et al. (1988) were adopted for analysis of data and to establish the model. The study was designed to test a moderator mediation hypothesis by using PROCESS macro (Hayes, 2013). Moderated mediation represents the mediation effect changes depending on the level of the moderator variable (Mueller et al., 2005).

In this regard, this study implemented a two-step approach for data analysing. First, the measurement model analysis was carried out to measure the reliability and validity concerns of the data with the help of confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). The overall measurement model includes five main constructs, namely, RL, trust in leader, organizational justice, employee well-being, and transparent communication. Next, the structural model was tested by verifying the hypotheses. SEM calculates all the hypothesized relationships among the variables in the proposed model and compares the fit of the hypothesized model with the underlying data (Anderson and Gerbing, 1988).

Descriptive Statistical analysis

Table 2 reports the values of the descriptive statistics among the key variables involved in this study.

Table 2: Descriptive statistics and reliabilities

Variables	Construct Identifier		M	SD
Responsible leadership	RL1	My direct leader/manager demonstrates awareness of the relevant stakeholder claims.	4.03	0.88
	RL2	My direct leader/manager considers the consequences of decisions for the affected stakeholders.	4.03	0.84
	RL3	My direct leader/manager involves the affected stakeholders in the decision-making process.	4.03	0.87
	RL4	My direct leader/manager weighs different stakeholder claims before making a decision.	4.07	0.81
	RL5	My direct leader/manager tries to achieve a consensus among the affected stakeholders.	4.04	0.85
Transparent Communication	PAR1	My leader asks for feedback from people like me about the quality of its information.	4.00	0.95
	PAR2	My leader involves people like me to help identify the information I need.	4.01	0.97
	PAR3	My leader provides detailed information to people like me.	3.97	0.94
	PAR4	My leader makes it easy to find the information people like me need.	4.01	0.90
	PAR5	My leader asks the opinions of people like me before making decisions.	4.02	0.95
	PAR6	My leader takes the time with people like me to understand who we are and what we need.	4.14	0.58
	SUB1	My leader provides information that is relevant to people like me.	4.07	0.94
	SUB2	My leader provides information that can be compared to previous performance.	4.05	0.96
	SUB3	My leader provides information that is easy for people like me to understand.	4.02	0.99
	SUB4	My leader provides information that is complete.	4.08	0.93
	SUB5	My leader provides information in a timely fashion to people like me.	4.05	0.92
	SUB6	My leader provides accurate information to people like me.	4.09	0.61
	SUB7	My leader provides information that is reliable.	4.11	0.61
	ACT1	My leader presents more than one side of controversial issues.	4.02	0.92
	ACT2	My leader is forthcoming with information that might be damaging to the organization.	3.97	0.97
	ACT3	My leader is open to criticism by people like me.	3.98	1.01
	ACT4	My leader freely admits when it has made mistakes.	3.99	0.99
	ACT5	My leader provides information that can be compared to industry standards.	3.98	0.95
Trust in Leadership	COG1	I can depend on my supervisor to meet his/her responsibilities.	3.99	0.99
	COG2	I can rely on my supervisor to do what is best at work.	3.99	0.98
	COG3	My supervisor follows through with commitments s(he) makes.	4.01	0.95
	COG4	Given my supervisor's track record, I see no reason to doubt his/her competence.	3.99	0.97
	COG5	I'm confident in my supervisor because (s)he approaches work with professionalism.	4.03	0.97
	AFT1	I'm confident that my supervisor will always care about my personal needs at work.	4.00	0.98
	AFT2	If I shared my problems with my supervisor, I know (s)he would respond with care.	4.04	0.91
	AFT3	I'm confident that I could share my work difficulties with my supervisor.	4.03	0.99
	AFT4	I'm sure I could openly communicate my feelings to my supervisor.	3.92	0.96
	AFT5	I feel secure with my supervisor because of his/her sincerity.	4.00	0.96

Variables	Construct Identifier (Con.)		M	SD
Organisational Justice	PRJ1	Have you been able to express your views and feelings during those procedures?	3.94	1.00
	PRJ2	Have you had influence over the (outcome) arrived at by those procedures?	4.02	0.95
	PRJ3	Have you been able to appeal the (outcome) arrived at by those procedures?	3.98	0.97
	PRJ4	Have those procedures been applied consistently?	3.95	0.98
	PRJ5	Have those procedures been free of bias?	3.98	0.92
	PRJ6	Have those procedures been based on accurate information?	4.11	0.64
	PRJ7	Have those procedures upheld ethical and moral standards?	4.07	0.63
	INJ1	Has (he/she) treated you in a polite manner?	3.95	0.93
	INJ2	Has (he/she) treated you with respect?	4.00	0.93
	INJ3	Has (he/she) treated you with dignity?	3.95	0.93
	INJ4	Has (he/she) refrained from improper remarks or comments?	3.98	0.91
Employee Well-being	PWB 1	I easily adapt to day-to-day changes of my life and manage my responsibilities well.	3.97	1.05
	PWB 2	I care for things that are important to me, not what is important to others.	4.00	1.02
	PWB 3	I feel I am a sensible person.	3.92	1.08
	PWB 4	I am not flexible.	3.99	1.03
	PWB 5	I understand the expectation from me.	3.96	1.05
	PWB 6	I feel I am capable of decision-making.	3.96	1.05
	PWB 7	I feel depressed from the stress and demands of day-to-day life	4.07	0.60
	PWB 8	I believe that I have a purpose and direction in life.	4.14	0.61
	PWB 9	I think life is a continuous process of learning	4.16	0.59
	PWB 10	I am a confident person.	4.13	0.64
	SOB 1	I am an important part of my team and organization.	3.93	1.04
	SOB 2	People are trustworthy in my team.	3.98	1.07
	SOB 3	I am close to my teammates in my organization.	4.01	1.03
	SOB 4	My team is a great source of social support.	3.95	1.05
	SOB 5	My views are well accepted by my teammates.	4.02	1.02
	SOB 6	People in my team don't help each other in difficult times.	3.96	1.04
	SOB 7	I take active part in important decision-making activities of my team.	4.07	0.61
	SOB 8	I love to spend time with my teammates.	4.14	0.60
	SOB 9	I can freely share my problems with my colleagues.	4.14	0.57
	SOB 10	My day-to-day activities contribute towards the benefits of my team.	4.05	0.60
	WWB 1	I am quite satisfied with my job.	4.00	1.05
	WWB 2	I enjoy meaningful work.	4.05	1.02
	WWB 3	I attach lots of value to my work.	4.00	1.02
	WWB 4	My work achievement often acts as a source of motivation.	3.99	1.02
	WWB 5	My workplace is very conducive.	3.99	1.05
	WWB 6	My job provides ample scope for career growth.	4.13	0.59
	WWB 7	I used to maintain a balance between work and home life.	4.10	0.62
	WWB 8	My employer does care a lot about their employees.	4.07	0.58
	WWB 9	My work offers challenges to advance my skills.	4.11	0.62
	SUW 1	Mostly I feel happy.	3.93	1.04
	SUW 2	I am an optimistic person.	3.98	1.07
	SUW 3	I feel good about myself.	4.01	1.03
	SUW 4	My life is mostly sorrowful.	3.95	1.05

Abbreviations: Means (M), Standard Deviation (SD)

Exploratory Factor Analysis

Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was employed to test the reliability and validity. In order to proceed with factor analysis, the overall measure of sampling adequacy (MSA) and Bartlett's test of sphericity were conducted. The value of overall MSA by KMO was 0.924 (Table 3), greater than a cut-off value of 0.50 (Hair et al., 2006). This indicated that the observed variables collectively were highly correlated and thus appropriate for factor analysis. Similar conclusions can be drawn from results of Bartlett's test of sphericity, which was found significant at the 0.0001 level, suggesting that the factor analysis is appropriate for further analysing the data for this study.

Table 3: Measure of sampling adequacy and Bartlett's test of sphericity

KMO Measure of Sampling Adequacy	Bartlett's Test of Sphericity		
	Approx. Chi-Square	df	Sig.
0.924	16827.950	1770	0.000

EFA using SPSS 27 was performed simultaneously on all of the five constructs. Results of analysis yielded 77 items representing 12 factors (Table 4). The initial EFA results showed that 17 items had either low factor loadings or cross-loadings; therefore, they were eliminated from the analysis (Hair et al., 2006). Factor loadings of all 60 items were above 0.5, ranging from 0.860 to 0.780. These illustrative explanations indicate that the aforementioned criteria of factor interpretation were met, and thus the factors extracted from this analysis were appropriate.

Once the factor solution was obtained, communality of each item was assessed to ensure that all items were adequately explained by their corresponding factors. Items with communalities less than 0.5 were considered for omission from further analysis (Hair et al., 2006). Results in Table 4 show that communalities of all items were in the range of 0.847 to 0.715. As such, two items were considered for deletion.

After EFA, the scales for each of the extracted factors were tested for internal consistency through Cronbach's alpha coefficient with the suggested threshold of 0.7 (Nunnally, 1978). Cronbach's alphas for each construct surpassed 0.7 and ranged from 0.953 to 0.896 (Table 4).

Table 4: Factor Analysis Results and communality of items

Variables	Construct	Items	Factor loadings	Communality	Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient
Responsible leadership	RL	RL1	0.786	0.723	0.896
		RL2	0.814	0.721	
		RL3	0.780	0.717	
		RL4	0.805	0.715	
		RL5	0.799	0.743	

Table 4: Factor Analysis Results and communality of items (Con.)

Variables	Construct		Items	Factor loadings	Communality	Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient
Transparent Communication	Participation	PAR	PAR1	0.786	0.786	0.924
			PAR2	0.814	0.765	
			PAR3	0.780	0.775	
			PAR4	0.805	0.742	
			PAR5	0.799	0.806	
	Substantiality	SUB	SUB1	0.826	0.772	0.929
			SUB2	0.858	0.785	
			SUB3	0.856	0.787	
			SUB4	0.844	0.804	
			SUB5	0.838	0.792	
	Accountability	ACT	ACT1	0.826	0.748	0.923
			ACT2	0.858	0.764	
			ACT3	0.856	0.806	
			ACT4	0.844	0.778	
			ACT5	0.838	0.764	
Trust in leader	Cognitive	COG	COG1	0.826	0.787	0.933
			COG2	0.858	0.808	
			COG3	0.856	0.801	
			COG4	0.844	0.799	
			COG5	0.838	0.793	
	Affective	AFT	AFT1	0.826	0.774	0.924
			AFT2	0.858	0.782	
			AFT3	0.856	0.759	
			AFT4	0.844	0.794	
			AFT5	0.838	0.768	
Organisational Justice	Interpersonal Justice	INJ	INJ1	0.830	0.765	0.898
			INJ2	0.860	0.801	
			INJ3	0.849	0.787	
			INJ4	0.846	0.759	
	Procedural Justice	PRJ	PRJ1	0.830	0.771	0.927
			PRJ2	0.860	0.811	
			PRJ3	0.849	0.792	
			PRJ4	0.846	0.796	
			PRJ5	0.826	0.781	

Table 4: Factor Analysis Results and communality of items (Con.)

Variables	Construct		Items	Factor loadings	Communality	Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient
Employee well-being	Psychological	PWB	PWB1	0.830	0.802	0.951
			PWB2	0.860	0.811	
			PWB3	0.849	0.802	
			PWB4	0.846	0.847	
			PWB5	0.826	0.811	
			PWB6	0.830	0.810	
	Social	SOB	SOB1	0.830	0.814	0.953
			SOB2	0.860	0.829	
			SOB3	0.849	0.834	
			SOB4	0.846	0.831	
			SOB5	0.826	0.801	
			SOB6	0.830	0.808	
	Workplace	WWB	WWB1	0.830	0.814	0.944
			WWB2	0.860	0.829	
			WWB3	0.849	0.834	
			WWB4	0.846	0.831	
			WWB5	0.826	0.801	
	Subjective	SUW	SUW1	0.830	0.808	0.916
			SUW2	0.860	0.814	
			SUW3	0.849	0.829	
			SUW4	0.846	0.834	
			SUW4	0.846	0.834	

Confirmatory Factor Analysis

Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) is used for testing the values of reliability and validity of the constructs to assure the reliability of the study (Ping, 2004). In this study, researcher tested the convergent validity using the values of factor loading that should above the accepted value of 0.5 (Hair et al., 2010) and the values of average variance extracted (AVE) that should also be above the value of 0.5 (Hair et al., 2010). Results in Table 3 confirmed that the values of AVE square root were all higher than their correlations among variables. Thus, the results confirmed the discriminant validity of the research data in this study (Hair et al., 2010).

EFA results yielded 12 factors solution with 60 measurement items. In order to validate these findings, CFA using AMOS 25 software was performed. The CFA test began with a measurement model, using all 60 scale items representing the 5 constructs obtained from earlier EFA results. A summary of these goodness-of-fit statistics, along with the condition for good fit of each measure, are presented in Table 5, which shown sufficient evidence of good models and demonstrated the soundness of measurement properties as well.

Table 5: Summary of goodness-of-fit statistics

Measure of Fit	Symbol / Abbr.	Cut-off Value of Good Fit	Final Model
Likelihood-Ratio or chi-square	χ^2	A non-significant value at the 0.05 level	852.125
Chi-square to degrees of freedom ratio	χ^2 / df	Lower than 3.0	1.024
Goodness-of-fit index	GFI	Higher than 0.9	0.903
Adjusted Goodness-of-fit index	AGFI	Higher than 0.9	0.881
Standardized root mean square residual	RMR	Lower than .09	0.030
Root mean square error of approximation	RMSEA	Lower than .06	0.009
Normed fit index	NFI	Higher than 0.9	0.936
Comparative fit index	CFI	Higher than 0.9	0.998
Tucker Lewis Index	TLI	Higher than 0.9	0.998

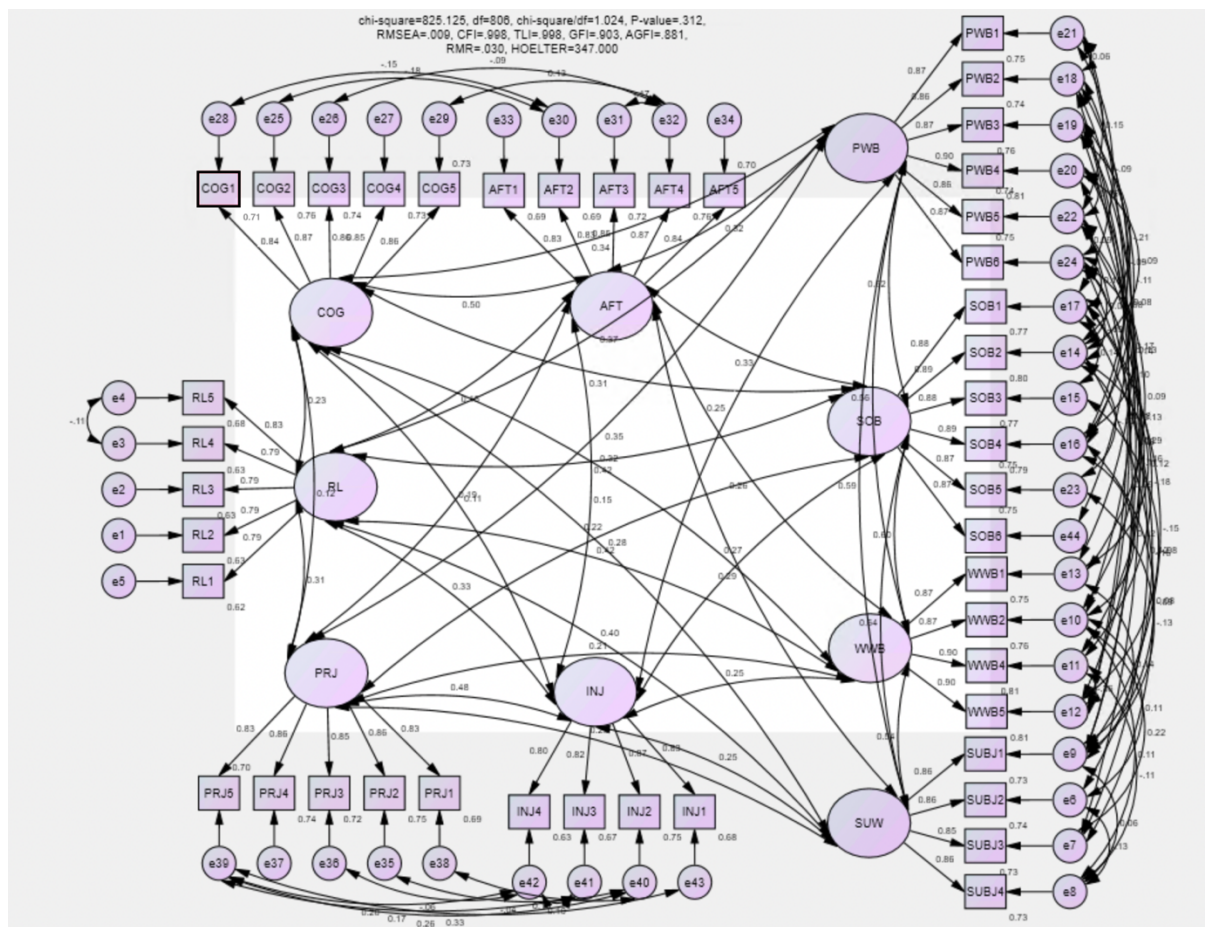


Figure 2: CFA

Source: Structure Equation Modeling (AMOS 25)

Construct Validity

Construct validity refers to the degree to which a set of scale items accurately represents its construct (Hair et al., 2006). It is estimated through the three measures, namely, factor loadings, average variance extracted (AVE), and scale to composite reliability (Hair et al., 2006). First, a construct is considered to demonstrate convergent validity when all of its corresponding measurements have significant loadings of 0.5 or more (Hair et al., 2006). The results revealed all items had significant loadings ranged from 0.860 to 0.780 (Table 4). Second, the AVE value of a construct should be at least 0.5 (Hair et al., 2006). The provided results show AVE estimates of each of the latent variables are above the threshold value of 0.50, with ranges between 0.884 and 0.799 (Table 6). Finally, composite reliability test is used (Hair et al., 2006), ranged between 0.954 and 0.888, which were above the suggested benchmark value of 0.70 (Fornell and Larcker, 1981).

For discriminant validity, it was evaluated using AVE values (Fornell and Larcker, 1981), MSV and ASV values (Hair et al., 2010). It is suggested that the MSV and ASV values should be lower than the AVE scores. The provided results confirmed the discriminant validity of the model, as all the constructs' AVE scores were far greater than that of the MSV and ASV values.

In addition, the square root of AVE scores were placed on the diagonals of the correlation matrix (Table 6) to compare with the correlation coefficients of the constructs (off-diagonal values). The square root of AVE scores were higher than the correlation coefficient of the rest of the latent variables either in column or row levels. Accordingly, these results revealed that the study did not show a discriminant validity issue.

Table 6 Convergent validity and discriminant validity analysis

	CR	AVE	MSV	MaxR(H)	RLf	SUWf	WWBf	SOBf	PWBf	COGf	AFFf	PRJf	INJf
RLf	0.898	0.638	0.175	0.899	0.799								
SUWf	0.917	0.733	0.416	0.917	0.396***	0.856							
WWBf	0.934	0.781	0.357	0.936	0.416***	0.543***	0.884						
SOBf	0.953	0.773	0.416	0.954	0.418***	0.645***	0.598***	0.879					
PWBf	0.950	0.758	0.390	0.950	0.369***	0.595***	0.561***	0.624***	0.871				
COGf	0.932	0.734	0.253	0.933	0.230***	0.282***	0.324***	0.313***	0.344***	0.857			
AFFf	0.925	0.713	0.253	0.926	0.153*	0.288***	0.256***	0.328***	0.324***	0.503***	0.844		
PRJf	0.927	0.718	0.233	0.928	0.313***	0.286***	0.207***	0.219***	0.345***	0.124*	0.111†	0.847	
INJf	0.897	0.685	0.233	0.900	0.332***	0.250***	0.251***	0.270***	0.255***	0.190**	0.150*	0.483***	0.827

Structural Equation Modeling

Once the overall model fit was approved, the significance of individual path coefficients was examined for hypothesis testing. After the model was specified, the validity of the model was examined through the same set of goodness-of-fit indices used for the measurement model. The goodness-of-fit statistics for the structural model were $\chi^2 = 851.772$, $df = 829$, $\chi^2/df = 1.027$, GFI = 0.900, AGFI = 0.880, CFI = 0.998, TLI = 0.998, and RMSEA = 0.009. Generally, it can be said that model fits the data well (Figure 3).

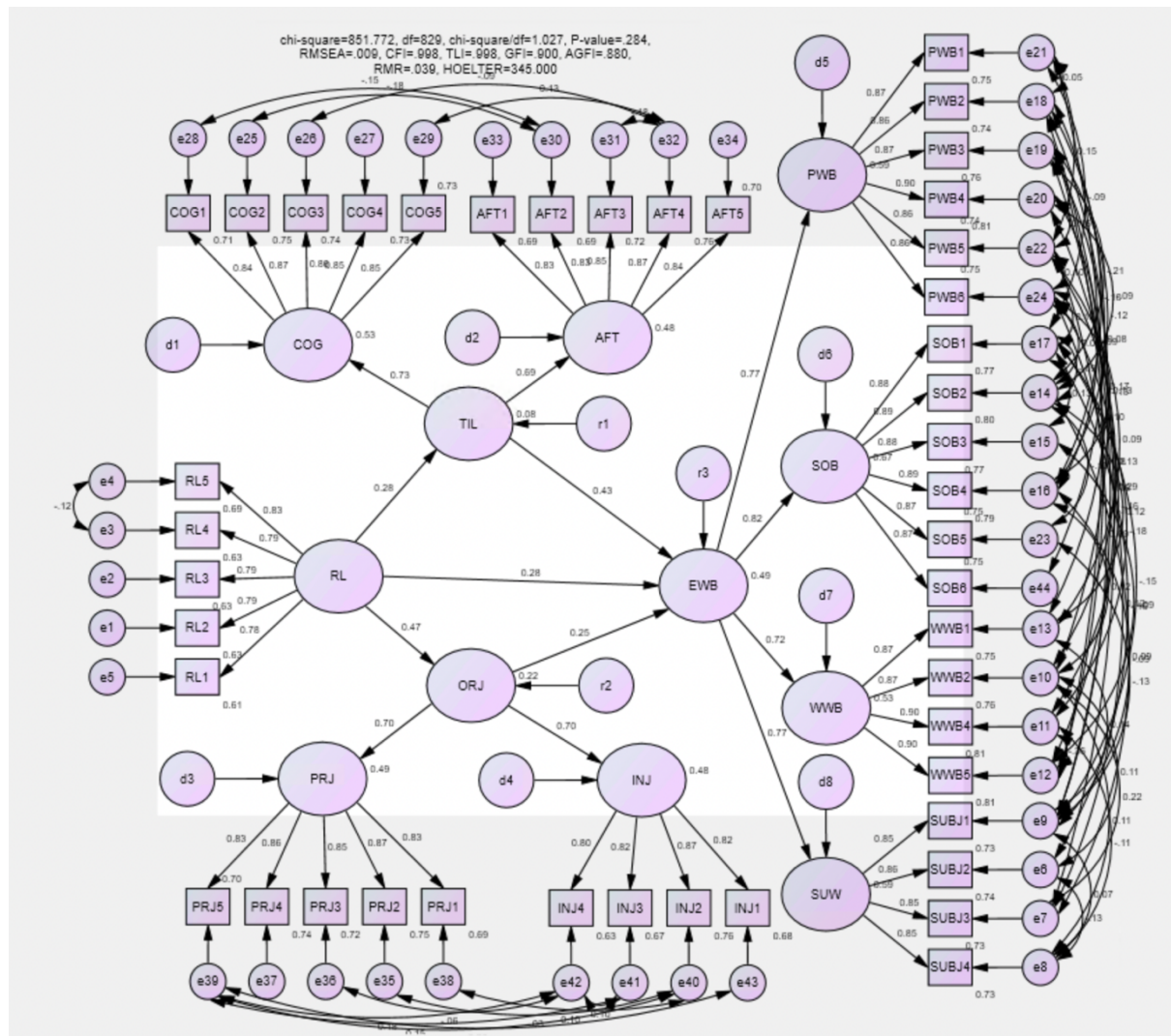


Figure 3: Path Model Estimation

Source: Structure Equation Modeling (AMOS 25)

Hypotheses testing

H1 posits that RL has a positive effect on employee' well-being. As presented in Table 7, RL is positively related to employee' well-being (0.28, $p < 0.001$), thus supporting H1.

H2 posits that RL has a positive effect on trust in leader. As demonstrated in Table 7, RL has a positive effect on trust in leader (0.28, $p < 0.001$), thus supporting H2.

H3 posits that trust in leader has a positive effect on employee well-being. As presented in Table 7, trust in leader has a positive effect on employee well-being (0.43, $p < 0.001$), thus supporting H3.

H7 posits that RL has a positive effect on organisational justice. As demonstrated in Table 7, RL has a positive effect on organisational justice (0.47, $p < 0.001$), thus H7 is accepted.

H8 posits that organisational justice has a positive effect on employee well-being. As presented in Table 7, organisational justice has a positive effect on employee well-being (0.25, $p < 0.01$), thus supporting H8.

Table 7 Main hypotheses testing results

Hypothesis	Relationship	Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P-value	Results
H1	RL → EWB	.28	0.071	3.976	p < 0.001	Supported
H2	RL → TIL	.28	0.072	3.536	p < 0.001	Supported
H3	TIL → EWB	.43	0.097	4.879	p < 0.001	Supported
H7	RL → ORJ	.47	0.070	5.654	p < 0.001	Supported
H8	ORJ → EWB	.25	0.098	3.022	p < 0.01	Supported

Note(s): *p < 0.05, **p < 0.01, ***p < 0.001

H4 assumes the mediating effect of trust in leader. The results in Table 7 shows that RL is positively related to trust in leader (H2), and trust in leader are positively related to employee well-being (H3), supporting H2 and H3.

H9 assumes the mediating effect of organizational justice. The results in Table 7 shows that RL is positively related to organizational justice (H7), and organizational justice are positively related to employee' well-being (H8), supporting H7, H8.

Further given that bootstrapping could be more powerful when testing the mediation effects (Lau and Cheung, 2010), the study applied PROCESS macro to test H4 and H9. With 5,000 bootstrap samples, the indirect effects of RL on employee well-being via trust in leader are significantly positive. Additionally, the indirect effects of RL on employee well-being via organizational justice are also significantly positive. Hence, H4 and H9 are verified (Table 8).

Table 8 Mediating hypotheses testing results

Hypothesis	Relationship	Estimate	Lower	Upper	P-value	Results
H4	RL→TIL→EWB	.120	.063	.221	.002**	Supported
H9	RL→ORJ→EWB	.118	.041	.231	.005**	Supported

Note(s): *p < 0.05, **p < 0.01, ***p < 0.001

H5 proposes the moderating effect of transparent communication. As demonstrated in Table 9, the interaction item (RL x transparent communication) does not have influence on trust in leader (0.071, p 0.491) as the result depicts no effect. Hence, H5 is not rejected.

To test the moderated mediation posited in H6, the study employed the PROCESS macro with 5,000 bootstrap samples. The study examined the conditional indirect effects of RL on employee well-being via transparent communication. The result revealed that the indirect effects were not significant in the case of high transparent communication, and non-significant when transparent communication was at both moderate and low level. The moderated mediation effect is thus non-significant (0.044, p 0.036). Overall, the results depict no effect; hence H6 is not supported (Table 9).

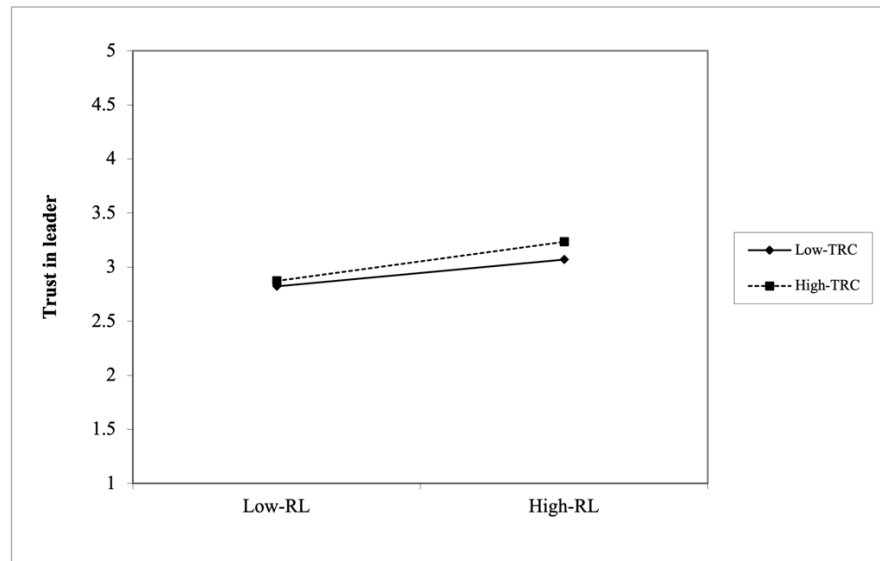
Meanwhile as shown in Figure 4, with high transparent communication, trust in leader improved. However, whether in low- or high-level of transparent communication, the level of trust in leader improved with the increasing RL.

Table 9 Moderating and moderated mediation hypotheses testing results

<i>Hypothesis</i>	<i>Relationship</i>	<i>Estimate</i>	<i>S.E.</i>	<i>C.R.</i>	<i>P-value</i>	<i>Results</i>
H5	RL*TRC→TIL	.071	.103	.011	.491	Not supported
H6	RL*TRC→TIL→EWB	.044	.082	.021	.036	Not supported

*Note(s): *p < 0.05, **p < 0.01, ***p < 0.001*

Figure 4 Interaction of responsible leadership and transparent communication on trust in leader



Note(s): RL = Responsible Leadership, TRC = Transparent Communication

DISCUSSION

The present study empirically examines the influence of responsible leadership (RL) on employee well-being. It also explores the mediating influence of trust in leader and organizational justice on the relationship between RL and employee well-being. The results obtained lead to two main conclusions. First, RL is an antecedent of well-being of employees. Second, the influence of RL on employee well-being rests mainly upon making employees perceive (a) trust in leader and (b) organizational justice. Nine hypotheses were proposed out of which seven hypotheses were supported by the data. This study sought to enhance the role of RL by drawing upon LMX theory (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995) to understand why (high vs low level of transparent communication), and under what conditions (enhancing trust in leader and implementing organisational justice), RL may or may not be effective in achieving employee well-being.

A significant contribution of this research is that it is specially directed towards the employee well-being in MSMEs sector. This research contributes to the literature by focusing on the perspectives of RL and employee well-being. The result of this study supports that when leaders involve in responsibility behaviours, it triggers employee well-being. These findings are in line with the existing literature which asserts that for the enhancement of employee well-

being, leaders must be engaged and committed to responsibility (Kim and Beehr, 2018; Gordon et al., 2019). Additionally, the results of mediating effect of trust in leader and organisational justice between the engagement level of RL and employee well-being reported that trust in leader and organisational justice strengthens the positive correlation between RL and employee well-being. This is because RL conceptualized as leader behavior that reflects a prioritization of multiple stakeholders for network ties with them, while making decisions (Maak and Pless, 2006; Waldman and Siegel, 2008). As a result, these network builds trustworthiness.

A detailed analysis of Figure 4 shows that transparent communication is more effective in absence or low level of RL to build trust in leader. However, in the presence of high levels RL, transparent communication is found to yield limited influence of responsible leaders in providing sources to employees to build trust in leader. Hence, it is more likely that RL substitutes transparent communication during enforcement of trust in leader. Furthermore, the study proposes that in order to enhance employee well-being, employees should build trust in RL and practice of organisational justice rather from transparent communication. Therefore, in presence of both transparent communication and RL, employees are likely to depend more on RL to enhance their well-being.

This study is based on Thai MSMEs industry and results highlights that responsible leaders who can build trust and implement organisational justice can effectively foster employee well-being. Thereby, this study states that the well-being of Thai employees rises under responsible leaders who can build trust and organisational justice.

Theoretical and practical implications

This study has both theoretical and practical implications. Firstly, the present study adds to the literature by examining the impacts of RL on employee well-being in the context of Thailand, an emerging market. As a new contribution, the study incorporates the mediating effects of the trust in leader and organisational justice on employee well-being, and the moderating effect of transparent communication on the relationship between RL and trust in leader. The empirical results confirm that RL approach is positively related to employee well-being.

Theoretical implications

This study makes an important contribution to the leadership and entrepreneurship literatures. First, this study enriches the limited empirical research on RL by revealing its significant role in promoting employee well-being and by recognizing trust in leader and organizational justice as vital mechanisms underlying this relationship. Notably, using RL as a construct allows the researcher to add on to the body of knowledge through many ways. First, RL is conceptualized as a novel construct for its ability to enhance employee well-being. Second, under the said conceptualization, a helping role of trust in leader and organizational justice has also been determined. Third, the development of a novel comprehensive framework to implement trust in leader under the contingent role of transparent communication (low vs high transparent communication) and RL have been established. Last but not least, drawing upon the LMX theory (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995), this research provides insightful understanding of how (through trust in leader and organizational justice), and under what

conditions (low or high level of transparent communication), RL may or may not be effective in achieving all four dimensions of employee well-being which previously under-researched.

Practical implications

From a managerial point of view, this study has a number of significant implications. First, this study highlights the significance of RL in motivating employee well-being, especially in the Thai MSMEs industry, which makes an important contribution to managerial practices within businesses. An effort to understand the mechanisms that develop employee well-being are matters of interest among managers. Consequently, given that the practice of RL for business leaders can serve to increase well-being of employees which in turn improves the quality of life. This study believes that entrepreneurs/managers/ leaders should devote time and attention to training programs because the benefits of RL in enhancing well-being of employees as well as economic growth.

Another implication is that although the practice of RL by leaders influences the well-being of employees directly, there is also an indirect influence through developing trust in leader and organisational justice. Thereby, both trust in leader and organisational justice become critical mechanisms. Leaders should become aware that all strengths directed to make employees trust in leader and organisational justice are present in the study outcomes. In addition, the established leaders-employee exchange relationships can have a significant role in fostering employee well-being.

Importantly, leaders, managers, and owners of MSMEs can utilize this research as a guideline to improve employee well-being by developing RL, trust in leader and organisational justice. Therefore, they can accelerate the firms' human resource strategies and organisational policies by concentrating on the perspectives highlighted in this research.

LIMITATION AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

This study has some limitations which offer the opportunity for future research. Firstly, the data of the study was collected from employees in the Thai MSMEs context. Future research could incorporate other larger organisations, in both manufacturing and service sectors. Also, researchers can gather data from the mentioned sectors and compare the results of both sectors to add valuable insights into this study. In addition, this study is limited by the Thai cultural context of the study and therefore future research should replicate this study in other cultures to enhance the study's external validity and generalizability. Secondly, future research could consider using the experimental or longitudinal research design to enhance the ability to explain cause-and-effect relationship. More empirical and longitudinal studies are therefore required to enhance deeper understanding of RL.

Regarding future research, this study uses only transparent communication as a contingent factor to determine its impacts on trust in leader and employee well-being. Future studies may include other moderating variables such as institutional pressure to moderate the different relationships between leadership and followers (Ur Rehman et al., 2021). In so doing, it can add value to the research. Finally, it is worthwhile to study leader' well-being to extend the present model since leader' well-being is also considered as a principal indicator of organizational performance (Bernerth and Hirschfeld, 2016).

CONCLUSION

Drawing upon the Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) theory, this study examines the importance of RL for employee well-being. It demonstrates that RL has positive impacts on all four dimensions of employee well-being encompassing psychological, social, workplace and subjective well-being (Pradhan and Hati, 2019). Specifically, this study reveals the significance of RL in promoting employee well-being through the mechanism of trust in leader and organisational justice. The study further suggests that MSME in Thailand should pay closer attention to fostering leaders' responsible leadership approach as a mean to increase employee well-being. Leaders should seek to build high-quality exchange relationships with employees to promote employee trust and develop justice within organisation. In addition, transparent communication does not moderate the link between RL and trust in leader. The study reveals transparent communication is not emerging as a sufficient intervening mechanism on responsible leaders in building trust in leader among employees. Hence, it is more likely that RL can substitute transparent communication during enforcement of trust in leader. Significantly, the results provided support for the hypothesized relationships expected moderation and moderated mediation. This study suggests that RL contributes to optimizing employee well-being at work and provides practical guidance for organisations to achieve higher performance and sustainable development.

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