

Leadership Styles and Occupational Stress in Sri Lanka's Event Management Industry

B. A. K. M. Mendis¹ and Sidar Atalay Şimşek²

¹Associate Member, Chartered Institute of Personnel Management, Sri Lanka

²PhD Candidate, University of Waikato, New Zealand.

²Department of Economics, Batman University, Türkiye

¹kanchana.mendis@gmail.com, ²sidaratalay@hotmail.com

Abstract: Sri Lanka's event management industry has expanded rapidly in recent years and now plays an important role in the national economy. Despite this growth, the sector faces persistent challenges, particularly high employee turnover and elevated levels of occupational stress among professionals. This study examines how transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire leadership styles influence employee stress within the industry, with additional attention to gender differences and the role of workload pressures. A quantitative study was conducted among executive-level employees from leading event management firms across three major urban centres in Sri Lanka. Leadership styles were assessed using the Full Range Leadership Model, while workplace stress was measured using a standardised psychological instrument. Data analysis explored overall patterns and predictive relationships between leadership behaviours and employee well-being. Findings reveal that transformational leadership is associated with reduced stress, creating a more supportive and motivating work environment. Transactional leadership demonstrated mixed outcomes, suggesting that its effectiveness depends on how it is applied in practice. Laissez-faire leadership emerged as the most detrimental style, contributing to increased stress, particularly in high-pressure and fast-paced organisational settings. Female employees reported higher stress levels than their male counterparts, and heavy workloads without adequate managerial support intensified strain across the sample. The study concludes that leadership style plays a critical role in shaping employee well-being in Sri Lanka's event management sector. Organisations are encouraged to strengthen transformational leadership capabilities, introduce gender-responsive support mechanisms, and implement structured workload management to enhance retention, performance, and long-term industry sustainability.

Keywords: *Event Management, Gender Differences, Occupational Stress, Transformational Leadership, Workload Management*

Introduction

The event management industry globally represents a dynamic, high-pressure sector characterised by tight deadlines, volatile client expectations, and complex logistical coordination (Brown & Arendt, 2012). In Sri Lanka, this industry has experienced exponential growth over the past decade, driven by tourism expansion, corporate function proliferation, and the increasing popularity of cultural festivals, which contributed approximately 4.2% to the national GDP in 2023 (Central Bank of Sri Lanka, 2023). However, this growth has also intensified occupational stressors,

with event professionals frequently required to work extended hours during peak seasons while managing multiple concurrent projects, a pattern commonly observed in event and hospitality industries globally (Silvers, 2012).

The industry's success heavily depends on experienced professionals who build long-term client relationships and maintain extensive vendor networks. However, high employee turnover poses a significant threat to organisational stability, as the loss of experienced staff is closely associated with declines in service quality and client retention in event-related and

hospitality sectors (Deery & Jago, 2015). This talent drain undermines Sri Lanka's regional competitiveness compared to countries such as India and Thailand, where service industry turnover rates are lower (World Bank, 2023).

Leadership plays a pivotal role in shaping how occupational stress is experienced and managed within organisations. The Conservation of Resources (COR) theory suggests that stress arises when individuals perceive threats to their resource pool, positioning leadership effectiveness as contingent upon leaders' ability to safeguard and replenish employees' psychological, emotional, and social resources (Hobfoll, 1989). Transformational leadership, characterised by inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualised consideration, has been positively associated with stress mitigation in high-pressure environments (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Conversely, laissez-faire leadership, marked by passive management and avoidance of decision-making, consistently correlates with heightened stress outcomes (Skogstad et al., 2007).

Despite extensive research on leadership–stress relationships in Western contexts, significant empirical gaps persist in South Asian settings, particularly within Sri Lanka's unique socio-cultural landscape. Cultural factors such as hierarchical organisational structures, collectivist values, and indirect communication patterns may moderate the relationship between leadership behaviours and employee stress in ways not captured by Western-developed frameworks.

Accordingly, this study aims to achieve the following objectives.

- To examine whether transformational leadership is associated with reduced

occupational stress among event management professionals in Sri Lanka.

- To determine whether laissez-faire leadership is associated with increased levels of employee stress within the industry.
- To assess the relationship between transactional leadership and employee stress, identifying whether its effects are beneficial, neutral, or detrimental.
- To evaluate gender differences in stress levels across leadership styles among executive-grade employees.
- To analyse whether high workload without adequate managerial support intensifies employee stress in event management settings.

By addressing these objectives, the study contributes a culturally grounded understanding of leadership–stress dynamics and provides actionable insights for organisational policy and leadership development in high-intensity service industries.

Literature Review

Leadership and Occupational Stress

The link between occupational stress and leadership has been extensively researched within organisational behaviour, with increasing evidence showing that leadership style plays a significant role in staff psychological well-being and stress responses (Nielsen et al., 2008). Leadership behaviour can act as stress buffers, diminishing workplace tension, or as catalysts that amplify workers' stress responses (Smith, 2020). The Job Demand-Resource model is a practical theory that posits leadership efficacy requires balancing job demands against available resources to mitigate increasing stress (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). Theoretically, leadership–stress

relationship explanations draw heavily from three primary models: the Conservation of Resources (COR) theory, which states that stress occurs when individuals perceive threats to valued resources (Hobfoll, 1989); the transactional model of stress and coping, which emphasizes cognitive appraisal as key to stress experience (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984); and social exchange theory, which explains leader-member relations influencing worker outcomes through mutual exchanges (Blau, 1964). In stress-prone industries like event management, where uncertainty and client expectations are the norm, the leadership role in stress management becomes crucial (Silvers, 2012). The transactional model of stress coping also sheds light on how leadership intervenes between work demands and employees' coping actions (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Current meta-analyses suggest that leadership quality accounts for approximately 15–25% of the variance in employees' stress levels across various industries (Montano, Reeske, Franke, & Hüffmeier, 2017).

Transformational Leadership and Stress Reduction

Transformational leadership, encompassing inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, individualised consideration, and idealised influence, has consistently demonstrated stress-reducing effects across various industries (Bass & Riggio, 2006). These leaders reduce stress by fostering purpose, inspiring optimism, and providing personalised support, particularly during organisational crises (Arnold, Turner, Barling, Kelloway, & McKee, 2015). The mechanisms through which transformational leadership reduces stress are multifaceted. Inspirational motivation creates a compelling vision that helps employees find meaning in challenging circumstances, thereby reducing the perceived threat of workplace stressors (Podsakoff et al., 1990). Intellectual stimulation encourages

creative problem-solving and innovation, providing employees with enhanced coping resources when facing complex challenges (Jung et al., 2003). Individualised consideration ensures that leaders attend to followers' unique needs and circumstances, creating personalised support systems that buffer against stress (Judge & Piccolo, 2004).

Empirical evidence consistently supports the stress-buffering effects of transformational leadership. A longitudinal study by Liu et al. (2010) found that employees under transformational leadership reported 23% lower stress levels than those under other leadership styles, with these effects persisting over an 18-month follow-up period. Similarly, Kelloway et al. (2012) demonstrated that transformational leadership was associated with reduced burnout symptoms and improved psychological well-being among healthcare workers. The effectiveness of transformational leadership in reducing stress appears particularly pronounced in collectivist cultures, where leaders who align their vision with communal values may be especially effective in fostering emotional engagement and mitigating stress (Hofstede, 2001). Cross-cultural research by Dorfman et al. (2012) indicates that transformational leadership behaviours are universally appreciated but manifest differently across cultural contexts, with collectivist societies showing stronger responses to community-oriented visions and group-focused consideration.

Transactional Leadership and Mixed Stress Outcomes

Transactional leadership, centred on exchanges between leaders and followers through contingent rewards and corrective actions, demonstrates a complex relationship with employee stress that varies depending on implementation approach and contextual factors (Judge &

Piccolo, 2004). While clear expectations and structured feedback can reduce uncertainty-related stress, overreliance on punitive measures may exacerbate pressure in dynamic industries that require creativity and flexibility (Wang, Li, Chen, & Zhang, 2023). The dual nature of transactional leadership effects can be understood through its two primary components: contingent rewards and management by exception. Contingent reward leadership, which involves setting clear performance expectations and providing recognition for achievement, typically demonstrates positive relationships with employee well-being by creating predictable work environments and fair exchange relationships (Den Hartog et al., 1997). Research by Bycio et al. (1995) found that contingent reward behaviours were associated with reduced role ambiguity and increased job satisfaction.

Conversely, management by exception, particularly in its active form, where leaders continuously monitor for errors and deviations, can create high-surveillance environments that increase employee stress and anxiety (Bass & Avolio, 1994; Bass, 1999). A study by Sosik and Godshalk (2000) revealed that excessive corrective leadership was associated with increased psychological strain and reduced innovative behaviour among subordinates. The effectiveness of transactional leadership in stress management appears to be moderated by industry characteristics, employee preferences, and cultural context. In highly structured environments with clear procedures and measurable outcomes, transactional approaches may provide clarity and fairness, thereby reducing stress (Howell & Avolio, 1993). However, in creative industries such as event management, where flexibility and innovation are essential, rigid transactional approaches can stifle creativity and increase pressure (Amabile et al., 2004).

Laissez-Faire Leadership and Stress Escalation

Laissez-faire leadership, characterised by hands-off management and decision-making avoidance, consistently correlates with heightened stress outcomes across diverse organisational contexts (Skogstad, Einarsen, Torsheim, Aasland, & Hetland, 2007). The lack of guidance and role clarity under passive leadership exacerbates feelings of ambiguity, isolation, and frustration, particularly in high-pressure environments requiring rapid decision-making. The detrimental effects of laissez-faire leadership on employee stress can be explained through several mechanisms. First, the absence of clear direction creates role ambiguity, forcing employees to operate without adequate guidance or feedback (Kahn, Wolfe, Quinn, Snoek, & Rosenthal, 1964). Second, passive leadership fails to provide the emotional support and recognition that employees need to cope with workplace challenges (House, 1971). Third, the lack of decision-making and conflict resolution by leaders creates unresolved tensions that compound over time (De Witte, 1999).

Empirical research consistently demonstrates the harmful effects of laissez-faire leadership. A comprehensive study by Kelloway et al. (2005) found that employees under laissez-faire leadership reported significantly higher levels of psychological distress, job dissatisfaction, and burnout than those under active leadership styles. The study revealed a significant and positive correlation between passive leadership and emotional exhaustion ($r = .45, p < .001$). A longitudinal study by Skogstad et al. (2014) followed employees for 2 years and found that exposure to laissez-faire leadership was associated with increases in bullying, role stressors, and psychological strain over time. The study suggested that passive leadership creates a leadership vacuum, allowing negative workplace dynamics to flourish unchecked.

Cultural Context and Leadership Effectiveness

Leadership effectiveness varies significantly across cultural contexts, with collectivist societies such as Sri Lanka demonstrating different stress responses to various leadership styles compared to individualist cultures (House et al., 2004). The GLOBE study, encompassing 62 societies, revealed that cultural values significantly moderate the relationship between leadership behaviours and employee outcomes, with variations observed across power distance, uncertainty avoidance, and collectivism dimensions. In high power distance cultures, such as those found in Sri Lanka (Hofstede, 2001), employees typically expect hierarchical leadership structures. They may experience stress when these expectations are not met through overly egalitarian or laissez-faire approaches. Research by Dorfman et al. (2012) found that participative leadership, although generally effective in low-power-distance cultures, can create discomfort and role confusion in high-power-distance societies where clear authority structures are highly valued.

Collectivist cultural orientations also influence how leadership styles affect employee stress. In collectivist societies, transformational leadership behaviours that emphasise group cohesion, shared values, and collective achievement may be particularly effective in reducing stress (Jung & Avolio, 1999). A cross-cultural study by Walumbwa and Lawler (2003) found that transformational leadership had more substantial positive effects on employee well-being in collectivist cultures than in individualist cultures. Buddhist philosophical influences, prevalent in Sri Lankan culture, introduce additional considerations for leadership effectiveness. The emphasis on mindfulness, compassion, and non-attachment in Buddhist philosophy may influence how employees respond to

different leadership approaches (Marques, 2012). Leaders who demonstrate mindful awareness, emotional regulation, and compassionate consideration may be particularly effective in Buddhist-influenced cultural contexts (Reb, Narayanan, & Chaturvedi, 2014).

Gender Considerations in Leadership-Stress Relationships

Gender differences in stress experiences suggest that female employees may be disproportionately affected by certain leadership styles, particularly in terms of expectations for managerial support and communication (Eagly & Carli, 2007). Research indicates that women and men may respond differently to various leadership behaviours due to socialisation patterns, communication preferences, and role expectations (Rosener, 1990). Women typically demonstrate stronger preferences for transformational leadership characteristics such as individualised consideration and inspirational motivation, possibly due to socialisation that emphasises relational and collaborative approaches (Eagly, Johannesen-Schmidt, & van Engen, 2003). A meta-analysis by Paustian-Underdahl, Walker, and Woehr (2014) found that female employees showed stronger positive responses to transformational leadership in terms of job satisfaction and reduced stress compared to their male counterparts.

The interaction between gender and leadership styles may be particularly pronounced in male-dominated industries like event management, where women face additional stressors related to gender role expectations and workplace discrimination (Heilman & Eagly, 2008). Research by Stamarski and Son Hing (2015) revealed that women in male-dominated fields experienced higher stress levels when leadership was inconsistent or unsupportive, suggesting that effective leadership may be even more critical for female employees' well-being. Cultural

context further complicates gender–leadership interactions. In South Asian cultures, where traditional gender roles remain influential, women often face unique challenges, including expectations of deference to male authority and the dual responsibility of balancing professional and domestic duties (Nath, 2000). These cultural pressures may intensify the relationship between leadership quality and the stress levels of female employees.

Event Management Industry Context

The event management industry presents unique occupational stressors that may influence how leadership styles affect employee well-being. Industry characteristics include seasonal workload variations, tight deadlines, high client expectations, complex coordination requirements, and public visibility of outcomes (Silvers, 2012). These factors create a high-pressure environment, making leadership effectiveness particularly crucial for managing employee stress. Project-based work structures in event management often result in teams forming and dissolving frequently, requiring leaders to establish rapport and provide practical guidance to diverse, temporary work groups quickly (Turner & Müller, 2003). Research by Huemann, Keegan, and Turner (2007) suggests that transformational leadership may be particularly beneficial in project-based industries due to its emphasis on inspiration and individualised consideration.

The emotional labour demands of event management, where employees must maintain positive demeanours while managing complex logistics and demanding clients, may intensify stress responses and increase the importance of supportive leadership (Hochschild, 1983). A study by Guy, Newman, and Mastracci (2008) found that emotional labour demands were significantly moderated by supervisory support and leadership quality.

Industry-specific stressors in Sri Lanka include managing cultural and religious events with deep community significance, navigating complex vendor relationships influenced by social hierarchies, and operating within infrastructure and bureaucratic constraints (Ministry of Tourism, Sri Lanka, 2022). These contextual factors may create unique demands on leadership effectiveness and employee stress management strategies.

Research Gaps

Despite extensive Western research on leadership–stress relationships, significant gaps remain in understanding these dynamics in South Asian contexts, particularly in Sri Lanka’s unique socio-cultural environment. Most leadership–stress research originates in Western, individualistic cultures and has limited validation in collectivist societies. Sri Lanka's unique cultural dimensions, including Buddhist philosophical influences, hierarchical structures, and extended family obligations, may fundamentally alter how leadership behaviours are perceived and stress manifests. Standardised stress assessment instruments developed in Western contexts may lack cultural sensitivity for South Asian settings. The Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) may not adequately capture culturally specific stressors such as intergenerational workplace conflicts, religious observance pressures, and social obligation-related stress.

Western findings on gender differences in leadership effectiveness may not translate to South Asian contexts, where traditional gender roles, family expectations, and workplace dynamics intersect differently. Sri Lankan women face unique challenges, including cultural expectations of deference and the dual burden of professional and domestic responsibilities. Event management presents distinctive occupational challenges that have received virtually no research attention in

South Asian contexts. These include seasonal income volatility, emotional labour demands for cultural events, caste-influenced vendor relationships, and Sri Lanka-specific challenges such as monsoon cycles and infrastructure limitations. Current cross-sectional designs cannot capture the dynamic nature of leadership stress relationships over time, which is crucial in project-based industries like event management, where stress levels fluctuate dramatically between seasons.

Sri Lanka's high power distance culture (Hofstede, 2001) suggests that employee responses to leadership styles may differ significantly from those in Western contexts, with cultural expectations of authority deference potentially suppressing feedback and creating different stress responses. Most research occurs in developed economies with established labour protections and mental health support. Sri Lanka's emerging-economy status may amplify stress responses while constraining available coping mechanisms. The predominant reliance on self-report measures raises concerns about social desirability bias, particularly in cultures that emphasise harmony. Integration of physiological stress markers and qualitative insights remains limited in South Asian contexts. These gaps collectively underscore the urgent need for culturally grounded, methodologically diverse, and contextually relevant research on leadership–stress relationships within South Asian professional contexts, particularly in dynamic service industries such as event management.

Research Hypotheses

Drawing on the Conservation of Resources Theory (Hobfoll, 1989), the Job Demands–Resources Model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007), and prior empirical findings, the following hypotheses were developed:

H1: Transformational Leadership and Stress

Transformational leadership has been shown to reduce stress by enhancing psychological resources, fostering meaning, and providing individualised support (Bass & Riggio, 2006; Arnold et al., 2015). In collectivist and high-power-distance contexts such as Sri Lanka, these behaviours may be especially effective in buffering strain (Hofstede, 2001; Dorfman et al., 2012).

H1: *Transformational leadership is negatively associated with employee stress.*

H2: Laissez-Faire Leadership and Stress

Laissez-faire leadership is consistently associated with heightened stress due to role ambiguity, insufficient guidance, and unresolved workplace conflict (Skogstad et al., 2007; Kelloway et al., 2005). Its harmful effects may be amplified in cultures where employees expect directive leadership and clear authority structures (House et al., 2004).

H2: *Laissez-faire leadership is positively associated with employee stress.*

H3: Transactional Leadership and Stress

Transactional leadership is associated with mixed stress outcomes, depending on the balance between contingent rewards and corrective monitoring (Judge & Piccolo, 2004). While clear expectations can reduce uncertainty (Den Hartog et al., 1997), excessive control may increase pressure in creative, fast-paced environments such as event management (Amabile et al., 2004).

H3: *Transactional leadership is significantly associated with employee stress.*

H4: Gender Differences in Stress Responses

Research indicates that female employees may experience higher stress due to differential leadership expectations, emotional labour demands, and dual work–family roles (Eagly & Carli, 2007; Nath, 2000). These patterns may be more pronounced in South Asian contexts, where cultural norms intensify gendered pressures (Stamarski & Son Hing, 2015). **H4:** *Female employees report higher stress levels than male employees.*

H5: Workload and Managerial Support

The JD-R model predicts that job demands lead to strain primarily when resources are insufficient (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). In project-based industries, heavy workload combined with low supervisory support increases vulnerability to stress (Silvers, 2012; Guy et al., 2008). **H5:** *High workload without adequate managerial support is associated with increased employee stress.*

Methodology

Research Design and Participants

A cross-sectional quantitative research design was employed to examine the proposed relationships between leadership styles and occupational stress. The study targeted executive-grade employees working in event management firms located in Sri Lanka's three major urban centres, Colombo, Kandy, and Galle. These cities were selected because they represent the primary hubs of the formal event-management industry, characterised by high project intensity, complex client demands, and time-sensitive operational environments, making them an appropriate population for investigating workplace stress.

Sampling Procedure

Purposive sampling was used to identify information-rich organisational settings relevant to the study's objectives. Fifteen event management firms were selected based on the following inclusion criteria:

1. A minimum operational history of five years to ensure organisational stability
2. Recognised industry standing; and
3. A minimum of ten executive-level employees to allow adequate participant access. A total of 225 executive-grade employees participated in the study, resulting in an 84.3% response rate from the 267 distributed questionnaires. This sample size exceeds recommended thresholds for multiple regression and provides sufficient statistical power for hypothesis testing.

Measures

Leadership Styles

Leadership styles were measured using the 36-item short-form Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ), adapted from Bass and Avolio's (1994) Full Range Leadership Model. The instrument generated standardised subscale scores for transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire leadership, corresponding to hypotheses predicting reduced (H1), mixed (H3), and increased (H2) stress outcomes. Short-form MLQ versions have demonstrated strong psychometric reliability while minimising respondent burden.

Occupational Stress

Employee stress was assessed using the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS-10; Cohen et al., 1983), which measures subjective evaluation of stress experienced within the past month.

Demographic and Control Variables

Additional data were collected on age, gender, years of experience, job designation, and current project load.

- Gender (H4) was coded as 1 = female to examine gender-based differences in stress.
- High workload without support (H5) was coded as 1 when respondents managed three or more simultaneous projects and reported inadequate managerial support, defined as fewer than two supervisory meetings per week or restricted decision-making access.

Data Analysis

Data were analysed using SPSS version 28. Descriptive statistics were used to summarise participant characteristics and key study variables. Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to explore initial bivariate relationships between leadership styles and stress (H1–H3). Multiple linear regression with robust standard errors was subsequently performed to assess the predictive influence of transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire leadership on employee stress (H1–H3), while

controlling for gender (H4) and high workload without support (H5). Regression assumptions, including linearity, normality of residuals, multicollinearity, and homoskedasticity, were evaluated following Tabachnick and Fidell (2019). Influential cases were examined using Cook's Distance, and the false discovery rate was controlled at the 0.05 level (Benjamini & Hochberg, 1995).

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was obtained from the appropriate institutional review board. Participation was voluntary, informed consent was obtained from all respondents, and confidentiality and anonymity were assured throughout data collection and analysis.

Results

Sample Characteristics

The final sample comprised 225 executive-grade employees (60.4% female, 39.6% male) aged 25 to 45 years ($M = 32.4$, $SD = 6.8$). Professional experience ranged from 2 to 20 years ($M = 7.3$, $SD = 4.2$). Table 1 presents the detailed demographic characteristics of the study participants.

Table 1 Demographic Characteristics of Study Participants (N = 225)

Characteristic	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)	Mean (SD)
Gender	Female	136	60.4	
	Male	89	39.6	
Age				32.4 (6.8)
	25-30 years	89	39.6	
	31-35 years	78	34.7	
	36-40 years	42	18.7	
	41-45 years	16	7.1	
Professional Experience				7.3 (4.2)

Characteristic	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)	Mean (SD)
Job Designation	2-5 years	98	43.6	
	6-10 years	76	33.8	
	11-15 years	38	16.9	
	16-20 years	13	5.8	
	Project Manager	78	34.7	
	Account Executive	65	28.9	
	Operations Coordinator	48	21.3	
	Senior Consultant	34	15.1	
Location	Colombo	135	60.0	
	Kandy	54	24.0	
	Galle	36	16.0	

Descriptive Statistics

Table 2 presents the descriptive statistics for the main study variables. Scores for transformational leadership ranged from 1.25 to 4.75, with a mean of 3.42 (SD = 0.68), indicating that transformational behaviours were reported at moderately high levels across respondents. Transactional leadership showed a slightly lower mean of 3.18 (SD = 0.61), with scores ranging from 1.50 to 4.50, suggesting moderate use of contingent reward and corrective practices. Laissez-faire leadership demonstrated the lowest mean (M = 2.31, SD = 0.74) and the widest variability, reflecting less frequent but inconsistent passive leadership behaviours.

Employee stress scores (PSS) ranged from 10 to 35, with a mean of 20.3 (SD = 5.1), indicating moderate overall stress levels

within the sample. Skewness and kurtosis values for all leadership and stress variables were within acceptable ranges (± 1), suggesting no serious deviations from normality.

Work experience ranged from 2 to 20 years (M = 7.3, SD = 4.2), with positive skewness (1.12), suggesting a higher proportion of early-career professionals in the industry. Current project load ranged from 1 to 8 concurrent projects (M = 3.4, SD = 1.8), reflecting substantial variation in workload across participants.

These descriptive patterns provide context for subsequent inferential analyses and confirm that the data met distributional assumptions required for correlation and regression testing.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics for Key Variables

Variable	N	Min	Max	M	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis
Transformational Leadership	225	1.25	4.75	3.42	0.68	-0.34	-0.21
Transactional Leadership	225	1.50	4.50	3.18	0.61	-0.12	0.18
Laissez-faire Leadership	225	1.00	4.25	2.31	0.74	0.45	-0.33
Employee Stress (PSS)	225	10	35	20.3	5.1	0.28	-0.15
Work Experience (years)	225	2	20	7.3	4.2	1.12	0.89
Current Project Load	225	1	8	3.4	1.8	0.67	-0.24

Note: Leadership scales range from 1 (never) to 5 (frequently). PSS scores range from 0-40.

Leadership Style Prevalence and Stress Levels (linked to Hypotheses 1 to 3)

Table 3 presents the prevalence of leadership styles as perceived by employees, along with their corresponding stress levels. Transformational leadership was the most prevalent style, perceived by 47% of respondents, followed by transactional leadership (35%) and laissez-faire leadership (18%). As shown

in the mean PSS scores, employees under transformational leadership reported the lowest stress levels (supporting H1), whereas those under laissez-faire leadership reported the highest (supporting H2). Transactional leadership was associated with moderate stress levels, consistent with the expected mixed-directional relationship (H3).

Table 3: Leadership Style Prevalence and Associated Stress Levels

Leadership Style	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)	Mean PSS Score	SD	Range
Transformational	106	47.1	17.8	4.3	10-26
Transactional	79	35.1	20.4	4.6	13-29
- Structure-focused	45	20.0	19.2	4.2	13-27
- Performance-focused	34	15.1	21.9	4.8	15-29
Laissez-faire	40	17.8	25.1	5.4	16-35
Total Sample	225	100.0	20.3	5.1	10-35

Note: PSS = Perceived Stress Scale. Higher scores indicate greater stress levels.

Correlations Between Leadership Styles and Employee Stress (H1–H3, H4)

Table 4 displays the correlation matrix, which shows the relationships between leadership styles, demographic variables, and employee stress levels. Transformational leadership demonstrated a significant negative correlation with stress ($r = -.38$, $p < .01$), providing evidence for H1. Transactional leadership

showed a small but significant positive correlation with stress ($r = .23$, $p < .01$), partially supporting H3. Laissez-faire leadership demonstrated the strongest positive correlation with stress ($r = .45$, $p < .01$), offering strong support for H2. Gender was also positively associated with stress ($r = .28$, $p < .01$), consistent with H4.

Table 4 Correlation Matrix: Leadership Styles, Demographics, and Stress Levels

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Transformational Leadership	-						
2. Transactional Leadership	-.31**	-					
3. Laissez-faire Leadership	-.42**	-.26**	-				
4. Employee Stress (PSS)	-.38**	.23**	.45**	-			
5. Gender (1=Female)	.09	-.11	.16*	.28**	-		
6. Age	.21**	.15*	-.18*	-.24**	-.13	-	
7. Work Experience	.28**	.14*	-.20**	-.31**	-.16**	.74**	-

*Note: $N = 225$. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

Gender Differences in Stress Levels by Leadership Style (H4)

Table 5 presents the breakdown of stress levels by gender across different leadership styles, revealing significant disparities in stress experiences. Female

employees consistently reported higher stress than male employees across all leadership styles, including transformational ($p < .01$), transactional ($p < .01$), and laissez-faire ($p < .05$), providing strong support for H4.

Table 5 Mean Stress Levels by Gender and Leadership Style

Leadership Style	Male (n = 89)	Female (n = 136)	Gender Difference
	M (SD)	M (SD)	t-value (p-value)

Leadership Style	Male (n = 89)	Female (n = 136)	Gender Difference
Transformational	16.4 (4.1)	18.7 (4.3)	3.89** (p < .01)
Transactional	18.9 (4.3)	21.4 (4.7)	3.86** (p < .01)
• Structure-focused	17.8 (4.0)	20.2 (4.2)	3.42** (p < .01)
• Performance-focused	20.3 (4.6)	22.8 (4.9)	2.18* (p < .05)
Laissez-faire	23.2 (5.1)	26.4 (5.6)	2.58* (p < .05)
Overall Sample	19.1 (4.8)	21.8 (5.2)	3.89 (p < .001)**

***Note:** Higher scores indicate greater stress levels. *p < .05, *p < .01

Workload and Managerial Support Effects (H5)

Table 6 illustrates the relationship between project workload, managerial support, and employee stress levels, demonstrating the compounding effects of high demands and

insufficient support. Employees with high workload and inadequate managerial support reported significantly higher stress levels across all project-load categories, offering strong empirical support for H5.

Table 6: Stress Levels by Workload and Managerial Support

Project Load	Adequate Support		Inadequate Support		Support Difference
	n	M (SD)	n	M (SD)	t-value (p)
1-2 Projects	67	16.8 (4.1)	23	19.4 (4.6)	2.44* (.017)
3-4 Projects	45	19.2 (4.5)	38	23.1 (4.8)	3.65** (.001)
5+ Projects	18	22.6 (5.2)	34	27.8 (5.4)	3.42** (.001)
Total	130	18.4 (4.7)	95	24.1 (5.3)	8.27 (< .001)**

**Note:* Adequate support is defined as regular supervisory meetings (≥ 2 per week) and accessible decision-making authority. *p < .05, *p < .01

Multiple Regression Analysis (H1–H5)

Table 7 presents the results of the multiple regression analysis examining predictors of employee stress levels. Transformational leadership significantly predicted lower stress ($\beta = -.28, p < .001$), supporting H1. Laissez-faire leadership significantly predicted higher stress ($\beta = .32, p < .001$), supporting H2.

Transactional leadership demonstrated a minor but significant positive effect ($\beta = .15, p = .037$), partially supporting H3. Gender remained a significant predictor ($\beta = .18, p = .003$), supporting H4, while high workload without support was also a significant predictor of elevated stress ($\beta = .26, p < .001$), supporting H5. The model explained 28.5% of the variance in employee stress levels.

Table 7: Multiple Regression Analysis - Predictors of Employee Stress

Predictor Variable	B	SE B	β	t	p	95% CI
Constant	28.45	2.31		12.33	< .001	[23.91, 33.00]
Transformational Leadership	-0.42	0.11	-.28	-3.82	< .001	[-0.63, -0.21]
Transactional Leadership	0.21	0.10	.15	2.10	.037	[0.01, 0.41]
Laissez-faire Leadership	0.51	0.12	.32	4.25	< .001	[0.27, 0.75]
Gender (1 = Female)	2.15	0.71	.18	3.03	.003	[0.75, 3.55]
High Workload without Support	3.24	0.74	.26	4.38	< .001	[1.78, 4.70]

Note: $R^2 = .285$, Adjusted $R^2 = .269$, $F(5,219) = 17.41$, $p < .001$
 The model explains 28.5% of the variance in employee stress levels.

Discussion

H1: Transformational Leadership and Stress Reduction

Findings provide strong support for H1, demonstrating that transformational leadership is significantly associated with reduced occupational stress among event management professionals. The negative correlation ($r = -.38$) and regression results confirm that leaders who provide inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualised consideration create psychologically supportive environments that buffer stress. In Sri Lanka's collectivist cultural context, where hierarchical respect and group harmony are highly valued, transformational leadership may be

especially effective. Leaders who align organisational vision with shared cultural values and community benefit are likely to foster emotional resilience and employee engagement. These results extend COR theory by illustrating that transformational leadership functions as a resource-enhancing mechanism in high-pressure service industries.

H2: Laissez-Faire Leadership and Stress Escalation

Results strongly support H2, indicating that laissez-faire leadership is the most detrimental style in this context. The strong positive correlation with stress ($r = .45$) and the highest mean PSS levels (M

= 25.1) demonstrate that passive leadership substantially increases employee strain. In Sri Lanka's high power-distance culture, employees expect proactive guidance and decision-making from leaders. The absence of direction violates cultural expectations, heightens role ambiguity, and generates unmanaged conflict. These findings reinforce existing literature and highlight that laissez-faire leadership is particularly inappropriate in South Asian organisational settings, especially in high-pressure, time-sensitive industries such as event management.

H3: Transactional Leadership and Mixed Stress Outcomes

Partial support was found for H3, reflecting the complex effects of transactional leadership. While contingent reward behaviours may provide clarity and reduce uncertainty, excessive performance-focused monitoring can increase pressure and undermine intrinsic motivation. The moderate positive association with stress suggests that stress outcomes depend on implementation rather than the style itself. In creative, project-driven environments that require flexibility, rigid transactional practices may constrain innovation and increase stress. These nuanced findings align with the JD-R model, indicating that transactional leadership can function as either a resource or a demand depending on contextual fit.

H4: Gender Differences in Stress Responses

Consistent with H4, female employees reported significantly higher stress levels than male employees across all leadership styles. This pattern may reflect gendered expectations regarding emotional support, communication quality, and work-life integration, particularly within South Asian cultural settings where women often shoulder dual domestic and professional responsibilities. The finding underscores the need for gender-responsive leadership

practices, including supportive supervision, mentorship, and workload flexibility. It also suggests that leadership inadequacies, especially passive styles, may disproportionately disadvantage women in male-dominated or high-pressure industries.

H5: Workload and Managerial Support Interaction

Strong support was found for H5, demonstrating that stress was highest when employees experienced heavy workloads without adequate managerial support. These results align with the JD-R model, which posits that high job demands lead to strain only when resources are insufficient. Progressive increases in stress across project load levels highlight that leadership support, not workload alone, is the critical determinant. Effective leadership can therefore buffer demand-related strain by providing resources, offering clear guidance, and granting access to decision-making.

Although leadership styles explained 28.5% of the variance in employee stress, findings indicate that stress is multifactorial, influenced by organisational culture, industry conditions, and socio-economic pressures. Sri Lanka's collectivist norms, hierarchical structures, and cultural reluctance toward confronting authority may moderate leadership-stress relationships in ways not reflected in Western research. These contextual insights reinforce the importance of culturally grounded leadership development in South Asian service industries.

Conclusions and Recommendations

This study provides empirical evidence that leadership styles significantly influence occupational stress within Sri Lanka's event management industry, with findings confirming that transformational leadership reduces stress, laissez-faire leadership exacerbates it, and

transactional leadership produces mixed outcomes depending on implementation. The results extend leadership–stress theory into a South Asian, collectivist, and high-power-distance context, highlighting the need for culturally sensitive interpretations and demonstrating that gender and workload conditions further shape stress responses. In practice, organisations should prioritise transformational leadership development, minimise passive leadership through supervision and accountability structures, and adopt balanced transactional practices that offer clarity without excessive pressure. Given that female employees reported higher stress across all leadership styles, gender-responsive interventions, including mentorship, supportive communication, and flexible workload planning, are essential for promoting equity and well-being. Additionally, systematic workload monitoring and consistent managerial support are recommended to prevent stress escalation during peak operational periods. At the industry level, leadership competency standards, stress-management guidelines, and occupational mental-health provisions would strengthen sustainability in high-pressure service sectors. Future research should employ longitudinal and mixed-method designs, explore mediating mechanisms such as psychological capital and emotional labour, and validate culturally adapted stress measures to deepen understanding. Overall, the study provides a contextually grounded evidence base for improving employee well-being and organisational resilience through effective, culturally aligned leadership practices.

Limitations & Future Research Directions

Several limitations should be acknowledged when interpreting the findings. First, the cross-sectional research design limits the ability to draw

causal inferences, so the directionality between leadership styles and stress cannot be definitively established. Second, the study relied solely on self-reported data, which may introduce social desirability bias and standard-method variance, particularly in collectivist cultures where respondents may be reluctant to evaluate supervisors critically. Third, the sample was drawn from event management firms in three major urban centres, Colombo, Kandy, and Galle, and therefore may not reflect the experiences of employees in rural or smaller-scale organisations. Finally, although efforts were made to adapt the Perceived Stress Scale to the local culture, the instrument may not fully capture context-specific stressors unique to South Asian work environments, such as family role obligations, hierarchical constraints, and cultural expectations regarding authority.

Future studies should consider adopting longitudinal or repeated-measure designs to examine how leadership behaviours and stress levels evolve across project cycles and seasonal fluctuations. A mixed-methods approach incorporating qualitative interviews or focus groups would deepen understanding of culturally specific stress experiences that may not be captured through standardised scales. Further research should also explore mediating and moderating mechanisms such as psychological capital, emotional labour, social support networks, and organisational climate to clarify how and why leadership styles influence stress outcomes. Comparative studies across related service industries (e.g., hospitality, tourism, media production) or between urban and rural organisational settings would enhance generalisability. Finally, developing and validating culturally grounded stress measurement tools for South Asian contexts would significantly advance theory and improve the accuracy of future empirical work.

References

- Amabile, T. M., Schatzel, E. A., Moneta, G. B., & Kramer, S. J. (2004). Leader Behaviours and the Work Environment for Creativity. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 15(1), 5–32. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2003.12.004>
- Arnold, K. A., Turner, N., Barling, J., Kelloway, E. K., & McKee, M. C. (2015). Transformational leadership and psychological well-being: The mediating role of meaningful work. *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology*, 20(1), 15–27. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0038767>
- Bakker, A. B., & Demerouti, A. (2007). The Job Demands–Resources Model: State of the Art. *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, 22(3), 309–328. <https://doi.org/10.1108/02683940710733115>
- Bass, B. M. (1999). Two decades of research and development in transformational leadership. *European Journal of Work and Organisational Psychology*, 8(1), 9–32. <https://doi.org/10.1080/135943299398410>
- Bass, B. M., & Avolio, B. J. (1994). *Full range leadership development: Manual for the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire*. Palo Alto, CA: Mind Garden.
- Bass, B. M., & Riggio, R. E. (2006). *Transformational leadership* (2nd ed.). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Benjamini, Y., & Hochberg, Y. (1995). Controlling the false discovery rate: A practical and powerful approach to multiple testing. *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society: Series B (Methodological)*, 57(1), 289–300.
- Blau, P. M. (1964). *Exchange and power in social life*. New York, NY: Wiley.
- Brown, L., & Arendt, S. W. (2012). Stress and Coping in Event Planning: Implications for Employee Well-being. *Event Management*, 16(2), 103–118. <https://doi.org/10.3727/152599512X13343565268486>
- Bycio, P., Hackett, R. D., & Allen, J. S. (1995). Further assessments of Bass's (1985) conceptualisation of transactional and transformational leadership. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 80(4), 468–478. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-9010.80.4.468>
- Central Bank of Sri Lanka. (2023). *Annual report 2023*. Colombo: Author.
- Cohen, S., Kamarck, T., & Mermelstein, R. (1983). A global measure of perceived stress. *Journal of Health and Social Behaviour*, 24(4), 385–396. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2136404>
- De Witte, H. (1999). Job insecurity and psychological well-being: Review of the literature and exploration of some unresolved issues. *European Journal of Work and Organisational Psychology*, 8(2), 155–177. <https://doi.org/10.1080/135943299398302>
- Deery, M., & Jago, L. (2015). Revisiting employee turnover in the hospitality industry: A contemporary review. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, 27(3), 453–472. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJCHM-12-2013-0538>

- Den Hartog, D. N., Van Muijen, J. J., & Koopman, P. L. (1997). Transactional versus transformational leadership: An analysis of the MLQ. *Journal of Occupational and Organisational Psychology*, 70(1), 19–34. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.2044-8325.1997.tb00628.x>
- Dorfman, P. W., Javidan, M., Hanges, P., Dastmalchian, A., & House, R. J. (2012). GLOBE: A twenty-year journey into the intriguing world of culture and leadership. *Journal of World Business*, 47(4), 504–518. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jwb.2012.01.004>
- Eagly, A. H., & Carli, L. L. (2007). *Through the labyrinth: The truth about how women become leaders*. Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press.
- Eagly, A. H., Johannesen-Schmidt, M. C., & Van Engen, M. L. (2003). Transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire leadership styles: A meta-analysis comparing women and men. *Psychological Bulletin*, 129(4), 569–591. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.129.4.569>
- Guy, M. E., Newman, M. A., & Mastracci, S. H. (2008). *Emotional labour: Putting the service in public service*. Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe.
- Heilman, M. E., & Eagly, A. H. (2008). Gender stereotypes are alive, well, and busy producing workplace discrimination. *Industrial and Organisational Psychology*, 1(4), 393–398. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1754-9434.2008.00072.x>
- Hobfoll, S. E. (1989). Conservation of resources: A new attempt at conceptualising stress. *American Psychologist*, 44(3), 513–524. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.44.3.513>
- Hochschild, A. R. (1983). *The managed heart: Commercialisation of human feeling*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Hofstede, G. (2001). *Culture's consequences: Comparing values, behaviours, institutions and organisations across nations* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- House, R. J. (1971). A path-goal theory of leader effectiveness. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 16(3), 321–339. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2391905>
- House, R. J., Hanges, P. J., Javidan, M., Dorfman, P. W., & Gupta, V. (Eds.). (2004). *Culture, leadership, and organisations: The GLOBE study of 62 societies*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Howell, J. M., & Avolio, B. J. (1993). Transformational leadership, transactional leadership, locus of control, and support for innovation: Key predictors of consolidated-business-unit performance. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 78(6), 891–902. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-9010.78.6.891>
- Huemann, M., Keegan, A., & Turner, J. R. (2007). Human resource management in the project-oriented company: A review. *International Journal of Project Management*, 25(3), 315–323. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijproman.2006.10.001>
- Jung, D. I., & Avolio, B. J. (1999). Effects of Leadership Style and Followers' Cultural Orientation on Performance in Group and Individual Task Conditions *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 84(4), 786–794. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-9010.84.4.786>

- Jung, D. I., Chow, C., & Wu, A. (2003). The role of transformational leadership in enhancing organisational innovation. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 14(4–5), 525–544. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S1048-9843\(03\)00050-X](https://doi.org/10.1016/S1048-9843(03)00050-X)
- Judge, T. A., & Piccolo, R. F. (2004). Transformational and transactional leadership: A meta-analytic test of their relative validity. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 89(5), 755–768. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-9010.89.5.755>
- Kahn, R. L., Wolfe, D. M., Quinn, R. P., Snoek, J. D., & Rosenthal, R. A. (1964). *Organisational stress: Studies in role conflict and ambiguity*. New York, NY: Wiley.
- Kelloway, E. K., Sivanathan, N., Francis, L., & Barling, J. (2005). Poor leadership. *Leadership & Organisation Development Journal*, 26(6), 446–460. <https://doi.org/10.1108/01437730510617664>
- Kelloway, E. K., Turner, N., Barling, J., & Loughlin, C. (2012). Transformational leadership and employee psychological well-being: The mediating role of employee trust. *Work & Stress*, 26(1), 39–55. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02678373.2012.660774>
- Lazarus, R. S., & Folkman, S. (1984). *Stress, appraisal, and coping*. New York, NY: Springer.
- Liu, J., Siu, O., & Shi, K. (2010). Transformational leadership and employee well-being: The mediating role of trust in leader and self-efficacy. *Work & Stress*, 24(1), 39–55. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02678371003703044>
- Marques, J. (2012). Conscious leadership: Mindfulness, compassion, and selflessness in the workplace. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 105(1), 1–6. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-011-0941-7>
- Ministry of Tourism, Sri Lanka. (2022). *Annual performance report*. Colombo: Author.
- Montano, D., Reeske, A., Franke, F., & Hüffmeier, J. (2017). Leadership, followers' mental health and job performance in organisations: A comprehensive meta-analysis. *Journal of Organisational Behaviour*, 38(3), 327–350. <https://doi.org/10.1002/job.2124>
- Nath, D. (2000). *Gently shattering the glass ceiling: Experiences of Indian women managers*. Hyderabad, India: ICFAI Press.
- Nielsen, K., Yarker, J., Randall, R., & Munir, F. (2008). The mediating effects of team and self-efficacy on the relationship between transformational leadership and job satisfaction and psychological well-being in healthcare professionals. *International Journal of Nursing Studies*, 46(9), 1236–1244. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijnurstu.2009.03.001>
- Paustian-Underdahl, S. C., Walker, L. S., & Woehr, D. J. (2014). Gender and perceptions of leadership effectiveness: A meta-analysis of contextual moderators. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 99(6), 1129–1145. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0036751>
- Podsakoff, P. M., MacKenzie, S. B., Moorman, R. H., & Fetter, R. (1990). Transformational leader behaviours and their effects on followers' trust in the leader, satisfaction, and

- organisational citizenship behaviours. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 1(2), 107–142. [https://doi.org/10.1016/1048-9843\(90\)90009-7](https://doi.org/10.1016/1048-9843(90)90009-7)
- Reb, J., Narayanan, J., & Chaturvedi, S. (2014). Leading Mindfully: Two Studies on the Influence of Supervisor Trait Mindfulness on Employee Well-being and Performance. *Mindfulness*, 5(1), 36–45. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12671-012-0144-z>
- Rosener, J. B. (1990). Ways women lead. *Harvard Business Review*, 68(6), 119–125.
- Silvers, J. R. (2012). *Professional event coordination* (2nd ed.). Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons.
- Skogstad, A., Einarsen, S., Torsheim, T., Aasland, M. S., & Hetland, H. (2007). The destructiveness of laissez-faire leadership behaviour. *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology*, 12(1), 80–92. <https://doi.org/10.1037/1076-8998.12.1.80>
- Skogstad, A., Hetland, J., Glasø, L., & Einarsen, S. (2014). Is avoidant leadership a root cause of subordinate stress? *Work & Stress*, 28(4), 323–341. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02678373.2014.957362>
- Smith, J. A. (2020). Leadership styles and employee well-being: A meta-analytic review. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 31(6), Article 101418. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2020.101418>
- Sosik, J. J., & Godshalk, V. M. (2000). Leadership styles, mentoring functions received, and job-related stress: A conceptual model and preliminary study. *Journal of Organisational Behaviour*, 21(4), 365–390. [https://doi.org/10.1002/\(SICI\)1099-1379\(200006\)21:4<365:AID-JOB14>3.0.CO;2-H](https://doi.org/10.1002/(SICI)1099-1379(200006)21:4<365:AID-JOB14>3.0.CO;2-H)
- Stamarski, C. S., & Son Hing, L. S. (2015). Gender inequalities in the workplace: The effects of organizational structures, processes, practices, and decision makers' sexism. *Equality, Diversity and Inclusion: An International Journal*, 34(3), 227–264. <https://doi.org/10.1108/EDI-09-2013-0081>
- Tabachnick, B. G., & Fidell, L. S. (2019). *Using multivariate statistics* (7th ed.). Boston, MA: Pearson.
- Turner, J. R., & Müller, R. (2003). On the nature of leadership in project management. *International Journal of Project Management*, 21(6), 475–483. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0263-7863\(02\)00102-2](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0263-7863(02)00102-2)
- Walumbwa, F. O., & Lawler, J. J. (2003). Building effective organisations: Transformational leadership, collectivist orientation, work-related attitudes and withdrawal behaviours. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 14(7), 1083–1101. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0958519032000114219>
- Wang, H., Li, Y., Chen, M., & Zhang, X. (2023). Transactional leadership and employee stress: The role of job characteristics and cultural context. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 34(8), 1567–1589. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09585192.2021.1930813>
- World Bank. (2023). *South Asia's Economic Focus: Charting a Sustainable Path*. Washington, DC