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RESEARCH ARTICLE

The harmful side of absent leaders: Multifactor leadership and employees' job-stress-related presenteeism

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Abstract
This study tests the role of the full range leadership model's leadership styles in employees' job-stress-related presenteeism (JSRP). Further, the study tests a model that introduces mediating variables in the relationship between absent leaders and JSRP. Employees from four different types of organizations: police ($N = 148$), public service ($N = 479$, not-for-profit ($N = 96$), and construction ($N = 214$) completed the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire on their direct supervisor, as well as a self-report measures of JSRP, psychological distress, and work–life balance. Correlations and hierarchical linear regression models showed that *laissez-faire* leadership had the strongest influence on JSRP for all four organizations. The parallel mediation model results showed that both employee psychological distress and work–life balance partially mediated the relationship between *laissez-faire* leadership style and employees' JSRP. These results underscore the importance of looking at absent leaders and how they affect employees negatively.

Keywords: *laissez-faire* leadership; presenteeism; job-stress-related presenteeism; leadership; absent leadership

In the past decade, there has been an increasing interest in research exploring the 'dark side of leadership'. However, most studies have focused on abusive (Tepper, 2000), toxic (Lipman-Blumen, 2008), destructive (Einarsen, Aasland, & Skogstad, 2007), and tyrannical (Ashforth, 1994) leadership styles. Some of the common behaviors exhibited by these leaders are ridiculing and degrading employees, lying and deceptiveness, blaming others for their mistakes, harassment, and physical aggression. It is easy to see how these overt and covert behaviors can harm employees. While the presence of such behaviors may be associated with bad leadership, the absence of abusive behaviors does not necessarily make a good leader. Indeed, the absence of positive and supportive leadership behaviors may also harm employees. More recently, a few studies have explored the negative or dark side of another type of leadership: absent leaders. In fact, authors studying the impact of tyrannical and *laissez-faire* leadership on employee job satisfaction have found that, while tyrannical leadership predicted a decrease in employee job satisfaction over a 6-month period, *laissez-faire* leadership was the sole predictor of job satisfaction over a 2-year time lag (Skogstad et al., 2015). Leary and Miller (2021, p. 9) conclude the following about absent leaders: 'The impact of an illusory perception that leaders who do nothing can do no harm is analogous to an undetectable cancer that proliferates'.

This study investigated the relationship between leader behavior and follower stress-related presenteeism. More precisely, relations between transformational, transactional, and *laissez-faire* leadership and job-stress-related presenteeism (JSRP) are investigated. The overall aim of this study

is to explore which of those leadership styles might reduce employees' JSRP and which styles may exacerbate it. Furthermore, the study aims to look further into *laissez-faire* leadership and the factors that increase employee JSRP through high employee psychological distress and low work–life balance.

Our topic fits within the intersection of two consequential work outcomes – stress and distraction. Both siphon away much of organizations' productivity. Stress can reduce employee productivity (Okeke, Echo, & Oboreh, 2016) and increase costs through its effects on employee turnover (Fried, Shirom, Gilboa, & Cooper, 2008; Jou, Kuo, & Tang, 2013) and stress-related illness and absence (Wolvetang, van Dongen, Speklé, Coenen, & Schaafsma, 2022). In a study measuring the relationship between presenteeism and psychosocial work factors, Cho, Park, Lee, Min, and Baek (2016) found presenteeism to be associated with discrimination, harassment, job insecurity, work–life imbalance, low job satisfaction, absence of support from colleagues, job stress, and high work intensity. Distraction is also a concern. Workplace influences can distract employees' attention from work and force them to cope with conflicting attentional demands, increasing the time required to complete tasks and the risk of mistakes and accidents (Roper & Juneja, 2008). One study found that the costs of distraction among employees at an organization were almost 15 times more than that of health-related absenteeism (Bialowolski, McNeely, VanderWeele, & Weziak-Bialowolska, 2020). Another found that distraction mediated the relationship between despotic leadership and employee turnover intention, the authors concluding that 'creating a distraction-free work environment has major financial implications for employers, enhances employee well-being and relieves frustration and stress' (Iqbal, Asghar, & Asghar, 2022, p. 8). As we will show, the construct we study, JSRP, involves stress and distraction.

Leaders' ways of managing and interacting with employees can alleviate or exacerbate their followers' stress (Arnold, 2017). For instance, Zhang, Wang, and He (2024) found that authoritarian leadership increased the association between performance pressure and employee presenteeism.

This is essential because job stress has many negative outcomes (Boyd, Lewin, & Sager, 2009; Murphy, Duxbury, & Higgins, 2007). For employees, these include diminished psychological and physical health and strained work and home relationships (Ganster & Rosen, 2013; Nwaogu & Chan, 2021). For organizations, stressful work environments can generate accidents and higher healthcare costs (Barkhordari, Malmir, & Malakoutikhah, 2019; Goh, Pfeffer, & Zenios, 2016). After all, leaders are the shapers of an organization's culture, and an unsafe culture leads to negative consequences for both the organization and its employees. It is clearly in organizations' interests to monitor the psychological climate of their work unit and their employees' stress levels just as they do for production processes and financial indicators (Gilbreath, 2008). A Canadian Labour Force Survey report (2023) indicated that over 4.1 million Canadians experienced high or very high levels of work-related stress, representing 21.2% of all employed people. The cost of employee mental health is not limited to human impacts; in the USA, the cost of lost productivity due to mental health issues is estimated at $47.6 billion annually (Witter & Agrawal, 2022).

Because leader behavior can increase or decrease follower's stress (LePine, Zhang, Crawford, & Rich, 2016), and negative leader behaviors, in particular, are associated with employees' stress levels (Labrague, Nwafor, & Tsaras, 2020), this led us to wonder which styles of leadership lead to more or less JSRP. Leadership researchers have coalesced much of their efforts around two leadership styles: transformational and transactional leadership. Later, a third category of leadership has generated interest: *laissez-faire* leadership. However, the extent to which *laissez-faire* or absent leaders can affect employee well-being remains relatively unknown. Thus, the research question we investigate is how those three leadership styles relate to employee JSRP. Furthermore, we are interested in understanding the role of *laissez-faire* leadership on employee presenteeism through its impact on work–life balance and psychological distress.

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Potential contributions of this study

Investigating the impact of the three leadership styles of the Full-Range Leadership Model on samples from very different types of organizations will provide a number of contributions to the leadership and presenteeism literature.

First, as discussed earlier, the study by George, Chiba, and Scheepers (2017) found that *laissez-faire* leadership was unrelated to followers' JSRP. Given the nature of this type of leadership and previous study findings indicating its detrimental effects on employee well-being, we believe that George et al.'s (2017) findings are counterintuitive and call for further investigation.

Second, our four samples permit an investigation – albeit limited – of industry or sector effects of leadership and JSRP, which George et al. (2017) believed could provide valuable information.

Third, our study expands the relatively new study of *laissez-faire* leadership as a destructive leadership style (Klasmeier, Schleu, Millhoff, Poethke, & Bormann, 2022). Indeed, the present study tests a model that presents factors (employee psychological distress, work–life balance) through which absent leaders affect employees' JSRP. This model expands the literature not just on absent leadership but on the dark side of leadership by bringing to light the harmful effects of *laissez-faire* leadership. The research gap this study seeks to address is determining the mechanisms through which leadership styles, psychological distress, and work–family conflict – as potential and likely antecedents – are associated with JSRP.

Literature review and research hypotheses

Job-stress-related presenteeism

There are different types of presenteeism, so it will be helpful to situate JSRP within the presenteeism nomenclature. Research on presenteeism has branched in two main directions. The predominant branch investigates sickness presenteeism. Researchers who study sickness presenteeism define it as when 'employees choose to attend work despite symptoms of illness that should prompt them to take sick leave' (Jourdain & Vézina, 2014, p. 486) or 'the phenomenon of attending work when sick or "working through" illness' (Sanderson, Tilse, Nicholson, Oldenburg, & Graves, 2007, p. 1). The other branch regards presenteeism essentially as a reduced ability to work that can result from a variety of causes. This is exemplified by presenteeism definitions such as 'reduced work productivity while present at work' (Woo & Postolache, 2008, p. 3). This is the branch that encompasses studies of presenteeism resulting from job stress.

One negative outcome that can result from work stress is JSRP. This occurs when employees' attention to their work is reduced because they are using coping resources to deal with stress on the job. The conservation of resources theory indicates this happens because coping resources are limited, and employees have to divert mental resources that could be devoted to their work to cope with stressors (Hobfoll, 2001). In a study on job demands and psychological well-being, Sarwat, Ali, and Khan (2021) found that cognitive job demands were positively associated with JSRP.

JSRP is associated with psychological distress, turnover intention, lower job satisfaction levels (Mathieu & Gilbreath, 2023), and well-being (Karimi, Cheng, Bartram, Leggat, & Sarkeshik, 2015). Among nurses, JSRP has been found to be associated with burnout and perceptions of patient safety (Rainbow, Drake, & Steege, 2020). Those results imply significant negative consequences for employees and their organizations.

As leaders, managers and supervisors can be stress generators or stress ameliorators for their employees (Cooke, Wang, & Bartram, 2019; Gilbreath & Benson, 2004). They can generate stress through poor planning, perfectionistic standards, and rude treatment of employees. They can ameliorate stress by listening to employees attentively, shielding them from interference, and supervising them considerately (Gilbreath & Benson, 2004; Harms, Credé, Tynan, Leon, & Jeung, 2017). It is understandable how actions such as those could affect employees' JSRP. Chen, Lu and Cooper (2021) found that supervisory and collegial support helped employees presenting high levels of presenteeism

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in achieving innovative performance. Furthermore, Gilbreath and Karimi (2012) found that supervisor behavior was correlated with employees' JSRP – especially negative behaviors. Examples included failing to monitor and manage group dynamics properly, making decisions that affect employees without seeking their input, and showing disinterest in employees' ideas and projects. It is understandable how supervisor behaviors such as those could generate employee stress. The supervisor's behavior with the strongest negative relationship with employees' JSRP was 'helps employees keep work in perspective (e.g., there is more to life than work)' (Gilbreath & Karimi, 2012). In fact, a study on the impact of leader presenteeism on employee well-being has highlighted the fact that leader presenteeism had a positive effect on employee presenteeism and an indirect effect on employee sick leave through employee presenteeism (Dietz, Zacher, Scheel, Otto, & Rigotti, 2020). One of the most studied models of leadership is Avolio and Bass's Full-Range Leadership Model; it encompasses three leadership styles that include different types of behaviors, some of which have been presented above to have an effect on presenteeism.

Full-Range Leadership Model

Transformational leadership

Burns (1978) identified the leadership style we now refer to as transformational leadership – he used the term 'transforming leadership'. Transformational leaders move followers beyond their self-interests through idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, or individualized consideration (Bass, 1999). They elevate followers' maturity and ideals and their concern for achievement, self-actualization, and the well-being of others (Bass, 1999). Leaders use *idealized influence* and *inspirational motivation* when they envision a desirable future, articulate how it can be reached, set high-performance standards, serve as an example to be followed, and show determination and confidence (Bass, 1999). That entails behaviors such as going beyond their self-interest for the good of the group, acting in ways that build follower respect, and considering the moral and ethical consequences of decisions (Avolio & Bass, 2004). They employ *intellectual stimulation* to help followers become more innovative and creative (Bass, 1999). That includes behaviors such as seeking differing perspectives when solving problems, encouraging followers to evaluate problems from different viewpoints, and suggesting new ways to complete assignments. Leaders use *individualized consideration* when they attend to followers' developmental needs and provide support. That encompasses behaviors like spending time teaching and coaching, treating followers as an individual rather than just group members, and helping followers develop their strengths (Avolio & Bass, 2004).

One experimental study provides insight into how transformational leadership may be helpful for followers under stressful conditions (Lyons & Schneider, 2009). Individuals completing a stressful task under transformational leadership conditions reported higher social support, greater task-related self-efficacy, less negative affect, and lower threat appraisals than individuals working under transactional leadership conditions (Lyons & Schneider, 2009). Research suggests that when leaders use transformational leadership behaviors such as intellectual stimulation and individualized consideration, followers are more likely to use their strengths and take initiative (Bakker et al., 2023. That might lead employees to be more engaged in their work and possibly less susceptible to stress-related distractions, resulting in less JSRP.

Studies have found transformational leadership to be related to lower stress among employees (Kloutsiniotis, Mihail, Mylonas, & Pateli, 2022; Manoppo, 2020; Salem, 2015). However, other studies found that transformational leadership is associated with higher levels of work stress for employees (Parveen & Adeinat, 2019). No theoretical explanations have been offered to explain those results. Bass and Avolio's full-range leadership theory transformational leadership theory does not explicitly identify situations where transformational leadership is detrimental, but perhaps leaders who overemphasize transforming employees and setting high goals can stress their employees, leading to increased JSRP. Furthermore, the intellectual stimulation component of transformational leadership, which leads to cognitive reappraisals and questioning some long-held assumptions, could create

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emotional distress for some employees (Avolio & Bass, 1988; MacKenzie, Podsakoff, & Rich, 2001). Both of those effects could increase employees' JSRP.

The study most directly related to ours is that of George et al. (2017), who found that transformational leadership was related to lower JSRP among South African knowledge workers. However, there is evidence that transformational leadership behaviors, although positive for the individual, can increase stress in a group setting if these behaviors are unevenly distributed or differentiated among followers (Bormann & Diebig, 2021). Furthermore, Avolio and Bass (1988) hypothesized that the intellectual stimulation component of transformational leadership, which leads to cognitive reappraisals and questioning of some long-held assumptions, could create emotional distress (Avolio & Bass, 1988; MacKenzie et al., 2001).

That body of research on transformational leadership makes predicting its effects on JSRP difficult. The potentially stress-inducing effects of some facets of transformational leadership weighed against the prevailing view of transformational leadership as a positive supervisory style for employees lead us to predict that

Hypothesis 1: The association between transformational leadership and followers' JSRP will be negative but not statistically significant.

Transactional leadership

Transactional leadership, also first identified by Burns (1978), refers to the exchange relationship between leader and follower to meet their self-interests (Bass, 1999). In its constructive form, transactional leadership involves developing and defining agreements to achieve work objectives, discovering followers' capabilities, and specifying the compensation and rewards that can be expected upon successfully completing the objectives (Avolio & Bass, 2004). In its corrective form, the leader's focus is on setting standards. In its passive form, leaders wait for mistakes to happen before taking action. Furthermore, in its active form, leaders engage in close monitoring for mistakes (Avolio & Bass, 2004).

Transactional leadership's use of contingent rewards includes behaviors such as specifying who is responsible for achieving performance targets, making it clear what followers can expect to receive when performance goals are achieved, and expressing satisfaction when followers meet expectations (Avolio & Bass, 2004). In its passive form, transactional leadership's management by exception encompasses behaviors like failing to get involved until problems become serious, waiting for things to go wrong before taking action, and adhering to the principle of 'If it ain't broke, don't fix it' (Avolio & Bass, 2004). In its active form, management by exception involves focusing on irregularities, mistakes, and deviations from standards, keeping track of mistakes, and directing followers' attention to instances when they fail to meet standards (Avolio & Bass, 2004).

Transactional leadership seems to be a 'double-edged sword' that can positively and negatively affect followers (Young, Glerum, Joseph, & McCord, 2021). When transactional leaders establish clear expectations and reliably follow through on what has been agreed to, followers may develop trust and the belief that their leader and coworkers will complete tasks reliably (Bass, Avolio, Jung, & Berson, 2003). That could reduce the uncertainty associated with job dissatisfaction (O'Driscoll & Beehr, 1994), physiological stress responses, and perceived stress (De Berker et al., 2016). On the other hand, transactional leaders' reliance on contingent rewards could feel controlling for followers (Young et al., 2021).

Studies investigating follower stress related to transactional leadership suggest it increases stress (Rowold & Schlotz, 2009; Vanesa, 2021). Although those researchers did not link their findings to theory, they may be partly explained by theories of intrinsic motivation, wherein a sense of personal agency is central to positive motivation and related to well-being (Renes, & Aarts, 2017). Transactional leaders' reliance on contingent rewards could feel controlling for followers (Young et al., 2021), perhaps undermining their sense of agency.

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In addition, one of the subscales used to measure transactional leadership, management by exception-passive, has been found to be positively related to chronic stress (Rowold & Schlotz, 2009). That may be because leaders only intervene if standards are not met or errors are detected, with the result that followers only receive negative feedback (Rowold & Schlotz, 2009). Furthermore, leaders who rely on management-by-exception have been described as merely controlling their followers without using behaviors that could help alleviate stress (Rowold & Schlotz, 2009). The only study investigating transactional leadership's association with JSRP (George et al., 2017) found a negative correlation between them. Those mixed results of studies lead us to predict that

Hypothesis 2: The relationship between transactional leadership and JSRP will not be statistically significant.

Laissez-faire leadership

Laissez-faire leadership is also known as the absence of leader behavior (Diebig & Bormann, 2020), which is why we use the term 'absent leaders'. It encompasses behaviors such as avoiding getting involved when important issues arise, being absent when needed, avoiding making decisions, and delaying responding to urgent questions. *Laissez-faire* leadership undermines followers' job satisfaction (Skogstad et al., 2015), their trust in their leader (Breevaart & Zacher, 2019), and their perceptions of their leader's effectiveness (Wong & Giessner, 2018). It is also associated with role conflict, role ambiguity, and conflicts with coworkers (Skogstad, Einarsen, Torsheim, Aasland, & Hetland, 2007), all of which are stressors. Unsurprisingly, *laissez-faire* leadership is associated with followers' stress (Pishgooie, Atashzadeh-Shoorideh, Falcó-Pegueroles, & Lotfi, 2019). This is aptly expressed by Diebig and Bormann (2020, p. 337): 'when followers run into acute problems without immediate feedback or support by their supervisor, they will experience insecurity, uncertainty and, as a result, stress'. In colloquial terms, these leaders are not there when you need them; therefore, they cannot create a safe work environment for their employees or offer them support when stressful situations occur. It is easy to see how stressful that would be.

The stressor–strain framework may be one avenue for understanding why *laissez-faire* leaders are stressful to work for, as employees experiencing work stressors cannot rely on a *laissez-faire* leader to help alleviate the stressors. Role theory (Katz & Kahn, 1966) is another possible explanation. Indeed, Vandenberghe and Vandenberghe (2022) found that the influence of *laissez-faire* leadership on employee well-being was partially moderated (amplified) by the perception of the supervisor's high organizational status. *Laissez-faire* leadership has been characterized as an ambiguity-increasing type of leadership behavior that leads to higher levels of stress among followers (Diebig & Bormann, 2020).

Only one study has investigated the relationship between *laissez-faire* leadership and JSRP. Contrary to what one might expect, given what is known about its effects on employees, George et al. (2017) found that *laissez-faire* leadership had no significant relationship with either job stress or JSRP. While the authors used the Job-Stress-Related Presenteeism Scale (JSRPS), they mention that they adapted it for their study. As part of the changes, they changed the responses on the Likert-type scale from the original version from a 5-point scale to a 3-point scale. As this is the only study investigating *laissez-faire* leadership and JSRP, and given that the authors have adapted the instrument, we believe the relationship between *laissez-faire* leadership and the JSRPS bears further investigation. The studies showing the positive relationship between *laissez-faire* leadership and job stress and psychological distress, coupled with the consideration that these types of leaders are not present to create safe and healthy work cultures, leads us to predict that

Hypothesis 3: *Laissez-faire* leadership will positively and significantly affect followers' JSRP.

Some studies on *laissez-faire* leadership view this type of leadership as more than being absent as a leader; they categorize it as a passive-aggressive leadership style that might be destructive for

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employees (Skogstad et al., 2007). Moreover, studies on dark personalities have found a strong positive relationship between the three Dark Triad constructs (narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy) and *laissez-faire* leadership (Ekizler & Bolelli, 2020). In fact, Mathieu and Babiak (2015) conclude that the strong association between psychopathic traits and *laissez-faire* leadership style could be an indication that dark personality traits underlie the destructive aspects of *laissez-faire* leadership. Since psychopathic traits in leaders have been associated with higher psychological distress in employees, lower job satisfaction, and higher work–family conflict (Mathieu, Neumann, Hare, & Babiak, 2014), the association between psychopathic traits and *laissez-faire* leadership leads us to believe that this leadership style will have stronger associations with JSRP than transformational and transactional leadership.

Hypothesis 4: *Laissez-faire* leadership will be the strongest predictor of followers' JSRPS.

Absent leaders ignore problems and conflicts and cannot support their employees when needed. Furthermore, absent leaders do not clarify expectations or assess whether objectives and workloads are too demanding. Consequently, it is not surprising to find in many studies a negative relationship between presenteeism, work–life balance (Özdemir & Söyük, 2023), lack of development opportunities, and poor leadership McGregor, Ashbury, Caputi and Iverson (2018). Hwang and Jung (2021) found that demands at work had a positive indirect effect on presenteeism mediated by trouble sleeping, fatigue, and muscle aches. Among the predictors of presenteeism, Ferreira, da Costa Ferreira, Cooper, and Dora (2019) found that negative affect and emotional exhaustion predicted productivity loss due to presenteeism. Rainbow, Gilbreath, and Linsey (2021) tested a mediated model of antecedents and consequences of presenteeism and found significant relationships between work environment, perceived stress, work–life balance, burnout, and presenteeism. Leary and Miller (2021, p.7) state that 'Laissez-faire leaders create role ambiguity (no direction), role conflict (inadequate clarification; incompatible demands), and through sustained inaction, exacerbate interpersonal conflict among their subordinates. The consequence, psychological burnout, has serious behavioral and psychological ramifications for employees'.

This leads us to believe that *laissez-faire* leadership will impact JSRP through the mediating role of employee psychological distress and work–life balance.

Hypothesis 5: Psychological distress and work–life balance will meditate the relationship between *laissez-faire* leadership and JSRPS.

Method

Samples

To investigate our hypotheses, we analyzed data collected from four organizational samples. Organizations from different industries were chosen to test the hypotheses in different settings with different types of employees. All employees and managers for the four organizations were invited to complete our paper–pencil questionnaire during work hours.

Sample 1

Sample 1 was composed of 228 employees from a private Canadian construction business. All employees, including office and construction workers, were asked by their organization to participate in this project by completing a measure of JSRP and the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ), the General Health Questionnaire (GHQ-12), and a measure of work–life conflict. Employees completed the questionnaire during work hours. In total, 228 employees completed the questionnaire. Of the participants, 62.3% were men ($n = 201$), and 11.8% were women ($n = 27$). Their ages ranged from 18 to 69 (mean = 39.8). On average, employees were in their current jobs for 4.8 years and had been employed by their company for 4.9 years (minimum = 1 month and maximum = 38 years).

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Sample 2

Sample 2 comprised 97 employees from a non-profit organization in the arts. All of the employees were asked by their organization to participate in this project by completing our questionnaire online during work hours. Men were 34% of the respondents, and women were 66%. Age varied from 19 to 62 (mean = 33.2). On average, employees had been at their jobs for 4.7 years and working for the company for 6.9 years.

Sample 3

Sample 3 comprised 491 employees from a public service organization in Canada. Their organization asked them to participate in this project and complete our questionnaire during work hours. Of the participants, 62.3% were men, and 37.7% were women. The ages ranged from 19 to 66 (mean = 45.3). On average, employees had been at their jobs for 8.3 years and worked for the organization for 14 years.

Sample 4

Sample 4 was composed of 148 employees from a police organization in Canada. Employees were asked by their organization to participate in this project and complete our questionnaire during work hours. Men were 68.9% of the participants, 30.4% were women, and 0.7% did not wish to respond to this question. The ages ranged from 20 to 56 (mean = 37.3). On average, employees had been at their jobs for 7.7 years and worked for the organization for 13.4 years.

Measures

Job-stress-related presenteeism

The JSRPS (Gilbreath & Frew, 2014) includes the six items shown in Table 1 that employees respond to using a Likert-type scale (1 = Never; 5 = All the time). The JSRPS has been validated and shows good psychometric properties (Beklemis, Harmanci Seren, & Gilbreath, 2023; Mathieu & Gilbreath, 2023). Alpha coefficients and mean inter-item correlations for the MLQ and the JSRPS are presented in Table 2.

Transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire leadership

We used the MLQ rater form (Avolio & Bass, 2004). This 45-item measure assesses leadership behavior. It is a validated and widely used measure translated for use in many languages and nations (Braathu, Laukvik, Egeland, & Skar, 2022; Rowold, 2005).

To create the *laissez-faire* subscale, we added the scales for management-by-exception passive and *laissez-faire* together. The management-by-exception behaviors (e.g., waiting for things to go wrong before taking action) seem to overlap with what is regarded as *laissez-faire* behavior. Others (e.g., Frooman, Mendelson, & Murphy, 2012) have similarly combined these positively correlated scales to investigate leaders' effects on their followers. Den Hartog, Van Muijen, and Koopman (1997, p. 32) report that 'the data give no reason to distinguish between the subdimensions *laissez-faire* and passive management-by exception", concluding that the two sub-types of leadership behavior are empirically and theoretically linked. Alpha coefficients for the measure of *laissez-faire* leadership in our samples were: sample 1, .75; sample 2, .80; and sample 3, .81. Mean inter-item correlations were: sample 1, .28; sample 2, .35; and sample 3, .36.

Work–life conflict

The instrument used for this study was adapted from the work–family conflict and family–work conflict and effective experiences questionnaire (Netemeyer, Boles, & McMurrian, 1996). While the original instrument measures family–work conflict and work–family conflict, we used only the five items about work–family conflict. In the original version (Netemeyer et al., 1996) the alpha coefficient for these five items was 88. Alpha in the current research was .85 for Sample 1, .85 for Sample 2,

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Table 1. Mean and standard deviation (SD) of MLQ leadership styles, MLQ subscales, and the JSRPS

	Sample 1		Sample 2		Sample 3		Sample 4	
	N = 214		*N* = 96		*N* = 479		*N* = 148	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Transformational	47.81	14.15	50.92	12.93	44.54	12.60	42.73	15.75
Transactional	16.47	5.05	16.60	5.04	14.90	4.33	15.49	4.52
Laissez-faire	9.59	4.96	9.40	5.24	10.12	5.51	11.43	6.28
MLQIIA	10.24	3.40	10.77	3.12	9.88	3.36	9.13	3.98
MLQIIB	8.67	3.22	9.26	2.93	8.70	2.90	8.07	3.27
MLQIM	10.74	3.28	11.59	2.99	10.52	3.18	941	3.48
MLQIS	9.09	3.02	9.65	2.87	8.65	2.87	8.30	3.44
MLQIC	9.11	3.10	9.65	2.99	8.44	3.22	7.82	3.60
MLQCR	9.15	3.24	9.56	3.14	8.46	3.20	8.24	3.61
MLQMBEA	7.31	2.55	7.04	2.87	6.45	2.30	7.25	2.17
MLQMBEP	6.11	2.69	6.03	2.30	6.11	2.84	7.09	2.91
MLQLF	3.52	2.95	3.52	3.05	4.00	3.25	4.34	3.94
JSRPS	4.91	4.02	5.08	4.39	5.67	4.12	6.18	4.64

Notes: MLQIIA (Idealized Influence); MLQIIB (Idealized Influence); MLQIM (Inspirational Motivation); MLQIS (Intellectual Stimulation)); MLQIC (Individualized Consideration); MLQCR (Contingent Reward); MLQMBEA (Management by Exception Active); MLQMBEP (Management by Exception Passive); MLQLF (*Laissez-faire*); JSRPS (Job-Stress-Related Presenteeism Scale).

Table 2. Cronbach α and mean inter-item correlations for MLQ leadership styles, MLQ subscales, and the JSRPS

	Sample 1		Sample 2		Sample 3		Sample 4	
	$N = 214$		$N = 96$		$N = 479$		$N = 148$	
	Alpha	MIC	Alpha	MIC	Alpha	MIC	Alpha	MIC
Transformational	.93	.42	.92	.38	.91	.35	.95	.48
Transactional	.69	.22	.67	.20	.55	.12	.55	.12
Laissez-faire	.75	.28	.80	.35	.81	.36	.85	.40
MLQIIA	.79	.48	.70	.36	.75	.43	.85	.56
MLQIIB	.73	.41	.63	.30	.68	.29	.74	.41
MLQIM	.84	.56	.83	.56	.83	.56	.88	.64
MLQIS	.71	.38	.72	.40	.67	.34	.83	.54
MLQIC	.67	.33	.63	.31	.68	.35	.79	.48
MLQCR	.69	.36	.62	.30	.69	.36	.78	.48
MLQMBEA	.34	.11	.56	.24	.16	.04	.41	.13
MLQMBEP	.44	.17	.54	.23	.55	.24	.53	.21
MLQLF	.76	.46	.81	.52	.82	.53	.90	.69
JSRPS	.87	.54	.89	.59	.88	.55	.91	.62

Notes: MLQIIA (Idealized Influence); MLQIIB (Idealized Influence); MLQIM (Inspirational Motivation); MLQIS (Intellectual Stimulation)); MLQIC (Individualized Consideration); MLQCR (Contingent Reward); MLQMBEA (Management by Exception Active); MLQMBEP (Management by Exception Passive); MLQLF (*Laissez-faire*); JSRPS (Job-Stress-Related Presenteeism Scale).

Table 3. Mean, standard deviation and correlations among MLQ leadership styles and the JSRPS Sample 1 ($N = 214$) and Sample 2 ($N = 96$)

	1.	2.	3.	4.
1. Transformational	…	.86**	−.36**	−.03
2. Transactional	.79**	…	−.35**	−.12
3. *Laissez-faire*	−.36**	−.20**	…	.30**
4. JSRPS	−.18**	−.07	.35**	…

Note: Sample 1 below the diagonal, Sample 2 above the diagonal.
* $p < 0.05$. ** $p < 0.01$.

.87 for Sample 3, .79 for Sample 4. Mean inter-item correlation were: .34 for Sample 1, .54 for Sample 2, .59 for Sample 3, .42 for Sample 4.

GHQ-12: employees' psychological well-being

The GHQ-12 (Goldberg & Williams, 1991) is a 12-item measure of psychological well-being frequently used to screen for symptoms of non-psychotic psychiatric disorders. The GHQ-12 produces assessments on three factors (anxiety and depression, social dysfunction, and loss of confidence) (Gao et al., 2004). Many researchers have used it as a single unidimensional GHQ scale score to represent overall psychological distress (Hankins, 2008). The GHQ-12 has been found to have good validity for individuals in the workforce (Makowska, Merecz, Moscicka, & Kolasa, 2002). Sample items include 'I think of myself as worthless' and 'I have been unable to concentrate', and are rated on a 4-point Likert-type scale ($\alpha = .83$ for Sample 1; $\alpha = .87$ for Sample 2; $\alpha = .87$ for Sample 3; $\alpha = .84$ for Sample 4). The mean inter-item correlation was .29 for Sample 1, .35 for Sample 2, .35 for Sample 3, and .31 for Sample 4.

Data analysis technique

To verify our hypotheses, we ran Pearson *r* correlational analyses between the MLQ subscales and the JSRPS for all four samples separately. Additionally, we ran multiple regression models to test the influence of each MLQ subscale on JSRP for our four samples separately. Finally, we combined the four samples to test a parallel mediation model of the effect of psychological distress and work–life balance on the relationship between *laissez-faire* leadership and JSRP.

Results

The means and standard deviations for all measures and scales are in Table 1.

Pearson r correlational analyses

Our first hypothesis was that the association between transformational leadership and followers' JSRP would be negative but not statistically significant. Contrary to our expectation, although not very strong, for three of our four samples, the negative relationship between transformational leadership and JSRP was significant (see Tables 3 and 4). This conforms with the only other study examining the relationship between JSRP and transformational leadership (George et al., 2017). In fact, of our four samples, the one that had the strongest association between JSRP and transformational leadership style was the police organization. Perhaps the realities of working in a high-risk environment increase the risks of developing JSRP, and transformational leadership could act as a buffer to help reduce presenteeism.

Our second hypothesis was that the relationship between transactional leadership and JSRP would not be statistically significant. For our four samples, this hypothesis has been confirmed.

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Table 4. Mean, standard deviation, and correlations among MLQ leadership styles and the JSRPS Sample 3 ($N = 479$) and Sample 4 ($N = 148$)

	1.	2.	3.	4.
1. Transformational	…	.75**	−.59**	−.27**
2. Transactional	.68**	…	−.42**	−.13
3. *Laissez-faire*	−.44**	−.20**	…	.40**
4. JSRPS	−.12*	.00	.31**	…

Note: Sample 3 below the diagonal, Sample 4 above the diagonal.
*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$.

Table 5. Hierarchical linear regressions of MLQ leadership styles and job-stress-related presenteeism for our four samples

	Sample 1	Sample 2	Sample 3	Sample 4
	Std.β	Std.β	Std.β	Std.β
1. Transformational	−0.15	0.02	−0.08	−0.18
2. Transactional	0.10	−0.11	0.11	0.16
3. *Laissez-faire*	0.31***	0.30**	0.30***	0.36***
Adj. R^2	0.12	0.10	0.09	0.16

Note: *$p \leq .05$; **$p \leq .01$; ***$p \leq .001$.

The third and fourth hypotheses were that *laissez-faire* leadership would be positively associated with followers' JSRP and would have the strongest association with JSRP. As seen in Tables 3 and 4, *laissez-faire* leadership was significantly and positively correlated with JSRP for all four samples. Tables 5 and 6 shows that, of the three MLQ leadership styles, *Laissez-faire* leadership had the strongest influence on JSRP. Finally, Table 8 shows that, of the nine MLQ subscales included in the model, the *laissez-faire* leadership subscale had the strongest influence on JSRP. This clearly indicates a link between absent leaders and employees' JSRP.

Before examining the results vis-à-vis our hypotheses, we ran ANOVAs to compare the means of our four samples for the JSRPS and MLQ. The one-way ANOVA revealed a significant difference between organizations on each of the MLQ's leadership styles:

Transformational leadership

Tuckey post hoc tests [F (3,938) = 6.59, $p \leq 0.001$] showed that transformational leadership scores were significantly lower for the police organization than for the construction ($p = .01$) and non-profit organizations ($p \leq .001$). Furthermore, the public service sample reported significantly lower transformational leadership scores than the construction organization ($p = .01$).

Transactional leadership

Tuckey post hoc tests [F (3, 938) = 145.46, $p \leq 0.001$] indicated that the non-profit organization reported significantly higher transactional leadership scores than the other three organizational samples ($p \leq .001$). Furthermore, the construction company presented significantly higher transactional leadership scores than the public service organization. ($p = .002$).

Laissez-faire leadership

The Tuckey post hoc test [F (3,938) = 3.79, $p = 0.01$] indicated that the police organization presented significantly higher scores than the non-profit ($p = .03$) and construction ($p = .02$) organizations. The degree of significance between the police organization and the public service organization's

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Table 6. Mean, standard deviation and correlations among all MLQ subscales and the JSRPS Sample 1 ($N = 214$) and Sample 2 ($N = 96$)

	Mean	SD	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.	10.
1. MLQIIA			…	.63**	.75**	.70**	.71**	.68**	.38**	−.28**	−.50**	−.03
2. MLQIIB			.70**	…	.68**	.66**	.66**	.64**	.27**	−.04	−.24*	.09
3. MLQIM			.75***	.72**	…	.68**	.72**	.66**	.24*	−.22*	−.40**	−.03
4. MLQIS			.70**	.70**	.73**	…	.75**	.73**	.34**	−.28**	−.45**	−.07
5. MLQIC			.71**	.72**	.71**	.75**	…	.69**	.32**	−.18	−.39**	−.07
6. MLQCR			.68**	.68**	.76**	.71**	.67**	…	.30**	−.19	−.43**	−.12
7. MLQMBEA			.50**	.52**	.47**	.51**	.45**	.49**	…	−.13	−.28**	−.08
8. MLQMBEP			−.24**	−.11	−.25**	−.19**	−.15*	−.19**	.07	…	.62**	.20*
9. MLQLF			−.44**	−.25**	−.44**	−.36**	−.32**	−.38**	.02	.52**	…	.33**
10. JSRPS			−.14*	−.14*	−.20**	−.18**	−.13	−.16*	.06	.26**	.34**	…

Notes: Sample 1 below diagonal, Sample 2 above diagonal.
MLQIIA (Idealized Influence); MLQIIB (Idealized Influence); MLQIM (Inspirational Motivation); MLQIS (Intellectual Stimulation)); MLQIC (Individualized Consideration); MLQCR (Contingent Reward); MLQMBEA (Management by Exception Active); MLQMBEP (Management by Exception Passive); MLQLF (*Laissez-faire*); JSRPS (Job-Stress-Related Presenteeism Scale).
*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$.

laissez-faire leadership was $p = 0.5$, close to being significantly different; the police *laissez-faire* score was higher than the public service scores.

Job-stress-related presenteeism

The Tuckey post hoc test [F (3, 938) = 3.32, $p = 0.02$] indicated that the police organization had the highest JSRPS scores. This is understandable, given how stressful police work can be (Anshel, 2000). However, it was only significantly different from the construction business' JSRPS scores ($p = .02$).

Regression analyses of the MLQ subscales and JSRP

First, we tested models including the three leadership styles on Job-Related-Stress Presenteeism. As shown in Table 7, *laissez-faire* leadership was the only leadership style with a significant (positive) relationship with the JSRPS for all four samples.

Next, we tested regression models, including all nine MLQ leadership subscales on the JSRPS. For all four samples, the strongest association was with the *laissez-faire* subscale. For the public service organization, inspirational motivation had a negative significant relationship with JSRP. Furthermore, for both the public sector organization and the police organization, management-by-exception-active had a significant positive influence on JSRP, indicating that this subscale of leadership was positively associated with presenteeism. It is worth noting that, for the first two samples (construction and non-profit), *laissez-faire* leadership was the *only* statistically significant subscale in the model.

Parallelle mediation model

The study assessed the mediating role of work–family conflict and psychological distress on the relationship between *laissez-faire* leadership and job-related stress presenteeism. To conduct this analysis, we have combined all four data sets. As can be seen in Fig. 1, the results indicate that *laissez-faire* leadership has a significant impact on employees' psychological and work–life conflict. *Laissez-faire* leadership, employees' psychological distress, and employees' work–life conflict have a significant direct impact on JSRP. The results revealed a significant indirect effect of the impact of *laissez-faire* leadership on job-related stress presenteeism through psychological distress, supporting H5. The study also found a significant indirect effect of *laissez-faire* leadership on JSRP through work–family conflict, supporting H5. Furthermore, the direct effect of *laissez-faire* leadership on job-related stress presenteeism in the presence of the mediators was also found to be significant. Hence, both psychological distress and work–family conflict partially mediated the relationship between *laissez-faire* leadership and job-related stress presenteeism. These results allow a better understanding of the mechanisms through which absent leadership style may affect employees' job-related stress presenteeism. Indeed, based on these results, it seems that having an absent leader increases levels of psychological distress and work–family conflict. The mediation model is presented in Fig. 1.

Discussion

This study investigated the effects of the Full-Range Leadership Model on JSRP. Furthermore, the study aimed to identify mechanisms through which *laissez-faire* leadership affects JJSRP by testing the mediating effects of employees' psychological distress and work–life balance.

As is sometimes the case, our results were not wholly what we expected. Because transformational leadership – overall – is a positive approach to managing, but with some potential stress-inducing subcomponents, we thought it would have a negative but non-significant relation with followers' JSRP. That was not the case. The negative relationship was statistically significant in two of our studied organizations. It is worth noting that not all transformational leadership subscales were significantly associated with JSRP. In fact, for Sample 2 (non-profit organization), none of the transformational

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Table 7. Mean, standard deviation and correlations among all MLQ subscales and JSRPS Sample 3 ($N = 479$) and Sample 4 ($N = 148$)

	Mean	SD	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.	10.
1. MLQIIA			…	.65**	.81**	.75**	.75**	.74**	.12	−.46**	−.75**	−.33**
2. MLQIIB			.57**	…	.78**	.71**	.73**	.77**	.28**	−.24**	−.48**	−.17*
3. MLQIM			.71**	.65**	…	.73**	.71**	.78**	.09	−.34**	−.60**	−.26**
4. MLQIS			.59**	.58**	.60**	…	.77**	.77**	.15	−.33**	−.57**	−.22**
5. MLQIC			.67**	.61**	.63**	.66**	…	.72**	.08	−.27**	−.54**	−.22**
6. MLQCR			.64**	.62**	.68**	.65**	.67**	…	.17*	−.39**	−.62**	−.27**
7. MLQMBEA			.21**	.23**	.09*	.19**	.17**	.20**	…	.11	.02	.19*
8. MLQMBEP			−.31**	−.12*	−.26**	−.19**	−.25**	−.23**	.19**	…	.68**	.29**
9. MLQLF			−.56**	−.27**	−.42**	−.39**	−.39**	−.42**	.08	.64**	…	.43**
10. JSRPS			−.12**	−.04	−.16**	−.07	−.12**	−.10*	.16**	.24**	.32**	…

Notes: Sample 3 below diagonal, Sample 4 above diagonal.
MLQIIA (Idealized Influence); MLQIIB (Idealized Influence); MLQIM (Inspirational Motivation); MLQIS (Intellectual Stimulation)); MLQIC (Individualized Consideration); MLQCR (Contingent Reward); MLQMBEA (Management by Exception Active); MLQMBEP (Management by Exception Passive); MLQLF (*Laissez-faire*); JSRPS (Job-Related – Stress Presenteeism Scale).
*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$.

Table 8. Hierarchical linear regressions of MLQ leadership styles and JSRP ($N = 175$)

	Sample 1	Sample 2	Sample 3	Sample 4
	Std.β	Std.β	Std.β	Std.β
Sample 1 Construction				
1. MLQIIA	0.10	.20	0.14	−0.13
2. MLQIIB	−0.10	.22	0.12	−0.01
3. MLQIM	−0.08	−.00	−0.17*	0.05
4. MLQIS	−0.11	.03	0.06	0.04
5. MLQIC	0.05	−.1-	−0.13	0.07
6. MLQCR	−0.04	−.18	−0.00	−0.12
7. MLQMBEA	0.14	−.04	0.10*	0.20*
8. MLQMBEP	0.11	−.02	0.04	−0.04
9. MLQLF	0.22**	.39**	0.28***	0.38**
Adj. R^2	0.11	.08	0.12	0.18

Note: $^*p \leq .05$; $^{**}p \leq .01$; $^{***}p \leq .001$.
MLQIIA (Idealized Influence); MLQIIB (Idealized Influence); MLQIM (Inspirational Motivation); MLQIS (Intellectual Stimulation)); MLQIC (Individualized Consideration); MLQCR (Contingent Reward); MLQMBEA (Management by Exception Active); MLQMBEP (Management by Exception Passive); MLQLF (*Laissez-faire*); JSRPS (Job-Related – Stress Presenteeism Scale).

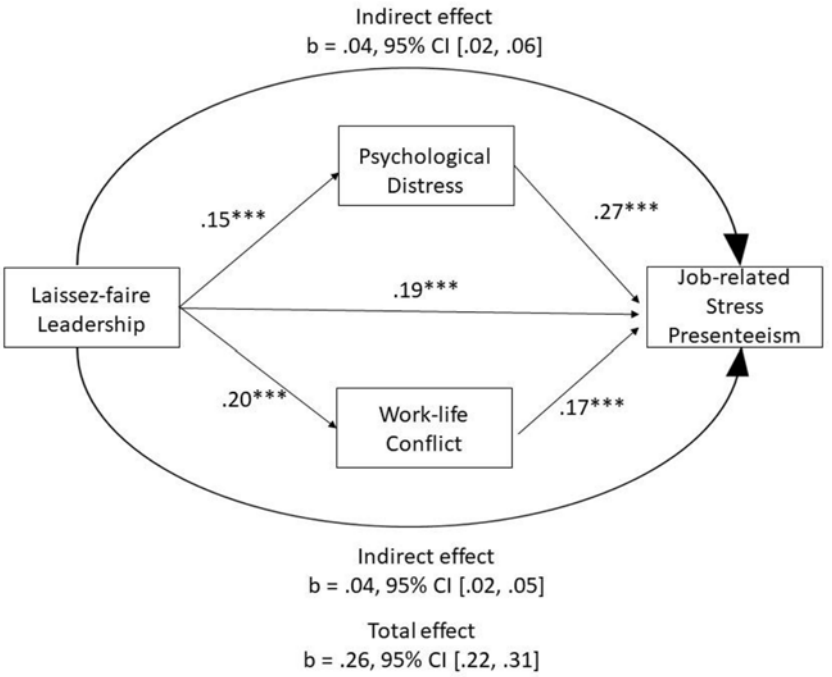

Figure 1. Parallel analysis mediation model.

leadership subscales were significantly associated with JSRP. On the other hand, for the police organization (sample 4), JSRP was significantly correlated with all transformational subscales. For the construction sample, all transformational leadership subscales were significantly associated with JSRP, except for individualized consideration. Finally, idealized influence (behavior) and intellectual

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stimulation were not significantly associated with JSRP for the public service sample. This highlights the importance of not applying a one-size-fits-all approach to leadership style. Indeed, different organizations create different realities for employees, underscoring the need for different types of support from leaders to avoid work-related stress presenteeism.

The finding that transactional leadership would not be significantly associated with JSRP was supported. This might be due to the fact that transactional leadership is composed of two subscales (contingent reward and management-by-exception active). For two of our samples, when we looked at the relationship between these two subscales and JSRP, we found a significant *positive* relationship for management by exception active, while we found a significant *negative* relationship between JSRP and contingent reward. The fact that the two subscales of a leadership style present different patterns of association with the JSRP suggests that there might be some problems with the internal validity of this leadership style. As shown in Table 2, the transactional leadership scale's Cronbach's αs were below .70 for all four samples, a problem flagged by previous studies using the MLQ (Carless, 1998; Heinitz, Liepmann, & Felfe, 2005; Tracey & Hinkin, 1998; Yammarino & Dubinsky, 1994). While some manifestations of transactional leadership have been related to follower stress, such as mainly interacting with followers when they make mistakes, the overall set of transactional behaviors is not particularly negative. The preponderance of the research does not indicate that being a transactional manager makes you a 'bad boss', which may explain our results. It is important to note, though, that our regression model showed management-by-exception active to have a significant positive association with JSRP.

For most of the industry sectors included in this study, it seems that transformational leadership can help reduce JSRP. Even in the non-profit organization sample, where none of the transformational leadership subscales were significantly associated with JSRP, the correlations were nonetheless negative between the subscales and JSRP. Is that true? And the positive effects of transformational leadership may be particularly efficacious in police organizations.

While transactional leadership was not related to JSRP, one of its subscales – management-by-exception active – was. That leadership behavior, keeping track of employees' mistakes and bringing up instances when they fail to meet standards seems like it would be unpleasant and stressful to work under. Leaders who utilize this style tend to seek out and punish mistakes, behavior that is similar to abusive behaviors identified by Tepper, 2000; Hancock, Gellatly, Walsh, Arnold, & Connelly, 2023). This implies that, if utilized, management-by-exception active must be implemented non-punitive, non-ego-deflating.

Our expectation that *laissez-faire* leadership would be significantly positively correlated with JSRP was upheld. In fact, in a model of the influence of the three leadership styles across our four samples, the only significant predictor was *laissez-faire* leadership. In addition, in a model testing the influence of the nine MLQ subscales, the *laissez-faire* subscale was the strongest predictor of JSRP across our four samples. It is easy to understand how a 'placeholder leader', or a manager in title only, who is not there physically or emotionally when one is experiencing difficult decisions or stressful situations, would lead to JSRP. Since JSRP is a form of presenteeism caused by stress in the workplace, one could also hypothesize that there is a link between absent leaders and conditions that can make the job environment stressful. Indeed, the absence of support may explain an increase in employee stress.

Indeed, by merging our four samples, we have tested a model that sheds light on the mechanisms by which *laissez-faire* leaders may impact employees' JSRP. We have found that employees working for *laissez-faire* leaders report more psychological distress and work–life conflict, which, in turn, both lead to JSRP. This is in line with studies that found that *laissez-faire* leaders create a more stressful work environment that affects employees not only in the workplace but in their personal lives (Diebig & Bormann, 2020). Moreover, an absent leader does not address negative workplace interpersonal behaviors such as conflict, incivility, and harassment, making the workplace unsafe and increasing employee stress. Next, we discuss some of our study's implications for theory, research, and practice and our study's limitations.

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Limitations and future studies

First, examining the possibility that some of our results reflected common-method variance is important. Although some commentators have suggested that the effects of common-method variance may be overstated (Brannick, Chan, Conway, Lance, & Spector, 2010), nonetheless, it is important to minimize its effects as much as possible (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, & Podsakoff, 2012). To address this concern, participants were assured anonymity, which gave them latitude to respond with their 'true' perceptions, attitudes and intentions. We also used robust measurement scales and ensured that the MLQ was placed in a different section of the questionnaire than the JSRPS.

Second, although one of the strengths of the present study is that we were able to test our model using four different types of organizations, we have encountered sample size imbalance as some organizations had a more extensive workforce. While we found significant relationships between *laissez-faire* leadership and JSRPS in our four samples, further studies with more balanced sample sizes are recommended to confirm these findings. Future research should aim for more even recruitment to enhance the validity and generalizability of the results.

Our data were cross-sectional, thereby limiting inferences of causality. Given that this was only the second attempt to link the MLQ leadership styles with JSRP, we believe the cross-sectional results are of value. Future studies could employ experimental and longitudinal designs to isolate causal directions better. Also, we cannot be certain that our results would generalize to all work settings and cultural contexts, as our respondents were sampled from four companies in one country (Canada). Future studies should test the impact of the Full-Range Leadership Model on employees from different countries as cultural differences may influence leadership expectations and the impact of different leadership styles on employees' job-related stress presenteeism. Indeed, we attempted to increase the generalizability of our results by sampling employees from multiple organizations in different industries, we cannot be certain that the present results would replicate in other work settings or other countries.

Theoretical and research implications

Our results show the difficulty of using leadership scales designed for other purposes to identify stress-reducing or stress-increasing leadership behaviors. Leaders are creators and enactors of their organization's culture, and their decisions and behaviors affect whether an environment is stress-free or stress-prone, impacting employees' well-being and JSRP. Once leadership behaviors conducive to a positive workplace and stress-free environment are identified, creating a valid measure would help organizations evaluate their leaders and help them achieve a leadership style that will reduce employee stress. In his Framework for Workplace Mental Health and Well-Being, the US Surgeon General (2022) presents the importance of mattering at work, of work–life harmony, the opportunity for growth, connection, and community, and, last but not least, protection from harm. Leaders are responsible for creating workplace cultures that are safe, supportive, and inclusive. As mentioned earlier, not only are absent leaders unable to provide support or any positive emotional connection with their employees, but they are also oblivious to the negative interpersonal behaviors that occur among their team. Part of creating a safe work culture is dealing with negative workplace behaviors; absent leaders cannot create a safe culture, as they are not only unable to create a trusting relationship with their employees, they are not present or involved enough to deal with harmful behaviors, increasing the risk of stress, distress, and presenteeism for their employees.

The focus in the leadership literature, and more precisely regarding the Full-Range leadership model, has been on transformational or positive leadership styles. However, our study, based on four samples from different industries illustrates the significant impact of absent leaders. These bad leaders may not be as visible as tyrannical or abusive leaders, however, their impact on employees is similar. One of the reasons why they may be able to fly under the radar is that some absent leaders may be good manipulators who seem to be present for their employees, when, in reality, they are not. Some absent leaders can use 'Carewashing', which refers to leaders pretending to care about their employees

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(Gube, Mahtieu, & Sabatini Hennelly, 2024). In fact, there is evidence that *laissez-faire* leadership may be one of the not so well-known aspects of dark leadership. Indeed, as mentioned earlier, some studies have found that, on top of being abusive leaders, psychopathic individuals score high on *laissez-faire* leadership style (Mathieu & Babiak, 2015, 2016).

Research to determine what personal characteristics explain why leaders adopt these various leadership styles would also be helpful. One such factor is undoubtedly routed in personality traits, which can be measured in employee and leader selection contexts through psychometric testing and structured interviews. This could help select candidates for leadership roles who are likely to adopt an appropriate and positive leadership style that will reduce stress in the workplace and help increase employee well-being. Research on what makes followers a better or worse fit for the different leadership styles will also be helpful.

We believe that there is a need for a theory-driven leadership construct to describe leadership that minimizes follower stress and JSRP. As Nielsen and Taris (2019) observed, although a variety of types of leadership are associated with follower health and well-being, there remains a need to identify the leadership characteristics that account for those outcomes.

For instance, one study looked into the effects of leaders' task-related skills versus people-related skills and found leaders' people-related skills to be better predictors of employees' job satisfaction, engagement, and turnover intentions (Mathieu, Fabi, Lacoursiere, & Raymond, 2016). Positive people skills imply that the leader is present with their teams to create positive interpersonal relationships and a safe workplace; little is known about leaders who are not present to create those positive relationships and workplaces. There also are pertinent perspectives and theories beyond the fields of leadership and management that can help understand the impact of absent leaders.

Practical implications

Our results suggest that management training programs should address the negative impacts of *laissez-faire* leadership on employees. Our results do not support the previously held idea that absent leaders can do no harm. Indeed, while many leadership programs are based on increasing transformational leadership behaviors, it is also important for managers in training to understand that being absent (not supporting employees, not dealing with problems, not giving clear directions can create a stressful environment for employees and lead to the development of psychological distress and JSRP. This leadership style has been characterized as destructive (Skogstad et al., 2007). At the very least, we would classify it as irresponsible; the leader is not fulfilling some of the basic duties of a supervisor or manager. *Laissez-faire* leadership also seems to be associated with abusive types of leadership (Mathieu & Babiak, 2016).

Not having supervisor support seems to be associated with higher stress for employees (Hämmig, 2017) and, as our study suggests, higher presenteeism due to job stress. Leaders are an important part of creating or buffering stress in the workplace. Since the transactional leadership style does not seem effective in reducing employees' JSRP, organizations need to consider interpersonal and task-related skills when they hire leaders. Indeed, transactional leaders are hired based on their task-related skills; however, what is lacking in both transactional and *laissez-faire* leaders is the presence and the ability to listen to employees and support them.

In their 2023 annual survey measuring work-related stress, the American Psychological Association found that 1 out of 5 employees reported working in a toxic environment. Toxic workplaces are associated with higher risks of burnout (Badri & Chieng, 2023). Furthermore, workers in a toxic environment are less productive (Anjum et al., 2018) and less engaged (Rasool, Wang, Tang, Saeed, & Iqbal, 2021). This has led organizations to turn to experts to offer employees tools to increase their mental well-being and productivity. While these tools are beneficial, they do not address the root of the problem. Indeed, we consider that employee burnout, lower productivity, and feeling less engaged are symptoms, not causes.

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Conclusion

Organizations rely on healthy, productive, and focused employees to thrive. Employees beset by stressors and impacted by JSRP are the antithesis of that. Our study provides information on how leader behavior relates to stress-related presenteeism. Our results indicate that transactional and transformational leadership do not significantly impact JSRP, and the most influential leadership style on employee JSRP is *laissez-faire* leadership. Our results suggest that leaders who want to minimize the psychological drain on productivity from JSRP should avoid a *laissez-faire* style and be present and focused on the well-being and development of their employees. The fact that the absence of leadership has the strongest impact on employee JSRP is innovative and interesting. Most previous studies on negative leadership styles have focused on abusive or negative leadership behaviors, but few have looked at absent leaders' detrimental impact. These results stress the importance of addressing *laissez-faire* leadership and its negative impacts on employees in management coaching programs and leadership development courses.

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