


# Comparing empowering, transformational, and transactional leadership on supervisory coaching and job performance: A multilevel perspective

Michelle C.C. Lee <sup>1</sup> and Alyssa Y.L. Ding<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Department of Psychology, Sunway University, Jalan Universiti, Petaling Jaya, Malaysia, <sup>2</sup>Centre for American Education, Sunway University, Jalan Universiti, Petaling Jaya, Malaysia

**Abstract:** With a leader being able to possess different types of leadership styles, there is a lack of literature investigating which leadership style best facilitates supervisory coaching behavior. The current study aimed to investigate which leadership style would exhibit supervisory coaching behavior, and if supervisory coaching behavior would mediate the relationship between leadership styles and job performance. The study compared the effects of three leadership styles—transformational, transactional, and empowering leadership—on supervisory coaching behavior, which has been reported to influence job performance. A multilevel approach was adopted in this study using 500 employees from 65 organizations within Malaysia. The study found that only empowering and transactional leadership styles exhibited supervisory coaching behavior, which in turn mediated their relationships with job performance. Overall, the findings suggest the importance of leadership styles that prioritize employee development, as these would lead to improved job performance in employees.

**Keywords:** empowering leadership; job performance; supervisory coaching; transactional leadership; transformational leadership

**Correspondence** Michelle C.C. Lee, Department of Psychology, 5, Sunway University, Jalan Universiti, Bandar Sunway 47500, Petaling Jaya, Malaysia. Email: michellel@sunway.edu.my

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A plethora of research has shown the importance of leadership styles in influencing the work attitude of employees (e.g., Holtz & Harold, 2010; Wang, Ma, & Zhang, 2014). Transformational leadership (Walumbwa & Lawler, 2003), transactional leadership (Walumbwa, Wu, & Orwa, 2008), and—in recent times—empowering leadership (M. C. C. Lee, Idris, & Delfabbro, 2016) are among the most well-investigated leadership styles. These three leadership styles have been suggested to increase the job performance of employees and thus have become increasingly important to the workplace where leaders are entrusted to coach and improve their employees' performance (Longenecker, 2010).

Although current literature has defined leadership style as “relatively stable patterns of behavior that are manifested by leaders” (Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001, p. 781), most studies on leadership often have only investigated a particular leadership style and its effect on employees (e.g.,

transformational leadership on job performance). Very few studies have investigated the behavioral aspects that align with a particular leadership style—the behaviors that personify the characteristics of the leadership style. This has led to practitioners and/or human resource personnel facing difficulties in cultivating leadership styles with the suitable leadership behaviors (e.g., supervisory coaching) among its leaders within the organization (McCull-Kennedy & Anderson, 2002).

Supervisory coaching is important in the leadership context because it can motivate employees to perform more effectively at work (Kim, Egan, Kim, & Kim, 2013). However, having the right combination of leadership style and behavior in influencing employees' outcomes has also not been examined in current literature. The relationship between leadership style and behavior needs more attention so that practitioners and human resource managers are able to develop the necessary

skills for a particular leadership style (Reams, 2005). Within the supervisory coaching context, there are still gaps in understanding which leadership styles best provide supervisory coaching, which would in turn influence job performance (Bozer & Jones, 2018).

Acknowledging that leaders are pertinent in the career development of employees (Bolino & Turnley, 2009), this study aims to discover which leadership style will have the strongest link to supervisory coaching, which subsequently leads to higher job performance. The current study extends existing literature by proposing that leadership styles exert a certain leadership behavior on employee job performance (M. C. C. Lee, Idris, & Tuckey, 2018). The study proposed that among the three well-known leadership styles (i.e., transformational, transactional, and empowering), empowering leadership would show the strongest link to supervisory coaching and that the effect of this leadership style on coaching behavior will result in the highest job performance. The study argues that empowering leadership contains empowerment and autonomy, elements that focus on employee development. The study also argues that although transformational and transactional leadership styles may affect employee job performance, they do not focus on employee development (Cox, Pearce, & Sims, 2003).

Findings from the current study will add to existing literature on which leadership style is able to influence employee job performance and how it does so. This study investigated which leadership style would be relevant and conducive to a Malaysian society that is collectivistic in nature, but exhibits high power distance between individuals of different authority levels (Hofstede, 2001). The proposed model of the study is shown in Figure 1.

## Review of the literature and hypotheses development

### Supervisory coaching and job performance

Leaders today take on multiple roles—manager, personal development coach, and feedback personnel—as compared to leaders in the past who were merely managers in charge of overseeing employees perform their work tasks (Kotter, 2000). With heightened business competition and challenges in employee retention, supervisory coaching behavior has emerged as one of the most important characteristics in defining a successful leader. As employees interact more with their leaders than the human resource department on a daily basis, leaders are in a better position to develop talent

and coach employees in suitable behaviors that translate to good job performance (Longenecker, 2010).

In an Asian context that is highly collectivistic (Power, Schoenherr, & Samson, 2010), the leader–employee relationship is not only limited to work but also outside of work (Yammarino, Salas, Serban, Shirreffs, & Shuffler, 2012). This presents not only a superior–subordinate relationship but also a close bond during informal settings (Yang, 2006). If the communication and interaction styles are successful, the relationship becomes pleasant and effective from both the perspectives of work and a personal relationship. Thus, the leader–employee relationship is important within the work context.

Supervisory coaching is defined as a process in which a leader helps employees to improve themselves through opportunities that would enable them to perform better at work and have better job skills (Ellinger, Ellinger, & Keller, 2005). In other words, supervisory coaching is a form of learning that is facilitated by one's superior and contributes to the improvement and growth of the employee (Ellinger & Bostrom, 1999). It contains elements of improving an individual's existing performance (Liu & Batt, 2010) and involves elements of communication, feedback, and practice (Ellinger, Ellinger, & Keller, 2003). Therefore, when leaders coach their employees, the latter are equipped with the necessary knowledge and skills to successfully carry out their tasks, which would result in higher performance among employees.

Supervisory coaching is different from supervisory support and supervisory mentoring. Supervisory support looks at the interaction quality between employees and superiors (Mayer & Gavin, 2005) and how it could protect employees from potential harm in the workplace (Zhou, Martinez, Ferreira, & Rodrigues, 2016). Unlike supervisory coaching, supervisory support is a more relational and emotional type of support that satisfies the socioemotional needs of employees (Zhou et al., 2016). Supervisory mentoring, on the other hand, is a longer term process that addresses an individual's emotional state and life problems at any given point of time (Hansman, 2002) whereas supervisory coaching is targeted at improving current work performance that is subpar (Ellinger et al., 2005).

Supervisory coaching is also viewed as an effort by the leader to increase employees' competencies (Tansky & Cohen, 2001). From the employees' perspective, this behavior indirectly illustrates that the leader, in caring about their job performance, shows concern for their well-being and

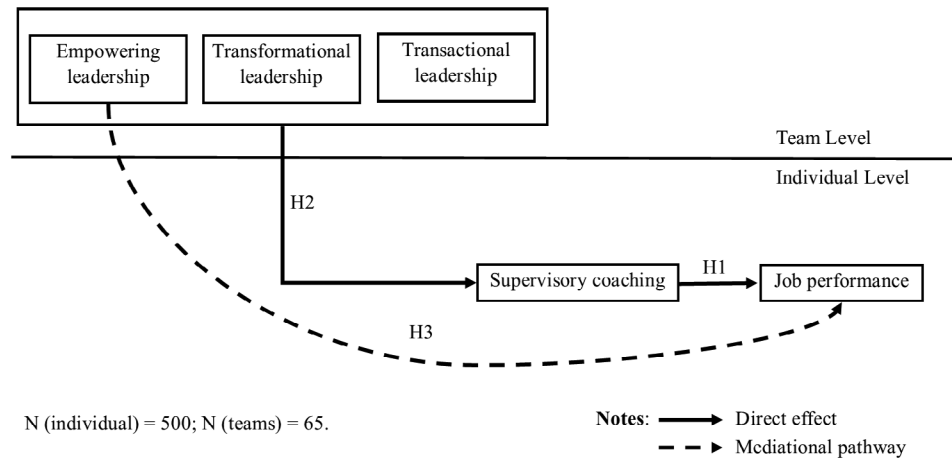


Figure 1. Proposed model.

pays attention to their needs at work. This creates a sense of appreciation which, in turn, motivates employees to perform better at work (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008). Job performance may be viewed from two perspectives: internal and external. From the internal perspective, employees' appreciation will turn into a positive emotion that encourages employees to work effectively (Skakon, Nielsen, Borg, & Guzman, 2010). From the external perspective, employees will have sufficient knowledge and skills to work effectively (Bright & Crockett, 2012). In combining both perspectives, supervisory coaching drives employees to do better at work; hence,

*Hypothesis 1. Perceived supervisory coaching is positively related to job performance.*

### Leadership styles and supervisory coaching

Transformational and transactional leadership styles are among the most well-investigated leadership styles in the literature. Transformational leadership is defined as a leadership behavior whereby leaders work towards meeting the higher order needs of their subordinates (Banks, McCauley, Gardner, & Guler, 2016). This leadership style focuses on nurturing employees' intrinsic motivation into sharing and adopting the leader's mission and vision. Leaders would set goals that influence, motivate, and encourage employees to think "out of the box" and venture into novel endeavors while also addressing each employee's unique needs and concerns (Judge & Piccolo, 2004). In contrast, transactional leadership focuses more on increasing employees' motivation and compliance through the exchange of desired rewards or unwanted punishments (Judge & Piccolo, 2004).

Although the two leadership styles lead to higher job performance, they are often viewed in the literature as being in contrast with each other. Based on the social exchange theory (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005), employees under transformational leadership identify and relate themselves to the leader and thus perform better at work. This is because transformational leadership fulfills an employee's psychological needs for competency and autonomy (Deci & Ryan, 2000), indicating a higher level of social exchange relationship between the leader and the employee. However, for transactional leadership, the leader provides employees with a contingent reward in return for completed work (Bass, 1990), indicating a lower level of social exchange relationship between the leader and the employee.

Nevertheless, Goodwin, Wofford, and Whittington (2001) found overlapping aspects in both leadership styles, proposing that contingent rewards in transactional leadership style comprise two distinguishable factors: explicit and implicit psychological contracts. An explicit psychological contract relates to transactional leadership behavior whereby expectations are clearly outlined, and employees engage in desired behaviors to attain rewards (Judge & Piccolo, 2004). On the other hand, an implicit psychological contract is subtler, whereby mutual obligations are based on employees' positive perception of their leader (Judge & Piccolo, 2004), which is consistent with transformational leadership behavior, suggesting that contingent rewards also play an important role in a transformational leadership style (Goodwin et al., 2001; Judge & Piccolo, 2004).

Transformational and transactional leadership styles have demonstrated predictive validity within the Asian context. For example, a study from Taiwan showed that transformational leadership (vs. transactional leadership) was more

effective in inducing the trust of employees and, in turn, resulted in positive organizational commitment (Dai, Dai, Chen, & Wu, 2013). Additionally, transformational leadership was found to be positively related to creativity whereas transactional leadership style was negatively related to job performance among Chinese employees (Si & Wei, 2012).

Apart from transformational and transactional leadership styles, a third style that has gained attention recently is empowering leadership. Defined as a leadership behavior whereby power, control, and accountability are shared with employees (Gao, Janssen, & Shi, 2011), empowering leadership focuses on the qualities of employees rather than those of the leader. In other words, empowering leadership, as the term suggests, focuses on employees' capability and growth as well as the level of trust that the leader has in them. Leaders who adopt this leadership style provide opportunities for their employees to develop in a way that is empowering and encouraging to employees (M. C. C. Lee et al., 2016). This also suggests that empowering leadership has a higher social exchange relationship with the employees, as this style focuses on employees' autonomy and independence. Although empowering leadership may have overlapping constructs with transformational leadership, the former pays attention to the growth of employees towards independence whereas the latter focuses on management visions and directions (Cox et al., 2003).

The current study proposed that empowering leadership has a stronger motivational element that influences employees' behavior than do the other two leadership styles, particularly transformational leadership. Although transformational leadership also stirs motivation within employees through its charismatic and idealized influences (Bass, 1999), the leader motivates employees through speech rather than behavior. Empowering leadership has been suggested as the leadership style that promotes learning through the creation of a learning culture (Chang & Chuang, 2011). In empowering leadership, the leader encourages employees through his or her behavior, which allows employees to experience higher levels of connectedness, appreciation, and motivation (Kwak & Jackson, 2015). For example, an empowered team is able to increase knowledge-sharing among team members and, in turn, increase the team's performance (J. Lee, Lee, & Park, 2014).

The current study expected transactional leadership to have the least significant relationship with supervisory coaching behavior because the nature of transactional

leadership is trade-based and nonmotivating. Despite this, the current study still proposed transactional leadership to be useful in coaching employees as transactional leaders do guide employees, but their guidance is focused on task completion rather than employee development (Walumbwa et al., 2008). Hence:

*Hypothesis 2. Empowering leadership will positively relate the most to supervisory coaching, followed by transformational leadership and transactional leadership.*

### **Leadership styles, supervisory coaching, and job performance**

Leadership style is often said to be an important antecedent to employees' work outcomes (Ugboro & Obeng, 2000). Due to the nature of empowering leadership, the current study proposed that higher levels of empowering leadership will lead to higher levels of supervisory coaching behavior, which in turn will result in increased employee job performance. Supervisory coaching was selected as a mediator between empowering leadership and job performance because the current study viewed supervisory coaching as the outcome of leadership styles. Supervisory coaching would motivate employees to perform better at work, and the difference lies in the degree to which the leadership style displays this behavior. Empowering leadership in particular comprises coaching, informing, and leading by example, all of which are behavioral forms that reflect supervisory coaching (Arnold, Arad, Rhoades, & Drasgow, 2000; Srivastava, Bartol, & Locke, 2006). As such, supervisory coaching was expected to mediate the relationship between empowering leadership (rather than transformational leadership and transactional leadership styles) and job performance.

Some studies have suggested that transformational leadership also exhibits supervisory coaching behavior (Scandura & Williams, 2004). However, the style's emphasis on supervisory coaching is less significant than is its emphasis on its four other aspects: individualized consideration, intellectual stimulation, inspirational motivation, and idealized influence (Bass, 1999). Similar to transactional leadership, transformational leadership does not prioritize employee development; thus, any increase in employee job performance as a result of this style may not be due to supervisory coaching behavior. Hence:

*Hypothesis 3. Supervisory coaching mediates the relationship between empowering leadership and job performance.*

## Methods

### Participants and procedure

A sample of 500 employees from 65 private organizations took part in the current study. One department was randomly selected from each organization to participate in the study and was coined as a “team.” The size of the team ranged from 5 to 26 participants, and the participants were coded according to their individual identification code and team identification code. Of the 500 participants, 43.4% of them were males, and 40.6% were single. The mean age of the participants was 31.11 years ( $SD = 8.47$ ), and the mean length of their working experience was 4.65 years ( $SD = 5.05$ ). All participants worked in Malaysia as administrative assistants in service industry organizations. The study first obtained ethics approval from the Sunway University Research Ethics Committee prior to initiation of data collection. Upon approval, heads of departments of the various organizations were contacted about the study through email which contained a participant information sheet and information about the study. Department heads who were interested in participating in the study then signed up through the link provided in the email. Researchers then met with interested organizations to explain more details of the study. Participant information sheets and questionnaires were then distributed to every team member. Those who agreed to participate in the study then completed the questionnaire. Those who did not agree returned the questionnaire uncompleted. Each participant was given 1 week to complete the questionnaire, which was sealed in an envelope and returned.

### Measurements

#### **Transformational and transactional leadership**

Transformational and transactional leadership were measured using items from the Transformational Leadership Inventory (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Moorman, & Fetter, 1990). An example of an item depicting transformational leadership is “My supervisor shows respect for my personal feelings.” An example of an item depicting transactional leadership is “My supervisor gives me special recognition when my work is very good.” All items were rated on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*).

#### **Empowering leadership**

Empowering leadership was measured using two items from the Leadership Behavior Questionnaire (Pearce & Sims, 2002). An example item is “My team leader encourages me to develop my skills and abilities.” All items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale from 0 (*never*) to 4 (*always*).

#### **Supervisory coaching behavior**

Supervisory coaching behavior was measured using Le Blanc’s (1994) Supervisory Support Scale. An example item is “My supervisor uses his/her influence to help me solve problems at work.” All five items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 (*never*) to 5 (*very often*).

#### **Job performance**

Job performance was measured using nine items from the Job Performance Measurement Scale (Goodman & Svyantek, 1999). An example item is “I perform well in the overall job by carrying out tasks as expected.” All items were rated on a 4-point Likert scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 4 (*strongly agree*).

#### **Data analysis**

A multicollinearity test was conducted to see if the leadership variables were highly correlated to one another. A multiple regression was conducted with job performance as the outcome variable and the different leadership styles (transformational, transactional, and empowering) and supervisory coaching as the predictor variables. The resulting variance inflation factor (VIF) values ranged from 1.39 (empowering leadership) to 3.16 (transformational leadership). There is no multicollinearity issue if VIF is less than 10 (Field, 2018). Hence, the values indicate a low possibility of multicollinearity between the three leadership styles (Kutner, Nachtsheim, & Neter, 2004) and that the three leadership styles exhibited discriminant validity.

Because leadership is a multilevel construct, leadership styles were first analyzed to see if they displayed group-level properties and hence would be viewed as group-level variables. Group level indicates that there is shared perception among group members (i.e., employees within the same team) (Kozlowski & Chao, 2012). The index of agreement  $r(WG)(J)$  and intraclass correlation coefficient analyses were conducted for group-level testing. To determine if the variables were due to group factors, the index of agreement

value ( $r(WG)(J)$ ) should be above .90 whereas the intraclass correlation coefficient (ICC[I]) should be .05 to .20 (Bliese, 2000). Additionally,  $F_{(III)}$  values should be statistically significant for leadership styles to be viewed as group-level variables.

Overall, the index of agreement values  $r(WG)(J)$  for transformational leadership, transactional leadership, and empowering leadership were .93, .95, and .96, respectively, indicating a high level of within-group agreement (LeBreton & Senter, 2008). The intraclass correlation coefficient values (ICC[I]) for transformational leadership, transactional leadership, and empowering leadership were .15, .11, and .19, respectively, indicating that 15, 11, and 19% of the variance in the three respective leadership styles were due to group factors. The  $F_{(III)}$  values were also found to be statistically significant, transformational leadership,  $F = 2.35$ ,  $p < .001$ , transactional leadership,  $F = 2.14$ ,  $p < .001$ , and empowering leadership,  $F = 2.54$ ,  $p < .001$ , which indicate justification of the aggregation of these variables.

A confirmatory factor analysis was conducted to determine if the three leadership scales were distinctive constructs in a valid measurement model (Hair, Black, Babin, & Anderson, 2014). The validity of the measurement model was assessed using several goodness-of-fit indices; namely, ratio of  $\chi^2$  to  $df \leq 2$  or 3, comparative fit index (CFI)  $\geq .90$ , standardized root-mean residual (SRMR)  $\leq .08$ , Root-mean-square error of approximation (RMSEA)  $< .06$  to  $.08$ , and  $p < .05$  (Hair et al., 2014;

Schreiber, Stage, King, Nora, & Barlow, 2006). The initial model did not show a good fit,  $\chi^2(5.25, N = 500)$ , CFI = .78, RMSEA = .09, SRMR = .07,  $p < .001$ , so items were removed to improve model fit. Nonsignificant items were removed first followed by items with low loadings. The final model consisted of 17 of the initial 34 items,  $\chi^2(5.51, N = 500)$ , CFI = .91, RMSEA = .10, SRMR = .04,  $p < .001$ . RMSEA did not fall into the ranges of good fit and showed mediocre fit (MacCallum, Browne, & Sugawara, 1996). However, because other fit indices showed good fit and because loadings of the items were high, the model was considered to have had achieved acceptable fit. Composite reliabilities and average variance extracted of all three leadership constructs showed adequate reliability and convergent validity (Hair et al., 2014) (Table 1).

The hierarchical linear modeling (HLM) software by Bryk and Raudenbush (1992) was used to test the study's hypotheses. Leadership styles were treated as a group-level variable that has top-down influence on employees, with supervisory coaching and job performance being the individual-level variables (Snijders & Bosker, 2012). To test the hypotheses, three types of analyses were used comprising lower-level effects (Hypothesis 1), cross-level effects (Hypothesis 2), and mediation effects (Hypothesis 3). Our analysis was initiated by regressing the lower level direct-effects variables, followed by the cross-level direct-effects variables (Mathieu & Taylor, 2007).

**Table 1**  
Loadings, Composite Reliabilities (CR), and Average Variance Extracted (AVE)

Construct	Items	Loadings	CR (>.7)	AVE (>.5)
Transformational leadership	8	.78***	.94	.59
	9	.75***		
	12	.70***		
	16	.73***		
	22	.77***		
	23	.73***		
	24	.74***		
	25	.82***		
	26	.83***		
	27	.77***		
Transactional leadership	28	.82***	.86	.60
	2	.75***		
	6	.76***		
	13	.77***		
Empowering leadership	15	.81***	.80	.66
	3	.84***		
	4	.78***		

\*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

An example of an individual-level equation is as follows:

$$\text{Job performance} = \beta_0 + \beta (\text{Supervisory coaching}) + r.$$

An example of a cross-level effect equation is as follows:

Level 1 Model.

$$\text{Job performance} = \beta_0 + \beta (\text{Supervisory coaching}) + r.$$

Level 2 Model.

$$\beta_{0j} = G_{00} + G_{01} (\text{Transformational leadership}) + G_{02} (\text{Transactional leadership}) + G_{03} (\text{Empowering leadership}) + u_{0j}.$$

$$\beta_{1j} = G_{10} + u_{1j}.$$

In testing lower level direct effects (Hypothesis 1), the lower level variable's dependent variable was regressed on the predictor variable. Hence, job performance was regressed on supervisory coaching (see Model 1).

In testing cross-level effects (Hypotheses 2), the lower level variable's dependent variable was regressed on the predictor variable. Hence, supervisory coaching was regressed on transformational leadership, transactional leadership, and empowering leadership (see Model 4).

Finally, to test for mediation effects (Hypothesis 3), a split design was used to analyze each part of the mediation pathway *ab* using estimates of Path *a* ( $X \rightarrow M$ ) and Path *b* ( $M \rightarrow Y$ ) (Cole & Maxwell, 2003). Hence, the following mediation steps were needed (Baron & Kenny, 1986). First, there was a significant relationship from  $X \rightarrow Y$  (empowering leadership  $\rightarrow$  job performance) (Model 3). Second, there was a significant relationship from  $X \rightarrow M$  (empowering leadership  $\rightarrow$  supervisory coaching) (Model 4). Third, there was a significant relationship from  $M \rightarrow Y$ , after controlling for *M* and *X* (supervisory coaching  $\rightarrow$  job performance, after controlling for empowering leadership) (Model 2). If the third step was not fulfilled, this is then considered as a partial mediation. The Monte Carlo test (Selig & Preacher, 2008), which is suitable for mediation in multilevel analyses (Bauer, Preacher, & Gil, 2006), revealed a 95% confidence interval (CI) and was tested on 20,000 repetitions.

## Results

Table 2 presents the descriptive analysis and correlations between all variables on the individual level. Table 3 presents the results from the HLM analysis. Figure 2 presents the study's final model, which summarizes the findings.

Hypothesis 1 predicted that perceived supervisory coaching would be positively related to job performance. As indicated in Table 2 (Model 1), the results suggest perceived supervisory coaching,  $\beta = .10, p < .05$ , to have a statistically significant positive relationship with job performance. Hence, Hypothesis 1 was supported.

Hypothesis 2 predicted that empowering leadership will positively relate the most to supervisory coaching, followed by transformational and transactional leadership. As indicated in Table 3 (Model 3), the results suggest that empowering leadership has the strongest statistically significant positive relationship with supervisory coaching,  $\gamma = .51, p < .05$ , followed by transactional leadership,  $\gamma = .32, p < .05$ . However, transformational leadership was not reported to have any statistically significant relationship with supervisory coaching,  $\gamma = -.02, p > .05$ . Hence, Hypothesis 2 was only partially supported.

Hypothesis 3 predicted that supervisory coaching would mediate the relationship between empowering leadership and job performance. In testing the relationship, the Monte Carlo method was conducted to ensure that all conditions of Baron and Kenny (1986) have been fulfilled. First, empowering leadership had a statistically significant effect on job performance, as shown by Model 3 in Table 3. The study then used the parameter estimate of Model 4 in Table 3 as the value for the direct effect of empowering leadership on supervisory coaching,  $\gamma = .51, SE = .12$ , and the parameter estimate of Model 2 in Table 3, supervisory coaching on job performance;  $\beta = .10, SE = .02$ , with the

**Table 2**  
Means, SDs, Reliability, and Pearson's Bivariate Correlations

Variables	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	$\alpha$	No. of items	1	2	3	4	5	<i>F</i>	ICC (I)
1. Transformational leadership	4.82	0.90	.93	11	1	.78***	.68***	.25***	.20***	2.54***	.19
2. Transactional leadership	4.81	1.05	.86	4	.81***	1	.57***	.23***	.16***	2.35***	.15
3. Empowering leadership	3.58	0.69	.66	2	.47***	.41***	1	.31***	.18***	2.14***	.11
4. Supervisory coaching	3.36	0.89	.89	5	.50***	.49***	.43***	1	.21***	2.07***	.11
5. Job performance	2.97	0.47	.86	9	.37***	.36**	.25***	.21**	1	1.51***	.06

Note. All leadership measures at the individual level below the diagonal and at the team level above the diagonal. ICC = intraclass correlation coefficient; *N* (individual) = 500; *N* (team) = 65.

\*\*  $p < .05$ . \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

**Table 3**

*HLM Analyses of Lower Level Outcomes and Cross-Level Effect of Empowering Leadership, Transformational Leadership, and Transactional Leadership on Lower Level Outcomes*

Variables	Job performance			Supervisory coaching Model 4
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	
Lower Level Effects				
Supervisory coaching	.10(.02)***	.10(.02)***		
Cross-Level Effects				
Transformational leadership		.13(.11)***		-.02(.18)***
Transactional leadership		.14(.09)***		.33(.16)***
Empowering leadership		.00(.07)***	.41(.11)***	.51(.12)***

Note. The first value is the unstandardized parameter estimate; the value in parentheses is the SE;  $N$  (individual) = 500;  $N$  (team) = 65.

\*\*\* $p < .001$ .

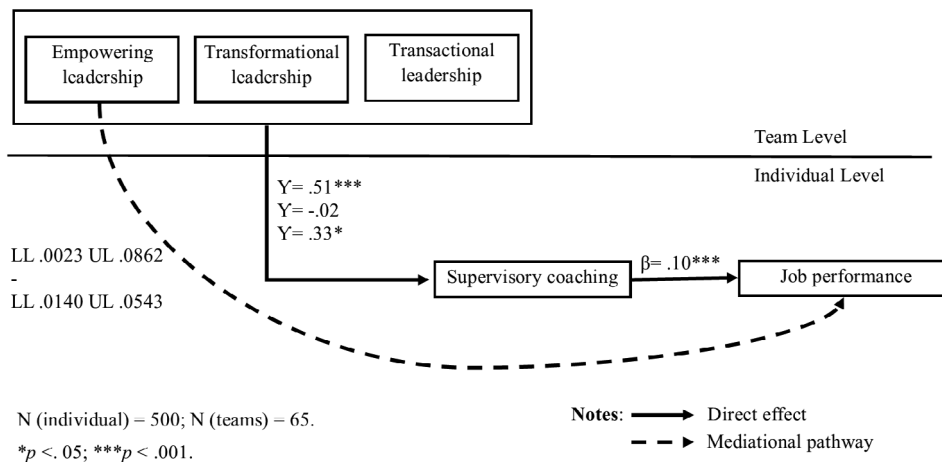


Figure 2. Final model.

three leadership styles in the model to run the mediation analysis. The Monte Carlo bootstrapping indicated that empowering leadership has a significant effect on job performance through supervisory coaching, 95% CI [.0023, .0862]. However, the conditions of Baron and Kenny were also fulfilled for the relationship between transactional leadership, supervisory coaching, and job performance; hence, a mediation analysis for this relationship was also conducted. The Monte Carlo bootstrapping indicated that transactional leadership has a significant effect on job performance through supervisory coaching, 95% CI [.0140, .0543]. Thus, Hypothesis 3 was only partially supported.

## Discussion

Numerous studies in the past have linked leadership styles to employee work outcomes. The current study extends current literature by highlighting the expression of leadership styles through their behavior in affecting employee job performance. Specifically, the study investigated if supervisory

coaching is displayed in transformational, transactional, and empowering leadership styles and how it may affect employee job performance.

As hypothesized, empowering leadership plays an important role in exhibiting supervisory coaching for employees. This is consistent with literature on empowering leadership which has stated that this style is able to assist in employee development through supervisory coaching (Ellinger et al., 2003). Coupled with its empowering characteristics, the essence of this leadership style involves empowering and improving employees' skills for better job performance (Zhang & Bartol, 2010). Unlike transformational and transactional leadership styles, the focus that empowering leadership places is on the employees. Employees have a need to accomplish tasks well without much restriction for them to grow or flourish at work (Md-Sidin, Sambasivan, & Muniandy, 2010). Because empowering leadership focuses on employee empowerment and autonomy, empowering leaders will ensure that employees have the necessary knowledge and skills to do the job (Arnold et al., 2000). As such, supervisory coaching is certainly exhibited in empowering leadership.

Interestingly, the study also found a link between transactional leadership and supervisory coaching, a finding that has not been reported in the current literature. An element of management by exception may explain this finding. As organizations require employees to be equipped with necessary behaviors to perform well at tasks, they may train employees on those behaviors (Krausz, 2005). Transactional leaders also pay close attention to employees' needs so that employees are able to perform well at their tasks. As such, these leaders may correct employees' behaviors to preserve consistency and stability of the work outcome (Bass, 1997). This leadership style is also clear on what the organization requires, and leaders will ensure that their employees are able to do those tasks without many errors.

Transformational leadership was not found to be linked to supervisory coaching behavior, which was inconsistent with findings of previous literature (cf. Scandura & Williams, 2004). Although supervisory coaching is viewed under the "individualized consideration" aspect, the overlapping characteristics between empowering and transformational leadership styles (Kark, Shamir, & Chen, 2003) may have resulted in transformational leadership being a nonsignificant antecedent to supervisory coaching when the three leadership styles were analyzed together. More specifically, supervisory coaching relates strongly to the empowerment aspect (Srivastava et al., 2006). Hence, whereas transformational leadership reportedly has empowering elements (Choi, Goh, Adam, & Tan, 2016), empowerment is a more distinctive aspect of empowering leadership (Arnold et al., 2000; Srivastava et al., 2006) as compared to transformational leadership which focuses on individualized consideration, intellectual stimulation, inspirational motivation, and idealized influence. This may have led to a statistically nonsignificant relationship between transformational leadership and supervisory coaching.

### **Strengths, limitations, and future directions**

The current study had several limitations. Although the study adopted a top-down perspective on how leadership styles affect employees using an appropriate multilevel method, this approach was still limited from a cross-sectional perspective. Hence, the study may only assume that cause and effect have taken place from a cross-sectional perspective. In addressing the issue of common method variance (CMV) (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003), the variables used in this study were a part of a larger study that had included other variables as

well. This reduced the biases that may arise, which could contribute to CMV (Podsakoff et al., 2003). To further examine and diagnose the degree to which CMV may be an issue, the Harman's single factor test was also conducted. Because the explained variance was at 31.67%, which is lower than the generally adopted 50% (Eichhorn, 2014), it may be concluded that CMV is most likely not a pervasive problem in this study.

It is recommended that future studies may undertake a similar method of testing, but over a longer length of time. Riggio and Mumford (2011) recommended that a two-phase approach may constitute a longitudinal study. However, a three-phase approach would be most preferred, as it would be able to capture the overall process from Phase 1 to Phase 2 to Phase 3. There have also been a few suggestions on the time gap between the phases, from a few weeks to a few years. Given the nature of this study looking at changes in employee job performance, a gap of 3 to 12 months has been suggested (Taris & Kompier, 2014). For example, a study by Daniel and Sonnentag (2014) adopted a 3-month gap when studying the relationship between engagement and work-life balance, indicating that to observe a cause-and-effect relationship, time is needed for the effect to happen.

In addition, even though employees were able to rate collectively on their leader's leadership styles, which made the rating more objective (M. C. C. Lee & Idris, 2019), such a multilevel approach may still contain biasness. The usual approach of having multiraters may be useful (Donaldson & Grant-Vallone, 2002), whereby future studies may obtain ratings from the leader as well. It would be useful to compare the discrepancy of leadership styles as perceived by both the employees and the leader, and how that may indirectly affect the leader-employee relationship.

The study managed to examine three important leadership styles found in the Asian context and acknowledged that a leader may possess more than one leadership style (M. C. C. Lee et al., 2018). Due to some limitation, however, the study was not able to capture other types of leadership styles that have been pertinent in recent leadership literature and are relevant within the Asian context. For example, paternalistic leadership has been proposed to be a good measurement of how leadership is viewed in Asia (Farh & Cheng, 2000). Hence, future studies may include paternalistic leadership and other leadership styles when investigating the leader-employee relationship.

The type of coaching behavior measured in the current study leaned more towards guidance coaching. Previous research on coaching behavior has distinguished two primary types of coaching: guidance and facilitation coaching (Hui, Sue-Chan, & Wood, 2013). Guidance coaching involves leaders providing feedback to employees on how to improve their performance based on behavioral modeling until performance mastery is achieved whereas facilitation coaching involves leaders encouraging employees to achieve performance improvement through self-reflection and self-guided learning (Hui & Sue-Chan, 2018). It is important to distinguish between coaching behaviors, as different coaching behaviors lead to different “beliefs, objectives, and goals” (Hui & Sue-Chan, 2018, p. 664). Future studies might want to examine the relationships between different types of coaching behaviors and different types of leadership styles (Grant, Curtayne, & Burton, 2009).

### Practical implications

The results first highlight the importance of supervisory coaching in contributing to higher employee job performance (Read, 2013). Organizations may train their leaders to possess certain leadership styles (e.g., empowering leadership) that exhibit supervisory coaching behavior which contributes to higher employee job performance. Empowering leadership comprises elements of empowerment and autonomy that encourage employees to perform well at work. Based on the self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000), employees feel a sense of autonomy and competency in successfully carrying out their tasks (Md-Sidin et al., 2010; Plomp et al., 2016).

The study also found a link between transactional leadership and supervisory coaching. This leadership style could work in the Asian context, which acknowledges power distance and formality (Hofstede, 2001). When transactional leaders give instructions to employees, this behavior may be viewed as a form of supervisory coaching. Overall, this study's findings show that certain leadership styles are equipped with suitable behavior (i.e., supervisory coaching) that positively influences employees (Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001).

The results of this study indicate that employee development is an important aspect for organizations to consider if they want to grow and advance further. Leaders in the organization should pay more attention to employee development. Leaders need to monitor themselves and adopt a suitable leadership style which prioritizes employees and exhibits supervisory coaching that would contribute to

employees improving their job performance (Turetgen, Unsal, & Dural, 2017).

### Conclusion

The current study aimed to investigate the relevance of leadership style in exhibiting supervisory coaching behavior. Between empowering, transformational, and transactional leadership styles, empowering leadership showed the strongest link to perceived supervisory coaching followed by transactional leadership, but not transformational leadership. Supervisory coaching was found to mediate the relationships between empowering leadership and job performance, and between transactional leadership and job performance. The study also suggested the need to consider the cultural context in which leadership styles are practiced.

Future studies could examine other leadership styles and behaviors that may assist employee job performance. In addition, a longitudinal method would allow a better observation of the cause-and-effect relationship between leaders and employees whereas a multirater approach would allow a multidimensional view on the relationship. In summary, this study found empowering leadership to be the better leadership style, followed by transactional leadership, which could be adopted by leaders because it exhibits supervisory coaching behavior that in turn leads to higher job performance. As such, leaders in the workplace need to be trained and equipped with the right skills so that they are able to effectively guide others.

### Disclosure of conflict of interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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