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EXPLORING PREFERRED LEADERSHIP STYLES ACROSS INDUSTRIES: PERSPECTIVES OF FOLLOWERS

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ABSTRACT

Introduction/ Main Objective: This study investigated preferred leadership styles, considered by many to be the most prevalent styles: autocratic, participative, and laissez-faire. We assessed 'preferred leadership style' from the perspective of the follower. The study aimed at exploring the variations in the preference for leadership styles across selected industries, namely the food/beverage industry, the retail industry, and the financial industry. **Novelty:** Leadership styles and perspectives have been investigated from divergent angles; but the preferred leadership styles have not been explored adequately across industries. This study endeavored at filling the gap in literature, and to provide direction to stakeholders, as regards followers' perspectives. **Research Methods:** Our convenience sample was a result of a targeted effort to query respondents from three distinct samples: retail, restaurant/drink establishments, and consumer finance institutions (primarily banks). In addition to the preferred leadership from the perspective of the follower, we also collected demographic data including gender and age of the follower, in order to get the critical insights from demographic lenses. Our survey included the leader behavior questions that are borrowed from the LBDQ XII manual provided by Stogdill (1962), and involved an examination of the studies conducted by Van Eeden, et al.(2008) for examples of behaviors attributed to the various leadership styles. **Finding/Results:** Our results were mixed. In some analyses, our results were reflective of the literature. However, in other analyses, our results differed from the literature. The study evinced tolerance for autocratic leadership, particularly in retailing, much against the pre-conceived notion. **Conclusion:** The study confirmed the generally-accepted hypothesis that employees from the food/beverage industry, the retail industry, and the financial industry all prefer participative leadership significantly more than autocratic or laissez-faire styles.

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1. Introduction

Different leadership styles have an impact on the effectiveness and efficiency of an organization (Jain, and Luhar, 2021). People leave their boss, not their job (Grant et al., 2011). We feel that there is often a disconnect between leadership styles held by those in leadership positions vs. the style of leadership that employees are willing to follow. Leadership can manifest in most organizational settings. We intend to explore preferred leadership styles across various industries to determine whether followers' preferences to leadership styles changes across selected industries. We have narrowed our choice of leadership styles to autocratic, participative, and laissez-faire. Grant, et al (2011) recognized these three leadership styles as quite common.

Participative leadership creates a trusting work environment that encourages employees to develop their skills, but it does not equally suit to all industries from the perspectives of followers. The underlying assumption is that leadership styles significantly influence employee productivity albeit different leadership styles have varying effects on employee productivity, and varying leadership styles can co-exist within the same organization (Olayisade, & Awolusi, 2021). Giddens, J. (2018), Bogler, R. (2001), Mohiuddin, Z. A. (2017), Shamaki, E. B. (2015), and Mat, J. (2008) studied leadership styles, and examined the influence of leadership in different settings, and across different industries; but their findings had underpinning support for the co-existence of varying styles.

The autocratic, participative, and laissez-faire leadership styles were chosen for this study, taking into consideration their wider usage within a dynamic strategic management process across industries, as supported by our critical appraisal of pertinent leadership literature. We explored the preferences of the three chosen leadership styles across a small variety of industries, namely: the food and beverages industry; financial institutions industry, and the retail industry. These industries were selected out of convenience which will be discussed in our Methodologies chapter below. We hope our research may be useful for those in leadership roles within the chosen industries as well as to inform future research. This study addresses the following two research questions:

1. How do preferred leadership styles vary by industry from the followers' perspective?
2. Do demographics such as gender, ethnicity affect a follower's preference in leadership styles?

2. Literature Review

Nearly every organization has leadership positions. Leadership styles and the idea of "how to lead" has been a topic of discussion for many years. In the past, researchers have investigated differences in leadership styles and behaviors (Bertsch, et al., 2018; Buxton, et al., 2017). Followers may prefer one leadership style over another because of their past experience, work style, and personal preference. This is not a new phenomenon. Researchers, scholars, and practitioners have been studying issues, perspectives, and challenges, pertaining to leadership. For example, Stark (1936) analyzed the relationship between the problems with labor versus leadership style. While Stark's article is quite dated, it illustrates that 'leadership styles' is a complex and lasting issue. Kouzes and Posner (1990) explore trait theory relative to critical attributes that followers admire.   Many review articles

indicate the state of investigation in how leadership manifests (or not) (for example, see Fries, Kammerlander, & Leitterstorf, 2020).

Instead of surveying the middle managers and/or supervisors, we studied the subordinates of those managers in hopes of gaining more insight on this topic from the perspective of the follower. To begin, we defined each type of leadership style we investigated in this study as well as how it varies by demographic and industry.

2.1. Autocratic Leadership

The autocratic approach to leadership can be compared to a "classical approach," and defined as a leader acting as a dictator: a decision maker does not tolerate questions to their authority (Khan, et al., 2015). Khan et al. (2015) touched on the criticism that this approach to leadership has received in recent years. Autocratic leaders and the behaviors that generally follow can be paralleled with military leaders and the straightforward attitude they possess. Khan et al. (2015) described autocratic leaders as not trusting employees, not allowing employee input, relying on negative reinforcement to affect employees, and giving detailed orders and instructions.

Anwar et al. (2015) analyzed the three leadership styles and in what contexts they were most effective. They suggested that autocratic leaders have little regard for the opinions of others and have complete authority over them. Autocratic leadership is useful when quick decision making is essential to the firm's success; however, Anwar et al. (2015) stated that it causes burnout in employees if that is the style of leadership used in the long-term. Although at first glance, many will stray from this leadership style even in the face of evidence that, in specific, it may be necessary. In

environments where the company experienced poor management, employees were "running the show," or were not responsive to other leadership styles – the autocratic leadership can obtain immediate and positive results.

As mentioned, an autocratic leadership style may bring either positive or negative effects upon the organizational culture. Van Vugt, et al. (2004) examined the impact of autocratic leadership style on the stability of small social dilemma groups. They hypothesized that the destabilization from the autocratic leadership style is caused by the procedural rather than the distributive aspects of the leadership style. Their results indicated that in the beginning, followers were more excited when working with an autocratic leader; however, in the long-term, more followers exited the group (Van Vugt et al., 2004).

Rast, et al. (2013), suggest that autocratic leaders may experience greater follower support in times of self-uncertainty compared to non-autocratic leaders. Rast, et al. (2013) hypothesized that under uncertainty, followers usually wait for their leaders - especially strong and directive leaders, for providing them clear direction and strategy. As a result, under uncertainty-identity theory prediction, more followers invest in greater support and trust in an autocratic leader rather than a non-autocratic leader.

Luther (1996) studied the impact of both autocratic and democratic leadership styles had on the perception of how well male and female employees performed. Luther (1996) surveyed undergraduate seniors and asked them to rate autocratic managers and democratic managers. The result indicated that democratic managers will often choose to encourage higher performers and superior leaders over

autocratic managers (Luthar, 1996). Further, Luthar (1996) also investigated the preference differences between male subjects and female subjects over autocratic female managers and autocratic male managers. Even though female managers were perceived to be higher performers than autocratic male managers, male subjects preferred autocratic male managers over autocratic female managers (Luthar, 1996). On the other hand, female subjects evaluated the autocratic male managers lower on both performance and leadership ability compared to autocratic female managers (Luthar, 1996). Bertsch, et al., (2018) also found that male followers preferred autocratic leadership styles over female followers.

Kotur, et al. (2014) found that female employees preferred autocratic managers to some extent compared to male employees. Kotur, et al. (2014) surveyed participants from different age groups and found that people between the ages of 26 and 35 preferred autocratic leaders compared to other age groups. Kotur et al. (2014) concluded that there is a major difference between the age groups on the autocratic leadership preference. In summary, autocratic leadership style is practiced wherein leaders control all the decisions and take very little or even no inputs from followers. Autocratic leaders make choices or decisions based on their own beliefs, knowledge and understanding.

2.2. Participative Leadership

Participative leadership may also be described as democratic leadership and is defined as leaders who are aware of their employees' skills and experience, and encourage them to make their opinions and views known (Khan et al., 2015). Khan et al.

(2015) concluded that this type of leadership style is the most effective approach in any type of business. Through the use of compromises, understanding, freedom of opinion, and motivation, participative leadership is successful in maintaining relationships with employees, as well as finding a "happy medium" for those in the company (Khan et al., 2015). Through this open atmosphere, employees are free to come to the manager with problems that may arise, offer up suggestions, and receive recognition for their good work. Others have suggested that participative leadership encourages employees to use their creativity and maintain a positive mindset (Anwar et al., 2015). The culture created by participative leaders encourages collaboration and innovation between team members although it may be more time consuming to establish (Anwar et al., 2015).

Participative leadership has been found via attribution theory (Kelley, 1967) to be a form of intrinsic motivation. Huang, et al. (2010) found that participative leadership is desired by not only the follower, but also by those holding the leadership positions as well. This can be relevant in not only larger corporations, but smaller ones as well. Because participative leadership allows the follower to offer up guidance and/or opinions, employees feel respected by their supervisors/leaders (Huang et al., 2010; Bijlsma & Bunt, 2003; Dirks & Ferrin, 2002). Huang et al. (2010) concluded that participative leadership triggers motivational mechanisms for peers, and exchange-based mechanisms for subordinates.

Huang et al. (2010) found that participative leaders have the most significant impact on organizational culture. Additionally, Detert and Burris (2007) found that this correlates with subordinates feeling

like they are truly accepted in the company and have a voice. Detert and Burris (2007) found that participative leadership and organizational adaptability go hand-in-hand more so than the other leadership styles we have chosen to look at (autocratic and laissez-faire). Dolatabadi and Safa (2010) also found that managers that adopt participative leadership have employees who are more committed to service quality and shared values. In a research study on employee commitment involving participative leadership, it was found that this leadership style is more appropriate than others in service organizations (Dolatabadi & Safa 2010). In summary, participative leadership style aims at involving followers in identifying l goals as well as in developing procedures, policies, plans, programs or strategies for accomplishing those goals. Participative leadership tends to work best, though it can be time consuming, and may delay the process, and result in procrastination.

2.3. Laissez-Faire Leadership

Khan et al. (2015) described laissez-faire leadership as the "free will" or "hands off" leader and discussed how laissez-faire leadership encourages employees to make decisions on their own without the direction or instruction of a superior. They concluded that freedom is the basis of this leadership style, and employees can benefit from this depending on the situation. In cases where employees are highly experienced, trustworthy and have personal drive, having a laissez-faire type of leader can be effective (Khan et al., 2015). Khan et al. (2015) also recognized that this style is not beneficial when the employees do not feel confident and require feedback for certain tasks and projects. Additionally, Khan et al. (2015) discussed that under laissez-faire leadership,

the manager is prone to place too much responsibility on the employees–so much so that the leader is no longer held accountable for their own job. In addition, Anwar et al. (2015) suggested laissez-faire leadership can lead to more organizational commitment by followers' (i.e., employees') to meet the overall goals and deadlines of the company. Being more hands-off and delegating responsibilities can make employees feel needed and increase their buy-in to the vision for their department (Anwar et al., 2015).

However, laissez-faire leadership has been found by others to significantly hinder employee job commitment and satisfaction (Sharon et al., 2013). Affective Commitment, which is when employees work somewhere because they actively want to, has been shown to be hindered by laissez-faire styles (Sharon et al., 2013). Lasseiz-faire leaders become increasingly taxing on their employees' psychological resources because followers are forced to take over tasks or duties that they are not best suited for due to the lack of direction from their superior (Julian, et al., 2016). Employees need some direction to be able to be most effective and not experience burnout.

Einarsen (1999) recognized laissez-faire leadership adds frustration and stress within the corporation or work force due to the lack of adequate leadership and direction. Many researchers have found that laissez-faire leadership can cause interpersonal conflicts, role conflicts, and role ambiguity – even bullying (Hoel & Salin, 2003; Einarsen, 1999). Thus, laissez-faire leadership is only successful in specific situations; such as when the follower does not need any direction or supervision due to their high experience, personal drive, or trustworthy work ethic (Khan et al., 2015). In summary, when leaders pursue laissez-faire style, they are hands-off and allow group members to make the

decisions. The studies have evinced that it leads to the lowest productivity at organizational as well as at individual levels.

2.4. Followership & Types of Followers

Generally, people usually categorize followers as subordinates, participants, and collaborators. Often, followership does not receive a lot of attention in leadership research. Though it could be argued that leadership styles have emerged from natural interactions between leaders and followers (Kahn, et al., 2019). How followers perceive and feel about their leaders directly affects the atmosphere and productivity of the workplace.

Just as there are different types of leaders, there are also different types of followers. According to Kahn et al. (2019), there are five types of followers: The Sheep, The Yes-People, Alienated Followers, Star Followers, and Pragmatic Followers. The Sheep will follow their leaders blindly, are dependent, and do not take initiative. The Yes-People need lots of direction from their leaders and will not question the task. Alienated Followers typically stay to themselves, reacting cynically and skeptically to most decisions. Star Followers are energetic and team-oriented; they participate and question their leaders for the overall good of the company. Lastly, Pragmatic Followers are the status quo followers, finding ways to do the least amount of work while still securing a future in the company. (Khan et al., 2019).

Leaders simply do not exist without followers. When followers do not like their leaders, the workplace gets complicated. Followers may decide whether they want to go along with their leaders if they view themselves as free agents (Kellerman, 2019). A good leader and a bad leader can make or break the entire environment of the workplace. Kellerman (2019) stated that the relationship between the leader and the follower is not one sided; it takes two to tango. Just as one needs a good leader; leaders also need to have good followers. The acknowledgement of both parties is important as it can lead to effective work relationships. Leaders such as managers do tend to have more leeway towards picking their followers; however, followers also have that same power. Leaders need their team to meet goals and evolve the company; they cannot do it by themselves. Followership is not measured as a part of this study. We included this discussion only to suggest the importance of followership in the leader-follower dynamic and, hence, is a key reason we intend to query the follower relative to preferred leadership style. That framing is also illustrated in Bertsch, et al. (2018). In summary, followership theory provides a framework to identify what type of followers a leader has on his/ her team. It rejects one generic approach for all types of followers. A leader, in order to be effective, endeavors to embrace the benefits that each follower type brings to him/ her.

2.5. Leadership Styles and the Effect on Job Satisfaction and Efficiency

Agyemeng, et al. (2016) analyzed how leadership styles affected employee turnover intentions as well as counterproductive work behaviors. They found that having an autocratic leader significantly impacted employee turnover intention. When describing the results for autocratic leaders, Agyemeng et al. (2016) found that the more autocratic leadership style behaviors employees see, the more likely they are to leave their job. This implies that employees began to become dissatisfied; therefore, increasing their intentions to voluntarily

separate from the organization due to how much they perceived their superior to be an autocratic leader.

Pedraja-Rejas, et al. (2006) investigated how autocratic leadership, participative leadership, and laissez-faire leadership impacted performance effectiveness in small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in Chile. They investigated whether or not there is a statistical relationship between leadership styles and performance effectiveness (Pedraja-Rejas et al., 2006). They found that laissez-faire leadership is present in most businesses, followed by participative leadership and autocratic leadership, respectively. The laissez-faire approach and the participative approach both had a positive influence on performance effectiveness in SMEs while autocratic leadership had a negative influence.

Pool (1997) examined the predictive values of substitutes of leadership, leadership behavior, and work motivation in relation to job satisfaction (Pool, 1997). As a result, the initiating structure leadership style influences 15.1% of the overall job satisfaction predictor. In any type of business, managers may need to adjust their leadership style to increase the worker's motivation and job satisfaction. Pool (1997) suggested that success in such a competitive environment usually becomes an organization's mission; unfortunately, not all businesses will succeed. Organizational goals can be accomplished productively with an effective leadership style. Leadership styles have great influences on employee performance and productivity. Nanjundeswaraswamy & Swamy (2014) point out that commitment to a company, work satisfaction, and the style of leadership in place all coexist. We mention this only as an example of how leadership styles can predict organizational performance.

However, performance in relationships to preferred leadership styles is not part of the scope of this current study.

2.6. Literature Review Summary

Autocratic, participative, and laissez faire all have their pros and cons. Subordinates all have their preferred styles that tailor best with how they work. Some may need a leader who tells them exactly what to do and how the task needs to be done. Others may prefer to be left alone in order to succeed.

Cherry (2019) states that with autocratic leaders, structurally, there is never a doubt of who is in charge. With such a leadership style, employees who need close supervision can benefit. However, autocratic leadership may lead to discouraged followers and possibly resentment from staff. Creativity may be overlooked as autocratic leaders do not generally welcome the opinions of others (Cherry, 2019). This style discourages followers to speak their minds freely, again diminishing potential creativity. Cherry concluded that it is possible for autocratic leaders to thrive if they listen more to their team members and recognize success. With these in mind, better relationships and closer organizational commitment could be cultivated (Cherry, 2019).

Participative leaders also have advantages and disadvantages. Through participative leadership, employees are involved in decision making – which often produces more creativity (Anwar et al., 2015). Because of this, followers are also more willing to adapt to changes in the workplace because they are included. Work morale tends to be higher under this leadership style, as followers feel more appreciated and valued by their leader (Belyh, 2019). However, participative leadership takes more time and effort due to

the employee involvement. Disagreements leading to the final decision may lead to followers resenting their leader as conflict can occur (Belyh, 2019).

Lastly, laissez-faire has benefits due to creativity and technological advancements (Kaushik, 2019). This type of leadership style will allow full utilization of the followers' entire abilities. It can lead to less stress and the opportunity to create the employee's own schedule; thus, leading to increased job satisfaction. Some downsides to this type of leadership can encourage laziness in employees and reduce productivity and accountability. Not all followers do well under this type of leadership (Kaushik, 2019).

We explored how preferred leadership styles vary by industry. We focused on three industries: food and beverage industry, retail industry, and financial institutions – chosen primarily due to convenience. We researched preferred behaviors of a leader and analyze how demographics such as gender, age, and ethnicity would affect a follower's preference in leadership styles. That was why, we collected data from the perspective of the followers instead of the managers or the leaders.

3. Research Method

The purpose of our study was to find and evaluate the preferred leadership styles from different industries and demographics based on the perspective of the follower. Through an exploratory research design (Bertsch, 2009; Bertsch & Pham, 2012; Tande et al., 2013) we applied our borrowed instrument across three industries. The data collection consisted of amalgamating survey items from sound and known sources (Stogdill, 1962; Stogdill, 1963; House et. al, 2004; Van Eeden, et al. 2008) and implementing

convenience sampling techniques (Bertsch & Pham, 2012).

We borrowed the survey questions that measure the followers' preferences of autocratic leadership style, participative leadership style, or laissez-faire leadership style from a study conducted by Stogdill (1963). This included the leader behavior questions that are borrowed from the LBDQ XII manual provided by Stogdill (1962). We also examined the studies conducted by Van Eeden, et al. (2008) for examples of behaviors attributed to the various leadership styles. Lastly, we created our demographic questions to analyze how demographics will affect a follower's preference in leadership styles. Our demographic-related survey questions include age, gender, and country of origin. We deemed it necessary to include demographic questions in order to address how these leadership style preferences varied by not only industry, but also other variables. See the Appendix for the final instrument.

Our survey consisted of both a paper survey and an electronic survey. We decided to implement both mediums as a way to reach more people. Our survey could be completed in approximately ten minutes. After collecting the survey, our data was entered into Excel and analyzed. In order to remain confidential, we provided survey participants with sealed envelopes to return their survey for the paper version. Employees under the age of 18 were not surveyed. We employed a 3:1 ratio of responses to the survey questions as a minimum sample size (Bertsch & Pham, 2012; Tande, et al., 2013).

4. Result and Discussion

Our data collection efforts yielded 119 completed surveys. The respondents filled in all questions asked, resulting in no missing

data. However, one respondent did not belong to any of the three industry groups we analyzed, and that response was removed from the data.

Along the 'gender' demographic, there were 72 female responses (60.5%), 42 male responses (35.3%), two transgender male responses (1.7%), one transgender female response (.8%), and one gender variant/nonconforming response (.8%). Along the level of education demographic variable, 6.8% had a master's degree, 33.1% of the responses are from those who had bachelor's degrees, 22.9% had some college or an associate degree, 0.8% went to a trade school, 14.4% had a high school diploma or a GED, and 11.9% had some high school education but no diploma. From the three industries included in our study, we received 40 responses from the retail industry, 37 from the financial industry, and 41 from the food and beverage industry.

Research question 1: How do preferred leadership styles vary by industry?
a. Financial
b. Retail
c. Restaurant/Drink

Table 1. Illustrates the analysis comparing mean scores of respondents from the food/beverage industry compared to respondents from the retail industry.

Table 1. Food/Beverage Industry and Retail Industry Leadership Preferences

Style	Sample	Mean
Autocratic	Food/Beverage Industry vs Retail Industry Leadership	m(food/beverages) = 3.27 m(retail) = 3.00 Significant at p<0.05
Participative	Food/Beverage Industry vs Retail Industry Leadership	m(food/beverages) = 3.53 m(retail) = 3.81 Significant at p<0.05
Laissez-faire	Food/Beverage Industry vs Retail Industry Leadership	m(food/beverages) = 3.12 m(retail) = 3.17 No significant difference

From Table 1, the mean of the food/beverages industry preference for autocratic leadership is 3.27 while the mean of retail industry is 3.00 (significant difference at p<0.05). For the participative leadership style, there is a significant difference at p<0.05 as the mean of food/beverages industry was 3.53 and the mean of retail industry was 3.81. On laissez-faire leadership style, the food and beverages industry scored 3.12 and retail industry scored 3.17. These results are not significantly difference.

Table 2 illustrates the analysis of respondents from the financial industry compared to respondents from the retail industry. None of the analyses illustrated in Table 2 indicated significant differences by industry.

Table 2. Retail Industry and Financial Industry Leadership Preferences

Style	Sample	Mean
Autocratic	Financial Industry Preference vs Retail Industry Leadership Preference	m(financial) = 3.17 m(retail) = 3.00 Not significantly different
Participative	Financial Industry Preference vs Retail Industry Leadership Preference	m(financial) = 3.72 m(retail) = 3.81 Not significantly different
Laissez-faire	Financial Industry Preference vs Retail Industry Leadership Preference	m(financial) = 3.19 m(retail) = 3.17 Not significantly different

Table 3 is the comparison between respondents from the food/beverage industry compared to respondents from the financial industry. None of the analyses illustrated in Table 3 yielded significant differences.

Table 3. Food/Beverage Industry and Financial Industry Leadership Preferences

Style	Sample	Mean
Autocratic	Food/Beverage Industry Preference vs Financial Industry Preference vs	m(food/beverages) = 3.27 m(financial) = 3.17 No significant difference
Participative	Food/Beverage Industry Preference vs Financial Industry Preference vs	m(food/beverages) = 3.53 m(financial) = 3.72 No significant difference
Laissez-faire	Food/Beverage Industry Preference vs Financial Industry Preference vs	m(food/beverages) = 3.12 m(financial) = 3.19 No significant difference

Table 4 is the comparison between preferred leadership styles in food and beverages industry. The results indicate that employees in the food/beverages industry prefer participative leadership significantly more than autocratic leadership and laissez-faire leadership styles.

Table 4. Food/Beverage Industry and Preferred Leadership Styles

Styles	Sample	Mean
Autocratic vs Participative	Autocratic Leadership	m(autocratic) = 3.27
	Participative Leadership	m(participative) = 3.53
	Significantly different at p<0.05	
Participative vs Laissez-faire	Participative Leadership	m(participative) = 3.53
	Laissez-faire Leadership	m(laissez-faire) = 3.12
	Significantly different at p<0.001	
Laissez-faire vs Autocratic	Laissez-faire Leadership	m(laissez-faire) = 3.12
	Autocratic Leadership	m(autocratic) = 3.27
	No significant difference	

Table 5 is the comparison between preferred leadership styles in the retail industry. It indicates that employees in the retail industry prefer participative leadership significantly more than autocratic leadership and laissez-faire leadership styles.

Table 5. Retail Industry and Preferred Leadership Styles

Styles	Sample	Mean
Autocratic vs Participative	Autocratic Leadership	m(autocratic) = 3.00
	Participative Leadership	m(participative) = 3.81
	Significantly different at p<0.001	
Participative vs Laissez-faire	Participative Leadership	m(participative) = 3.81
	Laissez-faire Leadership	m(laissez-faire) = 3.17
	Significantly different at p<0.001	
Laissez-faire vs Autocratic	Laissez-faire Leadership	m(laissez-faire) = 3.17
	Autocratic Leadership	m(autocratic) = 3.00
	No significant difference	

Table 6 is the comparison between preferred leadership styles in financial industry. It is worth noting that there is no significant difference between laissez-faire and autocratic styles in financial industry.

Table 6. Financial Industry and Financial Industry Leadership Preferences

Styles	Sample	Mean
Autocratic vs Participative	Autocratic Leadership	m(autocratic) = 3.17
	Participative Leadership	m(participative) = 3.72
	Significantly different at p<0.001	
Participative vs Laissez-faire	Participative Leadership	m(participative) = 3.72
	Laissez-faire Leadership	m(laissez-faire) = 3.19
	Significantly different at p<0.001	
Laissez-faire vs Autocratic	Laissez-faire Leadership	m(laissez-faire) = 3.19
	Autocratic Leadership	m(autocratic) = 3.17
	No significant difference	

While comparing the three leadership styles, the results indicated that the respondents from these three industries would prefer participative leadership style over both the autocratic leadership style and laissez-faire leadership style. From the food and beverages industry in Table 4, respondents' average result for participative leadership is 3.53 compared to the score of 3.27 for autocratic leadership and 3.12 for laissez-faire leadership. Their preference for participative leadership style is significantly different at p<0.05 for autocratic leadership and p<0.001 for laissez-faire leadership respectively. From the retail industry results in Table 5, autocratic (m=3.00) and participative leadership (m=3.81) styles are significantly different at p<0.001 with a preference toward participative leadership.

In addition, laissez-faire (m = 3.17) is significantly lower compared to participative leadership style also at p<0.001. From the financial industry Table 6, the results for autocratic, participative, and laissez-faire leadership are 3.17, 3.72, and 3.19, respectively. Participative leadership is significantly preferred compared to autocratic leadership at p<0.001 and from laissez-faire leadership at p<0.001.

Research question 2: Do demographics such as gender, ethnicity, etc., affect a follower's preference in leadership styles?

Table 7 is the comparison between male and female employees preferred leadership style regardless of industry.

Table 7. Gender and Preferred Leadership Styles

Category	Sample	Mean
Autocratic	Female Preference vs Male Preference	m(female)=3.01
		m(male)=3.42
		Significant difference at p<.001
Participative	Female Preference vs Male Preference	m(female)=4.04
		m(male)=3.86
		No significant difference
Laissez-faire	Female Preference vs Male Preference	m(female)=3.49
		m(male)=3.30
		Significant difference at p<.05

From the survey responses, there are 72 female responses, 42 male responses, two transgender female responses, and one transgender male response. Because the transgender female and transgender male group did not meet our required sample size for accurate testing, we only compared those who identified as males in comparison to those who identified as females. The result from Table 7 indicated male subjects scored 3.42 in preference toward an autocratic leader while female subjects only scored 3.01 (at p<0.001). Similarly, for laissez-faire, female subjects scored 3.49 while males

scored 3.30. The difference was significant at p<0.05.

Table 8 is the comparison between female respondents to preferred leadership styles. From the data of Table 8, female respondents preferred participative leaders over laissez-faire leaders, and in turn, preferred laissez-faire leaders over autocratic leaders.

Table 8. Female and Preferred Leadership Style

Category	Sample	Mean
Autocratic vs Participative	Autocratic Leadership	m(autocratic) = 3.01
	Participative Leadership	m(participative) = 4.04
	Significantly different at p<0.001	
Participative vs Laissez-faire	Participative Leadership	m(participative) = 4.04
	Laissez-faire Leadership	m(laissez-faire) = 3.49
	Significantly different at p<0.001	
Laissez-faire vs Autocratic	Laissez-faire Leadership	m(laissez-faire) = 3.49
	Autocratic Leadership	m(financial) = 3.01
	Significantly different at p<0.05	

Table 9 is the comparison between male respondents to preferred leadership styles. When comparing between female and males' preference on different leadership styles, both of the groups scored high in preferring participative leadership over the other two leadership styles studied. Females have a higher preference on participative (m=4.04) over autocratic (m=3.01) and laissez-faire (m=3.49) both at p<0.001. However, when comparing between laissez-faire and autocratic preference, they are significantly different at p<0.05. Similarly, males preferred participative leadership style over the other two leadership styles. When comparing men's scores between autocratic leadership style and participative leadership style the difference was significant at p<0.05. Male subjects scored high on participative with 3.86 while laissez-faire was only 3.30. This was significantly different at p<0.001.

Table 9. Male and Preferred Leadership Style

Category	Sample	Mean
Autocratic vs Participative	Autocratic Leadership	m(autocratic) = 3.42
	Participative Leadership	m(participative) = 3.86
	Significantly different at p<0.05	
Participative vs Laissez-faire	Participative Leadership	m(participative) = 3.86
	Laissez-faire Leadership	m(laissez-faire) = 3.30
	Significantly different at p<0.001	
Laissez-faire vs Autocratic	Laissez-faire Leadership	m(laissez-faire) = 3.30
	Autocratic Leadership	m(autocratic) = 3.42
	Significantly different at p<0.05	

Table 10 is the comparison between preferred leadership in age groups of 18-25 and 26-36. Although other age categories were included in the survey, those categories did not yield sufficient sample sizes to include in these analyses. Most of our respondents are in age groups of 18 to 25 and 26 to 36. We removed the age groups that did not meet our criteria of a minimum of n>19. From Table 10, both age groups illustrated no significant difference in preference between autocratic leaderships or laissez-faire leaderships. When it came to preference within the participative style, we found that the younger age group of 18-25 (m=3.83) preferred the participative style more than the age group of 26-35 (m=3.26) at p<0.05.

Table 10. Preferred Leadership Styles Between Age Groups Of 18-25 And 26-36

Category	Sample	Mean
Autocratic	Ages 18-25	m(18-25)=3.07
	Ages 26-35	m(26-35)=3.19
	No significant difference	
Participative	Ages 18-25	m(18-25)=3.83
	Ages 26-35	m(26-35)=3.26
	Significant difference at p<.05	
Laissez-Faire	Ages 18-25	m(18-25)=3.07
	Ages 26-35	m(26-35)=3.26
	No significant difference	

Table 11 provides comparison between full time and part time workers and their preferred leadership styles. Quite surprisingly and as illustrated in Table 11, full-time workers (m=3.29) reported a significantly higher preference for an autocratic leader when compared to part-time workers (m=2.93) at p<0.05. There were no other significant differences in the remaining to tests.

Table 11. Preferred Leadership Styles Between Full Time and Part Time Workers

Category	Sample	Mean
Autocratic	Full-Time	m(full-time)=3.29
	Part-Time	m(part-time)=2.93
	Significant difference at p<.05	
Participative	Full-Time	m(full-time)=3.77
	Part-Time	m(part-time)=3.60
	No significant difference	
Laissez-Faire	Full-Time	m(full-time)=3.15
	Part-Time	m(part-time)=3.21
	No significant difference	

5. Conclusions

Based on the analysis of the data, there are a few surprising results. First, autocratic leadership was tolerated more than we expected. The greatest aversion to autocratic leadership lay in the retail industry. However, none of the industries seemed to show a heavy aversion to any of the three leadership styles. Significant differences were found when comparing the food and beverages industry with the retail industry between autocratic leadership and participative leadership seen on Table 1. This difference was significant at p<0.05 towards autocratic leadership and participative leadership. Table 2 and Table 3 indicated that there was no significant difference between the retail industry and financial industry or the food/beverage industry and financial industry for autocratic leadership, participative leadership, or laissez-faire leadership. The results from Table 4, Table 5, and Table 6 showed that employees from the food/beverage industry, the retail industry,

and the financial industry all prefer participative leadership significantly more than autocratic leadership and laissez-faire leadership. This aligns with our initial hypothesis.

Table 7 illustrated the preferred leadership styles between males and females. There were no significant differences between male and female in preferring participative leadership. In addition, males prefer autocratic leadership styles at the significant different of p<0.001, and females prefer laissez-faire leadership styles at the significant different of p<0.05. Also, according to Tables 8 and 9, the respondents' preferences towards participative leadership outshined the autocratic leadership and laissez-faire leadership in the mean scores. For age groups, we did not have enough participants to analyze any groups besides the age ranges 18-25 and 26-35. Respondents from the age group of 18-25 preferred autocratic styles while the respondents from age group of 26-35 preferred participative leadership styles according to Table 10. When we analyzed the data from the Table 11, full time employees and part time employees would prefer participative leaders over the other two.

6. Implications of the Study

Comparing our findings to previous literature, participative leadership seems to be slightly favored. Although opinions may differ on which leadership style is preferred by followers, many studies' results mirror ours (Lewin, et al. 1939; Huang et al., 2010; Dolatabadi & Safa, 2010). For managers, it is important to know what style works best for them, their company, and their followers – even if it is a mix of things. Our study evinces that stereotyping for a preferential leadership style is not an appropriate approach. Although our convenient sample size was significant, we collected results from only one area. Future studies may take cognizance of this constraint for deducing and validating conclusions for investigating leadership in large scale industries or in multinational settings. As regards implications of this study for future researches in the domain of leadership, researchers might consider surveying multiple geographical areas in order to pull significant samples in different demographics. There are other instruments that could result in a broader variety of preferred leadership behaviors (for example, see Littrell, et al. 2018).

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Appendix - Preferred Leadership Behaviors Survey Questions

PART 1 - Demographics

1. Gender: (please circle only one)
   A. Female
   B. Male
   C. Transgender male
   D. Transgender female
   E. Gender Variant/Non-conforming
   F. Not listed: _____
   G. Prefer not to answer

2. Age: (please circle only one)
   A. 18-25
   B. 26-35
   C. 36-45
   D. 46-55
   E. 56-65
   F. 66-75
   G. 75 years or older

3. Education level (please circle only one)
   A. Some High School
   B. High School Diploma/GED
   C. Some College or associate degree
   D. Bachelor's Degree
   E. Master's Degree
   F. Ph.D. or higher
   G. Trade School
   H. Prefer not to say

4. What industry are you currently working in? (please circle only one)
   A. Food and Beverage
   B. Retail
   C. Financial

5. Are you a part time or full-time employee?
    A. Part time (less than 36 hours per week)
    B. Full time (36 hours or more per week)

6. Where do you originate? (please circle only one)
    A. Minot, North Dakota
    B. North Dakota, but not Minot
    C. The United States, but not North Dakota
    D. Other: _____ (optional)
    E. Prefer not to say

PART 2 – Leadership Behaviors

You are probably aware of people in your organization or industry who are exceptionally skilled at motivating, influencing, or enabling you or groups of people to contribute to the success of the organization or task. We might call such people "outstanding leaders."

The following questions contain several behaviors and characteristics that can be used to describe various behaviors exhibited by managers and leaders. Each behavior or characteristic is accompanied by a short definition to clarify its meaning.

Using the above description of outstanding leaders as a guide, rate the behaviors and characteristics contained in the following questions. To do this, circle the number from the scale below that best describes how important that behavior or characteristic is for a leader to be outstanding.

1= This behavior or characteristic **greatly inhibits** a person from being an outstanding leader.
2= This behavior or characteristic **somewhat inhibits** a person from being an outstanding leader.
3= This behavior or characteristic **has no impact** on whether a person is an outstanding leader.
4= This behavior or characteristic **contributes somewhat** to a person being an outstanding leader.
5= This behavior or characteristic **contributes greatly** to a person being an outstanding leader.

1.   Tells subordinates what to do in a commanding way

1	2	3	4	5
greatly inhibits	somewhat inhibits	has no impact	contributes somewhat	contributes greatly

2.   Makes decisions in a dictatorial way

1	2	3	4	5
greatly inhibits	somewhat inhibits	has no impact	contributes somewhat	contributes greatly

3.   Is in charge and does not tolerate disagreement or questioning, gives orders

1	2	3	4	5
greatly inhibits	somewhat inhibits	has no impact	contributes somewhat	contributes greatly

4.   Inclined to dominate others

1	2	3	4	5

greatly inhibits	somewhat inhibits	has no impact	contributes somewhat	contributes greatly

5. Concerned with and places high value on preserving individual rather than group needs

1	2	3	4	5
greatly inhibits	somewhat inhibits	has no impact	contributes somewhat	contributes greatly

6. Believes that all individuals are not equal and only some should have equal rights and privileges

1	2	3	4	5
greatly inhibits	somewhat inhibits	has no impact	contributes somewhat	contributes greatly

7. An extremely close supervisor, one who insists on making all decisions

1	2	3	4	5
greatly inhibits	somewhat inhibits	has no impact	contributes somewhat	contributes greatly

8. Unwilling or unable to relinquish control of projects or tasks

1	2	3	4	5
greatly inhibits	somewhat inhibits	has no impact	contributes somewhat	contributes greatly

9. Let's the members do their work the way they think best

1	2	3	4	5
greatly inhibits	somewhat inhibits	has no impact	contributes somewhat	contributes greatly

10. Assigns a task, then closely supervises the members carrying it out

1	2	3	4	5
greatly inhibits	somewhat inhibits	has no impact	contributes somewhat	contributes greatly

11. Is the leader of the group in name only

1	2	3	4	5

greatly inhibits	somewhat inhibits	has no impact	contributes somewhat	contributes greatly

12.   Pushes for increase production

1	2	3	4	5
greatly inhibits	somewhat inhibits	has no impact	contributes somewhat	contributes greatly

13.   Keeps the group working together as a team

1	2	3	4	5
greatly inhibits	somewhat inhibits	has no impact	contributes somewhat	contributes greatly

14. Urges the group to beat its previous record

1	2	3	4	5
greatly inhibits	somewhat inhibits	has no impact	contributes somewhat	contributes greatly

15. Keeps the group working up to capacity

1	2	3	4	5
greatly inhibits	somewhat inhibits	has no impact	contributes somewhat	contributes greatly

16. Permits the members to use their own judgement in solving problems

1	2	3	4	5
greatly inhibits	somewhat inhibits	has no impact	contributes somewhat	contributes greatly

17. Stresses being ahead of competing groups

1	2	3	4	5
greatly inhibits	somewhat inhibits	has no impact	contributes somewhat	contributes greatly

18. Sees to it that the work of the group is coordinated

1	2	3	4	5
greatly inhibits	somewhat inhibits	has no impact	contributes somewhat	contributes greatly

19. Maintains a closely knit group

1	2	3	4	5
greatly inhibits	somewhat inhibits	has no impact	contributes somewhat	contributes greatly

20. Is reluctant to allow the members of any freedom of action

1	2	3	4	5
greatly inhibits	somewhat inhibits	has no impact	contributes somewhat	contributes greatly

21. Permits the group to set its own pace

1	2	3	4	5
greatly inhibits	somewhat inhibits	has no impact	contributes somewhat	contributes greatly

22. Sees to it that the work of the group is coordinated

1	2	3	4	5
greatly inhibits	somewhat inhibits	has no impact	contributes somewhat	contributes greatly

23. Helps group members settle their differences

1	2	3	4	5
greatly inhibits	somewhat inhibits	has no impact	contributes somewhat	contributes greatly

24. Encourages initiative in the group members

1	2	3	4	5
greatly inhibits	somewhat inhibits	has no impact	contributes somewhat	contributes greatly