



# The Mediating Role of the Participatory Leadership Style on the Effect of Job Stress on Job Performance

Ibraheem Mohammed Abd<sup>a\*</sup>, Mustafa Mohammed Kleban Zuhairi<sup>a</sup>, Ghaith Hasan Kamil<sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Faculty of Administration and Economics, Imam Al Adham University College, Republic of Iraq

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\*Corresponding author

[ibrahemarzok40@gmail.com](mailto:ibrahemarzok40@gmail.com)

## Abstract

The aim of the current study is to shed light on the impact of workplace stress on job performance in Iraqi public sector universities through the mediating role of leadership style. Where stresses in the workplace were measured through three types: role conflict, role burden and work conditions, job performance was determined as a dependent variable, the participatory leadership style was tested as a mediating variable for the relationship, the structural equation modeling method was applied to test the study model. A sample of professors of public universities in Iraq-Baghdad was selected, and 120 answers were collected that were valid for analysis. The study concluded that conflicting roles and working conditions are the factors that have an impact on academic performance. In contrast to the workload, which did not have a statistically significant effect on the performance of university professors. As for the mediation role of participatory management, it was contrary to expectations. It was not a contributing factor in reducing the effects of work stresses on the performance of university professors. These results are attributed to the fact that the university work environment affects its leaders and professors and is governed by the instructions and regulations of higher authorities.

**Keywords:** Leadership Style, Participatory Leadership, Job Stress, Job Performance, Workload

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## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

Man lives his daily life in a constantly changing environment due to the progress in various sciences, and then tries to adapt his life to these changes and invest them in his favor. At times, it is difficult for a person to adapt to some of the changing conditions in his environment, and he cannot interact with them, which results in the occurrence of stresses that are considered one of the obstacles of this era, as stresses have become a natural aspect of human life that cannot be avoided, and workers in one organization suffer from different types of stress. Our contemporary world is witnessing a significant increase in the number and size of business organizations of all kinds, public or private, which work to meet the needs and desires of individuals and societies alike. For the success and continuity of these organizations in achieving their goals, a set of variables that may prevent them from reaching their goals must be considered. Work stress is one of these variables, which has become a manifestation of the life of the individual working within the organization. In addition, the same organization is witnessing several forms of pressure at its various administrative and organizational levels. Human resource is the basis for the success of business organizations of all kinds, whether they are productive organizations or service organizations, through the work it performs and the amount of effort it exerts, as it is the only one capable of managing other resources in the organization, which requires paying attention to him, following up and evaluating his performance, examining the problems and stresses he faces at work, in an effort to improve his level of performance and raise his morale.

The subject of job stress is one of the topics that has received great attention from researchers and those interested in the field of administrative sciences. Therefore, we find that officials at various administrative levels give great importance to the subject of work stress and its impact on human resources and their performance in the organization. This is because the performance of the human resource is one of the most important pillars for the success of organizations, and since the performance indicator is directly affected by work pressure, it was necessary for organizations to create an appropriate environment that would reduce this pressure in order to

maintain the quality of performance and thus be able to provide what is required of them in order to compete and continue.

Here, the management's role in reducing this pressure on employees is highlighted by adopting a leadership style whose priorities include reducing pressure and continuous improvement of performance by pushing employees to achieve high levels of accuracy in carrying out the tasks assigned to them, diligence, perseverance, initiative and creativity, and good relations with others.

Where these processes require a holistic view starting from the roots, because the picture is not integrated except when we focus on all possible resources to improve performance, and this focuses on (organizational change, organizational culture and technology, ....) and the most important of all is the concept of leadership.

Effective leadership is the objective description of the characteristics of the internal work environment of the organization. It is also considered the most important factor in the success or failure of the organization because of its role in influencing the behavior of employees.

Leadership, in its agreement, expresses a pattern of the relationship between the leader and the work teams, which in turn leads to directing the individuals to make the utmost effort in order to achieve the desired goals. Within our institutions, we will find different types of leadership, such as authoritarian leadership, chaotic leadership, and participatory democratic leadership. Perhaps one of the most important of these patterns is participatory leadership, which means inviting the leader to his subordinates and meeting with them to discuss and analyze their administrative problems facing them and try to reach the best possible solutions for them in a way that creates confidence in them and motivates them to reduce pressure and increase performance to achieve a higher level of productivity.

In this sense, the current study attempts to shed light on knowing and determining how work stresses affect the performance of employees in the organization and how the participatory leadership approach reduces this impact.

Therefore, the aim of the study is the effect of work stress on job performance and the mediating role of participatory leadership.

## 2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

### Job Stress

Many studies and academic works have paid attention to monitoring occupational stress in the workplace, due to its direct importance in affecting the organizational climate and employee well-being, and thus on the results of the organization (Badu et al., 2020). There were many and varied opinions in defining the concept of work stress, due to the lack of similarity in work conditions from one place to another or from one organization to another. For example, Zapf and Vogt defined work stress as what the employee is exposed to during his work, whether it is situations, stresses, or problems, these conditions may cause them many problems, whether psychological or physical (Zapf, Vogt others. 1999). therefore, these interactions that occur between workers and the work environment generate an undesirable emotional state that results in anxiety and stress. (Albertsen, Rugulies. and others. 2010). Also preserving the health of employees in their workplaces and its potential impact on their general health has been the subject of interest for many interested in this regard. The best evidence is the emergence of stress theories in the workplace, one of the biological sciences concerned in this regard. They call on companies to take measures to reduce stress in the workplace and provide a healthy environment for their employees (Hobfoll, 1989). If the employee continues to feel pressure and tension, this will generate a state of exhaustion and anxiety that negatively affects his focus and productivity (Xu et al., 2019). (Kundarag and Kadakol, 2015, p. 19) Admit that work stress is of four types. The first is positive stress and occurs for a short period of time. It gives the individual the ability to provide the best performance and results from excessive enthusiasm and happiness in accomplishing a challenge.

As for the second type, it is negative stress, and it comes as a result of bad stresses, such as the death of a certain person, illness, or financial crises (Li et al. 2017). As for the third, it is excessive stress, and it comes as a result of pushing the person beyond what he was dealing with, usually because of the workload and constant stress, as for the fourth, it is the excessive psychological stress that a person feels when he is constantly bored, the same task over and over again. Work stress has several sources that can be divided into two parts according to the factors leading to it, where the first is related to pressure resulting from psychological factors (external stresses), which are outside the control of the organization because they are related to the employee himself, such as illness and the psychological state resulting from social, economic or political problems (Kerdpitak & Jermittiparsert, 2020). This would negatively affect the employee's status and productivity within the organization (Foy et al., 2019). As for the other, which the current study focuses on, it is related to organizational matters within the organization, where the management of the organization is responsible for it and its management. (Nikolaou & Tsaousis, 2002). For example, tension increases when the employee feels difficult in performing the tasks entrusted to him as a result of being assigned tasks that exceed his ability and knowledge, which is known as the ambiguity of the role (Hicks & Caroline, 2007); (Nikolaou & Tsaousis, 2002). Or the stress is a result of the individual's inability to achieve the different expectations that the rest of the parties want, which is known as role conflict (Van den Brande et al., 2016). Also, the conditions of the work environment have a role in

increasing tension when the employee feels uncomfortable as a result of the lack of interaction between employees in the work environment (Çelik, 2018). In addition to this, physical conditions such as location, furniture, ventilation, and available equipment play a special importance for the individual if they are not provided appropriately (Robert, Eliot, Fred (Lathans, 1992). In addition, the prevailing organizational climate and leadership style play a key role in reducing potential employee stress (Boyer-Davis, 2018).

### **Employee Performance**

(Borman & J.S. 1993) gives the concept of performance as accomplishing a task or job in an effective and more efficient way, i.e., accomplishing a job task at the lowest cost, best quality and as soon as possible using the available resources in the organization. According to (Mangkunegara 2009). work performance is defined as the result of work in the quality and quantity that an employee can achieve in carrying out tasks in accordance with the responsibilities assigned to him (Mangkunegara. 2009). Meanwhile, according to (Nguyen, P. T., Yandi, A., & Mahaputra, M. R. 2020). work performance is what a person achieves from work in some way to carry out work activities. This means that both inputs (behavior) and outputs (outcomes) must be taken into account, as it is not just about achieving goals as is usual in a pattern Management by objectives, but it should be considered to include the results of efficiency in the process (498. p 2006, Armstrong),

The success of organizations is measured by the performance they provide, and therefore it was necessary for them to monitor and evaluate their performance, identify negative results and try to address them (Iskamto, Ghazali, and Aftanorhan 2019). The importance of job performance for employees is due to the importance of the human element itself, as it is one of the basic elements of the productive process of any organization, whether it operates in the public or private sectors. long term (Iskamto, Karim, et al. 2020). Therefore, it is necessary to make efforts to improve the capabilities of human resources and to identify the problems that affect and hinder them from providing outstanding performance, as they are the result or output of a process (Nurlaila, 2010; P. L. Ghazali et al., 2019). There are several factors that make some employees more performant compared to their counterparts, including (Martin, 2010):

- a. Declarative knowledge: It represents what the individual possesses of information about the facts of things, for example: understanding the requirements for performing a specific work, the facts associated with it, its principles, and its objectives.
- b. Procedural knowledge: It is a combination of knowing what to do and how to do it, and it involves cognitive, physical, sensory, motor and interactive skills.
- c. Motivation: It is the level of impulsiveness of the person to do the work.

### **Leadership style (Participative leadership)**

Participative leadership is one of the leadership theories based on inclusive participation in work. Employees within this leadership style feel more involved in achievements, and they have a responsibility to develop tasks and enhance performance. Their ideas and contributions are also taken into consideration. This theory dates back to the 1930s when further purposeful studies were conducted to identify common leadership styles (Bass, & Avolio, 1995). The participative leadership style is not limited to specific types of business organizations; it can also be strongly present in various sectors such as hospitals, entertainment production companies, and universities (Gill, 2016). The concept of leadership has several definitions, as researchers vary in expressing a specific concept of leadership according to style and context variation from one person to another. It has been envisioned in the past from different points of view, however, leadership has two main features: the first is that the process of leadership is the ability to influence others, and the second feature is that leadership is between groups that share the common goals achievement, so he defined it (Northouse, 2010) as a process that is influenced by in which a group of individuals to achieve a common goal by one person. This is similar to what (Robbins. 2006) presented as the ability to influence a group to achieve the desired goal set by the leader. In general, leadership is the individual's ability to benefit from influence to achieve difficult goals (vansevich, 2008, Alsomaidae, et al., 2023), and influence in subordinates depends on the leader's strong, dedicated, and selfless personality (Jenkins, 2013). There are several ancient and contemporary leadership theories namely trait theory, behaviour, contingency, exchange of leadership members, transactional and transformational leadership (Glendon et al 2006). Many scholars and researchers have contributed opinions and theories within the framework of each approach, but there were several voices that contradict these management theories with performance and how to manage conflict and urge workers towards providing distinguished and satisfactory performance in which the interests of workers and the organization are taken into account (Blake and Mount, 1964), (Yukl, 2010), (Den Hartog and Koopman, 2001), (Blake and Mount, 1964). However, most researchers agree that the participatory leadership style has a strong relationship between it and the employee's performance in terms of the satisfactory effect on Job satisfaction and employee productivity (Dalluay and Jalagat, 2016, ISPAS, 2012, Iqbal, Anwar and Haider, 2015, Mulki Caemerer and Heggde, 2015). And it also has an effect on performance in the long run (Iqbal et al, 2015). Where this style of leadership is characterized by the quality of leaders who are characterized by simplicity and acceptance, and this reflects positively on the relationship between the boss and the subordinate, and in turn the employee feels comfortable and safe, which gives a stable psychological state that pushes him to perform better (Mulki et al, 2015). Where an invitation is directed to the employees of the organization to participate in the formulation of the decision, through which the leader consults the employees, obtains their ideas and opinions,

and shares their suggestions in the decisions that serve to advance the group and the organization. (Northhouse.2010. p128) that the involvement of workers in management began to appear in the middle of the nineteenth century in some European countries as a result of the stresses that were exerted on workers at the time, and their lack of participation in management. In Britain it began in the year 1937, and in France a decision was issued to involve workers in Management in 1946 and in 1981 began the participation of workers in Germany (Robbins, Coulter, 2005, p430). Participatory leadership is one of the styles of leadership, and participatory leadership is associated with the democratic leadership style. It may not necessarily be considered a new style, but the focus on participation in decision-making has begun to increase dramatically in the last two decades due to its importance in managing the organization and in facing future administrative challenges. Participatory leadership includes the use of procedures Decision making that aims to allow others to influence the leader's decisions (Templar 2010). Through the foregoing, it is clear that participatory leadership is a natural result of the development of leadership theories, and although it was present as a partial part in most of the previous theories, it did not exist independently except in the studies of the modern era.

### **Hypothesis Development**

#### **Workplace Stress and Employee performance**

Many studies have confirmed the existence of a relationship between work stress and job performance (Davis & Newstrom 2008). Stress can harm or help improve performance. When there is stress at work the percentage of performance will increase in line with the increased stress, because stress helps employees direct all resources to meet work needs, until stress reaches a stage that cannot be compared with the capabilities of employees in this field. This situation of Stress will generate a state of dissatisfaction and lack of performance among employees (Naseem, 2017; Pandey, 2020). According to (Davis & Newstrom. 2008) shows that if stress is increasing, work performance will start to decline, because stress interferes with the execution of work. Where employees lose the ability to control this stress, and they will have difficulty in the decision-making process, and their behavior becomes irregular. Which entails unacceptable consequences such as disturbances, illness, inability to work or leave, and refusal to work to avoid stress. In this study, we investigate the relationship between stresses related to the work environment such as workload, role conflict, and work conditions with job performance through the following main hypothesis:

H1: There is a negative effect of work stress on job performance.

#### **Mediation Role of Participative Leadership Style**

We have shown earlier in this study the patterns of leadership and its role in the organization by reducing conflicts and reducing tension for the success of the organization. Where management plays a role in reviving the organization and activating the role of workers to work at their highest capacity in order to implement and achieve the goals of the organization, where the leadership style can reduce the impact of work stresses on job performance, if the leaders adopt a leadership style that encourages workers to unite and coordinate efforts and impart a spirit of cooperation In order to achieve the desired goals (Lyons & Schneider, 2009; Olsen et al., 2023, Alsomaidae, 2023). Leaders who follow a democratic participatory method with employees based on consultation and guidance can reduce tension n within the organization by providing the appropriate atmosphere, giving employees importance within the organization, encouraging and training them, and unifying responsibilities in order to achieve goals efficiently and effectively (Bhatti et al., 2012; Osazevbaru, & Amawhe 2022). In contrast to this, when the leader's style is authoritarian, it will increase pressure on employees, which will reflect negatively on their work performance and significantly decrease their performance index (Erskine & Georgiou, 2017). Therefore, leadership has a major role in influencing the relationship between work stress and job performance (Pishgooie et al., 2019; Saad et al., 2018). Based on the above, the following hypothesis can be formulated:

H2: The participative leadership style mediates the effect of work stress on job performance.

## **3.0 METHODOLOGY**

### **Data collection**

The university work environment represents one of the work environments that frequently experiences work stress. The tasks of university professors extend beyond the workplace and often continue at home, even into late hours of the day. This increases the chances of exposure to higher work stresses. To collect sample data appropriately, we chose the summer vacation as the time to start gathering all the data we need. We conducted a series of semi-structured interviews to confirm the presence of the issue within the exploratory study. Later, we collected the data based on the main research tool, which is the electronic questionnaire.

### **Instrument and Measure**

We designed an electronic questionnaire to collect data and distribute it through Google Forms. The answer scores in the questionnaire were distributed into five levels based on a 5-Point Likert scale (1=fully disagreed, 5= fully agreed). 5 components were the makeup of the questionnaire [Role conflict (RC), Role load (RL), Work conditions (WC), Participative leadership (PL), and Employee performance (EP)], with each component containing 4 elements. Thus, the total number of items in the tool becomes 20.

### Population and Sample

We targeted the education sector to represent the academic population, specifically; university professors within Iraqi government universities, to constitute the research sample. Based on the review of previous studies and research works, there is a belief in the existence of higher work stress among university professors. Most university professors carry out their tasks from home. This leaves a difficulty in balancing family commitments against work commitments. Due to the difficulty of determining the size of the research population, we selected a purposive sample of respondents. We obtained 120 valid responses for analysis.

### Preliminary tests - Validity and Reliability

A set of reliability and validity tests were conducted to ensure the validity of the data for measuring the phenomenon. The first set of tests included reliability and internal consistency tests using alpha Cronbach and split-half methods. All analysis results were supportive. The values of the alpha Cronbach coefficient ranged from 0.88 (for employee performance) to 0.729 (for working conditions), all of which were higher than 0.6, which is the bottom-line value. Accordingly, the internal consistency coefficient of the scale as a whole was 0.947. In regards to the split-half, the result of the analysis was also supportive, where the coefficient value for the scale was 0.879.

The exploratory factor analysis test was also applied to ensure the association of the factor with the main components. It was found that the value of the latent root (Initial Eigenvalue) was greater than one for five main components. As for the cumulative variance, it was 74%. The correlation coefficients for the component matrix were all good, and suitable for completing the analysis. Table 1. illustrates the results of the preliminary tests.

**Table 1. Preliminary tests**

Items	Paragraph	Loading	KMO	Alpha	Split-half
RC1	I often feel torn between my work and personal responsibilities.	0.765	0.769	0.837	0.849
RC2	Meeting the expectations of different roles sometimes feels overwhelming.	0.773			
RC3	Conflicting demands from various roles cause me stress and anxiety.	0.550			
RC4	I find it difficult to switch between different roles seamlessly.	0.805			
RL1	I often find myself multitasking to manage all the responsibilities in my role.	0.775	0.739	0.729	0.719
RL2	Balancing the demands of my role with personal life is challenging.	0.849			
RL3	I feel overwhelmed by the number of tasks and responsibilities in my role.	0.701			
RL4	The variety of tasks in my role keeps me less engaged and motivated.	0.609			
WC1	Overtime is required excessively to meet job demands.	0.704	0.741	0.800	0.715
WC2	The physical working conditions are appropriate and sufficient	0.756			
WC3	I feel there is a certain level of conflict with management	0.779			
WC4	Co-workers are sometimes uncooperative when it comes to individual achievement	0.762			
PL1	Leadership enhances the overall job satisfaction of team members	0.679	0.783	0.884	0.759
PL2	Team members' input is considered before making important decisions in our organization	0.839			
PL3	Leaders encourage a sense of ownership and commitment to the team's goals	0.720			
PL4	I feel empowered to voice my opinions and ideas under participative leadership.	0.698			
EP1	Employee have a strong understanding of the job requirements	0.671	0.824	0.867	0.696
EP2	Employee able to apply their knowledge to solve problems and make decisions	0.722			
EP3	Employee able to meet deadlines and work efficiently	0.796			
EP4	Employee take initiative and go above and beyond their job duties	0.676			

## 4.0 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Demographics

Table 2. presents the responses of the demographic sample. It is evident that males constitute the highest number and percentage of participation in the questionnaire. This confirms what is mentioned in periodic government reports about the greater inclination of males towards government jobs compared to females. Regarding the age group, participants between the ages of 25 and over 40 are the most engaged in the survey. This suggests that employees of government universities are mostly young, especially after the retirement age was set at 60 years,

which has allowed greater participation from younger age groups. Our survey included employees in various administrative levels at government universities, in addition to the diversity of job roles. We reached out to officials in different administrative centers and across diverse managerial levels, as well as to teaching staff and administrative employees. Officials are believed to be more susceptible to stress due to the multitude and diversity of administrative tasks. Therefore, the participation rate from this group is the highest. Professors who do not have additional administrative tasks were ranked second in terms of participation. Participants with job experience between 10 and 14 years are the most engaged, followed by those with experience exceeding 14 years. This indicates the early joining of employees in positions at Iraqi universities, where a combination of young age groups and extensive years of experience can be achieved.

**Table 2. Demographics responses**

Items	Categories	Frequency	Percentage%	Cum. Percentage%
Sex	Male	83	69.2	69.2
	Female	37	30.8	100
	<b>Total</b>	<b>120</b>	<b>100</b>	
Age/Years	18-24	21	17.5	17.5
	25-31	35	29.2	46.7
	32-38	31	25.8	72.5
	39 or older	33	27.5	100
	<b>Total</b>	<b>120</b>	<b>100</b>	
Role	Officials	51	42.5	42.5
	Professors	38	31.7	74.2
	Administrative staff	18	15	89.2
	Other	13	10.8	100
	<b>Total</b>	<b>120</b>	<b>100</b>	
Experiences/Years	0-4	11	9.2	9.2
	5-9	17	14.2	23.3
	10-14	60	50	73.3
	Above 14	32	26.7	100
	<b>Total</b>	<b>120</b>	<b>100</b>	

### Correlation and Multicollinearity

The descriptive statistics reveal that the arithmetic means of all variables were moderate, indicating that the extent or level of application of these variables was moderate. The variable with the highest level was role conflict, and the lowest was workload. The extracted standard deviation values confirm that the degree of dispersion in the response was weak, being less than 1 for all variables. All correlation coefficients were strongly positive, statistically significant at 0.01 level. The strongest correlations were between the participative leadership style and the working conditions, while the weakest correlations were found between participative leadership and the workload. It is clear that the leadership style is directly related to the onset of job tasks, and thus the potential work stress resulting from performing those tasks. Regarding the linear multicollinearity test, the results indicate that the values of the variance inflation factor (VIF) were less than 5, which means there is no issue concerning linear multicollinearity. Thus, the data is suitable for the regression model. Table 3 presents descriptive statistics and correlation coefficients, as well as the outputs of linear multivariate analysis through the analysis of the variance inflation factor.

**Table 3. Descriptive Statistics, Correlation Coefficients and Variance Inflation Factors**

Items	Mean	S.D.	RC	RL	WC	PL	EP	VIF
RC	2.882	.876	1					2.557
RL	2.336	.683	.541**	1				1.624
WC	2.567	.865	.750**	.605**	1			4.305
PL	2.655	.906	.733**	.518**	.841**	1		3.715
EP	2.491	.836	.695**	.562**	.783**	.765**	1	-

n= 120

Note: Significance level at <0.05\*, <0.01\*\*

### Hypothesis tests

Table 4 presents the results of the hypothesis test. Structural equation modeling (SEM) was used in the analysis of research hypotheses. According to the analysis results, the effects are evident between work stress and employee performance. Except for workload, as its impact was not statistically significant. The most impactful factor of job stress on employee performance is work conditions, with a ( $\beta$ ) value of around 53%. This leads to the inadequacy of work conditions for employees, or they don't feel comfortable enough to achieve in unfavorable work conditions. The other influential factor is role conflict, where the value of ( $\beta$ ) reached around 21%. This means that university professors still feel a state of conflicting roles for several reasons, including the nature of the job, management style, or prevailing circumstances. In terms of the overall regression model, the coefficient of determination ( $R^2$ ) reached around 67%, and the calculated F value is 70.3, making it statistically significant at a 0.05.

Contrary to what was expected, the participative leadership style was not sufficiently effective in modifying the relationship of the impact of work stress on employees' performance. In fact, it may have yielded counterproductive results in specific instances. The mediator role of the participative leadership style has led to reducing the impact of work conditions on employee performance. It is unexpected for the leadership style to be associated with work conditions as long as there are many other contributing factors to them. The participative leadership style renders the relationship between role conflict and workload on one hand, and employee performance on the other hand, a meaningless connection. In other words, it is a statistically insignificant relationship, and thus the participative leadership style hasn't positively intervened in the relationship; quite the opposite, perhaps. It seems that other leadership styles will be more effective in government universities when it comes to dealing with work stress. We do not have any confirmed best leadership style, but it certainly isn't the participative style. We attribute that to the nature of work in government universities, which strongly adhere to the instructions and educational regulations they receive. As a result, opportunities for participation and expressing opinions are uncommon.

Table 4. Hypothesis tests

Path	$R^2$ , F	Estimate	SE	C.R.	$p$	Conclusion
RC $\rightarrow$ EP	$R^2$ , 674	.214	.081	2.639	.009	Supported
RL $\rightarrow$ EP	F, 70.35	.131	.086	1.521	.131	Not Supported
WC $\rightarrow$ EP		.532	.087	6.143	.000	Supported
RC $\rightarrow$ PL $\rightarrow$ EP	$R^2$ , 661	.144	.082	1.762	.081	Not Supported
RL $\rightarrow$ PL $\rightarrow$ EP	F, 58.60	.138	.083	1.653	.101	Not Supported
WC $\rightarrow$ PL $\rightarrow$ EP		.332	.107	3.088	.003	Supported

### Discussion

Work stress is an important and worthy issue to consider and pay attention to. There are significant effects and risks that may result from the workplace characterized by stress as a key feature. Usually, work stress is managed with the goal of enhancing satisfaction, productivity, and affiliation. These are not the primary issues when it comes to caring about the effects of work stress. Workplace stress can lead to negative outcomes that affect employees' lives both inside and outside the organizations. The results link several findings between leadership styles and causes of stress at work. There are opinions that indicate that an appropriate leadership style can significantly alleviate potential work-related stress. In the current study, we attempted to test the effect of work stress on the performance of employees within Iraqi government universities. Subsequently, we observed the role of participative leadership style in mediating that effect.

In the current study, we attempted to test the effect of work stress on the performance of employees within Iraqi government universities. Subsequently, we observed the role of participative leadership style in mediating that effect. Role conflict is a significant contributor to job-related stress, wherein professors find themselves torn between conflicting expectations and demands within their professional or academic roles. This occurs when different roles they are expected to fulfill, such as those of a team member, a supervisor, or an employee, come into conflict with each other, causing a sense of confusion, frustration, and emotional strain. Navigating these conflicting role expectations can lead to heightened stress levels, negatively impacting job satisfaction and overall well-being. Work conditions play a pivotal role as one of the primary job stress factors within a university environment. The combination of heavy workloads, tight deadlines, and the constant need to balance teaching, research, and administrative responsibilities can create a demanding and pressurized atmosphere. Inadequate resources, such as limited funding, inadequate facilities, and insufficient support staff, further amplify the stress levels experienced by faculty members and staff. Addressing and improving these work

conditions is essential to fostering a healthier and more productive university setting, allowing educators and professionals to thrive while effectively fulfilling their roles. In spite of the fact that the role load is a major factor of job stress, it was not influential in the performance of the university professors in the research sample. This result might be somewhat perplexing to interpret; however, we believe that the nature of the university professors' work had turned the work load into a routine challenge or a habitual activity that does not result in psychological or physical work-related strain, and thus stress. The diverse, branching, and constantly changing nature of the tasks of university professors is a shared characteristic. This could possibly serve as a reason that makes the workload no more than a familiar issue.

Regarding the mediation role of the participative leadership style, contrary to the findings of several previous studies, the participative leadership style was not a good mediator in the relationship between work stress and the performance of university professors. While participative leadership has the potential to positively impact on employee performance, including less stress and higher engagement, there are circumstances where it might not effectively mediate the relationship. For instance, the overall culture of the university plays a crucial role in the success of participative leadership. If the organizational culture is hierarchical, authoritarian, or resistant to change, implementing a participative leadership style might face resistance and challenges. In such a culture, the mediating effect of participative leadership on work stress and performance might not be as effective. This approach seems to be the closest to the current study's findings. Most government universities follow a strict hierarchical leadership style, built on precise implementation of regulations and laws. This could make the participatory atmosphere less conducive to presence. And it might make the leadership style less effective in reducing work stresses or mitigating their impact on performance especially. In fact, there are several other factors that may explain the current research results, such as the nature of work conditions, the level of workload, the communication method between leaders and subordinates, limitations in accessing and utilizing resources.

## 5.0 CONCLUSION

### Conclusion

The aim of our current study was to investigate the mediating role of participative leadership in the impact of work stress on the performance of faculty members in Iraqi universities. Initially, we noticed that the level of work stress was moderate in government universities according to the sample's response. Upon further investigation, it becomes clear to us that the professors' familiarity with multiple and numerous tasks makes them feel less stressed. We have identified three possible factors contributing to the issue of stress, which are (1) role conflict, where university professors are exposed to conflicting or incompatible demands in their workplace. This can be due to a variety of factors, such as unclear expectations, task or responsibility changes, conflicts among employees or departments, as well as work stresses resulting from resource shortages. (2) role load, which refers to the number of tasks, responsibilities, and assignments that professors are expected to complete within a given time frame, typically a day, week, or month. This includes a wide range of activities, including projects, assignments, meetings, administrative tasks, and more, depending on the nature of the job and the industry. And (3) work conditions, that includes a range of factors that influence their professional environment and responsibilities. These conditions encompass elements such as teaching load, research expectations, administrative duties, and engagement with students. We examined work stress with its mentioned factors on the performance of university professors. We found that role conflict and working conditions are the factors that have an impact on academic performance. In contrast to workload, which statistically had no significant effect on the performance of university professors. We later tested the mediator role of the participative leadership style. Contrary to expectations, the participative leadership style was not a contributing factor in reducing the effects of work stress on the performance of university professors. We attribute these results to external factors beyond the control of both leaders and professors within the university work environment. We believe that the university work environment within the government sector is strictly governed by instructions and regulations from higher authorities. Therefore, the participative leadership style may not introduce anything new or distinctive regarding work stress management. In conclusion, this study was conducted on a sample of government universities during the final exam period. Generalizing those results may not be accurate for several reasons, including the additional workload pressure during the exam period, as well as changes in academic curricula.

### Implication

It is essential to accurately understand the university work environment. The performance of university professors is not subject to many common measurement methods used to assess employee performance in other work environments. We argue that the participative leadership style is ineffective in the university workplace for several reasons, including the strictness of government instructions and the lack of motivation among university professors towards creativity. Therefore, the results of the current study have implications directed towards university leaders and higher regulatory bodies. In order to enhance creativity in the performance of government



universities, it is necessary to provide a larger space for empowering university professors, along with focusing on the supportive leadership style.

### Limitation

Reduced sample responsiveness and the fear of inappropriate representation for the research population are among the key limitations of the current study. Not all targeted individuals responded, and they did not declare the reasons for their non-participation. Another determining factor is time, as the study was conducted during the summer period, which limited the study's duration. Additionally, many of the sample individuals were on vacation, resulting in fewer opportunities for participation.

### Recommendation

We emphasize the importance of conducting further research activities within the university work environment. This is not limited to the performance of university professors alone. It is expected that there are several factors that hinder the increase in the effectiveness of government universities within society. The performance of university professors is difficult to measure using traditional performance metrics. We recommend that extra duties of university professors be taken into consideration, and appropriate compensations be provided for them.

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