

## AUTHORITARIAN LEADERSHIP AND EMPLOYEE JOB PERFORMANCE: A MODERATED MEDIATION OF JOB ROLE CLARITY, TRUST IN LEADERS AND POWER DISTANCE

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### Abstract:

**Background:** Leadership is a critical factor in determining organizational success. It serves as the primary catalyst for significant changes within an organization, where leadership is defined as the art of fostering organizational alignment and stability.

**Purpose:** This study examines the direct effect of authoritarian leadership on employee job performance. Furthermore, this study explores the moderating role of power distance and the mediating roles of job role clarity and trust in leaders.

**Design/methodology/approach:** This study employs a quantitative survey-based design with a sample of 176 employees from water utility company in West Sumatra. The data were analyzed using structural equation modeling with partial least squares (SEM PLS).

**Findings/Results:** The research findings show that authoritarian leadership has a negative effect on employee job performance. Furthermore, the results indicate that power distance moderates the relationship between authoritarian leadership and both job role clarity and employee job performance. The findings also reveal that job role clarity and trust in leaders mediate the effect of authoritarian leadership on employee job performance.

**Conclusion:** The authoritarian leadership style has a negative influence on the work performance of employees at a water utility company in West Sumatra, resulting in an unhealthy impact on the company's performance.

**Originality/value (state of the art):** This research combines the mediating influence of job role clarity and trust in leaders for the influence of authoritarian leadership on employee job performance, and the moderating effect of power distance on the influence of authoritarian leadership on job role clarity and employee job performance.

**Keywords:** authoritarian leadership, employee job performance, job role clarity, power distance, trust in leaders

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## INTRODUCTION

Leadership in an organization is the ability and skills of a person who occupies a position as a leader to influence the behavior of other people, especially his subordinates, to think and act in such a way, so that through positive behavior, he makes a real contribution to achieving organizational goals (Budiyanto & Mochklas, 2020; Ramaditya et al. 2023). Leadership is a determining factor for success in organizations, because leadership is the central point for significant changes in organizations, where leadership is the art of creating organizational conformity and stability (Latifah, 2021). Leadership and leadership skills are the most important things an organizational leader has (Khan et al. 2018). Authoritarian leadership, also called directive or dictatorial leadership, is often associated with negative performance and a worsening work climate, where the leader gives instructions to subordinates, explains what must be done, and then employees carry out their duties according to what the leader ordered (Helwig et al. 2017).

Previous research on authoritarian leadership shows that it can have a positive or negative effect on employee performance, depending on context and factors. An authoritarian leadership style can positively influence employee work performance, particularly in contexts that require strong centralization and the assignment of specific tasks (Nawaz et al. 2022). The positive impact of authoritarian leadership on employees' job performance influences their learning goal orientation, which is a state and trait that can be enhanced by certain work contexts (H. Wang & Guan, 2018). In contexts where the individual power distance is higher, authoritarian leadership has the potential to significantly enhance employee job role clarity, which can subsequently lead to improved performance outcomes (Nawaz et al. 2022). The clarity of employee job roles has been demonstrated to have a significant effect on employee job performance (Thangavelu, 2017). While authoritarian leadership has a positive impact on employee job role clarity at higher individual power distance, this effect reverses at lower individual power distance (Nawaz et al. 2022).

Apart from that, authoritarian leaders can provide clarity and direction, but this can also reduce employee work satisfaction and motivation because employees

feel less involved and less motivated, which has the potential to hinder work performance (Wen et al. 2019). Authoritarian leaders tend to disregard subordinates' suggestions and contributions, ascribe success to themselves and failure to subordinates, and prioritize their dignity and self-confidence, which can foster distance and distrust between subordinates and leaders (Z. Wang et al. 2019). So it is necessary to test employees' trust in their leaders, based on existing phenomena, in order to see how it affects employee work performance. The detrimental effects of authoritarian leadership are also evident in the context of interpersonal relationships, work climate, and employee job performance (Yi, 2022). Authoritarian leaders frequently control and manipulate information to maintain power distance, which sets an unfavorable example for subordinates and is not conducive to improving employee job performance (Z. Wang et al. 2019). So it is also important to know more deeply how the power distance fostered by authoritarian leadership can influence work performance and job role clarity as well as how the influence of employee job role clarity affects employee job performance where researchers conduct research, such as in the research conducted (Nawaz et al. 2022). Given the ongoing debate surrounding the impact of authoritarian leadership on employee work performance, further research is essential to elucidate the precise influence on performance and the potential for leaders to adapt their approach based on past outcomes (Pizzolitto et al. 2023).

Previous research has identified several factors that influence employee job performance when viewed from the influence of authoritarian leadership. These include the clarity of job roles, trust in leaders, and power distance. Previous research has partially examined the factors that influence employee work performance when viewed from the influence of authoritarian leadership. This research introduces a novel approach by examining the moderating effect of power distance on the effect of authoritarian leadership on job role clarity and employee job performance, also test the mediating effect of job role clarity and trust in leaders on the effect of authoritarian leadership on employee job performance. This study aims to examine the direct and indirect effect of authoritarian leadership on employee job performance through job role clarity, power distance, and trust in leaders

## METHODS

The research was conducted at water utility company in West Sumatera with a population of 189 employees. Data collection was carried out through direct distribution of paper-based questionnaires. The researcher explained directly to the respondents the questions contained in the research questionnaire based on the 16 existing question indicators. This type of research is quantitative research. This study employed a non-probability sampling technique, specifically purposive sampling, with the sample criteria being a work tenure of more than one year and full-time employees. From the existing population, only 176 employees were ultimately used as samples for this research. This sample size meets the requirements for multivariate research, where the sample size is based on the assumption that the sample size is at least 5-10 times the number of indicator variables (Nawaz et al. 2022).

The data obtained was then analyzed using the Structural Equation Modeling-Partial Least Square (SEM-PLS) method with a Likert scale ranging from 1 to 5. Researchers tested each variable used in this research based on the questions used by previous researchers. Among them is authoritarian leadership measured using indicators developed by (Gumusluoglu et al. 2020). Employee work performance is measured using indicators developed by (Çalışkan & köroğlu, 2022). Job Role Clarity is measured using indicators developed by (Unegbu et al. 2023). Trust in Leaders is measured using indicators developed by (Adams et

al. 2008), Power Distance is measured using indicators developed by (Templer, 2003). Conceptual framework in Figure 1.

## Hypothesis

### Authoritarian Leadership and Employee Job Performance

Authoritarian leadership is often associated with negative performance, but under certain conditions this leadership can also have a positive impact on group performance (Pizzolitto et al. 2023). Authoritarian leadership can have a negative influence on employee job performance (Huang et al. 2023). The negative impact of authoritarian leadership is also shown on interpersonal relationships, work climate and employee job performance (Yi, 2022). Authoritarian leaders often control and manipulate information to maintain power distance, which sets a bad example for subordinates and is not conducive to improving employees' job performance (Z. Wang et al. 2019). The negative relationship between authoritarian leadership and workplace outcomes can be demonstrated by team interaction, organizational commitment, task performance, and extra-role performance (Du et al. 2020). Finally, according to research (Huang et al. 2023), authoritarian leadership is negatively related to leader effectiveness, which ultimately harms employee task performance.

H1: Authoritarian leadership has a negative effect on employee work performance.

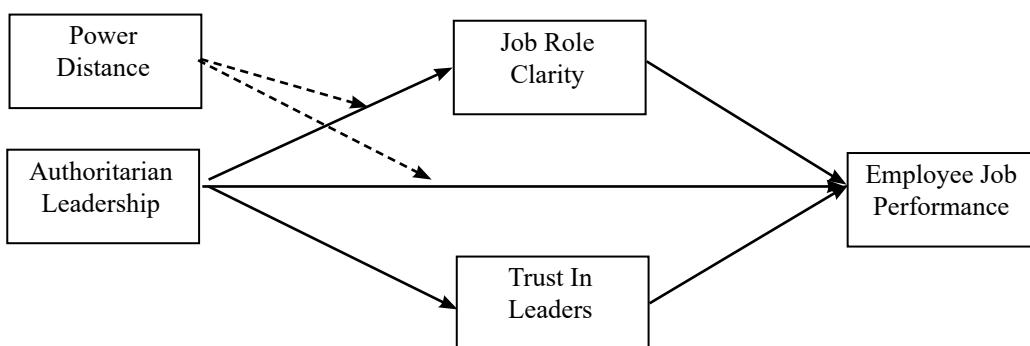


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

## Authoritarian Leadership and Job Role Clarity

Authoritarian leadership causes employees to feel micromanaged and less empowered in making decisions, which can reduce the clarity of work roles (Nawaz et al. 2022). Authoritarian leadership will increase role ambiguity (Zhang & Xie, 2017). Role ambiguity occurs due to a lack of necessary information regarding role expectations for certain organizational positions, so that job role clarity is needed which is a clear understanding of the tasks, goals and expectations of their job role so that employees will know what authority they have to decide and what they will do. achieve(Thangavelu, 2017).

H2: Authoritarian leadership has a negative effect on role clarity

## Job Role Clarity and Employee Job Performance

Clarity of employee job roles has a significant effect on employee job performance (Thangavelu, 2017). When employees have a clear understanding of their roles, they will be more engaged, productive, and motivated, because role clarity helps employees understand their specific tasks, goals, and how their work contributes to the organization's larger goals (Nawaz et al. 2022). The clearer an employee's work role will have a positive impact on employee work performance (M. C. C. Lee et al. 2024), while role ambiguity can have a negative impact on employee work performance (Ahmad & Din, 2023). A lack of role clarity can lead to stress, poor prioritization, and duplication of work, which ultimately has a negative impact on individual and team performance (Kundu et al. 2020).

H3: Clarity of employee job roles has a positive effect on employee job performance

## Authoritarian Leadership and Trust in Leaders

Authoritarian leadership tends to reduce trust in leaders because of its negative traits and the poor social exchange relationships it fosters, but the specific skills possessed by authoritarian leaders can reduce these effects, and the context can influence the type of leadership that fosters trust (D. Wang et al ., 2022). In contrast, employees with high cognitive trust in their leaders show fewer negative reactions to authoritarian leadership, indicating that trust can reduce the negative impact of authoritarian leadership (Du et al. 2020). Authoritarian leaders tend to ignore subordinates' suggestions and contributions, attribute

success to themselves and failure to subordinates, and focus on their dignity and self-confidence, which can create distance and distrust between subordinates and leaders (Z. Wang et al. 2019) . Overall, the literature highlights that authoritarian leadership tends to weaken trust in leaders, which can have significant negative consequences for employee behavior and job performance.

H4: Authoritarian leadership has a negative effect on trust in leaders

## Trust in Leaders and Employee Job Performance

The extant literature indicates that trust in leaders has a direct impact on employee work performance. Employees who trust their leaders tend to exhibit higher levels of motivation and commitment to their work, which in turn leads to enhanced performance (Asencio, 2016). Trust in leaders, such as direct superiors, coworkers, and top managers, has an independent and irreplaceable impact on employee job performance (C. C. Lee et al. 2023). When employees trust their leaders, they will be more motivated, engaged, and committed to their work, resulting in better job performance (Kleynhans et al. 2022). Research consistently shows that when employees trust their leaders, they are more engaged, more committed, and perform better in their roles.

H5: Trust in leaders has a positive effect on employee job performance

## The Mediating Role of Job Role Clarity and Trust in Leaders on The Effect of Authoritarian Leadership on Employee Job Performance

Authoritarian leadership was found to have positive and negative impacts on employee job performance (Pizzolitto et al. 2023). On the one hand, authoritarian leadership can produce a clear definition of roles and responsibilities, thereby increasing the clarity of employees' job roles (H. Wang & Guan, 2018). On the other hand, authoritarian leadership can also cause a lack of autonomy and creativity, thus having a negative impact on employee work performance (Nawaz et al. 2022). Job role clarity plays an important mediating role in the relationship between authoritarian leadership and employee job performance (H. Wang & Guan, 2018). When employees have a clear understanding of their roles, they will be more engaged, productive, and motivated, because role clarity helps employees understand their specific tasks, goals, and how their

work contributes to the organization's larger goals (Nawaz et al. 2022).

**H6: Job role clarity mediates the relationship between authoritarian leadership and employee job performance**

The decline in trust in leaders is attributable to the characteristics of authoritarian leaders, including a proclivity for violence, a tendency to maintain high power distance, and an absence of personal warmth, which collectively impede the formation of high-quality relationships between leaders and employees (D. Wang et al. 2022). Employees who trust their leaders will be more open about their work and seek guidance when needed, resulting in better performance results (Arwika, 2022). Research shows that trust in leaders is an important factor in determining employee job performance. When employees trust their leaders, they will be more motivated, engaged, and committed to their work, resulting in better job performance (Kleynhans et al. 2022). The mediating effect of trust in the leader on the indirect influence of authoritarian leadership on employee job performance is an important aspect in understanding how authoritarian leadership style impacts employee job performance.

**H7: Trust in leaders mediates the relationship between authoritarian leadership and employee job performance**

#### Moderating Role of Power Distance

Individual power distance is the extent to which less powerful members in an organization accept that power is distributed unequally (Chien Jie et al. 2020). In contexts where there are significant power differences between leaders and employees, authoritarian leadership can increase the clarity of job roles, resulting in better employee performance (Nawaz et al. 2022). Conversely, when power distance is low, the positive impact of authoritarian leadership on job role clarity will be weaker (H. Wang & Guan, 2018). In particular, higher individual power distance can strengthen the positive impact of authoritarian leadership on employee job performance, job role clarity, learning goal orientation, and organizational engagement (H. Wang & Guan, 2018)(Nawaz et al. 2022).

**H8: Power distance moderates the relationship between authoritarian leadership and employee job role clarity.**

The positive impact of authoritarian leadership on employee job performance is enhanced when power distance is elevated. Nevertheless, in situations where power distance is low, the positive effect is less

pronounced (Nawaz et al. 2022). Employees who are more accepting of unequal distribution of power and have greater psychological dependence on their leaders tend to accept authoritarian leadership more easily and are more likely to focus on their work and improve their competence and abilities (H. Wang & Guan, 2018). In contrast, employees with lower power distance tend to be less motivated and may experience negative impacts such as emotional exhaustion (J. Wang et al. 2022). Specifically, higher individual power distance can strengthen the positive impact of authoritarian leadership on employee job performance, job role clarity, learning goal orientation, and organizational engagement (Nawaz et al. 2022). A higher power distance index in an organization can lead to better employee job performance (Chien Jie et al. 2020).

**H9: Power distance moderates the relationship between authoritarian leadership and employee job performance.**

## RESULTS

Research data was analyzed using a quantitative method approach, using a measurement model in Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). That is, it is based on a composite-based approach. SEM PLS has two models, namely the outer model and the inner model, which are used to analyze complex relationships between constructs and indicators in multivariate data (Hair et al. 2019). After carrying out a validity and reliability test (Convergent Validity) on the results of this research, all indicators for each variable were declared valid as shown in Table 1, so that they could proceed to the Discriminant Validity test. Where an indicator is considered reliable/valid if it has a correlation (outer loading) that must be greater than or equal to 0.70, an AVE value above 0.60, a composite reliability value greater than 0.7 and a Cronbach alpha above 0.70 (Hair et al. , 2019; Magno et al. 2022).

The inner model is tested using Partial Least Squares (PLS) Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) with the R-Square ( $R^2$ ) statistic, which measures the proportion of variance in the endogenous latent variable that is explained by the exogenous latent variable. This test is utilized to assess the predictive efficacy of the model (Sarstedt et al. 2020). In other words, R-Square ( $R^2$ ) represents a statistical measure that demonstrates the degree to which a model is effective in explaining the variance of a dependent variable in relation to one or more independent variables. An  $R^2$  value of

0.67 or higher indicates a strong relationship between the independent and dependent variables. An  $R^2$  value between 0.33 and 0.66 indicates a moderate relationship, while an  $R^2$  value below 0.33 indicates a weak relationship (Ravand & Baghaei , 2016).

From Table 2 it can be seen that the R-Square value for the job performance variable is 0.752. This value shows that 75.20% of job performance variables can be explained by clarity of job roles and trust in leaders, while the remaining 24.8% is explained by other variables not explained in this research. The R-Square value for the job role clarity variable is 0.239. This value shows that 23.9% of job role clarity can be explained by job performance and trust in leaders, while the remaining 76.1% is explained by other variables not explained in this study. And the R-Square value for the

variable trust in leaders is 0.089. This value shows that 8.9% of the variable trust in leaders can be explained by job performance and clarity of job roles, while the remaining 91.1% is explained by other variables not explained in this research. After testing the outer model and inner model, a causal relationship hypothesis is then carried out for the research variables, as shown in Table 3.

Table 3 illustrates that all hypotheses, both direct effects (H1, H2, H3, H4, H5, H8, and H9) and indirect effects (H6 and H7), are supported by the findings of this study. The negative direction is shown by H1, H2, H4 , H6, H7 and the positive direction is shown by H3, H5, H8, H9 where a hypothesis is accepted if the significance level value is 5% ( $p<0.05$ ) and the t-statistic value is  $>1.96$  (Hair et al. 2019 ).

Table 1. Validity and Reliability Test

Variabel	AVE	Cronbach Alpha	Composite reliability
Authoritarian leadership	0.770	0.963	0.968
Job Performance	0.685	0.954	0.954
Job Role Clarity	0.685	0.974	0.975
Power Distance	0.811	0.979	0.979
Trust In Leaders	0.739	0.981	0.982

Table 2. R square ( $R^2$ )

Variable	R-square
Job Performance	0.752
Job Role Clarity	0.239
Trust In Leadership	0.089

Table 3. Hypothesis of Direct and Indirect Effects

Hypothesis	Path	Coefficients	T statistics	P values	Decision
H1	Authoritarian Leadership → Job Performance	-0.354	5.426	0.000	Supported
H2	Authoritarian Leadership → Job Role Clarity	-0.349	6.778	0.000	Supported
H3	Job Role Clarity → Job Performance	0.270	2.655	0.008	Supported
H4	Authoritarian Leadership → Trust in Leadership	-0.299	3.715	0.000	Supported
H5	Trust in Leadership → Job Performance	0.556	6.841	0.000	Supported
H6	Authoritarian Leadership → Job Role Clarity → Job Performance	-0.094	2.293	0.022	Supported
H7	Authoritarian Leadership → Trust in Leadership → Job Performance	-0.166	3.043	0.002	Supported
H8	Power Distance x Authoritarian Leadership → Job Performance	0.117	2.326	0.020	Supported
H9	Power Distance x Authoritarian Leadership → Job Role Clarity	0.254	3.831	0.000	Supported

The findings of this research indicate that authoritarian leadership has a negative effect on employee job performance. The findings of this research are consistent with those of previous studies indicating that authoritarian leadership has a detrimental impact on interpersonal relationships, the work climate, and employee job performance (Yi, 2022), authoritarian leadership has a negative relationship with leader effectiveness evaluation, which in the end is detrimental to task performance or task performance (Huang et al. al., 2023) and authoritarian leadership has a negative influence on task performance (Z. Wang et al. 2019). Where task performance is one indicator of employee work performance (Çalışkan & Körögülu, 2022).

Furthermore, authoritarian leadership has a negative impact on the clarity of job roles, which is supported in this research, in line with research findings which state that authoritarian leadership has a negative impact on the clarity of employee job roles (Zhang & Xie, 2017), where roles and expectations are not predetermined for employees' work under authoritarian leadership. will result in an unstructured and disorganized work environment, which can result in decreased clarity of employee job roles (Nawaz et al. 2022). In carrying out their work duties, employees need adequate information about work responsibilities, detailed information about work procedures, knowledge about work priorities, adequate feedback and control over the work they do (Unegbu et al. 2023).

The clarity of job roles has been demonstrated to have a positive impact on employee job performance. This is supported by the findings of this research, which align with those of other studies (M. C. C. Lee et al. 2024). These studies indicate that there is a negative relationship between role clarity and job performance. In other words, there is a positive relationship between role clarity and employee job performance. When employees lack sufficient information about their work, this lack of clarity can lead to confusion, frustration, and perceptions of unfairness in the performance evaluation process. This may result in difficulties for employees in meeting performance expectations, which can have a negative impact on their job performance. To improve employee job performance, it is essential to provide them with adequate information about their work (Çelik, 2013). The clarity of job roles perceived by employees is not only positively related to job performance but also serves to prevent role ambiguity, which can result in stress, poor prioritization, and the

duplication of work. This ultimately has a negative impact on individual and team performance (Kundu et al. 2020).

Authoritarian leadership's has a negative impact on trust in leaders is supported in this research, in line with research results which state that employees with high cognitive trust in their leaders show fewer negative reactions to authoritarian leadership, which shows that trust can reduce the negative impact of authoritarian leadership, but the level Low trust in leaders will foster negative reactions from the impact of authoritarian leadership on employee work performance (Du et al. 2020). Trust in leaders has a positive impact on employee work performance, which is supported in this research. This finding is in line with research findings (C. C. Lee et al. 2023) which states that trust in leaders, such as direct superiors, colleagues and top managers, has a positive impact. on employee job performance.

The present study provides evidence that job role clarity plays a mediating role in the relationship between authoritarian leadership and employee job performance. This finding is consistent with the proposition that the mediating effect of job role clarity between authoritarian leadership and employee job performance represents a crucial aspect in understanding the relationship between authoritarian leadership and employee work outcomes (H. Wang & Guan, 2018). Such clarity of job roles can, in turn, have a positive impact on employee performance, providing clear direction and expectations (Nawaz et al. 2022). Conversely, authoritarian leadership may also result in a lack of autonomy and creativity, which can have a detrimental impact on employee work performance. As evidenced by research conducted by Zhang and Xie (2017), authoritarian leadership fosters role ambiguity, which impairs individuals' ability to discern their work tasks and responsibilities. A lack of role clarity can precipitate stress, poor prioritization, and ultimately a detrimental impact on individual and team performance. Therefore, it is imperative that employees have access to clear job information in order to fulfill their job duties and responsibilities effectively (Kundu et al. 2020).

The research findings also indicate that trust in leaders plays a mediating role in the influence of authoritarian leadership on job performance. The findings of this study align with those of previous studies which suggest that a decrease in trust can lead to a decrease

in employee motivation, effort, and overall job performance. This decrease in trust is caused by the characteristics of authoritarian leaders such as violence, high power distance, and impersonality, which hinder the establishment of high-quality relationships between leaders and employees (D. Wang et al. 2022). Employees who trust their leaders will be more open about their work and seek guidance when needed, resulting in better performance results (Arwika, 2022). The findings of this research support the hypothesis that power distance moderating authoritarian leadership positively affects employee job role clarity. These results align with previous studies that have demonstrated a significant positive impact of authoritarian leadership on employee job role clarity when individual power distance is high (Nawaz et al. 2022). This indicates that in circumstances where there is a considerable disparity in power between leaders and employees, authoritarian leadership can enhance the clarity of job roles, which in turn leads to enhanced performance. Conversely, this suggests that in situations where there is a significant power differential between leaders and employees, authoritarian leadership may have the opposite effect. The present study lends support to the proposition that power distance moderates the impact of authoritarian leadership on employee job performance. This finding aligns with the existing research literature, which indicates that power distance serves to moderate the direct influence of authoritarian leadership on employee job performance, enhancing the positive effect of authoritarian leadership when individual power distance is higher and attenuating it when individual power distance is lower (H. Wang & Guan, 2018). Individuals with higher power distance accept and appreciate authoritarian leadership. This results in a positive correlation between authoritarian leadership and employee job performance. They view authoritarian leadership as normal and acceptable. They are also more motivated by discipline and rules, which can lead to improved performance. Furthermore, power distance is a significant factor influencing the impact of authoritarian leadership on job performance. Employees with higher power distance are more inclined to accept authoritarian leadership and are more likely to be motivated by it, leading to enhanced job performance. Conversely, employees with lower power distance may exhibit lower motivation and may experience adverse effects such as emotional exhaustion (J. Wang et al. 2022).

## Managerial Implication

This research offers insights into the concept of leadership and its potential to positively impact a company. It also sheds light on the influence of authoritarian leadership on the work performance of employees. Moreover, it is anticipated that the findings of this study will contribute to the linking style of leader, sub-ordinate, and contextual factors.

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### Conclusion

The findings of this research strengthen the impact of authoritarian leadership on employee performance which is mediated by job role clarity and trust in the leader and the moderation of power distance in authoritarian leadership on job role clarity and employee performance. From the current research findings, it is clear that authoritarian leadership has a negative relationship with employee job performance, job role clarity, and trust in leaders. In terms of indirect effects, it was found that job role clarity and trust in leaders mediate authoritarian leadership on employee job performance. Apart from that, this research also confirms that the moderating role of power distance states that power distance moderates the direct relationship between authoritarian leadership and job role clarity.

### Recommendations

In the context of academic research, the findings of this study are anticipated to enhance understanding, knowledge, and the literature review of the subject matter, specifically with regard to the influence of authoritarian leadership on employee work performance. This is achieved through the examination of the role of job role clarity and trust in leaders, which are moderated by power distance. This research will be of particular benefit to other researchers in the future who are interested in studying the impact of authoritarian leadership in greater depth. It would be advisable for future researchers to consider modifying the mediating, moderating, or dependent variables, such as the leader's capability as a moderator. Thus, an examination of the moderating role of leader capability is expected to reinforce the impact of authoritarian leadership on trust in leaders and enhance its influence on job performance.

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