



# Stress, Task, and Relationship Orientations of Vietnamese Working Adults: Do Age, Gender, and Government Work Experience Make a Difference?

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## Abstract

Adult people are always structured diversely based on their gender, age, and work experience in the government versus private enterprises. To investigate the task, relationship and stress orientations of Vietnamese adults, this research examined 294 Vietnamese people living in three main cities in Vietnam including Hanoi (the capital) in the north, Vinh in the middle and Ho Chi Minh in the south. It found that they have different mean scores on task and relationship orientations. Gender, age and government work experience seem to be essential factors in leadership orientation and overload stress perception. Additionally, older people appear to be more task-oriented than their younger counterparts. In summary, the Vietnamese respondents confirmed a moderate stress perception regardless of age, gender and government work experience.

**Keywords** Tasks · Relationships · Stress · Age · Gender · Working experience · Vietnam

## Introduction and Cultural Values

There are several definitions of leadership in various cultures, as examined in cross-cultural leadership studies (Dickson et al. 2003; Martin et al. 2009). Culture shapes behaviours and its aspect is a significant forecaster of behaviour (Hall 2000). In the international business world, comprehending a subordinate's behaviours in various cultures is the essential duty of superiors, leaders and practitioners. It can support them to create a robust theoretical framework and practical adaptation that pave the way for business success in a distinct environment. The purpose of this research is to discover and compare the leadership orientations and the workload stress perceptions within

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working adult Vietnamese respondents based on various demographic bases. In more detail, this research aims to answer the following research question: Do gender, age and work experience make a divergence in Vietnamese working people's orientations of stress, task and relationship? To answer this question, the author selected the Style Questionnaire, adapted from Northouse (2007) to collect a typical profile of a respondent's leadership behaviours concerning task-oriented and relationship-oriented styles, and the Overload Stress Inventory, provided by Hyde and Allen's study (1996, pp. 29–30), to evaluate the stress orientation of Vietnamese respondents.

The author selected Vietnam for two reasons. Firstly, though some research has been studied to analyse the cultural impact on leadership behaviour in Vietnam (Nguyen et al. 2012; Nguyen et al. 2013a); cultural framework and their influences on leadership appear to change over time quickly, these research can be out of date. Therefore, this calls for attention to have more recent studies in this field. Secondly, unlike the typical bias of a weak and underdeveloped nation, which was destroyed by the war, recent Vietnam has been a fast and emerging country that become one of the most prominent markets in Asia. Over a few decades, Vietnam has reached an average GDP rise of 7.6% from 2000 to 2009 (Tran 2013). Despite the economy receded between 2009 and 2011 due to the global economy financial crisis, the Vietnamese economy is beneficial in worldwide markets and has a highly skilled labour force and low salary as a result of excellent education and cheap living cost. Therefore, a comprehension of beneficial effects on Vietnamese working adult's orientations of stress and leadership is essential for personal development and economic expansion.

## Literature Review

### The Vietnamese Context

The Socialist Republic of Vietnam, or Vietnam, is one of eleven countries of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). The nation has a population of 97.8 million citizens, of which two-thirds are living in rural areas. Vietnam has 58 provinces and five large cities including Hanoi (the capital) and Hai Phong in the north, Da Nang in the middle, and Ho Chi Minh and Can Tho in the south. Vietnam is the official and primary language, while English and Chinese have been increasingly regarded as the second and third languages since the economic reform in 1986.

Socialism has been the official political government system since the introduction of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam in 1945. After a few decades, the values and ideology of socialism associated with the pre-existing Confucianism of Vietnam (Ashwill and Diep 2005; McHale 2002). Vietnam started an economic reform calling Doi Moi in 1986, which has opened its economy and invited Western social and business organisations to work under the construct of a socialist government system (McHale 2002).

In recent times, globalisation has paved the way for the establishment of new social ideologies and values in Vietnamese society (Lan 2002; Truong 2013). As several scholars have pointed out, the current Vietnamese context is a combination of values, ideologies and norms derived from Confucianism, socialism and globalisation (Ashwill and Diep 2005; Bich 1999; Lan 2002; Truong 2013).

## The Vietnamese Cultural Aspects

The term “culture” can be regarded as a conjugated framework of behaviour that shapes the feature of members in society (Nguyen and Mujtaba 2011). Culture is a combination of community thought process, community behavioural trend, attitudes and proper ways to display emotions. Through this concept, culture is considered as a “collective programming of the mind” (Hofstede 1980, p.13) where unique ways of thinking and behaviour can represent the culture of a nation.

Cultural values are often regarded as an assumption about what is right or wrong, good or bad as well as the beliefs are shared by members of a society (Hofstede 1980; Strauss and Quinn 1997). These values are accepted, shared and transferred cross-generationally and regarded as a code of conduct for social behaviour (Strauss and Quinn 1997). Although the impact of globalisation is emerging in the current Vietnamese society, Confucianism is permeable and active in the ideology of people behaviour (Bich 1999; Borton 2000). In this study, the author focuses on two dimensions of cultural value created by Hofstede (1980): collectivism and power distance. These dimensions have been confirmed to connect directly to core cultural values in the Asian context (Gerstner and Day 1994; Holmes and Tangtongtavy 1996), including Vietnam (Quang and Vuong 2002; Ralston, Thang, & Napier 1999).

Norms that respect and strengthen hierarchical connection are valued in Confucianism. The impact of the hierarchy is displayed in how individuals shape relations, adapt to use verbal communication and conduct their duties with relatives and friends (Ho and Tikly 2012; Jamieson 1993). Jamieson (1993) suggested that the awareness of Vietnamese people about the world stems from the Confucius tradition, which justifies and shapes the pecking order of society. The hierarchical norms embedded in the Vietnamese culture are regarded by Confucian values that include the values of patriarchy, family, social duties and ranking. Confucian cultural values are immersed in Vietnamese people through the social hierarchy (e.g. states, enterprises and family) and education system. As such, Vietnamese public organisations call attention to full compliance with an order from parents, teachers and superiors. A Vietnamese proverb goes: “Above must be above, and below must be below”. A person must understand who is below them and who is above among their relatives or in workplaces so they can honour those above and condescend to those below.

Hofstede (1980) also mentioned that a nation has a propensity to identify its society either as a group (i.e. a collectivised society) or an individual (i.e. an individualist society). As a collectivist society, Vietnamese culture places a heavy emphasis on consensus, loyalty, coordination and unity within groups (Ralston et al. 2006). Authors have highlighted that Vietnamese people place a great concern on relatives and community (Ashwill and Diep 2005; Bich 1999). Though globalisation has affected social communication, the traditional Vietnamese culture values relatives and community roles strongly. The definition of “losing face” also mirrors this characteristic of collectivism as Borton (2000) mentioned that ‘loss of face is painful in any society, but unbearable in Vietnam’ (p. 24). Since a Vietnamese person is a child, she/he is taught to keep “communal assessment” as the most critical standard. Every success or achievement rewarded by a person will lead to honour and respect to family or the community. In contrast, failure or punishment damages not only a person but also his/her relatives and friends.

## Task and Relationship-Oriented Leadership

Several leadership concepts in the behaviour systems differentiate behaviour forms of leadership styles. A leadership style concerns how a leader behaves in a particular circumstance and cannot change much across time (Stock-Homburg 2008). The two general patterns of leadership behaviours that have been examined in various research are the task and relationship orientations, also regarded as initiating structure and consideration (Oaklander and Fleishman 1964; Fleishman 1967). Initiating structure leaders value task fulfilment, objective and success. This leadership style places heavy emphasis on clarifying and organising activities and duties to achieve their objectives and goals (Oaklander and Fleishman 1964). In contrast, consideration style leaders aim to maintain group cohesion, distribute great help, and assign authorities to their employees. They call attention to respecting colleagues, beliefs and recognition of their employees (Nguyen et al. 2012).

Another research that distributed similar results to the Ohio State University findings is the University of Michigan research. This research indicated two types of leadership behaviour: production-centred and employee-centred (Schermerhorn et al. 2008). Production-centred leaders, who correspond with the initiating structure leaders, concentrate on tasks, objectives and the achievement of these tasks and objectives (Nguyen et al. 2012). Employee-centred leaders, who correspond with the consideration leaders, place heavy emphasis on the happiness of their employees. Both leadership styles are regarded as not mutually exclusive and can be merged (Mujtaba et al. 2010, p.179). In several situations, leaders score highly on both leadership styles (Blake and Mouton 1966).

Being deeply embedded in Chinese culture for a thousand years, Vietnamese individuals have created a significant sense of employer-employee hierarchical coordination, or “guanxi” (Chen and Tjosvold 2006). An active guanxi person is highly respected and believed by the community (Ping et al. 2012). Vietnamese people place a heavy emphasis on group cohesion and regard themselves as loyal, trustful and friendly individuals. As officially being recognised as a member of a significant group, Vietnamese people are ready to sacrifice themselves to reach group benefit.

Despite having the same cultural features as China, Vietnamese leadership traits have not been examined clearly. In the early stage, local superiors are labelled as paternalistic leaders who have a strong sense of autocracy, command and control (Doan 2005). Quang et al. (1998) mentioned that ethics, accountability and morality are the main leadership traits of Vietnamese corporations. Being embedded in a collectivist culture, Vietnamese working adults are more relationship-oriented; however, delegating authority is not widely prevalent due to an influence of high power distance in which autocratic leadership characteristic is highly emphasised. Vietnamese employees were examined to be more task-oriented and relationship-oriented than Omani and German counterparts (Nguyen et al. 2012; Nguyen et al. 2013b).

Several previous literature have examined task and leadership behaviour in state and private organisations. Silvia and McGuire (2010, p.264) examined the leadership behaviour between the agency and network fields. As a result, superiors in the agency appear to be more task-oriented and less relationship-oriented in comparison with the counterpart's networks. Prior studies on sales leaders in Sweden confirmed that relationship-orientation appears to be more common among private sectors rather than among state sectors (Arvonen and Petterson 1999). According to Mujtaba and Balboa

(2009), American students are more task-oriented but less relationship-oriented than Filipino students. Ermasova et al. (2017) conducted a comparative study between German and Russian working people, and the results highlighted that there was no significant difference among the two- leadership behaviours between the two countries.

On the other hand, a cross-country study between Japanese and Oman respondents conducted by Nguyen et al. (2019) confirmed that Japanese working adults were more task-oriented and more relationship-oriented than Omani working adults. A few studies challenged the two leadership behaviour in Vietnam and indicated that Vietnamese working adults appeared to be more task-oriented and more relationship-oriented than German and Omani counterparts (Nguyen et al. 2012; Nguyen et al. 2013a). However, as the scope of these studies in Vietnam is small and only in one city in the south (Ho Chi Minh City), their results are difficult to represent the whole country.

Gender research has been investigated quite widely in leadership style literature. Men and women consider leader characteristics in various ways (Schein 2004). Females are assumed to care for other people, be sympathetic and attentive. Isaković (2011) mentioned that female leaders call attention on relationship orientation, participation and flexibility as well as concentrating on teamwork and devolution. However, literature findings are inconclusive as there has not been completed literature on how cultural differences affect the association between leadership traits and gender. While Nguyen and Mujtaba (2011) supported the result as they showed that Vietnamese women are more relationship-oriented than Vietnamese men, there are not any significant differences in relationship-oriented leadership style in gender in Germany, Iran and Oman (Nguyen et al. 2012; Tajaddini and Mujtaba 2011; Mujtaba et al. .2010). This study tries to broaden the scope of leadership behaviour study in Vietnam, and its results can influence to other Asian countries that share the same characteristics in cultural and social factors. In conclusion, the leadership hypotheses for this research are as below:

*Hypothesis 1.* Vietnamese respondents have similar scores for task and relationship orientations.

*Hypothesis 2.* Vietnamese male and female respondents have similar scores on task orientations.

*Hypothesis 3.* Vietnamese male and female respondents have similar scores on relationship orientations.

*Hypothesis 4.* Older (27 years old and above) and younger (less than 27 years old) Vietnamese respondents have similar scores on task orientations.

*Hypothesis 5.* Older (27 years old and above) and younger (less than 27 years old) Vietnamese respondents have similar scores on relationship orientations.

*Hypothesis 6.* Vietnamese respondents who have government experiences have similar scores for task orientations as those who do not have government experiences.

*Hypothesis 7.* Vietnamese respondents who have government experiences have similar scores for relationship orientations as those who do not have government experiences.

## **Stress and Overload Perception**

Stress can happen to everyone in the world. Tajaddini and Mujtaba (2009) indicated that the leading causes contributing to stress in recent times stemmed from tasks,

family, personal issues and death. As Selye (1956) pointed out, stress can influence both people's emotion and physique as they have a lack of know-how, ability and time to solve their issues in a specific time. Hyde and Allen (1996) asserted that overload stressors could express changes in physiology and behaviour and have a negative influence on people's health. Frese (1985) mentioned that stress could be linked to insecure jobs, low-salary jobs and lower-ranking of employees in their corporations. Workers who are stressed tend to change their job to overcome this problem.

Incorporation settings, stress has an effect on both organisational and individual's aspects. Organisational stress is regarded as interpersonal disputes, ill-treatment and non-coordination among superiors and subordinates (Oaklander and Fleishman 1964). As such, protective behaviours can appear in workers experiencing overload stress as they reduce communication and separate themselves from a colleague in their organisation. In contrast, low-stress workers refer to more cooperative attitudes and behaviours. Stress is also assumed to be linked to ethical dilemmas. Workers are likely to face ethical dilemmas when coping with these stressful cases such as workload distribution, corporation and family conflict, and interpersonal problems (Mujtaba and Sims 2011).

People in developing countries are assumed to experience more varied categories of stress perception than those in developed countries. As displayed in many emerging countries in the Asian context, Vietnam has experienced a movement in its social-cultural situation with an increased amount of secondary employment and single parent families. Pressure and expectation between company and family are hard to balance, which results in a family-work dispute, and vice versa. Nguyen et al. (2012b) discovered that Vietnamese people seemed to have more overload stress than German counterparts. Similar research by Nguyen et al. (2013b) concluded that Vietnamese people experience more overload stress than Omani counterparts. As Houtman et al. (2007) pointed out, globalisation and movements in working conditions have led to a developing concern for work overload stress in emerging countries. While people in developed nations are used to dealing with work overload stress, those in developing nations are deficient in knowledge and precaution in stress perception and lack of resources to resolve it.

Linh et al. (2016) completed a study examining whether there is a difference in work-family disputes between Vietnamese people working in state-owned enterprises (SOEs) and foreign-invested enterprises (FIEs). They concluded that there is no significant divergence between the two types of enterprises. This finding is in line with research by Huffman et al. (2013) who discovered that employees at the earlier working stage have low accountabilities in their companies and families; therefore, their stress in work-family disputes is low.

A shortage of knowledge, awareness and perception about workload stress orientation can be derived from organisational context as its context has a significant impact on a person's thinking, behaviour and attitudes (Huffman et al. 2013). Moreover, cultural influences as high power distance and low uncertainty avoidance also affect how Vietnamese individuals are aware themselves in positive or negative situations. As a subordinate's chances are limited, which lead to a lack of choices compared to those received by their superiors, this contributes to their stress due to long working hours combined with a low salary.

The causes leading to workload stress perception can also be derived from "gender inequalities, poor environmental management of industrial pollution to illiteracy,

parasitic and infectious diseases, poor hygiene and sanitation, poor nutrition, poor living conditions, inadequate transportation systems and general poverty” (Huffman et al. 2013, pp. 68). Conventionally, the healthcare system in Vietnam only places heavy emphasis on physical threats, while the mental exposures have not been given serious attention (Kortum et al. 2011). As such, the causes and effects on stress perception are questionable in emerging nations like Vietnam.

Globalisation has also led to unemployment and self-employability (Huffman et al. 2013). This has paved the way for shifts in working patterns because of new workplaces and organisational freedom. As unemployment is a significant factor causing health and mental problems, insecure jobs also seem to have similar problems. Though insecure jobs cannot have a robust harmful influence on people’s health, such as unemployment, its effects are also detrimental (Kortum et al. 2011). The authors also mentioned that overload stress perception is the most popular reason leading to the health problems in unemployed people.

Besides the shortage of knowledge about stress perception, lack of resources is also a massive problem in emerging countries. The majority of workers in developing countries have been working in small and medium enterprises (SMEs) or self-employment, which are often deficient in working conditions and resources to prevent themselves from overload stress perception.

The shortage of instruction and treatment regarding mental threats and overload stress make it hard for enterprises to express useful solution to cope with these problems. The issue is even worse as a result of lacking psychological services. According to Huffman et al. (2013), only 5–10% of the labour forces in developing countries and 20–50% of those in developed countries can adapt to use the health and psychological services. Therefore, overload stress will still be a considerable concern for developing countries such as Vietnam.

Previous studies have examined the differences in overload stress of adult people among various countries. German people were examined to have more overload stress than Russians (Nguyen et al. 2012). Japanese people seemed to have more overload stress than Omanis and Russians (Nguyen et al. 2019; Nguyen et al. 2018). Within a national context, Afza et al. (2011) uncovered that Pakistani adult workers in state organisations appear to experience higher stress overload than those who work in private organisations. In Russia, leaders were confirmed to have higher work overload stress than employees (Nguyen et al. 2015). The authors explained the higher level of stress in Russian superiors because they must cope with pressures from the highly competitive market, and this can lead to overload stress. Though there have been several conducted research on overload stress, only a few studies have been examined in Vietnam (Nguyen et al. 2012; Nguyen et al. 2013a). The problem is that the sample size in these studies was small and limited to only one city in the south of Vietnam (Ho Chi Minh City). Therefore, their results are hard to represent the whole country. Moreover, the time gap is also a problem as the prior studies were examined six and seven years ago, which seems to be outdated in social science study.

As several variables influence a person’s category of stress that results in health and work results, this research is conducted to broaden the scope of work on overload stress in Vietnam, and its results can influence other Asian countries that share the same cultural and social characteristics. This study evaluates whether Vietnamese

respondents are affected by overload stress to a high, medium or low level. Therefore, the stress orientation hypotheses for this research are displayed below:

*Hypothesis 8.* Vietnamese males and females are similar levels of stress orientation from work overload.

*Hypothesis 9.* Older (27 years old and above) and younger (less than 27 years old) Vietnamese respondents are similar scores on stress orientation from work overload.

*Hypothesis 10.* Vietnamese respondents who have government experiences have similar scores for stress orientation as those who do not have government experiences.

### Study Methodology: Stress, Task and Relationship Orientations

This study explores whether Vietnamese are more task orientation, relationship and stress orientations based on their age, and state work experiences. Peter G. Northouse (2007) discovered a useful survey called Style Questionnaire, which would be done by oneself and one's friends, colleagues and superiors for comparison objectives. The findings display one's use of task and relationship orientations. For each item, the respondent displays the extent to which he or she participates in the proper behaviour. A score of 5 means "Always" while a score of 1 means "Never" with the respondent regarding the stated behaviour. The rating explanation for Style Questionnaire by Northouse (2007, pp. 87) is displayed in Table 1.

This research adapts to use the Overload Stress Inventory (Hyde and Allen 1996, pp. 29–30) to evaluate the overload stress orientation of Vietnamese respondents. Several statements of Overload stress orientation can be interpreted as: often taking task home to do in the weekends; having more workload to complete than it is possible to conduct; having many urgent deadlines; having lack of time to conduct works; often failing to meet the deadline. A score of 5 means "Always" while a score of 1 means "Never" with the respondent regarding the stated situation. The responses are evaluated based on the below standard criteria (transmitted from Hyde and Allen 1996)

- Scores in the range of 40–50 mean *severe* overload stress orientation.
- Scores in the range of 30–39 mean *high* overload stress orientation.
- Scores in the range of 20–29 mean *moderate* overload stress orientation.
- Scores in the range of 19 and below mean *low* overload stress orientation.

This research specifies Vietnamese respondents in the three most significant cities: Hanoi (the capital) in the north, Vinh in the middle and Ho Chi Minh in the south. The original version of the questionnaire was first translated into Vietnamese then was

**Table 1** Task and relationship score explanation

Score	Descriptions
45–50	Very high range
40–44	High range
35–39	Moderate-high range
30–34	Moderate low range
25–29	Low range
10–24	Very low range



back-translated into English. Two versions were contrasted and tested by two English and Vietnamese experts to ensure the accuracy of the questionnaire. As a result, they confirmed that there were not errors and differences. This research uses the self-administered questionnaire system, which helped to minimise the mistakes from the subjectivity of respondents. This is a useful technique as Vietnamese respondents sometimes lack the comfort to express their real thinking and thoughts publicly.

For this research, 294 surveys were collected from respondents. A convenient sampling framework for choosing the proper respondents has been implemented. The hypotheses are linked to Vietnamese working adults, both male and female. The convenience respondents were collected through a range of universities, organisations, state-owned enterprises (SOEs), and private-owned enterprises (POEs). A couple of sentences explained the objective of this study and confirmed secure confidentiality in each questionnaire. A new paragraph was added to collect the respondent's opinion at the end of the survey.

Hard copies were sent to various SOEs, POEs and universities. In universities, students were expected to respond to the questionnaire. In addition, the subordinates and superiors in SOEs and POEs were asked to fill in the questionnaire. When the questionnaire design was approved, the hard versions were sent to the enterprises and universities. More importantly, the author appeared to present while the respondents completed the questionnaire. Its purpose is to ensure that the questionnaires were conducted successfully without any errors. The questionnaire was also created as a web link that could be sent to various internet sources like Skype, email, Facebook and Google Drive. For those surveys conducted through the web link, the results were transmitted into an excel database for analysis. For those questionnaires conducted through hard version, results were automatically processed and combined to the same file that included the online data to distribute a full data file.

Of 294 respondents, 177 are female, which equals to 60.2%. The mean age and working experience years are 30.67 years (SD = 8.69) and 6.59 (SD = 7.20), respectively. Within 294 participants, 117 participants (39.7%) have experience in the state enterprises, 153 participants (52%) have experience in private enterprises, and 24 participants (8.3%) have experience in family sectors and freelancer. About years of working experience, 182 respondents (61.9%) have 1 to 5 years, 53 respondents (18%) have 6 to 10 years, and 59 respondents (20.1%) have above 10 years of working experience. Thus, concerning educational qualification, 199 respondents (67.6%) appears to have a bachelor degree or less, 65 respondents (22.1%) qualify a Master degree, and 30 respondents (10.3%) have a PhD degree.

## Results

As displayed in Table 2, the mean scores of Vietnamese respondents for task orientations fall in “high range”, and their relationship orientation means regarding “moderately high range.” Also, the mean stress perception of Vietnamese respondents falls in the “moderate” range. Hypothesis 1 “*Vietnamese respondents have similar scores for task and relationship orientations*” cannot be supported as the average task orientation score for the Vietnamese respondents is 41.10 (St. Dev. 6.210) and the average relationship orientation score is 38.46 (St. Dev. 6.272) with statistically significant

**Table 2** Stress, task and relationship scores of Vietnamese respondents

Vietnamese respondent	Number	Average task orientation score	Average relationship orientation score	Stress perception score
Mean		41.10	38.46	26.44
St. Deviation		6.210	6.272	8.519
	294			

divergence confirmed in the t-test of the two means ( $t = 9.832$ ;  $p < 0.000$ ). The Vietnamese are more task oriented.

$t = 9.832$ ;  $p < 0.000$ ; rejected.

As mentioned in Table 3, hypothesis 2 “*Vietnamese male and female respondents have similar scores on task orientations*” can be supported ( $t = -1.104$ ;  $p = 0.405$ ) as there is not any significant difference between both genders.

$t = -1.104$ ;  $p = 0.405$ ; cannot rejected.

As mentioned in Table 4, hypothesis 3 “*Vietnamese male and female respondents have similar scores on relationship orientations*” can be supported ( $t = -0.583$ ;  $p = 0.828$ ) as there is not any significant difference between both genders.

$t = -0.583$ ;  $p = 0.828$ ; cannot rejected.

As mentioned in Table 5, hypothesis 4 “*Older (27 years old and above) and younger (less than 27 years old) Vietnamese respondents have similar scores on task orientations*” cannot be supported ( $t = 0.684$ ;  $p = 0.034$ ) as older respondents have a slightly higher score (41.33) than younger people (40.83). Perhaps older Vietnamese people appear to be more focused on task orientation.

$t = 0.684$ ;  $p = 0.034$ ; rejected.

As mentioned in Table 6, hypothesis 5 “*Older (27 years old and above) and younger (less than 27 years old) Vietnamese respondents have similar scores on relationship orientations*” can be supported ( $t = 2.754$ ;  $p = 0.088$ ) as there is not any significant difference between both groups.

$t = 2.754$ ;  $p = 0.088$ ; cannot rejected.

As mentioned in Table 7, hypothesis 6 “*Vietnamese respondents who have government experiences have similar scores for task orientations as those who do not have government experiences*” can be supported ( $t = -0.632$ ;  $p = 0.146$ ) as there is not any significant difference between both groups.

$t = -0.632$ ;  $p = 0.146$ ; cannot rejected.

As mentioned in Table 8, hypothesis 7 “*Vietnamese respondents who have government experiences have similar scores for relationship orientations as those who do not*

**Table 3** Task orientation by gender

Group	Number	Mean	St.Deviation
Males	117	40.61	6.421
Females	177	41.42	6.063

**Table 4** Relationship orientation by gender

Group	Number	Mean	St.Deviation
Males	117	38.20	6.424
Females	177	38.63	6.182

*have government experiences*” can be supported ( $t = 1.374$ ;  $p = 0.679$ ) as there is not any significant difference between both groups.

$t = 1.374$ ;  $p = 0.679$ ; cannot be rejected.

As mentioned in Table 9, hypothesis 8 “*Vietnamese male and female respondents have similar scores on stress perceptions*” can be supported ( $t = 1.050$ ;  $p = 0.662$ ) as there is not any significant difference between both genders. Females and males in Vietnam appear to have the same overload stress perceptions in life.

$t = 1.050$ ;  $p = 0.662$ ; cannot be rejected.

As mentioned in Table 10, hypothesis 9 “*Older (27 years old and above) and younger (less than 27 years old) Vietnamese respondents have similar scores on stress perceptions*” can be supported ( $t = -0.868$ ;  $p = 0.074$ ) as there is not any significant difference between both groups.

$t = -0.868$ ;  $p = 0.074$ ; cannot be rejected.

Finally, as mentioned in Table 11, hypothesis 10 “*Vietnamese respondents who have government experiences have similar scores for stress perceptions as those who do not have government experiences*” can be supported ( $t = -2.112$ ;  $p = 0.998$ ) as there is not any significant difference between both groups. Government experience is not a cause leading a difference in overload stress perceptions scores within Vietnamese people.

$t = -2.112$ ;  $p = 0.998$ ; cannot be rejected.

## Discussion and Conclusion

In this study, the author evaluates the findings and suggests several conclusions. Since there is a high range in task orientation scores, it is in line with previous research (Nguyen et al. 2012; Nguyen et al. 2013a; Nguyen et al. 2013b). It is interesting to note that Vietnamese mean scores for relationship orientation are below the high range, which is somewhat different to the studies of Nguyen et al. (2011) and Nguyen et al. (2013b). It confirms a high range in task orientation and moderate-high relationship orientation within Vietnamese people. The result confirms a rise in the “harder” orientation of leadership in Vietnam (Nguyen et al. 2013a; Nguyen et al. 2013b). The explanation for this issue is the Vietnam economic reform since 1986, which has

**Table 5** Task orientation by age

Group	Number	Mean	St.Deviation
Older	159	41.33	6.588
Younger	135	40.83	5.745

**Table 6** Relationship orientation by age

Group	Number	Mean	St.Deviation
Older	159	39.38	6.627
Younger	135	37.38	5.662

led to a transformation from state-centralised sector to private-centralised sector, thus, Vietnamese people highly expect task structure and place less emphasis on relationship structure from their superiors (Nguyen et al. 2012; Tran 2019a). In this business world where efficiency and performance have a great influence, perhaps a harder system, i.e., more task-oriented, could a foundation for the superior's success.

Similar task-oriented and relationship-oriented scores are investigated among Vietnamese females and males. This is because the Vietnamese society and mainly working environments have displayed more female appearances in the business corporations. These females could contribute more sympathy, collaboration and comprehension into the workplace, i.e. more interrelated connection, empathy, and they might also be a model for their male colleagues to learn.

Older Vietnamese people appear to be more task oriented. This is because they have more working experiences than younger Vietnamese and therefore, become more professional. Thus, they better realise the importance of efficiency and working performance in the new business organisation, and, therefore, place more emphasis on goal fulfilment within corporations.

Vietnamese respondents are confirmed to have no significant divergences in their task-oriented and relationship-oriented scores based on state work experience. This result is indeed impressive given that Vietnamese have an emphasis on active government enterprises (Tran 2019b). This could be because the Vietnamese society has displayed a movement from state centralisation to own centralisation, and, thus, there are no differences between the two sectors.

Vietnamese respondents appear to experience moderate overload stress perception irrespective of whether they are male or female; and have government experience or not. Perhaps this is because, Vietnamese corporations, government or private, make a substantial concern about task-concerned stress and express solutions to limit their subordinates' stress successfully. Thus, this research confirms that age is not a cause leading to a divergence in the work overload stress orientation in the Vietnam context. This result is in line with the studies of Nguyen et al. (2012), Nguyen et al. (2013a), and Nguyen et al. (2013b).

**Table 7** Task orientation by government experience

Group	Number	Mean	St.Deviation
With Gov. Exp	138	40.86	6.607
No Gov. Exp	156	41.31	5.848

**Table 8** Relationship orientation by government experience

Group	Number	Mean	St.Deviation
With Gov. Exp	138	38.99	6.495
No Gov. Exp	156	37.99	6.050

## Implications and Limitations

Altogether, it is supposed that economic reform pressure since 1986 has affected the leadership behaviours of Vietnamese. The author suggests that Vietnamese people are expected to focus on task orientation rather than relationship orientations, and, thus, aims to maintain their business outcome. However, as the relationship orientation score is slightly lower than the task orientation score, superiors and expatriates settling in Vietnam should understand that their Vietnamese workers maintain high contention in their performance while also placing heavy emphasis on keeping group cohesion. Foreign leaders need to realise the fact that Vietnamese managerial techniques are entirely towards their task orientation, but they call attention to relationship orientation as well.

This study also indicated that age has a significant difference in task orientation as older Vietnamese working adults who are 27 years of age and above report higher task orientation scores than those who are below 27 years of age. This result is in line with the results of Nguyen et al. (2012), Nguyen et al. (2013b), and Tran (2019a) as the authors mentioned that older people because of their life experiences, discovered more useful experiences and thus considered their emphasis on goal fulfilment. As such, experienced Vietnamese people appear to have more duties in comparison with young people and therefore more work-related issues to cope with.

To cope with work overload stress, Vietnamese superiors should establish optimal conditions for their subordinates. In detail, they should build coordinated and open workplaces to develop worker belief, commitment and collaboration. Local subordinates must have access to workload stress training to support them in overcoming their psychological problems. Vietnamese employees must learn a reasonable way to resolve work-family conflict. Proper scheduling, organising and managing time may be a proficient choice. The same implementation can be applied for leaders, superiors and managers as well. As Vietnamese people are regarded as diligent, creative and flexible workers, they should acknowledge the detrimental influence of work-related stress and develop their solutions to deal with it and keep high performances in their enterprises.

This study succeeded in distributing the theoretical influence in the field of leadership behaviour and overload stress. As suggested in the prior literature, leadership

**Table 9** Stress perception by gender

Group	Number	Mean	St.Deviation
Males	117	27.08	8.449
Females	177	26.01	8.562

**Table 10** Stress perception by age

Group	Number	Mean	St.Deviation
Older	159	26.04	9.042
Younger	135	26.90	7.865

behaviour has been confirmed for various decades as the leading causes contributing to an organisation's success. In addition, work overload stress has been regarded as the main reasons leading to the working people's dissatisfaction. However, as the rich body of studies has been researched in the Western context, its influence on Vietnam is under question. Moreover, although research on leadership behaviour and work overload stress have been conducted in Vietnam (Nguyen et al. 2012; Nguyen et al. 2013a), their samples and scopes were limited. As such, the conclusions are still unclear. Therefore, the main findings of this research fill this gap by taking a deep look at leadership behaviour and work overload stress in Vietnam.

In summary, the research not only discovered the main understanding of Vietnamese leadership and stress orientations according to a quantitative study but also distributed advantageous knowledge for foreign superiors about the feature of their behaviour by analysing the literature on Vietnamese culture, leadership and managerial techniques. Thus, the author places a heavy emphasis on examining task, relationship and stress orientations in the Vietnamese context.

There are some limitations to this research. One limitation is the small adult population of Vietnamese respondents. As the questionnaires were distributed only to local people working in three cities, the research automatically removed Vietnamese adults who live in other provinces. As such, the result concluded from this research cannot apply to everyone, nor be relevant to the whole Vietnamese working adult population. Future research can be conducted on larger populations in many Vietnam provinces. Another limitation is that this study focused only on the Vietnamese people. A future study can focus on other countries to compare whether there are similarities or dissimilarities in the task, relationship and stress orientations of working adults in Vietnam and other countries.

## Conclusion

This research has placed emphasised on the dissimilarities in leadership orientation and overload stress perception in Vietnam. Scholars can take advantage from this research as it distributed more empirical findings concerning the task and relationship

**Table 11** Stress perception by government experience

Group	Number	Mean	St.Deviation
With Gov. Exp	138	25.33	8.461
No Gov. Exp	156	27.42	8.475

orientations as well as the work overload stress perception within Vietnamese working people based on age, gender and state work experience. Practitioners can also take advantage of the research as it distributed many practical implications in conducting business or managing Vietnamese subordinates. The globally business world has become more internationalised and interrelated, and the labour force has become more distinct, thereby, comprehending the leadership styles and stress perceptions of Vietnamese adult can support superiors and organisations to select, manage, and use their subordinates effectively.

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