

Leadership Styles in Relation to Employee Engagement and Satisfaction: A Systematic Literature Review

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Abstract

This systematic literature review examines how diverse leadership styles influence employee engagement and job satisfaction. Transformational leadership, characterized by inspiration, individualized consideration, and a compelling vision, consistently emerges as the most effective style for heightening both employee engagement and satisfaction across sectors and regions. Transactional leadership provides stability and procedural clarity, promoting satisfaction particularly in structured environments, though it is less likely to foster deep engagement or innovation. In contrast, servant and authentic leadership styles prioritize ethical conduct, empowerment, and follower well-being, facilitating trust and positive affect, which are strong predictors of workplace happiness. Servant leadership, especially, was found to enhance citizenship behaviors and institutional commitment in critical sectors like healthcare and aviation. Passive and autocratic leadership consistently undermined engagement and satisfaction, often by reducing autonomy and clarity or increasing stress and organizational politics. Sectoral and cultural moderators, such as human resource management practices and perceived organizational politics, significantly modulate these effects. Furthermore, job satisfaction frequently mediates the pathway between leadership and engagement, underscoring the importance of psychological empowerment and organizational culture as key levers. Future research should integrate digital transformation and sustainability perspectives, using mixed methods.

Keywords: Leadership Style, Employee Engagement, Job Satisfaction, HR Management

INTRODUCTION

Background and Rationale

Leadership has long been recognized as a pivotal factor influencing organizational success, particularly through its impact on employee outcomes such as engagement and job satisfaction. Effective leadership guides organizational culture, drives motivation, and facilitates goal attainment, thereby fostering both individual and collective performance. Leadership styles, defined as the characteristic approaches leaders employ to influence their followers, are central in shaping employee experiences at work. Understanding the nuances of these styles is crucial because they determine how employees perceive their work environment and, ultimately, their attitudinal and behavioral outcomes (Bou et al., 2024).

Employee engagement and job satisfaction are two critical outcomes extensively studied in organizational behavior research. Engagement reflects the emotional and cognitive connection employees have toward their work, which often translates into discretionary effort and persistence. Job satisfaction, meanwhile, relates to an employee's overall affective evaluation of their job experience, encompassing factors such as work conditions, recognition, and relationships with

supervisors. Both outcomes are linked to crucial organizational metrics, including productivity, retention, and innovation (Irianti et al., 2024).

Despite rich research on leadership and employee outcomes individually, the literature reveals a gap in systematically integrating leadership styles' influence on engagement and satisfaction. Furthermore, the mediating and moderating processes underlying this relationship remain inadequately explored, making it difficult to understand under what conditions and through what mechanisms leadership styles exert their effects. This systematic review seeks to address these gaps by synthesizing empirical evidence and theoretical insights on how different leadership styles impact employee engagement and job satisfaction, highlighting mediators, moderators, and contextual nuances (Dallabona et al., 2024).

Objectives of the Review

The primary objective of this review is to critically analyze and synthesize scholarly literature about the influence of various leadership styles on employee engagement and job satisfaction. By delving into this intersection, the review aims to clarify which leadership behaviors most effectively foster positive employee outcomes. Furthermore, it seeks to identify and discuss the mediating psychological and organizational processes, such as job satisfaction, psychological empowerment, and organizational culture, that facilitate or explain this relationship.

In addition to mediators, the review highlights the role of moderating variables like human resource management (HRM) practices, perceived organizational politics, and sector-specific or cultural contexts that shape leadership effectiveness. Understanding these factors is crucial for tailoring leadership development interventions and optimizing employee outcomes in diverse organizational settings.

Through a systematic literature approach, this study compiles empirical findings and theoretical models to provide an integrated perspective, emphasizing the nuanced and multifaceted nature of leadership's effects on engagement and satisfaction. The findings are intended to guide both researchers in addressing existing gaps and practitioners aiming to implement evidence-based leadership strategies. Abhishake Reddy Onteddu, Rahul Reddy Bandhela, Ram Mohan Reddy Kundavaram (2024). Enhancing E-Commerce Product Recommendations through Data Engineering and Machine Learning. ES 2024, 20 (1), 171-183. [https://doi.org/10.69889/vqgz857.\(2024\)](https://doi.org/10.69889/vqgz857.(2024))

Methodological Approach

This review employs a systematic literature review methodology, leveraging rigorous frameworks such as the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) to ensure transparency, replicability, and comprehensiveness in article selection and analysis. The approach includes bibliometric techniques to map the intellectual structure and trends within the leadership literature, focusing on employee engagement and satisfaction. The database selection emphasizes peer-reviewed academic journals indexed in recognized repositories such as Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar. Literature published within a recent time frame, broadly from 2020 onwards, was considered to capture contemporary developments in leadership theories and empirical research. Inclusion criteria limited selection to studies explicitly investigating leadership styles (transformational, transactional, servant, ethical, autocratic, laissez-faire, among others) and examining their effects on employee engagement, job satisfaction, or related motivational outcomes. Exclusion criteria filtered works not focused on these variables or those lacking empirical or robust

theoretical grounding. This refined scope ensures the relevancy and depth of insights generated for this review.

THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS OF LEADERSHIP STYLES

Transformational Leadership Theory

Transformational leadership is characterized by leaders who inspire, motivate, and intellectually stimulate their followers by articulating a compelling vision and fostering an environment of trust and commitment. Key features include idealized influence (serving as a role model), inspirational motivation (painting an appealing future), intellectual stimulation (encouraging creativity), and individualized consideration (attending to follower needs). This style has been widely associated with enhancing employee motivation and organizational commitment through the activation of positive psychological processes (Lui et al., 2023). Psychologically, transformational leaders foster social exchange relationships where followers perceive trust and mutual obligation, leading to enhanced emotional attachment to the organization. Empowerment mechanisms, such as increasing autonomy and access to resources, are core to this leadership approach, enabling employees to feel efficacious and intrinsically motivated. Transformational leadership thus aligns well with theories of intrinsic motivation and self-determination, offering pathways by which leaders can galvanize followers toward higher engagement levels and satisfaction (Irianti et al., 2024; Ren, 2025).

Transactional Leadership Framework

Transactional leadership is principally concerned with clarifying roles, setting expectations, and administering contingent rewards or corrective actions contingent on performance. Core aspects include management by exception (active or passive) and contingent reward systems. Unlike transformational leadership, transactional leadership operates within established routines and guidelines, emphasizing performance monitoring and control. Empirically, transactional leadership has demonstrated effectiveness in enhancing job satisfaction and performance in relatively stable organizational environments where clarity and consistency are valued. However, it is often regarded as less effective in dynamic or innovative contexts due to its limited emphasis on motivation beyond extrinsic rewards. This approach may engender satisfaction by reducing ambiguity and reinforcing clear performance-reward linkages, but may not deeply engage or inspire employees (Zanabazar et al., 2023; Irianti et al., 2024; Lui et al., 2023).

Servant and Ethical Leadership Perspectives

Servant leadership presents a morally grounded approach where leaders prioritize followers' needs and development above self-interest, promoting a culture of trust, empathy, and stewardship. Ethical leadership shares this orientation but centers explicitly on adherence to ethical standards and corporate social responsibility (CSR). Both styles contribute to fostering positive organizational climates. Research indicates that servant and ethical leaders enhance organizational trust and psychological well-being by cultivating fairness, transparency, and supportive environments. Their commitment to ethical practices is linked with increased employee engagement and satisfaction through the promotion of meaningful work experiences and alignment of personal and organizational values. CSR initiatives, often championed by ethical leaders, further reinforce employee pride and identification with the organization, translating into heightened engagement (Asghar & Zafar, 2025; Setyaningrum et al., 2020; Zhu, 2025).

LEADERSHIP STYLES AND EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT

Transformational Leadership and Engagement

Transformational leadership is robustly associated with enhanced employee engagement across diverse sectors. Empirical studies highlight that transformational behaviors invigorate employees' emotional and cognitive connection to their work, reflected in greater vigor, dedication, and absorption. The influence of transformational leadership on engagement operates through mediators such as psychological empowerment, which enhances employees' sense of control and competence, and organizational culture, which shapes shared values and norms supportive of engagement. Moreover, engagement outcomes under transformational leadership demonstrate notable variability depending on contextual factors such as industry, national culture, and organizational maturity. For example, service industries and knowledge-intensive sectors benefit substantially from leaders' inspirational qualities, while manufacturing contexts reflect mixed responses conditioned by task routineness (Sana et al., 2024; Lui et al., 2023; Nawaz et al., 2024).

Transactional and Autocratic Leadership Effects

Transactional leadership exhibits a moderate yet positive influence on employee engagement by reinforcing clear expectations and structured reward systems. While it may not evoke the emotional commitment characteristic of transformational leadership, transactional behaviors can motivate engagement through predictability and fairness in exchanges. Conversely, autocratic leadership generally correlates negatively or ambiguously with engagement. Its controlling and directive nature may suppress autonomy and intrinsic motivation, leading to disengagement or superficial compliance. However, contextual contingencies such as crises or hierarchical cultures may modulate this effect, where autocratic leaders provide needed clarity and rapid decision-making, temporarily sustaining engagement (Lui et al., 2023; Benagin & Hassan, 2025; Nasra & Naeem, 2023).

Negative and Passive Leadership Styles

Leadership styles marked by passivity or excessive control, notably laissez-faire leadership and micromanagement, largely impair employee engagement. Laissez-faire leadership, characterized by a lack of involvement or direction, fosters role ambiguity and employee frustration, thereby diminishing motivation and discretionary effort. Micromanagement undermines autonomy and increases stress, adversely affecting well-being and performance. Nonetheless, emerging evidence posits that micromanagement may play a limited and context-dependent positive role, such as providing necessary structure for novice employees or in process-driven, high-stakes environments. Despite these exceptions, the consensus favors adaptive leadership balancing control and autonomy to optimize engagement (Kamal et al., 2024; Jr., 2025; P. Koeswayo, 2024).

LEADERSHIP STYLES AND EMPLOYEE JOB SATISFACTION

Positive Leadership Styles Influencing Satisfaction

Leadership styles that emphasize support, ethical conduct, and employee development consistently relate positively to job satisfaction. Transformational, servant, authentic, and ethical leadership foster trust, empowerment, and a psychologically safe work environment conducive to satisfaction. Cross-cultural studies reinforce these findings, demonstrating that supportive leadership predicts favorable affective responses across diverse organizational and national contexts. Such leadership behaviors reduce job strain and improve workplace relationships, contributing to employees' intrinsic satisfaction with their roles. Empowerment, recognition, and alignment with organizational

values mediated by these leadership styles yield sustained satisfaction and reduce turnover intentions (Muttalib & Danish, 2023; Dallabona et al., 2024).

The Role of Transactional Leadership in Job Satisfaction

Transactional leadership's focus on contingent rewards and clear expectations supports job satisfaction by providing tangible incentives and reducing role ambiguity. However, its reliance on extrinsic motivators may limit intrinsic satisfaction and dampen innovation-driven motivation. Variations in effectiveness emerge across sectors, with transactional leadership performing better in structured environments such as manufacturing and banking, where job roles are standardized (Eliza Mwakasangula, 2021; M. Hasim, 2024; Ren, 2025).

Detrimental Effects of Autocratic and Laissez-Faire Styles

Autocratic leadership correlates negatively with job satisfaction, primarily due to its reduction of employee autonomy, recognition, and communication efficacy. These deficits generate dissatisfaction, increase stress, and hinder motivation. Laissez-faire leadership similarly leads to dissatisfaction via role ambiguity and lack of guidance. Mitigating adverse effects includes promoting participative decision-making and clarifying roles, thereby reducing the absence of direction associated with laissez-faire approaches (Kamal et al., 2024; Nasra & Naeem, 2023; Sam et al., 2024).

MEDIATING AND MODERATING VARIABLES IN LEADERSHIP

Role of Job Satisfaction as a Mediator

Job satisfaction plays a crucial mediating role in connecting leadership styles to employee engagement and psychological well-being. Studies employing structural equation modeling confirm that leadership styles impact engagement indirectly through their effect on job satisfaction. Satisfaction acts as a psychological state reflecting fulfillment of employee needs, which motivates higher levels of engagement and well-being. This mediation underscores the importance of addressing satisfaction in leadership development programs to maximize engagement outcomes (Gonu et al., 2025; Nawaz et al., 2024; Nanjundeswaraswamy, 2021).

Psychological Empowerment and Organizational Culture

Leadership's influence is significantly channeled through employees' psychological empowerment, which entails perceived meaning, competence, self-determination, and impact at work. Transformational and servant leaders promote empowerment by delegating authority and encouraging innovation, resulting in elevated engagement and job satisfaction. Organizational culture acts as a critical moderator by either reinforcing or attenuating these effects. Cultures that are supportive, adaptive, and innovation-oriented synergize with positive leadership to boost employee outcomes. Conversely, rigid, hierarchical cultures may dampen these benefits. Notably, in healthcare and service settings, the cultural climate strongly interacts with leadership effectiveness, illustrating domain specificity (M. Hasim, 2024; Nawaz et al., 2024; Muhammad Usman Khan, 2024).

Moderating Effects of HR Practices and Perceived Organizational Politics

Human resource practices, particularly agile and flexible HRM, moderate leadership effectiveness in enhancing employee engagement and satisfaction. Leadership, coupled with adaptable HR policies, fosters resilience and responsiveness to employee needs, optimizing work outcomes. Organizational

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politics, often perceived negatively, can mediate or moderate leadership-outcome relationships by influencing trust and fairness perceptions. Transformational leadership may buffer the adverse effects of politics by promoting transparent communication and inclusive decision-making, whereas autocratic leadership often exacerbates political perceptions, reducing satisfaction and engagement (Hussein et al., 2024; Nawaz et al., 2024; P. Koeswayo, 2024).

SECTORAL CONTEXTUALIZATION OF LEADERSHIP

Public vs Private Sector Differences

Leadership styles manifest differential effects in public and private sectors due to variations in organizational cultures, structures, and stakeholder pressures. Public sector entities often face bureaucratic constraints and politicization, dampening the effectiveness of participative and transformational leadership. Employee engagement and satisfaction thus require tailored leadership approaches, balancing hierarchical norms with employee-centric practices. Studies in government and public organizations highlight challenges in implementing adaptive leadership owing to institutional inertia and cultural rigidity. Conversely, private sector firms demonstrate more pronounced positive effects from transformational and servant leadership, reflecting more flexible structures and competitive pressures (Ahuchogu et al., 2024; Majrashi, 2022; Sharma & Verma, 2024).

In the public sector, studies such as Fekadu (2021) and Karunakaran (2022) found that transformational leadership positively influences employee job satisfaction, performance, and motivation, but transactional leadership has a relatively weaker effect. Public sector institutions, such as Ethio Telecom and Mizan-Aman City Administration, benefit from a leadership approach that is more people-oriented, with transformational leadership fostering job satisfaction and organizational commitment. On the other hand, private sector studies, like Feleke (2017) and Gonche (2020), show a stronger impact of transactional and transformational leadership on job satisfaction, especially in companies like Heineken Ethiopia and the Ministry of Revenue. While both sectors benefit from transformational leadership, private sector employees seem to experience slightly more pronounced effects from transactional leadership, highlighting differences in leadership expectations and organizational culture between the two sectors.

Leadership in Higher Education and Nonprofit Sectors

Higher education and nonprofit sectors feature unique leadership challenges, including the necessity for shared governance and attention to emotional and motivational factors such as joy and purpose. Transformational and servant leadership dominate as effective styles, aligning with the sectors' emphasis on development and community orientation. Empirical research documents that emotional aspects, such as joy in leadership, significantly enhance employee outcomes in nonprofit organizations, while servant leadership development programs in educational institutions improve engagement and institutional performance despite governance hurdles (Da Bou et al., 2024; Dawit Negussie, 2023; Katie McIntyre, 2024).

In the higher education sector, studies such as Zeleke (2020) and Marga (2020) demonstrate that transformational leadership is linked to higher levels of academic staff job satisfaction, with participative and democratic leadership styles also showing positive effects. In Jimma University, transformational leadership encourages a productive academic environment, leading to greater engagement and satisfaction among faculty members. Similarly, in the nonprofit sector, such as

Marga's (2020) research at Jimma University, leadership that focuses on collaboration, communication, and support positively influences organizational commitment, with job satisfaction acting as a mediator. Leadership in higher education and nonprofit sectors emphasizes creating supportive environments where transformational leadership fosters an atmosphere of trust and motivation, ultimately leading to better job satisfaction.

Cross-Cultural Perspectives and Regional Focus

Cultural and regional contexts critically influence leadership outcomes. Studies from Southeast Asia and African contexts reveal that leadership effectiveness varies with local norms, economic conditions, and organizational maturity. For instance, green transformational leadership shows promise in Southeast Asia by promoting pro-environmental behaviors, though research in Africa remains sparse, pointing to a need for further inquiry. In developing economies, adaptive and hybrid leadership styles responsive to resource and institutional constraints enhance employee engagement and performance. The call for more regionally nuanced research emerges repeatedly, urging scholars to address these underexplored contexts for more generalizable and culturally relevant theories (Gonu et al., 2025; Mphaluwa et al., 2025; Tabithah & Njoroge, 2025).

Research with a cross-cultural perspective emphasizes the varying impacts of leadership styles across different regions of Ethiopia. Awlachew (2019) and Kebede & Demeke (2017) demonstrate how cultural factors in the Ethiopian context affect the perceived effectiveness of leadership styles, with transformational leadership showing universal benefits in fostering engagement and satisfaction across both public and private sectors. Regional differences also appear to play a role, as seen in studies focusing on the Amhara region (Relationship between leadership style and job satisfaction in Amhara, 2022) and Southern Ethiopia (Karunakaran, 2022). These studies suggest that leadership styles must be adapted to specific regional and cultural contexts to be most effective, underlining the importance of cross-cultural understanding in leadership practices, especially in a diverse country like Ethiopia, where regional dynamics influence leadership effectiveness and employee satisfaction.

SPECIFIC LEADERSHIP STYLES: DETAILED IMPACT ANALYSES

Transformational Leadership: Deep Dive

Transformational leadership facilitates motivation and engagement by articulating vision and fostering innovation. Empirical evidence underscores its role in driving organizational growth through knowledge sharing, strategic adaptability, and employee empowerment. Research across industries notes that transformational leaders inspire proactive behaviors and sustain high-level performance, particularly when aligned with innovative and sustainability goals. Recent studies integrate digital transformation challenges, emphasizing transformational leaders' capacity to navigate technological change and continual learning, thereby sustaining dynamic engagement and organizational effectiveness (Sam et al., 2024; Rusilowati et al., 2025).

Servant Leadership: Commitment and Trust Building

Servant leadership emphasizes followers' needs, nurturing trust and commitment. Meta-analyses reveal its strong association with organizational citizenship behaviors and longer-term employee retention. In sectors like safety-critical aviation and healthcare, servant leaders promote collaboration and psychological safety essential for high reliability. Though conceptual clarity and measurement scales for servant leadership continue evolving, its unique focus on ethical

stewardship and follower well-being positions it as an influential approach for fostering employee engagement (Canavesi & Minelli, 2021; Berliandari et al., 2024).

Ethical and Authentic Leadership Roles

Ethical and authentic leadership intertwine moral dimensions with leadership practice, underscoring transparency, integrity, and ethical accountability. These styles build psychological safety and nurture positive organizational climates, enhancing employee well-being and job satisfaction. Practical applications advocate embedding ethical principles within leadership development and linking CSR initiatives directly to leadership behavior, fostering both ethical cultures and employee engagement. Cross-sectoral examples highlight authentic leadership's effectiveness in complex, high-stress environments (Asghar & Zafar, 2025; Zhu, 2025).

THE DARK SIDE AND NEGATIVE LEADERSHIP EFFECTS

Autocratic and Despotic Leadership Consequences

Autocratic and despotic leadership styles are linked to decreased employee satisfaction, autonomy, and heightened perceptions of organizational politics and turnover intentions. Studies emphasize the detrimental effects of controlling and oppressive leadership, which erode trust and engagement. The prevalence of despotic leadership, particularly in bureaucratic or politically fraught organizations, calls for strategic interventions to curtail its influence and promote more participative leadership cultures (Mughal et al., 2023; Nasra & Naeem, 2023).

Micromanagement and Laissez-Faire Leadership Effects

Micromanagement typically reduces employee autonomy and motivation, leading to stress and turnover. However, it may prove beneficial in specific contexts such as high-pressure or procedural tasks requiring close oversight. Laissez-faire leadership's general association with negative outcomes due to disengagement and role confusion is moderated by contexts involving highly skilled, autonomous employees who might benefit from minimal intervention. Adaptive leadership approaches, balancing control and autonomy, offer pathways to mitigate the negative impacts of these styles (Kamal et al., 2024; Jr., 2025).

Perception of Politics and Organizational Climate

Leadership styles influence how employees perceive organizational politics, which in turn affects engagement and satisfaction. High perceived politics correlate with reduced trust and motivation. Leadership that fosters transparency and ethical climates can mitigate these perceptions, whereas authoritarian or despotic styles exacerbate them. Managing politics-related challenges through leadership development is critical for sustaining employee engagement in complex organizational environments (Hussein et al., 2024; Mughal et al., 2023).

INTEGRATIVE MODELS AND RESEARCH GAPS

Proposed Conceptual Frameworks

Recent conceptualizations integrate leadership styles with mediating variables such as job satisfaction, psychological empowerment, and moderators, including organizational culture and HRM practices. Theoretical lenses like Social Identity Theory and Leader-Member Exchange provide foundations for understanding how leadership behaviors foster follower identification and

reciprocal engagement, ultimately influencing organizational outcomes. Such integrative models offer structured pathways for future research and practical application, encouraging holistic perspectives in leadership studies (Haque et al., 2021; Nawaz et al., 2024; Purnomo et al., 2025).

Identified Research Gaps

Despite advances, significant gaps remain. There is a scarcity of longitudinal and experimental studies to establish causality and dynamics over time. Certain leadership approaches, such as green transformational and inclusive leadership, remain underexplored. Moreover, a dearth of research in regions like Africa and developing economies limits the global generalizability of findings. Addressing these gaps demands methodological diversification and greater regional inclusion to enrich leadership theory and practice (Mphaluwa et al., 2025; Richard Kwaku Abudetse, 2025; Tabithah & Njoroge, 2025).

Future Research Directions

Future investigations should incorporate digital transformation and sustainability frameworks, recognizing evolving organizational complexities. Hybrid and adaptive leadership models that respond to shifting employee and environmental needs warrant further exploration. Applying qualitative and mixed-method approaches will also deepen understanding of the nuanced interpersonal and cultural processes inherent in leadership and employee outcomes.

CONCLUSION

Comprehensive evidence indicates that transformational and servant leadership styles exert the strongest positive effects on employee engagement and job satisfaction. These effects are frequently mediated by job satisfaction and psychological empowerment, which facilitate intrinsic motivation and organizational commitment. In contrast, autocratic, laissez-faire, and despotic leadership styles generally produce negative employee outcomes by undermining autonomy, trust, and motivation.

Organizations should prioritize leadership development programs that emphasize value-based, ethical, and supportive leadership behaviors. Tailoring leadership approaches to organizational culture, sectoral contexts, and employee characteristics enhances effectiveness. Additionally, fostering a healthy organizational culture and integrating agile HRM practices creates enabling environments where leadership impact is maximized.

Final Remarks and Recommendations

Scholars are encouraged to adopt rigorous, systematic approaches when examining leadership and employee outcomes to overcome existing fragmentation in the literature. Practitioners should embrace adaptive and inclusive leadership paradigms, which hold promise for sustainable improvements in employee engagement, satisfaction, and organizational success.

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