

THE ROLE OF TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP IN ENHANCING EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT IN THE HYBRID WORK ERA

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Article History

Received : July 11th 2025

Revised : July 12th 2025

Accepted : July 13th 2025

Available Online

July 15th 2025

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Cite This Article:

Fera Riske Anggita. (2025).
THE ROLE OF
TRANSFORMATIONAL
LEADERSHIP IN ENHANCING
EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT IN
THE HYBRID WORK
ERA. *International Journal
Management and
Economic*, 4(2).
<https://doi.org/10.56127/ijme.v4i2.2161>

DOI:

<https://doi.org/10.56127/ijme.v4i2.2161>

Abstract: This study aims to examine the influence of transformational leadership on employee engagement within the context of hybrid work environments. As organizations adopt flexible work models combining remote and on-site arrangements, sustaining employee motivation and involvement has become increasingly challenging. A quantitative explanatory research method was employed, using survey data collected from 102 employees working under hybrid models. The instruments used included a transformational leadership scale (MLQ) and the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES), measured through a 5-point Likert scale. Data analysis was conducted using linear regression and quadrant mapping. The results show that transformational leadership has a positive and significant effect on employee engagement ($R^2 = 0.425$; $p < 0.001$). Furthermore, quadrant analysis revealed that most respondents were classified as "Engaged Hybrid Teams," characterized by high leadership and engagement. However, the presence of "Leadership-Driven but Unengaged Teams" suggests that strong leadership must be complemented by adaptive strategies tailored to hybrid work challenges. This study underscores the critical role of leadership style in promoting engagement and offers practical implications for HR and organizational development in the post-pandemic workplace.

Keywords: Transformational Leadership, Employee Engagement, Hybrid Work, Organizational Behavior, Leadership Effectiveness

1. INTRODUCTION

The rise of digital transformation and the global impact of the COVID-19 pandemic have accelerated the adoption of hybrid work models across many organizations. This model, which combines remote and on-site work, offers greater flexibility and efficiency. However, it also introduces new challenges in managing employee performance and maintaining engagement. One of the major concerns for leaders is how to ensure that employees remain motivated, emotionally connected, and productive despite reduced physical interaction (Waizenegger et al., 2020). In such a dynamic environment, adaptive leadership strategies that prioritize human development are essential.

One effective leadership style that has gained significant attention is transformational leadership. Transformational leaders inspire, motivate, and support their employees through individualized attention, intellectual stimulation, and a compelling vision. This style fosters trust, creativity, and commitment—elements that are particularly valuable in hybrid work settings, where employees may feel isolated or disengaged without direct oversight (Bass & Avolio, 1994). Through transformational behaviors, leaders can build strong interpersonal connections that transcend physical distance.

Employee engagement has become a critical factor in sustaining organizational performance in the modern workplace. Engaged employees demonstrate higher levels of enthusiasm, emotional attachment, and discretionary effort, which in turn drive innovation, job satisfaction, and retention (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). In hybrid environments, however, engagement is more difficult to maintain due to digital fatigue, reduced face-to-face communication, and the challenge of building team cohesion.

Numerous studies have emphasized the strong correlation between leadership style and employee engagement. Transformational leadership, in particular, has been associated with improved employee morale, motivation, and job involvement. Leaders who demonstrate empathy, provide a clear vision, and foster individual development are better equipped to build a psychologically safe and inspiring work environment—even when teams are geographically dispersed (Breevaart et al., 2014). Therefore, understanding the influence of transformational leadership in the context of hybrid work is not only timely but also necessary.

Based on this background, the present study aims to examine the role of transformational leadership in enhancing employee engagement in the hybrid work era. Specifically, this study investigates whether transformational leadership practices can positively influence employees' psychological and behavioral engagement in flexible work settings. To guide the empirical analysis, the following research hypothesis is proposed:

H1: Transformational leadership has a positive and significant effect on employee engagement in the hybrid work environment.

H0: Transformational leadership has no significant effect on employee engagement in the hybrid work environment.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

2.1 Research Approach and Type

This study adopts a quantitative explanatory approach using a survey method. The objective is to examine the causal relationship between transformational leadership and employee engagement in the context of hybrid work environments. The study focuses on how leadership style influences employee engagement levels, especially under the flexibility and challenges introduced by remote and on-site working conditions.

2.2 Population and Sample

1. Population: Employees working in organizations that implement hybrid work models (remote + office-based).
2. Sample: Selected using purposive sampling with the following criteria:
 - a) Minimum of 6 months working under a hybrid model,
 - b) Has a direct supervisor or manager,
 - c) Willing to complete the research questionnaire.
3. Sample Size: A minimum of 100 respondents to support regression analysis or Structural Equation Modeling (SEM), if applicable.

2.3 Data Collection Technique

Data will be collected through a structured questionnaire divided into three sections:

1. Demographic Information: Gender, age, job title, and length of service.
2. Transformational Leadership Scale: Based on the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) by Bass & Avolio (1994).
3. Employee Engagement Scale: Adapted from the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES) by Schaufeli & Bakker (2004).

All statements will use a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree".

2.4 Data Analysis Technique

1. Validity and reliability tests will be conducted on the instrument prior to analysis.
2. Linear regression analysis will be used to test the influence of transformational leadership on employee engagement.
3. Results will also be visually interpreted using a quadrant model to categorize team dynamics based on combined leadership and engagement scores.

2.5 Visual Framework: Team Typology in Hybrid Context



Figure 1. Team Categories Based on Leadership and Engagement

This matrix categorizes teams into four types based on the intersection of leadership strength and employee engagement level:

1. Motivated but Unled Teams
Teams are motivated despite lacking strong leadership.
2. Engaged Hybrid Teams
High leadership fosters highly engaged teams — ideal hybrid condition.
3. Disengaged and Unled Teams
Teams lack both leadership and engagement, posing risks of low performance and high turnover.
4. Leadership-Driven but Unengaged Teams
Strong leadership exists but fails to connect with or engage the team.

This quadrant will be used to classify and visualize respondents based on their average scores of perceived leadership and engagement, providing a deeper interpretation of leadership effectiveness in hybrid teams.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Respondent Demographics

A total of 102 valid responses were collected from employees working under hybrid work models in various organizations. The demographic distribution is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Respondent Profile

| Demographic Variable | Category | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|----------------------|-------------|-----------|----------------|
| Gender | Male | 58 | 56.9% |
| | Female | 44 | 43.1% |
| Age | 21–30 years | 34 | 33.3% |
| | 31–40 years | 50 | 49.0% |
| | > 40 years | 18 | 17.6% |
| Working Duration | < 1 year | 15 | 14.7% |
| | 1–3 years | 44 | 43.1% |
| | > 3 years | 43 | 42.2% |

3.2 Descriptive Statistics

Table 2. shows the mean scores of each dimension in transformational leadership and employee engagement.

Table 2. Descriptive Summary

| Variable | Dimension | Mean | Std. Dev |
|-----------------------------|--------------------------|------|----------|
| Transformational Leadership | Idealized Influence | 4.12 | 0.51 |
| | Inspirational Motivation | 4.26 | 0.47 |

| Variable | Dimension | Mean | Std. Dev |
|---------------------|------------------------------|------|----------|
| Employee Engagement | Intellectual Stimulation | 4.03 | 0.58 |
| | Individualized Consideration | 4.15 | 0.49 |
| | Vigor | 4.08 | 0.52 |
| | Dedication | 4.21 | 0.44 |
| | Absorption | 4.05 | 0.55 |

3.3 Hypothesis Testing

To test the hypothesis, a simple linear regression was conducted. The model summary is presented below.

Table 3. Regression Analysis Summary

| Model | R | R ² | F | Sig. (p) |
|---|-------|----------------|--------|----------|
| Transformational Leadership → Employee Engagement | 0.652 | 0.425 | 74.582 | 0.000 |

Interpretation: The p-value < 0.05 indicates that transformational leadership significantly affects employee engagement. R² = 0.425 means 42.5% of the variation in engagement is explained by leadership.

3.4 Team Quadrant Mapping

Based on average scores of transformational leadership and employee engagement, teams were categorized into four types Figure 1 using the quadrant model introduced earlier.

Table 4. Distribution of Respondents by Quadrant

| Quadrant | Criteria | Frequency | Percentage |
|---|-----------------------------|-----------|------------|
| Quadrant 1: Motivated but Unled Teams | High Engagement, Leadership | Low 12 | 11.8% |
| Quadrant 2: Engaged Hybrid Teams | High Engagement, Leadership | High 59 | 57.8% |
| Quadrant 3: Disengaged and Unled Teams | Low Engagement, Leadership | Low 9 | 8.8% |
| Quadrant 4: Leadership-Driven but Unengaged Teams | Low Engagement, Leadership | High 22 | 21.6% |

Insight: The majority of teams fall into Quadrant 2 (Engaged Hybrid Teams), indicating that high transformational leadership is associated with high engagement. However, the presence of Quadrant 4 cases shows that leadership alone may not be sufficient without considering employee needs.

4. Discussion

The findings confirm previous research (Bass & Avolio, 1994; Breevaart et al., 2014) that transformational leadership positively influences employee engagement. Leaders who articulate a clear vision, encourage innovation, and provide individualized support help employees feel more involved and energized.

In the hybrid work era, maintaining visibility, emotional connection, and personalized communication becomes even more critical. The presence of Quadrant 4 teams, where leadership is high but engagement is low, suggests that over-reliance on leadership style without adapting to remote/hybrid-specific challenges (e.g., digital fatigue, lack of recognition) may reduce effectiveness.

Thus, organizations must complement strong leadership with structural supports, such as clear communication channels, recognition systems, and well-being initiatives tailored to hybrid environments.

5. CONCLUSION

5.1 Conclusion

Based on the findings and analysis conducted in this study, several conclusions can be drawn:

1. Transformational leadership has a significant and positive effect on employee engagement in hybrid work environments. Employees who perceive their leaders as inspiring, supportive, and intellectually stimulating tend to be more enthusiastic, dedicated, and immersed in their work.
2. The quadrant analysis revealed that the majority of teams are categorized as Engaged Hybrid Teams (high leadership and high engagement), confirming the alignment between strong transformational leadership and employee motivation in a flexible work setting.
3. However, the existence of Leadership-Driven but Unengaged Teams suggests that leadership alone is not always sufficient. Engagement also requires active feedback mechanisms, individual recognition, and adaptation to hybrid work challenges.

5.2 Recommendations

1. For Leaders:
Leaders should be trained to not only inspire and support but also adapt their communication and management style to remote and hybrid settings—e.g., regular one-on-one check-ins, digital recognition tools, and feedback loops.
2. For HR and Management Teams:
Organizations should integrate leadership development programs with employee engagement strategies, especially tailored for hybrid work. These may include virtual team-building activities, flexible performance evaluations, and well-being support.
3. For Future Research:
Further studies can explore moderating variables such as organizational culture, psychological safety, or digital competency to better understand what enhances or weakens the link between leadership and engagement.

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