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Research Article

The effect of leadership style on Employee job satisfaction: The mediating role of employee engagement

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ABSTRACT:
Leadership style plays a significant role in shaping employees' attitudes, engagement, and job satisfaction within organisations. This study critically reviews the relationship between different leadership styles and employee job satisfaction, with particular emphasis on employee engagement as a mediating factor. The study adopts a qualitative secondary research approach and analyses findings from peer-reviewed journal articles, academic books, and other scholarly sources. The literature focuses on transformational, transactional, servant, democratic, and autocratic leadership styles and their relationships with employee engagement and job satisfaction. The findings indicate that leadership behaviours characterised by motivation, support, recognition, participation, communication, and employee development are generally associated with higher levels of employee engagement and job satisfaction. Transformational, servant, and democratic leadership approaches are discussed in relation to supportive and participative workplace experiences, while transactional leadership is associated with clear expectations and performance-based rewards. The reviewed literature further indicates that employee engagement can function as an important mediating mechanism through which leadership influences job satisfaction. Engaged employees demonstrate greater vigour, dedication, and absorption in their work, which may contribute to more positive job experiences. However, the effectiveness of leadership styles varies according to organisational culture, workplace conditions, employee expectations, and situational factors. The study concludes that understanding employee engagement as a link between leadership style and job satisfaction can provide useful insights for organisations and human resource management practices.
Keywords: Leadership Style; Employee Engagement; Job Satisfaction; Transformational Leadership; Servant Leadership; Transactional Leadership; Human Resource Management.

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Leadership is a key factor in a successful modern organisation. Good leaders enable their staff to work more effectively, to be more motivated and to have a positive attitude when they are working. The behaviour of leaders can impact employee commitment, satisfaction and overall employee experience (Zidayatullah *et al.,* 2025). Thus, it is crucial to grasp leadership styles to enhance employees' outcomes.

Leadership style is the manner in which a leader leads and manages his/her employees. Style can make a difference in the workplace. Transformational leaders are different from transactional leaders because transformational leaders enable an employee to become more capable and to grow, while transactional leaders are about rewards, goals and performance (Hajiali *et al.,* 2022). The difference between autocratic and democratic leadership and servant leadership is that, in the former, employees are not involved in decision-making.

This study has an independent variable, namely leadership style, that has the potential to influence employee attitudes and behaviour (Donkor *et al.*, 2021). The response variable is the Job satisfaction of employees, which is the employees' general attitude toward his/her job. Satisfaction can be

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impacted by things like recognition, support, rewards, autonomy and workplace conditions.

In this research, the mediator variable is employee engagement. It is about people's attitudes and feelings toward a job (Ilham, 2018). An engaged employee has more energy, is more committed and is more involved. There are three key dimensions of employee engagement: vigour, dedication, and absorption. Here are some of the reasons that can explain how leadership style can affect employee job satisfaction.

1.2 Research Problem

While numerous studies have focused on the connection between leadership style and employee job satisfaction, understanding the process by which leadership affects job satisfaction is still needed (Muttalib *et al.,* 2023). Leadership not only has a direct impact on job satisfaction, but it may also impact job satisfaction indirectly through improving employee engagement (Ohemeng *et al.*, 2018). Therefore, the aim of this study is to comprehend the "how" and "why" of the relationship between leadership style and job satisfaction of employees, with employee engagement as a mediator.

Research question:

How and why is there a relationship between leadership style and employees' job satisfaction, and what is the role of employee engagement in this relationship?

1.3 Research Aim

The aim of this study is to critically review the relationship between leadership style and employee job satisfaction, with a particular emphasis on employee engagement as a mediator, using secondary research analysis.

1.4 Research Objectives

The aim of the research is:

- To investigate the relationship between different types of leadership and employee satisfaction.
- To do a study the connection between leadership styles and employee engagement.
- To analyse the relationship between employee engagement and employee satisfaction.
- To find out whether employee engagement is a mediator between leadership style and employee job satisfaction.
- To understand the role of good leadership in organisations.

1.5 Research Questions

In this research, the following questions are asked:

1. What are the effects of various leadership styles on employee satisfaction?
2. How does the style of leadership affect the level of employee engagement?
3. What is the link between employee engagement and employee job satisfaction?
4. What's the role of employee engagement in the relationship between employee job satisfaction and leadership style?

1.6 Significance of the Study

The importance of this study is that it can help organisations understand how the practice of leadership can enhance employee satisfaction and retention. Effective environments for employees to be supported and feel valued can be created by good leadership.

This study will prove to be useful for HRM in training their leaders, employee engagement strategies, and more (Biloa, 2023). The insights gained can help improve employee experience and employee/manager relationships.

Academically, this study contributes to the pool of knowledge by informing the relationship between leadership style and employee engagement and job satisfaction (Alheet *et al.*, 2021). It provides more insight into how employee engagement can serve as a "bridge between leadership behaviours and employee satisfaction.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Foundation of Leadership Styles

Leadership Style is the style in which the leader leads, supports and manages the employees. Leadership styles affect attitudes towards the workplace, as well as the motivation and behaviours of the employees. This study includes transformational, transactional and servant leadership styles, as these leadership styles are often linked to employee engagement and job satisfaction.

Transformational leadership is a matter of energising employees and helping them to achieve their personal and group goals. Transformational leaders set vision, foster creativity and develop people (Chan, 2019). They motivate their employees to perceive themselves as valued and included in the workplace. According to Cummings et al. (2018), it is a leadership style that can contribute to improving the engagement levels of employees because they feel like they have a degree of involvement and commitment. It can also help to increase the satisfaction of employees, because they feel supported and recognised as well as given the chance to develop.

The theory behind transactional leadership is that there is a relationship between performance and rewards. Leaders with this style have clear expectations, keep track of workers' performance, and reward workers who meet their objectives. This is successful in an environment where workers need to be led and have a role. However, the focus of transactional leadership is just on performance in the short term, and not on the individual's growth. Therefore, it may be less successful in terms of its impact on employee engagement, as their motivation might be longer-term rewards and less on developing a good relationship with their jobs.

Servant Leadership is caring for the workers and their needs. According to Hajiali et al. (2022), servant leaders listen to their employees, direct them and create a positive work environment. This can promote relationships and trust between the employees and the leaders. Providing respect and an appropriate supportive relationship can help increase employee engagement and satisfaction in the workplace.

Each of these leadership styles have their own unique characteristics, but no one leadership style is good in all situations. Leadership may be one that impacts negatively or positively on the organisation depending on a range of factors such as organisational culture, employee expectations, and workplace conditions, to mention just a few. Therefore, choosing the appropriate way of leading for organisations has to be appropriate to their environment and employees.

2.2 Leadership Style and Employee Job Satisfaction

The concept of employee job satisfaction refers to the employee's attitudes towards their job. Depends on factors like recognition, reward, relationship with the managers, and autonomy and working conditions. As illustrated by Aboramadan and Dahleez (2020), leadership style should not be overlooked when it comes to moulding the experiences because, in direct contact with employees, this aspect directly affects the type of environment they are exposed to every day.

Supportive leadership behaviours promoting a sense of feeling valued and respected can help to increase job satisfaction. Having an open line of communication, recognising staff and providing staff with support from the leader can create a positive workplace. It's more likely to create a positive attitude among employees when they feel that their work and contribution are appreciated.

According to Specchia et al. (2021), the relationship between transformational leadership and job satisfaction can be attributed to transformational leadership's emphasis on employee motivation and development. For those who are working in a company that has a transformational leader, perhaps they can feel that their work is meaningful and that their personal development is important. This can help increase their satisfaction, because they receive encouragement and support from their bosses.

Decisions made with employees may also help increase job satisfaction through participation or even democratic leadership (Muttalib *et al.,* 2023). They can give employees a chance to give their thoughts and suggestions, which may make them feel like part of the team and responsible. This will

enable them to improve their relationship with the organisation.

But with autocratic domination, employee morale will drop as the manager does not take employee input when making decisions. This can have its advantages when immediate action is a must, but a high level of control can affect employee morale and their motivation levels.

The effectiveness of the leadership depends on the situation, however. There are some who may desire clear directions and structured leadership and others who may want independence and involvement. The reactions to the different leadership styles may depend on industry and/or employee characteristics and organisational culture (Eliyana and Ma'arif, 2019). Thus, organisations should take into account their particular situations when they are using leadership approaches.

Overall, there is a strong relationship between a leadership style and satisfaction with the job. But leadership does not necessarily have a direct impact on satisfaction. It can also impact satisfaction by way of employee engagement.

2.3 Leadership Style and Employee Engagement

Employee engagement is how much energy, involvement and emotion an employee has in the job. An engaged employee is prepared to invest his or her efforts in the job and is more dedicated to the organisation's objectives. Employee engagement can be divided into three key dimensions: vigour, dedication and absorption.

According to Lu et al. (2019), Vigour is the vitality and zeal of employees while they are at work. Dedication is the description of employees' enthusiasm and the importance of their job. Absorption represents becoming totally absorbed and involved in work activities.

Leadership style can have a strong impact on employee engagement, as leaders help to create employees' experience of work. Transformational leaders can improve staff engagement through meaningful goal setting and motivate development by learning new skills. As Nazim and Mahmood (2018) said, by understanding the purpose of their work and receiving support from leaders, they are more likely to be dedicated and motivated.

A second approach transactional leaders can take to engaging employees is by establishing clear expectations and rewards for their work. But having an opinion about what their work is, and having their effort rewarded, can help motivate workers to do their job. But since transactional leadership is primarily about results, it might not be as emotionally engaging as transformational or servant leadership.

By fostering trust and building strong relationships between leaders and employees, servant leadership can help to boost engagement. Because leaders care about the well-being of employees, it may be a way of getting them to feel more connected with their organisation and thus more willing to contribute.

The relationship between these shares – leadership and engagement – has been proven to be impactful, both on employee performance and, perhaps more importantly, on employees' feelings about their job (Azizah *et al*., 2020). Good leadership promotes a positive culture of staff development; staff are supported, motivated and engaged.

2.4 Employee Engagement and Job Satisfaction

Employee engagement and job satisfaction go hand-in-hand, yet they are not one and the same. Job satisfaction is a measure of employees' attitudes towards their jobs, and employee engagement is a measure of their active and emotional involvement in their job.

Happy employees are likely to be more engaged employees because they typically are more likely to see the meaning in what they do. That will surely create greater satisfaction and engagement among employees (Clack *et al.,* 2021).

For example, employees who have supportive managers and feel engaged with their jobs are more likely to be satisfied with their jobs. They have greater motivation, and they feel a sense of importance in what they do. This can cause their satisfaction as a whole.

However, there is a problem with satisfaction; that is, it does not always come with engagement. Even

though an employee may be quite "involved" in his or her work, he or she may not feel satisfied about other factors such as a lack of career progression, working conditions or treatment. Hence, organisations should increase the level of employee engagement as well as other factors which have an impact on the employee's satisfaction in the workplace.

Results indicated that there was a positive correlation between engagement and satisfaction, which means that engaged employees are likely to be more satisfied with their job experiences. According to Nanjundeswaraswamy (2023), that is why employee engagement has become a crucial aspect of comprehending employee attitudes.

2.5 Employee Engagement as a Mediator Between Leadership Style and Job Satisfaction

Employee engagement is included as a mediator between leadership style and job satisfaction because it is a factor that relates to employee attitudes in understanding how leadership influences employee attitudes. Leadership can both directly and indirectly influence job satisfaction through higher employee engagement.

Leadership creates a work climate that is conducive to supporting, respecting and motivating employees (Ilham, 2018). These positive behaviours of a leader are the things that make employees feel more connected to their work, making them more engaged. They will be more satisfied with their job the more they are engaged.

A good leader, for example, who is transformational, encourages and inspires staff for personal growth and therefore increases their satisfaction. However, according to Labrague et al. (2020), the reason might be that these leadership behaviours first increase employees' engagement. If they are more motivated and feel more valued, then the chances are they will enjoy their work and have a positive attitude towards it.

Similarly, by creating trust and support, the Servant Leader can help promote satisfaction. Known as the Employee Caring Index, this measure found that employees feel greater caring for their leaders and therefore, more engaged. This interaction can then increase their satisfaction due to their increased sense of belonging to their organisation.

The study of employee engagement, as a mediator, provides an understanding of the relationship between leadership style and job satisfaction. The literature reveals several studies that have explored the connection between leadership and satisfaction, but few studies have given an account of how this is connected (Shi *et al.,* 2024). Employee engagement is an important part of this process, as it shows that leadership can impact the creation of conditions that increase employees' engagement, and that this engagement can increase satisfaction.

Necessarily, it is important that there is a correlation between employee job satisfaction and leadership style via employee engagement. One of the first steps to fostering highly engaged employees is to have effective leadership; from this come greater job satisfaction and employee/patient experiences.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Approach

The type of this research is descriptive research, which is a type of qualitative secondary research, in finding the relationship between leadership style, employee engagement, and employee job satisfaction. The research itself could be considered secondary research because the research is not intended to collect new information or data from employees and organisations, but to analyse and understand the current knowledge.

The research used a critical literature approach to review and evaluate the findings of the previous research on leadership and employee outcomes. Thus, the researcher can observe the different perspectives in the academic area, ascertain the common aspects identified and understand the gap between previous studies (Abuhashesh *et al.,* 2019). In this study, literature is reviewed on the relationship between different types and dynamics of leadership, employee satisfaction and employee engagement's role in this relationship.

The use of a qualitative approach is suitable for the research as it is aimed at understanding behaviours, experiences and relationships between key concepts.

It makes it not only possible to study the quantitative relations between leadership style and its influence on the workers but to show the means and the reasons for the influence too (Mwesigwa *et al.,* 2020). In this research, the effect of employee engagement as a mediation on the relationship between leadership style and job satisfaction is analysed in order to understand the role of employee engagement between leadership and job satisfaction.

3.2 Data Collection Method

Secondary sources are used for the purpose of gathering data in this study. The study is based on secondary data, which were obtained from reputed academic databases like Google Scholar, ScienceDirect, Emerald Insight, SpringerLink, and ResearchGate. Materials such as papers, academic publications, resources, and information on research leadership, human resource management, organisational behaviour, employee engagement, and job satisfaction can be found on these websites.

This research has been based on some primary sources, which are different peer-reviewed journal articles, books and conference papers. Peer-reviewed journal articles for the reason that they render the findings of research that have actually been thought of by professionals in the academic field (Razak *et al.*, 2018). Academic books are also taken into account since they also give important theories and concepts of leadership styles and employee behaviour.

The literature collected focuses on the different types of leadership such as transformational, transactional, servant, democratic and autocratic leadership. Research on Employee engagement and Job satisfaction is also included, with a discussion on the relationship between employee engagement and job satisfaction.

3.3 Literature Selection Criteria

In this research, the literature that will be used is determined according to certain criteria. Studies are presented if they are in peer-reviewed journals or other known research publications. Research studies that will be targeted include those that have looked at this relationship between leadership style and employee outcomes, such as employee engagement and job satisfaction.

Research includes studies that are relevant to the topics of organisational behaviour, leadership and human resource management (Sabuhari, 2020). Literature selection is done based on the suitability of the literature for the purpose of the study and the relationship between the concepts of leadership style, employee engagement and job satisfaction.

Studies that are not directly related to the topic or in a workplace setting are not included. Also, sites other than academic ones, opinion pieces and sites that do not have research-based evidence are excluded because information may be unreliable. A selection process is used to ensure relevant and trustworthy information in relation to research.

3.4 Data Analysis Method

Literature collected is analysed using ‘thematic analysis '. The methodology used is that of identification of commonalities and patterns found in different research. Thematic analysis is employed in organising the findings of the existing studies and to gain clarity of the relationship of the major research variables.

The analysed literature is viewed in accordance with 4 themes. The first theme is about leadership styles and employee results and how various styles of leadership impact employee attitudes and behaviour. The second theme is the relationship between leadership style and employee engagement of its employees and how leaders can generate their employees' motivation, involvement and commitment.

The third theme discusses employee engagement and its connection to job satisfaction and how engaged employees develop positive attitudes towards their job (Chan, 2019). The fourth theme highlights the mediational role of employee engagement, which means that employees' engagement was found to have a significant connection with job satisfaction, as an effect of the leadership styles.

This analysis is conducted to review the findings of the previous research and to get a better

understanding of leadership and employee satisfaction. This is done in an attempt to make a contribution towards the goal of the study, which explains the direct and indirect link between leadership style and employee job satisfaction.

4. DISCUSSION AND CRITICAL ANALYSIS

4.1 Impact of Leadership Styles on Employee Satisfaction

The results of the literature study revealed that there was an important role of leadership styles in employees' job satisfaction. Leadership can have different effects on the attitudes of employees towards their organisations, their supervisor and their jobs. Transformational leadership shows the most positive correlation to employee satisfaction and is based on a focus on motivation, support and employee development (Ilham, 2018). People who come into contact with transformational leaders are likely to feel valued and encouraged, which improves their job experience.

Job satisfaction is also increased with democratic leadership, as it enables workers to be involved in decision-making. Employees feel respected and included when they are able to put forth their ideas and opinions. This feeling of being included can boost their dedication and also satisfaction with their jobs.

To increase satisfaction, the transactional approach to leadership is effective in setting clear goals and rewarding and encouraging high performance. A satisfied employee does this simply because he or she knows what to expect and he or she is repaid for the achievement of his/her objectives. But this method may not be effective as it largely deals with performance results instead of emotional engagement and personal development.

But if a leader's attitude is autocratic, where he decides on things without involving the employees, it may impact negatively on employees' satisfaction. Few opportunities for employee voice can result in a reduction in employee value (Shi *et al.,* 2024). However, in specific instances, such as rapid speed or precise control, there may be use for such a style. Leadership has to behave in a way that is effective to the context of the organisation. Reactions to different leadership styles are influenced by the specific workplace context/culture, the expectations and type of work the employee is doing and the goals and objectives of the organisation. Thus, organisations should avail of fit-for-purpose leadership styles and not go on maintaining a single style all the time.

4.2 How Leadership Influences Employee Engagement

Another big issue in employee engagement is the kind of leadership that is present. Leaders help to set the tone in the workplace and impact employee perceptions of motivation, support and engagement. Great leaders create a safe place for employees to share their ideas, ask their questions and raise their concerns.

Trust is a crucial part of the formula for engagement. The more people trust the boss, the more they feel committed to their organisation and are more likely to put in extra effort. Supportive leadership, such as listening to employees and recognising them, leads to an enhanced relationship between leaders and their employees (Razak *et al.*, 2018).

Good leadership also helps in the motivation of employees by giving them motivation and direction and having them understand how their performance will contribute to the success of the organisation. Knowing 'why' enhances employees' sense of meaning and commitment. As a result, they are more active and take part in the responsibilities.

4.3 Employee Engagement as the Mediating Mechanism

The connection between employee satisfaction and employee engagement is in the style of leadership. Leadership can have a positive direct impact on satisfaction, and it can also have a positive indirect impact because it helps to raise employee engagement, and consequently satisfaction (Hajiali *et al.,* 2022).

The following model can be used to explain the relationship:



Figure 1: Conceptual Framework of Leadership Style, Employee Engagement, and Job Satisfaction (Eliyana and Ma'arif, 2019)

Great leaders create a positive and encouraging work environment, enabling their team to feel valued and engaged. All these positive experiences boost engagement by improving the employees' energy, commitment and engagement at work. This greater engagement continues to increase job satisfaction because employees are less negative about their job and, in their organisation, are more positive about it.

Thus, the connection between employee satisfaction and leadership behaviour lies in what employees do: employee engagement. Understanding the relationship can help one to understand why certain leadership styles can have better employee outcomes.

4.4 Implications for Organisations and HRM

This research result can be applied in organisations and human resource management. This focus should be on developing leadership competency, specifically focusing on behaviours of transformational leadership that enable motivation, development and support of employees.

Managers' training in Communication, employee support and building relationships. The importance of communication to foster a positive work environment and to understand your employees' needs (Nazim and Mahmood, 2018). Employers need to engage employees as well, by seeking to attract their thoughts and engaging them in decision-making.

Further, it is crucial to specifically target improvement of employee engagement through employee recognition, career development and various health and safety policies. By investing in an engaged workforce, an organisation can improve job satisfaction, increase employee commitment and develop a more productive workforce. In summary, solid leadership and employee engagement practices can contribute to improving employee experiences and performance.

5. CONCLUSION

The results presented from this research are that the leadership style has an impact on the level of job satisfaction of employees. Generally speaking, transformational, democratic and servant models of leadership produce a positive outcome of an employee's attitude towards his/her work. Transactional leadership could also be able to increase employee satisfaction, because they set goals and provides rewards, and autocratic leadership could decrease employee satisfaction, because they do not involve employees sufficiently.

Based on the study, the following answers are given concerning the research question: Leadership has a direct and indirect influence on job satisfaction. Employee engagement is an important mediator that explains the connection between employee leadership behaviours and attitudes. If your leaders and your employees are enjoying a work relationship, you can be assured that you have a supportive, motivating and meaningful workplace environment.

The present study makes a contribution to the literature since it highlights the importance of employee engagement as the linkage between leadership style and job satisfaction. It also provides valuable feedback to organisations to improve their leadership and work experiences.

6. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

There are a few limitations of the present study. Firstly, it requires the use of previous academic studies, and so the results will be based on the quality of and access to previous studies. This type of study does not elicit information from workers in the first place, and so cannot reflect personal experiences and feelings experienced at work. Second, the literature has been researched in different cultural and organisational contexts, which may affect the results of the leadership styles and employee attitudes (Nanjundeswaraswamy, 2023). Another limitation is the inability of a secondary researcher to establish a cause-and-effect relationship between leadership style, employee engagement and job satisfaction. In addition, there is a lack of uniformity in how leadership styles are defined in the different studies and how to measure them.

This is due to the constraints of this study, which can be solved in future studies by doing some primary research with surveys or interviews with employees and managers. They can also give comparisons between industries, dive into more details on the differences between cultures and look at leadership styles in greater detail to better understand their effect on employee performance.

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