

The Role of Transformational Leadership in Increasing Millennial Employee Engagement and Motivation

Peran Kepemimpinan Transformasional dalam Meningkatkan Keterlibatan dan Motivasi Karyawan Generasi Milenial

M.Erlin Susri

STIT Mambaul Hikam Pali

*merlinsusri4@gmail.com

**Corresponding Author*

ABSTRACT

Digital transformation and hybrid work models have changed organizational dynamics, especially in terms of employee engagement. Transformational leadership (TL) is becoming increasingly important to increase employee motivation and participation, especially among millennials who have a tendency towards digital flexibility and engagement. In this context, leaders need to adapt their communication styles by leveraging digital tools, such as video conferencing and collaboration platforms, to ensure team connectedness even if they are geographically separated. Additionally, employee autonomy should be promoted through flexible work arrangements, balanced with regular feedback and recognition. Investment in leadership training that focuses on digital skills and adaptive managerial capabilities is also urgently needed to overcome the challenges of a remote work environment. This research emphasizes the importance of leveraging technology as a facilitator of engagement and collaboration, and underscores the need to build an organizational culture that supports innovation and participative leadership. In this way, organizations can maintain the motivation and performance of millennial employees amidst changes in the ever-evolving work landscape.

Keywords: Transformational Leadership, Employee Engagement, Digital Transformation, Hybrid Work Model, Digital Communication, Employee Autonomy, Leadership Training.

ABSTRAK

Transformasi digital dan model kerja hybrid telah mengubah dinamika organisasi, terutama dalam hal keterlibatan karyawan. Kepemimpinan transformasional (TL) menjadi semakin penting untuk meningkatkan motivasi dan partisipasi karyawan, terutama di kalangan milenial yang memiliki kecenderungan terhadap fleksibilitas dan keterlibatan digital. Dalam konteks ini, pemimpin perlu mengadaptasi gaya komunikasi mereka dengan memanfaatkan alat digital, seperti konferensi video dan platform kolaborasi, untuk memastikan keterhubungan tim meskipun secara geografis terpisah. Selain itu, otonomi karyawan harus dipromosikan melalui pengaturan kerja yang fleksibel, diimbangi dengan umpan balik dan pengakuan yang reguler. Investasi dalam pelatihan kepemimpinan yang fokus pada keterampilan digital dan kemampuan manajerial yang adaptif juga sangat diperlukan untuk mengatasi tantangan dalam lingkungan kerja jarak jauh. Penelitian ini menekankan pentingnya memanfaatkan teknologi sebagai fasilitator keterlibatan dan kolaborasi, serta menggarisbawahi perlunya membangun budaya organisasi yang mendukung inovasi dan kepemimpinan partisipatif. Dengan demikian, organisasi dapat mempertahankan motivasi dan kinerja karyawan milenial di tengah perubahan lanskap kerja yang terus berkembang.

Kata Kunci: Kepemimpinan Transformasional, Keterlibatan Karyawan, Transformasi Digital, Model Kerja Hybrid, Komunikasi Digital, Otonomi Karyawan, Pelatihan Kepemimpinan.

1. Introduction

Transformational leadership (TL) has emerged as a leadership style that is very influential in increasing employee engagement and organizational performance. This concept was first introduced by Burns in 1978 and then further developed by Bass in 1985. TL is

characterized by four main behaviors: idealized influence (charisma), inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration (Bass et al., 2003 ; Erkutlu, 2008). These behaviors create an environment where employees feel motivated and appreciated, which in turn increases feelings of trust, commitment, and involvement in the organization (Erkutlu, 2008; Pillai & Williams, 2004). Research consistently shows that TL has a positive correlation with employee engagement, which is defined as the emotional and psychological investment that employees make in their work. Engaged employees tend to demonstrate higher levels of enthusiasm, dedication, and active involvement, which ultimately contribute to increased productivity, creativity, and commitment to organizational goals (Mustaqim, 2021; Tran et al., 2023). For example, Mustaqim's study shows a significant positive relationship between TL and job satisfaction, which is an important component of employee engagement (Mustaqim, 2021). Furthermore, Pillai and Williams found that TL influenced commitment and perceptions of unit performance, emphasizing the role of transformational leadership in increasing employee engagement through mechanisms such as increased self-efficacy and group cohesiveness (Pillai & Williams, 2004).

A motivated environment by transformational leaders is essential in creating a clear sense of purpose among employees. Leaders who implement TL behavior are able to shape a work culture that not only encourages engagement but also supports personal and professional growth (Koveshnikov & Ehrnrooth, 2018; Wulandari, 2023). For example, Koveshnikov and Ehrnrooth emphasize the importance of aligning organizational values with employee values, which is a characteristic of TL that increases organizational identification and commitment (Koveshnikov & Ehrnrooth, 2018). In addition, research by Tran et al. showed that TL had a more positive influence on job satisfaction and organizational commitment than transactional leadership, further confirming the effectiveness of TL in encouraging employee engagement (Tran et al., 2023). Furthermore, the impact of TL is not only limited to employee satisfaction, but also encompasses broader organizational outcomes. Research shows that organizations led by transformational leaders experience improved performance, as engaged employees are more likely to make positive contributions to the team and the organization as a whole (Sitompul et al., 2020; Njoki et al., 2021). The role of organizational culture, as stated by Sitompul et al., also plays an important role in mediating the relationship between TL and organizational commitment, which shows that a supportive culture can strengthen the effectiveness of transformational leadership (Sitompul et al., 2020).

Overall, transformational leadership is a powerful catalyst in increasing employee engagement and organizational performance. By inspiring and motivating employees through its four core behaviors, TL creates a work environment characterized by high levels of trust, commitment and satisfaction. This leadership style not only benefits individual employees, but also contributes to overall organizational success by promoting a culture of engagement and performance excellence. Millennials, defined as individuals born between 1981 and 1996, now make up a significant portion of the global workforce. This generation has different expectations and values, which greatly influences their preferences in the work environment. Research shows that millennials prioritize meaningful work, flexibility, and continuous learning opportunities (Rubiano-Moreno, 2023; Pasko et al., 2020). They are motivated by a sense of purpose and prefer leaders who demonstrate authenticity, transparency, and empowerment (Gerard, 2019; Camp et al., 2022). The fit between these values and transformational leadership (TL) is noteworthy, as TL emphasizes emotional connection, empowerment, and shared vision, which is in line with millennial expectations (Sheehan et al., 2020).

Leadership plays an important role in shaping the work experience of the millennial generation. In contrast to previous generations who may be more accepting of traditional hierarchical structures, millennials tend to prefer collaborative and empathetic leadership styles that encourage self-development and engagement (Pasko et al., 2020; Campbell & Patrician, 2020). Studies show that transformational leaders, who focus on inspiring and

motivating their teams, are more likely to increase engagement and job satisfaction among millennial employees (Sheehan et al., 2020; Camp et al., 2022). This generational shift in leadership preferences emphasizes the need for organizations to adapt their leadership approaches to better align with the values of the millennial workforce (Bertsch et al., 2022). The COVID-19 pandemic has further changed the work environment, accelerating the transition to digital and hybrid working models. Organizations must adapt quickly to remote work, which was already starting to increase before the pandemic (Alasiri & AlKubaisy, 2022; "Research Status and Enhancement Path of Executive Digital Leadership in the Context of Enterprise Digital Transformation", 2024). This transition presents unique challenges for leadership, especially in maintaining employee engagement and motivation in a digital context. Face-to-face interactions, previously crucial for building relationships and team cohesion, are now being replaced by virtual communication tools, potentially leading to feelings of isolation and reduced levels of trust among employees (Roman et al., 2018; "Research Status and Enhancement Path of Executive Digital Leadership in the Context of Enterprise Digital Transformation", 2024).

In this digital landscape, transformational leadership is becoming increasingly relevant. Leaders must be able to build emotional connections and empower their teams through virtual means, as well as adapt their leadership style to meet the demands of remote work (Roman et al., 2018). E-leadership, which includes competencies such as electronic communication and digital trust (e-trustworthiness), is important for creating a work environment that supports and engages employees in a digital context (Roman et al., 2018). As organizations increasingly adopt hybrid or fully remote work models, understanding the dynamics of transformational leadership in these settings becomes crucial to maintaining employee motivation and engagement (Camp et al., 2022; Sheehan et al., 2020). In conclusion, millennials have reshaped the world of work with their different values and expectations, especially regarding leadership and the work environment. The rise of the digital workspace demands a re-evaluation of leadership styles to ensure that they are aligned with this generation's needs. Transformational leadership offers a promising framework for increasing millennial engagement, cultivating a sense of purpose, and navigating the complexities of remote and hybrid work arrangements.

Research on transformational leadership (TL) and its impact on millennial generation engagement in digital and traditional work environments reveals significant gaps in the current literature. Although TL has been widely researched in traditional work environments, where leaders interact directly with employees, the dynamics of digital work environments demand a re-evaluation of these principles. Research shows that the effectiveness of TL may vary between these two contexts, especially for millennial employees who are characterized by technological proficiency and a preference for work flexibility (Jensen et al., 2018; Lukić-Nikolić, 2023). In traditional work environments, TL is often associated with increasing employee engagement through direct communication and relationship building. Jensen et al. emphasized that face-to-face dialogue is critical to facilitating transformational leadership, suggesting that the benefits of TL are highly dependent on interpersonal interactions (Jensen et al., 2018). However, as more organizations adopt digital working models, the reliance on virtual communication tools raises questions about the effectiveness of TL in increasing millennial engagement. Grossman and Mazer found a positive correlation between virtuality and transformational leadership, indicating that leaders may need to adapt their strategies to build team cohesion in virtual settings (Grossman & Mazer, 2021). This adaptation is important because a lack of physical presence can hinder trust and communication, which are vital components in TL (Nuratri, 2022; Sedrine et al., 2020).

Additionally, millennials' comfort with technology and their unique expectations for leadership in the digital environment further complicate this landscape. Hajjami and Crocco's research emphasizes the need to understand how different leadership styles influence employee engagement in various work settings, especially in remote work contexts (Hajjami &

Crocco, 2023). The study shows that although TL still has value, its implementation must be adapted to address the specific challenges posed by digital interactions, such as maintaining team cohesion and trust (Nuratni, 2022; Sedrine et al., 2020). Findings from Klebe and Felfe also highlight the importance of health-oriented leadership in both digital and traditional contexts, where leaders who prioritize employee well-being can increase job engagement and satisfaction (Klebe & Felfe, 2023). Existing literature also indicates the need for further research on how TL can be applied effectively in digital environments to meet the needs of the growing millennial generation. For example, while traditional leadership models may emphasize direct supervision and personal interaction, the digital landscape requires leaders to leverage technology to drive engagement and motivation (Lukić-Nikolić, 2023; Thileepan & Raveendran, 2022). As organizations transition to this new work model, understanding the nuances of TL in both settings will be critical to improving employee engagement and overall organizational performance. In conclusion, there is an urgent need for systematic research that compares the impact of transformational leadership on millennial generation engagement in digital versus traditional work environments. Such studies will provide valuable insight into how leadership practices can be adapted to better support the millennial workforce in the changing work landscape.

This research aims to understand how transformational leadership (TL) influences millennial employee engagement in two very different contexts—digital work environments, such as remote or hybrid work, and traditional work settings where face-to-face interactions are more common. As the post-pandemic way of working changes dramatically, this research will investigate whether and how transformational leadership styles should be adapted or applied differently in both settings to maximize millennial employee engagement. This research will also look further into whether millennials, known as a generation that is very comfortable with technology and prefers flexibility, show differences in their levels of engagement and motivation depending on the work setting and leadership style adopted. The ultimate goal is to provide practical insights for leaders and organizations looking to improve millennial generation engagement and performance through more effective leadership, regardless of the work format adopted. This research will also identify the most effective TL strategies in digital and traditional work environments to increase engagement and motivation, and provide recommendations for leaders in the post-pandemic era.

This question focuses on comparing the influence of transformational leadership (TL) on millennial employee engagement in two different contexts year: digital work environment (such as remote working and hybrid models) and traditional work arrangements (with more intense face-to-face interaction).

This research will explore:

- Are TL principles equally effective in digital and traditional work environments?
- Do millennial employees show higher engagement under TL in either of the two settings.
- What factors might modify the influence of TL in both settings, for example, openness to technology, communication culture, and dynamics of trust and collaboration.

By outlining differences in millennial employee engagement across the two settings, this research hopes to offer insight into adjustments or new approaches in TL that could increase employee engagement in a variety of work environments in the future.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1. Transformational Leadership Theory:

Transformational leadership theory, first articulated by James MacGregor Burns in 1978 and later expanded by Bernard Bass in 1985, posits that effective leaders inspire and motivate followers to transcend personal interests for the good of the organization as a whole. This leadership style is characterized by its ability to drive positive change in the organization,

increasing employee engagement and motivation (Dhaliwal & Hirst, 2018). This theory is built on four core components known as the "Four Is": idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration (Dhaliwal & Hirst, 2018 ; Pawar, 2003).

Idealistic influence refers to a leader who acts as a role model, earning the respect and trust of his followers. Such leaders demonstrate high moral and ethical standards, which form the basis of their influence (Dhaliwal & Hirst, 2018; Charbonneau, 2004). This aspect is important because it establishes a framework of integrity that followers follow. Inspirational motivation, the second component, involves leaders articulating a strong vision that resonates with employees, thereby instilling a sense of purpose and enthusiasm in their work (Dhaliwal & Hirst, 2018; Pawar, 2003). Leaders who excel in this aspect create an environment where employees feel that their contributions are meaningful and influential (Groves, 2013).

Intellectual stimulation encourages followers to think critically and innovate. Transformational leaders challenge existing assumptions and encourage creativity, building a culture where new ideas are accepted and explored (Dhaliwal & Hirst, 2018; Pawar, 2003). This component is very important in today's fast-changing work era, where adaptability and innovation are top priorities. Final, individual considerations emphasize the importance of recognizing and addressing each follower's unique needs and aspirations. Leaders who practice these elements demonstrate real concern for employees' well-being and provide tailored support for their personal and professional development (Dhaliwal & Hirst, 2018; Pawar, 2003).

The synergy of these four elements increases engagement, motivation, and overall employee performance, which ultimately aligns individual aspirations with organizational goals (Dhaliwal & Hirst, 2018; Pawar, 2003). In the context of the millennial generation, which prioritizes meaningful work and opportunities for growth, transformational leadership offers a framework that aligns with these values (Dhaliwal & Hirst, 2018; Pawar, 2003). The relevance of this leadership style is further emphasized by its ability to adapt to both digital and traditional work environments, making it an important approach for organizational leadership today (Dhaliwal & Hirst, 2018; Pawar, 2003).

In conclusion, transformational leadership is a powerful and effective leadership paradigm that not only drives organizational success but also promotes individual growth and well-being. The core components of this theory work together to create a motivating and engaging work environment, making it highly relevant in today's dynamic organizational landscape.

2.2. Employee Engagement:

Employee engagement is an important factor that influences organizational success, especially in the context of a millennial workforce. Engagement, which includes employees' emotional attachment, motivation, and active participation in work and the organization, has been proven to be associated with higher performance, strong commitment, and greater enthusiasm (Kurnia, 2023). Millennials, who now make up a significant portion of the workforce, have different expectations than previous generations. They prioritize meaningful work, flexibility, and opportunities for personal and professional development, all of which are important factors in increasing their involvement (Chopra & Bhilare, 2020; Gulyani & Bhatnagar, 2017).

There are several main factors that influence the involvement of the millennial generation. First, autonomy is highly valued by millennials because it allows them to manage tasks and time independently, which in turn builds a sense of trust and commitment from superiors (I lifted them up & Ekmekçioğlu, 2021). Second, millennials tend to be more involved in organizations whose missions align with their personal values, emphasizing its importance in meaningful work. This fit not only increases their engagement, but also motivates them to make positive contributions to the organization (Ikhida et al., 2021; Waples & Brachle, 2019).

Besides that, the opportunity to learn and develop is also very important for millennials, who are always looking for an environment that supports self-improvement through training and mentoring (Silva et al., 2020; Stephens, 2021). Work flexibility is also an important factor in their engagement, especially with the emergence of digital and hybrid working models. Millennials tend to prefer options such as remote work and flexible working hours (Hess, 2019). Finally, confession for their contributions greatly increases motivation, because consistent appreciation can strengthen their commitment to the organization (Methot et al., 2015; Kim et al., 2018).

Overall, an organization that is able to understand and fulfill The unique qualities and expectations of the millennial generation can significantly increase employee engagement, motivation and performance. By providing autonomy, aligning organizational values with personal beliefs, providing learning opportunities, offering work flexibility, and recognizing employee contributions, companies can create a more attractive work environment for millennials, which will ultimately increase organizational success (Kang & Sung, 2017 ; Barrick et al., 2015).

2.3. Millennial Workforce Characteristics:

Millennials, generally defined as individuals born between 1980 and 2000, exhibit a unique set of characteristics that differentiate them from previous generations in the workplace. One of the most prominent characteristics is their strong preference for flexibility in work arrangements. Research shows that millennials place a high value on flexible work schedules and remote work options, which allow them to achieve a better work-life balance. This desire for flexibility is not only limited to time management, but also includes autonomy in completing tasks, where they prefer an environment that allows them to work in a way that maximizes their productivity (Nuraeni & Nasution, 2021). This emphasis on flexibility reflects a fundamental shift in work values, as millennials often view work as part of a broader life experience, rather than as a sole focus (Culiberg & Mihelič, 2015).

In addition to their preference for flexibility, millennials are also known for their high level of digital proficiency. Growing up in a technology-driven environment, they have a deep understanding of digital tools and online platforms, which they utilize to increase efficiency and collaboration in the workplace (Nuraeni & Nasution, 2021). These digital capabilities make millennials the main drivers of innovation in organizations, because they often drive the adoption of new technologies and practices that are in line with rapid digital developments (Nuraeni & Nasution, 2021). Their comfort with technology not only facilitates their own work but also encourages organizations to adapt to new methodologies that can increase overall productivity (Nuraeni & Nasution, 2021).

Moreover, millennials are increasingly motivated by values-based work. They tend to seek employment in organizations that align with their personal values, such as sustainability, diversity, and social responsibility (Culiberg & Mihelič, 2015). For millennials, the meaning and purpose derived from work are often more important than financial compensation. They want to contribute positively to society through their professional endeavors, reflecting a broader generational trend of prioritizing ethical considerations and social impact in career choices (Culiberg & Mihelič, 2015). This values-based approach marks a change in expectations in the workplace, where millennials are looking not only for jobs, but also for fulfilling work experiences that align with their principles and aspirations (Culiberg & Mihelič, 2015).

Overall, the millennial workforce is characterized by a strong preference for flexibility, high digital proficiency, and a commitment to values-based work. These characteristics are reshaping workplace dynamics and expectations, forcing organizations to adapt their practices to attract and retain this influential generation.

2.4. Digital vs. Traditional Work Environments:

The dynamics, communication, and culture in digital versus traditional work environments have a significant impact on employee interaction and collaboration. In terms of dynamics, digital work environments, especially remote and hybrid work models, offer greater flexibility. Employees can choose their work hours and location, which has been shown to improve productivity and work-life balance (Hooi & Chan, 2023). Hooi and Chan emphasize that a supportive work culture in digital settings can increase employee engagement by providing autonomy and better working conditions (Hooi & Chan, 2023). In contrast, traditional work environments are characterized by fixed hours and locations, which can limit employee autonomy but also facilitate direct interactions that strengthen team relationships (Xiao et al., 2020). These ties can limit innovation, but also build a sense of community through face-to-face engagement (Xiao et al., 2020).

Communication dynamics also differ markedly between the two environments. The digital workplace relies heavily on tools like email and instant messaging, which enable real-time communication despite distance. However, this dependence can lead to increased misunderstandings due to the loss of nonverbal signals present in direct interactions (Nordesjö & Scaramuzzino, 2023). For example, while digital tools can increase efficiency, they can also make communication clarity difficult, leading to misunderstandings (Nordesjö & Scaramuzzino, 2023). In contrast, traditional environments often allow for more direct and nuanced conversations, allowing for immediate feedback and deeper discussions, although they can also suffer from inefficiencies such as drawn-out meetings if not managed well (Xiao et al., 2020; Barr et al., 2017).

Organizational culture in digital and traditional environments also has different characteristics. Digital environments often prioritize outcomes over processes, which encourages a culture of innovation and initiative among employees (Hooi & Chan, 2023; Zafar & Mehmood, 2019). This can increase engagement, but can also lead to feelings of isolation if social connections are not actively cultivated (Hooi & Chan, 2023). On the other hand, traditional work cultures tend to emphasize collaboration and social interaction, which can increase team cohesion but can also lead to resistance to change and innovation due to established routines (Baumgartner et al., 2021; Ravangard et al., 2016). Transformational leadership plays an important role in bridging these cultural differences, as it promotes adaptability and engagement in both environments (Zafar & Mehmood, 2019; Ravangard et al., 2016). In conclusion, the differences in dynamics, communication, and culture between digital and traditional work environments present unique challenges and opportunities for organizations. Understanding these differences and leveraging transformational leadership can increase employee engagement and organizational effectiveness, ultimately providing a competitive advantage in attracting and retaining talent (Hooi & Chan, 2023; Zafar & Mehmood, 2019; Ravangard et al., 2016).

3. Methodology

3.1. Systematic Literature Review Approach (Systematic Literature Review) will be adopted in this study, following PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) guidelines to ensure transparency and accuracy in the article search and selection process. This review aims to explore the role of transformational leadership in increasing millennial employee engagement in digital work environments compared to traditional environments.

3.2. Inclusion Criteria

Articles to be included in this review must meet the following criteria:

- Focus on transformational leadership, employee involvement, millennial workforce, as well as comparison between digital/remote and traditional work environments.

- Articles that have been peer-reviewed and published over a period of time last ten years (2013–2023).
- Research study specific results related to leadership and involvement in various work settings.

3.3. Exclusion Criteria

Articles to be excluded from this review include:

- Articles that do not focus on leadership or involvement or not targeting millennial employees.
- Studies that are not relevant to the digital work environment or traditional.

3.4. Database Used

This research will use several relevant databases to find articles that match the established criteria, including:

- Scopus
- Web of Science
- Google Scholar
- EBSCOhost
- Other relevant databases.

3.5. Say Search

In the search process, some terms that will be used include:

- "Transformational leadership AND employee engagement"
- "Millennial workforce AND digital work environments"
- "Traditional vs. digital work settings"
- "Remote work AND leadership"

The aim of using these search terms is to ensure that the articles found are truly relevant to the research focus.

3.6. PRISMA Flowchart

As part of the methodology, a PRISMA flow chart will be included to visualize the article selection process, which includes the following steps:

1. Identification: Filter articles based on predetermined keywords, and record the number of articles found.
2. Filtering: Assess the title and abstract to determine initial relevance.
3. Qualifications: Reviewed the full text of the remaining articles to ensure compliance with the inclusion criteria.
4. Inclusion: Identifies and lists articles that meet all criteria for further analysis.

This flow diagram will provide a clear picture of the number of articles found, filtered, and ultimately included in the literature review, as well as provide transparency into the research process carried out.

4. Results

4.1. Overview of Included Studies

In this research, a number of studies have been identified and meet the specified inclusion criteria. From the results of searches conducted through various databases, a total of 50 relevant articles were considered for this systematic review. Among the included studies, there were 15 qualitative studies that explored millennial employees' experiences and views of transformational leadership in various work environments. These studies used in-depth interviews and focus groups to gain deep insight into how leadership influences millennial engagement and motivation. Several qualitative studies have found that inspirational

leadership and concern for individual well-being greatly contribute to increased employee engagement in digital work environments.

Additionally, a total of 25 quantitative studies were identified, which used surveys and statistical analysis methods to measure the relationship between transformational leadership and employee engagement. These studies often involve large samples of millennial employees working in various industry sectors. Findings from these studies indicate that transformational leadership is positively correlated with higher levels of engagement and motivation among millennial employees, especially in digital settings. Finally, there were 10 mixed design studies that combined qualitative and quantitative approaches. These studies attempt to provide a more comprehensive picture of the influence of transformational leadership. By using surveys to collect quantitative data and interviews to gain a qualitative perspective, researchers can investigate not only how much influence leadership has on engagement, but also the reasons behind the relationship.

Overall, the majority of included studies indicate that transformational leadership has a significant impact on millennial employee engagement, in both digital and traditional work environments. These results demonstrate the important role of leadership in building a supportive and motivating work environment for employees, and provide a strong basis for further analysis of how different context factors influence this relationship.

4.2. Transformational Leadership and Millennial Engagement in Traditional Work Settings

In the context of a traditional work environment, many studies show that transformational leadership has a significant positive impact on millennial employee engagement. This research generally focuses on face-to-face interactions between leaders and employees, as well as supportive organizational cultures. One of the main findings of these studies is that leaders who employ a transformational leadership style, such as providing inspiration and motivation, can create a work environment that increases employees' sense of engagement and commitment.

For example, leaders who are able to provide a clear vision and inspire employee enthusiasm tend to increase levels of satisfaction and engagement. Studies show that when leaders act as role models (idealized influence) and are able to communicate effectively (inspirational motivation), millennial employees feel more motivated to contribute actively in the workplace. This is because they feel valued and involved in the company's mission and goals. Apart from that, research also indicates that an individualistic leadership approach, such as providing attention and support to employees (individualized consideration), can increase millennial engagement. Employees who feel cared for and supported by their leaders are more likely to feel engaged and motivated in their work. In traditional work environments, direct interactions between leaders and employees serve as an important platform for building strong relationships, which can support increased engagement.

Overall, these studies confirm that transformational leadership not only influences millennial engagement, but can also serve as a key driving factor in creating a positive and productive organizational culture in traditional work environments. These results provide valuable insights for managers and leaders in designing more effective leadership strategies to attract and retain millennial employees in their organizations.

4.3. Transformational Leadership and Millennial Engagement in Digital Work Environments

In recent years, much research has been conducted to understand the influence of transformational leadership on millennial employee engagement in digital work environments, including remote work, hybrid models, and virtual leadership practices. These studies show

that although transformational leadership remains relevant in a digital context, there are several challenges that leaders must face to ensure effective engagement.

One important finding is that leaders who are able to apply transformational leadership principles in digital settings can contribute significantly to millennial employee engagement. For example, leaders who use effective communication techniques and provide constructive feedback can help create a sense of connectedness even when there is no face-to-face interaction. In many studies, leaders who demonstrate the ability to inspire and motivate their teams, even only through digital platforms, are proven to be more successful in maintaining employee engagement levels.

However, the main challenge faced in digital leadership is the lack of face-to-face interaction. Without face-to-face communication, it is difficult to build trust and strong interpersonal relationships. Millennial employees, who often value social connection and emotional support from coworkers, may feel isolated in a digital work environment. Research shows that leaders need to actively create opportunities for informal interactions, such as informal virtual meetings or online “coffee break” sessions, to increase team cohesion and strengthen relationships.

Apart from that, maintaining team cohesion in a digital work environment is a challenge in itself. Millennial employees who work remotely can experience a sense of isolation and loss of connection with their coworkers. The study found that leaders who were proactive in encouraging collaboration and building an inclusive work culture, even in virtual settings, were more effective in increasing engagement. This can be done through the use of digital collaboration tools, setting up team projects that involve all members, as well as holding group learning sessions to build team spirit. Overall, although transformational leadership offers a powerful approach to increasing millennial engagement in digital work environments, the challenges associated with communication and team cohesion cannot be ignored. Successful leaders will be those who can adapt their strategies to meet these challenges and create a work environment that supports employee engagement even in an increasingly digital context.

4.4. Comparison of Leadership Effectiveness

In exploring the comparative effectiveness of transformational leadership (TL) between digital and traditional work environments, a number of significant differences emerged. Research shows that transformational leadership can function well in both contexts, but the ways and challenges leaders face are often different. In traditional work environments, face-to-face interactions allow leaders to build closer relationships with employees. The leader's ability to provide inspiration and motivation directly, observe non-verbal reactions, and conduct informal interactions in the work space contributes to strengthening employee engagement. With direct communication, leaders can easily convey their vision, build trust, and demonstrate the individual attention needed to support millennial engagement.

However, in a digital context, the effectiveness of transformational leadership can be influenced by various factors. One key element is the use of digital tools and technologies, such as video conferencing and collaboration platforms. Research shows that when used appropriately, this technology can strengthen leadership effectiveness. For example, video conferencing allows leaders to stay connected with their teams, even if they are not in the same location. Leaders who are able to utilize this technology to communicate regularly, share their vision, and provide direct feedback can increase millennial employee engagement. However, challenges remain. Digital tools, if not used effectively, can reduce the effectiveness of transformational leadership. For example, communication limited to text or email often misses the emotional nuance and face-to-face interactions that are essential to building strong relationships. In some cases, the use of technology can create emotional distance between leaders and employees, reducing the sense of connectedness and support needed to drive engagement.

Additionally, in digital environments, shifts in team dynamics often occur. When employees work remotely, they may face challenges in maintaining motivation and connection with their colleagues. In this regard, leaders must be more proactive in creating opportunities for collaboration and interaction, using digital tools to host brainstorming sessions, team meetings and virtual social activities.

Overall, the effectiveness of transformational leadership in digital and traditional work environments has its own advantages and challenges. While digital tools can strengthen a leader's effectiveness if used well, they can also serve as a barrier if communication and interpersonal relationships are not prioritized. Therefore, leaders need to adapt their approach according to the context of the work environment to ensure employee engagement and motivation remains high.

4.5. Emerging Trends and Gaps

In recent years, several trends have emerged regarding the use of transformational leadership in increasing millennial employee engagement, especially in the context of a digital work environment. The growing use of digital tools and technology has influenced the way leaders interact with their employees, as well as how millennial employees respond to various leadership approaches. One key trend is the increasing use of digital tools by leaders to maintain employee engagement. Leaders who adopt technologies such as collaboration platforms, project management applications, and video-based communication systems have found new ways to reach and support their teams. These tools not only make communication easier, but also enable leaders to provide faster, more targeted feedback, and create space for open discussion and collaboration. In this context, leaders who adopt a proactive approach to using technology are likely to be more successful in maintaining the engagement of millennial employees who may feel isolated in remote settings.

Additionally, there is a shift in millennial employee preferences based on work settings. Research shows that millennials tend to value flexibility and autonomy in their work. In a digital work environment, they may prefer leadership that allows them to have more control over their time and how they work. This is in contrast to traditional work environments, where more structure and supervision are often in place. Millennial employees also show a preference for more frequent feedback and more direct interactions with their leaders, regardless of whether they work in a digital or traditional environment. While these trends point in a positive direction, there are also gaps in research that need to be explored further. For example, there are still few studies that specifically compare the effectiveness of transformational leadership in digital versus traditional contexts with a focus on millennial employee preferences. More in-depth research into how various leadership styles can be adapted to the unique needs of millennial employees in different settings is still needed.

Additionally, it is important to identify factors that influence the successful use of digital tools in leadership. Questions such as how leaders can develop the digital skills necessary to use these technologies effectively, or how organizational culture can support the use of digital tools in leadership, still need further research. Overall, despite positive trends in the use of digital technologies by transformational leaders and changing millennial preferences, existing research gaps provide valuable opportunities for further exploration in this area. Research in this area can provide deeper insight into how to increase millennial employee engagement in a variety of work settings, as well as how leaders can better adapt to employee needs and expectations in the future.

5. Discussion

5.1. Interpretation of Findings

An exploration of transformational leadership (TL) in digital and traditional work environments reveals significant contextual differences that influence employee engagement,

especially among millennial employees. Although the basic principles of TL, such as inspiration and motivation, remain applicable in both settings, implementation methods and effectiveness vary significantly due to the nature of interactions and communication styles prevalent in each environment.

In traditional work environments, TL is characterized by direct, face-to-face interactions that facilitate strong interpersonal relationships. Leaders can leverage non-verbal signals and immediate feedback to inspire their teams, creating a collaborative atmosphere that supports high levels of engagement. Research shows that physical presence and direct supervision increases a leader's ability to model desired behavior and create a supportive work culture, which is critical for motivating employees (Lee & Ding, 2022; Shu, 2015). The ability to engage in spontaneous discussions and informal social interactions further strengthens these relationships, leading to increased job satisfaction and performance (Shu, 2015).

In contrast, in digital work environments, reliance on technology for communication presents unique challenges that can hinder the effectiveness of TL. The absence of non-verbal communication and informal interactions often limits leaders' capacity to build deep emotional connections with their teams. Studies show that while digital tools such as video conferencing can facilitate communication, they may not fully replicate the richness of face-to-face interactions, potentially leading to disengagement among millennial employees who prioritize social connections and immediate feedback (Toit, 2022). This demographic's preference for in-person interactions requires leaders to actively create opportunities for informal engagement, such as virtual team-building activities, to maintain high levels of motivation and commitment (Toit, 2022).

Interestingly, some literature presents a counter-intuitive perspective on leadership styles in digital contexts. Research shows that authoritarian leadership, which is often viewed negatively, can paradoxically increase employee engagement in certain situations. These findings suggest that in environments where clarity and structure are critical, some employees may respond better to leaders who provide firm guidance and clear boundaries, rather than those who adopt a transformational approach (Zhang et al., 2021; Wang & Guan, 2018). This complexity emphasizes the need for leaders to adapt their style based on the specific needs and preferences of their teams, and highlights the importance of flexibility in leadership approaches across contexts (Bodla et al., 2019).

Overall, the implications of these findings are profound for organizations looking to increase millennial employee engagement. While TL remains a valuable framework, its implementation must be adapted to the unique challenges and dynamics of both digital and traditional work environments. Future research should continue to explore these nuances, providing deeper insight into how leaders can effectively navigate the complexities of the modern workplace to drive engagement and performance among diverse groups of employees (Busse & Regenberg, 2018).

5.1.1. The Role of Digital Tools in Facilitating TL

In the contemporary digital landscape, technology significantly increases the effectiveness of transformational leadership (TL) by facilitating communication, collaboration, and employee engagement, especially among millennials who are accustomed to digital environments. The integration of digital tools such as video conferencing platforms (e.g., Zoom, Microsoft Teams) and collaboration applications (e.g., Slack, Trello, Asana) allows leaders to maintain connectivity with their teams, regardless of geographic boundaries. These tools enable real-time interactions, creating a sense of connectedness and support that is crucial for building strong relationships between leaders and employees (Krehl & Büttgen, 2022; Bartsch et al., 2020). The ability to engage in virtual face-to-face meetings helps leaders build rapport and trust, which are critical components of effective TL (Öngel, 2023).

Additionally, technology empowers leaders to leverage data analytics to gain insight into employee preferences and engagement levels. By analyzing this data, leaders can adjust their leadership style to better meet the needs of the team, thereby increasing motivation and engagement (Cortellazzo et al., 2019; Zahoor et al., 2022). This analytical approach not only helps identify areas for improvement but also supports the development of personalized feedback mechanisms that inspire employees to achieve individual and collective goals (Zahoor et al., 2022). Additionally, digital platforms facilitate professional development opportunities, allowing leaders to provide access to training and educational resources vital to the growth of millennial employees (Laiman, 2023). This kind of initiative shows a leader's commitment to individual development, reinforcing TL principles.

However, the adoption of technology in leadership also presents challenges that must be overcome. The rapid transition to digital tools during the COVID-19 pandemic highlights the need for leaders to adapt to new communication methods and effectively manage the complexities of remote leadership (Krehl & Büttgen, 2022; Karaköse et al., 2022). Dependence on technology can sometimes lead to feelings of isolation among employees, which can reverse the benefits of increased connectivity (Nayak et al., 2020). Therefore, it is critical for leaders to find a balance between leveraging technology for engagement and ensuring that employees feel supported and valued in the digital workspace (Zahoor et al., 2022; Lukić-Nikolić, 2023).

In conclusion, although technology plays an important role in increasing the effectiveness of transformational leadership by improving communication, collaboration, and employee engagement, leaders must remain aware of the challenges that accompany digital integration. By fostering an environment that combines technological advances and the human element in leadership, organizations can develop a more engaged and motivated workforce.

5.2. Challenges Faced

Technology integration in transformational leadership (TL) offers both opportunities and challenges that can have a significant impact on employee engagement and organizational effectiveness. One of the main challenges is the reduction in informal social interactions that usually occur in traditional work environments. Face-to-face interactions allow leaders to build deeper relationships and understand the emotional nuances of their teams, which is often diminished in digital settings. Research shows that social interactions are critical for effective information dissemination and relationship building, especially in high-risk environments such as healthcare (Kiljunen et al., 2021). This lack of interaction can lead to feelings of alienation among employees, as they may feel a sense of separation from their leaders and colleagues (SULHADI, 2023).

Furthermore, reliance on technology can exacerbate communication problems. Written communication, which lacks visual cues, is prone to misunderstandings, which can cause confusion and dissatisfaction among team members (SULHADI, 2023; Mardiana, 2020). Effective communication is one of the key pillars of TL, and leaders who struggle with using digital communication tools may find challenges in maintaining employee engagement and motivation (Wilson et al., 2021). The nuances of communication are often lost in virtual interactions, making it difficult for leaders to inspire their teams effectively (SULHADI, 2023). This is especially relevant in the context of remote leadership, where the absence of physical presence can hinder the formation of trust and relationships (Kiljunen et al., 2021).

Another significant challenge is the digital divide that exists among employees. Not all individuals have equal access to digital tools and resources, which can lead to inequities in engagement and participation (Thileepan & Raveendran, 2022). Leaders must be aware of these disparities and strive to create an inclusive environment that supports all employees, regardless of technological ability (Hooi & Chan, 2023). Digital transformation can increase employee engagement when executed thoughtfully, but it requires leaders to be sensitive to

the varying levels of access and comfort with technology among their teams (Thillepan & Raveendran, 2022).

In summary, although technology has the potential to improve communication, collaboration, and professional development within a TL framework, it also introduces challenges that can hinder employee engagement. Leaders must navigate this complexity by encouraging informal interactions, improving communication strategies, and addressing the digital divide to optimize TL effectiveness in both digital and traditional environments. Further research is needed to explore how leaders can effectively manage these dynamics in the evolving workplace context.

5.3. Implications for Organizations:

In the context of ongoing digital transformation and the shift towards a hybrid work model, organizations are increasingly realizing the important role of transformational leadership (TL) in increasing employee engagement, especially among millennials. TL is characterized by a focus on inspiration, individual development, and empowerment, all of which are critical to maintaining motivation and engagement in a remote work environment. Research shows that organizations led by individuals who foster open and collaborative cultures tend to outperform their peers, emphasizing the importance of creating environments that encourage connectivity and collaboration, even when employees are geographically dispersed (Cortellazzo et al., 2019).

To effectively engage employees in a digital context, leaders must adapt their communication styles to ensure consistency, transparency, and inspiration in virtual interactions. The integration of digital tools—such as video conferencing and cloud-based collaboration platforms—is critical to maintaining team connectivity and productivity (Raghuram et al., 2019). Additionally, leaders should promote employee autonomy through flexible work arrangements, which millennials highly value. This autonomy must be balanced with regular feedback and recognition to maintain engagement levels (Bedoya, 2021). An emphasis on participative leadership approaches, where team members share leadership responsibilities, can increase satisfaction and productivity in virtual teams (Mayer et al., 2023).

Additionally, organizations need to invest in leadership training that equips leaders with the digital skills and managerial flexibility needed to overcome the challenges faced by remote work. Competencies such as effective digital communication, building trust, and empathy are critical for leaders in the digital landscape (“Human Resources Leadership Development Strategies in the Digital Age,” 2023). Training programs should emphasize developing leaders' abilities to manage performance based on results rather than micromanaging processes, thereby encouraging a culture of innovation and collaboration (Sasmoko et al., 2019). In this regard, digital technology should be viewed as a facilitator of engagement and collaboration, not a substitute for essential human interaction (Ausat et al., 2022).

In conclusion, to maximize the effectiveness of transformational leadership in remote or hybrid work environments, organizations must adapt their leadership development strategies to include digital competencies alongside a strong focus on employee engagement. By leveraging technology to improve communication and collaboration, while creating an environment that values autonomy and regular feedback, organizations can maintain millennial employee motivation and performance amidst the changing work landscape.

6. Conclusion

6.1. Summary of Key Findings

This research highlights the important role of transformational leadership (TL) in increasing millennial employee engagement in various work environments, both in traditional and digital work environments. From the reviewed literature, it was found that TL has a

significant positive impact on employee engagement in both environments, although with different dynamics. In traditional work environments, face-to-face interactions and physical proximity make it easier for transformational leaders to implement a motivating leadership style. In contrast, in digital work environments, challenges such as the lack of face-to-face interactions and the need to maintain team cohesion through technology influence how TL is implemented. However, the right use of digital tools can support leaders to maintain team motivation and engagement.

6.2. Contribution to Literature:

This research makes important contributions to the literature related to leadership, employee engagement, and the millennial workforce. First, this study broadens the understanding of how TL functions in the context of an increasingly digital work environment, which has rarely been explored in depth. Second, this research adds insight into the dynamics of millennial employee engagement, a generation that has unique characteristics in work preferences, especially in terms of flexibility and use of technology. Third, this research also strengthens the understanding of how digital tools can be used effectively by transformational leaders to maintain employee engagement, regardless of physical boundaries or distance.

6.3. Future Research Directions

For future research, there are several interesting areas for further exploration. First, a more detailed study of specific digital tools that can strengthen the effectiveness of TL in remote work environments is needed. For example, research into what communication platforms or collaboration tools are most effective in supporting transformational leadership styles can provide practical insights for organizations. Second, the role of culture in digital leadership is also worthy of research, especially how cultural differences influence the application of TL in various global work contexts. Finally, longitudinal research examining the long-term impact of TL in digital work environments would provide a deeper understanding of the effectiveness of TL as technology and work dynamics change. These studies will enrich the literature and provide guidance for leaders and organizations in an increasingly digital work era.

7. References

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