The Role of Transformational Leadership Style on Employee Engagement and Organizational Innovation in the Hybrid Work Era

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Abstract
This study explores the role of transformational leadership in enhancing employee engagement and fostering organizational innovation within the context of hybrid work arrangements. Using a qualitative research approach, data were collected through in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with organizational leaders and employees operating in hybrid work environments in Indonesia. The findings reveal that transformational leaders, through inspirational motivation, individualized consideration, intellectual stimulation, and idealized influence, significantly contribute to higher levels of employee engagement and promote innovative behaviors despite the challenges posed by hybrid work settings. The study underscores the importance of adaptive leadership practices to sustain organizational competitiveness in the evolving work landscape.

Keywords*: transformational leadership, employee engagement, organizational innovation, hybrid work, qualitative research.*

Introduction

The global workforce landscape has undergone a profound transformation following the COVID-19 pandemic, accelerating the adoption of hybrid work models that blend remote and on-site work arrangements. This shift has redefined how organizations operate, communicate, and innovate. Hybrid work offers employees increased flexibility and autonomy, which are highly valued in today's knowledge-driven economy. However, it also presents unique challenges for organizational leaders, particularly in maintaining employee engagement and fostering innovation across dispersed teams. In Indonesia, as in many other countries, organizations are navigating this new paradigm, seeking leadership approaches that can effectively sustain motivation, collaboration, and creativity in hybrid environments.

Employee engagement, defined as the emotional and cognitive commitment employees have toward their work and organization, is a critical driver of organizational performance and innovation. Engaged employees demonstrate higher productivity, creativity, and willingness to contribute beyond their formal job descriptions. However, sustaining engagement in hybrid settings is complex due to physical separation, reduced face-to-face interaction, and potential feelings of isolation. Research indicates that without deliberate leadership efforts, hybrid work can lead to communication gaps, weakened team cohesion, and diminished organizational culture assimilation, all of which undermine engagement and innovation (Jiatong et al., 2022).

Transformational leadership, characterized by its ability to inspire, intellectually stimulate, and individually consider employees, emerges as a promising leadership style to address these challenges. Transformational leaders articulate a compelling vision, foster trust, and empower employees to take initiative and innovate. This leadership style has been widely associated with positive outcomes such as increased employee engagement, creativity, and organizational

adaptability in traditional work settings. Yet, its role and effectiveness in the hybrid work era remain underexplored, especially within the Indonesian organizational context where cultural and technological factors interplay uniquely.

The hybrid work model itself acts as a catalyst for innovation by providing employees with autonomy and flexibility, which are conducive to creative thinking and problem-solving. Empowering employees to make decisions and encouraging professional development within hybrid frameworks have been shown to enhance both engagement and innovative behaviors. Moreover, organizations adopting hybrid work are increasingly leveraging digital tools and innovative management philosophies to bridge the physical divide, facilitate collaboration, and maintain a cohesive culture. However, these technological and procedural adaptations require leadership that can effectively motivate and guide employees through change, uncertainty, and new modes of interaction.

In Indonesia, the hybrid work transition is particularly significant given the country's diverse workforce and rapid digital adoption. Indonesian organizations face the dual challenge of integrating traditional hierarchical leadership styles with more participative and transformational approaches suited for hybrid environments. This study aims to fill the gap by qualitatively examining how transformational leadership influences employee engagement and organizational innovation amidst hybrid work arrangements in Indonesian companies.

The significance of this research lies in its potential to inform Human Resource Development (HRD) practices and leadership development programs tailored to hybrid work realities. By understanding the transformational leadership behaviors that most effectively engage employees and stimulate innovation, organizations can better design interventions to sustain competitive advantage. Furthermore, this study contributes to the broader academic discourse on leadership effectiveness in evolving work models, offering insights that may be applicable in similar emerging market contexts.

This study addresses the following key questions:

- How do transformational leaders in hybrid work settings inspire and engage employees?
- In what ways does transformational leadership facilitate innovative behaviors in hybrid teams?
- What challenges and opportunities do leaders face in applying transformational leadership within hybrid work models?

To answer these questions, this research employs a qualitative methodology, gathering rich, contextual data from leaders and employees actively engaged in hybrid work environments. The findings are expected to highlight specific transformational leadership practices that enhance engagement and innovation despite the physical and psychological distance inherent in hybrid work..

LITERATURE REVIEW
1. Theoretical Foundations of Transformational Leadership

Transformational leadership, first conceptualized by Burns and later developed by Bass, is characterized by leaders who inspire, motivate, and intellectually stimulate their followers, fostering an environment where employees transcend their self-interests for the collective good. The four core dimensions—idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration—form the basis of this leadership style, which has been widely associated with positive organizational outcomes, particularly in times of change and uncertainty.

In the post-pandemic era, the need for transformational leadership has become more pronounced. The COVID-19 crisis forced organizations worldwide to rapidly adapt to new working models, with hybrid work—combining remote and in-office arrangements—becoming a dominant paradigm. This shift has redefined leadership requirements, with employees increasingly expecting leaders to demonstrate empathy, foster cooperation, maintain tight communication, and rebuild trust in a dispersed work environment (Zhang, 2025).

2. Transformational Leadership and Employee Engagement

Employee engagement, defined as a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption, is a crucial predictor of individual and organizational performance. Numerous studies have established a strong positive relationship between transformational leadership and employee engagement.

Transformational leaders stimulate engagement by providing a clear vision, fostering a sense of purpose, and supporting employees' self-efficacy in pursuing challenging goals. By articulating organizational objectives and connecting employees' efforts to broader outcomes, these leaders help individuals internalize the value of their contributions, thereby enhancing engagement. Intellectual stimulation—one of the key behaviors of transformational leaders—encourages employees to critically examine situations and develop creative solutions, which not only makes their work more challenging and meaningful but also increases their sense of autonomy. This, in turn, activates intrinsic motivation and deepens engagement (Vătămănescu & Vintilă, 2023).

The importance of transformational leadership for engagement is particularly evident in hybrid work settings. Hybrid work offers flexibility and autonomy but also introduces challenges such as reduced social interaction, potential miscommunication, and a risk of disengagement due to physical distance. Research in Indonesia and other emerging economies has shown that transformational leadership is vital for sustaining engagement among hybrid employees, as it helps bridge the gap created by remote work and maintains a sense of belonging and motivation. For example, a recent study in Jakarta found that transformational leadership had a significant positive influence (57.5%) on work engagement among employees working in a hybrid model, highlighting the need for organizations to develop and support this leadership style (Amirah Jasmine & Utomo, 2024).

Furthermore, studies focusing on Generation Z employees in Indonesia's creative industries have revealed that transformational leadership significantly impacts employee engagement and organizational commitment in hybrid work environments. Engagement, in particular, was found to be a critical mediating factor between leadership behaviors and organizational commitment, especially for younger employees who value flexibility and meaningful work.

3. Transformational Leadership and Organizational Innovation

Organizational innovation—the development and implementation of new ideas, processes, products, or services—is essential for long-term competitiveness and adaptability. Transformational leadership has been identified as a key driver of innovation across various industries.

Transformational leaders foster innovation through several mechanisms:

- Fostering Creativity: By encouraging intellectual stimulation and supporting risk-taking, transformational leaders create a psychologically safe environment where employees feel empowered to propose and experiment with novel ideas.
- Building a Supportive Culture: These leaders cultivate trust, open communication, and knowledge sharing, which are critical for cross-functional collaboration and the continuous development of innovative solutions.
- Modeling Risk-Taking: Transformational leaders serve as role models by embracing change and demonstrating resilience, inspiring employees to follow suit and contribute proactively to innovation initiatives.

Empirical evidence supports the effectiveness of transformational leadership in promoting both radical and incremental innovation. A recent bibliometric analysis highlights that organizations with transformational leaders tend to exhibit higher levels of creativity, knowledge sharing, and adaptability, all of which are essential for fostering innovation in the rapidly evolving hybrid work landscape (Rahma & Lisa Widawati, 2025).

4. Transformational Leadership in the Hybrid Work Era

Hybrid work models, which combine remote and on-site work, have become increasingly prevalent in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic. While hybrid arrangements offer flexibility, autonomy, and improved work-life balance, they also present unique challenges, including maintaining psychological well-being, effective communication, and a sense of team cohesion.

Transformational leadership is particularly well-suited to address these challenges. Leaders who inspire, motivate, and empower employees can help maintain engagement and innovation despite the physical and psychological distance inherent in hybrid work. By building trust, aligning team efforts with organizational objectives, and leveraging the flexibility of hybrid arrangements, transformational leaders foster a culture of resilience and adaptability.

A review of recent studies in Indonesia underscores the strategic importance of transformational leadership in hybrid environments. Leaders who demonstrate individualized consideration and empathy can address the diverse needs of employees, many of whom face unique challenges balancing work and personal responsibilities in hybrid settings. Moreover, transformational leaders play a critical role in maintaining cohesion, managing communication across dispersed teams, and ensuring that employees remain aligned with organizational goals (Nawaz et al., 2024).

5. Mediators and Moderators in the Leadership-Engagement-Innovation Nexus

The relationship between transformational leadership, employee engagement, and organizational innovation is complex and often mediated or moderated by additional factors. For instance, employee empowerment has been identified as a key mediator, with transformational leaders enhancing engagement by empowering employees to take ownership of their work and contribute to decision-making processes. Work experience, gender, and generational differences can also moderate the effectiveness of transformational leadership, as employees' expectations and responses to leadership behaviors may vary across demographic groups.

Work-life balance is another important factor, especially in hybrid work environments. While transformational leadership positively influences engagement and innovation, the ability of employees to balance work and personal life can further enhance these outcomes. Organizations that support both transformational leadership and work-life balance are better positioned to retain talent, reduce turnover, and foster a culture of continuous improvement.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative research design to gain an in-depth understanding of how transformational leadership influences employee engagement and organizational innovation within hybrid work environments. Qualitative methodology is appropriate for this study because it allows exploration of complex social phenomena, such as leadership behaviors and employee perceptions, in their natural context. This approach facilitates rich, detailed insights into participants' experiences, beliefs, and attitudes, which are difficult to capture through quantitative methods

The qualitative design is particularly suitable for investigating transformational leadership in the hybrid work era, where the nuances of leader-follower interactions, communication dynamics, and innovative behaviors are shaped by both physical and virtual workspaces. This study adopts a phenomenological approach to explore the lived experiences of leaders and employees, focusing on how transformational leadership manifests and impacts engagement and innovation in hybrid settings

The research was conducted within several Indonesian organizations across diverse sectors, including digital services, manufacturing, and public administration, all of which have implemented hybrid work arrangements post-pandemic. These organizations were selected purposively based on their adoption of hybrid work models and the presence of leaders identified as practicing transformational leadership.

Participants were selected using purposive sampling to ensure that informants had relevant experience and knowledge regarding leadership styles, employee engagement, and innovation in hybrid work contexts. The sample included:

- 15 leaders (middle to senior managers) responsible for teams operating under hybrid work arrangements.
- 20 employees working within these teams, representing various levels and functions.

This diverse participant pool enabled a comprehensive understanding of leadership dynamics from both the leader and follower perspectives

Data were collected through multiple qualitative methods to enhance the depth and credibility of findings:

- In-depth Semi-Structured Interviews: Individual interviews were conducted with both leaders and employees to explore their perceptions, experiences, and interpretations of transformational leadership behaviors and their effects on engagement and innovation. Semi-structured interviews allowed flexibility to probe emerging themes while maintaining focus on core research questions
- Focus Group Discussions (FGDs): Two FGDs were held with groups of employees to capture collective views, stimulate discussion on shared experiences in hybrid work, and validate interview findings. FGDs facilitated dynamic interaction and deeper exploration of organizational culture and innovation practices
- Document Analysis: Organizational documents such as internal communication memos, leadership development materials, and innovation reports were reviewed to triangulate data and contextualize leadership practices within organizational policies and culture

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Participants represented a range of industries including digital services, manufacturing, and public sector institutions, all of which have adopted hybrid work arrangements post-pandemic. Employees worked remotely 2-3 days per week on average, with the remainder spent on-site. Leaders included middle and senior managers responsible for teams ranging from 5 to 30 members.

All participants acknowledged that hybrid work introduced both flexibility and complexity, necessitating adaptive leadership approaches. While employees appreciated the autonomy and work-life balance hybrid work offered, they also reported challenges such as feelings of isolation, communication barriers, and difficulties in maintaining motivation and innovation momentum.

Transformational leaders were found to play a pivotal role in maintaining employee engagement by clearly communicating a compelling vision that resonated with hybrid work realities. Leaders frequently used digital communication platforms—video calls, virtual town halls, and messaging apps—to reinforce organizational goals and inspire commitment.

Key findings:

- Leaders who consistently articulated a clear purpose helped employees connect their individual roles to broader organizational objectives, which increased emotional engagement.
- Inspirational messages that acknowledged hybrid work challenges while emphasizing collective resilience fostered a sense of belonging despite physical distance.
- Employees reported feeling motivated when leaders celebrated team successes publicly, even in virtual settings.

The hybrid work environment heightened the need for leaders to provide individualized attention to employees' unique circumstances. Leaders who demonstrated empathy and flexibility in managing workloads and personal challenges were more successful in sustaining engagement.

Key findings:

- Leaders who regularly checked in on employees' well-being, beyond task performance,

helped reduce feelings of isolation and stress.

- Tailoring communication styles and feedback to individual preferences improved trust and openness.
- Providing resources such as flexible hours, mental health support, and skill development opportunities was critical in addressing diverse employee needs.

Transformational leaders fostered a culture of innovation by encouraging employees to challenge assumptions, propose new ideas, and experiment without fear of failure. This was particularly important in hybrid settings where spontaneous idea sharing is less frequent.

Key findings:

- Leaders who actively solicited input during virtual meetings and created dedicated innovation forums increased employees' willingness to contribute ideas.
- Intellectual stimulation was linked to higher engagement because employees felt their creativity was valued and impactful.
- Some leaders introduced digital collaboration tools to facilitate brainstorming and project management, which supported innovative teamwork.

Leaders who demonstrated adaptability, transparency, and resilience served as role models, inspiring trust and loyalty among employees. Their behavior set the tone for organizational culture in hybrid contexts.

Key findings:

- Leaders who openly shared their own challenges with hybrid work and how they overcame them fostered psychological safety.
- Consistency in values and actions, such as punctuality and fairness, reinforced credibility.
- Employees were more engaged when leaders visibly supported innovation initiatives and recognized contributions.

The combined effect of these transformational leadership dimensions was a notable increase in employee engagement and innovative behavior, as reported by participants.

- Employee Engagement: Participants described feeling more connected, motivated, and committed when leaders practiced transformational behaviors, which helped mitigate hybrid work's isolating effects.
- Organizational Innovation: Employees reported that transformational leadership created an environment conducive to idea generation and implementation, even when working remotely.

These qualitative findings align with quantitative research conducted in Indonesia, such as the study at PT Semesta Integrasi Digital, which found transformational leadership positively influences job satisfaction mediated by a creative environment. Similarly, literature highlights that transformational leaders in hybrid settings enhance motivation and performance by addressing unique challenges of remote and on-site work integration (International Journal of Social, Policy and Law, 2025).

Despite the positive impacts, leaders faced several challenges:

- Maintaining consistent communication and engagement across dispersed teams required significant time and effort.
- Balancing individualized consideration with organizational demands was complex, especially when employees' home environments varied widely.
- Encouraging innovation remotely was difficult due to reduced informal interactions and spontaneous collaboration.

Some leaders struggled with digital tool proficiency, impacting their ability to stimulate and support teams effectively.

Table 1. Transformational Leadership Dimension

Transformational Leadership Dimension	Key Themes	Illustrative Employee Quote
Inspirational Motivation	Clear vision communication, purpose alignment, virtual recognition	"Our leader reminds us why our work matters, making me feel part of something bigger."
Individualized Consideration	Empathy, flexible support, personalized communication	"My manager offers flexibility when I struggle balancing work and home demands."
Intellectual Stimulation	Encouragement of creativity, safe experimentation, digital collaboration	"Our leader encourages thinking outside the box and values our ideas."
Idealized Influence	Role modeling adaptability, transparency, trust building	"Seeing my leader adapt and openly share challenges builds my trust."
Impact on Engagement & Innovation	Increased motivation, connection, idea generation	"Transformational leadership makes me more engaged and confident to innovate."
Challenges	Communication effort, balancing needs, fostering remote innovation, digital skills	"Sometimes it's hard to stay connected and creative when working remotely."

One of the most salient findings is that transformational leadership significantly enhances employee engagement despite the physical and psychological barriers inherent in hybrid work models. The four dimensions of transformational leadership—Inspirational Motivation, Individualized Consideration, Intellectual Stimulation, and Idealized Influence—each play a distinct but interconnected role in sustaining engagement.

Inspirational Motivation emerged as a critical factor in helping employees find meaning and purpose in their work amid the dispersed nature of hybrid teams. Leaders who consistently communicated a compelling vision and organizational goals helped employees connect their daily tasks to a larger mission. This conceptualization of transformational leadership, which emphasizes the leader's role in articulating an inspiring vision that motivates followers to transcend self-interest for collective goals. In hybrid settings, where informal cues and spontaneous interactions are limited, deliberate and frequent communication of vision becomes even more crucial. The participants' testimonies highlight that virtual town halls, video messages, and online recognition ceremonies serve as effective vehicles for reinforcing organizational purpose and fostering emotional attachment (Eaton et al., 2024).

This finding is consistent with recent studies indicating that clear, inspirational communication mitigates the disengagement risks associated with remote work. It also resonates with the Self-Determination Theory, which posits that employees' intrinsic motivation is enhanced when they perceive their work as meaningful and aligned with personal values—a perception that transformational leaders actively cultivate.

Individualized Consideration was equally vital in maintaining engagement by addressing

employees' unique needs and circumstances. The hybrid work model introduces diverse challenges, such as balancing home responsibilities, managing work-life boundaries, and coping with social isolation. Leaders who demonstrated empathy, flexibility, and personalized support helped employees feel valued beyond their productivity metrics. This finding extends the literature by underscoring the importance of emotional intelligence and personalized leadership in hybrid contexts, as suggested by and supported by recent hybrid work studies (Wijaya, 2025)

Moreover, the participants' experiences reflect that individualized consideration fosters psychological safety, identifies as essential for engagement and learning. By regularly checking in on well-being and adapting work expectations, transformational leaders create a supportive environment that encourages openness and reduces stress, thereby sustaining motivation and commitment.

The study also revealed that transformational leadership significantly promotes organizational innovation by stimulating intellectual curiosity and creating a psychologically safe space for experimentation. Intellectual Stimulation was highlighted as a key driver of innovation, with leaders encouraging employees to challenge assumptions, propose novel solutions, and learn from failures. This aligns with the foundational work who emphasized that transformational leaders foster creativity by encouraging followers to rethink conventional approaches.

In hybrid work environments, where spontaneous idea exchanges are less frequent, leaders' intentional efforts to stimulate intellectual engagement become indispensable. The use of digital collaboration tools and structured brainstorming sessions, as reported by participants, illustrates how leaders adapt their practices to sustain innovation remotely. This finding corroborates the growing body of research emphasizing the role of technology-enabled leadership in virtual and hybrid teams

Furthermore, the study's findings resonate componential theory of creativity, which posits that intrinsic motivation and a supportive environment are crucial for innovation. Transformational leaders, by intellectually stimulating employees and valuing their creative contributions, enhance intrinsic motivation and foster a culture conducive to innovation (Karimi et al., 2023).

Idealized Influence, or the leader's role modeling, also emerged as a vital mechanism for building trust and inspiring innovative behaviors. Leaders who demonstrated adaptability, transparency, and resilience served as role models, instilling confidence and loyalty. This finding supports Bandura's (1977) social learning theory, which suggests that employees emulate leaders' behaviors, especially in uncertain contexts like hybrid work. The participants' accounts show that when leaders openly share challenges and model constructive coping strategies, employees feel psychologically safe to take risks and innovate (Jiatong et al., 2022).

The study highlights a dynamic interplay between employee engagement and organizational innovation, mediated by transformational leadership. Engaged employees are more likely to contribute innovative ideas, while a culture of innovation further reinforces engagement by providing meaningful and stimulating work. This reciprocal relationship is supported by prior research, which identifies engagement as a precursor to creativity and innovation.

In hybrid work contexts, this interplay is particularly significant because physical separation can dampen spontaneous interactions and reduce motivation. Transformational leaders bridge this gap by fostering connectedness, encouraging idea sharing, and recognizing contributions, thus sustaining a virtuous cycle of engagement and innovation.

Despite the positive impacts, the study also uncovered several challenges faced by transformational leaders in hybrid work settings. Maintaining consistent and meaningful communication across dispersed teams demands considerable time and effort, potentially leading to leader burnout. Additionally, balancing individualized consideration with organizational demands can be difficult, especially when employees' home environments and personal circumstances vary widely (Chiu et al., 2021).

Encouraging innovation remotely remains challenging due to the reduced informal socialization

and spontaneous collaboration that typically fuel creativity. Some leaders reported difficulties in mastering digital tools and managing virtual team dynamics effectively, which may hinder their ability to intellectually stimulate employees.

These challenges echo concerns raised in recent literature about the limits of transformational leadership in virtual contexts. They suggest that transformational leadership must be complemented by organizational support systems, such as leadership development programs focused on digital competencies, emotional intelligence, and time management.

The findings offer several practical implications for Human Resource Development (HRD) practitioners and organizational leaders. First, leadership development programs should emphasize transformational competencies tailored to hybrid work realities, including effective virtual communication, empathy, and digital collaboration skills. Training leaders to recognize and respond to diverse employee needs can enhance individualized consideration and psychological safety.

Second, organizations should invest in digital infrastructure and tools that facilitate real-time collaboration, knowledge sharing, and innovation. Providing platforms for virtual brainstorming, peer recognition, and informal social interaction can help replicate the benefits of co-located work.

Third, HRD initiatives should promote a culture that values experimentation and tolerates failure, encouraging leaders to intellectually stimulate employees and support creative risk-taking. Embedding transformational leadership principles into performance management and reward systems can reinforce these behaviors.

Finally, organizations must recognize the potential for leader fatigue in hybrid contexts and provide resources such as coaching, peer support, and workload management to sustain leadership effectiveness.

This study contributes to the growing body of knowledge on leadership effectiveness in hybrid work by providing empirical evidence from the Indonesian context, which remains underrepresented in global leadership research. It extends transformational leadership theory by demonstrating its applicability and nuances in hybrid work environments, highlighting the importance of digital communication and individualized support.

Future research could quantitatively test the relationships identified here, exploring mediating and moderating variables such as organizational culture, technology adoption, and employee personality traits. Longitudinal studies could examine how transformational leadership impacts engagement and innovation over time as hybrid work evolves.

CONCLUSION

Transformational leadership plays a pivotal role in sustaining employee engagement and driving organizational innovation in the hybrid work era. Leaders who effectively communicate vision, provide individualized support, stimulate intellectual growth, and model exemplary behavior can overcome hybrid work challenges and foster a culture of innovation. Organizations should invest in leadership development programs that cultivate these transformational competencies to remain competitive in the evolving work environment. This article contributes to the understanding of leadership dynamics in hybrid work and offers practical insights for Human Resource Development practitioners aiming to enhance organizational outcomes through transformational leadership..

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