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Research Methods for Business
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The Impact of Leadership Styles on Employee Motivation

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Table of Contents

1. Introduction	3
1.1 Background	3
1.2 Identification of the Business Problem	4
2.1 Research Aim	5
2.2 Research Objectives	5
2.3 Research Questions	5
3. Preliminary Literature Review	6
4. Research Methodology and Design	7
4.1 Quantitative phase:	7
4.2 Qualitative phase:	7
4.3 Data Analysis	7
4.4 Ethical Considerations	8
4.5 Limitations	8
5. Business Relevance and Practical Implications	8
6. Plan of Work and Time Schedule	8
7. References	9

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

Leadership continues to play a pivotal role in shaping organisational culture, employee behaviour, and business outcomes. Effective leadership not only influences strategic decision-making but also affects how employees experience their work, interact with one another, and perceive their own value within an organisation (Northouse, 2022). The link between leadership style and employee motivation has therefore become a central topic in both management research and professional practice.

In today's dynamic business landscape, organisations face increasing pressure to maintain productivity while also supporting employee engagement and well-being. Hybrid work structures, cultural diversity, and constant technological change have transformed workplace expectations. Employees now look for leaders who inspire, empower, and recognise their individual contributions (Armstrong and Taylor, 2020). However, many organisations still struggle with disengagement, low morale, and staff turnover—issues that often arise when leadership fails to meet motivational needs.

This study seeks to explore how leadership styles, particularly transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire, influence employee motivation. Understanding these relationships is essential for designing leadership practices that promote satisfaction, commitment, and sustainable performance. The research aims to contribute to both theoretical understanding and practical improvements in leadership development.

1.2 Identification of the Business Problem

Employee motivation remains one of the most critical drivers of organisational success. Yet, despite significant investment in training and development, many businesses report persistent challenges in maintaining motivation, engagement, and retention. These problems often stem from the leadership approach adopted by managers.

A mismatch between leadership style and employee expectations can lead to frustration, disengagement, and underperformance. Leaders who rely heavily on transactional methods may achieve compliance but fail to inspire commitment, whereas those who adopt transformational practices often foster innovation and enthusiasm (Bass and Avolio, 1994). Laissez-faire leaders, by contrast, tend to create uncertainty and lack of direction, which can negatively affect morale (Skogstad et al., 2017).

Given the diverse needs of modern employees, there is a clear need to identify which leadership styles best support motivation. Understanding these dynamics can help organisations improve productivity and reduce turnover through more informed leadership strategies.

2 Research Aim, Objectives, and Questions

2.1 Research Aim

To examine how different leadership styles influence employee motivation and identify effective leadership practices that enhance engagement and organisational performance.

2.2 Research Objectives

- To review and analyse key theoretical models of leadership and motivation.
- To examine the relationship between transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire leadership and employee motivation.
- To explore employees' perceptions of leadership behaviours that support or hinder motivation.
- To propose practical recommendations for leadership development that improve motivation and performance.

2.3 Research Questions

- How do leadership styles affect employee motivation?
- Which leadership style is most effective in enhancing motivation?
- What leadership behaviours do employees find motivating or demotivating?
- How can leaders adapt their approach to sustain engagement?

3. Preliminary Literature Review

Leadership and motivation are long-standing topics within organisational behaviour and management studies. Transformational leadership, first introduced by Burns (1978) and later expanded by Bass (1985), is characterised by leaders who inspire, intellectually stimulate, and personally develop their employees. Such leaders encourage creativity, trust, and commitment (Avolio and Yammarino, 2013). Research shows transformational leadership often results in higher levels of job satisfaction and intrinsic motivation (Breevaart and Bakker, 2018).

Transactional leadership, in contrast, relies on clear exchanges—rewarding good performance and sanctioning poor outcomes (Judge and Piccolo, 2004). While effective in maintaining order and achieving short-term objectives, transactional approaches may not sustain motivation in the long term because they rely on external incentives.

Laissez-faire leadership involves minimal supervision or involvement. Although it may encourage independence among highly capable employees, it often causes role ambiguity and reduced accountability (Skogstad et al., 2017).

Theories of motivation further explain these effects. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (1943) proposes that individuals seek to fulfil needs from basic to self-actualisation. Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory (1959) distinguishes between hygiene factors (which prevent dissatisfaction) and motivators (which create satisfaction). Self-Determination Theory (Deci and Ryan, 2000) emphasises the importance of autonomy, competence, and relatedness in fostering intrinsic motivation. Transformational leadership aligns closely with this theory because it empowers employees and meets their psychological needs (Deci and Ryan, 2017).

Empirical studies (e.g. Al Khajeh, 2018; Gandolfi and Stone, 2018) consistently find that transformational leadership positively correlates with motivation and engagement. However, most research focuses on single industries or cultural contexts, limiting generalisability. Therefore, this study aims to fill that gap by adopting a mixed-methods

approach to explore leadership styles and motivation across diverse workplace environments.

4. Research Methodology and Design

This research adopts a pragmatic philosophical approach, allowing for flexibility in combining quantitative and qualitative methods to provide a comprehensive understanding of the research problem.

A mixed-methods design will be used:

4.1 Quantitative phase:

A structured online survey will gather data from employees across various industries. Instruments such as the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) (Bass and Avolio, 1994) and the Work Extrinsic and Intrinsic Motivation Scale (WEIMS) (Tremblay et al., 2009) will be employed. Approximately 100 participants will be targeted.

4.2 Qualitative phase:

Semi-structured interviews with 10–12 participants will explore personal experiences and perceptions of leadership behaviours.

4.3 Data Analysis

Quantitative data will be analysed using descriptive statistics and correlation analysis. Qualitative data will undergo thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's (2019) six-phase model, identifying recurring themes and insights related to leadership and motivation.

4.4 Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval will be obtained prior to data collection. Participants will receive full information about the study, provide informed consent, and be assured of confidentiality. Data will be anonymised and stored securely in compliance with university ethical standards.

4.5 Limitations

Potential limitations include reliance on self-reported data, which may introduce bias, and a relatively small sample size, which could affect generalisability. However, triangulation of methods enhances reliability and depth.

5. Business Relevance and Practical Implications

This research has direct implications for business practice. Understanding how leadership style influences motivation can guide organisations in developing more effective leadership training and management strategies. Transformational leadership, for instance, may foster higher engagement and satisfaction, improving retention and productivity.

The findings could help managers identify behaviours that drive motivation, such as recognition, empowerment, and communication. By applying these insights, organisations can cultivate a more positive work environment and stronger organisational culture—key factors for sustaining long-term success in today's competitive markets.

6. Plan of Work and Time Schedule

The project will be conducted over twelve weeks.

<u>Task / Activity</u>	<u>Duration (Weeks)</u>	<u>Timeline</u>
Topic Selection and Proposal Design	1-2	Week 1-2
Comprehensive literature review	3-6	Week 3-6
Research instrument design	2	Week 5-6
Ethical approval and pilot testing	1	Week 7
Data collection (survey & interviews)	2	Week 8-9
Data analysis (quantitative & qualitative)	2	Week 10-11
Interpretation and recommendations	1	Week 11
Writing, editing, and submission	1	Week 12

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