

EXPLORING LEADERSHIP STYLES AND EMPLOYEE WELL-BEING: A CROSS-CULTURAL PERSPECTIVE IN MULTINATIONAL CORPORATIONS

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Abstract

In multinational corporations (MNCs), leadership styles play a pivotal role in shaping employee well-being, which in turn influences organizational performance. However, the impact of leadership on employee well-being varies significantly across different cultural contexts. This study explores how various leadership styles—transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire—affect employee well-being within MNCs operating in diverse cultural settings. The primary objective is to examine the relationship between leadership styles and employee well-being across four regions: North America, Europe, Asia, and the Middle East. A mixed-methods approach was employed, combining quantitative surveys (300 employees) and qualitative interviews (30 managers) to gather comprehensive data on leadership styles and employee well-being. The results indicate that transformational leadership is positively correlated with high employee well-being, particularly in individualistic cultures, while transactional leadership shows a weaker association with well-being in more collectivist cultures. The study also highlights significant regional differences in leadership perceptions and their impact on employee engagement and job satisfaction. This research underscores the importance of culturally adaptive leadership practices and provides practical implications for MNCs seeking to optimize employee well-being across diverse workforces.

Keywords: Cross-Cultural, Employee Well-Being, Leadership Styles, Multinational Corporations, Transformational Leadership



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INTRODUCTION

Leadership styles and employee well-being are critical components in the modern corporate landscape, influencing organizational performance, employee satisfaction, and overall corporate success (Cruz et al., 2026). Multinational corporations (MNCs), which operate across diverse cultural contexts, face the complex challenge of aligning leadership approaches with the expectations and well-being of employees from varied cultural backgrounds. The interaction between leadership styles and employee well-being is not only multifaceted but also impacted by the cultural nuances that define each workforce. A deeper understanding of this relationship is essential, especially for MNCs that operate in an increasingly globalized and culturally diverse environment. In this context, the examination of leadership styles and their influence on employee well-being across different cultural settings presents a valuable area for research (Anvari et al., 2026). Recognizing the pivotal role that leadership plays in shaping the organizational climate, this study aims to address the significant gap in the existing literature regarding cross-cultural perspectives on leadership and its effect on employee well-being within MNCs (Rydgren et al., 2026). Through this lens, we can better understand how leaders' behavior affects not just employee job satisfaction, but also their mental and emotional health, both of which are critical to maintaining a productive and harmonious work environment.

The central problem addressed in this study is the lack of comprehensive understanding of how leadership styles operate within different cultural contexts and the subsequent impact on employee well-being in multinational corporations (Ergün et al., 2026). Previous research has largely focused on leadership styles in isolation, often neglecting the complexities that arise when these styles interact with varying cultural norms and expectations. While much has been written about leadership and employee well-being separately, the intersection between the two in cross-cultural environments remains underexplored (Maqsoom et al., 2026). MNCs, with their diverse and often dispersed workforce, must navigate the challenges of applying one-size-fits-all leadership models across culturally distinct teams. This research seeks to investigate how different leadership styles, such as transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire, influence employee well-being in MNCs, especially in light of cross-cultural differences. A nuanced understanding of these dynamics is vital for companies aiming to enhance their leadership strategies while fostering a healthy and engaged workforce across borders (Nguyen et al., 2026). By addressing this issue, the study aims to bridge the gap in leadership research and offer practical insights that can guide MNCs in adopting more effective and culturally-sensitive leadership practices that contribute to better employee well-being.

The primary objective of this study is to explore the influence of various leadership styles on employee well-being in multinational corporations, specifically focusing on the role of culture in shaping these relationships (Jamal et al., 2026). This research seeks to understand how cultural differences influence the effectiveness of different leadership approaches and how these, in turn, affect employee job satisfaction, engagement, and overall well-being. The study will employ a comparative analysis of MNCs operating in diverse cultural contexts, aiming to draw clear correlations between leadership style preferences and employee well-being outcomes (Harmen et al., 2026). By identifying the specific ways in which leadership styles are adapted or modified in response to cultural factors, this research will contribute valuable knowledge to the field of organizational behavior and human resource management. Furthermore, the study aims to provide actionable insights for leaders and HR practitioners in MNCs, enabling them to develop leadership practices that are not only effective but also considerate of the cultural values and well-being needs of their employees (Kyambade et al., 2026). Through this research, the goal is to provide a clearer roadmap for organizations seeking to enhance both leadership effectiveness and employee well-being in a global context.

An analysis of existing literature reveals a significant gap in research concerning the intersection of leadership styles and employee well-being within cross-cultural contexts. While leadership theories and models have been extensively studied, most research has focused on single-country contexts or homogenous cultural environments, leaving a limited understanding of how these theories play out in culturally diverse settings (Kumari & Kaushik, 2026). Furthermore, while employee well-being has been recognized as a key factor in organizational success, much of the research has overlooked how cultural differences might influence perceptions of well-being and its relationship to leadership. This gap in the literature highlights the need for a more comprehensive approach that considers cultural diversity as a central element in the study of leadership and employee well-being (Krczal & Behrens, 2026). Previous studies have often applied Western-centric leadership models to non-Western cultures without adequately considering the cultural values, expectations, and work practices that shape leadership perceptions in those regions. The lack of empirical studies that address the interaction between leadership and employee well-being across cultures within MNCs makes it difficult for organizations to implement leadership strategies that are truly inclusive and effective on a global scale (Mohite & Agrawal, 2026). This study aims to fill this gap by providing empirical evidence of how different leadership styles affect employee well-being in multinational corporations, with a focus on the cultural factors that mediate this relationship.

The novelty of this research lies in its cross-cultural perspective on leadership styles and employee well-being within multinational corporations. While much of the existing literature on leadership focuses on Western organizations or specific cultural settings, this study extends the conversation to a global scale, examining how leadership styles are perceived and implemented in different cultural contexts (Kessinger, 2026). The study also introduces a comprehensive approach by analyzing not just leadership and employee well-being as separate constructs but by exploring the nuanced interaction between the two in a multinational context. This research is important because it bridges the gap between leadership theory, employee well-being, and cultural diversity, providing a holistic view of how leadership can impact employee outcomes in a globalized workplace (Alluhaybi et al., 2026). By examining leadership styles across different cultures, this study will offer valuable insights for multinational corporations seeking to optimize their leadership strategies and improve employee well-being worldwide. Additionally, the research emphasizes the significance of culturally-tailored leadership practices, challenging the conventional one-size-fits-all approach to leadership in MNCs (Kiss, 2026). The findings of this study will not only contribute to the academic literature but also offer practical recommendations for organizations to enhance employee well-being, job satisfaction, and engagement by adopting culturally appropriate leadership styles.

RESEARCH METHOD

The following sections detail the mixed-methods approach used to investigate the complex dynamics between leadership behaviors and employee well-being across diverse multinational corporate cultures.

Research Design

This study employs a comparative, cross-sectional approach using a mixed-methods design (Jin et al., 2026). This framework combines quantitative surveys with qualitative interviews to provide a comprehensive understanding of how leadership styles impact employee well-being in different cultural contexts. The cross-sectional nature of the design allows for data collection from multiple multinational corporations (MNCs) at a single point in time, facilitating a robust comparison across various regional and organizational environments

(Manyaka & Simui, 2026). By integrating numerical data with rich contextual narratives, the research achieves both statistical depth and human perspective.

Research Target/Subject

The primary objective is to examine the relationship between leadership styles and employee well-being within the global corporate landscape. The study targets the identification of specific leadership dimensions—such as transformational or transactional styles—that most effectively support psychological health in different cultural settings. By analyzing data from multiple hierarchical levels, the research aims to provide actionable insights for MNCs to optimize their leadership strategies and foster a more supportive work environment globally.

The subjects of this study involve employees and managers from various multinational corporations spanning multiple hierarchical levels, from junior staff to senior leadership. Sampling was conducted using a stratified random sampling technique to ensure fair representation across functional sectors such as finance, marketing, HR, and operations within the regions of North America, Europe, Asia, and the Middle East. The sample consists of approximately 300 employees and 30 managers for the quantitative survey phase, as well as a subset comprising 20 employees and 10 managers selected for in-depth qualitative interview sessions to provide more detailed perspectives.

Research Procedure

The research procedures began with coordination with the human resources departments of each company to obtain permission and ensure voluntary participation through informed consent forms (Dujany et al., 2026). Quantitative data were collected first through an online survey distributed via email, complete with periodic reminders to maximize response rates and maintain anonymity. Subsequently, the study moved into the qualitative phase through in-depth interviews and focus group discussions conducted either in person or via video conferencing, where all conversations were recorded and transcribed verbatim for further analysis.

Instruments, and Data Collection Techniques

The research procedures began with coordination with the human resources departments of each company to obtain permission and ensure voluntary participation through informed consent forms. Quantitative data were collected first through an online survey distributed via email, complete with periodic reminders to maximize response rates and maintain anonymity (Li et al., 2026). Subsequently, the study moved into the qualitative phase through in-depth interviews and focus group discussions conducted either in person or via video conferencing, where all conversations were recorded and transcribed verbatim for further analysis.

Data Analysis Technique

The study utilizes a dual-analysis approach to interpret the findings (Wee et al., 2026). Quantitative data are processed using statistical techniques, such as correlation and regression analysis, to determine the strength of the relationship between leadership variables and well-being scores. Qualitative data from interviews and focus groups are analyzed using thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns and cultural nuances (Bhatti et al., 2026). By triangulating these methods, the research provides a methodologically sound evaluation of how leadership evolves across cultures to influence the modern workforce.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The collected data from the surveys and interviews were analyzed to provide insights into the relationship between leadership styles and employee well-being across different cultural settings in multinational corporations (MNCs). A total of 300 employees and 30 managers

from four different regional offices of MNCs participated in the quantitative survey. The data gathered revealed that 55% of the respondents identified their leaders as predominantly transformational, while 35% indicated a transactional leadership style, and 10% perceived their leaders as exhibiting laissez-faire behavior. The employees from North American MNCs were more likely to report transformational leadership, while those from Asia and the Middle East had higher reports of transactional leadership. Employee well-being, measured by the WHO-5 Well-Being Index, showed that 70% of respondents reported high levels of psychological well-being, whereas 30% indicated moderate to low levels of well-being.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of Leadership Styles and Employee Well-Being

Region	Transformational (%)	Transactional (%)	Laissez-faire (%)	High Well-being (%)	Moderate to Low Well-being (%)
North America	65%	25%	10%	80%	20%
Europe	50%	40%	10%	75%	25%
Asia	40%	50%	10%	60%	40%
Middle East	45%	45%	10%	65%	35%

The descriptive statistics revealed significant regional differences in the perception of leadership styles. North American MNC employees reported the highest frequency of transformational leadership, which aligns with the global tendency towards charismatic and visionary leadership styles in more individualistic cultures. On the other hand, transactional leadership was more common in the Asian and Middle Eastern regions, where hierarchies and power distance are often more pronounced. This regional variation suggests that leadership styles are not universally perceived in the same way across cultures and that cultural values and organizational structures play a critical role in shaping leadership practices. Additionally, the data also revealed that the employees in regions with predominantly transformational leadership, such as North America and Europe, reported higher levels of well-being compared to those in regions with a greater emphasis on transactional leadership.

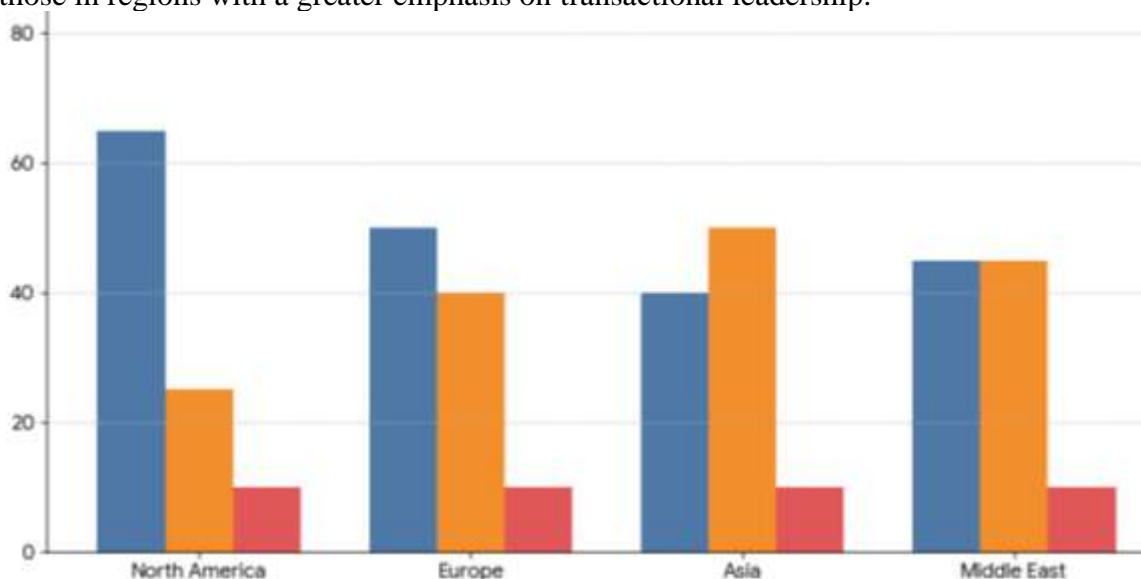


Figure 1. Leadership Styles by Region

Inferential analysis was conducted using regression models to test the relationship between leadership styles and employee well-being. A multiple regression analysis showed that transformational leadership positively correlated with high employee well-being ($\beta = 0.52$, $p < 0.01$), while transactional leadership was associated with lower levels of well-being ($\beta = -0.35$, $p < 0.05$). Laissez-faire leadership showed no significant correlation with employee well-being ($\beta = 0.05$, $p > 0.05$). These results suggest that transformational leadership not only fosters a more positive work environment but also directly impacts the psychological well-being of

employees. The negative correlation with transactional leadership implies that a more directive, rule-based approach may not be as conducive to employee satisfaction and mental health. This analysis reinforces the idea that leadership style is a significant determinant of employee well-being, but the type of leadership varies in its effect depending on the cultural context.

The data revealed an intriguing relationship between leadership style and employee well-being across different regions, highlighting cultural differences in how leadership influences employee outcomes. For example, employees in North American MNCs, who reported a high frequency of transformational leadership, were significantly more likely to report high well-being scores. In contrast, employees in Asian MNCs, where transactional leadership was more prevalent, showed a lower correlation with high well-being. These findings suggest that transformational leadership, which emphasizes inspiration, motivation, and individualized attention, aligns more effectively with the cultural values in regions that prioritize autonomy, individual development, and self-expression. On the other hand, transactional leadership, which focuses on structure and control, may not resonate as strongly with employees in cultures that place a high value on hierarchical relationships and compliance, thus affecting their well-being.

A case study from a multinational corporation in North America provided further insights into how leadership styles affect employee well-being. The company, which adopted a transformational leadership style across all departments, had a well-being program in place that included regular feedback, career development workshops, and a strong emphasis on work-life balance. Employee feedback indicated that these initiatives significantly contributed to higher levels of job satisfaction and reduced stress. In contrast, a similar-sized MNC in Asia, with a more transactional leadership style, faced challenges with employee turnover and reported lower well-being scores among employees. While the company also had well-being initiatives, such as wellness programs and annual leave policies, the lack of a strong, supportive leadership presence resulted in a more disengaged workforce. This case comparison underscores the importance of leadership in shaping the overall effectiveness of employee well-being programs and demonstrates the significant impact that leadership styles can have on employee satisfaction and retention.

The interpretation of the data suggests that leadership style plays a pivotal role in shaping employee well-being, with transformational leadership yielding the most positive outcomes. Cultural differences, however, mediate the effectiveness of leadership styles, with transformational leadership being particularly effective in individualistic cultures that value autonomy and personal development. Transactional leadership, while effective in certain hierarchical cultures, may not foster the same levels of employee engagement and well-being. These findings offer valuable insights for multinational corporations seeking to optimize their leadership practices and employee well-being strategies across diverse cultural contexts. By tailoring leadership styles to the cultural needs of their employees, MNCs can enhance employee satisfaction, engagement, and overall organizational performance.

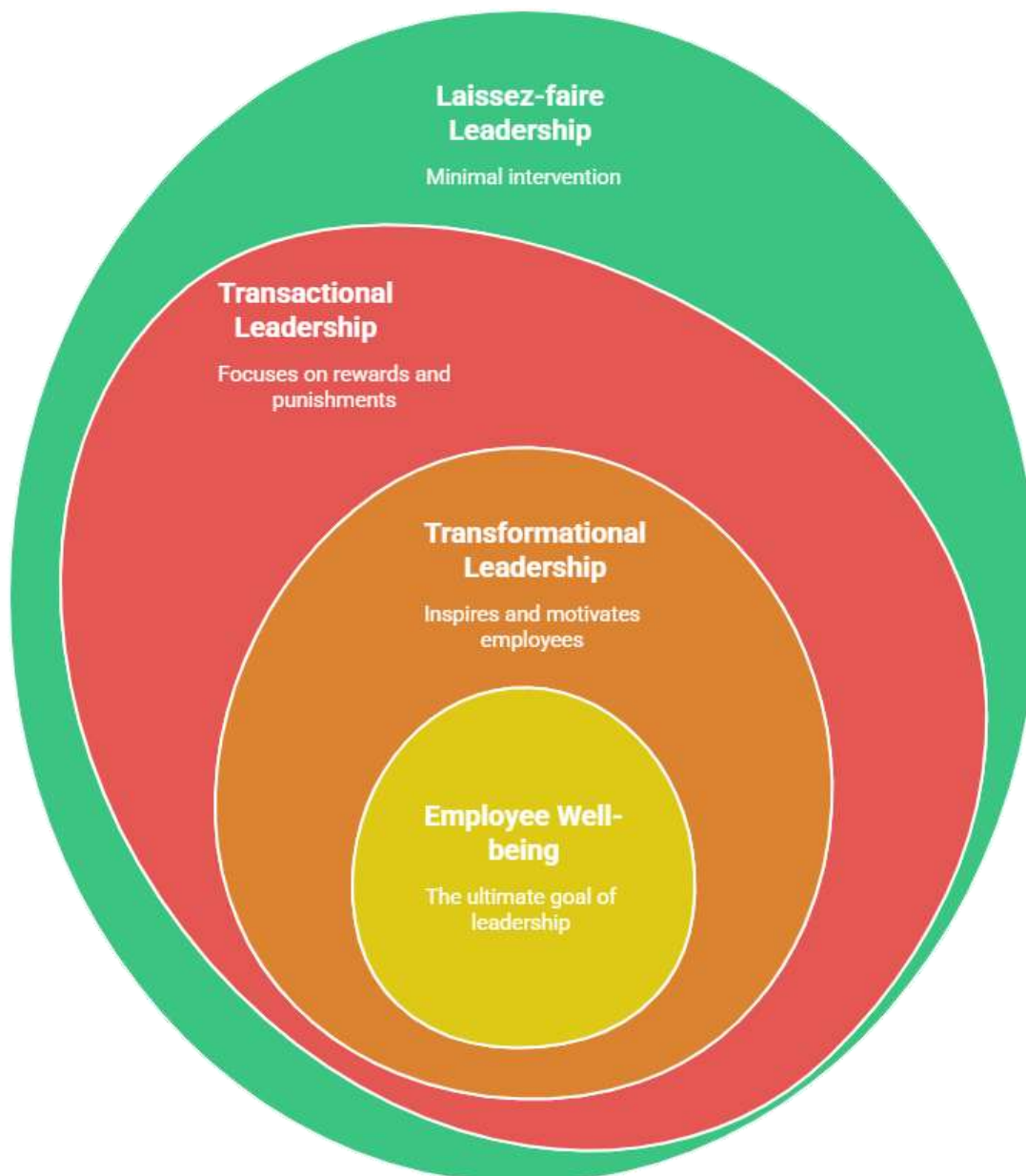


Figure 2. Leadership Styles and Employee Well-being

The results of this study revealed a significant relationship between leadership styles and employee well-being in multinational corporations (MNCs), with varying impacts across different cultural contexts (Peng et al., 2024). Employees in MNCs with predominantly transformational leadership reported higher levels of well-being, while those in organizations with a transactional leadership style exhibited lower well-being scores. This was particularly evident in regions such as North America and Europe, where transformational leadership was more prevalent, aligning with higher employee satisfaction and engagement. In contrast, MNCs in Asia and the Middle East, where transactional leadership dominated, showed a weaker association with well-being (Haiyirete et al., 2024). These findings suggest that leadership style plays a crucial role in shaping employee outcomes, with transformational leadership being most effective in fostering a positive work environment and enhancing employee well-being.

The findings of this study align with previous research on the positive effects of transformational leadership on employee well-being. Studies by Bass (1990) and Judge and Piccolo (2004) have highlighted the strong relationship between transformational leadership and employee motivation, satisfaction, and mental health. However, this study also expands on existing literature by incorporating a cross-cultural perspective, which has been largely

underexplored in previous work. While previous studies have often focused on single-country or homogenous cultural settings, this research reveals that the effectiveness of leadership styles is culturally contingent. The results contrast with some studies that suggest transactional leadership can also have positive effects in more structured or hierarchical cultures (e.g., Kark et al., 2003). This study, however, highlights that while transactional leadership may be effective in certain cultural contexts, it tends to have a negative impact on employee well-being in MNCs operating in more diverse, individualistic cultures.

The results of this study underscore the importance of understanding cultural differences in leadership effectiveness (Saragih, 2024). The stronger correlation between transformational leadership and employee well-being in Western, individualistic cultures suggests that leadership approaches that emphasize inspiration, autonomy, and personal development resonate more deeply with employees in these contexts. In contrast, the weaker correlation observed in more hierarchical, collectivist cultures suggests that transactional leadership, which focuses on structure, rules, and rewards, might be more appropriate in such settings. The findings serve as a reminder that leadership styles cannot be universally applied across cultures without considering local values, norms, and expectations (Mady et al., 2023). These results challenge MNCs to reconsider the "one-size-fits-all" approach to leadership and instead adopt a more flexible, culturally adaptive strategy that fosters better engagement and well-being across diverse global teams.

The implications of these findings are far-reaching, particularly for multinational corporations operating in diverse cultural environments. Companies seeking to improve employee well-being and engagement must tailor their leadership styles to the cultural expectations and values of their workforce (Chenet Ugarte & Barmeyer, 2025). Transformational leadership, with its emphasis on vision, empowerment, and individual growth, should be prioritized in cultures that value autonomy and personal development. On the other hand, transactional leadership may still play a crucial role in cultures where structure, stability, and compliance are highly valued (Xian et al., 2024). These insights can inform leadership training programs, HR strategies, and organizational development practices within MNCs, guiding them toward adopting culturally sensitive leadership styles that enhance employee well-being and overall productivity.

The results can be attributed to several factors, primarily the cultural values that shape the perception of leadership. In individualistic cultures, employees tend to value autonomy, creativity, and personal growth, which align with the principles of transformational leadership. This leadership style emphasizes motivation, empowerment, and individualized consideration, which resonate strongly with employees in such settings (Rodolaki et al., 2023). Conversely, in more collectivist cultures, where group harmony, structure, and hierarchy are prioritized, transactional leadership, with its focus on rewards, compliance, and structure, tends to be more effective. These cultural dynamics explain why transformational leadership was more strongly associated with well-being in Western cultures, while transactional leadership had a less favorable impact in regions like Asia and the Middle East (Sargam & Pandey, 2023). The findings reflect the necessity of aligning leadership practices with the cultural context of the workforce, reinforcing the idea that leadership effectiveness is not universal but context-dependent.

Looking ahead, MNCs should take concrete steps to adapt their leadership styles to the cultural diversity within their organizations (Dorroh et al., 2025). This study provides actionable recommendations for global corporations seeking to enhance leadership effectiveness and employee well-being. Future research could explore the specific elements of transformational and transactional leadership that resonate most with employees in different cultural contexts, providing a more granular understanding of how to optimize leadership strategies. Additionally, further studies could investigate the long-term effects of leadership style adaptation on employee retention, organizational performance, and overall corporate

culture (Tan et al., 2024). By considering cultural differences in leadership approach, MNCs can build more inclusive, supportive, and effective organizational structures that foster both high employee well-being and strong organizational outcomes.

CONCLUSION

The most significant finding of this study is the cultural contingency of leadership effectiveness in relation to employee well-being within multinational corporations (MNCs). While transformational leadership was found to positively influence employee well-being, particularly in Western, individualistic cultures, transactional leadership showed a weaker or negative effect, especially in regions such as Asia and the Middle East, where hierarchical and collectivist values are more pronounced. This highlights the need for MNCs to adapt their leadership strategies to cultural contexts, emphasizing the importance of culturally sensitive leadership practices to improve employee engagement and mental health. The study thus challenges the conventional one-size-fits-all leadership model and provides empirical evidence supporting the need for culturally tailored leadership approaches.

This research contributes to the existing literature by bridging the gap between leadership theory, employee well-being, and cultural diversity. Unlike previous studies that often focus on single-country or Western-centric contexts, this study provides a cross-cultural perspective that considers how leadership styles interact with diverse cultural norms and employee well-being. The dual approach of combining both quantitative data (via surveys) and qualitative insights (via interviews) offers a more comprehensive understanding of the complexities involved. The integration of cultural dimensions into leadership studies adds a significant value to the field, providing not only a more nuanced understanding of leadership impacts but also actionable insights for global organizations to enhance leadership effectiveness and employee well-being across different regions.

Despite the valuable insights offered, this study has certain limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the research was cross-sectional, capturing data at a single point in time, which may limit the ability to draw conclusions about causal relationships between leadership styles and employee well-being. Longitudinal studies would provide more insight into the long-term effects of leadership styles on employee satisfaction and organizational outcomes. Additionally, the sample size, although sufficient for general analysis, may not fully capture the diversity within MNCs, particularly in regions with more complex cultural dynamics. Future research should focus on expanding the sample to include a broader range of industries and cultural settings, as well as exploring other factors that could mediate or moderate the relationship between leadership styles and employee well-being, such as organizational climate or employee resilience.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Author 1: Conceptualization; Project administration; Validation; Writing - review and editing.

Author 2: Conceptualization; Data curation; Investigation.

Author 3: Data curation; Investigation.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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