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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Transformational Leadership and Employee Engagement in Cooperatives: The Mediating Role of Supervisor Support and Moderating Effect of Digital Communication Skills

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Abstrak

Penelitian ini mengkaji hubungan antara kepemimpinan transformasional, dukungan supervisor, dan keterlibatan kerja dalam konteks Koperasi Nuansa Perkasa di Indonesia, dengan fokus pada peran mediasi dukungan supervisor dan peran moderasi keterampilan komunikasi digital. Studi ini dilatarbelakangi oleh ketidakkonsistenan hasil penelitian sebelumnya serta keterbatasan eksplorasi empiris pada organisasi koperasi yang bercorak kolektivistik dan hierarkis. Menggunakan pendekatan kuantitatif, data dikumpulkan melalui survei terhadap 182 karyawan dan dianalisis menggunakan metode Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa kepemimpinan transformasional berpengaruh positif signifikan terhadap dukungan supervisor (β = 0,953; t = 145,563; p < 0,001) dan keterlibatan kerja (β = 0,512; t = 11,465; p < 0,001). Namun, dukungan supervisor menunjukkan pengaruh langsung yang negatif dan signifikan terhadap keterlibatan kerja (β = -0,252; t = 6,070; p < 0,001), serta memediasi secara negatif hubungan antara kepemimpinan transformasional dan keterlibatan kerja (β = -0,240; t = 5,922; p < 0,001). Temuan ini mengindikasikan adanya efek suppressor dalam model struktural, di mana dukungan yang diterma justru dapat dipersepsikan sebagai bentuk kontrol dalam budaya organisasi Indonesia. Selain itu, keterampilan komunikasi digital terbukti secara signifikan memoderasi hubungan antara dukungan supervisor dan keterlibatan kerja (β = 0,111; t = 9,885; p < 0,001), menunjukkan bahwa kompetensi komunikasi yang tinggi memperkuat efektivitas dukungan. Studi ini memberikan kontribusi teoretis dengan menekankan pentingnya sensitivitas budaya dalam mekanisme dukungan dan peran strategis komunikasi dalam lingkungan kerja digital.

Kata Kunci: Kepemimpinan Transformasional; Dukungan Penyelia; Keterlibatan Karyawan; Keterampilan Komunikasi Digital; Organisasi Yang Kooperatif.

Abstract

This study investigates the relationship between transformational leadership, supervisor support, and employee engagement in the context of Koperasi Nuansa Perkasa, Indonesia, with a focus on the mediating role of supervisor support and the moderating role of digital communication skills. Motivated by inconsistencies in prior research and the need to understand leadership dynamics within collectivist and hierarchical cultures, this study responds to the limited empirical exploration in cooperative-based organizations. Using a quantitative approach, data were collected through a survey of 182 employees and analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). The results confirm that transformational leadership has a significant positive effect on both supervisor support (β = 0.953; t = 145.563; p < 0.001) and employee engagement (β = 0.512; t = 11.465; p < 0.001). However, supervisor support shows a significant but negative direct effect on employee engagement (β = -0.252; t = 6.070; p < 0.001), and also negatively mediates the effect of transformational leadership on engagement (β = -0.240; t = 5.922; p < 0.001). These findings suggest the existence of a suppressor effect in the structural model, where perceived support may be interpreted as control in the Indonesian organizational context. Furthermore, digital communication skills significantly moderate the relationship between supervisor support and engagement (β = 0.111; t = 9.885; p < 0.001), indicating that high communication competence enhances the effectiveness of supervisory support. The study contributes to the leadership and organizational behavior literature by highlighting the cultural sensitivity of support mechanisms and the critical role of communication in digital work environments.

Keyword: Transformational Leadership; Supervisor Support; Employee Engagement; Digital Communication Skills; Cooperative Organization.

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1. Introduction

In today's increasingly dynamic and digitally driven work environment, employee engagement has become a crucial determinant of organizational performance and sustainability. Particularly in cooperativebased organizations, which often rely on member participation and communal ownership, fostering high levels of employee and member engagement is essential for operational efficiency and service quality (Han, 2022). Yet, many cooperatives face challenges in sustaining such engagement amidst pressures for modernization and digital adaptation. Transformational leadership has emerged as a key leadership style to address these challenges. Characterized by inspirational motivation, idealized influence, individualized consideration, and intellectual stimulation (Bass & Riggio, 2006), transformational leaders can elevate employee motivation and commitment by aligning individual aspirations with organizational goals. Empirical evidence indicates that this leadership style not only improves employee performance but also cultivates a positive work climate that enhances job satisfaction and engagement (Avolio & Bass, 2004; Değirmenci et al., 2022). In addition, supervisor support plays a critical mediating role in strengthening this leadership-employee engagement relationship. Perceived support from supervisors has been shown to foster a sense of psychological safety, motivation, and attachment to the organization (Eisenberger et al., 2002: Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). However, in today's digital workplace, the quality of supervisor support is increasingly contingent upon digital communication skills. Supervisors equipped with effective digital communication abilities can more clearly articulate expectations, offer timely feedback, and foster stronger relationships with team members thereby enhancing engagement (Handke et al., 2022; Leonardi et al., 2013).

Although transformational leadership and supervisor support have been widely studied in organizational behavior literature, few studies have explored how digital communication competence moderates these dynamics especially in the cooperative sector in developing countries. Digital competence is no longer just a technical asset but is now central to leadership effectiveness, particularly in remote or hybrid work contexts (Lukić-Nikolić, 2023; Van Den Hooff & De Ridder, 2004). This is particularly relevant in Indonesian cooperatives, such as Koperasi Nuansa Perkasa, which faces increasing demands for digital integration to maintain competitiveness and member loyalty. Koperasi Nuansa Perkasa, one of the largest cooperatives in Sumbawa Island, provides an ideal context to explore these leadership dynamics. Despite its strong local presence and broad business coverage from microfinance to agriculture the cooperative grapples with challenges in employee engagement. communication efficiency, and leadership adaptation in digital contexts (Oghenekome Urefe et al., 2024). In this environment, leadership style, supervisor behavior, and digital capability become intertwined factors that shape employee involvement and organizational effectiveness. Given these issues, the present study seeks to investigate the relationship between transformational leadership and employee engagement in the context of a cooperative organization. Specifically, it examines the mediating role of supervisor support and the moderating role of supervisors' digital communication skills. By doing so, this research addresses a significant gap in the literature regarding leadership and engagement dynamics in community-based organizations undergoing digital transformation. The study not only extends theoretical discourse on transformational leadership but also offers practical implications for cooperative managers seeking to enhance workforce commitment through digitally enabled leadership practices. The remainder of the paper is structured as follows. The next section reviews relevant literature and theoretical foundations, followed by the research methodology. The results section presents empirical findings, which are then discussed in the context of existing studies. The paper concludes with practical recommendations, theoretical implications, limitations, and directions for future research. Transformational leadership refers to a leadership approach where leaders motivate and inspire employees through vision, idealized influence, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration (Bass & Avolio, 1990, p. 199; Burns, 1978). This style encourages proactive behavior, emotional connection, and continuous development. In cooperative contexts, where leadership and community participation intertwine, transformational leaders foster trust and inspire both employees and members toward shared goals (Avolio & Bass, 2004, p. 200; Kim et al., 2023).

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Empirical research supports the link between transformational leadership and perceived supervisor support. Wang et al. (2011) found that transformational leaders create collaborative cultures that enable supervisors to engage more deeply in providing guidance, feedback, and emotional support. Similarly, Boccoli et al. (2024) demonstrated that transformational leadership significantly enhances perceived supervisor support in cooperative settings. These findings reinforce the proposition that transformational leaders indirectly shape daily support practices. Based on this evidence, the following hypothesis is proposed: H1: Transformational leadership has a positive effect on supervisor support. Work engagement is a motivational construct comprising vigor, dedication, and absorption (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). It reflects an individual's cognitive and emotional commitment to their role and is enhanced when employees feel empowered, appreciated, and challenged. Transformational leaders contribute to such environments by providing vision, recognition, and intellectual stimulation (Bass & Riggio, 2006; Northouse, 2018). Empirical research supports the link between transformational leadership and perceived supervisor Prior studies confirm that transformational leadership significantly influences engagement. García-Morales et al. (2021) and Santya & Dewi, (2022) reported that in cooperatives, such leadership improves satisfaction, loyalty, and job involvement. Perliner et al., (2022) observed that transformational leaders enhance member engagement through individualized support and shared purpose. These findings indicate that transformational leadership is a key antecedent of work engagement, particularly in community-based organizations. Based on this evidence, the following hypothesis is proposed: H2: Transformational leadership has a positive effect on work engagement.

Perceived Supervisor Support (PSS) is defined as the degree to which employees believe their supervisors value their contributions and care for their well-being (Eisenberger et al., 2002). Rooted in social exchange theory, PSS reinforces mutual obligation and trust in organizational settings. Supportive supervisors reduce role stress and enhance employees' psychological resources to stay engaged (Hobfoll, 1989; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). Research by Schaufeli & Bakker (2004) found that PSS increases motivation and reduces burnout, leading to stronger work engagement. Rhoades & Eisenberger (2002) also demonstrated that support leads to improved well-being and job satisfaction. More recently, Ullah et al. (2022) confirmed the positive relationship between PSS and engagement across sectors, including cooperatives. Amanda & Ekhsan (2024) further showed that satisfaction mediated this relationship, highlighting PSS as a critical enabler of workplace energy and focus. Based on this evidence, the following hypothesis is proposed: H3: Supervisor support has a positive effect on work engagement. While transformational leadership directly influences engagement, scholars argue that its impact is partially mediated through the quality of supervisory relationships. Bocoli et al., (2024) demonstrated that perceived supervisor support mediates the link between transformational leadership and engagement, particularly by reinforcing psychological safety and work purpose. Similarly, Rhoades & Eisenberger (2002) noted that employees who perceive their supervisors as supportive experience greater motivation and organizational attachment. In cooperative settings, this dynamic is even more relevant. Li & Tang, (2022); Qalati et al., (2022) emphasized that supportive supervisory behavior amplifies the benefits of transformational leadership by translating strategic vision into everyday support. Saif et al. (2024) and Joo & Lim, (2013) found that supervisor support serves as a mechanism through which transformational leaders cultivate engagement. Based on this evidence, the following hypothesis is proposed: H4: Supervisor support mediates the relationship between transformational leadership and work engagement. In the digital era, communication effectiveness is heavily influenced by the ability of supervisors to use digital platforms competently. Digital communication skills involve the capacity to convey information clearly and empathetically via email, messaging tools, or collaboration platforms (Leonardi et al., 2013; Roman et al., 2019). Effective digital communication improves responsiveness, trust, and engagement, especially in remote and hybrid work environments. Yukl (2012) and Lukic Nikolic (2023) further confirmed that such skills help supervisors deliver timely feedback and reduce miscommunication, which directly contributes to higher engagement. In cooperative contexts, digital competence among leaders is essential for maintaining effective communication with members. Based on this evidence, the following hypothesis is proposed: H5: Digital communication skills moderate the relationship between supervisor support and work engagement.

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2. Research Methodology

This study employed a quantitative research approach to examine the relationships among the variables using numerical data analyzed through statistical procedures. A quantitative method was deemed appropriate due to its ability to provide objective results and enable empirical testing of hypothesized relationships between constructs (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). The primary data were collected using a structured questionnaire distributed directly to respondents. The questionnaire, developed based on validated scales from prior literature, allowed for efficient data collection and minimized interviewer bias (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). The use of printed questionnaires distributed to employees of Koperasi Nuansa Perkasa ensured that the responses were obtained from individuals relevant to the research objectives. To ensure clarity and consistency in measurement, the following constructs were operationalized based on established scales:

- Transformational Leadership
 Measured using items adapted from Carless et al. (2000), capturing leadership behaviors such as
 articulating a vision, encouraging innovative thinking, building trust, and individual consideration.
 Example item: "My supervisor encourages thinking about assumptions in new ways."
- 2) Work Engagement Measured with indicators adapted from Bakker and Demerouti (2008), focusing on vigor, dedication, and cognitive involvement. Example item: "You are involved in improving the work organization or process in your department or organization."
- 3) Supervisor Support

 Measured using items adapted from Rhoades *et al.* (2001), reflecting employees' perceptions of emotional and instrumental support provided by supervisors. Example item: "My supervisor genuinely cares
- about my well-being."4) Digital Communication Skills

Assessed using items from Roman *et al.* (2019), covering a supervisor's ability to competently use digital tools for effective communication. Example item: "My supervisor communicates competently through digital communication channels."

All items were measured using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree), as it provides a balanced range of responses without overburdening respondents cognitively (Revilla *et al.*, 2014). The target population comprised all operational and managerial employees at Koperasi Nuansa Perkasa. A purposive sampling technique was employed to ensure the inclusion of participants with adequate exposure to the workplace dynamics being studied. Inclusion criteria required respondents to be permanent or contract employees who had worked for at least six months. This approach aligns with Sekaran & Bougie's (2016) recommendation for purposive sampling in context-specific research. The required sample size was calculated using the formula:

Sample Size = $[(Number of Indicators + Variables) \times 2] \times 5$ to 10

Given 21 indicators and 4 variables, the resulting range was 180–250 respondents. This meets the minimum recommendation for Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM), which requires at least 100–200 participants for reliable estimations. This study employed Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) using SmartPLS 3.0 to test the relationships among variables. PLS-SEM is suitable for complex models with multiple latent constructs and does not require data normality, making it ideal for social and business research contexts. The analysis followed two main stages:

1) Outer Model

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The evaluation of the measurement model (outer model) was conducted to assess the validity and reliability of the constructs. Convergent validity was examined by analyzing the outer loadings of each indicator, with values equal to or greater than 0.5 considered acceptable, as suggested by Hair *et al.*

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(2021). Indicators below this threshold were excluded to ensure the integrity of the construct measurement. Discriminant validity was evaluated using both cross-loadings and the Fornell-Larcker criterion, where the square root of the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) for each construct must exceed its correlation with other constructs. This step ensures that each construct is empirically distinct. Furthermore, the reliability of the constructs was assessed using composite reliability (CR), with values above 0.7 indicating an acceptable level of internal consistency (Hair *et al.*, 2021). These tests collectively confirmed that the indicators adequately captured the intended latent constructs.

2) Inner Model

Following the validation of the measurement model, the structural model (inner model) was assessed to examine the hypothesized relationships among the latent constructs. Path coefficients were analyzed to determine the strength and direction of these relationships, while statistical significance was evaluated using t-statistics. Based on Hair *et al.* (2021), t-values above 1.96 for a two-tailed test or 1.64 for a one-tailed test at a 5% significance level indicate significant relationships. Additionally, the model's explanatory power was assessed through the coefficient of determination (R²), which reflects the proportion of variance in the dependent variable explained by its predictors. Higher R² values suggest stronger explanatory capability of the model. The combination of these analyses provided empirical support for the proposed theoretical framework and confirmed the robustness of the structural relationships among the constructs.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Results

3.1.1 Respondent Profile

The respondents in this study consisted of employees of Koperasi Nuansa Perkasa. Based on gender distribution, the majority of respondents were male, accounting for 86.8% of the total, while female respondents comprised 13.2%. This indicates a male-dominated workforce within the cooperative. In terms of age, the largest proportion of respondents (52.2%) were aged between 26 and 30 years. Respondents aged under 25 years constituted 24.7%, those between 31 and 35 years accounted for 13.7%, and those above 36 years made up 9.3%. These figures suggest that the workforce is predominantly composed of young adults, most of whom are in their early or mid-career stages. Regarding educational background, 42.3% of respondents held a senior high school (SMA or equivalent) qualification, followed closely by 40.1% who held a bachelor's degree (S1/S2/S3), and 17.6% who held a diploma (D1/D2/D3). This reflects a relatively well-educated workforce capable of engaging in organizational development and leadership practices. In terms of length of employment, the majority of respondents (81.9%) had worked for two to four years, followed by 12.6% who had less than one year of experience. A smaller portion had worked for five to seven years (4.4%) and more than seven years (1.1%). These results suggest that most employees were still within the early stages of their tenure, offering valuable insights into how newer employees perceive leadership and workplace engagement.

3.1.2 Model Specification

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The measurement model was assessed to examine the reliability and validity of the constructs. As shown in Table 1, all constructs met the minimum thresholds for internal consistency, with Cronbach's Alpha values ranging from 0.765 to 0.895 and Composite Reliability (CR) from 0.851 to 0.923. Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values ranged between 0.557 and 0.706, confirming convergent validity (Hair *et al.*, 2021). Discriminant validity was assessed using the Fornell-Larcker criterion and cross-loading values and was found to be acceptable:

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Table 1. Construct Validity and Reliability

	Cronbach's Alpha	Rho_A	Composite Reliability	AVE
Supervisor Support	0.765	0.789	0.851	0.594
Transformational Leadership	0.865	0.874	0.897	0.557
Digital communication skills	0.895	0.903	0.923	0.706
Work Engagement	0.871	0.873	0.907	0.662

Table 1 also confirms that rho_A values are all above 0.70, further supporting construct reliability. Multicollinearity was assessed using the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF), and all values were below the threshold of 5, indicating no collinearity issues. Furthermore, the R² values (Table 2) show that 90.8% of the variance in Supervisor Support is explained by Transformational Leadership, while 96.7% of the variance in Work Engagement is explained by the combined predictors, demonstrating a strong model fit.

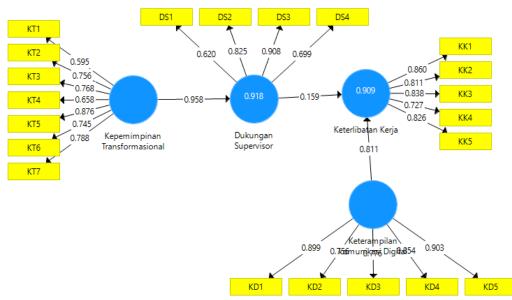


Figure 1. Outer Loading and Final Model

Table 2. R Square Values

	R Square	R Square Adjusted
Supervisor Support	0.908	0.908
Work Engagement	0.967	0.967

3.1.3 Hypothesis Testing

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The structural model was tested using the bootstrapping technique with 5,000 samples. As shown in Table 4.10, five hypotheses were examined. Hypothesis 1 (H1) is supported, indicating that Transformational Leadership significantly influences Supervisor Support (β = 0.953, t = 145.563, p < 0.001). Hypothesis 2 (H2) is also supported, showing that Transformational Leadership has a positive and significant effect on Work Engagement (β = 0.512, t = 11.465, p < 0.001). Unexpectedly, Hypothesis 3 (H3) is not supported in the expected direction: Supervisor Support negatively affects Work Engagement (β = -0.252, t = 6.070, p < 0.001). Likewise, Hypothesis 4 (H4) is statistically significant but also reveals a negative mediation effect of Supervisor Support in the relationship between Transformational Leadership and Work Engagement (β = -0.240, t = 5.922, p < 0.001). Finally, Hypothesis 5 (H5) is supported: Digital Communication Skills positively moderate the relationship between Supervisor Support and Work Engagement (β = 0.111, t = 9.885, p < 0.001), indicating that digital competence strengthens the effect of supervisor support on engagement.

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Table 3. Summary of Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis	Relationship	Original	t-value	p-	Conclusion
		Sample		value	
H1	Transformational Leadership → Supervisor Support	0.953	145.563	0.000	Supported
H2	Transformational Leadership → Work Engagement	0.512	11.465	0.000	Supported
H3	Supervisor Support → Work Engagement	-0.252	6.070	0.000	Not supported (Negative direction)
H4	Transformational Leadership → Supervisor Support → Work Engagement	240	5.922	0.000	Supported (Negative mediation)
H5	Supervisor Support × Digital Communication Skills → Work Engagement	0.111	9.885	0.000	Supported (Positive moderation)

3.2 Discussion

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This study, conducted at Koperasi Nuansa Perkasa, involved 182 valid responses from a population of 253 employees, reflecting a diverse demographic profile in terms of gender, age, educational attainment, and tenure. Most respondents were women under the age of 25 with a high school or diploma education and had worked less than a year. Descriptive analysis showed positive perceptions across all variables, indicating a favorable work climate. The high scores for transformational leadership, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and employee performance point to a cooperative environment that supports motivation and productivity. The findings confirm the significant positive influence of transformational leadership on both supervisor support and employee engagement. These results align with Bass and Avolio (1990); Herminingsih (2020); Saif et al., (2024) who emphasized that transformational leadership fosters trust, individualized attention, and intellectual stimulation. This leadership style also enhances employee engagement by promoting vigor, dedication, and absorption at work, as supported by Schaufeli and Bakker (2004) and García-Morales et al. (2021). In the cooperative context where shared goals and participatory structures are prominent transformational leaders play a key role in cultivating motivation and collective involvement.

However, contrary to previous studies such as those by Rhoades and Eisenberger (2001) and Tims et al. (2014), the direct effect of supervisor support on employee engagement was found to be negative, though statistically significant. This unexpected result may reflect cultural nuances in Indonesian workplace settings, where hierarchical communication and tight supervisory control are common. In such environments, support perceived as overly directive can be misinterpreted as micromanagement, reducing autonomy and intrinsic motivation an issue echoed by Blau's (1964) social exchange theory. The suppressor effect found in the mediation analysis further supports this notion: although transformational leadership fosters supportive behavior, if that support is delivered in a controlling rather than empowering way, it may dampen engagement. Interestingly, the moderating role of digital communication skills proved to be a key factor in reversing the negative perception of supervisor support. When supervisors possess strong digital communication competencies, their supportive behaviors are more likely to be interpreted as helpful and motivating. This finding supports studies by Roman et al. (2019) and Erdogan et al. (2022). who emphasize the importance of communication media and style in effective leadership. In digital or hybrid workplaces, especially within collectivist cultures like Indonesia, clear and empathetic communication helps bridge hierarchical gaps and enhances the efficacy of leadership practices. Therefore, this study highlights the need for leadership development programs that integrate emotional intelligence and digital communication training to ensure contextual alignment in support delivery.

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4. Conclusion

This study concludes that transformational leadership plays a vital role in fostering employee engagement both directly and indirectly through supervisor support. However, the effectiveness of supervisor support is contingent upon how it is perceived within the organizational culture. The findings revealed that although transformational leadership enhances supervisory behavior, if such support is delivered in a directive or overly controlling manner as often occurs in hierarchical structures it may have a counterproductive effect on employee engagement. Practically, this research implies that organizations, especially cooperatives like Koperasi Nuansa Perkasa, should not only promote transformational leadership but also ensure that supervisors are trained in emotionally intelligent communication and culturally sensitive support strategies. Digital communication competence is also essential to maintain clarity, empathy, and autonomy in employee-supervisor interactions, particularly in remote or digitally facilitated workplaces. From a theoretical standpoint, this research supports and extends existing models by integrating the moderating role of communication skills and contextualizing support within Indonesian organizational culture. The findings also suggest that future research should further explore the psychological interpretation of support behaviors across different cultural settings, potentially using longitudinal or mixed-method designs to deepen understanding. A limitation of this study lies in its crosssectional design and the single organizational setting, which may restrict generalizability. Further studies in varied organizational contexts and regions are recommended to validate and refine the conclusions drawn. Nonetheless, the study successfully addresses its initial research questions and highlights practical insights for leadership development and employee engagement strategies in culturally complex organizations.

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