



Impact of Leadership Style on Employee Performance and Engagement

A Study Based on Employee Perceptions

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Abstract: Purpose – This study examines how leadership style, as perceived by employees, is associated with employee performance and employee engagement. Rather than testing a single named leadership typology, the study captures leadership as a bundle of everyday managerial practices relating to goal-setting, participation, recognition, feedback and workplace relationships, and identifies which of these practices employees most closely associate with better performance and stronger engagement.

Design/methodology/approach – Data were collected through a structured, close-ended questionnaire administered online to 52 working respondents. The instrument captured demographic characteristics (gender, age, education and marital status) together with twelve perception-based items covering leadership approach, task-completion style, participation practice, idea-sharing, responsibility, feedback frequency, performance improvement, engagement, organisational connection and overall workplace priorities. Responses were coded and analysed using frequency and percentage analysis, descriptive statistics (mean, median and standard deviation), chi-square tests of independence, one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) and linear regression, the last two supported by index scores derived from the item responses.

Findings – Inspiring and motivating leadership was the most frequently experienced style (50.0%), followed by target-and-reward-focused leadership (26.9%). Team involvement, regular guidance and manager encouragement emerged as the practices most strongly associated with task completion, participation and idea-sharing, while leader confidence and involvement in decision-making were the strongest drivers of employee responsibility-taking. Constructive feedback, trust and good communication were the factors most closely linked to performance improvement and engagement, and supportive management was the leading driver of organisational connection. A healthy work environment (46.2%) and strong leadership (40.4%) were rated the two most important overall workplace factors, ahead of employee development and formal recognition schemes. Inferential tests showed that perceived leadership practices and outcome drivers did not differ significantly by gender, age, education or marital status. Respondents naming inspiring leadership reported more frequent progress discussions with their leaders (ANOVA $F(3, 48) = 3.10, p = .035, \eta^2 = .16$), although this result was borderline under a non-parametric check and in Fisher's exact tests. A relational leadership-practice index

significantly predicted a performance-and-engagement index in simple linear regression ($B = 0.17$, $p = .037$, $R^2 = .084$), but the effect was small and was no longer significant once demographic controls and feedback frequency were added ($p = .104$). The statistical evidence is therefore suggestive rather than conclusive.

Originality/value – The study adds employee-perception-based, developing-country evidence to a literature that has predominantly relied on validated Likert-scale instruments tested in single named leadership styles (mainly transformational, transactional and laissez-faire). By mapping a broader menu of everyday leadership practices onto performance and engagement outcomes, and by situating the findings alongside recent cross-national and digital-era leadership research, the study offers practical guidance for managers seeking to strengthen performance and engagement through concrete, everyday leadership behaviours.

Keywords; Leadership style, employee performance, employee engagement, transformational leadership, participative leadership, workplace environment, feedback, employee development.

1. Introduction

Leadership remains one of the most enduring constructs in organisational behaviour because of its pervasive influence on how employees think, feel and behave at work. The way a leader sets goals, involves employees in decisions, recognises effort and provides feedback shapes not only what employees accomplish but also how attached they feel to their organisation. Li, Ebabu, Yu, Yuan, Ning and Xuanyi (2025) found that leadership exerts a significant positive effect on employee performance across public sector organisations, while Gemed and Lee (2020) showed, in a cross-national comparison of Ethiopian and South Korean information and communication technology (ICT) professionals, that different leadership styles shape both engagement and task performance in broadly similar ways across very different cultural settings. These findings, together with a growing body of complementary research, suggest that leadership style is not a peripheral managerial preference but a central lever through which organisations can influence performance and engagement outcomes.

Despite this growing consensus, most existing evidence has been generated using validated psychometric scales built around a small number of named leadership typologies - principally transformational, transactional and laissez-faire leadership - and has been collected predominantly from single-country, single-sector settings such as ICT firms, public administration or financial services (Bhat and Ghoshal, 2025; Gemed and Lee, 2020; Thanh, Quang and Anh, 2022). Relatively little attention has been paid to how employees themselves describe, in everyday terms, the specific leadership practices - such as clear goal-setting, involvement in decisions, recognition for ideas, and the frequency and nature of feedback - that they associate with better performance and stronger engagement, particularly within an Indian setting.

Against this backdrop, the present study pursues four objectives. First, it identifies the leadership styles and practices that employees report experiencing most often in their workplace. Second, it examines which specific leadership practices employees associate with task completion, participation, idea-sharing, responsibility-taking, performance improvement and engagement. Third, it identifies the workplace factors that employees consider most important overall, in order to assess the relative weight employees place on leadership compared with other organisational factors such as the work environment, financial rewards and career development. Fourth, it tests statistically whether these perceptions differ across demographic groups and leadership styles, and whether relational leadership practices predict performance- and engagement-related outcomes. In doing so, the study extends the leadership-performance-engagement literature by providing descriptive, employee-perception-based evidence from a diverse, developing-country sample, and by mapping leadership onto a broader set of everyday managerial practices rather than a single predefined style.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Leadership styles and employee performance

Leadership style refers to the recurring pattern of behaviours a leader adopts while directing, motivating and interacting with subordinates, and it has consistently been shown to shape how employees perform their tasks. Bhat and Ghoshal (2025), synthesising 52 studies published between 2017 and 2024, concluded that transformational and servant leadership styles improve employee performance, that participative leadership increases motivation and productivity, and that autocratic leadership tends to reduce performance. This conclusion is corroborated by Li et al. (2025), who surveyed 397 employees across 30 public sector organisations in Ethiopia and found that leadership exerts a significant positive effect on employee performance, and by a good working environment operating alongside it as a second, complementary driver. Gemed and Lee (2020), examining 291 South Korean and 147 Ethiopian ICT professionals, reported that transformational leadership enhances engagement and creativity, transactional leadership strengthens task performance, and laissez-faire leadership diminishes it, a

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pattern that held consistently across both cultural contexts. Thanh, Quang and Anh (2022) extended this line of enquiry to department-level leaders in Vietnam's public sector, confirming that transformational, transactional and laissez-faire styles differentially shape staff task performance and innovation.

2.2 Leadership, employee engagement and the mediating pathway

A recurring theme across the reviewed literature is that leadership rarely influences performance directly; rather, its effect is substantially channelled through employee engagement. Cahyani and Siswanto (2019), studying 101 financial-sector employees using partial least squares structural equation modelling, found that transformational leadership improves employee engagement, which in turn directly enhances job performance. Li et al. (2025) similarly established that employee engagement significantly mediates the relationship between leadership, the working environment and performance. Wang, van Woerkom, Breevaart, Bakker and Xu (2023), using a two-wave, multi-source design involving 556 employees and 104 managers in China, went further and showed that strengths-based leadership does not improve supervisor-rated task performance directly; instead, its effect operates almost entirely through the engagement it generates among employees, a finding made more credible by the use of supervisor ratings rather than self-reported performance. Zaw and Takahashi (2022) reported a comparable engagement-mediated pathway between transformational leadership and contextual performance.

2.3 Boundary conditions and contextual influences

Several studies point to conditions under which the leadership-engagement-performance relationship strengthens or weakens. Wang et al. (2023) found that the quality of the leader-member relationship moderates the strength of the link between strengths-based leadership and engagement. Zaw and Takahashi (2022) identified an employee's mindful awareness as a further moderating trait, and additionally noted that women appeared somewhat more responsive to transformational leadership behaviours than men. At the same time, Gameda and Lee (2020) and Thanh et al. (2022) both demonstrate that the fundamental engagement-mediated pattern holds across markedly different cultural and institutional settings - East Asian, African and South-East Asian public-sector and ICT contexts alike - suggesting a degree of cross-cultural robustness in how leadership translates into engagement and, ultimately, performance.

2.4 Leadership and workplace learning

Beyond performance and engagement, leadership has also been linked to how employees learn and develop at work. Jarl (2024), synthesising 40 studies from 14 international journals, found that leaders influence workplace learning through role modelling, relational support and coaching, and that strong leadership improves both individual- and team-level learning outcomes. This adds a developmental dimension to the leadership-outcome relationship that complements the performance- and engagement-focused literature reviewed above, and is consistent with the present study's finding that employees associate leader confidence and involvement in decisions with a greater willingness to take on responsibility.

2.5 Insight from digital-era resilience research

Recent research on digital agility and organisational resilience offers a complementary, higher-order perspective on the centrality of leadership. Acharjya, Das, Foropon and Belal (2026), analysing 765 responses from Indian educational-technology small and medium enterprises through an integrated Rough Set Theory and Formal Concept Analysis approach, found that Digital Leadership was the only employee-level capability associated with all four states of organisational resilience examined in their study - Sense, Adapt, Thrive and Transform - and that its influence became particularly pronounced during the Adapt and Thrive states, where it operated alongside employees' self-efficacy and mindset to sustain performance under uncertainty. Although this study is grounded in a different theoretical tradition and a substantially larger, differently structured sample, its central conclusion reinforces the pattern that emerges from the leadership-engagement-performance literature: leadership is not a peripheral or one-off influence but a persistent, cross-contextual driver of positive employee and organisational outcomes, remaining salient even as the specific capabilities surrounding it evolve.

2.6 Research gaps

Notwithstanding this substantial body of evidence, several gaps remain. First, the majority of existing studies rely on cross-sectional, single-time-point designs, which restrict causal inference regarding the leadership-engagement-performance relationship (Gameda and Lee, 2020; Wang et al., 2023). Second, most measures are self-reported, raising the possibility of common-method bias; supervisor-rated performance data of the kind used by Wang et al. (2023) remain comparatively rare. Third, existing research has typically examined a narrow set of named leadership styles - most commonly transformational, transactional and laissez-faire - leaving newer, more granular, everyday leadership practices, as well as digitally enabled leadership, comparatively under-explored (Bhat and Ghoshal, 2025; Acharjya et al., 2026). Fourth, much of the evidence originates from specific sectors, such as ICT, public administration or finance, and from East Asian, African or Western economies, with comparatively limited attention paid to a broad, mixed-sector, developing-country workforce such as India's. The present study addresses these gaps in part by drawing on employee perceptions gathered from a cross-section of Indian working professionals and by examining a broader menu of everyday leadership-related practices - spanning goal-setting, participation, recognition, feedback and workplace relationships - rather than a single predefined leadership typology.

3. Conceptual Basis of the Study

Building on this literature, the present study conceptualises leadership style not as a single named typology but as a bundle of everyday managerial practices - encompassing goal orientation, participative practices, recognition and feedback behaviours - that jointly shape two proximal employee outcomes: performance and engagement. Consistent with the reviewed

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evidence on engagement as a mediating pathway, engagement is treated in this study not merely as an outcome in its own right but as a state closely intertwined with, and reinforcing of, performance-related behaviours such as feedback-seeking, responsibility-taking and organisational connection. Accordingly, the study examines leadership, performance and engagement together as an interconnected set of workplace experiences rather than as three strictly separate constructs to be tested through formal path modelling.

4. Research Methodology

4.1 Research design

The study adopts a descriptive and inferential cross-sectional survey design intended to capture employees' perceptions of leadership style and its association with performance and engagement at a single point in time.

4.2 Sample and data collection

Data were collected through a structured, close-ended questionnaire administered online via Google Forms during September 2026. A non-probability convenience sampling approach was used to reach working respondents across a range of ages, educational backgrounds and marital statuses. After screening, 52 valid responses were retained for analysis.

4.3 Measures

The questionnaire comprised two parts. The first part captured demographic information, namely gender, age group, educational qualification and marital status. The second part comprised twelve close-ended, single-choice items, each offering four response options representing distinct leadership-related practices or outcome factors: (i) the factor that most encourages better performance, (ii) the leadership approach that helps task completion, (iii) the leadership practice that encourages participation, (iv) the leadership approach that increases interest in work, (v) the practice that encourages idea-sharing, (vi) the factor that encourages taking more responsibility, (vii) the frequency with which the leader discusses work progress, (viii) the factor that most improves performance, (ix) the factor that sustains engagement, (x) the factor that builds organisational connection, (xi) the factor that builds a sense of connection or support, and (xii) the factor considered most important overall for the workplace. All responses were coded numerically following a predefined codebook and analysed in their categorical form.

4.4 Derived variables and indices

Because the questionnaire items are single-choice and categorical, two count-based index scores were derived from the item responses so that mean-based and regression analyses could be performed. The Leadership Practice Index (LPI, range 0 to 6) counts, across Q1 to Q6, the number of times a respondent selected a relational or inspirational option rather than a reward-, target-, independence- or freedom-oriented option: inspiring or participation-focused leadership (Q1), team involvement or regular guidance (Q2), team discussions or motivational guidance (Q3), employee involvement or vision and inspiration (Q4), participation in discussions or manager encouragement (Q5), and the leader's confidence or involvement in decision-making (Q6). The Performance and Engagement Index (PEI, range 0 to 3) counts the number of interpersonal drivers selected among practical guidance or constructive feedback (Q8), trust or good communication (Q9) and supportive management or positive feedback (Q10). Feedback frequency (FF, range 1 to 4) is Q7 reverse-coded so that 4 denotes daily progress discussions and 1 denotes rare discussions. Q11 and Q12 were not included in the indices because all Q11 options are relational and Q12 is an overall-priority item. These classifications are analytical judgements rather than a validated scale; internal consistency was low (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.43$ for LPI and 0.13 for PEI), so index-based results are treated as exploratory.

4.5 Statistical analysis

Three hypotheses guided the inferential analysis. H1: perceived leadership practices and outcome drivers differ across demographic groups (gender, age, education and marital status). H2: perceived leadership style is associated with how often leaders discuss work progress and with performance-and-engagement outcomes. H3: relational leadership practice (LPI) positively predicts performance and engagement (PEI). Descriptive statistics (mean, median, standard deviation and mode) were computed for every item and index. Pearson chi-square tests of independence, with Cramér's V as the effect size, examined associations between categorical variables; demographic categories were collapsed to limit sparse cells, Fisher's exact test is reported for 2×2 tables, and Holm's procedure was used to adjust for the 23 tests in the main set. One-way ANOVA (with η^2 as the effect size) compared index scores across groups, with Levene's test for homogeneity of variance and the Kruskal–Wallis test as a non-parametric check. Ordinary least squares regression estimated the association between LPI and PEI, first as a simple model and then with feedback frequency, gender, age (above 25 years), and undergraduate education as controls; marital status was omitted from the multiple model because of collinearity with age (VIF above 11). Significance was judged at $\alpha = .05$ (two-tailed). Analyses were carried out in Microsoft Excel (descriptive statistics, index construction and the simple regression, using worksheet formulas) and Python with SciPy and NumPy (chi-square, ANOVA and multiple regression); results were cross-checked between the two where both were used.

5. Data Analysis and Results

5.1 Demographic profile of respondents

Characteristic	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Female	18	34.6%
	Male	33	63.5%

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	Prefer not to say	1	1.9%
Age group	Below 20 years	13	25.0%
	20 to 25 years	25	48.1%
	26 to 30 years	2	3.8%
	31 to 40 years	3	5.8%
	Above 40 years	9	17.3%
Education	Undergraduate	33	63.5%
	Higher Secondary	5	9.6%
	Diploma	3	5.8%
	Postgraduate	8	15.4%
	Other	3	5.8%
Marital status	Single	39	75.0%
	Married	13	25.0%

Table 1 summarises the demographic composition of the 52 respondents.

The sample is dominated by young, single, undergraduate respondents, with almost three-quarters (73.1%) aged 25 years or below and 63.5% holding an undergraduate qualification. This profile is broadly consistent with an early-to-mid career workforce and provides a suitable context for examining how leadership shapes performance and engagement among relatively junior employees.

5.2 Leadership style and task-related preferences

Item	Response option	Frequency	Percentage
Leadership style associated with better performance	Inspiring and motivating	26	50.0%
	Target and reward focused	14	26.9%
	Employee participation focused	9	17.3%
	Freedom-based	3	5.8%
Approach that helps task completion	Team involvement	20	38.5%
	Regular guidance	16	30.8%
	Clear targets	14	26.9%
	Independent working	2	3.8%
Practice that encourages participation	Team discussions	18	34.6%
	Motivational guidance	18	34.6%
	Recognition for results	14	26.9%
	Personal freedom	2	3.8%
Approach that increases interest in work	Vision and inspiration	19	36.5%
	Rewards and targets	14	26.9%
	Employee involvement	11	21.2%
	Flexible working style	8	15.4%
Practice that encourages idea-sharing	Encouragement from the manager	16	30.8%
	Freedom to express yourself	15	28.8%
	Participation in discussions	13	25.0%
	Rewards for useful ideas	8	15.4%

Table 2 presents the frequency distribution for the items relating to leadership style, task completion, participation and idea-sharing.

Half of the respondents (50.0%) associate inspiring and motivating leadership most strongly with better performance, considerably ahead of target-and-reward-focused leadership (26.9%). Team involvement (38.5%) and regular guidance (30.8%) are the two practices most valued for task completion, while team discussions and motivational guidance are tied as the leading practices encouraging participation (34.6% each). Vision and inspiration is the leading factor sustaining interest in work (36.5%), and manager encouragement (30.8%) together with the freedom to express oneself (28.8%) are the two most valued triggers for idea-sharing.

5.3 Responsibility, feedback and performance improvement

Item	Response option	Frequency	Percentage
Factor encouraging greater responsibility	Leader's confidence in you	22	42.3%
	Involvement in decision-making	18	34.6%
	Performance-based benefits	8	15.4%
	Independent working opportunities	4	7.7%
Frequency of leader-employee progress discussion	Daily	24	46.2%

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	Weekly	18	34.6%
	Occasionally	9	17.3%
	Rarely	1	1.9%
Factor most improving performance	Constructive feedback	20	38.5%
	Practical guidance	17	32.7%
	Performance reviews	12	23.1%
	Training opportunities	3	5.8%

Table 3 presents the frequency distribution for the items relating to responsibility-taking, feedback frequency

A leader's confidence in the employee (42.3%) and involvement in decision-making (34.6%) together account for more than three-quarters of responses on what drives greater responsibility-taking, underscoring the empowering role of trust-based leadership. Feedback is frequent in this sample, with 80.8% of respondents reporting daily or weekly progress discussions with their leader. Constructive feedback (38.5%) is the single most valued driver of performance improvement, ahead of practical guidance (32.7%) and formal performance reviews (23.1%).

5.4 Engagement, organisational connection and overall priorities

Item	Response option	Frequency	Percentage
Factor sustaining engagement at work	Good communication	21	40.4%
	Trust	15	28.8%
	Recognition	8	15.4%
	Career opportunities	8	15.4%
Factor building organisational connection	Supportive management	26	50.0%
	Financial rewards	13	25.0%
	Positive feedback	8	15.4%
	Learning opportunities	5	9.6%
Factor building connection/support	Friendly workplace	21	40.4%
	Respect from management	16	30.8%
	Team relationships	11	21.2%
	Fair treatment	4	7.7%
Most important overall workplace factor	Healthy work environment	24	46.2%
	Strong leadership	21	40.4%
	Recognition and appreciation	5	9.6%
	Employee development	2	3.8%

Table 4 presents the frequency distribution for the items relating to engagement, organisational connection, workplace support and overall priorities.

Good communication (40.4%) and trust (28.8%) together account for over two-thirds of responses on what sustains engagement, while recognition and career opportunities trail well behind.

Supportive management is by far the leading driver of organisational connection (50.0%), ahead of financial rewards (25.0%). A friendly workplace (40.4%) and respect from management (30.8%) dominate as sources of connection and support. Notably, when asked to identify the single most important overall workplace factor, respondents placed a healthy work environment (46.2%) and strong leadership (40.4%) well ahead of formal recognition schemes (9.6%) and employee development programmes (3.8%), together accounting for 86.6% of responses.

5.5 Descriptive statistics

Table 5 reports the mean, median, standard deviation and mode for each questionnaire item and for the three derived scores. Items Q1 to Q6 and Q8 to Q12 are nominal single-choice items, so their means and standard deviations describe only the numeric codes assigned in the codebook and are reported for completeness; the median and mode (the most frequently chosen option) are the more meaningful summaries for these items. Q7, the frequency of progress discussions, is ordinal (1 = daily, 4 = rarely): its mean of 1.75 (SD = 0.81) and median of 2 indicate that discussions typically take place between daily and weekly.

Item / score	N	Mean	Median	SD	Modal response (code – label)
Q1 Style linked to better performance	52	2.02	2.00	0.83	2 – Inspiring and motivating
Q2 Approach aiding task completion	52	1.96	2.00	0.91	1 – Team involvement
Q3 Practice encouraging participation	52	2.00	2.00	0.89	1 – Team discussions (tied with 2)

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Item / score	N	Mean	Median	SD	Modal response (code – label)
Q4 Approach raising interest	52	2.46	3.00	1.00	3 – Vision and inspiration
Q5 Practice encouraging idea-sharing	52	2.73	3.00	1.05	3 – Manager encouragement
Q6 Factor encouraging responsibility	52	1.96	2.00	1.07	1 – Leader's confidence in you
Q7 Progress-discussion frequency (1 = daily)	52	1.75	2.00	0.81	1 – Daily
Q8 Factor improving performance	52	2.17	2.00	0.96	3 – Constructive feedback
Q9 Factor sustaining engagement	52	2.67	3.00	1.28	4 – Good communication
Q10 Factor building org. connection	52	2.29	2.00	0.85	2 – Supportive management
Q11 Factor building connection/support	52	2.29	2.00	1.29	1 – Friendly workplace
Q12 Most important workplace factor	52	1.77	2.00	0.92	1 – Healthy work environment
Leadership Practice Index (LPI, 0–6)	52	3.96	4.00	1.44	3
Performance & Engagement Index (PEI, 0–3)	52	2.06	2.00	0.85	2
Feedback frequency (FF, 1–4)	52	3.25	3.00	0.81	4 – Daily

The Leadership Practice Index averaged 3.96 out of 6 (Mdn = 4, SD = 1.44), the Performance and Engagement Index averaged 2.06 out of 3 (Mdn = 2, SD = 0.85), and the feedback-frequency score averaged 3.25 out of 4 (Mdn = 3, SD = 0.81). On average, therefore, respondents chose a relational or inspirational option for roughly two-thirds of the leadership items and for a similar share of the outcome items. As noted in Section 4.4, the internal consistency of both indices was low ($\alpha = 0.43$ and 0.13), so index-based tests are exploratory.

5.6 Chi-square tests of independence

Chi-square tests examined whether four demographic characteristics, and the leadership-style and feedback-frequency items, were associated with four binary outcome indicators: naming an inspiring style as most performance-enhancing (Q1), practical guidance or constructive feedback as the main performance driver (Q8), trust or good communication as the main engagement driver (Q9), and strong leadership as the most important workplace factor (Q12). Gender was compared for female and male respondents only ($n = 51$) because one respondent preferred not to say. Table 6 presents the results; the final two rows use the original four-category items and have many cells with expected counts below 5, so they are indicative only.

Test (row × column)	n	χ^2	df	p	Fisher p	Holm p	V
Gender × Q1 inspiring style	51	0.48	1	.490	.565	1.000	.10
Gender × Q8 guidance/feedback	51	0.04	1	.850	1.000	1.000	.03
Gender × Q9 trust/communication	51	0.73	1	.393	.529	1.000	.12
Gender × Q12 strong leadership	51	0.40	1	.525	.565	1.000	.09
Age (≤ 25 / > 25) × Q1 inspiring style	52	1.56	1	.211	.349	1.000	.17
Age (≤ 25 / > 25) × Q8 guidance/feedback	52	0.00	1	.979	1.000	1.000	.00
Age (≤ 25 / > 25) × Q9 trust/communication	52	0.78	1	.376	.506	1.000	.12
Age (≤ 25 / > 25) × Q12 strong leadership	52	2.86	1	.091	.118	1.000	.23
Education (UG / other) × Q1 inspiring style	52	0.75	1	.388	.565	1.000	.12
Education (UG / other) × Q8 guidance/feedback	52	0.09	1	.760	1.000	1.000	.04
Education (UG / other) × Q9 trust/communication	52	0.28	1	.598	.758	1.000	.07
Education (UG / other) × Q12 strong leadership	52	0.16	1	.693	.774	1.000	.05
Marital status × Q1 inspiring style	52	0.92	1	.337	.523	1.000	.13
Marital status × Q8 guidance/feedback	52	0.03	1	.860	1.000	1.000	.02
Marital status × Q9 trust/communication	52	1.93	1	.165	.298	1.000	.19
Marital status × Q12 strong leadership	52	2.16	1	.142	.198	1.000	.20

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Test (row × column)	n	χ^2	df	p	Fisher p	Holm p	V
Q1 inspiring style × Q7 daily/weekly talks	52	4.46	1	.035	.075	.765	.29
Q1 inspiring style × Q8 guidance/feedback	52	0.09	1	.760	1.000	1.000	.04
Q1 inspiring style × Q9 trust/communication	52	0.00	1	1.000	1.000	1.000	.00
Q1 inspiring style × Q12 strong leadership	52	2.00	1	.158	.258	1.000	.20
Q7 daily/weekly talks × Q8 guidance/feedback	52	0.75	1	.386	.448	1.000	.12
Q7 daily/weekly talks × Q9 trust/communication	52	4.97	1	.026	.052	.595	.31
Q7 daily/weekly talks × Q12 strong leadership	52	0.55	1	.456	.721	1.000	.10
Q1 style (4 cat.) × Q9 engagement (4 cat.)	52	5.95	9	.745	–	–	.20
Q1 style (4 cat.) × Q8 improvement (4 cat.)	52	8.05	9	.529	–	–	.23

None of the 16 demographic tests was statistically significant (all $p > .05$; Cramér's V between .00 and .23), so H1 is not supported: perceived leadership practices and outcome drivers did not differ meaningfully by gender, age, education or marital status in this sample. The largest demographic effect concerned age and the choice of strong leadership as the most important workplace factor, which was named by 18 of 38 respondents aged 25 or under (47.4%) but by 3 of 14 older respondents (21.4%), $\chi^2(1, n = 52) = 2.86, p = .091, V = 0.23$ (Fisher $p = .118$).

Two of the seven inter-item tests were significant before correction. Respondents who named inspiring leadership as most performance-enhancing were more likely to report daily or weekly progress discussions (24 of 26, 92.3%) than other respondents (18 of 26, 69.2%), $\chi^2(1, n = 52) = 4.46, p = .035, V = 0.29$. Respondents with daily or weekly discussions were also more likely to name trust or good communication as the main engagement driver (32 of 42, 76.2%) than those with occasional or rare discussions (4 of 10, 40.0%), $\chi^2(1, n = 52) = 4.97, p = .026, V = 0.31$. However, Fisher's exact tests gave $p = .075$ and $p = .052$, and neither result survives Holm adjustment across the 23 tests (adjusted $p = .765$ and $.595$). These two associations are best read as promising leads rather than established effects.

5.7 One-way analysis of variance

One-way ANOVA compared the Performance and Engagement Index and feedback frequency across leadership-style groups, and the PEI and LPI across demographic groups (Table 7). Levene's test showed homogeneous variances in every case (all $p \geq .25$). Because several groups contain only two to five respondents, Kruskal–Wallis tests are reported as a robustness check, and no post-hoc pairwise comparisons were attempted.

Outcome	Factor	F	df	p	η^2	Kruskal–Wallis p
PEI	Leadership style (Q1)	1.02	3, 48	.392	.06	.239
Feedback frequency	Leadership style (Q1)	3.10	3, 48	.035	.16	.080
PEI	Age group	2.25	4, 47	.078	.16	.089
PEI	Education	2.72	4, 47	.041	.19	.037
LPI	Age group	0.90	4, 47	.472	.07	.417
PEI	Gender	1.96	1, 50	.168	.04	.186
PEI	Q12: strong leadership	0.00	1, 50	.945	.00	.992

Leadership style was not significantly related to the PEI, $F(3, 48) = 1.02, p = .392, \eta^2 = .06$, so H2 is not supported for the outcome index. It was, however, related to feedback frequency, $F(3, 48) = 3.10, p = .035, \eta^2 = .16$: respondents who named inspiring leadership ($M = 3.46, SD = 0.65$) or participation-focused leadership ($M = 3.44, SD = 0.88$) reported more frequent progress discussions than those naming target-and-reward-focused leadership ($M = 2.93, SD = 0.73$) or freedom-based leadership ($M = 2.33, SD = 1.53, n = 3$). The Kruskal–Wallis test was borderline ($p = .080$), so this finding is suggestive.

Education showed a significant effect on the PEI, $F(4, 47) = 2.72, p = .041, \eta^2 = .19$ (Kruskal–Wallis $p = .037$): postgraduates ($M = 2.75, n = 8$) and higher-secondary respondents ($M = 2.40, n = 5$) scored highest, while diploma holders ($M = 1.33, n = 3$) scored lowest. The pattern does not rise steadily with education and three of the five groups are very small, so it should not be over-interpreted. Age group was not significant for the PEI, $F(4, 47) = 2.25, p = .078, \eta^2 = .16$, although respondents above 40 scored highest ($M = 2.67$) and those aged 20 to 25 lowest ($M = 1.76$). The LPI did not differ by age, $F(4, 47) = 0.90, p = .472$; the PEI did not differ by gender, $F(1, 50) = 1.96, p = .168$, or by naming strong leadership as the most important factor, $F(1, 50) = 0.00, p = .945$. With seven ANOVAs, none of the significant results would survive a Bonferroni correction ($\alpha = .007$).

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5.8 Linear regression

Table 8 reports two ordinary least squares models with the Performance and Engagement Index as the dependent variable. Model 1 regresses the PEI on the Leadership Practice Index alone. Model 2 adds feedback frequency and three demographic controls. Variance inflation factors for Model 2 were all below 1.42, indicating no problematic multicollinearity.

Predictor	B	SE	t	p	95% CI for B
Model 1: PEI on LPI ($R^2 = 0.084$; adj. $R^2 = 0.066$; $F(1, 50) = 4.59$, $p = .037$)					
Intercept	1.380	0.336	4.11	< .001	[0.705, 2.055]
Leadership Practice Index (LPI)	0.171	0.080	2.14	.037	[0.011, 0.331]
Model 2: PEI on LPI and controls ($R^2 = 0.230$; adj. $R^2 = 0.146$; $F(5, 46) = 2.75$, $p = .030$)					
Intercept	0.648	0.559	1.16	.252	[-0.477, 1.774]
Leadership Practice Index (LPI)	0.135	0.082	1.66	.104	[-0.029, 0.300]
Feedback frequency (FF)	0.266	0.138	1.93	.060	[-0.011, 0.544]
Male (vs female)	-0.100	0.269	-0.37	.711	[-0.642, 0.441]
Age above 25 (vs ≤ 25)	0.526	0.292	1.80	.078	[-0.062, 1.115]
Undergraduate (vs other)	-0.112	0.243	-0.46	.646	[-0.602, 0.377]

In Model 1, the LPI was a significant positive predictor of the PEI ($B = 0.171$, $SE = 0.080$, $t(50) = 2.14$, $p = .037$, 95% CI [0.011, 0.331]), giving the equation $PEI = 1.380 + 0.171 \times LPI$ and a Pearson correlation of $r = 0.29$. Each additional relational or inspirational practice selected across the six leadership items was associated with a 0.17-point higher score on the 0 to 3 outcome index, but the model explained only 8.4% of the variance (adjusted $R^2 = 0.066$). H3 therefore receives weak support. In Model 2, explained variance rose to 23.0% (adjusted $R^2 = 0.146$; $F(5, 46) = 2.75$, $p = .030$), but no individual predictor was significant at the 5% level: LPI ($B = 0.135$, $p = .104$), feedback frequency ($B = 0.266$, $p = .060$) and being older than 25 ($B = 0.526$, $p = .078$) were positive, while gender and undergraduate education contributed little. The LPI coefficient fell from 0.171 to 0.135 once feedback frequency and age were controlled, suggesting that part of its association with the outcome index overlaps with how often leaders discuss progress. A further model regressing feedback frequency on the LPI was not significant ($R^2 = 0.016$, $p = .376$).

Because the PEI takes only four values (0 to 3), the Model 1 residuals departed from normality (Shapiro–Wilk $W = 0.907$, $p < .001$). A rank-based check was consistent with the regression result (Spearman $\rho = 0.34$, $p = .013$), but the p-values for the regression coefficients should be treated as approximate.

5.9 Summary of hypothesis tests

H1 (demographic differences) was not supported: no demographic characteristic was significantly associated with any leadership or outcome indicator. H2 (leadership style and outcomes) was partly supported: leadership style was associated with feedback frequency in the ANOVA, but not with the PEI, and the corresponding chi-square results did not survive correction for multiple testing. H3 (relational leadership predicting performance and engagement) received weak support in the simple regression but not after controls were added. Overall, the descriptive patterns in Sections 5.1 to 5.4 are clear, whereas the inferential evidence is modest, which is what would be expected from a small convenience sample and single-choice measures.

6. Discussion

The findings of this study are broadly consistent with, and extend, the leadership-performance-engagement literature reviewed above. The dominance of inspiring and motivating leadership as the style most associated with performance (50.0%) mirrors the consistent finding that transformational-type leadership behaviours improve employee performance and engagement (Bhat and Ghoshal, 2025; Cahyani and Siswanto, 2019; Zaw and Takahashi, 2022). At the same time, the meaningful presence of target-and-reward-focused leadership (26.9%) suggests that transactional elements continue to coexist with, rather than being replaced by, more inspirational leadership practices - a pattern also reported by Gameda and Lee (2020), who found that transactional leadership can independently strengthen task performance alongside transformational leadership's effect on engagement and creativity.

The centrality of team involvement, team discussions and manager encouragement in driving task completion, participation and idea-sharing reinforces the participative-leadership findings of Bhat and Ghoshal (2025), who identified participative leadership as a consistent driver of motivation and productivity across the studies they reviewed. Similarly, the strong role of leader confidence and involvement in decision-making in encouraging responsibility-taking echoes the developmental and empowering function of leadership described by Jarl (2024), who found that leaders shape workplace learning and growth through relational support rather than through directive control alone.

Perhaps the most striking pattern in the results concerns engagement. Good communication and trust emerge as the two leading factors sustaining engagement, and supportive management is the clear leader in building organisational connection. This is consistent with the engagement-mediation pathway repeatedly identified in the literature, whereby leadership does not influence performance directly but works through the trust, communication and support it generates among employees (Li et al., 2025; Wang et al., 2023; Cahyani and Siswanto, 2019). The frequency with which respondents report daily or weekly progress discussions with their leader (80.8% combined) further suggests that regular, responsive communication is already a relatively well-established practice within this sample, and one that respondents clearly value, given that constructive feedback was independently identified as the leading driver of performance improvement.

Finally, the finding that a healthy work environment and strong leadership together account for close to 87% of

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responses on the single most important overall workplace factor - far ahead of formal recognition or development programmes - suggests that, from the employee's own vantage point, leadership quality is judged to matter almost as much as the physical and psychological work environment itself. This finding resonates with the broader resilience literature, in which digital leadership was found to be the one employee-level capability associated with organisational resilience across every stage examined, from initial sensing of change through to full strategic transformation (Acharjya et al., 2026). Read together, the two studies suggest that leadership's influence is not confined to any single outcome or organisational state, but recurs as a consistently valued factor across very different levels of analysis, from individual day-to-day engagement to organisation-wide resilience.

The inferential results qualify the descriptive picture. The absence of significant demographic differences in perceived leadership practices is consistent with the cross-cultural robustness reported by Gameda and Lee (2020) and Thanh et al. (2022), who found that the leadership-engagement pattern held across very different settings, although with only 52 respondents and several very small subgroups the tests had limited power to detect differences. For the same reason, the non-significant gender result for the PEI should not be read as contradicting Zaw and Takahashi (2022), who noted that women appeared somewhat more responsive to transformational behaviours. The positive link between the LPI and the PEI ($B = 0.17$, $p = .037$) is in the direction reported by Li et al. (2025) and Bhat and Ghoshal (2025), but its size is small ($R^2 = 0.084$) and it weakened once controls were added, so the present data support only a tentative association.

The most coherent inferential signal concerns feedback. Respondents who associated inspiring or participation-focused leadership with performance reported more frequent progress discussions ($M = 3.46$ and 3.44 on a 1 to 4 scale) than those who emphasised targets and rewards ($M = 2.93$), and frequent discussions went together with naming trust and good communication as the main engagement driver. This fits the relational, coaching-oriented view of leadership described by Jarl (2024) and the finding that constructive feedback was the most valued performance driver in this sample. Because these associations were borderline under Fisher's exact and non-parametric tests, they are best treated as hypotheses for a larger study rather than as confirmed effects.

7. Theoretical and Practical Implications

7.1 Theoretical implications

The study contributes to the leadership literature in three ways. First, it supports the view, established across several of the reviewed studies, that engagement functions as a central pathway linking leadership to performance rather than a separate, parallel outcome. Second, it extends the evidence base to a mixed-sector, developing-country employee sample, complementing prior research concentrated in ICT, public-sector and financial-services settings in East Asia, Africa and South-East Asia. Third, by mapping leadership onto a broader set of everyday practices - goal-setting, participation, recognition and feedback - rather than a single named typology, the study offers a more granular, practice-level view of what leadership actually looks like from the employee's perspective.

7.2 Practical implications

For practising managers, the findings suggest several concrete actions. Leaders seeking to improve performance should combine inspirational, vision-led communication with clear goal-setting, since both were strongly endorsed by respondents. Regular, constructive feedback - ideally on a daily or weekly basis - appears to be the single most valued lever for performance improvement and should be prioritised over less frequent, formal performance reviews alone. Involving employees in decisions and visibly expressing confidence in their abilities are the strongest levers for encouraging responsibility-taking, and should be built into everyday delegation practices. Finally, because good communication, trust and supportive management dominate as drivers of engagement and organisational connection, managers should treat these relational behaviours as a strategic priority rather than as a secondary concern behind financial rewards or formal recognition programmes. Given the modest statistical effects reported in Section 5, these actions should be read as evidence-informed priorities that employees themselves endorse, not as guaranteed routes to higher performance.

8. Limitations and Future Research

This study has several limitations that should be considered when interpreting its findings. First, the sample size of 52 respondents, drawn through non-probability convenience sampling, restricts the generalisability of the findings to the wider working population and gives the statistical tests limited power; several groups contain only two to five respondents. Second, because all items were single-choice, categorical measures rather than validated multi-item Likert scales, the inferential analysis relies on derived index scores whose construction involved analytical judgement and whose internal consistency was low ($\alpha = 0.43$ for the LPI and 0.13 for the PEI). The means and standard deviations of nominal items describe numeric codes only, the regression models explain a small share of variance, and several nominally significant results (the education and feedback-frequency ANOVAs and two chi-square tests) were fragile under non-parametric, exact or multiplicity-adjusted checks. The analysis therefore identifies associations only and cannot establish mediation or causal relationships between leadership, performance and engagement. Third, the cross-sectional, single-time-point design shares the same limitation identified in much of the reviewed literature (Gameda and Lee, 2020; Wang et al., 2023): it cannot capture how leadership perceptions, performance and engagement evolve over time. Fourth, all measures are self-reported, raising the possibility of common method bias.

Future research could address these limitations by employing larger, probability-based samples and validated multi-item scales that permit correlation, regression or structural equation modelling of the leadership-performance-engagement relationship. Longitudinal or multi-wave designs, of the kind used by Wang et al. (2023), would allow stronger causal inference.

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Incorporating supervisor-rated or objective performance indicators alongside self-reported engagement measures would reduce common method bias. Finally, given the growing emphasis on digital leadership in recent resilience research (Acharjya et al., 2026), future studies could usefully examine how digitally enabled leadership practices - such as virtual communication, remote feedback and digitally mediated recognition - shape performance and engagement within Indian organisations specifically.

9. Conclusion

This study examined how leadership style, understood as a bundle of everyday managerial practices, is associated with employee performance and engagement among 52 working respondents. The findings show that inspiring and motivating leadership, team involvement, manager encouragement, leader confidence and frequent constructive feedback are the practices most closely associated with performance-related outcomes, while good communication, trust and supportive management dominate as drivers of engagement and organisational connection. Employees in this sample rate strong leadership as nearly as important as a healthy work environment overall, well ahead of formal recognition or development programmes. These findings are consistent with, and extend, a body of international research showing that leadership shapes performance largely through the engagement it generates, and they reinforce the broader conclusion that leadership - whether expressed through everyday managerial practice or higher-order digital capability - remains one of the most consistently influential factors in organisational life. Aligning managerial practice with these employee priorities offers a practical and evidence-based pathway for organisations seeking to strengthen both performance and engagement. Statistical testing added nuance to this picture: perceived leadership practices did not differ significantly by gender, age, education or marital status, leadership style was associated with how often leaders discuss progress with employees, and a relational leadership-practice index showed a small positive association with performance and engagement ($R^2 = .084$) that did not persist after controls. These inferential results are exploratory given the small convenience sample and single-choice measures, and they point to feedback frequency and relational leadership as priorities for larger, validated-scale studies.

Declarations

Author contributions

R. Jaswanthi: conceptualisation, questionnaire design, data collection, data analysis, and writing of the original draft. Simanchala Das: supervision, guidance on methodology and manuscript review.

Ethics statement

Participation in the online survey was voluntary and anonymous, and no personally identifying information was collected from respondents.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have influenced the work reported in this paper.

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Data availability

The anonymised survey responses and codebook are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

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