

Original Article: Exploring Effective Leadership Styles and Strategies for Enhancing Employee Motivation and Organizational Productivity in Multinational Corporations

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Citation A Vahedi, *Exploring Effective Leadership Styles and Strategies for Enhancing Employee Motivation and Organizational Productivity in Multinational Corporations*, AJMHSS, 2025; 1(6): 363-373..

 <https://10.5281/zenodo.16936591>

Article info:

Received: 11.06.2025

Accepted: 21.07.2025

Checked for Plagiarism: Yes

Keywords:

Leadership styles, Employee motivation, Organizational productivity, Multinational corporations, Cross-cultural leadership

ABSTRACT

Leadership remains a cornerstone of organizational success, particularly within multinational corporations (MNCs) that operate in diverse and complex environments. Effective leadership styles and strategies are crucial for enhancing employee motivation and improving organizational productivity. This paper explores various leadership theories, including transformational, transactional, servant, and situational leadership, to examine their applicability in motivating employees within MNCs. Additionally, the paper highlights the role of cross-cultural leadership, communication, emotional intelligence, and strategic human resource management in driving organizational outcomes. Through a comparative analysis of previous empirical studies, the paper underscores that no single leadership style is universally effective. Instead, adaptable, culturally sensitive, and employee-centered leadership approaches yield sustainable improvements in motivation, innovation, and productivity. The discussion also considers the challenges of globalization, digital transformation, and remote working, offering practical strategies for leaders in MNCs to build resilient, motivated, and high-performing teams.

Introduction

In today's dynamic global economy, multinational corporations (MNCs) face an increasingly complex set of challenges and opportunities in managing their human resources effectively [1]. The integration of diverse markets, cultures, and technological systems has heightened the need for leaders who can adapt to rapid changes while motivating employees across geographies. Leadership, once understood merely as a positional authority or the ability to direct teams,

has evolved into a multidimensional construct encompassing vision, strategy, communication, and the capacity to inspire. Leadership styles and strategies have direct implications for employee motivation, which in turn, influences organizational productivity and competitive advantage. Within multinational corporations, where cultural diversity, geographical dispersion, and economic volatility are defining features, leadership effectiveness becomes a cornerstone for long-term sustainability and growth [2].

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The significance of leadership in organizations has been acknowledged by both scholars and practitioners for decades, but its importance has gained even more traction in the modern corporate environment. Leadership in MNCs cannot be reduced to one universal formula; rather, it must be flexible, culturally sensitive, and contextually grounded. For instance, while transformational leadership may resonate strongly in some cultural contexts where vision and innovation are highly valued, servant leadership or participative leadership may align more effectively in environments that emphasize inclusivity and collaboration [3].

The recognition of cultural nuances in leadership styles highlights the necessity for MNCs to adopt adaptable and hybrid approaches.

Employee motivation remains one of the most studied topics in organizational behavior, owing to its direct impact on performance outcomes such as productivity, innovation, retention, and organizational citizenship behavior. Motivation is a psychological driver that influences individuals to pursue goals, persist in the face of challenges, and align their efforts with organizational objectives [4].

Leaders in multinational corporations are tasked with not only understanding motivation theories—such as Maslow’s hierarchy of needs, Herzberg’s two-factor theory, and Deci and Ryan’s self-determination theory—but also translating these theories into practices that fit diverse workforces. In an era of globalization, leaders cannot assume that motivational strategies are universally applicable; instead, they must tailor their approaches to align with cultural differences, generational expectations, and industry-specific requirements [5].

Moreover, organizational productivity is intrinsically tied to the interplay between leadership and motivation. Productivity in MNCs is not limited to measurable outputs but extends to qualitative factors such as innovation, adaptability, collaboration, and the ability to meet dynamic customer needs. Leaders influence

productivity by creating environments that foster psychological safety, provide developmental opportunities, and align individual aspirations with corporate goals. Effective leadership, therefore, serves as a catalyst that transforms motivated employees into productive contributors who drive organizational success [6].

The globalized nature of multinational corporations also introduces a level of complexity not typically encountered in domestic organizations. For example, leaders in MNCs must navigate cross-cultural communication barriers, diverse regulatory frameworks, geopolitical risks, and economic fluctuations. These challenges necessitate leadership strategies that emphasize resilience, inclusivity, and adaptability. For instance, situational leadership becomes relevant in addressing varying levels of employee readiness across regions, while distributed or shared leadership models may be employed to leverage local expertise and decision-making authority.

Another critical dimension of leadership in MNCs is the ethical and sustainable orientation of strategies. Stakeholders—including employees, consumers, and governments—increasingly demand that corporations prioritize social responsibility, environmental stewardship, and ethical governance. Leaders who integrate ethical practices into their motivational strategies can foster a sense of purpose among employees, leading to stronger engagement and productivity. Research has consistently shown that employees are more motivated and productive when they perceive their work as meaningful and aligned with broader societal goals. Thus, leadership in MNCs must balance economic performance with ethical responsibility [7].

Technological advancements further shape leadership strategies and employee motivation. The rise of digital transformation, artificial intelligence, and remote work has redefined workplace dynamics. Leaders are now required to manage hybrid teams, ensure digital inclusivity, and adopt technologies that streamline operations

without alienating employees. Digital leadership, characterized by openness to innovation, agility, and tech-savviness, has emerged as a critical competency for MNC leaders. At the same time, the human element of leadership—empathy, emotional intelligence, and authentic communication—remains indispensable for motivating employees in an increasingly digital world.

Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic underscored the importance of leadership resilience and adaptability. MNCs faced unprecedented disruptions in supply chains, remote working conditions, and employee well-being concerns. Leaders who demonstrated empathy, transparency, and decisiveness were more successful in sustaining employee motivation and organizational productivity. The pandemic experience reinforced the idea that leadership is not static but evolves in response to crises. As MNCs look toward the future, lessons from the pandemic will inform strategies that prioritize employee well-being, organizational agility, and digital readiness [8].

The complexity of leadership in multinational corporations also lies in balancing global consistency with local responsiveness. While corporate headquarters may establish overarching leadership philosophies and motivational frameworks, local subsidiaries often require customization to reflect cultural and market realities. This tension between standardization and localization is a recurring theme in MNC leadership studies. Effective leaders are those who can strike a balance, ensuring alignment with corporate values while empowering local leaders to adapt strategies to their unique contexts.

In terms of theoretical underpinnings, leadership studies have evolved from trait-based approaches to behavioral, contingency, transformational, transactional, and more contemporary models such as authentic and servant leadership. Each of these perspectives offers insights into how leaders can influence employee motivation and organizational outcomes. For instance,

transformational leadership emphasizes vision, inspiration, and intellectual stimulation, which are particularly effective in driving innovation in MNCs. Transactional leadership, on the other hand, focuses on clear structures, rewards, and punishments, which may be necessary for achieving operational efficiency in complex global operations. The integration of multiple leadership styles, depending on situational demands, has proven to be a successful strategy in multinational contexts [9].

Equally important is the recognition of employee diversity in MNCs. Workforces in multinational corporations are often composed of individuals from different cultural, educational, and professional backgrounds. This diversity can be both an asset and a challenge. Leaders who adopt inclusive leadership practices, valuing diverse perspectives and promoting equity, are better positioned to enhance employee motivation and harness the potential of diversity for organizational productivity. On the other hand, a lack of inclusivity can lead to disengagement, conflict, and reduced performance.

The relationship between leadership, motivation, and productivity is not linear but cyclical. Effective leadership inspires motivation, which enhances productivity, and higher productivity further reinforces leadership credibility and employee engagement. Understanding this cycle is crucial for MNCs seeking to sustain competitive advantage in global markets. Moreover, the rapidly changing nature of work, shaped by globalization, technological disruption, and shifting employee expectations, requires leaders to continuously refine their styles and strategies.

Given the significance of leadership in multinational corporations, this study aims to explore effective leadership styles and strategies that enhance employee motivation and organizational productivity. By examining theoretical frameworks, empirical evidence, and case studies, the paper seeks to provide insights into how leadership practices can be tailored to the unique challenges and opportunities faced by

MNCs. The study emphasizes the need for adaptive, culturally sensitive, and ethically grounded leadership approaches that align employee motivation with organizational objectives [10].

In summary, the introduction establishes the critical role of leadership in driving motivation and productivity within multinational corporations. It highlights the interplay between cultural diversity, motivation theories, leadership styles, and organizational outcomes. The discussion underscores the need for leaders in MNCs to balance global consistency with local responsiveness, integrate ethical and digital competencies, and cultivate inclusive and resilient organizational cultures. By doing so, MNCs can not only enhance employee motivation and productivity but also secure sustainable competitive advantage in a volatile global landscape.

Leadership Theories and Their Implications

- **Transformational Leadership:** Emphasizes vision, inspiration, and intellectual stimulation. Research shows it fosters intrinsic motivation, creativity, and long-term commitment [11].
- **Transactional Leadership:** Focuses on reward and punishment mechanisms. While effective for short-term goals, it may limit innovation in dynamic environments.
- **Servant Leadership:** Prioritizes the needs of employees, emphasizing empathy, trust, and service. Studies link it to higher job satisfaction and reduced turnover.
- **Situational Leadership:** Suggests no single best style; leaders must adapt based on employee readiness and organizational context (Table 1).

Table 1. Previous Studies on Leadership Styles, Motivation, and Productivity in MNCs [13].

Title of Study	Methodology	Key Findings	Relevance to Current Research
Improving organizational effectiveness through transformational leadership	Conceptual/Review	Transformational leadership enhances employee motivation and organizational productivity.	Provides theoretical foundation for linking leadership to motivation.
Culture, leadership, and organizations: The GLOBE study of 62 societies	Cross-cultural study	Cultural differences strongly shape effective leadership styles in multinational corporations (MNCs).	Highlights cultural impact on leadership in MNCs.
Transformational and transactional leadership: A meta-analytic test	Meta-analysis	Transformational leadership positively relates to employee motivation and performance.	Supports the role of transformational leadership in productivity.
Leadership in organizations	Theoretical/Review	Different leadership strategies affect productivity and motivation depending on organizational context.	Provides multi-framework approaches for leadership in MNCs.

Authentic leadership: Development and validation of a theory-based measure	Empirical study	Authentic leadership strengthens employee trust and increases intrinsic motivation.	Shows importance of trust-building leadership in MNCs.
Self-determination theory and work motivation	Theoretical/Review	Supportive environments and participative leadership enhance intrinsic motivation.	Explains motivational mechanisms for higher productivity.
Transformational leader behaviors and their effects on followers' trust and organizational citizenship behaviors	Quantitative study	Transformational leadership improves trust and organizational citizenship behaviors among employees.	Connects leadership to motivation and productivity outcomes.

Cross-Cultural Leadership in MNCs

Multinational corporations encounter unique challenges, as leadership effectiveness is shaped by cultural differences. The GLOBE study highlights how leadership expectations vary across societies, making cultural intelligence a vital competency for global leaders [14].

Employee Motivation in Multinational Settings

Motivation theories such as Maslow’s hierarchy of needs and Herzberg’s two-factor theory remain relevant, but must be contextualized within global organizations. For instance, employees in collectivist cultures may prioritize belonging and teamwork, whereas those in individualistic cultures may value autonomy and recognition.

Organizational Productivity and Leadership Strategies

Leadership has a direct correlation with organizational productivity. Transformational and servant leadership styles have been linked to increased innovation, while transactional leadership supports efficiency in structured operations. Effective leaders integrate performance management, continuous learning, and well-being programs to sustain productivity [15].

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative analytical approach by reviewing empirical studies, theoretical frameworks, and case studies related to leadership, motivation, and productivity in MNCs. Peer-reviewed journal articles, books, and industry reports form the primary sources of analysis.

Discussion

Leadership Styles in Practice

Evidence suggests that transformational leadership is particularly effective in motivating employees across cultural boundaries. Leaders who articulate a compelling vision and empower employees foster organizational loyalty. However, transactional leadership remains useful in industries requiring strict compliance and standardized performance. Servant leadership is gaining attention in MNCs seeking to build inclusive workplaces, especially as employees increasingly value organizational ethics and well-being. Meanwhile, situational leadership offers flexibility in dynamic environments, such as remote or hybrid work settings, where leaders must adapt strategies based on employee capabilities.

The exploration of leadership styles and strategies for enhancing employee motivation and organizational productivity in multinational corporations (MNCs) highlights the complexity of managing diverse teams across cultural,

geographical, and structural boundaries. This discussion integrates previous studies with the findings of contemporary research, comparing different leadership models and their effectiveness in promoting motivation and productivity within global organizations.

Leadership Styles in Multinational Settings

Leadership in multinational corporations cannot be examined in isolation from cultural influences. The *GLOBE study* (House et al., 2004) demonstrated that leadership effectiveness varies depending on cultural values, such as collectivism, power distance, and uncertainty avoidance. For example, transformational leadership has been shown to be universally effective in enhancing motivation (Bass & Avolio, 1994), but the degree to which it is expressed may differ between cultures. In collectivist cultures, leaders may emphasize group goals and shared identity, whereas in individualistic cultures, leaders may stress personal achievement and recognition.

Transformational leadership stands out as a style that motivates employees by aligning their values with organizational goals, fostering creativity, and encouraging higher commitment (Judge & Piccolo, 2004). However, transactional leadership, characterized by reward and punishment mechanisms, remains relevant in certain contexts, particularly where performance measurement is clear and culturally expected (Podsakoff et al., 1990). This suggests that effective leaders in MNCs often adopt a hybrid approach, blending transformational and transactional elements depending on cultural and situational demands [16].

Motivation and Self-Determination in MNCs

Employee motivation in multinational organizations is also strongly linked to leadership approaches that support autonomy, competence, and relatedness—principles highlighted in *self-determination theory* (Gagné & Deci, 2005). Leaders who provide opportunities for employees to take ownership of their work and recognize

their contributions foster intrinsic motivation, which is more sustainable than extrinsic rewards alone.

Research indicates that authentic leadership also plays a crucial role in motivation (Walumbwa et al., 2008). Leaders who act with transparency, ethical standards, and genuine concern for employee well-being foster trust, which is essential in culturally diverse environments where misunderstandings are more likely to occur. Trust serves as a mediator between leadership style and employee engagement, enhancing both job satisfaction and productivity.

Comparative Insights from Previous Studies

Comparing previous research reveals consistent findings regarding the superiority of transformational leadership in enhancing productivity, though with some nuanced differences. Podsakoff et al. (1990) identified transformational behaviors as predictors of trust and organizational citizenship, while Judge and Piccolo (2004) confirmed through meta-analysis that transformational leadership correlates more strongly with performance outcomes than transactional leadership.

At the same time, Yukl (2013) argued that no single leadership style is universally effective. Situational and contingency perspectives suggest that leaders must adapt to the organizational environment, cultural background of employees, and specific challenges. In MNCs, this adaptability is even more critical due to cultural heterogeneity. Thus, while transformational leadership provides a strong theoretical base, leaders in multinational contexts require intercultural competence and situational flexibility to ensure sustainable productivity [17].

Strategies for Enhancing Productivity

Beyond leadership style, specific strategies have proven effective in boosting employee motivation and productivity in MNCs:

1. **Cross-cultural Communication Training**

Communication barriers are one of the major challenges in MNCs. Leaders who invest in cross-cultural communication training not only reduce misunderstandings but also create inclusive work environments. The GLOBE findings support the idea that culturally intelligent leadership significantly enhances performance.

2. **Empowerment and Participation**

Empowering employees through participative leadership has been shown to increase intrinsic motivation (Gagné & Deci, 2005). In multinational teams, empowerment is particularly crucial, as employees often operate remotely or in culturally distinct environments. Allowing autonomy while maintaining clear goals enhances accountability and innovation.

3. **Recognition and Feedback**

Recognition is a universal motivator, but its expression varies across cultures. For instance, public recognition may be valued in individualistic cultures but considered inappropriate in collectivist societies. Leaders must tailor recognition strategies to cultural expectations while maintaining fairness and consistency.

4. **Ethical and Authentic Leadership**

The rise of ethical concerns and corporate social responsibility in global business emphasizes the importance of authentic leadership. Walumbwa et al. (2008) showed that authenticity fosters commitment and reduces turnover intentions. Employees are more motivated when they perceive leaders as fair, ethical, and socially responsible.

5. **Technology and Innovation in Leadership Practices**

With the globalization of work and the expansion of digital communication platforms, leaders in MNCs must adopt digital leadership strategies. Technology enables collaboration across borders, but it also requires leaders to foster virtual trust,

establish transparent communication, and maintain motivation in virtual teams [18].

Challenges in Application

While transformational and authentic leadership styles are widely endorsed, challenges remain in their application across multinational contexts. One issue is the potential mismatch between leadership style and cultural expectations. For example, transformational leadership emphasizes challenging assumptions and encouraging innovation, but in high power-distance cultures, employees may perceive such behavior as disruptive rather than empowering. Similarly, participative leadership may be less effective in cultures where hierarchical authority is deeply respected.

Another challenge lies in balancing global consistency with local adaptation. MNCs often develop global leadership frameworks that may not fully align with local practices. Leaders must navigate this tension by implementing flexible approaches that respect local culture while adhering to corporate standards [19].

Integrating Leadership Styles for Sustainable Impact

A key insight from comparative research is that effective leadership in MNCs is not about adhering strictly to one style, but about integrating multiple approaches. Leaders who can combine transformational vision with transactional clarity, authentic behavior with situational adaptability, and ethical grounding with cultural intelligence are more likely to sustain motivation and productivity.

Furthermore, leadership effectiveness in MNCs is dynamic. As global economic conditions shift, employees face new stressors such as remote work, digital overload, and economic uncertainty. Leaders must continuously adapt strategies to maintain resilience, support well-being, and foster innovation [20].

Contribution to Organizational Productivity

Ultimately, leadership styles and strategies that effectively enhance motivation contribute directly to organizational productivity. Transformational leadership, with its focus on vision and empowerment, encourages employees to exceed performance expectations. Authentic and ethical leadership strengthens trust and reduces turnover, while participative approaches increase engagement and innovation. By aligning these leadership approaches with cultural values and organizational goals, MNCs can achieve sustainable productivity gains even in volatile global environments. In conclusion, the discussion of leadership styles and strategies in MNCs reveals that effective leadership is multifaceted, context-sensitive, and culturally adaptive. While transformational and authentic leadership emerge as the most effective for motivating employees and improving productivity, they must be integrated with transactional clarity, ethical grounding, and cultural intelligence to address the complexities of multinational operations. Future research should continue to explore how digital transformation, global crises, and evolving employee expectations reshape leadership effectiveness in MNCs [21].

Strategies for Enhancing Motivation

- **Recognition and Reward Systems:** Tailoring incentives to cultural contexts enhances effectiveness [22].
- **Career Development:** Opportunities for skill development and international assignments boost motivation.
- **Work-Life Balance:** Flexible work arrangements improve job satisfaction, particularly in the digital age.
- **Inclusive Leadership:** Respecting diversity strengthens team cohesion in global corporations [23].

Organizational Productivity Drivers

Leaders influence productivity by:

- Establishing clear goals and performance standards.
- Encouraging collaboration through digital platforms.
- Leveraging emotional intelligence to address employee concerns.
- Promoting innovation through open communication and knowledge-sharing cultures [24].

Challenges for Leaders in MNCs

- **Cultural Complexity:** Misunderstandings and conflicts due to cultural differences.
- **Technological Change:** Need for digital leadership skills.
- **Remote Work Management:** Balancing autonomy with accountability.
- **Global Crises:** Navigating uncertainty such as pandemics and economic disruptions [25].

Conclusion

Leadership is a vital determinant of employee motivation and organizational productivity, particularly within multinational corporations. The analysis reveals that while transformational, servant, and situational leadership styles are highly effective, the success of any leadership strategy depends on cultural sensitivity, adaptability, and alignment with organizational goals.

Leaders in MNCs must embrace a hybrid approach that integrates vision-driven inspiration with employee-centered practices. Motivation is best achieved through recognition, career development, inclusivity, and work-life balance, while productivity thrives under clear communication, innovation, and emotional intelligence.

In a globalized and digitalized business environment, leadership effectiveness requires continuous learning, cultural intelligence, and resilience. By adopting flexible, sustainable, and people-oriented strategies, leaders in MNCs can

build motivated teams and achieve long-term organizational success.

The exploration of leadership styles and strategies in the context of multinational corporations (MNCs) highlights the pivotal role of leadership in shaping employee motivation and organizational productivity. Leadership in MNCs transcends traditional boundaries, as it must account for cultural diversity, global market dynamics, and the challenges of managing a dispersed workforce. Effective leaders not only adapt their styles to specific organizational contexts but also create an inclusive environment that fosters collaboration, innovation, and engagement.

Among the various leadership approaches, transformational leadership stands out as a highly effective style in enhancing motivation and productivity. By inspiring a shared vision, fostering trust, and empowering employees, transformational leaders create a culture of commitment and innovation. Transactional leadership, while more traditional, remains valuable in maintaining structure, clarity, and accountability. Situational leadership, on the other hand, demonstrates that flexibility in leadership is essential, as different contexts, cultures, and organizational challenges require different approaches. Similarly, authentic and ethical leadership have gained prominence for their ability to establish trust and long-term organizational commitment, particularly in diverse multinational environments.

Strategies such as cross-cultural leadership training, the integration of motivational frameworks like self-determination theory, and the emphasis on continuous employee development further strengthen leadership effectiveness. Research demonstrates that when leaders align organizational goals with employee needs—providing recognition, growth opportunities, and autonomy—the result is increased motivation, higher job satisfaction, and improved performance outcomes.

In the context of globalization, leadership in MNCs cannot adopt a “one-size-fits-all”

approach. Instead, leaders must combine different leadership styles and strategies to address evolving challenges, including rapid technological change, remote and hybrid work arrangements, and cultural complexities. By doing so, they foster a resilient and adaptable organizational culture that enhances productivity while ensuring employee well-being.

Ultimately, leadership is not simply about directing or managing; it is about inspiring, engaging, and unlocking the potential of employees across diverse contexts. As MNCs navigate global economic uncertainties, effective leadership will remain a cornerstone of organizational success, ensuring that both employees and organizations thrive in an increasingly interconnected world.

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