Leadership and Employee Psychological wellbeing: A Systematic Review and Directions of Future

[1]Dr.Mohd Shakeel

Associate Professor, Department of Education and Training\,
Maulana Azad National Urdu university, College Of Teacher Education Srinagar
msdedar@gmail.com

[2]Dr Preeti Singh

Assistant Professor, Department of Management,
Jagannath International Management School, New Delhi
preeti23.chauhan@yahoo.com

[3]Dr. N. Praveen Kumar Reddy

Professor, Department of MBA, School of Management and Commerce,
Malla Reddy University, Hyderabad - 500100.
drnamburu@gmail.com

[4]Dr Asha R Nair

Assistant Professor of Commerce,
NSS College, Pandalam, Pathanamthitta, Kerala
aish.nair83@gmail.com

[5]Salini J S

Assistant Professor, Department of Commerce
NSS College.Pandalam, Pattanamthitta, Kerala
salinijs@gmail.com

[6]Dr.S.Sekar

Guest Lecturer, Department of Commerce (CA)
Government Arts College (Autonomous), Salem-7, Tamilnadu
sekarsphd@gmail.com

Abstract

Leadership practices have a substantial influence on employee mental health because they determine job satisfaction along with stress and total wellness outcomes. This analytical approach studies how various leadership methods affect worker mental health through results collected from many workplace sectors worldwide. The article evaluates how transformational leadership and transactional leadership and servant leadership and genuine leadership affect employee stress levels together with burnout and motivation and engagement. The research investigates important boundary conditions which include organization culture and autonomy and emotional intelligence and their impact on this relationship. The research established a positive relationship between transformational and servant leadership approaches which leads to better psychological state and strengthened employee resilience together with higher work satisfaction. A worker's stress increases as well as their emotional exhaustion under authoritarian leadership and laissez-faire managerial styles. The analysis reveals several weaknesses in current research since most studies lack longitudinal follow-ups and cross-national data. The study evaluation introduces research directions that require focus on psychological approaches and remote digital leadership examination using mixed research approaches to boost understanding.

Introduction

Since mental health problems including stress, anxiety, and burnout are more common in workplaces all around, the psychological well-being of employees has grown to be a major concern in modern companies. The evolving nature of work environments—characterized by higher job demands, technological developments, and competitive pressures—characterizes calls for a thorough analysis of the elements affecting employee well-being. Organizational culture, working environment, and employee experiences all depend on leadership in great measure. Leadership styles affect workers' job performance, mental health, involvement, and general job happiness. Organizational psychology and human resource management both clearly show how important good leadership is to creating a psychologically healthy workplace. Good leadership may improve employee involvement, lower workplace stress, and provide a motivating atmosphere that advances well-being. Inappropriate leadership styles can cause more worker turnover, job discontent, and more stress. This has sparked increasing interest in knowing how various leadership styles influence employees' psychological well-being and the processes controlling or improving this connection. Positive psychological results are sometimes linked with transformational leadership—defined by vision, inspiration, and staff development. Conversely, transactional leadership—which emphasizes performance-based incentives and penalties—has mixed benefits depending on how it is applied. Reduced burnout and higher work satisfaction follow from servant and genuine leadership that highlighted empathy, ethical behavior, and employee help. More strict or authoritarian leadership styles, however, are probably going to aggravate job-related stress, emotional tiredness, and mental health issues. Though a lot of studies on leadership and workplace results, a thorough synthesis of the clear impacts of different leadership styles on psychological well-being in diverse organizational environments is lacking. Furthermore, it is important to investigate how new leadership paradigms—digital and remote leadership among others—impact modern companies. The study reveals various research gaps, particularly the requirement of longitudinal studies to prove causal links between workplace elements and mental health results. They also underline how underrepresented various cultural settings are in current studies as most research is conducted in Western environments. They also advocate increased study on how digital leadership and remote work affect mental health. While future studies should concentrate on multi-level analyses, cross-cultural perspectives, and technology-driven treatments to improve employee well-being in changing work settings, the study indicates that businesses must include mental health measures into their basic policies. Khalid and Syed (2024).
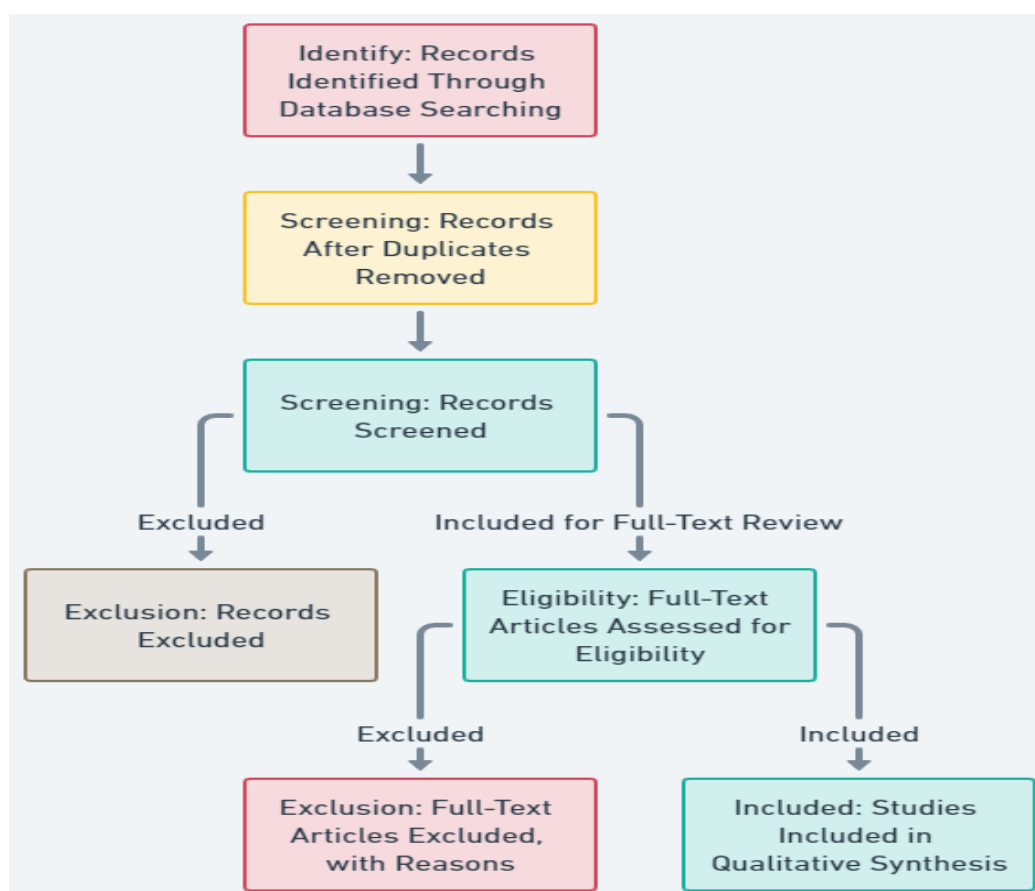
Figure: 1 Systematic Literature chart
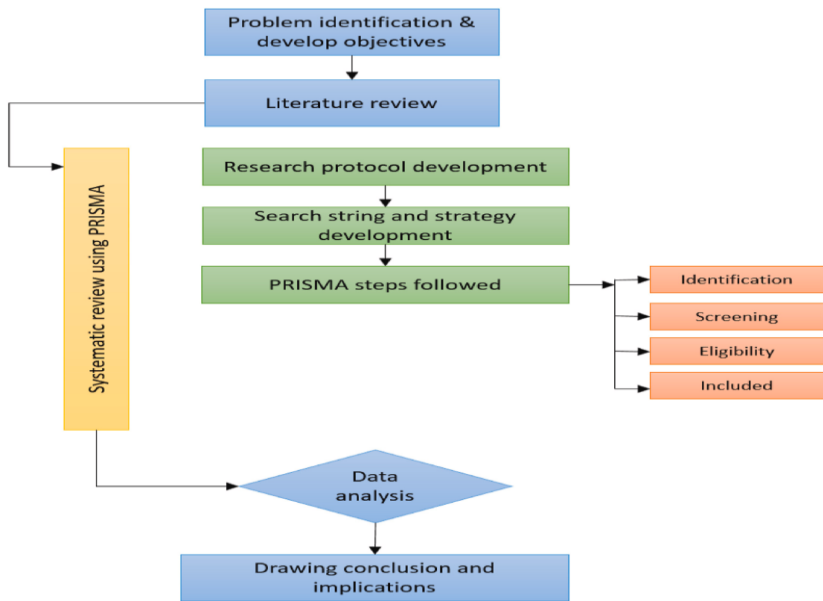
Background of the Research

Early theories of leadership, like Trait Theory and the Great Man Theory, concentrated on natural leader traits and usually neglected their impact on employees' emotional well-being. As research in organizational behavior developed, academics started looking at leadership as a dynamic process defined by interactions between leaders and subordinates. The change from trait-based to behavioral and situational leadership theories offered fresh angles on how leaders may affect workers' psychological and emotional well-being. Transformational and transactional leadership styles were prevailing paradigms in the 1970s and 1980s, which prompted researchers to look at how they affected work satisfaction and employee engagement. On the other hand, transactional leadership—which relies on disciplined incentives and methodologies—has mixed results: occasionally it increases motivation while also generating stress if taken strictly. Positive psychology's arrival in the twenty-first century has spurred studies of leadership to concentrate more on mental health, well-being, and resilience in professional environments. Considered as a style that promotes workplace well-being, servant leadership—defined by humility, attention to employee welfare, and ethical decision-making—has just emerged. Based on openness and self-awareness, authentic leadership was acknowledged for helping staff members to feel mentally safe and emotionally stable. Particularly in respect to remote work and virtual teams, recent studies have looked at flexible leadership and digital leadership. Most studies make use of cross-sectional data, therefore restricting causal conclusions. Often disregarded are environmental and cultural elements affecting leadership efficacy. This emphasizes the need of a comprehensive review including present data and suggesting future study paths addressing these   constraints.
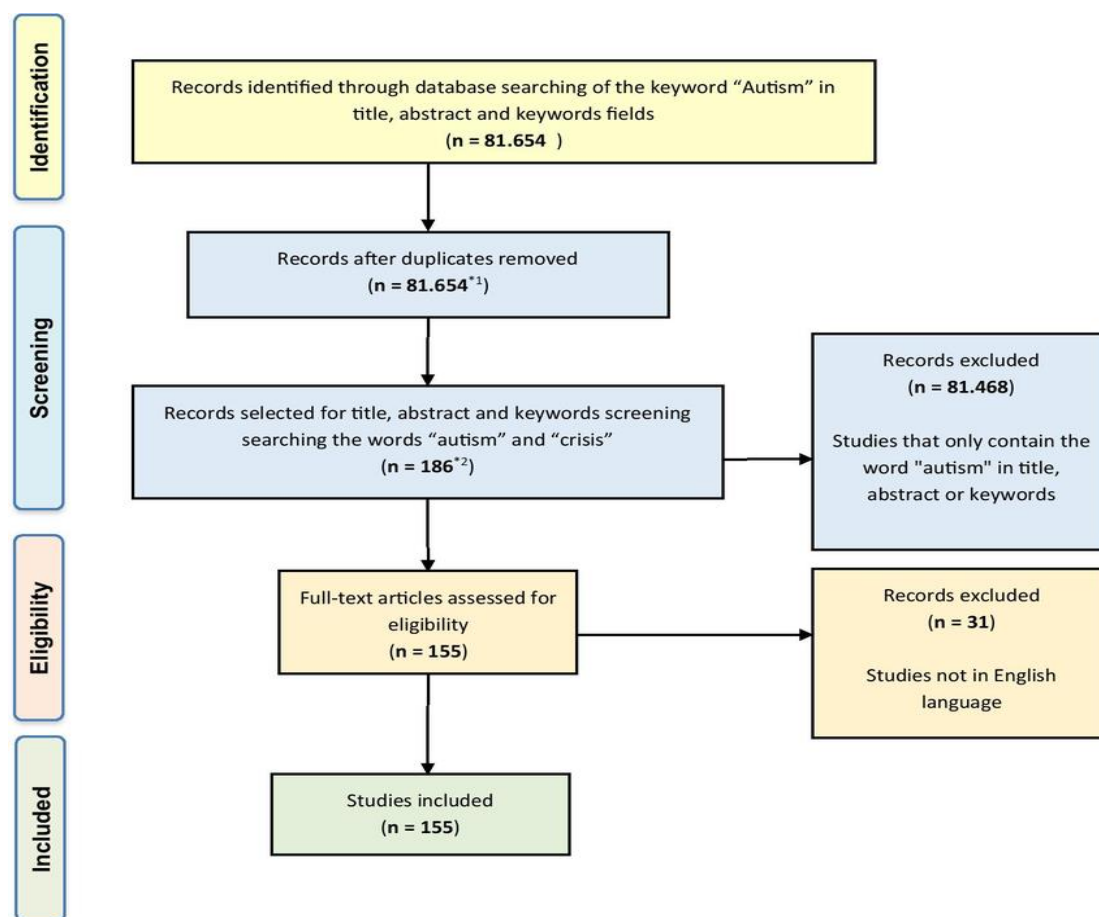
Figure: 2Flowchart of Literature Records

Source: https://www.google.com/url?sa=i&url=https%3A%2F%2Feditverse.com%2Feasy-guide-to-prisma-flow-chart

Importance of the Research

The study methodically reviews and categorizes other studies to identify important patterns, shortcomings, and issues, therefore explaining the impact of leadership on mental health outcomes in many different working settings. This study clarifies the link between leadership and employee well-being by combining concepts from psychology, organizational behavior, and human resource management, thereby advancing leadership theories. Corporate executives, human resources experts, and government agencies trying to support healthy work environments especially should pay attention to this study. Knowing which leadership styles enhance psychological well-being can help companies create mental health campaigns catered to employee needs, supportive work environments, and successful leadership training programs. Those who possess this awareness may carry out strategies meant to improve employee involvement, reduce burnout, and increase general company output. The study also looks at modern concerns such remote work, digital leadership, and rising workplace stress frequency. The move to hybrid work models calls for a study of how leadership may be modified to keep employee well-being in virtual environments. The article suggested future study prospects for academics to investigate the evolution of leadership ideas, use several methodological techniques, and examine cultural differences in leadership efficacy. This large-scale study offers a basis for enhancing leadership research and directing organizational policies to advance psychological well-being in the workplace.

Figure: 3 PRISMA Flow Diagram

Source:
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/353069665/figure/fig1/AS:11431281103445297@1669692509897/PRISMA-flow-diagram-for-information-search-in-SCOPUS-own-elaboration.png

Research statement

Poor mental health among staff members can result in more absenteeism, less drive, and more turnover rates, therefore influencing the general performance of a company. Although several elements affect employee well-being, leadership has become clearly important. Leaders create norms, build business culture, and affect employee views of emotional resilience, stress management, and work-life balance. On the other hand, laissez-faire and authoritarian leadership philosophies are connected to higher stress, workplace anxiety, and emotional tiredness. Many studies, however, neglect to include contextual elements as industry-specific difficulties, company culture, and workforce diversity, which can greatly affect leadership effectiveness. Furthermore, despite the move to digital workplaces, the function of leadership in remote and hybrid workplaces is still rarely investigated. One of the main problems is the unequal assessment of psychological well-being among much research. While some research examines job happiness, others evaluate burnout, emotional tiredness, or work engagement, producing contradictory results.

Literature review and contributions

Khalid and Syed (2024) emphasized how employee mental health is becoming more and more important in determining work performance, involvement, and general organizational success. It looks at many workplace pressures that lead to decreased employee well-being: excessive job expectations, lack of autonomy, bad leadership, and poor work-life balance). As efficient means of enhancing workplace well-being, the study also emphasizes occupational treatments such flexible work schedules, mindfulness training, and stress management programs. Mishra and Venkatesan (2023) do a thorough assessment of the psychological well-being of employees in their Key elements affecting employee well-being, including leadership style, job characteristics, workplace environment, and personal resources, the study finds include By lowering workplace stress, raising job satisfaction, and therefore promoting a feeling of belonging, supportive leadership—especially transformational and servant leadership—is reported to improve psychological well-being. On the other hand, toxic leadership and heavy job expectations compromise well-being and cause burnout, disengagement, and mental health problems. High psychological well-being employees show better work performance, inventiveness, and organizational commitment; poor well-being is connected to increased turnover, absenteeism, and worse productivity. Emphasizing the mediating function of job autonomy, work-life balance, and social support, the study suggests a theoretical framework incorporating several psychological, organizational, and behavioral elements that enhance well-being. The study does, however, point up some research gaps, including the dearth of longitudinal studies and the ignorance of cross-cultural variances in employee well-being. Future studies on multi-level analyses combining organizational and personal elements are advised by the writers in order to create complete well-being models. They come to the conclusion that through work-life balance policies, mental health campaigns, and leadership development, companies should give employee well-being top priority in order to raise general workplace productivity and satisfaction.

Otaye-Ebede, and Stewart (2019) highlighted a paradox whereby well-being programs often have both good and unexpected negative effects. The study looks at corporate strategies meant to raise employee well-being including mental health programs, flexible schedules, and efforts at leadership development. Although these techniques usually improve job satisfaction, engagement, and stress management, they can also result in higher work expectations, role uncertainty, and pressure to self-manage well-being, therefore generating inadvertent stressors. One important realization is that employee views, business culture, and leadership conduct determine how effective well-being practices are. While uneven or poorly carried out regulations could cause employee mistrust and resistance, supportive leadership promotes psychological safety and emotional support. The research also emphasizes the importance of paradox theory, which helps to understand how companies try to reconcile performance requirements with well-being campaigns, therefore generating sometimes contradictory pressures for staff members. The writers also point up research gaps, including the requirement of longitudinal studies to evaluate the long-term impacts of well-being practices and cross-cultural viewpoints to grasp variances in various workplaces. They underline the increasing significance of digital well-being as technology-driven companies need fresh approaches to handle stress, work-life balance, and virtual leadership difficulties. Future studies should investigate comprehensive, context-specific well-being models, combining organizational and individual-level elements to create more efficient and sustainable well-being practices, the report finds.

Arnold (2017) motivated and inspires staff members, designs a workplace that lowers burnout, and helps to control stress. This leadership approach improves psychological resources like self-efficacy, resilience, and optimism, therefore supporting general well-being. Transformational leaders also give specific attention, mentoring and emotional support meant to create psychological safety in the workplace. By encouraging a feeling of work meaningfulness and therefore enabling people to feel valued and satisfied in their employment, transformational leadership also helps to improve well-being. The study also points out research gaps, though, especially the dearth of longitudinal studies proving a causal link between psychological well-being and transformative leadership. Furthermore understudied are moderating and mediating elements like company culture, job autonomy, and workload. Arnold (2017) also underlines the importance of study on the possible drawbacks of transformative leadership, including leader fatigue and unreasonable performance demands imposed on staff. The report exhorts investigation of digital leadership in distant work situations and additional cross-cultural research to evaluate differences in leadership efficacy. Arnold comes to the general conclusion that transformational leadership is very important for employee well-being; yet, more study is required to improve theoretical models, consider contextual elements, and modify leadership approaches to fit changing corporate dynamics.

Skakon et al. (2010) discussed that leaders' personal mental health and well-being greatly affect their leadership style and, thus, affect staff well-being. High stress, burnout, or emotional tiredness among leaders increases their likelihood of engaging in bad leadership practices such dictatorial, laissez-faire, or inactive leadership, therefore aggravating employee stress and discontent. On the other hand, those who have good well-being are more likely to show transformative and encouraging leadership qualities, therefore promoting a psychologically sound workplace. The study also looks at ways of influence, stressing how job demands, social support, autonomy, and work environment affect employee well-being under different leadership styles. Those leaders who offer psychological and emotional support create a workplace that lowers stress and raises job satisfaction. The study does, however, point to some research gaps, especially the dearth of studies examining bidirectional effects—where employees' well-being could potentially affect leadership behavior. Furthermore, most studies depend on cross-sectional designs, therefore restricting the capacity to establish causation. More longitudinal research is urged by the writers to better grasp how changes in leadership well-being impact workers over time. Moreover, they underline the significance of treatments aiming at leaders' personal well-being as better leaders are more able to inspire psychological well-being of their subordinates.

Research Gap

Though a lot of study has been done on leadership and workplace results, knowledge of the link between leadership styles and employee psychological well-being still lags greatly. Since most current research use cross-sectional designs, it is challenging to find causal links between leadership actions and well-being results. The little research done on mediating and moderating elements influencing the link between leadership-well-being also stands out as a deficit. Few studies have methodically examined how corporate culture, work autonomy, and emotional intelligence interact with various leadership styles; even although some research admit that these elements shape employee experiences. Furthermore lacking is evidence on how leaders' and workers' personality features affect the efficacy of leadership in promoting well-being. Furthermore unexplored is the part digital and distant leadership play in psychological well-being. Leaders have to change their strategies to keep employee engagement, motivation, and mental health intact as remote work grows more common. Most leadership studies, however, have been done in conventional office environments, hence lacking knowledge about how virtual leading affects psychological results. Further complicating the generalizability of current studies are cultural and environmental variances. Cultural standards, power distance, and society expectations all help to define leadership effectiveness; so, it follows that effective leadership approaches in one situation might not be generally relevant. At last, the integration of qualitative and mixed-method techniques in leadership research suffers a methodological vacuum. Many studies depend on quantitative survey data, which offers statistical insights but usually lacks depth in knowledge about employees' actual experiences. Case studies and interviews in qualitative research might provide a more complete picture of how leadership actions affect psychological well-being in various corporate environments.

Research objectives

1. To systematically review existing literature on leadership styles and employee psychological well-being.
2. To analyze key mediators and moderators influencing this relationship.
3. To identify research gaps and propose future directions for empirical investigations.

Research Methodology

The research uses a methodical review approach to examine body of current knowledge on employee psychological well-being and leadership. An evidence-based method called a systematic review compiles results from several studies to offer a whole picture of a given research issue. This approach guarantees a methodical, open, and reproducible study of pertinent data, therefore enabling the identification of trends, contradictions, and literary gaps. Ethical issues are few as this investigation does not call for direct human subjects. Nonetheless, the study guarantees conformity to ethical standards by precisely referencing all sources, preserving openness in data choosing, and avoiding study interpretation bias by means of avoidance of ethical requirements. To record current advancements, study written in peer-reviewed publications between 2018 and 2025.Studies that examine leadership styles and their impact on employee psychological well-being.

Summary of Literature Review

l. No	Author	Title	Objectives	Methodology	Findings and Results
Khalid & Syed	2024	"Mental health and well-being at work: A systematic review of literature and directions for future research"	To review literature on workplace mental health and propose future research directions.	SLR	The success of employee well-being depends heavily on leadership styles and organization-backed initiatives and interventions so future studies must investigate both multiple levels of analysis and cultural differences.
Ausat et al.	2024	"The Role of Transformational Leadership in Improving Employee Psychological Wellbeing: A Review"	To explore how transformational leadership impacts employee well-being.	Literature review	Transformational leadership helps enhance psychological wellbeing through its creation of motivation and support and workplace satisfaction.
Czakert & Berger	2024	"The influence of leadership on employees' work-network interface and wellbeing: A scoping review"	To assess how leadership influences the work-life interface and well-being.	Scoping review	Staff members who work under supportive leadership styles demonstrate superior capabilities in balancing their work obligations with personal responsibilities thereby achieving better well-being.
Lundqvist et al.	2023	"Leadership and well-being of employees in the Nordic countries: A literature review"	To examine leadership's role in employee well-being in Nordic countries.	Literature review	Employee well-being receives backing through Nordic leadership styles which practice supportive management principles together with participatory practices.

Mishra & Venkatesan	2023	"Psychological well-being of employees, its precedents and outcomes: A literature review and proposed framework"	To identify key factors influencing employee well-being and propose a framework.	Literature review	Leadership coupled with work-life balance and employee autonomy creates better job satisfaction which in turn enhances wellbeing for superior achievements
Kim & Cruz	2022	"Transformational leadership and psychological well-being of service-oriented staff: Hybrid Data Synthesis Technique"	To analyze transformational leadership's impact on service staff well-being.	Hybrid data synthesis (qualitative and quantitative)	Transformational leadership positively influences job satisfaction and reduces burnout.
Tummers & Bakker	2021	"Leadership and job demands-resources theory: A systematic review"	To examine how leadership interacts with job demands and resources.	Systematic review	Supportive leadership increases job resources, reducing stress and improving well-being.
Kaluza et al.	2020	"Leadership behaviour and leader self-reported well-being: A review, integration and meta-analytic examination"	To explore the link between leadership behavior and leaders' well-being.	Meta-analysis and literature review	Leaders' well-being influences their leadership style, affecting employee well-being.
Loon et al.	2019	"The paradox of employee psychological well-being practices: An integrative literature review and new directions for research"	To examine the paradox of well-being initiatives having both positive and negative effects.	Integrative literature review	Well-being programs can improve job satisfaction but may also create new stressors.
Inceoglu et al.	2018	"Leadership behavior and employee well-being: An integrated review and a future research agenda"	To review leadership behaviors that impact well-being.	Literature review	Relationship-oriented leadership improves well-being, while toxic leadership increases stress.
Skakon et al.	2010	"Are leaders' well-being, behaviours and style associated with the affective well-being of their employees? A systematic review of three decades of research"	To explore how leaders' well-being affects employees.	Systematic review	Leaders with poor well-being negatively impact employees; supportive leadership fosters well-being.
Nielsen et al.	2017	"Workplace resources to improve both employee well-being and performance: A systematic review and meta-	To assess workplace resources that enhances well-being and	Systematic review & meta-analysis	Work autonomy, leadership support, and fair treatment improve both well-being and productivity.

		"analysis"	performance.		
Arnold	2017	"Transformational leadership and employee psychological well-being: A review and directions for future research"	To evaluate how transformational leadership affects employee well-being.	Literature review	Transformational leadership enhances self-efficacy and reduces workplace stress.

Limitations

The scope of systematic reviews depends on available published studies and their quality levels. The process of publication bias includes presenting more studies that contain significant results while neglecting null or conflicting findings. This study implements a methodical systematic review process to explain the link between leadership and employee psychological well-being while defining new research opportunities for empirical work.

Implications of the Study

This systematic review establishes important implications for how organizations must lead people and handle personnel resources while creating beneficial wellbeing programs. This research from a theoretical viewpoint adds to the expanding field of leadership and psychological well-being studies through complete review of existing literature and gap analysis and future research planning. The detailed understanding of leadership effect on employee mental health emerges from uniting psychological techniques with behavioral analysis in this review. The study furnishes critical information to assist both business leaders and HR professionals and policy makers in their practices. Leadership training programs must utilize these findings to establish employee wellness and emotional intelligence along with resilience development programs. True workplace success depends on leadership behaviors that establish trust and offer support alongside motivation through transformational servant and authentic approaches since these methods generate staff engagement alongside productivity boost and minimize employee mental exhaustion. Organizations should establish mental health programs and flexible work systems and well-being-oriented leadership training to address the necessary policy requirements. Leaders must learn new strategies for sustaining employee psychological health because remote work along with hybrid models has become more common. The research findings show how leadership development must be adapted to suit individual organizational and societal cultures because traditional standardized programs prove insufficient.

Recommendations and Suggestions

Based on the findings of this systematic review, the following recommendations are proposed to improve leadership practices and enhance employee psychological well-being:

1.   Organizations should implement leadership development programs that teach transformational along with servant leadership skills and interpersonal abilities and empathetic and active listening competencies. Leadership approaches that build trust in addition to motivation and psychological safety improve employee wellness.
2.   Workplace mental health policies need implementation by HR departments which includes building organizational programs regarding mental health awareness and making available counseling alongside stress management workshops alongside employee assistance programs to sustain psychological wellness.

3.	Leaders should implement flexible work arrangements which combine good work-life balance and job autonomy for employees. When employees obtain control over their work assignments this leads to enhanced job fulfillment together with decreased work-related tension.

4.	Management guidelines must be created by organizations to advance virtual leadership effectiveness through focus on team member engagement and communication systems and psychological wellness programs.

5.	Workers need companies to create an organizational culture based on inclusivity and recognition and vibrant open communication. A transparent system of leader-employees feedback creates better psychological well-being for workers while building their trust in the organization.

Conclusion

The research explored existing academic publications about leadership approaches and their influence on worker psychological condition while discussing essential discoveries and existing knowledge gaps for future study. The scientific data indicates that leadership has direct influence on employee mental health through its positive effects on transformational and servant and authentic leadership approaches. The practices of authoritarian along with laissez-faire leadership reignite workplace anxiety while simultaneously raising emotional exhaustion levels among personnel. The field of leadership research has achieved numerous achievements yet important insights are needed to explain long-term effects on psychological health and mediating elements and digital leadership dynamics during remote work formats. The analysis highlights businesses must use leadership approaches focused on employee well-being and put supportive workplace rules into effect while maintaining funding for novel research which explores uncharted areas. Leadership transcends performance enhancement to serve as the foundation for establishing workplaces where employees experience value and active motivation while experiencing complete psychological security. Organizations that place such leadership strategies in the forefront of employee well-being create healthier environments and generate more productive workplaces which yield benefits to both employees and the business performance.

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