

A Bibliometric Analysis of a Four-Construct Framework: Transformational Leadership, Employee Engagement, Well-Being and Burnout

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The year 2020 forever altered the nature of labor, affecting every individual and organization on the planet. Remote work has provided some individuals with new employment prospects, more time with their families, and the choice of whether or not to commute. However, this has created new issues, as teams have grown more compartmentalized and digital tiredness has become a serious threat. The purpose of this research is to offer an overview of the relationships between four main constructs, namely transformational leadership, employee engagement, wellbeing versus burnout via the employment of a bibliometric analysis using VOSviewer. In addition, the future goal – as derived from an in-depth study of the relevant literature - is to determine whether and to what extent the leadership style effects employee engagement, as well as their wellbeing versus burnout. The examination is designed to take place in the context of firms operating in hybrid work environments, mixing online and on-site work as well as contacts with co-workers and leadership. The primary premise is that the leadership style has a substantial impact on employee engagement and well-being, or burnout if they are not aligned with the present work issues.

Keywords: *transformational leadership, employee engagement, well-being, burnout, COVID-19 pandemic.*

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1. Introduction

This research focuses on the influence of leadership style on employee engagement and well-being and burnout, particularly after pandemics when the workforce has begun to change dramatically and hybrid model work has become essential for leaders seeking to attract and retain talented human resources. According to Bratianu and Bejinaru's (2021, p. 11) approach, the COVID-19 catastrophe “came like any natural disaster, catching people and organizations unprepared for disruptive power and social nexus. People recognized that organizations and governments have no strategy to combat such a pandemic when the unthinkable became a reality”.

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Today, the chronic uncertainty that dominates organizations generates emerging modes of thinking and probabilistic models for developing solutions (Murgatroyd, 2015; Bratianu & Bejinaru, 2021), which compel even genuine leaders to conform to a variety of leadership styles. This is mostly due to the fact that they must reinvent the organization's crucial dynamic capabilities based on new knowledge structures and knowledge competencies (Bratianu, Hadad, & Bejinaru, 2020). Leadership styles of the future. How COVID-19 is reshaping leadership beyond the crisis, one of Deloitte's research from July 2020, provides evidence in favor of this notion. The work argues that the social and economic crisis brought on by the current epidemic is an extreme but representative illustration of the types of problems leaders confront today.

Theoretically, the majority of academics concur that the leadership style has a considerable impact on the amount of employee engagement or disengagement. Employees are more likely to be engaged in their work and to perform well if their leaders exhibit the following characteristics: a. resilience, consistency, trust, and competence (Kahn, 1990); b. engagement (Welbourne, 2007) and commitment to the organization (CIPD, 2006); c. care and support (Kahn, 1990) and recognition for a job well done (Wellins et al., 2005); d. care and support (Kahn, 1990) (Tower Perrin, 2003).

There is no doubt that employee well-being is one of the major indicators of excellent return on investment for both individual and organizational growth and productivity. Mohd et al.'s (2020) article - "The roles of authentic leadership, incentives, and meaningful work" reveals that the optimism of authentic leaders indirectly promotes employee well-being via on – financial rewards and meaningful work. It also proposes that financial and non-financial rewards should be evaluated independently in light of the current socioeconomic climate and the motivational demands of employees.

Starting from these aspects, the present paper intends to propose a bibliographic analysis of the scientific articles simultaneously tackling the main envisaged constructs, respectively transformational leadership, employee engagement, well-being and burnout. Given the fact that the inclusion of the Covid-19 pandemic would have narrowed down too much the analysis, the term was not considered in the searches. The bibliometric analysis was performed by means of VOSviewer (Visualization of Similarities) (van Eck & Waltman, 2023).

2. Theoretical insights

Due to a lack of essential information to comprehend and combat the COVID-19, there is a great deal of mystery around the current situation (Chang & Velasco, 2020; McKibbin & Fernando, 2020). Staying at home and working remotely have also led to new modes of operation and communication. By decreasing the emotional input and boosting the rational role, the knowledge dynamics shift (Bratianu & Bajinaru, 2021). The transition to a new style of working, whether in response to disruptions or business as usual, modifies both the

employment contract and the psychological contract between employers and workers (Jaakson & Kallaste, 2010). If businesses fail to realize this shift, the potential effectiveness of teleworking may be diminished (Eckhardt et al., 2019).

In a review of the literature, Morosan-Danila, Grigoras-Ichim, and Bordeianu (2021) identified the challenges of telework, which are reflected in possible technological challenges in the work environment, communication, and management, which are interconnected; telework can have negative effects, such as isolation, work from home conflict, and work intensity, if these areas are neglected (as also highlighted by Bentley et al., 2016; Eddleston & Mulki, 2017). And consequently, these can have a negative impact on well-being (physical and mental health) and job performance (Eurofound and ILO, 2017). In light of this, businesses must never forget that the most valuable and adaptable resource they possess (with the correct impetus) is the human resource. Telework organization was a need in 2020, but it is now a long-term solution to the company's cost-cutting and productivity needs. In this setting, businesses must continually seek for strategies and solutions for arranging employee work, supervision, incentive, and evaluation of telework.

Brower (2020) predicted that mental health and leadership will increase during times of crisis, that company culture will become a greater focus, that working from home will become the norm, and that there will be greater disparities in work-life balance, more frequent team engagement, vast flexibility, and extensive use of technology. The increased speed and less bureaucracy, standardization of practice, and elimination of superfluous procedures will result in increased employee empowerment.

The current pandemic appears to be the ultimate test of global leadership. Leaders of organizations rely on their intuition and the insights of human resource specialists to guarantee that the organization and its employees feel supported (Dirani et al., 2020). The loss of skilled people entails a loss of knowledge and expertise (Ramllal, 2004). During a crisis, many firms attempt to cut the number of employees in order to reduce expenses, while at the same time expecting the remaining employees to be more resilient (Naude, 2012). Employees, on the other hand, react differently at times of crisis, with responses ranging from acceptance to minor discomfort, fear, anger, frustration, and even complete opposition (Smollan, Sayers, & Matheny, 2010).

The importance of leaders in employee engagement has been the focus of numerous studies over the years. According to Skalkon, Nielsen, Borg, and Guzman (2010), leadership can play a significant role in developing and defining the psychological work environment of a company. Leadership has both direct and indirect effects on employee engagement and mental health (Hetland, Sandal, & Johnsen, 2007). According to Wakabi's (2016) research on the relationship between leadership style and employee retention in firms, managers develop distinct leadership styles based on their orientation. Any leadership style employed by a manager has an effect on staff motivation, performance, and organizational commitment, hence influencing the decision of employees to quit or remain with

the firm. One of the most important conclusions of this study is that leadership style influences employee retention in firms.

Wellness and engagement at work are crucial for both individuals and businesses (Osam et al., 2020; Sutton, 2020). Employees that demonstrate a high level of work engagement also demonstrate a high level of energy; they are enthusiastic and productive (Bakker & Demerouti 2008). In turn, this adds to both financial success (Schneider et al., 2018) and growth (Sorensen, 2013) at the organizational level (Schaufeli, 2012; Bakker et al., 2012; Schaufeli & Salanova, 2010).

The same study demonstrates that leaders who have the courage to initiate and support meaningful dialogues between colleagues typically lead high-performing teams (Duhigg, 2016). Leaders that pay close attention to the intrinsic value preferences of their employees are likely to satisfy fundamental psychological demands and generate high levels of engagement. To expand on this idea, additional research on the evolution of employee engagement demonstrates that high employee engagement sustains job satisfaction and performance among staff and suggests that employee engagement could be a crucial component in shifting towards a human-centered approach that balances individuals' wellbeing and performance. Moreover, it has been established that employee engagement encourages proactive activities, which have a significant impact on accomplishing personal and organizational work objectives (Rich et al., 2010; Sonnentah, 2003; Zhong et al., 2016). Multiple studies have demonstrated that a positive engagement experience can result in individuals finding their occupations more enjoyable (Haynie et al., 2016).

In line with other studies (Guest, 2017; Peccei & Van de Voorde, 2019), the current review on the evolution of employee engagement reinforces the need for companies to shift towards a human-centered approach rather than a performance-centered approach. It is also demonstrated that, when companies decide to orient their practices solely on performance, they negatively impact the well-being of their employees, and as a result, this results in a decline in employee engagement. In the hybrid environment in which we are currently operating, a proposal might be made to examine how firms can boost employee engagement by identifying solutions to problems that may arise while working remotely, such as hyper-connection, isolation, and procrastination. According to Cropanzano and Mitchell (2005), a high degree of employee engagement may be achieved if firms are able to manage the aforementioned challenges while also taking care of their employees by implementing appropriate policies and activities. Therefore, employees are more engaged and productive when they believe their organizations and managers care about their emotions and needs.

As further indicated by Bakker and Costa (2014) in their research article on chronic job burnout and everyday functioning, employees with high levels of burnout require assistance in modifying their working conditions and health status substantially. Chronic burnout amplifies the loss loop of daily job expectations, daily exhaustion, and daily self-deprecation and reduces the gain cycle of daily job resources, daily work engagement, and daily job crafting, according to research. Burnout is a syndrome marked by chronic exhaustion, cynicism, and a lack of personal accomplishment, as described by Maslach, Jackson, and Leiter

(1996, p. 20). It is a condition of "exhaustion in which one is skeptical about the usefulness of their employment and uncertain about their ability to function. Burnout is characterized by a high level of chronic exhaustion and an emotional and cognitive distancing from professional tasks.

A survey conducted by Ernst & Young (2020) reveals that employees prefer to return to the office for social contact, but do not perceive office work and remote work as mutually exclusive. A bigger proportion of work from home is desired in the future. They desire to return to the workplace for social interaction and expect their employers to improve digital tools for remote work. Therefore, it is essential to have technologies that facilitate increased communication and virtual collaboration.

In addition to the existing environment, the competition between businesses is becoming increasingly intense, and managers must stay up with new ideas and strategies for the future. As also described by Drosos et al. (2021) in their study, to improve employee satisfaction in the workplace necessitates a constant quest for flexibility and shifting employment patterns. On the one hand, corporations are not seeking to offer permanent employment to all employees, but only to a select elite that is deemed the core group because of its capacity to do a range of duties and provide flexibility. The remainder of the labor force consists primarily of part-time, temporary or seasonal, independent or self-employed workers.

In a period of crisis, such as the one we are presently experiencing, a leader's primary objective would be to reopen, recover the firm, and initiate crisis management. As a result, employees may be vulnerable in a variety of ways. They will need to learn how to deal with complexity, how to adjust to the new reality of the workplace, and they will also require emotional and interpersonal assistance. In this way, leaders may support supervisors by enhancing staff motivation and engaging them frequently. As employees are also unprepared and must adapt to the new reality, it is crucial that corporate leaders and managers become more adaptable.

In light of the fact that we are all confronting something incredibly novel in terms of workforce transition, it is necessary to think on and investigate all of these trends and research findings further. It is a significant mindset shift that will need leaders and companies to fundamentally reassess and rewire their operating mode in order to prioritize employee health. Diversity and culture are at the heart of a reinvented workplace in which working and collaborating with others is likely to remain a fundamental aspect of the entire employee experience.

3. Methodological approach

In order to provide an overarching perspective on the research issue linking four main constructs – transformational leadership, employee engagement, well-being and burnout, the current work makes use of bibliometric research, also known as statistical bibliography, a term that was coined in 1922 by Hulme (2015). Bibliometric analysis is considered to be a statistical assessment of published

documents, allowing the measurement of the influence of a publication in the scientific community.

The information was obtained from the Web of Science (WoS) Core Collection during January 2023. WoS is the world’s premier scientific citation search and analytical information platform (Li et al., 2017). The retrieval period that was used ranged from 1975 to 2023, and the retrieval model relied on the Advanced search function. The default values that were provided by WoS were used for all of the other retrieval parameters, with the exception of selecting articles that have titles and abstracts written in English because this is the only writing language used. Regarding the type of document, only articles were selected.

Records that were exported from WoS featured a wealth of information, including authors, titles, abstracts, sources, subjects, publication years, and references. This data was exported as a plain text file and included the whole record as well as the references. As a result of this, the full data obtained from the WoS research was directly utilized in the process of performing the analysis. By employing the full counting method and generating a map based on the aforementioned bibliographic data, the bibliometric software VOSviewer (Visualization of Similarities) (van Eck & Waltman, 2023) was utilized in order to analyze and visualize the co-occurrence of the considered constructs (keywords) and the citation, co-citation of sources and authors alongside the countries of the most prominent authors and the bibliometric coupling.

4. Analysis of the retrieved data

With a view to spot the most important sources co-citing the retrieved articles, a co-citation analysis was performed, establishing the cited sources as a unit of analysis – ‘A co-citation link is a link between two items that are both cited by the same document’, Van Eck & Waltman, 2023 p. 27). A synopsis of the most prominent co-citing sources (i.e., journals) is presented Figure 1.

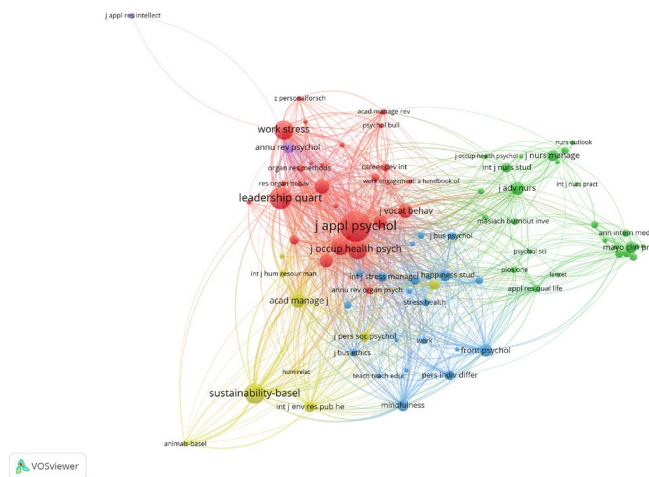


Figure 1. Prominent co-citing sources and their clusters
Source: author’s own research

The most important authors in the selected articles who were co-cited were established by choosing cited authors as a unit of analysis. A synopsis of the most prominent co-citing authors is illustrated in Figure 2.

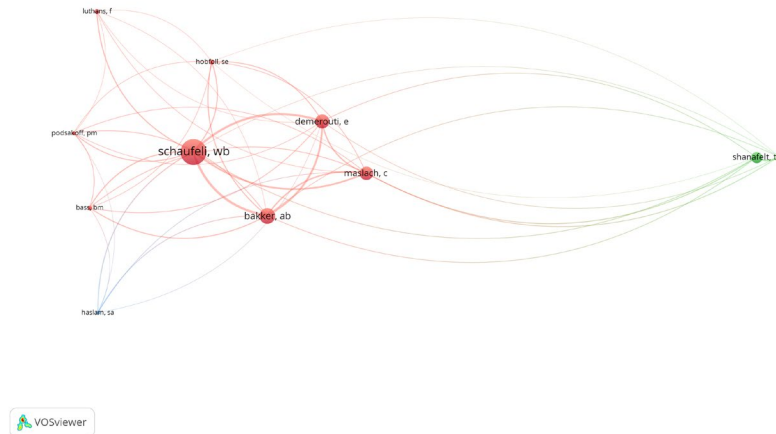


Figure 2. Prominent co-citing authors and their clusters

Source: author's own research

In terms of bibliographic coupling (i.e., ‘A bibliographic coupling link is a link between two items that both cite the same document’, as stated by Van Eck & Waltman, 2023 p. 27), the most recurring cited authors are mentioned in Table 1.

Table 1. Recurrent cited authors based on bibliographic coupling

Document	Citations	Total link strength
O'donoghue (2016)	9	120
Steffens (2018)	35	113
Katou (2022)	6	112
Schaufeli (2015)	167	100
Kotze (2022)	2	97

The use of a keywords' co-occurrence can positively represent the research hotspots in the discipline domains, offering additional support for scientific and academic study in the process. In this respect, in order to identify the relevant articles integrating the main envisaged constructs, the following search was performed in WoS: (((AB=(Burnout)) AND AB=(leadership)) AND AB=(engagement))) AND AB=(well-being). It should be mentioned here that the initial search which included the more specific terms “transformational leadership” and “employee engagement” did not retrieve any results. Consequently, with a view to broaden the search, the newly searched terms were the more generic ones, respectively “leadership” (instead of “transformational leadership”) and

“engagement” (instead of “employee engagement”). The analyzed section was the abstract as it would have been highly unlikely to find all the concepts in the titles or keywords whereas searching for the terms in the body of the papers would have led to too vague results.

Of the 265 keywords from the 37 retrieved results, only 26 met the threshold (i.e., appeared at least three times). As previously indicated, the VOSviewer program was responsible for the processing and construction of the keyword co-occurrence network (Figure 3). The size of the nodes and words in the figure that follows represents the importance of the information they contain. The weight is proportional to the size of both the node frequency and the word frequency. The length of the path separating two nodes is directly proportional to the quality of the connection that exists between them; hence, a shorter path often reflects a more robust connection. If there is a line connecting two keywords, it indicates that those keywords have appeared together at some point. The thicker the line, the more times the two keywords have occurred together (an illustration of such relationships is presented in Figure 3).

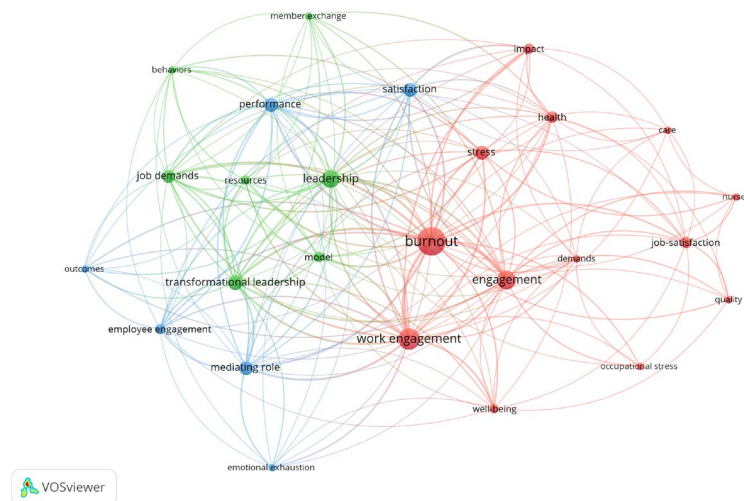


Figure 3. Keywords’ co-occurrence network of WoS publications - by VOSviewer
Source: author’s own research

The nodes that all share the same color have been reorganized into a cluster with them. As seen above, the first cluster (highlighted in red in Figure 3) gravitates around the triad burnout – (work) engagement – well-being. The relevance of burnout is hereby backed up by the co-occurrences of (occupational) stress which also points to health issues, the imperative to cope with the demands and simultaneously get proper care with a view to achieve job satisfaction and well-being.

The second cluster revolves around (transformational) leadership and the adequate management of resources, behaviors and job demands. The exigency for thorough model advancement is implicitly brought forward, as the term ‘model’ appears several times interlinked with the targeted constructs.

The third cluster focuses on various outcomes such as emotional exhaustion, employee engagement, performance, satisfaction, also pointing to the mediating role of different variables in the integrative models covering the targeted constructs. The most interconnected constructs are Burnout – (Work / Employee) Engagement (25 links) and (Work / Employee) Engagement – (Transformational) Leadership (23 links), followed by Burnout - (Transformational) Leadership (16 links). Given this situation, the premises of an articulate conceptual model covering at least these three constructs seem viable from a theoretical point of view.

Conclusion

This topic is particularly novel, given that we are still confronting effects of a pandemic, and there is incipient research to support a method of employee engagement and well-being. Ernst & Young (EY) is collaborating with the most prominent worldwide organizations to support a variety of transitions associated with reinventing work. In June and July of 2020, EY commissioned the Physical Return to Work Reimagined (PRWR) survey and JAM analysis (from an interactive crowdsourcing event) via the MillionYou platform. Involved were 3683 employees, 708 employers, and data from the United States, the United Kingdom, and Germany.

Despite the fact that many leaders recognize the disruptions produced by the COVID-19 epidemic, major behavioral changes are anticipated to adapt to the new situation. In order to prevent employee burnout and disengagement, the leadership style should be altered to match the demands of hybrid work settings.

Given the newly emerged context, the present bibliometric research sought to examine the interrelationships between leadership, employee engagement, well-being and burnout as a topical and compelling subject matter. The aim was to provide an overview of the main publications simultaneously tackling these issues by unfolding a bibliometric analysis covering citation, co-citation and bibliographic coupling. In this way, valuable insights into the most prominent articles, authors and publications were brought forward as a prerequisite for further content scrutiny.

The main limitation of the current endeavor refers to the presentation of facts and figures without going deeper into content analysis. Therefore, future research on this topic should study the theoretical and empirical developments on the topic more in-depth, beyond bibliometric reports.

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