

Exploring factors influencing work productivity: A qualitative case study of employee motivation and leadership practices

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Abstract: Work productivity is essential for organisational success, yet the reasons for varying levels of productivity among individuals are still not fully understood. This qualitative case study explores the elements that impact employee productivity and leadership practices through an examination of a private Business College's Headquarter office in England. The study investigates motivational factors and engagement techniques used in this office through interviews with personnel and management. By studying real-world examples like this private business college, this research develops our understanding of productivity and leadership in contemporary business environments. The research aims to investigate the complex factors influencing employee productivity by drawing on motivational theories such as Self-Determination Theory and Expectancy Theory, as well as insights from leadership literature on transformational leadership and employee engagement. Early findings indicate that internal motivators, such as autonomy, competency, and purpose, are crucial in enhancing employee productivity. Leadership styles that exhibit empathy, honesty, and a shared vision promote trust and cooperation, leading to increased employee engagement and performance. This research intends to provide important insights on employee productivity and leadership practices in the Headquarter office of a private business college setting by using a qualitative case study technique.

Keywords: *Employee engagement, Employee motivation, Leadership strategies, Organisational culture, Qualitative case study, Work productivity,*

1. Introduction

Work productivity is a crucial factor that influences the performance and competitiveness of organisations in the fast-paced and ever-changing commercial landscape of today. Maximising staff productivity boosts operational efficiency, encourages innovation, increases customer happiness, and helps to sustainable growth (Rouse, 2017). Comprehending the various aspects that impact job productivity is a complicated and difficult task for both organisational executives and researchers. Employee productivity is closely connected to motivation, engagement, and leadership effectiveness in the organisational setting (Grant, 2012). Employees who are motivated and engaged are more inclined to put in extra effort, show increased job satisfaction, and make good contributions to organisational objectives (Kahn, 1990; Saks, 2006). Avolio *et al.* (2009) argue that effective leadership, which includes vision, empathy, and empowerment, is crucial for creating a culture of trust, cooperation, and high performance. Organisational culture, communication techniques, and feedback mechanisms have a substantial impact on employee satisfaction, commitment, and productivity levels (Cameron and Quinn, 2011; Schein, 2010). An encouraging and all-encompassing culture that prioritises openness, innovation, and ongoing learning has the ability to motivate workers to achieve their maximum capabilities and enhance organisational performance (Cable and Judge, 1996; Edmondson, 2018). Although there has been thorough study on work productivity and its factors, there is still a requirement for detailed

studies that examine the specific dynamics influencing productivity in various organisational environments.

To understand the complex relationship between work productivity and leadership practices, it is crucial to use real-world examples that demonstrate these ideas. The case study of a Business College Headquarters exemplifies how dedication to academic quality, practical learning, and an international perspective can promote organisational success. Studying the Headquarter office of this school provides significant insights into the elements affecting work efficiency and leadership effectiveness in the changing environment of business education.

Qualitative case study research is a great way for exploring job productivity by gathering detailed information from real-world situations. This study uses a qualitative case study technique to investigate the factors that impact job productivity at the Headquarter office of the case study Business College. Three individuals from this organisation were selected to take part in this research, including one personnel and two mid-level managers from the IT department.

By conducting interviews with personnel and managers within this organisation, the research aims to explore:

1. The motivational drivers that inspire employees to perform at their best;
2. The leadership strategies employed by the Chairman of this organisation to engage and empower their team members;
3. The impact of organisational culture, communication, and feedback mechanisms on employee satisfaction and productivity;
4. The identification of challenges and barriers that may hinder productivity and ways in which they are addressed.

The study aims to enhance the current knowledge on work productivity by offering insights into the intricate relationship between motivational variables, leadership practices, and organisational dynamics. Organisations may improve their strategy for creating a productive and engaging work environment by understanding these dynamics, resulting in enhanced performance and employee satisfaction.

2. Literature Review

In the current field of organisational psychology and management studies, there has been much study and academic investigation into understanding the complexities of work productivity. Work productivity is crucial for organisational success, competitiveness, and sustainability (Grant, 2012; Rouse, 2017). It refers to how efficiently and effectively people and teams complete tasks and achieve goals inside an organisation. This literature review intends to explore important theoretical frameworks and empirical investigations that reveal the elements affecting work productivity, specifically focusing on motivational theories like Self-Determination Theory (SDT) and Expectancy Theory.

2.1. Self-Determination Theory

Deci and Ryan (1985) introduced Self-Determination Theory (SDT) as a framework to explain intrinsic motivation and behaviour among people in different settings, such as the workplace. Self-Determination Theory states that people have natural psychological requirements for autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Meeting these needs promotes internal motivation, well-being, and optimal performance (Deci and Ryan, 2000). SDT emphasises the significance of establishing work settings that encourage employees' autonomy in decision-making, provide chances for skill enhancement and mastery, and foster meaningful interpersonal relationships (Gagne and Deci, 2005). Studies indicate that individuals who view their job as consistent with their values, interests, and personal goals are more inclined to exhibit elevated levels of engagement, creativity, and productivity (Ryan and Deci, 2000). Although SDT provides useful insights into the motivational dynamics affecting work productivity, empirical investigations have shown many limitations and problems in its implementation in organisational contexts. Translating SDT concepts into specific organisational practices and policies

may face opposition or limitations because of structural and cultural influences (Gagne and Deci, 2005). Furthermore, variations in motivational preferences and contextual factors need a detailed comprehension of how Self-Determination Theory principles are expressed in various work environments (Qureshi and Khawaja, 2021; Vansteenkiste and Ryan, 2013).

2.2. *Expectancy Theory*

Furthermore, Vroom (1964) has developed Expectation Theory, which suggests that individuals' desire to work hard and complete tasks is determined by their ideas regarding the connection between effort, performance, and results. Expectancy Theory posits that employees are driven to work hard when they are certain that their efforts will result in successful performance (expectancy), that successful performance will be rewarded (instrumentality), and that the benefits are appealing and valuable (ibid. 1964). Expectancy Theory in the context of work productivity highlights the significance of clear, transparent, and fair performance expectations, feedback methods, and compensation structures (Luthans, 2011). Employees are more motivated and productive when they see a clear connection between their work, performance results, and valuable rewards or incentives (Lawler and Porter, 1967). However, empirical studies on Expectancy Theory have identified certain constraints and difficulties, especially related to the intricate character of human decision-making and the subjective aspect of perceived effort-performance-outcome connections (Mitchell and Daniels, 2003). The usefulness of Expectancy Theory in predicting and explaining employee motivation may vary depending on different organisational circumstances and cultural environments (Kanfer, 1992).

2.3. *Impact of Employee Engagement*

Employee engagement has been defined as the emotional commitment and psychological investment people have in their job, colleagues, and company. It is considered as a crucial factor for organisational success, innovation, and sustainability (Macey and Schneider, 2008; Saks, 2006). Employee engagement plays a vital role as a mediating element in the interaction between motivational drivers, leadership practices, and organisational results in the study on variables affecting work productivity. Studies indicate that individuals who are highly engaged are more inclined to demonstrate discretionary effort, innovation, and resilience when encountering problems, resulting in increased job satisfaction, retention, and performance levels (Bakker and Demerouti, 2008; Harter *et al.*, 2002).

Engaged individuals develop deep connections with their colleagues and the organisation, which promotes a feeling of belonging, trust, and shared purpose. This, in turn, enhances collaborative work processes and organisational effectiveness (Harter *et al.*, 2002). Employee engagement's influence on work productivity depends on organisational elements such as leadership quality, communication methods, and chances for professional development (Macey and Schneider, 2008; Saks, 2006). Transformational leadership, which includes inspiring vision, supportive communication, and empowerment, has been proven to enhance employee engagement by creating an atmosphere of trust, autonomy, and shared responsibility (Avolio *et al.*, 2009). Organisational efforts focused on enhancing employee well-being, recognition, and work-life balance can lead to increased levels of engagement and job satisfaction (Bakker and Demerouti, 2008; Harter *et al.*, 2002). Organisations may cultivate settings that support employee engagement and improve job productivity and organisational success by promoting appreciation, open communication, and continual learning.

2.4. *Organisational Culture*

Organisational culture, which encompasses shared values, beliefs, conventions, and practices inside a company, significantly impacts employee engagement and organisational outcomes (Cameron and Quinn, 2011; Schein, 2010). Within the context of the study in hand, organisational culture serves as the basis for cultivating, sustaining, and integrating employee involvement into daily work activities. An organisational culture that is transparent, accountable, and inclusive promotes a feeling of belonging and dedication among workers, leading to increased engagement and voluntary effort (ibid. 2011; 2010).

Employees who see a connection between their personal views and organisational principles are more inclined to exhibit proactive behaviours, inventive thinking, and collaborative problem-solving. This contributes to the organisation's resilience and flexibility (ibid. 2011).

On the other hand, organisational cultures that are unclear, inconsistent, or incongruent can reduce employee engagement and morale, resulting in higher turnover, absenteeism, and performance problems (Schein, 2010). Cultures that are toxic or dysfunctional, marked by fear, distrust, or aversion to change, can hinder innovation, lower employee morale, and obstruct organisational success (Cameron and Quinn, 2011; Karimi, 2021).

Leadership is essential for influencing and maintaining corporate culture by acting as examples, advocates of principles, and drivers of cultural transformation (Schein, 2010). Leaders who exemplify the organisation's values, encourage openness, and cultivate open communication establish settings that empower, appreciate, and respect people, resulting in increased levels of engagement and dedication (ibid. 2010). That is to be said that organisational culture significantly influences employee engagement, impacting attitudes, actions, and performance results in the business. Organisations may build inspiring and motivating workplaces by fostering a good, values-based culture and ensuring that leadership practices are in line with organisational principles. This can allow people to reach their full potential and make significant contributions to the organisation's success.

2.5. Leadership Styles and Work Productivity

Studying leadership styles and their influence on work productivity is an important addition to current research. It sheds light on how motivational theories, organisational dynamics, and leadership practices interact in organisational environments. Leadership styles significantly influence business culture, employee motivation, and work productivity (Schein, 2010). Transformational leadership (Bass, 1985), transactional leadership (Avolio et al., 2009), and servant leadership (Greenleaf, 1970) are three notable leadership styles that have been thoroughly researched in terms of their impact on employee performance and organisational results.

Transformational leadership, defined by vision, charisma, inspiration, and intellectual stimulation, is linked to increased employee engagement, dedication, and creativity (Bass, 1985). Transformational leaders motivate their followers to go beyond their personal interests and strive towards shared objectives, promoting an environment of trust, cooperation, and ongoing enhancement. Studies indicate that companies with transformational leaders tend to demonstrate increased adaptation, resilience, and long-term performance sustainability (Avolio *et al.*, 2009; Judge and Piccolo, 2004).

While transactional leadership focuses on dependent compensation, active management by exception, and laissez-faire leadership techniques (Bass, 1985). Transactional leaders set specific performance standards, offer feedback, and give incentives or remedial measures according on workers' performance results (Judge and Piccolo, 2004). This type of leadership style is helpful for short-term performance and task-oriented goals but may have minimal influence on long-term employee engagement and organisational culture (ibid. 2004).

Finally, Servant leadership, based on Greenleaf's (1970) writings, focuses on empathy, humility, stewardship, and empowerment as the key elements of successful leadership. Servant leaders care about their followers' needs, support their personal and professional development, and promote a feeling of belonging and community in the organisation (Greenleaf, 1970; Spears, 1995). Research indicates that servant leadership is linked to increased employee happiness, trust, and organisational citizenship practices (Liden *et al.*, 2008; Sendjaya *et al.*, 2008).

Empirical studies have emphasised the significance of leadership congruence and situational adaptation in enhancing organisational performance, notwithstanding the distinct strengths and benefits offered by each leadership style (Yukl, 2012). Effective leaders understand that organisational challenges are always changing and use a flexible, context-specific leadership strategy that utilises many leadership styles to address fluctuating demands and goals (ibid. 2012).

That is to be said, leadership styles significantly influence organisational culture, employee motivation, and job productivity. Transformational, transactional, and servant leadership are different leadership styles linked to different degrees of employee engagement, satisfaction, and performance results. Leaders may create settings that foster creativity, innovation, and sustained production by comprehending the subtleties of various leadership styles and their impact on organisational performance.

2.6. *Gaps in the Field*

Although Self-Determination Theory (SDT) and Expectation Theory are theoretically rich and practically relevant for understanding work productivity, but there are still gaps and opportunities for further study. Both theories highlight the significance of intrinsic motivation and goal-oriented behaviour. However, further empirical research is required to combine and assess the effectiveness of these two theories in predicting employee productivity in various organisational settings (Deci *et al.*, 2017). Moreover, extended research is needed to explore how leadership styles, organisational culture, and contextual factors influence the impact of motivational theories on work productivity (Gagne and Deci, 2005). Bearing in mind, technological improvements and shifts in work dynamics, such as remote work and flexible arrangements, have brought new problems and possibilities for improving work efficiency in the digital era (Grant and Parker, 2009).

Ultimately, combining motivational theories like SDT with Expectancy Theory offers a thorough structure for grasping how human motivations, organisational dynamics, and environmental elements influence work productivity. Future research can help to developing evidence-based methods to enhance work productivity and organisational effectiveness in varied and dynamic work contexts by addressing the limitations and problems identified in this literature analysis.

This research was guided by the following research questions:

Research question1: What factors contribute to employee engagement and satisfaction, and how do they impact overall work productivity within the organisation?

Research question 2: How do leadership strategies and organisational culture influence employee motivation and work productivity?

2.7. *Research Design and Sampling*

The research methodology and sampling approach for this study are based on the theoretical underpinnings outlined in the literature review. The purpose is to investigate the key factors that affect work productivity in organisational environments. Due to the qualitative character of the research and the aim to gather detailed, contextual insights from real-world situations, a qualitative case study method is considered the most suitable (Yin, 2012).

2.8. *Qualitative Case Study Approach*

The qualitative case study technique enables a thorough investigation of the intricacies and subtleties present in work productivity, employee motivation, and leadership practices in particular organisational settings (Creswell, 2013). The study aims to reveal the complex factors influencing work productivity by analysing qualitative data obtained from interviews with personnel and managers.

2.9. *A Case Study in a Business College*

This Business College is located in the ancient city of Oxford, nurtures future business leaders and entrepreneurs. This private higher education institution maintains a legacy of academic brilliance similar to reputable universities in the town such as Oxford University with a subtle charm. Within its modest exterior is a vibrant setting that combines academic rigour with practical relevance. The institution has seven campuses located around the UK, serving as a central place for study and drawing students from various cultural and intellectual backgrounds. The institution now has over 8000 students from more than 10 countries, enhancing the study experience with a worldwide perspective.

The college aims to empower students with the knowledge, skills, and ethical principles required to succeed in the global business environment, with the support of a committed team of instructors and staff. Their ideals centre around a dedication to academic achievement, integrity, diversity, and innovation.

The institution offers a variety of academic courses that meet the changing demands of the corporate sector. Students get theoretical knowledge and practical skills through research, case studies, simulations, and internships in programmes ranging from undergraduate degrees in Business Management to postgraduate diplomas in Finance.

The college's success is mostly due to its excellent faculty, which consists of a mix of academics and industry leaders who provide real-world expertise in the classroom. They cultivate critical thinking and problem-solving abilities necessary for success in the corporate world through interactive lectures and coaching. The institution embraces diversity by welcoming students from over 10 nations, developing a global perspective to equip graduates for the linked modern economy. Comprehensive support services go beyond academics to guarantee students' well-being and success, including aid in areas such as career guidance and lodging.

This Business College is known for its practical learning and academic rigour in a field where business education tends to focus on theory. Its dedication to quality, global outlook, and extensive support services positions the college as a top choice for anyone looking for a well-rounded business education. The institution is dedicated to inspiring and empowering future business leaders, aiming to have a lasting influence on society by focusing on one student at a time as it evolves and adapts.

2.10. Sampling Strategy

This study utilises purposive sampling, selecting participants based on their relevance to the research topics and the depth of their experiences and viewpoints (Palinkas *et al.*, 2015). The case study focuses on a Headquarter office to reflect the private higher education industry, organisational culture, and leadership structure.

2.11. Participant Selection

This study targets a varied group of participants, including operational personnel and two mid-level managers in the IT department (see Figure 1 below). The study intends to explore how human motivations, leadership practices, and organisational dynamics at various levels of the hierarchy are interrelated and impact work productivity.

Figure 1.
Interviewee profiles.

Participants	Position	Time at the company
Participant 1	Consultant	15 Years
Participant 2	IT manager	3 Months
Participant 3	IT manager	3 Months

2.12. Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations such as informed consent, confidentiality, and participant anonymity are crucial at all stages of the study process (Bryman, 2016). Participants were given detailed information on the study's objectives, their rights as research subjects, and the voluntary aspect of their involvement. Precautions were taken to protect the privacy and confidentiality of participants' replies and to prevent any potential dangers or damage.

2.13. Data Collection and Analysis

Data gathering includes semi-structured interviews with a range of participants, such as personnel and mid-level managers. This approach allows for a thorough examination of the study issues from

many viewpoints (Creswell, 2013). The interviews were audio recorded, transcribed word for word, and analysed using thematic analysis methods to discover important themes, patterns, and insights related to the study goals (Braun and Clarke, 2006). The study design and sampling method are carefully planned to provide a thorough and detailed investigation of the elements that impact work productivity in organisational environments. The study intends to use a qualitative case study method while considering ethical aspects to provide significant insights that enhance the current understanding of work productivity, employee motivation, and leadership practices.

2.14. Findings and Analysis

The interview transcripts from the three participants provided insight into the elements that affect employee engagement, happiness, and productivity in a private higher education company. The elements have been classified into leadership strategies and organisational culture, and communication and feedback techniques.

2.15. Leadership Strategies and Organisational Culture

The participants emphasised the importance of leadership style and organisational culture in influencing staff motivation and productivity (Karimi and Khawaja, 2023). Participant 1, a consultant, admired the Chairman's hands-on approach and openness to innovation, showing a desire to emulate and be mentored by him:

"I like to see how someone has done so well and I try and emulate them... So, for me, that is a motivating factor. However, challenges arise in aligning tasks with organisational goals due to structural issues within the organisation, revealing a tension between admiration and pragmatic obstacles." (Participant 1)

The participant's rhetoric indicates adoration and desire towards the Chairman's leadership style, presenting the Chairman as a role model deserving of imitation. Recognising structural issues indicates a keen understanding of the constraints present in the organisational environment. The Chairman's leadership style is commended for its visionary approach, but the absence of specific instructions on implementing the goal presents difficulties for personnel. This highlights a frequent criticism of transformational leadership, in which leaders may find it challenging to harmonise motivating vision with pragmatic implementation (Bass and Riggio, 2006). The conflict between independence and coordination emphasises the intricacies of distributed decision-making, requiring a sophisticated leadership strategy that combines empowerment with strategic guidance (Eisenbeiss, 2012).

Participant 3, who has management duties, highlighted the significance of granting autonomy alongside clear objectives and support to successfully encourage team members, proposing a strategic leadership approach:

"I give them [staff] the ownership so they can make the decision with the confidence." (Participant 3)

The participant's focus on empowerment and autonomy in this discourse, portraying leadership as a facilitator of decision-making and confidence-building. Participant 2 also emphasised the need of balancing autonomy and assistance to help accomplish goals, demonstrating a sophisticated knowledge of leadership dynamics by stating, *"The opportunity to learn from their failures is the best feedback"* (Participant 2). The focus on learning from mistakes showcases a thoughtful and flexible leadership style, indicating an understanding of the significance of ongoing development.

2.16. Communication and Feedback Mechanisms

Additionally, effective communication and feedback methods are essential aspects that significantly impact employee productivity. Participant 1 emphasised the organisation's open culture, where everyone's contribution is respected, resulting in more involvement:

"A lot of companies will have a yes or no, correct or incorrect answer, but here there's no incorrect... Everyone's point of view is with time" (Participant 1).

His portrayal of the organisation's open culture highlights a positive story, focusing on inclusiveness and respect for varied viewpoints. The organisation's transparent culture demonstrates a dedication to inclusion and cooperation, in line with research that emphasises the beneficial effects of clear communication on employee morale and organisational success (Eisenberger *et al.*, 2010). Nevertheless, the absence of structured feedback channels hinders the organisation's capacity to methodically tackle performance deficiencies and promote individual growth (London, 2003). This highlights the need of establishing organised feedback mechanisms that offer practical insights for enhancement while maintaining the organisation's culture of transparency and confidence. In addition, Participant 2 highlighted the significance of communication in enhancing team productivity and alignment with organisational objectives, advocating for a practical feedback strategy, stating, "*Feedback and communication are really important*" (Participant 2). The participant's focus on feedback and communication is in line with recognised management concepts, presenting leadership as a promoter of efficient communication pathways. Lastly, Participant 3 reinforced the need of customised communication and positive feedback to enhance ongoing progress, emphasising the strategic role of communication in reaching corporate goals:

"*Feedback and communication, it's ultimately everything comes back to strategy and governance.*" (Participant 3)

The integration of feedback and communication into the framework of strategy and governance implies a systematic approach to organisational management, demonstrating an understanding of the interdependence of different organisational activities.

Therefore, based on the findings of this research, firstly, leaders must match their visionary leadership styles with concrete organisational processes to guarantee successful execution. Secondly, it is crucial to cultivate an environment of transparent communication and constructive criticism to improve employee engagement and promote a sense of belonging in the organisation. Organisations should allocate resources towards implementing formal feedback mechanisms and performance management systems to enhance employee development and organisational expansion. These findings provide significant insights for organisational practice but implementing them may face problems due to organisational inertia and reluctance to change (Armenakis and Bedeian, 1999). Leaders need to overcome these obstacles by promoting a culture of innovation and ongoing enhancement, backed by strong systems and procedures that enable efficient communication and feedback (Kotter, 2012).

The findings have been diagrammed in Figure 2, below, illustrating the interconnectedness of leadership strategies, organisational culture, communication dynamics, employee engagement, and work productivity:

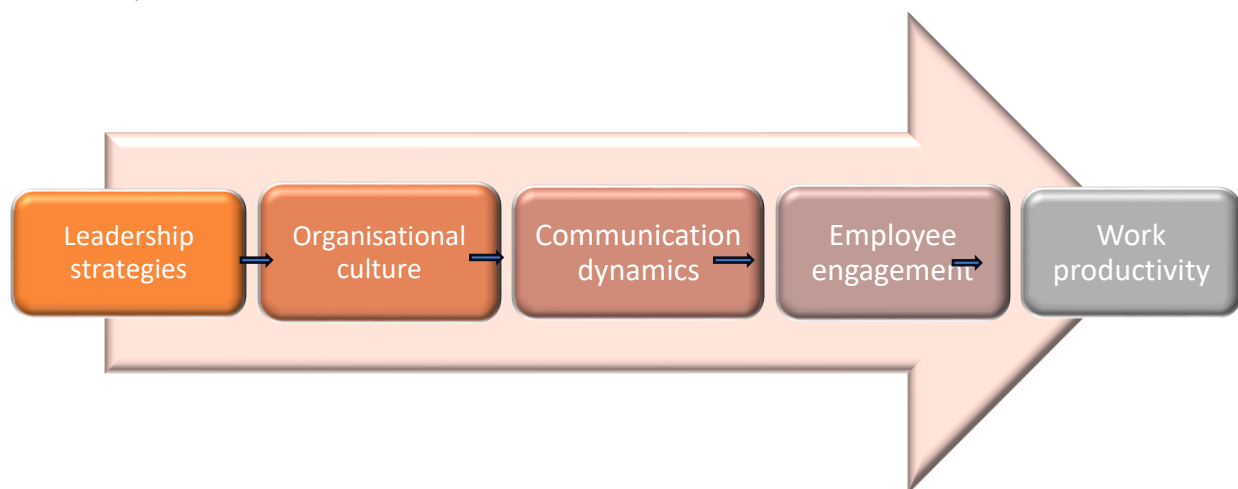


Figure 2.
Unveiling work productivity: leadership, culture, engagement

3. Conclusion

The case study of a private Business College provides a concrete example of the ideas of work productivity and leadership techniques covered in this article. Particularly, the Headquarter office of this institution exemplifies the principles that enable successful leadership and organisational achievement via its commitment to academic quality, practical learning, and extensive support services. Studying schools such as this Business College may help us improve our knowledge of work productivity and create conditions that support individuals to succeed in today's business world. The journey explored how leadership strategies, organisational culture, and communication dynamics influence employee experiences and organisational performance. The research questions provided as guiding markers, focusing on the complex relationship between employee engagement and productivity. The research used qualitative inquiry and thematic analysis to explore the experiences and viewpoints of individuals inside the organisation, revealing the complex dynamics present in organisational settings. The results highlight the vital role of leadership in establishing the atmosphere of organisational culture and motivating employees. Participants admired the Chairman's leadership style, but rigorous investigation reveals complexities that go beyond simple imitation. Leaders must skilfully manage practical limitations, turning their vision into actions that align with the organisation's objectives. The discussion highlights the crucial importance of open communication, inclusion, and feedback systems in promoting employee engagement and productivity.

By combining these insights with the research questions, a comprehensive understanding arises, shedding light on the complex network of variables influencing employee experiences and organisational results. Leadership strategies, organisational culture, and communication dynamics are crucial factors in improving productivity and engagement. The critical analysis adds complexity to this narrative by revealing the hidden tensions, contradictions, and possibilities present in organisational dynamics.

Ultimately, the research highlights the need of using a critical perspective to navigate complex organisational challenges. Organisations may use this research findings and critical analysis to create paths towards excellence and innovation. By engaging in ongoing reflection, learning, and adjustment, they may create settings that enable people to flourish, leading to organisational success in the ever-changing higher education sector.

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