

Analysis of Transformational Leadership Style in Employee Work Engagement at the Faculty of Economics Universitas Nias

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Abstract

This research analyzes the implementation of transformational leadership style and its role in enhancing employee work engagement at the Faculty of Economics, Universitas Nias. Using a qualitative descriptive approach, data were collected through in-depth interviews with five key informants, including the Dean, Vice Deans, Head of Study Program, and staff, complemented by observation and documentation from June to November 2025. Findings reveal that transformational leadership has been implemented through four dimensions: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. However, implementation faces multidimensional constraints, including varied employee readiness for change, limited resources, workload imbalance, coordination challenges, suboptimal reward systems, insufficient monitoring mechanisms, and a persistent conventional work culture. Despite these obstacles, employee engagement remains relatively high, characterized by strong vigor, dedication, and absorption. The research proposes twelve strategic initiatives to optimize transformational leadership effectiveness: strengthening internal communication systems, developing systematic capacity building programs, establishing transparent reward mechanisms, enhancing employee empowerment through delegation, creating conducive work environments, building structured monitoring systems, strengthening cross-unit collaboration, redistributing workload equitably, implementing systematic change management, establishing mentoring programs, fostering innovation culture, and developing external partnerships. The regional independence ratio of only 2.59% indicates minimal fiscal capacity, underscoring the need for comprehensive long-term strategies to enable meaningful organizational transformation.

Keywords: *Transformational Leadership, Work Engagement, Employee Performance, Higher Education Management, Organizational Development*

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INTRODUCTION

Leadership plays a crucial role in organizational dynamics across government sectors and educational institutions, as it determines direction, policies, and institutional success. An organization led by individuals capable of exercising effective leadership can bring positive change while significantly enhancing employee work engagement. Various leadership models have been applied across different sectors, yet

one of the most relevant in this era of rapid change is the transformational leadership style.

Transformational leadership is a style focused on inspiring, motivating, and developing individuals within organizations. Transformational leaders not only direct their subordinates but also strive to build a strong vision and provide moral and intellectual encouragement to employees. Consequently, employees become more motivated to work with complete dedication and creativity. Leaders adopting this approach focus on developing each individual's potential and creating work environments that foster a sense of value and opportunities to contribute maximally (Bass & Riggio, 2020).

The advantages of transformational leadership lie in its ability to manage change and build adaptive organizational cultures. In situations full of challenges and uncertainty, transformational leaders can provide clear direction and build solidarity among employees. This approach enables organizations to develop sustainably and enhance their competitiveness. Furthermore, transformational leadership emphasizes the importance of effective communication between leaders and employees. Leaders who communicate well can more easily convey organizational vision and mission while ensuring employees have a clear understanding of the objectives to be achieved (Robbins & Judge, 2021).

Organizations led by individuals with transformational leadership styles generally demonstrate higher work engagement than those led by other approaches. This occurs because transformational leaders not only provide inspiration but also build trust and create positive work environments, which, in turn, encourage employees to become more engaged in their work. Therefore, implementing transformational leadership becomes an important factor in enhancing productivity and work effectiveness within organizations (Mangkunegara, 2022).

Bass & Riggio (2020) identify four main dimensions in transformational leadership: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. These four dimensions play important roles in forming effective leadership in enhancing employee motivation and work engagement. According to Northouse (2021), transformational leaders can move individuals within organizations toward common goals by building strong relationships with employees. These leaders not only direct but also inspire and encourage employees to reach their full potential in their work.

Employee work engagement represents the level of emotional and psychological commitment individuals have toward their organization and work. Work engagement is influenced by factors such as motivation, competence, the work environment, and the leadership style of organizational leaders (Robbins & Judge, 2021). Mangkunegara (2022) also emphasizes that employee work engagement is reflected in the levels of active participation, dedication, and enthusiasm employees demonstrate in carrying out their duties and responsibilities. Therefore, transformational leadership plays a vital role in enhancing employee work engagement by motivating, inspiring, and empowering individuals within organizations.

Previous research by Jenadun (2018), titled "Transformational Leadership of District Head in Improving Employee Performance at North Rahong District Office, Manggarai Regency," demonstrates that implementing transformational leadership by the North Rahong District Head successfully improved employee performance. This

research used qualitative descriptive methods and data collection techniques through observation, interviews, and documentation. Research indicates that transformational leadership positively contributes to improving employee performance by motivating, inspiring, and empowering individuals.

Another study conducted by Simanjuntak (2021) titled "The Role of Transformational Leadership in Improving Employee Performance at Siborong-borong District Office, North Tapanuli Regency," also found similar results. Leaders with transformational characteristics, such as providing inspiration, individual attention, and intellectual stimulation to employees, can create positive and productive work environments. Employees feel more valued and motivated to improve their performance, especially in providing better public services to communities. This demonstrates that transformational leadership has a significant impact on enhancing employee work effectiveness across various organizational sectors.

The Faculty of Economics at Nias University, as one of the higher education institutions with strategic roles in producing high-quality graduates and contributing to society, faces challenges in enhancing employee work engagement. Based on preliminary observations, ineffective communication between leadership and employees leads to miscommunication when conveying directions and work priorities. This leads to employee confusion when carrying out assigned tasks, thereby resulting in suboptimal work engagement. Additionally, minimal work motivation and appreciation for employee achievements also contribute to decreased employee spirit and productivity. Therefore, a leadership approach capable of inspiring, supporting, and building trust among employees is needed to create more conducive work environments and enhance employee work engagement. If this problem is not addressed immediately, the quality of academic and administrative services at the Faculty of Economics, Nias University, will be disrupted.

Based on the problem background above, researchers are interested in raising the title "Analysis of Transformational Leadership Style in Employee Work Engagement at the Faculty of Economics, Nias University." This research aims to analyze the implementation of transformational leadership style by leadership at the Faculty of Economics, Nias University; identify constraints faced in implementing transformational leadership style in efforts to enhance employee work engagement; and determine strategies that can be applied to optimize the role of transformational leadership style in enhancing employee work engagement at the Faculty of Economics, Nias University.

METHODOLOGY

Research Approach and Design

This research uses a qualitative, descriptive approach. According to Sugiyono (2022), qualitative descriptive research aims to understand phenomena in depth by collecting narrative or descriptive data through observation, interviews, and documentation. This method allows researchers to explore experiences, perceptions, and dynamics in specific contexts. Meanwhile, Moleong (2021) explains that qualitative descriptive research emphasizes meaning rather than generalization, so research results focus more on holistic situational understanding.

The reason for choosing the qualitative method in the research titled "Analysis of Transformational Leadership Style in Employee Work Engagement at the Faculty

of Economics Universitas Nias" is that this approach allows researchers to explore in depth the meanings, perceptions, and subjective experiences of leaders and faculty staff regarding the implementation of transformational leadership. Employee work engagement is a complex concept closely related to psychological factors, motivation, and interpersonal relationships, and cannot be measured solely by numbers or statistical data.

Through qualitative methods, researchers can obtain a holistic understanding of how faculty leaders implement a transformational leadership style and of its impact on staff work engagement in carrying out the tridharma of higher education. In addition, this method offers flexibility in data collection through in-depth interviews, observation, and documentation, yielding richer, more context-rich information that aligns with real conditions in the academic environment.

Research Location and Schedule

The research was conducted at the Faculty of Economics, Universitas Nias, located on Jln. Karet No. 30, Ilir Village, Gunungsitoli District, Gunungsitoli City, from June 2025 to November 2025.

Data Sources and Research Informants

Data sources consist of primary and secondary data. Primary data was obtained directly through in-depth interviews with informants, field observations, and documentation. Secondary data were obtained from academic documents, faculty profiles, performance reports, organizational structure, and various official publications of the Faculty of Economics, Universitas Nias, relevant to the research.

Research informants consist of five people selected through a purposive sampling technique based on their position, experience, and involvement in the leadership process and faculty operational activities:

Table 1. Research informants

No	Name	Position	Informant Category
1	Maria Magdalena Bate'e, S.E., M.M.	Dean of the Faculty of Economics	Key Informant
2	Serniati Zebua, S.E., M.Si.	Vice Dean I	Main Informant
3	Idarni Harefa, S.E., M.E.	Vice Dean II	Main Informant
4	Heniwati Gulo, S.E., M.E.	Head of Management Study Program	Supporting Informant
5	Medianus Anofuli Telaumbanua, S.E.	Study Program Staff	Supporting Informant

Data Collection and Analysis

Data collection techniques include: (1) In-depth interviews using semi-structured interview guides covering aspects of transformational leadership and work engagement; (2) Systematic observation of leadership interactions, work dynamics, and academic environment; and (3) Documentation study of official faculty documents such as organizational structure, annual reports, academic policies, meeting minutes, and other supporting documents relevant to research focus. Data analysis follows Miles and Huberman framework as cited in Sugiyono (2022): (1) Data reduction through selecting and simplifying field data while focusing on themes that match research focus; (2) Data display in narrative form describing findings about transformational leadership style and employee work engagement, complemented with matrices, charts, or diagrams to visualize relationships between categories; and

(3) Conclusion drawing and verification through triangulation of sources and methods to ensure the validity of research findings.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Implementation of Transformational Leadership Style by Leaders at the Faculty of Economics, Universitas Nias

The implementation of a transformational leadership style fundamentally emphasizes a leader's ability to inspire, motivate, and foster a shared vision and values with subordinates. In the context of higher education institutions such as the Faculty of Economics at Universitas Nias, implementing this leadership style is crucial for fostering a progressive work culture and driving positive change across education, research, and community service. Transformational leaders in academic environments do not only focus on achieving administrative targets but also on building strong work relationships, fostering work morale, and instilling values of responsibility and ethics in daily task implementation. In its implementation, transformational leadership reflects effective communication between leaders and employees, clarity of work vision, and encouragement to increase individual and team capacity and performance.

Idealized Influence: Building Trust and Exemplary Leadership

Based on interview results with Maria Magdalena Bate'e, S.E., M.M. (Dean of the Faculty of Economics, Universitas Nias) on Monday, September 8, 2025, at 09:00 WIB, when asked, "How do you build trust and become a role model for employees at the faculty?" she stated:

"Building trust starts from oneself. I always try to be on time, take responsibility for my work, and be consistent between my words and actions. I am also always open to communicating with all employees, both lecturers and education personnel. When there are problems, I do not immediately blame but try to understand the situation first. I believe that trust is built through concrete actions, not just words. When employees see that I also work hard and do not just give orders, they will be more motivated to do the same."

This finding demonstrates that trust and leadership exemplarity are built through consistency between words and actions, open communication, and empathetic attitudes in problem-solving. All informants confirmed that the Dean demonstrates high integrity in daily leadership, creating a strong foundation for organizational trust.

Inspirational Motivation: Communicating Vision and Inspiring Achievement

Continuing the interview with the Dean on the same day, when asked, "How do you motivate and inspire employees to achieve faculty goals?" she stated:

"Motivation is essential in organizations, especially in higher education environments. I always clearly convey the faculty's vision and mission to all employees so they understand the direction and goals we want to achieve together. In addition, I appreciate employees who perform well, both verbally and in official forums. I believe everyone has potential, and my job as a leader is to explore and develop it. I also encourage employees to continue learning and improving their competencies through training or further education."

This indicates that motivation and inspiration are provided through clear communication of vision, performance appreciation, and encouragement for self-development. The Vice Deans reinforced this, stating that the Dean regularly emphasizes the importance of collaboration and synergy in achieving faculty vision during routine meetings, making employees feel that their work is meaningful and contributes to faculty progress.

When asked, "How do you encourage employees to think creatively and develop their abilities?" the Dean responded:

"I always open space for employees to express their ideas or opinions, both in meetings and informal discussions. I believe that everyone has different perspectives, and from these differences, innovative ideas can emerge. I also encourage employees not to be afraid to try new things, even though there is a possibility of failure. Failure is part of the learning process. What matters is how we learn from that failure. In addition, I also facilitate employees to attend training or workshops that can increase their creativity and abilities."

Supporting informants provided concrete examples of how ideas were accepted and facilitated by leadership, such as the development of digital administrative systems and the implementation of innovative workshops. This demonstrates genuine openness to innovation and tolerance for failure as part of organizational learning.

Regarding individual attention, the Dean explained:

"Every employee is unique and has different needs. Therefore, I always try to get to know each employee personally, both professionally and personally. I often have informal conversations with employees to learn what they need or what problems they face. If any employee has difficulty at work, I will provide guidance or direct them to more competent people. I also pay attention to employee career development and try to provide equal opportunities for everyone to develop."

This finding shows that individual attention is provided through personal communication, guidance in problem-solving, and fair career development opportunities. Vice Dean II reinforced this, stating that the Dean is very attentive to employee needs as individuals, not just as workers, and always provides support and understanding when employees face personal problems.

When asked about the level of employee work engagement, the Dean stated:

"Overall, the level of employee work engagement at our faculty is quite good. Employees demonstrate dedication in carrying out their tasks in both academic and administrative fields. However, of course, there is still room for improvement. Factors that affect work engagement are varied, ranging from job satisfaction and relationships with superiors and colleagues to the appreciation they receive. I believe that when employees feel valued, heard, and given opportunities to develop, their engagement will increase. Therefore, I continue to strive to create a conducive and supportive work environment."

Supporting informants confirmed high levels of vigor, dedication, and absorption in their work. Medianus Anofuli Telaumbanua, S.E. (Study Program Staff) stated: "My enthusiasm for working is very high. I feel that the work I do is important and meaningful. Support from leadership and colleagues also makes me increasingly motivated. I feel focused on working because there is clarity about my tasks and

responsibilities. A positive work environment also helps me to continue to be dedicated to carrying out tasks."

These findings align with research by Rahmawati & Achmad (2025), which shows that transformational leadership positively influences employee work engagement, and with Saleh et al. (2021), which demonstrates that transformational leadership significantly affects both performance and motivation, directly and indirectly.

Obstacles Faced in Implementing Transformational Leadership Style

The implementation of the transformational leadership style at the Faculty of Economics, Universitas Nias, faces several multidimensional obstacles that hinder its effectiveness in increasing employee work engagement. Based on comprehensive data analysis from interviews and documentation, six critical structural obstacles were identified:

The Dean identified this as the most significant challenge:

"The biggest challenge I face is the difference in understanding and readiness of employees in accepting change. Not all employees have the same level of understanding of the vision we want to achieve. Some are very enthusiastic and ready to change, but some are still comfortable with the old way of working and reluctant to leave their comfort zone."

This resistance to change manifests in several forms: employees who continue to work routinely without initiative for innovation or improvement; reluctance to adopt new technologies or work methods; and a preference for waiting for superior orders rather than taking initiative. This aligns with change management theory, which emphasizes that resistance to change is a common phenomenon that requires comprehensive strategies to overcome (Suriagiri, 2020).

Resource limitations, both financial and human, constitute significant constraints. The Dean explained:

"Although we have many good ideas for development, we are sometimes constrained by limited budgets. I also face challenges with coordination between units. Sometimes there are differences in perception or priorities between one unit and another, requiring more intensive communication to align understanding."

Vice Dean, I reinforced this:

"One challenge I feel is the sometimes unbalanced workload between units. Some units are very busy, while others are relatively relaxed. This sometimes creates jealousy or feelings of injustice among employees."

This workload imbalance can decrease job satisfaction and organizational commitment, as noted by Prajogo & Tahang (2023).

Multiple informants highlighted that while verbal appreciation exists, the reward system lacks structure and transparency. Vice Dean II stated:

"What still needs improvement is a clearer and more transparent reward and recognition system. Currently, the appreciation given is still more verbal in nature, whereas employees also need more concrete forms of appreciation."

Study Program Staff added: "I feel that there needs to be a clearer career path for staff like me, so we know what must be done to develop in this organization." This

aligns with Saleh et al. (2021)'s emphasis that effective reward systems must be fair, transparent, and motivating, encompassing both financial and non-financial recognition. Vice Dean II identified:

"What needs to be improved, according to me, is monitoring and evaluation. Although leadership has provided direction and support, sometimes there is insufficient follow-up or evaluation of program implementation. This makes some programs run without clear feedback."

The absence of structured monitoring and evaluation mechanisms prevents systematic measurement of program effectiveness and the identification of areas for improvement, undermining the capacity for continuous improvement, as emphasized by evaluation program theory.

The Head of the Management Study Program stated:

"The obstacles I face are related to cross-unit coordination. Sometimes programs require support from other units, but coordination does not run smoothly because each unit has its own priorities and workload. Another obstacle is related to communication. Although communication with faculty leadership is good, sometimes information does not reach the study program level quickly."

This limited delegation of authority slows operational decision-making and reduces organizational efficiency, in contrast to practical delegation principles that can enhance efficiency and develop subordinate capacity (Suriagiri, 2020).

Despite leadership efforts to drive change and innovation, some employees remain attached to old routines characterized by waiting for orders from superiors, reluctance to take initiative, and risk aversion. Transforming organizational culture requires long-term processes that touch not only surface artifacts but also the fundamental values and assumptions underlying employee behavior (Wulandari & Santosa, 2025). These findings demonstrate that obstacles to implementing transformational leadership are multidimensional, encompassing individual, organizational, and contextual aspects that are interrelated and mutually influential, requiring holistic, systematic approaches to resolution.

Strategies to Optimize Transformational Leadership Role

Based on research findings on the implementation of transformational leadership and the obstacles encountered, comprehensive, systematic strategies are needed to optimize its role in increasing employee work engagement. These strategies must cover various aspects, from human resource development to strengthening organizational culture:

The Dean proposed:

"The strategy I will implement is first, strengthening the internal communication system through more structured routine coordination meetings and the formation of informal discussion forums that allow employees to express their aspirations. Second, developing more systematic and sustainable employee capacity development programs."

This includes: conducting regular coordination meetings at various levels, forming thematic discussion forums involving employees from different units, developing management information systems that enable rapid, accurate

dissemination of information, and creating feedback mechanisms that allow employees to convey aspirations, complaints, or suggestions easily and without fear.

The strategy encompasses: conducting a training needs analysis, preparing clear, measurable capacity development roadmaps, organizing regular training programs, providing opportunities for employees to continue their education to higher levels, and developing mentoring programs in which senior employees guide junior employees.

Vice Dean, I emphasized:

"Concrete steps that need to be taken are first, creating scheduled, regular training and development programs, not just incidental. Second, forming cross-unit work teams for certain projects so collaboration and mutual learning between units are created."

Vice Dean II recommended:

"My recommendation is first, creating a clear performance assessment system with measurable and mutually agreed-upon indicators. Second, creating diverse award categories, not only for academic achievements but also for other aspects such as dedication, innovation, or service."

The system should include: objective performance assessment systems, diverse award categories, concrete forms of rewards (bonuses, development opportunities, promotions), transparent and fair processes, and regular recognition rather than only at year-end.

Empowerment can be achieved through: granting middle-level leaders greater authority over operational decisions; involving employees in planning and decision-making processes; giving employees autonomy to determine how they complete tasks; and encouraging employees to take initiative and not fear making mistakes as part of the learning process.

From a physical standpoint, improvements in work facilities (computers, internet access, comfortable workspaces) are needed. From a psychological perspective, creating positive organizational climates characterized by harmonious interpersonal relationships, trust among organizational members, and a culture of mutual support is essential.

Study Program Staff suggested:

"What can be done is first, improving work facilities such as computers, internet, and comfortable workspaces. Second, balance workloads so no one is too busy or too idle. Third, creating a more familial work atmosphere where everyone respects and helps each other."

Effective monitoring and evaluation systems must include: clear, measurable performance indicators; systematic, regular data collection mechanisms; communication of monitoring and evaluation results to all relevant parties; evaluation processes involving various stakeholders; and concrete follow-up actions based on evaluation results.

The Head of the Management Study Program recommended:

"The best way is to create programs or activities that involve various units together. For example, organizing seminars or workshops involving all study programs, or

creating cross-study program research projects. In addition, there needs to be a regular communication forum between units to discuss common issues and find solutions collaboratively."

Steps include forming cross-unit work teams for specific projects, organizing regular inter-unit communication forums, developing integrated information systems, and establishing precise coordination mechanisms for multi-unit programs.

Given resistance to change as a significant obstacle, systematic change management programs are needed, including: clearly communicating why change is necessary, involving employees in change processes, providing adequate support for employees to adapt, creating quick wins, and consolidating changes in organizational culture for sustainability.

To ensure transformational leadership sustainability, systematic mentoring and succession planning programs must be developed: establishing experienced senior employees as mentors, designing structured mentoring programs with clear objectives, providing mentor training, creating a mentoring culture where knowledge and experience sharing becomes part of organizational culture, and identifying key positions and potential candidates for leadership succession.

Supporting innovation requires: creating safe spaces where employees feel free to express new ideas without fear of criticism, providing time and resources for employees to experiment with new approaches, celebrating innovation successes and learning from failures without blaming individuals, providing incentives for employees generating impactful innovations, and creating mechanisms for sharing best practices between units (Daeli et al., 2024).

To overcome internal resource limitations, strategic partnerships with external parties (local government, private sector, alumni, other universities, international organizations) should be developed through: collaboration in developing relevant academic programs, research and community service partnerships providing additional funding sources, human resource development cooperation through training or employee exchange programs, and alums fundraising to support various faculty programs.

Steps include: conducting job analysis and workload analysis for each position and work unit, performing fairer task redistribution considering each employee's capacity and competence, recruiting new employees for high-workload units when possible, and developing more efficient work systems through procedure simplification, automation, or information technology use (Ekawaty et al., 2024).

These twelve strategies form a comprehensive framework requiring strong leadership commitment, active participation from all employees, adequate resource support, and consistent implementation. With systematic implementation and regular monitoring, these strategies are expected to optimize transformational leadership's role in increasing employee work engagement and ultimately improving the quality of education delivery at the Faculty of Economics, Universitas Nias.

CONCLUSION

Based on research conducted at the Faculty of Economics, Nias University, it is concluded that the implementation of a transformational leadership style has been generally effective, positively impacting employee work engagement. This is demonstrated through the four dimensions of transformational leadership: idealized

influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. However, the implementation faces multidimensional constraints, including differences in employee readiness, resource limitations, workload imbalances, and a persistent conventional work culture, suggesting that organizational transformation requires a holistic approach beyond leadership alone.

To optimize the role of transformational leadership, several key strategies are recommended. These include strengthening internal communication, developing systematic employee capacity programs, building transparent reward systems, enhancing empowerment, and improving cross-unit coordination. The successful implementation of these strategies requires strong leadership commitment, active employee participation, and adequate resource support. For broader impact, it is also suggested that the university provide greater budgetary support and autonomy to the faculty. At the same time, future researchers should further explore this topic through quantitative or comparative studies.

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