ENHANCING EMPLOYEE PERFORMANCE IN THAILAND'S ICT INDUSTRY: THE ROLES OF AUTHENTIC LEADERSHIP AND WORK-LIFE INTEGRATION

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Abstract

This research explores the relationships between authentic leadership, work-life integration, and employee performance within Thailand's Information and Communication Technology (ICT) industry. Using a qualitative research design, data were collected through structured interviews with eight key informants and analyzed via content analysis. The findings reveal that authentic leadership, characterized by sincerity, transparency, fairness, and openness, significantly fosters employee trust, motivation, and commitment. This leadership style supports employee development through clear communication and skill enhancement, leading to improved performance. Furthermore, a strong emphasis on work-life integration, reflected in flexible policies and comprehensive wellbeing support, reduces employee stress and enhances their potential. The synergy between authentic leadership and supportive work-life practices directly contributes to improved employee performance and sustainable human resource management within ICT organizations.

Keywords: Authentic Leadership, Work-Life Integration, Employee Performance, ICT Industry, Thailand

Introduction

Work-life balance is no longer the best approach to work, but work-life integration. This is because people strive for meaningful work while enjoying their domestic happiness, being involved in the community, and having a satisfying inner life. This results in a balanced mix of work life and life outside work. The proportions include four areas: work life, family life, community life, and personal life, based on the three key principles: being real, being whole, and being innovative (Friedman, 2014). When integrating work and personal life, problems can arise if the complex roles are not separated. Therefore, they need the role of self-leadership. In general, leadership is an essential factor that helps to ensure that the work and management in the organization are practical and that the organization can survive and grow sustainably (Thongdi, 2018). This leads to competitive trends in human resource management to recruit and attract personnel with leadership qualities and high skills. This is not an easy task, as incentives and monetary compensation alone are insufficient to attract them. Therefore, the organization must employ various forms of welfare to attract them (Phongatchat, 2007).

Authentic leadership is influenced by authenticity. In other words, the leader's behavior conveys the true identity, concepts, values, and behaviors that dominate and build trust among followers (Avolio & Mhatre, 2012). The idea of authentic leadership goes back to Luthans & Avolio (2003), who studied the elements of leadership. It consists of self-awareness, internalized moral perspective, balanced processing, and relational transparency. Later, Avolio et al. (2004) discovered that authentic leadership affects positive psychology, a variable related to self-efficacy, hope, optimism, and resilience. Thus, authentic leadership affects followers' attitudes, behavior, and performance (Ilies et al., 2005). Junkrapor & Chienwattanasook (2020) also discussed work-life integration, according to which authentic leadership leads to a fulfilling life, which is seen as the ultimate inspiration in human life, and supports people to fulfill their potential. In addition, the role of authentic leadership encourages people to become self-aware, ethical, fair, transparent, honest, and responsible. With high efficiency, these qualities help lead the organization to success. In addition, authentic leadership impacts performance by positively influencing employees by reshaping organizational culture and promoting efficiency through simple actions and trustworthy behaviors exhibited by psychologically and physically caring employees. It also promotes stronger core values (Ali et al., 2021). In addition, working from home requires authentic leadership that enhances employee performance through that person's identity, maturity, and awareness of purpose and responsibility (Daraba et al., 2021).

However, the shortage of ICT workers in various professional groups has not yet been addressed (Koyviriyakul, 2019), especially the need for workers in the Eastern Special Development Zone (EEC), where the industry's labor force is needed. According to the Ministry of Labor in 2017, the demand for 2,485 workers increased to 4,104 in 2022 and would rise to 8,291 by 2027 (The Secretariat of The House of Representatives, 2018). They are considered highly talented personnel and are needed by large companies. Therefore, they must rely on the principles of talent management, i.e., organizations can recruit capable employees with high skills suitable for important positions in the company. After recruiting these employees, organizations need to develop and create a bond to retain them. Previous studies have shown that the loss of employees with high knowledge and skills represents a loss to the organization in terms of recruitment, selection and development costs of up to 100-150% of salary, not including non-monetary costs such as work disruption, organizational capacity and competitive opportunities (Somaya & Williamson, 2008). Therefore, it is necessary to motivate these employees with monetary and non-monetary rewards to retain them in the organization (Intharakerd, 2017). According to Garg & Yajurvedi (2016), non-monetary rewards significantly impact the recruitment and retention of potential employees. Interestingly, the work-life balance program is one of the first choices of these employees. Preena & Preena

(2021) found that work-life balance directly impacts employee productivity and accounts for 90 percent of the variance. Therefore, work-life balance strategies and policies are necessary for companies. The Thailand Development Research Institute (2020) studied the impact of working from home and found that working from home impacts the company and its employees in terms of reduced direct costs and commuting time, while increasing work productivity. In addition, employees can take on additional activities when needed, resulting in a better quality of life. Working from home also positively impacts society, as there is less traffic, fewer fuel imports, and less air pollution. However, the adverse effects of working from home are the lack of knowledge sharing and less interaction with colleagues (Aczel et al., 2021).

Therefore, this article investigates authentic leadership, work-life integration, and employee performance in the Thai ICT industry. The findings are expected to provide valuable insights into how authentic leadership and balanced work-life practices can improve employee effectiveness and organizational sustainability and have practical implications for human resource management and leadership development in the digital age.

Literature Reviews

Work-life integration is a challenge for organizational leaders who want to maximize employee performance by bridging the gap between life and work and incorporating the two. Based on the theory of well-being, employees are encouraged to be happy at work to adapt their work to their needs (Kinman & Jones, 2008). Thus, life and work policies strongly influence employees' attitudes and behaviors (Ning et al., 2015). This leads to social relationships and support, a traditional form of practice. It also promotes well-being and fit between the person and the environment, which is the person's surroundings. A person's environment consists of the family, the workplace, and the community. A lack of fit can therefore cause stress for the individual (Jones, 1988). When it comes to work-life balance, lack of fit leads to work-life conflict, but when fit is present, it is naturally useful for work-life enrichment (Kumar & Janakiram, 2017).

The originality of work-life is a challenge for the organization in two ways, namely: structural factors with flexible work design and HR policies. And organizational culture and factors that support and promote a positive work environment in organizations (Kossek et al., 2009), where work and life are interwoven. From the perspective of boundary theory, it is helpful to consider a person's role with multiple roles, such as work and family life. Role integration is higher when there is no difference between work and life. Conversely, role segmentation also occurs (Olson-Buchanan & Boswell, 2006). Employers view work and the rest of life as interconnected worlds that influence each other. Therefore, an integrated approach must be supported by employers who recognize employees' personal lives and provide a system that supports or assists employees in fulfilling their roles at work and in their personal lives (Kirchmeyer, 2000). As a result, work-life balance may not be perfectly evenly distributed, but may be divided according to individual convenience (Greenhaus et al., 2003). Furthermore, work-life balance is a traditional understanding that may be outdated and complex. Therefore, a new model for integrating life and work needs to be developed. Furthermore, both men and women are responsible for looking after their families. The term "work-life integration" implies that areas of the boundary between work and life are interconnected, overlapping, or alternating. The difference is that technology connects people to work or creates a modern workplace (Ehrens, 2016).

Friedman (2014) proposed the elements of life-work integration in an article titled "Work+home+community+self," which was published in the Harvard Business Review Journal, and became popular and widely read. In it, he mentioned the four compositions, which are distinct but connected. It is also used to evaluate the importance of each role. To create a diagram that illustrates the patterns of work-life integration that led to the integration of work,

home, community, and self. To improve effectiveness in each dimension of life through three key principles: be real, whole, and innovative.

The role of leadership influences the integration of work and life. Authentic leadership is a positive variable in an organizational culture that focuses on employee flexibility and performance satisfaction (Azanza et al., 2013). Employee motivation and emotions influence creativity (Ahmad et al., 2015). Leaders are the most important decision-makers in human resource management. The behavior of an authentic leader, which is stable and correlates with values, ultimately leads to consistent communication. An authentic leader uses "work-life balance" to shape work characteristics and performance management (Gill et al., 2018). Thoti's (2016) research confirms that work-life integration helps employees feel responsible. As a result, they feel part of the team and have a good relationship with the company. Moreover, Jiang & Men (2017) also found that authentic leadership influences employee engagement through work and life enrichment. As a result, work, family, and personal life, including mental and physical life, friends, and community, have a strong and meaningful relationship with one's career (Muna & Mansour, 2009).
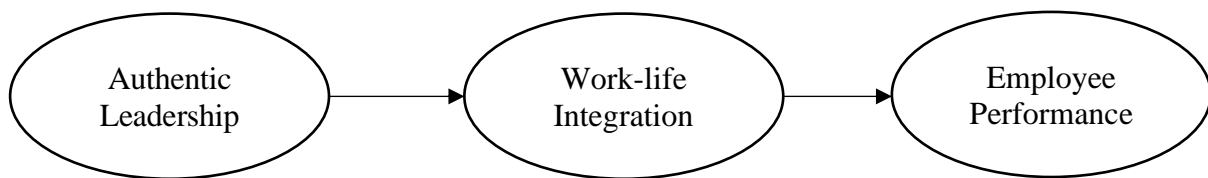

Figure 1 Conceptual Framework

Research Methodology

This study used a qualitative research methodology based on a phenomenological approach to explore and understand the lived experiences and subjective meanings that participants associate with authentic leadership, work-life integration, and employee performance in the context of ICT organizations. The phenomenological method was appropriate because it focuses on capturing personal perceptions and interpretations of real-world experiences. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, which allowed the researcher to gain rich, descriptive insights into how participants perceive and interpret leadership behaviors and organizational practices. This approach ensured that the findings were based on participants' real-life experiences. It offered context-specific insights into the dynamics of leadership behaviors and work-life practices in the ICT sector.

The population includes the managers or executives involved in human resource management strategy and employees who are relevant stakeholders of the three major companies. The names of the companies cannot be disclosed for ethical reasons, as this study was approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee of Rajamangala College of Technology Thanyaburi under protocol number Exp 88/66. By international standards of research ethics, the identities of the companies were anonymized to protect the rights and confidentiality of the study participants. Even though the total population is small, the participants know their company and can answer questions about it. To determine the sample size of qualitative research, participants' qualifications are based on non-probability and purposive sampling. Adler & Adler (2012) suggest choosing a small sample of 8-12 people. Therefore, this study with a sample size of 8-12 people was considered sufficient for data collection in qualitative research. Upon completion of data collection for the research, it was determined that data saturation reached 8 participants.

In this study, an in-depth interview using the structured interview method is used as an instrument for data collection. The interview is a personal and individual conversation. The interview guide contains a series of open-ended questions covering various topics that have

been fully and sufficiently defined. The type of interview is an interview with defined questions and requirements focusing on the key factors of authentic leadership, work-life integration, and work performance of employees in the ICT industry. Before the interview, the list of questions was submitted to the advisor and the committee for review and revised based on the committee's feedback and suggestions.

The primary data was collected through in-depth interviews with the sample for the qualitative research. Each interview lasted approximately 1 hour and was recorded for later analysis. Given the small sample size of eight participants, the researcher conducted the content analysis manually without the qualitative data analysis software. After transcribing the in-depth interviews, the researcher read the data several times to identify key ideas and recurring patterns. Coding was done by categorizing meaningful text segments under three main variables: authentic leadership, work-life integration, and employee performance. Related codes were then grouped into themes reflecting the core concepts of the study.

Research Results

Key informants in this study included individuals holding key leadership and expert roles, such as deputy general managers, budget and human resource managers, regional marketing managers (eastern region), vice presidents, and corporate specialists. Their ages ranged from 36 to 58 years, and the gender distribution was balanced between male and female participants. The informants collectively described the current situation of their respective companies and noted that mergers and acquisitions had occurred in all companies. The main objectives of these corporate consolidations were to increase operational efficiency, eliminate redundancies, and optimize resource utilization. Following the mergers, companies recognized the need to realign corporate cultures and systems to ensure coherence and integration. This transition was described as a process requiring deep understanding and collaboration among employees at all levels. Several informants emphasized the importance of companies adapting to the digital age. Companies have focused on developing digital infrastructures like cloud systems, high-speed internet, and innovative factory frameworks. In addition, the integration of new technologies, including the Internet of Things (IoT), artificial intelligence (AI), and big data, was highlighted as critical to improving service capabilities. In addition, companies showed a strong commitment to developing human capital by encouraging employees to participate in innovation processes and fostering an environment that encourages creative expression. These strategic efforts reflect an organizational focus on sustainable digital transformation and continuous improvement.

Leadership Styles and Employee Self-Regulation in ICT Organizations

The leadership styles observed in the information and communication technology (ICT) companies surveyed exhibit different characteristics that focus on integrity, transparency, participative engagement, and the promotion of employee skills development. Leadership in these companies is not limited to senior management. However, it extends across all levels of the organization and fosters an environment where employees are encouraged to reach their full potential and develop meaningfully in their roles. Leaders in these ICT companies value direct and open communication, actively solicit feedback from all stakeholders, and demonstrate a willingness to take a principled stance based on rational judgment. They serve as role models and demonstrate selflessness, empathy, and fairness in their management practices. In addition, these leaders can motivate, inspire, and encourage creativity and innovation in their teams. Their adaptability and openness to change are also crucial for the organization's continuous development. The delegation of tasks in these organizations is clearly structured, with responsibilities divided according to departmental functions such as budgeting, accounting, and order management. Leaders play an important role in leading their teams and fostering mutual understanding through collaborative processes. A strong emphasis is placed

on visionary leadership, where leaders are expected to effectively articulate the values and goals of the organization and align them with the team's goals. Regarding human capital development, leaders emphasize capacity building by offering various learning opportunities, including online courses, seminars, and professional mentoring. These initiatives are designed to enable employees to improve their skills and remain competitive in a rapidly evolving industry. In addition, employee self-regulation is an important focus of the organization. Employees are encouraged to take responsibility for their tasks, fully understand their role, and make independent decisions or solve problems that arise in their work. This autonomy is supported by guidance from supervisors and an organizational culture that values accountability and proactive problem solving. These practices contribute to a resilient, adaptable, and high-performing workforce.

Work-Life Integration among Employees in ICT Organizations
Companies in the information and communication technology (ICT) sector actively promote the integration of work and private life through various measures and benefits for employees. A key focus is on flexibility in the workplace, including flexible working hours and providing remote working opportunities. These measures have been particularly evident and well-received during the COVID-19 pandemic, as they have significantly reduced commuting time and costs for employees while allowing for more effective management of personal and professional commitments. In addition to flexible working arrangements, companies have introduced a variety of wellness and leisure activities in the workplace. These include sports programs, designated relaxation areas, and spaces to de-stress. Great emphasis is also placed on physical and mental well-being, which is reflected in benefits such as annual health check-ups, comprehensive health insurance, psychological counseling, and family support initiatives. For example, employees are given time off to care for family members and can receive educational support for their children through scholarships or financial assistance. In addition, many ICT companies invest in professional development programs to improve employees' work-related skills and promote career advancement. These opportunities include skills training workshops, seminars, and access to professional development platforms. To support collaboration in a digital environment, organizations also leverage digital technologies for internal communication and coordination, such as virtual meetings and collaborative applications, improving efficiency and convenience in day-to-day operations. These efforts reflect a holistic approach to HR management that values the integration of employees' personal and professional lives. This approach improves employee well-being and job satisfaction and contributes to higher productivity, talent retention, and organizational resilience in a dynamic and competitive industry.

Methods for Measuring and Evaluating Employee Performance in ICT Organizations
Organizations in the information and communication technology (ICT) sector use systematic methods to measure and evaluate their employees' performance, focusing on using key performance indicators (KPIs). These KPIs are carefully tailored to the specifics of each role and the company's overarching goals. Several dimensions are considered when assessing performance, including work output, accuracy, problem-solving skills, and responsiveness in completing assigned tasks. However, in many ICT companies, performance appraisal is not limited to individual performance. It also includes teamwork, mutual support among colleagues, participation in organizational activities, and efforts to acquire new skills. This multidimensional approach is intended to reflect not only individual responsibility, but also cooperation, shared responsibility, and the holistic development of employees in terms of technical skills and interpersonal behavior in the workplace. Some organizations use various appraisal methods to improve the fairness and comprehensiveness of performance appraisals. These include 360-degree appraisal, which incorporates feedback from supervisors, peers, and self-assessments; real-time monitoring, which allows for continuous performance tracking; and

employee reviews and surveys, which provide qualitative insights into employee contributions and challenges. These diverse appraisal methods allow organizations to comprehensively understand their employees' performance, promoting a fairer and more accurate appraisal process. In addition, these methods support the development of a performance management system that recognizes performance and identifies areas for improvement, ultimately contributing to employee growth and organizational effectiveness.

Authentic Leadership and Work-Life Integration as Critical Determinants of Employee Performance in ICT Organizations

Based on the analysis of qualitative interview data collected from employees in information and communication technology (ICT) companies, it is evident that employee performance improvement is directly influenced by two interrelated factors: the nature of organizational leadership and the ability of employees to maintain a work-life balance. Among these two factors, authentic leadership has emerged as the most important determinant of employee performance. Authentic leaders, characterized by sincerity, transparency, fairness, and a demonstrated sense of selflessness and accountability, play a transformative role beyond traditional management functions. These leaders act as catalysts for inspiration and trust-building, fostering employee confidence through credible actions and open, transparent communication. By encouraging employees to participate in expressing opinions, making decisions, and solving problems together, authentic leaders signal their appreciation and respect for the potential of their employees. This inclusive approach fosters a stronger emotional connection to the company, strengthens loyalty, and increases intrinsic motivation. In addition, authentic leadership contributes to developing positive psychological capital among employees. While psychological capital is not the primary factor influencing performance, it significantly strengthens the power of leadership. Leaders who can foster optimism, self-esteem, and confidence in employees' ability to overcome challenges contribute to a work environment filled with positive energy. Such an atmosphere contributes directly to better employee adaptability and work performance.

At the same time, work-life balance is another key factor for sustainable employee performance. Companies that take flexible measures, such as allowing remote working, offering flexible working hours, and supporting mental health, help to reduce employee stress and improve overall quality of life. A well-integrated home and work life allows employees to commit to their work thoroughly, derive satisfaction from their role, and maintain long-term engagement. This balance also leads to a lower turnover rate and supports the long-term retention of talent. In summary, authentic leadership and work-life integration form the basis for improved employee performance in the ICT sector. Together, they help to build a resilient, engaged, and well-functioning workforce that can thrive in a dynamic and innovation-driven environment.

Conclusion and Discussion

By collecting qualitative data through in-depth interviews with key informants in information and communication technology (ICT) companies, several critical insights emerged that reflect the broader organizational environment in today's world. These include the dynamics of corporate mergers, adapting to digital transformation, and strategies for human resource development. The analysis clearly shows that authentic leadership and work-life integration are two fundamental factors significantly improving employee performance in practical and observable ways. Authentic leadership consistently emerged across all data groups as a key driver of employee trust, inspiration, and self-worth. Leaders characterized by transparency, fairness, self-sacrifice, and open communication not only set the tone but actively shape a participatory and empowering culture that fosters employee engagement, trust, and capacity building at all levels. This is in line with the theoretical framework of Avolio & Gardner (2005),

who defined authentic leadership as the expression of one's true self and emotions without pretense, making employees feel recognized and supported as valued individuals. In addition, encouraging employee voice and participation in problem-solving processes strengthens organizational commitment, which is the foundation for sustained high performance (Hmieleski et al., 2012).

Authentic leadership also plays a crucial role in forming positive psychological capital, even if psychological capital is not structurally central. Leaders who promote optimistic thinking, build self-efficacy, and foster constructive attitudes among employees help to create a resilient and adaptable workforce. This finding is supported by Joo et al. (2016), who found a direct correlation between authentic leadership, positive psychological capital, and employee engagement, and Nasab & Afshari (2019), who found that authentic leadership significantly increases both performance and organizational commitment. At the same time, work-life integration has emerged as another key factor that ICT organizations prioritize. Flexible work arrangements such as remote work, customizable work schedules, wellness activities, and family-friendly benefits allow employees to effectively manage the demands of their personal and professional lives. These measures help to reduce stress, increase job satisfaction, and improve work performance. The relevance of such measures became particularly clear during the COVID-19 pandemic, which highlighted the importance of employee well-being and adaptability. This aligns with the work of Adisa et al. (2022), who observed how the pandemic changed work and life patterns through social distancing and remote working assignments. Similarly, Chenji & Raghavendra (2021) argue that working from home requires the integration of private and work spheres, which is facilitated by digital technologies that enable communication and collaboration between employees and organizations. In this context, digital innovation becomes essential for optimizing work-life integration (Valcour & Hunter, 2005).

In addition, remote workplaces offer remarkable economic and environmental benefits by reducing the cost and time spent commuting while lowering transportation-related carbon emissions (Gault & Lovell, 2006; Lin et al., 2024). These aspects underline the multidimensional benefits of promoting work-life integration in modern ICT companies. The study also shows that ICT companies use various performance evaluation methods characterized by flexibility and multidimensionality. While key performance indicators (KPIs), which are aligned with company goals, remain the focus of performance assessment, behavioral criteria such as teamwork, collaboration, and continuous skills development are also included. Complementary tools such as 360-degree feedback, real-time performance monitoring, and self-assessment allow for a more holistic and equitable appraisal process. This approach mirrors the evolution of performance appraisal theories as explored by DeNisi & Murphy (2017), who noted that while performance appraisals have historically focused on organizational goals, recent trends incorporate broader assessment dimensions to improve organizational outcomes.

In authentic leadership and work-life integration, it is clear that high-quality performance appraisal systems are supported by leaders who communicate transparently, encourage employees to participate in the appraisal process, and provide constructive feedback. A positive work environment, such as leadership, supports continuous learning and personal development. At the same time, organizations that promote a balanced life and work structure for their employees reduce the psychological pressure associated with evaluation and increase intrinsic motivation for long-term growth. Thus, organizations that successfully integrate authentic leadership, balanced work-life support systems, and fair performance appraisals can better strengthen employee performance and achieve sustainable people development. These findings are consistent with the work of Junkrapor & Chienwattanasook (2020), who argue that authentic leadership promotes work-life integration by supporting a psychologically positive outlook that fully enables employees to realize their roles in their personal and professional

lives. Similarly, Maya et al. (2022) have shown that authentic leadership significantly impacts positive psychological capital and work-life integration, which improves employees' ability to maintain a life-work balance and perform more effectively.

Implications for the Study

The findings of this study show that authentic leadership and work-life integration are two closely linked factors. When promoted together as part of human resource management, these factors directly impact employee performance in the information and communication technology (ICT) sector.

Authentic leadership, characterized by sincerity, transparency, fairness, and openness to employees' contributions, helps to create an atmosphere of trust and organizational participation. Such leadership provides direction and inspiration and plays a critical role in helping employees balance their personal lives and professional responsibilities. By promoting a values-based approach that recognizes the importance of employee well-being both inside and outside of work, authentic leaders help create an environment where individuals feel valued and supported.

At the same time, work-life integration should not only be understood as providing flexible working hours or remote working opportunities. Instead, it encompasses a broader range of supportive practices, including physical and mental health initiatives, family-friendly leave policies, designated relaxation spaces in the workplace, and a broader organizational understanding of employees as individuals with multiple roles. When organizations can develop policies and workplace environments that truly support life-work integration, employees are more likely to experience higher job satisfaction, greater motivation, and better work performance.

An important conclusion from this study is that authentic leadership development must go hand in hand with establishing organizational systems that support work-life integration. Leaders must actively participate in policy design and practical implementation by fostering a flexible organizational culture that values employees holistically and promotes their quality of life on multiple levels. Accordingly, organizations should incorporate these principles into their people management strategies to improve their competitive advantage and achieve long-term sustainability in people management, especially when the boundaries between work and life are becoming increasingly indistinguishable.

Recommendations for Future Research

Given this study's findings, which highlight the critical role of authentic leadership and work-life integration in improving employee performance in ICT organizations, future research should place a greater emphasis on exploring the profound relationship between these two factors and employee outcomes using quantitative methods. In particular, culturally appropriate measurement tools need to be developed to assess authentic leadership in the context of Thai organizations, as well as tools to assess the impact of work-life integration on performance, employee engagement, and long-term retention.

Comparative studies across different industries, such as the public service, manufacturing, and service sectors, would also be beneficial to broaden the applicability of the research findings. Such comparative analyses could lead to generalizable findings and contribute to policy recommendations that can be adapted to different organizational contexts.

In addition, future research should examine the role of other contributing variables, particularly positive psychological capital. Although not the focus of this study, positive psychological capital is a reinforcing factor that improves leadership effectiveness and work-life balance. A more in-depth examination of this variable could lead to a more holistic understanding of the mechanisms that support sustained employee performance.

Furthermore, data collection should be extended to a larger and more diverse group of participants. Specifically, future research should include executive-level informants,

operational-level employees, younger generations in the workforce, and individuals representing different gender identities and cultural backgrounds. This broader inclusion would lead to richer and more comprehensive findings and help ensure that the findings reflect the complex realities and needs of today's dynamic work environment. Such diversity in the sample would also support the development of HR strategies that are equitable, inclusive and responsive to organizational change.

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