

Transformational Leadership Components That Are Most Effective in Promoting Employee Work Engagement

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Abstract

The study of transformational leadership has gained prominence in organisational behavior research due to its potential to enhance employee work engagement. This article analyses key components of transformational leadership, specifically inspirational motivation, individualized consideration, intellectual stimulation, and idealized influence with special emphasis on their effectiveness in promoting employee engagement. Utilizing descriptive statistics from a sample of 200 employees, the study reveals significant insights into how these leadership components mutually interact to foster a motivated workforce. Findings indicate that while inspirational motivation is the most highly regarded component, the effectiveness of transformational leadership is nuanced and context dependent. This paper discusses the implications for leaders who desire to enhance employee engagement through transformational leadership strategies. In the mind of the authors, the paper provides useful insights regarding effective leadership practices for the promotion of employee engagement.

Introduction

Employee engagement is a critical factor in organisational success, influencing productivity, job satisfaction, and employee retention (Saks, 2006). In contemporary workplaces, the role of leadership has been identified as a significant determinant of employee engagement (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008). Among various leadership styles, transformational leadership has emerged as particularly effective in fostering an engaged workforce (Bass and Riggio, 2006). This article aims to explore the components of transformational leadership that are most effective in promoting employee work engagement, based on a study conducted at the National Railways of Zimbabwe (NRZ) from a sample of 200 employees.

Literature Review

The concept of transformational leadership is demonstrated by leaders who inspire and motivate followers to achieve extraordinary outcomes while fostering their personal and professional development (Basu & Saha, 2020). In other words, this leadership style encourages leaders to motivate their team members to exceed their own self-interests for the sake of the organisation and personal growth. Often, transformational leaders achieve this through creating a compelling vision, demonstrating idealized influence, providing individualized consideration, and promoting intellectual stimulation among their followers.

Steinmann, Klug, & Maier (2018) describe the four components of transformational leadership as follows: (i) inspirational motivation refers to leaders articulating a compelling vision and inspire enthusiasm among their followers; (ii) individualized Consideration is a situation where leaders provide personalized support and attention to individual team members; (iii) intellectual stimulation, leaders encourage creativity and innovation by challenging the status quo; and (iv) idealized influence is a situation where leaders serve as role models, earning the trust and respect of their followers. Fundamentally, through effectively utilizing these four key components, leaders can significantly enhance employee engagement and drive extraordinary outcomes within their organisations. Essentially, transformational leadership is characterized by its focus on inspiring and developing followers while fostering a collaborative and innovative work environment (Bass & Riggio 2006; Northouse, 2019). From the scholars who extensively dealt with this leadership style (Northouse, 2019; Steinmann, Klug & Maier, 2018) it is increasingly accepted that the style not only benefits individuals but also contributes to the overall success and sustainability of the organisation.

The key subject in this article is work engagement, which is understood as a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption into one's work (Schaufeli *et al.*, 2002). Scholarship on this concept has revealed that engaged employees are more likely to exhibit higher levels of productivity, creativity, and organisational commitment (Bakker *et al.*, 2008). Given the importance of engagement in driving organisational performance, understanding the factors that influence it, particularly leadership styles, is essential. Understanding the relationship between transformational leadership style and employee engagement was crucial. Research has consistently shown a

positive correlation between transformational leadership and employee engagement. For instance, a meta-analysis by Judge and Piccolo (2004) found that transformational leadership was significantly related to follower satisfaction, work engagement, and performance. Additionally, studies have highlighted that specific component of transformational leadership, such as inspirational motivation and individualized consideration, play crucial roles in promoting engagement (Imamoglu & Keskin, 2020; Lin & Dong, 2021). Despite the established relationships between transformational leadership and employee engagement, there is a need for more nuanced understanding of which components are most effective in specific organisational contexts. The current study sought to address this gap by examining the effectiveness of transformational leadership components in promoting employee engagement within the National Railways of Zimbabwe.

Methodology

The study employed mixed methods research approach with the quantitative aspect being the dominant one, utilizing descriptive statistics to analyse data collected from a survey administered to selected employees at NRZ. A total of 200 employees from various departments participated in the survey, which included items designed to measure the perception of transformational leadership and employee engagement. The survey utilized a Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) for respondents to indicate their level of agreement with each statement. The qualitative dimension was through interviews conducted with eight purposively selected managers across all the departments.

In terms of data analysis, descriptive statistics, including means and standard deviations, were calculated for each survey item to identify the key components of transformational leadership that most effectively promote employee engagement. Furthermore, thematic analysis and extraction of powerful verbatim statements were used on qualitative datasets.

Results

Table 1 below presents the means and standard deviations for the statements measuring the key components of transformational leadership.

Table 1: Key components of transformational leadership

Statements measuring key components of transformational leadership to promote employee work engagement	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
1.1 The leader's ability to inspire and motivate their team increases employee work engagement	200	3.69	1.280
1.2 A leader's willingness to listen, support, and provide guidance to employees improves work engagement	200	3.69	1.280
1.3 A leader's ability to give constructive feedback to employees increases employee motivation and engagement	200	2.58	1.375
1.4 A leader's display of trust and confidence in their employees enhances employee engagement and job performance	200	3.42	1.529
1.5 A leader's commitment to employee development and growth increases work engagement and productivity	200	3.36	1.454
1.6 A leader's ability to create a positive work environment through teamwork and collaboration fosters employee engagement	200	3.59	1.364
1.7 A leader's openness to new ideas and innovation encourages employee work engagement and creativity	200	3.59	1.280
Overall		3.42	1.366

The results shown in Table 1 indicate that the highest mean scores of 3.69 (*Agreed*) for both inspirational motivation and willingness to listen underscore the significance of these components in enhancing employee engagement. In contrast, the lowest mean score of 2.58 for constructive feedback suggests a lack of consensus among respondents on its effect on employee work engagement. A mean score of 3.42 denotes that the respondents were indecisive to express if leader's display of trust and confidence in their employees enhance

employee work engagement and job performance. Similarly, a mean score of 3.36 indicates that the respondents were neutral on the notion that a leader's commitment to employee development and growth increases work engagement and productivity.

Discussion

The findings highlight that inspirational motivation is viewed as the most effective component of transformational leadership for promoting employee engagement. By articulating a clear vision and inspiring enthusiasm, leaders can foster a shared sense of purpose among employees. This aligns with research by Hoang *et al.* (2019), which demonstrated that inspirational motivation positively impacts follower engagement. However, it is essential to note that while inspirational motivation can drive engagement for many, it may not resonate with every employee. As one of the interview participants noted, *“the lack of resources or support can lead to disengagement, even in the presence of a compelling vision”* (IP7). This suggests that while inspirational motivation is crucial, it must be complemented by practical support mechanisms to be most effective. In fact, seven of the eight interview participants were of the view that inspirational motivation is the most effective component of transformational leadership for promoting work engagement. On this aspect, IP3 commented that *“Inspirational motivation encourages employees to be passionate about their work and have a shared sense of purpose with their leaders, leading to higher work engagement”*.

Individualized consideration emerged as another key component influencing work engagement. By addressing individual employee needs and preferences, leaders can create an environment where employees feel valued and supported. This perspective aligns with findings from Imamoglu and Keskin (2020), which emphasized the positive relationship between individualized consideration and employee engagement. However, implementing individualized consideration can be challenging. As noted by IP4, *“personalizing attention for each employee may not be feasible in all settings, particularly in organisations with limited resources”*. Thus, while individualized consideration is essential, its practical application may vary across different organisational contexts.

Regarding intellectual stimulation, the findings have shown that this encourages employees to think creatively and take risks, which can enhance engagement. This is emphasized by one of the interview participants who stressed the importance of fostering an “*environment that challenges employees to innovate*” (IP1). Nevertheless, studies elsewhere present mixed results regarding the efficacy of intellectual stimulation in promoting work engagement. For instance, while Shabir *et al.* (2019) found a positive correlation, Basu and Saha (2020) indicated a weaker relationship. This suggests that while intellectual stimulation can be beneficial, its impact may depend on contextual factors such as organisational culture, work conditions and employee characteristics.

Pertaining to idealized influence, this plays a crucial role in establishing trust and admiration between leaders and employees. Participants acknowledged that leaders who model positive behaviors can inspire higher engagement levels. This notion is supported by Prabawani *et al.* (2020), who found a positive relationship between idealized influence and follower engagement. However, Asare and Nagy (2019) pointed out that idealized influence may not directly impact engagement but rather operates through other factors such as leader-member exchange.

Conclusion

The study highlights the significance of transformational leadership components, particularly inspirational motivation, individualized consideration, intellectual stimulation, and idealized influence in promoting employee work engagement. While inspirational motivation emerged as the most effective component, punctuated by a leader's willingness to listen, support, and provide guidance to employees to improve work engagement. The nuanced interactions among the transformational leadership components underscore the complexity of leadership in enhancing employee work engagement.

Implications for Practice

For leaders aiming to foster employee engagement, a multifaceted approach that incorporates all four components of transformational leadership is recommended. Leaders should strive to inspire and motivate their teams while also providing individualized support

and encouragement for innovation. Additionally, modeling positive behavior through idealized influence can further enhance trust and engagement.

Future Research Directions

Future research should explore the contextual factors that influence the effectiveness of transformational leadership components in promoting employee engagement. Longitudinal studies could provide insights into how these relationships evolve over time and across different organisational cultures and industries.

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