

# A Conceptual Paper on the Relationship between Transformational Leadership and Employee Engagement

Ivan Vun Kai Wen

Faculty of Business, Raffles University

Iskandar Puteri, Johor, Malaysia

Tel: +6011-11438322 E-mail: ivanvkw8322@gmail.com

Choi Sang Long

Faculty of Business, Raffles University

Iskandar Puteri, Johor, Malaysia

Tel: +6016-7634198 E-mail: choisanglong@raffles-university.edu.my

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## **Abstract**

The importance of a transformational leader's capabilities is beyond direct guidance, rather it extends towards securing lasting outcomes and sustained performance. Considering multiple facets of enhancement are inevitable, the various dimensions of transformational leadership enable scholars and industrial practitioners to pinpoint the pivotal aspects of transformational leadership responsible for employee engagement. Expanding on existing theories, it becomes vital to establish the traits of transformational leadership that significantly influence employee engagement. Thus, this conceptual paper shall fortify the theoretical structure by investigating the relationship between transformational leadership (idealized influence, individualized consideration, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, employee appreciation, and performance expectation) and the correlations towards employee engagement, through comprehensive literature reviews, validating the significance of the relationship. From the findings of this study, the relationship between transformational

leadership and employee engagement was justified to be significant. Future studies may leverage the expanded framework proposed in this conceptual paper to conduct quantitative studies in specific geographic areas or industries, further validating the effectiveness of these variables.

**Keywords:** employee engagement, idealized influence, individualized consideration, intellectual stimulation, inspirational motivation, employee appreciation, performance expectation

## **1. Introduction**

This conceptual study paper was reinforced with literature that improved understanding of the niche gap filled by specialized researchers. As transformational leadership is gaining traction across a wide range of organizations and industries, inclusive of employee engagement aspects, this paper attempted to include various characteristics and dimensions of transformative leadership. Corporate leaders recognize that a highly engaged workforce can boost creativity, productivity, and performance while reducing recruitment and retention costs (Kumar et al., 2014).

Thompson (2021) proposed that employee engagement portrayed requirements to ensure employees feel valued, engaged, and productive, emphasizing the significance of managerial and senior leadership behaviours alongside policy execution. Golding (2021) underscored the complexity of addressing "bad leadership" by observing companies' inadequacy in understanding the root causes. Egeland (2010) suggested effective strategies to be employed to yield results, emphasizing that resolving such issues can strengthen overall productivity and employee engagement. Abdalla et al. (2022) stressed that employee engagement was determined by the impact of how employees perceive their role and treatment at work by their leaders.

Grzesik and Piwovar-Sulej (2018) suggested that managers employing transformational leadership approaches may enhance team cohesion, collaboration, and communication. However, many companies fail to comprehend or acknowledge the root causes of poor management, often characterized by a lack of communication, micromanagement, and unclear expectations. Micromanaging leaders, identified as toxic, exhibit a desire to assert dominance over their followers, reflecting a lack of trust in subordinates' ability to take initiative and complete tasks (Tavanti, 2011).

With the various challenges faced in resolving employee engagement, this conceptual paper attempted to fill the research gap where additional dimensions were suggested to be considered for transformational leadership to prevail effectively (Van Knippenberg & Sitkin, 2013). Therefore, the research goal of this study was attempted to discover the relationship between multiple dimensions of transformational leadership towards employee engagement.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 *Employee Engagement*

Robinson (2022) highlighted that the concept of employee engagement drew significant influence from Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs and Herzberg's (1959) two-factor theory. Maslow's hierarchy organizes human needs based on their importance, stating that to fulfill higher-level needs, the most basic ones must be met initially. Schaufeli and Bakker (2004) further added that engaged employees form strong emotional connections with the company, thereby impacting task completion and the quality of work produced. These definitions share common traits of individuals fully devoted to their work, believing in its significance, and going beyond expectations to contribute to the firm's success (Blessing, 2013). Employees continually seek opportunities for skill enhancement, fostering their career growth, which in turn enhances engagement and satisfaction with their organizations (Cox, 2022).

Henkel et al. (2017) defined employee engagement as a dimension that pertains to employees investing their time and effort and being dedicated and enthusiastic about their work. Engaged employees are motivated to share their ideas, feel connected to their work, and exhibit high involvement in their jobs. Fleming (2009) added that engaged employees avoid merely fulfilling minimum job requirements; instead, they take initiative and express interest in the organization's goals and success.

Herbert (2011) emphasized that employee engagement is not a momentary state but a lasting cognitive condition independent of specific events or individuals. Macey and Schneider (2008) pointed out the consensus among studies regarding the preferable nature of employee engagement, its effects on organizational goals, and the incorporation of psychological and behavioural components. Empirical research also discovered that leadership environmental factors are pivotal factors influencing engagement (Saks & Gruman, 2014).

### 2.2 *Transformational Leadership*

Raziq et al. (2018) described transformational leadership as pivotal for subordinates to have positive change, emphasizing the leader's role as a primary source of inspiration and encouragement. A consensus among researchers highlighted four dimensions of transformational leadership: idealized influence, intellectual stimulation, inspirational motivation, and individualized consideration (Ali et al., 2021). This research further incorporated dimensions such as employee appreciation and performance expectation. On the contrary, Anwar (2017) defined transformational leadership as a leadership perspective fostering positive changes in both social systems and individuals, transforming followers into leaders themselves. Transformational leaders empower staff with autonomy, inspiring them to acquire new skills and improve existing talents (Almahasneh et al., 2022).

Hughes (2018) defined transformational leadership as a unique style that encourages team members to take ownership of tasks, enhancing employee motivation, morale, and

productivity. Managers embracing transformational leadership inspire, support, and drive staff to innovate and drive changes that positively impact the organization's future success (Maqbool et al., 2017). Serin and Akkaya (2020) outlined the key attributes essential for transformational leaders, focusing on entrepreneurial, deliberative, motivating, inspiring, guiding, and change-oriented capabilities, alongside adeptly navigating challenges and directing audiences. Fichtner (2020) further enhanced that effective leadership primarily involved proficiently leading teams, comprehending how to analyse performance data, and strategizing to navigate situations where employee dissatisfaction could potentially derail organizational goals or plans.

### *2.3 Relationship between Transformational Leadership and Employee Engagement*

#### *2.3.1 Idealized Influence*

Dionne et al. (2004) defined idealized influence behaviour as exhibited by charismatic leaders. Ogola et al. (2017) added that a leader's idealized influence behaviour is recognized through charismatic personalities by subordinates who aspire to resemble these leaders. Antonakis et al. (2003) further highlighted that leaders exhibiting idealized influence behaviour tend to emphasize values and the significance of the mission.

Essentially, idealized influence observed leadership qualities emphasizing the value of possessing a strong sense of purpose surpassing self-interest for the collective welfare. This dimension found support mainly from Bass's (1985) model, affirmed by Bass and Avolio's (2000) study, along with the dimension of providing an appropriate model (Podsakoff et al., 1996; Liu & Li, 2018), and leading by example (Carless et al., 2000).

Several studies have found a correlation between idealized influence and employee engagement in various industrial sectors such as the banking industry (Winasis et al., 2021), Islamic high schools in Jakarta (Arifin & Troena, 2014), and the hospitality sector of Sri Lanka (Thisera & Sewwandi, 2018).

#### *2.3.2 Intellectual Stimulation*

Ali et al. (2021) defined intellectual stimulation as a leader's encouragement that sparked followers' creativity, prompting employees to devise innovative or resourceful solutions to problems. This behaviour encourages employees to question assumptions, reframe problems, and approach old situations in new ways (Bass, 1985).

Intellectual stimulation assessed leadership traits involving objective issue analysis from diverse perspectives, fostering creativity, and offering unconventional problem-solving approaches. This dimension received additional support from Bass's (1985) primary model while reaffirmed in Bass and Avolio's (2000) research. It aligned with similar intellectual stimulation dimensions by various authors (Conger & Kanungo, 1994; Liu & Li, 2018; Podsakoff et al., 1996; Rafferty & Griffin, 2004), and intellectual arousal (Al-Matroushi & Alkiyumi, 2022).

Previous studies have shown the significance between intellectual stimulation and employee engagement as well, including the study by Bezuidenhout and Schultz (2013) specifically studying on intellectual stimulation of employees in the mining industry of South Africa, and Datche et al. (2015) found a correlation of intellectual stimulation to employee engagement on civil servants of top corporations.

### 2.3.3 Individualized Consideration

Bass (1985) defined individualized consideration as leaders fostering a considerate relationship with each employee, acting as coaches or mentors to support and develop employees to their maximum potential. Individualized consideration was also referred as attending to individual followers' unique requirements and providing them with support, encouragement, and coaching (Ali et al., 2021; Avolio et al., 2004; Lindgren & Packendorff, 2009).

Individualized consideration stemmed from Bass's (1985) primary model was reinforced in Bass and Avolio's (2000) study. It resonated with individualized support (Podsakoff et al., 1996), supportive leadership (Rafferty & Griffin, 2004), sensitivity to members' needs (Conger and Kanungo, 1994), providing support (Saboe et al., 2015), and offering supportive leadership (Carless et al., 2000). Numerous studies have demonstrated an association between individualized consideration and employee engagement, including the study by Herminingsih (2020) and Tonvongval (2013), specifically collecting data from branch managers of developing companies.

### 2.3.4 Inspirational Motivation

Inspirational motivation involved a leader transmitting a captivating vision and assigning challenging duties with high expectations to motivate employees, thereby enhancing performance (Ali et al., 2021; Bass, 1985). Inspirational motivation also explored leadership qualities articulating a compelling future vision and expressing confidence in goal achievement. This dimension aligned with Bass's (1985) primary model, validated in Bass and Avolio's (2000) research. It resonated with articulating a vision (Podsakoff et al., 1996), shared a similar dimension with other authors (Liu & Li, 2018; Rafferty & Griffin, 2004), and vision articulation (Conger & Kanungo, 1994).

Multiple studies have highlighted a correlation between inspirational motivation and employee engagement such as the study from Abdul Ghani and Shuhada (2018) specifically studying the inspirational motivation dimension on employees from Malaysian government-linked companies (GLC) where the result showed significance towards employee engagement. Additionally, Mufeed (2018) also found significance in the study on teaching and research institutions, whereas Fransiska et al. (2021) found positive effects in the context of Indonesia as well. Wibawa and Takahashi (2021) added that leaders that were able to provide followers with appropriate motivation and inspiration tend to further enhance the engagement of employees, regardless of employees with low or high self-efficacy.

### 2.3.5 Employee Appreciation

Vandenberg et al. (1999) referred to employee appreciation as expressing gratitude for efforts made toward predetermined goals, including praising and acknowledging such efforts. McGee and Ford (1987) added that such appreciation potentially may empower employees to explore new opportunities, given that it communicates their value. Employee appreciation involved leaders promoting the celebration of achievements and projecting a favourable impression of successful personnel to the public. This dimension was comprehensively adopted from Rafferty and Griffin's (2004) study concerning the dimension of personal recognition.

Perspective that aligns with high-performance work system models was distinguished between management-led appreciation and appreciation as part of a system aimed at fostering employee engagement (Vandenberg et al., 1999). These practices serve as a model for sustaining and continuously nurturing excellent work habits (Ojha et al., 2018).

A body of research has suggested a link between the dimensions such as the study by Amor et al. (2020) on the employees in the Spanish tourism sector of Galicia, and another study by Pourbarkhordari and Pourkarimi (2016) within the telecommunication industry.

### 2.3.6 Performance Expectation

Performance expectation highlighted the emphasis on demanding employees to provide maximum effort and achieve a certain performance threshold (Podsakoff et al., 1990). Li et al. (2017) further elaborated that it represents the leader's expectations regarding followers' performance in terms of perfection, quality, and high competence. Ojha et al. (2018) corresponded with emphasizing this dimension as urging followers to enhance outcomes and performance quality. Performance expectation further represented a leader characteristic in ensuring employees consistently strive for high achievement levels and encourage knowledge exchange and cross-functional collaboration. This dimension was derived from the perspective of the high-performance expectation dimension presented by Liu and Li (2018) and Podsakoff et al. (1996).

Prior studies were minimal on performance expectation and its correlation towards employee engagement, with only a study by Pourbarkhordari and Pourkarimi (2016) finding the significance of performance expectation towards employee engagement. With the above dimensions and correlation towards the dependent variable of employee engagement, a conceptual framework was developed to map the relationship between the variables.

## 2.4 Conceptual Framework

Based on the literature reviews of theoretical and empirical research above, there exists a correlation between additional dimensions of transformational leadership (idealized influence, intellectual stimulation, inspirational motivation, individualized consideration, employee appreciation, and performance expectation) towards employee engagement. This may be

further illustrated in the conceptual framework produced as shown in Figure 1:

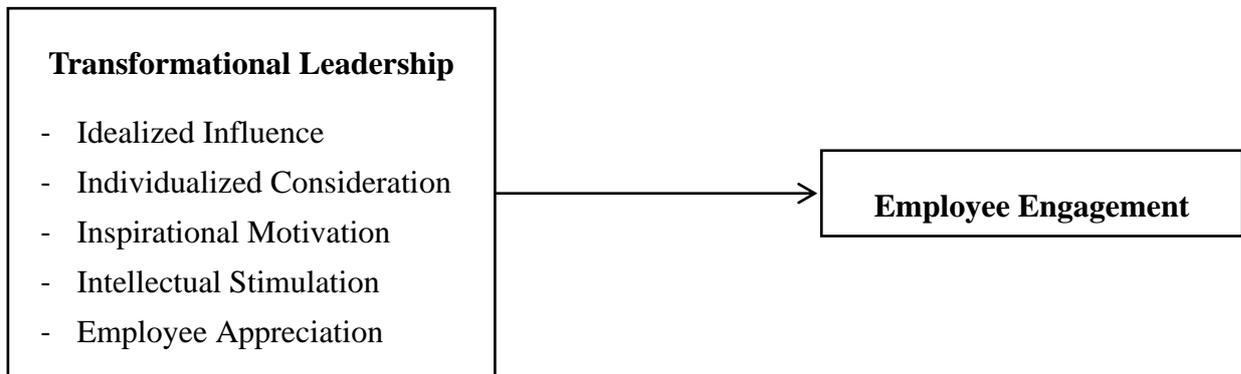


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

### 3. Research Methodology

The methodology employed in this conceptual paper rests on a comprehensive review and synthesis of existing literature within the field. The approach entailed an extensive exploration of diverse scholarly sources, encompassing journals, books, and relevant theoretical frameworks. The initial phase encompassed the identification of prevalent theories and concepts, followed by a critical analysis to discern gaps, contradictions, or limitations within the existing knowledge. Subsequent steps involved systematically merging these established theories to craft an original conceptual framework. This process involved careful consideration of interconnections, identifying patterns, and restructuring elements to propose an innovative theoretical approach aimed at addressing the identified gaps in the field. Essentially ensuring a transparent and robust foundation for the development of this conceptual framework.

### 4. Discussion

This conceptual paper offered various theoretical and practical potential contributions, benefiting scholars and practitioners. Theoretically, this paper was able to contribute and fill the gap of additional dimension and correlation towards employee engagement. With the aim of filling the research gap, this study managed to discover the dimensions of idealized influence, intellectual stimulation, individualized consideration, inspirational motivation, employee appreciation, and performance expectation. On an industrial level for practitioners, leaders may consider on the multiple dimensional along with additional dimensions discovered corroborated from numerous resources discovered in this paper. By implementation of broadened aspects of transformational leadership, it is believed that employee engagement may further be improved on practical situations.

### 5. Conclusion

Mohd Kasmuri et al. (2022) asserted that employee engagement is directly correlated with

effective leadership, with factors influencing engagement centred around leadership dimensions and their subsequent effects on colleagues. Transformational leadership positively influenced employee engagement, emphasizing the critical role of leadership beyond mere management obligations (Baidina et al., 2021; Yasin, 2019). Employees labeled as "actively" disengaged are deemed unfavourable and may even act against business interests (Weber, 2013). These individuals tend to influence others toward disengagement, both from specific job roles and the primary goals of the organization, in addition to being personally disengaged (Clifton, 2011). Fleming's (2009) research revealed that engaged employees are more inclined to innovate, enhance productivity, deliver higher-quality products or services, minimize waste, satisfy customers, and generate greater profits. Wibawa and Takahashi (2021) further emphasized that prior to implementing leadership strategies, leaders are encouraged to examine the cultural characteristics of the demographical context.

Madsen (2019) stressed that leadership is not defined by job titles but by attitudes and behaviours, prompting leaders to embrace a new approach to designated work. Rantai et al. (2022) emphasized the significance of leadership amid environmental changes, suggesting that future studies aim to bridge gaps by exploring the methods transformational leadership can enhance employee engagement. Transformational leadership as evidenced by empirical and theoretical data, indicated the need to explore additional dimensions to enhance the variable's value (Podsakoff et al., 1990). Van Knippenberg and Sitkin (2013) further highlighted the oversight within transformational leadership research, urging more attention to its multidimensional nature. Examining various dimensional enhancements becomes pivotal, aiding scholars and industry experts in identifying transformational leadership's crucial components that drive effectiveness in workplace outcomes (Wen & Long, 2023).

There exists a necessity to shift the focus from the established idea of transformational leadership to specific dimensions, especially if a single dimension emerged as the primary influencer of its effects (Saboe et al., 2015). Nixon et al. (2012) highlighted the importance of understanding team dynamics such as employee engagement being a crucial aspect of leadership within the industry. Despite that, Egeland (2010) identified a challenge where project leaders fail to acknowledge that leadership is an ongoing responsibility. Boogaard (2019) concluded that effective managers should delegate tasks, emphasizing that the organization requires leadership beyond managing details, encompassing employee engagement as an additional aspect as well.

## **6. Recommendations for Future Research**

Future researchers may look further into implementation of empirical studies utilizing the established framework within different unit of analysis and geographical settings. Various demographical setting may differ in results, where improvements can further be implemented through the study on correlation of these transformational leadership dimensions and employee engagement.

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