

# **Role of Transformational Leadership in Enriching Employee Engagement: An Empirical Study**

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## **Abstract**

The purpose of this paper is to examine the relationship between transformational leadership and employee engagement of academic staff in sample select institutions. The study will also analyze the existing perception of respondents towards transformational leadership and employee engagement elements. Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ-5x) developed by Bass and Avolio (1995) was employed to measure transformational leadership. The Utrecht Work Engagement Scale, developed by Schaufeli et al. (2006) was used to measure employee engagement. The reliability of constructs varies from .70 to .85. The data collected was analyzed using various statistical tools such as mean score, standard deviation and correlation. The findings of the study reveal that there prevails a favourable perception of academic staff towards transformational leadership and employee engagement. The results also depict that there is a positive and significant association between transformational leadership and employee engagement. It is suggested that transformational leadership practices should be further strengthened in sample select institutions in order to increase the employee engagement of academic staff.

**Keywords:** Transformational leadership, employee engagement, academic staff, higher education.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

The 21<sup>st</sup> century organizations are characterized with the ability to continuously innovate, excel and outperform their competitors. The dynamic and competitive business environment has forced organizations to rethink and redesign their strategies and policies so as to remain effective and relevant in the present business world. The success factor of organizations lies in developing and managing capable and competent human resource who can contribute significantly towards organizational growth and prosperity. Organizations need to possess sound, effective and dedicated employees who can engage and involve themselves in attaining organizational objectives. Such employees are attributed as 'engaged employees'. Engaged employees are highly motivated and committed in increasing productivity of organizations. They are highly enthusiastic and passionate about their work and strive hard in accomplishing their tasks. Kular, et al., (2008) opined that engaged employees play a critical role in achieving organizational outcomes. It calls for the role of transformational leaders who can inspire and motivate their followers to work together in attaining organizational objectives. Transformational leaders inculcate a sense of positivity, commitment and motivation among their workers with a purpose to make them more effective and result oriented. Yukl and Howell (1999) believed that leadership is one of the crucial factors in encouraging employee engagement. As the complexity of business changes, the role of leadership in maneuvering human resources for betterment of organizations becomes all more critical and more so in developing dedicated and engaged workforce.

## **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

### **EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT**

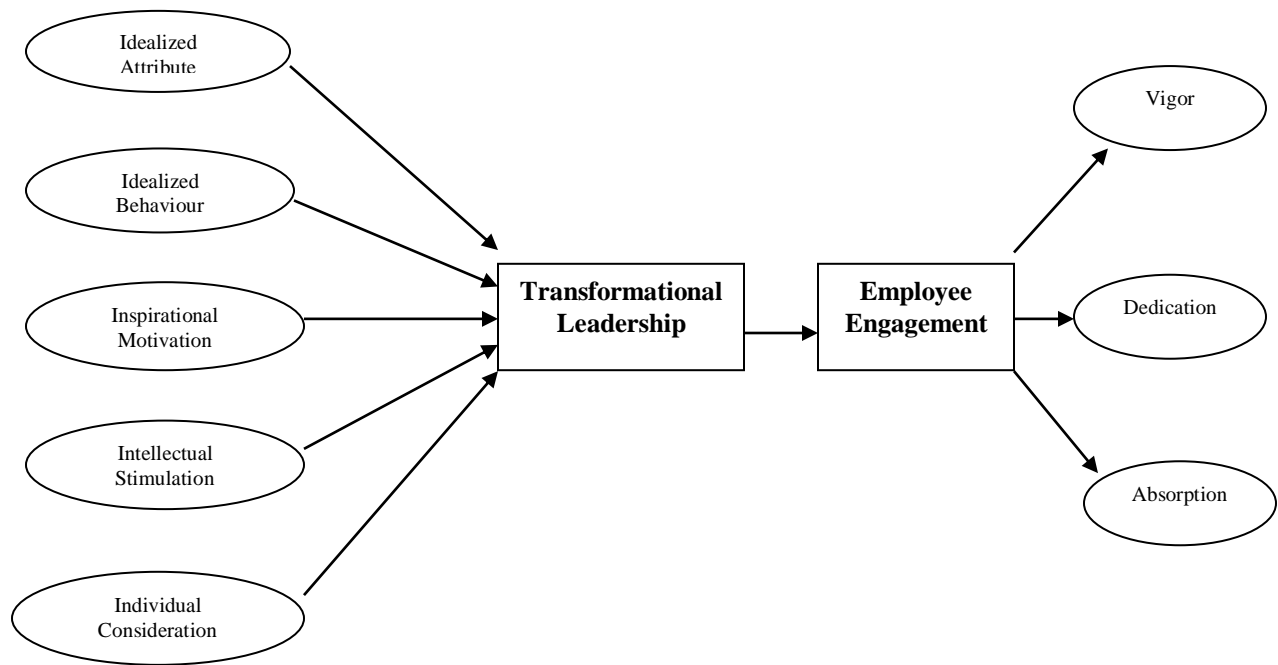
The term engagement refers to an "individual's involvement and satisfaction with as well as enthusiasm for work" (Harter, Schmidt, & Hayes, 2002). Kahn (1990) viewed employee engagement as "the harnessing of organization members' selves to their work roles; in engagement, people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally during role performances". According to Schaufeli et al. (2002), employee engagement has three components namely 1) Vigor, 2) Dedication and 3) Absorption. Vigor refers to the stimulating and energizing experience the employee has towards his/her work. Dedication refers to employee's commitment, involvement and devotion to his/her work. Absorption is characterized by the extent to which an employee is engrossed and attentive towards his work. It helps employee to shy away from any kind of distraction at work places. Absorption at work places refers to highly engrossed employee who finds it difficult to leisure and rather concentrates minutely towards his work (Gonzalez-Roma et al., 2006). Vigor aspect of employee engagement drives high energy, mental resilience, strength and resistance among employees (Salanova et al., 2005). The third dimension of employee engagement is 'dedication' that is characterized with a sense of pride, enthusiasm, and high involvement of employees in performing their tasks (Schaufeli and Bakker, 2003).

## **TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP**

Over the years, a vast number of researches have been conducted on transformational leadership in varied organizational settings. The concept of transformational leadership was initially introduced by James MacGregor Burns in 1978. He stated that transformational leadership is an ongoing process in which leaders and their followers raise one another to higher levels of morality and motivation. The existing body of knowledge on transformational leadership was added and contributed by many researchers. Bass (1985) extended the work of Burns by explaining how transformational leadership can be measured and how it impacts follower's motivation and performance. Transformational leadership style is measured using 5 factors namely i) Idealized attribute ii) idealized behavior iii) inspirational motivation iv) intellectual stimulation v) Individual consideration (Bass and Avolio, 2000). With passage of time the area of transformational leadership gained immense popularity among academicians, researchers and policy makers. Marquis & Huston (2008) stated that transformational leaders help in creating a productive environment at workplaces which aimed at acknowledging the individual and organizational needs. Groenewald and Ashfield (2008) pointed out that transformational leadership reduces the effects of uncertainty and change and effectively guides employees to attain their occupational goals. Transformational leaders can encourage employees toward gaining valuable organizational goals include higher productivity, presenting better services and solving social problems (Spector, 2004). Transformational leadership includes affective and charismatic elements of leadership that resonate with workers who experience a need to be inspired and empowered in uncertain and volatile times (Hughes, 2010). Gibson *et al.* (2012) explain that transformational leaders have the ability to inspire and motivate followers to achieve greater results which helps in attaining organizational objectives.

## **RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP AND EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT**

Employee engagement has been found very vital in enhancing organizational performance. Organizations strive hard in ensuring that they possess sound and dedicated workforce at their disposal who eventually would lead in contributing towards organizational success. In this regard organizational leaders have a significant role to perform in providing an atmosphere at workplaces where each individual focuses on improving their performance. Past research studies have made an attempt to highlight the significance of employee engagement for organizations. However, the academic literature on the subject of employee engagement with reference to transformational leadership has found very less mention. Hayati, et al., (2014) in their study found that transformational leadership has a positive and significant impact on employee engagement. Northouse (2010) pointed out that transformational leadership play an effective role in ensuring dedicated, motivated and commitment workforce which help them to become involved and engaged with their work. Bass (1985) suggested that employees were more likely to devote additional extra effort at work, if they reported to a transformational leader who guided their employees by stimulating them and inspiring their trust. Transformational leaders inspire and motivate their followers to put extra efforts and enable them to be more engaged with their work and contribute towards organizational outcomes (Zhu et al., 2009; Gill, 2006; Walumbwa & Lawler, 2003)



**Fig 1:** Theoretical framework of transformational leadership and employee engagement

## OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The present research was undertaken in the light of objectives set forth as follows:

- 1) to study the relationship between transformational leadership and employee engagement and
- 2) to draw conclusions and suggest measures for improving employee engagement in sample study institutions.

## HYPOTHESIS

There is a positive relationship between transformational leadership and employee engagement.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A comprehensive study of primary and secondary sources was done for purpose of collecting data. A well systematic questionnaire was designed to elicit responses from three undergraduate colleges in Srinagar district. A total of 120 questionnaires were distributed among teaching staff of sample institutions, out of which 102 questionnaires were received. Of the 102 questionnaires returned, eight responses were incomplete. The remaining 94 valid and complete questionnaires were used for the quantitative analysis. It represented a response rate of 78.33%. Employee engagement was measured using the Schaufeli et al. (2006) Utrecht Work Engagement Scale, which has three subscales: i) vigor, ii) dedication, and iii) absorption consisting of 3 items in each subscale while as transformational leadership was measured by employing MLQ- 5X

questionnaire developed by Bass and Avalio (1995) consisting of five subscales: i) idealized attribute ii) idealized behavior iii) inspirational motivation iv) intellectual stimulation and v) individual consideration having 4 items in each subscale. The reliability coefficient of the research instrument variables varied from 0.70 to 0.85.

The data whatsoever collected were analyzed using SPSS 20.0.Version. Descriptive statistics such as mean score, % mean score, Std. deviation, frequency were used to study the employee's perception with respect to transformational leadership practices and employee engagement elements. Pearson correlation was employed for hypotheses testing purpose.

**Table 1 Reliability Analysis of Study Variables**

Construct	No. of Items	Reliability
Idealized Attribute	4	.77
Idealized Behaviour	4	.70
Inspirational Motivation	4	.72
Intellectual Stimulation	4	.82
Individual Consideration	4	.85
Vigor	3	.76
Absorption	3	.80
Dedication	3	.74

Cronbach Alpha's internal consistency coefficients are calculated to find reliability of the constructs under study and to obtain dependable picture of internal consistency of the measuring instruments. The results of the reliability test given in table 1, reveal that the Cronbach's alpha values for all the five dimensions of transformational leadership practices and three elements of employee engagement are above the threshold level of 0.7 reflecting that the items imposed on leadership variables and employee engagement are consistently measuring its constructs

## DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

**Table 2: Relationship between transformational leadership and employee engagement (Correlation)**

		Transformational leadership	Employee Engagement
<b>Transformational Leadership</b>	Pearson Correlation	1	.496**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	94	94
<b>Employee Engagement</b>	Pearson Correlation	.496**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	94	94

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

From the above Table 2, it can be seen that there is a positive and significant relationship between transformational leadership and employee engagement in sample select institutions. It

depicts that the more we exhibit transformational leadership in select institutions, the more it will result in promoting employee engagement of academic staff. Therefore our hypotheses I is supported since correlation between transformational leadership practices and employee engagement was found ( $r=.496$ ,  $p=0.000$ ) which is both positive as well as statistically significant.

**Table 3: Correlation between transformational leadership practices and employee engagement**

<b>Transformational Leadership Practices</b>	<b>Employee Engagement</b> (Pearson Correlation)
Idealized Attribute	<b>.303**</b>
Idealized Behaviour	<b>.333**</b>
Inspirational Motivation	<b>.325**</b>
Intellectual Stimulation	<b>.310**</b>
Individual Consideration	<b>.318**</b>

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Similarly from the Table 3 correlations were determined between transformational leadership practices and employee engagement. It can be seen that all the dimensions of transformational leadership depicts positive and significant relationship with respect to employee engagement. The most positive relationship was found in case of idealized behavior and employee engagement with ( $r= .333$ ,  $p=0.000$ ), it was followed by inspirational motivation ( $r= .325$ ,  $p=0.000$ ), individual consideration ( $r=.318$ ,  $p=0.000$ ), intellectual stimulation ( $r=.310$ ,  $p= 0.000$ ), the least positive and significant relationship of employee engagement was found with idealized attribute ( $r=.303$ ,  $p=0.000$ ). All of these correlations were statistically significant.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

The present study examined the relationship between transformational leadership and employee engagement in sample study institutions. The findings of the study highlighted that employee engagement is positively and significantly related to transformational leadership. Idealized behavior and inspirational motivation elements of transformational leadership showed high association towards employee engagement. It depicted that these practices need to be further promoted in order to enhance employee engagement among employees towards their work and organization. Moreover, focus should be made to further strengthen idealized attribute and inspirational motivation characteristics so as to make employee more productive and involved towards their organization.

The present study is faced with certain limitations. Firstly, the study targeted only three colleges in Srinagar district and that too with small sample size. As such the findings of the study cannot be generalized to whole population. Therefore future research can include more colleges with wider geographical representation. Secondly, no demographic variable was examined in the

present paper therefore future research can consider factors namely age, gender, and designation so that transformational leadership practices and employee engagement elements can be studied more holistically.

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