

Transformational Leadership and Employee Engagement in Hospitality Sector in Sri Lanka

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Abstract

This study examines the impact of transformational leadership on subordinates' engagement in the hospitality sector in Sri Lanka. Further, it tests the impact of each dimension (i.e., idealized influence, intellectual stimulation, inspirational motivation, and individual consideration) of transformational leadership on employee engagement. Data were collected through a self-administered questionnaire from 245 executive level employees working in the hospitality sector in Sri Lanka. Findings revealed that transformational leadership and its each dimension positively influence the employee engagement in the hospitality industry. Further, the study discusses the practical and theoretical implications.

Index terms— employee engagement, transformational leadership style, the hospitality sector.

1 Introduction

Engaged workforce upgrades innovation, productivity, and bottom-line performance (Harvard Business School Publishing, 2013). There is a general belief about the positive relationship between employee engagement and business performance (Harter, Schmidt, & Hayes, 2002). Many researchers (e.g., Emsley, 2008; Smith & Markwick, 2009) have found that engagement affects employees' attitudes, absence, turnover, individual, group and organizational performance, quality of customer experience and customer loyalty. Similarly, Maynard (2016) stated that employee engagement is one of the key priorities in businesses since an engaged employee is productive by two times than a disengaged employee and they provide better customer service which leads high profits and returns.

Unfortunately, there can be seen an employee engagement crisis in today's world, with potentially lasting impacts for the global economy (Mann & Harter, 2016). For examples, Gallup researchers have mentioned that truly engaged workplaces are rare today and show that it is just 13% (O'Boyle & Harter, 2015). The remaining 87% of employees are either not engaged or indifferent or even worse, actively disengaged and potentially hostile to their organization. Further, Gallup researchers identified that less than one-third of employees in the United States engage in their jobs and workplaces. Crabtree (2013) mentioned that only one in eight workers is mentally committed to the jobs and contributes positively for the organization. In Sri Lanka, 62% of employees disengaged while 24% of employees actively disengaged (<http://www.allup.com>, 2014).

When looking at the hospitality sector in Sri Lanka, researchers conducted a few discussions using managerial level employees to verify whether employees in this sector are engaged or not. Majority of them mentioned that disengagement of employees is a burning issue that they are facing today. They highlighted that many employees do enjoy their privileges but do not fully contribute to the success of the organization. One of them mentioned that their organization conducts many programmes focusing on improving engagement of their employees to reduce disadvantages of disengagement of employees.

Empirical research studies (e.g. Hang, 2011) have shown different antecedents of employee engagement. The impact of leadership on employee engagement has been empirically tested. When looking at the scholarly attention on transformational leadership and employee engagement in Sri Lanka (e.g., Jayarathne & Shermila, 2015) is very limited, especially in the hospitality sector. Thus, Slatten and Mehmetoglu (2011) have mentioned

3 A) TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP AND EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT

45 that there is a high demand for research intervention on employee engagement in the hospitality industry and
46 highlighted the need for more research in this sector while showing the contribution of research findings towards
47 theory and practice for the industrial betterment. Hence, this study examines whether the transformational
48 leadership impacts on employee engagement. The following section focusses on literature review.

49 2 II. Literature Review and Hypotheses Development

50 Though the concept of employee engagement is relatively new in research and practice, it has become a widely
51 discussable area in managing human resources in organizations (Macey & Schneider, 2008). They defined
52 engagement as the extent to which employees feel passionate about their jobs, are committed to the organization,
53 and put discretionary effort into their work. Further, it was defined as positive, fulfilling, work-related state of
54 mind that is characterized A , by vigor, dedication, and absorption ??Schaufeli, Salanova, Gonzalez -Roma, &
55 Bakker, 2002). Although there are many overlapping definitions and identification for engagement with some
56 other concepts (e.g., job involvement, organizational commitment) in practice, the academic literature clearly
57 defines and distinguishes this concept from other related constructs (Saks, 2006).

58 Employees who are engaged in their job show a positive attitude towards the work physically, mentally and
59 cognitively. Such employees have the desire to invest themselves fully in their tasks (Kahn, 1990 ?? Maslach
60 & Leiter, 1997) and it affects their performance (Kahn, 1990). Further, Kahn (1990) explains that engagement
61 and investment of the self into one's work may lead to mindfulness, intrinsic motivation, creativity, authenticity,
62 non-defensive communication, playfulness, ethical behavior, increased effort and involvement and overall a more
63 productive and happy employee. An engaged employee tends to have a better understanding on how to meet
64 customer needs. Therefore, customer loyalty towards the organization tends to be better ??Pont, 2004). Further,
65 it causes to increase engaged customers towards the organization (Bates, 2004). Therefore, employee engagement
66 is a source of sustainable competitive advantage (Macey & Schneider, 2008), and it can make a real difference
67 for a company's survival (Song, Kolb, Lee, & Kim, 2012).

68 When looking at the antecedents of engagement, Kahn (1990) identified three psychological conditions (i.e.,
69 meaningfulness, safety, and availability) that affect the level of work engagement. Similarly, May, Gilson, and
70 ??arter (2004) found that meaningfulness influences the engagement of employees than safety and availability.
71 Many other researchers (e.g., Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner, & Schaufeli, 2001; Hakanen, Schaufelib, & Ahola,
72 2004; ??chaufeli & Bakker, 2004) have examined the impact of job resources (e.g., feedback, rewards, job control,
73 participation) on employee engagement based on the job demand-resource model. Ruyle, Eichinger and De Meuse
74 (2009) have pointed out eleven (??1) factors (i.e., strategic alignment, trust in senior leadership, immediate
75 manager working relationship, peer culture, personal influence, nature of my career, career support, nature of
76 the job, development opportunities, employee recognition and pay fairness) as influential factors on employee
77 engagement. Moreover, they mentioned that the immediate manager working relationship is the most significant
78 factor which drives employee engagement and retention. The following section discusses the empirical evidence
79 on transformational leadership and employee engagement.

80 3 a) Transformational leadership and employee engagement

81 Transformational leadership is one of the new leadership theories which was introduced by James MacGregor
82 ??urns (1978) in his book of "Leadership. "Burns (1978) mentioned that transformational leadership involves
83 shifts in the beliefs, the needs and the values of followers. Transformational leaders operate out of deeply held
84 personal value system that includes values such as justice and integrity ??Bass, 1985; ??ums, 1978). ??ums
85 (1978) refers to these values as end values which cannot be negotiated or exchanged between individuals.

86 By expressing their standards, transformational leaders can unite followers while changing followers' goals and
87 beliefs. This form of leadership results in the achievement of higher levels of performance among individuals
88 ??Bass, 1985). Bass, Avolio, Jung, and Berson (2003) described four I's (i.e., Idealized influence, inspirational
89 motivation, individual consideration, and intellectual stimulation) as dimensions of transformational leadership.
90 The idealized influence which means being a role model for their followers (Hinkin & Tracey, 1999)influences
91 on ideology, influence over ideals, and influence over "bigger-thanlife" issues ??Bass, 1990). The second dimension,
92 inspirational motivation is shown by a leader when he/she acts in a way that causes subordinates to perform better
93 by instilling a sense of meaning in their work ??Avolio & Bass, 2004). Hinkin and Tracey (1999) mentioned that
94 transformational leaders behave in ways that motivate and inspire people around them by providing meaning
95 and challenge to their followers' work. Individual consideration is usually emphasizing the role as a coach or
96 mentor, he/she tends to be concerned for each of their subordinates' independent needs ??Avolio & Bass, 2004)
97 while acknowledging that every employee has his/her own needs and abilities (Hinkin & Tracey, 1999). The
98 fourth dimension, intellectual stimulation is exhibited when a leader asks questions to increase innovation and
99 creativity ??Avolio & Bass, 2004). A transformational leader stimulates followers to enhance their innovation and
100 creativity in different ways (e.g., questioning assumptions, reframing problems, and approaching old situations
101 in new ways). Followers are encouraged for creativity, new approaches, ideas (Hinkin & Tracey, 1999 Leaders
102 with idealized influence which means acting as a role model (Hinkin & Tracey, 1999) admire, respect and trust
103 followers. This kind of leaders builds loyalty and devotion while paying less attention to their selfinterests ??Bass
104 & Bass, 2008). Shamir, House, and Arthur (1993) mentioned that subordinates perform effectively and are

105 energized to sacrifice and move beyond their self-interests to make a better contribution towards organizational
106 performance. When leaders set themselves as examples for followers, followers' sense of values and contributions
107 will enhance, and as a result, engage their whole self in work. Further, Lievens et al., ??1997) has found
108 that charisma which represents idealized influence and inspirational motivation of leader has a positive impact
109 over the followers. Similarly, Schults and Bezuidenhout (2013) found that charisma strongly predicts affective
110 engagement of employees. Through inspirational motivation, leaders create a future with a vision that appeals
111 to subordinates and makes them a significant part of the organization (Piccolo & Colquitt, 2006). A leader with
112 intellectual stimulation encourages followers to think out of the box and make creative solutions for problems
113 ??Bass & Bass, 2008). Moreover, ??ass (1985) mentioned that leader encourages employees to go beyond the basic
114 needs to the needs of the organizational mission and purpose through this behavior. Researchers (e.g., ??vio
115 & Bass, 2002; ??ass & Bass, 2008) have shown that when leaders do not criticize followers' contribution, then
116 followers tend to become dedicated. Further, leaders who display intellectual stimulation behavior can influence
117 employees' involvement in work. When leaders demonstrate genuine consideration and care for each follower,
118 they are more likely to motivate positive leaderfollower relationships, and it improves the sense of belonging to
119 the organization (Zhu, Avolio, & Walumbwa, 2009). If leader provides essential personal resources (e.g., care,
120 consideration and respect) to followers, followers are likely to perceive that the workplace as more supportive and
121 this creates a sense of obligation to reciprocate positively to this support. Saks (2006) found that individualized
122 consideration behaviors of the supervisor enhance employees' attributes of engagement at work.

123 Based on this evidence, the following hypotheses are suggested.

124 **4 H1: There is a positive impact of transformational leadership 125 on employee engagement**

126 H1a: There is a positive impact of idealized influence on employee engagement H1b: There is a positive impact
127 of inspirational motivation on employee engagement H1c: There is a positive impact of intellectual stimulation
128 on employee engagement H1d: There is a positive impact of individual consideration on employee engagement.

129 **5 III.**

130 **6 Methodology**

131 The current study is a positivistic study which uses the deduction research approach. It quantified the
132 relationships between transformational leadership and employee engagement by collecting data from 245 executive
133 level employees in the hospitality industry in Sri Lanka using a self-administered questionnaire. Employee
134 engagement was measured using Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES) developed by ??akker and Schaufelli
135 (2004), and it is a 7-point Likert-scale with anchors ranging from Never (0) to Always (6). Transformational
136 leadership was measured using 39 items adopted from the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire, covering all four
137 main dimensions of transformational leadership (Hinkin & Tracey, 1999). All items are in 7-point Likert scale
138 with anchors ranging from strongly disagree (0) to strongly agree (6). The questionnaire was distributed among
139 350 executivelevel employees in star hotels in Sri Lanka. Only 256 respondents returned the questionnaire. There
140 were 11 questionnaires which were not in a usable manner. Accordingly, 245 respondents (70%) were included as
141 the final sample.

142 **7 IV.**

143 **8 Sample Composition**

144 Majority of respondents were males (63%) and belonged to the age category (43%) of between 35 years -39 years.
145 Very few (8.5 %) of respondents belonged to the age category of years 46 -50. 47% of the sample were married.
146 66.9 % of respondents have been working in their current position for less than three years.

147 Preliminary analysis was conducted for ensuring normality, linearity, homoscedasticity, reliability, validity,
148 multicollinearity, and common method variance. Descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation (SD), skewness,
149 kurtosis, correlation) relating to all constructs are shown in Table 1. As shown in Table 2, the current
150 study employed simple linear regression for testing the direct effect of transformational leadership and its four
151 dimensions on employee engagement. .17

152 **9 Year ()**

153 A V.

15 IMPLICATIONS

10 Results

11 Note: EE -Employee Engagement, TL -Transformational Leadership, II -Idealized Influence, IM -Inspirational Motivation, IS -Intellectual Stimulation, IC -Individual Consideration

154 Results revealed that the impact of transformational leadership on employee engagement is positive and
155 significant. Transformational leadership explains 32% of variance ($R^2 = .32$) of employee engagement. Beta is
156 .40 and p-value is 0.00 ($P < 0.05$). It implies that there is a positive impact of transformational leadership on
157 employee engagement. Hence, H1 is supported.

158 As shown in Table 2 -Model 2, beta is 0.30. Therefore, idealized influence positively related to employee
159 engagement. Further, it explains the variance (R^2) of employee engagement by 23%. P value of 0.00 ($p < 0.05$).
160 Hence, H1a is supported.

161 Inspirational motivation has a positive impact on employee engagement since the beta value is 0.51 with
162 a significant value of 0.00 which is less than 0.05. R^2 is 0.45 and it denotes that the variance of employee
163 engagement is explained by inspirational motivation is 45%. Accordingly, H1b is supported; there is a positive
164 impact of inspirational motivation on employee engagement.

165 As shown in Table 2 -Model 4, intellectual stimulation positively influences (Beta = 0.37) on the engagement
166 of employees. It is significant ($p = 0.00 < 0.05$). Further, it explains the variance of engagement by 34 %. Hence,
167 H1c is supported.

168 Finally, results suggest that impact of individual consideration on employee engagement is positive and
169 significant (Beta = 0.27, $p = 0.00 < 0.05$). R^2 is 0.19 therefore, the variance of employee engagement explained
170 by individual consideration is 19 percent. Accordingly, the H 5 is also supported.

171 12 VI.

172 13 Discussion

173 This study examined the impact of transformational leadership on employee engagement in the hospitality
174 industry in Sri Lanka. Findings of this study are consistent with earlier studies (e.g., ??reevaart et
175 Idealized influence allows followers to identify with their leaders. As Hinkin and Tracy (2009) explained, the leader becomes
176 a role model for his/her followers. Leader highly concentrates on followers' needs than thinking about personal
177 needs. Leaders who act as role models foster loyalty and devotion while paying less attention to their self-interests
178 ??Bass and Bass, 2008). It causes subordinates to perform effectively, and they are energized to sacrifice and
179 move beyond their selfinterests to make a better contribution towards organizational performance (Shamir et
180 al., 1993). ??ezuidenhout and Schults (2013) found that charisma related positively with employee engagement.
181 In the present study, idealized influence explains the engagement of employees in the hospitality sector by 23%.
182 However, there are counter-arguments (e.g., Datche & Mukulu, 2015, Mansor et al., 2017) over the positive
183 impact of idealized influence on engagement.

184 Further, it revealed that inspirational motivation positively influences engagement of employees while consisting
185 with empirical findings (e.g., Datche & Mukulu, 2015, Mansor et al., 2017). Moreover, current study findings
186 show a positive impact of intellectual stimulation and individual consideration on engagement. Similar findings
187 have been shown in empirical studies (e.g., Datche & Mukulu, 2015; Mansor et al., 2017). Employees will be
188 highly engaging in their job when their leaders stimulate them to be positive (Datche & Mukulu, 2015; ??ayati
189 et al., 2014; Mansor, et al., 2017).

190 14 VII.

191 15 Implications

192 This study contributes to the theory and practice in many ways. There are relatively less scholarly attempts
193 on new leadership theories such as transformational leadership, especially in South Asian countries. Hence, the
194 current study fills the knowledge gap on transformational leadership and employee engagement in the hospitality
195 sector in Sri Lanka while upgrading the current research stock. Further, this study enriches the limited empirical
196 evidence on analyses of impacts of dimensions of transformational leadership.

197 Further, it provides many implications for managers as it revealed that transformational leadership affects
198 the engagement of employees in the hospitality sector. Accordingly, HR professionals can take necessary actions
199 to improve transformational leadership attributes of superiors of their organizations to increase the level of
200 the engagement of their subordinates. It is suggested to conduct leadership development training programmes,
201 developing role models while focusing all attributes of transformational leadership in employees in the hospitality
202 sector in Sri Lanka.

208 **16 VIII.**

209 **17 Conclusion**

210 This study examined the impact of transformational leadership on employee engagement. Further, it focused on
211 each dimension's impact over the executive-level employees' engagement in the hospitality sector in Sri Lanka.
212 The study revealed that transformational leadership, and each dimension (i.e., idealized influence, intellectual
213 stimulation, inspirational motivation, and individual consideration) positively impacts on employee engagement.
214 Findings suggest that organizations can enhance the employee engagement by developing transformational leaders.

215 **18 Year ()**

1

Construct	Correlation					
	Mean	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis	TL	EE
TL	5.53	1.16	-1.29	.87	.969	
EE	4.87	.81	-1.48	2.31	.571 **	.908

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed), and Cronbach's alpha values appear on the diagonal.

Figure 1: Table 1 :

2

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
Regression	EE<-TL	EE<-II	EE<-IM	EE<-IS	EE<-IC
Independent variable	TL	II	IM	IS	IC
Beta	.40	.30	.51	.37	.27
?	.57	.48	.67	.58	.43
Std. Error	.07	.07	.07	.06	.07
P value	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00
	Model Summary				
R	.57	.48	.67	.58	.43
R ²	.32	.23	.45	.34	.19
Adjusted R ²	.31	.22	.44	.33	

Figure 2: Table 2 :

216 1 2

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