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# TRANSFORMATIONAL BEHAVIORS: INCREASING WORK ENGAGEMENT IN MULTINATIONAL ENVIRONMENTS

## Abstract

The role of a leader is fundamental to increase organizational culture and facilitate employee engagement. However, organizations are not providing clear guidance on how to do it. This study aims to determine the relationship between leadership styles and employee engagement as well as to understand whether there is a correlation between an engaged employee and extra effort. The study uses a Multi-Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ-5x Rater Form) to measure employee perception of the leader styles and Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES-17) to determine employee engagement. The scope of the study is limited to a sample of 167 employees from 7 different multinational companies and 31 different nationalities.

Results show that all the transformational behaviors and, concretely the idealized behavior, are significantly positively related to work engagement in multinational environments. Results also reveal a strong correlation between employee engagement and extra effort. The study concludes that leaders or managers should use transformational behaviors if they want to increase engagement and extra effort with their teams. They should increase transformational behaviors like being transparent, consistent, and having a strong sense of purpose to catalyze a collective engagement. These results expand previous studies of transformational leadership and work engagement in multinational environments.

## Keywords

leadership, management, transformational leadership, organizational development, work engagement, extra effort

## JEL Classification

M10, M12, M54, D23

## INTRODUCTION

Leaders and managers are responsible to drive teams towards set goals to achieve company growth and success. They could be defined as an influencer force, which exercises power and gives others direction to execute companies' goals. Leadership is a significant factor to drive an organization towards the path of success or to turn towards its failure (Rahbi et al., 2017).

Moreover, leaders also realize that productiveness does not come only from a pleased team. The most productive employee for a company is known as an engaged employee (Rao et al., 2021). This is the main reason why leaders are seeking to identify the keys to increase employee engagement levels. The current study intends to acknowledge the relationship between a leader and an engaged employee by detecting, which leadership style or behavior creates higher engagement. Additionally, the study aims to understand the relationship between an engaged employee and extra effort. Studies have shown that one of the most critical factors to have a better work engagement is leadership (Rao et al., 2021). Findings could lead to a better understanding of how to improve leadership and company success. The current study seeks to find the keys to answer these questions and guide leaders and managers towards better employee engagement.



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Author(s) reported no conflict of interest

## 1. LITERATURE REVIEW

A wide range of leadership models is developed. One of the most validated models is “the full-range model of leadership” (Bass & Avolio, 1994). Alloubani et al. (2019), Budiati et al. (2017), Li et al. (2018), Mozammel and Haan (2016), Purvi et al. (2019), Shah et al. (2016), and Yahaya and Ebrahim (2016) rely on this model.

Bass and Avolio (2004) identified nine leadership factors and the development of transformational, transactional, and passive-avoidance styles. The transformational style is based on Bass and Avolio’s theory (1994) and exhibits five main behaviors (referred to as the 5I’s): idealized attributes (high level of trust), idealized behavior (leading by example), inspirational motivation (ability to inspire others), intellectual stimulation (promote intelligence and problem solving), and finally individualized consideration (recognize individuality among employees). Secondly, the transactional style is a task-oriented style in which the leader focuses basically on the completion of goals. Following Bass and Avolio (2004), the transactional style includes two behaviors: contingent reward (task-oriented) and management by exception: active (monitors and calibrates). Finally, the passive-avoidance style is characterized by leaders who avoid decision-making. Bass and Avolio (2004) further defined the passive-avoidance style by establishing two dimensions: management by exception: passive (waits for mistakes) and laissez-faire leadership (do nothing).

Transformational leadership has accumulated sizeable scholarly attention since its origination and it remains to be a utilized leadership framework (Day & Antonakis, 2012; Dinh et al., 2014; Northouse, 2019). The transformational leader can inspire and share a common future vision and create commitment towards the goals of the companies (Baker, 2013; Bass, 1985; Wilford, 2020). Transformational leadership is globally viewed to be the most approved and efficacious leadership behavior (Northouse, 2019; Zhu & Mu, 2016), receiving further consideration from managers and leaders.

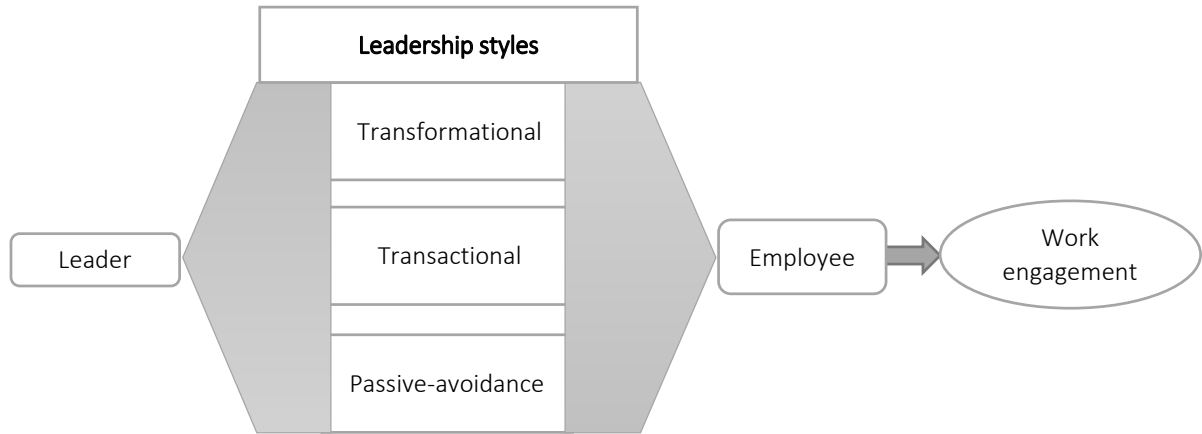
A relation between transformational style to positive results, like fidelity, satisfaction, employee progression, and performance, is established (Miranda,

2019; Walumbwa & Lawler, 2003; Yahaya & Ebrahim, 2016; Zhu et al., 2009). Transformational leadership is a motivated and dynamic style, which develops the bond between leader and employee, creating a positive effect on employees’ work mindset and attitude (Avolio et al., 2004; Dai et al., 2013; Lian & Tui, 2012). Valldeneu et al. (2021) showed that adopting a transformational leadership approach can increase positive organizational outcomes, company success, and recognition.

Work engagement is defined as a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption (Schaufeli et al., 2002; Shah et al., 2016). Job engagement has gained awareness in the scholarly literature and enterprises over the last years, having been associated with several organizational goals (Buckingham & Coffman, 1999; Coffman & Gonzalez-Molina, 2002; George, 2011, Horváthová et al., 2019). The expression ‘work engagement’ represents an alignment between highest contribution and highest job satisfaction. Work engagement is a pillar to create bonds between employees and their superiors. Employee work engagement has been demonstrated to positively predict work performance and innovation (Mone & London, 2010; Park et al., 2014) and has been linked to better execution (Schaufeli & Salanova, 2007). Companies must pay particular attention to employee work engagement if they want to be competitive and avoid business disruption.

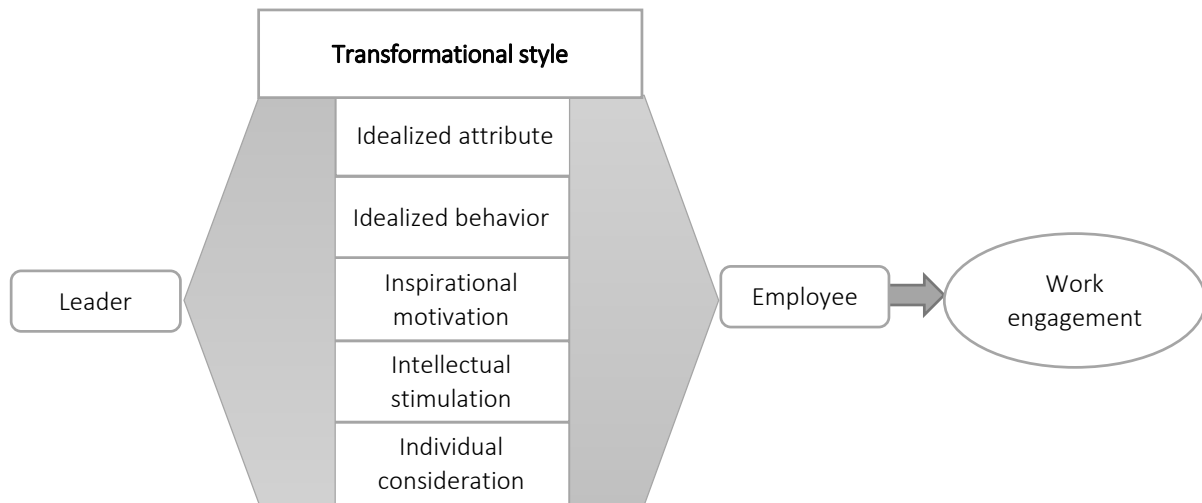
Walumbwa et al. (2007) argued that workers with enterprise pertinence react more positively with transformational style because workers believe in the common goal. Multinational companies are using best practices and knowledge sharing to improve enterprise pertinence and employee development (Tsai et al., 2017). Harter et al. (2009) and Zhu et al. (2009) showed that engaged employees lead to better performance, efficiency, and long-term enterprise advantage. An engaged employee is bound with the organization, gives the extra mile for the job, feels passion and satisfaction about the company, and lives organizational values.

It is found that transformational style is positively related to work engagement and brings better business outcomes (Datche & Mukulu, 2015; Dumdum et al., 2013; Dvir et al., 2002; Kirkpatrick



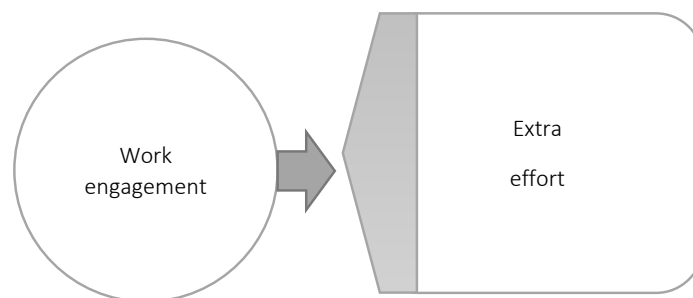
Note: Independent variables: transformational, transactional, and passive-avoidance styles. Dependent variables: work engagement.

Figure 1. Conceptual framework



Note: Independent variables: idealized attribute, idealized behavior, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individual consideration. Dependent variables: work engagement.

Figure 2. Parallel Framework



Note: Independent variables: work engagement. Dependent variables: extra effort.

Figure 3. Parallel Framework expansion

& Locke, 1996; Walumbwa & Lawler, 2003; Zhu et al., 2009). Based on the literature review, a conceptual framework was created (Figure 1).

Secondly, an in-depth framework was created for all the transformational behaviors, work engagement, and extra effort (Figure 2 and Figure 3).

## 2. AIMS

The study aims to clarify whether transformational style has a better positive impact on job engagement versus transactional and passive-avoidance styles. In addition, the aim is to determine which transformational behavior has a stronger significance relationship with work engagement and, finally, to which extent an engaged employee is related to extra effort. By addressing these three questions, the study seeks to identify the keys that could increase team engagement from a leader or manager stance.

## 3. METHODOLOGY

The overall study used the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) developed by Bass and Avolio (2004) to assess leadership style and extra effort perceptions, as well as Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES-17) to determine engagement perception. MLQ and UWES surveys (Microsoft forms – 56 questions) were administered to employees of diverse nationalities at different companies. Twenty questions were assessed to evaluate the transformational 5I's behaviors (four questions for each behavior), eight questions were assessed for transactional, and eight more for passive-avoidance. Moreover, three questions were defined to determine extra effort. Finally, UWES-17 survey was composed of seventeen questions.

The sample of the study, which includes 167 respondents, is rather balanced in gender (56% male, 44% female) and is relatively young; 75% of the respondents were born after 1980. This workforce also has a high level of education: 35.3% have a bachelor's degree, 56.3% have a master's degree and 1.2% have a doctorate. Also, workers from the study have a certain level of previous working experience with different companies as well as stability in their present company; 67% of the respondents have worked in at least more than 3 companies. The country with more respondents is Spain (52).

The data collected were transferred to SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) software to run the analyses. Mean calculation, bivariate correlation, and multiple regressions analysis were assessed to understand the perception and relation of the leadership behaviors on work engagement.

Cronbach's alpha was used to evaluate the scale of reliability and consistency. In the present study, all the variables were showing an alpha above 71%, meaning the model was reliable, the transformational leadership construct or scale has a Cronbach's alpha of .95 or 95%. Transactional has a Cronbach's alpha of 71%, the passive-avoidance style has an alpha of 83%, and extra effort 80%. Finally, work engagement had an alpha of 92%.

## 4. RESULTS

Table 1 displays the mean calculation of the perceived leadership styles in the companies, the work engagement, and extra effort by the employees. Three main types of leadership were assessed: the transformational, the transactional, and the passive-avoidance leadership styles.

**Table 1.** Mean and SD analysis of transformational, transactional, passive-avoidance, work engagement, and extra effort

Source: Authors' elaboration.

Dimension	N	Mean	S.D
Transformational	167	3.67	.81
Transactional	167	3.30	.64
Passive-avoidance	167	1.99	.80
Work engagement	167	5.39	.87
Extra effort	167	3.64	1.0

Table 2 presents the results of bivariate correlation based on Pearson's correlation statistics. Transformational, transactional and extra effort are strongly and positively correlated with work engagement ( $p < .01$ ). On the other hand, passive-avoidance leadership is strongly and negatively correlated with work engagement ( $p < .01$ ).

**Table 2.** Bivariate correlation analysis: leadership styles, extra effort and work engagement ( $N = 167$ )

Source: Authors' elaboration.

Dimension	Work engagement	
	Pearson	Sig. (bilateral)
Transformational	.467 <sup>a</sup>	.000
Transactional	.364 <sup>a</sup>	.000
Passive-avoidance	-.240 <sup>a</sup>	.002
Extra effort	.456 <sup>a</sup>	.000

Note: *a* means correlation is significant at the .01 level (2-tailed).

Multiple regression was done to evaluate the prediction of leadership styles (independent variables) on work engagement (dependent variable). Table 3 presents a summary of the model in which the item of interest is adjusted  $R^2$  statistics, which is .22.

**Table 3.** Regression analysis,  $R^2$  statistics (leadership styles and work engagement)

Source: Authors' elaboration.

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. error of estimate
1	.483 <sup>a</sup>	.233	.219	.771

Table 4 presents the analysis of ANOVA results, also known as model fit. It is important to highlight that the results show that F-statistics is  $p < .01$ , meaning the model has the power to predict work engagement from leadership style scores.

**Table 4.** Model fit results, ANOVA<sup>a</sup> (leadership styles and work engagement)

Source: Authors' elaboration.

Model		Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	29.536	3	9.845	16.534	.000 <sup>b</sup>
	Residual	97.062	163	.595		
	Total	126.599	166			

Note: *a* means predictors: (constant), passive-avoidance, transactional, transformational, *b* means dependent variable: work engagement.

**Table 5.** Regressions coefficients (leadership styles and work engagement)

Source: Authors' elaboration.

Model		Unstandardized coefficients		Standardized coefficients	t	Sig.	Collinearity statistics	
		B	Std. error	Beta			Tolerance	VIF
1	(Constant)	3.393	.443		7.654	.000		
	Transformational	.387	.103	.360	3.776	.000	.517	1.936
	Transactional	.204	.114	.152	1.792	.075	.657	1.521
	Passive-avoidance	-.045	.086	-.042	-5.25	.600	.746	1.341

Note: *a* means a dependent variable: work engagement.

**Table 6.** Regression coefficients (extra effort and work engagement)

Source: Authors' elaboration.

Model		Unstandardized coefficients		Standardized coefficients	T	Sig.	Collinearity statistics	
		B	Std. error	Beta			Tolerance	VIF
1	(Constant)	.679	.456		1.490	.138		
	Work engagement	.549	.083	.456	6.590	.000	1.000	1.000

Note: *a* means a dependent variable: extra effort.

Table 5 presents the results of the coefficients of the regression model. Firstly, these results show that transformational leadership significantly encourages a positive increase in work engagement, standardized  $\beta = .36$ , ( $p < .01$ ). Lastly, the transactional leadership style and the passive-avoidance style are not conclusive ( $p > .01$ ). Multicollinearity statistics show tolerance figures ranging from .51 to .74, while variation inflation factors (VIF) ranged from 1.34 to 1.93. Figures suggest that multicollinearity is not suspected amongst the independent variable. (Tolerance  $> .1$ , VIF  $< 10.0$ ).

Table 6 presents the results of the coefficients of the regression model for extra effort and work engagement. Firstly, these results show that the work engagement significantly encourages a positive increase in extra effort, standardized  $\beta = .55$ , ( $p < .01$ ).

Table 7 presents the results of bivariate correlation based on Pearson's correlation statistics. All transformational behaviors (5I's) are strongly and positively correlated with work engagement ( $p < .01$ ). The most correlated is idealized behavior.

The study shows that there is a remarkable positive relationship between transformational style (MLQ 5x-Short) and employee engagement (UWES-17). These results are aligned with several pieces of evidence, which link transformational style and employee engagement (Breevaart et al., 2014; Ghadi et



**Table 7.** Bivariate correlation analysis: transformational behaviors and work engagement ( $N = 167$ )

Source: Authors' elaboration.

Dimension	Work engagement	
	Pearson	Sig. (bilateral)
Idealized attributes	.347 <sup>a</sup>	.000
Idealized behavior	.454 <sup>a</sup>	.000
Inspirational motivation	.434 <sup>a</sup>	.000
Intellectual stimulation	.434 <sup>a</sup>	.000
Individual consideration	.412 <sup>a</sup>	.000

Note: *a* means correlation is significant at the .01 level (2-tailed).

al., 2013; Kovjanic et al., 2013; Raja, 2012; Song et al., 2012; Vincent-Höper et al., 2012). The present study contributes to leadership theories that aim to acknowledge the positive impact between transformational style and work engagement. Moreover, correlation and regressions analyses revealed that work engagement significantly boosts a positive increase in employees' extra effort to run the extra mile. Finally, the last correlational analysis revealed that idealized behavior was the most related to work engagement.

Based on the current study, leaders of multinational companies may need to incorporate transformational behaviors. Therefore, it is vital for managers to increase their work passion and vision, thus keeping a contagious attitude and cheerful spirit. By encouraging teams to trust in their capabilities and skills, leaders and managers can proactively support teams to overcome challenges and obstacles, and consequently create a place where new ideas are welcome.

## CONCLUSION

The first aim of the current study was to determine the relationship between leadership styles and employee engagement. Based on the current findings, the paper concludes that the transformational leadership style has a significant positive influence on work engagement. On the other hand, transactional and passive-avoidance styles could not be validated. Leaders and managers need to improve their ability to bring high levels of trust, promote intelligence, bring questioning to the table, use continuous learning and clear measurement of goals if they want to increase work engagement.

The second aim was to determine which transformational behavior is the most related to work engagement. Results also show that idealized behavior is the most correlated, however, the study does not appreciate a significant difference between other transformational behaviors and consequently cannot be firmly validated. Leaders who demonstrate high moral standards and principles that share professional-related or personal-related values or beliefs may tend to have a higher engagement with their teams.

The last aim was to determine whether an engaged employee is related to extra effort, and based on the current findings, the study concludes that there is a positive relationship between engagement and an employee who runs an extra mile (extra effort), meaning a higher engagement would lead to a higher effort. A suggestion for future studies should be to validate the influence of transactional and passive-avoidance styles and also to corroborate if idealized behavior has a higher impact on work engagement versus other transformational behaviors.

To wrap it all up, the study concludes that if a leader or manager desires to improve employee engagement, the leader should incorporate all the described transformational behaviors and avoid other styles, which may lead to an unknown level of engagement. Leaders, who desire better results and outcomes, should understand their leadership style and identify the level of engagement of their team, find the principal causes and implement transformational behavioral approaches. The current study demonstrates why transformational behaviors are the keys for a leader to increase employee engagement and, ultimately, better business outcomes.

## AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Conceptualization: Marc Valldeneu.

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Formal analysis: Marc Valldeneu.

Funding acquisition: Marc Valldeneu.

Investigation: Marc Valldeneu.

Methodology: Marc Valldeneu.

Project administration: Marc Valldeneu.

Resources: Marc Valldeneu.

Software: Marc Valldeneu.

Supervision: Marc Valldeneu, Xavier Ferras, Elisenda Tarrats-Pons.

Validation: Marc Valldeneu, Xavier Ferras, Elisenda Tarrats-Pons.

Visualization: Marc Valldeneu.

Writing – original draft: Marc Valldeneu.

Writing – review & editing: Marc Valldeneu, Xavier Ferras, Elisenda Tarrats-Pons.

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