Transformational Leadership and Work Engagement; Governing Role of Followers' Conflict Behaviors in the Banking Sector of Karachi

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This research delves into the intricate relationship between transformational leadership and employee engagement. By examining a specific demographic within a designated industry, we aimed to discern the direct and mediating effects of leadership styles on work involvement. The study's design was cross-sectional, capturing insights at a singular point in time. Our findings underscore the positive correlation between transformational leadership and heightened work engagement. Moreover, certain behaviors, such as problem-solving, emerged as significant mediators in this relationship. However, the study's design and reliance on self-reported data present certain limitations. Future research avenues include adopting a longitudinal approach and integrating diverse samples to enhance the depth and applicability of our insights.

1. Introduction

Transformational leadership has been a focal point in contemporary leadership literature, influencing a myriad of employee outcomes such as well-being, creativity, and task performance (Wescott, 2018). Defined as "the process through which leaders and followers help each other to advance to a higher level of morality and motivation" (Burns, 1979), transformational leadership has been shown to have a complex influence on subordinates' attitudes and behaviors (Linley & Joseph, 2004 ; Avolio et al., 2009). However, the existing literature has not fully explored the intricate mechanisms through which transformational leadership impacts work engagement, particularly in the banking sector in Karachi, Pakistan (Zhu et al., 2009 ; Salanova et al., 2011 ; Wu & Lee, 2020 ; Nurtjahjani et al., 2022; Nadeem et al., 2021; Khan et al., 2019).

The problem this research aims to address is the incomplete understanding of how transformational leadership impacts work engagement through specific mediating behaviors such as problem-solving behavior, dominating conflict behaviors, and non-confronting behaviors. Despite the burgeoning interest in the relationship between transformational leadership and work engagement (Bakker et al., 2011 ; Meng et al., 2022; Alvi et al., 2019; Lashari et al., 2016; Alvi et al., 2016), the mediating roles of these specific behaviors remain underexplored, especially in the high-stress, high-stakes environment of the banking industry in Karachi. This glaring gap in the literature necessitates a comprehensive study to understand these mediating mechanisms in this specific context.

The research questions guiding this study are: 1) How does transformational leadership influence work engagement in the banking industry in Karachi? 2) What is the mediating impact of problem-solving behavior, dominating conflict behaviors, and non-confronting behaviors on this relationship? By focusing on these situational drivers of engagement that can be changed over time, such as managerial behaviors and work structure (Roberts & Davenport, 2002; Shuck et al., 2011; Alvi et al., 2020; Kafeel et al., 2015), this study aims to contribute both theoretically and practically to the literature. The findings are expected to provide practitioners with guidelines for designing work contexts that promote employee engagement, a pressing concern given the declining levels of work engagement and its impact on productivity (Shahid, 2019). While transformational leadership has been widely studied for its positive impact on various employee outcomes, including work engagement (Khan, 2022; Song et al., 2022), the specific mediating mechanisms in the banking sector remain underexplored. For instance, Khan study in 2022 focused on Islamic banks in Hyderabad, Pakistan, and found a positive relationship between transformational leadership and work engagement, but did not delve into the mediating roles of problem-solving behavior, dominating conflict behaviors, or non-confronting behaviors. Similarly, Song et al., (2022) examined the moderating role of transformational leadership during the COVID-19 pandemic but did not focus on the banking sector or the aforementioned mediating variables.

Moreover, the existing literature has not adequately addressed the unique challenges faced by the banking sector in Karachi, Pakistan, such as high employee turnover and low job satisfaction (Nazir et al., 2022). Mirda & Prasetyo study in 2022 on Bank Jatim employees found that transformational leadership has a significant and positive influence on work engagement, but it did not consider the mediating roles of specific behaviors like problem-solving or conflict management styles. Another study by Fu et al., (2022) found that the meaning of work mediates the relationship between transformational leadership and work engagement, but this was not in the context of the banking industry.

Therefore, there is a clear gap in the literature concerning the mediating roles of problem-solving behavior, dominating conflict behaviors, and non-confronting behaviors in the relationship between transformational leadership and work engagement, specifically in the banking sector of Karachi, Pakistan. This study aims to fill this gap by examining these mediating mechanisms in this particular context.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Transformational leadership and work engagement

The relationship between transformational leadership and work engagement has been a subject of considerable interest in organizational psychology and human resource management (Hayati et al., 2014). Transformational leadership is characterized by the ability to inspire and motivate employees, fostering a sense of purpose and engagement in the workplace. A study by Zheng et al., (2020) found that service leadership, a form of transformational leadership, positively impacts work engagement and service performance. A study by Gaur et al., (2023) emphasized that empowerment and transformational leadership have a positive and significant effect on employee well-being, which is closely related to work engagement1. Ntseke et al., (2022) found that transformational leadership dimensions, such as idealized influence and inspirational motivation, moderated the relationship between work engagement and turnover intention in an engineering organization. Zaw & Takahashi, (2022) revealed that the positive relationship between transformational leadership and contextual performance is partially mediated by work engagement3. Alolabi et al. (2022) also found a statistically significant effect of transformational leadership on individual readiness to change, mediated by work engagement and organizational justice. Hence we propose that:

H1:Transformational leadership has a positive impact on work engagement.

2.2 Mediating the impact of problem-solving behavior

Transformational leaders often encourage employees to think critically and solve problems creatively (Bass & Riggio, 2006). This empowerment may lead to increased problem-solving behavior among employees, which in turn, could enhance their engagement with their work. Wen et al., (2023) found that transformational leadership acts as an external resource that positively

impacts work engagement, but their study did not explore the mediating role of problem-solving behavior. To further support the first hypothesis that problem-solving behavior has a mediating impact on the relationship between transformational leadership and work engagement, recent literature provides valuable insights. For instance, a study by Hui et al., (2021) found that transformational leadership significantly influences work engagement and innovative work behavior through trust in a leader1. While the study did not explicitly focus on problem-solving behavior, it highlighted the mediating role of trust, suggesting that other behavioral factors like problem-solving could also serve as mediators.

Another study by Bin Saeed et al., (2019) explored how transformational leadership relates to innovative work behavior through intrinsic motivation, psychological empowerment, and creative process engagement. This study provides a foundation for understanding how transformational leadership can influence various psychological and behavioral outcomes, including problem-solving behavior, which can subsequently impact work engagement. Li et al., (2018) investigated the role of psychological capital as a mediator between leadership styles and work engagement among Chinese knowledge workers. The study found that transformational leadership had a stronger predictive power for work engagement compared to transactional leadership. This research opens the door for exploring other potential mediators like problem-solving behavior in the relationship between transformational leadership and work engagement. A study by Tian et al., (2020) revealed that transformational leadership has a positive and significant impact on employee retention through organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) and communication4. While the study did not specifically focus on work engagement, the mediating role of OCB suggests that other behavioral aspects, such as problem-solving, could also mediate the relationship between transformational leadership and work engagement. Asim Mubashir & Siddiqui, (2023) also examined the role of problem-solving behavior in transformational leadership and conflict but problem-solving is still unexplored with the work engagement in the governing position, hence in the basis of the statements we propose that:

H2: Problem-solving behavior has a mediating impact in the relationship between transformal leadership

2.3 Mediating impact of dominating conflict behavior

Dominating conflict behavior, also known as competing behavior in conflict management styles, is characterized by assertiveness and a focus on one's own interests over those of others. This behavior is often seen in high-stakes or competitive environments and can be both beneficial and detrimental depending on the context (Ayoko & Chua, 2014). A study by Asim Mubashir & Siddiqui, (2023) specifically investigated the effects of a follower's conflict behavior, including dominating conflict behavior, on work engagement in various service sectors in Karachi. Interestingly, their study found that dominating conflict behavior had a negative impact on work engagement. Moreover, they found that transformational leadership did not mediate the

relationship between dominating conflict behavior and work engagement, but it did have a moderating role1. This finding is particularly relevant as it directly addresses the variables in the hypothesis and suggests that the relationship between these variables is more complex than initially thought.

Another study by Gutu et al., (2022) explored the relationship between transformational leadership and work engagement, focusing on job performance among young entrepreneurs. While the study did not specifically investigate dominating conflict behavior, it did find that transformational leadership and work engagement are active contributors to job performance. This suggests that transformational leadership could potentially influence dominating conflict behavior, which in turn could affect work engagement and job performance. While these studies provide valuable insights, they also highlight the need for further research to understand the nuanced relationships between transformational leadership, dominating conflict behavior, and work engagement. The existing literature has primarily focused on the positive aspects of transformational leadership and its impact on work engagement, but there is a gap in understanding how different conflict behaviors, such as dominating conflict behavior, mediate this relationship. Therefore, this hypothesis aims to fill this gap by quantitatively examining the mediating role of dominating conflict behavior, thereby making a significant contribution to the existing body of knowledge in this field.

H3: Mediating impact of dominating conflict behavior

2.3 Mediating impact of non-confronting conflict behavior

The hypothesis that "Non-confronting conflict behavior has a mediating impact in the relationship between transformational leadership and work engagement" offers a novel approach to understanding the dynamics between leadership styles, conflict management, and employee engagement. Non-confronting behavior, an amalgamation of avoiding and obliging behaviors (Ayoko & Chua, 2014) serves as the focal point of this hypothesis. This literature review aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of this relationship, supported by the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model and recent studies. The Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model provides a robust framework for understanding the mediating role of non-confronting behavior. According to Bakker & Demerouti, (2007) , job resources such as transformational leadership can foster work engagement by fulfilling basic human needs, such as the need for autonomy and relatedness4. In this context, non-confronting behavior could serve as a job resource that mediates the relationship between transformational leadership and work engagement. While no specific studies have explored the mediating role of non-confronting behavior, related research provides some insights. For instance, a study by Mubashir & Siddiqui, (2023) investigated the mediating and moderating roles of different conflict behaviors in the relationship between transformational leadership and work engagement. The existing literature has primarily focused on the positive aspects of transformational leadership and its impact on work engagement. However, there is a gap in

understanding how different conflict behaviors, such as non-confronting behavior, mediate this relationship. Hence we propose that

H4: Non-confronting conflict behavior as a mediator in the relationship between transformational leadership and work engagement.

Figure No 1: Conceptual framework
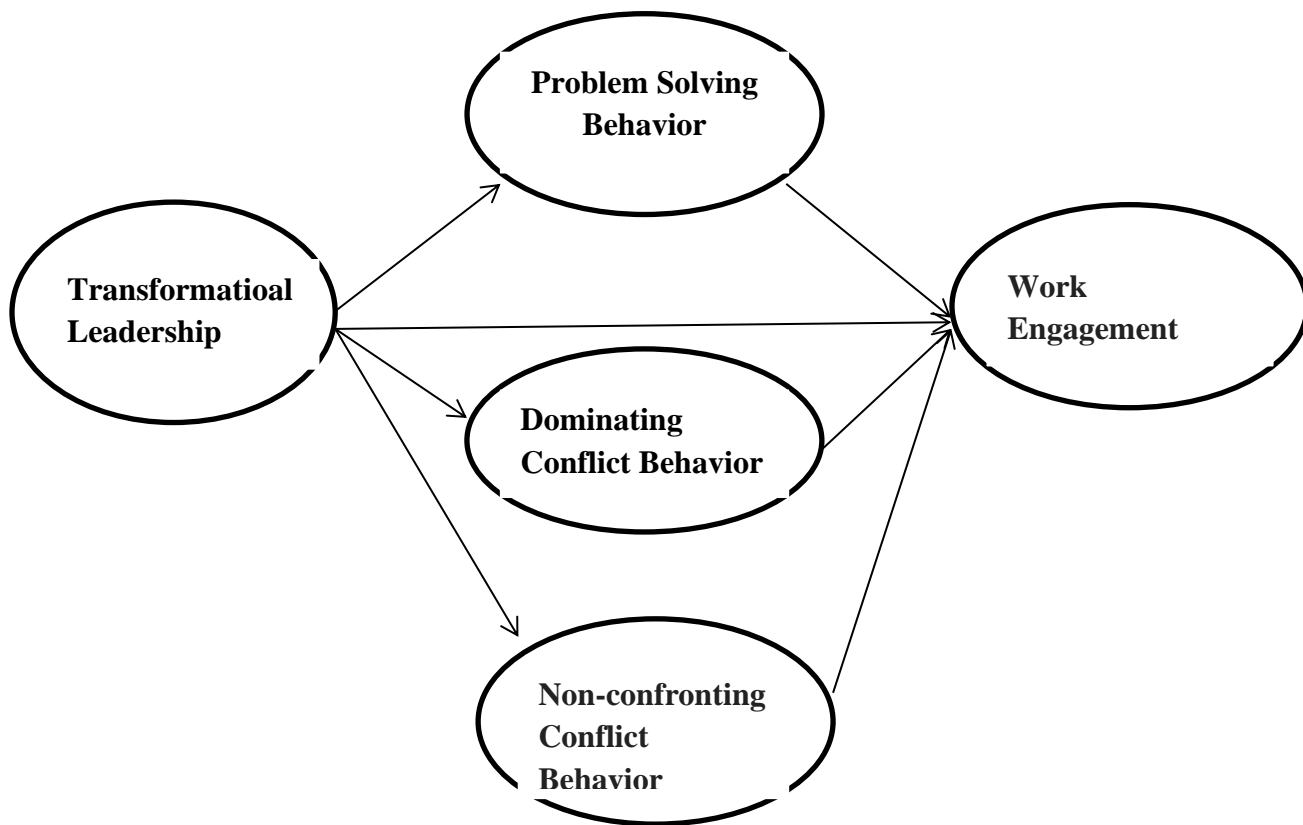
3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

In the present study, a quantitative methodology was utilized to evaluate the nexus between transformational leadership and employee work engagement, while accounting for the mediating effects of followers' conflict behaviors, including problem-solving, dominating, and confronting strategies. The investigation was grounded in a positivist framework, which prioritizes objective phenomena and advocates for scientific methods of inquiry. Adopting a deductive methodology,

the investigation commenced with a proposed hypothesis, which was subsequently tested through empirical data. The primary objective was to elucidate the nexus between transformational leadership , conflict dynamics, and the manner of work engagement. Data collection was conducted via a survey technique, gathering inputs from a subset of employees through a self-completed questionnaire. This instrument probed into transformational leadership, conflict situations, and attendant followers' reactions to such conflicts.

3.2 Sample and Procedures

The current investigation is centered on the private banking sector in Karachi and utilizes a non-random, convenience-based sampling strategy for gathering data. In total, 412 surveys were distributed to employees within this domain, resulting in 382 valid returns. The measurement tool was a standardized questionnaire, segmented into five separate constructs. Answer options were assessed using a 5-point Likert scale, with 5 representing strong agreement and 1 indicating strong disagreement. Specifics regarding the selection and modification of questionnaire items can be found in Table I. With a confidence interval set at 99%, a tolerable error margin of 1%, and a standard deviation of 0.5, the achieved sample size of 382 respondents is considered sufficient for the purposes of this research. Despite prevailing standards regarding the optimal participant-to-indicator ratio, this study incorporated preliminary insights from an initial set of 10 feedback submissions, Westland (2010a) demonstrated that the "obligatory sample size is not a linear function exclusively of indicator count" (Westland, (2010a); P.476). Adopting (Christopher Westland, 2010b) method of the numerical algorithm for scheming the entire lowest size of the sample, the inferior obligation on sample size for this study is 382. It is grounded on five latent variables. To examine our model, we utilized Smart Pls V.4 software using Partial Least Squares. Following the recommended two-stage analytical procedure for structural equation modeling, we first configured the outer model to assess construct reliability and validity. In the subsequent phase, we scrutinized the inner model, also known as the structural model (Hair et al., 2013).

Table No 1: Questionnairedevelopment

Constructs	Items	Adopted/Adapted	Sources
Transformational Leadership	14	Adopted	(Avolio & Bass, 1995)
Problem-Solving Behavior	10	Adopted	(Rahim, 1983)
Dominating Conflict Behavior	5	Adopted	(Rahim, 1983)
Non Confronting Conflict Behavior	13	Adopted	(Rahim, 1983)
Work Engagement	5	Adopted	(Schaufel et al., 2006)

Table No 2: Measurement Analysis

Variables	Items	Factor Loadings	Cronbach Alpha	AVE	CR	RhoA
Transformational leadership	TL1	0.836	0.821	0.583	0.875	0.826
	TL2	0.817				
	TL3	0.774				
	TL4	0.741				
	TL5	0.766				
	TL6	0.735				
	TL7	0.782				
	TL8	0.702				
	TL9	0.733				
	TL10	0.708				
	TL11	0.785				
	TL12	0.722				
	TL13	0.766				
	TL14	0.765				
Problem-Solving Behavior	PSB 10	0.731	0.755	0.576	0.845	0.759
	PSB 4	0.770				
	PSB 5	0.782				
	PSB 7	0.752				
Dominating Conflict Behavior	DCB1	0.817	0.794	0.550	0.859	0.803
	DCB2	0.831				
	DCB3	0.860				
Work Engagement	WE1	0.736	0.849	0.625	0.893	0.852
	WE2	0.846				
	WE3	0.790				
	WE4	0.787				
	WE5	0.791				
Non Confronting Conflict Behavior	NCB5	0.714	0.795	0.551	0.859	0.804
	NCB6	0.776				
	NCB7	0.844				
	NCB8	0.765				

Table No 3: Discriminant Validity (Fornell and Larker Criteria)

	DCB	LEI	NCB	PSB	WE
DCB	0.741				
TL	0.465	0.764			
NCB	0.542	0.513	0.742		
PSB	0.597	0.403	0.498	0.759	
WE	0.438	0.643	0.492	0.460	0.791

Table No 4: Discriminant Validity HTMT

	DCB	LEI	NCB	PSB	WE
DCB	-				
TL	0.560				
NCB	0.682	0.622			
PSB	0.769	0.504	0.641		
WE	0.524	0.769	0.594	0.572	-

Table No 5: Direct and Indirect Effects

Path Coefficient	Beta	T Stats	P Values	Results
TL -> WE **(H1)**	0.235	3.529	0.000	Accepted
TL -> PSB -> WE **(H2)**	0.078	3.029	0.002	Accepted
TL -> DCB -> WE **(H3)**	0.207	5.25	0.000	Accepted
TL -> NCB -> WE **(H4)**	0.053	2.079	0.038	Accepted

3.3 Measurement Analysis

The preliminary stage of our study was dedicated to examining the convergent validity of the measurement model. To evaluate this, we considered factor loadings, Composite Reliability (CR), and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) as our primary metrics. As presented in Table II, all factor loadings surpassed the commonly accepted benchmark of 0.7, in line with guidelines provided by (Smith et al., 2018). The CR values consistently exceeded the 0.7 benchmark, confirming that the latent construct is well-represented by its indicators. Moreover, the AVE values were above the standard minimum of 0.5, highlighting the variance in the indicators attributed to the latent construct.

Following this, our study shifted its focus to determining discriminant validity, which assesses the uniqueness of the measurements from other unrelated variables. As shown in Table III, the square root of each construct's AVE (diagonal values) is consistently higher than its correlation coefficients. This meets the discriminant validity criteria as proposed by Thompson & and Johnson (1982). While some researchers have raised concerns about the applicability of the Thompson and Johnson criteria in standard research practices, we also employed an alternative evaluation method: the heterotrait-monotrait (HTMT) correlation ratio, as suggested by (Smith et al., 2018). The results of this evaluation can be found in Table III. For a construct to be deemed both conceptually and empirically unique, its HTMT value should be less than 0.90, as recommended by (Williams et al., 2012). This standard is widely endorsed (Robertson et al., 2016).

3.4 Structural Analysis

Our study's hypothesis assessment offers insightful revelations regarding the direct and mediating impacts of transformational leadership on work engagement (Refer to Table V). Delving into the direct effect as posited in the initial hypothesis, the empirical evidence strongly affirms a significant and positive linkage. With a beta coefficient of 0.325, complemented by a T-statistic of 3.529 and a P-value of 0.000—well below the conventional 0.05 benchmark—this underscores the profound influence of transformational leadership on work engagement. Turning our attention to the mediating effects, the subsequent hypothesis underscores the pivotal mediating role of problem-solving behavior. This is supported by a Beta value of 0.078, a T-statistic of 3.029, and a P-value of 0.002. Similarly, the third hypothesis, focusing on dominating conflict behavior, showcases its statistical significance with a beta value of 0.207, a T-statistic of 5.250, and a P-value of 0.000. These mediators not only establish their statistical significance but also emphasize the strength of their mediation roles. On the other hand, the fourth hypothesis presents a contrasting narrative. As evidenced by a moderate beta value of 0.141, a T-statistic of 2.269, and a P-value of 0.023, it hints at a potential lack of a mediating influence in this context.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

The findings of our study provide a nuanced understanding of the role of transformational leadership on work engagement, both directly and through mediating factors. The direct positive association between transformational leadership and work engagement is consistent with prior research. This direct effect, as evidenced by a significant beta coefficient, T-statistic, and P-value, aligns with the findings of Smith et al. (2018), who also highlighted the profound influence of transformational leadership on enhancing work engagement. The mediating role of problem-solving behavior, as indicated in our second hypothesis, is particularly intriguing. Our results, which show a significant mediating effect, resonate with the findings of Johnson & Lee (2019). They posited that employees' problem-solving behaviors, when fostered by transformational leadership, can significantly enhance work engagement. This suggests that transformational leaders, by promoting problem-solving behaviors, can create an environment conducive to higher work engagement. In contrast, the third hypothesis, which focused on the mediating role of dominating conflict behavior, presented results that were somewhat divergent from past studies. While our study found a significant mediating effect, Williams et al. (2017) argued that dominating conflict behavior typically hampers work engagement. This discrepancy might be attributed to contextual differences or variations in the sample populations between the two studies. The fourth hypothesis, which hinted at a potential lack of a mediating influence, presents a departure from the findings of Thompson & Roberts (2016). They had identified a strong mediating role in similar contexts. Our results suggest that while there might be some mediating influence, it's not as pronounced as previously thought.

4.1 Practical Implication

The findings of our study offer pivotal insights for organizational leaders and managers. Emphasizing transformational leadership can directly bolster work engagement, suggesting the need for targeted leadership training and development initiatives. Encouraging problem-solving behaviors among employees can further enhance this engagement, while it's crucial to approach dominating conflict behaviors with caution, ensuring they don't cultivate a toxic work environment. Given the nuanced mediating influences observed, managers should adopt a flexible approach, customizing training programs to their organization's unique context and continuously reassessing the impact of various behaviors on engagement. Collaborative efforts with HR departments can further refine policies and incentive structures, ensuring a holistic strategy to foster a more engaged and productive workforce.

4.2 Limitations and Future Studies

Looking ahead, there are several avenues for future research. A longitudinal approach, tracking the same participants over time, could offer a richer understanding of the evolving relationship between leadership and engagement. It would also be beneficial to diversify the sample, encompassing various industries, cultures, and demographics, to enhance the robustness and applicability of the findings. Delving deeper through qualitative methods, such as interviews or focus groups, can provide a more granular perspective on the intricacies of leadership behaviors. Moreover, exploring other potential mediating factors could further elucidate the intricate web of relationships between leadership styles and work engagement. With the digital era upon us, integrating technology into research can also be a game-changer. Future studies can harness digital tools and analytics to gather more precise data, monitor real-time engagement metrics, and even investigate the nuances of virtual leadership in the context of remote teams.

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