



How Employees' Engagement Mediates Relationship between Transformational Leadership and Employee Performance: Case of Private Universities in Mongolia

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ABSTRACT

In today's competitive environment, effective leadership requires quickly adapting to situations, listening to and respecting others' opinions, incorporating them into one's actions, collaborating with others, and involving them in decision-making, rather than simply managing and controlling. This study explores the connection between transformational leadership, employee engagement, and employee performance in the context of two private universities in Mongolia. Using a sample of 114 employees, the research investigates how transformational leadership influences employee performance, with employee engagement acting as a mediator. Data were collected through surveys, and structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM) was employed to analyze the relationships among the variables. The results confirm that transformational leadership positively impacts employee performance and engagement, with employee engagement mediating the relationship between leadership style and performance. The study's findings indicate that fostering employee engagement through transformational leadership enhances both individual and organizational performance. Practical implications suggest that universities should prioritize leadership development programs focusing on transformational leadership qualities to improve employee performance. The research contributes to the growing literature on leadership and

employee performance, highlighting the importance of leadership in creating a work environment that promotes engagement and, ultimately, improved productivity.

Keywords: Leadership Style, Transformational leadership, Employee performance, Employee engagement.

INTRODUCTION

The uncertainty of the global marketplace is heightening organizational awareness, requiring continuous adaptation and active engagement at all levels [1]. Consequently, organizations face a growing demand for leaders who can navigate the complexities of the evolving global environment while effectively managing human resources. In today's competitive environment, organizations must maximize employee performance to achieve their strategic objectives [2] and leadership plays a decisive role in shaping subordinate performance [3].

As the understanding and perspective of leadership evolve alongside societal changes, researchers continue to explore pathways to effective leadership [4]. Leadership is a crucial factor in determining organizational success, with research demonstrating that leadership styles significantly influence every aspect of organizational functioning [5]. The style of leaders managing their teams profoundly and significantly influences organizational culture, employee satisfaction, and overall performance [6]. Therefore, comprehending the relationship between leadership style and employee performance is vital for management professionals and scholars. Many studies have consistently demonstrated a strong correlation between various leadership styles and employee performance, emphasizing the significant impact of leadership style on key outcomes such as creativity, motivation, satisfaction, productivity, and overall performance [7, 8]. Leadership style has a profound impact on employee performance and effective leadership styles boost productivity and foster innovation [9, 8]. Therefore, this study aims to explore how managers' transformational leadership styles impact employee performance and whether employee engagement moderates this relationship.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Leadership Styles

A single, widely accepted definition or theory of leadership does not exist [10]. To date, we lack a comprehensive understanding of the relationship between leadership styles and leadership behaviors from a theoretical perspective. Specifically, there is no integrative framework that highlights the similarities and differences between these two concepts [11].

Leadership styles are shaped by individual and group interests, dependability, and values, which are 'managerial attitudes, behaviors, characteristics, and skills [12]. Leadership style refers to a specific management strategy and behavioral pattern exhibited by leaders within an organization, which in turn influences employee attitudes, behaviors, and performance [13]. In his research, Zulch [14] identified eight primary leadership styles: directive, bureaucratic, pacesetter, participative, visionary, coaching, laissez-faire, and affiliative. Transformational and transactional leadership are widely regarded as the most effective management and leadership strategies of the twenty-first century [15].

These leadership styles have both positive and negative effects on employee performance, productivity, engagement, and overall organizational effectiveness [16]. Although every leadership style has distinct advantages and disadvantages and influences employee relationships, attitudes, and performance in different ways, it is crucial to remember that the style of leadership must be suitable for the given circumstance. Leadership is responsible for innovating how a business operates, transforming existing processes and structures, and shaping employee behavior and work culture [2].

Transformational Leadership Style

According to Bass and Riggio [17], transformational leaders genuinely inspire and motivate their people to achieve unprecedented success while also fostering the development of their leadership abilities. By focusing on the needs and strengths of their employees and reducing the power gap between them, transformational leaders typically cultivate and maintain strong relationships with their staff [18].

Transformational leadership fosters positive employee performance by encouraging personal development and learning, including skill growth and career advancement. This approach can enhance performance, and reduce employee dissatisfaction, burnout, absenteeism, and turnover, while generating more creative, diverse, and effective ideas [19]. The ultimate goal of transformational leadership is to empower staff members to reach their full potential and work with integrity and enthusiasm toward a shared objective [20].

Transformational Leadership and Employee Performance

Extensive research has been conducted on the factors influencing employee performance. Among these factors, leadership style is one that has been shown to significantly impact employee performance [21].

Numerous theoretical and empirical studies have examined the effectiveness of transformational leadership, with many previous researches demonstrating that transformational leadership enhances employee performance [22, 23, 20, 24, 25, 26]. Employees under transformational leaders typically exhibit improved performance because they feel valued and empowered to contribute to the organization's objectives [27]. Transformational leadership enhances organizational performance by overcoming obstacles, promoting change, and fostering an environment that encourages team learning and adaptability [28].

Transformational leadership enhances employee autonomy, motivation, creativity, and organizational performance [22, 24]. Compared to other leadership styles, such as ethical leadership, authentic leadership, servant leadership, and transactional leadership [29], TFL has a stronger and more positive impact on employee performance due to its multifaceted nature, which incorporates ethical values [23]. Employee performance improves when transformational leaders support their staff in maintaining psychological well-being and job satisfaction [25]. In light of the review, we put out the following first hypothesis:

- H1: Transformational leadership style positively influences employee performance.

Transformational Leadership and Employee Engagement

Leadership styles that emphasize trust and communication enhance employee engagement [30]. Innovative work practices introduced by transformational leaders further boost productivity and employee engagement [20, 25, 31]. Transformational leadership has been positively associated with employee performance, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment. Transformational leaders cultivate strong relationships and a sense of belonging within the organization by genuinely caring for each employee. This positive sentiment, in turn, boosts employee engagement [32]. According to Nurtjahjani, Batilmurik, Puspita, and Fanggidae [33], transformational leaders foster employee engagement, and highly engaged employees are passionate, dedicated, motivated, and deeply immersed in their work. Transformational leadership approaches have a strong, positive impact on employee loyalty and engagement [34]. Based on the discussion, the following hypothesis is proposed:

- H2: Transformational leadership style positively influences employee engagement.

Employee Engagement and Employee Performance

The level of employee engagement directly impacts organizational performance. According to Bakker and Demerouti [35], engaged employees are more likely to demonstrate higher levels of innovation, take initiative, and contribute to the team's success. Furthermore, engaged employees are less likely to leave, reducing turnover and associated [36]. Studies have shown that employee engagement enhances both individual and team performance. Engaged employees not only improve their performance but also foster a productive work environment that boosts teamwork, creativity, and problem-solving skills [37]. This collective engagement plays a crucial role in achieving organizational goals and ensuring long-term success.

As employee engagement rises, job satisfaction and initiative improve, leading to reduced burnout, enhanced collaboration, and increased productivity among employees. Additionally, engaged employees are better equipped to overcome challenges and adapt to change, leading to improved long-term company performance. According to Jindain and Gilitwala [38], employee engagement plays a significant role in improving employee performance. As a result, the following hypothesis is proposed:

- H3: Employee engagement is significantly related to employee performance

The Role of Employee Engagement in Enhancing Performance

Employee engagement refers to the emotional commitment that employees have to their work, which directly impacts their performance and behavior [39]. One important determinant of how leadership styles transfer into real performance outcomes is employee engagement. Higher levels of initiative, innovation, and a stronger sense of accountability for their work are all characteristics of engaged employees. The organization's overall success is directly impacted by this conduct.

Researchers Buil et al. [23] concluded that the relationship between transformational leadership and job performance is mediated by employee engagement. Engaged employees are more emotionally invested in their work and experience higher job satisfaction. This leads to lower turnover rates, increased productivity, and improved teamwork. Furthermore, engaged employees are more capable of managing difficulties and adjusting to changes, contributing to the long-term sustainability of organizational performance. Lai et al. [25] found that the relationship between transformational leadership and job performance was partially mediated

by employee engagement. However, Ribeiro et al. [40] concluded that transformational leadership does not have a direct impact on job performance. On the other hand, transformational leadership enhances employee performance by fostering greater staff engagement [41, 20]. From the discussion above, the following hypothesis is proposed:

- H4: Employee engagement mediates the relationship between transformational leadership style and employee performance.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research Design, Population and Sample

The study investigates the connection between employee performance and transformational leadership style, as well as how employee engagement functions as a mediator in this relationship.

Employees of two private universities in Mongolia participated in the current study. The sample size was 113 and the overall population was 158 employee of two private university. The Krejcie and Morgan [42] table was used to calculate the sample size. A total of 114 complete surveys were obtained, indicating a 100.8% response rate. Participants were selected randomly from each university using simple random sampling.

The Questionnaire and Variables Measurement

The questionnaire was initially developed in English and then translated into Mongolian. A 5-point Likert scale was used to record all responses, with 1 indicating strongly disagree and 5 indicating strongly agree.

Transformational Leadership:

The Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ), developed by Bass and Avolio in 1990, was used to measure transformational leadership. The scale was adapted from Dai et al. [43] and consists of eight items. The Cronbach's alpha for transformational leadership ranged from 0.951, indicating strong reliability.

Employee Performance:

A five-item scale adapted from Ozer's [44] study was used to measure employee performance. The Cronbach's alpha for this scale ranged from 0.921, indicating strong reliability.

Employee Engagement:

An eight-item scale, modified from Croswell [45], was used to measure employee engagement. The Cronbach's alpha for this measure ranged from 0.886, indicating strong reliability.

RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Demographic Characteristics

Of the respondents, 75 (65.8%) were female and 39 (34.2%) were male. Regarding age, 23(20.2%) were between 21 and 30 years old, 51 (44.7)% were between 31 and 40, 28 (24.6%) were between 41 and 50, and 12 (10.5%) were over 51.

In terms of education, 19 (16.7%) had completed high school, 21 (18.4%) held a specialized degree, 28 (24.6%) had a bachelor's degree, 38 (33.3%) had a master's degree, and 8 (7%) held

a doctorate. Regarding years of work experience, 14 (12.3%) had less than a year, 54 (47.4%) had 1 to 10 years, 37 (32.5%) had 11 to 20 years, and 9 (7.9%) had more than 21 years. Structural equation modeling was used to validate the model using the Partial Least Squares (PLS) method and SmartPLS 4.1.0.9 software.

Model Fit Analysis

It is crucial to determine whether the proposed model is a valid structural equation model before testing the study hypotheses. In other words, the discriminant validity of the three primary variables was assessed using the model fit index. The results of the model fit analysis are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Result of Model Fit Analysis.

	Saturated model	Estimated model
SRMR	0.068	0.068
d_ULS	1.080	1.080
d_G	0.611	0.611
Chi-square	360.351	360.351
NFI	0.808	0.808

According to Henseler et al. [46], the model fit was assessed using the standardized root mean square residual (SRMR), with a value of less than 0.08 considered acceptable. Therefore, the SRMR value of 0.068 for the proposed model indicates its overall fit.

Measurement Validation

Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability (CR) were used to assess construct reliability, while the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) was used to evaluate convergent validity. Discriminant validity was assessed using the Fornell-Larcker criterion.

Table 2: Construct reliability and validity.

Variables	Loadings	Mean	SD	CR (>0.7)	AVE (>0.5)	α (>0.7)
Transformational Leadership (TFL)	.794-.888	3.472	.825	.951	.707	.941
Employee Performance (EP)	.767-.908	3.281	.831	.921	.701	.892
Employee Engagement (EE)	.717-.836	3.639	.781	.886	.565	.823

Note: SD, Std. Deviation; CR, Composite reliability; AVE, Average variance extracted; α, Cronbach's alpha.

The results in Table 2 indicate that all the three main constructs used in the present study met the criteria for reliability as the Cronbach's alpha values ranged from 0.823-0.941 while CR values ranged from 0.886-0.951 which is all above the required threshold of 0.7 [47]. Furthermore, the AVE values ranged from 0.565-0.707, which are all above the acceptable threshold value of 0.5, thus depicting acceptable levels of convergent validity for all the constructs [47].

Moreover, the Fornell-Larcker criterion was used to assess discriminant validity. According to Fornell and Larcker [48], the criterion is satisfied when the square root of each variable's AVE is greater than the correlations between constructs. As shown in Table 3, the square roots of the AVE values (bold figures) for all major constructs are greater than the corresponding inter-

construct correlations (bold figures). This indicates that discriminant validity has been achieved and that the Fornell-Larcker criterion has been satisfied.

Table 3: Fornell-Larcker criterion results.

	TFL	EP	EE
Transformational Leadership (TFL)	0.841		
Employee Performance (EP)	0.634	0.837	
Employee Engagement (EE)	0.645	0.631	0.752
*p<0.05; **p<0.01			

Hypothesis Testing

To examine and validate the hypotheses, Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) was employed. The study examined the relationships between the independent and dependent variables. All three hypotheses were confirmed, with all regression weights being positive and statistically significant ($p < 0.01$). The results are presented in Table 4.

Table 4: Research results in PLS-SEM.

Hypothesis	Path	Standardize Beta	Standard Error	t statistics	p-value	Remarks
H1	TFL→EP	0.337***	0.091	6.682	0.000	Accepted
H2	TFL→EE	0.645***	0.103	3.280	0.001	Accepted
H3	EE→EP	0.497***	0.120	3.318	0.001	Accepted
*p<0.05; **p<0.01						

The study hypothesized that H1 and H2 would show that transformational leadership positively influences employee performance and engagement. The findings of the study showed that transformational leadership has a positive and moderate effect on employee performance ($\beta = 0.337$, $p < 0.01$) and a positive and significant effect on employee engagement ($\beta = 0.645$, $p < 0.01$). Additionally, the study predicted that H3 would demonstrate a significant relationship between employee engagement and employee performance. The results of the study confirmed this, showing that employee engagement has a positive and significant effect on employee performance ($\beta = 0.497$, $p < 0.01$). Furthermore, the R^2 values indicated that 47.7% of the variance in employee engagement and 54.1% of the variance in employee performance were explained by the model.

Another objective of this study was to examine whether employee engagement mediates the relationship between transformational leadership and employee performance. Table 5 presents the mediation effects of the intervening variables, based on the assessment of the indirect effects of transformational leadership on employee performance.

Table 5: The Mediating Impact of Employee Engagement.

Hypothesis	Path	Direct effect	Indirect effect	Total effect
H4	TFL→EP → EE	0.337***	0.241***	0.578***
*p<0.05; **p<0.01				

The findings in Table 5 demonstrate that the relationship between transformative leadership and employee performance is fully mediated by employee engagement. The hypotheses are all

supported by the positive and statistically significant ($p < 0.01$) impacts of the pertinent variables (Beta coefficients), as indicated in Tables 4 and 5.

Discussion

The article explores the relationship between transformational leadership, employee engagement, and employee performance in the context of two private universities in Mongolia. It presents a comprehensive analysis of how leadership styles, specifically transformational leadership, impact employee performance, with employee engagement playing a critical mediating role.

Leadership Styles and Employee Performance:

One of the key takeaways from this research is the significant influence of transformational leadership on employee performance. This leadership style, which emphasizes motivation, inspiration, and the development of individuals, has been shown to enhance employee performance by fostering a positive and empowering work environment. Previous studies cited in the article align with these findings, reinforcing that transformational leadership not only boosts employee motivation and satisfaction but also leads to higher productivity and innovative outcomes [17, 20, 29, 24]. The positive influence of transformational leadership on employee performance is consistent across various industries, making it an essential strategy for organizations seeking to improve performance outcomes.

Employee Engagement as a Mediator:

The role of employee engagement as a mediator in the relationship between transformational leadership and employee performance is particularly noteworthy. The study found that transformational leadership significantly enhances employee engagement, which in turn leads to better performance outcomes. This finding aligns with Bakker and Demerouti's [35] assertion that engaged employees are more innovative and motivated, contributing to overall organizational success. Transformational leaders cultivate strong relationships with their employees, creating an environment of trust and commitment that increases employee engagement [43]. Engaged employees are more likely to take initiative, collaborate effectively, and exhibit higher levels of creativity, all of which contribute to improved organizational performance [37].

Moreover, the study's results confirm that employee engagement not only has a direct positive impact on performance but also serves as a critical intermediary in the relationship between leadership style and performance. This mediation effect strengthens the argument that leadership styles should focus on fostering employee engagement to drive performance, rather than simply focusing on direct leadership tactics.

Implications for Management and Future Research

The findings have several implications for management practice, particularly in how leaders can foster a culture of engagement to improve performance. Organizations should prioritize leadership development programs that equip managers with transformational leadership skills, such as motivation, mentoring, and empowering employees. By focusing on employee growth and fostering a sense of belonging, leaders can create a work environment where engagement thrives, ultimately enhancing productivity and organizational outcomes.

Future research could explore how different industries or organizational contexts might influence the relationship between transformational leadership, employee engagement, and performance. For instance, it would be valuable to compare how these dynamics play out in public versus private organizations or in different cultural contexts. Additionally, examining the long-term effects of transformational leadership and employee engagement on organizational success would provide further insights into the sustainability of these relationships.

Limitations

Despite its valuable contributions, this study has several important limitations. First, its focus on private Mongolian universities may limit the generalizability of findings to other educational contexts, particularly public institutions. Second, the study's reliance on self-reported data for measuring both employee performance and engagement introduces potential response bias. To enhance validity, subsequent studies should complement self-reports with objective performance metrics and multi-source feedback from supervisors, peers, and students. These methodological improvements would provide a more comprehensive and reliable assessment of the relationships identified in this research.

CONCLUSION

The influence of leadership styles on employee performance is substantial, but the mediating role of employee engagement is crucial in determining the strength of this impact. By understanding and leveraging the role of employee engagement, organizations can enhance employee performance and, ultimately, achieve greater success. Leadership is not just about giving direction—it's about inspiring, motivating, and fostering an environment where employees are committed to both their roles and the organizational goals they help achieve.

This study offers valuable insights into enhancing staff productivity in higher education. Additionally, it contributes to the growing body of literature on leadership and employee performance by emphasizing the pivotal role of transformational leadership and employee engagement.

It demonstrates that transformational leadership not only directly influences employee performance but also works through employee engagement to enhance organizational outcomes. When leaders involve staff in decision-making processes, it boosts engagement, which in turn enhances initiative and performance. The research highlights the direct impact of leadership style on employee performance, emphasizing the importance of creating an environment that encourages staff involvement to improve performance levels. Additionally, the study underscores the significance of both employee engagement and leadership style in driving organizational success, while also calling for further research in Mongolian universities.

Acknowledgments

The authors would like to thank all the participants who voluntarily took part in this study.

Interest Conflicts

The authors have no competing interests to declare that are relevant to the content of this article.

Informed Consent

All study participants provided informed consent before involvement in the study, following the study protocol approved by the institutional research board.

Funding Statement

No funds, grants, or other types of support were received for conducting the survey and preparation of this manuscript.

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