Role of Leadership in Employees' Work Engagement: Organizational Identification and Job Autonomy

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Abstract

Transformational leadership is a style of leadership that leads to transformation in the opinions and beliefs of followers. The behaviors of transformational leaders result in higher levels of follower commitment and engagement. Work engagement refers to followers' feelings regarding their work in terms of what their work means to them and to what extent they want to show full concentration. The present study examines the effect of transformational leadership on work engagement by focusing on the mediator roles of job autonomy and organizational identification. The study data was collected using questionnaires from 252 participants working in higher education. The data was analyzed using structural equation modeling. The results supported study hypotheses, demonstrating that transformational leadership had a positive effect on work engagement, and job autonomy and organizational identification fully mediated the relationship between transformational leadership and work engagement. The findings from this research specifically highlight the significant impact of job autonomy and organizational identification on work engagement within the context of leadership.

Keywords: job autonomy, leadership, organizational identification, transformational leadership, work engagement

1. Introduction

Because organizations seek motivated employees in order to be successful, leadership, which plays a vital role in organizational performance, transformation and modernization, is a popular topic of research (House, Spangler, & Woycke, 1991; Jones & Olken, 2005). Leadership has been discussed using different approaches; however, researchers have tended to focus mainly on Bass's theory of leadership (1985), a full-range theory that involves transformational, transactional and laissez-faire styles.

According to Bass's theory, transformational leadership is a style of leadership in which the leader transforms the followers' basic values, beliefs and attitudes, inspiring them to exhibit greater performance and exceed even their own expectations (Yukl, 1989). The transformational style of leadership concentrates on getting employees more involved in achieving their organizational targets (Bass, 1985) and is based on the inspirational power of the leader (Den Hartog, Koopman, & Van Muijen, 1997). Some components of leadership – such as the ability to make decisions regarding task scheduling and completion, performance assessment, support from the group and freedom to exercise capabilities—are particularly important for improving job-related resources (Piccolo & Colquitt, 2006). Consequently, such resources positively affect employee engagement (Breevaart, Bakker, & Demerouti, 2014).

Transformational leaders act as role models through 'idealized influence', resulting in greater employee contributions that in turn lead to enhanced employee engagement (Shamir, House, & Arthur, 1993). Transformational leaders also show 'individualized consideration', i.e., genuine concern for each employee, which gives employees a stronger sense of belonging to their organization (Zhu, Avolio, & Walumbwa, 2009). This enhanced sense of belonging increases employee engagement, as employees wish to exhibit more affirmative attitudes in response to such consideration and support (Saks, 2006). Studies have shown that employees feel more engaged with their work when they are supported, inspired and skillfully supervised

because they feel their employers are creating a challenging and involving work environment (Shamir et al., 1993).

Theoretically, if a leader's actions inspire confidence in his or her followers, their sense of identification with their company will be magnified because they know that they are honored and appreciated by their leader (Tyler, 1997). In this sense, organizational identification is positively affected by transformational leaders and their strong ability to make employees adopt the corporate mission within their own identity and coach them into a collective spirit, resulting in identification with the company (Kark & Shamir, 2002). Given that transformational leadership is closely related to inspiration and stimulation, this leadership style also has a positive effect on job autonomy (Bass & Avolio, 1990), which, along with organizational identification, is known to positively affect work engagement (Rich, Lepine, & Crawford, 2010; Cartwright & Holmes, 2006). Drawing on the available literature, and in view of the scarce research on this subject, the present study aims to investigate the effect of the transformational leadership style on work engagement through the mediators of job autonomy and organizational identification.

2. Transformational Leadership and Work Engagement

According to Avolio, Bass and Jung (1999), the charisma and influence of transformational leaders strongly motivate followers to outperform expectations. In addition, transformational leaders provide inspiration and encouragement that lead followers to find innovative ways of overcoming internal and external work challenges (Seltzer & Bass, 1990). The organizational literature addresses transformational leaders using a variety of terms, including inspirational, appealing, attentive, dynamic, incentive and credible (Bass, Avolio, & Goodheim, 1987).

Transformational leadership is associated with four major characteristics, also known as 'the 4Is': idealized influence (II), inspirational motivation (IM), individualized consideration (IC) and intellectual stimulation (IS) (Bass & Avolio, 1990; den Hartog et al., 1997). *Idealized influence* describes leaders who serve as role models for their followers, putting emphasis on organizational benefits over those of the individual (Bono & Judge, 2004). *Inspirational motivation* refers to the ways leaders inspire and motivate their followers with a clear and rational vision in order to achieve both individual and organizational goals (Den Hartog et al., 1997). These leaders radiate passion and optimism for the future (Bono & Judge, 2004). Idealized influence and inspirational motivation are often combined in a single trait, called charisma. Charismatic leaders gain follower admiration, trust, confidence and respect, and they inspire followers to pursue a higher collective goal. All of these cause followers to become more engaged in and enthusiastic about the common vision created by the leader (House & Howell, 1992). *Individualized consideration*, the third characteristic of transformational leadership, refers to treating each follower as an individual rather than as an employee. The leader shows genuine concern for the individual's needs and talents and provides support and coaching (Den Hartog et al., 1997). Followers are regarded as unique, with individual requirements and concerns, and feel supported in their own progress (Avolio & Bass, 1995). The last major characteristic of transformational leadership is *intellectual stimulation*, which refers to stimulating intelligence and promoting creativity by making followers question the status quo and challenging them to find new ways of solving problems. Through this process, followers become more active and creative in decision-making processes at work and thus more dedicated. According to Shamir et al. (1993), working with a transformational leader increases performance, commitment, achievement and competency levels of followers. When a leader shows respect, support, inspiration and effective management, followers feel fulfilled, involved and challenged and thus display a high level of engagement towards their work.

Kahn (1990) described the engaged employee as an individual with physical, cognitive and emotional energies concentrated on achieving task-related goals. There are numerous definitions of engagement (Schaufeli, Salanova, Gonzáles-Romá, & Bakker, 2002; Bakker & Leiter, 2010), however, Schaufeli and Bakker's (2010) definition of "a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption" is commonly preferred. Engagement has been discussed in terms of multiple dimensions, but "there is a growing consensus that engagement can be defined in terms of high levels of energy and high levels of involvement in work" (Bakker, Albrecht, & Leiter, 2011). Essentially, work engagement means the extent to which employees feel connected to their jobs. Kahn (1990), who was the first to define engagement, described it as "the harnessing of organizational members' selves to their work roles." According to Kahn (1990), "in engagement, people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally during role performances," whereas "in disengagement, people withdraw and defend themselves physically, cognitively and emotionally." Consequently, work engagement represents employees' attitudes towards work and the extent of involvement to which they are willing to commit (Kahn, 1990). Accordingly, when engaged, employees feel a sense of involvement in their work mentally, intellectually and physically, and they are eager to exercise all of their dynamism at work (Xanthopoulou, Bakker, Heuven, Demerouti, & Schaufeli, 2008). In contrast,

non-engaged employees have low levels of ambition for their job in physical terms, and they lack an emotional connection with their colleagues (Kahn, 1990).

As stated by Jones and Harter (2005), "engagement leads to human benefits for the individual who experiences it." Leaders are a vital part of an organization, considering that they are responsible for communicating and connecting with the employees and are capable of making employees feel motivated, engaged and supported at work (Koppula, 2008). A study by Tims, Bakker, and Xanthopoulpu (2011) reported a positive correlation between transformational leaders and employee engagement on a daily basis. Likewise, a study by Zhu et al. (2009) showed that the transformational leadership style is correlated with engagement and that this correlation is especially prevalent in the presence of active, visionary and productive employees. Given these findings and in accordance with leadership theory, the first study hypothesis was formulated as follows:

Hypothesis 1. Transformational leadership has a positive effect on work engagement.

3. Transformational Leadership, Job Autonomy and Organizational Identification

Leaders are an essential part of any organization, as they affect the self-respect and self-sufficiency of employees (Deci, Connell, & Ryan, 1989). Normally, when employees receive support and guidance, they become more conscious of their authority and competency with regard to a task's progression and outcome, and thus develop an enhanced level of autonomy (Spreitzer, 1996). When subordinates are motivated intrinsically, they espouse corporate principles and guidelines (Gagne & Deci, 2005), feel they have the freedom to make decisions and are acknowledged for their efforts (Alge, Ballinger, Tangirala, & Oakley, 2006), and believe they have competence and autonomy.

Job autonomy is a job-related resource referring to "the degree to which the job provides substantial freedom, independence and discretion to the individual in scheduling work and in determining the procedures to be used in carrying it out" (Hackman & Oldham, 1975). As a core job characteristic, autonomy causes individuals to feel responsible for achievements and failures. If followers have a high level of autonomy, they tend to believe that job outcomes are a result of their personal efforts, not the leader's instructions or adherence to standardized rules. In this regard, autonomy provides followers with more satisfaction and motivation as they seek to develop as individuals (Cleavenger & Munyon, 2013).

Higher levels of autonomy can be achieved by inspiring followers to grow and learn in their positions and providing them opportunities for self-guidance (Manz & Sims, 2001). If leadership is considered a means of affecting people's beliefs and behaviors (Yukl, 1989), transformational leaders can be said to be equipped to provide followers with a higher degree of autonomy (Bass & Avolio, 1990) so that they can become their own leaders (Yammarino, 1994). Indeed, experimental studies have demonstrated this causal relationship between transformational leadership and autonomy (Hackman & Oldham, 1976; Piccolo & Colquitt, 2006; Rich et al., 2010).

Similarly, job-related resources have been shown to have a positive effect on individual growth and learning processes through intrinsic motivation (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). In this way, job autonomy enables employees to reach their targets, thereby increasing their job satisfaction, which in turn produces a greater degree of work engagement (Hackman & Oldham, 1980). A number of other studies have also reported positive correlations between job autonomy and work engagement (Saks, 2006; Xanthopoulou, Bakker, Demerouti, & Schaufeli, 2007; Hakanen, Bakker, & Demerouti, 2005; Llorens, Schaufeli, Bakker, & Salanova, 2007; Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). Based on the evidence presented above, the study's second hypothesis was formulated as follows:

Hypothesis 2. Job autonomy has a mediator role in the relationship between transformational leadership and work engagement.

According to Shamir et al. (1993), transformational leaders modify employees' perception of identity; motivate employees to identify themselves with the corporate objectives and mission at both the individual and organizational levels; and make employees feel more engaged, involved, successful and capable. Studies conducted over the past three decades (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Foremen & Whetten, 2002) have demonstrated that employees with a high level of organizational identification exhibit affirmative behaviors and attitudes towards their organizations. The extensive research into the concept of organizational identification can be explained by the positive effect it has been shown to have on attitudes including job satisfaction, performance, motivation, employee retention and communication (Scott, Corman, & Cheney, 1998). Briefly, organizational identification may be defined as "the perception of oneness with or belongingness to an organization, where the individual defines him/herself in terms of the organization(s) of which he or she is a member" (Mael & Ashforth,

1992). When individuals identify themselves with their company, they share the same values and goals with that organization (van Knippenberg & Van Schie, 2000) and they develop more affirmative attitudes towards their workplace (Dutton, Dukerich, & Harquil, 1994). Strong organizational identification causes employees to be interested in organizational well-being and makes them more willing to work for the organization as a whole (Dutton et al., 1994). Consequently, such employees are expected to be more engaged in their job, both physically and mentally.

Transformational leaders inspire employees to relate their identities with the collective identity of the organization by presenting intellectual explanations, thereby motivating them to perform beyond expectations (Jung, Chow, & Wu, 2003). As a result of their increased collective identity, employees are more likely to be engaged in achieving the mission and goals of the organization rather than their own individual interests (Kark, Shamir, & Chen, 2003). Previous studies have also reported that transformational leaders are able to increase the sense of organizational identification of their followers, which in turn has an effect on their work-related attitudes (Shamir et al., 1993; Kark et al., 2003). When employees' organizational identification is enhanced, their perceptions of the organization are expected to be more positive.

The literature includes only a limited amount of research into the relationship between organizational identification and work engagement. For instance, Tyler and Blader (2001) reported that identification affects employee attitudes and beliefs, as employees who have a strong sense of identification with their organization are likely to be more motivated to work on its behalf. Reade (2001) demonstrated that organizational identification is a direct predictor of enhanced motivation and performance. Smith (2012) and Guarano (2010) also showed a positive relationship between organizational identification and employee engagement. Thus, the third study hypothesis was formulated as follows:

Hypothesis 3. Organizational identification has a mediator role in the relationship between transformational leadership and work engagement.

3. Present Study

The hypotheses based on the research findings presented above indicate a model in which the relationship between transformational leadership and work engagement is mediated by job autonomy and organizational identification (Figure 1).

4. Method

4.1 Participants and Procedure

A total of 252 participants (151 female, 100 male, 1 no response) working in higher education were selected by convenience sampling. The mean age of the study sample was 33.78 years (SD= 8.71).

Study participants were individuals employed at a private university in Turkey. Study data was collected using a set of questionnaires consisting of 64 items in total. The questionnaires were completed online by employees within a 10-week period.

4.2 Measures

The Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) Form-5X Short (Bass & Avolio, 1995) was used to measure the transformational leadership style. The MLQ consists of 36 items. There are 20 questions corresponding to the four dimensions of transformational leadership: idealized influence [both attributes (e.g., "My executive acts in ways that build my respect") and behavior (e.g., "My executive talks to us about his/her most important values and beliefs")]; inspirational motivation (e.g., "My executive expresses his/her confidence that we will achieve our goals"); intellectual stimulation (e.g., "My executive seeks differing perspectives when solving problems"); and individual consideration (e.g., "My executive spends time teaching and coaching me"). The Cronbach's alpha for these items was 0.96, revealing sufficient reliability.

Work engagement was measured using the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES) developed by Schaufeli & Bakker (2003). This instrument consists of 17 items that measure three dimensions of job engagement: vigor (six items) (e.g., "At my work, I feel bursting with energy"); dedication (five items) (e.g., "I am enthusiastic about my job"; and absorption (six items) (e.g., "Time flies when I'm working"). The Cronbach's alpha for all three dimensions was ≥0.70.

Job autonomy was measured using the autonomy subscale of a 21-item questionnaire by Ilardi, Leone, Kasser and Ryan (1993) that evaluates three intrinsic needs (autonomy, competence and relatedness) of employees regarding their work. The autonomy subscale consists of seven items (e.g., "I feel like I have a lot of input in deciding how my job gets done"). The Cronbach's alpha of the overall scale was 0.78.

The extent of organizational identification was determined using the Organizational Identification Scale developed by Mael and Ashforth (1992). This scale consists of 6 items [e.g. "When someone criticizes (this organization), it feels like a personal insult" and "When I talk about this organization, I usually say 'we' rather than 'they'"]. The Cronbach's alpha of the scale was 0.87.

5. Results

5.1 Strategy of Analysis

Structural equation modeling (SEM) was conducted using LISREL 8.5 (Joreskog & Sorbom, 1993) to test the fit of the data to the proposed model. The Maximum Likelihood Estimation Method was used because it has been shown to result in fit indices that are less likely than other estimation methods to be influenced by sample size and distribution (Hu & Bentler, 1998). An alternative models strategy was used to determine the advantage of the proposed model (Figure 1) against models indicating either that the relationship between transformational leadership and organizational identification and work engagement is fully mediated by autonomy or that the relationship between transformational leadership and autonomy and work engagement is fully mediated by organizational identification.
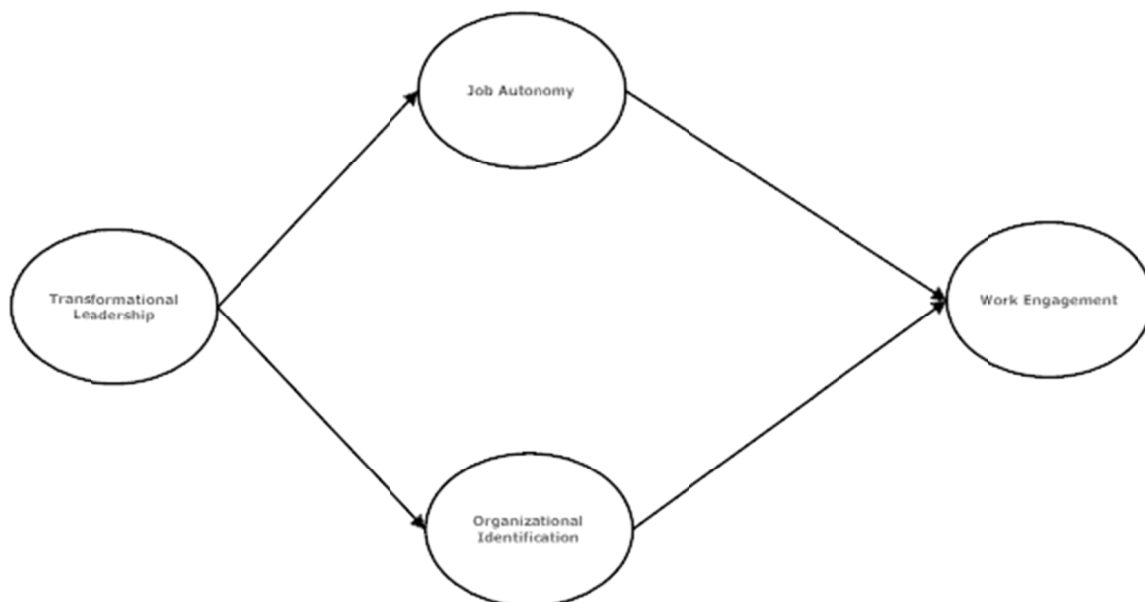

Figure 1. Proposed model concerning the mediating role of job autonomy and organizational identification on the relationship between transformational leadership and work engagement

In the proposed model, the mediation hypotheses were tested by calculating bootstrap confidence intervals. This analysis was used to test whether the indirect pathways were significant with the standard errors from sampling distribution estimated using a bootstrap resampling from the original sample. Then, it was used to calculate 95% confidence intervals (CI) for each of the indirect effects. The upper and lower limits of 95% CI with no inclusion of zero indicated significant mediation.

Moreover, the method introduced by Baron and Kenny (1986) was also used to clearly demonstrate the effects of the mediator variables organizational identification and autonomy on the relationship between transformational leadership and work engagement. According to Baron and Kenny's method (BKM), a four-step approach is needed to support a mediation condition. First, there should be a statistically significant association between independent and dependent variables. Second, the independent variable should be correlated significantly with the mediator variable(s). Third, the mediator variable(s) should have a statistically significant association with the dependent variable(s). Finally, full mediation is considered to exist if the statistically significant correlation between the independent (transformational leadership) and dependent (work engagement) variables becomes non-significant when the mediator variable(s) (job autonomy and organizational identification) are included in the equation.

5.2 Descriptive Statistics

Means, standard deviations and intercorrelations of the observed variables were calculated and are given in Table 1. Values for skewness (ranging from -.69 to -.27) and kurtosis (from -.08 to .95) were also calculated and indicated a normality of distribution.

Table 1. Means and standard deviations of and correlations among the observed variables

Variable	M	SD	IDINF	IMOT	ISTI	ICON	OIP1	OIP2	AUP1	AUP2	VIG	DED
Tran. Lead.												
IDINF	25.62	6.74	-									
IMOT	13.87	3.77	.87**	-								
ISTI	14.43	3.75	.86**	.84**	-							
ICON	13.88	3.85	.87**	.87**	.86**	-						
Org. Id.												
OIP1	10.55	2.78	.16*	.18*	.16*	.22**	-					
OIP2	11.82	2.40	.29**	.27**	.33**	.33**	.60**	-				
Job Autonomy												
AUP1	9.28	2.13	.41**	.44**	.40**	.44**	.05	.16*	-			
AUP2	14.45	2.94	.40**	.40**	.38**	.41**	.05	.19**	.60**	-		
Work Engagement												
VIG	22.02	4.76	.43**	.47**	.44**	.44**	.29**	.36**	.35**	.38**	-	
DED	20.39	3.97	.26**	.34**	.27**	.28**	.22**	.34**	.28**	.36**	.67**	-
ABS	23.15	4.59	.26**	.25**	.28**	.30**	.32**	.43**	.28**	.23**	.74**	.74**

Note. N = 252 Tran. Lead = Transformational leadership, IDINF = Idealized influence, IMOT = Inspirational motivation, ISTI = Intellectual stimulation, ICON = Individual consideration; Org. Id. = Organizational identification, OIP1- 2 = Two parcels from the Organizational Identification Scale; AUP1-2 = Two parcels from the Basic Psychological Needs Satisfaction in Work Scale; VIG = Vigor, DED = Dedication, ABS = Absorption.

*$p<.05$, **$p<.01$.

5.3 Test of the Measurement Model

The measurement model specifies the relationships between measured and observed variables. This study tested both the proposed and the alternative models using the same measurement model that defined the two latent variables (transformational leadership and work engagement) by their respective factors and the other two variables (organizational identification and job autonomy) using item parceling, in which parcels were created for each scale by randomly selecting and assigning items to the parcels.

The first test of the measurement model indicated a good fit to the data, $\chi^2(38, N = 252) = 128.05$, p<.05, GFI = 0.92, CFI = 0.97, SRMR = 0.039, NFI = .96. All factor loadings on the latent variables were found large and statistically significant (range of the standardized values: 0.79 - 0.94, see Table 2). Modification indices calculated using LISREL indicated only minor chi-square decreases in the model and were thus disregarded.

Table 2. Factor loadings, standard errors, and t-values for the measurement model

Variables	Unstandardized factor loading	SE	T-Value	Standardized factor loading
Tran. Lead.				
IDINF	6.41	.32	19.90	.94**
IMOT	3.50	.18	19.11	.92**
ISTI	3.45	.18	18.89	.92**
ICON	3.52	.18	19.56	.93**
Org. Id.				
OIP1	1.56	.17	9.05	.80**
OIP2	1.80	.14	12.69	.89**
Job Autonomy				
AUP1	1.74	.14	12.70	.81**
AUP2	2.24	.18	12.38	.79**
Work Engagement				
VIG	4.55	.26	17.78	.90**
DED	3.43	.20	17.04	.87**
ABS	3.96	.24	16.32	.85**

Note. N = 252 ; Tran. Lead = Transformational leadership, IDINF = Idealized influence, IMOT = Inspirational motivation, ISTI = Intellectual stimulation, ICON = Individual consideration; Org. Id. = Organizational identification, OIP1- 2 = Two parcels from the Organizational Identification Scale; AUP1-2 = Two parcels from the Basic Psychological Needs Satisfaction in Work Scale; VIG = Vigor, DED = Dedication, ABS = Absorption.

** $p < .01$

Zero-order correlations among the latent variables indicated by the measurement model are given in Table 3. All latent variables were found to be moderately or strongly correlated with each other. Transformational leadership and work engagement were found moderately correlated, which supports Hypothesis 1 and confirms the first step of mediation according to Barron and Kenny. Moderate or strong correlations were also found between the independent variable and mediator variables and between the mediator variables and the dependent variable, confirming Baron and Kenny's second and third prerequisites.

Table 3. Intercorrelations among the latent variables

Variables	Tran. Lead.	Org. Id.	Job Autonomy	Work Engagement
Tran. Lead	-			
Org. Id.	.46**	-		
Job Autonomy	.60**	.45**	-	
Work Engagement	.47**	.64**	.45**	-

Note. N = 252 ; Tran. Lead = Transformational leadership, Org. Id. = Organizational identification.

5.4 Test of the Structural Model

The proposed model (Figure 1) was tested and yielded an acceptable fit to data, yielding the following goodness of fit statistics: $\chi^2(40, N = 252) = 140.37$; p<.05; GFI = 0.91; CFI = 0.96; SRMR = 0.051; NFI = .95. Two alternative models were tested against the proposed model. The first alternative, in which autonomy mediated the effect on the relationship of transformational leadership and organizational identification with work engagement, resulted in a clear deterioration of fit [$\chi^2(40, N = 252) = 182.84$, p<.05, GFI = 0.88, CFI = 0.95, SRMR = 0.088, NFI = .94], and the second alternative, in which organizational identification fully mediates the relationship of transformational leadership with autonomy and work engagement, produced the worst fit: [$\chi^2(40, N = 252) = 762.98$, p<.05, GFI = 0.47, CFI = 0.60, SRMR = 0.30, NFI = .60].

After confirming that the proposed model was the best able to account for variances in the data, a bootstrapping procedure was used to provide support for the indirect effect of transformational leadership on work engagement through job autonomy and organizational identification. The bootstrapped CI for the proposed model was

0.077-0.213, supporting the indirect effect indicated by the model.

In addition to the support lent by these results to Hypotheses 2 and 3, direct support was provided using a nested models strategy. Two nested models could be derived from the proposed model: a model in which the path from job autonomy to work engagement was set to zero (Model a), and a model in which the path from organizational identification to work engagement was set to zero (Model b). Chi-square difference tests indicated that both Model a ($\Delta\chi^2 = 8.68$; df = 1; p<.01) and Model b ($\Delta\chi^2 = 45.89$; df = 1; p<.01) were weaker than the model in which the path was freely estimated. These results indicate that both mediator variables contribute to the indirect effect of transformational leadership on work engagement.

The results obtained using these different strategies all indicated the relationship between transformational leadership and work engagement to be fully mediated by both job autonomy and organizational identification. Although the model presumed the path from transformational leadership to work engagement to be equal to zero, this path was added to confirm the last step of BKM. Indeed, a chi-square difference test ($\Delta\chi^2 = 9.18$; df = 1; p<.01) showed that adding this path had an insignificant effect and did not improve the model (Figure 2).
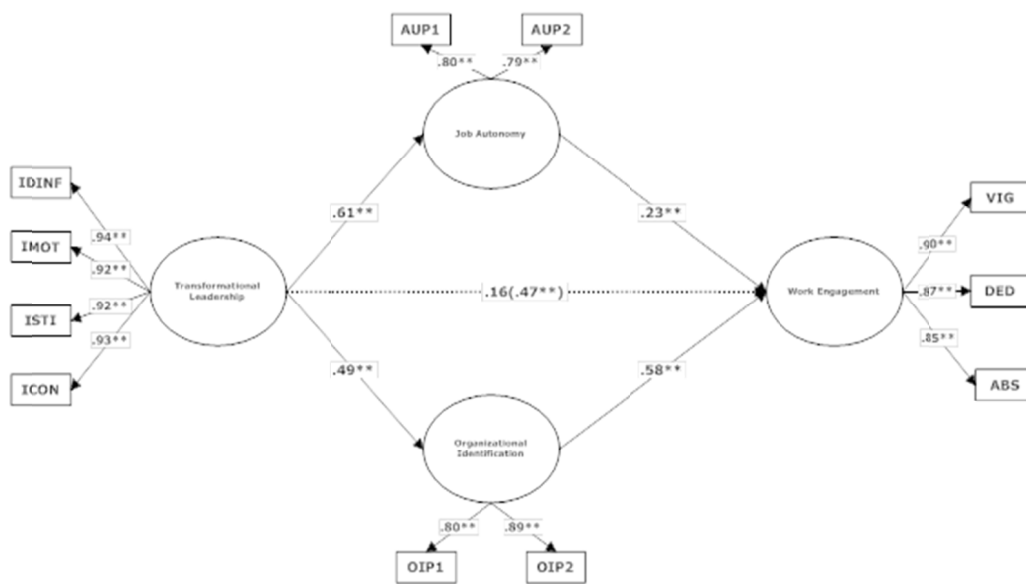

Figure 2. Standardized parameter estimates for the final structural model

Notes. The numbers in parentheses refer to the coefficients for the direct paths when the mediator is included in the model; the dashed line indicates the non-significant path when the mediator variables included into the model.

* p<.05.

6. Discussion

6.1 Summary and Contributions to Scholarship

The aim of the present study was to investigate the mediator roles of job autonomy and organizational identification in the relationship between transformational leadership and work engagement. The study results supported the hypotheses and showed that this relationship was mediated by both job autonomy and organizational identification. In this regard, the present study has significant implications for the organizational literature; specifically, it emphasizes the importance of transformational leadership as well as job autonomy and organizational identification. Moreover, we believe that the findings may be of benefit to organizations and leaders wishing to develop and enhance follower engagement.

Transformational leaders demonstrate four typical behaviors: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, individualized consideration and intellectual stimulation (Bass & Avolio, 1990). Data from this study demonstrate that the behaviors of transformational leaders are positively correlated with the dimensions of work engagement, i.e. vigor, dedication, and absorption (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2010). This finding is consistent with a study by Zhu et al. (2009) that showed a positive relationship between transformational leadership and work

engagement, a study by Tims et al. that demonstrated this correlation on a daily basis, a study by Salanova et al. (2011) that showed a direct relationship between transformational leadership and work engagement, and a study by Ghadi et al. (2011) that reported transformational leadership to influence followers' work engagement. The present study also showed idealized influence and inspirational motivation to promote work engagement by motivating followers to adopt a common vision; moreover, the respect and support transformational leaders show their followers instill in them a sense of fulfillment and challenge, which in turn leads to enhanced engagement. These findings are all in agreement with studies by Bono and Judge (2003) and Yukl (2002). As made clear above, our first hypothesis suggesting that transformational leadership has a positive effect on work engagement was supported by the results of the present study.

This study also found job autonomy to mediate the relationship between transformational leadership and work engagement, as predicted by Hypothesis 2. Job autonomy is a basic need of followers and an important construct for individual growth and optimum performance. Job autonomy allows followers to become their own leader, as suggested by Manz and Sims (2001) and Yammarino (1994). Yukl (1989) stated that transformational leaders modify the beliefs and opinions of followers, causing greater follower autonomy, a finding confirmed by the present study that is also in line with the theory of Bass and Avolio (1990). Job autonomy produces a sense of job satisfaction that results in enhanced engagement. This finding is consistent with studies by Saks (2006) and Xanthopoulou et al. (2007) reporting a positive correlation between follower engagement and autonomy. This finding may be helpful in understanding the wide spectrum of positive outcomes of this leadership style.

The third finding of the present study was that organizational identification fully mediated the relationship between transformational leadership and work engagement, as predicted in Hypothesis 3. By modifying their followers' perceptions of their own identity, especially through intellectual stimulation, transformational leaders spur their followers to relate their own identity to that of the organization (Shamir et al., 1993). Previous studies have demonstrated the effect of organizational identification on followers' affirmative behaviors and attitudes toward their organization (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Foremen & Whetten, 2002). In this regard, it has been suggested that transformational leaders cause their followers to adopt a collective identity, resulting in greater performance and engagement (Jung et al., 2003). As demonstrated by the present study, increased organizational identity in turn generates positive attitudes towards work. This finding supports the results of Shamir et al. (1993) and Kark et al. (2003) regarding the motivational effect of the transformational leadership style. The present study contributes to what is at present a limited amount of literature on the effect of organizational identification on work engagement and its mediation in the relationship between transformational leaders and the engagement of their followers.

6.2 Applied Implications

The transformational leadership style has positive outcomes for organizations, as proven in many studies. The present study specifically contributes to the literature on the psychological empowerment of transformational leadership through its findings on organizational identification and job autonomy. These findings suggest that job autonomy and organizational identification can be enhanced by transformational leaders and that this, in turn, can improve the relationship between transformational leadership and work engagement. This is important, given that organizations generally believe that engaged employees are the key to success. The present study may guide organizations as to how they can enhance such engagement. Specifically, leaders can achieve this by clarifying goals, clearly describing tasks/role descriptions, caring for the needs of employees, establishing reciprocal confidence and maintaining an open line of communication.

Organizations can create a proper environment in which supervisors are able to display transformational behaviors, which can be measured periodically using various scales (e.g. MLQ Form-5X). The results of such assessments can be used to provide feedback to supervisors in order to ensure effective leadership. Attitudes of followers may also be measured to obtain a thorough and unbiased evaluation of supervisors. Data on both leaders and followers may help to identify points requiring improvement.

Supervisors should develop their leadership skills and continue to enhance their theoretical knowledge. They should also improve their communication skills so as to provide a clear vision and transmit organizational goals. Supervisors should be able to identify their employees' needs and recognize their individual characteristics so that they can provide individualized attention, which will enhance their followers' sense of autonomy and identification with the organization. Positive outcomes such as better performance and greater work engagement can be achieved if leaders provide their followers with tools for self-guidance that will increase their sense of job autonomy, thereby allowing them to become their own leaders and experience freedom of choice. Moreover, followers work harder to achieve organizational goals when they relate their identity with their organization;

therefore, supervisors should encourage their followers to adopt a collective identity, which is an important element of organizational success. Finally, it should be noted that the identification construct varies among cultures; therefore, supervisors must be aware of differences between individualistic and collectivistic cultures if they want to achieve positive results.

6.3 Limitations and Future Research Directions

The present study has certain limitations. First, because it was conducted with only a limited number of participants (n=252) from a single institution, it is not possible to generalize the results. Therefore, we recommend future studies include large-scale research conducted at multiple centers and different workplace environments. Second, this study was conducted using self-reporting questionnaires, which could result in a bias of socially desirable responses. Therefore, we recommend that future studies utilize a modified approach to data collection that may include collecting data from both employees and their supervisors using a rating system for work engagement and transformational leadership style.

As is the case in many similar studies, this study is also limited by its correlational design, which cannot represent a direct causality. Although we believe that the causality proposed in this study is solidly grounded in the theoretical justification and relevant literature, future research could test the same hypotheses using an experimental design or growth-curve modeling.

Finally, the literature indicates that the mediator roles of job autonomy and organizational identification might differ according to culture, given that job autonomy is an individualistic construct whereas organizational identification is considered a characteristic of collectivist cultures (Man & Lam, 2003). According to Lukes (1973), "the notion of autonomy or self-direction, according to which an individual's thought and action are his own, and not determined by agencies or causes outside his control," pertains to individualistic cultures. On the contrary, individuals in collectivistic cultures have stronger identification with their organizations (Chatman, Polzer, Barsade, & Neale, 1998). Accordingly, the model tested in the present study should be tested in cross-cultural research that will allow for analysis of these cultural differences.

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