

TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP STRATEGY AS A DRIVING FORCE TO ENGAGEMENT OF WORKERS: EMPIRICAL STUDY IN THE BANKING SYSTEM

Wasib Bin Latif^{*}, Ida Md Yasin^{*}, Mohammad Bin Amin^{**},
Jewel Kumar Roy^{***}, Md. Atikur Rahaman^{****},
Md. Kamal Hossain^{*****}

^{*} Putra Business School, Universiti Putra Malaysia, Serdang, Selangor, Malaysia

^{**} Doctoral School of Management and Business, Faculty of Economics and Business, University of Debrecen, Debrecen, Hungary

^{***} *Corresponding author*, Doctoral School of Regional and Business Administration Sciences, Széchenyi István University, Győr, Hungary
Contact details: Doctoral School of Regional and Business Administration Sciences, Széchenyi István University, Győr 9026, Hungary

^{****} School of Economics and Management, Jiujiang University, Jiujiang, Jiangxi Province, China

^{*****} Doctoral School of Regional and Business Administration Sciences, Széchenyi István University, Győr, Hungary



Abstract

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This paper explores the hypothesis that transformational leadership strategy (TLS) is related to employee engagement in the branch-banking setting of a developing economy. Based on a quantitative survey of bank managers and employees (matched pairs; $n = 61$) and the available measures, reliability and validity have been measured, and the hypothesized TLS-engagement path has been tested through regression. Although there are recent studies and reviews that usually indicate positive links between TLS and engagement (e.g., meta- and narrative syntheses) (Bakker et al., 2023; Grah et al., 2024), our findings indicate a weak, statistically insignificant effect. The result indicates that leadership can be less motivated in banking due to contextual contingencies, including reward systems, legacy processes, or culture. We present hypotheses to apply to the job demands-resources (JD-R) theory, and in this case, leadership as a job resource might not be effective without other resources. We provide some steps that banks should take to balance leadership development with job redesign and incentives. We end with restrictions (convenience sampling, cross-sectional design) and future research (longitudinal and multi-level design and studies in other industries). Such insights provide a valuable boundary condition to other existing studies of TLS-engagement in other industries and different regions (Decuyper & Schaufeli, 2021; Bakker et al., 2023; Grah et al., 2024).

Keywords: Transformational Leadership, Employee Engagement, Banking Sector, JD-R Theory, Organizational Behavior

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1. INTRODUCTION

Leadership has been a key aspect of employee motivation and the success of organizations. Transformational leadership strategy (TLS) prioritizes idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration, which are the dimensions that improve commitment and discretionary effort (Awashreh & Al Ghunaimi, 2025). But the contextual realities in developing economies, of inflexible structures and lack of autonomy, can limit the efficacy of leadership behaviors. The impact of relational and motivational benefits of leadership in banking, specifically in Bangladesh, is generally compromised by the existence of legacy processes and compliance pressures.

Leadership has been at the center of employees' thoughts, feelings, and actions in the workplace. TLS focuses on idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration, in an effort to increase commitment and discretionary effort. The existing evidence of the world before seems to have a pattern of associating TLS with more intense involvement and performance, yet contingencies of the sector and culture may mitigate the impact. Banking in developing situations is subject to unique constraints of legacy processes, excessive compliance burden, and reward systems that do not necessarily support proactive behavior, which can dampen the power of leadership alone. It is on this background that we empirically test the correlation between TLS and employee engagement in the banking system based on matched manager-employee data and valid scales. But unlike most of the literature, we can propose that the effect of TLS-engagement is not significant, which is why we may want to take a closer glance at contextual job resources and system design.

In developing the scope of the study, this paper narrows down to the branch-level banks in Bangladesh, where the impact of transformational leadership on employee engagement in this country will be examined. The results will be used to advise leadership development, strategies in human resources (HR), and policy formulation in the financial field. In addition, the research study also adds value to the leadership theory as it has localized transformational leadership to a developing economy in South Asia. The incompetence and lack of policies pertaining to employees in the Bangladesh banking sector aid in promoting a poor level of involvement and poor performance (Nguyen et al., 2011; Rubel & Kee, 2015). Although positive results of transformational leadership have been reported in other places, its use in the employee engagement context within the banking industry in Bangladesh has not been examined in the empirical literature yet. The present paper fills this gap by investigating the relationship between transformational leadership and engagement level among employees at the branch level.

Despite growing evidence that transformational leadership can strengthen employee engagement in service organizations, there remains limited context-specific evidence from branch-banking settings in Bangladesh, where high customer-contact

work, performance pressures, and hierarchical structures may shape leadership-engagement dynamics. Addressing this gap, the present study examines how transformational leadership practices relate to employee engagement among matched manager-employee pairs in Bangladeshi bank branches. Accordingly, the study is guided by the following research question:

RQ1: How does the relationship between transformational leadership practices and employee engagement in the branch-banking sector of Bangladesh manifest?

This paper is structured in the following way. Section 2 summarizes recent research on the subject of TLS, engagement, and job demands-resources (JD-R) theory with a focus on the studies published in 2021–2025. Section 3 presents the methodology, measures, analysis, and possible alternative methods that can be used in this inquiry. Section 4 provides the data analysis and results. Section 5 discusses the findings. Section 6 concludes the paper by summarizing the key findings and outlining the implications, limitations, and directions for future research.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Other more recent studies still place TLS as one of the important job resources that have the potential to increase vigor, dedication, and absorption (JD-R lens). An Annual Review of 2023 summarizes antecedents of engagement and reinforces the leadership role, alongside emphasizing the contextual resources (Bakker et al., 2023). An empirical paper of 2024 indicates that TLS is connected with engagement contingent upon intrinsic motivation, which points to the significance of person-context interaction (Grah et al., 2024). An evidence-based overview of 2023/2024 reports positive averages on transformational leadership in terms of satisfaction and performance, but recommends boundary condition testing and sector-specific replication (Deng et al., 2023). In banking-related service sectors, positive relationships are often reported in studies published between 2022 and 2025, and these relationships are frequently mediated by trust or culture (Alfalih & Rasmoun, 2025; Scholze & Hecker, 2024; Zhang et al., 2025). Positive relationships are also observed in banking-based work in South and Southeast Asia, often through the use of trust and organizational climate (Cindrella & Merlin, 2025). However, these effects might be undermined in thin or improperly matched job resources or by misfit leadership messages.

Contextualizing this current research. The fact that the results showed no significant effect of engagement of TLS is a useful counterargument. They posit that when banking systems are riddled with deep processes, and they have limited autonomy, then leadership behaviors would not be translated into engagement without supplementary resources (work design, incentives, and supportive climate). This is in line with the calls to combine leadership development and structural job redesign as the JD-R framework (Bakker et al., 2023; Scholze & Hecker, 2024; Wang et al., 2011).

2.1. Employee engagement

The present definition of employee engagement shows psychological and emotional commitment that employees develop towards their jobs and workplace (Kahn, 1990; May et al., 2004). Authors of the study by Robinson et al. (2004) define it as a favorable attitude towards work and organizational values, whereas Schmidt (2007) focuses on commitment and satisfaction dimensions. According to Christian et al. (2011), engagement is characterized by awareness and the desire to perform. In the same manner, Gubman (2004) also focuses on the importance of the emotional connection between work staff and the organization. Such organizations as the Corporate Leadership Council (2004) associate engagement with intellectual concentration and optional effort. Good profitability, reduced turnover, and enhanced customer satisfaction have been associated with great levels of engagement (Harter et al., 2002; Gruman & Saks, 2011).

2.2. Transformational leadership

Transformational leadership elevates the followers to a higher sense than self-interest, mentally challenging, motivational, and giving personal attention (Gözükara & Şimşek, 2015; Bass, 1999). Bass (1990) goes further to state that transformational leaders become role models, create ownership, and align employees to work that fits their strengths, hence improving their level of motivation, loyalty, and performance.

2.3. The correlation of the transformational leadership and employee engagement

An increasing amount of literature supports the existence of a positive correlation between transformational leadership and employee engagement. Transformational leaders focus much on coordination, invention, and contentment by engaging in decision-making and personal growth (Shibru & Darshan, 2011; Kovjanic et al., 2013; Al-Swidi et al., 2012). According to a study conducted by Gözükara and Şimşek (2015), such leaders endorse employee values and objectives, and this leads to dedication and the improvement of performance. Such theoretical positions and empirical findings therefore indicate that transformational leadership may help to bring up profound employee engagement in the form of psychologically involved engagement and discretionary effort, which makes it a relevant approach to this paper (Cindrella & Merlin, 2025).

2.4. Hypothesis of the research

Transformational, which is characterized by visionary leadership, inspiration, and support on a personal level, is empirically connected with an increase in employee motivation and engagement (Bass, 1999; Christian et al., 2011). This kind of leadership behavior will probably increase engagement in the banking sector, where the quality of services depends on motivated staff (Harter et al., 2002; Rubel & Kee, 2015).

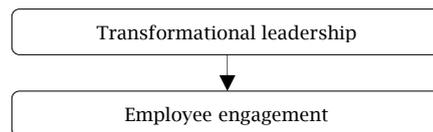
In line with this argument, the research assumes the following:

H1: The transformational leadership shows a positive impact on employee engagement in the banking sector.

2.5. Conceptual framework

This study uses transformational leadership theory (Bass & Riggio, 2006) and the JD-R model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007) to describe the way in which leadership affects employee engagement within the banking sector in Bangladesh. Transformational leaders (idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration) are deemed key job resources that facilitate their subordinates via psychological empowerment and a greater aspect of engagement (Bass, 1999; Breevaart et al., 2014). The JD-R model implies that these resources can lower job strain and improve motivation, thus adding to engagement. On that basis, the hypothesis of the study is that transformational leadership has a direct positive correlation with employee engagement due to the role of the emerging financial sector.

Figure 1. Conceptual framework



The diagram will show the hypothetical direct association between transformational leadership and staff commitment within the banking system of Bangladesh.

3. METHODOLOGY

We employed a quantitative research design using validated measures of transformational leadership and employee engagement, collected from matched manager-employee pairs within bank branches. Scale reliability was satisfactory ($\alpha = 0.735$ and 0.839), and all factor loadings exceeded commonly accepted thresholds. We tested directional hypotheses using regression analysis. Data were collected through a structured survey questionnaire and analyzed in the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) (Field, 2017).

Other analytical and design approaches that could be applied to this topic include:

- structural equation modeling (SEM) or partial least squares SEM (PLS-SEM) to test multi-path models with latent constructs;
- multilevel modeling to estimate cross-level effects (e.g., employees nested within branches and managers);
- longitudinal or panel designs to examine change over time and time-varying relationships;
- mixed-methods designs (e.g., explanatory sequential) to unpack contextual mechanisms and barriers;
- experimental or field quasi-experimental designs, such as leadership-skills interventions.

3.1. Population and sampling

The target population included the branch managers and the employees of selected banks within Bangladesh. Owing to the lack of an all-inclusive list of the banking personnel, the method of convenience sampling was utilized (Etikan et al., 2016). The sample size of 128 (64 managers and 64 employees) was chosen, and all of them had at least three years of experience, so they understood the organizational setting.

3.2. Instruments of research

The items of the questionnaire were divided into three sections as follows: 1) demographic questions (gender, age, and education), 2) transformational leadership — five items, and 3) employee engagement — three items. Open and validated Likert-scale statements were borrowed and modified from previous studies (Bass & Avolio, 1995; Schaufeli et al., 2002). Cronbach's alpha was used to check internal consistency.

3.3. Procedure in data collection

It was managed through an online survey. The consent was sought through electronically reaching bank managers by email, after which a series of questionnaires was issued to willing

employees. Each of them was issued an informed consent form, therefore remaining anonymous and indicating the purpose and concerns of the study.

4. RESEARCH RESULTS

A total of 128 respondents from the Bangladeshi banking industry participated in the survey, including both managers and employees.

4.1. Response summary of sample data

On the analysis of 64 managers sampled, 61 of them (95.3%) were valid, with three incomplete. On the same note, out of 64 employees, 61 valid results (95.3%) were noted, with three missing values. There were 122 valid responses with 61 matched manager-employee pairs as subjects in the final analysis.

4.2. Descriptive information

Table 1 presents the gender distribution of respondents, providing insight into the gender balance of the sample population. This table indicates whether male or female participants dominate the banking workforce under study, reflecting gender representation in Bangladesh's banking sector and possibly influencing engagement perceptions.

Table 1. Gender profile

	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>	<i>Valid percent</i>	<i>Cumulative percent</i>
Valid	Male	99	78.0	81.1	81.1
	Female	23	18.1	18.9	100.0
	Total	122	96.1	100.0	
Missing	System	5	3.9		
Total		127	100.0		

Table 2 describes the age distribution of participants, showing the generational composition of the respondents. This table helps to understand whether younger employees (aged 20–30 years old)

or mid-career professionals (31–40 years old) form the majority, which can influence leadership perception and engagement behavior due to differences in work values and motivation levels.

Table 2. Age profile

	<i>Age group (years)</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>	<i>Valid percent</i>	<i>Cumulative percent</i>
Valid	20–30 years old	22	17.3	18.0	18.0
	31–40 years old	63	49.6	51.6	69.7
	41–50 years old	37	29.1	30.3	100.0
	Total	122	96.1	100.0	
Missing	System	5	3.9		
Total		127	100.0		

Table 3 outlines the educational background of respondents, presenting the academic qualifications such as bachelor's, master's, diploma, and professional degrees. This provides important context about

the intellectual profile and professional capacity of participants, which may affect how leadership behaviors are interpreted and how engagement manifests in different educational strata.

Table 3. Education level

	<i>Education level</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>	<i>Valid percent</i>	<i>Cumulative percent</i>
Valid	Bachelor's degree	61	48.0	50.0	50.0
	Diploma	9	7.1	7.4	57.4
	Master's degree	40	31.5	32.8	90.2
	Professional degree	10	7.9	8.2	98.4
	Others	2	1.6	1.6	100.0
Total		122	96.1	100.0	
Missing	System	5	3.9		
Total		127	100.0		

4.3. Reliability analysis

The reliability, according to Malhotra et al. (2017), can be defined as the consistency of a measurement tool, that is, how much a measurement tool measures consistently with repeated measurements. To determine this, Cronbach's alpha was used for both constructs within the study. It is a coefficient between 0 and 1, the mean of all the possible split-half reliability coefficients. A higher value means higher internal consistency (and, therefore, reliability) is indicated by a value nearer 1.

Table 4. Reliability analysis

Variables	No. of items	Cronbach's alpha
Transformational leadership	5	0.735
Employee engagement	2	0.839

Cronbach's alpha was used in this study to help in measuring the internal consistency of the items in the scale. The items with acceptable reliability were only kept for further analysis. The coefficients were calculated with the help of the SPSS reliability

process; Table 4 presents the results. *Transformational leadership* and *Employee engagement* had Cronbach's alpha of 0.735 and 0.839, respectively, both of which were above the recommended acceptable Cronbach's alpha of 0.70. Such that, every construct showed good reliability, and nine items were retained between the two scales.

4.4. Factor analysis

In this study, to determine the discriminant validity, factor analysis, which is widely used when it is necessary to minimize and summarize data (Malhotra et al., 2017), has been used. The factor analysis in SPSS was used to remove factor loadings in order to come up with the constructs. The factor loadings indicate the strength of interdependence of a pair of items and the factor. According to Sharma (1995), there is a need to have a loading value of not less than 0.3, and a value of 0.4 and above is considered meaningful, whereas a value of above 0.5 will be taken as statistically significant. Therefore, the higher the loading value, the more the item is depicted by the factor chosen.

Table 5. Factor analysis

No. of items	Variables	Factor loading
Transformational leadership		
TL1	Do you think job engagement is related to leadership?	0.643
TL2	Managers enable employees to think in new ways.	0.787
TL3	Managers help others to improve.	0.694
TL4	The manager tries to make other employees feel good.	0.824
Employee engagement		
EE1	Employees are self-motivated.	0.768
EE2	Employees do their work enthusiastically.	0.845
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin value		0.689
Cumulative variance		65.68%

Transformational leadership (4 items) and *Employee engagement* (2 items) were the two constructs in the questionnaire. The factor loadings were high and above 0.50 (see Table 5), which means that the construct validity is good. In the case of *Transformational leadership*, there were values between 0.643 and 0.824. In the case of employee engagement, the loadings were 0.768 and 0.845. Therefore, no item was discarded in the analysis.

4.5. Hypothesis testing

This paper tested one hypothesis. To compute the measure of statistical significance of the proposed directional relationship, a t-test was applied. Furthermore, a Pearson correlation test was done to check a linear relationship between the independent variable (*Transformational leadership*) and the dependent variable (*Employee engagement*).

Regression analysis assessed the proposed relationship. Table 6 presents regression outcomes.

Table 6. Results of regression analysis

Panel A: Regression coefficients				
Variable	β	Std. error	t-value	p-value
Transformational leadership	0.168	0.098	0.233	0.089
Panel B: Hypothesis test result				
No.	Hypothesis path			Remarks
H1	Transformational leadership has a positive influence on employee engagement.			Not supported

Table 6 provides a detailed summary of the regression analysis, showing the coefficient (β), standard error, t-value, and p-value that quantify the statistical relationship between *Transformational leadership* and *Employee engagement*. The table highlights that although the beta coefficient ($\beta = 0.168$) is positive, the corresponding p-value (0.089) exceeds the 0.05 significance threshold, indicating that the relationship is statistically insignificant. This suggests that while TLS has a slight positive trend toward enhancing engagement, the evidence is insufficient to confirm a meaningful predictive effect. Such findings underscore the need for examining mediating variables and contextual moderators that could strengthen or weaken this relationship in future research.

Findings show a non-significant effect ($\beta = 0.168$, $p = 0.089$), suggesting that TLS does not significantly predict engagement in this context.

4.6. Findings

As shown in Tables 4 and 5, the instrument demonstrated acceptable reliability, with Cronbach's alpha values of 0.735 and 0.839 — close to the commonly accepted threshold of 0.70 (Malhotra & Birks, 2007). Validity was also established through positive item correlations. However, regression analysis indicates that the independent variable's p-value exceeds 0.05, suggesting no significant relationship between transformational leadership

and employee engagement in the Bangladeshi banking sector. As shown in Table 6, the hypothesis (*H1*) is not supported, and transformational leadership appears to have no measurable impact on employee engagement in this context (Sharma, 1995).

5. DISCUSSION

The non-significant connection is in contrast to numerous reports of positivity in other areas and industries (Decuyper & Schaufeli, 2021; Grah et al., 2024; Deng et al., 2023), which is promising for the conditions of boundaries. TLS under JD-R theory will be a resource, but in case core job resources (autonomy, feedback, fair rewards) are limited, and demands (compliance load, sales pressure) are strong, leadership behaviors might not be transformed into engagement. The rigidity in the process of banking and compensation norms could therefore mitigate the proximal effects of leadership. Recent research indicates that trust in leadership and supportive climate tend to mediate the effect of TLS (Zhang et al., 2025); without the mentioned mechanisms, direct effects may be low. This situational interpretation is in line with our results and indicates the integrative interventions as opposed to leadership training in isolation. Whereas Raja (2012) has suggested that various components of transformational leadership (namely, idealized influence, inspirational motivation, individualized consideration, and intellectual stimulation) were associated with a higher level of engagement.

However, the results of this study indicate that leadership by itself lacks the capacity to generate engagement adequately. The structural barriers can include the outdated banking principles, compensation patterns, or the poor organizational culture that can become the limiting factor (Nguyen et al., 2011). Moreover, Sarangi and Srivastava (2012) observed that communication and organizational culture are two of the factors that have a significant influence on engagement, and therefore, these factors may lead to the predominance of the leadership influence. Therefore, in the future, further studies must analyze the more contextual variables of the engagement of employees in the emerging economies.

The results do not show any special association between transformational leadership and employee engagement within the Bangladesh banking sector, as most of the literature suggests a positive correlation between them (Ghadi et al., 2013; Tims et al., 2011). Although transformational leadership has been linked to increased engagement in different setups (Gill et al., 2006; Song et al., 2012), the current study recommends that this might not be the case across every cultural and organizational setup. The relationship between leadership and engagement might be mediated by some other variables that include compensation, organizational culture, or individual resources (Sarangi & Srivastava, 2012). These findings show that the leaders of the banking sector of Bangladesh should reexamine the performance and consider turning to other elements of leadership strategies that can better encourage the workers to engage in the practice than an exclusive focus on transformational leadership.

The findings of this research are that transformational leadership might not be enough to boost the engagement of employees in the banking industry of Bangladesh. There are three major implications of the same. The first recommendation is that the leaders of the bank, as well as the HR practitioners, need to think about introducing complementary practices, such as membership, e.g., job design, incentive program, or cultural fit. Second, the leadership training that has been skewed towards Western developed personas needs to be modified to suit the socio-economic and cultural environment of Bangladesh. Lastly, the research study urges researchers to re-evaluate the universality of transformational leadership theory, whereby culturally-labeled leadership structures are needed in new economies.

From a management perspective, banks ought to combine leadership training with HR strategies that are in a position to promote autonomy, communication, and participatory decision-making. Leadership development, job redesign, and cultural change should be combined in the future to form synergy between the managerial vision and employee experience.

Theoretically, the paper contradicts the universality of TLS as the authors find sector-specific contingencies. It points to the necessity of contextualized leadership models within emerging markets that lack structural and cultural obstacles that reduce the direct influence of leadership.

6. CONCLUSION

This empirical research is important in that it brings out a boundary to the TLS-engagement relationship. Although transformational leadership has been shown to be effective in most environments, its independent effect in the banking industry in Bangladesh seems to be limited. Thus, leadership training should be supported by systemic changes and redesign of jobs, aligning incentives, and building trust.

The nature of the study (cross-sectional) does not allow causal inference; also, the use of convenience sampling limits the possibility of generalization, and the use of self-reported data may be prone to bias. Irrespective of these constraints, the study offers grounds for which leadership theory can be improved in the new conditions.

Scholars are encouraged to use bigger and more representative samples, longitudinal or multilevel designs, and mediation (e.g., trust, psychological safety) and moderation (e.g., regulatory environment, digital transformation). The comparative research among South Asian economies may enhance the insight into the contextual influence on leadership effectiveness.

To the banking administrators, the findings suggest that transformational leadership is not adequate on its own but needs to be incorporated in wider HR and cultural change initiatives. Engagement and sustainability of organizations in the long term can be boosted by improving leadership pipelines, modernizing incentives, and developing participatory climates.

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