

RESEARCH ARTICLE

On the Link between Transformational Leadership and Employees' Work Engagement: The Role of Psychological Empowerment

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Abstract

The results of previous studies have consistently supported the relationship between transformational leadership style and work engagement, yet the focus is now on the explanatory mechanisms. This study aims to investigate whether psychological empowerment could be a potential mediator of the relationship between the two constructs. Featuring new knowledge reported in the literature, a non-experimental, cross-sectional study based on a sample of 174 participants from different industries was conducted. The results of the statistical analysis showed that transformational leadership style is a significant predictor of engagement. Moreover, psychological empowerment partly mediated the relationship between transformational leadership and employees' work engagement. These findings reiterate both the importance and the efficiency of the transformational leader in relation to the positive outcomes of the subordinates. Also, it highlights a potential motivational process that underpins these results.

Keywords

transformational leadership, work engagement, psychological empowerment, motivational process

Numerous theoretical frameworks had outlined the relationship between transformational leadership style and employees' work engagement, the most frequently used being the Social Exchange Theory (Blau, 1968). However, the inherent criticisms associated with this theoretical framework refer to the lack of specificity due to the leader's style and explanations (Blomme, Kodden, & Beasley-Suffolk, 2015). Based on this observation, firstly, this paper analyzes the relationship between transformational leadership and the employees' level of work engagement, using a specific framework, namely the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model (Bakker &

Demerouti, 2007; Bakker & Demerouti, 2014). Furthermore, although various mechanisms have been proposed as mediators of the relationship between transformational leadership and work engagement, this topic has not been covered yet. In this manner, our second objective investigates the mediating effect of psychological empowerment within the mentioned relationship.

From the beginning, the concept of work engagement has gained momentum due to its positive valence (Simpson, 2009). For example, the association between work engagement and in-role performance and extra-role performance is well-established (Babcock-Roberson & Strickland, 2010; Buil,

Martínez, & Matute, 2018; Salanova, Lorente, Chambel, & Martínez, 2011). Additionally, work engagement is positively associated with both employee and customer satisfaction, productivity and profitability of the organization, and is negatively associated with turnover and work accidents (Harter, Schmidt, & Hayes, 2002).

Considering the multiple positive effects of work engagement, distinct antecedents were examined, embracing individual and organizational levels. The transformational leadership style is often conveyed as an antecedent of work engagement. As follows, roughly three decades after its emergence, valuable insights are provided (Mhatre & Riggio, 2014), as transformational leadership's efficiency is reflected not only by the employees' results, but also by the entirety of the organization. Additionally, related to the falling dominoes effect, it was established that transformational leadership style – adopted at a higher hierarchical level – is also adopted by leaders from the following lower level (Bass, Waldman, Avolio, & Bebb, 1987).

Various theoretical frameworks had explored the relationship between transformational leadership style and employees' work engagement. However, the most intensely used have been the Social Exchange Theory (Blau, 1968). In short, as the principle of reciprocity claims, specific actions taken by the leader determine a positive response from the employees, leading to a higher level of work engagement (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). Nevertheless, critics complain about the lack of specificity (Blomme, Kodden, & Beasley-Suffolk, 2015).

Therefore, distinctive from the prior perspective, we attempt to explain the mentioned relationship through the lens of the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Bakker & Demerouti, 2014). A significant number of studies revealed the relationship between a broad range of job resources and work engagement (Quiñones, den Broeck, & De Witte, 2013; Saks, 2019). The category of work resources goes beyond features strictly associated with the work task (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). Starting from this

assumption, the transformational leadership style – as a social resource – could be associated with a high level of employees' work engagement through the motivational process proposed by the JD-R model.

Although different explanatory mechanisms have been put forward as mediators in the relationship between transformational leadership and work engagement, Avolio, Walumbwa, & Weber (2009) suggested that the process by which transformational leaders motivate their employees requires further investigation. In response to this call, our study aims to analyze empowerment as a potential mediator within the prior relationship. As stated in the early days of theorizing on the transformational leadership style, such a leader facilitates positive work results by psychologically empowering the employees. Nevertheless, there is limited support for the association between transformational leadership, psychological empowerment and work engagement.

As follows, conceding that psychological empowerment proves to be an explanatory mechanism in the relationship between transformational leadership and work engagement, advanced directions of psychological intervention may be foreseen.

Transformational leadership style and work engagement

Work engagement outlines a persistent and extensive cognitive-affective state, which is not limited to an object, event, individual or behavior. It consists of three specific components: vigor, dedication and absorption (Schaufeli, Salanova, González-Romá, & Bakker, 2002). The Job Demands-Resources model is a frequently used framework for analyzing the antecedents and consequences of work engagement and other important outcomes for organizations (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Bakker & Demerouti, 2014). Actually, the JD-R model was first developed as a stress explanatory model where burnout was the main outcome investigated (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). The first proposition of model assumed that all jobs are defined by a series of demands, and a set of

available resources. The dynamic relationship between these characteristics (i.e., demands and resources) conducts the employee's level of performance and burnout. Years later, with the development of the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES; Schaufeli, Salanova, González-Romá, & Bakker, 2002), the JD-R model demonstrated flexibility in explaining also positive outcomes, such as work engagement. Instead of looking at what is wrong with employees, it was now possible to investigate under which conditions employees flourish at work (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). In this context, the second proposition of JD-R model is that job demands and resources instigate two very different processes, namely a health-impairment process that leads to negative outcomes and a motivational process that leads to positive outcomes. One of the motivational assumptions of the JD-R model claims that when being provided with enough resources the employee would not only accomplish the position's tasks but also exert extra-role behaviors, via work engagement as a mechanism. As follows, within this model, work engagement plays a primary role.

A sequence of resources such as task variety, task significance, autonomy, feedback, social support from colleagues, etc., found empirical support for their potential to facilitate work engagement (Rich, Lepine, & Crawford, 2010). Although it is not based on the theoretical framework of the JD-R model, the impact of the transformational leader on employees' attitudes and behaviors has also benefited from extensive support (Enwereuzor, Ugwu, & Eze, 2018; Hayati, Charkhabi, & Naami, 2014) and could effortlessly be treated as an employees' resource. Transformational leadership could naturally be defined as a „style of leadership that transforms followers to rise above their self-interests, by altering their morale, ideals, interests, and values, motivating them to perform better than initially expected” (Pieterse, van Knippenberg, Schippers, & Stam, 2009, p. 610). Transformational leadership became noticeable in the late 1970s, when leadership research experienced a paradigm shift from traditional leadership approaches to what has been labeled positive forms of leadership (Hoch, Bommer,

Dulebohn, & Wu, 2018). Burns (1978) introduced transformational leadership to describe the ideal situation between political leaders and their followers. Although other forms of positive leadership have appeared in the literature (e.g., ethical, authentic, and servant leadership) none of them has been shown to have incremental validity above and beyond transformational leadership in explaining various criteria (Hoch, Bommer, Dulebohn, & Wu, 2018).

The leadership style - a social aspect of the work context - could serve as a resource, facilitating not only the fulfillment of key assertions of work, but it could also act as a motivator, fostering employees' growth. Moreover, the transformational leader, through the specificity of his behavior, could facilitate access to other job resources, contributing to an increased level of engagement. For example, intellectual stimulation involves providing feedback along with challenging tasks to stimulate problem-solving, while individualized consideration could encourage the development of employees' distinctive resources according to their needs, competencies and aspirations.

As stated in the JD-R model, a significant role of job resources consists of their potential to reduce the negative effect of job demands (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). In this regard, employees having transformational leaders will perceive job demands in terms of challenges (Cavanaugh, Boswell, Roehling, & Boudreau, 2000). Suggestive from this perspective is a study conducted by Breevaart & Bakker (2018) showing that the transformational leadership style has not only increased employees' engagement - taking into account high work demands (cognitive requirements, workload) - but it has also moderated the impact of stressors (role conflict) on work engagement. Therefore, employees would treat work tasks as challenges, not as strains. This pattern updates the fact that leaders are an essential resource for their subordinates, helping them reach their organizational goals, even under stressful working conditions (Breevaart & Bakker, 2018).

In addition, leadership could facilitate the development of alternative resources not only at the job level but also at the individual level.

A study conducted by Tims, Bakker & Xanthopoulou (2011) identified the daily level of employees' optimism as a mediator of the relationship between transformational leadership and work engagement. Even under high demands, the leader who motivates and pays attention to the employees' needs enhances a higher level of optimism. Therefore, guided by the optimistic attitude towards achieving the goals, the employee is more engaged and willing to make additional efforts (Tims, Bakker, & Xanthopoulou, 2011). Accordingly, based on this argument from recent literature, our first hypothesis is rather confirmatory:

H1: Transformational leadership style is positively related to employees' work engagement.

The mediating effect of psychological empowerment

Various explanatory mechanisms have been proposed for the relationship between transformational leadership and employees' work engagement (e.g., Bui, Zeng, & Higgs, 2017; Li, Castaño, & Li 2018). However, studies that approached empowerment as such a mechanism are non-existent.

Two research directions on empowerment have emerged in the literature. Structural empowerment was associated with Kanter's name (1987) and emphasized a set of policies designed to decentralize power, allowing lower-level employees to execute appropriate actions. Subsequently, Conger & Kanungo (1988) mark the shift to a motivational perspective, namely psychological empowerment, arguing that these two forms of empowerment are distinct manners of approaching the concepts of power and control.

Psychological empowerment is characterized by a set of four cognitions: meaning, self-determination, self-efficacy and impact, which are formed in relation to the work environment. Nevertheless, psychological empowerment is not a pervasive feature in various contexts and its extended character explains why different people manifest different degrees of empowerment (Spreitzer, 1995).

Given that this concept is often described in terms of intrinsic motivation, the premise of its association with the transformational leadership style is easily outlined. Thus, the transformational leader could facilitate favorable results of the employees by stimulating their intrinsic motivation. It is acknowledged that, unlike transactional leadership, the transformational leader promotes intrinsic motivation (George & Sabhapathy, 2010). Therefore, psychological empowerment captures this process, which is further manifested in the employees' perception regarding not only their influence on the work environment, but also their ability to successfully perform their duties.

Spreitzer (2008) stated that a supportive and trusting relationship is essential for employees' empowerment. A possible relationship between these variables has been prefigured since the outset of the transformational leadership. For instance, Bass (1999) suggested that empowerment could be a mediator in the relationship between leadership style and different organizational outcomes.

Moreover, one who is guided by a strong intrinsic motivation is likely to exhibit higher levels of absorption, energy and dedication, thus enhancing the level of work engagement (McAllister, 2016).

Even though it has been argued that psychological empowerment has received particular attention because „it provides a label for a nontraditional paradigm of motivation” (Thomas & Velthouse, 1990, p. 667), its relationship with one of the main concepts of motivation – work engagement – was under-investigated (Quiñones et al., 2013). It has been previously demonstrated that psychological empowerment is associated with job satisfaction, organizational commitment and turnover intention at an attitudinal level. Moreover, it is also related to task performance, OCB and innovation at a behavioral level (Seibert et al., 2011).

Although scarce, current studies have shown a positive association between psychological empowerment and work engagement. Macsinga, Sulea, Sârbescu, Fischmann, & Dumitru (2013) suggested that not only does psychological empowerment

positively correlate with engagement, but also that psychological empowerment has an increased incremental value over other predictors (personality traits and job tenure) of engagement.

In light of previous arguments, it could be assumed that psychological empowerment acts as a mediator of the relationship between leadership style and work engagement. Under the coordination of the transformational leader, subordinates become more intrinsically motivated (psychologically empowered) to perform their duties, which leads to high levels of work engagement (McAllister, 2016).

H2: Psychological empowerment will mediate the relationship between transformational leadership and employees' work engagement.

Method

This study is based on a non-experimental research model. The analyzed variables were transformational leadership style as an independent variable, work engagement as a dependent variable and psychological empowerment – presumed mediating variable. Due to the inability to control or manipulate the independent variable, the research design was a cross-sectional one.

Prior studies have reported variables such as gender, age, level of education, and job tenure as being positively associated with both work engagement and psychological empowerment (Quiñones et al., 2013; Seibert et al., 2011). On this account, in the present study they were used as control variables. The time that employees spend interacting with their supervisors varies, as there are differences in the working hours. Because the type of work (full-time/part-time) was not included in the conditions of participation, the number of working hours in a week was also treated as a control variable.

Participants and procedure

The sample was constructed using the snowball sampling method. To estimate the minimum number of participants, a power analysis using the statistical program „G * Power 3.1.9.2” (Faul, Erdfelder, Buchner, &

Lang, 2014) was performed. Thus, in order to obtain a mean effect size (.15) at a statistical power of .08, the program estimated that 153 participants were needed.

A number of 184 people from a variety of industries (IT, human resources, sales, psychology and psychotherapy, education and others) initially answered the questionnaire. One questionnaire was deleted because it was a duplicate and another participant was excluded, due to his suspended employment at the time of completing the questionnaire. Also, following the preliminary data analysis, cases with missing values or identified as extreme values were excluded. The final sample consisted of 174 persons aged between 20 and 58 years ($M = 29.57$; $SD = 6.64$). Of these, 97 were women (55.7%) and 77 were men (44.3%).

The questionnaire was distributed online, on social networks, access to completion being achieved through the „Google Drive” platform. Participants were informed about the study and the conditions of inclusion, about the confidentiality of the data provided and about the possibility of withdrawing at any time. Participation was voluntary and anonymous, no personal data being requested. No incentives were used. The conditions of participation included having a job and a direct superior within the respective job.

Instruments

Transformational leadership. The transformational leadership style was assessed using the 15-item Transformational Leadership Questionnaire, developed by Rafferty and Griffin (2004). Example of items includes: “Has a clear understanding of where we are going”, “Says things that make employees proud to be part of this organization”. Participants were asked to rate their level of agreement on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from „strong disagreement” (1) to „strong agreement” (5). Cronbach’s Alpha for the scale was .91, 95% CI [0.89, 0.93].

Work engagement. Employee engagement was measured using the short version of the „Utrecht Work Engagement Scale” (Schaufeli, Bakker, & Salanova, 2006). The scale consists of 9 items. Three items are allocated for each of the three dimensions: vigor („At my work, I feel

bursting with energy”), dedication („I am enthusiastic about my job”), absorption („I get carried away when I am working”). Responses were scored on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 0 („never”) to 7 („always”). This scale was validated on the Romanian population (Virgă et al., 2015). Both single-factor and three-factor models had acceptable values. Cronbach Alpha coefficients for the 3 scales ranged from .70 to .80, indicating good internal consistency. For the unifactorial model, the consistency was constantly higher than the previous one, gravitating around .90. According to the authors, the unifactorial model for Romania proves to be the most appropriate, regardless of the organization. (Virgă et al., 2015). In this study, Cronbach’s Alpha coefficient was 0.92, 95% CI [0.90, 0.93].

Psychological empowerment. Psychological empowerment was measured using the „Psychological Empowerment Scale” (Spreitzer, 1995). This questionnaire comprises 12 items, for example: „I am confident about

my ability to do my job”, „I have a great deal of control over what happens in my department”. Participants answered the questionnaire items using a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from strong disagreement (1) to strong agreement (7). In this study Cronbach’s Alpha for the entire scale was 0.91, 95% CI [0.89, 0.93].

Results

All data were analyzed using SPSS 25. During the first stage, descriptive statistics were obtained for all the variables included in the study. Table 1 displays demographic information of the sample. Before properly testing the hypotheses, the variables were subjected to a preliminary analysis. The data was complete, no missing values were identified. Next, the extreme values were analyzed. Scores with 3 standard deviations beyond the mean were considered outliers and were eliminated from the analysis, resulting in a final sample of 174 participants.

Table 1. *Descriptive statistics for demographic variables*

Variables	N	Percent (%)
Age	<i>M</i> = 29.57	<i>SD</i> = 6.64
Gender		
Female	97	55.7%
Male	77	44.3%
Education		
High school	31	17.8%
Bachelor’s degree	76	43.7%
Master’s degree	66	37.9%
Ph. D	1	0.6%
Job tenure	<i>M</i> = 3.27	<i>SD</i> = 2.95
Working hours/week	<i>M</i> = 39.84	<i>SD</i> = 7.63

Note: *M* = Mean, *SD* = Standard deviation, *N*=174

To test the distribution for normality and multicollinearity, a multiple regression analysis was performed. The analysis of the tolerance index and VIF coefficient had values within the normal limits, not indicating a

problem of multicollinearity. For normality, the distribution of residual values was analyzed. Table 2 presents the means, standard deviations and correlations for all three variables.

Table 2. *Descriptive statistics and inter-scale correlations*

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2
1 Transformational leadership	3.83	.62		
2 Psychological empowerment	5.55	.86	.47**	
3 Work engagement	4.44	.93	.44**	.61**

Note: *M* = mean; *SD* = standard deviation; *N* = 174. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .001$.

The correlations recorded between variables have mean values, all being statistically significant. There is a positive, statistically significant correlation between transformational leadership style and employee engagement ($r = .44, p < .001$), which means that an increase in the transformational leadership style is associated with a higher level of work engagement. A positive, close correlation was also identified between the transformational leadership and the perceived level of psychological empowerment ($r = .47, p < .001$). Subordinates of the transformational leader are more likely to perceive a higher level of psychological empowerment. The strongest correlation was between the perceived level of psychological empowerment and employees' work engagement ($r = .61, p < .001$). Thus, high values of empowerment are associated with greater engagement.

Hypotheses were tested using the *MEDIATE* macro (Hayes, 2018). The proposed model examined the effect of transformational leadership style on work engagement through psychological empowerment. Age, gender, education level, job tenure and number of working hours were introduced as covariates.

This program calculates multiple regression analysis providing information on the total, direct and indirect effect. Its advantage compared to the algorithm proposed by Baron & Kenny (1986), respectively the Sobel test, is related to a higher statistical power. In addition, compared to prior models, it provides clues on the statistical significance of the indirect effect using the bootstrap method. The authors recommend that the estimation of the confidence intervals should be based on the calculation of 10,000 samples extracted from the initial data sets (Hayes & Preacher, 2014).

The indirect effect is significant when zero is not within the confidence interval.

Our first hypothesis corresponds to the total effect. The results of the regression analysis displayed by *Process* indicate that transformational leadership style is a significant predictor of work engagement ($\beta = .51, p < .001$). Controlling for demographic variables, the transformational leadership style accounted for 27% of the variance in work engagement ($R^2 = .27, p < .001$). The background variables – gender ($\beta = .11, p > .05$), level of education ($\beta = .10, p > .05$), number of working hours ($\beta = .005, p > .05$) and job tenure ($\beta = .07, p > .05$) – were not significant predictors. In contrast, a low association between age and work engagement was identified ($\beta = .16, p < .05$).

Transformational leadership style was a significant predictor of psychological empowerment ($\beta = .54, p < .001$). Controlling for the background variables, it explained about 28% of the variance in psychological empowerment ($R^2 = .28, p < .001$). Most demographic variables made a non-significant contribution in predicting psychological empowerment: gender ($\beta = .04, p > .05$), education ($\beta = .09, p > .05$), age ($\beta = -.03, p > .05$), job tenure ($\beta = .11, p > .05$). The number of working hours was the only significant control variable ($\beta = .18, p < .05$).

A final regression analysis presents both the relationship between psychological empowerment and work engagement and the direct effect of the mediation relationship. Psychological empowerment was shown to be a predictor of work engagement ($\beta = .51, p < .001$). Along with demographic variables, transformational leadership style and psychological empowerment accounted for 46% of the variance in work engagement

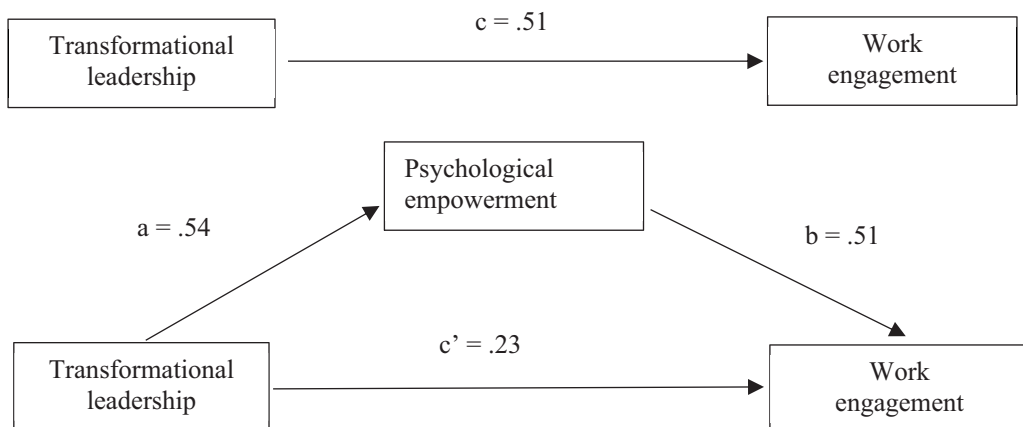
($R^2 = .46$, $p < .001$). The only significant control variable was age ($\beta = .18$, $p < .01$).

Detailed results and coefficients for these variables, as well as the results of the mediation analysis are presented in Table 3. Results for the direct effect show that the relationship between transformational leadership and work engagement remained statistically significant when controlling for psychological empowerment ($\beta = .23$, $p < .01$). However, differences in results may exist due

to the sample size, so these data are not enough to conclude whether there is a total or partial mediation (Hayes, 2018). There is a tendency to analyze the indirect effect, which corresponds to the effect of transformational leadership on work engagement via psychological empowerment. Results showed that zero was not within the confidence interval, suggesting a statistically significant effect.

Table 3. *Total, direct and indirect effect of transformational leadership on work engagement*

	Coefficient β	Se	R^2	CI95%
Total effect	.51***	.10	.27***	
Covariates				
Gender	.11	.13		
Age	.16*	.01		
Education	.10	.08		
Job tenure	.07	.02		
Working hours	.00	.00		
Direct effect	.23**	.10		
Indirect effect	.28	.05		[0.17, 0.39]



Note: Reported values correspond to standardized coefficients (β); a - effect of transformational leadership on empowerment; b - effect of empowerment on work engagement; c – total effect; c' – direct effect

Figure 1. *Final Research Model*

Discussions

The current study aimed to investigate whether and to what extent the transformational leadership style is associated with the employees' work engagement and to test whether psychological empowerment mediates this relationship. The results showed that leadership style is a significant predictor of work engagement. Similar findings have been reported by other authors (Breevaart & Bakker, 2018; Hayati, Charkhabi, & Naami, 2014).

These results could be explained based on the motivational process proposed by the Job Demands-Resources model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). Prior studies assign employees' resources to the category of elements strictly associated with the work task. However, job resource classification should include various aspects associated with either social or interpersonal relationships (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). In this regard, our first contribution to the literature was to treat transformational leadership as a social resource.

In essence, the transformational leadership style, in light of a social resource, stimulates the employees to invest a higher level of energy. Therefore, they will confront much easier the inherent obstacles and will remain connected to their work, meaning they will have a higher level of work engagement.

By discovering a partial mediation relationship between transformational leadership style, psychological empowerment and work engagement, the second hypothesis was supported. According to the results, empowerment carries off part of the transformational leadership effect on work engagement. Keeping the same framework, proposed by the JD-R model, empowerment follows the pattern of this motivational process. Spreitzer (1995) defined empowerment by placing it within the paradigm of intrinsic motivation. Accordingly, transformational leadership by empowering employees stimulates, indeed, intrinsic motivation. Therefore, the employees are more engaged and are acting due to the virtue of their motivation, not being driven by any external enforcement. An intrinsically motivated person (psychologically

empowered) could become more easily absorbed and energized by his or her work (McAllister, 2016).

Based on a similar approach, Quiñones, den Broeck, & De Witte (2013) analyzed various job resources, including support from colleagues, superiors, and autonomy, showing that psychological empowerment contributes to the motivational process proposed by the Job Demand-Resources model.

Theoretical and Practical implication

A series of theoretical and practical implications are descending from the current study. Regarding the theoretical perspective, firstly, transformational leadership and work engagement have been priority investigated by the lenses of Social Exchange Theory, while present findings add to the academic literature, by drawing on the JD-R model to establish transformational leadership as an employees' resource. Secondly, from a theoretical point of view, it is not enough to discover the existence of a relationship between two variables, it is also imperative to determine the explicative mechanisms associated with this relationship. Therefore, the next theoretical implication consists of providing the literature with an additional explanatory key regarding the relationship between transformational leadership and employees' work engagement.

In terms of practical implications, this study reinforces the importance of the positive influence of the leadership style on the employees. Furthermore, it suggests to the organizational stakeholders to reconsider the promotion criteria related to the leadership positions. Namely, the promotions should not be based only on the frequently used condition of prior professional performance, but also on the need to promote in leadership positions those individuals who have the potential of being transformational leaders.

An additional practical direction is ensured by discovering a specific manner in which a transformational leader could have a positive influence on the employees' engagement. One of the strategies is for transformational leaders to exert empowerment behaviors. Finally, empowering others is a skill that could be

acquired by attending training or personal development programs. The positive relationship between transformational leadership and employees' engagement signals the importance of not only hiring managers who employ the transformational leadership style, but also to train current managers to lead with the transformational leadership style. The employees who feel empowered and engaged will have strong attachments with the organization who employs them, which will produce in turn higher retention levels, low absenteeism and counterproductive work behaviors, and high productivity levels.

Limitations and further directions

A first limitation of the study is the cross-sectional design. Bono & McNamara (2011) addressed the problem of cross-sectional designs for topics that involve organizational change. The relationship between leadership style and work engagement assumes that transformational leadership influences employees' work engagement. Along with the supposed mediation relationship, this involves causal inferences for which further studies are required.

The data on the variables included in the study were collected at the same time. The participants evaluated the transformational leadership style of their direct superior, the perceived degree of psychological empowerment as well as their level of engagement, which may be a source of common method bias. In addition, given the positive nature of the work engagement, scores for this variable may be inflated due to social desirability.

This study identified that psychological empowerment partially mediates the relationship between transformational leadership style and work engagement, which suggests that there could be numerous other explanatory mechanisms. Future research should investigate more than one potential mediator and consider how more similar variables could be associated, providing a comprehensive explanation. For instance, close to this framework, upcoming studies could analyze the potential mediating effect of

both structural and psychological empowerment. There are several other factors underpinning these results. Certain individual variables, such as psychological capital and proactive personality, could change our understanding regarding the association between transformational leadership and engagement. For example, people with high psychological capital are prone to perceive their control of the situation, thus more easily immersing themselves into work. Other job characteristics, including the degree of relationship with the leaders or colleagues and trust in the leader could also explain the dynamics of this relationship. In particular, trust in leader plays a crucial role when evaluating the effectiveness of transformational leadership, which is subsequently reflected in a higher level of engagement.

While this study only investigated the mediating effect of psychological empowerment, a future research would aim to analyze patterns of change, depending on specific cultural particularities (e.g. power distance orientation and collectivism). It would be expected that a mediation relationship will exist especially in those cultures characterized by a low power distance. Also, the leader's unique vision is more likely to propagate in a collectivist culture. Since the individual plays an active role in determining the consequences of leadership (Howell & Shamir, 2005), it would be interesting to investigate if Person-Organization (P-O) fit perceptions act as a moderator. A previous study showed that structural empowerment and P-O fit interact to increase work engagement via psychological empowerment (Kimura, 2011). Following this line, transformational leadership could enhance work engagement only for those employees with a high level of P-O fit. Recent studies raise concerns about the moral dimension of leadership. Leaders could be „transformational” but also unethical and abusive, acting contrary to organizational values (Hoch, Bommer, Dulebohn, & Wu, 2018). In this respect, future work could shed light on the moderating effect of organizational justice in the relationship

between transformational leadership style and work engagement.

Furthermore, the present study addressed psychological empowerment from an individual perspective. Future research could adopt a team-oriented approach. The rationale is that the transformational leader offers a common vision, fostering employees' personal identification with the group (Kark et al., 2003).

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