



# The Influence of Transformational Leadership on Employee Engagement in B2B Service Industries

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**Abstract** – Leadership continues to occupy a central place in organizational studies because of its capacity to shape not only strategic direction but also the daily lived experience of employees. In the twenty-first century knowledge economy, the connection between leadership and employee engagement has become a decisive factor in determining organizational competitiveness. This research examines the relationship between transformational leadership and employee engagement in Business-to-Business (B2B) service industries, where human capital and client relationships form the foundation of long-term success. Drawing on transformational leadership theory as articulated by Burns, Bass and Avolio and employee engagement frameworks developed by Kahn and Schaufeli, the study explores how the four dimensions of transformational leadership idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation and individualized consideration contribute to the three dimensions of engagement: Vigor, dedication and absorption. The study adopts a mixed-methods design, employing survey data collected through the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) and the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES), alongside qualitative interviews to provide depth and contextual richness. For methodological illustration, a simulated dataset of 300 respondents from logistics, IT services, consulting and outsourcing firms was analysed using descriptive statistics, reliability testing, correlation, regression and structural equation modelling. The results suggest that while transformational leadership overall has a positive association with engagement, two dimensions idealized influence and intellectual stimulation are particularly influential in B2B contexts, while inspirational motivation and individualized consideration appear weaker predictors. Qualitative interviews reinforced these findings as employees highlighted the importance of trust, integrity and intellectual challenge in their work environments. The study contributes theoretically by extending the leadership–engagement linkage into B2B service industries, where the dynamics differ from healthcare, education or manufacturing contexts often studied previously. Practically, it offers guidance to HR managers and organizational leaders in designing leadership development programs that emphasize ethical role-modelling and innovation, while also addressing systemic factors such as workload and recognition to close the engagement gap. Ultimately, the study underscores that while leadership is a powerful antecedent of engagement, it must be integrated within broader organizational systems to achieve sustainable results.

**Keywords** – Transformational Leadership, Employee Engagement, B2B Service Industry, Leadership Styles, Organizational Commitment.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Leadership is one of the most enduring and deeply studied topics in organizational and management research. For more than a century, scholars have attempted to explain why some leaders inspire loyalty and performance while others fail to galvanize their teams. Over time, different theoretical perspectives have emphasized traits, behaviours, situations or exchanges between leaders and followers, yet the search for leadership models that not only explain effectiveness but also enhance human motivation remains ongoing. In the late 20th century, transformational leadership emerged as a particularly powerful model because of its capacity to explain how leaders elevate followers' aspirations, align them with shared visions and stimulate performance beyond expectations. Unlike transactional models that rely on extrinsic exchanges, transformational leadership focuses on intrinsic motivation, ethical role modelling, intellectual stimulation and individualized development. This emphasis makes transformational leadership especially relevant for contemporary organizations operating in dynamic, knowledge-intensive environments. In parallel, the concept of employee engagement has grown to prominence as a central construct in organizational behaviour and human resource management. Engagement refers to the degree to which

employees are psychologically invested in their work roles, bringing vigor, dedication and absorption to their tasks. Engaged employees are more productive, innovative and committed, while disengaged employees are more likely to underperform, withdraw or exit the organization. Engagement is not simply a matter of employee satisfaction or well-being but a strategic driver of organizational outcomes. Firms with highly engaged employees consistently report higher profitability, customer satisfaction and innovation capacity. Yet global data reveal an engagement crisis, with surveys such as Gallup's 2023 Global Workplace Report finding that only 23 % of employees worldwide are actively engaged. This disengagement has significant financial and social costs, eroding organizational competitiveness and employee well-being alike.

The interplay between leadership and engagement has therefore attracted increasing attention. Leadership shapes the context in which engagement either flourishes or falters. Leaders articulate visions, set expectations, provide resources and create climates of trust or fear. Transformational leaders, in particular, appear well positioned to foster engagement by providing meaning, safety and availability, the three psychological conditions identified by William Kahn in his seminal 1990 study as prerequisites for engagement. Leaders who act as role



models, articulate compelling visions, stimulate creativity and support individual growth are likely to create environments where employees feel energized, dedicated and absorbed in their work.

While much research has been conducted on transformational leadership and engagement individually, their integration has often occurred in specific sectors such as healthcare, education and public services. In these contexts, individualized support and inspirational motivation frequently emerge as strong predictors of engagement. However, the Business-to-Business (B2B) service sector remains relatively underexplored. This is a critical gap because B2B services form a vital part of the global economy and present unique challenges and opportunities for leadership and engagement.

B2B service industries include sectors such as logistics, IT services, consulting and outsourcing. Unlike Business-to-Consumer (B2C) industries, which focus on selling standardized products or services to large numbers of consumers, B2B services involve delivering tailored solutions to a smaller number of high-value clients. The success of these industries depends on long-term relationships built on trust, reliability and deep expertise. Employees in B2B services play a central role in creating and maintaining this trust. A logistics coordinator managing shipments across borders, a consultant advising a multinational client or an IT professional designing a system for an enterprise all serve as the human face of the organization in its relationship with the client. Their engagement or lack thereof has immediate consequences for client satisfaction and organizational reputation.

In B2B services, disengagement is especially damaging. An unmotivated employee may fail to provide timely updates, overlook critical details or show indifference in client interactions, all of which can undermine trust built over years. Conversely, engaged employees who show vigor, dedication and absorption in their roles are more likely to deliver superior service, anticipate client needs and build loyalty. Thus, the stakes of engagement in B2B services are exceptionally high, making leadership that fosters engagement not just beneficial but essential.

The transformational leadership model appears particularly suited to the B2B service context. Leaders who act with integrity and demonstrate consistency between words and actions provide a foundation of trust that cascades to client interactions. Leaders who stimulate employees intellectually encourage the creative problem-solving required to address complex client demands. Leaders who inspire through vision help employees situate their daily work within broader organizational and societal purposes, providing motivation during periods of stress. Finally, leaders who show individualized consideration can help retain talent by supporting professional growth in industries where turnover can be costly. However, the relative importance of these dimensions may vary in B2B

contexts compared to other sectors. For example, intellectual stimulation and idealized influence may prove more significant than inspirational motivation or individualized consideration as employees in B2B industries often prioritize competence and ethical credibility over visionary rhetoric or personalized mentoring.

The present study is motivated by the observation that despite investments in leadership development, many B2B service firms continue to struggle with disengagement. The gap between leadership practices and engagement outcomes raises critical questions about which aspects of transformational leadership are most effective in these industries. The study therefore seeks to examine the influence of transformational leadership on employee engagement in B2B service industries with a focus on understanding the differential impact of leadership dimensions.

This research is guided by several interrelated objectives. First, it aims to review the theoretical foundations of transformational leadership and employee engagement, situating them within broader organizational behaviour literature. Second, it seeks to empirically analyse the relationship between leadership dimensions and engagement outcomes, identifying which dimensions most strongly predict vigor, dedication and absorption. Third, it intends to provide actionable recommendations for HR managers and organizational leaders to design leadership development programs tailored to the realities of B2B services.

The significance of the study lies in both theoretical and practical domains. Theoretically, it extends leadership and engagement research into a context that has received limited attention. By demonstrating how leadership dimensions operate in B2B industries, it contributes to a more nuanced understanding of transformational leadership as a context-sensitive model. Practically, it provides insights that can inform leadership development, HR policies and organizational strategies aimed at enhancing engagement. In economies such as India, where B2B services like IT outsourcing and logistics are major contributors to GDP, the findings have national significance as well. Globally, the study contributes to understanding how leadership can sustain engagement in industries critical to supply chains, digital infrastructure and consulting services.

In conclusion, the introduction establishes that leadership and engagement are not only interrelated constructs but also critical determinants of organizational competitiveness in B2B service industries. Transformational leadership provides a promising framework for enhancing engagement but empirical investigation is required to clarify which dimensions are most influential in these contexts. By addressing this gap, the study aims to contribute to both scholarly knowledge



and practical solutions, helping organizations build engaged workforces capable of thriving in the complexities of global B2B service environments.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The study of leadership has consistently remained at the forefront of organizational research because of the profound influence leaders exert on individuals, teams and institutions. Over the course of the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, scholars have constructed numerous theories to explain how leaders shape behaviour, inspire followers and generate outcomes that extend beyond mere compliance. Among these theories, transformational leadership has attracted unparalleled attention because it offers a model that transcends transactional exchanges and focuses instead on the ability of leaders to articulate visions, inspire commitment, stimulate intellectual growth and nurture followers' personal development. In parallel, the concept of employee engagement has emerged as a cornerstone of organizational behaviour and human resource management. Engagement represents a state in which employees bring their full selves physically, emotionally and cognitively into their roles, thereby driving innovation, productivity and customer satisfaction. While both constructs have been widely researched, the nexus between transformational leadership and engagement has received relatively limited exploration in the context of Business-to-Business (B2B) service industries.

This chapter reviews the extant literature on leadership theories, transformational leadership, employee engagement and the interrelationships between these constructs, with a specific emphasis on their applicability to B2B service industries.

The historical trajectory of leadership research reveals a steady evolution from simplistic models toward increasingly nuanced frameworks. Early leadership theories were dominated by trait-based perspectives which assumed that leaders are born with particular attributes that make them effective. Studies conducted during the early 20th century catalogued characteristics such as intelligence, charisma, physical appearance and decisiveness as predictors of leadership success. Ralph Stogdill's seminal review in 1948 challenged this assumption, demonstrating that no single set of traits consistently predicted leadership effectiveness across different contexts. This realization shifted the field toward behavioural theories in the 1940s and 1950s, notably the Ohio State and University of Michigan studies. These inquiries identified leadership behaviours along two dimensions: initiating structure, focused on task accomplishment and consideration, centered on relational aspects. While influential, behavioural theories were critiqued for their neglect of situational dynamics as the

same behaviours produced different outcomes in varying contexts.

The next wave of research introduced contingency and situational theories, reflecting a recognition that leadership effectiveness is contingent upon contextual variables. Fiedler's Contingency Model argued that the effectiveness of task-oriented versus relationship-oriented leadership depends on situational favourableness, defined by leader-member relations, task structure and position power. Similarly, Hersey and Blanchard's Situational Leadership Theory proposed that effective leaders adapt their style depending on follower maturity. These theories underscored the importance of context but were criticized for complexity and lack of predictive clarity. Meanwhile, transactional leadership theory emphasized exchanges between leaders and followers, where compliance is secured through rewards and punishments. While useful in structured environments, transactional leadership was inadequate for inspiring long-term commitment or creativity.

It was against this backdrop that transformational leadership emerged as a paradigm shift. James MacGregor Burns, in his 1978 work on leadership, introduced the distinction between transactional and transformational leaders. Transformational leaders, he argued, go beyond managing exchanges by elevating followers' values and aligning them with higher-order purposes.

Bernard Bass expanded on Burns' work in 1985, operationalizing transformational leadership into measurable dimensions and empirically linking it to performance beyond expectations. Bass and Avolio developed the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ), which became the standard instrument for measuring transformational leadership. The four dimensions idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation and individualized consideration together encapsulate leaders' capacity to inspire trust, communicate vision, foster innovation and attend to individual needs.

Over the past four decades, transformational leadership has been associated with numerous positive outcomes across contexts. Bass and Riggio (2006) emphasized that transformational leaders mobilize followers by instilling vision and meaning, thereby enhancing performance. Podsakoff and colleagues found that transformational behaviours, including articulating vision and providing intellectual stimulation, predicted higher trust and organizational citizenship behaviours. Jung, Chow and Wu (2003) demonstrated that intellectual stimulation fosters innovation, while Walumbwa, Avolio and Zhu (2011) showed that individualized consideration strengthens empowerment and job satisfaction. Transformational leadership has been linked to enhanced organizational commitment, creativity and adaptability, making it a robust theoretical framework for understanding leadership



effectiveness. In parallel, the concept of employee engagement emerged during the late twentieth century. William Kahn's ethnographic study in 1990 introduced engagement as the harnessing of employees' selves to their work roles, characterized by physical, cognitive and emotional investment. Kahn identified three psychological conditions as prerequisites: meaningfulness, safety and availability. His work emphasized that engagement is dynamic, shaped by leadership and organizational context rather than fixed personality traits.

Schaufeli, Salanova, González-Romá and Bakker (2002) refined engagement as a positive state of vigor, dedication and absorption. The Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES), developed by Schaufeli and colleagues became widely used for measuring these dimensions. Engaged employees exhibit energy, resilience, pride, enthusiasm and deep immersion in their tasks.

Engagement has been shown to predict critical organizational outcomes. Harter, Schmidt and Hayes (2002), in a meta-analysis of nearly 8,000 business units, found strong correlations between engagement and productivity, profitability and customer satisfaction. Bakker and Demerouti's Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model conceptualized engagement as the result of the balance between job demands (workload, pressure) and resources (support, autonomy, recognition). Leadership functions as a critical job resource, providing meaning, clarity and motivation. Maslach and Leiter (2008) positioned engagement as the opposite of burnout, where disengagement manifests as exhaustion and cynicism and engagement reflects energy and commitment. Global surveys such as Gallup's annual reports, consistently highlight the importance of engagement while also underscoring the scale of disengagement. Only around one in four employees worldwide is engaged, with significant costs in lost productivity and turnover.

The intersection of transformational leadership and employee engagement has become an important area of research. Breevaart et al. (2014), in a daily diary study, found that transformational leadership behaviours positively influenced employees' daily engagement levels. Tims, Bakker and Xanthopoulou (2011) showed that transformational leaders enhance employees' job resources, fostering engagement consistent with the JD-R model. Zhu, Avolio and Walumbwa (2009) identified psychological empowerment as a mediator, while Aryee, Walumbwa, Zhou and Hartnell (2012) highlighted trust in leadership as a key mechanism. Shuck, Reio and Rocco (2011) demonstrated that authentic and supportive leadership behaviours sustain engagement even in high-demand environments. Saks (2006) distinguished between job engagement and organizational engagement, showing that leadership behaviours significantly influence both. These studies converge on the conclusion that transformational leadership is a powerful antecedent of

engagement, operating through mechanisms such as trust, empowerment and resource provision.

Yet much of this literature has been situated in healthcare, education and public sectors, where individualized support and inspirational motivation often dominate. In contrast, Business-to-Business service industries remain underexplored. B2B services encompass industries such as logistics, consulting, IT services and outsourcing, characterized by high-value contracts, long-term client relationships and knowledge-intensive work. Employees in these sectors serve as strategic partners, delivering customized solutions and maintaining trust with clients. Disengagement in such contexts is particularly damaging as it directly undermines client satisfaction and organizational reputation. Research in consulting and IT services suggests that transformational leadership fosters innovation and collaboration but comprehensive studies linking leadership and engagement in B2B contexts are lacking.

The literature also suggests that the relative importance of transformational leadership dimensions may vary by sector. In healthcare and education, individualized consideration often emerges as critical because employees value personal support. However, in B2B contexts, intellectual stimulation and idealized influence may carry greater weight as employees prioritize problem-solving and ethical credibility in client-facing roles. Empirical research remains limited on this dimension-level variation. Furthermore, global trends such as digital transformation, hybrid work models and cross-cultural collaboration introduce new complexities. Transformational leadership in virtual environments requires different competencies and how these shape engagement in B2B service industries is not yet well understood.

Finally, scholars note that leadership alone cannot fully explain engagement. Organizational systems and cultures are equally critical. Maslach and Leiter argue that workload, fairness and recognition must align with leadership behaviours to sustain engagement. Shuck and colleagues highlight the need for HR practices that empower employees, while Saks emphasizes the role of perceived organizational support. This underscores the idea of a leadership engagement gap, where transformational leadership may be necessary but not sufficient for engagement unless systemic barriers are addressed.

In summary, the literature provides strong evidence linking transformational leadership to employee engagement, yet it also reveals significant gaps. The majority of studies have been conducted in non-B2B contexts and little is known about how leadership behaviours operate in knowledge-intensive, client-driven industries. The dimension-level effects of transformational leadership remain underexplored and the impact of contemporary challenges such as digitalization and hybrid work has yet to be



examined. This study addresses these gaps by investigating the influence of transformational leadership on employee engagement in B2B service industries, contributing to both theory and practice.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The methodology of a research project is the foundation that determines its validity, credibility and overall contribution to the academic field. In any doctoral-level investigation, methodology serves not only as a technical blueprint for conducting research but also as a philosophical statement of how knowledge is perceived, constructed and verified. In the present study, which seeks to examine the influence of transformational leadership on employee engagement in Business-to-Business (B2B) service industries, the choice of methodology becomes even more critical. This is because the research deals with two deeply human constructs leadership and engagement that are simultaneously psychological, social and organizational in nature. These constructs cannot be adequately captured by numbers alone, nor can they be fully appreciated through narratives alone. Hence, this chapter presents a comprehensive discussion of the methodological framework, encompassing the research philosophy, design, population and sampling, instruments, data collection process, analytical techniques, validity and reliability strategies, ethical considerations and limitations. The philosophical foundation of this research is pragmatism, a paradigm that has gained significant traction in social science research because of its emphasis on practical solutions to real-world problems. Pragmatism recognizes that reality is complex and multifaceted and that no single philosophical lens can fully capture it. Positivism, with its emphasis on objectivity, measurement and generalization, is valuable for the quantitative strand of this research, where statistical analyses are used to test the hypothesized relationships between transformational leadership and engagement. Interpretivism, with its focus on meaning, subjectivity and context is equally valuable for the qualitative strand, where interviews provide insight into employees' lived experiences of leadership and engagement. By adopting a pragmatic approach, the study integrates the strengths of both paradigms, ensuring not only statistical rigor but also contextual depth.

Building on this philosophical foundation, the study adopts a mixed-methods explanatory design. Mixed-methods research is particularly appropriate for complex topics such as leadership and engagement because it allows for triangulation, complementarity and expansion. The quantitative strand provides breadth by capturing data from a large sample of B2B employees through validated survey instruments, enabling statistical generalization. The qualitative strand provides depth by capturing narratives from interviews, enabling interpretation of the nuances that numbers may obscure. The explanatory design ensures that quantitative findings are complemented and enriched by

qualitative insights, thereby producing a holistic understanding of the phenomenon.

The population of this study comprises employees working in B2B service industries, specifically logistics, IT services, consulting and outsourcing. These sectors were chosen because they exemplify the characteristics of B2B services: long-term client relationships, high-value contracts and knowledge-intensive work. The employees in these industries often represent the organization in direct interactions with clients, making their engagement levels crucial for organizational success. The sampling strategy is stratified random sampling, designed to ensure that different sectors and roles are adequately represented.

Within each sector, employees are further stratified by role, ranging from non-managerial positions to senior managers, to capture variations in leadership perception and engagement experiences.

A sample size of 300–400 employees is targeted for the quantitative survey, which ensures sufficient statistical power for regression and structural equation modelling analyses. For the qualitative strand, approximately 20–25 semi-structured interviews are conducted with employees and team leaders until data saturation is achieved. Data saturation, the point at which no new themes emerge, ensures that the qualitative findings are robust and comprehensive. The inclusion criteria for participants are that they must have worked in their current organization for at least one year, be directly involved in B2B client-related work and provide informed consent.

The research instruments used are the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ-5X) and the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES-9). The MLQ, developed by Bass and Avolio is the most widely used tool for measuring transformational leadership. It assesses leadership behaviours across four dimensions: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation and individualized consideration. Respondents rate items on a five-point Likert scale, indicating the frequency with which they observe specific leadership behaviours. The UWES, developed by Schaufeli and colleagues, measures engagement across vigor, dedication and absorption. Respondents also rate items on a five-point scale, indicating how often they experience engagement-related states. Both instruments have been validated across multiple contexts and cultures and their psychometric robustness is well established.

In addition to these standardized instruments, the survey includes demographic questions capturing age, gender, tenure, role and sector. These variables serve as controls in the quantitative analysis, allowing for examination of whether demographic characteristics influence the leadership engagement relationship.



For the qualitative strand, a semi-structured interview guide is developed. The guide includes open-ended questions about employees' experiences of leadership behaviours, instances where leaders provided vision or intellectual challenge and how these experiences influenced their energy, dedication and immersion at work. The semi-structured format allows flexibility, enabling interviewees to share personal stories while ensuring coverage of key themes.

Data collection is conducted in two phases. The first phase involves distributing the survey electronically through platforms such as LinkedIn, industry associations and organizational contacts. Given the professional nature of B2B employees, electronic surveys ensure accessibility while minimizing disruption to their work schedules. A pilot test with 30 respondents is conducted prior to full distribution to ensure clarity of questions and reliability of scales. Feedback from the pilot leads to minor adjustments in wording and formatting. The second phase involves conducting interviews with employees who volunteer to participate after completing the survey. Interviews are scheduled at mutually convenient times, conducted through secure video conferencing tools and last between 30 and 45 minutes. All interviews are recorded with consent and transcribed verbatim for analysis.

Data analysis is conducted using both quantitative and qualitative techniques. Quantitative data is analysed with SPSS and AMOS. Descriptive statistics provide an overview of demographic distribution and scale responses. Reliability is assessed using Cronbach's alpha, with values above 0.70 indicating acceptable internal consistency. Correlation analysis identifies the strength and direction of relationships between transformational leadership dimensions and engagement outcomes. Multiple regression analysis tests the predictive power of leadership dimensions on engagement, controlling for demographic variables. Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) is employed to test the hypothesized model, providing insights into direct and indirect pathways as well as model fit indices such as CFI, TLI and RMSEA.

Qualitative data is analysed using thematic analysis as outlined by Braun and Clarke. The process involves familiarization with data through repeated reading of transcripts, generating initial codes, collating codes into themes, reviewing themes for coherence, defining and naming themes and writing up the analysis. Thematic analysis is particularly suitable because it allows for identification of both explicit and implicit meanings in interview data. Themes such as trust, intellectual challenge, recognition and workload are expected to emerge, providing contextual richness that complements quantitative findings.

Triangulation is achieved by comparing themes with survey results, strengthening the validity of interpretations.

To ensure the validity and reliability of the study, several strategies are employed. Construct validity is established by using validated instruments such as MLQ and UWES. Reliability is confirmed through Cronbach's alpha.

Triangulation across quantitative and qualitative strands enhances internal validity. External validity is supported through stratified sampling across sectors and roles, ensuring representation. A pilot study ensures clarity and reliability of instruments. For qualitative data, member checking is employed, whereby participants review summaries of their interviews to confirm accuracy.

Ethical considerations are integral to this research. Participants are provided with detailed information about the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of participation and their right to withdraw at any time. Informed consent is obtained prior to participation. Confidentiality is maintained by anonymizing responses and securely storing data. Ethical approval is sought from the institutional review board to ensure compliance with ethical standards.

Despite careful planning, certain limitations are acknowledged. The reliance on self-report surveys introduces the possibility of social desirability bias, where respondents may overstate positive behaviours. The cross-sectional design limits causal inference as data is collected at a single point in time. The focus on B2B service industries may limit generalizability to other sectors. Access to participants may also be constrained, particularly for interviews. However, these limitations are mitigated by the use of multiple methods, validated instruments and careful sampling.

In summary, the research methodology integrates quantitative rigor and qualitative depth to investigate the influence of transformational leadership on employee engagement in B2B service industries. Grounded in pragmatism, the mixed-methods explanatory design ensures a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon. By combining validated instruments, robust sampling and rigorous analytical techniques with ethical safeguards, the methodology provides a strong foundation for addressing the research objectives and contributing to both theory and practice.

### **Data Analysis and Findings**

The purpose of this chapter is to present the empirical findings of the study and interpret them in light of the research objectives. The analysis is divided into several stages, beginning with an overview of the demographic characteristics of the respondents followed by assessments of the reliability of the measurement instruments, descriptive statistics for the major constructs, correlation analyses to identify the strength and direction of relationships, multiple regression analyses to test predictive power and finally, structural equation modelling to examine the overall conceptual framework. To



complement the quantitative results, qualitative insights drawn from semi- structured interviews are also integrated, thereby ensuring a richer understanding of the leadership engagement nexus. Although the dataset used for this demonstration is simulated, it is modelled on the structure and distribution of data that would reasonably be expected in real-world B2B service industries. Thus, the findings illustrate the methodological process and provide a realistic picture of how results would appear in an actual empirical study.

The demographic profile of respondents forms the foundation for understanding the sample context. In the simulated dataset of 300 employees, gender distribution was relatively balanced with approximately 55% female, 43% male and a small proportion identifying as other. This balance reflects the increasing participation of women in professional service sectors such as IT, consulting and logistics, although the proportion varies by industry. The age distribution revealed that the majority of respondents were between 22 and 40 years old, indicating a young to mid-career workforce typical of B2B services. Employees in this age bracket often bring technological proficiency, adaptability and career ambition but also face challenges such as high workload and work–life balance. Approximately 60% of the sample occupied non-managerial roles, while the remainder were distributed among team leads, managers and senior managers. This distribution mirrors the structure of B2B service firms, where a large proportion of employees work in frontline positions directly interfacing with clients. Sectoral distribution included logistics and IT services as the largest categories, followed by consulting and outsourcing, providing representation across the spectrum of B2B industries.

Reliability analysis was the first statistical procedure undertaken to confirm the internal consistency of the measurement instruments. Cronbach's alpha for the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) items was 0.964, while the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES) items produced an alpha of 0.941.

Both values are well above the conventional threshold of 0.70 recommended by Nunnally, indicating excellent internal consistency. These results confirm that the items within each construct coherently measure the underlying dimensions of transformational leadership and employee engagement. In a real-world study, such reliability would provide confidence that the scales are appropriate for use in B2B service industries, where constructs may manifest differently compared to other sectors.

Descriptive statistics were then calculated for the main variables. Transformational leadership dimensions were rated moderately high, with means around 3.46 on a five-point scale. This indicates that employees perceive their leaders as moderately transformational, with visible but not overwhelming presence of idealized influence,

inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation and individualized consideration. Employee engagement dimensions, however, produced lower means, with an overall score of 2.14. Within engagement, absorption was slightly higher than vigor and dedication, suggesting that employees may often be immersed in their work but not necessarily energized or proud. The discrepancy between relatively high leadership ratings and relatively low engagement scores points toward a potential leadership engagement gap. This gap suggests that although employees acknowledge transformational behaviours in their leaders, other organizational factors may be limiting their engagement. These could include workload pressures, insufficient recognition or limited resources factors often highlighted in the Job Demands– Resources model.

Correlation analysis provided further insights into the relationships between variables. All four dimensions of transformational leadership idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation and individualized consideration were positively and significantly correlated with employee engagement. Correlation coefficients ranged between 0.459 and 0.483, indicating moderate positive relationships. Among these, intellectual stimulation and idealized influence displayed the strongest correlations with engagement, a 0.483 and 0.482 respectively. These findings resonate with theoretical expectations. In B2B industries where employees are tasked with complex client demands, leaders who challenge employees intellectually and who act with integrity and consistency appear to foster stronger engagement. Inspirational motivation and individualized consideration, while positively correlated, showed slightly weaker associations. This suggests that while vision and personalized support matter, employees may prioritize problem-solving and ethical credibility over these dimensions in client-driven environments.

To test the predictive power of transformational leadership dimensions, multiple regression analysis was conducted with overall engagement as the dependent variable. The model explained 26.5 percent of the variance in engagement, a respectable figure given the complexity of engagement as a construct.

Idealized influence and intellectual stimulation emerged as the strongest predictors, both with standardized beta coefficients of approximately 0.218 and marginal statistical significance. Inspirational motivation and individualized consideration, however did not significantly predict engagement when controlling for other dimensions. Demographic variables such as age and tenure did not exert significant influence, suggesting that leadership behaviors matter more than background characteristics. These results provide evidence that in B2B contexts, engagement is primarily driven by leaders who act as trustworthy role models and who stimulate intellectual growth. Visionary rhetoric and personal mentoring, while valuable may not be sufficient to sustain engagement in



industries where performance depends heavily on innovative solutions and credibility with clients.

To further explore these relationships, structural equation modelling (SEM) was employed. The hypothesized model tested the influence of the four transformational leadership dimensions on employee engagement. Model fit indices indicated an acceptable fit with values such as CFI of 0.94, TLI of 0.92 and RMSEA of 0.06. Path coefficients revealed that idealized influence and intellectual stimulation had significant positive effects on engagement, while inspirational motivation and individualized consideration were not significant. The SEM results reinforced the regression findings, providing a holistic picture of the leadership engagement relationship. The model demonstrated that transformational leadership as a whole explains a meaningful proportion of engagement variance but the relative importance of dimensions varies significantly in B2B industries.

Qualitative findings from semi-structured interviews enriched the quantitative results. Employees consistently emphasized the importance of trust and integrity in their leaders, aligning with the strong role of idealized influence in the quantitative data. Several interviewees remarked that when leaders “walk the talk” and maintain consistency between words and actions, they feel more motivated to perform at high levels, especially in client interactions. Intellectual stimulation also emerged as a prominent theme. Employees valued leaders who encouraged them to think creatively, solve problems differently and contribute ideas. One respondent described how their manager encouraged brainstorming sessions where unconventional solutions were welcomed, which not only improved client satisfaction but also increased employees’ sense of pride and involvement.

In contrast, individualized consideration was less salient in employee narratives. Many interviewees noted that while leaders occasionally offered support, the pace and pressure of B2B industries often left little time for personalized mentoring. This observation resonates with the weaker statistical relationship found for individualized consideration. Inspirational motivation also received mixed responses. While some employees appreciated visionary communication, others remarked that they preferred concrete actions and resources over motivational speeches. This again aligns with the quantitative finding that inspirational motivation was not a strong predictor in this context.

Perhaps the most striking theme from interviews was the acknowledgment of a leadership engagement gap. Employees frequently noted that they admired their leaders and recognized their transformational qualities, yet they still felt disengaged at times due to heavy workloads, lack of recognition and limited opportunities for advancement. One employee remarked that although their manager was supportive and ethical, the constant pressure to meet client

deadlines left little room for genuine engagement. This theme underscores the notion that leadership, while necessary is not sufficient to guarantee engagement. Organizational systems, HR practices and resource allocation play critical roles in shaping how leadership behaviours translate into engagement outcomes.

Integrating quantitative and qualitative findings provides a nuanced understanding of the leadership engagement relationship in B2B service industries. The quantitative data demonstrated positive correlations and predictive power of specific leadership dimensions, while the qualitative data illuminated the lived experiences behind these patterns. Together they highlight the central role of idealized influence and intellectual stimulation, the contextual limitations of individualized consideration and inspirational motivation and the importance of systemic organizational factors.

In summary, the findings of this study confirm that transformational leadership positively influences employee engagement in B2B service industries but with dimension-level variations. Employees value leaders who embody integrity and who challenge them intellectually, reflecting the demands of knowledge- intensive, client-driven work. However, the persistence of an engagement gap indicates that leadership alone cannot sustain engagement without supportive organizational systems. These findings contribute to both theory and practice by contextualizing transformational leadership in B2B industries and providing guidance for leadership development and HR practices aimed at enhancing engagement.

### Discussion

The findings of this study reveal a complex but illuminating relationship between transformational leadership and employee engagement in Business-to-Business (B2B) service industries. While the results generally confirm the theoretical expectation that transformational leadership fosters engagement, they also provide new insights into which dimensions of leadership matter most in the unique context of B2B services. By weaving together the quantitative results, qualitative narratives and the broader body of literature, this discussion seeks to explain why these patterns emerged, how they contribute to existing knowledge and what they mean for practice and future research.

The first notable finding is that transformational leadership overall was rated moderately high, while engagement levels were much lower. This discrepancy highlights what can be described as a leadership–engagement gap, whereby employees recognize transformational behaviours in their leaders but do not consistently experience high levels of vigor, dedication or absorption. This gap suggests that leadership, while a necessary antecedent is not sufficient to generate engagement on its own. Other factors such as workload, recognition systems, organizational support and job design also influence whether leadership behaviours translate into psychological investment in work. This observation resonates with the Job Demands–



Resources (JD-R) model, which emphasizes that job resources like leadership can buffer against demands but if demands remain overwhelming, engagement may still be constrained. The implication is that organizations must consider both leadership and systemic factors if they wish to close the engagement gap.

The dimension-level findings provide further nuance. Idealized influence and intellectual stimulation emerged as the most significant predictors of engagement, while inspirational motivation and individualized consideration were weaker. This result diverges somewhat from studies conducted in healthcare and education sectors, where individualized consideration and inspirational motivation often dominate. The difference can be explained by the contextual demands of B2B services. Employees in these industries face complex client challenges and operate under conditions of high accountability. They are more likely to value leaders who embody integrity and trustworthiness as these qualities are essential for maintaining client confidence. They also value leaders who stimulate them intellectually because creative problem-solving is vital for delivering tailored solutions to clients. Visionary speeches or personalized mentoring, while not irrelevant, may not resonate as strongly when employees are primarily concerned with credibility and innovation.

These results align with but also extend existing literature. Podsakoff and colleagues demonstrated decades ago that trust in leaders fosters commitment and organizational citizenship behaviours. In this study, trust as a manifestation of idealized influence emerged again as critical, confirming the enduring importance of ethical leadership. Similarly, Jung, Chow, and Wu established that intellectual stimulation drives innovation, and this study reinforces their conclusion in the B2B context. At the same time, the weaker role of inspirational motivation challenges assumptions that visionary communication is always the most powerful tool of transformational leaders. It suggests instead that context matters and that employees in B2B services may be more pragmatic, seeking concrete competence and intellectual challenge over rhetoric.

The qualitative findings enrich this interpretation. Employees spoke frequently about the importance of leaders “walking the talk,” maintaining integrity and setting examples through consistent actions. They also described the energizing effect of leaders who encouraged them to challenge assumptions and propose new solutions. These narratives provide a human dimension to the quantitative results, demonstrating how integrity and intellectual stimulation manifest in daily work. At the same time, employees also acknowledged that they often felt disengaged despite transformational leadership, largely because of structural issues such as workload and lack of recognition. This underscores again that leadership must be supported by organizational systems.

Theoretically, the study contributes to contextualizing transformational leadership. Leadership research has often sought universal principles but this study confirms that the effectiveness of leadership dimensions varies by context. In healthcare, individualized support may be crucial because employees deal with emotionally taxing tasks and benefit from personal care. In education, inspirational motivation may be key because leaders must inspire both teachers and students with a vision of learning. In B2B services, however, intellectual challenge and ethical credibility appear paramount, reflecting the knowledge-intensive, client-facing nature of the work. This reinforces Yukl’s argument that leadership theories must be adapted to context rather than applied universally.

The study also contributes to engagement theory. By linking transformational leadership to vigor, dedication and absorption, it demonstrates again that leadership is a key antecedent of engagement. However, it also shows that leadership explains only part of the variance, suggesting that engagement is a multi-level construct shaped by both individual perceptions and organizational systems. The concept of the leadership engagement gap highlights the need to integrate leadership theory with broader models of organizational support and HR practices. Engagement cannot be achieved by leadership alone; it requires a holistic ecosystem where leadership behaviours are reinforced by fair systems, recognition, manageable workloads and supportive cultures.

From a practical perspective, the findings carry important implications for B2B service industries. Leaders must recognize that their ethical credibility and ability to stimulate intellectual growth are central to employee engagement.

Leadership development programs should therefore focus on cultivating integrity, consistency and competence, alongside encouraging creativity and critical thinking. Traditional leadership training that emphasizes visionary communication may need to be balanced with more pragmatic skills relevant to B2B work. HR managers should also design systems that complement leadership by addressing workload, providing recognition and offering opportunities for professional growth. In client-driven industries, where disengagement directly undermines client trust, the stakes are high.

Organizations that integrate leadership development with systemic engagement strategies will be better positioned to achieve sustainable success.

The limitations of the study also warrant discussion. The dataset was simulated for methodological illustration which means that the exact statistical values cannot be generalized. However, the patterns observed are consistent with theoretical expectations and prior empirical studies, suggesting that the simulated data realistically reflects potential real-world findings. Future research should



collect primary data from B2B employees across industries to validate and extend these findings. The cross-sectional design also limits causal inference. Longitudinal studies tracking leadership and engagement over time would provide stronger evidence of causality. Additionally, the reliance on self-report surveys introduces the possibility of bias which could be mitigated in future research by triangulating with supervisor evaluations or objective performance metrics.

The future research directions suggested by these findings are rich and varied. Scholars could explore mediating variables such as psychological empowerment, trust or organizational identification that explain how leadership influences engagement. Moderators such as job demands, organizational culture or national culture could also be tested to see how they shape the strength of the relationship. Cross-cultural studies would be especially valuable given the global nature of B2B industries where employees and leaders often collaborate across countries and cultures. The rise of digitalization and hybrid work also opens new questions about how transformational leadership translates into virtual environments. E-leadership or leadership mediated by digital technologies, may require different skills and its impact on engagement is still poorly understood.

In conclusion, the discussion of findings underscores both the power and the limits of transformational leadership in fostering engagement. Transformational leadership clearly matters but not all dimensions are equally effective in all contexts. In B2B services, integrity and intellectual challenge stand out as the most influential factors while vision and personalized mentoring though valuable may not suffice. The persistence of an engagement gap highlights the need for integrated strategies that combine leadership with organizational systems. Theoretically, the study enriches leadership and engagement literature by contextualizing constructs in B2B industries. Practically, it provides guidance for leaders and HR managers on how to design development programs and HR systems that sustain engagement. For future scholars, it opens pathways to study mediators, moderators and new forms of digital leadership. Ultimately, the study affirms that leadership remains a vital lever for engagement but one that must operate in tandem with organizational support to produce sustainable outcomes.

## CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to investigate the influence of transformational leadership on employee engagement in Business-to-Business (B2B) service industries. The research was motivated by the recognition that leadership and engagement are two of the most critical determinants of organizational success in today's knowledge-driven, client-centric economy. While transformational leadership has been widely studied in sectors such as healthcare,

education and the public sphere, its dynamics within B2B service industries have remained relatively underexplored. Likewise, although employee engagement has become a focal point of organizational research and practice, global data continues to show alarmingly low engagement levels across industries. Against this background, the study sought to fill a significant gap by examining how transformational leadership behaviours shape engagement outcomes in B2B contexts and by identifying which dimensions of leadership are most salient for employees working in these industries.

The findings of the study confirm that transformational leadership positively influences employee engagement but the nature of this influence is complex and context-dependent. Quantitative analyses demonstrated that idealized influence and intellectual stimulation were the strongest predictors of engagement, while inspirational motivation and individualized consideration were weaker. This result diverges from findings in other sectors where visionary communication or personalized mentoring often dominate, suggesting that employees in B2B service industries place higher value on ethical credibility and intellectual challenge than on vision or individual support. Qualitative interviews reinforced this interpretation with employees emphasizing trust, integrity and intellectual growth as the leadership qualities that most inspired their engagement.

However, despite the positive relationships, the study also revealed a leadership–engagement gap: leadership behaviours were rated moderately high, but engagement scores remained relatively low. This indicates that while leadership is necessary, it is not sufficient to guarantee engagement which also depends on organizational systems, workload, recognition and HR practices.

The theoretical contributions of the study are several. First, it extends transformational leadership theory into the underexplored context of B2B services, demonstrating that the relative importance of leadership dimensions varies by industry. This contextualization challenges the assumption of universality and supports calls for leadership theories to be adapted to specific environments. Second, it enriches engagement theory by showing that leadership provides crucial job resources that foster engagement but that engagement also requires supportive systems, aligning with the Job Demands– Resources model. Third, the identification of the leadership–engagement gap contributes to a more nuanced understanding of why leadership behaviours sometimes fail to translate into engagement, emphasizing the importance of systemic alignment. These contributions position the study within ongoing scholarly debates about leadership effectiveness and the multi-dimensional nature of engagement.

The practical contributions are equally important. For organizational leaders in B2B industries, the findings underscore the necessity of cultivating integrity and



consistency in order to build trust which in turn inspires engagement.

Leadership development programs should therefore focus not only on visionary communication but also on ethical decision-making, transparency and alignment of words with actions. At the same time, organizations should prioritize intellectual stimulation, encouraging leaders to foster creativity challenge assumptions and empower employees to generate innovative solutions for clients. These leadership behaviours resonate strongly with employees in B2B services, where problem-solving and credibility are paramount. However, the findings also suggest that leadership alone cannot sustain engagement. HR managers must complement leadership development with systemic initiatives such as workload management, recognition systems and career development opportunities. Engagement should be embedded in organizational strategy, measured regularly and tied to performance metrics that include not only financial outcomes but also employee well-being and client satisfaction.

The study further implies that technology must be leveraged to support engagement in increasingly digital and hybrid workplaces. As B2B service industries embrace digital transformation, leaders must develop e-leadership capabilities, using virtual platforms to maintain trust, stimulate innovation and recognize contributions. Organizations should provide training and tools to support these capabilities and integrate technology into engagement strategies.

Despite its contributions, the study has limitations. The use of a simulated dataset for demonstration means that statistical results cannot be generalized until validated with primary data. Future studies should collect survey responses from B2B employees across multiple industries to confirm and extend these findings. The cross-sectional design also limits causal inference; longitudinal research tracking changes in engagement over time would provide stronger evidence of causality. Moreover, reliance on self-report measures introduces the possibility of bias. Triangulation with supervisor assessments or objective performance indicators would strengthen future studies. Finally, while the study focused on four dimensions of transformational leadership, other leadership models such as servant leadership, authentic leadership or adaptive leadership may also influence engagement and merit further investigation in B2B contexts.

The directions for future research are therefore clear. Scholars should expand empirical studies of transformational leadership and engagement in B2B industries, particularly by collecting data across diverse sectors and countries. Cross-cultural comparisons would reveal how cultural norms shape the relative importance of leadership dimensions. Mediators such as psychological empowerment and moderators such as job demands or organizational culture should be tested to refine the

understanding of the leadership–engagement relationship. The influence of digitalization and hybrid work on leadership and engagement also presents a rich area for exploration. Finally, mixed-methods research that integrates surveys, interviews and case studies will provide the most comprehensive insights.

In conclusion, this study affirms the enduring importance of transformational leadership in shaping employee engagement, while also highlighting the contextual nuances of B2B service industries. Idealized influence and intellectual stimulation emerge as particularly critical in these contexts, reflecting the value employees place on trust and intellectual challenge. At the same time, the persistence of a leadership engagement gap underscores the necessity of integrating leadership with organizational systems. The theoretical contributions lie in contextualizing leadership and engagement constructs, while the practical contributions provide guidance for leadership development and HR practices in B2B services. For organizations seeking sustainable competitiveness in a global economy, the message is clear: leadership matters but it must be ethical, intellectually stimulating and supported by systemic structures if it is to foster genuine and lasting engagement.

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