TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP AND EMPLOYEE AFFECTIVE WELLBEING: THE MEDIATING ROLE OF PSYCHOLOGICAL EMPOWERMENT

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Abstract
The link between transformational leadership and psychological empowerment as well as psychological empowerment and employee work attitudes have been previously discussed Specifically, transformational leadership represents an important factor that influences psychological empowerment among salespersons. In the same context, there is a significant direct effect of transformational leadership on employees' sense of empowerment. Moreover, transformational leadership is positively related to psychological empowerment. Regarding the relation between transformational leadership and well-being, transformational leader behaviors influenced employees' job satisfaction. Furthermore, the positive effects of transformational leadership behaviors on both work-related and general well-being are documented. Specifically, leaders who encouraged employee's decision making and treated them with respect increased their followers' job-related and general well-being. Similarly, those types of transformational leadership behaviors were related to psychological well-being. The current paper explores the relationship between transformational leadership and employee affective wellbeing, considering the mediating effect of psychological empowerment. The research is based on a cross-sectional design, data is collected from 139 employees through the following structured questionnaires: MLQ – Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire, JAWS – Job-related Affective Well-being Scale, and Psychological Empowerment Instrument. The results show a positive and significant relationship between transformational leadership and both affective well-being and psychological empowerment. Additionally, transformational leadership through psychological empowerment foster affective well-being. The paper contributes to the empirical research in the area of transformational leadership and its influence on employee outcomes and attitudes, confirming the mediating role of psychological empowerment.

Keywords
Transformational leadership; psychological empowerment; well-being; mediation.

Introduction

To meet the provocation of the current business environment transformational leadership creates the necessary "radical change" (Laohavichien et al., 2009, p.8).

Therefore, transformational leadership, by producing entrepreneurial and organizational champions, contributes to performative management. According to Bass and Riggio (2010) and Northhouse (2010) conceptualization, transformational leadership has an essential impact on organizational performance, as well as on the employees' attitude and emotional encouragement.

Psychological empowerment and transformational leadership are modern used by managers to motivate employees (Thomas & Velthouse, 1990; Srivastava, Bartol, & Locke, 2006). Psychological empowerment seems a psychological mechanism mediating between transformational leadership and job-related well-being. From the employee's point of view, psychological empowerment relates to intrinsic task motivation, perceptions of competence, and self-determination to work (Deci, Connell, & Ryan, 1989).

As Afsar, Badir, and Bin Saeed (2014) show, transformational leaders delegate authority, empower employees, encourage participative decision-making and cooperation. Employees would carry out tasks with a high degree of control and freedom (Jung & Sosik, 2002). Therefore, employees' confidence level and self-efficacy increase, they feel empowered, motivated and competent (Avolio, Zhu, Koh, & Bhatia, 2004; Zohar & Tenne-Gazit, 2008).

Another approach focuses on the psychological empowerment as a psychological attitude reflecting individuals' response to leadership behaviors (Spreitzer, 1995; Thomas & Velthouse, 1990). Dewettinck and van Ameijde (2011) observed that affective commitment and job satisfaction are also connected to psychological empowerment, pointing towards a direct link between different organizational behaviors and attitudes, and psychological empowerment, leadership behaviors playing an essential role in this process (Arnold, Arad, Rhoades, & Drasgow, 2000; Conger & Kanungo, 1988).

Employee well-being represents one of the most important research topics among the psychologists who are working on organizational psychology. As Danna and Griffin (1999) stated, well-being can be defined in relation to the mental, psychological, or emotional states of workers. Therefore, psychologically well employees tend to experience more positive emotions than negative ones in the workplace (Wright & Cropanzano, 2000). Within an organizational context, well-being is often defined and measured as employee affective well-being (Van Katwyk, Fox, Spector, & Kelloway, 2000).

A series of factors in the workplace can affect an individual's well-being and mental health (Danna & Griffin, 1999). In the last decades, scholars have examined a wide variety of individual and organizational variables that can influence employee's well-being such as self-efficacy (Siu, Lu, & Spector, 2007) and leadership (van Dierendonck, Haynes, Borrill, & Stride, 2004). Also, in a series of studies using cross-sectional data, Nielsen and colleagues (Nielsen, Yarker, Brenner, Randall, & Borg, 2008; Nielsen, Yarker, Randall & Munir, 2009) have explored the indirect relationships between transformational leadership and psychological well-being.

A series of previous empirical studies have already used psychological empowerment as a mediating or moderating variable between different leadership styles and different work-related employees' attitudes, such as job satisfaction (Seibert, Wang, & Courtright,

2011), organizational commitment (Avolio, Zhu, Koh, & Bhatia, 2004) and workplace aggression (Hepworth & Towler, 2004). Previous research shows that psychological empowerment has a mediating role between transformational leadership and organizational commitment (Avolio, Zhu, & Koh, 2004), as well as between the transformational leadership and the employees' effectiveness (Özaralli, 2003).

Methods

In this study, we aim to investigate the relationship between transformational leadership and employee affective wellbeing, additionally examining the mediating effect of psychological empowerment (figure 1).
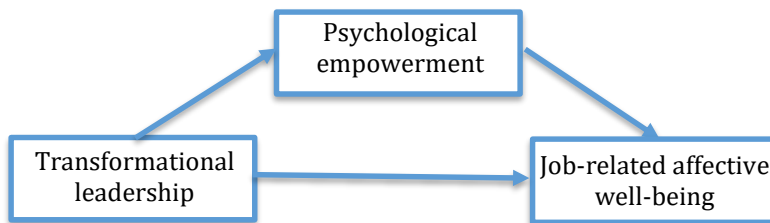
Figure 1. Conceptual framework

Figure 1 presents the theoretical framework proposed, considering the study of the relations between transformational leadership, psychological empowerment, and job-related affective well-being. The investigation also aims to analyze the mediating role of the psychological empowerment between the transformational leadership and job-related affective well-being.

To achieve the aforementioned objective, the following hypotheses were formulated:
  *Hypothesis 1. Transformational leadership is positively related to psychological
    empowerment.*
  *Hypothesis 2. Transformational leadership is positively related to job-related affective
    well-being.*
  *Hypothesis 3. Psychological empowerment is positively related to job-related affective
    well-being.*
  *Hypothesis 4. Psychological empowerment mediates the relationship between
    transformational leadership and job-related affective well-being.*

The sample includes 139 employees (men = 42, women = 97), of ages ranging from 19 to 63 years (M = 32.80, SD = 11.17), and with educational levels from graduation (35.3%), master (48.2%) to doctorate level (16.5%). A purposive convenience sampling technique was used to collect data. Participants were invited to fill in a questionnaire compiling the following measures:

- *Psychological empowerment*. It was self-reported using a 12-item scale composed of 4 subdimensions: meaning, competence, self-determination, and impact (Spreitzer, 1995). The validity of the instrument is very good, with a strong reliability (Spreitzer & Quinn, 2001). For the present study, the reliability was .94.

- *Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire* (Form 5X). We used this structured, verbal, omnibus measure of leadership styles, comprising 45 items, covering what is known as the ''full-range'' leadership model (Bass & Avolio, 1990). The leadership model considers differences in the effectiveness of leadership styles based on the active/passive distinction, leading to broad categories of leadership. The MLQ scales range from Passive / Avoidant Leadership (Laissez-Faire), through the classical model of Transactional Leadership and up to Transformational Leadership. The Cronbach Alpha obtained for this study was .87.

- *JAWS.* The Job-related Affective Well-being Scale (Van Katwyk, Fox, Spector, & Kelloway, 2000) is a 20-item (short version) scale designed to assess people's emotional reactions to their job. The JAWS include a wide variety of emotional experiences, both negative and positive. Internal consistency reliability estimates (coefficient alpha) reported by Spector, Fox, Goh, and Bruursema (2003) for the total score (.95), negative emotions (.92) and positive emotions (.94) subscales were excellent. The Cronbach Alpha obtained for this study was .67.

Results

The data obtained was analyzed using SPSS 22.0, including the PROCESS macro for SPSS version 3.2.02 developed by Andrew Hayes. Then, we carried out a Sobel test (quantpsy.org/sobel/sobel.htm) to probe the mediation effect (Preacher & Hayes, 2004).

Hypothesis 1. Transformational leadership is positively related to psychological empowerment.

To test this hypothesis, the Pearson intercorrelation coefficients were calculated, both between the Transformational leadership and the psychological empowerment score and between Transformational leadership sub-scales and psychological empowerment. The results presented in Table1 and Table 2 highlight the existence of significant positive relationships, both at the composite score ($r = 0.502$, $p < 0.01$) and for all five dimensions of transformational leadership, according to the Full Range Leadership Model.

Table 1. Transformational Leadership and Psychological empowerment (N=139)

		Psychological empowerment
Transformational Leadership	Pearson Correl.	.502**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000

The in-depth analysis highlights the strongest correlation between *psychological empowerment* and the *idealized influence (behavior)* ($r = 0.499$, $p<0.01$) and *idealized influence (attributed)* ($r = 0.415$, $p<0.01$) scale of transformational leadership. Thus, the higher the level of *psychological empowerment*, the higher the level of *influence.* This component of transformational leadership allows leaders to take actions that benefit their employees' health and well-being in the long-term. The scale of *idealized influence*

detects through its high scores a person's ability to exert influence, inspiring power, arousing pride among his "followers", ensuring and offering trust, overcoming individual "interests" in favor of the group, and serving as a reference model for those who follow them (Avolio & Bass, 2004, p.5).

Moreover, the *individualized consideration* scale also correlates with *psychological empowerment* (r = 0.397, p<0.01). People with high scores on the *Individualized consideration* scale pay attention to the achievement and development needs of each individual, demonstrate empathy and compassion, acting as a mentor or a coach, allocating time, effort, and individual resources to help those around them to develop and provide employees with guidance and support which impacts the employee's wellbeing (Avolio & Bass, 2004, p. 6).

Although the correlations between *psychological empowerment* and *intellectual stimulation* (r = 0.349, p <0.01) and between *psychological empowerment* and *inspirational motivation* (r = 0.363, p <0.01) are smaller, they highlight significant intercorrelations, of lower intensity. Therefore, leaders with high scores on the intellectual stimulation scale identify the people who stimulate and cultivate the innovation and creativity of those around them. This type of leader avoids mocking or publicly criticizing the mistakes of team members, thus encouraging them to experiment and be creative. These leaders constantly ask their subordinates to find new ideas and creative solutions to common problems, being continuously involved in the resolution process (Avolio & Bass, 2004, p. 6). Through *Intellectual stimulation,* employees can feel an increased sense of self-confidence solving different work-related problems in their way, and by doing this they enhance their well-being (Kelloway et al., 2012). Moreover, a transformational leadership style could also influence employee's task clarity which in turn leads to low levels of perceived stress (Liu et al., 2010). Regarding the relation with *inspirational motivation*, Avolio and Bass (2004) observed that these leaders speak optimistically about the future, having a confident vision about it, and express confidence in achieving the established goals (Avolio & Bass, 2004, p.6).

Table 2. Transformational Leadership scales and Psychological empowerment (N=139)

		Idealized Influence (Attributed)	Idealized Influence (Behavior)
Psychological empowerment	Pearson Correl.	.415**	.499**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000

		Inspirational Motivation	Intellectual Stimulation	Individualized Consideration
Psychological empowerment	Pearson Correl.	.363**	.349**	.397**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000

Hypothesis 2. Transformational leadership is positively related to job-related affective well-being.

The results showed in Table 3 highlight the existence of a significant positive correlation between transformational leadership and job-related affective well-being (positive emotions) ($r = 0.416$, $p < 0.01$), which leads to the confirmation of the previously stated hypothesis. In other words, the higher the level of transformational leadership, the higher the positive emotions experienced by the employees. In the same vein, Gilbreath and Benson's (2004) findings indicate that positive supervisory behavior made a statistically significant contribution to employee well-being.

Table 3. Transformational Leadership and Affective well-being (positive emotions) (N=139)

		Positive emotions
Transformational Leadership	Pearson Correl.	.416**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000

Current findings are supported by previous studies that highlighted positive correlations between transformational leadership and well-being (Arnold, Turner, Barling, Kelloway, & McKee, 2007; Nielsen & Daniels, 2012; Nielsen & Munir, 2009; Stenling & Tafvelin, 2014). Moreover, Bono and Ilies (2006) stated that "charismatic leaders enable their followers to experience positive emotions" (p. 331). "The potential mechanism accounting for this finding may be that charismatic leaders express more positive emotions themselves and these positive emotions are "caught" by their followers" (Arnold, Turner, Barling, Kelloway, & McKee, 2007, p.194). Similarly, Van Dierendonck et al. (2004) found that high-quality leadership behavior was associated with increased employee well-being. The results are further supported by prior studies that demonstrated the direct or mediated effects of transformational leadership on well-being (Sivanathan et al., 2004; Skakon et al., 2010).

Hypothesis 3. Psychological empowerment is positively related to job-related affective well-being.

Table 4 shows *psychological empowerment* to be positively correlated with the job-related affective well-being (positive emotions) ($r = .517$, $p < .01$), thus confirming the hypothesis.

Table 4. Psychological empowerment and Affective well-being (positive emotions) (N=139)

		Positive emotions
Psychological empowerment	Pearson Correl.	.517**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000

A substantial body of literature has investigated the links between psychological empowerment and a range of work outcomes such as work engagement, organizational commitment, job satisfaction, and well-being (Nielsen, & Randall, et al., 2008; Nielsen, et al., 2008). Furthermore, previous research has found psychological empowerment to be associated with increased work effectiveness (Koberg et al., 1999), organizational

commitment (Meyerson & Kline, 2008), and psychological well-being (McClain, 2001), in line with current findings. Previous studies also showed similar findings in the case of a positive relationship between wellbeing and empowerment (Deepa, 2005; Biswas-Diener, 2011).

Hypothesis 4. Psychological empowerment mediates the relationship between transformational leadership and job-related affective well-being.

To test the proposed mediation model, the PROCESS (Hayes, 2012) macro for SPSS was used (version 3.2.02). In this regression analysis, assertiveness was used as a predictor, transformational leadership as a mediator, and job performance as an outcome variable. In Step 1 of the mediation model, the regression of the transformational leadership on the affective well-being, ignoring the mediator, was significant - $F(1,137) = 28,64$, $p<0,01$, $R^2 = 0,17$, $b = 9,30$, $t(137) = 5,35$, $p<0,01$.
Step 2 showed that the regression of the transformational leadership on psychological empowerment, the mediator, was also significant - $F(1,137) = 49,92$, $p<0,01$, $R^2 = 0,27$, $b = 1,27$, $t(137) = 7,07$, $p<0,01$.
Step 3 of the mediation process revealed that the mediator (psychological empowerment), controlling for transformational leadership, was significant - $F(2,136) = 27,17$, $p<0,01$, $R^2 = 0,28$, $b = 4,76$, $t(136) = 7,39$, $p<0,05$.
Step 4 of the analyses revealed that controlling for the mediator (psychological empowerment), transformational leadership were a less significant predictor of affective well-being, $b = 3,55$, $t(136) = 4,63$, $p<0,01$.

As recommended by Baron and Kenny (1986), the Aroian version of the Sobel test was conducted. It revealed that psychological empowerment mediated the relationship between transformational leadership and the affective well-being ($z = 2,31$, $p = 0,020$). Hence, employees who work with transformational leaders will have a higher level of well-being when they experience psychological empowerment.

Conclusions

According to the findings of this study, it was seen that both transformational leadership and psychological empowerment had a big contribution to the outcome of psychological well-being (positive emotions), and this finding are further supported by previous studies results which have revealed that well-being was an important outcome of psychological empowerment (McClain, 2001; Tahira et al., 2010) and transformational leadership (Arnold, Turner, Barling, Kelloway, & McKee, 2007; Nielsen & Daniels, 2012). In conclusion, this study has found a positive relationship between transformational leadership and psychological well-being that was mediated by the psychological empowerment.

This study extends our understanding of the positive effects of transformational leadership, and practical application of the current results suggests that leadership training in this area, along with a better understanding and implementation of psychological empowerment in the workplace could be associated with an increase in the psychological well-being of followers (Barling, Weber, & Kelloway, 1996; Kelloway & Barling, 2000).

In the present study, there are several limitations worth noting. First, all the data are cross-sectional. Therefore, an assessment of the cause-effect relation is not possible. Also, another limitation is related to the fact the questionnaires were self-reported, and the participants' sample was relatively small. Therefore, results are difficult to generalize.

Future research could focus on investigating what workplace factors encourage behaviors related to transformational leadership to better understand how leaders' transformational behaviors can be developed, and how employee well-being can be promoted in the workplace. Future research directions could be also targeted at expanding the topics addressed in this study by adding new variables such as innovative work behavior, organizational greed, and various personality factors.

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