

FOOTPRINTS OF LEADERSHIP ON EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT: DOES SELF-AWARENESS MATTER?

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Received: September 2, 2024

Approved: November 1, 2024

Abstract

The purpose of this study is to empirically investigate the utility of self-awareness as a sequential mediator of the relationship between different leadership styles and employee engagement. The study collected data from employees of various public and private institutions in Pakistan using self-report questionnaires. The study, which is cross-sectional in nature, employed sophisticated statistical techniques, particularly SPSS and Partial Least Squares (PLS) to ensure the accuracy and validity of the results. The results of this study show significant relationships between leadership styles, self-awareness, and employee engagement. Specifically, self-awareness was found to fully mediate the relationship between leadership styles and employee engagement. These findings contribute to existing knowledge about leadership, self-awareness, and employee engagement, thus expanding the understanding of these constructs in the context of leadership and resource maintenance theory. The study provides insight into perceptions of employee behaviour, particularly in the presence of servant leadership. It also examines how leader support facilitates employees' use of social and emotional resources to achieve positive organizational outcomes. The study draws on the principles of resource maintenance theory, discussing the theoretical and practical implications for managers and organizations considering the study findings.

Keywords: Leadership Style, Self-Awareness, Employee Engagement, Mediation Pakistan

Introduction

Authors Brown and Mitchell (2010) state that in order to promote workplace behaviour and communicate the organization's norms, leadership plays a central role, while Grand (2013) adds that leaders have the responsibility for recognizing the potential in people and ideas, and has the courage to develop that potential, and that is why she puts emphasis on daring leaders, while Brown (2019) emphasise the importance of leaders ability of embracing vulnerability and showing courage. The leader's task is also constantly promoting employee engagement in the

organizational context (Singhapakdi et al., 1999), which coincides with the findings of Sinek (2014) which shows the importance of leaders in the process of creating environments, where the employees feel safe and are consequently more engaged. The importance of the leadership is also reflected in a work of Goodall and Buckingham (2019), which state different reasons of frustration and unhappiness at work and point out that leadership cannot be created with a fulfilment of list of traits or criteria, but to their unique "spikes" or one to two potent strengths that drive profound impact in their domains.

Despite the growing importance of this topic, empirical studies in this area are still relatively recent (Waldman, Wang, Hannah, & Balthazard, 2017). It is believed that leadership is fundamental to establishing and reinforcing norms (Brown, Trevio, & Harrison, 2005), which is in line with the findings of Brown (2018), which notes the importance of leaders, which have a courage, to (re)form and influence organizational culture and values. Leadership is defined as "the demonstration of normatively appropriate behaviour by one's own actions and interactions with others, and the encouragement of such conduct to followers through two-way communication, reinforcement, and decision making" (Brown, Trevio, & Harrison, 2005, p. 120). Malik and Azmat (2019) propose a new definition, which is more in line with current leadership vision: "Leadership is a process in which a person or persons inspire(s) and motivate(s) the people to meet the shared goals or objectives which may be changed or added as per the needs and challenges. Leadership connects with the people beyond superficial or formal level and creates a bond that motivates them to do things rather than forcing them". The organization's workforce becomes more devoted and engaged when leaders are clear about their expectations, communications, and responsibilities (DenHartog & Belschak, 2012). A growing body of research consistently highlights the importance of leadership in promoting positive outcomes for both individual employees and collective groups (e.g., Byun, Karau, Dai, & Lee, 2018; Huang, & Paterson, 2017; Walumbwa, Hartnell, & Misati, 2017).

In Albert Bandura's (1977) social cognitive theory is reflected that self-awareness plays a critical role in motivating individuals, promoting their well-being, and enabling personal achievement. According to Bandura (1977), self-awareness is not determined solely by objective truths, but rather by the individual's subjective beliefs in organizational research, scholars have identified self-awareness as a significant motivational factor (Judge & Bono, 2001). Chen et al. (2001) and Shelton (1990) argue that integrating one's accomplishments and failures contributes to the development of self-confidence. In addition, self-awareness has the potential to influence individuals' behaviour in turbulent situations by altering their expectations (Saks & Ashforth, 2000). Individuals with high levels of self-awareness demonstrate resilience and confidence in their ability to overcome obstacles, thus displaying increased commitment and engagement (Judge, Bono, & Locke, 2000). While Brown (2018) points out the importance of self-awareness in embracing vulnerability, which can consequently lead to better motivation and higher achievements and ensure a better well-being.

The construct of employee engagement has become an important topic of study in recent years (Mone & London, 2018), as different authors acknowledge the low levels of employee's engagements (Maslach et al., 2001, Harter et al., 2002, Macey and Schneider, 2008, MacLeod and Clarke, 2009, Bailey et al. 2020, Gallup, 2020, Macey et al., 2021). This construct refers to the valuable behaviours of employees who demonstrate their commitment to their work (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). Researchers have sought to establish a link between employee engagement and

various leadership styles (Breevaart et al., 2014). Recent scholarly discourse, however, has raised questions about the effects of leadership style on employee performance (Bonner, Greenbaum & Mayer, 2016; Mo & Shi, 2017). Yet, there remains a gap in understanding the underlying mechanism linking leadership and employee engagement. Carasco-Saul et al. (2015) specifically underscores the deficiency in knowledge surrounding the specific leadership styles that influence employee engagement behaviours. Furthermore, scholarly inquiries have inadequately addressed the direct relationship between characteristics and employee engagement, alongside the underlying processes fostering this relationship (Brown & Mitchell, 2010; Xu & Thomas, 2011). To address the aforementioned research gaps, the present study relies on predictions derived from the Conservation of Resources Theory (Hobfoll, 1989). This theory postulates that individuals strategically invest their resources, such as time and effort, to acquire valuable resources and achieve their desired goals (Hobfoll, 1989). The Conservation of Resource Theory posits that a leader's positive and optimistic demeanour is a valuable organizational resource that promotes employee vitality and effectiveness (Salanova, Agut, & Peiró, 2005).

Eldor and Harpaz (2016) argue that organizational resources are the most important factor influencing employee work engagement. Thus, individuals who are highly engaged at work are more likely to use their personal resources to achieve outcomes that are personally meaningful to them. The main objective of our study is to explore the mechanisms by which authentic leadership can elicit higher levels of employee engagement in the work environment. We examine the central role of self-perception and explore the methods by which leaders can foster employee engagement. This research is supported by the belief that authentic leadership, characterized by self-awareness and sincerity, can promote engagement, and foster a more productive and harmonious work environment.

Literature Review

This study proposes that elements of leadership and self-awareness within employees significantly impact their levels of engagement at work. This study is based on the conservation of resources theory, focusing on the less explored dimension of resource investment. The latter states that resources are used in a work environment with the goal of creating additional resources (Hobfoll, 1989). Leaders that are supportive give their people important resources, both material and psychological. Consequently, the recipients of these resources generate new resources from their existing ones in accordance with expectations. This is one way that the encouraging environment of leadership fosters self-awareness. Zhou, Wang, Chen, and Shi (2012) assert that leaders' actions have a big impact, much like resources do. Workers give back by using this newly obtained resource to raise employee engagement at work.

Leadership is receiving increasing attention and support because of its potential to positively influence employees' perceptions of routine tasks (Neubert et al., 2009). While the influence of leadership is not only a concern for managers, its impact on employee attitudes and behaviours has significant implications (Li et al., 2014).

Dirks and Ferrin (2002) hypothesize that the figure of a leader who holds a position of authority can profoundly influence employees' work attitudes and behaviours, as evidenced primarily in three areas. First, a leader who exhibits sincere and trustworthy behaviour elicits appropriate responses from followers, such as respect, caring, and support. Second, equitable practices in hiring decisions, performance evaluations, and promotions foster an environment of employee

engagement and optimism, which increases overall efficiency (Kouzes and Posner, 2002). Zak's research (2017) notes similar findings as he states that leadership practices, which increase trust, can improve job satisfaction, employee productivity and team interconnections. Different authors emphasise different leadership priorities: Quinn (2015) emphasises the need for leaders to ensure that people are motivated and have a desire to grow, learn, find a sense of purpose, see new possibilities, and sacrifice for the common good; Sinek (2017) points at the importance of leadership ability to prioritize their employees' well-being and creating such environments, where employees feel safe, trusted, valued and emphasises the team connectedness; while Brown (2018) points out the need for authentic leadership, where leaders are genuine and trustworthy in an environment, where employees feel respected and valued. As we have seen, the literature underscores the critical role that leadership plays in the organizational context. Brown, Trevio, and Harrison (2005) explain that leadership involves promoting appropriate behaviour among followers through bidirectional communication, reinforcement, and decision-making processes in conjunction with demonstrating appropriate behaviour through leaders' actions and interpersonal interactions. Based on this theoretical foundation, this study assumes a positive correlation between a leader's behavioural patterns and the level of self-confidence of his or her followers. This study aims to analyse the nuances of this correlation, contributing to the body of knowledge about the influential role of leadership in shaping employees' self-esteem and, consequently, their work engagement.

It is postulated that a leader's positive demeanour is an invaluable organizational resource that enhances employee vitality and effectiveness (Salanova, Agut, & Peiró, 2005). In addition, Eldor and Harpaz (2016) confirm that organizational resources play an important role in shaping employee work engagement, leading to the conclusion that highly engaged employees tend to use their personal resources to achieve outcomes that are personally rewarding for them. This dynamic further suggests that by providing supportive resources, managers can increase their effectiveness and thereby increase employee engagement. In addition, self-awareness plays a central role in promoting personal change and growth. It acts as a catalyst that transforms routine tasks into constructive activities. The importance of self-awareness was highlighted by different authors like: Bandura (2001), which illustrates that self-awareness significantly influences employees' decision-making processes, effort, and consistency; Stajkovic (2006), which explains that increased self-awareness creates a sense of capability in individuals and gives them the confidence to take on challenges that facilitate the achievement of their goals. This sense of self-efficacy permeates all of their efforts and serves as a fundamental driver for their actions and accomplishments; Duchworth (2016) points out the importance of recognizing a persons' long term passion, which needs to be combined with perseverance in order to achieve success; David (2016) points out the need for emotional agility in order to steer self-awareness and achieve success; Eurich (2017), which stated that individuals with clear vision of their motivation, emotions and behaviour achieve higher levels of success, regardless of if we focus on their professional or personal life; while Collins (2019) acknowledges the importance of self-awareness in achieving effective decision-making process. Also, self-aware employees create hard goals that give them confidence in their abilities to be successful workers (Bandura & Locke, 2003; Stajkovic, 2006; Duchworth, 2016; Eurich, 2017 etc.). The influence of self-awareness on employee behaviour is supported by numerous studies (e.g., Bandura & Locke, 2003; David, 2016; Eurich,

2017; Walumbwa et al., 2017 etc.). There aren't many signs, though, that self-awareness may be used to make a clear connection between leadership and employee behaviour.

Conversely, Walumbwa et al. (2011) postulated that self-perception (SA) could serve as a link between leadership and employee performance. This thesis draws on Bandura's (1977) social learning theory (SLT), which provides an explanation for the mechanisms by which leadership influences performance through self-perception. The SLT holds that ethical and trustworthy leaders serve as role models for their followers, passing on knowledge and tasks that shape follower behaviour. Consequently, consistent with Walumbwa et al.'s (2011) assertion, this study assumes that self-awareness plays a mediating role between leadership and employee engagement. We can find agreement about the mentioned findings among different authors, like: Eisenbeiss, Knippenberg, & Boerner (2015) point out the role of self-awareness in ethical behaviour of leaders in achieving positive outcome for organisational performance; Eichhorn (2017), which noted the crucial role of self-awareness in building modern leadership practices; Drucker and Maciariello (2017) shed a light on importance of self-awareness in leadership; while Hoch et al. (2018) point out the importance of self-awareness in effective leadership, which shows through authentic leadership. Autonomy and engagement at work enhance employee motivation as these elements strengthen their commitment to the organization (Schaufeli, 2013). Leadership, in turn, cultivates a workplace ethos that drives individuals to energize, engage, and complete their tasks (Piccolo et al., 2010).

According to Macey et al. (2009), employee engagement increases when employees are empowered with freedoms and skills. In this context, it is claimed that receiving cues about the situation at work has a profound effect on employee motivation (Cheng et al., 2014). Bellingham (2003) argues that the tendency of managers to encourage their employees by enabling them to overcome challenges strengthens their commitment. This provides the rationale for the proposition that granting employees autonomy and self-confidence enhances their commitment and thus increases their engagement at work. Based on the examined literature, we formulated the following hypothesis in the theoretical part of the article in order to fill the identified research gap:

H1: Leadership is positively related to employee's Self-awareness.

H2: Leadership has positive relationship with Employees work engagement.

H3: Self-awareness has direct relationship with employee engagement.

H4: Self-awareness mediate the relationship between leadership and employee engagement.

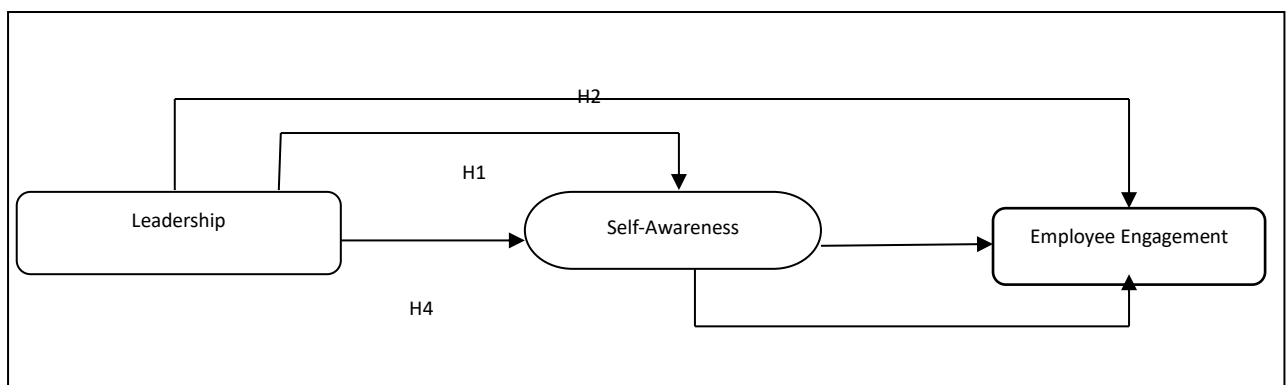


Figure 1. Research model

Research Methodology

Data for this study were collected through self-administered questionnaires distributed to various organisations in Lahore, including banks, multinational corporations, and educational institutions. Participants were assured of the confidentiality of the survey. To mitigate the potential effects of general methodological bias, the present study used a three-wave time-lag study design, as recommended by Podsakoff et al. (2003). Leadership skills were assessed at T1. After a 15-day interval following the T1 measurements, self-perceptions were assessed at T2. Employee engagement measurements were taken at T3, two weeks after T2. The data collection procedure remained constant for each institution across T1, T2, and T3.

Initially, questionnaires were administered to 500 participants at T1, of which 400 were returned. After eliminating incomplete questionnaires or those with missing information, 350 were deemed usable. Thus, the response rate at T1 was 70%. At T2, 300 questionnaires were distributed to the same respondents who had participated at T1. Of the 280 questionnaires returned, 30 had missing data, leaving 250 usable surveys. The response rate at T2 was 93%. At T3, 250 questionnaires were distributed, of which 230 were returned and 215 were deemed usable, for a response rate of 92%. Consequently, a total of 215 questionnaires were used for the final analysis. Mentioned reflects in the fact that the sample size has a confidence level of 85% with a 5% margin of error.

The age of the participants ranged from 20 to 56 years ($M = 32.77$, $SD = 7.82$ years); 49% were single, 48% were married, and the remaining 3% were either divorced or widowed. The gender distribution included 54% men ($N = 118$) and 45% women ($N = 99$). Academic qualifications ranged from bachelor's to doctoral degrees, with 17% of respondents holding bachelor's degrees, 66% holding master's degrees, and 9% holding doctoral degrees. General education level ranged from 14 to 20 years ($M = 16.42$, $SD = 2.714$).

A 10-item measure scale from Brown, Trevio, and Harrison (2005) was used to assess leadership, e.g., "My supervisor measures success not only by results, but also by how they are achieved." Responses were recorded on a 5-point Likert scale, with 1 representing 'almost never' and 5 representing 'very often.' The internal consistency of the scale, as measured by Cronbach's alpha, was 0.87.

Self-perception was measured using an eight-point scale from Chen, Gully, and Eden (2001), e.g., "When confronted with difficult tasks, I am confident that I will master them" Responses were rated on a 5-point Likert scale, with 1 representing 'almost never' and 5 representing 'very often.' The Cronbach's alpha for this scale was 0.87.

In the current study, the 17-item Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES) by Schaufeli et al. (2002) was used, e.g., "During work, I am bursting with energy" Responses were measured on a 5-point Likert scale, with 1 representing 'almost never' and 5 representing 'very often.' The scale had high reliability with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.91.

Based on previous research by Eby, Butts, and Lockwood (2003) and Schaufeli et al. (2006), potential confounding variables such as age, gender, tenure, and education that are known to influence employee engagement were included in the analysis. Both age and length of service are associated with higher commitment, while male employees tend to have higher commitment, making gender an influence as well. These factors were therefore included as control variables.

Results And Discussion

This section presents the statistical analysis that was used in the current study. It includes confirmatory factor analysis, assessments of convergent and discriminant validity, multicollinearity diagnostics, descriptive statistics, and hypothesis testing.

Table 1: Convergent and Discriminant Validity

	CR	AVE	MSV	ASV	L	SA	EE
L	0.838	0.510	0.128	0.842	0.714		
SA	0.895	0.522	0.006	0.919	0.076	0.722	
EE	0.922	0.545	0.001	0.936	0.023	0.713	0.738

EL refers to 'Leadership', SA refers to 'Self-awareness', EE refers to 'Employee Engagement'.

The tolerance test and variance inflation factor (VIF) were calculated to test the multicollinearity assumptions. According to the general guideline of VIF values below 10, the data do not show multicollinearity for any of the variables studied. In addition, the Durbin-Watson statistic, an instrument used to determine the presence of autocorrelation, yielded a value of 1.23 for the data set, which is within the acceptable range of 0-4, indicating no significant autocorrelation. Thus, the Durbin-Watson analysis indicates a positive sequential correlation, a prerequisite for further application of regression analysis.

Table 2: Multi-collinearity and Autocorrelation Diagnostic

Variables	Collinearity Statistics	
	Tolerance	VIF
Employee Engagement	.833	1.201
Self-awareness	.843	1.186
<i>Durbin-Watson statistic 1.234</i>		

Tables below present the means, standard deviations, and correlations for the study and control variables. There is a significant correlation between self-awareness (SA) and leadership ($r = 0.16$, $p < 0.05$), fulfilling the requirement to postulate SA as a mediator. Employee engagement has significant positive correlations with both variables.

Table 3. Matrix of Correlation and Descriptive Statistics

Variables	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1 Gender	-	-	-							
2 Age	31.50	7.51	0.17*	-						
3 Tenure	6.01	4.88	0.15*	0.65*	-					
4 Education	15.72	1.50	0.34*	0.17*	0.12	-				

5	Leadership	3.58	0.66	-	-0.15*	-	0.05	(0.85		
6	Self-			0.14*		0.10)		
7	awareness	3.74	0.68	0.04	0.07	0.09	-0.02	0.15*	(0.87)	
8	Employee									
9	Engagement	3.72	0.58	0.081	0.06	0.05	0.012	0.14*	0.54*	0.44*
									*	*
										(0.81)

The mediation analysis was conducted using SPSS macro, with bias-corrected (BC) bootstrapping with 2000 replicate samples in accordance with the recommendation of Preacher & Hayes (2008) to account for the limitation due to small sample size. The results of the mediation model are presented in below table.

Table 4: Path Coefficients & Indirect Effects of Mediation Models

		Path Coefficients		Indirect Effects	
		SA	EE	Boot LLCI	Boot ULCI
From →	To				
L → SA		.147*	-.309		
			.509***		
Total Indirect Effects				.070	.272
Indirect Effect					
L → SA → EE				.016	.144
Direct Effect					
L → EE				-.135	.057
Total Effect					
L → EE				.006	.240

The analytical underpinnings of direct and ancillary pathways in our sequential mediation model are delineated via path analysis. We leveraged the bootstrapping approach with 2000 resamples to calculate the 90% confidence interval (CI) of both direct and indirect effects, as recommended by Preacher and Hayes (2008). The data reveals that the direct association between leadership and work engagement remains statistically non-significant within the CI90% [-.135, .057], even as self-awareness and work commitment exert their direct influences. Conversely, the indirect effect of leadership on employee engagement, mediated sequentially by self-awareness and organizational commitment, remains statistically significant at the CI90% [.070, .272]. As such, the evidence indicates full mediation of the relationship between leadership and employee engagement by self-awareness and work commitment, as the indirect effect sustains its significance while the direct effect remains non-significant. Table 4 elaborates on the comprehensive effect of the model, including the direct influence of leadership on employee engagement. The model's overarching significance is affirmed by the upper and lower bounds of the CI90% [.006, .240] not encompassing a zero value and both limits being positive.

The empirical findings of our study substantiate the proposed positive association between leadership and Self-awareness (SA), registering a coefficient of $\beta = .147$, $p < .05$, within the CI90% confidence interval [.022, .273]. This is underpinned by the mediating influence of Self-awareness

in the dynamic between leadership and employee engagement, an observation reinforced by the absence of zero in both upper and lower limits of the confidence interval, lending credibility to our first hypothesis.

The second hypothesis posits a positive correlation between organizational commitment and SA. Consistent with this proposition, the data displays a regression coefficient of $=.357$, $p < 0.001$, within the CI90% confidence interval $[.234, .481]$, thereby upholding hypothesis 2.

Our third hypothesis, asserting a positive correlation between organizational commitment and employee engagement, finds support in the regression coefficient $=.216$, $p < 0.001$, within the CI90% confidence interval $[.075, .340]$. This resonates with our fourth hypothesis, for which the first indirect pathway establishes the mediating role of self-awareness in the relationship between leadership and employee engagement (CI90% $[.016, .144]$).

The third indirect path, revealing the mediation of organizational commitment in the linkage between leadership and employee engagement, supports our fifth hypothesis with a CI90% confidence interval of $[.022, .146]$.

Additionally, the second indirect pathway, which illustrates sequential mediation between leadership and employee engagement by organizational commitment and self-awareness, holds a CI90% confidence level of $[.002, .031]$, thereby enhancing supportive mechanisms of our sixth hypothesis as anticipated.

The significance of all indirect pathways is affirmed by the absence of zero in the upper or lower bounds of any indirect path, which, combined with the statistical insignificance of the total direct effect in the absence of mediators, validates the assertion that organizational commitment and self-awareness wholly moderate the relationship between leadership and employee engagement.

Discussion

This study examined the complex interplay between leadership, self-awareness, organizational commitment, and employee engagement. By employing a multifaceted statistical approach that included confirmatory factor analysis, tests of convergent and discriminant validity, multicollinearity diagnostics, and hypothesis testing, we gained in-depth insights into the relationships among these constructs.

We performed a critical analysis for multicollinearity, a prerequisite for ensuring the validity and reliability of the regression analysis. Using the tolerance test and calculating the variance inflation factor (VIF), it was determined that none of the variables in the study exhibited multicollinearity, which is consistent with O'Brien's (2007) guidelines that VIF values should remain below 10. In addition, the Durbin-Watson statistic was within an acceptable range (Salkind, 2010), indicating a positive sequential correlation and qualifying our data for further regression analysis.

Our results showed a significant correlation between self-awareness (SA) and leadership skills, a relationship confirmed by existing literature (Goleman, 1995; Eisenbeiss, Knippenberg, & Boerner, 2015; Drucker & Maciariello, 2017; Eichhorn, 2017; Hock et al., 2018). This study further explored the role of SA as a mediator, and our analyses showed a significant positive relationship with employee engagement. The mediation analysis followed Preacher & Hayes' (2008) protocols and supported consideration of SA as a mediator in the dynamics of leadership and engagement. Scholarly research, particularly that of Day and Dragoni (2015) and Hannah,

Woolfolk & Lord (2017), points to the important link between leadership, engagement, and SA and emphasizes the central role of self-awareness in shaping leadership effectiveness, van Quaquebeke & Eckloff (2013) show, that leaders' self-awareness and integrity play a critical role in how individuals identify with an organization, which in turn affects job satisfaction, while Eichhorn (2014) points to the multifaceted nature and influence of the intertwining of self-awareness and leadership.

Further examination of the mediating role of self-awareness and employee engagement revealed that these factors exert a significant moderating role in the relationship between leadership and employee engagement. Our findings suggest that the positive influence of leadership behaviors, particularly ethical behaviors, significantly influences employee engagement. In this relationship, credible leaders serve as role models who guide their employees in their tasks and increase their confidence, which in turn promotes the courage to take on new tasks. Such leadership behavior promotes understanding and trust among employees and enhances self-esteem, which is a critical component according to Walumbwa et al. (2011), Hassan et al. (2013), Menges et al. (2015), Breevaart et al. (2016), and OC (2018), etc. Zhou et al. (2012) found that leaders' supportive actions act as important source and leads employees onto a path of optimizing and strengthening their own resources, which manifests in better organizational performance.

Furthermore, the present study provides empirical support for Bandura's (2001) thesis regarding the role of self-awareness as a catalyst for personal change and growth. By demonstrating the mediating effect of self-awareness in the link between leadership and employee engagement, our findings contribute to the existing literature by providing evidence of the influence of self-awareness on employees' decision-making processes, commitment, and behavioral consistency (Bandura, 2001). This study highlights the importance of fostering employee self-awareness as a means of increasing organizational commitment and overall effectiveness. Our findings are also consistent with Bandura's (1977) social learning theory (SLT), which states that self-awareness (SA) acts as a mediator between leadership and employee performance. The findings confirm the role of leaders as ethical and trustworthy role models who influence employee behavior by imparting knowledge and assigning tasks (Walumbwa et al., 2011). The importance for a leader to gain trust among employees is emphasised also by Quinn (2015) and Zak (2017), which pointed out the treats of inappropriate leadership on employee engagement and trust with a snowball effect. While Eisenbeiss, Knippenberg, & Boerner (2015) and Hoch et al. (2018) emphasize the crucial role of self-awareness and ethical behavior in leadership as they point out the need for consistent maintenance of ethical standards and fostering environments that preserve (mental) well-being of their employees. This theoretical implication supports the notion that leaders' behaviors and actions have an impact on employee engagement and performance by serving as role models for behavior and promoting self-awareness. Mentioned is also confirmed by Walumbwa et al. (2011), which found that a lack of self-awareness in employees can significantly weaken the relationship between leadership and employee performance, potentially leading to a rapid decline in engagement, and upgraded with Eurich (2017) and David (2016) which point out the importance of self-awareness for success in both professional and personal spheres, as it serves a crucial factor for actions and accomplishments.

The study is consistent with the Conservation of Resources Theory (Hobfoll, 1989), which emphasizes the role of leaders in providing material and psychological resources to their

employees. This is consistent with previous research that emphasizes the importance of investing in the work environment to create additional resources (Hobfoll, 1989). By confirming the positive relationship between leadership and self-esteem, this study contributes to the theoretical framework of resource investment by suggesting that leaders' actions and support can be considered valuable resources that enhance employees' self-esteem. This is consistent with previous studies (Kouzes & Posner, 2002; Zhou et al., 2012). Also, Sinek (2017) and Brown (2018) also point to the importance of positive leadership behavior in maintaining a sense of safety and respect, implying that such behavior can set in motion a positive upward spiral in organizational culture. Conversely, the lack of such leadership can lead to downward spirals of mistrust and disengagement.

Our research also highlights that employees who are engaged show high levels of commitment, characterized by enthusiasm, energy, and dedication to the task at hand (Macey et al., 2009). It is noteworthy that while the direct relationship between leadership and employee engagement did not reach statistical significance, the indirect relationship mediated by self-awareness and organizational commitment was significantly maintained. These empirical findings support the importance of self-awareness and organizational commitment in the dynamics between leadership and employee engagement (Walumbwa et al., 2010) and underscore the importance of leadership behaviors in fostering employee self-awareness and engagement (Aquino & Reed, 2002). Nevertheless, we have to point out that only the leaders ability to foster fostering employee self-awareness and engagement is not a stand-alone point, but external factors can impact employees, so it is crucial that leaders have the possibility to adopt and respond to such external factors in order to ensure the appropriate well-being of their employees.

Furthermore, our study contributes to the understanding of employee engagement by highlighting the moderating effects of self-confidence and organizational commitment on the relationship between leadership and engagement. This finding is consistent with previous research emphasizing the role of autonomy, skills, and supportive cues in promoting employee motivation and engagement (Macey et al., 2009; Cheng et al., 2014). By including self-awareness and organizational commitment as critical factors in this relationship, our study extends the theoretical understanding of the mechanisms underlying employee engagement.

In summary, our study adds to the growing body of evidence on the complex relationships among leadership, self-esteem, organizational commitment, and employee engagement. By demonstrating the full moderating effect of self-esteem and organizational commitment in the dynamics between leadership and employee engagement, we provide robust empirical evidence and a theoretical foundation for future research. Our findings support the need for leaders to foster self-awareness and commitment in their employees, thereby providing an impetus for higher employee engagement. This comprehensive understanding of these relationships is valuable to both scholars and practitioners in organizational contexts.

Conclusion And Recommendation

Conclusion

This study makes several noteworthy contributions to multi-time theory and research. It finds that the relationship between leadership and employee engagement is sequentially mediated by organizational commitment and self-awareness. While previous research has focused on self-

awareness as a moderating variable, our study examines the particular characteristics of self-awareness that are fostered by leadership. Results indicate that self-awareness and organizational commitment can account for all of the variance explaining the influence of leadership on employee engagement. In essence, the potential mechanisms underpinning the relationship between leadership and employee engagement are employee self-awareness and organizational commitment. Consequently, our study provides practical guidance for organizations to create an environment that facilitates the transition from self-awareness to organizational commitment, which in turn increases employee engagement.

The implications of these findings for theory and practice are compelling. Due to the lack of research on the variables under study, both empirical research and the development of a theoretical model were initially required to examine the direct and indirect relationships among the variables of interest. The results confirm the influence of leadership on self-esteem and commitment, which in turn promote employee engagement. The research also proposes sequential mediation models for three different pathways. The sequential mediation effects of self-awareness, commitment, and organizational commitment in the relationship between leadership and employee engagement appear to be novel discoveries according to our literature review. The complete mediation in the relationship between leadership and employee engagement due to the sequential mediation of organizational commitment and self-awareness underscores the originality of these findings.

This study fills a research gap identified by Carasco-Saul, Kim, and Kim (2015) by revealing the mechanisms through which leadership promotes employee work engagement. Moreover, it advances understanding of the causal relationship between leadership traits and follower work engagement and the underlying mechanisms that drive this relationship, paving the way for future research in this area (Brown & Mitchell, 2010; Xu & Thomas, 2011).

Empirical testing of the theoretical model suggests that the study has important implications for followers. Based on the theory of resource retention, our study assumes that leaders serve as invaluable organizational resources through their positive demeanour, encouraging employees to invest their own resources and thereby increasing their commitment. As a result, employees are likely to become more energetic and productive. In addition, the study aims to educate organizations on the importance of leaders exhibiting certain leadership behaviours in order to foster a work culture that emphasizes employee encouragement and development. This knowledge could be invaluable in the increasingly competitive global business environment.

Recommendation

Despite its significant theoretical, practical, and empirical contributions, our study, like any research, is not without limitations. First, the study used a relatively small sample. Although we mitigated this limitation by using a bootstrapping procedure with 2000 replicate samples that allowed for relative generalization, caution should be exercised in extrapolating the results of the study. Second, the data were collected using self-reports, which are known to pose certain problems (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Although self-reports are useful for assessing personal perceptions, inadvertent or intentional misreporting by respondents could potentially bias the results of the study. Future studies might consider using other data collection sources or a longitudinal design to further mitigate these limitations.

Future research could examine the impact of employee engagement beyond the antecedents already examined. For example, the impact of employee engagement on life satisfaction could be

examined. In addition, future studies could incorporate measures of Workplace Wellbeing and Fulfilment in examining the relationship between leadership and employee engagement. Shuck and Reio (2013) find that employee engagement increases productivity at both the individual and organizational levels. In addition, Shuck, Adelson, and Reio (2017) identify several subdimensions of engagement, including emotional, cognitive, and behavioural engagement. Such subdimensions should be considered in future research. Thus, this study both adds to current knowledge about the relationship between leadership and employee engagement and provides a foundation for future research in this area.

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