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TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP AND TEAMWORK
ATTITUDE: TRUST AND COLLECTIVE EFFICACY AS
MEDIATORS

Reneesya Panicker (a), Michelle Chin Chin Lee (b)*

*Corresponding author

(a) Department of Psychology, Sunway University, 47500, Petaling Jaya, Malaysia,
15006745@imail.sunway.edu.my

(b) Department of Psychology, Sunway University, 47500, Petaling Jaya, Malaysia, michellel@sunway.edu.my

Abstract

Teamwork is essential in any organizations, and leadership plays an important role in influencing teamwork attitude. Transformational leadership as a positive leadership in influencing employees has been highly researched. However, its influence in teams has not been explored much in the current literature. In order to investigate the underlying processes of how transformational leadership may affect teamwork attitude, the present study aims to investigate how transformational leadership promotes teamwork attitude through trust in leaders, trust in team members, and collective efficacy. Two hundred and five full-time employees (Female = 64%, N= 131; Mean age = 29) from private sectors in Malaysia participated in the study. Through linear regression, the results indicated that transformational leadership leads to higher trust in leaders, trust in team members, higher teamwork attitude, and higher collective efficacy. Trust in leader and trust in team members mediate transformational leadership and collective efficacy, and collective efficacy mediates trust in leader, trust in team members, and teamwork attitude. Overall, these findings imply the importance of transformational leaders in promoting positive teamwork attitude among employees by focusing on trust in leader, trust in team members, and collective efficacy. Future studies may investigate how different leadership styles may be able to promote a teamwork attitude and their mediational pathways.

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Keywords: Transformational leadership, trust in leaders, trust in team members, collective efficacy, teamwork attitude.



1. Introduction

Teamwork attitude is defined as an individual's willingness that influences their choices and decisions when working in teams (Gardner & Korth, 1998). With the growing need for efficiency and teams are becoming a norm in organizations, it has led organizations to adopt a more team-based structure in accomplishing goals (Sharp et al., 2000). In order for employees to produce desirable teamwork outcomes, it is vital for them to have a positive teamwork attitude (Baker et al., 2005). To achieve a well-structured team, leaders play an important role as leadership styles have been found to promote a teamwork attitude effectively (Aldoshan, 2016).

Among the many leadership styles, transformational leadership has deliberately been found to play an important role in teamwork settings (Chuang et al., 2004; De Jong et al., 2016; Podsakoff et al., 1990). Transformational leaders can motivate their team members in seeing the vitality of rising above their self-interest for the team benefit (Bass, 1985). Moreover, it has been established that transformational leadership is able to influence teamwork attitude (Rashid & Halim, 2015) and instil trust in their team members as the antecedents of trust are highly associated with the characteristics of transformational leaders, such as integrity, benevolence, care, and respect (Liu et al., 2010). Additionally, transformational leaders are capable of instilling collective efficacy by linking their team members' self-concept to the team mission (Walumbwa et al., 2007).

1.1. Transformational leadership and teamwork attitude

Transformational leadership is one of the widely cited leadership styles, which plays a significant role in teamwork settings as past studies have often associated the capability of these leaders in promoting effective teamwork (Burke et al., 2007; De Jong et al., 2016). In teamwork settings, leaders play a vital role in ensuring the members understanding that they will succeed or fail not as individuals, but as a team (Katzenbach, 1993).

The effectiveness of transformational leaders in promoting positive work outcome among their team members has been often explained using social exchange theory (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). Drawing from social exchange theory, transformational leaders form a social exchange process that ultimately creates a quality leader-member relationship within a collaborative change process (Pillai et al., 2011). A quality leader-member relationship is vital as transformational leaders are capable of influencing not only team members' values and emotions, but also their attitudes, which allow them to work beyond their expectations (Bass, 1985; Yukl, 2012). Hence, Hypothesis 1 states that transformational leadership would lead to a higher teamwork attitude.

1.2. Transformational leadership, trust in leaders, and trust in team members

Trust is defined as a willingness to rely on another party and to behave in circumstances in which such action makes them vulnerable to the other party (Doney et al., 1998). In teamwork settings, transformational leadership has been found to gain and establish trust among team members effectively (Dirks & Ferrin, 2002; Jung & Avolio, 2000; Podsakoff et al., 1990; Pillai et al., 2011). Creating a trusting leader-member relationship is vital as high mutual trust allows these leaders to mobilize their team

members' commitment toward the leader's vision (Ngodo, 2008). In teamwork settings, trust includes two vital dimensions, which are trust in leaders and trust in team members (Chuang et al., 2004).

Several empirical studies have shown how transformational leadership can instil trust in the leader through their characteristics (Dirks & Ferrin, 2002). For instance, transformational leaders are able to gain trust from their team members through actions, such as showing support, respect, and encouragement to their team members (Chuang et al., 2004). Additionally, transformational leaders are able to gain trust from their team members by setting an example through developing a shared vision, being considerate of their team members' needs, and being capable of achieving the vision (Jung & Avolio, 2000).

Furthermore, transformational leaders do not only build their followers' trust in leader, but they also play a major role in fostering the development of trust among team members (Chuang et al., 2004; Dirks & Skarlicki, 2004) by encouraging them to cooperate which in turn, increase trust and foster positive feelings among the members (Sosik et al., 1997). Based on the above findings, Hypothesis 2 proposes that transformational leadership would lead to a higher (a) trust in leaders and (b) trust in team members.

1.3. Trust in leaders, trust in team members, and collective efficacy

A trusting environment is vital as it builds confidence and induces higher efficacy among team members in which team members feel they can accomplish tasks collectively as a team (Dirks & Ferrin, 2002; Hakanen et al., 2015). In essence, both trusts in leaders and team members are important antecedents in heightening collective efficacy in a team (Chou et al., 2013). Therefore, a leader is not only responsible in building the followers' trust in a leader, but they also play a vital role in fostering the development of trust among team members (Dirks & Skarlicki, 2004).

For instance, having high trust in a leader will motivate team members to perform better and practice positive attitudes (Davis et al., 2000). Furthermore, this also increases team members' willingness to accept their leader's decisions and objectives (Dirks, 2000). Additionally, trust in leader helps team members to deal with differences in opinions and promote a more accepting environment for members (Hyman-Shurland, 2016). It was stated that trust in team members is a consequence of high trust in leaders (Chuang et al., 2004). Thus, Hypothesis 3 posits that (a) trust in leaders and (b) trust in team members would lead to higher collective efficacy.

1.4. Collective efficacy and teamwork attitude

Collective efficacy transpires through team development; hence, it has been notably found to play an essential role in promoting teamwork (Chuang et al., 2004; Jung & Sosik, 2002; Peterson et al., 2000; Walumbwa et al., 2008). It was found that when members are confident in the capability and expertise of their team, their willingness to share ideas, beliefs and feelings about the work project will increase (Lee et al., 2010), which may lead to a more positive teamwork attitude. Therefore, Hypothesis 4 states that collective efficacy would lead to a higher teamwork attitude.

1.5. Trust in leaders, trust in team members, and collective efficacy as mediators between transformational leadership and teamwork attitude

All in all, when looking at transformational leadership and teamwork attitude, we argue that transformational leadership can influence team members; increasing trust in leaders and team members will

indirectly increase the collective efficacy of the team members, and eventually increases teamwork attitude. Using social exchange theory (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005), an effective leader-member exchange relationship can increase team members' confidence in which over time will also contribute to the team's collective efficacy (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). Therefore, Hypothesis 5 states that (a) trust in leader and (b) trust in team members would mediate transformational leadership and collective efficacy, and Hypothesis 6 suggests that collective efficacy would mediate (a) trust in leader and (b) trust in team members and teamwork attitude.

2. Problem Statement

Past studies have mainly focused on trust and collective efficacy of team's behavioral outcomes, such as team performance and not on its processes. In other words, the current literature has not delved into investigating the influence of these variables on teamwork attitude. Therefore, Aldoshan (2016) stated that it is imperative to investigate how leadership styles may help to improve teamwork attitude. While attitude is a key determinant of behavior (Ajzen & Fishbein, 2005), trust is an essential factor to consider when investigating teamwork attitude in relation to the leader (Kiffin-Peterson & Cordery, 2003). Trust in leaders and trust in team members are important dimensions to focus on when investigating trust in teamwork settings as this allows for a more comprehensive understanding of team-based working relationship (Chuang et al., 2004). Moreover, trust has also been suggested to lead to higher collective efficacy—a component to increase teamwork attitude (Chou et al., 2013; Gully et al., 2002).

3. Research Questions

As most leaders in Malaysian organizations utilized transformational leadership style (Lee et al., 2018), the present study intends to focus on how transformational leadership influence teamwork—a work structure highly preferred by Malaysian employees (Achim et al., 2015).

4. Purpose of the Study

Overall, the present study intends to explore the processes in which transformational leadership can potentially affect teamwork attitude among employees. The study investigates trust in leader, trust in team members, and collective efficacy as mediators between transformational leadership and teamwork attitude. As Malaysia is a collectivistic culture (Hofstede, 2001), thus, trust and collective efficacy can be seen as factors that are highly valued by Malaysian employees. A proposed model is illustrated in Figure 1 below.

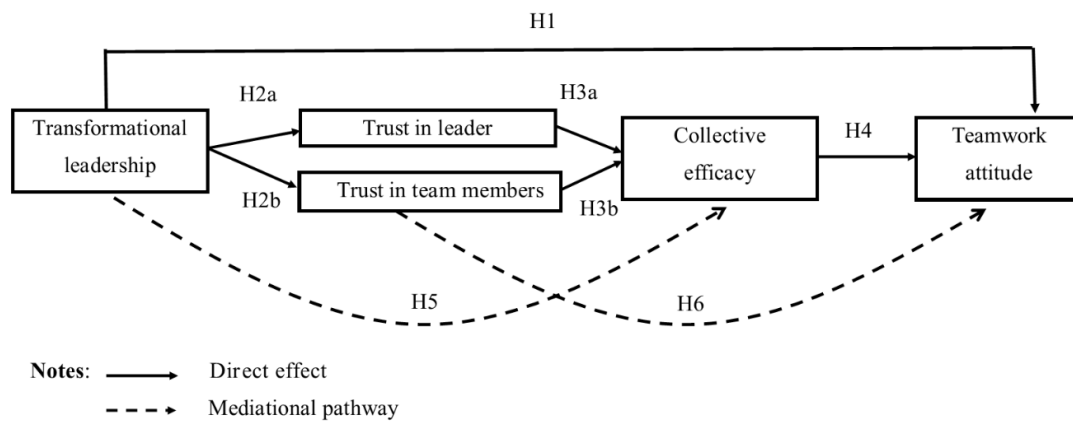


Figure 01. Research mode

5. Research Methods

5.1. Participants

A total of 205 full-time employees from the private service sectors (131 females, 64%) took part in the present study. The inclusion criteria were Malaysians age between 18 and 60 with teamwork experience and at least three months working experience under a direct leader. There were 130 Chinese (63%), 38 Indians (19%), 26 Malays (13%) and 11 Others (5%). The mean age is 29 (S.D. = 8.8). The majority of the participants (75%) had at least five years of working experience under a leader or direct supervisor. Also, the majority of the participants (71%) earn at least MYR5000 a month. All participants indicated they had teamwork experience based on their demographic details. Using the snowballing sampling method, participants were sent a direct message personally by the researcher using social media platforms, such as Facebook and LinkedIn. A link to the online questionnaire was provided to those who agreed to participate in the study to complete. All responses were kept private and confidential.

5.2. Instruments

Transformational leadership was measured using the Global Transformational Leadership Scale (GTL) developed by Carless et al. (2000). The seven items measure the seven aspects of leadership behaviors (i.e., communicates a vision, develops staff, provides support, empowers staff, innovative, leads by example, and charismatic). Items are rated using a 5-point Likert scale. The scale has an estimated alpha value of .93 (Carless et al., 2000).

Trust in leader was measured using Trust in Leader Scale (TLS) and trust in team member was measured using Trust in Team Member Scale (TMS). The scales were developed by Kanawattanachai and Yoo (2002). Each scale consists of eight items in which four items measure affective trust, and four items measure cognitive trust. Items are rated using a 5-point Likert scale. The construct reliability of the affective trust scale is .89, whereas the cognitive trust scale is .86 (Kanawattanachai & Yoo, 2002).

Collective efficacy was measured using the Perceived Collective Efficacy Scale (PCES) developed by Salanova et al. (2003). The four items are rated using a 5-point Likert scale. This scale has an alpha value of .77 (Salanova et al., 2003).

Teamwork attitude was measured using Teamwork Attitude Scale (TAS) developed by Beigi and Shirmohammadi (2012). The six items are rated using a 5-point Likert scale. This scale has an alpha value .82 (Beigi & Shirmohammadi, 2012).

5.3. Analysis

Hypothesis 1, 2, 3 and 4 were tested using linear regression. Hypothesis 5 and 6 were tested using the Monte Carlo test.

6. Findings

Hypothesis 1 predicted that transformational leadership would lead to a higher teamwork attitude. Using linear regression, the results reveal a statistically significant relationship between transformational leadership and teamwork attitude ($F [1,203] = 19.66$, $R=.30$, $R^2 = .09$, $p<.001$). The results indicate that transformational leaders explain 9% of variance of teamwork attitude. Further, it also indicates that an increase in 1 SD of transformational leadership will lead to an increase in .30 of teamwork attitude. Therefore, Hypothesis 1 is supported.

Hypothesis 2 proposed that transformational leadership would lead to a higher (a) trust in leaders, and (b) trust in team members. Using linear regression, the results indicated a statistically significant relationship between transformational leadership and trust in leaders ($F [1, 203] = 395.16$, $R= .81$, $R^2= .66$, $p< .001$) and between transformational leadership and trust in team members ($F [1,203] =40.78$, $R=.41$, $R^2=.17$, $p<.001$). This indicates that transformational leadership explains 66% of variance of trust in leaders and 17% of variance of trust in team members. The findings also indicate that an increase in 1 SD of transformational leadership leads to an increase of .81 of trust in leaders and .41 of trust in team members. Therefore, Hypothesis 2 is supported.

Hypothesis 3(a) and (b) predict that (a) trust in leader, and (b) trust in team members would lead to higher collective efficacy. Using linear regression, the results indicated a statistically significant relationship between trust in leader and collective efficacy ($R=.51$, $R^2=.26$, $p<.001$) and between trust in team members and collective efficacy ($R= .77$, $R^2=.60$, $p<.001$). The findings further indicate that an increase in 1 SD of trust in leader leads to an increase of .51 of collective efficacy. Also, an increase in 1 SD of trust in team members leads to an increase of .77 of collective efficacy. Therefore, Hypothesis 3 is supported.

Hypothesis 4 predicts that collective efficacy would lead to a higher teamwork attitude. Using linear regression, the results indicate a statistically significant relationship between collective efficacy and teamwork attitude ($R=.47$, $R^2=.22$, $p<.001$). The findings also indicate that an increase of 1 SD of collective efficacy leads to an increase of .47 of teamwork attitude. Therefore, Hypothesis 4 is supported.

Hypothesis 5 proposed that (a) trust in leader, and (b) trust in team members would mediate transformational leadership and collective efficacy. Using the Monte Carlo test, transformational leadership was found to have a significant effect on collective efficacy through trust in leader and trust in team members (LL= .2278, UL =.1432, $p <.001$; LL= .1913, UL=.0992, $p<.001$). Since the effect of transformational leadership on collective efficacy is significant in the presence of the mediators (i.e., trust in leader and trust in team members), it indicates that the effect was partially mediated.

Hypothesis 6 proposed that collective efficacy would mediate (a) trust in leader, and (b) trust in team members, and teamwork attitude. Using the Monte Carlo test, trust in leader and trust in team members were found to have a significant effect on teamwork attitude through collective efficacy (LL= .1518, UL=.0763, $p < .001$; LL=.2811, UL=.1564, $p < .001$). Since the effect of trust in leader and trust in team members on teamwork attitude was significant in the presence of the mediator (i.e., collective efficacy), thus, it indicates that the effect was partially mediated.

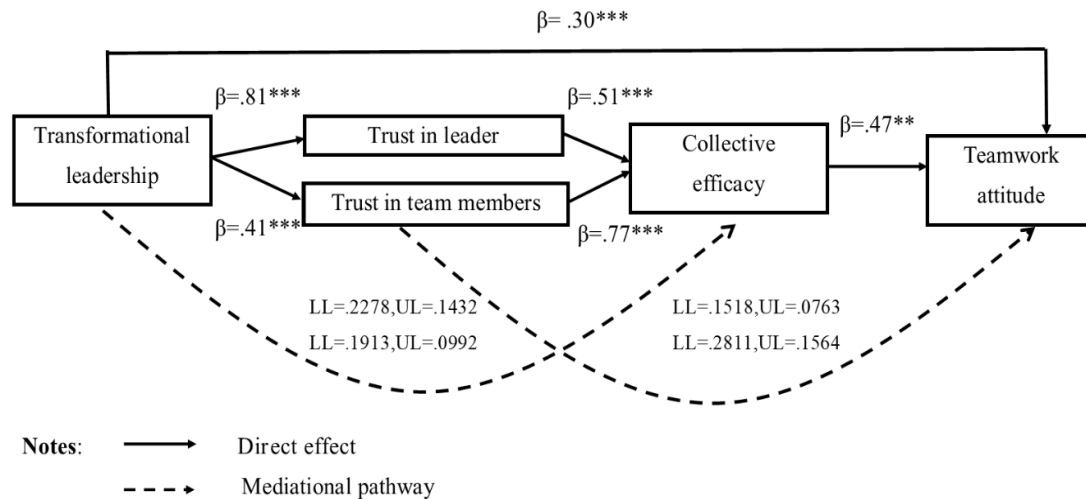


Figure 02. The final model

The findings showed that transformational leadership significantly influences teamwork attitude through trust in leaders, trust in team members, and collective efficacy. The findings also showed that trust in leaders and trust in team members mediate transformational leadership and collective efficacy. Collective efficacy was also found to mediate trust in leader, trust in team members, and teamwork attitude. Overall, all hypotheses were supported.

6.1 Theoretical contributions

Based on social exchange theory (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005) and social identification theory (Tajfel & Turner, 2001), it is evident that transformational leadership is able to influence teamwork attitude through their characteristics. Furthermore, transformational leaders are able to promote positive teamwork attitude by encouraging the team members to see the benefit of working in a team (Bass, 1985). Moreover, the current findings support the notion that transformational leadership significantly promotes trust in leaders and trust in team members through their characteristics (Dirks & Ferrin, 2002). Besides that, as trust in team members is a consequence of high trust in leaders, transformational leaders are able to promote trust in team members by encouraging and motivating members to work together (Dirks & Skarlicki, 2004).

Additionally, the high trust in leaders and team members leads to heightened collective efficacy in a team. The current findings are in line with the findings by Chou et al. (2013) where it is found that both trust in leader and trust in team members are vital antecedent to promoting collective efficacy in a team. It has been consistently found that there is a positive relationship between group cohesion and collective efficacy (Dvir et al., 2002). Therefore, the current findings can be explained as trust is found to be an

essential factor in group cohesion (Cohen & Bailey, 1997). Also, this study reveals that collective efficacy significantly contributes to teamwork attitude. As trust in leaders and team members increases, collective efficacy in a team is heighten mainly because of the confidence members have with one another (Chuang et al., 2004). Thus, when collective efficacy exists in a team, members will strive to achieve team goals (Kark & Shamir, 2002). Overall, these findings show that collective efficacy is crucial to ensure employees possess positive teamwork attitude.

6.2 Practical implications

The current findings allow more organizations to encourage leaders to adopt transformational leadership style. By adopting a transformational leadership style, these leaders are able to create a trusting environment, which in turn promotes collective efficacy. It is also evident from the current findings that these elements are important in order to foster an overall positive teamwork attitude that will lead to greater teamwork skills and team effectiveness (Kiffin-Peterson & Cordery, 2003). Ultimately, this will benefit the organizations as it helps create better understanding and improve communication in a team, which will lead to better achievement of organization goals. Furthermore, as it is shown that teamwork is an important soft skill sought after by business executives (Robles, 2012), the findings of the current study allow organizations to compete more efficiently and effectively.

6.3 Strength and limitations

The current study contributes to the current literature; hence, there are a couple of strengths to be discussed. Firstly, the study focused on an Asian sample that consists of multiple cultural backgrounds. As Asians are collectivistic, they are more likely to be loyal to their team, and that affects their overall teamwork attitude (Beigi & Shirmohammadi, 2012). Therefore, the findings of the current study help Asian leaders to gauge better understanding on how to install as positive teamwork attitude among their employees through transformational leadership, trust, and collective efficacy.

Nevertheless, one of the limitations is that the current study utilizes a cross-sectional design, which makes it difficult to determine the exact direction of causality between the variables (Zhu et al., 2013). For instance, employees who have higher trust in their leader may be biased by rating their transformational leader more favorably.

6.4 Future Direction

Future studies should consider using a longitudinal study design as this helps to examine in detail the development of variables, such as trust in leader (Zhu et al., 2013). This will also confirm the cause and effect relationship between the variables. Secondly, future studies could focus on and investigate how individual factors, such as different personality affects an individual's teamwork attitude. Lastly, future studies may also explore how different leadership styles could promote teamwork attitude through trust and collective efficacy. For instance, it has been found that empowering leadership style is able to promote trust in Asians (Gao et al., 2011), hence, it is possible that empowering leadership may foster teamwork attitude.

7. Conclusion

The present study sheds light on the impact of transformational leadership on trust in leaders, trust in team members, and collective efficacy and how these factors are able to promote a more positive teamwork attitude among employees in Malaysia. The findings indicate the importance of transformational leadership in promoting teamwork attitude, trust in leaders, and trust in team members. High trust in leaders and team members will lead to a higher collective efficacy in a team, which in turn leads to a positive teamwork attitude. Therefore, it is imperative for organizations' leaders to adopt a transformational leadership style to nurture a positive teamwork attitude.

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