

# The Relationship among Transformational Leadership, Employee Engagement and Commitment

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## Abstract:

**Purpose:** An engaged employee contributes significantly to the organization. He is an excellent mean to achieve competitiveness and effectiveness. Still the conclusive research with regard to employee's engagement, its antecedents and consequences are limited. Keeping this in mind, the present study attempts to provide insights into the interplay among leadership, engagement and commitment by investigating the mediating role of employee engagement.

**Methodology:** The data was collected using convenience-based sample method. A total of 450 filled questionnaires from managers and officers of commercial banks were found suitable for the analysis. Model 4 in PROCESS macro (Hayes, 2013) was applied.

**Findings:** It was found that transformational leadership exerted a significant impact on both commitment and employee engagement. Further, employee engagement partially mediated transformational leadership-organizational commitment relation. The results revealed that transformational leadership style is crucial in predicting positive work related aspects such as organizational commitment and engagement.

**Practical Implications:** Employee engagement is a positive behavioral attitude that is vital for the success of any organization. It is believed that engagement and commitment can potentially translate into valuable business results for an organization. Since Leaders have a greatest influence on the subordinates especially in high power distance country like India. Hence, they can significantly foster engagement and commitment among employees. Therefore, the present study is of great importance to the organization.

**Value:** The present study talks about engagement and its association with other constructs in a non-western culture, that is, India where it severely lacks the theoretical and empirical presence. It addresses the mediating effect of employee engagement on transformational leadership and organizational commitment which is overlooked before.

**Keywords:** Employee Engagement (ENGT), Transformational Leadership (TRFLDR), Organizational Commitment (COMT), Mediation, Social Exchange Theory (SET)

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## Introduction

In this era of competition and constant change, organization heavily rely on their people. They provide organization with unique capabilities that cannot be copied or imitated, hence, providing an edge to an organization over its competitors. Managements are always keen to promote such positive behaviors among their workforce that are vital for its survival and success. One such behavior that has garnered a great deal of interest is- Employee Engagement. It has been derived by considering those behaviors demonstrated by employees that yield higher productivity and positive outcomes. An engaged employee excels in his job and contribute significantly to the efficiency of the organization. Avey, Wernsing and Luthans (2008) pointed that when employees exhibit engagement, it enhances positive organizational change. Enhancing engagement among employees creates a positive psychology which made them believe that their personal ability is the cause for the organizational success. They become rigors and dedicated while performing the tasks ensuring more productivity, less wastage and adapting to the necessary changes.

Previous studies have established a compelling and positive link of engagement with reduced turnover intention (Schaufeli and Bakker, 2004; Harter, Schmidt and Hayes, 2002), leadership (Papalexandris and Galanaki, 2009; Breevaart et al., 2014; Hayati, Charkhabi and Naami, 2014), organizational citizenship behavior (Babcock-Roberson and Strickland, 2010; Rurkkhum and Bartlett, 2012; Ariani, 2013), job satisfaction (Harter, Schmidt and Hayes, 2002), and other positive organizational outcomes (Sonnetag, 2003; Salanova and Schaufeli, 2008; Christain, Garza and Slaughter, 2011; Anitha 2014; Yongxing et al., 2017). Anitha (2014) asserted that employee engagement is a great tool at the disposal of organization to gain competitive advantage. Hence, creating and sustaining higher engagement level among its employees is apparently desirable (Ghadi, Fernando and Caputi, 2013). Any organization should focus on identifying the antecedents that could foster the level of engagement among employees (Crawford, LePine and Rich, 2010). However, the research concerning the same still remain limited (Macey and Schneider, 2008; Saks and Gruman, 2014). Moreover, in the extant literature on engagement, the majority of the studies are conducted in western countries (Bhatnagar, 2007; Motyka, 2018). The generalization of such results is debatable as the validation of management models in one cultural context may not necessarily validate its existence in other different culture (Parnell, 2003). The present study is set out to assess the relationship of employee engagement with other constructs in a non-western context, that is, India. The uniqueness of this study is that it addresses the mediating effect of employee engagement (ENGT) on transformational leadership (TRFLDR) and organizational commitment (COMT) which is overlooked before (Avolio et al., 2004; Choi, Tran and Park, 2015; Popli



and Rizvi, 2016; Asif et al., 2019). The aim is to investigate the relationship among TRFLDR, COMT and ENGT by examining the mediating role of ENGT.

The coming section examines the literature on ENGT, its linkage with COMT and TRFLDR. Afterwards the section summarizes the methodology related aspects of the present study which is followed by the analysis of the results. At last, discussions, conclusions and limitations are given.

## Literature Review

### *ENGMT*

Although the academics research on engagement has significantly flourished recently but until date there lack a consensus in the theoretical definition of engagement (Little and Little, 2006; Macey and Schneider, 2008; Saks and Gruman, 2014).

It was Kahn (1990) that conceptualized engagement as the expression of ‘preferred self’ by an employee in the task behaviors that encourage them to connect with their work as well as to others. It involves ones’ physical, cognitive as well as emotional presence and active role performances. It is a state of mind that is characterised as pervasive and persistent. Employee feel connected to their work and get actively involved in their given task (Kahn, 1990, 1992). Later on May, Gilson and Harter (2004) and Christian, Garza and Slaughter (2011) stated that engagement involves investment of employees’ personal resources (that constitute of physical, emotional and cognitive energies) in their job. Engagement is characterized as a positive antipode of burnout by Maslach, Schaufelli and Leiter (2001). Saks (2006) also argued that it is a distinctive construct that define the degree to which an employee is attentive and absorbed in one’s formal role. Likewise Rich, Lepine and Crawford (2010) argued that an engaged individual is psychologically present and fully attentive, connected and focussed in one’s role performances. Macey and Schneider (2008) connote engagement as a combination of involvement, passion, enthusiasm and focused efforts that creates a preferable condition to serve organizational purpose. According to Rurkkhum and Bartlett (2012) it is a positive psychological mindset of employees that causes them to dedicate themselves actively in their job and organization.

The most widely used definition in the literature (Hakanen, Bakker, Schaufeli, 2006; Salanova et al., 2011; Ghadi, Fernando and Caputi, 2013) is introduced by Schaufeli, Salanova, González-Romá and Bakker (2002, pp. 74) that defined engagement as ‘a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption’ While vigor is defined by ‘high levels of energy and mental resilience’ during job, dedication is characterized by a ‘sense of significance, enthusiasm, inspiration, pride, and challenge’. The third dimension- absorption, is defined as being ‘fully concentrated and deeply engrossed in one’s work’, whereby



**NMIMS**  
**Management Review**  
ISSN: 0971-1023  
Volume XXX  
Issue-5 | October 2022

one finds it difficult to detach oneself from work (Schaufeli et al., 2002; Schaufeli and Bakker, 2004).

### *ENGT and TRFLDR*

Ariani (2013) argued that employee engagement highly depends on the leadership style adopted by the organization. Past studies have indeed reported the positive association between leadership style and employee engagement (Babcock-Roberson and Strickland, 2010; Tims, Bakker and Xanthopoulou, 2011; Ariani, 2014; Hayati, Charkhabi and Naami, 2014; Scheepers and Elstob, 2016; Singh et al., 2016). Leadership, particularly transformational leadership (TRFLDR) is one of the prominent motivators in enhancing employee's engagement (Saks and Gruman, 2014; Carasco-Saul, Kim and Kim, 2015). Transformational leaders lift its followers to extra-ordinary heights. They transform the followers' basic notions, beliefs and attitudes so that employees willingly perform beyond the minimum level specified by the organization. (Podsakoff, Mackenzie and Moorman, 1990; Avolio, Walumwa and Weber, 2009). According to Bass et al. (2003) transformational leadership is a multi-dimensional construct that constitute of four major elements namely, idealized influence (behaving in ways that result in being role model among their followers), inspirational motivation (motivating and inspiring by providing meaning and challenge to the follower's works), intellectual stimulation (stimulating the followers' efforts to be innovative and creative) and individualized consideration (giving special attention to individual's needs for achievement and growth). These characteristics traits of transformational leader foster positive attitudes among employees such as engagement and commitment. While aspects like idealised influence and inspirational motivation build loyalty and devotion among employees that helps them to identify with organization; intellectual stimulation and individualised consideration stimulate the employees to expend their traditional working role (Ghadi, Fernando and Caputi, 2013; Hayati, Charkhabi and Naami, 2014). Another important trait of Transformational leaders is their charisma (Conger, 1999; Babcock-Roberson and Strickland, 2010) that helps inspire others (Howell and Shamir, 2005). Dvir et al. (2002) comprehended that charismatic personality of the leaders stimulates their followers to expend their boundaries and by treating them with individualized consideration, they arouse inspirational motivation among its followers. They help the followers to identify their true potential and generate the highest levels of performance at the workplace.

Engagement is the result of an exchange relation between leader and employees wherein leaders provides them with the necessary resources and empower them and in turn employees reciprocate through greater efforts and commitment (Vincent-Hoper, Muser and Janneck, 2012). It has been argued that an employee who receives support, proper guidance and inspiration will engage more in his job (Tims, Bakker and Xanthopoulou, 2011).



Recent work by Bhatnagar (2007), Popli and Rizvi (2015, 2016) also revealed that supportive nature of the management could be significant in predicting employee engagement. Popli and Rizvi (2015) explored the association between TRFLDR and ENGT with the help of 106 samples collected from private sector organization. It revealed a positive association between the two ( $R= 0.59, p< 0.01$ ). In 2016, Popli and Rizvi expanded their study by assessing the effect of two more leadership style viz transactional leadership and passive-avoidant on ENGT. It reported the positive association of ENGT with transactional leadership but negative association with passive-avoidant. They further maintained that there still lacks ample empirical works linking leadership with employee engagement in India-specific context. Therefore, the present study hypothesized.

**H1:** Transformational Leadership (TRFLDR) positively predicts Employee Engagement (ENGT)

#### *ENGT and COMT*

The committed employees are defined as one who feel pride for being with the organization (Mowday, Steers and Porter, 1979) and strongly believe in its value (Porter et al., 1974) As per Vance (2006) employees feel pride in their organization only to the extent they enjoy and believe in their work and employee engagement warrants that employee feel proud in what he does and is connected with his job (May, Gilson and Harter, 2004; Macey and Schneider, 2008). This ensures that highly engaged employees would feel committed and are attached to their organization (Schaufeli and Bakker, 2004; Kataria, Garg and Rastogi, 2012). According to Jackson, Rothmann, and Van de Vijver (2006) engagement is a strong predictor to organizational commitment. Literature has also supported a strong association between engagement and commitment (Hakanen, Bakker and Schaufeli, 2006; Field and Buitendach, 2011; Dalal et al., 2012; Hanaysha, 2016; Azim, 2016). Saks (2006, 2019) also observed a positive effect of both job and organizational engagement on commitment. Therefore, it is being hypothesized.

**H2:** Employee Engagement (ENGT) positively predicts Organizational Commitment (COMT)

#### *ENGT, TRFLDR and COMT*

The leadership is an important factor in determining the positive employees' attitude. There are ample of empirical evidences to support the positive influence of transformational leadership on both organizational commitment and engagement (Robert, 2000; Cotton and Hart, 2003; Attridge, 2009; Avolio et al., 2004; Wiza, and Hlanganipai, 2014; Mesu, Sanders and Van Riemsdijk, 2015; Dajani and Zaki, 2015). Transformational leadership has assumed to facilitates the activities and structure and



**NMIMS**  
**Management Review**  
ISSN: 0971-1023  
Volume XXX  
Issue-5 | October 2022

guide people thereof. It integrates the elements of empathy, compassion, sensitivity, relationship building and innovation (Jin, 2010, Popli and Rizvi, 2016). By providing ample opportunities and enriching the job, they can strengthen the commitment and engagement (Mclaggan, Botha and Bezuidenhout, 2013).

Social Exchange (SET) Theory (Blau, 1964; Saks, 2006) and Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) theory (Demerouti et al., 2001; Bakker, Demerouti and Verbeke, 2004) offers a more strong theoretical rationale for establishing a connection of transformational leadership with commitment and engagement. As per SET when one person does or doesn't perform something that holds some value for other, the receiving party will try to reciprocate with something that is equally valuable. The relationship between leaders and employees may evolve into one of reciprocity (Strom, Sears and Kelly, 2014). Transformational leaders create a social relationship with their employees that is built on mutual trust and respect, this creates a positive attitude among employees who may choose to show their respects to such relations by performing their required duties more seriously and vigorously at the workplace. Saks (2006) also make the case that employees see their supervisor's attitude toward them as a sign of the company's support. So, employees that receive any economic and socio-emotional aids from their leaders will readily devote themselves in performing the work roles assigned to them by the organization in exchange of the support extended by leader.

Similarly, JD-R theory established that job resources play an instrumental motivational role in achieving work goals. When employees are provided with necessary supports, mutual respect, and innovative climate to grow to their highest potential, then the task will automatically be completed more successfully and the further outcomes that are likely to occur as a result of such support and climate would be committed attitude and greater engagement among employees (Hakanen, Bakker and Schaufeli, 2006). Moreover, it is plausible that engaged employees are assumed to be committed to the organization (Ariani, 2013, 2014). Transformational leader ensures that its followers are provided with these necessary job resources and therefore more engagement among employees which in turn leads to greater commitment for the organization. Based on previous studies and logical arguments, it is being hypothesized

- H3:** Transformational Leadership (TRFLDR) positively predicts Organizational Commitment (COMT)
- H4:** The relationship between Transformational Leadership (TRFLDR) and Organizational Commitment (COMT) is mediated by Employee Engagement (ENGT)

Figure 1 depicts the present study hypotheses.

(Figure 1- here)



## Research Methodology

The survey was conducted on bank employees that included managers and officers working in various branches of commercial banks (private and public banks). Through convenience sampling method, the data was collected from Delhi and Haryana because of the rich geographical diversity present in these areas. Total 481 filled questionnaires were received but only 450 were found adequate for study.

### *Instrument development*

The employee engagement was measured with short version of Utrecht Work Engagement Scale developed by Schaufeli, Bakker and Salanova (2006) that constitute nine statements. The scale composed of three statements from each dimension viz. vigour, dedication and absorption. To measure Transformational leadership, the scale developed by Podsakoff, Mackenzie and Moorman (1990) has been used. Total twelve statements were extracted from twenty-two statements mentioned in it. The five statements created by Armstrong (2009) was considered to assess the Organizational commitment level among the respondents. All the items were measured on 7-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (7).

The results of normality of data analysis of all constructs revealed that data was normally distributed as the value of skewness and kurtosis ranges between +2 and -2 (Ryu, 2011).

### *Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents*

Majority of the data was collected from public sector banks (315, 70 per cent) and only 135 (30 per cent) was collected from private sector banks. The data constituted 313 (69.6 per cent) males and 137 (30.4 per cent) females working in commercial banks. In the data 272 (60.4 per cent) respondents were married and remaining 178 (39.6 per cent) were unmarried. About 228 (50.7 per cent) aged below 30 years, followed by 155 (34.3 per cent) between the age group of 30-40 years and 67 (14.9 per cent) aged more than 40 years. Similarly, based on the work-experience, of 450, 221 (49.1 per cent) had an experience of less than 5 years, 127 (28.2 per cent) respondents had an experience between 5-10 years and 102 (22.7 per cent) had more than 10 years respectively.

### *Measurement Model*

Confirmatory Factor Analysis was run to assess the validity and reliability. To ensure convergent validity, the values of average variance extracted (AVE) and composite reliability (CR) should be greater than 0.5 and 0.7 respectively (Malhotra, Nunan and Birks, 2017). Discriminant validity is checked with the square root of the AVE of each construct that should be higher than the construct's highest correlation with any



**NMIMS**  
**Management Review**  
ISSN: 0971-1023  
Volume XXX  
Issue-5 | October 2022

other construct (Hair et al., 2014). While Factor loadings are used to test which items converge to the measuring construct. According to Hair et al. (2014), minimum factor loadings of 0.5 is preferable.

In the present study, after dropping one statement from each construct namely employee engagement and commitment, rest loaded significantly on their intended latent construct and were well above the preferred limit. Contrary to the three-dimensional model of employee engagement, the present study supported the single factor model (Sonnetag, 2003; Shimazu et al., 2008.). In case of transformational leadership, six-dimensional model with two statements each was observed. Table 1 shows the results of reliability and convergent validity of the constructs. The Cronbach value ranged between 0.860 to 0.938 which are well above the ideal limit of 0.70 (Nunnally, 1978).

(Table-1 here)

Discriminant validity is observed by the diagonal values as shown in Table 2. Further, it can be seen that AVE is greater than Maximum Shared Squared Variance (MSV). This indicate that discriminant validity was achieved. Various indices that depict the fitness of the data are shown in Table 3. Except CMIN/Df which is sensitive to sample size and considered to increase with large data (Malhotra, Nunan and Birks, 2017), all the other indices are well above the threshold limit. The assessment indicates that the theoretical account of the constructs is satisfactory.

(Table-2 here)

(Table-3 here)

## Results

### *Summary Statistics*

The descriptive Statistics of the measures are shown in Table 4. The intercorrelations among the constructs were statistically significant that provided an initial support to hypotheses of the present study.

(Table-4 here)

### *Analysis*

To test mediation effect, a mediation model (Model 4) with PROCESS macro (Hayes, 2013) is used. The results presented in Table 5 revealed a significant influence of transformational leadership (TRFLDR) on employee engagement (ENGT) ( $B= 0.69, p<.001$ ). It has been observed from Table 6 that both TRFLDR ( $B= 0.37, p<.001$ ) and ENGT ( $B= 0.39, p<.001$ ) had a direct effect on organizational commitment (COMT). Hence, H1, H2 and H3 are supported.



(Table-5 here)

(Table-6 here)

Table 7 depicts the indirect effect of TRFLDR on organizational commitment COMT via ENGT. The Zero did not fall between the confidence interval [CI= (0.162, 0.374)]. Hence, it is reported that there is a significant effect of TRFLDR on COMT through ENGT with  $B = 0.27$  [CI= (0.162, 0.374)]. It is observed that direct effect as well as indirect effect of TRFLDR on COMT was statistically significant. Since the direct relation between the two remained significant even in the presence of ENGT, therefore, it is drawn that employee engagement partially mediated the TRFLDR-COMT relationship. Hence, H4 is partially accepted.

(Table-7 here)

## Discussions and Conclusions

Organizations have always shown interest in discovering the positive employees' behavior so as to use it for the betterment. Employee Engagement is one such meaningful behavior (Saks, 2006) that predicts positive organizational outcome and act as excellent mean to achieve competitiveness and effectiveness. Still, there lacks an adequate amount of research that comprehend the effect of employee engagement in Indian context. The present study tries to fill that gap in the sense that it proposed and empirically analyzed an often-neglected relationship among employee engagement, transformational leadership and commitment. The finding supported the hypotheses H1, H2, H3 and partially accepted H4.

Employee engagement is a positive behavioral attitude that is vital for the success of the organization. Encouragement of such positive behavior is necessary. Vance (2006) believed that engagement and commitment can potentially translate into valuable business results for an organization. Since Leaders have a greatest influence on the subordinates specially in high power distance country like India (Organ, Podsakoff and MacKenzie, 2005; Varma, Srinivas and Stroh, 2005) and hence, they can significantly contribute in fostering engagement and commitment among employees. According to Welch (2011) engagement is a concern for those who directly communicate with employees as they can significantly stimulate their engagement level with the way they communicate. The transformational leaders, particularly, has the ability to influence its followers and extend the vision that helps the them to utilise their total amount of talent and potential in their job and aids in achieving organizational goals more effectively and efficiently. Tims, Bakker and Xanthopoulou (2011) argued to be the first to establish the relationship between transformational leadership and employee engagement. Later on, Hayati, Charkhabi and Naami (2014) also supported the existence of a positive link between transformational leadership and engagement



**NMIMS**  
**Management Review**  
ISSN: 0971-1023  
Volume XXX  
Issue-5 | October 2022

in Iran. The results of the present study are in line with the previous study and indicated a positive effect of transformational leadership on engagement. Consistent with previous studies (Rowden, 2000; Emery and Barker, 2007; Mclaggan, Botha and Bezuidenhout, 2013) the present found a positive association between transformational leadership and organizational commitment as well. Further, study found the mediating effect of engagement on commitment. This is because transformational leaders are such that provide employees with challenging purpose and widen their sense of identification, and worthiness. Such leaders provide a good working culture that is characterised with mutual trust and respect. They stimulate employees' to challenge the traditionally accepted methods and provide them with relevant job resources, individualised consideration for their individual needs and growth. All these factors are strongly connected with improved employee engagement and commitment (Avolio et al., 2004; Attridge, 2009). Consequently, a general implication is focussing on promoting and adopting transformational leadership style is an organization. (Parry and Sinha, 2005).

The present study, however, is not free from limitations. The use of self-report survey to generate response may have biased the answers. There's a possibility that employees reacted in a way that favoured their actions. Future research should include studies that use a different sources and approaches to corroborate the relationships shown in the present study. Second, because the study is cross-sectional, causal inferences are not possible (West, 2011). As a result, longitudinal research designs are needed in the future to investigate changes in the relevant factors. Further studies could conduct the research with larger sample size and across different industries for the generalisation of the findings.

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**NMIMS**  
**Management Review**  
ISSN: 0971-1023  
Volume XXX  
Issue-5 | October 2022

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**NMIMS**  
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Volume XXX  
Issue-5 | October 2022

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**NMIMS**  
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Volume XXX  
Issue-5 | October 2022

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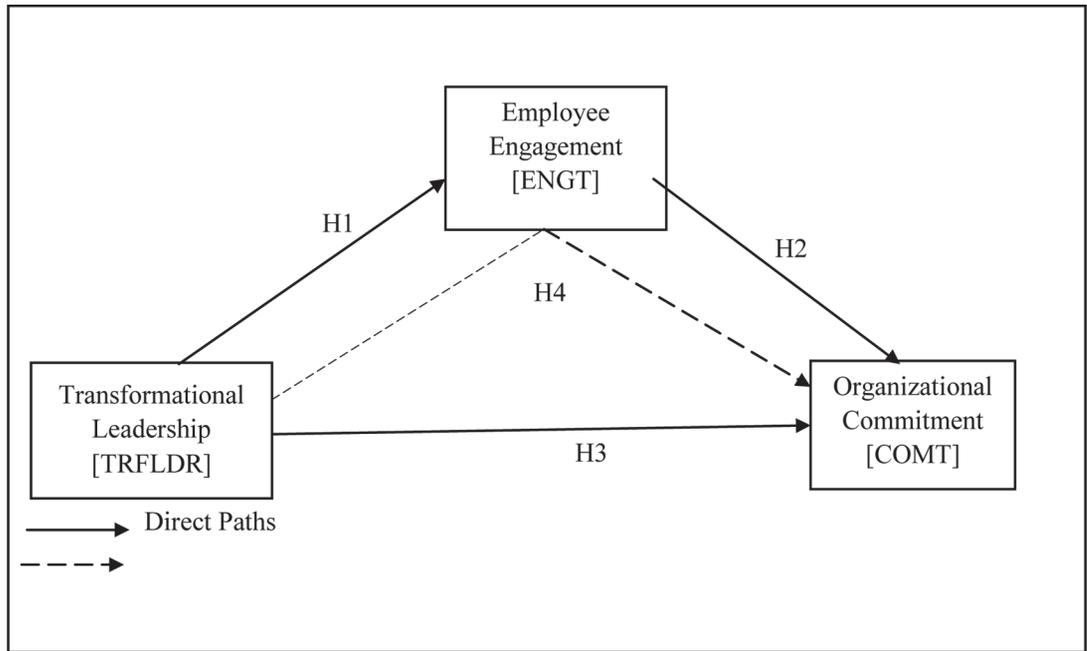


Figure 1: The Conceptual Model  
 Source: The Authors

Latent Construct	Items	Factor Loadings	Cronbach Alpha	AVE	CR
ENGT	ENGT1	0.809	0.926	0.621	0.929
	ENGT2	0.887			
	ENGT3	0.882			
	ENGT4	0.816			
	ENGT5	0.658			
	ENGT6	0.725			
	ENGT7	0.776			
	ENGT8	0.714			
COMT	COMT1	0.882	0.860	0.641	0.872
	COMT2	0.910			
	COMT3	0.849			
	COMT5	0.477			



TRFLDR	AV	TRFLDR1	0.728	0.938	0.731	0.941
		TRFLDR2	0.907			
	AM	TRFLDR3	0.864			
		TRFLDR4	0.936			
	FAG	TRFLDR5	0.923			
		TRFLDR6	0.877			
	HPE	TRFLDR7	0.853			
		TRFLDR8	0.808			
	IS	TRFLDR9	0.897			
		TRFLDR10	0.925			
	INTST	TRFLDR11	0.818			
		TRFLDR12	0.836			

**Table 1:** Reliability and Convergent Validity Result

**Sources:** The Authors

**Notes:** AV: Articulating Vision; AM: Appropriate Model; FAG: Fostering Acceptance of Group goals; HPE: High Performance Expectations; IS: Individualised Support; INTST: Intellectual Stimulation

	AVE	MSV	ENGT	COMT	TRFLDR
ENGT	0.621	0.569	<b>0.788</b>		
COMT	0.641	0.403	0.630	<b>0.801</b>	
TRFLDR	0.730	0.569	0.754	0.635	<b>0.854</b>

**Table 2:** Discriminant Validity Result

**Sources:** The Authors

Model fit Indices	CMIN/Df	SRMR	CFI	TRFLDRI	GFI
8 items 1 factor model of ENGT	9.225	.0424	.936	.910	.900
12 items 6 factor model of TRFLDR	6.326	.0468	.941	.919	.908
4 items 1 factor model of COMT	3.431	.0160	.995	.986	.993
Acceptable Limits (Hu and Bentler, 1999 and Hair et al., 2014)	<5	>.09	>.09	>.09	>.09

**Table 3:** Fit Indices of the constructs

**Source:** The Authors



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**Management Review**  
 ISSN: 0971-1023  
 Volume XXX  
 Issue-5 | October 2022

Constructs	Mean	Standard Deviation	ENGT	COMT	TRFL-DR
1 ENGT	5.33	1.09	1		
2 COMT	5.13	1.17	.672**	1	
3 TRFLDR	5.30	1.24	.796**	.680**	1

**Table 4:** Descriptive Statistics, Reliabilities and Intercorrelations of the Constructs

Sources: The Authors

Note: \*\*Significance is at level of .001

Predictors	on ENGT			
	B	S.E.	Lower CI	Upper CI
TRFLDR	0.69**	0.025	0.650	0.748
R <sup>2</sup>	0.63**			
F	772.84			

**Table 5:** Direct Effect Result of TRFLDR on ENGT

Source: The Authors

Note: \*\*Significance is at level of .001; B= Beta Value, CI=Class Interval

Predictors	on COMT			
	B	S.E.	Lower CI	Upper CI
TRFLDR	0.37**	0.051	0.271	0.473
ENGMT	0.39**	0.059	0.270	0.500
R <sup>2</sup>	0.51**			
F	231.66			

**Table 6:** Direct Effects Results

Source: The Authors

Note: \*\*Significance is at level of .001

Mediator	B	S.E.	Lower CI	Upper CI
ENGT	0.27	0.054	0.162	0.374

**Table 7:** Indirect Effect Results of TRFLDR on COMT

Source: The Authors

