
Transformational leadership and organizational commitment: Testing the moderating role of Emotional intelligence in Indian IT sector

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Abstract

This study analyzed the moderating role of Emotional intelligence (EI) of employees on the relationship of transformational leadership (TL) and organizational commitment (OC) in the IT sector of India. The sample of the targeted consists of 200 supervisors and employees from different organizations in the IT sector of India by using random sampling techniques to participate in this study. Transformational leadership was measured with a 20-item MLQ, multifactor leadership questionnaire, emotional intelligence was a 28-item scale (EIA, Emotional intelligence appraisal) and a 18 item scale (OCQ) measured the organizational commitment. The statistical result found that EI acts as a moderator on the relationship of transformational leadership and organizational commitment. This study provides leaders with a new insight to look at their employees' level of commitment to their organization. In addition, this study further helps in exploring the impact of employees' emotional intelligence on the relationship between transformational leadership and different components of organizational commitment. Different aspects of these variables were tested, so as to provide a wider and more comprehensive understanding of the factors that affect organizational commitment in IT companies of India.

Keywords: Transformational leadership, Organizational commitment, Emotional intelligence, IT sector, India.

Introduction

Organizational commitment is a major concern for most of the organization even today, which needs to be resolved instantly. Lack of commitment affects all organizations at some or the other level and enables the organization to evaluate the issues like turnover during economic instability. It is essential for the company to know the aspects that plays important role or have big impact in boosting the commitment of the employees. Organizational commitment and its constructs are affected by a lot of variables. One of the most important of these variables is leadership styles exhibited by leaders. Swanepoel, Erasmus, Van Wyk and Scheck (2000) recommended that leadership styles that encourage employee commitment is imperative for an organization to successfully implement business strategies, achieving their goals, gain competitive advantage and optimizing human capital. Transformational leadership in particular is such leadership style which could effectively boost the commitment of the employees. Organizational commitment is a state that arises due to an individual's positive perceptions towards /of his or her organization, and transformational leaders work to shape their follower's perception.

Transformational leaders have an emotional impact on subordinates by providing them with a vision of the

future, communicating that vision to them and motivating them. Recent research in this area shows that the ability of leaders to properly practice transformational styles in managing organizational functions may affect organizational commitment (Bycio et al., 1995; Simon, 1994). Transformational leadership refers to a leadership type in which leaders possess charisma and provide intellectual stimulation, individualized consideration and inspirational motivation to followers (Pawar, Eastman 1997). These leaders have the capability to motivate and inspire followers to achieve higher performance. They bring awakening in followers in terms of problem awareness and problem solving, thoughts and imagination, beliefs and values rather than awakening and change in immediate action (Bass, 1988). Such leaders are in demand throughout the organization and they have significance in every area.

Charismatic leaders display conviction, take stands and appeal to followers on an emotional level (Judge and Piccolo, 2004). Hence this characteristic of Transformational leaders would be more appealing to the followers who have high level of Emotional intelligence.

It appears that the link between transformational leadership and organizational commitment is affected by many factors, suggesting that emotional intelligence will likely partially moderate this relationship. The aim of the

current study is to understand the role that emotional intelligence of employees plays in the relationship between transformational leadership and organizational commitment in the IT sector of India since this sector has shown a tremendous growth and has provided steady support in India's economic growth and accounts for approximately 7.5% of the country's GDP. The present study will contribute to the literature available on organizational commitment and leadership by introducing a new idea of emotional intelligence as a moderator. This concentrated level of analysis may lead to a greater understanding as to how emotional intelligence of employees can influence the relation between TL and OC.

Conceptual framework

Transformational leadership

Over the past 20 years, transformational leadership has generated a great deal of research attention. Downton (1973) first coined the term transformational leadership; however its emergence as an important approach to leadership began with a classic work by the political sociologist James McGregor Burns titled leadership (1978). To Burns, transforming leadership is a relationship of mutual stimulation and elevation that converts followers into leaders and may convert leaders into moral agents (Burns 1978). He went on to suggest that Transformational leadership "is a process in which leaders and followers help each other to advance to a higher level of morale and motivation". These leaders are able to define and articulate a vision for their organizations, and are able to influence or transform followers for the betterment of their self as well for organization. Transformational leadership contains four components, charisma or idealized influence (attributed or behavioral), inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration (Bass, 1985, 1990, 1997; Bass&Avolio, 2004). Bass (1990b) declared that transformational leaders motivate followers with a vision about achievement through individual effort and struggle. They treat their followers with respect and this respect forms a connection and association between both leader and the follower (Bass 1990a). They are regarded as the role model either because they exhibit certain personal characteristics or charisma or because they demonstrate certain moral

behavior (Kirkbride, 2006). The current study attempted to investigate how these transformational leaders obtain an enhanced commitment from their employees, and if there is any significant role for emotional intelligence in this process.

Emotional intelligence

The emotional intelligence is a long term investigation of the evolution of intelligence. In 1920 Thorndike stated that there are different types of intelligence. He identified IQ intelligence, concrete intelligence and social intelligence. In 1920 Thorndike originally distinguished social intelligence from other form of intelligence and defined it as "the ability to understand men and women, boys and girls – to act wisely in human relations. Emotional intelligence appeared again when Gardner (1983) introduced the concept of multiple intelligences. He divided personal intelligences into interpersonal and intrapersonal intelligence. He classified emotional intelligence into interpersonal and intrapersonal intelligence. As a term emotional intelligence first came into sight in 1989 in an article of two American academic psychologists, Mayer and Salovey. They defined Emotional intelligence as the subset of social intelligence that involves the ability to monitor one's own and others feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them and to use this information to guide one's thinking and action. (Mayer&Salovey 1990). When this term was cited by Mayer and Salovey it didn't get much attention. The term Emotional intelligence came into lime light after the work of Goleman. After the publication of his 1995 bestselling book, Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More than IQ this term gained the popularity. It continues to be a topic of great interest among researchers and within the workplace.

Organizational commitment

Organizational commitment is considered to be a significant factor in the further understanding of the work-related attitudes and behaviour of employees (Manion 2004). Organizational commitment is defined as 'the relative strength of an individual's identification with and involvement in a particular organizations' (Mowday, Porter, & Steers, 1982, p. 27). No doubt, the organizational commitment has become the one of the

most research topic in this globalized era. This construct is an important issue in today's highly competitive business environment as the organization need committed employees to survive in such a globalized scenario.

Dimensions of Organizational Commitment

John Meyer and Natalie Allen developed their Three Component Model of Commitment and published it in the 1991 "Human Resource Management Review. They have divided the concept of commitment in three dimensions i.e. affective, normative and continuance.

Affective commitment- According to Meyer and Allen (1991) affective commitment is a sense of belonging and identification that increases the employees' involvement in the organization's goal and their desire to remain with the organization as thus, is considered as an important determinant of dedication and loyalty. Individuals with an elevated level of affective commitment tend to stay with the organization due to the positive feelings that they derive from their employment relationship. This positive feeling that employees derive from their employment relationship is expected because of a leader who is emotionally intelligent.

Continuance commitment- Continuance commitment is that commitment in which employees are continually working for organization because they cannot bear the cost to leave the organization. . The underlying reason for the continuance committed employees lies in their need to stay with the organization. Employees with this type of commitment remain in the organization because they feel that the cost they would bear by leaving the organization is greater than the benefits they might get after entering in a new role.

Normative commitment- The third component of organizational commitment is the normative commitment, which is more concerned with the feeling of moral bonds with the organization. Employees who have strong normative commitment will remain in organization because they feel ethical responsibility for doing works.

Existing literature

Transformational leadership and organizational commitment

Prior research suggests that work experiences, personal and organizational factors serve as antecedents to organizational commitment (Eby et al., 1999; Meyer & Allen, 1997; Allen & Meyer, 1996, 1990). One organizational factor that is considered a key determinant of organizational commitment is leadership (Mowday et al., 1982). It's extremely imperative to understand the connection between transformational leadership and organizational commitment so that such behavior could be used for enhancing the organizational commitment of the employees. Many studies have been conducted to establish the link between transformational leadership and organizational commitment.

Bycio et al., (1995) and Dubinsky (1995) explored the relationship between transformational leadership and organizational commitment on 1376 nurses in some US health organizations and sales people group in certain US organizations respectively they found a positive relationship between transformational leadership and organizational commitment. Similarly in 2012 Selamat et al. conducted a study on 186 secondary school teachers in the district of Klang to examine the relationship of perceived transformational leadership behavior and Organizational commitment. His study also found a strong linear relationship existed among all the elements of transformational leadership behavior and organizational commitment. Furthermore, the findings suggests that organizational commitment of school teacher might increase when their principal strongly demonstrate the transformational leadership behavior. These studies found that the ability of leaders to properly use transformational behaviors (i.e., intellectual stimulation, individualized consideration, influenced attributed and individualized influence behavior) had been a major determinant of organizational commitment. Limsila and Ogunlana (2007) found that for Thai people transformational leadership style is most adopted and proved to be most suitable. In addition, their result reveals that transformational leadership style is likely to generate commitment from subordinates while transactional and laissez-faire are not. . In 2008 Ramachandran, S & Krishnan also conducted an empirical study to find out the effect of transformational leadership on followers' affective and normative commitment using culture as the moderating variable.

The researcher collected data from employees working in different organizations across India, U.S and China. His study indicated that affective and normative commitments are positively related to transformational leadership, whereas continuance commitment was not found to be significantly related. Thamrin, H.M (2012) conducted an empirical study to analyze the influence of transformational leadership and organizational commitment on job satisfaction and employee performance. The result revealed that transformational leadership has a positive significant influence on organizational commitment. Besides this many more findings were revealed. Transformational leadership had a positive influence on employees' performance but not on job satisfaction. Organizational commitment was found to have a significant influence on job satisfaction and employee performance. The study laid emphasis on leaders to develop transformational leadership skills in order to grow organizational commitment of the employees.

There is a need to analyze and further investigate the mechanisms behind the impact that leaders have on their employees (Tsai et al. 2009), especially the impact that leads to an enhanced level of employee commitment. Based on the above literature the following hypotheses have been proposed

H1 (a): Transformational leadership is positively related to organizational commitment.

H2 (a): Transformational leadership is positively related to affective commitment.

H3 (a): Transformational leadership is positively related to continuance commitment.

H4 (a): Transformational leadership is positively related to normative commitment.

Transformational leadership, Emotional intelligence and Organizational commitment

Transformational leadership stimulates followers to find out new ways to provide solution to crises and disputes, and recognizes their needs; encourages followers to get involved in their work, which results in an enhanced form of organizational commitment (Walumbwa, Lawler 2003). Barling et al. (2000) proposed that leaders who are able to understand and manage their own emotions are able to display self-control and act as a role model for

their followers. This helps the leaders to maintain a positive appearance with subordinates, which instills feelings of security, trust and satisfaction which in turn, influences organizational commitment. Khan & Awan et.al (2014) undertook a quantitative study on 267 respondents to investigate the moderating effects of emotional intelligence in the relationship of transformational leadership and organizational commitment, their study revealed that there does exist a moderating effect of emotional intelligence on the relation between transformational leadership and organizational commitment

Summarizing, emotional intelligence impacts the relationship of transformational leadership and organizational commitment;

e) H1 (b) Emotional intelligence moderates the relationship between transformational leadership and organizational commitment

f) H2 (b) Emotional intelligence moderates the relationship between transformational leadership and affective commitment

g) H3 (b) Emotional intelligence moderates the relationship between transformational leadership and continuance commitment.

h) H4 (b) Emotional intelligence moderates the relationship between transformational leadership and normative commitment

Data Source and Methodology

Data collection

The data was collected from 200 respondents from different organizations in the IT sector, mostly middle management, but the responses received amounted to 180, the remaining 20 did not respond. So the response rate turned out to be 90%. The questionnaire was basically designed and edited in order to measure the perception of employees (subordinates) regarding the transformational leadership of their leaders and their own (subordinates) level of emotional intelligence and organizational commitment.

Measures

The survey questionnaire has 4 sections. The first section inquired about the demographic information of the

respondents. The second focused on transformational leadership and third and fourth session focused on organizational commitment and emotional intelligence respectively.

In the second section transformational leadership was measured using MLQ-5X. The scale consisted of 20 items, with the anchors as 0=not at all, 1=once in a while, 2=sometimes, 3=fairly often, and 4=frequently, if not always. The questionnaire was used for measuring the perception of employees regarding their supervisor's leadership.

Organizational commitment was measured using 18 items scale of Meyer and Allen. This survey measures three components of commitment affective, normative and continuance using a seven point Likert scale with anchors as 1=strongly disagree, 2=moderately disagree, 3=slightly disagree, 4=neither agree nor disagree, 5=slightly agree, 6=agree, 7=strongly agree.

The Emotional Intelligence Appraisal developed by Bradberry and Greaves (2003) measures 4 dimensions of emotional intelligence including: (1) self-awareness, (2) self-management, (3) social awareness, (4) relationship management, and it provides an overall score for emotional intelligence. Items target the existence of skills reflective of the above components and are rated using a six point frequency scale where 1 reflects "never" exhibiting a behavior and 6 reflects "always" exhibiting a behavior.

Findings

5.1 Analysis on the relationship of emotional intelligence, transformational leadership and organizational commitment.

Table 1						
Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6
Transformational leadership	1					
Emotional intelligence	0.275*	1				
Organizational commitment	0.562*	0.128	1			
Affective commitment	0.528*	0.065	0.825	1		
Continuance commitment	0.286	-0.01	0.801	0.854	1	
Normative commitment	0.635*	0.107	0.939	-0.806	0.893	1

Table 1 presents the result obtained from bi-variate analysis. The relationship between transformational leadership and organizational commitment was found to be positive and significant ($r = 0.562$, $p < 0.05$). Affective and normative commitment was also found to be positively correlated with transformational leadership with their respective values ($r = 0.528$, $p < 0.05$), ($r = 0.635$, $p < 0.05$) but continuance commitment was not found to be significantly related to transformational leadership ($r = 0.286$, $p > 0.05$). Finally, transformational leadership was also found to be positively correlated with emotional intelligence of employees ($r = 0.275$, $p < 0.05$).

5.2 Analysis of the moderating effect of Emotional intelligence on the relationship between transformational leadership and organizational commitment.

The moderating role of emotional intelligence in the relationship of transformational leadership and organizational commitment along with its components was calculated by assessing the change in R square change, after regressing the interaction term. Table 2, 3, 4 and 5 presents the result of multiple regression analyses to find out the moderating role of EI on the relationship between TL and OC and also between TL and the components of OC.

Table 2 and 3 shows that transformational leadership was a good predictor of organizational and affective commitment. In Step 1 of table 2 and 3 transformational leadership explained a significant amount of variance in organizational commitment and affective commitment with their respective values ($R^2 = 0.316$, $p < 0.05$) and ($R^2 = 0.264$, $p < 0.05$). In other words, R^2 means that 31.6% of variance in Organizational commitment and 24.6% in Affective Commitment is explained by transformational leadership. Step 2 showed that after the inclusion of the interaction term ($TL \times EI$) change in variance by 3.5% and 2.5% proves that emotional intelligence of subordinates did moderate the relationship between transformational leadership and organizational commitment as well as between transformational leadership and affective commitment. In this context the null hypotheses were rejected and alternate hypotheses H1(a), H1(b), H2(a) and H2(b) were accepted.

Table 4 gives the details of the regression coefficients, involving continuance commitment as a dependent variable. The result shows that TL had no significant

direct relationship with continuance commitment ($p > 0.05$), supporting the findings of the correlation results, where the results didn't support the alternate hypothesis and the null hypothesis was accepted. Furthermore the result also shows that after the inclusion of the interaction term, the value of β was found to be negative ($\beta = -0.275$) which proves that EI didn't moderate the relationship of Transformational leadership and continuance commitment. These results provide a reason for rejecting the alternate hypothesis and accepting the null hypothesis in case of H3 (a) and H3 (b).

Table 5 explains the results of the regression coefficients, involving normative commitment as a dependent variable. The result shows that transformational leadership has a significant relationship with normative commitment supporting the hypothesis H4 (a). After the inclusion of the interaction term the value of β was found to be negative ($\beta = -0.107$, $P > 0.05$). This proves that EI didn't moderate the relationship of transformational leadership and normative commitment. In this context the null hypothesis was accepted rejecting the alternate hypothesis H4 (b).

Table 2

Table 2							
Dependent	Independent	R	R ²	R ²		F-change	P
Step 1:	Main effect						
Organizational commitment	Transformational leadership	0.562	0.316	0.309	0.56	45.189	0.001
Step 2:	Interaction						
Organizational commitment	Moderator(TL×EI)	0.59	0.348	0.334	0.136	25.849	0.031
Table 3							
Dependent	Independent	R	R ²	R ²		F-change	P
Step 1:	Main effect						
Affective commitment	Transformational leadership	0.514	0.264	0.257	0.514	35.205	0.000
Step 2:	Interaction						
Affective commitment	Moderator(TL×EI)	0.537	0.289	0.274	0.09	19.699	0.05
Table 4							
Dependent	Independent	R	R ²	R ²		F-change	p
Step 1:	Main effect						
Continuance commitment	Transformational leadership	0.286	0.206	0.187	0.431	22.322	0.08
Step 2:	Interaction						
Continuance commitment	Moderator(TL×EI)	0.388	0.218	0.224	-0.275	16.097	0.005
Table 5							
Dependent	Independent	R	R ²	R ²		F-change	P
Step 1:	Main effect						
Normative commitment	Transformational leadership	0.638	0.406	0.397	0.635	66.246	0.000
Step 2:	Interaction						
Normative commitment	Moderator(TL×EI)	0.643	0.409	0.401	-0.107	34.13	0.208

Discussion

The objective of this study was to throw light on whether the transformational leadership impacts the employees' organizational commitment and also to study the moderating role of employees' emotional intelligence on this relationship.

In line with the hypothesis H1 (a) and H1 (b) the present study has been able to show that transformational leadership was a good predictor of organizational commitment in the IT sector of India. In table 2 Regression statistical showed a strong correlation ($R=0.562$) between the variables. The value of R^2 (0.316) shows that 31.6% of variance in Organizational commitment is explained by transformational leadership. These findings support the findings of Dum Dum et al. (2002) who explained the positive correlations between transformational leadership and organizational commitment in different organizational setups. The findings are consistent with previous studies (e.g., Dvir et al., 2002; Howell & Hall-Merenda, 1999; Kirkpatrick & Locke, 1996; Walumbwa & Lawler, 2003). The study has also shown a change in variation by 3.5% after the inclusion of the interaction term (TL ? EI). Hence it has added to the management literature by providing evidence of the moderating relation of emotional intelligence of subordinate on the relationships. The analysis supports the findings of Abraham (2000) though to a lesser extent, who explored the idea that individuals possessing higher emotional intelligence were more committed to their organization. He noted that the social skills facets of emotional intelligence may exercise a strong control on organizational commitment by forming a strong working relationship among the colleagues.

In line with the hypothesis H2 (a) and H2 (b) transformational leadership has a strong correlation ($R=0.514$) with affective commitment. The above result shows that a transformational leader with emotional intelligence can enhance and achieve an elevated affective commitment from his/her followers. The study supports the findings of Chiun et al (2009) who explored that three components of transformational leadership i.e. idealize influence; inspirational motivation and intellectual stimulation have positive direct relationship with affective commitment. Further the study found that emotional intelligence of subordinates did have a

moderating effect on this relationship as the inclusion of the interaction term (TL ? EI) brings a change of 2.5% in the variance. Since affective commitment is an emotional attachment of the employees to the organization, hence the employees with high level of emotional intelligence might be high in affective commitment.

In line with hypotheses H3 (a) and H3 (b), transformational leadership was not found to be related to continuance commitment as there was a weak relationship among the variables ($R=0.286$). The reason for low correlation between transformational leadership and continuance commitment could be that employees may not consider leaders' traits and his behavior as a reason to be perceived as loss. Since transformational leadership is an engaging relationship it doesn't influence employees to stay in the organization only because of the cost involved with leaving the organization.

The study shows a strong positive correlation ($R=0.638$) between transformational leadership and normative commitment. In line with hypotheses H4 (a) and H4 (b) transformational leadership was found to have a significant relationship with normative commitment. The results of the current study supported the findings Ramachandran, S & Krishnan (2009) where they indicated that affective and normative commitments are positively related to transformational leadership. This study shows that employees in an organization are emotionally attached and they feel obliged to stay when they perceive their superiors to be transformational leaders. Contrary to our expectation the study didn't find a moderating role of emotional intelligence on this relationship as the value of β was found to be negative ($\beta = -0.107$, $P > 0.05$) after the inclusion of the interaction term (TL ? EI). This may be due to the reason that transformational traits of leaders are more strongly related to normative commitment than the EI of employees.

Implications for Practice

There are several practical implications that can be derived from our findings. First, the current study provides managers/ leaders with a new way to look at their employees' organizational commitment by taking

their (employees) emotional intelligence into consideration. This study also helps us in gaining an insight of the role of transformational leadership on the emotional intelligence of employees which in turns influences the organizational commitment of the employees. It was observed that most followers follow a leader who is equipped with transformational traits, they trust and adopt their leaders' values and creates a strong emotional bond with him.

The ongoing study aids the organizations with a set of guidance regarding the relevance and significance of employees' emotional intelligence and transformational leaders in elevating the organizational commitment of employees.

Conclusion

The study has provided a new direction for research studies by considering emotional intelligence of employees as a moderating variable in relationships between transformational leadership and organizational commitment. This may be one of the pioneering works based on applying emotional intelligence of employees as a moderating variable, in the relationship of leadership and commitment, especially in Indian IT organizations. The study emphasizes on the training needs which must be conducted for enhancing the transformational leadership traits and emotional intelligence competencies of employees.

The current study is limited in certain ways that include the sample size of the respondents. The sample size of the study is only 200 respondents which may reduce the probability of generalizing the result to the entire population. Generalizability of the present findings should therefore be examined in future research with larger sample and in other sectors, with mixed gender, older, and more heterogeneous samples.

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