Do You Believe the Transformational Leader's Role in Engaging Employees at The Workplace? An Evidence in Malaysia

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ABSTRACT: *Leadership style is one of the factors that cause employees' unhappiness while working. Ineffective leadership among the leaders nowadays may affect the work engagement of employees in an organization. Thus, this research objective is to investigate the relationship between transformational leadership and work engagement among workers in one government linked company located at the southern region of Malaysia. To obtain the empirical data, 108 clerical staff of the studied company were involved as the participant of the study. A survey research design by using a questionnaire adapted from Multiple Leadership Questionnaire acquired by Bass (1985) and the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES) was employed for the data collection method. Then, all findings were analyzed by using the descriptive and structural Equation Modelling (SEM) with SmartPLS 3 software. Hence, the result showed that there is a positive and significant relationship between transformational leadership and work engagement among the studied company. Lastly, the researchers have provided some recommendations for the organization and future research.*
KEYWORDS: *Leadership, Transformational Leadership, Work Engagement*

I. INTRODUCTION

Yulk (2010) demonstrates how leadership is important as it affects the effectiveness of an organization and the employee who works in it. When a leader practices good leadership behavior, they may influence a good impact on their followers. The important component to ensure that employees can work well in the organization is the leadership of the leader (Christian *et al.*, 2011). Among the topics of leadership, behavior from transformational leadership is said to be able in influencing employee work engagement (Kovjanic et. al, 2013). They also mentioned that transformational leadership is when a leader able to motivate and inspire the development of employees' abilities while providing all the needs of their followers. Thus, employees are driven to be more devoted to their works when all their needs have been fulfilled by the transformational leaders (Cheung and Wong, 2011). Gundersen *et al.*, (2012) stressed the effectiveness of transformational leadership to the improvement of an organization.

The study from Amor *et al.*, (2020) also discloses the influence of transformational leadership on the improvement of work engagement among the workers. Work engagement is a common topic that will be discussed when related to the employee who works in any organization (Christian *et al.,* 2011). Work engagement defines as the physical and mental effort of individuals that represents their commitment to developing themselves while completing their work tasks (Rich *et al.*, 2010). Song *et al.,* (2012) mentioned the high contribution that can be produced by an employee if they are more engaged in their job. The more engaging the employee is the higher their contribution to the success of an organization. Moreover, Fearon, McLaughin, and Morris (2013) illustrate the ability of an employee to be highly engaged in their work through the opportunity and confidence they have in performing without problem in an organization.

However, from the statistics published by JobStreet.com, 42% of Malaysian employees are having lack of happiness when working. Among all factors that were listed, leadership becomes the factor that influenced the employee's unhappiness at work (Seek Asia, 2017). As stated by Jamaludin *et al.,* (2017), the behavior of a leader can be seen through the employees' viewpoint. For that reason, it demonstrates that there is a lack of practice for transformational leadership among the leaders. The lack of awareness on the influence of transformational leaders causes it to arise a complication between a leader and employee in the organization (Lo, Ramayah and Run, 2010). Nowadays, not many leaders are applying transformational leadership behavior

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compared to transactional leadership for the management of employees in their company (Pradhan and Jena, 2019).

This situation causes a leader to be less active in giving support and inspiration hence it gives a bad impact on the work engagement of an employee (Amor *et al.,* 2020). Avolio and Yammarino (2013) mentioned how transformational leadership is able to contribute to the development of the relationship between leader and employees. Thus, the influence of a transformational leader can make the followers have a high work engagement. But according to Lai *et al*., (2020), the work engagement of employees can be affected through the challenges that they face while working in the organization. The challenge may come from the physical, mental, and emotional problems that employees face in the workplace (Sheikh *et al*., 2019). This situation caused less work engagement of employees. Therefore, the problem draws the researcher to conduct this study with an objective to identify the relationship between transformational leadership and work engagement in the studied government linked company.

Transformational Leadership

Transformational leadership defines as the ability of a leader in encouraging employees to move towards the organization's goals and motivate them to commit more to their works to ensure they can contribute to the organization's success (Ng, 2017). Accordingly, employees are easier to follow and influenced by the practice of the values by the transformational leadership (Mulla and Krishnan, 2011). Other than that, Zhu *et al.,* (2013) perspective for transformational leadership is that this leadership style is the type of behavior where it can produce an impact on the employee hence it makes them become role models and inspiration to the followers. The behavior of a transformational leader is categorized into four different dimensions. Idealized influence, individualized consideration, intellectual stimulation, and inspirational motivation are the dimensions of transformational leadership.

Originally, transformational leadership was first studied by James McGregor Burns through Burns's theory (1978). According to Burns (1978), the good influence must be achieved by the employees to enable it to be considered as transformational leadership. Different than Burns, Bass (1997) illustrates transformational leadership as the ability of a leader to focus on a good attitude while influencing the employee in achieving success beyond their interest. Based on the goal of Bass (1985) who intends to broaden the definition of the relation between leader and followers, this theory has been adopted to support the transformational leadership variable. This strength of Bass theory assures the researcher to use this theory. Also, the theory that has been used for the past 30 years to measure transformational leadership behavior in the field of social science is Bass's theory (Jamaludin *et al*., 2011). Besides transformational leadership, this study also discussed a further understanding of work engagement.

Work Engagement

The definition of work engagement by Bakker and Bal (2010) is the attitude where workers will feel pride and confidence towards their works in an organization. Kahn (1990) describes work engagement as the behavior of an individual who uses physical, emotional, and mental in adopting themselves while doing their job. The employees' energy and involvement while working also define work engagement (Taris, Ybema, and Beek, 2017). Besides, the circumstance where a worker is seen giving out their personal commitment to completing their job is best to describe as the work engagement of an employee (Kuok and Taormina, 2017). Furthermore, the performance of an employee in works will increase because of their involvement through work engagement in the organization (Allesandri, 2018; Kotzé and Nel, 2020). High involvement produces more contribution from the employees.

Good work engagement is beneficial for the workers themselves and especially to the organization they worked under (Gutermann et. al, 2017). According to Kahn (1990), the behavior of people around is important in engagement as it will affect the individual and makes them more engaged in their work. To support the explanation of the work engagement variable in this study, the social cognitive theory was adopted. Social cognitive theory stresses how the behavior of an individual can be influenced by the environment, attitude, and communication around as this theory is focused on the connection between the individual and their environment (Lee *et al.,* 2018). In addition, there is three-dimension under work engagement which are vigor, dedication, and dimension (Schaufeli *et al.,* 2002). Each dimension explained the work engagement in a different idea. Therefore, the relationship between transformational leadership and work engagement was discussed.

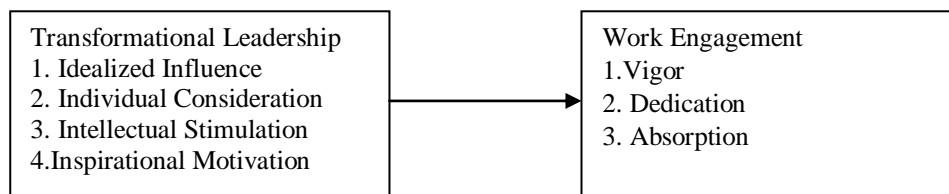**Relationship between Transformational Leadership and Work Engagement**

Gutermann *et al.,* (2017) stated the possibility of a leader's good engagement and its influence on employees' work engagement. In terms of leadership, transformational leadership seems to be more effective in the employees' work engagement hence the relationship between these two variables is examined in this study. Transformational leaders are capable of encouraging employees to keep improving themselves through high

work engagement in works (Lai *et al.,* 2020). The employees also appear to be more involved during their work process when the leader is showing an attitude from transformational leadership (Tims, Bakker, and Xanthopoulou, 2011). This statement is parallel with the research from Gözükaraa and Şimşek (2015) who found the effectiveness of transformational leadership behavior on the followers' work engagement. For that reason, it shows the existing relationship between the two variables.

Next, Amor, Vasques, and Faina (2020) who conducted research among the tourism industry in Galicia, Spain also found a relationship between transformational leadership and work engagement in their findings. The researchers claimed that the motivation, encouragement, and support the employees got from transformational leaders may raise the work engagement of their followers to the highest level. Besides, the significant relationship of the variables can also be seen in the study of Hayati *et al.*, (2014). The study which runs among hospital nurses in Khuzestan, Iran can prove how the employee who appreciates their leader as a role model can improve their work engagement as they worked together in an organization. Through all these research studies from various researchers, a hypothesis that can be made is:

H_a: There is a relationship between transformational leadership and work engagement.

Therefore, the research framework of this study can be seen in figure 1.0 below.

Transformational Leadership		Work Engagement
1. Idealized Influence	→	1. Vigor
2. Individual Consideration		2. Dedication
3. Intellectual Stimulation		3. Absorption
4. Inspirational Motivation		

II. METHODOLOGY

For this research study, 108 clerical staff from the government linked company at the southern region of Malaysia have been chosen as respondents in the data collection process. The sample is chosen based on the simple random sampling method. The researcher referred to a table by Krecjie and Morgan when choosing the total number of respondents. Data collection was conducted by using a quantitative research method and a set of the questionnaires were delivered to all respondents. All items in the questionnaire are taken from the Multiple Leadership Questionnaire acquired by Bass (1985) and the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES) by Schaufeli and Bakker (2003). Besides, this questionnaire was divided into three sections which are demographic information, transformational leadership, and work engagement. There are a total of 73 items in the questionnaire with 56 items from four dimensions of transformational leadership (idealized influence; individualized consideration; intellectual stimulation; inspirational motivation) and 17 items from three-dimension of work engagement (vigor; dedication; absorption).

The researcher used descriptive statistics to calculate the percentage, mean, and standard deviation while inferential statistics used to identify the relationship of the variables from all data of the respondents. Refer to the objective of finding the level of transformational leadership and work engagement, the researcher used descriptive statistics to calculate the mean value for every dimension of both variables. A structural equation modelling procedure was used to test the relationship between the dimensions of transformational leadership and employee engagement. Partial least squares (PLS) path modelling using Smart PLS 3.0 (Ringle et al., 2015) was chosen to conduct the data analyses.

III. DISCUSSION

According to the research objectives listed by the researcher, all the findings will be discussed. The objectives are to identify the level of transformational leadership and work engagement also the relationship between these two variables in the studied government linked company. According to all data from the survey of 108 respondents, the leaders in the studied government linked company has practiced the behavior of idealized influence the most. This proves the capability of a leader in gaining respect and trust while being an inspiration to their followers. Research by Milhem *et al.,* (2019) supported that the quality of a transformational leader is the leader who has the ability to be an inspiration for their followers. Followed by the inspirational motivation dimension which is the second-highest among the dimensions of transformational leadership. This stressed the fact that employees are motivated to be braver in voice out their ideas and opinions to ensure goals can be achieved because of the motivation given by their transformational leaders.

The findings for inspirational motivation is supported by the research of Salanova *et al.,* (2011) as it also stated that employee are motivated to be braver to present themselves with the courage from inspirational motivation behavior of a leader. Furthermore, the employee also admits that their leader does perform the intellectual stimulation behavior when working. The findings revealed the ability of a leader to help the employees improve their creativity and innovation in their way of thinking. A study by Amor, Vasques, and Faina (2020) supported that intellectual stimulation behavior is when a leader is trying to help in developing the

ideas from an employee. The individualized consideration has the lowest score among the other dimensions, but the respondents acknowledged their leader's understanding of each of the needs for the employees and realize the importance of the leader in their working process. Hayati *et al.,* (2014) supported this by mentioning how the employees can get their work needs from the individualized consideration of a leader.

The second objective is to identify the level of work engagement among employees in the studied government linked company. Among all the dimensions, the dedication dimension contributes the highest score in the high level of work engagement among the employees. It shows the excellent commitment and enthusiasm of an employee who is working on every task given to them. Arokiasamy and Tat (2020) supported that the employees' involvement can be high because of the dedication that they have. The second contributor is from the vigor dimension of work engagement. From the result, it can be concluded that the respondents do have a strong mental strength that can be helpful during their hard times at work. This finding is supported by Othman *et al.,* (2017) as it also mentioned the effect of positive energy on the work and organization of an employee. Next, the lowest score from the absorption dimension demonstrates the respondents' difficulty to cut off themselves from their work. This statement can be supported by Ghadi and Fernando (2013) as it mentions that the employee with this difficulty tends to have high work engagement. Thus, the respondents claimed their attachment and how they felt the happiness of working busily.

Identifying the relationship between transformational leadership and work engagement is the third objective of this study. So, the result is the researcher has found a significant relationship between these two variables. The significant relationship portrays how the encouragement and motivation from the transformational leaders affect the employees as it makes them able to work happily even when they are having a list of the tasks at work. Other than that, this study also claimed that transformational leadership and work engagement has a moderate level of positive correlation. Research by Hoper, Muser, and Janneck (2012) also support this relation as their findings also indicated the ability of transformational leaders to influence an employee to become more dedicated after they fulfilled any of the employees' needs. Therefore, the discussion of all findings leads to an acceptance of the hypothesis of this study.

IV. FINDINGS

Level of Transformational Leadership

Dimension	Mean	Standard Deviation	Level
Idealized Influence	3.43	0.48	Medium
Individualized Consideration	3.13	0.45	Medium
Intellectual Stimulation	3.19	0.60	Medium
Inspirational Motivation	3.31	0.39	Medium
Overall	3.27	0.43	Medium

Table 1: Level of Transformational Leadership

The value of mean and standard deviation for every dimension in transformational leadership is stated in table 1.1. The final result shows the medium level of transformational leadership due to the high respect from the employees to their leader but there is still a lacking in the behavior of a leader who will empathize with the employees' needs. It is proven by the medium level of an idealized influence dimension because of the behavior of a leader who is able to gain trust from the followers, however, they are still not much excited by the leader's vision when working. Based on the leader's ability in influencing them, some employees admit to frequently think of their leader as an icon for success (Fairly often: f=25, %=23.1; Frequently, if not always: f=4, %=3.7). Apart from that, the findings also demonstrate how the leader becomes one of the factors that inspired the majority of the staff to keep loyal towards their organization (Fairly often: f=60, %=55.6; Frequently, if not always: f=2, %=1.9). Therefore, the result is able to display the ability of the leader to be an inspiration for their followers.

Next, the ability of transformational leaders in the studied government linked company also included the medium level of individualized consideration which indicates how the leader is able to give attention to every employee in the organization but rarely help them to achieve their needs. The findings illustrate the attitude of the leader who will frequently express the satisfaction to every good contribution from their followers (Fairly often: f=41, %=38.0; Frequently, if not always: f=5, %=4.6). But, the leader is not frequent in giving credit to the employee who is excellent in their job (Not at all: f=1, %=0.9; Once in a while: f=1, %=0.9; Sometimes: f=50, %=46.3). Nevertheless, the respondents claimed that their transformational leader in the studied government linked company Corportwill frequently focus on the employees who tend to be overlooked when working (Fairly often: f=16, %=14.8; Frequently, if not always: f=6, %=5.6). From all these statements, it proves how a leader is able to apply individualized consideration in their leadership.

Furthermore, a medium level of intellectual stimulation (M=3.19, SD=0.60) also contributes to the medium level of transformational from the findings. The result of the medium level for intellectual stimulation

dimension is influenced by the ability of a leader who is able to encourage their followers to rethink their former problem, however the leader still not be able to make their employees have a better view of the things that may be confusing for them. Still, the employee acknowledges the behavior of their transformational leaders in leading them to reconsider their ideas during the whole working process in an organization (Fairly often: f=27, %=25.0; Frequently, if not always: f=5, %=4.6). Thus, it justifies the appreciation of all respondents to the intellectual stimulation behavior of their leader.

Lastly, the fourth contributor is a medium level of inspirational motivation due to the behavior of a leader that is willing to accept any contribution produced by their subordinates, however, this still does not make the employees view their leader as a father-figure in working. From the findings, the opportunity to act as a leader with the guidance of their leader can be frequently felt by some staff (Fairly often: f=20, %=18.5; Frequently, if not always: f=3, %=2.8). Nonetheless, more than half of the respondents admitted that the time where their leader can influence them to give up on their passion for other people is not frequently happened (Not at all: f=1, %=0.9; Once in a while: f=24, %=22.2; Sometimes: f=59, %=54.6). From there, it can be seen that leaders in the studied government linked company does play a role in motivating their staff. Therefore, the researcher concludes that the findings from all respondents show their positive acknowledgment of the behavior of transformational leadership that was being practiced by their leader.

Level of Work Engagement

Dimension	Mean	Standard Deviation	Level
Vigor	3.85	0.53	High
Dedication	4.11	0.70	High
Absorption	3.70	0.52	High
Overall	3.89	0.54	High

Table 2: Level of Work Engagement

Table 1.2 displays an overall mean and standard deviation of work engagement among the respondents based on the outcome from all dimensions under the dependent variable of this study. The high level of work engagement shows that the staff is giving their full commitment and energy in performing their job task (M=3.89, SD=0.54). Specifically, high level of vigor dimension contributes to the high level of work engagement due to the good stamina and stable mental health of employees when working in the organization. The findings emphasized how many respondents are able to have constant great energy working in the organization (Often: f=55, %=50.9; Very often: f=35, %=32.4; Always: f=2, %=1.9). As well as almost the majority of them admit to having a working mood when they wake up every morning (Often: f=39, %=36.1; Very often: f=5, %=4.6; Always: f=1, %=0.9). Hence, these findings prove how the respondents in the studied government linked company are able to work with high energy.

Next, a high level of work engagement from the findings also possessed from a dedication shown by the respondents towards their job (M=4.11, SD=0.70). A high level of dedication is due to the employees' passion and inspiration they felt towards their job. Furthermore, the researcher found out that 95 respondents often feel proud of their current work and it makes them more dedicated to carrying out their respective duties (Often: f=48, %=44.4; Very often: f=40, %=37.0; Always: f=7, %=6.5). Also, the respondents are motivated to be dedicated while working because of the challenges they felt from their work (Often: f=46, %=42.6; Very often: f=41, %=38.0; Always: f=2, %=1.9). Also, the findings illustrate how the employee thinks their work is meaningful and remarkable (Often: f=54, %=50.0; Very often: f=35, %=32.4; Always: f=4, %=3.7). Thus, this high dedication from employees contributes to high work engagement.
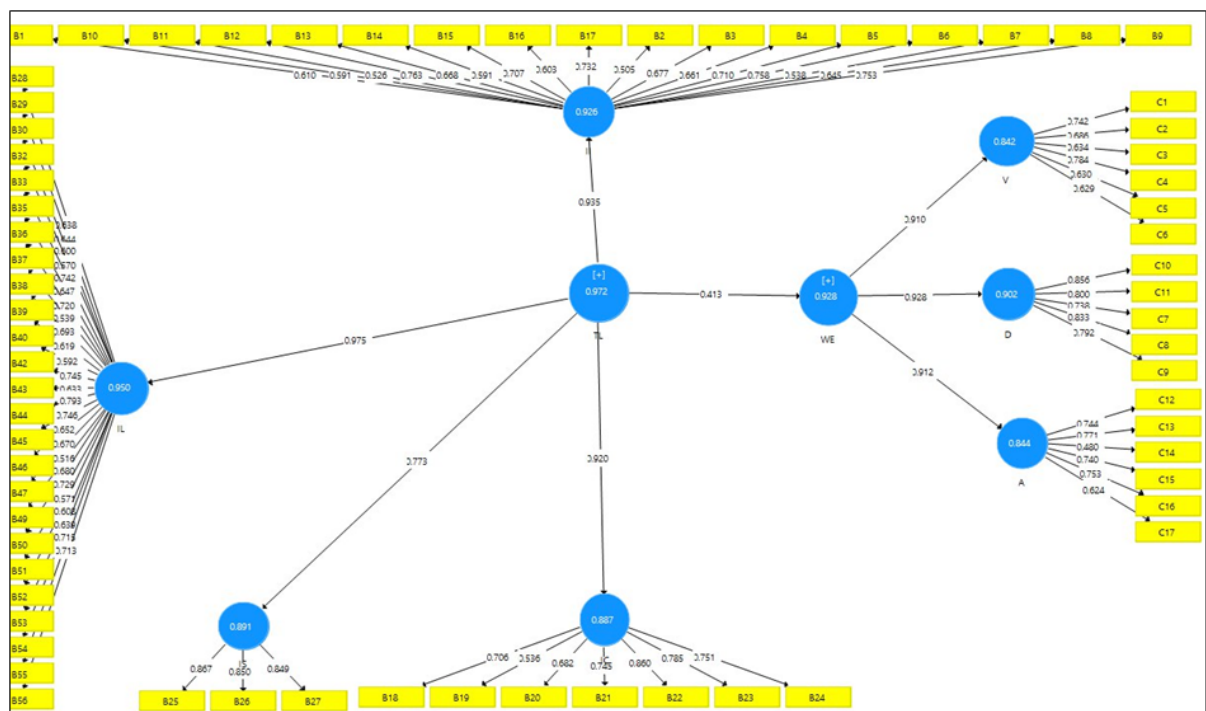
The other contributor to the high level of work engagement in the studied government linked company is based on the employees' absorption into their work (M=3.70, SD=0.52). The high level of absorption is because of the tendency of the employee to ignore their environment and feel happy when doing their work. Moreover, the respondents show their absorption to the job as they admit to having difficulty to disengage from doing their job (Often: f=22, %=20.4; Very often: f=1, %=0.9; Always: f=1, %=0.9). As the level of absorption among the employees is high, the majority of them do feel the rapid time change when they are working on their task (Often: f=65, %=60.2; Very often: f=31, %=28.7; Always: f=2, %=1.9). Hence, this absorption level proves the high work engagement among the staff in the studied government linked company. To conclude, the work engagement level among the respondents in this survey is proven through all the energy, dedication, and absorption they have while trying to accomplish their duty for the organization.

Relationship of Transformational Leadership and Work Engagement

To test whether the data fit a hypothesized measurement model based on theory, it based on the result of consistent internal analysis consist of reliability and convergent validity. There were 4 items from the transformational leadership under dimension inspirational leadership, questionnaires that had to be removed due to non-compliance. This according to Ringle *et al*. (2015), assertions containing factorial loads lower than 0.5 should be removed from the analysis.

Table 1.3 displays the findings on the relationship between the independent and dependent variables of the study. the results of the analysis have found that the t-value that is obtained is t = 13.612 which indicates that the relationship between transformational leadership and work engagement is positive and significant. Moreover, the value of R^2 to show the effect of the relationship between transformational leadership to work engagement is 0.18. This means that the effect of transformational leadership to work engagement is 18% in this study. Next is to know the size of the impact of safety climate on safety performance. The size of this effect is through f^2 analysis. The results of the analysis found that $f^2 = 0.492$. This means that the impact between security climates on security performance is high. Through the analysis of the relevance of the forecast that is Q^2, it is found that the value obtained is 0.064. This suggests that transformational leadership is related to work engagement.

In details, the relationship demonstrates how the improvement of transformational leadership behavior from the leader also influences the increase of work engagement from their followers. Therefore, when leaders in the studied government linked company is practicing transformational leadership behavior in their leadership style, it becomes a motivating factor for the employees to be more engaged in their works.

**TL=Transformational Leadership, II=Idealized Influence, IC=Individualized Consideration, IS=Intellectual Stimulation, IL=Inspirational Leadership, WE=Work Engagement, V=Vigor, D=Dedication, A=Absorption

Figure 1: The Relationship Between Transformational Leadership and Work Engagement

Relationship between Variable	Work Engagement					
	t-value	P	R^2	f^2	Q^2	Hypothesis
Transformational Leadership	3.125	0.00	0.183**	0.492	0.064	Hypothesis Accepted

Table 3 Relationship between Transformational Leadership and Work Engagement

V.   CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

As regards the low mean score of an individual consideration behavior, the researcher has given out a recommendation to help in improving this behavior from the leader. It was proposed that the leader should build a strong personal connection with their followers such as by conducting a one consultation session with them. Through this way, it helps a leader to have a better understanding of their employees' needs. As a clerical staff,

their works required a lot of computer uses such as for the data management or online works. Hence, the organization can conduct computer skills training to help in developing their staffs' skills in this area. The employee may improve their concentration in working even if they have developed a better technique and readiness at work. Other than that, the recommendation for future research is to conduct a qualitative research method. The reason is that qualitative research can allow the respondents to give their opinion on the topic more freely with a broad perspective compared to quantitative research. Also, the researcher recommends future research to conduct the study of this topic, but it will mainly focus on top-level management. A leader may show a different level of work engagement contrasting from the outcome of the employees as shown in this study.

In conclusion for this study, it has been found that there is a positive significant relationship between transformational leadership and work engagement in the studied government linked company at the southern region of Malaysia. It illustrates how the leader is indeed practicing transformational leadership as their leadership style in an organization and it gives a positive influence on their followers' work engagement. Moreover, the medium level of transformational leadership and high level of work engagement among employees in the studied government linked company also has been discussed. Therefore, the researcher has provided some useful recommendations that may help the organization and future research on this topic. Hopefully, the information in this study helps in delivering a better idea of the understanding of transformational leadership and work engagement topics for any workers also an organization.

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