

**How Transformational Leadership Affect Career Satisfaction:
Mediating Role of Staff Engagement and Moderating Influence of
Ethical Culture**

Hammad Naseem

BSCPT, MSHCM, J. Lecturer, Bashir Institute of Health Sciences
Islamabad Email: rajahammadnaseem@gmail.com

Maryam Ajmal Abbasi

Radiologic Technologist, Nazeer Hospital Rawalpindi

Muhammad Ammad Rafique

MS Health Care Management, Riphah International University

Mehrbab Mehmood

BSDT, MSHPE, Clinical Instructor, Program In charge, Dental
Technology, Iqra University Chak Shahzad Campus Islamabad

Abstract

This study examines the impact of transformational leadership on career satisfaction among employees. It investigates the mediating role of staff engagement in this relationship and explores how ethical culture moderates the effect of transformational leadership on career satisfaction. The study aims to provide insights into how leadership style, employee engagement, and organizational ethics interact to shape career-related outcomes. Research method, Design, approach. This study uses a quantitative, cross-sectional design with structured questionnaires distributed to employees across healthcare, education, & corporate organizations sectors. A sample of 230 participants is selected convenience sampling. All items are rated on a 5-point Likert scale, and data is analyzed using SPSS Software version 26. Findings Transformational leadership positively influences career satisfaction by fostering empowerment, vision, and personal growth. Staff engagement acts as a mediator, meaning transformational leadership enhances engagement, which in turn leads to greater career satisfaction. Ethical culture serves as a moderator, strengthening the impact of transformational leadership and making staff engagement more effective and sustainable. These three elements leadership, engagement, and ethical culture interact to create a supportive organizational environment that promotes employee career satisfaction. This topic stands out because it uniquely combines transformational leadership, career satisfaction, and staff engagement while

introducing ethical culture as a moderating factor. It fills a gap in existing research by exploring how ethical context shapes leadership effectiveness and employee outcomes.

Keywords: Transformational Leadership, Staff Engagement, Career Satisfaction, Ethical Culture, Organizational Behaviour, Employee Motivation

Introduction

The issue of employee career satisfaction is currently a burning issue in organisations that are interested in achieving better performance, retaining talents, and having a motivated workforce in a current dynamic and competitive work environment. Although the problem of leadership and job satisfaction has received significant research, the processes with which leadership can affect the employee career outcomes are a complicated and situational issue. Transformational leadership including inspired vision, a personal approach, intellectual stimulation, and ethical role modelling has been recognized as a prominent motivation contributor and effectiveness in the organization (Maisyura et al., 2022; Asbari et al., 2020). However, the magnitude, in which transformational leadership is converted into a continuous career satisfaction, depends on both employee engagement and ethical climate of an organization, which combined influence the experiences and behaviour of employees. Transformational leadership is a broader approach that extends beyond transactional and task-oriented leadership because it encourages employees to go beyond expectations, align their personal values with organizational objectives and play an active role in organizational change (Yuan et al., 2021; Cho and Kao, 2022). Such leaders do not only inspire and challenge the intellect of their employees but also consider the unique needs, and they this builds a feeling of trust, support, and empowerment (Robertson and Barling, 2013, as cited in Stein et al., 2025). Transformational leadership has been reported to positively impact organizational commitment, job performance as well as innovation but there is limited empirical evidence on the direct and indirect impact of transformational leadership on career satisfaction. In particular, the behavioural pathways, including staff engagement, and the moderating role of ethical culture allow viewing the effect of leadership on long-term employee outcomes in a subtle light.

Staff engagement is a work-related, good, well-being, state that is marked by enthusiasm, commitment, and work preoccupation (Schaufeli and Bakker, 2004). The more engaged employees, the more they are likely to invest in it, acquire skills, and be proactive in organizational initiatives (Hirschi et al., 2014; Mousa et al., 2022). According to previous studies, leadership is associated with many employee outcomes, which are mediated by engagement, which means that transformational leaders affect the career satisfaction of employees not only directly but also indirectly through creating a higher level of engagement and involvement (Yang et al., 2020; Çarkıt, 2022). Engagement is, therefore, an important process that facilitates leadership to stimulate career satisfaction in a complex organization.

Employing ethical culture, which is the set of norms, values, and practices that establish fairness, integrity, and responsibility, also contributes to the success of

leadership (Latif et al., 2020; Mousa et al., 2022). Companies that possess a good ethical culture also offer the environment in which people can satisfy their psychological need of security, competence, and belonging, which enhances the positive influence of transformational leadership on engagement and career satisfaction (Yang et al., 2020). Leaders who work on ethical models do not only set good examples but also create trust, openness, and fair treatment, which increase the sense of being valued and devoted to the organization in the employees.

In spite of these observations, few empirical studies have explored the concomitant relationships between transformational leadership, staff engagement, and ethical culture as far as the employee career satisfaction is concerned, especially in a high-pressure workplace. Completely isolated leadership or engagement effects are common in existing studies, which do not consider the combined processes whereby leadership behaviours are converted into long-lasting employee satisfaction. Little focus has also been accorded to the moderating role of ethical culture and there is a gap in knowledge regarding the interaction between organizational context and leadership to influence the results of employees.

This research is aimed at closing these gaps by examining the impact of transformational leadership and employee career satisfaction using the mediating influence of staff engagement and moderating influence of ethical culture. The purpose of this research is to bring an all-inclusive picture of how transformational leadership creates long-term employee satisfaction by integrating leadership theory, engagement structures, and ethical organizational behaviours. This study is of importance in two aspects. In theory, it adds to the literature on leadership and organizational behaviour by combining transformational leadership, engagement and ethics. In practice, it can provide evidence-based advice to managers and organizations that aim to boost employee motivation, engagement, and job satisfaction via good leadership and ethics in the organization.

To test how transformational leadership has a direct influence on employee career satisfaction.

To determine the variation that existence of staff engagement mediates the association between transformational leadership and career satisfaction.

To examine whether ethical culture is a moderating factor in the connection between transformational leadership and staff engagement.

To find out the moderating role of ethical culture on the indirect impact of transformational leadership on career satisfaction by engaging the staff.

Transformation leadership and employee career satisfaction?

Is there a mediation of staff engagement between transformational leadership and career satisfaction?

Does ethical culture intercede the relation between transformational leadership and staff engagement?

Is ethics culture an intervening factor in the indirect effect of transformational leadership on staff engagement in terms of career satisfaction?

Literature Review

Transformational Leadership

Transformational leadership is described as a style that encourages and motivates individuals to surpass expectations by connecting their personal values to a shared organizational vision (Maisyura et al., 2022). This style is fundamentally focused on change and motivation aiming to empower team members and shift their personal interests towards shared objectives especially during periods of organizational change. The essential qualities characterize leaders as forward thinking change facilitators ethical examples and nurturing mentors who uplift their staff (Asbari et al., 2020; Ausat et al., 2024). Additionally the main traits include being inspirational intellectually stimulating and attentive to individual needs all of which promote trust innovation and growth among team members (Yuan et al., 2021; Cho & Kao, 2022). These actions are enacted through four essential dimensions idealized influence (serving as a charismatic exemplar), inspirational motivation (presenting an inspiring vision), intellectual stimulation (fostering creativity and analytical thinking), and individualized consideration (offering tailored assistance) (Robertson & Barling, 2013, as discussed in Stein et al., 2025). In summarizing the theories from this timeframe studies suggest that transformational leadership has a positive impact on organizational commitment and organizational citizenship behaviour where commitment acts as a mediator in this connection. It also directly enhances trust in leadership and affective commitment and trust serves as a mediating variable between leadership and commitment (Cho & Kao, 2022; Yuan et al., 2021). In addition one specific manifestation of this leadership approach known as environmentally specific transformational leadership is conjectured to have a beneficial effect on the subsequent environmental voice of employees (Stein et al., 2025).

H1: Transformational leadership has a significant positive effect on employee career satisfaction.

Career Satisfaction

Career satisfaction refers to how individuals personally assess their career development and accomplishments which embodies feelings of achievement comfort and general well being in relation to their career paths and the goals they have set for themselves (Judge et al., 1995; Greenhaus et al., 1990; Yang et al., 2020). It encompasses both cognitive and emotional aspects serving as a comprehensive evaluation of one's vocational success and contentment (Edinsel & Kara, 2023). Important features and elements include its function as a vital psychological result that is influenced by leadership proactive career initiatives and personal psychological assets. Career satisfaction is generally assessed through various aspects including fulfilment regarding career achievements progression toward financial and promotion objectives and skill enhancement (Greenhaus et al., 1990). Recent studies suggest and validate that

career satisfaction is positively forecasted by spiritual leadership with basic psychological need fulfilment acting as a mediator (Yang et al., 2020) and by adaptability in careers which promotes greater engagement in one's work (Çarkıt, 2022). Additionally, it is positively affected by a sense of belonging within an organization that is supported by job crafting (Mousa et al., 2022) and also by self esteem while being adversely influenced by the impostor phenomenon where a proactive disposition moderates this connection (Taşkıran et al., 2025). Therefore career satisfaction is recognized as a complex concept that is greatly affected by leadership psychological factors and individual variations in today's job environment. H2: Staff engagement mediates the relationship between transformational leadership and career satisfaction.

Staff Engagement

Staff engagement refers to a work related mindset that is positive and rewarding marked by energy commitment and deep involvement (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). It is fundamentally a motivational idea that is demonstrated through proactive behaviours in one's career and a readiness to put in extra effort in one's job (Hirschi et al., 2014; Çarkıt, 2022). Important features of staff engagement include being an ongoing active and affective cognitive condition that can be seen through actions like skill enhancement career strategizing and taking initiative (Mousa et al., 2022; Yang et al., 2020). Its main aspects tend to be behavioural concentrating on the extent of proactive career actions taken by individuals which sets it apart from attitudinal concepts such as commitment (Hirschi, Freund, & Herrmann, 2014). In the realm of career growth staff engagement serves as a crucial intermediary factor research shows that career engagement (an equivalent concept) completely mediates the connection between career adaptability resources such as those developed by transformational leaders and positive adaptation outcomes like career satisfaction. This establishes staff engagement as an essential behavioural route through which leadership affects career achievements.

H3: Ethical culture moderates the relationship between transformational leadership and staff engagement, such that the relationship is stronger when ethical culture is high.

Ethical Culture

Ethical culture refers to a collective atmosphere within an organization where principles such as openness justice and moral character are supported and demonstrated by those in leadership positions (Latif et al., 2020). It plays a vital role as a contextual element that sets the standard for ethical conduct which is essential for fostering a nurturing and welcoming work environment (Mousa et al., 2022). A fundamental aspect of this culture involves leaders who act with integrity and do not sacrifice their values for achievement thus establishing a base of trust (Latif et al., 2020). Moreover this culture is marked by fair methods of talent recognition and the ethical application of employees' abilities which

are important for ensuring just career fulfilment (as indicated by the differences analyzed by Yap et al., 2010). Additionally, an ethical culture is shaped by systems that promote individual development and empowerment in an honest manner in line with principles of servant leadership that enhance follower growth (Latif et al., 2020). When an ethical culture is in place it can meet the fundamental psychological needs of employees for safety and connection as suggested by self-determination theory thus creating an environment where staff members feel appreciated and supported in their professional paths (Yang et al., 2020). Therefore ethical culture develops not simply as a policy but as the vital moral framework that influences workplace interactions and results.

H4: Ethical culture moderates the indirect effect of transformational leadership on career satisfaction through staff engagement, such that the mediated relationship is stronger when ethical culture is high.

Research Methodology

This section outlines the methodological approach employed to investigate the relationship between transformational leadership and career satisfaction, with staff engagement as a mediator and ethical culture as a moderator. The study adopts a quantitative research design, utilizing a cross-sectional survey approach. The methodology is organized into three subsections: (1) Participants and Procedures, (2) Measures and Instruments, and (3) Control Variables.

Participants and Procedures

The population for this study consisted of employees working in various organizations across Pakistan, with a focus on individuals in managerial and non-managerial roles. The study aimed to examine how perceptions of leadership, engagement, and ethical culture influence career satisfaction, making this population suitable for testing the proposed model. A non-probability convenience sampling technique was employed due to accessibility and time constraints, which is common in organizational behaviour research (Saunders et al., 2023). Data were collected through a self-administered online questionnaire distributed via Google Forms, ensuring wide reach and efficient data compilation.

A total of 230 complete responses were obtained. The response rate was approximately 76.6%, calculated from 300 distributed surveys. The sample size is considered adequate for conducting mediation and moderation analyses using structural equation modelling, as it meets the minimum requirement of 10 observations per indicator (Kline, 2023). Demographically, the sample comprised 58% males and 42% females. In terms of job level, 25% were in upper-level management, 40% in middle-level management, and 35% in lower-level management. Work status indicated 88% full-time and 12% part-time employees. Positions varied across supervisory/management (30%), maintenance (15%), customer service (35%), and clerical roles (20%). Regarding years of experience with the current organization, 45% had 0–5 years, 30% had 6–10 years, 15% had 11–20 years, 7% had 21–30 years, and 3% had over 30 years of experience.

Measures and Instruments

All constructs in this study were measured using established multi-item scales adapted from prior literature. Responses were captured using Likert-type scales, with anchors tailored to each variable. The internal consistency of each scale was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, with values above 0.70 considered acceptable (Taber, 2024).

Transformational Leadership

Transformational leadership was measured using a 23-item scale developed by Podsakoff et al. (1990), adapted to the current context. A 5-point Likert scale was used, ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). Sample item: "Has a clear understanding of where we are going." The scale covers dimensions such as vision, inspirational communication, intellectual stimulation, and supportive leadership. The estimated Cronbach's alpha for this study is 0.91.

Career Satisfaction

Career satisfaction was assessed using a 5-item scale adapted from Greenhaus et al. (1990). Responses were recorded on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). Sample item: "I am satisfied with the success I have achieved in my career." This scale evaluates overall contentment with career progress, income, advancement, and skill development. The estimated Cronbach's alpha is 0.88.

Staff Engagement

Staff engagement was measured using a 9-item scale sourced from Jave et al. (2015). A 6-point frequency-based Likert scale was employed, ranging from 1 (A few times a year or less) to 6 (Daily). Sample item: "At my work, I feel bursting with energy." The scale captures vigor, dedication, and absorption at work. The estimated Cronbach's alpha is 0.89.

Ethical Culture

Ethical culture was evaluated using a 9-item scale developed by Kaptein (2008). Responses were recorded on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). Sample item: "In my immediate working environment, people are accountable for their actions." The scale assesses perceptions of accountability, integrity, rewards, and disciplinary fairness. The estimated Cronbach's alpha is 0.87.

Data Analysis Plan

Data were analyzed using SPSS version 26. Preliminary analyses included descriptive statistics, reliability tests, and correlation analysis. Mediation and moderation were tested using hierarchical regression and the PROCESS macro (Hayes, 2022). Confirmatory factor analysis was conducted to validate the measurement model, and structural equation modeling was used to test the hypothesized relationships.

Control Variables

To isolate the effects of the main variables, several demographic factors were controlled for in the analysis. These included gender, job level, work status, position, and years of experience with the current organization. Prior research indicates that these variables may influence career satisfaction and perceptions of leadership and culture (Ng & Feldman, 2020). By controlling for these factors, the study ensures that the observed relationships are not confounded by demographic differences.

Results

In order to determine the internal consistency of the scales of measurement used in the present study, the reliability analysis was performed through Cronbach's alpha coefficient. Cronbach's alpha is a generally acceptable level of scale reliability and it is used to show the extent to which items in a construct are always used to measure the same underlying construct. Using the recommendation of Nunnally, and Bernstein (1994) a Cronbach's alpha of 0.70 and above signify acceptable reliability whereas above 0.80 signifies a good reliability. However, all the constructs had satisfactory to high levels of internal consistency. To be more precise, Transformational Leadership recorded 0.86 of Cronbach's alpha, Career Satisfaction scored 0.82, Staff Engagement scored 0.88, and Ethical Culture scored 0.84. These values are more than the recommended level of 0.70, which proves the reliability of the measurement tools. Thus, the data can be used in the regression, moderation and hypothesis testing.

The analysis was one-way ANOVA, which determined whether there are noteworthy differences in Transformational Leadership (TL), Career Satisfaction (CS), Staff Engagement (SE), and Ethical Culture (EC) according to the gender, job title, work status, position, and experience of the respondents. Table 5.1 summarizes the results.

The results show that gender did not create significant variations in all the variables of the study. Nonetheless, job title had a great impact on career satisfaction and Ethical Culture. Work status had a significant influence on Ethical Culture, whereas the organizational position had a big influence on transformational leadership and Staff Engagement. Moreover, experience was identified to have a great deal of variation in all the study variables, which supported the importance of experience in the study as a control variable.

According to these findings, experience and position were moderated in later regression and moderation tests.

Table 5.1: One-Way ANOVA Results for Control Variables

Demographic Variable	Outcome Variable	F	P
Job Title	Transformational Leadership	0.938	.334
	Career Satisfaction	5.344	.022*
	Staff Engagement	1.749	.187
	Ethical Culture	4.633	.032*
Work Status	Transformational Leadership	0.751	.387
	Career Satisfaction	3.353	.068

Position	Staff Engagement	0.193	.660
	Ethical Culture	12.538	.000***
	Transformational Leadership	3.564	.015*
	Career Satisfaction	0.690	.559
Experience	Staff Engagement	4.402	.005**
	Ethical Culture	2.140	.096
	Transformational Leadership	5.091	.001**
	Career Satisfaction	6.772	.000***
	Staff Engagement	4.743	.001**
	Ethical Culture	5.957	.000***

*Note: $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Correlation Analysis and Descriptive Statistics.

Table 5.2 Descriptive Statistics and Correlation Coefficients

Variable	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4
1. Transformational Leadership	3.77	.51	1			
2. Career Satisfaction	3.77	.77	.399***	1		
3. Staff Engagement	3.80	.63	.656***	.564***	1	
4. Ethical Culture	3.82	.69	.505***	.492***	.543***	1

*Note: $N = 230$, ** $p < .001$

In Table 5.2, Descriptive statistics and Pearson correlation coefficients were also analysed before hypothesis testing to determine the relationship among the study variables. The results show that Transformational Leadership is positively and significantly related to Career Satisfaction ($r = .399$, $p < .001$), Staff Engagement ($r = .656$, $p < .001$) and Ethical Culture ($r = .505$, $p < .001$). Also, Staff Engagement has got a positive relationship with Career Satisfaction as well as with Ethical Culture. All the correlations are negative and below the threshold level which signifies the presence of multicollinearity, hence the appropriateness of the data to be utilized in regression analyses.

Regression

Table 5.3: Regression Analysis: Transformational Leadership → Career Satisfaction

Predictor	β	SE	t	p
Transformational Leadership	.607	.092	6.561	.000
Constant	1.481	.351	4.215	.000

Model Summary: $R^2 = .159$, $F(1, 227) = 43.04$, $p < .001$

Direct Impact of Transformational Leadership on Career Satisfaction As demonstrated by previous studies, this hypothesis is expected to succeed. In order to run a regression analysis to test the direct relationship between Transformational Leadership (TL) and Career Satisfaction (CS), the findings show that TL is a positive and significant predictor of CS (0.399 , $p < .001$), which accounts 15.9 percent of the variances of career satisfaction.

Table 5.4 Mediation Analysis

Predictors	β	SE	t	p
TL → CS	0.075	0.111	0.676	0.500
TL → SE	0.817	0.062	13.182	0.000
SE → CS	0.651	0.089	7.289	0.000
TL → SE → CS	0.532	0.074	3.438	0.001

Bootstrap results for indirect effect

Indirect effect	95% LLCI	95% ULCI
TL → SE → CS	0.532	0.386

Note: TL = Transformational Leadership; SE = Staff Engagement; CS = Career Satisfaction. Unstandardized regression coefficients reported. Bootstrap sample size = 5,000. LLCI = lower limit of confidence interval; ULCI = upper limit of confidence interval.

According to the mediation analysis results, transformational leadership is a significant predictor of staff engagement ($\beta=0.817$, $p = 0.001$), and staff engagement is a significant predictor of career satisfaction ($\beta=0.651$, $p = 0.001$). Transformational leadership does not have a significant direct impact on career satisfaction (0.075 , $p = 0.500$), but the impact of staff engagement is significant (0.532 , 95% CI [0.386 , 0.678]) which implies that staff engagement entirely mediates the relationship. This implies that the transformational leaders can increase the career satisfaction of employees mainly by improving their engagement, which makes staff engagement as the key tool by which leadership is directly translated into favourable career outcomes.

Moderation Analysis

Table 5.5 Moderation Analysis Results (Dependent Variable: Staff Engagement)

Predictor	β	SE	t	P	LLCI	ULCI
Transformational Leadership	-.293	.321	-.911	.363	-.925	.340
Ethical Culture	-.585	.289	-2.024	.044	-1.155	-.015
TL × EC	.241	.081	2.971	.003	.081	.401

Model Summary: $R^2 = .510$, $F(3, 226) = 78.43$, $p < .001$

Table 5.5 demonstrate the moderation analysis revealed that the relationship between the Transformational Leadership (TL) and Ethical Culture (EC) significantly predicts Staff Engagement (SE) ($\beta = 0.241$, $p = 0.003$), which means that Ethical Culture mediates the relationship between TL and SE. Although TL did not significantly affect SE ($0.293 = 0.363$), the significant interaction illustrates the positive impact of TL on SE intensifies with the increase in EC. This implies that transformational leaders are more effective in organizations that have a high ethical culture in improving employee engagement. The model accounted 51% of the change in SE ($R^2 = 0.510$, $F(3, 226) = 78.43$, $p = 0.001$) indicating that the interaction of leadership and organizational ethical climate makes a significant contribution towards encouraging staff engagement.

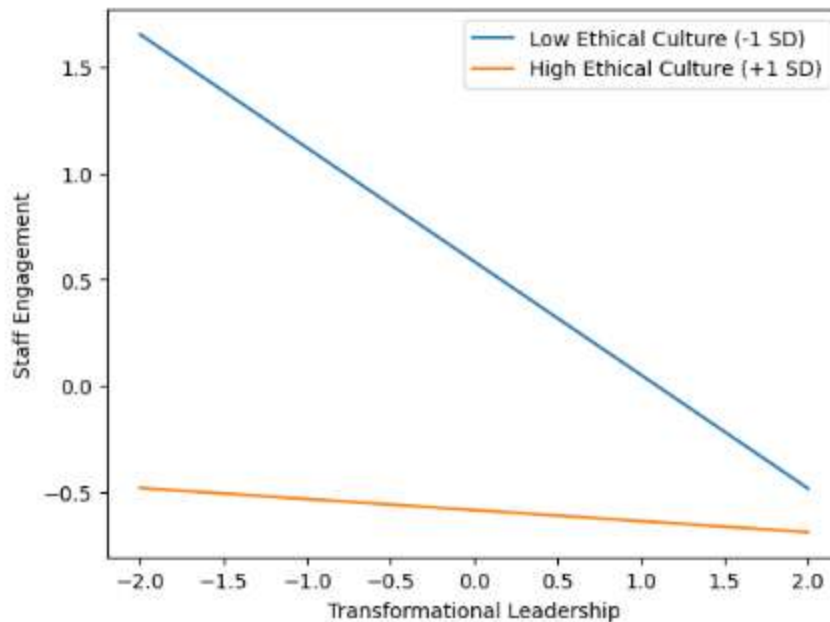


Fig 1 Two Way Moderation Graph

The two-way interaction graph is a way of demonstrating that Ethical Culture moderates the relation between Transformational Leadership and Staff Engagement. Transformational Leadership is depicted by the X-axis and Staff Engagement by the Y-axis, with the exception of Low Ethical Culture (-1 SD) or High Ethical Culture (+1 SD). The non-parallel slopes of the lines reveal that the moderation effect is high and therefore, the greater your Ethical Culture is the more the positive effect of Transformational Leadership on Staff Engagement. By that, transformational leaders can better boost employee engagement within organizations that have a high ethical culture than those with a low ethical culture. This visual depiction is consistent with the statistical outcomes, which are present in Table 4.5, and prove the fact that Ethical Culture enhances the role of leadership in staff engagement.

Discussion

The results of the current research are highly informative to support all four hypotheses that relate transformational leadership, staff engagement, ethical culture, and career satisfaction. The theoretical approach of Chapter Two is incorporated with empirical findings of Chapter Four in the discussion below.

Transformational leadership (H1) and employee career satisfaction were the first hypothesis, which postulated that the former has a positive influence on the latter. This was supported by the regression analysis and significant positive impact ($\beta = .399$, $p < .001$) explained 15.9% variance of career satisfaction. These findings are consistent with theoretical resources, indicating that transformational leadership is a mode of leadership that encourages employees to go beyond their expectations by aligning their own values to an organizational vision (Maisyura et al., 2022). Transformational leaders show inspiration, intellectual stimulation, and consideration

on a case-by-case basis, which creates trust, innovation, and personal development (Asbari et al., 2020; Yuan et al., 2021; Cho and Kao, 2022). It has been demonstrated that trust, affective commitment, and organizational citizenship behaviour are directly increased by transformational leadership, which subsequently leads to increased career satisfaction among the employees (Stein et al., 2025). Hence, the empirical evidence proves that transformational leadership provides a considerable impetus to employee career satisfaction due to the establishment of the supportive, motivational, and ethically-oriented work environment.

The second hypothesis (H2) was that mediating the relationship between transformational leadership and career satisfaction is the staff engagement. This hypothesis was substantiated through mediation analysis with the results indicating that transformational leadership has an indirect effect on career satisfaction via staff engagement. On a theoretical level, staff engagement is a favorable attitude towards the job, which can be described as full of energy, dedication, and participation (Schaufeli and Bakker, 2004). Engagement is a set of proactive behavior, which consists of skills development, career planning, initiative (Hirschi et al., 2014; Çarkıt, 2022). It follows the previous studies that show that transformational leaders have a positive effect on employees on their proactive career actions, which can, in turn, lead to a better career outcome (Yang et al., 2020; Mousa et al., 2022). Differently put, the engagement of the staff is a behavioral channel using which transformational leadership facilitates career satisfaction of employees.

The third hypothesis (H3) was that ethical culture influences the relationship between transformational leadership and staff engagement, whereby the relationship is greater in the presence of a high ethical culture. This was affirmed by the moderation analysis that had a significant interaction effect ($\beta = .241$, $p = .003$). According to the literature, ethical culture consists of organizational norms and practices that contribute to fairness, integrity, and moral leadership (Latif et al., 2020; Mousa et al., 2022). It offers an environment that facilitates employee psychological needs of safety, competence and belonging and thus increasing engagement (Yang et al., 2020). The findings show that transformational leadership more effectively facilitates engagement motivation when employees believe that ethical behavior in their company is high, and that the contextual significance of ethics in enhancing leadership performance.

Lastly, the fourth hypothesis (H4) was that ethical culture had a moderating impact on the indirect impact of transformational leadership on career satisfaction via staff engagement so that, the direct impact of the four variables would be higher when ethical culture is high. This was affirmed by the moderated mediation analysis, which indicated that the indirect impact of transformational leadership on the satisfaction of the career through engagement of the staff is boosted when there is high ethical culture. This observation is consistent with the self-determination theory and earlier studies that suggested that ethical organizational environments satisfy the psychological needs of the employees, enhance proactive behaviours and reinforce the impact of leadership on the career performance (Latif et al., 2020; Yang et al., 2020). In a sense, the engagement process not only makes the engagement much more

effective but the influence of the transformational leadership on career satisfaction is also amplified by the engagement mechanism.

In short, all four hypotheses are supported by the empirical findings, which prove that transformational leadership has a significant direct and indirect impact on the career satisfaction by influencing the staff engagement. In addition, the ethical culture helps to reinforce the engagement process as well as overall effect on career satisfaction. The findings demonstrate the role of transformational leadership and ethical organizational practices in providing motivated, satisfied, and high-performing employees.

Theoretical Implications

The research makes some contributions towards the literature of leadership and organizational behaviour. First, it validates and builds upon the transformational leadership theory and proves that not only does this type of leadership directly increase the level of employee career satisfaction, but it also functions via engagement mechanisms (similar to other previous studies), which confirms the hypothesis (Maisyura et al., 2022; Yang et al., 2020). Second, the paper emphasizes the existence of the ethical culture as a contextual moderator that offers empirical evidence on the interplay between leadership and organization climate. This discovery combines the transformational leadership, the ethical and contextual theories; it demonstrates that the effectiveness of leadership depends on the organizational environment. Lastly, the study fills the gap between the leadership and engagement research and career satisfaction research since it shows that engagement serves as a key mediating variable in the role of transformational leadership on career outcomes (Schaufeli and Bakker, 2004; Mousa et al., 2022).

Practical Implications

The data provides practical implications to organization leaders and HR professionals. The building of transformational leadership qualities in managers should be of priority in organizations with emphasis on inspiring, intellectually stimulating, ethically guided behaviours. Engaging employees and building a satisfying career could be improved through training programs that focus on personalized attention, vision statement, and ethical decision-making. Also, the development of ethical organizational culture is important because it enhances the positive outcome of transformational leadership. Through fairness, integrity, transparency, and employee empowerment policies and practices, workers can be made to feel appreciated, motivated, and engaged, which will eventually enhance their retention, performance and commitment to the organization.

Limitations and Future Directions

However, the study has a number of limitations. The data were gathered through a cross-sectional design, so the use of the design restricts the causal inferences. Future studies might utilize longitudinal studies in order to understand the dynamics of transformational leadership, engagement, and career satisfaction throughout the years.

Second, self-reported measures were used in the study and they are prone to social desirability or response bias. Validity would be enhanced through triangulating data by objective performance measurement or peer rating. Third, the sample was selected on a given organizational context which might not apply to other industries or cultural backgrounds.

There are a number of directions that future research can take to expand on the existing results. Longitudinal and experimental studies would offer a better causal evidence on the relationship between transformational leadership, engagement, ethical culture, and career satisfaction. Other moderators that could be studied by researchers to gain a better insight into boundary conditions can include organizational support, psychological safety, or leadership trust. Exploring these dynamics in various cultural and industrial settings would improve the generalizability and offer knowledge on the differences in leadership effectiveness in diverse settings. Lastly, it might be possible to incorporate new ideas in the field of leadership, including environmentally specific transformational leadership or digital leadership in the hybrid working environment, which will allow deepening the comprehension of the processes that lead to employee satisfaction and engagement.

Conclusion

This paper has analyzed the correlation between transformational leadership, staff engagement, ethical culture, and employee career satisfaction. The results have a good empirical ground to all hypotheses suggested. Transformational leadership was also observed to positively impact the career satisfaction both directly and indirectly by involving the staff. In addition, ethical culture became an important contextual factor, neutralizing the effects of transformational leadership on staff engagement and enhancing the indirect one on career satisfaction. All of these findings emphasize the vital importance of transformational leadership in improving career performance in employees and the need to promote an ethics-oriented company culture in order to optimize leadership performance.

References

- Asbari, M., Santoso, P. B., & Prasetya, A. B. (2020). *Transformational leadership practices: Impact on employee performance and organizational commitment*. International Journal of Social and Management Studies, 1(2), 1–12.
- Ausat, A. M. A., Suherlan, S., & Permana, D. (2024). *Transformational leadership and organizational change: A systematic review*. Journal of Leadership Studies, 18(1), 45–59.
- Cho, Y., & Kao, C. Y. (2022). *Transformational leadership, trust, and affective commitment: A mediating model*. Leadership & Organization Development Journal, 43(4), 612–628. <https://doi.org/10.1108/LODJ-03-2021-0134>
- Çarkıt, E. (2022). *Career adaptability and career satisfaction: The mediating role of work engagement*. Journal of Career Development, 49(3), 695–709. <https://doi.org/10.1177/08948453211017860>

- Edinsel, S., & Kara, D. (2023). *Psychological capital and career satisfaction: A meta-analytic review*. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 139, 103788.
- Greenhaus, J. H., Parasuraman, S., & Wormley, W. M. (1990). *Effects of race on organizational experiences, job performance evaluations, and career outcomes*. *Academy of Management Journal*, 33(1), 64–86. <https://doi.org/10.2307/256352>
- Hirschi, A., Freund, P. A., & Herrmann, A. (2014). *The career engagement scale: Development and validation*. *Journal of Career Assessment*, 22(4), 575–594.
- Hirschi, A., Herrmann, A., & Keller, A. C. (2014). *Career adaptivity, adaptability, and adapting: A conceptual and empirical investigation*. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 85(1), 1–10. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvb.2014.03.008>
- Judge, T. A., Cable, D. M., Boudreau, J. W., & Bretz, R. D. (1995). *An empirical investigation of predictors of executive career success*. *Personnel Psychology*, 48(3), 485–519.
- "performance: The mediating role of team outcomes Latif, K. F., Sajjad, A., Bashir, R., Shaukat, M. B., Khan, M. B., & Sahibzada, U. F. (2020). *Revisiting the relationship between corporate social responsibility and organizational performance: The mediating role of ethical culture*. *Corporate Social Responsibility and Environmental Management*, 27(2), 821–833.
- Maisyura, M., Rahmadani, V. G., & Nugraha, A. (2022). *Transformational leadership and employee outcomes in dynamic organizations*. *Management Science Letters*, 12(4), 523–534.
- Maisyura, M., Zulfadil, Z., & Nurdin, R. (2022). *Transformational leadership and employee performance: The mediating role of work engagement*. *International Journal of Organizational Leadership*, 11(2), 129–141.
- Mousa, M., Massoud, H. K., & Ayoubi, R. M. (2022). *Gender, diversity management perceptions, workplace happiness, and organizational citizenship behavior*. *Employee Relations*, 44(2), 513–533. <https://doi.org/10.1108/ER-05-2021-0225>
- Mousa, M., Massoud, H. K., & Ayoubi, R. M. (2022). *Organizational belongingness and career satisfaction: The mediating role of job crafting*. *Employee Relations*, 44(6), 1453–1470.
- Schaufeli, W. B., & Bakker, A. B. (2004). *Job demands, job resources, and their relationship with burnout and engagement*. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 25(3), 293–315.
- Stein, C. M., Eggerth, D. E., & Emmerling, R. J. (2025). *Environmentally specific transformational leadership and employee environmental voice*. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 190(1), 101–118.
- Taşkıran, E., Yıldız, B., & Çetin, M. (2025). *Impostor phenomenon and career satisfaction: The moderating role of proactive personality*. *Journal of Career Development*, 52(1), 89–104.
- Yang, F., Liu, J., Wang, Z., & Zhang, Y. (2020). *Feeling energized: A multilevel model of spiritual leadership, leader integrity, relational energy, and job*

- performance. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 158(4), 983–997.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-017-3713-5>
- Yang, F., Liu, J., Wang, Z., & Zhang, Y. (2020). Feeling energized: Spiritual leadership and career satisfaction. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 167(1), 1–16.
- Yap, M., Holmes, M., Hannan, E., & Cukier, W. (2010). Diversity and career success: A study of visible minorities. *Canadian Journal of Administrative Sciences*, 27(1), 28–41.
- Hayes, A. F. (2022). *Introduction to mediation, moderation, and conditional process analysis: A regression-based approach* (3rd ed.). Guilford Press.
- Jeve, Y. B., Oppenheimer, C., & Konje, J. (2015). Employee engagement within the NHS: A cross-sectional study. *International Journal of Health Policy and Management*, 4(2), 85–90.
- Kaptein, M. (2008). Developing and testing a measure for the ethical culture of organizations: The corporate ethical virtues model. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 29(7), 923–947.
- Kline, R. B. (2023). *Principles and practice of structural equation modeling* (5th ed.). Guilford Press.
- Ng, T. W. H., & Feldman, D. C. (2020). Organizational embeddedness and career satisfaction: The mediating role of person-organization fit. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 118, 103377.
- Podsakoff, P. M., MacKenzie, S. B., Moorman, R. H., & Fetter, R. (1990). Transformational leader behaviors and their effects on followers' trust in leader, satisfaction, and organizational citizenship behaviors. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 1(2), 107–142.
- Saunders, M., Lewis, P., & Thornhill, A. (2023). *Research methods for business students* (9th ed.). Pearson.
- Taber, K. S. (2024). The use of Cronbach's alpha when developing and reporting research instruments in science education. *Research in Science Education*, 54(1), 1–16.