"Impact of transformational leadership on employees' reactions to change and mediating role of organizational trust: Evidence from service companies in Hungary"

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BUSINESS PERSPECTIVES

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IMPACT OF TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP ON EMPLOYEES' REACTIONS TO CHANGE AND MEDIATING ROLE OF ORGANIZATIONAL TRUST: EVIDENCE FROM SERVICE COMPANIES IN HUNGARY

Abstract

In the context of organizational change, employees can have different reactions, where some of them accept and engage with it, and others completely refuse and resist it. Hence, companies should permanently settle for the best and introduce a fruitful leadership style along with a good change management strategy to ensure the company's prolonged survival and prosperity.

This investigation aims to examine the influence of transformational leadership on employees' affective commitment and intention to support change. Both were chosen to constitute the main dimensions of employees' reactions toward organizational change and highlight the importance of organizational trust as a mediator in that correlation.

To confirm the hypotheses subtracted from the literature review, a quantitative study was managed by a survey devoted to 428 employees working for diverse service companies in Hungary and going through different change cases.

Structural equation modeling (SEM) was then applied to hold out the favorable findings, which reveal that transformational leadership is a booster for employees' intention to support change but not for affective commitment. It was also found that organizational trust firmly mediates the relationship between transformational leadership and employees' reaction to change.

This statement justifies that both transformational leadership and organizational trust are able to reduce change complexity and lead to its acceptance, openness, and support.

Keywords	transformational leadership, change management, affective commitment, change support, organizational trust
JEL Classification	D23, M12, M16

INTRODUCTION

Globalization was remarkably displayed throughout the last three years, where the effect of the pandemic has reached relatively most countries. Indeed, the world was going under a substantial change in which organizations were compelled to adapt to an expeditious change. Meanwhile, organizations were confronted with convoluted confrontations posed by globalization, modernization, and societal variation. These changes imposed some new regulations and implementation of new structures that led to different employees' reactions from resistance to engagement. However, employee engagement is not easy to accomplish, especially if it is not being opened to change and support.

For this reason, implementing a well-structured change management strategy and ensuring the collusion between leaders and leadership development was highly recognized to revive organizations and control employees' reactions toward change. In fact, leadership development is highly required for the organizations in a condition where it acts as a base for the transformations. However, current leadership development methods argue that it is limited to interpreting significant benefits (McCauley et al., 2021). Regarding organizational change and leadership development, the psychological and behavioral context enacts as an essential aspect of an effective organization's management.

Because of the frequent changes, organizations were directed to reassess their strategies, styles, formalities, and the needed appliances in their practices. In this sense, they will understand what and how the organization will proceed as well as raise awareness of whether to use a new approach or keep on the current ones. The value of using the right leadership style was remarkably highlighted in previous studies, as it plays a critical role in adjusting the employees' change behaviors. However, none of these studies spotlighted the best type of leadership that can engage employees and attract their affective commitment and intention to support change. Therefore, this study will mainly focus on transformational leadership as an important variable able to enhance change and boost organizational effectiveness by seeking to improve employees' performance (Xie, 2020). Moreover, it shows a positive relationship with the employees' idealized influence, emotional association, and awareness level. The strength of transformational leadership is then shown in how it can notify the employees' mentality and attitudes to accelerate change progress.

Moreover, scientists mentioned that organizational leadership during managerial change shows essentiality. However, the mediating role of organizational trust was bridged along with transformational leadership, considering multiple variables. For example, they are transparent communication (Kim & Lee, 2021), employees' openness to change (Yue et al., 2019; Kim & Lee, 2021), constant improvement (Khattak et al., 2020), and finally, organizational commitment (Top et al., 2014; Men et al., 2022). Yet, there is a gap linking it with employees' reactions to change.

Therefore, this study deals with detecting the change in employees' behaviors with the existence of a specific style of leadership.

1. LITERATURE REVIEW

Leadership was consistently considered a central subject matter, attracting many researchers in the business management field (Bass, 1985; Berraies et al., 2021). Going through its definitions, scholars agreed that leadership is an activity by which a leader tries to influence followers to make them understand the business and facilitate their assigned tasks to achieve a common goal (Burns, 1978). Many leadership styles were highly discussed to mention their vast effect on change management.

Bass (1985) discussed transformational leadership and mentioned that it is dedicated to inspiring followers and empowering them to face challenges and accomplish fixed goals. In the same line, Tepper et al. (2018) reported that transformational leadership is about motivated employees following transformational leaders who favorize the organization's development rather than their personal interests.

As transformational leadership theory mainly focuses on engendering change (Xie, 2020) and boosting it, employees' reactions to change got the highest interest from scientists in change management studies. They defined it as a response to a change needed for a successful firm's management (Wang & Kebede, 2020). Correspondingly, Oreg et al. (2011, p. 463) examined the notion according to the following dimensions: "commitment to change, openness to change, readiness for change, support for change, resistance to change, and cynicism about change." This study will mainly focus on two important aspects with the press on two theories to explain the variables. Namely, the paper uses social learning theory (Bandura, 1977) and social exchange theory (Blau, 1964).

The first aspect is the employees' affective commitment to change (Herscovitch & Meyer, 2002). The notion was conceptualized as a psychological aspect helping individuals make the right decisions and actions to reach a wealthy change implementation and maintain their membership in the company (Allen & Meyer, 1990; Amir & Mangundjaya, 2021). The second aspect is the employees' intention to support organizational change, defined as a behavior adopted by employees to brace the change (Fedor et al., 2006).

The value of transformational leadership was highly investigated. In these investigations, researchers stated that by having a great company's vison, a transformational leader can attract followers' interests and generate their support (Bayraktar & Jiménez, 2020). Furthermore, it was advised to always empower employees during change implementation by ensuring good and clear communication (Herold et al., 2008). Accordingly, anterior scientists devoted that creating meaning for a change can boost employees' favorable outcomes and performance and create positive mindsets toward change (Bartunek et al., 2006).

Bayraktar and Jiménez (2020) surveyed 298 employees facing different organizational changes. They confirmed that transformational leader practices tend to affect employees' different levels of affective commitment (Shin et al., 2015). It was also concluded that leaders should always focus on the outcomes and communicate them with all the initiatives and the benefits of change. Moreover, it is worth mentioning their roles in the organizations' success.

Besides employees' emotional reactions in managing change, their intention to support it (Meyer & Allen, 1997) seems to be also crucial (Seo et al., 2012). Accordingly, the social learning theory examined by Bandura (1977) confirmed this statement by reporting that employees' intention to support change is highly dependent on different leaders' reactions to manage changes. Hence, literature focused on showing the importance of having collective interests and adopting collaborative tasks by leaders to motivate employees to support change (Bass, 1985).

Consistently, Kim et al. (2021) conducted a survey dedicated to restaurant employees. They report-ed that transformational leadership is one of the fruitful leadership styles that can boost employees' support compared to other leadership practices. It is possible with the help of having clear visions, excellent communication, higher inspiration, and giving attention to each employee.

Obviously, during a situation of change, employees usually feel the fear of involving the organizational change process due to its uncertainty and complexity. That is why organizational trust in a changing working atmosphere seems crucial (Alshaabani et al., 2022). Organizational trust was defined as the ability of employees to believe in their leaders' actions and expect to reach positive outcomes (Jaskeviciute et al., 2021).

Based on Luhmann's (1979) trust theory, organizational trust was always a key element in building a successful organization in a changing environment. In such a context, transformational leaders can gain their followers' trust by ensuring their integrity and dedication, treating them fairly, and demonstrating their faith to empower and satisfy them (Top et al., 2013). Usually, transformational leaders have the capacity and the competencies to motivate their followers in order to effectively perform around a common goal by influencing them and acting as role models to increase their levels of trust (Jung & Avolio, 2000). In their study based on a survey collected from 563 employees working in the banking industry, Islam et al. (2018) reported that by trying to create a pleasant environment based on trustworthy relationships, excellent communication, shared values, vision, and sense of purpose, transformational leaders can easily be trusted as well as their organization (Jung & Avolio, 2000). Accordingly, in a changing business environment, transformational leaders' ability to encourage, teach, coach, and develop followers is critical to building trust, respect, and confidence (Khattak et al., 2020).

Before facing a situation of change and trying a new adventure, trust among employees, the organization, and leaders is a crucial element in facing the new challenges (Ouedraogo & Ouakouak, 2018). This was explained by the fact that trust can decrease employees' doubts and increase their change readiness and motivation to face any change (Madsen et al., 2005). It has also been men-

tioned that commitment to change and trust are conclusively related (Feng et al., 2020), as trust is one of the affective commitment elements (Cater & Cater, 2010).

That is why Ouedraogo and Ouakouak (2018, p. 5) highlighted that "employees who trust their leaders and organizations usually develop an attachment sensation and a feeling of belonging to the organization" (Ertürk, 2010). Along with this idea, Neves and Caetano (2009) used social exchange theory and conducted a survey dedicated to 221 employees from several companies going through major organizational changes. They confirmed that if supervisors and the organization trust their employees, usually employees increase their citizenship behaviors and performance, and decrease their turnover intentions. Contrary, the absence of trust can lead to less commitment to change that could affect all the previously mentioned components.

Trust was frequently mentioned as an essential factor that should always be earned and cultivated when an organization faces a situation of change to avoid employees' negative behaviors (Men et al., 2020). With a study based on a questionnaire sent to 439 employees going through different organizational changes in the United States, Men et al. (2020) showed that organizational trust impacts employees' support for change. In the same direction, based on a survey including 439 employees in the United States, Yue et al. (2019) suggested that organizational trust is the variable that determines the employees' continuous cooperation, excellent communication, and higher levels of performance. They have also mentioned that trust is one of the best ways to cultivate positive employee attitudes. Moreover, a lack of trust can decrease their perception and engagement toward change, leading to less readiness and stronger behavioral resistance.

2. AIMS AND HYPOTHESES

The current study first aims to examine the extent to which transformational leadership could affect employees' reactions to change, a variable that is consisted of two important dimensions: employees' affective commitment and intention to support. Second, it investigates the mediating role of organizational trust in the correlation between transformational leadership and change reactions.

The context of this study was based on service companies in Hungary and committed to employees going through different types of changes.

As a conclusion from the literature review, the following hypotheses were formulated:

H1a: Transformational leadership has a significant positive effect on employees' affective commitment.
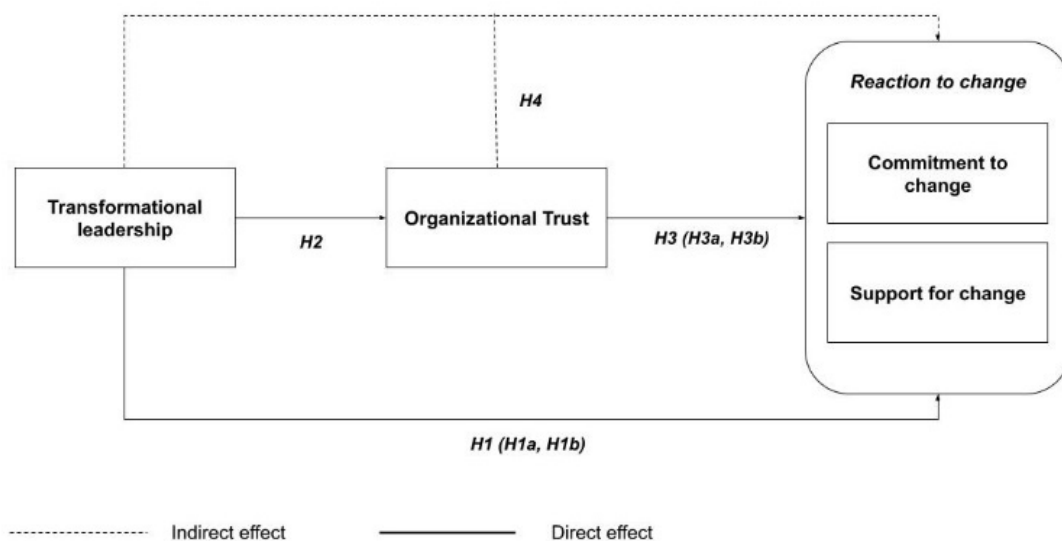

Figure 1. Theoretical model

H1b: *Transformational leadership has a significant positive effect on employees' intention to support change.*

H2: *Transformational leadership has a significant positive effect on organizational trust.*

H3a: *Organizational trust has a significant positive effect on employees' affective commitment.*

H3b: *Organizational trust has a significant positive effect on employees' intention to support change.*

H4: *Organizational trust mediates the relationship between transformational leadership and employees' reaction to change.*

3. METHODS

To achieve the study's objectives, an online questionnaire was established based on previous studies. The questionnaire was distributed to more than 800 employees working for marketing, IT, logistics, and management consulting service companies operating in Hungary (Alshaabani et al., 2022) and going through different organizational changes.

The employees were reached via social channels such as LinkedIn, Facebook, and emails, where an introduction letter explained the purpose. In addition, the notice on importance of these employees' contributions to the scientific research was attached. The self-administrated questionnaire consisted of four sections covering the study's variables.

The snowball sampling method was adopted to collect the responses, where the participants were asked to resend the questionnaire to their colleagues at work and their friends.

A total of 428 responses were collected, where only 401 were valid and suitable for analysis. The rate of received responses was nearly 53%, which is in the accepted range (Baruch & Holtom, 2008). Table 1 shows the respondents' profiles.

Table 1. Participants' demographics

Variables	Items	Count	%
Gender	Male	240	59.9
	Female	161	40.1
Educational level	Undergraduate	141	35.2
	Graduate	81	20.2
	Postgraduate	179	44.6
Age	18 to 24 years	94	23.4
	25 to 39 years	205	51.1
	40 to 55 years	89	22.2
	> 55 years	13	3.2
Company size	< 50 employees	10	2.5
	50-250 employees	69	17.2
	> 250 employees	322	80.3
Job tenure	2 < years	242	60.3
	2-5 years	88	21.9
	5-10 years	45	11.2
	> 10 years	26	6.6

The study used measures from previous investigations tested and validated by different researchers. A five-point Likert scale was also operated to complete the measurement, which can be explained as follows: 1 = strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree.

The transformational leadership scale follows Podsakoff et al. (1990) and includes twenty three-item divided into six factors. The first factor is "articulating vision" consisting of five items. The second is "providing role model" consisting of three items. The third is "fostering acceptance of goals" consisting of four items. The fourth is "setting high-performance expectations" consisting of three items. The fifth is "individual support" consisting of four items. Finally, the last element is "intellectual stimulation" consisting of four items (Schwepker & Good, 2013).

For organizational trust, a four-item scale was applied according to Nyhan and Marlowe (1997). Similarly, a six-item scale opted for affective commitment to change following Herscovitch and Meyer (2002). Finally, the intention to support change measurement was based on a four-item scale developed by Fedor et al. (2006).

Besides, the following demographic variables were utilized to control the dependent variables, in line with prior studies:

(i) gender (1 = male, 2 = female);

(ii) age (1 = from 18 to 24; 5 = older than 55 years old);

(iii) educational background (1 = undergraduate to 3 = postgraduate");

(iv) company size (1 = less than 50 employees; 3 = more than 250 employees);

(v) job tenure (1 = less than 2 years; 4 = more than 10 years).

The reason for choosing these variables to control is that many studies have used them (Evanschitzky et al., 2011; Lundmark et al., 2021; Sarros et al., 2008).

Concerns about potential standard method bias-variance can be raised due to a self-reporting questionnaire (Podsakoff et al., 2003). As the variance is "attributable to the method of measurement instead of the measures that represent the constructs" (Podsakoff et al., 2003, p. 879), this can be a warning for the results' validity (Burton-Jones, 2009).

Therefore, this study used Herman's single factor test. This test shows that all the studied variables were loaded into a single factor with no rotation solutions. The results reveal that a one-factor solution could explain 26.80 % of the explained variance. Furthermore, to avoid the common method bias, obtaining the data of the dependent and independent variables via different resources was vital (Favero & Bullock, 2014). That is why the current study used different measures.

Cronbach's alpha test was used to ensure the variables' internal consistency. Findings indicate that all variables had a good internal consistency since all values were above 0.60, as Sekaran and Bougie (2016) recommended, highlighting excellent reliability.

To evaluate the validity, two tests were performed: the first one is the convergent validity. To do so, a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was used. In fact, convergent validity determines "the extent to which a measure correlates positively with alternative measures of the same constructs" (Hair et al., 2017, p. 112).

Estimating the average variance extracted (AVE) and the outer loading values are required to assess convergent validity. According to Hair et al. (2017), the items with loading less than .400 should be removed when the other items with higher loadings are enough to explain around 50 % of the variance in the variable. Therefore, four items were deleted (FAG4; IS4; ISI4; AC6). Next, the AVE value of each variable was counted, and the findings showed that all the values of AVE of each variable exceeded the threshold of (0.50). Therefore, the measurement model of the current study is considered satisfactory (Hair et al., 2017). The second convergent validity measurement was the composite reliability. According to Hair et al. (2017), the values of CR should not exceed 0.7 for each variable. The results show that all the values are above the limit of 0.7 and within the acceptable range (Hair et al., 2017). Table 2 presents the test results.

Table 2. Reliability tests

Variable	Items	AVE	CR	CA
Transformational leadership	23	0.61	0.90	0.92
Organizational trust	4	0.53	0.81	0.84
Intention to support	4	0.70	0.90	0.90
Affective commitment	6	0.59	0.85	0.72

Note: AVE = average variance extracted; CR = composite reliability; CA = Cronbach's alpha.

Regarding the discriminant validity, Heterotrait-Monotrait ratio (HTMT) was estimated. As mentioned by Fassott et al. (2016), to ensure that each construct is different from other constructs, the HTMT ratio must be less than the threshold of 0.85. Table 3 presents the results indicating that the HTMT ratio of all correlation values was significantly lower than the cutoff level, explaining the discriminant validity.

Table 3. Discriminant validity HTMT

Variable	TRA	TR	INS	AC
TRA	–	–	–	–
TR	0.231*	–	–	–
INS	0.137*	0.587*	–	–
AC	0.08*	0.641*	0.801*	–

Note: TRA = transformational leadership; TR = organizational trust; INS = intention to support; AC = affective commitment; * = significantly different from 1.

A structural equation modeling (SEM) method was used to measure the links between the studied variables. SEM is an effective technique to examine "the weight" and the "effect of the independent variables over the dependent ones." SEM is also

valuable to determine to what extent the model fits the data by performing confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). Furthermore, it helps easily test the moderation and the mediation effects (Hair et al., 2016; Kaplan, 2001). SEM assists in estimating the coefficients and the relationships between the variables by using the maximum likelihood estimation. SEM was applied by using AMOS package 22 software.

Hair et al. (2010) mentioned that prior to drawing conclusions based on the analysis results, diagnosing the model's goodnof ess fit is crucial. To test the model fit, the study was divided into two models. The first one (Model 1) estimates the direct relationship between the dependent and the independent variables. The second model (Model 2) estimated the indirect relationships between the variables.

To determine the model fit of each variable, a CFA analysis was carried out to check the values of different model fit indices as recommended by Hair et al. (2010). Some of the main model fit indices that are used for this purpose are: "model's chi-square" (χ^2), "degree of freedom of the model "(df)," the ratio of the chi-square statistic to the respective degrees of freedom ($\chi2/df$) ", "comparative fit index" (CFI), the root mean square error of approximation ($RMSEA$), "the Tucker-Lewis index" (TLI), and "the standardized root mean residual" ($SRMR$). As suggested by Awang (2012), to consider a model as a good fit, there are thresholds values of these indices, suggested cutoffs values are $\chi^2/df < 5$, $RMSEA \leq 0.08$, $CFI > 0.9$, $TLI > 0.9$, and $SRMR \leq 0.05$. The key indices of both models are presented in Table 3. In the present study, the values indicate the goodness of fit of the models. The model fit indices are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Model fit

Indices	χ^2	DF	Sig	χ^2/DF	CFI	TLI	RMSEA	SRMR
Model 1	187.843	97	.001	1.937	.97	.96	.048	.038
Model 2	276.537	99	.001	2.793	.96	.94	.067	.050

4. RESULTS

The mean, standard deviation of the variables, and Pearson's correlation coefficient between the variables are presented in Table 5.

Before evaluating the mediation model (Model 2), the direct effect model (Model 1) was examined to assess the explanatory power and the predictive relevance of the proposed research model. The results of the first model analysis are presented in Table 6, where the standardized path coefficients are spotlighted. The results of Model 1 show that transformational leadership can directly affect intention to support the change ($\beta = 0.135$, $t = 2.534$, $p < 0.05$), explaining $R^2 = 11\%$ of the variance in intention to support change variable. In contrast, there was no significant correlation between transformational leadership and affective commitment to change ($\beta = 0.086$, $t = 1.547$, NS). These results lead to accept hypothesis *H1b* and to reject *H1a*. The results of Model 1 are displayed in Figure 2.

Among the control variables, age and company size were significantly the two dependent variables (Age → AC: $\beta = 0.147$, $p < 0.01$); (Age → IN: $\beta = 0.138$, $p < 0.05$); (Size → AC: $\beta = 0.125$, $p < 0.01$); (Size → IN: $\beta = 0.160$, $p < 0.05$) whereas gender and education were not significant.

The results of Model 2 in Table 7 showed that transformational leadership is positively associated with organizational trust at a significant level (β

Table 5. Descriptive analysis and intercorrelations

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Gender	1.40	0.49	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
Age	2.09	0.76	0.023	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
Education	2.10	0.89	0.091	0.062	–	–	–	–	–	–
Company size	2.77	0.47	0.008	0.630**	0.068	–	–	–	–	–
Transformational leadership	3.55	0.57	−0.090	0.016	0.077	0.067	–	–	–	–
Organizational trust	3.30	0.75	0.017	0.068	0.007	0.079	0.226**	–	–	–
Affective commitment	3.77	0.57	−0.006	0.187**	0.037	0.209**	0.113*	0.552**	–	–
Intention to support	3.70	0.77	0.052	0.232**	0.068	0.244**	0.133**	0.500**	0.630**	–

*Note: ** p < 0.01, * p < 0.05.*

= 0.249, t = 4.131, p < .001), explaining R^2 = 11.2% of the variance in organizational trust. That is why $H2$ is confirmed. Transformational leadership was not directly related to affective commitment (β = −0.091, NS) nor to intention to support change (β = −0.042, t = −.882, NS). In line with $H3a$ and $H3b$, the findings showed that organizational trust was positively associated with both affective commitment and intention to support change (β = 0.676, t = 10.418, p < 0.001); (β = 0.573, t = 9.144 p < 0.001) respectively. Explaining R^2 = 34.6% of the variance in affective commitment to change, and R^2 = 30.3% of the variance intention to support change, so both hypotheses are accepted.

Among the control variables, age and size were significantly related to the affective commitment, while company size was associated with intention to support change (Age → AC: β = 0.113, p < 0.01); (Size → AC: β = 0.118, p < 0.01); (Size → IN: β = 0.143, p < 0.01). The results are presented in Table 8.

The results in Table 8 display that transformational leadership indirectly affect affective commitment at a significant level (PE = 0.123. 95% BC, CI [0.065; 0.180]), and intention to support change (PE = 0.148.

95% BC, CI [0.059; 0.162]). This indicates the role of organizational trust in mediating the relationship between transformational leadership and the two dependent variables, which leads to accepting hypotheses 4 and 5. Figure 3 presents Model 2 and the relationships among the study's variables.

Table 6. Structural model results of Model 1 (without mediator)

Path	B	S.E.	t-value	P-value
Age → INS	0.138	0.063	2.106	0.035
Size → INS	0.160	0.101	2.394	0.017
Edu → INS	0.030	0.042	0.719	NS
Gender → INS	0.087	0.075	1.157	NS
Age → AC	0.147	0.047	2.495	0.05
Size → AC	0.125	0.077	2.232	0.026
Edu → AC	0.009	0.031	0.286	NS
Gender → AC	0.001	0.057	0.020	NS
TRA → INS	0.135	0.065	2.534	0.04
TRA → AC	0.086	0.049	1.547	NS
R^2				
INS	11%			

Note: TRA = transformational leadership; AC = affective commitment to change; INS = intention to support the change; Edu = educational background; NS = not significant.
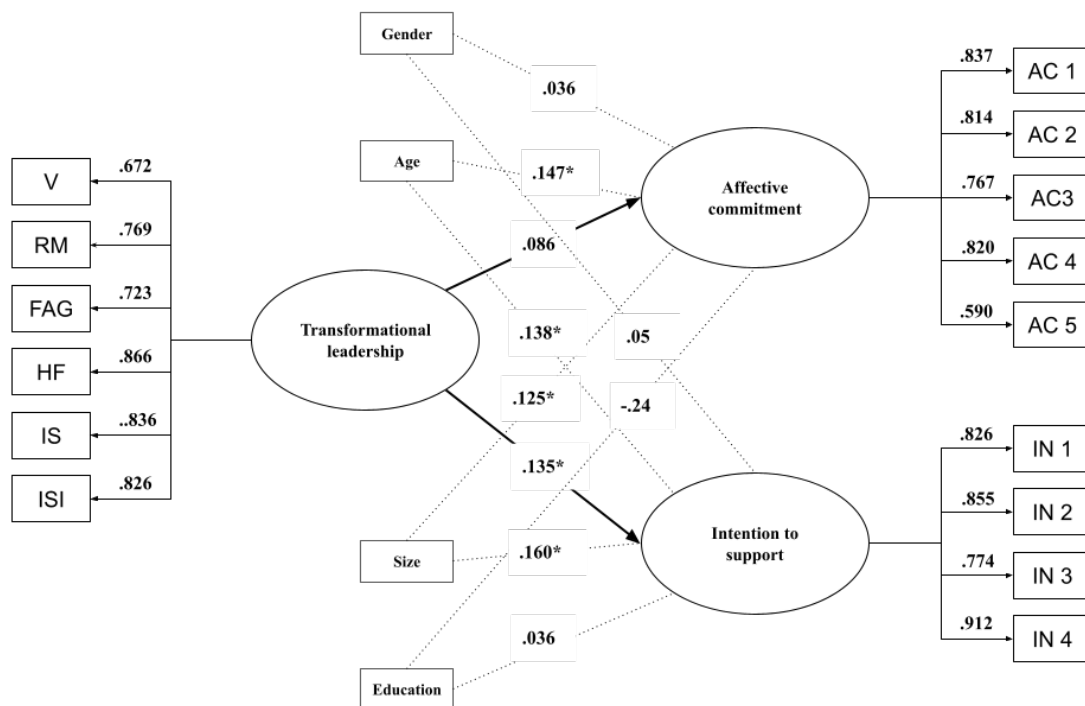
Note: TRA = transformational leadership; TR = organizational trust; INS = intention to support; AC = affective commitment. "Articulating vision" (V), "providing role model" (RM), "fostering acceptance of goals" (FAG), "setting high-performance expectations" (HF), "individual support" (IS), and "intellectual stimulation" (ISI). * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01.

Figure 2. Direct effects (Model 1)
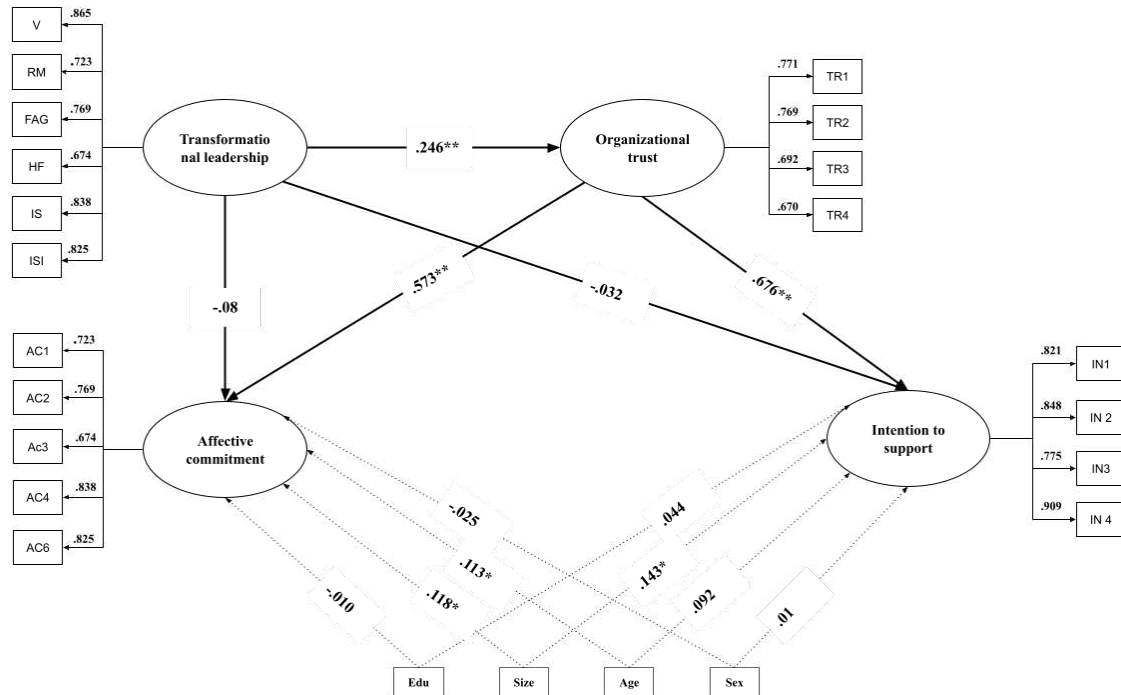
Note: "Articulating vision (V), providing role model (RM), fostering acceptance of goals (FAG), setting high-performance expectations (HF), individual support (IS), and intellectual stimulation (ISI). * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01.

Figure 3. Indirect effects (Model 2)

Table 7. Structural model results of Model 2

Path	B	S.E.	t-value	P-value
Age → AC	0.113	0.055	2.056	0.04
Size → AC	0.118	0.089	2.400	0.017
Edu → AC	0.039	0.036	1.041	NS
Gender → AC	0.059	0.066	.889	NS
Age → INC	0.054	0.040	1.369	NS
Size → INC	0.146	0.064	2.265	0.022
Edu → INC	0.016	0.026	0.595	NS
Gender → INC	−0.025	0.048	−0.522	NS
TRA → TR	0.249	0.079	4.131	***
TRA → INS	−0.042	0.070	−.882	NS
TRA → AC	−0.091	0.075	−1.919	NS
TR → INS	0.573	0.076	9.144	***
TR → AC	0.676	0.076	10.418	***
R^2				
TR		11.2%		
AC		34.6%		
INS		30.3%		

Note: TRA = transformational leadership; TR = organizational trust; AC = affective commitment to change; INS = intention to support the change; Edu = educational background; NS = not significant; *** p < 0.001.

Table 8. Mediation analysis results

Indirect effect	SIE	95% CI	Sig?
TRA → TR → AC	0.148	[0.065; 0.180]	Yes
TRA → TR → INS	0.123	[0.059; 0.162]	Yes

5. DISCUSSION

This study tries to look into the influence of transformational leadership on employees' reactions to change, which is associated with two critical dimensions: employees' affective commitment and employees' intention to support change. Literature states that transformational leadership is the best way to support and promote innovation, employees' engagement and commitment, and the organization's long-term survival.

Another important component was also highly considered. It is the organizational trust initiative that is contemplated as the best way to lead to positive employees' attitudes and behaviors, as well as their considerable cooperation, great and clear communication, and solid and productive relationships' abilities (Rawlins, 2008), which are crucial in a frequent changing and challenging environment (Ertürk, 2008).

Accordingly, from an empirical outlook, the present paper confirms *H1b*, stating that transformational leadership has a notable positive impact on employees' intention to support change. This fact corroborates Bandura (1977), who reported with

the press on the learning theory that employees' intention to support change is highly dependent on their superiors' reactions to manage a transformational situation. It also goes along with Kim et al. (2021), who stated that leaders who care for the collective interest prioritize collaborations and motivate employees. They also can attract employees' intention for change support with the help of having clear visions, excellent communication, and higher inspiration.

Regarding *H1a*, the findings disclosed that transformational leadership does not show a significant effect on employees' affective commitment. This point disapproves of the idea shared by Peng et al. (2020) and Bayraktar and Jiménez (2020), who mentioned with the press on social exchange theory that transformational leaders' practices are mandatory to impact employees' different levels of affective commitment (Shin et al., 2015). That is why they insisted that in a situation of change, leaders should always mention the positive outcomes of their initiatives and the benefits of change in the organizational success to constructively call their affective commitment. However, this paper has shown a lack of effect between transformational leadership and employees' affective commitment, explained by the fact that transformational leadership influences from only one direction. It is considered a detail-oriented and risky leadership style.

As for *H2*, this study confirmed and spotlighted the positive correlation between transformational leadership and organizational trust. This statement agrees with the investigations of Top et al. (2012), Khattak et al. (2020), and Islam et al. (2018). They underscored that transformational leaders can ensure their followers' integrity and dedication by ensuring a certain level of organizational trust. This explains that transformational leaders can increase their followers' performance by creating a common goal and influencing them as role models, which can highly raise their levels of trust.

Keeping with organizational trust variable, this paper verifies *H3a*, which shows a significant impact of organizational trust on employees' affective commitment to change. This conclusion authenticates Cater and Cater (2010), who considered organizational trust an important factor in

affective commitment. It also supports Madsen et al. (2005) and Ertürk (2010), who reported that organizational trust is a component able to decrease employees' doubts and increase their change readiness and motivation to face any type of change. They also highlighted that if employees trust their leaders and organizations, they can develop an attachment sensation and a feeling of belonging to any new emerging change (Ertürk, 2010).

In addition, *H3b* was approved, revealing that organizational trust positively influences employees' intention to support change, along with Men et al. (2020). They insisted on cultivating trust factors to avoid employees' negative behaviors in change situations. It also corroborates Yue et al. (2019), who confirmed that employees' organizational trust level is highly linked to their attitudes and behaviors toward change. Moreover, organizational trust is the variable that determines the employees' continuous cooperation and excellent communication. They also added that a lack of trust can decrease employees' perceptions and engagement toward change, leading to less readiness and stronger behavioral resistance.

As a conclusion from *H3a* and *H3b*, the fourth hypothesis was also confirmed, mentioning that organizational trust plays a notable mediation role between transformational leadership and employees' reactions to change.

This study indeed offers many substantial and practical implications and contributions, concluded from the profound discussion. However, escaping some limitations was not easy, and going through them and stating them is mandatory.

Therefore, the first limitation was related to the risk of bias, since a causal relationship was used as a statistical method. Removing it was hard, despite using the absolute approximation of the collinearity to deduct the links between the studied variable summarized from the literature review. As a solution to avoid this issue, the adoption of a longitudinal research method is necessary to reach solid findings. The second limit was about the restricted context, as this study was only applied to the Hungarian service companies specialized in some specific fields. That is why it is better to generalize the context from a population as well

as field perspective or even divide employees according to their hierarchical positions.

As the third proposition, adding other moderating and mediating variables to the suggested model is highly recommended to make the readers understand the things from all outlooks, such as communication, culture, knowledge sharing, motivation, etc. To conclude, this study encourages future research to adopt both quantitative and qualitative studies to confirm the results and the findings.

CONCLUSION

The present study stands out from the earlier studies by examining the impact of transformational leadership on employees' reactions to change and accentuating readers' and managers' attention on the importance of organizational trust as a mediator in that key relationship, especially in organizational change situations.

The study affirms that transformational leadership remarkably affects employees' intention to support change and has no significant effect on employees' affective commitment. It also verifies that organizational trust positively mediates the link between transformational leadership and employees' reactions to change.

Thence, adopting a transformational leadership style helps encourage innovation and creativity in the workplace by offering an excellent, enthusiastic, and challenging work environment and boosting employees' performance and productivity. It also minimizes employees' negative attitudes and behaviors towards change, with rising interactions and good relationships with the organization and with a common vision and effective communication. In addition, it was confirmed through this investigation that trust is a crucial element to boost organizational change understanding. It helps in decreasing its uncertainties and increasing employees' learning. It also favorizes coordination and enlarges the adoption of good behaviors by leaders and their members.

This study insists then on the importance of ensuring a trustworthy environment in the organization to appreciate the extra work and higher people's willingness to be engaged in the changing process actively. It also encourages companies to avoid hierarchical structures in organizational change circumstances in the future and embrace more collaborative and collective practices instead. Furthermore, they favorize positive reactions among employees and boost their openness to it and their support.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

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