

# The Dance of Leadership: Unravelling the Impact of Leadership Styles on Employee Engagement in Malaysia's Private Sector

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## ABSTRACT

The level of employee engagement maintains a pivotal influence on overall staff and career development, as well as organizational growth. By integrating leadership and social exchange theories, this study assessed whether transformational and transactional leadership styles influence employee engagement in private sector organizations operating in the Tiger Cub Economy of Malaysia. Using snowball sampling, primary data was collected from 203 private sector staff across various industries in Malaysia through the distribution of survey questionnaires. The results of correlation and regression analyses indicated that both transformational and transactional leadership significantly increase employee engagement. Though transactional leadership demonstrated a stronger effect on engagement than transformational leadership, this difference was not statistically significant. The findings enhance the understanding of the extent to which the transformational and transactional leadership styles influence employee engagement in the private sector of a developing economy and country. The implications of the findings for theory and practice are discussed in this paper, along with future research directions.

**Keywords:** *Transformational Leadership, Transactional Leadership, Employee Engagement, Social Exchange Theory, Human Capital*

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

Effective leadership for the 21<sup>st</sup> century is an economic imperative. It ensures the successful attainability of organizational set milestones while improving employee engagement (Mone et al. 2018). A highly engagement employee could serve as an organization's most invaluable resource for enhancing the effectiveness of change management (Saad et al., 2018). Extensively researched leadership styles, like

transformational and transactional leadership, have been subject to a thorough examination to determine the most appropriate approach for leaders to manage and engage with their staff (Maaitah, 2018).

Exceptional leaders lead and motivate their teams to achieve their preferred organizational objectives and goals. This provides a business case for organizations scouting for adept leaders, as they are vital to build sustainable business models and strategies in a constantly evolving business ecosystem. Subsequently, periodical attainment of organizational milestones provides a benchmark against which their business success can be measured (Rabiul, 2022). With a need to define the concept of leadership, it is a process of how leaders can influence their subordinates toward achieving their organizational goals. Kouzes and Posner (2006) state that leaders' vision is the force that invents the future. This is true as dyadic interactions between leaders and followers create a process whereby both parties influence one another interactively, with leaders acting as change agents inspiring a shared vision pioneering through innovation and change and approaching change through incremental steps and small wins (Kouzes & Posner, 2006).

Past literature on different leadership styles highlighted several implications. First, leaders who practice varying leadership styles can motivate their subordinates to perform beyond their initial expectations and become high-potential employees (Lo et al., 2009). Second, the job satisfaction, productivity, and commitment of employees can also be influenced by different leadership styles (Voon et al. 2011). Third, the degree of employee engagement is positively associated with effective leadership styles (Popli and Rizvi 2016).

Fourth, Aboramadan and Kundi (2020) applied the social exchange theory (SET) in their study on the interactions of different leadership styles with employee engagement in the private sector. The SET explains that employees demonstrate certain reactions to the actions and attitudes of supervisors or leaders through balanced reciprocity in leader-follower relationship. Additionally, past studies showed that certain styles of leadership promote positive work performance and outcomes based on certain leader-follower interactions (Karatepe et al., 2020).

Human capital development plays a significant role in organizational sustainability (AlQershi et al., 2023; Di Fabio & Peiró, 2018; Marchiori et al., 2022; Xu & Wang, 2018). It is deemed an essential strategic resource management to ensure a firm's success (AlQershi et al., 2023; Dahiyat et al., 2021; Ganotakis et al., 2021; Bontis, 2004). Most importantly, human capital management is correlated with employee engagement. A recent research paper by Desta, Tadesse and Mulusew (2022) examined the link between leadership practices, as part of human capital management practices, and employee engagement. Their findings show an indirect positive effect of better leadership practices on employees' job performance through higher engagement levels. In turn, researchers have asserted that improved employee engagement is linked to more positive work outcomes and performance (Brunetto et al., 2014).

The SET denotes that employees will generally strive for the success of their organization when they are more motivated by good leaders (Anitha 2014; Aboramadan & Kundi 2020). However, the level of employee engagement globally is not exceedingly high, with certain data showing approximately 32% of employees worldwide are engaged in their job (Gallup Inc., 2017). For Malaysia, the 2018 Mercer Engagement Index reports that approximately one in four employees do not feel engaged at their workplace and it is one of the highest in the Asia Pacific region. Hence, this study aims to investigate whether different leadership styles play a role in influencing employee engagement in the private sector of Malaysia.

Lack of motivation and anxiety towards an uncertain working environment may be the main reasons for employee disengagement. Employers who want to achieve higher employee engagement among employees will need to understand key drivers that will enhance employee engagement, as well as factors or conditions that would cause disengagement instead (Schullery, 2013). Meanwhile, empirical evidence shows that employee engagement is declining (Richman, 2006) as cited in (Saks, 2006). The common circumstances in Malaysia causing higher employee turnover rate or attrition rates are due to poor engagement and loyalty among employees. Employee engagement levels declined from 63% in 2018 (Aon Hewitt Malaysia 2018) to 54% in 2020 as reported by the Qualtrics (2020) study. The analysis of the attrition rate reported by HR in Asia (2015) indicates that Malaysia has the third highest voluntary turnover rate (9.5%) among the countries within the Southeast Asia region. Hence, it is vital to study deeper into employee engagement issues in organizations in Malaysia and how different leadership styles can further enhance employee engagement going forward.

There have been numerous studies on the impact of different leadership styles on employee engagement. These empirical studies provide evidence of the positive relationship between employee engagement and the good practices of transformational and transactional leadership in various sectors (Voon et al. 2011; Papalexandris & Galanaki 2009; Breevaart et al. 2014) and in recent years, similar studies were completed to understand how these relationships can foster organizational growth (Soieb et al., 2015; Mansor et al. 2017). However, there are limited studies that investigate these relationships in private sector settings in Malaysia using the SET to explain any causal link between these relationships. Hence, this study focuses on two leadership styles, transformational leadership (hereafter TFL) and transactional leadership (hereafter TAL), in terms of their impact on the engagement of employees working in the Malaysian private sector. The study seeks to determine which leadership style is more widely adopted in Malaysia and influences employee engagement the most.

### ***Significance of Study***

The research results will benefit various parties, such as organizations, leaders, employees, and future researchers. It is vital that efficient leaders can deliver clear and concise messages for both the organization and employees to attain desirable goals because a highly efficient organization is always on the run with the change phenomenon. Moreover, different leadership styles should be practiced according to leaders' personal attributes suited to the organization's culture and strategy.

On the other hand, practicing an appropriate leadership style impacts not only employees' engagement but also their loyalty, job commitment and job satisfaction toward their organization. This study concentrates particularly on applying the TFL and TAL paradigms to analyse their effects on employee engagement. Hence, the discussions and findings of this study may be constructive to organizational leaders applying effective leadership to further enhance employee engagement. This, in turn, will reduce the attrition rate within the organization.

Next, employees of various organizations will benefit from the results of this study. Employees are vital in an organization as the main source of organizational success. This study may help employees understand how their level of engagement could improve their organization's overall performance by accomplishing organizational objectives and goals. Finally, this study may benefit future researchers based on the implications for future research summarized in this study.

## **2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW**

### ***Leadership***

Leadership is defined as an individual's ability to steer followers in a direction that facilitate the achievement of the organizational goals. A process of continuous influence and motivation that progressively alters the behaviours of others (Udin, 2023). Past literature stated that leadership is a vital factor contributing to positive work performance and engagement (Oyewobi, 2022; Voon et al., 2011; Zheng et al., 2020). Leadership styles are central to understanding how leaders influence employee engagement. Several leadership styles have been identified and studied (Specchia et al., 2021; Gemedu & Lee, 2020), and each can have a distinct impact on employee engagement.

### ***Transformational Leadership (TFL) Theory***

The TFL theory suggests that leaders attempt to raise subordinates' inner motivation and moral level (Hautala 2006). TFL is envisioned as an active and successful style of leadership under the full range leadership model (Turnnidge & Côté, 2019). Transformational leaders embody the following elements: (i) stimulate employees intellectually, (ii) show employee's consideration in an individualized manner; (iii) motivate employees inspirationally; and (iv) influence employees idealistically (Aboramadan & Kundi, 2020). In this way 4 I's are four dimensions of TFL that have been proposed. Burns' Theory of Transforming Leadership appears when a degree of integrity and enthusiasm are cultivated among leaders and followers and foster them to achieve their goals and purposes (Chin et al., 2019). Based on this theory, leaders have transformed the employees by enhancing higher-order needs, increasing alertness of the values, and the importance of task performance (Bass, 1985). Furthermore, Lussier and Achua (2015) suggested that followers will unconditionally contribute to achieving organizational goals when they trust, respect, and admire their transformational leaders. Extant research has highlighted the significant impact of TFL on work performance by incorporating employee engagement as a mediator (Ghadi et al., 2013).

Also, TFL has a positive effect on work engagement through the mediation of corporate social responsibility (Besieux et al., 2018).

### ***Dimensions of Transformational Leadership (TFL)***

The four dimensions of TFL are as follows:

#### ***Idealized Influence***

Idealized influence can be viewed as the charismatic manner in role modelling through which a leader exemplifies their relentlessness to help followers thereby getting their respect, trust, and admiration (Afshari 2022). Leaders who practice idealized influence will acquire their subordinates' additional efforts toward meeting high levels of development and performance (Bass & Avolio 1990).

#### ***Inspirational Motivation***

A study by Bono and Judge (2004) denotes that the leader behaviours comprising this dimension include boosting confidence, stimulating enthusiasm, and encouraging followers to use persuasive language and symbolic actions to attain visions. This makes the followers feel they are one of the significant parts of the organization (Bass and Riggio 2006). A compelling future vision is effectively communicated by transformational leaders (Jensen et al., 2018). Leaders clearly state a common objective that inspires colleagues, who are excited to help bring this vision to life. Employees are motivated by this dimension to work hard and offer their all at work (Asaar et al., 2019).

#### ***Intellectual Stimulation***

This dimension indicates the behaviour of a leader's capability to stimulate followers' intention to be innovative by taking calculated risks instead of using a traditional way (Ghadi et al., 2013). Besides, leaders with intellectual stimulation also generate innovative ideas from existing problems. Employees of transformational leaders are encouraged to challenge the existing quo, exercise critical thought, and look for novel solutions. Leaders encourage employees to actively participate in problem-solving and idea development by creating an environment that fosters intellectual stimulation (Leithwood et al., 2021). Employee engagement and job satisfaction increase (Al-dalahmeh et al., 2018) as a result of this dimension. Hence, followers have the ability and strategy to tackle problems effectively without the leader's facilitation.

#### ***Individualized Consideration***

According to Bass (1999), individualized consideration refers to a leader's concerns about the development needs of his followers. Hence, the leader assigns tasks to the followers as opportunities for growth alongside coaching and supporting them during the developing stages. To promote staff members' growth and development, transformational leaders offer them individualized coaching, mentoring, and support. They cultivate a sense of worth and gratitude by genuinely caring about each person's growth and well-being (Dong, 2017; Yücel, 2021). Higher levels of dedication and zeal among staff members are a result of this component. Furthermore, leaders with individualized consideration focus on diagnosing their subordinates' demands and capabilities.

#### ***Transactional Leadership (TAL)***

A study by Bycio et al. (1995) indicates that transactional leaders always identify their followers' needs and provide rewards for their performance and contribution. Bass (1985) denotes that transactional leaders operate within the existing culture, practice risk avoidance, and emphasize time constraints and efficiency. Aside from that, transactional contingent reward leaders offer rewards and recognition when their subordinates achieve certain goals. Burns (1978) defines there as an exchange activity that occurs between transactional leaders and followers. Furthermore, Pillai et al. (1999) also defined TAL as an exchange process in which leaders reward the subordinate's effort and performance.

TAL involves employing rewards and appreciation to compensate subordinates instead of task accomplishment (Popli and Rizvi, 2016). Followers agreed or complied to exchange rewards, praise, and resources with leaders who exhibited TAL. Followers who successfully carry out their roles and responsibilities will receive rewards and recognition as a return from transactional leaders (Podsakoff et al., 1982).

### ***Contingent Reward***

Breevaart et al. (2014) defined contingent rewards as transactional leaders providing incentives to their followers after they accomplish their missions or tasks, and this stimulates followers' task motivation. A crucial component of the transactional leadership style, which was first popularized by Bernard M. Bass and subsequently improved upon in the literature on leadership, is contingent reward (Xenikou, 2017). Contingent reward comprises tangible and intangible rewards such as bonuses and praise. Apart from that, a study by Odumeru and Ogbonna (2013) indicates that transactional leaders are more concentrated on contingent reward or penalization. Additionally, the heart of Contingent Reward lies in the recognition and reward of employees when they meet or exceed performance expectations. Transactional leaders use a system of rewards, which may include financial incentives, promotions, or other forms of recognition, to motivate employees and maintain engagement (Nielsen et al., 2019; Hossan et al., 2022).

### ***Management by exception (Active)***

According to Bass et al. (2003), management by exception, or active management, refers to leaders punishing followers who do not achieve standards for compliance and creating ineffective performance. Leaders who practice this leadership style will continually check on each subordinate's performance and give corrections if necessary, throughout the process (Odumeru & Ogbonna 2013). They anticipate subordinates' problems, monitor their behaviour, and take corrective actions before the subordinates make any mistakes (Judge and Piccolo 2004). Management by exception is a management style in which a leader is continuously involved directly in the affairs of his/her followers to avoid deviation from the main objectives. Direction is given straightaway when it is needed and errors are pointed out immediately (Hasija et al., 2019).

### ***Employee Engagement***

Employee engagement refers to employees' willingness to contribute by giving their time and effort to work with their organization (Anitha 2014). Kahn (1990) denoted that employee engagement is affected by the psychological work experience, which influences the performance among followers. Besides, employees will psychologically connect when they are engaged and cognitively focused on the team's goals. Higher levels of employee loyalty and satisfaction are formed by higher level of employee engagement (Harter et al., 2002).

Besides, several empirical works have focused on how different leadership styles influence employee engagement (Popli and Rizvi 2016; Batista-Taran et al. 2013; Othman et al. 2017; Mansor et al. 2017), while a systematic review by (Anitha 2014) confirmed some factors such as leadership, working environment, training, and career environment would influence employee engagement. The components of employee engagement are (i) vigor, which indicates a high level of energy to work; (ii) dedication, which indicates a sense of enthusiasm towards work; and (iii) absorption, which refers to the extent of immersion in work (Schaufeli et al. 2002).

### ***Vigor***

Schaufeli et al. (2002) defined vigor as "high levels of energy and mental resilience while working, the willingness to invest effort in one's work, and persistence even in the face of difficulties". According to Shirom (2003), vigor is a positive affective response when an individual interacts with significant elements during his job, comprising the interrelated sense of high energy in emotion, cognition, and physique. Employees with vigor are proactive and take initiative (Zahoor, 2020). They willingly invest extra effort and exhibit a strong commitment to their roles. Vigorous employees are more resilient in the face of challenges (Ansell et al., 2021). They demonstrate a capacity to overcome obstacles and maintain their enthusiasm for their work.

### ***Dedication***

González-Romá et al. (2006) defined "a sense of significance, enthusiasm, inspiration, pride, and challenge characterizes dedication." Schaufeli et al. (2002) preferred using the term 'dedication' instead of 'involvement', as the latter refers to identifying psychologically with one's job. Instead, the author described dedication as a higher level of involvement that is beyond common subjective identification. According to Chanana and Sangeeta (2021) dedicated employees are committed to the goals and mission of their organization. They see a clear alignment between their personal values and the values of their workplace. Dedication is often associated with intrinsic motivation (Rheinberg & Engeser, 2018).

Employees who are dedicated find meaning in their work and are less reliant on external rewards for their motivation.

### ***Absorption***

According to González-Romá et al. (2006), absorption is "fully concentrating on and being deeply engrossed in one's work, where time passes quickly, and one has difficulty detaching oneself from work." This researcher also explained that absorption occurs when an individual is entirely concentrated in their work, hardly detaches from it, and usually loses track of time. Generally, fully engaged individuals in their roles represent their psychological presence in their role activities and effectively contribute to their role performance (Kahn 1990). When employees experience absorption, they enter a state of "flow," (Marty-Dugas & Smilek, 2019) where they are highly focused, experience a sense of control, and derive great satisfaction from their work (Oluwatayo & Adetoro, 2020). Absorbed employees are less prone to distractions and are more productive (Bunjak et al., 2021). They achieve a state of deep concentration, which is conducive to high-quality work.

### ***Social Exchange Theory (SET)***

SET refers to exchanging at least two points worth of tangible or intangible actions with variable degrees of benefits or costs (Ohemeng, et al., 2020). It is also a self-initiated behaviour of individuals driven by the anticipated benefits they will receive, which typically manifest in actual gains from others (Blau, 2017). Drawing from the SET, the interplay of diverse leadership styles showcased the dynamic social exchange interactions between employees and their leaders, in which the leaders provide resources and rewards to the subordinates, which are subsequently reciprocated by their subordinates in a mutually beneficial exchange (Babalola et al., 2020). Hence, based on previous literature, this study explained and justified that when employees hold favourable perceptions of their leaders' conduct, they are more inclined to react positively, with favourable results, including heightened work engagement, better emotional commitment, and demonstrating constructive organizational citizenship behaviours.

### ***Hypothesis Development***

#### ***Transformational leadership (TFL) and employee engagement***

The influence of transformational leaders in an organization is significant to change or transform the values and norms of their employees, thus inspiring them to act beyond their expectations (Chin, Yap and Kee, 2019). According to Bin Saeed et al. (2019), transformational leadership fosters psychological empowerment—a sense of competence, significance, and autonomy at work—which in turn has a favourable effect on employee engagement. In a study, it was generated that transformational leadership and a number of employee outcomes, such as work satisfaction, organizational commitment, and performance, had a substantial positive association. Since engaged workers are more likely to be dedicated to their organizations, be happy with their work, and perform at greater levels, these outcomes are directly tied to employee engagement (Atmojo, 2015). Consequently, individuals demonstrate a greater willingness to engage and actively participate in their tasks when they possess increased self-confidence in their creative talents and abilities. As such, the hypothesis is developed as shown below:

H<sub>1</sub>: TFL positively affects employee engagement.

#### ***Transactional leadership (TAL) and employee engagement***

According to Cho et al. (2019), transactional leadership is a strategy that can be used in conjunction with transformational leadership. Transactional leaders emphasize task completion and apply contingent rewards and penalties as a means of directing and inspiring their staff. Despite being perceived as more conventional, this leadership style can nevertheless be quite effective in corporate contexts. Since past empirical studies support that TAL is significantly associated with employee engagement (Jangsiriwattana, 2019), implementing the TAL style will effectively increase the probability of employee work engagement. Also, they will show a higher level of dedication to their work. Based on this discussion, the hypothesis is stated as below:

H<sub>2</sub>: TAL positively affects employee engagement.

## Research Framework

Figure 1 presents the research framework of this study.

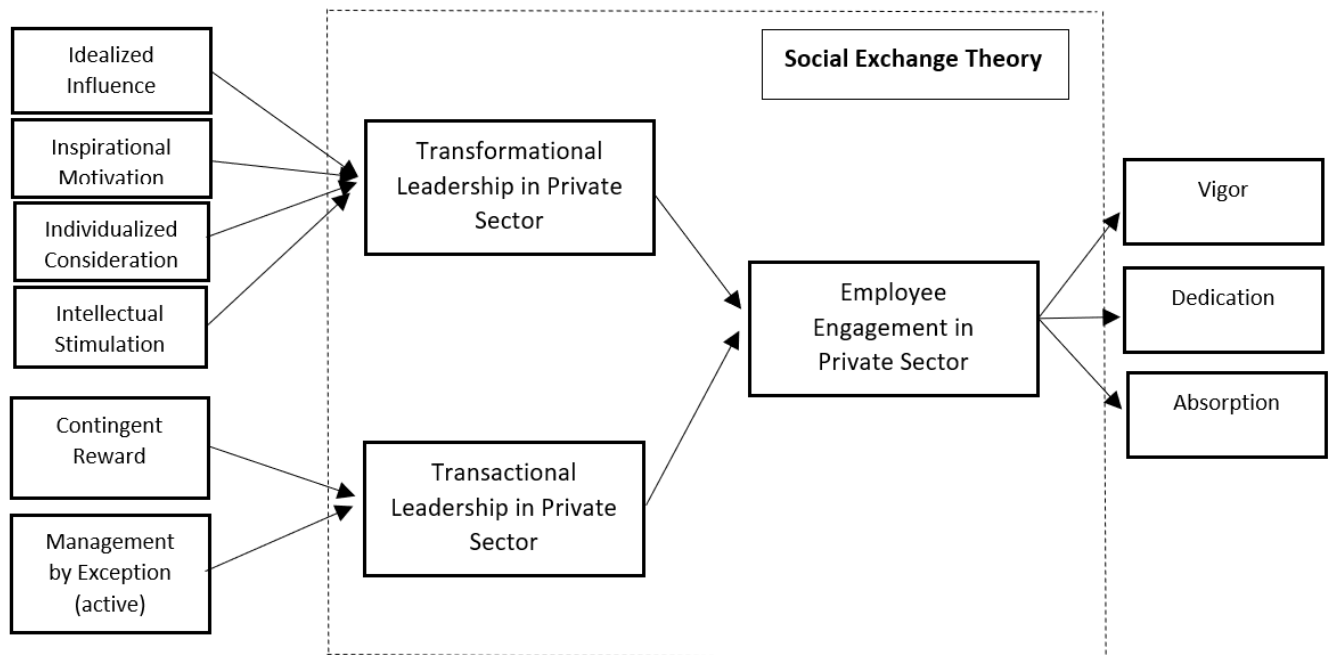


Figure 1: Research Framework

## 3.0 METHODOLOGY

### 3.1 Sampling and Data Collection

This cross-sectional study employed a survey questionnaire as the data collection instrument, following which the survey data was analysed to test the proposed hypotheses (Nanjundeswaraswamy, 2023). The population of the study encompassed employees working in the private sector in Malaysia, including Peninsular Malaysia, Sabah and Sarawak. The Department of Statistics Malaysia (2021) reported that approximately 8.437 million private sector jobs in Malaysia, with 8.242 million (97.9%) people currently employed in this sector. The study collected respondents' details such as age ranges, location of work, and employment sectors such as education, retail, sales, service, finance service and so forth. This study employed the snowball sampling technique for selecting respondents. This sampling technique has been chosen as participants can be referred by others within their network or community are often more willing to participate because there's an inherent level of trust (McCombes, 2021). The sample size of 100 to 200, as recommended by Hoyle (1995), was considered apt for the study. A total of 203 responses was acquired out of 385 distributed surveys, thus achieving a 52.7% response rate and fulfilling the desired sample size.

### 3.2 Survey Instrument

The questionnaire comprised three parts. The first part gathered data related to the respondents' perceptions of TFL and TAL, measured using 28 items from Bass and Avolio (2004)'s Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ). The TFL dimensions of intellectual stimulation, individualized consideration, idealized influence, and inspirational motivation, as well as the TAL dimensions of contingent reward and management by exception, were assessed distinctly in this section. The second part of the survey delved into elements related to employee engagement by adopting Schaufeli, Bakker and Salanova's (2006) nine-item Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES-9). The nine-item version of the UWES was chosen to test employee engagement because it has been widely used as a measurement tool for measuring employees' well-being and examining the facilitating conditions or predications demonstrated by certain employees (Schaufeli, Bakker and Salanova 2006). A 7-point Likert scale was used to rate items in the first part (from

strongly disagree to strongly agree) and the second part (from never to always). The final and third part of the survey collected the respondents' demographic information.

The reliability of the selected research instruments was analysed using Cronbach's Alpha (CA) to ensure they were suitable to measure the intended research constructs (Cronbach, 1951). The values were anticipated to vary between zero and one, where zero denotes no relationship amongst the items and one denotes complete internal consistency (Tavakol and Dennick 2011). The CA values in this study ranged from 0.79 to 0.95 (see Table 1), which were considered acceptable based on Nunnally's (1978) recommendation that internal consistency reliability values should be at least 0.6.

**Table 1: Reliability Results**

<b>Reliability Statistics</b>		
<b>Variables</b>	<b>Cronbach's Alpha</b>	<b>N of Items</b>
Transformational Leadership	0.947	20
Transactional Leadership	0.892	8
Employee Engagement	0.793	9

Table 1 tabulates the reliability of the independent constructs (i.e., TFL and TAL), and the dependent construct, which was employee engagement. All in all, there were 20 items measuring TFL, eight items measuring TAL, and nine items measuring employee engagement, with CA values of 0.947, 0.892, and 0.793, respectively. Statistically, the results showed that both the independent and dependent variables exceeded the satisfactory standard of reliability range (Nunnally, 1994) with the range from 0.7 to 0.90. Variables that achieved the standard of reliability range were valid to test the hypotheses of this study.

### 3.3 Data Analysis

The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software was employed to organize and analyse the collected data. During this process, meticulous data screening was performed to address issues like missing values, outliers, and other abnormalities. The analyses performed included respondents' demographic profiling, descriptive statistics, Pearson's correlation analysis, and multiple regression analysis.

## 4.0 RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

### Demographic Data of the Respondents

The respondents' demographic profile, which comprised their gender, age, education level, geographical location, employment industry, and current position, is reported in Table 2.

**Table 2: Respondents' Demographic Data (N=203)**

<b>Demographic Data</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>	
<b>Gender</b>	Male	90	44.3
	Female	113	55.7
<b>Age (years)</b>	Under 19	2	1.0
	20 to 29	151	74.4
	30 to 39	32	15.8
	40 to 49	14	6.9
	Above 50	4	2.0
<b>Current Location</b>	Peninsular	69	34.0
	Sabah	14	6.9
	Sarawak	120	59.1
<b>Education Level</b>	SPM	11	5.4



	STPM	7	3.4
	Diploma	18	8.9
	Degree	138	68.0
	Master's Degree	25	12.3
	PhD	4	2.0
	Education	16	7.9
	Retail	13	6.4
	Sales	17	8.4
	Service	36	17.7
	Financial Services	33	16.3
<b>Employment Industry</b>	Food & Beverage	11	5.4
	Information & Technology	20	9.9
	Telecommunication	3	1.5
	Oil & Gas Industry	14	6.9
	Construction	17	8.4
	Others	23	11.3
	Manager	16	7.9
	Assistant Manager	15	7.4
	Supervisor	18	8.9
<b>Current Position</b>	Assistant Supervisor	13	6.4
	Executive	60	29.6
	Non-executive	28	13.8
	Officer	28	13.8
	Others	25	12.3

## Descriptive Analysis of the Variables

**Table 3: Descriptive Statistics**

<b>Descriptive Statistics</b>				
	<b>Minimum</b>	<b>Maximum</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std. Deviation (SD)</b>
Transformational Leadership	2	7	5.7291	1.04384
Transactional Leadership	3	7	5.7192	0.94658
Employee Engagement	2	7	5.2020	1.15338

The descriptive statistics for both the independent and dependent variables are summarized in Table 3. The mean for TAL is 5.7192, which is only 0.009 different from the mean of TFL, which is 5.7291 (SD = 1.04384). With a standard deviation of 1.15338 for employee engagement and 0.94658 for TAL, employee engagement has the lowest mean at 5.202.

### Hypothesis Testing

Two hypotheses were tested using data analysis of the data drawn from the survey questionnaire. Pearson's correlation was utilized to determine how closely the independent and dependent variables are linearly connected. Additionally, multiple regression analysis was conducted to confirm or reject the two hypotheses.

### The Pearson's Correlation Coefficient Analysis

Pearson's correlation analysis was performed to examine the direct relationships of TFL and TAL with employee engagement. The closer the correlation value between two variables is to one, the stronger their association. Conversely, no association exists if the correlation value between two variables equals zero.

**Table 4: Pearson's Correlation Results**

Correlation		Transformational Leadership	Transactional Leadership	Employee Engagement
<b>Transformational Leadership</b>	Pearson Correlation	1	.784**	.498**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0.000	0.000
<b>Transactional Leadership</b>	Pearson Correlation	.784**	1	.537**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000		0.000
<b>Employee Engagement</b>	Pearson Correlation	.498**	.537**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.000	

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 99% confidence level (2-tailed).

Table 4 illustrates the intercorrelations among the TFL, TAL and employee engagement. Based on the statistics above, both TFL and TAL exhibited a significant correlation with employee engagement. Moreover, the correlation values (r) provided in Table 4 demonstrate the distinct strengths of correlation between the variables. Specifically, TFL displayed a significant positive correlation of 0.498 with employee engagement, while TAL indicated a stronger positive correlation of 0.537. This correlation value difference suggests that the statistical association between TAL and employee engagement is stronger than the statistical association between TFL and employee engagement.

### Multiple Regression Analysis

The multiple regression technique was also applied to evaluate the hypothesized relationships on the influences of TFL and TAL on private sector employees' engagement in Malaysia.

**Table 5: Regression Model Summary**

Model Summary				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted Square	R Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.551 <sup>a</sup>	0.304	0.297	0.96704

a. Predictors: (Constant), Transactional Leadership, Transformational Leadership

Table 5 reports the analysis summary of the values of R and R-square, where the multiple correlation coefficient, R, was 0.551. This indicated a proficient level of predictive power held by TFL and TAL towards employee engagement. Furthermore, the value of the coefficient of determination, R-square, in this study was 0.304. This showed that the independent variables of the study, TFL and TAL, could explain approximately 30.4% of the variance in employee engagement, the dependent variable.

**Table 6: ANOVA<sup>a</sup>**

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	81.684	2	40.842	43.673	.000 <sup>b</sup>
	Residual	187.035	200	0.935		
	Total	268.719	202			

a. Dependent Variable: Employee Engagement

b. Predictors: (Constant), Transactional Leadership, Transformational Leadership

Table 6 summarizes the ANOVA test result, which included the analysis of F-value and the significance value. The F-value of the analysis was recorded at 43.673. This helped to explain that the regression model was, overall, a good fit for this study's dataset, as the independent constructs could significantly estimate the dependent construct at a significance level of 0.000. The confidence level of 95% was used in this test. Hence, the p-value must be less than 0.05 to prove the significance of the effect of the independent variable on the dependent variable.

**Table 7: Multiple Regression Analysis Result****Coefficients<sup>a</sup>**

Variables	$\beta$ -Value	T-Value	P-Value
<b>Transformational Leadership</b>	0.220	2.090	0.038
<b>Transactional Leadership</b>	0.465	4.011	0.000

a. Dependent Variable: Employee Engagement

Based on Table 7, a multiple regression analysis performed had generated the results of unstandardized coefficient beta ( $\beta$ ), t statistics (t) and significance value (p) for this study.

H<sub>1</sub>: TFL positively affects employee engagement.

Hypothesis 1 (H1) tested the effect of TFL on employee engagement. The result indicated a positive beta ( $\beta$ ) value of 0.220 with a t-value of 2.090. These findings confirm a positive yet weaker effect of TFL on employee engagement, as the value of beta is closer to zero value. In other words, it meant that 22% of employee engagement was affected by leaders who applied TFL style at their workplace. Additionally, the effect of TFL on employee engagement was shown to be significant as the p-value was 0.038, which was less than 0.05. Hence, H1 was supported by the multiple regression analysis.

H<sub>2</sub>: TAL positively affects employee engagement.

Hypothesis 2 (H2) evaluated the effect of TAL on employee engagement. The results showed a positive beta ( $\beta$ ) value of 0.465 and a t-value of 4.011. This confirms a positive impact of TAL on employee engagement. In other words, 46.5% of employee engagement was influenced by transactional leaders in their organizations. This relationship is stronger than that between TFL and engagement as indicated by the higher beta value. The significance value for this hypothesis ( $p=0.000 < 0.05$ ) also supported H2, showing that TAL has a significant influence on employee engagement.

In conclusion, two hypotheses were evaluated in this study through multiple regression analysis, summarized in Table 8, and this analysis supported these two hypotheses, H1 and H2.

**Table 8: Summary of Hypothesis Results**

Hypothesis	Result
H1: TFL positively affects employee engagement.	Supported
H2: TAL positively affects employee engagement.	Supported

## 5.0 DISCUSSION

Firstly, while H1 was accepted, revealing a significant positive effect of TFL on employee engagement ( $\beta = 0.220$ ,  $t = 2.090$ ,  $p = 0.038 < 0.05$ ), it's essential to critically assess the depth of this influence. Leaders practicing TFL undoubtedly inspire their subordinates towards career success, fostering an environment conducive to positive engagement (Sultana et al., 2015). However, while this aligns with previous studies (Datche & Mukulu 2015; Al-Amin 2017; Besieux et al. 2018; Thisera & Sewwandi 2018), it's crucial to question the sustainability and depth of this engagement, especially when innovation and initiative-taking are expected from followers.

Secondly, H2's support, indicating a significant positive influence of TAL on employee engagement ( $\beta = 0.460$ ,  $t = 4.011$ ,  $p = 0.000 < 0.05$ ), raises questions about the long-term implications of such a leadership style. While transactional leaders utilize "rewards and recognition" strategies, it's worth probing the depth and longevity of loyalty and commitment these strategies foster. Is it genuine loyalty or merely transactional allegiance? The findings, though consistent with past literature (Popli & Rizvi 2016, 2015; Breevaart et al. 2014; Gangai & Agrawal 2017; Udin et al., 2022), necessitate a deeper understanding of the nuances of employee engagement under TAL.

Thirdly, the preference of Malaysian private sector employees for TAL over TFL is intriguing. While Popli and Rizvi (2016) suggest that transactional leaders have a more significant workplace impact, it's essential to critically evaluate the long-term sustainability of such a preference. Is the allure of immediate rewards overshadowing the potential long-term benefits of transformational leadership? The SET's complementarity to this finding, emphasizing engagement based on negotiated remuneration packages (Blau, 2017; Ohemeng, et al., 2020), further underscores the need for a balanced leadership approach.

In conclusion, both TFL and TAL significantly enhance the level of engagement among subordinates. However, superiors or leaders displaying TAL are preferred by private sector employees over those with TFL, in exchange for higher engagement.

## 6.0 IMPLICATIONS

This research extends the TFL and TAL theories by integrating the SET from the perspective of work engagement in the private sector in the developing country context. Although there have been numerous studies evaluating leadership theories' impact on the workforce and work performance in the developing context (Ariyabuddhiphongs & Kahn, 2017; Lumban, 2023; Truong & Hallinger, 2017), these studies vary in terms of different social, cultural background, economic status, human resources practices, and policies perspectives. To reiterate, by incorporating the SET, the present context addresses leadership styles' effect on work engagement in private organizations rather than public ones (Campbell, 2018; Van, 2016). This provides further insights into the original leadership theories from the perspectives of the context of this study.

From the practical perspective, the findings significantly impact human resource practitioners, leaders, and business stakeholders. The findings suggest that leaders should apply appropriate leadership styles to reinforce employee engagement in their organization. Alternatively, leaders can apply leadership styles to employee characteristics or categories. For example, TAL may be more suited to lead engaging, promising, or junior-ranked employees. On the other hand, organizations can consider placing transformational leaders when dealing with employees who prefer longer-term career success and progression and who are not only motivated by remuneration packages. With a growth mindset and the ability to manage changes, the organization can consider conducting leadership training to match different employees to different leaders, extending not only to mid or senior-level employees but also encompassing individuals with the potential to perform better future leadership roles. Furthermore, the improvement of reward and compensation packages can be tailored to diverse leadership styles, thereby motivating employees to showcase their creativity and innovation in their work. Hence, in turn, can indirectly contribute to the sustainability of the business model as it progresses into the future.

In the context of this study, it is evident that private-sector employees in Malaysia exhibit a higher preference for following transactional leaders, primarily due to their inclination towards earning rewards and recognition upon successful completion of work and tasks within the organizational setting. Such

findings complement the SET, and they highlight the importance of providing attractive remuneration packages to deserving workforce in the private sector in developing countries or economies.

## 7.0 LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE STUDY

This study has targeted employees working in the private sector in Malaysia. Even though this study fulfilled the required sample size as recommended by Hoyle (1995), the final sample number was still relatively low (203 respondents) and may not fully represent the whole population of employees working in the private sector in Malaysia. Moreover, most of the respondents are working in Sarawak, and the results may not be representative of Malaysia nationally. Hence, prospective future studies should try to obtain samples from a group of representative states or regions in Malaysia. In addition, qualitative methods or mixed methods can be implemented to further enhance the data collection strategies. Apart from these, future researchers may also consider conducting studies of the same in different industry contexts or involving micro businesses, small and medium-sized companies, and/or multinational companies. Finally, it is suggested to incorporate some mediator(s) and moderator factor(s) into further studies as this may generate different research outcomes.

## 8.0 CONCLUSION

In a developing country context, this research melds the TFL, TAL, and SET frameworks to probe private sector employee engagement. The results highlight the pronounced positive influence of both TFL and TAL leadership styles on engagement, indicating that varying leadership methods resonate differently with employees in private entities. Interestingly, private sector employees exhibit a stronger inclination towards transactional leaders over transformational ones. Echoing SET's principles, employees are inclined to align with transactional leaders in the private sector, motivated by the allure of superior rewards and acknowledgment in return for heightened work commitment. This emphasizes the pivotal role of compensation and incentives in galvanizing employee engagement within Malaysia's private sector.

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