



The Influence of Transformational Leadership on Employees' Organizational Citizenship Behavior: Based on Work Engagement Theory and Perceived Organizational Support Theory

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Abstract

Background and Aims: This study introduces a dual-pathway model that integrates work engagement as a mediator and perceived organizational support as a moderator in the relationship between transformational leadership and organizational citizenship behavior. Drawing on Work Engagement Theory and Perceived Organizational Support Theory, the study proposes a dual-pathway model that explains both the mechanism and the boundary conditions of leadership influence.

Methodology: A quantitative approach was employed using survey data from 380 full-time employees across various industries in China. Established measurement instruments were used to assess transformational leadership, work engagement, perceived organizational support, and OCB. Structural equation modeling (SEM), confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), and moderation/mediation analyses (using bootstrapping and interaction effects) were conducted via SPSS and AMOS.

Results: Transformational leadership significantly enhances both work engagement and OCB. Work engagement was found to mediate the relationship between leadership and OCB partially. Additionally, perceived organizational support positively moderated the effect of transformational leadership on engagement, indicating that leadership is more effective when organizational support is high.

Conclusion: The findings highlight the novelty of the dual-pathway model and provide theoretical and managerial implications for enhancing OCB in Chinese enterprises.

Keywords: Transformational Leadership; Work Engagement; Organizational Citizenship Behavior; Perceived Organizational Support; Structural Equation Modeling

Introduction

In today's dynamic and competitive organizational landscape, promoting voluntary and constructive employee behaviors such as Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB) has become





a strategic imperative. OCB encompasses discretionary actions that go beyond formal job requirements, contributing to organizational effectiveness and cohesion. Transformational leadership, characterized by inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, individualized consideration, and idealized influence, has been consistently linked to positive employee attitudes and behaviors. However, the internal mechanisms through which transformational leadership promotes OCB remain underexplored. In the context of Chinese enterprises facing rapid digital transformation and intense market competition, employees' discretionary behaviors, such as OCB, are essential for organizational resilience. Grounded in Work Engagement Theory and Perceived Organizational Support Theory, this study proposes a dual-path model to uncover how transformational leadership stimulates employees' engagement and, subsequently, their citizenship behavior. Although prior studies have linked transformational leadership to OCB, few have simultaneously examined the dual mechanisms of work engagement and organizational support, especially within the Chinese cultural context. Work engagement, defined as a positive, fulfilling work-related state of vigor, dedication, and absorption, is conceptualized as the core mediator, translating leadership influence into behavioral outcomes. Additionally, perceived organizational support, the degree to which employees believe their organization values their contributions and cares about their well-being, is introduced as a moderator that may strengthen the influence of leadership on engagement. By integrating these frameworks, the study aims to offer a deeper understanding of the psychological and contextual conditions that enable transformational leadership to foster proactive and cooperative employee conduct. This study advances the literature by proposing and testing a dual-pathway model, demonstrating how transformational leadership fosters OCB through engagement while being contingent on organizational support. For example, Namdech et al. (2024) highlighted OCB among personnel in Thailand's Prime Minister's Office, while Liu et al. (2024) emphasized leadership styles driving engagement in the digital economy. Through empirical analysis based on data from Chinese enterprises, this research contributes to the ongoing discourse on leadership effectiveness, employee motivation, and organizational sustainability.

Objectives

The study's objectives are

1. To test how transformational leadership influences employees' organizational citizenship behavior (OCB).
2. To examine whether work engagement mediates this relationship.
3. To evaluate whether perceived organizational support strengthens (moderates) the effect of leadership on engagement and OCB.





4. To develop and validate a dual-pathway model combining these mechanisms in Chinese enterprises.

Literature Review

Transformational Leadership and Organizational Citizenship Behavior

Transformational leadership has been widely studied as a powerful managerial approach that inspires and motivates followers to exceed performance expectations. Leaders who display transformational behaviors—such as articulating a compelling vision, showing individualized consideration, encouraging innovative thinking, and modeling ideal behavior are found to cultivate trust and commitment among employees. Numerous studies have demonstrated that transformational leadership significantly enhances Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB), which includes voluntary, extra-role activities such as helping colleagues, being loyal to the organization, and showing initiative. According to Organ (1988), OCB is critical for promoting organizational effectiveness. Transformational leaders create an emotionally supportive environment where employees feel empowered and motivated to contribute beyond their formal roles.

Work Engagement as a Mediator

Work engagement refers to a fulfilling and persistent psychological state characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption in work tasks. Work Engagement Theory explains the motivational mechanism through which leadership behaviors energize employees to go beyond formal roles, while Perceived Organizational Support Theory highlights how organizational context shapes employees' willingness to reciprocate through OCB. Rooted in Kahn's (1990) theory of personal engagement, employees who are engaged are more likely to exhibit proactive and discretionary behaviors. Some studies (e.g., XANTHOPOULOU et al., 2009) reported weak or non-significant links between transformational leadership and OCB, suggesting contextual moderators may play a role. Research has shown that transformational leadership fosters engagement by stimulating employees' intrinsic motivation, psychological empowerment, and alignment with organizational values. Engaged employees are more emotionally invested and willing to go the extra mile, thereby displaying higher levels of OCB. Work engagement thus functions as a key mediating mechanism in the relationship between leadership and citizenship behavior, as leaders energize employees who, in turn, take initiative and show commitment through discretionary efforts.

Perceived Organizational Support as a Moderator

Perceived Organizational Support (POS) is defined as employees' belief that the organization values their contributions and cares about their well-being. According to Eisenberger et al. (1986),



high POS enhances employees' sense of psychological safety, obligation, and reciprocity, which fosters stronger work attitudes and performance. When employees perceive high levels of organizational support, they are more responsive to transformational leadership behaviors and more likely to be engaged and committed. POS also amplifies the effectiveness of transformational leadership by providing an enabling environment where employees feel supported in acting autonomously and proactively. Thus, POS is posited as a moderating variable that strengthens the relationship between transformational leadership and work engagement, indirectly affecting the overall level of OCB displayed by employees.

Conceptual Framework

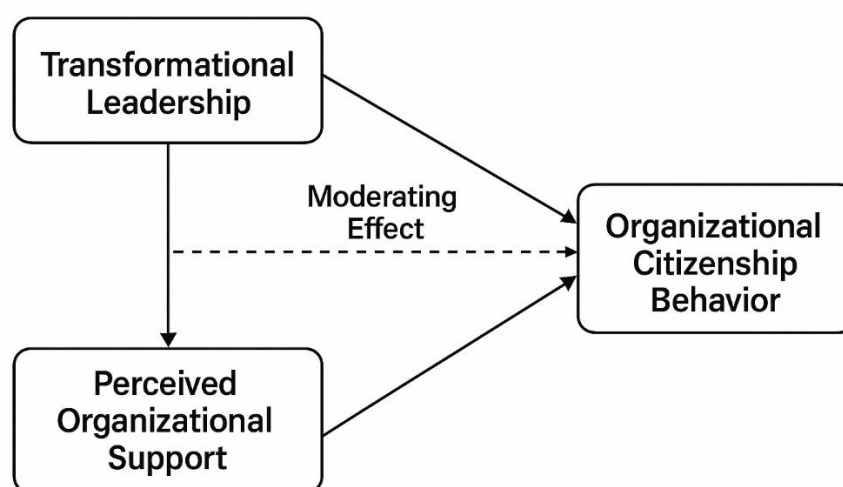


Figure 1 Conceptual Framework

Methodology

This study employed a quantitative research design to examine the relationship between transformational leadership and employees' organizational citizenship behavior (OCB), with work engagement as a mediator and perceived organizational support as a moderator. This study employed convenience sampling, which may limit generalizability. The sample was skewed toward service industries, which should be considered when interpreting results. Data were collected through an online questionnaire survey administered to full-time employees in various industries across China. A total of 400 questionnaires were distributed using convenience sampling, and 380 valid responses were retained for analysis, resulting in a valid response rate of 95%. The sample included respondents from both private and state-owned enterprises, covering sectors such as manufacturing, services, and technology.



To test for common method variance, Harman's single-factor test was applied, and no single factor explained more than 40% variance. A marker variable was also included to reduce CMV concerns. The scales were translated into Chinese using back-translation, and prior studies have validated their use in the Chinese context. Cultural values emphasizing collectivism and respect for authority may have influenced employees' perceptions of leadership and support. To ensure the validity and reliability of the study, well-established measurement instruments were used. Transformational leadership was measured using the 20-item scale developed by Bass and Avolio (1995), encompassing four dimensions: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. Work engagement was assessed with the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES) developed by Schaufeli et al. (2002), which includes three dimensions: vigor, dedication, and absorption. Perceived organizational support was measured using the 8-item short form of the POS scale by Eisenberger et al. (1986). Organizational citizenship behavior was evaluated with the 16-item scale by Podsakoff et al. (1990), covering helping behavior, civic virtue, and conscientiousness. All items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

Descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, and reliability tests (Cronbach's α) were conducted using SPSS 26.0. Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) and structural equation modeling (SEM) were performed with AMOS 24.0 to test the measurement model and the hypothesized paths. The mediating effect of work engagement was assessed using the bootstrapping method with 5,000 resamples, while the moderating effect of perceived organizational support was examined through interaction term analysis. The overall model fit was evaluated based on χ^2/df , CFI, TLI, RMSEA, and SRMR, with values meeting the accepted thresholds indicating good model fit.

Results

The statistical results derived from SPSS and AMOS analyses provided strong empirical support for the proposed model. Descriptive statistics showed that the average scores for transformational leadership ($M = 3.78$, $SD = 0.59$), work engagement ($M = 3.64$, $SD = 0.63$), perceived organizational support ($M = 3.70$, $SD = 0.61$), and organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) ($M = 3.82$, $SD = 0.58$) were all above the mid-point, indicating generally favorable responses among participants. Reliability tests demonstrated high internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha values ranging from 0.88 to 0.92. These details are summarized in Table 1.



Table 1 Descriptive Statistics and Reliability Coefficients

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation	Cronbach's α
Transformational Leadership	3.78	0.59	0.91
Work Engagement	3.64	0.63	0.89
Perceived Organizational Support	3.7	0.61	0.88
Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB)	3.82	0.58	0.92

The significant effect of TL on WE ($\beta=0.58$) indicates that transformational leaders substantially enhance employees' energy and enthusiasm, which in turn strongly predicts OCB ($\beta=0.53$). This suggests that leaders' inspirational behaviors can mobilize discretionary effort beyond job requirements. Correlation analysis revealed significant positive relationships between all variables. Transformational leadership was significantly correlated with work engagement ($r = .62$), perceived organizational support ($r = .58$), and OCB ($r = .66$). Additionally, work engagement was positively correlated with perceived organizational support ($r = .59$) and OCB ($r = .64$), and perceived organizational support correlated with OCB ($r = .60$). All correlations were statistically significant at the $p < .001$ level. The full correlation matrix is presented in Table 2.

Table 2 Correlation Matrix

	1	2	3	4
1. Transformational Leadership	1	0.62	0.58	0.66
2. Work Engagement	0.62	1	0.59	0.64
3. Perceived Organizational Support	0.58	0.59	1	0.6
4. Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB)	0.66	0.64	0.6	1

Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was conducted to assess the fit of the measurement model. All factor loadings were greater than 0.70 and statistically significant, supporting convergent validity. The fit indices demonstrated good model fit: $\chi^2/df = 2.13$, CFI = 0.961, TLI = 0.954, RMSEA = 0.049, and SRMR = 0.041. These values met established thresholds for acceptable model fit. See Table 3 for model fit indices.

Table 3 Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA)

Fit Index	Value	Recommended Threshold
Chi-square/df	2.13	< 3.00
CFI	0.961	> 0.90
TLI	0.954	> 0.90
RMSEA	0.049	< 0.08
SRMR	0.041	< 0.08

Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) results supported all hypothesized direct and indirect relationships. Transformational leadership had a significant positive effect on work engagement ($\beta = 0.58$, $p < .001$) and OCB ($\beta = 0.35$, $p < .001$). Work engagement significantly predicted OCB ($\beta = 0.53$, $p < .001$) and served as a partial mediator in the relationship between transformational leadership and OCB. The indirect effect ($\beta = 0.31$, $p < .001$) was confirmed using a 5,000-sample bootstrapping procedure. The path coefficients are summarized in Table 4.

Table 4 SEM Path Coefficients

Path	β	p-value	Effect Type
Transformational Leadership $\rightarrow$ Work Engagement	0.58	< .001	Direct
Work Engagement $\rightarrow$ OCB	0.53	< .001	Direct
Transformational Leadership $\rightarrow$ OCB (direct)	0.35	< .001	Direct
Transformational Leadership $\rightarrow$ OCB (indirect via WE)	0.31	< .001	Indirect

Moderation analysis further revealed that perceived organizational support significantly moderated the effect of transformational leadership on work engagement (interaction $\beta = 0.19$, $p < .01$). A simple slope test indicated that under conditions of high perceived support, the positive effect of transformational leadership on work engagement was more pronounced. This confirms the hypothesized interaction effect, strengthening the theoretical argument that organizational context shapes leadership effectiveness.

In conclusion, the results empirically validate the proposed research model, showing that transformational leadership positively affects organizational citizenship behavior through both



direct and indirect pathways, with work engagement serving as a mediator and perceived organizational support acting as a boundary condition that enhances engagement outcomes.

Discussion

This study extends transformational leadership theory by integrating motivational (engagement) and contextual (support) mechanisms into a dual-pathway model, offering a more nuanced explanation of how leaders drive OCB. This study investigated the impact of transformational leadership on employees' organizational citizenship behavior (OCB), highlighting the mediating role of work engagement and the moderating influence of perceived organizational support. The results offered robust empirical evidence in support of the hypothesized relationships, contributing to both theoretical development and managerial practice in the field of organizational behavior.

First, the findings confirmed that transformational leadership significantly enhances OCB. This aligns with prior studies (e.g., Podsakoff et al., 1996; Wang et al., 2011), which emphasize that leaders who inspire, intellectually stimulate, and care about their employees foster an environment conducive to voluntary, extra-role behaviors. The present research strengthens this linkage by demonstrating that transformational leaders directly influence employees' willingness to go beyond their prescribed duties, contributing to organizational cohesion and performance.

Second, the partial mediating role of work engagement adds depth to our understanding of how leadership behaviors translate into employee actions. Employees who feel energetic, dedicated, and absorbed in their work are more likely to display citizenship behaviors. This supports the theoretical underpinnings of Kahn's (1990) personal engagement theory and the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model, suggesting that leadership functions as a key job resource that fosters psychological investment and discretionary effort.

Third, the moderating role of perceived organizational support offers important insights into boundary conditions. The relationship between transformational leadership and work engagement was significantly stronger when employees perceived that their organization cared about their well-being and valued their contributions. These findings echo social exchange theory (Blau, 1964), highlighting that mutual trust and reciprocity amplify leadership effectiveness. Organizations that combine supportive environments with effective leadership can more successfully channel employee energy toward positive organizational behaviors.

The integration of these findings contributes to a more comprehensive model of employee motivation and behavior, bridging leadership, engagement, and contextual support. Importantly, the study not only confirms established relationships but also offers a nuanced understanding of





the mechanisms and conditions under which transformational leadership yields optimal outcomes.

However, this study is not without limitations. The cross-sectional design limits the ability to make causal inferences. Future research could employ longitudinal or experimental designs to validate the temporal sequence of these relationships. Additionally, the use of self-reported data may introduce common method bias, although statistical checks indicated that such bias was not severe. Future studies could incorporate multi-source or behavioral measures to strengthen validity.

In conclusion, the study advances current knowledge by demonstrating how transformational leadership fosters proactive behaviors through psychological and contextual mechanisms. For managers, it underscores the importance of not only practicing transformational behaviors but also cultivating a supportive organizational climate that enables such leadership to flourish. This cross-sectional study relies on self-reported data and convenience sampling, which limit causal inferences and generalizability. Future studies should adopt longitudinal designs, multi-source data, and cross-cultural comparisons to test the robustness of the dual-pathway model.

Conclusion

This study explored the influence of transformational leadership on organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) through the mediating mechanism of work engagement and the moderating effect of perceived organizational support. Drawing upon the frameworks of work engagement theory and perceived organizational support theory, the research offered an integrative model that explains both how and under what conditions leadership affects employees' discretionary behaviors.

The findings demonstrate that transformational leadership significantly enhances employees' OCB, both directly and indirectly through increased work engagement. Moreover, the effect of transformational leadership on engagement is amplified when perceived organizational support is high, confirming the importance of a supportive organizational climate in maximizing leadership effectiveness. These results collectively validate the proposed hypotheses and highlight the dual pathways—psychological and contextual—through which transformational leadership exerts influence.

Theoretically, the study contributes to the leadership and organizational behavior literature by clarifying the mechanisms linking leadership to extra-role behavior. Practically, the results suggest that organizations seeking to foster OCB should not only invest in developing transformational leadership capabilities but also strengthen systems that make employees feel





supported and valued. Leadership training programs, combined with HR policies promoting recognition, wellness, and employee voice, can generate synergistic effects.

Future research could address the limitations of this study by employing longitudinal designs to capture dynamic changes over time and including multi-level or multi-source data to enhance robustness. Expanding the sample beyond Chinese enterprises and considering cultural variables may also help generalize and contextualize the findings in broader organizational settings.

In conclusion, this study provides a theoretically grounded and empirically validated model of how transformational leadership fosters organizational citizenship behavior. By emphasizing the roles of engagement and organizational support, it offers meaningful guidance for leaders and organizations aiming to cultivate a proactive, committed, and high-performing workforce.

In sum, this study introduces and validates a dual-pathway model linking transformational leadership to OCB through work engagement and moderated by perceived organizational support. The findings advance theory and provide actionable guidance for organizations seeking to enhance employees' discretionary contributions.

Recommendation

1. Policy Recommendations

Policy makers in organizations can support the development of transformational leadership by integrating it into leadership training programs and HR policies.

Policymakers in enterprises should reinforce organizational support with recognition, employee wellness initiatives, and fair treatment, establishing a climate that magnifies leadership impact.

Incorporate policies that reinforce voice, participation, and trust-building, consistent with social exchange theory principles.

2. Practice Recommendations

Managers can actively display transformational behaviors (inspiration, intellectual stimulation, individualized consideration, and role modeling) to inspire employees to exhibit extra-role behavior (OCB).

Organizations can promote work engagement by providing job resources, recognition, and opportunities for meaningful work experiences.

HR practitioners can implement continuous feedback and recognition mechanisms, making employees feel valued and supported, thereby enhancing engagement and OCB.

3. Further Research Recommendations





Conduct longitudinal studies to test the causal relationships and capture the dynamic effects of leadership.

Employ multi-source data (e.g., supervisor ratings, peer evaluations) to reduce self-report bias.

Test the model in different cultural contexts to explore the generalizability of the dual-pathway beyond Chinese enterprises.

Investigate additional moderators (e.g., organizational culture, digital transformation, job resources) to refine the framework.

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