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# Measuring Transformational Leadership, Employee Engagement, and Employee Productivity: Retail Stores

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This is to certify that the doctoral study by

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has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,
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2021

Abstract

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Productivity: Retail Stores

by

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MA, The University of Baltimore, 2009

BA, Morgan State University, 2006



Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Business Administration



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December 2021

Abstract

Retail stores are less profitable because of poor productivity from disengaged employees.

Retail store leaders must prioritize employee productivity, as low productivity can

negatively impact business performance with financial consequences. Grounded in

transformational leadership theory and the theory of work engagement, the purpose of

this quantitative correlational study was to examine the relationship between

transformational leadership, employee engagement, and employee productivity in retail

stores. Survey responses were collected from 119 nonmanagerial employees in the retail

sector in the eastern United States. The results of the multiple linear regression analysis

indicated the model was statistically significant, $F(7, 112) = 35.149$, $p < .01$, $R^2 = .69$.

The only two significant individual predictors were individual consideration ($t = 4.10$, $p <$

.01) and vigor ($t = 5.36$, $p < .01$). A key recommendation is for retail store leaders to

enact strategies promoting vigor- employees who work with high energy and effort

levels, and to employ a transformational leadership style, particularly showing employees

individualized consideration. Creating such a positive working environment for

employees will improve their productivity. Implications for positive social change

include the potential for retail managers to increase competitiveness for retail stores. The

success of retail businesses, driven by improved worker productivity, may ensure

financial stability for workers, families, and communities.

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Dedication

I am dedicating this study to my late grandfather, John DeSilva who was a man of few words with zero tolerance for failure. My grandfather exemplified the true qualities of leadership and perseverance and did so with my grandmother, Jean DeSilva by his side. I appreciate all of those family members and friends that positively contributed to when overall wellbeing and academic journey. Being the first person to obtain a doctorate in my family is a huge accomplishment and I  hope to pave the way for others!

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I would like thank the man above, Jesus Christ for never letting me lose faith during this journey and keeping me grounded throughout uncertain moments. I could not have completed this journey without my original committee members Dr. Casale, Dr. Pearo, and Dr. Schaefer. I appreciate Dr. Casale for making sure my study was given the attention needed  to get to the finish line. I am forever grateful for those who made this journey possibly. I appreciate the support from my cohort. I am proud of myself for not giving up and staying motivated during moments of uncertainty.

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Section 1: Foundation of the Study

Business leaders continue to identify and pursue effective managers who empower followers to achieve high morale and productivity (Rapp et al., 2020). While there is no evidence of employee engagement linked to low employee productivity, Moletsane et al. (2019) identified low employee engagement as a factor impacting employee productivity. For business leaders to sustain a competitive advantage, they must employ qualified managers who demonstrate the leadership qualities that positively influence employee performance. In this doctoral study, I examine the relationship between transformational leadership, employee engagement, and employee productivity. The findings of this study may provide managers with improved knowledge and data to achieve better productivity outcomes with retail store employees.

**Background of the Problem**

Researchers have shown that when employees are engaged, productivity increases, and organizations become more stable and successful (Osborne & Hammoud, 2017; Turner, 2020). However, when employees are not engaged, productivity is likely to decrease, leading to adverse outcomes such as lower revenues, higher employee turnover, and reduction in quality of services or goods (Osborne & Hammoud, 2017; Turner, 2020). Implementing employee engagement measures in a leadership style directly impacts employee engagement and employee productivity (Boyd, 2019; Popli & Rizvi, 2017; Williams et al., 2019). However, the role of leadership style in engaging and boosting clothing retail employees' engagement and productivity remains understudied, even as retail stores are becoming increasingly less profitable (Popli & Rizvi, 2017). An

organization's employee engagement has profound effects on a company's overall success, and leadership style is essential in the promotion of positive employee engagement. A strong leader will prompt employee engagement, drive performance, and work to create a positive organizational climate. Organizational leaders who promote employee engagement increase motivation and morale (Baldoni, 2013; Turner, 2020). Other positive outcomes associated with employee engagement are higher employee retention rates, increased workplace safety, and better health among the workforce.

## Problem Statement

Organizational leaders continue to endure financial losses because of low employee productivity (Kalogiannidis, 2020). Employee productivity loss in the United States costs businesses approximately $300 million a year, causing businesses to underperform (Bialowolski et al., 2020). The general business problem is that some retail stores are less profitable because of poor productivity from disengaged employees. The specific business problem is that some retail store managers possess little knowledge about the relationship between transformational leadership, employee engagement, and employee productivity.

## Purpose Statement

The purpose of this quantitative correlational study is to examine the relationship between transformational leadership, employee engagement, and employee productivity in retail stores. The predictor variables are the dimensions of transformational leadership (i.e., idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration) and the dimensions of employee engagement (i.e.,

dedication, vigor, and absorption). The outcome variable is employee productivity. The target population consists of retail clothing store employees who are not managers in Northwest Washington, DC, Southern Maryland, and Arlington and Alexandria, Virginia.

A multiple linear regression analysis was used to determine the relationship between the predictor variables of transformational leadership and employee engagement and the outcome variable of employee productivity. The positive social change may include reduced employee turnover rates, leading to higher employee retention. As a result of higher employee retention, business leaders may develop new job opportunities within the communities, creating a positive cash flow to the business. The positive impact on higher employee retention may also lead to cost savings to the business, further generating greater economic growth outcomes.

## Nature of the Study

For this study, I selected a quantitative research method to determine whether there is a relationship between the predictor variables and outcome variable. I did not select qualitative research, as qualitative research does not entail measuring relationships. Barnham (2015) claimed that the qualitative research method allows the researcher to answer the "why" of a research phenomenon through deeper understandings and integrative strategies. A mixed-method approach does not support this study, as mixed-method research requires a combination of qualitative and quantitative work, which was not feasible within the intended time frame. This study did not require participants to explain their feelings or lived experiences, which are obtained through a natural group setting. Quantitative research best supported the research problem and research question,

as I could show whether there is a statistically significant relationship between the predictor variables and outcome variable.

Regarding quantitative research designs, I did not select an experimental design, as there was not a random selection of participants based on comparison groups (Saunders et al., 2015), nor did I select a quasi-experimental design, as the research study does require the intentional selection of groups or a controlled group (Rutberg & Bouikidis, 2018). Rather, I selected a correlational design. Aggarwal and Ranganathan (2016) defined correlation as a statistical tool used by researchers to determine the degree of association between quantifiable variables. Using a correlational design allows a researcher to assess the strength and the nature of the relationship between the predictor variables and outcome variable. In this study, I used a correlational design to examine the relationship between transformational leadership, employee engagement, and employee productivity within retail stores.

## Research Question

The following research question guided the study: What relationship, if any, exists between transformational leadership, employee engagement, and productivity?

## Hypotheses

$H_0$: There is no significant relationship between any of the dimensions of transformational leadership or employee engagement and the outcome of productivity.

$H_a$: There is a statistically significant relationship between one or more of the dimensions of transformational leadership or employee engagement and the outcome of productivity.

**Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical frameworks supporting this doctoral study are transformational leadership theory and the theory of employee engagement. The transformational leadership theory is an approach used by leaders to influence followers' performance and creativity (Wang et al., 2016). Burns (1978) introduced the transformational leadership theory as a method for leaders to pursue a deeper relationship with followers to evoke higher motivation and morality within the workplace. Bass further examined transformational theory in 1985 by explaining how transformational leadership can be measured, further examining follower motivation and employee performance (Bass, 1985). As Bass theorized transformational leadership, he identified the dimensions of the transformational leadership style as (a) idealized influence, (b) inspirational motivation, (c) intellectual stimulation, and (d) individualized attention.

In support of the transformational theory, Kahn introduced the theory of employee engagement in 1990. Kahn's theory allowed leaders to observe and analyze employee behavior (Kahn, 1990). Evaluating workplace behavior allows managers to identify factors that contribute to employee engagement and disengagement. Kahn's research identified three psychological conditions influencing employee work engagement: meaningfulness, safety, and availability (Kahn, 1990). These psychological conditions, per Kahn (1990), are associated with work engagement, composed of dedication, vigor, and absorption. Together, the theories support the inclusion of the predictor variables, as predictors of the employee productivity.

## Operational Definitions

*COVID-19*: A global pandemic infecting and transmitted by human respiration (Webber, 2020).

## Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

This section provides the assumptions, limitations, and delimitations of the current study. Assumptions are considered real and self-evident facts; however, no formal testing of assumptions is completed (Simon & Goes, 2013). Akaeze (2016) defined limitations as multiple factors within a study that are uncontrolled. Limitations are unavoidable consequences of the choices made regarding methodology and theory. Delimitations are conscious choices made by the researcher that define the scope of the study (Simon & Goes, 2013).

### Assumptions

Assumptions are underlying foundational truths (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). These truths must hold for the study to have meaning, but they cannot be straightforwardly tested and hence must be assumed to hold (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). There are a few necessary assumptions within this study. The first assumption is that employee engagement, leadership style, and employee productivity can be meaningfully assessed from a quantitative standpoint. The second assumption is that leaders in the retail industry are interested in improving employee productivity. The third assumption exists that all persons who complete surveys were honest and forthright in their answering.

**Limitations**

Research limitations are unavoidable consequences related to the researcher's choices while completing a study (Simon & Goes, 2013). First, there are several limitations to sampling. Some degree of bias may be present within the sample, preventing it from being fully representativeness. The possibility of such self-selection bias arises from the fact that the participants must self-select to participate in this study by expressing interest and agreeing to participate (Schaurer & Weiß, 2020). The risk of some self-selection bias is unavoidable given that the requirements of ethical research necessitate that all participation must be voluntary (Ertmann et al., 2020). Participants were also all nonmanagerial employees, reducing the generalizability of the results to persons within management. All persons were from the areas of Northwest Washington, DC, Southern Maryland, and Arlington and Alexandria, Virginia, so results may not be generalizable to outside sites.

In addition to limitations with sampling, rules exist regarding the use of self-report instruments to collect data. Although self-report measures are ideal for collecting opinion-based data from participants, individuals may answer how they believe they should, regardless of accuracy or truthfulness (Grimm, 2010). This phenomenon is known as social desirability bias (Grimm, 2010). To mitigate social desirability bias, I informed all participants about the importance of truthful answers, and participants gave informed consent to participate. I notified participants of their right to cease participation without fear of retribution.

**Delimitations**

This research study has multiple delimitations. First, all participants were at least 18 years of age. Persons under 18 are defined as a vulnerable group of participants and are not readily able to consent (Laydner et al., 2017). All participants were clothing retail employees in nonmanagerial positions, which may decrease the generalizability of the study results to different retail types. Retail employees of other goods could not participate in this study, nor could managers or upper-level personnel. The delimitation consisted of nonmanagerial, retail employees in the areas of Northwest Washington, DC, Southern Maryland, and Arlington and Alexandria, Virginia. I did not consider individuals outside of these areas as part of the sample.

**Significance of the Study**

Disengaged employees lead to low productivity and low profitability. This study is significant to business practice, as retail clothing stores managers can develop a framework to understand factors that influence employee productivity. Specifically, the research findings may be of value to business leaders who seek to understand how transformational leadership affects employee engagement and employee productivity. Business leaders may use this information to educate retail store managers on why a leadership style change may improve employee engagement and productivity. My study findings may influence retail store managers to adopt new leadership styles that promote effective communication to reduce employee attrition and sustain profitability. The outcome of improved productivity may result in reduced stress in employees and

improved work culture. Further, this study's results may allow business leaders to improve internal and external relationships with employees, customers, and stakeholders.

## A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature

Research on leadership has been popular throughout the 20th and 21st centuries (Hung & Fedynich, 2019; Miska & Mendenhall, 2018). Researchers have theorized different leadership roles and styles. They have also provided supporting evidence to that leadership predicts success or failure in all sizes of retail businesses (Bronnenberg & Ellickson, 2015; Geyskens, 2018). Examining retailing requires a multifaceted research approach to determine what variables keep retailers at high levels of business success (Dekimpe & Geyskens, 2019). All of these ideas provide background for this study. Another contextual aspect that informs the present study is the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on retailers and how it may influence the relationships between key variables such as transformational leadership, employee engagement, and employee productivity.

### Strategies for Searching the Literature

To acquire sources of academic literature, I used the electronic journal databases Google Scholar, JSTOR, Business Source Complete, and EBSCO Academic Search Complete. I carried out the literature search using the following keywords: *transformational leadership*, *leadership styles*, *employee engagement*, *burnout*, *productivity*, and *profit*. I took care to ensure that I used literature published between the years 2017 and 2021 in at least 85% of the citations (see Table 1). A small number of older seminal sources provided foundational information to this study.

**Table 1**

*Frequency and Percentage of Resources Within the Literature Review*

| Resources | Within 5 years | Older than 5 years | Total | % |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Books | 10 | 3 | 13 | 13.0 |
| Dissertations | 4 | 0 | 4 | 4.0 |
| Peer-reviewed articles | 77 | 5 | 82 | 82.0 |
| Other | 1 | 0 | 1 | 1.0 |
| Total | 92 | 8 | 100 | 100 |

**Application to the Applied Business Problem**

Retail research on leadership style, management, and success factors has provided an abundance of expert opinions (Kanwall et al., 2019; Sarwar et al., 2017). A variety of studies offer different views on theories of leadership and practical application of leadership styles (Hag & Chandio, 2017; Tarsik et al., 2015). However, as the current world climate has changed with the impact of COVID-19 on businesses, more research is needed to determine what aspects of leadership, motivation, and engagement have assisted in the successful continuation of retail businesses. This study is intended to fill the gap regarding up-to-date research on the relationships between transformational leadership, employee engagement, and employee productivity in the age of COVID-19.

**Retail Industry: COVID-19 Impacts**

The impact of COVID-19 has been widespread through industries globally. The pandemic's effect has already affected society, disrupting the lives of individuals and the function of businesses alike. The retail sector alone has experienced critical changes in short- and long-term survival (Donthu & Gustafsson, 2020). Guiding factors on retail shopping changed during the pandemic, increasing the need to evaluate a successful leadership style in the efficacious retail business. In particular, the pandemic has caused

much of the population to prefer online shopping (Grashuis et al., 2020). Social distancing protocols have caused a drastic shift in the retail environment, one which has long relied on in-person sales (Donthu & Gustafsson, 2020). Small retail businesses, in particular, have been impacted by this phenomenon, given that they often rely on in-person customer interaction.

The new environment combines both existing and novel problems for retail industry owners, leaders, and managers. The facets of the retail sector in the COVID-19 economy include inventory proficiency, changes in their supply chain, and moderating items for a delivery system (Roggeveen & Sethuraman, 2020). Media professionals have examined the problems associated with business competition during the COVID-19 pandemic, directing their inquiries as to what sort of disruptions the sector has handled successfully and what role leadership style has played in these successes (Donthu & Gustafsson, 2020; Pantano et al., 2020; Roggeveen & Sethuraman, 2020). However, few studies are available investigating the type of leadership style that supports the sustainability of retail businesses during the COVID-19 pandemic. Hence, there is an eminently relevant gap in the existing literature that this study is intended to address.

**Transformational Leadership Theory**

The theoretical framework supporting this doctoral study is composed of transformational leadership theory and the theory of employee engagement. Burns (1978) introduced the transformational leadership theory as a method for leaders to pursue a deeper relationship with followers to evoke higher motivation and morality within the workplace. Burns held that individuals within an organization or society could be

motivated by leaders who expressed a high degree of morality. Individuals who

witnessed leaders acting with what they perceived as proper morality were more likely to

follow. Thus, such leaders convey a greater ability to lead and to provoke productivity in

their followers (Burns, 1978). Burns further described transformational leadership as a

mutually beneficial process where individuals and leaders iteratively raise each other to a

higher level of motivation and morality through the sharing of ideas and displays of

morality. This iterative process is fundamental to transformational leadership and sets it

apart from other leadership styles, which take a more dictatorial approach (Burns, 1978).

Though leaders can use transformational leadership in the absence of a specific set of

moral values connected with spirituality or religion (Northouse, 2016), Burns emphasized

the importance of leadership working cooperatively with employees and demonstrating

the values in themselves, such as diligence, commitment, and hard work, that they would

wish to see in their employees.

Though transformational leadership theory was first proposed by Burns (1978), its

modern formulation was developed by Bass (1985). Bass's conceptualization of

transformational leadership was developed through a study of the characteristics of the

most charismatic and successful United States presidents. In Bass's conceptualization of

the transformational leader, the primary unit of measurement of transformational

leadership is a leader's ability to influence their employees or subordinates. Bass

theorized that subordinates of a transformational leader would feel positive emotions

towards the leader like trust, admiration, respect, and loyalty. The feelings confer on the

leader a greater ability to influence their subordinates. Based on his understanding of

transformational leadership, Bass proposed a four-dimensional conceptualization of transformational leadership, containing the dimensions of (a) idealized influence, (b) inspirational motivation, (c) intellectual stimulation, and (d) individualized consideration. Avolio and Bass (1999) later developed the full-range model of leadership styles, which combined transformational leadership, transactional leadership, and laissez-faire leadership styles. However, the same four dimensions of transformational leadership remain.

The idealized influence dimension reflects leaders' ability to lead by example or provide their followers with an aspirational ideal toward which to strive (Bass, 1985). The dimension of inspirational motivation reflects transformational leaders inspiring their followers rather than relying on material rewards or other transactional forms of motivation (Bass, 1985). Intellectual stimulation encompasses a transformational leader offering followers tasks that are engaging and challenging, thereby avoiding boredom and disinterest (Bass, 1985). Last, individualized consideration means that a transformational leader interacts with each follower as an individual and attempts to address the specific needs, concerns, and opinions of that follower (Bass, 1985). I discuss these dimensions in greater detail later in the review. Taken together, the dimensions convey the notion of a transformational leader as someone who leads actively, engages followers, and effectively transforms them. Rather than dictatorially leading individuals, transformational leaders can inspire and encourage their followers to challenge old organizational norms and develop new ways of handling information or tasks. This

process can lead to greater organizational efficiency, employee self-efficacy, and employee satisfaction (Bass, 1985).

Because of these outcomes, researchers have long used transformational leadership theory as a lens through which to assess how leaders influence their followers. Transformational leadership establishes a connection between leader and followers, resulting in greater motivation for followers to reach their highest potential (Northouse, 2016). Leaders use the transformational leadership theory to influence followers' performance and creativity (Wang et al., 2016). Employee work performance and employee behaviors are linked to positive organizational outcomes when leaders use the theory, according to Wang et al. (2016). In this study, I used transformational leadership to assess the influence of employee engagement on employee productivity.

### *Idealized Influence*

The notion of idealized influence is that of a leader who exhibits the qualities they wish to see in their followers and leads by example. Inspirational transformational leaders demonstrate positive values that they desire to see in their employees, such as honesty, dedication, high productivity, and increased organizational commitment levels (Salas-Vallina et al., 2020). The theory holds that employees will be more likely to emulate the behavior of leaders if they see them exhibit the traits desired in employees (Salas-Vallina et al., 2020). Salas-Vallina et al. (2020) found that individuals who worked for inspirational transformational leaders who exhibited idealized influence were more likely to develop positive work habits and emulate the behaviors demonstrated by their leader. Salas-Vallina et al.'s results suggest that an individual's ability to inspire others may be

an essential leadership quality, mainly if the leader demonstrates qualities that companies are desirous of emulating, such as a high degree of work ethic. This suggestion is consistent with Bass's (1985) development of transformational leadership, in which the charismatic presidential leaders were identified as leading by example on issues such a bravery, moral character, and hard work.

### Inspirational Motivation

Transformational leaders are seen as inspirational or possessing the ability to inspire their employees (Salas-Vallina et al., 2020). Salas-Vallina et al. (2020) confirmed the effectiveness of inspirational motivation in managing employee behavior and satisfaction. Without inspirational capacity, leaders who exhibit positive attributes in themselves may be less likely to create a workplace culture where their employees emulate positive behaviors, the researchers concluded (Salas-Vallina et al., 2020). Leaders who possess the ability to inspire can positively benefit employees (Al Dari et al., 2018). For example, in organizations where business leaders want to focus on knowledge contribution and a knowledge-building culture, leaders who focus on these traits can inspire other employees to do similarly. In a study of 154 employees, Al Dari et al. (2018) found that leaders' inspirational qualities improved the knowledge contribution of the employees they managed. By making room for employee knowledge contribution in meetings and demonstrating curiosity, leaders could inspire similar qualities in their employees. The study results indicated that when leaders reward employees who exhibit emulated or inspired behavior, the organization benefits through improved knowledge sharing and heightened productivity. Employees generally respond positively when

managers demonstrate specific behaviors and rewards employees who exhibit similar behaviors (Al Dari et al., 2018).

### *Intellectual Stimulation*

Intellectual stimulation refers to a transformational leader's ability to mentally challenge their followers. Although all jobs have boring aspects, transformational leaders work to help their employees engage with the interesting aspects (Bass, 1985). There is an association between intellectual leadership and competitive advantage (Veselovsky et al., 2020). Veselovsky et al. (2020) found that when organizational leaders demonstrate intellectual leadership, they prioritize this trait in their subordinates and encourage intellectual innovation. Developing a culture focused on intellectual leadership results in a competitive advantage; by addressing the interesting and challenging parts of work, transformational leaders can keep their followers engaged and drive valuable innovation.

Moreover, by intellectually stimulating their followers, transformational leaders can help them to acquire knowledge and skills that benefit the leader and follower both. For example, Uslu and Arslan (2018) found that intellectual leadership is more likely to foster creation of new, valuable knowledge in academia, in part through intellectual stimulation. Furthermore, by contributing to a specific academic area, faculty contributed to the accumulation of scholarly knowledge in the industry of study (Uslu & Arslan, 2018). Uslu and Arslan argued that the free exchange of ideas in a professional setting fostered knowledge development and positive workplace outcomes related to innovation, creativity, and research. This idea aligns well with Bass's (1985) notion that a

transformational leader's intellectual stimulation of their followers will better both the follower and the leader/organization through the resulting innovation.

### *Individualized Consideration*

Individualized consideration is a dimension of transformational leadership that focuses on how a transformational leader forms individualized relationships with different followers and adapts those relationships to meet the followers' unique needs (Bass, 1985). This quality includes adapting management techniques to suit the employee and acknowledging differences in employee preferences, communication styles, and strengths (Koveshnikov & Ehrnrooth, 2018). Studying the role of individualized consideration in transformational leadership, Koveshnikov and Ehrnrooth (2018) found that offering individualized consideration to employees was an impactful element of transformational leadership. They pointed out the inherent contradiction in a leadership style aimed at transforming employees' behavior requiring adaptation to employee preferences. However, Koveshnikov and Ehrnrooth noted that giving individualized care to employees on things like communication style, management style, reward systems, and job tasks allows the employees to meet organizational objectives, such as higher productivity. In addition, although transformational leadership can work towards organizational goals, doing so within the bounds of cultural norms can lead to a greater chance of success. Transformational leaders must identify, preserve, and support cultural elements while also working towards workplace cultural goals like higher productivity or cooperation (Koveshnikov & Ehrnrooth, 2018).

Other studies have established the importance of individualized considerations in different corporate and geographic contexts (Hahm & Sun, 2020; Ogola et al., 2017). For example, in Kenya, Ogola et al. (2017) found that individualized consideration had a strong positive correlation with employee performance and that employees worked more productively when their managers tailored management styles, job tasks, and communication styles to align with employees' style, beliefs, and expectations. Ogola et al. suggested that when managers give employees individual consideration by tailoring communication style and rewards, the employees are more likely to adopt positive behaviors like organizational commitment or higher productivity.

**Theory of Employee Engagement**

Employee engagement is the second key predictor variable for this study and is supported by a similarly well-developed theory, the theory of employee engagement. First developed by Kahn (1990), the theory of employee engagement has inspired a substantial body of literature on employee engagement and organizational efficacy. Kahn conceptualized employee engagement as when employees make a conscious decision to invest themselves authentically and entirely in their role at an organization, based on their collective experiences working within the organizational environment. Though related, employee engagement is distinct from employee productivity (Bailey et al., 2017; Mone et al., 2018). Employee productivity relates to specific quantitative metrics of job performance through measurement of outputs, while engagement relates to an employee's internal experience, objectives, and commitments (Kahn, 1990).

The three dimensions of employee engagement are (a) dedication, (b) vigor, and (c) absorption. These are engaged by psychological constructs: (a) meaningfulness, (b) safety, and (c) availability (Kahn, 1990). The first predictive psychological construct, meaningfulness, refers to the sense of value that an employee finds in doing the work and hence is indicative of their investment in it. Meaningfulness may be derived from the perception that the work is important or necessary. Psychological safety refers to the idea that employees are able to carry out their work in an environment where they can act naturally and without fear. This feeling, according to Kahn (1990), contributes to work engagement. Psychological safety can be inhibited by a hostile work environment (Liu et al., 2020) as well as by more individualized acts of aggression such as unwanted sexual attention (Walker et al., 2019). Psychological availability refers to employees' sense of being able to devote their whole energies toward work when at work (Kahn, 1990), achieving absorption. Though not all factors included in psychological availability are in the employer's control, employers may still facilitate it by, for example, eliminating distractions. These dimensions are discussed in greater detail later in the review. They have appeared in a large body of research (e.g., Biddison et al., 2016; Chaudhary, 2019; Presbitero, 2017).

As the literature on employee engagement developed, researchers conducted a more in-depth analysis of the connection between employee engagement and organizational outcomes (Bailey et al., 2017; Eldor & Vigoda-Gadot, 2017; Mone et al., 2018; Ribeiro et al., 2018). They found that employee engagement is, in many ways, particularly relevant to organizational outcomes because it captures many facets of the

employee experience. Employee engagement combines elements of employee

satisfaction and productivity (Eldor & Vigoda-Gadot, 2017). In their review of literature

on the theoretical implications of employee engagement, Eldor and Vigoda-Gadot (2017)

found a wide body of conceptual literature establishing a connection between employee

engagement and positive organizational outcomes. Therefore, employee engagement

theory is relevant as a theoretical framework for the proposed study. It offers a lens

through which to examine the effects of COVID-19, specifically because the virus and

related factors could easily impact employees' psychological safety at work and their

psychological availability relative to virus-related concerns and anxieties.

### *Meaningfulness*

Meaningfulness, as a psychological construct contributing to employee

engagement, means that employees perceive their work to have value or significance,

resulting in dedication (Chaudhary, 2019). Work that lacks meaningfulness is work that

the employee perceives as unnecessary or menial (Chaudhary, 2019). Employees are less

likely to experience or report engagement if they perceive their work to lack meaning or

purpose (Chaudhary, 2019). A task's meaningfulness includes an employee's perception

that the organization's overall mission is valuable or that the employee's job is essential

to the organizational mission (Chaudhary, 2019). The value of a job from an employee's

viewpoint may be significant to one person but may not be recognized by another

employee (Chaudhary, 2019). Meaningfulness is critical to employee engagement, which

is essential to employee productivity. As such, organizational leaders who prioritize

corporate social responsibility may have more productive and engaged employees (Chaudhary, 2019).

Another critical aspect of meaningfulness is the perceived meaningfulness of employee personal development and progress (Fletcher, 2019). In addition to employees perceiving their organizational mission as important to society or their work being necessary to the organizational mission, employees can perceive their work as required for personal development and growth (Fletcher, 2019). This meaningfulness element addresses the theory that growth opportunity is important to employee engagement (Fletcher, 2019. The theory holds that employees are more likely to be engaged if they perceive their work to be contributing to future growth potential through further learning, promotional opportunities, or salary increases (Fletcher, 2019). Meaningfulness, in either regard, is a predictor of engagement that would appear least likely to have been affected by the ongoing pandemic for nonmedical fields, although the public health crisis could still potentially affect the meaningfulness of jobs based on which businesses closed or remained open during lockdowns.

*Safety*

Safety is an important workplace consideration for organizations, mainly when employees operate in potentially dangerous job conditions or offer healthcare services to customers. In instances, safety culture focuses on keeping either employees, patients, or both safe (Biddison et al., 2016). Biddison et al. (2016) emphasized that research has established that employee engagement is important to productivity and that safety culture is an essential contributor to productivity. Still, few researchers have focused on the

relationship between employee productivity and employee safety. Using secondary data from over 50 inpatient hospitals in the United States, Biddison et al. sought to determine the relationship between safety culture and employee engagement. The data collection process included responses from the other 2,000 respondents in each of the three data collection rounds. The study results indicated a moderate to strong correlation between employees who demonstrated a high degree of engagement and the four dimensions of safety culture from the Safety Attitudes Questionnaire (Biddison et al., 2016).

Psychological safety is another critical safety dimension contributing to employee engagement (Walters & Diab, 2016). Walters and Diab (2016) theorized that employees who felt psychologically safe at work were more likely to be engaged than employees who felt psychologically in danger. The researchers theorized that when employees felt that they could work and offer feedback without being at risk for anger or belittlement, they were more engaged than employees who were always expecting or braced for a psychological attack from their management team (Walters & Diab, 2016). To test the theory, Walters and Diab collected survey data from 140 employees about their psychological safety and engagement perceptions. Using a hierarchical linear regression, Walters and Diab determined that employees were more engaged when they perceived themselves psychologically safe.

COVID-19 may have negatively affected employees' physical and psychological safety. The pandemic, being a major public health threat, has obvious implications for physical safety. However, this pervasive sense of danger is not the only threat to psychological safety. In many parts of the United States, the public health measures

needed to contain the pandemic have become contentious (Palmer & Peterson, 2020).

The contentiousness of such measures may create a worrisome and hostile work

environment that impedes psychological safety. To those who do not believe in the

importance of public health measures, requiring their usage can be quite inflammatory

because of perceived slights or emasculation (Umamaheswar & Tan, 2020). By contrast,

to those who believe strongly in the importance and necessity of public health measures,

colleagues who refuse to utilize them are inherently stressful and worrisome (Wong et al.,

2020). Hence, simply the presence of employees from the opposite group can be

psychologically threatening. In some cases, these conflicts may also boil over into

interpersonal resentments and acts of aggression as well.

*Availability*

Another vital contributor to employee engagement is employee psychological

availability (Chaudhary, 2019). Studies suggest that when the management and human

resources staff are more available to employees, employees are more likely to be engaged

in and absorbed by their work (Presbitero, 2017). Leaders and human resources staffers

who have undertaken efforts focused on increasing employee engagement often

recommend that organizations make management and human resources staff more

available to reduce employee feelings of isolation, abandonment, or confusion

(Presbitero, 2017). In a quantitative study using a survey design, Presbitero (2017) sought

to determine the role of management and human resources availability and employee

engagement. A regression analysis indicated that employees were more likely to be

engaged when they worked for a management team that was highly available and

interested in employee actions. There were many facets of management availability, including responsiveness to questions, responsiveness to feedback, and direct work production (Presbitero, 2017).

Kahn (1990) focused on availability from a more personal aspect and asked if employees could fully engage mentally and physically. If employees cannot engage in the work for physical reasons, such as proximity issues or technical barriers, they are less likely to be involved. Furthermore, if employees lack adequate training or mental capacity to undertake a task, they are less likely to be engaged (Kahn, 1990). Employees can increase their mental and physical availability through adequate resource provisions, workspace considerations, and proper training and mental capacity (Presbitero, 2017). The pandemic may have significantly affected availability, not only through the distraction and anxiety it creates, but also through the need for social distancing and the avoidance of public spaces. Hence, there is a need to better understand how employee engagement may have changed in the context of COVID-19.

**Transactional Leadership Theory**

Transactional leadership theory differs from transformational leadership, as the latter assists with the strategic development of small businesses, whereas the former has the propensity to manage details for building a strong reputation and keeping employees productive (Chen et al., 2018; Cho et al., 2018; Xenikou, 2017). The focus of the transactional leadership theory is significant on supervision, performance, and organization. Weber (1947) established the foundations of transactional leadership, introducing four specific assumptions: (a) understanding how performance is best when a

chain of command is transparent, (b) the motivation of employees works best through a punishment and rewards system, (c) the goal of employees is to follow the leadership role and instructions, and (d) management of employees, to ensure meeting all expectations.

Building on Weber's (1947) original notions of leadership, Bass (1985) later found that formal leadership is often necessary for motivating workers to follow an overall goal of a given company. Transactional leadership is centered on the *transaction* between leader and follower (Weber, 1947), in which the leader offers the follower material rewards for success and material punishments for failure. In this sense, transactional leadership is not only more formalized but also more impersonal and bureaucratic than other leadership styles. Transactional leadership applicability differs from transformational leadership as transactional influences through a base reward or punishment system (Afsar et al., 2017; Juhary et al., 2019).

In contrast, transformational leaders focus on offering employees a sense of value and trust that they will do the job correctly. The critical difference between the two leadership theories is how to motivate employees to do their job (Tarsik et al., 2015). Bass (1985) originally developed the theory of transactional leadership in opposition to transactional leadership, and Avolio and Bass (1999) later developed the full-range model of leadership styles which posited a continuum of leadership styles from most active (transformational) to most passive (laissez-faire). Transactional leadership falls in the middle of this range, being partially active and partially passive.

Although many researchers implicitly claim that transformational leadership is superior and more desirable, research has indicated this is not always true. In some

contexts, transactional leadership may yield better results (Supriadi et al., 2020). Hence, the superior leadership style is contingent upon the specific circumstances of a given business. The key to transactional leadership for positive outcomes in any given business is the motivating factors promoted by a manager who focuses on directing employees by appealing to self-interest (Tarsik et al., 2015). Transactional leaders are active managers by exception. The leadership role may be structured to monitor and oversee employee work to determine if they follow the rules and regulations.

Transactional leaders are passive managers by exception, in that when an employee fails to meet the work standards, such a manager will intervene with a response. Such a response to unacceptable work is often in the form of punishment (Adeel et al., 2018). Nonetheless, the action is based on the leader's assessment of employee work and provides contingent rewards. Contingent rewards are vital in meeting set goals that are specific, measurable, attainable, realistic, and timely, known as SMART goals (Ogbeiwi, 2018). A transformational leader engages employees to take responsibility for the business (Tarsik et al., 2015). The transformational leader empowers employees to be a part of the company to be a key figure in a business's success.

Transactional leadership is important to understand because it represents the primary alternative style of leadership to transformational leadership that is being studied herein. The present study's hypotheses include that transformational leadership would be a key driver of employee productivity in the retail sector during the COVID-19 pandemic. Pandemic conditions have disrupted the more formalized chains of command

through which transactional leadership operates (Donthu & Gustafsson, 2020; Pantano et al., 2020; Roggeveen & Sethuraman, 2020). Moreover, transformational leadership may offer leaders greater flexibility in addressing pandemic conditions. However, it is also possible that, under the greater levels of strain and uncertainty present in pandemic conditions, the stable and straightforward nature of the transactional approach instead creates more benefit. If the hypothesized relationships regarding transformational leadership are not upheld, the results may instead support transactional leadership theory rather than transformational leadership theory.

**Motivation Theory**

In this study, transformational leadership and employee engagement are considered together. However, there is also an accompanying theory of employee motivation that aligns better with the propositions of transactional leadership, namely motivation theory. The origins of motivation theory lie in Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs, a theory of the different levels of factors by which humans are motivated. The conceptualization of motivation under Maslow's hierarchy of needs is that human motivation can be ranked from foundational to higher order. Once a more basic need is satisfied, that need ceased to motivate a person and they turn to higher order needs. Motivation theories have addressed different aspects that managers assess employee motivation outcomes within the workplace.

Motivation theory assessment uses quantitative analysis on correlational factors, employee motivation factors, and organizational performance (Lee & Raschke, 2016). Implementing the set-theoretic approach allows managers to take a configurational

thinking and complex causality approach to changing variables based on conditions that influence employee work motivation (Lee & Raschke, 2016). Under current conceptions of motivation theory, employee motivation may be contingent upon one or more elements, causing the same outcome (Hag & Chandio, 2017; Lee & Raschke, 2016).

Using motivation theory, the transactional leader will encourage employees through punishment and rewards (Hag & Chandio, 2017). Motivation theory's driving factor is understanding the key to inspiring the workforce to work within the management or leadership team's strictures. In the transactional leadership theory review, the motivation theory does not give employees any accountability beyond their own positive or negative benefit based on their workplace (Lee & Raschke, 2016). A transactional leader using motivation theory with a punishment and reward system is merely looking for job completion based on the business's requirements and leader's ideas, not the workforce's engagement.

As with transactional leadership, the motivation theory approach represents an alternative theoretical perspective on one of this study's key constructs: employee motivation. The hypothesis of the study tests the propositions of engagement theory, which regard psychological meaningfulness, psychological safety, and psychological availability. If the hypothesis of the present study is repudiated and these factors are not, in fact, drivers of employee productivity during the pandemic, Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs and motivation theory may explain why. Perhaps the pandemic has resulted in lower-order needs going unfulfilled, shifting employees' focus away from the

higher-order psychological needs posited by engagement theory and toward the more straightforward, lower-order motivation provided through motivation theory.

**Transformational Leadership and Managerial Performance**

A key proposition in this study is the idea that transformational leadership can boost employee performance or productivity. Through transformational leadership that can positively impact managerial performance (Wang et al., 2016), not all managers can quickly adopt a transformational leadership style (Carleton et al., 2018; Phaneuf et al., 2016). In a quantitative study of 89 leaders and 643 employees, Phaneuf et al. (2016) found that managers who naturally evoked a relationship-oriented personality were more likely to adopt a transformational leadership style than managers who did not. Individuals who exhibited relationship-oriented traits were also more likely to demonstrate transformational leadership if they worked in organizations with were supportive generally and involved a high degree of team engagement (Phaneuf et al., 2016). Carleton et al. (2018) found that leaders who demonstrated a high degree of natural mindfulness were more likely to develop into transformational leaders than individuals who showed a low degree of natural mindfulness. Hence, some leaders would seem more given to a transformational leadership style than others. However, the research solidly supports the benefits of a transformational leadership style.

Managerial performance, in turn, has key organizational implications. Research on managerial responsibilities has demonstrated that organizational managers serve vital roles within an organization, such as knowledge acquisition and maintenance, employee assessment, and safety management (Nguyen et al., 2017). Knowledge management

requires managers to preserve institutional knowledge by documenting processes,

retaining long term employees, and building effective training programs (Imran et al.,

2016). In a study utilizing over 200 survey responses from organizational managers,

Imran et al. (2016) found that transformational leadership was a statistically significant

variable to high organizational learning and knowledge management levels. Imran et al.

argued that managers are well-positioned to develop workplace cultures that focus on

knowledge acquisition, thus increasing organizational knowledge management capacity.

Knowledge management capacity may relate to employee productivity in that knowledge

management practices offer employees the tools they need to effectively carry out their

tasks within the organization (Kianto et al., 2019). Hence, knowledge management is one

way that transformational leadership could indirectly affect employee productivity.

     Though Imran et al. (2016) found a connection between transformational

leadership and organizational learning, research on the topic is somewhat mixed.

Megheirkouni (2017) found that some transformational leadership characteristics, such as

idealized influence, were associated with increased organizational learning, but other

factors, such as intellectual stimulation, were not. Though resulting in somewhat

contradictory literature, Megheirkouni's findings support Burns's (1978) conclusion that

leaders are most effective when they model the characteristics they would wish for their

employees to possess. Presenting an idealized influence, organization leaders could better

encourage organizational learning rather than intellectual stimulation (Megheirkouni,

2017). This uncertainty, however, offers motivation for further study of the effects of

transformational leadership on employees.

Another important aspect of managerial performance is employee evaluation (Nguyen et al., 2017). Recent literature suggests employee assessment is most impactful and accurate when using quantitative and measurable metrics (Nguyen et al., 2017). Nguyen et al. (2017) found that transformational leadership styles related to comprehensive employee management systems that utilized standard metrics for evaluations. This finding is relevant because it suggests that transformational leadership encourages managers to assess employees in a manner associated with greater fairness, less bias, and more uniformity of measurement. Nguyen et al. (2017) also found that transformational leadership related to utilizing reward systems, which encouraged employee performance through positive reinforcement rather than relying heavily on assessment and criticism. Employee evaluation can also be related to employees' productivity, especially given that assessment often attempts to evaluate productivity and improve it (Mollel-Eliphaz et al., 2017). Hence, assessment offers another channel through which employee productivity might indirectly be driven by transformational leadership.

In addition to employee assessment, managers hold responsibility for their workplaces' safety conditions (Nguyen et al., 2017). To understand the relationship between transformational leadership and safety in a workplace, Willis et al. (2017) conducted a quantitative multiple regression analysis to determine the relationship between leadership style and organizational safety. Willis et al. theorized that more dictatorial leadership styles could bring comfort to worried or nervous employees in workplaces with a high risk of accidents. Willis et al.'s review on safety and leadership

styles suggested that reducing ambiguity was essential to achieving feelings of safety. The authors recommended that leaders wishing to employ a transformational style in dangerous workplaces should ensure no ambiguity regarding employee safety, even while engaging with employees (Willis et al., 2017). This suggests a potential linkage between transformational leadership and employee engagement, given that employees' psychological safety is a key component of engagement theory (Kahn, 1990).

Furthering the discussion on a managerial role in safety, von Thiele Schwarz et al. (2016) emphasized the large role that managers play in influencing organizational safety. Similar to Willis et al. (2017), von Thiele Schwarz et al. found that the positionality and communication style of the manger had measurable impacts on workplace safety. In comparison to Willis et al., von Thiele Schwarz et al. found that transformational leadership had a positive impact on organizational safety. Using a quasi-experimental design, von Thiele Schwarz et al. provided organizational leaders with a training course focused on developing the qualities of transformational leaders. After the course, the researchers quantitatively established improvement in safety culture. This finding creates a conflict in the literature with respect to understanding how transformational leadership may affect safety. That conflict is relevant to this study because, in addition to its potential effect on employee engagement, the safety of the workplace can more directly impact employee productivity (Li, 2020), though not always positively. Threats to safety are disruptive and distracting, and hence they inhibit productivity. If transformational leadership increases or decreases safety, it may therefore indirectly affect employee productivity.

**The Effect of Transformational Leadership on the Organization**

Transformational leadership may also have more organization-wide impacts. The ability to achieve a market advantage and therefore drive profit margins is associated with an adaptive and flexible workplace culture (Alos-Simo et al., 2017). Using an empirical methodology, Alos-Simo et al. (2017) found that transformational leadership is significantly related to adaptive culture and the acquisition of new revenue streams, such as e-business. Organizations with transformational leaders were more willing to explore recent sales and revenue streams than organizations with leaders utilizing other leadership styles. Transformational leadership can help generate significant revenues and profits through a willingness to adapt to changing business conditions (Alos-Simo et al., 2017). Alos-Simo et al.'s study connects to Para-González et al.'s (2018) findings by explaining a possible process by which transformational leaders drive higher profits. One study focused on the phenomenon, while another study focused on why the phenomenon occurred (Alos-Simo et al., 2017; Para-González et al., 2018). One potential channel for these effects is through transformational leadership driving productivity, as is explored in this study.

*Profitability*

Organizational leaders have an overarching responsibility to maintain the economic profit and revenue stream of the organization they lead (Zehnder et al., 2017). In a study of organizational economics and leadership, Zehnder et al. (2017) found that transformational leaders could maintain and support managerial economics without losing the vital interpersonal characteristics that help other workplace elements, team

building, and employee satisfaction. Similarly, Para-González et al. (2018) found a significant relationship between transformational leadership and organizational economic performance.

The similar results between the two studies were confirmed utilizing different methods, with Zehnder et al. (2017) undertaking a literature review and Para-González et al. (2018) using a partial least squares approach by means of quantitative data from 200 industrial companies. Para-González et al. added further granularity to the finding by concluding that transformational leadership had a stronger association with organizational economic performance when the organizations implemented robust knowledge management systems. The results connect to Imran et al.'s (2016) findings that transformational leadership is associated with strong knowledge management, beneficial for organizations. Since employee productivity (Maliranta & Nurmi, 2019) and employee satisfaction (Utami et al., 2018) are significant drivers of firm performance, this overall relationship supports the idea that employees work more productively under transformational leaders.

### *Culture*

Organizational leaders can influence organizational culture by setting internal goals and examples to emphasize specific work habits and values (Imran et al., 2016). Depending on the leader's positionality, including elements like leadership style and the interpretation of personal values, organizational leaders can create a workplace culture with a resource-based view or a knowledge-based view (Imran et al., 2016). In a statistical analysis utilizing 204 survey responses, Imran et al. (2016) found that

transformational leadership correlated with a knowledge-based-culture that focused on developing institutional learning and knowledge. More broadly, there is a wide literature on transformational leadership and different aspects of organizational culture (Esmi et al., 2017). Organizational culture shapes many of the factors apart from the employee engagement theory, such as psychological safety (Kahn, 1990). Hence, transformational leaders may be able to bolster employee engagement through shaping organizational culture.

Though the conclusions reviewed mainly support the conclusion that transformational leadership positively impacts employees and workplaces (Alos-Simo et al., 2017), organizational culture can mediate or reverse staff perceptions of the generally positive relationship. In a quantitative study, Niessen et al. (2017) determined that teachers' emotional and physical exhaustion in an academic institution mediated their perception of transformational leadership's impact on productivity and workplace culture. When exhausted, teachers perceived transformational leadership to have negative associations with their ability to thrive in the workplace culture. Teachers reported low levels of exhaustion when associating transformational leadership with a higher capacity to succeed in the workplace culture (Baptiste, 2019). Experts suggested that the perceptions around transformational leadership and workplace culture are not universally positive or negative, and those workplace culture elements can alter employee perceptions significantly (Baptiste, 2019; Niessen et al., 2017). Employee perceptions within their organizations may offer insights into why the broader set of circumstances surrounding COVID-19 may play a role in the effectiveness of transformational

leadership, and a potential mechanism for why transformational leadership might not be as well-suited to the pandemic conditions as initially hypothesized.

**The Effect of Transformational Leadership on Employees**

Leadership styles can significantly impact employees, and transformational leadership is generally associated with employee benefits (Niessen et al., 2017). The following section is an overview of transformational leadership's impact on employees with team building, turnover and burnout, productivity, and engagement (Dong et al., 2017). The potential positive effects of a transformational leadership style on employees are the primary motivation for considering transformational leadership as a driver of employee productivity in this study. In many ways, employee productivity is a meta-outcome that can be affected by many of the other employee-level factors that transformational leadership drives.

*Team Building*

While researchers have suggested that transformational leadership positively impact individual employees (Dong et al., 2017; Niessen et al., 2017), experts have also indicated transformational leadership could support organizational team building by developing a culture of cooperation, knowledge-sharing, mutual respect, and support (Choi et al., 2017; Dong et al., 2017; Niessen et al., 2017). In a quantitative analysis utilizing 171 individual participants from 43 teams in eight companies, Dong et al. (2017) found that transformational leaders' strategies could target either individuals or teams. Transformational leadership interventions increased the organizational culture around team building and created a more cooperative and supportive environment when targeting

teams (Dong et al., 2017). Team cohesion and other positive outcomes related to team-building efforts may be essential to driving employee productivity in a team-based work environment (Ulabor et al., 2020). Hence, the team-building effects of transformational leadership may indirectly drive employee productivity.

Other studies utilizing a regression analysis approach confirmed the positive impact of transformational leadership on organizational team building (Choi et al., 2017). Dong et al. (2017) and Choi et al. (2017) found that transformational leadership is positively associated with team output effectiveness. The implications of transformational leadership have both a positive impact on team building and organizational effectiveness. Choi et al. expanded on academic understanding by finding that transformational leadership, while positively associated with team output effectiveness, had a lesser impact on team collaboration than other leadership styles, such as shared leadership. Under the shared leadership approach, the teams demonstrated higher levels of cooperation based on the selected metrics. Leadership styles have different impacts on discrete elements of team building, and organizations could optimize results by considering their institutional priorities closely (Choi et al., 2017). The specific relationship between transformational leadership and team output effectiveness indicates that transformational leadership may influence employees' productivity individually and their productivity in teams, which adds an extra layer of utility.

***Turnover and Burnout***

Leadership styles also impact elements such as employee turnover and burnout (Hildenbrand et al., 2018; Juhary et al., 2019; Kossek et al., 2018). Modern leadership

styles, such as transactional leadership and transformative leadership, are associated with workplace benefits such as lower turnover and burnout. However, research into employee burnout and turnover shows greater graduality than a simple positive relationship (Juhary et al., 2019). For example, in a quantitative descriptive study, Juhary et al. (2019) associated transactional leadership with lower employee turnover levels and suggested transformational leadership related to lower levels of burnout and higher employee commitment levels. According to Ferreira et al. (2019), the link between burnout is significant with a negative association to employee productivity.

If transformational leadership can prevent or lessen burnout, then alternative leadership styles may offer another pathway to improving productivity. Several experts have studied the elements of transformational leadership and employee experience (e.g., Choi et al., 2017; Dong et al., 2017; Niessen et al., 2017). In addition, the recent literature on turnover and burnout has utilized several methodological techniques (Arnold, 2017; Juhary et al., 2019). Unlike Juhary et al. (2019), Arnold (2017) used a systematic review format to understand leadership style's impact on employee turnover and burnout. Jointly including employee turnover and burnout in the category of employee well-being, Arnold found 40 eligible articles that met the inclusion criteria. In general, Arnold found that transformational leadership positively predicted positive dimensions of employee well-being. Employee well-being does not only relate to productivity but also organizational engagement. Arnold defines well-being as the psychological safety and availability components of employee engagement tied to employee well-being and transformational leadership.

Arnold (2017) found that transformational leadership results were more nuanced than a straightforward positive relationship on positive indicators. Arnold also found several mediating variables in the relationship between employee experience and transformational leadership, such as pay and exhaustion. Arnold pointed out that leadership style is not the only element relevant to understanding employee turnover and burnout. This idea was further supported by Astuti et al. (2016), who found links between compensation, employee experience, and transformational leadership. Compensation is, by definition, a transactional leadership characteristic, and this mediating role suggests the importance of certain transactional qualities even in achieving the full benefits of transformational leadership.

Despite granularities in the findings on transformational leadership and employee burnout and turnover, there a compelling body of quantitative literature with strong methodological foundations suggesting the positive benefits of transformational leadership (Sahu et al., 2018). In an empirical study utilizing a survey as the data collection instrument, Sahu et al. (2018) determined using a sample of 405 full-time employees that individuals with transformational leaders were less likely to experience high levels of burnout and turnover intention than those with other types of organizational leaders. Sahu et al. also noted the strong connection among turnover, burnout, employee productivity, and employee engagement. The variables are relevant to the present study, which primarily considers the impact of transformational leadership on employee productivity. However, Sahu et al. argued that turnover and burnout impact

employee engagement and are themselves impacted by transformational leadership. Sahu et al.'s findings would suggest a potential mediating relationship.

*Productivity*

Employee productivity is the outcome variable in this study and research has linked this outcome directly to transformational leadership in addition to the many indirect linkages already established. Research on transformational leadership suggests that it positively impacts team building and prevents turnover and burnout (Arnold, 2017). In addition to enhancing the employee experience, some studies indicate that transformational leadership can positively impact employee productivity (Ng, 2017). Ng (2017) studied the impact on transformational leadership and employee productivity. Utilizing a quantitative methodology and more than 600 participants, Ng found that transformational leadership is positively associated with employee productivity attributes such as task-performance, citizenship characteristics, and innovation behavior. Ng noted the importance of relying on non-self-reported productivity metrics when assessing employee productivity to avoid methodological flaws. Unfortunately, such metrics are difficult to obtain without conducting a multilevel analysis; in the present study, no better productivity data source was available.

Though Ng (2017) argued that non-self-reported data is essential to assessing employee productivity, Vatankhah et al. (2017) produced similar findings using self-reported data. Vatankhah et al. utilized questionnaires from Avolio and Bass (1999) and Hersey and Goldsmith (1980) to assess transformational leadership and employee productivity. Vatankhah et al. use of descriptive statistics and structural equation

modeling, found a significant relationship between transformational leadership and employee productivity. However, researchers such as Rogers (2017) more closely adhered to Ng's methodological framework for assessing the transformational leadership's role on employee productivity. Comparable to Ng, Rogers utilized citizenship behavior as an indicator of transformational leadership. Connecting Rogers's results to Burns (1978), Rogers found that leaders who demonstrated citizenship behaviors were more likely to have employees who likewise demonstrated citizen behavior and higher productivity levels. Overall, these studies provide strong support for the hypotheses of this study.

Other studies on employee productivity and transformational leadership have utilized a survey approach similar to that of Vatankhah et al. (2017), which supported this study. Rahimi et al. (2016) conducted a similar study with the same independent and dependent variables on the Tax Administration staff in the West Azerbaijan province. Rahimi et al. used Bass's (1985) framework for transformational leadership to identify transformational leaders. From there, they utilized the Achieve questionnaire to assess employee productivity. According to the study results, there was a positive and significant relationship between transformational leadership and employee productivity, further confirming the results of Vatankhah et al., Rogers (2017), and Ng (2017). These results represent further support for the hypotheses of this study.

Though many studies on productivity utilized a quantitative approach and surveys as instruments, at least one study has used a literature review approach (Choiryah et al., 2018). Experts have utilized a quantitative approach with surveys as the instrument tool,

with a smaller number using non-self-reported data to measure productivity (Choiryah et al., 2018). Given the extensive literature connecting transformational leadership with employee productivity, this study might seem redundant. However, the critical novelty introduced in this study is to test if these previously demonstrated relationships still hold amidst the chaotic upheaval that the retail sector has undergone as a result of COVID-19. This upheaval has created conditions that may play to the strengths of transformational leadership or may play instead to its weaknesses and emphasize the stability of a more structured and stable transactional approach. Hence, the preponderance of literature establishing linkages between transformational leadership and employee productivity does not negate this study's need.

### *Engagement*

To synthesize the large body of research connecting employee engagement to organizational performance, Bailey et al. (2017) conducted a systematic analysis of 214 studies involving employee engagement and organizational performance. The most common independent variables related to employee engagement were psychological states, job structure and design, leadership qualities, organizational variables, team factors, and organization interventions. The most relevant feature of Bailey et al.'s study of the present study was the finding that leadership qualities correlated with employee engagement. In total, 36 studies considered the aspects of leadership and management, which influenced engagement in employees. Five of the studies reviewed by Bailey et al. found a connection between employee engagement and transformational leadership.

Other studies found an association between employee engagement and qualities that transformational leaders might possess, such as manager trust (Bailey et al., 2017).

Similar literature focuses on what factors contribute to employee engagement, with the assumption that engaged employees benefit businesses (Ruck et al., 2017). In much of the literature, employee engagement's benefits are implicit and treated as an outcome to be predicted and not a predictor of other results (Bailey et al., 2017; Ruck et al., 2017). Among other factors, recent literature on employee engagement drivers includes employees' ability to communicate effectively with coworkers and managers (Ruck et al., 2017). In a 2017 study, Ruck et al. (2017) found that employees could upwardly communicate to managers receptive to their feedback and were more engaged in their work. On the other hand, employees who could not upwardly speak or did not feel that their managers were receptive to upward communication. This finding links with the individual consideration dimension of transformational leadership.

Further building the body of literature which established factors influencing employee engagement in the workplace, current literature found that employee engagement originates from a confluence of factors, including elements specific to leaders, teams, organizational support, and organization culture (Singh et al., 2016). Utilizing a literature review format, Singh et al. (2016) determined that literature compiled substantial evidence to suggest that the perception of healthy teamwork habits leads to positive employee engagement indicators. This links to the previous discussion of how transformational leaders can benefit team building (Dong et al., 2017; Niessen et al., 2017). Furthermore, leaders could influence employee engagement. Studies included

in Singh et al. suggested leaders interested in maintaining and increasing employee

enthusiasm could affect higher levels of employee engagement than leaders who did not.

***Employee Engagement***

Employee engagement is a crucial predictor variable in this study. Recent

literature on employee engagement and productivity establishes a possible connection

between the variables, which was explored further in the present study (White, 2017).

Studies on productivity and employee engagement utilize various methodologies ranging

from qualitative studies using semi-structured interviews to quantitative correlation

studies utilizing instrument or survey data (Combs, 2018; White, 2017). In 2017, White

conducted a qualitative study that explored the organizational manager's and supervisors'

perceptions of how employee engagement enhanced productivity. The study results

indicated that managers and supervisors consistently felt that engaged employees were

more productive. Many managers and supervisors noted that their organization struggled

to respond to employee feedback on such a plan effectively in terms of engagement

strategies. Another theme that emerged from the research was the manager and

supervisor's perception that mutual respect between employees and supervisors increased

employee engagement (White, 2017). Mutual respect ties back into transformational

leadership, especially the dimensions of individualized attention and intellectual

stimulation.

In some instances, targeting specific sectors is essential to understanding

employee engagement in employee productivity. As established by White (2017),

employee engagement is vital to productivity in the hospitality sector, partially because

of the customer service element of the organizational role. Higher education is a very different sector than hospitality and presumably requires employees to operate under different expectations and conditions. Hanaysha (2016a) conducted a study on the higher education sector to understand employee engagement's role in employee productivity. Utilizing a survey as the primary data collection instrument, Hanaysha collected data from 242 employees working at public higher education institutions. They modeled the effect of employee engagement on productivity and found that employee engagement had a significant and positive impact on productivity. Hanaysha's findings further support the hypotheses presented in this study linking the dimensions of employee engagement to employee productivity.

Explaining the essential nature of employee engagement to productivity, researchers asserted that fostering employee engagement can increase organizational productivity disproportionally compared to other variables (Patil, 2018). The lack of employee engagement typically cannot be addressed by implementing new informational, technological processes, technical solutions, or monetary influxes (Patil, 2018). Discounting employee engagement through financial solutions suggests that organizational managers may play a large role in fostering a culture of engagement among employees (Patil, 2018). This further links employee engagement with transformational leadership as proposed by Singh et al. (2016).

Using an exploratory and descriptive quantitative research design, Patil (2018) explored the causal relationship between human resources development processes and employee engagement. Patil found that organizations that focused on developing,

training, and internally promoting employees fostered a culture of employee engagement, which increased company productivity levels. Organizational factors that increased employee engagement and productivity in the banking sector included reward strategies explicitly targeted to employee groups' desires and ensuring that employee complaints are comprehensively addressed, even if they seem minor (Patil, 2018). This related to the individualized attention dimension of transformational leadership in particular (Bass, 1985). Individualized attention can help leaders ensure that they are aware of these potentially important.

Rehman et al. (2019) determined that authoritative leadership styles hurt employee productivity, while transactional leadership styles resulted in an insignificantly positive relationship. Transformational leadership styles were also positively and significantly related to increased employee productivity. The research findings support the conclusions of numerous other researchers, including Patil (2018). Some researchers have also looked at these issues using a qualitative research design with semi-structured interviews as the primary data collection method (Osborne & Hammoud, 2017). Osborne and Hammoud (2017) used a format similar to Patil but diverged from other researchers in choosing a conceptual framework. The present study and many others related to transformational leadership or employee engagement utilized Burns's (1978) work or Bass (1985). However, Osborne and Hammoud used self-determination theory as the primary research framework. Osborne and Hammoud formulated their qualitative study as a case study and focused data collection and analysis on a single organization. Most of the participants indicated that they believed employee engagement encouraged

productivity. The company established an employee engagement policy that required managers to respond to employee concerns, which the participants believed supported employee organizational engagement. Most of the participants stated that corporate leaders were the primary driver of employee engagement and productivity. It was the leader's responsibility to create a workplace that encouraged and supported employee engagement (Osborne & Hammoud, 2017).

The finding that workplace leaders have responsibility for developing and supporting employee engagement emerges from research (Combs, 2018; Osborne & Hammoud, 2017). Like Osborne and Hammoud (2017), Combs (2018) found that meaningful recognition was a significant contributor to clinical nurses' job satisfaction and engagement. As the primary leading force for a unit or organization, credit meaningfully delivered from organizational leaders is the most impactful on employee engagement and subsequent productivity (Osborne & Hammoud, 2017). Combs tested the impact of employee recognition programs on employee engagement in a pre-post study design. In the pre-test phase, Combs determined that employee recognition delivered through three methods: an email blast to the company employees, a printed achievement certificate, and a star-shaped pin, effectively increased employee perceptions of their engagement.

Though the results were positive and significant, Combs' (2018) design relied on employee perceptions of their engagement. Combs did not quantitatively address employee recognition's workplace impacts, as seen in measurable employee or organizational productivity (Combs, 2018). Though many other studies relied on self-

reported metrics on productivity and employee engagement, Ng (2017) noted the

importance of relying on non-self-reported productivity metrics when assessing employee

productivity to avoid methodological flaws.

Overall, the postulated relationship between employee engagement and employee

productivity is supported less strongly than between transformational leadership and

employee productivity. As previously noted, most studies on employee engagement do

not treat it as a predictor (Bailey et al., 2017; Ruck et al., 2017). Rather than explicitly

drawing connections between employee engagement and other outcomes, engagement is

treated, *de facto*, as itself a desirable outcome. While the small body of literature treating

engagement instead as a predictor does seem to support this assumption, the present study

still helps fill an essential conceptual gap in the literature by addressing employee

engagement as a predictor rather than an outcome. Testing these presumed but only

occasionally verified benefits is even more important during the pandemic, given the

significant changes it has wrought on the retail sector in particular.

**Transformational Leadership, Employee Engagement, and Employee Productivity**

The problem under consideration in the present study is some retail store

managers possess little knowledge about the relationship between transformational

leadership, employee engagement, and employee productivity. To address the research

problem, I used a quantitative correlation research design. The present study's theoretical

framework is Burns' (1978) transformational leadership theory and Kahn's (1990) theory

of engagement. The current study is significant because it may provide business leaders

with additional information on leadership styles and the connection between

transformational leadership, employee engagement, and employee productivity. Employee productivity, which has been alluded to repeatedly as a critical outcome, is conceptually measuring employees' efficiency and effectiveness of doing their jobs.

Recent literature on transformational leadership, employee engagement, and employee productivity found that transformational leadership generally has a positive impact on both managerial outcomes and variables related to employee experience (Mone et al., 2018; Wills et al., 2017; Zehnder et al., 2017). Though there are granularities and mediators between transformational leadership and employee experience, the research used rigorous research techniques to establish good correlations between positive organizational outcomes and transformational leadership (Ababneh et al., 2019). The critical need for this study arises from two factors. First, the link with employee engagement is not present. Second, and more importantly, this study occurs amidst the economic and strategic disruption resulting from the ongoing pandemic. These factors have destabilized the retail sector, in particular, resulting in circumstances that may change the nature of these previously established relationships and necessitate a reevaluation of the interplay between transformational leadership, employee engagement, and employee productivity.

## Summary and Transition

Low employee engagement and productivity result in significant financial losses (Osborne & Hammoud, 2017). Losses in employee productivity cost United States businesses an estimated $300 million a year (Bialowolski et al., 2020). Some retail store businesses that have low employee productivity because of disengaged employees are

less profitable. Some retail store managers also possess little knowledge about the relationship between transformational leadership, employee engagement, and employee productivity. This quantitative correlational study intends to examine the relationship between transformational leadership components, employee engagement components, and employee productivity in retail stores. This review covered recent literature on transformational leadership, employee engagement, and employee productivity. I identified the related findings currently in existence and identify spaces where more research is required to understand transformational leadership impacts in a retail context.

To understand the business problem, I organized the literature review by the leadership components, including idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. In alignment with the direction of leadership, I discussed transformational leadership and managerial performance. Additional literature review areas include the effect of transformational leadership on organizational performance, the impact of transformational leadership on employees, and the role of employee engagement and productivity. I concluded the literature review discussion with employee engagement components, including (meaningfulness, safety, and availability).

In Section 1, I provided information on the current study context and presented extant literature associated with the study's meaning viewed through the theoretical lens of multiple theories. In Section 2, I discuss the purpose statement, the researcher's role, and the study participants. Then, discuss the project, including the research method, research design, and population and sampling. I also discuss data collection and analysis

techniques. In Section 3, I present the results of the study and discuss them in relation to

the study context and the literature. Based on this discussion, implications are present,

and recommendations for future research and practice proposed.

Section 2: The Project

I begin this section by discussing the problem statement and the specific business problem. I also describe their role within the research study and address implications to any research bias. I discuss participants' function, the research method and design, the population, and sampling. Following this, I present sections addressing the study's ethical perspective, data collection instruments, and data collection technique. Lastly, I discuss the data analysis used and the study validity to support this quantitative research study.

**Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this quantitative correlational study is to examine the relationship between transformational leadership, employee engagement, and employee productivity in retail stores. The predictor variables are the dimensions of transformational leadership: (a) idealized influence, (b) inspirational motivation, (c) intellectual stimulation, and (d) individualized consideration; and the dimensions of employee engagement: (a) dedication, (b) vigor, and (c) absorption. The outcome variable is employee productivity. The target population consists of retail clothing store employees who are not managers in Northwest Washington, DC, Southern Maryland, and Arlington and Alexandria, Virginia.

A multiple linear regression analysis was used to determine the relationship between the predictor variables of transformational leadership, employee engagement, and the outcome variable of employee productivity. The positive social change may include reduced employee turnover rates, leading to higher employee retention. As a result of higher employee retention, business leaders may develop new job opportunities

within the communities. The positive impact to higher employee retention may also lead to cost savings to the business, further generating greater economic growth outcomes.

## Role of the Researcher

The researcher's role in a study is to work with other insiders (Corlett & Mavin, 2018). As I am familiar with clothing retail outlets' operation, I, as the researcher, have some preconceived opinions. Such preconceived biases and beliefs could affect how researchers sample participants and interpret data analysis (Corlett & Mavin, 2018). Through inadvertent bias, a researcher's positionality may impact study findings and reduce study validity (Corlett & Mavin, 2018; Gabriel, 2018).

To ensure that my preconceived notions would not impact study results, I participated in bracketing. Bracketing refers to a practice in which the researcher makes notes of their prior ideas and assumptions relating to the study topics (Gabriel, 2018). I used a bracketing notebook in which I recorded my preconceived opinions and possible biases throughout the study. This way, I could report and reflect on my biases within the discussion of study findings. Such a reflection ensures the validity of a study (Corlett & Mavin, 2018; Gabriel, 2018). In addition, since the study is quantitative rather than qualitative, I presented the statistical analyses in detail so that readers may verify for themselves whether my conclusions are valid.

## Participants

The target population consists of retail clothing store employees who are not managers and working in Northwest Washington, DC, Southern Maryland, Arlington, and Alexandria, Virginia. From this population, I selected a sample of participants using

purposive sampling. The sample was recruited through online posts on social media platforms (such as LinkedIn and Facebook) in conjunction with paid recruitment services (such as SurveyMonkey or Google Audience) in the areas of Northwest Washington, DC, Southern Maryland, and Arlington and Alexandria, Virginia. Online posting was completed once appropriate permissions were granted by the Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB). Online recruitment included information on study objectives, participants' expectations, researcher contact information, and inclusion and exclusion criteria for sample participants.

The sample was selected using purposive sampling. Inclusion and exclusion criteria are established in purposive sampling (Etikan et al., 2016). For this study, inclusion criteria established that all participants would (a) be at least 18 years of age; (b) be a nonmanagerial employee within a retail clothing store in the in the areas of Northwest Washington, DC, Southern Maryland, or Arlington and Alexandria, Virginia; and (c) grant consent to participate within this study. Similarly, if individuals were not at least 18 years of age, were not a nonmanagerial employee within a retail clothing store, were not from the Northwest Washington, DC, Southern Maryland, or Arlington or Alexandria, Virginia areas, or did not grant consent to participate within this study, they would be summarily excluded from participation within this study.

## Research Method and Design

### Research Method

For this study, I selected a quantitative methodology. These methods are often employed to identify relationships between measurable variables (McNabb, 2015).

Quantitative methods are routinely used to determine the strength and direction of the respective relationship between variables (Barnham, 2015; McNabb, 2015; Rutberg & Bouikidis, 2018). As the objective of this study was to determine whether there is a relationship between transformational leadership components, employee engagement components, and employee productivity in retail stores, quantitative methods were appropriate. Moreover, quantitative research best supports the research problem and research question, as I could show whether there is a statistically significant relationship between the predictor variables and the outcome variable.

I did not select qualitative research; qualitative research does not entail measuring relationships (McNabb, 2015). Instead, qualitative methodology is used to ascertain a deep understanding of a specific phenomenon, typically through participants' lived experiences (McNabb, 2015; Rutberg & Bouikidis, 2018). The qualitative researcher answers the "why" of a research phenomenon by collecting robust data and using integrative strategies (Barnham, 2015).

I also did not select a mixed-methods approach. A mixed-method study integrates quantitative and qualitative methods (McNabb, 2015; Rutberg & Bouikidis, 2018). Such an approach would not have supported this research study because it was not feasible within the allotted time frame. This study did not require participants to explain their feelings or experiences to address research questions. Thus, a quantitative methodology was the most appropriate for this study.

**Research Design**

I also decided upon a nonexperimental correlational design for this study. This design was chosen for the study because experimental research would not be feasible; participants' experience of transformational leadership and engagement cannot be manipulated or randomized. Within the nonexperimental research designs, a correlational design examines the relationship between measurable predictor and outcome variables (Aggarwal & Ranganathan, 2016). Aggarwal and Ranganathan (2016) defined correlation as a statistical tool used by researchers to determine the degree of association between quantifiable variables. Using a correlational design, I could assess the strength and nature of the relationship between transformational leadership, employee engagement, and employee productivity within retail stores. I conducted this study to examine the predictive relationships between variables, so a correlational design was most appropriate.

Other designs were considered for use within this study. The first was an experimental design. Experimental design requires that the researcher place participants into categories, in which some participants receive treatment, and others do not (Edmonds & Kennedy, 2016; Rutberg & Bouikidis, 2018). I did not select an experimental design for two reasons. First, no treatment would be administered to participants (Rutberg & Bouikidis, 2018). Second, I did not randomly select participants based on comparison groups.

A quasi-experimental design was also not selected for this study. This design is comparable to experimental designs, except participants are not placed into groups before

administering treatment or intervention (Rutberg & Bouikidis, 2018). As this study had no treatment, a quasi-experimental design was not appropriate. Moreover, my study did require the intentional selection of groups. A quasi-experimental design would not require such selection (Rutberg & Bouikidis, 2018).

## Population and Sampling

The target population consists of retail clothing store employees who are not managers in Northwest Washington, DC, Southern Maryland, Arlington, and Alexandria, Virginia. From this population, participants were selected using purposive sampling. The sample participants were ascertained using a G*Power statistical test with an alpha level of 0.05 and a power of 0.80. These inputs align with the conventions of quantitative research (Malone et al., 2016). Based on the G*Power analysis with the parameters established, this study's appropriate minimum sample size was 109 (see Appendix A).

Sampling was completed through nonprobability sampling. This type of sampling is used when the researcher needs to select participants who fulfill a particular niche or comprise a certain proportion of the overall population (Etikan & Bala, 2017). It can be accomplished in various ways, including quota sampling, accidental sampling, snowball sampling, and purposive sampling (Etikan & Bala, 2017). I used purposive sampling within this study. Purposive sampling ensures that all participants possess the knowledge, skills, or experience to answer data collection questions in a meaningful way (Etikan et al., 2016; Sharma, 2017). As such, I developed all the inclusion and exclusion criteria.

**Ethical Research**

In any study that uses human participants, ethical considerations must be made (Cacciattolo, 2015; Dixon & Quirke, 2018). I ensured that this study remained ethical in a variety of ways. First, an IRB's objectives and methodology should be reviewed before sampling (Dixon & Quirke, 2018). The IRB board aims to protect human participants from harm (Dixon & Quirke, 2018). The IRB ensures that the study's purpose, its research questions, and its methodological approach are ethical (Cacciattolo, 2015). I collected no data until IRB approval was obtained.

In addition to seeking IRB approval, I ensured that all identifying information including names and contact information were protected. Ethical research practices include protecting the confidentiality of participant information (Dixon & Quirke, 2018; Laydner, 2017). Participants' names were not collected; however, email addresses were collected to enable sending a $5 thank-you gift, and some demographic information was collected from participants through their responses to the survey's screening items. Raw data collected from surveys and screening items are kept on a password-protected USB drive stored in a locked file cabinet. All raw data is to be held for 5 years and then destroyed to protect patient confidentiality in perpetuity.

To ensure ethical standards are upheld throughout this study, all participants consented electronically. The informed consent included information on participants' right to confidentiality, right to be treated with respect, and right to cease participation at any time and for any reason without fear of retribution. To terminate participation in the

study, a participant would only need to send me an email stating their desire to no longer
be involved.

<div align="center">**Data Collection Instruments**</div>

Data collection within this study was accomplished using three instruments
included in one questionnaire, all of which were administered electronically to
participants because of COVID-19. The first instrument was a short screening survey (see
Appendix B) that I created. Items included age, gender, employment position, and
locality of employment. The screening survey was used to characterize the sample and
ensure that participants met inclusion criteria before they could access the remaining
instruments: the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ-5x), the Work and Well-
Being Survey (UWES), and the Employee Productivity Scale.

After creating this screening survey, I field-tested it to bolster reliability. Field
testing included submitting the screening survey to my committee and gaining feedback.
Once feedback was addressed, the screening survey was given to a person who could be
in the sample but was not to ensure questions were not ambiguous or confusing. Any
feedback received through field testing was be addressed before data collection.

**The MLQ-5x**

Employee perception of the retail store manager's leadership style were measured
using the MLQ-5x developed by Avolio and Bass (1999; see Appendix C). The MLQ-5x
is a 45-item questionnaire that measures and denotes types of leadership styles. Scoring
on the MLQ-5x is accomplished using a five-point Likert scale to measure responses

from 0 (*not at all*) to 4 (*frequently, if not always*). Then individual scores are tallied to identify retail store managers' leadership style, as perceived by employees.

Since its inception, the MLQ has been used in numerous studies, reinforcing validity. The MLQ-5x has been used in previous research by Muenjohn and Armstrong (2008), who ascertained the reliability of the MLQ-5x with the use of Cronbach's alpha. The Cronbach's alpha score was 0.87, indicating strong reliability. Construct validity, determined through factor analysis, was 0.78, suggesting reasonable validity (Muenjohn & Armstrong, 2008). Similarly, Dimitrov and Darova (2016) used Cronbach's alpha per MLQ-5x to yield coefficients between 0.74 and 0.87. Scores from both studies indicate high validity and reliability, which bolsters suitability for use within this study.

**The UWES**

The final instrument used in this study is the UWES, developed by Schaufeli and Bakker (2003; Appendix D). The UWES is a 17-item survey used to measure employee engagement. Scoring is completed using a 7-point Likert scale from 0 (*never*) to 6 (*always, every day*). Then, all scores are added together to determine employee engagement scores. Previous research from Torabinia et al. (2017) decided that the UWES had a validity score of 0.80, indicating a high validity score. When constructs were rated for reliability by a Cronbach's alpha, all components had high reliability between 0.79 and 0.89 (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2003). Thus, the UWES was appropriate for use within this study.

**The Employee Productivity Scale**

Employee productivity was measured using a 5-item scale developed by

Hanaysha (2016b) and based on items used by past researchers. This conceptualizes

productivity as a one-dimensional variable based on an average of five items on a 5-point

Likert scale. This scale appears in Appendix E. As the data are on a Likert scale, they

were treated as continuous per analytical tradition (Wu & Leung, 2017). The reliability of

this scale was acceptable for use in my study, with a Cronbach's alpha score of 0.755

(Hanaysha, 2016b). A Cronbach's alpha score of 0.700 or above is considered reliable

(Hanaysha, 2016b).

## Data Collection Technique

With the threat of COVID-19 continuing within the United States, I collected all

data electronically. Sampling began after IRB approval (Approval #05-05-21-0812555)

through electronic posts on online forums for retail employees within the Northwest

Washington, DC, Southern Maryland, and Arlington and Alexandria, Virginia areas. The

online posts included my contact information. To ensure that it was possible to recruit a

sufficient number of participants, the LinkedIn groups SurveyCircle: Finding Research

Participants and SurveyCircle: Research Participation were used to locate participants.

The two groups contain over 30,000 members from a variety of backgrounds and

working in a wide range of fields.

I sent an invitation e-mail to interested participants based on their responses to my

social media postings. The invitation contained an explanation of the study and

participant expectations, and a link to the survey. Participants who agreed to the informed

consent and met the inclusion criteria filled out the MLQ-5x (see permission for use in Appendix F), the UWES, and the Employee Productivity Scale. These three instruments were selected because they are prevalidated and reliable, as illustrated by prior researchers' validation of their psychometric properties (Bagheri & Sohrabi, 2015; Hanaysha, 2016b; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2003). Surveys are an ideal way to collect data from large numbers of persons quickly and efficiently (Bennett et al., 2012). Participants had 14 business days to fill out the surveys. I sent out reminders to participants who had not completed their surveys in the first 7 days.

I collected responses from the surveys electronically. All participants received a thank-you email for their time and responses after survey completion. The participant entered their email contact information in the screening portion of the survey, receiving a notification that the information would not connect to their survey responses, to receive the $5 gift card offered as a participation incentive. Once the 14 business days concluded, the survey link expired. I then examined the data collected and discarded any incomplete surveys, as numerical values were needed for all categories to ascertain overall scores on both leadership style and job satisfaction. Incomplete surveys could also create inaccurate results, which could negatively impact study quality (Sullivan & Artino, Jr., 2017). All raw data to be analyzed were then transferred to SPSS (Version 27). Raw data are to be kept for five years on a password-protected USB drive stored in a locked file cabinet before being destroyed to maintain participant confidentiality.

**Data Analysis**

Once all data were collected and transferred to SPSS, data analysis began. The analyses included descriptive statistics and inferential analysis. The analysis began with descriptive statistics to summarize the demographic characteristics of the sample and to report the mean, median, range, and standard deviation for each scale and subscale. The descriptive statistics served to present a picture of the study sample and the statistical properties of each of the study variables. I used inferential statistics to test the hypotheses. The research question was as follows: What relationship, if any, exists between transformational leadership, employee engagement, and employee productivity?

The inferential analysis consisted of a multiple linear regression analysis to answer the research question. Regression analysis is a powerful statistical test that examines the impact of more than one predictor variable on an outcome variable, indicating the strength and direction of a relationship between variables (Bala, 2016; Darlington & Hayes, 2016). A multiple linear regression model allows for simultaneous testing of multiple predictors using a single model, which reduces the danger of type II error in the analysis (Bala, 2016). Other approaches, such as ANOVA, are appropriate for examining the mean differences between groups (Bala, 2016). For this study, the regression included the dimensions of transformational leadership and employee engagement as predictors and employee productivity as the criterion. I analyzed productivity using a Likert scale, treating it as a continuous variable. Treating Likert scale data as continuous conforms with analytical tradition (Wu & Leung, 2017).

Before conducting the analysis, I validated the model assumptions. There are four main assumptions for linear regression (Brown et al., 2018). The first assumption is that the relationship between the outcome and predictor variables is linear (Bangdiwala, 2018). The second assumption, tested using the Breusch-Pagan test, is homoscedasticity, which refers to the variance of residuals being identical for any independent or predictor variables (Bangdiwala, 2018). The third assumption is that all observations, or data points, are independent (Brown et al., 2018). The third assumption is untestable; I met the assumption of independence based on the data collection strategy. Fourth is the assumption of normality, meaning that for any predictor variable, the value of the outcome variable is normally distributed (Bangdiwala, 2018). Shapiro-Wilk testing is appropriate for assessing the normality assumption (González-Estrada & Cosmes, 2019). If there were violations within all assumptions, I would have attempted allowable transformations, such as the logarithm. If the assumptions were still not met, I would have substituted a less severe form of regression model that allows for a broader variety of data types.

Once the model assumptions were validated, I developed the multiple linear regression model to answer the research question based on several key model parameters. The rejection of the null hypothesis in the research question would occur if the overall multiple $R^2$ value is significantly different from zero. The hypothesis involved a $t$-test for the significance of the regression coefficient, as suggested by Bala (2016).

Following the regression analysis, I used SPSS to test the results for the fit of the regression model with the $R^2$ test. The $R^2$ test assesses the model's residual values (Bala,

2016). I also completed an *F*-test to understand better the overall fit, as suggested by

Darlington and Hayes (2016). If testing revealed no relationship between the predictor

and outcome variables, I would confirm the null hypotheses. If significant evidence was

present to determine a relationship between variables, I would reject the null hypothesis.

## Study Validity

Validity refers to the accuracy and reliability of study results (Baldwin, 2018).

Studies in which validity is high are accurate and reliable (Drost, 2011). Strategies to

ensure validity vary by research type: Experimental and quasi-experimental studies

require internal validity, or accuracy in identifying causal relationships between variables

(Baldwin, 2018). However, the current study was, by contrast, nonexperimental

correlational and thus required statistical conclusion validity. Common threats to

statistical conclusion validity include type I and type II errors (Drost, 2011). Type I errors

occur when the researchers falsely reject the null hypothesis; type II errors result from

falsely confirming the null hypothesis (Saha & Jones, 2016).

I took precautions regarding data collection instruments, data assumptions, and

sample size. These precautions ensured that statistical errors did not occur (Baldwin,

2018; Drost, 2011). First, I selected pre-validated instruments: Both the MLQ-5x and the

UWES have good validity and high reliability. Validity and reliability refer the ability of

instruments to measure what they are supposed to measure and do so accurately, thus

reducing the likelihood of statistical error (Baldwin, 2018; Christensen et al., 2011; Drost,

2011).

The next way to reduce statistical errors is to make the appropriate data assumptions (Brown et al., 2018; Christensen et al., 2011). If a researcher fails to make the proper assumptions regarding their data or uses the wrong statistical tests, then the probability of statistical errors increases (Baldwin, 2018). In addition, to reduce statistical error, I used SPSS to complete Grubb's test for the identification of outliers. Grubb's test is appropriate for the detection of outliers in single-variable data sets (Aslam, 2020). I removed incomplete entries to ensure accuracy and reduce the prevalence of outliers. I also, where appropriate, minimized redundancy among predictor variables to improve the regression tests' performance. Each of the approaches reduced statistical error.

A small sample size may increase the likelihood of statistical errors (Prajapati et al., 2010). To ensure that the sample size was adequate, I conducted an *a priori* power analysis using G*Power to determine the proper sample size. A sample large enough to generate statistically significant results reduces the likelihood of statistical error (Prajapati et al., 2010). Thus, to ensure validity within this study, I used valid and reliable instruments, ensure that the data meet assumptions, and that sample size was statistically significant.

**Transition and Summary**

In Section 2, I discussed the purpose statement, my role, and the study participants. I discussed the project, including the research method, research design, and population and sampling. In Section 3, I present the findings from the research and discuss the applications for professional practice and implications for social change.

This quantitative correlational study examines the relationship between transformational leadership, employee engagement, and employee productivity in retail stores. To accomplish this objective, I sampled nonmanagerial retail employees from clothing stores in Northwest Washington, DC, Southern Maryland, and Arlington and Alexandria, Virginia areas. Once participants consent, I collected data using the MLQ-5x, UWES, and the Employee Productivity Scale, sending surveys electronically to ensure safety from COVID-19. I analyzed all data using multiple linear regression, using the results to address the research questions associated with this study.

Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Change

**Introduction**

The purpose of this quantitative correlational study is to examine the relationship between transformational leadership, employee engagement, and employee productivity in retail stores. The participants in the study included retail clothing store employees in Northwest Washington, DC, Southern Maryland, and Arlington and Alexandria, Virginia. Participants responded to items in the MLQ-5x, the UWES, and the Employee Productivity Scale. A multiple linear regression analysis was conducted to determine the relationship between transformational leadership, employee engagement, and employee productivity. The results of the study determined whether developing transformational leadership and employee engagement leads to higher employee productivity within retail stores. The null hypothesis was that transformational leadership and employee engagement did not predict employee productivity. The null hypothesis was rejected.

**Presentation of the Findings**

In this section, I discuss the assumptions testing, share descriptive statistics, and present the results of inferential testing. The goal of the assumptions testing, descriptive statistics, and inferential testing was to examine whether employee productivity could be predicted by transformational leadership and employee engagement. I also compare the findings with existing literature and the theoretical framework, concluding with a summary of the study. I utilized multiple linear regression to answer the following research question:

RQ: What relationship, if any, exists between transformational leadership, employee engagement, and employee productivity?

$H_0$: There is no significant relationship between transformational leadership, employee engagement, and employee productivity.

$H_a$: There is a statistically significant relationship between transformational leadership, employee engagement, and employee productivity.

**Assumptions Testing**

Preliminary analyses are conducted by researchers using multiple linear regression to determine whether assumptions of multicollinearity, outliers, normality, linearity, homoscedasticity, and independence of residuals are violated (James et al., 2013). I conducted assumptions testing for the current study. First, I cleaned and prepare the data set for analysis. In all, 121 individuals responded, provided informed consent, and began the survey. Two participants did not complete the survey, leaving 119 complete responses. Based on the a priori G*Power analysis with parameters established, this study's appropriate minimum sample size was 109. Specifically, the a priori power analysis used to determine the minimum sample size to achieve statistical significance yielded a result of 109, using an alpha level of .05 and a power of .80. Thus, the study's actual sample size of 119 was sufficiently large to ensure statistical significance.

Regarding multicollinearity, I determined that VIF values ranged from 1.89 to 2.98 (see Table 2), suggesting no violation of the assumption of multicollinearity because the VIF values are less than 5 (James et al., 2013; Menard, 2001). According to Kramer (2011), a range of 1.5 to 2.5 is acceptable for the Durbin-Watson statistic. The Durbin-

Watson statistic was at 2.21, indicating that the assumption of independence of residuals

was not violated. Assumptions of outliers, normality, linearity, and homoscedasticity

were also not violated based on a visual inspection of the boxplots, normal P-P plots, and

scatterplot for each variable (Brown et al., 2018). The normal P-P plots and scatterplots

are presented in Appendix G. Based on the plots, the points conform to the diagonal

normality line, which indicated that the residuals were normally distributed (Brown et al.,

2018). To test homoscedasticity, the scatterplots of residuals versus predicted values were

observed. The results of the scatterplots determined that there were no patterns formed.

Thus, the assumption of homoscedasticity was also met for the research question (Brown

et al., 2018). If the residuals are normally distributed and homoscedastic, the assumption

of linearity is also met (Brown et al., 2018).

**Table 2**

*VIF Statistics*

|  | Collinearity statistics | |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Subscale | Tolerance | VIF |
| TL - Idealized Influence | .354 | 2.821 |
| TL - Inspirational Motivation | .522 | 1.915 |
| TL - Intellectual Stimulation | .528 | 1.894 |
| TL - Individual Consideration | .530 | 1.888 |
| Engagement - Vigor | .436 | 2.295 |
| Engagement - Dedication | .336 | 2.977 |
| Engagement - Absorption | .384 | 2.603 |

Boxplots were used to graphically present the variables considered in the study.

Boxplots were also used to identify outliers in the study. As observed in the boxplots,

variables of Engagement – Vigor, Engagement – Dedication, and Transformational

Leadership – Inspirational Motivation have data outliers. Because there are numerous

outliers in the data, Kwak and Kim's (2017) Winsorization approach of handling outliers

was used. The method involves replacing the outliers with the closest non-outlier value

(Kwak & Kim, 2017). Outlier values for variables of Engagement – Vigor, Engagement –

Dedication, and Transformational Leadership – Inspirational Motivation were replaced

using the Winsorization approach prior to conducting the inferential statistics for the

study.

For the Engagement – Vigor scores, values higher than 35 were replaced with 35

while values lower than 18 were replaced with 18. For Engagement – Dedication, values

higher than 32 were replaced with 32 while values lower than 12 were replaced with 12.

For Transformational Leadership – Inspirational Motivation, values higher than 18 were

replaced with 18 while values lower than 7 were replaced with 7. After conducting the

Winsorization approach, boxplots of the three variables were re-generated. The boxplots

indicated that there were no more outliers in the dataset (see Figures 1–8).

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**Figure 1**

*Boxplot for Employee Productivity*
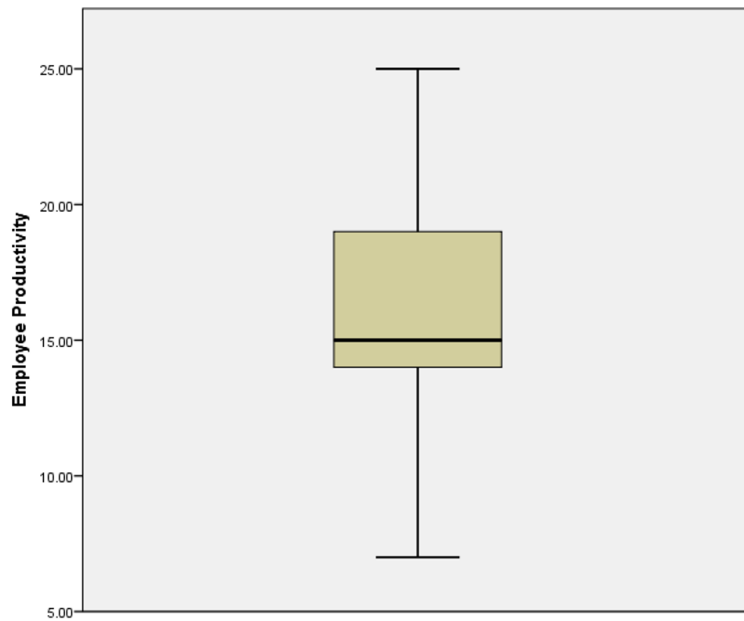


**Figure 2**

*Boxplot for Engagement - Dedication*
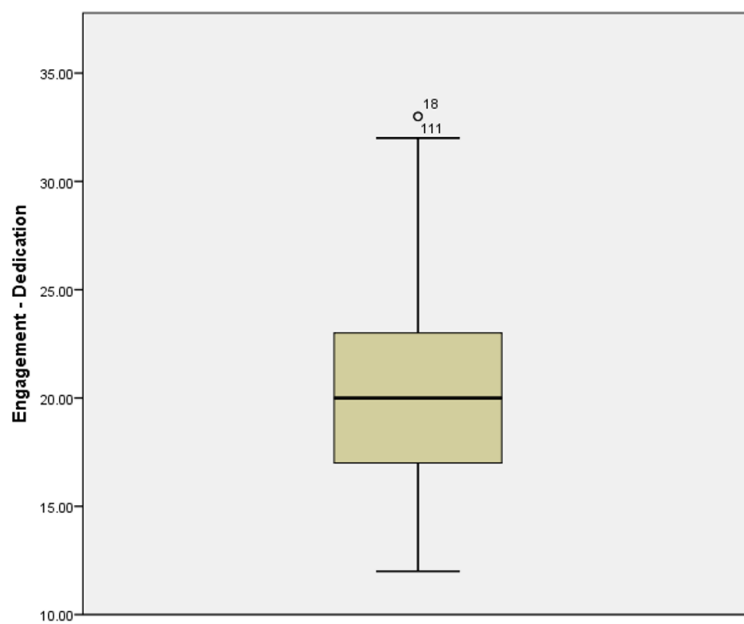
**Figure 3**

*Boxplot for Engagement - Vigor*
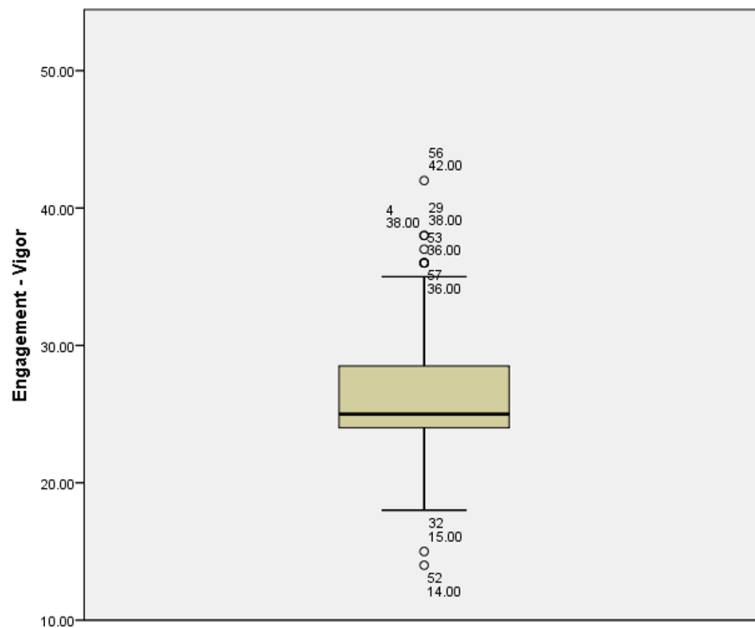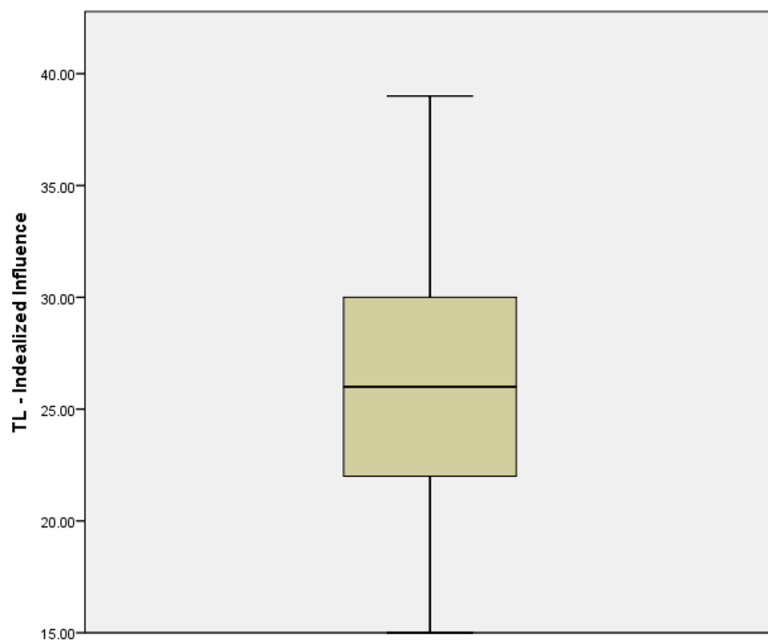


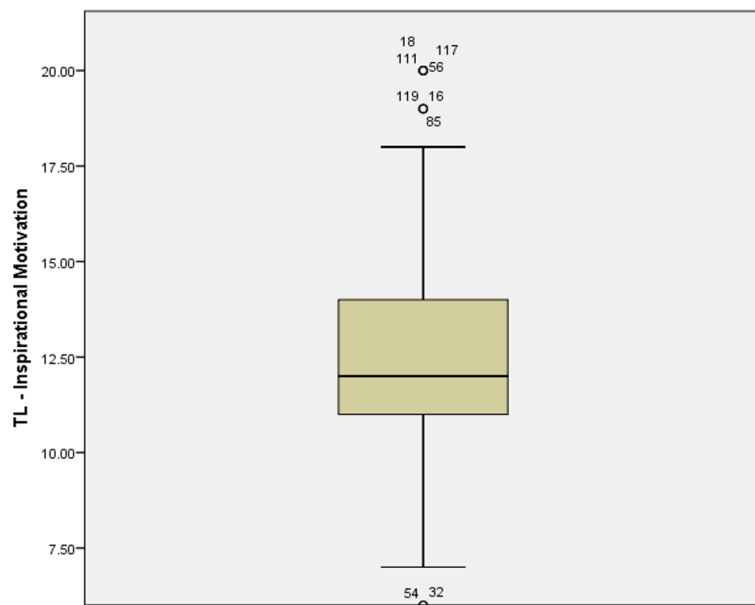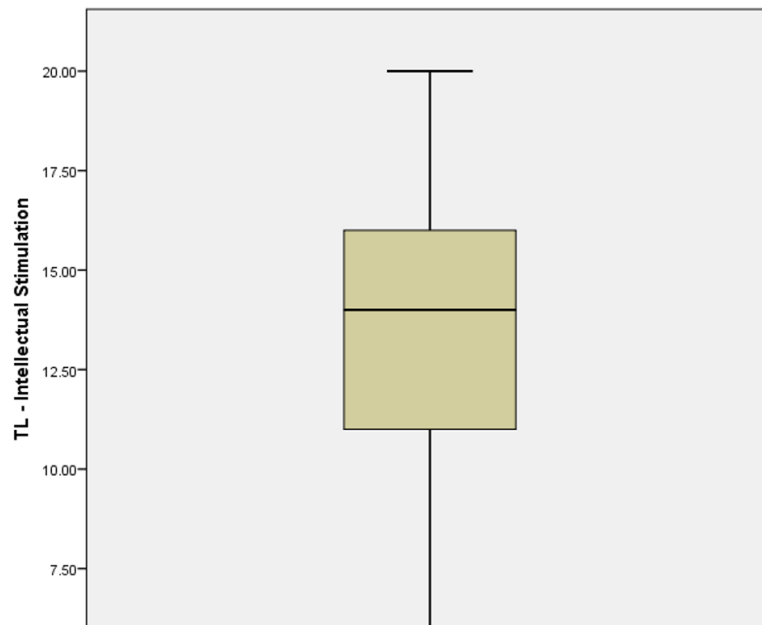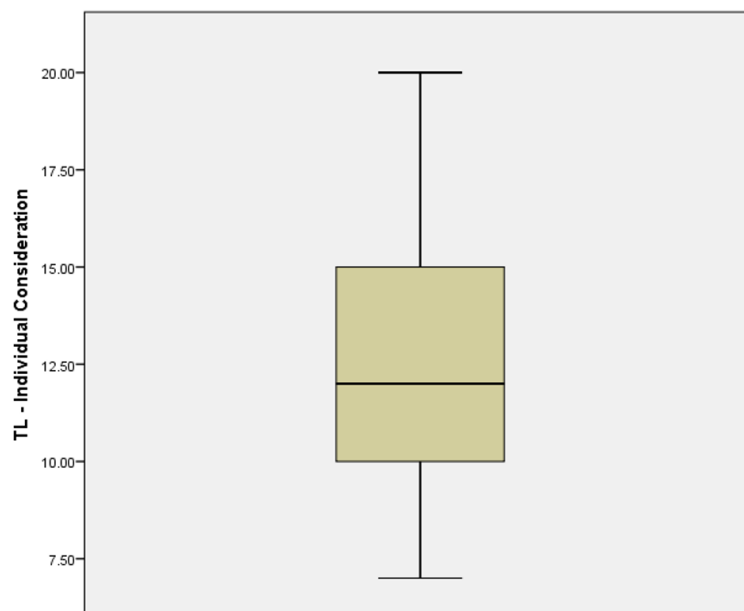**Figure 4**

*Boxplot for Engagement – Absorption*
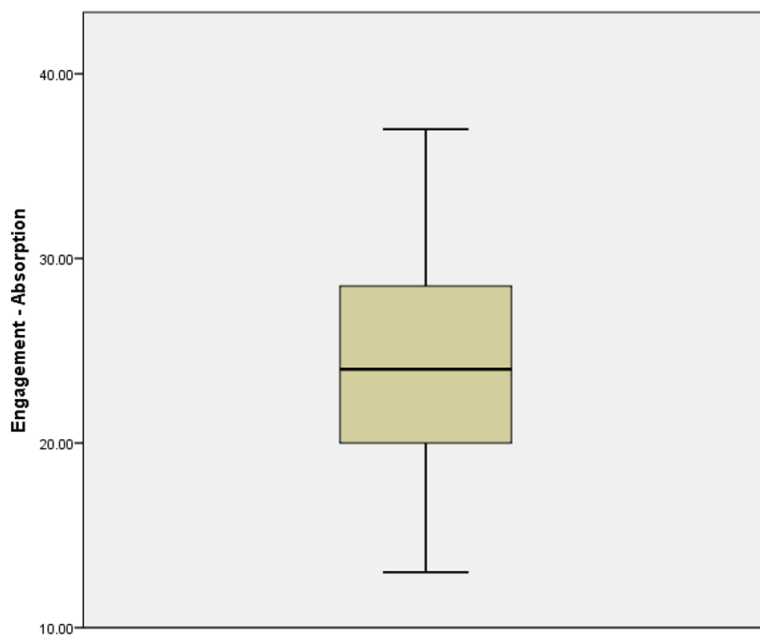
**Figure 5**

*Boxplot for Transformational Leadership – Idealized Influence*



**Figure 6**

*Boxplot for Transformational Leadership – Inspirational Motivation*

**Figure 7**

*Boxplot for Transformational Leadership – Intellectual Stimulation*



**Figure 8**

*Boxplot for Transformational Leadership – Individual Consideration*

**Descriptive Statistics**

One hundred and nineteen participants completed the survey questionnaires.

Descriptive statistics were used to present the location characteristics of participants (see

Table 3). For the geographic location of participants, 42 were from Northwest

Washington, DC (35.3%), 41 were from Southern Maryland, 24 were from Alexandria,

Virginia (20.2%), and 12 were from Arlington, Virginia (10.1%).

**Table 3**

*Frequencies and Percentages of Participant Location Characteristics*

| Location | Frequency | Percent |
|---|---|---|
| Northwest Washington, DC | 42 | 35.3 |
| Southern Maryland | 41 | 34.4 |
| Arlington, Virginia | 12 | 10.1 |
| Alexandria, Virginia | 24 | 20.2 |
| Total | 119 | 100.0 |

The variables considered in the study were employee productivity, employee

engagement, and transformational leadership. The mean employee productivity score was

16.03 ($SD = 3.50$). The median was slightly lower than the mean, which indicated that the

data was slightly right-skewed. The employee engagement variable was measured using

three subscales: vigor, dedication, and absorption. Among the three subscales, the highest

mean score was observed for vigor ($M = 26.13$, $SD = 5.03$), followed by absorption ($M =$

$24.29$, $SD = 5.84$) and dedication ($M = 20.56$, $SD = 4.82$). For the transformational

leadership subscales, the highest mean score was observed for idealized influence ($M =$

$25.51$, $SD = 5.32$) while the lowest mean score was observed for individual consideration

($M = 12.24$, $SD = 3.03$; see Table 4).

**Table 4**

*Descriptive Statistics of Employee Productivity, Employee Engagement, and Transformational Leadership Subscales*

| Subscale | *M* | *SD* | Minimum | Maximum | Median |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Employee Productivity | 16.03 | 3.50 | 7.00 | 25.00 | 15.00 |
| Engagement - Vigor | 26.13 | 5.03 | 14.00 | 42.00 | 25.00 |
| Engagement - Dedication | 20.56 | 4.82 | 12.00 | 33.00 | 20.00 |
| Engagement - Absorption | 24.29 | 5.84 | 13.00 | 37.00 | 24.00 |
| TL - Idealized Influence | 25.51 | 5.32 | 15.00 | 39.00 | 26.00 |
| TL - Inspirational Motivation | 12.59 | 2.97 | 6.00 | 20.00 | 12.00 |
| TL - Intellectual Stimulation | 13.31 | 3.18 | 6.00 | 20.00 | 14.00 |
| TL - Individual Consideration | 12.24 | 3.03 | 7.00 | 20.00 | 12.00 |

**Inferential Results**

I used multiple linear regression to examine the relationships between transformational leadership, employee engagement, and work productivity. The predictor variables were transformational leadership subscales of idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individual consideration as well as engagement subscales of vigor, dedication, and absorption. The criterion variable was employee productivity. The null hypothesis was that there would be no significant relationship between transformational leadership, employee engagement, and employee productivity. The alternative hypothesis was that there would be a statistically significant relationship between transformational leadership, employee engagement, and employee productivity. The model as a whole was statistically significant in predicting the employee productivity score, $F(7, 112) = 35.149$, $p < .01$, $R^2 = .69$. The $R^2$ (.69) value indicated that approximately 69% of the variation in employee engagement is accounted

for by the linear combination of the predictor variables (transformational leadership

subscales and engagement subscales). In the final model, variables of individual

consideration ($t = 4.10$, $p < .01$) and vigor ($t = 5.36$, $p < .01$) were the only statistically

significant predictors of employee productivity (see Table 5). The result of the analysis

determined that an increase in individual consideration results in an increase of .34 in

employee productivity. An increase in one unit of vigor also results to an increase of .33

in employee productivity. The final predictive equation was Employee Productivity = -

2.00 + .04 (Idealized Influence) +.15 (Inspirational Motivation) +.03 (Intellectual

Stimulation) +.34 (Individual Consideration) +.33 (Vigor) +.09 (Dedication) +.00

(Absorption).

**Table 5**

*Regression Analysis Results for Employee Productivity*

| Model | Unstandardized coefficients | | Standardized coefficients | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | B | SE B | Beta | t | p |
| (Constant) | -2.00 | 1.28 | | -1.56 | .12 |
| TL - Idealized Influence | .04 | .06 | .05 | .61 | .54 |
| TL - Inspirational Motivation | .15 | .09 | .12 | 1.63 | .11 |
| TL - Intellectual Stimulation | .03 | .08 | .03 | .38 | .71 |
| TL - Individual Consideration | .34 | .08 | .30 | 4.10 | .00* |
| Engagement - Vigor | .33 | .06 | .43 | 5.36 | .00* |
| Engagement - Dedication | .09 | .07 | .13 | 1.41 | .16 |
| Engagement - Absorption | .00 | .05 | .00 | .04 | .97 |

*$p < .01$

### Analysis Summary

The purpose of this quantitative correlational research was to examine the

relationship between transformational leadership, employee engagement, and employee

productivity in retail stores. I used standard multiple linear regression to examine the

ability of transformational leadership and engagement subscales to predict the value of

employee productivity. Assumptions surrounding multiple regression were not violated.

The model as a whole, $F(7, 112) = 35.149$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .69$, significantly predicted

employee productivity. Both individual consideration and vigor significantly predict

employee productivity. The conclusion from this analysis is that individual consideration

and vigor are associated with employee productivity. However, the other variables

included in the model did not individually predict employee productivity. These variables

were the transformational leadership dimensions of idealized influence, inspirational

motivation, and intellectual stimulation, and the engagement dimensions of dedication

and absorption.

**Application to Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework for this study included Burns' (1978) transformational

leadership theory and Kahn's (1990) theory of employee engagement. The results of this

study showed that the individual consideration dimension of transformational leadership

predicted employee productivity, which aligns partially with the literature. Several

researchers found that transformational leadership as a whole has a positive impact on

both managerial outcomes and variables related to employee experience (Mone et al.,

2018; Wills et al., 2017; Zehnder et al., 2017). Regarding the specific dimension of

individual consideration, Koveshnikov and Ehrnrooth (2018) noted that managers could

give individual consideration to employees through communication style, management

style, reward systems, and job tasks. The provision of individual consideration as a part

of transformational leadership allows the employees to meet organizational objectives, such as higher productivity. Additionally, Al Dari et al. (2018) found that when leadership rewards employees who exhibit emulated or inspired behavior, the organization benefits through improved knowledge sharing and heightened productivity. Such a finding suggests the influence of inspirational motivation, which was not predictive of employee productivity in this study.

The results of this study also aligned partially with the literature on employee engagement by showing that the employee engagement dimension of vigor predicted employee productivity. Regarding employee engagement generally, several researchers have identified a connection between employee engagement and positive employee and organizational outcomes (Bailey et al., 2017; Eldor & Vigoda-Gadot, 2017; Mone et al., 2018; Ribeiro et al., 2018). Researchers also asserted that fostering employee engagement can increase organizational productivity disproportionally compared to other variables such as job satisfaction and organizational commitment (Patil, 2018). No literature reviewed for the current study reached similarly mixed results; studies found instead that engagement as a whole predicted positive employee- and organization-level outcomes (Bailey et al., 2017; Eldor & Vigoda-Gadot, 2017; Mone et al., 2018; Ribeiro et al., 2018).

To determine a potential explanation for insignificant results, I conducted a post-hoc power analysis. With an alpha level of 0.05, effect size of 0.15, sample size of 119, and 8 predictors, the achieved statistical power for the multiple linear regression analysis was 0.85 (Appendix H). This result, higher than a conventional statistic power level of

0.80, suggests that insignificant results do not result from insufficient statistical power (Malone et al., 2016).

Other explanations for the results come from the nature of retail work. Facets of transformational leadership, particularly inspirational motivation and idealized influence, may be more difficult to enact in the retail industry. Employees may not perceive their work to be mission-driven, and these employees may not see the tasks they complete as part of their work as achieving a larger, collective purpose; such employees may also fail to find work in retail intellectually stimulating. Transformational leaders in the retail industry may also struggle to behave in alignment with these dimensions of transformational leadership. No researchers have examined these issues; future researchers should explore these possibilities to generate fuller understandings of the application of transformational leadership to the retail industry.

Regarding employee engagement, the nature of retail work may also explain the insignificant findings for dedication and absorption. Just as employees may find retail tasks disconnected from a larger mission or purpose, they may find it difficult to be dedicated to such tasks. A similar alignment may exist between intellectual stimulation and absorption; retail employees failing to find intellectual stimulation in their work may be less absorbed in it. As with leadership, no published literature addresses these potential explanations for the current study's findings. Future researchers should explore both these insignificant findings for employee engagement and potential links between dimensions of transformational leadership and employee engagement within the retail industry.

**Applications to Professional Practice**

The purpose of this quantitative correlational study was to examine the relationship between transformational leadership, employee engagement, and employee productivity in retail stores. Furthermore, this study is intended to provide further information regarding up-to-date research on the relationships between transformational leadership, employee engagement, and employee productivity in the age of COVID-19. The study findings support a significant relationship between the transformational leadership dimension of individual consideration, the employee engagement dimension of vigor, and employee productivity within retail stores. The results of this study are relevant because retail store managers can use the findings to improve employee performance through increased productivity. Specifically, retail store managers can apply the specific principle of individual consideration and the engagement dimension of vigor to the ways in which they manage their employees. Wang et al. (2016) supports this notion, who shared that employee work performance and employee behaviors are linked to positive organizational outcomes, when leaders use transformational leadership theory. Given that this study's results include a significant result only for individual consideration, retail managers may focus on treating employees as individuals, with distinct needs, characteristics, and interests, as they seek to increase employee productivity.

The results of this study can also be applied to practice by showing that retail managers can achieve improved employee productivity by enhancing employee engagement through vigor. This can be done through a variety of employee engagement

initiatives that promote vigor, such as offering flexible work arrangements, creating an

inclusive work environment, and developing leadership transparency. The results of this

study indicate that implementing employee engagement initiatives or campaigns designed

to increase vigor will lead to greater employee productivity within the retail industry.

There is a particular lack of research regarding what constitutes strategies to increase

vigor within the retail industry; future researchers should explore such strategies to

provide further guidance to retail managers.

<p align="center">**Implications for Social Change**</p>

The results of this study may guide positive social change. The findings that

transformational leadership and work engagement predict employee productivity for

nonmanagerial employees in the retail sector suggests a pathway by which leaders can

increase productivity and thus improve overall business outcomes. The COVID-19

pandemic has disrupted the retail sector (Donthu & Gustaffson, 2020) and communities.

Losses in the retail sector and communities from the COVID-19 pandemic compound

existing losses created by poor employee productivity (Bialowolski et al., 2020). Creating

and maintaining a competitive advantage for retail stores through leadership that

increases productivity, despite a consumer shift toward online shopping (Grashuis et al.,

2020), can protect businesses that contribute to the financial health of cities and the

individuals and families who shop at and work in them. The result may be stronger and

more resilient communities.

**Recommendations for Action**

This study's findings, revealing that the transformational leadership dimension of individual consideration and the work engagement dimension of vigor predict employee productivity, are significant in guiding action in the retail sector. Based on the results, I recommend retail store managers adopt a transformational leadership style in enacting individual consideration for employees. Managers should consider each employee as an individual with different skills and needs and be responsive to employees' skills and needs in providing leadership. Because managers may be unaware of transformational leadership style generally or the specific aspect of individual consideration, or because managers may find it difficult to adopt, retail firm leaders and upper-level managers should develop training programs for existing managers and new managers to help them understand and perform effective management to treat employees individually and with care and concern for their differences and needs. In this way, retail leaders at all levels should consider the findings of this study and make changes to achieve improved productivity through improved leadership. Leaders at all levels should also consider aspects of work engagement as an important factor in employees' productivity. Employee evaluations that require explicit observation and measurement of employee vigor may enable managers to make decisions about staffing and employee development through this information.

Publishing this study will enable retail sector leaders and other researchers to learn about and apply the findings of this study and extend them. Other studies have indicated that transformational leadership predicts employee outcomes (Mone et al.,

2018; Wills et al., 2017; Zehnder et al., 2017). However, researchers have not adequately assessed the potential complexity of these relationships, resulting in this study's novel finding regarding individual consideration as the sole transformational leadership predictor of productivity. To provide both academic and practical benefits, I plan to publish this study as a dissertation manuscript on ProQuest, and I also intend to develop and publish one or more peer-reviewed journal articles using the findings. I may also present the study and its results at conferences and at events attended by leaders in the retail sector.

**Recommendations for Further Research**

For this study, I examined the relationships between transformational leadership, work engagement, and employee productivity within retail stores. A limitation of the study was that the participants worked in the Northwest Washington, DC, Southern Maryland, and Arlington and Alexandria, Virginia, areas. Therefore, a recommendation for further research is to explore the relationships between transformational leadership, employee engagement, and employee productivity among retail employees working in other areas of the United States. Future researchers can also explore the relationships between the study variables among populations within other industries to provide a more thorough analysis of employee productivity. In addition, this study was limited by the use of self-report instruments to collect data. Therefore, future research should expand upon this study by using non-self-reported productivity metrics when assessing employee productivity.

Given the mixed nature of the study's findings, with only individual consideration and vigor significantly predicting employee productivity, future researchers should explore issues related to transformational leadership and employee engagement in the retail industry. Such researchers may utilize qualitative methods, interviewing employees to explore their perceptions regarding the mission or purpose of their work, the stimulation they derive through work tasks, and other attitudes related to transformational leadership. Researchers may also use interviews and other qualitative approaches to explore the engagement dimensions of absorption and dedication in a richer way, resulting in understanding of employees' experiences and perceptions regarding these facets of engagement.

## Reflections

At the start of my doctoral journey, before planning and conducting this study, I did not understand the leadership characteristics that were important employee productivity. I considered in basic terms that leadership was a significant driver of employee outcomes, but as a novice researcher, I did not understand the precise nature of that influence. Through this research, I learned that both transformational leadership and work engagement predict employee productivity. In the process of achieving these findings, I needed to control for my biases, some of them unconscious, from my own experiences working both for leaders and as a leader. I used an anonymous survey and pre-validated instruments to measure the variables in this study, thus ensuring that neither bias nor my expectations influenced the results. Through the research process, I learned about the potential implications of the research, particularly that the findings can

influence practice for leaders in the retail sector and to the benefit of employees and society. I also learned about the limits of those implications and the need for continued research to create new knowledge regarding leadership and employee outcomes. I plan to use the findings to effect change within the retail sector. At the same time, I recognize that research is continuous and requires patience and dedication.

## Conclusion

For this study, I examined the relationships between transformational leadership, employee engagement, and employee productivity in the retail industry. I collected data from 119 participants who worked in retail clothing stores in the Northwest Washington, DC, Southern Maryland, and Arlington and Alexandria, Virginia, areas. The study results indicated significant relationships between the transformational leadership dimension of individual consideration, the employee engagement dimension of vigor, and employee productivity among retail employees. This study's findings may help retail clothing store managers improve employee productivity by applying the principles of individual consideration for employees and enhancing employee engagement through vigor. The implications for positive social change include reduced employee turnover rates, leading to higher employee retention. Higher employee retention may also lead to cost savings to the business, further generating greater economic growth outcomes.

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Appendix A: G*Power Test for Sample Size

Appendix B: Demographic Survey

1. What is your current age?
   a. Under 18 years of age
   b. 18–24 years of age
   c. 35–44 years of age
   d. 45–54 years of age
   e. 55 years or older
   f. Prefer not to answer

2. With which gender do you identify?
   a. Female
   b. Male
   c. Nonbinary
   d. Prefer not to answer

3. Are you currently employed as a nonmanagerial employee in a retail clothing store?
   a. Yes
   b. No
   c. Prefer not to answer

4. Which area best describes where you are from?
   a. Northwest Washington, DC
   b. Southern Maryland
   c. Arlington, Virginia
   d. Alexandria, Virginia
   e. None of the above
   f. Prefer not to answer

Appendix C: Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ-5x)

# MLQ     Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire
## Scoring Key (5x) Short

My Name: _____ Date: _____

Organization ID #: _____ Leader ID #: _____

**Scoring:** The MLQ scale scores are average scores for the items on the scale. The score can be derived by summing the items and dividing by the number of items that make up the scale. All of the leadership style scales have four items, Extra Effort has three items, Effectiveness has four items, and Satisfaction has two items.

| Not at all | Once in a while | Sometimes | Fairly often | Frequently, if not always |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |

Idealized Influence (Attributed) total/4 =          Management-by-Exception (Active) total/4 =

Idealized Influence (Behavior) total/4 =          Management-by-Exception (Passive) total/4 =

Inspirational Motivation total/4 =          Laissez-faire Leadership total/4 =

Intellectual Stimulation total/4 =          Extra Effort total/3 =

Individualized Consideration total/4 =          Effectiveness total/4 =

Contingent Reward total/4 =          Satisfaction total/2 =

---

| #   | Scale | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
|-----|-------|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1.  | Contingent Reward | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 2.  | Intellectual Stimulation | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 3.  | Management-by-Exception (Passive) | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 4.  | Management-by-Exception (Active) | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 5.  | Laissez-faire | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 6.  | Idealized Influence (Behavior) | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 7.  | Laissez-faire | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 8.  | Intellectual Stimulation | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 9.  | Inspirational Motivation | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 10. | Idealized Influence (Attributed) | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 11. | Contingent Reward | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 12. | Management-by-Exception (Passive) | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 13. | Inspirational Motivation | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 14. | Idealized Influence (Behavior) | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 15. | Individualized Consideration | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |

| Not at all | Once in a while | Sometimes | Fairly often | Frequently, if not always |
|:---:|:---:|:---:|:---:|:---:|
| 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |

16. **Contingent Reward** ............................................................0  1  2  3  4
17. **Management-by-Exception (Passive)** ............0  1  2  3  4
18. **Idealized Influence (Attributed)** ............................................0  1  2  3  4
19. **Individualized Consideration** ............................................0  1  2  3  4
20. **Management-by-Exception (Passive)** ............0  1  2  3  4
21. **Idealized Influence (Attributed)** ............................................0  1  2  3  4
22. **Management-by-Exception (Active)** ..........................0  1  2  3  4
23. **Idealized Influence (Behavior)** ............................................0  1  2  3  4
24. **Management-by-Exception (Active)** ..........................0  1  2  3  4
25. **Idealized Influence (Attributed)** ............................................0  1  2  3  4
26. **Inspirational Motivation** ............................................0  1  2  3  4
27. **Management-by-Exception (Active)** ..........................0  1  2  3  4
28. **Laissez-faire** ............................................0  1  2  3  4
29. **Individualized Consideration** ............................................0  1  2  3  4
30. **Intellectual Stimulation** ............................................0  1  2  3  4
31. **Individualized Consideration** ............................................0  1  2  3  4
32. **Intellectual Stimulation** ............................................0  1  2  3  4
33. **Laissez-faire** ............................................0  1  2  3  4
34. **Idealized Influence (Behavior)** ............................................0  1  2  3  4
35. **Contingent Reward** ............................................0  1  2  3  4
36. **Inspirational Motivation** ............................................0  1  2  3  4
37. **Effectiveness** ....................0  1  2  3  4
38. **Satisfaction** ............0  1  2  3  4
39. **Extra Effort** ................................0  1  2  3  4
40. **Effectiveness** ....................0  1  2  3  4
41. **Satisfaction** ............0  1  2  3  4
42. **Extra Effort** ................................0  1  2  3  4
43. **Effectiveness** ....................0  1  2  3  4
44. **Extra Effort** ................................0  1  2  3  4
45. **Effectiveness** ....................0  1  2  3  4

Appendix D: Work and Well-being Survey (UWES)

**Work & Well-being Survey (UWES) ©**

*The following 17 statements are about how you feel at work. Please read each statement carefully and decide if you ever feel this way about your job. If you have never had this feeling, cross the "0" (zero) in the space after the statement. If you have had this feeling, indicate how often you feel it by crossing the number (from 1 to 6) that best describes how frequently you feel that way.*

| | Almost never | Rarely | Sometimes | Often | Very often | Always |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| Never | A few times a year or less | Once a month or less | A few times a month | Once a week | A few times a week | Every day |

1. _____ At my work, I feel bursting with energy
2. _____ I find the work that I do full of meaning and purpose
3. _____ Time flies when I'm working
4. _____ At my job, I feel strong and vigorous
5. _____ I am enthusiastic about my job
6. _____ When I am working, I forget everything else around me
7. _____ My job inspires me
8. _____ When I get up in the morning, I feel like going to work
9. _____ I feel happy when I am working intensely
10. _____ I am proud of the work that I do
11. _____ I am immersed in my work
12. _____ I can continue working for very long periods at a time
13. _____ To me, my job is challenging
14. _____ I get carried away when I'm working
15. _____ At my job, I am very resilient, mentally
16. _____ It is difficult to detach myself from my job
17. _____ At my work I always persevere, even when things do not go well

Appendix E: Employee Productivity Scale

Instructions: This questionnaire asks you to respond to statements related to your productivity as an employee. Five descriptive statements are listed below. Please select the response that most closely corresponds to your level of agreement with each statement.

| | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neither Agree nor Disagree | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. I do a large amount of work each day. | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| 2. I accomplish tasks quickly and efficiently. | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| 3. I have a high standard of work accomplishment. | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| 4. My work outcomes are of high quality. | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| 5. I always beat our team targets. | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |

Appendix F: Permission for Use of the MLQ-5x

# Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire™

## Instrument (Leader and Rater Form)

## and Scoring Guide
## (Form 5X-Short)

### by Bruce Avolio and Bernard Bass

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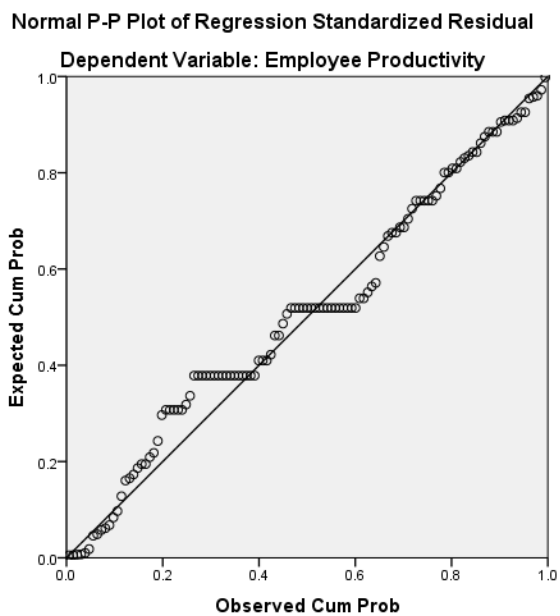www.mindgarden.com

Appendix G: Normal P-P Plots and Scatterplots

**Figure G1**

*Normal P-P Plot of Residuals for Idealized Influence*
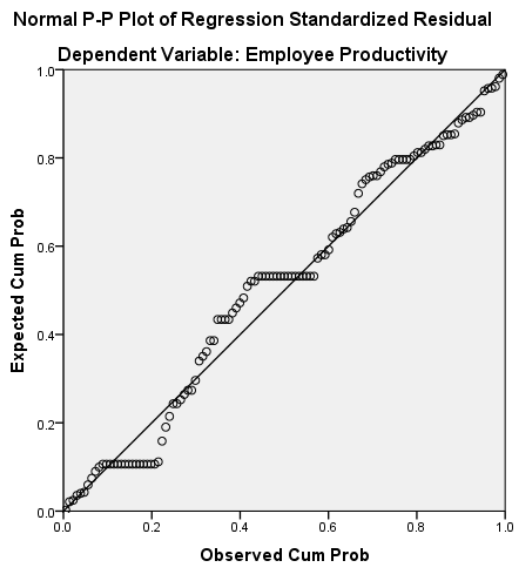


**Figure G2**

*Scatterplot of Residuals for Idealized Influence*
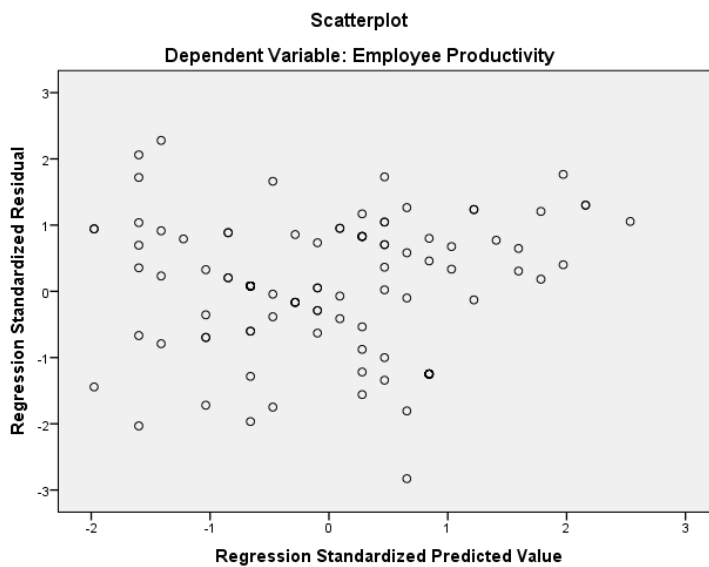
**Figure G3**

*Normal P-P Plot for Inspirational Motivation*



Normal P-P Plot of Regression Standardized Residual

Dependent Variable: Employee Productivity

**Figure G4**

*Scatterplot of Residuals for Inspirational Motivation*



Scatterplot

Dependent Variable: Employee Productivity
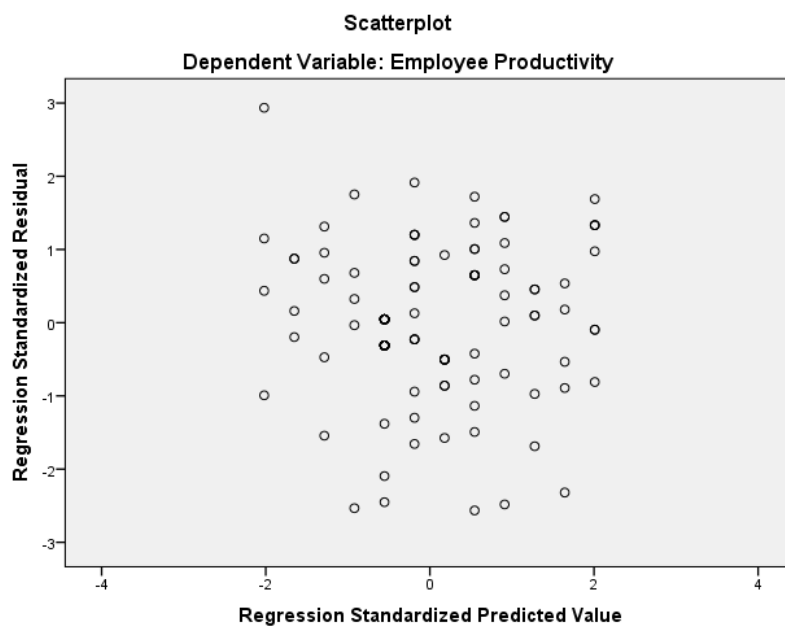
**Figure G5**

*Normal P-P Plot for Intellectual Stimulation*



Normal P-P Plot of Regression Standardized Residual
Dependent Variable: Employee Productivity
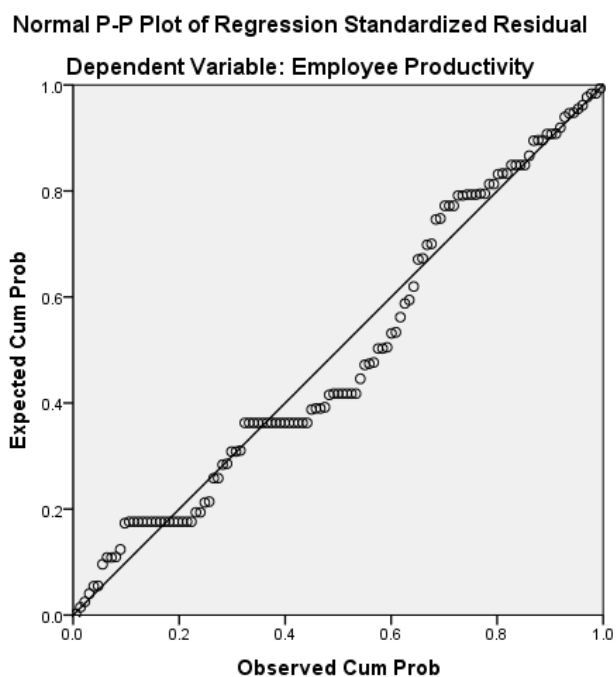
**Figure G6**

*Scatterplot of Residuals for Intellectual Stimulation*



Scatterplot
Dependent Variable: Employee Productivity
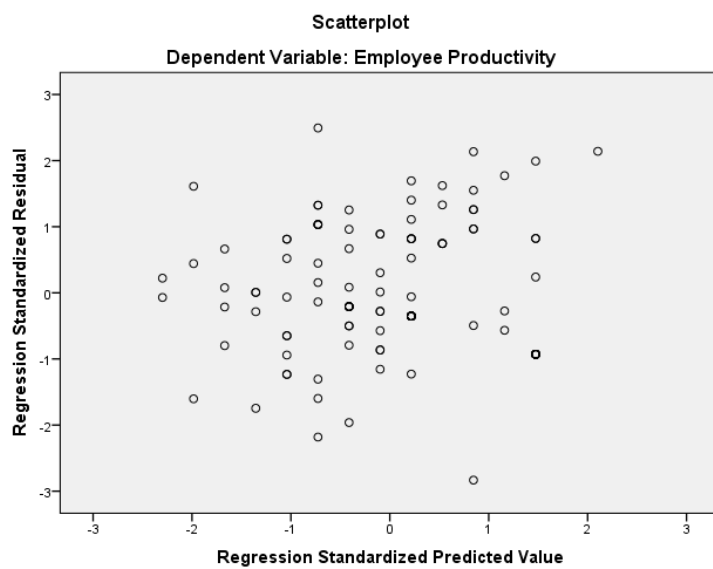
**Figure G7**

*Normal P-P Plot for Individual Consideration*



Normal P-P Plot of Regression Standardized Residual
Dependent Variable: Employee Productivity
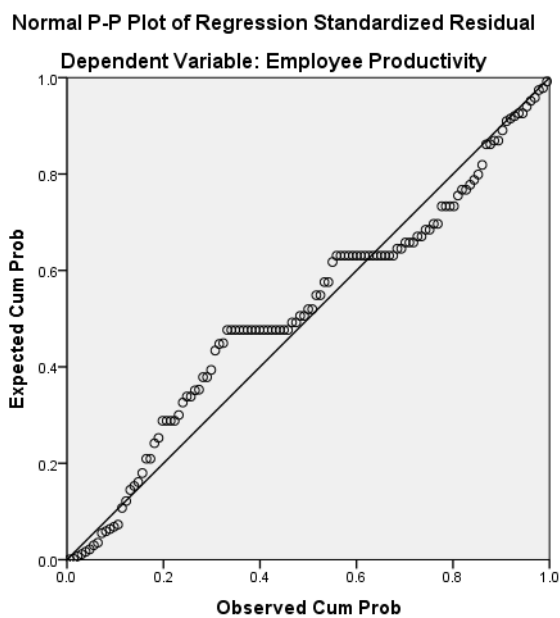
**Figure G8**

*Scatterplot of Residuals for Individual Consideration*



Scatterplot
Dependent Variable: Employee Productivity
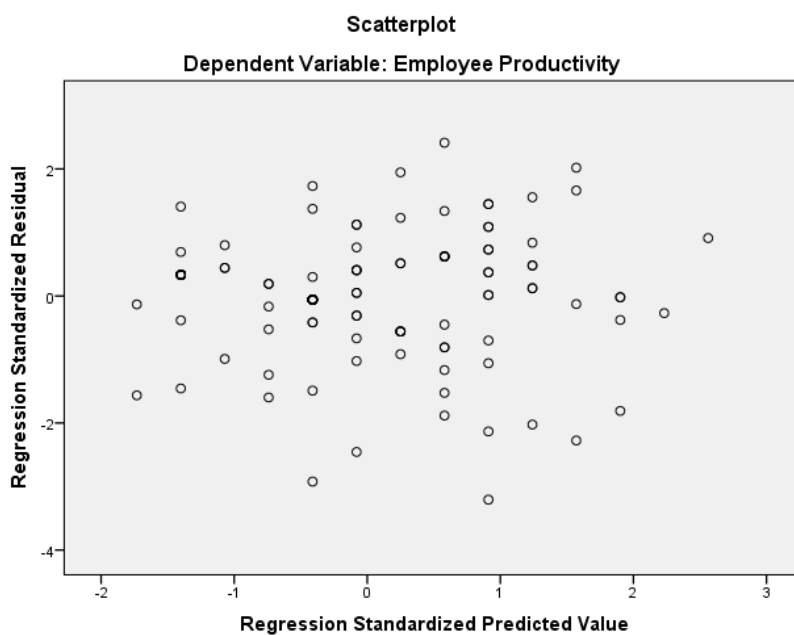
**Figure G9**

*Normal P-P Plot for Dedication*



Normal P-P Plot of Regression Standardized Residual
Dependent Variable: Employee Productivity
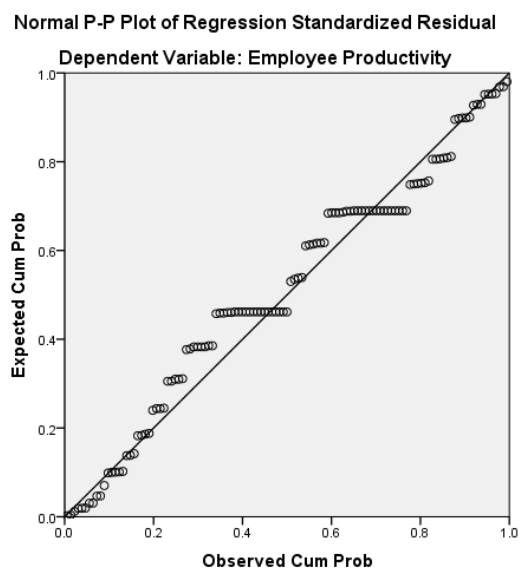
**Figure G10**

*Scatterplot of Residuals for Dedication*



Scatterplot
Dependent Variable: Employee Productivity
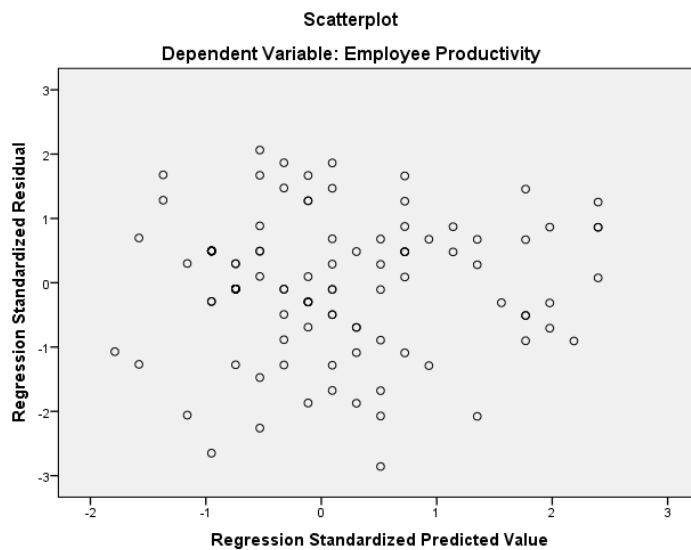
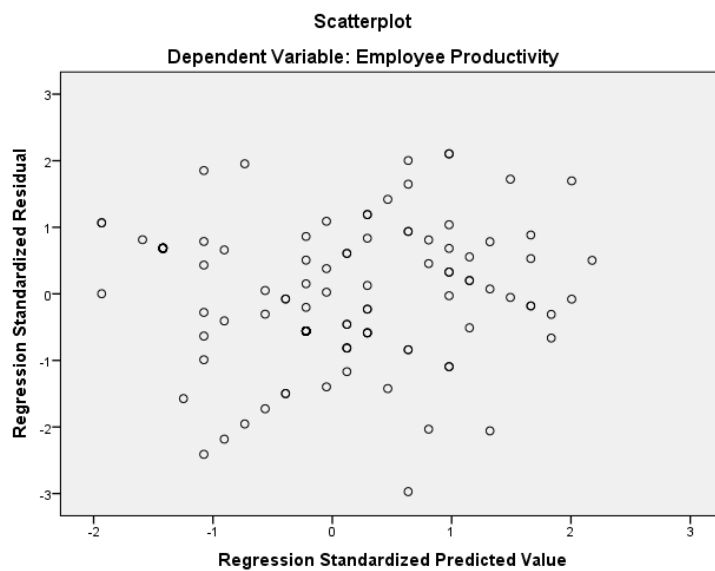**Figure G11**

*Normal P-P Plot for Vigor*



Normal P-P Plot of Regression Standardized Residual
Dependent Variable: Employee Productivity
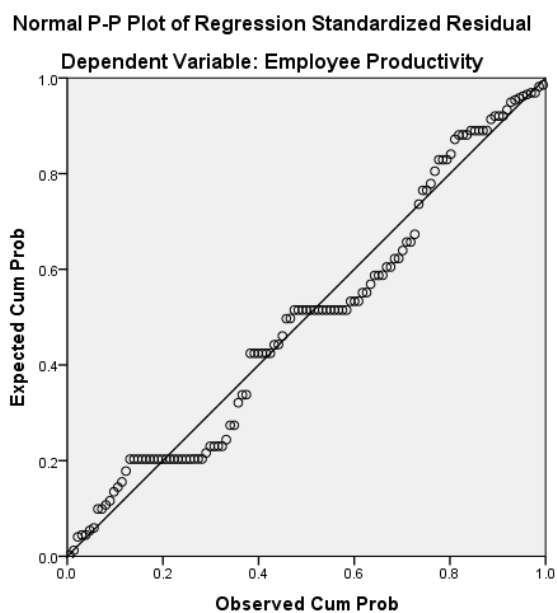
**Figure G12**

*Scatterplot of Residuals for Vigor*



Scatterplot
Dependent Variable: Employee Productivity
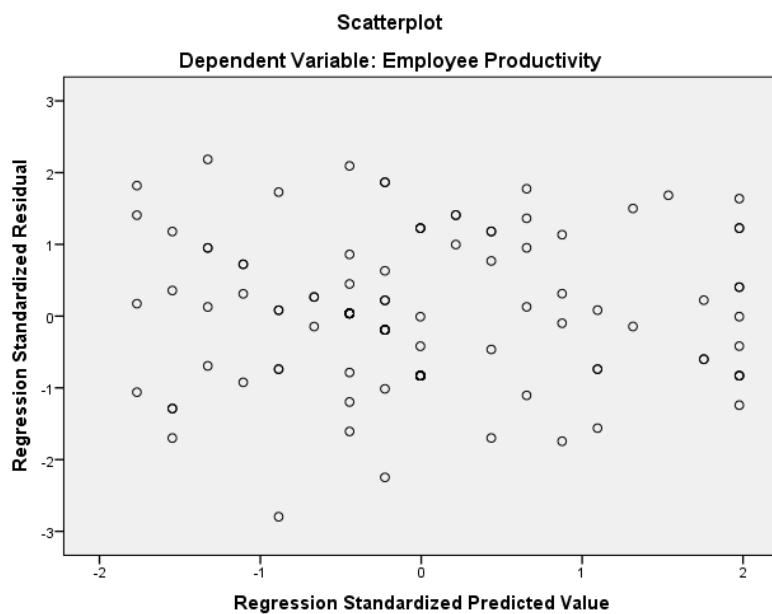
**Figure G13**

*Normal P-P Plot for Absorption*



Normal P-P Plot of Regression Standardized Residual
Dependent Variable: Employee Productivity
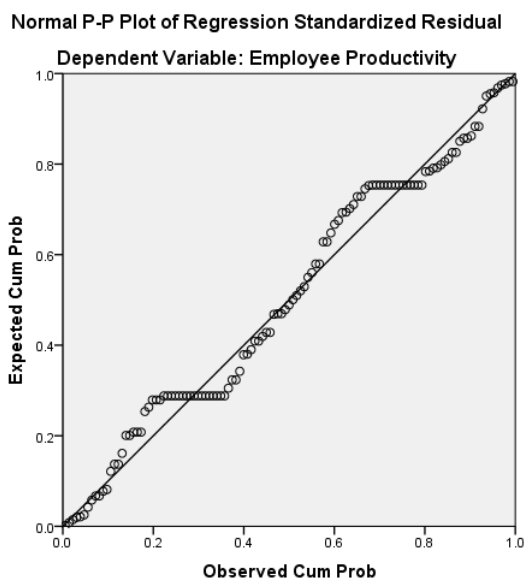
**Figure G14**

*Scatterplot of Residuals for Absorption*



Scatterplot
Dependent Variable: Employee Productivity

Appendix H: Post-Hoc Power Analysis Using G*Power