

An Empirical Study on the Relationship Between Transformational Leadership and Employee Creativity: Mediating Role of Perception of Meaning in Work and Work Engagement

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변혁적 리더십이 직장인 창의성에 미치는 영향: 일의 의미와 일 몰입의 매개효과를 중심으로

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Abstract China's rapid economic growth is continuous but the country still has a long way to become a center for creativity. Leaders have no idea how to encourage their employees to work more efficiently in Chinese companies. Meanwhile the majority of employees are not fully engaged in their work, sometimes they think their work is not meaningful. The purpose of this study is to explore the relationship between transformational leadership and employee creativity, through perceptions of meaning in work and work engagement among employees working in XunLei Networking Technology Corporation. 140 valid data were collected and were analysed using SPSS and AMOS. Results showed that transformational leadership has a positive and significant influence on meaning in work and work engagement. Meaning in work has a significant effect on work engagement, and work engagement has a significant influence on employee creativity. This study provides both academic and practical implications about transformational leadership and employee creativity through meaning in work and work engagement.

Key Words : Leadership, Transformational Leadership, Meaning in Work, Work Engagement, Employees Creativity

요 약 중국의 급속한 경제 성장은 지속되고 있으나 창의성 측면은 아직 요원하다. 중국 기업의 관리자들은 직원들이 보다 효율적으로 업무를 수행할 수 있도록 장려하는 노하우가 아직 부족하다. 한편 중국 기업에서 일하고 있는 대부분의 직원들은 자신의 업무에 몰입하지 않을 뿐만 아니라 때로는 자신의 업무가 의미가 없다고 생각하는 경우가 많다. 이러한 배경에서 변혁적 리더십은 중국 IT 기업에서 중요한 역할을 할 수 있다. 본 연구의 목적은 중국 심천에 소재한 IT기업에서 근무하는 직원들을 대상으로 업무 및 업무 참여의 의미에 대한 인식을 통해 변혁적 리더십이 직원의 창의력에 미치는 영향을 조사하는 것이다. 이를 위해 사례 IT기업에 근무하는 직원들을 대상으로 광범위한 설문조사를 실시하여 140개의 유효 데이터를 수집하였다. 자료의 통계분석은 SPSS와 AMOS를 이용하였다. 분석결과 일과 노동 참여의 의미를 통한 변혁적 리더십이 직원의 창의력에 유의한 영향을 미치는 것으로 나타났으며 이에 대한 학술적, 실무적 시사점을 제시하였다.

주제어 : 리더십, 변혁적 리더십, 일의 의미, 일 몰입, 창의성

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1. Introduction

Industry reports in China showed that the majority of employees in some IT companies were not fully engaged in their work, and that the engagement level were steadily declining and lacking productivity. XunLei Networking Technology Corporation was adopted as an example to examine the relationship between transformational leadership and employee creativity through perception of meaning in work and work engagement. This study mainly to find that whether the employees are more creative, and want to be engaged in their work and feel that their work is more meaningful through leader's simulation. More and more IT companies have begun to focus on transformational leadership in China. According to the prior study, transformational leadership is one of the most dominant paradigms in the contemporary leadership literature[1]. It has connections with employee outcomes, things like, team work[2], organizational citizenship behavior [3], and well-being[4]. The transformational leadership has been defined as "Leaders and employees create a bridge which can help each other to get a higher level of morality and motivation"[5]. Thus a transformational leader is a morally mature leader who motivates followers' behaviors and attitudes to generate higher levels of moral reasoning in followers. However, transformational managers do not influence subordinates' attitudes and behaviors in a simple way. While evidence suggested numerous mediation mechanisms through which transformational leadership affect subordinates. [6]found that the process of influence or the mechanism through which transformational managers motivate subordinates needed further investigation. The prior studies showed us that through inspirational stimulation, leaders are seen as having a compelling vision of the future, and communicating optimism about future goals, which in turn increases employees' personal core values[2, 7]. Thus we can predict that there is a positive relationship between transformational

leadership and meaning in work. And according to [8], they has found that employees' feelings of involvement, cohesiveness, commitment, potency and performance are enhanced by the transformational leadership style. So we can predict that transformational leadership has a positive relationship with work engagement. Through the empirical evidence of [9], transformational leadership has positively impacts on both the individual creativity of employees and organizational innovation. Therefore we can predict that transformational leadership is positively related to employee creativity. And meanwhile employees' perception of meaning in work positively predict employees' work engagement. Through [10], we know that employees engagement can make a true different which helping followers to come up with some new ideas at the workplace. This means that we can predict that work engagement has a significant relationship with employee creativity.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Transformational Leadership

According to [11], transformational leadership has different dimensions, they are: Giving followers right to have freedom of choice and appealing to the ideals of followers. Leaders need to know the importance of positive development of employees and internal motivation, improving follower's moral standards, cultivating employees' high moral standards and employees can also develop well with share values, high ethical standards of ethical climate. In this study, 4 components to transformational leadership was used as a theory. First is idealized influence, which is a leader's ability to create commitment and dedication which can help employees to recognize themselves. The second is inspirational motivation, which involves a supervisor's ability to create a vision that appeals to followers and makes them as a significant part of the organization. The third is stimulation, which involves leaders' ability to stimulate employees' efforts to be

innovative through questioning assumptions and taking risks. The final behaviour is individualized consideration, leaders act as a mentor or coach paying special attention to the different needs of individuals[12].

2.2 Meaning in Work

The main interest in meaning in work has been fuelled by the assumption that personal and organizational outcomes were associated with perceptions of meaning in work[13]. As an indication for the importance of meaning in work, the construct of meaning in work has been found in major models, such as in the empowerment model[14], and job characteristics model[15]. [16] suggested that if employees realize the individual's self-perception and self-evaluation, they tend to experience both internally motivating and meaningful even the work tasks are not enjoyable. Meaning in work scholars have proposed that when employees experience intrinsic motivation, employees are willing to explain it as a symbol of consistency between their job tasks and their self-concepts, which can cause bigger experienced meaningfulness. Meaning in work can be viewed as a source of individuals' and organizational outcomes, such as well-being, organizational commitment, job satisfaction.

2.3 Work Engagement

[17] was the first people to come up with "personal engagement", he defined that "employees' self work roles in terms of organization governance: in engagement, people employ and express themselves emotionally, mentally and physically during role performance". There are two perspectives about the definition of work engagement. On the one hand, [18] assume that as two opposite poles, there is a continuous existing in engagement and burnout. On the other hand, engagement in its own right as the positive antithesis of burnout[19]. According to this approach, work engagement is defined as satisfying, desirable high-energy and work-related of mind which covers

three dimensions: vigor, absorption and dedication[20]. Vigor is followers with mental resilience and high-energy when they are working. When followers are facing difficulties, they are willing to deal with the problem and tend to invest effort to their work. Absorption is followers can fully concentrate on their work, whereby time passes quickly and one has difficulties with detaching oneself from work. Dedication means employees tend to be fully engaged in their work with a sense of enthusiasm, pride, inspiration and challenge.

2.4 Employee Creativity

According to conventional wisdom, creativity is something that creative people have to do. There are some features about creative individuals that we can tell from their less creative peers. They are wealthy in knowledge and high skills: they find their work intrinsically motivating, they tend to be nontraditional, independent and risk takers. And they also have a wide vision and a broad horizon to new experiences. Many studies have identified creativity as an outcome that focuses on new and useful ideas[21]. Individual creativity consists of: need for achievement, locus of control, encounter to ambiguity condition, and creativity-related skills. According to [22], individual creativity are divided into three components: expertise, creative-thinking skills, and motivation. Managers can influence these components for better and worse through workplace practices and conditions. Expertise and creative thinking skills are more difficult and time consuming to achieve than motivation. Intrinsic motivation stimulates high level of persistence and creative effort on work contexts where creativity is clearly valued. [22] defined individual creativity as, "the production of novel and useful ideas by an individual or small group of individuals working together".

3. Research Model and Hypothesis

The research model of this study includes 4 variables. They are transformational leadership,

meaning in work, work engagement and employee creativity. Research model was showed in Fig. 1.

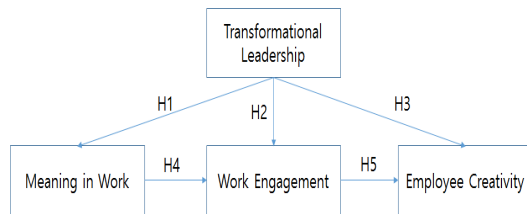


Fig. 1. Research Model

3.1 Transformational Leadership and Meaning in Work

Meaning in work not only concerns reward an employee to encourage their performance, but also forms the link between purpose and values[23]. Leaders want to develop goals, missions and identities for company that can impact employees' perceptions to perceive work as meaningful. Through inspirational stimulation, leaders are viewed as having a compelling vision of the future, and communicating optimism about future goals, which in turn increases employees' personal core values[7, 8]. Consistency between leaders' vision of the company's objectives and the core value of their employees are more likely to appear. Thus, employees are likely to perceive the work to be more motivational and creative—all of which are integral components of perceiving meaning in work[24]. Excellent leaders' transformational leadership behaviors and employees' perception of meaning in work is likely to improve. Thus we propose a hypothesis as follows:

H1: Transformational leadership has a positive effect on meaning in work.

3.2 Transformational Leadership and Work Engagement

Transformational leadership includes four parts: inspirational motivation; idealized influence; individual consideration and intellectual stimulation. In other words, the leader is optimistic and enthusiastic about the future. Idealized influence refers to behaviors like

benefits of the group are more important than benefits of the individual, demonstrating high ethical norms, and being a role model for the employees[25]. Inspirational motivation and idealized influence together are also called "charisma". "Charismatic" leaders have a positive influence on their employees and can change the self-focus of the employees to a collective focus[26]. As a result, employees become more involved with the vision of the leader and are willing to make sacrifices for that vision[27]. The third component of transformational leadership, individual consideration, refers to coaching, supporting and stimulating subordinates. The supervisor acknowledges followers' feelings and emotions and their need to grow and develop themselves. Employees are seen as unique individuals who need specific, individual attention that is congruent with the developmental phase they are in[28]. The last component of transformational leadership is called intellectual stimulation, which means that the supervisor challenges the subordinate to see problems from a different perspective. It has been found that employees' feelings of involvement, cohesiveness, commitment, potency, and performance are enhanced by the transformational leadership style[29]. If employees receive motivation, assistance quality coaching and stimulation from leaders, they tend to be highly engaged with the work. Thus:

H2: Transformational leadership has a positive effect on the work engagement.

3.3 Transformational Leadership and Employee Creativity

Transformational leadership can positively influence employees' creativity, as it promotes employee motivation to challenge old ways of doing things[30]. In addition, as firms in the hospitality industry aim to increase the satisfaction of customers, transformational supervisors can encourage the desire of creative people to provide better quality services, and thus help to develop and maintain competitive advantages[31]. For example, [32]evaluated the effects of different

leadership styles in a longitudinal laboratory experiment, and the results indicated that transformational leadership had more positive effects on group effectiveness. [9] proposed that transformational leadership has positive impacts on both the individual creativity of employees and organizational innovation. Thus, we proposed the following hypothesis:

H3: Transformational leadership has a positive effect on employee creativity.

3.4 Meaning in Work and Work Engagement

The body of literature on meaning in work and work engagement indicated the relationship between both terms but with some contradictions. Work engagement has been studied in both directions: either as an antecedent variable to appearance of meaning in work or as a consequence for finding meaning in work. On the one hand, some supported the idea that perceiving meaning in work is an intrinsic motivational factor that predicts characteristics of work engagement[33]. Others found meaning in work as an antecedent to work engagement[34]. Some also have suggested that during times spent in work when the employee is being engaged, employees may come to value the work they do and be more aware about the significant and values of the work values[35]. Therefore:

H4: Employees' perceptions of meaning in work has a positive effect on the employee's work engagement.

3.5 Work Engagement and Employee Creativity

Through literature review, we found that some internal and external factors influencing the success of employee engagement in the workplace. [36]used inductive methods to investigate factors affecting engagement in the innovation process. The study showed that three types of demand were interacted and coadjutant to impact engagement which give managers implications to improve followers' creative behaviour. Some previous scholars on employee engagement have partially mentioned creativity and innovation as an

outcome of engaged employees. [37]pointed out that employees engagement is very difficult to imitate, which means engaged employees are eager to their job tasks and will be highly immersed in their work. The empirical results evidently showed that employees engagement can make a positive influence helping followers to come up with some new ideas at the workplace. Thus:

H5: Work engagement has a positive effect on the employee creativity.

4. Research Design and Research Result

4.1 Operational Definition and Measurement Items

Table 1 showed the operational definition of each concept and measurements for each variable with related previous studies.

4.2 Sampling Design and Data Collection

With the science and technology's rapid development, high technology companies like XunLei Networking Technology Corporation in ShenZhen, China, has realized that human resources are critical for high-tech companies' development. The key point for human resource is to motivate them to develop their innovation and creativity. Thus, this study adopted the method of questionnaire survey and focused on the employees working in XunLei Corporation. The survey was conducted from June to September in 2016 by using instant message and e-mail in China. Questionnaires were translated into Chinese. Each measurement item is rated on 5-point Likert-scale. A total number of 183 employees are collected and among all of the respondents, 140 data are valid to use. Data was analyzed using SPSS 20.0 and Amos 20.0.

The demographic characteristics of the respondents was shown in Table 2. From the table we can see that there 61.7% males and 32.9% female. And in terms of

Table 1. Operational Definition and Measurements

Variable	Operational Definition	Measurement Items	Reference
Meaning in Work	The extent to which after leaders' motivations their employees feel that their work is meaningful.	The work I do is very important to me.	[38]
		My job activities are personally meaningful to me.	
		The work I do is meaningful to me.	
Transformational Leadership	The extent to which leaders' motivations encouragement, and stimulations to their employees.	My supervisor communicates a clear and positive vision of the future	[39]
		My supervisor treats staff as individuals, supports and encourages their development.	
		My supervisor gives encouragement and recognition to staff.	
		My supervisor fosters trust, involvement and cooperation among team members	
		My supervisor encourages thinking about problems in new ways and questions assumptions.	
		My supervisor is clear about his or her values and practices what he or she preaches.	
Work Engagement	A positive, fulfilling work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication and absorption.	My supervisor instills pride and respect in others and inspires me by being highly competent.	[40]
		At my work, I feel bursting with energy	
		At my job, I feel strong and vigorous.	
		When I get up in the morning, I feel like going to work.	
		I am enthusiastic about my job.	
		I am proud on the work that I do and my job inspires me.	
		I am immersed in my work.	
Employee Creativity	Creativity is an individual's tendency to produce novel and useful ideas.	I get carried away when I'm working.	[41]
		I feel happy when I am working intensely.	
		As an employee, can you suggest some ways to achieve company's goals or objectives?	
		Can you come up with new technologies, processes, techniques, and product ideas?	
		You often have new and innovative ideas.	
		You often have a fresh approach to problems.	
You can develop adequate plans and schedules for the implantation of new ideas.			
You can suggest new ways of performing work tasks.			

the age distribution, 89.3% of the respondents are under 30s and 10.7% of respondents are over 30s. And in terms of the education, 15% of respondents have diploma. 67.1% of respondents have bachelor degree, 10.7% of respondents have master. In terms of working hours per week, 35.7% of respondent is below 30 working hours per week, and meanwhile 64.3% of respondents is over 30 working hours per week. In terms of duration of service in work, 63.6% of respondents are under six years, but 36.4% of respondents are over six years. In terms of duration of service under supervisor, 57.2% of respondents are under 4 years, but 42.8% of respondents are over 4 years.

4.3 Validity, Reliability and Model Fit Test

Validity is "an integrated evaluation judgement of the degree to which empirical evidence and theoretical rationale support the adequacy and appropriateness of inferences and actions based on test score". Factor analysis is a common used procedure for interpreting a large number of correlations is factor analysis, which is a group of analytical and statistical techniques.

Table 3 showed the factor loading and Cronbach's alpha results of the research model. From the table we can see that the lowest accepted level of factor loading is higher than 0.5. And Cronbach's alpha was used to measure the reliability of each item. From the table we can know that Cronbach's alpha for all of the variable are more than 0.7, which indicating a good reliability of

Table 2. Demographic Statistics

		Frequency	Percentage(%)
Gender	Male	94	67.1
	Female	46	32.9
Age	20-30	125	89.3
	31-40	10	7.2
	41-50	3	2.1
	51-60	2	1.4
Education	High School	3	2.2
	Associate Diploma	2	1.4
	Diploma	21	15.0
	Degree	94	67.1
	Masters	15	10.7
	Others	5	3.6
Industry Type	Innovation Science and Technology	140	100
Working Hours per Week	10 hours or less	40	28.6
	11-20 hours	8	5.7
	21-30 hours	2	1.4
	31-40 hours	42	30.0
	41 hours or more	48	34.3
Duration of Service in Work	Less than 6 months	3	2.1
	7 months-1year	25	17.9
	2-5 years	61	43.6
	6-10 years	41	29.3
	11-20 years	6	4.3
	21 years or more	4	2.8
Duration of Service under Supervisor	Less than 6 months	4	2.9
	7 months-1 year	5	3.6
	2-4 years	71	50.7
	5-8 years	47	33.6
	9 years or more	13	9.2

Table 3. Validity and Reliability Analysis

Variable	Item	Factor Loading	Eigen Value	Cronbach's alpha
Transformational Leadership	TL4	0.866	5.201	0.944
	TL5	0.826		
	TL3	0.825		
	TL1	0.803		
	TL2	0.794		
	TL7	0.786		
	TL6	0.753		
Meaning in Work	WE2	0.772	2.678	0.903
	WE1	0.766		
	WE4	0.761		
	WE8	0.729		
	WE5	0.590		
Work Engagement	EC2	0.818	2.012	0.935
	EC5	0.813		
	EC6	0.803		
	EC1	0.667		
Employee Creativity	MW3	0.756	1.689	0.893
	MW2	0.753		
	MW1	0.691		

the variables. Table 4 showed the results of the convergent validity analysis result. From the table we can see that, the standard estimate(standardized indicator item loading) of each item is above the standard of 0.7, and all the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) are above 0.5, which indicating the convergent validity was confirmed. Table 5 showed the discriminant validity test result. The correlation indicators are all less than the square root of AVE and most of them are significant at the 0.01 level, which showing that the items are valid to use in this study.

For the model fit of the whole dataset. χ^2/DF is 1.736, less than 3.0. GFI is 0.903 is higher than the recommended value of 0.900. AGFI is 0.801, higher than the recommended value of 0.800. PGFI is 0.652, higher than the standard 0.6. CFI is 0.955 and NFI is 0.901, both larger than the recommended value of 0.9. RMR is 0.048, less than value 0.050. RMSEA is 0.073, less than the recommended value 0.080. According to the results, we could confirm the research model possesses a good model fit.

Table 4. Convergent Validity Analysis

Factors	Item	Standard Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	AVE
Transformational Leadership	TL7	0.847	---	---	0.709
	TL6	0.705	0.08	9.614	
	TL5	0.859	0.075	13.136	
	TL4	0.876	0.072	13.562	
	TL3	0.868	0.069	13.474	
	TL2	0.876	0.07	13.629	
	TL1	0.852	0.072	12.889	
Meaning in Work	MW3	0.907	---	---	0.764
	MW2	0.888	0.058	15.786	
	MW1	0.825	0.066	13.123	
Work Engagement	WE8	0.787	---	---	0.748
	WE5	0.878	0.106	11.863	
	WE4	0.899	0.0903	12.347	
	WE2	0.878	0.096	11.935	
	WE1	0.877	0.091	11.989	
Employee Creativity	EC1	0.789	---	---	0.680
	EC2	0.841	0.107	10.545	
	EC5	0.811	0.101	10.243	
	EC6	0.855	0.098	11.018	

Table 5. Discriminant Validity Analysis

	Mean	SD	TL	MW	WE	EC
TL	3.60	.73	0.842			
MW	3.27	.75	.554***	0.874		
WE	3.33	.86	.600***	.823***	0.865	
EC	3.28	.93	.520***	.638***	.681***	0.825

***) Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 6. Hypothesis Test Result

Hypothesis	Standardized Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P-value	Result
H1 TL→MW	0.541	0.077	7.035	***	Accepted
H2 TL→WE	0.125	0.046	2.697	0.007	Accepted
H3 TL→EC	0.115	0.067	8.742	0.069	Rejected
H4 MW→WE	0.589	0.063	1.816	***	Accepted
H5 WE→EC	0.637	0.108	5.909	***	Accepted

4.4 Hypothesis Test

Table 6 gave the result of hypothesis test using the whole dataset. All the hypothesis were supported excepted H3. According to the result, work engagement has relatively strong influence on employee creativity (H5: 0.637***) at a high significant level, that is to say, for employees working in high-tech companies, when they want to be engaged in their work, they can extend their creativity. Meaning in work has the second stronger positive influence on work engagement (H4: 0.589***). When employees working in high-tech companies, if they feel that their work is meaningful, they want to be engaged in their work. Transformational leadership has the third stronger positive influence on meaning in work (H1: 0.541***), that means when supervisors can motivate their subordinates, their subordinates will feel their work is meaningful. Transformational leadership has the fourth stronger positive influence on work engagement (H2: 0.125***). That means, employees can be engaged in their job after top leaders' motivation. But there is no direct relationship between transformational leadership and employee creativity (H3: 0.069). Thus, in Chinese IT company, leader's motivation may not extend employees' creativity directly.

5. Implications and Discussion

According to the results of our data analysis, we know that transformational leadership were proved positively influence on meaning in work (H1), and work engagement (H2), but transformational leadership has no direct effect on employee creativity (H3). In addition, meaning in work has a positive and significant influence on work engagement (H4), and work engagement has a positive and significant effect on employee creativity (H5).

5.1 Academic Implications

The result of H1 is accordance with the prior studies

of [7]. The study proved that leaders who developed goals, missions, and identities for company can impact employees' perceptions to perceived work as meaningful. The result of H2 is accordance with the prior studies of [8]. They showed that employees' feeling of involvement, commitment, potency and performance were enhanced by the transformational leadership style. The result of H3 indicated that there is no significant relationship between transformational leadership and employee creativity. This result is out of our expectation and may because the country discrepancy. The result of H4 is accordance with the prior studies of [33]. And the results of H5 is in accordance with [10].

5.2 Practical Implications

For high-level management working in XunLei Corporation, the main responsibilities for management is how to motivate their subordinates to work more efficiently and meaningfully. For employees, when high-level management do not realize motivation is an important things, employees tend to have no any directions to finish their work, they do not know how to utilize their time to achieve company's objectives. But if high-level management realize that stimulation can help subordinates to finish their work efficiently, using different motivation methods, the organizational climate can be changed, and the employees will know their value and would like to engage in their work.

H5 indicated that work engagement has the strongest relationship with employee creativity, comparing with the other hypothesis. That means, if employees want to be engage in their work, they can be more creative. Meaning in work has the second strongest relationship with work engagement, which indicated that if employees feel that their work is very meaningful and not so boring, they tend to be engaged in their work. Transformational leadership has the third strongest relationship with meaning in work. Through leaders' motivations, leaders can change employees' ideas, make the work become more meaningful.

Sometimes, not all the employees want to be engaged in their work, sometimes they are very tired and lazy, sometimes, they will sleep when they are working. If leaders arrange some missions which can be figure out easily, they will have more motivations to engage in work.

5.3 Limitations

The study has some limitations. First of all, most of the respondents of this paper are under 30 years old, this may lead to bias among other people. Second, all the respondents are from innovation science and technology industry, different industry type may has different result, and we only choose one Chinese IT company, thus the limitation of industry type may influence the result. And all the respondents are from this IT company, maybe respondents in different companies will have different perspectives and this will influence the result. Third, we only focused on employees' perspectives and ignore measuring high-level managements' perspectives. As a matter of fact, high-level management is a main element for transformational leadership. Thus, it is suggested that future studies should focus on various industries and examine different kinds of leadership style.

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