The Impact of Transformational Leadership and Empowerment on Employee Job Stress

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Abstract

The purpose of this research is to examine the impact of transformational leadership (TL) and employee empowerment (EE) on employee job stress (JS). This study also extends the findings of Gill *et al.* [1] related to the factors that mitigate job stress in the service industry. A survey research (a non-experimental field study design) was utilized. The current study consists of a population of Indian hospitality industry employees. A convenience sampling method was applied to select and recruit the research participants. Data were collected using questionnaires. The $p < .05$ significance level was used to accept or reject the null hypotheses. The results suggest that the improvement in the level of perceived TL used by managers and EE mitigate the job stress of customer contact service employees (CCSEs) in the Indian hospitality industry. The results also show that TL and EE mitigate the job stress of CCSEs in the Indian hotel industry.

Keywords: Hospitality; empowerment; transformational leadership; customer-contact service employees; job stress.

Introduction

This study examines the impact of transformational leadership and employee empowerment on the job stress of customer contact service employees (CCSEs) in the Indian hospitality industry. India is known worldwide as ancient and mysterious civilization and the second most populated country of the world after China, with a population of over one billion [2]. Issues of employee job stress have been found to be prevalent in the Indian hospitality industry [3]. Stress causes serious health problems such as high blood pressure. Stress is also linked to health conditions such as depression, heart disease, and asthma [4], which is not beneficial to Indian hospitality services organizations. Job stress leads directly to health issues: physical (headaches, stomach problems, and even heart attacks), and mental (job dissatisfaction, anxiety, depression) [1]. These health issues have a negative impact on employee commitment and result (in addition to the employee health issues) in lowered productivity for the service organization [5]. Transformational leadership (TL) and employee empowerment (EE) are among the best strategies to handle organizational issues like employee job stress (JS).

The concept and definition of TL and the embodiment of that leadership in transformation leaders were first coined by Burns [6], and then extended and operationalized by Bass [7] as: "leadership and performance beyond expectations." For the purpose and use in this study, TL is defined as "the process of influencing major changes in the attitudes and assumptions of organization members and building commitment for the organization's mission and objectives" [8]. This definition emphasizes the importance of leadership characteristics as they pertain to i) the leader's ability to define and articulate a vision, a mission, and a set of goals and objectives for the organization and ii) the importance of the followers' acceptance of the mission and objectives.

The term "empowerment" refers to an individual's belief in his/her ability to exercise choice. Campion *et al.* [9] define empowerment as the employees' ability to make business decisions and to accept responsibility for the outcome of those decisions. A management style that leads to empowerment is the antithesis of an authoritarian management style, where supervisors make all key decisions. Webster defines authoritarian management as "relating to or favoring blind submission to authority" [10]. Empowerment is also transferring power and responsibility to employees so that, within specified limits, they will be able to provide the best possible customer service at their own discretion [11]. The term "empowerment" in the management literature appears to have come into general usage in the early 1980s [12]. By the mid-1980s, it had become a commonplace expression used in both management texts and in the vocabulary of organizations. By the time Block's book "The Empowered Manager" [13] was published, the term was already in use in large-scale organizations committed to cultural change and was actively promoted by evangelical management advisors as a sine qua non of change [12]. Although the term "empowerment" has been central to management thought and has been practiced for a little over two decades now, little research has been conducted in the customer service management area to test the relationships between i) TL and job stress, and ii) employee empowerment and job stress. Hartline and Ferrell [14], Lashley [15, 16], McDougall and Levesque [17], and Lam *et al.* [18] have been able to transfer the concept of empowerment to the services industry by conducting research studies.

TL and empowerment hold a great promise for advancing the quality of hospitality services. Such measures may mitigate or even largely eliminate the deeper issues of employee job stress and create new paradigms for the service industry. It has been found that TL and empowerment reduce the stress levels of service employees [1, 5, 19, 20]. Therefore, the resultant thesis is that TL and empowerment reduce the stress levels of CCSEs in the Indian hospitality industry. Although the relationships between TL, EE, and JS have been tested [1, 5, 19, 20], there has not been much research conducted on the Indian hospitality industry. This study contributes to the existing literature by testing the relationships between TL, EE, and JS in the Indian hospitality industry. The results can be generalized to the Indian hospitality services industry.

The Impact of Transformational Leadership on Job Stress

Stress is a mental and physical condition, which directly and negatively affects an individual's productivity, effectiveness, personal health, and quality of work [5]. Job stress can be conceptualized as an individual's reactions to work environment characteristics that appear threatening to him or her. The harmful and costly consequences of stress demonstrate the need for strategies to limit stressors within the organization [21]. TL, as one such strategy, has been found to encourage open communication with followers, which in turn, reduces employee job stress [8]. Gill *et al.* [1, 5] and Dhaliwal [19] found a negative relationship between TL and job stress; that is, TL reduces employee job stress in the hospitality services industry. Hospitality industry workers, like other workers, are subjected to a dynamic, multi-national, multi-lingual, and many times, to unplanned or unforeseen peaks in their working environments, all contributing to higher levels of work related stress [5]. Therefore, it is theorized that employees who are more committed to their organization's mission, goals and objectives (the results of transformational leadership), will feel less job stress than those who are less committed. Consequently, we should find lower levels of stress wherever TL is implemented in the hospitality services industry.

Accordingly, the following hypothesis is formulated:

H1: The more a manager's leadership is perceived as transformational, the less will be the job stress of his or her CCSEs in the Indian hospitality services industry.

Conjecture: There might be differences regarding the nature of the relationship between transformational leadership and job stress based on employee age and length of employment.

The Relationship between Empowerment and Job Stress

Job stress can be conceptualized as an individual's reactions to work environment characteristics that appear threatening to the individual. The harmful and costly consequences of stress demonstrate the need for strategies to limit stressors within the organization [21]. Empowerment, as one such strategy, has been found to encourage flexibility and give more control to employees to perform their duties, which in turn, reduces job stress [20, 21, 22, 23, 24]. Gill *et al.* [1] also found a negative relationship between empowerment and employee job stress in the Canadian hospitality industry. Hospitality services industry employees face different organizational and personal factors such as locus of control, self-esteem, and perceptions of supervisor support [25], which in turn, lead to a feeling of job stress. Research on Indian culture indicates that high power distance, collectivism and effective reciprocity are major cultural values of Indian employees [26]. It is well established over several decades that India ranks relatively high on power distance [27, 28]. India's former status as a colony of the United Kingdom for approximately 100 years may have played a role. India's historical caste system has also contributed to high cultural power distance [29]. For example, people born into the lower castes did not have the right to have meals with those born into in the upper castes, and were despised by them. Brahmins considered themselves superior to all other classes. Although this is still the case to some extent, the gap has decreased over time. To minimize locus of control and other minor work related problems, service managers have started to empower services employees. Empowerment is new to Indian hospitality services employees. Empowerment is expected to play an important role in mitigating employee job stress in the Indian hospitality services industry. Therefore, it is theorized that employee who are empowered will feel less job stress than those who are not empowered in the Indian hospitality services industry.

Accordingly, the following hypothesis is formulated:

H2: The higher the level of empowerment perceived by CCSEs, the lower the level of job stress in the Indian hospitality services industry.

Conjecture: There might be differences regarding the nature of the relationship between empowerment and job stress based on employee age and length of employment.

Methods

Research Design

This study utilized survey research (a non-experimental field study design).

Measurement

In order to remain (for comparison and reference reasons) consistent with previous research, the measures were taken from three referent studies, which in turn are based on previous studies in marketing, management, and psychology. All measures pertaining to i) TL were taken from Dubinsky *et al.* [30], ii) employee empowerment were taken from Hartline and Ferrell [14], and iii) job stress were taken from Firth *et al* [25].

All scale items were pre-tested for construct validity. Respondents were asked to indicate their agreement with each item (statement), using a five-point Likert scale providing an interval level of measurement.

TL is operationally defined as the extent to which managers motivate and encourage employees to use their own judgment and intelligence to solve problems while performing their jobs, transfer missions to employees, and express

appreciation for good work. Dubinsky *et al.* [30] used the twelve-item tolerance-of-freedom scale [31], which measures a sales person's relationship with their managers. Based on Dubinsky *et al.'s* [30] CFA (confirmatory factor analysis), seven items were selected to measure "TL." Scale items were reworded to apply to CCSEs in the hospitality services industry and the reliability of these re-worded items was re-tested.

EE is operationalized as the extent to which CCSEs feel that i) their managers allow them to use their own judgment in performing their jobs, ii) their managers encourage them to handle problems, iii) their managers allow them freedom in their work, and iv) they trust their judgment in performing their jobs. Hartline and Ferrell [14] used the eight-item tolerance-of-freedom scale [32], which measures the degree to which managers encourage initiative, give employees freedom, and trust employees to use their own judgment. Based on confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) loading scores, four items were selected to measure "empowerment." Scale items were reworded to apply to CCSEs in the hospitality services industry and the reliability of these re-worded items was re-tested.

JS was measured as the extent to which CCSEs feel i) emotionally drained by their jobs, ii) burned-out by their jobs, iii) frustrated at their jobs, iv) tense at their jobs, and v) job-related problems keep them awake at night. Firth *et al.* [25] used eight items to measure job stress. Five items were selected to measure "job stress." Scale items were reworded to apply to CCSEs in the hospitality services industry and the reliability of these re-worded items was re-tested.

Sample

Punjab area (Chandigarh, Ludhiana, and Banga) of India was chosen as the research site to collect data. Given that the population is "abstract" (i.e., it was not possible to obtain a list of all members of the focal population) [33, p. 101], a non-probability (purposive) sample was obtained. In a purposive sample, participants are screened for inclusion based on criteria associated with members of the focal population. The focal population was comprised of restaurant (fast food and full service) service workers in the Punjab area of India. The survey did not need to be translated into Punjabi; since restaurants in the region hire CCSEs who can read, write, and speak English. The instruction sheet indicated that participants could contact the researchers by telephone and/or email regarding any questions or concerns they might have about the research. An exhaustive list of hospitality employees' names and phone numbers in the Punjab area of India was created to enable trained volunteers to contact, screen, and invite qualified service workers to participate. Survey questionnaire bundles coupled with an instruction sheet were provided to participating volunteers for distribution. Approximately 900 surveys were distributed and 266 were returned, 2 of which were not usable, for an overall response rate of roughly 29.55%.

Study Procedures

Confidentiality

Participants were assured that their names would not be disclosed and that confidentiality would be strictly maintained. In addition, participants were explicitly asked not to disclose their names on the questionnaire, and were advised not to respond to any survey question that they felt might reveal their identity.

Results

We used multiple linear regressions to accept or reject our null hypothesis and used $p < .05$ as our level of significance.

Data Analysis Methods

Measures of central tendency, variance, skewness, and kurtosis were calculated on responses to all of the items. Skewness measures for all of the items were within the range of: 0.008 to 1.069, which is considered an excellent range for most research that requires using statistics appropriate to normal distributions. Therefore, we used statistics that assume scalar values and symmetric distributions to test our hypothesis. Using a principle component rotation and a varimax rotation, we ran a Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) on the sixteen items. Three factors explained 64.64% of the variance in the sixteen items (see Table 1), and all of the items did not load on the expected factors (see Table 2). Therefore, item 1 and item 2 of TL were deleted and factor analysis was rerun. After the deletion of item 1 and item 2 of transformational leadership, all of the items loaded on the expected factors (see Table 3).

Table 1: Total Variance Explained – Rotation Sums of Square Loadings.

		Total Variance Explained	
		Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings	
Component	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	4.385	27.409	27.409
2	3.110	19.439	46.848
3	2.847	17.796	64.644

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Table 2: Rotated Component Matrix.

	Component		
	1	2	3
To what extent does your immediate manager/supervisor…..?			
TL1) …..encourage you to be "team player?"	0.354	-0.093	**0.800**
TL2) …..get the group to work together towards the same goal?	0.377	-0.028	**0.802**
TL3) …..show respect for your personal feelings?	0.504	-0.125	**0.642**
TL4) …..inspire others with his/her plans for the future?	**0.707**	-0.073	0.388
TL5) …..transmit a "sense of mission" to you?	**0.569**	-0.132	0.450
TL6) …..enable you to think about old problems in new ways?	**0.702**	-0.025	0.247
TL7) …..let you use your intelligence to overcome obstacles?	**0.739**	-0.002	0.274
To what extent does your immediate manager/supervisor…..?			
EE1) …..permit you to use your own judgment?	**0.517**	-0.188	0.457
EE2) …..encourage you to handle problems?	**0.691**	-0.137	0.261
EE3) …..trust your judgment?	**0.685**	-0.107	0.197
EE4) …..allow you freedom in your work?	**0.757**	-0.110	-0.005
I feel…..			
JS1) …..emotionally drained by my job.	-0.351	**0.688**	0.245
JS2) …..burned-out by my job.	-0.260	**0.816**	0.093
JS3) …..frustrated at my job.	0.019	**0.843**	-0.246
JS4) …..tense at my job.	0.138	**0.733**	-0.451
JS5) Job-related problems keep me awake at night.	-0.063	**0.773**	-0.116

Notes: Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.
Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.
a. Rotation converged in 5 iterations.

Table 3: Rotated Component Matrix.

	Component		
	1	2	3
To what extent does your immediate manager/supervisor…..?			
TL3) …..show respect for your personal feelings?	**0.643**	-0.174	0.380
TL4) …..inspire others with his/her plans for the future?	**0.802**	-0.102	0.282
TL5) …..transmit a "sense of mission" to you?	**0.758**	-0.172	0.206
TL6) …..enable you to think about old problems in new ways?	**0.778**	-0.041	0.228
TL7) …..let you use your intelligence to overcome obstacles?	**0.819**	-0.022	0.236
To what extent does your immediate manager/supervisor…..?			
EE1) …..permit you to use your own judgment?	0.181	-0.177	**0.833**
EE2) …..encourage you to handle problems?	0.280	-0.104	**0.833**
EE3) …..trust your judgment?	0.334	-0.077	**0.705**
EE4) …..allow you freedom in your work?	0.340	-0.062	**0.655**
I feel…..			
JS1) …..emotionally drained by my job.	-0.267	**0.663**	0.025
JS2) …..burned-out by my job.	-0.197	**0.802**	-0.050
JS3) …..frustrated at my job.	0.000	**0.856**	-0.144
JS4) …..tense at my job.	0.039	**0.768**	-0.163
JS5) Job-related problems keep me awake at night.	-0.044	**0.774**	-0.107

Notes: Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.
Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.
a. Rotation converged in 5 iterations.

We factor analyzed the five transformational leadership items and used the resultant weighted score as our TL scale. The items loaded roughly equally on the scale. This factor explained 67.20% of the variance in the five items. Cronbach alpha = 0.877 on the five items. We factor analyzed the four empowerment items and used the resultant weighted score as our EE scale. The items loaded roughly equally on the scale. This factor explained 67.75% of the variance in the four items. Cronbach alpha = 0.837 on the four items. We factor analyzed the five job stress items and used the resultant weighted score as our JS scale. The items loaded roughly equally on the scale. This factor explained 61.84% of the variance in the five items. Cronbach alpha = 0.842 on the five items.

Testing of Hypotheses

The Relationship between Transformational Leadership, Empowerment, and Job Stress

It was hypothesized that i) the more a manager's leadership is perceived as transformational, the less will be the job stress of his or her CCSEs in the Indian hospitality services industry, and ii) the higher the level of empowerment perceived by CCSEs, the lower the level of job stress in the Indian hospitality services industry. As is shown in Table 4, for the overall Indian hospitality services industry, negative relationships were found between i) TL and JS and ii) EE and JS; that is, lower the perceived job stress by CCSEs is related to higher degrees of perceived i) TL used by managers and ii) empowerment in the Indian hospitality services industry. As is shown in Tables 4, for the Indian hospitality services industry, the regression equation with unstandardized coefficients is as follows:
JS = 1.434 – 0.146 TL – 0.186 EE.

As is shown in Tables 5 and 6, for that regression, around 8.90% (R^2 = 0.089, sig. = <.0001) of the variance in employee JS can be explained by employee perceived degrees of EE and TL in the Indian hospitality services industry. We note that in spite of the above described effort to create independent factors, we found TL and EE to be correlated (r = 0.616; sig. < 0.01). Thus, the joint effect of TL and EE on JS may be due to the high correlation between TL and EE.

In studying our results, we noted that the size of the sample (with a predominance of restaurant workers), might affect the results. We first tested to see if TL, EE, and JS were significantly different between Restaurant and Hotel/Motel CCSEs. Using one-way ANOVAs, we found that levels of perceived TL did NOT differ between the 2 types of CCSEs (sig. = 0.007), levels of perceived employee empowerment did differ between the 2 types of CCSEs (sig. = 0.053), and levels of perceived employee job stress did NOT differ between the 2 types of CCSEs (sig. = 0.075).

Table 4: Regression Coefficients [a, b]

	Overall Results (N = 264)					
	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients[c]	r	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta			
(Constant)	1.434	0.059			0.000	1.000
TL	-0.146	0.075	-0.146	-0.261	-1.947	0.053
EE	-0.186	0.075	-0.186	-0.276	-2.484	0.014
	Hotel/Motel Industry (N = 72)					
	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients[c]	r	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta			
(Constant)	0.311	0.122			2.555	0.013
TL	-0.302	0.113	-0.304	-0.413	-2.663	0.010
EE	-0.257	0.105	-0.279	-0.398	-2.445	0.017
	Restaurant Industry (N = 192)					
	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients[c]	r	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta			
(Constant)	-0.089	0.067			-1.336	0.183
TL	-0.098	0.108	-0.096	-0.214	-0.901	0.369
EE	-0.167	0.112	-0.158	-0.230	-1.484	0.139

[a] Dependent Variable: JS.
[b] Independent Variables: TL and EE.
[c] Linear Regression through the Origin.
 N = Number of responses.
TL = Transformational Leadership.
EE = Empowerment.
JS = Job Stress.

We then re-tested the hypotheses for subsets of the sample.

As is shown in Table 4, for the Indian hotel/motel services industry, negative relationships were found between i) TL and JS and ii) EE and JS; that is, lower perceived job stress by the CCSEs is related to higher degrees of i) perceived transformational leadership used by managers and ii) perceived empowerment in the Indian hotel/motel services industry. As is shown in Table 4, for the Indian hotel/motel services industry, negative relationships were found between i) TL and JS and ii) EE and JS; that is, lower perceived job stress by CCSEs is related to higher degrees of perceived i) TL

used by managers and ii) empowerment in the Indian hospitality services industry. As is shown in Table 4, for the Indian hospitality hotel/motel services industry, the regression equation with unstandardized coefficients is as follows:
JS = 0.311 – 0.302 TL – 0.257 EE.

As is shown in Tables 5 and 6, for that regression, around 23.70% (R^2 = 0.237, sig. = <.0001) of the variance in employee JS can be explained by employee perceived degrees of EE and TL in the Indian hotel/motel services industry. We note that in spite of the above described effort to create independent factors, we found TL and EE to be correlated (r = 0.390; sig. < 0.01). Thus, the joint effect of TL and EE on JS may be due to the high correlation between TL and EE.

As is shown in Table 4, for the Indian restaurant services industry non-significant relationships were found between i) TL and JS and ii) EE and JS; that is, perceived job stress by CCSEs is not related to i) the degree of perceived transformational leadership used by managers and ii) perceived empowerment in the Indian restaurant services industry. As is shown in Tables 4, for the Indian restaurant services industry, the regression equation with unstandardized coefficients is as follows:
JS = JS = -0.089 – 0.098 TL – 0.167 EE.

As is shown in Tables 5 and 6, for that regression, around 5.7% (R^2 = 0.057, sig. = .004) of the variance in employee JS can be explained by employee perceived degrees of EE and TL in the Indian restaurant services industry. We note that in spite of the above described effort to create independent factors, we found TL and EE to be correlated (r = 0.748, sig. < 0.01). Thus, the joint effect of TL and EE on JS may be due to the high correlation between TL and EE.

Table 5: Model Summary.

Hospitality Industry			
R	R^2	Adjusted R^2	S.E.E.
0.299[a]	0.089	0.082	0. 958

Hotel/Motel Industry				Restaurant Industry			
R	R^2	Adjusted R^2	S.E.E.	R	R^2	Adjusted R^2	S.E.E.
0.487[b]	0.237	0.215	1.001	0.238[c]	0.057	0. 047	0.919

S.E.E. = Standard Error of the Estimate.
[a] Predictors (Hospitality Industry): (Constant), EE, TL.
[b] Predictors (Hotel/Motel Industry): (Constant), EE, TL.
[c] Predictors (Restaurant Industry): (Constant), EE, TL.

Table 6: ANOVA.

Hospitality Industry					
	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	23.523	2	11.761	12.818	0.000[a]
Residual	239.477	261	0.918		
Total	263.000	263			

Hotel/Motel Industry						Restaurant Industry					
	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	21.451	2	10.726	10.708	0.000[c]	Regression	9.609	2	4.805	5.688	0.004[d]
Residual	69.116	69	1.002			Residual	159.658	189	0.845		
Total	90.567	71				Total	169.267	191			

[a] Predictors (Hospitality Industry): (Constant), EE, TL.
[b] Dependent Variable: JS.
[c] Predictors (Hotel/Motel Industry): (Constant), EE, TL.
[d] Predictors (Restaurant Industry): (Constant), EE, TL.

Discussion

The main purpose of this study was to determine whether the improvement in the degree of TL and EE reduce the degree of perceived job stress of CCSEs in the Indian hospitality industry. This was done by surveying a sample of hotel/motel and restaurant employees from the Punjab area of India. These employee perceptions and judgments are the basis of our overall findings that the degree of reduction in job stress is associated with the improvement in the degree of TL and empowerment. Results also show that TL used by managers and empowerment mitigate the job stress of CCSEs in the Indian hotel/motel services industry. The findings of this paper are consistent with the findings of Pearson and Moomaw [20] and Gill *et al.* [1] in which they indicate that perceived empowerment decreases employee job stress. In addition, the results of this study support the finding of Tracy and Hinkin [8], Gill *et al.* [1, 5], and Dhaliwal [19] in which they found negative relationship between transformational leadership and job stress. However, the relationships between i) EE and JS and ii) TL and JS are not significant in the Indian restaurant services industry. This may be due to the fact that empowerment and transformational leadership have just started to be used on Indian restaurant industry employees.

Conclusion

CCSEs play a boundary-spanning role in the hospitality industry where they interact with many individuals from inside (fellow employees and managers) and outside (guests) their organization. This large role set requires CCSEs to satisfy frequently variegated needs and expectations of multiple parties, which in turn, lead to the higher level of job stress. The consequences of job stress lead to serious health problems and other issues such as high employee turnover. Since TL and empowerment reduce employee job stress, it is highly advocated TL and empowerment should be implemented as the managerial methods of choice in the Indian hospitality industry.

Competing Interests

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

Authors' Contributions

AG developed the framework, carried out the final estimations and statistical analysis, and drafted the manuscript. SB gathered all the data and edited the final draft. ABF verified methodology and edited the final draft.

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