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Transformational leadership and innovative work behaviour: the mediating role of psychological empowerment

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Abstract

Purpose – This study aims to explore the relationship between transformational leadership and employees' innovative work behaviour (IWB), additionally examining the mediating effect of psychological empowerment.

Design/methodology/approach – The study is based on a cross-sectional design, data being collected from 139 employees through the following structured questionnaires: Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire, IWB and psychological empowerment instrument.

Findings – The findings revealed a positive and significant relationship between transformational leadership and both IWB and psychological empowerment, as well as the fact that transformational leadership, through psychological empowerment, fosters IWB.

Research limitations/implications – One of the main weaknesses of this study is the use of a cross-sectional design, which does not allow for an assessment of the cause–effect relation. Also, using a self-reported questionnaire might have brought common method bias.

Practical implications – The paper shows that, by creating a greater sense of empowerment, leaders could have a higher positive effect on employee's levels of IWB. Moreover, empowerment acts as one of the most important and effective processes within the transformational leadership framework in fostering innovation among followers.

Originality/value – This study extends the empirical research on transformational leadership and its influence on employees' work attitudes. Given the scant research on the role of the psychological empowerment, the results of this study confirm not only its mediating role but also the need for further studies in this direction.

Keywords Psychological empowerment, Transformational leadership, Innovative work behaviour

Paper type Research paper

1. Introduction

In a market scenario defined by tough competition and knowledge-intensive dynamics, organizations are in great demand to be innovative. The highly interconnected global system paved the way for the system thinking to be given preference over other business

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model approaches for many market players (Skarzauskiene, 2009). The systems thinking dynamics is necessary for coping with challenges and, thus, critical for the survival, growth and competitiveness of the organizations (Shipton *et al.*, 2006). Organizations are constantly challenged and challenging one another, which comes with a higher need to be flexible and adapt to the complex globalized context, and consequently, with the need to be more innovative than ever before. As a result, many organizations have become more and more interested in identifying the factors that can predict and increase the innovative work behaviour (IWB) of their employees (Agarwal, 2014; Scott and Bruce, 1994).

As IWB is essential in organizations surviving this turbulent environment (Jung *et al.*, 2003; Tierney *et al.*, 1999), many researchers have argued that innovation is one of the best strategies allowing organizations to be more competitive and to efficiently deal with increasing competition and customer expectations (Fay *et al.*, 2015; Hoch, 2013).

It has been well acknowledged that employees' innovation can foster innovation at the organizational level and promote organizational success (Mytelka and Smith, 2002). Ramamoorthy *et al.* (2005) found that, to achieve the task of innovation, organizations must work on their employees. Both researchers and practitioners considered the increasing role that leadership plays in the current work context when it comes to motivating employees to innovate. Their main objective is to identify effective ways to persuade employees to display creative and IWBs, at individual levels, through transformational leadership (Piccolo and Colquitt, 2006). Therefore, it is quite important to understand how organizations should be led so that they improve the innovation capabilities of their employees (Hoch, 2013).

In this regard, some authors (Kahai *et al.*, 2003) were focused on how different forms of leadership influence IWB and have found that leadership practices exert a clear influence on this component of the employees' behaviour. Other authors (Braun *et al.*, 2013) have also noticed that individuals' perception over the supervisors' transformational leadership is closely related to their desired outcomes, including IWB.

Laohavichien *et al.* (2009, p. 8) stated that transformational leadership is essential for creating "radical change" needed to meet the provocation or the current business environment. According to Wren's (1995, p. 105) opinion, the transformational leader is a requirement for contemporary management because such a leader produces "entrepreneurial champions, organizational champions, and champions of radical military innovations" (Wren, 1995, p. 105). In a similar vein, for Ayoubi *et al.* (2015, p. 245), transformational leadership requires the application of a systemic thinking and adaptive complex system to achieve the desired purposes (Ayoubi *et al.*, 2015, p. 245).

Alongside transformational leadership, a modern technique that has been applied by managers is the psychological empowerment. Thomas and Velthouse (1990) consider psychological empowerment as a factor of internal motivation, which reflects the active role of the employees in the organization and represents an essential ingredient for organizational success (Srivastava *et al.*, 2006). Therefore, psychological empowerment appears as a promising psychological mechanism, which may mediate the relationship between transformational leadership and creativity. Psychological empowerment refers to the employee's cognitive state characterized by increased intrinsic task motivation, perceptions of competence and self-determination to initiate and implement work behaviours (Deci *et al.*, 1989).

However, there is limited proof of a link between transformational leadership, psychological empowerment and employee's work attitude, namely, IWB. Additionally, these aspects have never been investigated within the framework of the Romanian organizations. In this study, we aim to determine the effects of transformational leadership on psychological empowerment and employees' IWB, as well as to investigate the mediating role of psychological empowerment between transformational leadership and employees' IWB.

The possible mediation effect of the psychological empowerment in the relationship between transformational leadership and IWB is based on the importance of psychological empowerment in predicting employees' creativity (Zhang and Bartol, 2010). Mumford and Gustafson (1988) believe that creativity denotes the formation of novel ideas and innovation and bringing them into practical use. Therefore, the term IWB encompasses both the creativity and the innovative aspects (Janssen, 2000). As creativity is an essential element of IWB, we assume that psychological empowerment is likely to impact the relationship between transformational leadership and employees' IWB.

2. Literature review

2.1 Innovative work behaviour

One of the most important concepts for the organizations' long-term survival in the current economic and social environment is the IWB (Scott and Bruce, 1994). Previous studies (Janssen *et al.*, 2004) found innovativeness to be a relevant asset in helping organizations have and maintain a competitive advantage over their competitors. Other scholars (Abstein and Spieth, 2014; Janssen, 2000) concluded that IWB is not only important for the innovation-oriented organizations or jobs, but it is also very important for the whole organizational workforce (De Jong and Den Hartog, 2010).

West and Farr (1989) defined IWB as employees' behaviour directed towards the generation, introduction and/or application of ideas, processes, products or procedures. Starting from this definition, De Jong and Den Hartog (2008) also defined IWB as an individual's behaviour that is directed towards the initiation and intentional introduction of new and useful ideas, processes, products or procedures, as well as towards the implementation of those ideas.

Janssen (2000), along with Scott and Bruce (1994) consider that IWB is perceived as consisting of four interrelated sets of activities: recognition of the problem, idea generation, promotion and realization. More recently, De Spiegelaere *et al.* (2014, p. 144) have described IWB as an "employee behaviour oriented to generation, introduction and application (within a role, group or organization) of ideas, processes, products or procedures, new and intended to benefit the relevant adoption". There is not only a high overlapping between those definitions, but they are all consistent in admitting that employees' innovative behaviour is one of the most important factors contributing to the organizations' high performance. Therefore, it is very important to identify the individual and organizational factors that facilitate or encourage this innovative employees' behaviour (Scott and Bruce, 1994).

2.2 Psychological empowerment

During the past decades, psychological empowerment has received considerable attention within the field of organizational science (Thomas and Velthouse, 1990; Spreitzer, 1995; Dewettinck and van Ameijde, 2011). A brief review of the literature showed that the concept of empowerment had different understandings and definitions. For instance, the definition provided by Conger and Kanungo (1988) highlights the role of giving employees as much responsibility and autonomy as possible, through power delegation, in increasing their work motivation. Similarly, Thomas and Velthouse (1990) define empowerment as encompassing the delegation of authority and sharing the resources, together with enabling means of motivation through enhancing self-efficiency.

Another approach focuses on the psychological empowerment as a psychological attitude reflecting individuals' response to empowering approaches and leadership behaviours (Spreitzer, 1995; Thomas and Velthouse, 1990). Affective commitment and job satisfaction are also connected to psychological empowerment (Dewettinck and van Ameijde, 2011). Therefore, this approach points towards a direct link between leadership

behaviours and psychological empowerment, leadership behaviours playing an essential role in this process (Arnold *et al.*, 2000; Conger and Kanungo, 1988).

Spreitzer (1995, p. 1443) defined empowerment as "increased intrinsic task motivation manifested in a set of four cognitions reflecting an individual's orientation to his or her work role: *competence*, *impact*, *meaning*, and *self-determination*." Going further with this approach, *meaning* refers to the weight individuals place on a given task, the value they put on a work role based on one's own beliefs, principles and standards (Thomas and Velthouse, 1990). Being meaningful is the feeling that employees have when they are working and reflect their perceptions towards their work and what they think about their abilities (Stander and Rothmann, 2010). Moreover, being meaningful also implies the fit between work roles and beliefs, values and behavioural requirements from an individual (Seibert *et al.*, 2011).

Competence refers to the feeling of self-efficacy, showing that one is capable of successfully performing tasks with skill and confidence (Corsun and Enz, 1999; Spreitzer and Doneson, 2005; Thomas and Velthouse, 1990).

The third dimension is *impact*, which speaks about the degree to which an employee can influence organizational outcomes, such as management, operations and strategy (Ashforth and Mael, 1989). Thomas and Velthouse (1990) defined "impact" as perceived control over one's environment, the extent to which an individual believes he or she can influence organizational outcomes (Corsun and Enz, 1999).

Finally, *self-determination* refers to the feeling of autonomy in making decisions about work (Deci *et al.*, 1989), the extent of freedom that individuals have in the work process (Choong *et al.*, 2011). It also refers to the employees' perception of their control over how they will perform their tasks and reflect their feeling of autonomy in both initiation and work-related behaviours (Spreitzer, 1995).

A lot of researchers have already used psychological empowerment as a mediating or moderating variable between different leadership styles and different work-related employees' attitudes, such as job satisfaction (Seibert *et al.*, 2011), organizational commitment (Avolio *et al.*, 2004) and workplace aggression (Hepworth and Towler, 2004). Bass (1999) noted that, because of the fact that transformational leaders inspire and motivate employees to display positive work behaviours, and, at the same time, psychological empowerment represents a motivational construct, the later can mediate the effects of the transformational leadership on employee's work outcomes. Furthermore, Hennessey and Amabile (2010) noticed that employee's intrinsic motivational state, created through psychological empowerment by transformational leaders, is essential for employees' IWB.

2.3 Transformational leadership

Burns (1978) described leaders as being the ones who are able to inspire and motivate their followers to achieve a common goal. According to his understanding (Burns, 1978), transformational leaders inspire followers by creating a vision and by providing them with challenging goals (Burns, 2012). Following Burns' work, Bass (1985) further developed the concept by explaining the leader's effect in creating valuable and positive change in their followers. He stated that leaders influence not only the employees' job satisfaction and their overall work behaviour, but also their values, beliefs, needs, self-esteem, self-confidence and emotional impacts (Bass, 1985).

Transformational leadership has an essential impact on the organizational performance, as well as on the employees' attitude and emotional encouragement (Bass and Riggio, 2010; Northhouse, 2010). It also allows followers to rise above their self-interest by encouraging

them to go beyond their needs, so that they accomplish the organizational goals, motivating them to perform better than expected (Avolio *et al.*, 2004; Bass, 1998; Bass and Riggio, 2006).

According to Bass' (1998) conceptualization, transformational leadership covers four major components: *idealized influence*, *inspirational motivation*, *intellectual stimulation* and *individualized consideration* (Avolio, 1999; Bass, 1998). Moreover, the same dimensions were also described in several other studies (Avolio *et al.*, 1999; Bass and Riggio, 2010; Luthans, 2005).

The first dimension of the transformational leadership is *idealized influence*, which refers to the leader's ability to act as a role model, to generate respect, admiration and loyalty among his/her followers and to articulate clear visions that are consistent with the organizational goals, thereby fostering the trust and the respect of the followers (Avolio *et al.*, 1999).

The second dimension is *inspirational motivation*, which involves encouraging followers to believe in their ability to achieve an exciting vision by inspiring and motivating them to exceed the established performance standards. Inspirationally motivating leaders are able to demonstrate strong determination and confidence, to speak optimistically and encourage their followers and, at the same time, to maintain high expectations (Bass, 1997; Avolio *et al.*, 1999).

The third dimension, *intellectual stimulation*, involves encouraging followers to challenge the status quo and to be innovative in their work and seek improved solutions to problems (Avolio *et al.*, 1999). This dimension includes leaders' behaviours that help increasing the followers' ability to provide and use new and creative approaches in solving problems and performing work (Bass and Avolio, 1997). This implies the re-examination of the traditional ways of doing things while encouraging employees to take more responsibility and, ultimately, to turn them into leaders (Bass, 1985; Yukl, 1998).

Individualized consideration is about offering personal attention and time to followers' individual differences and developmental needs, while linking those needs to the organizational mission, through coaching and feedback. In this regard, leaders need to treat each employee as a unique person, to devote time coaching them, offering useful criticisms and providing them with different learning opportunities (Avolio *et al.*, 1999).

3. Previous empirical studies

3.1 Transformational leadership and innovative work behaviour

Several studies support the assumption that there is a positive relationship between transformational leadership and IWB. Avolio and Bass (2002) argued that certain aspects of transformational leadership, such as inspirational motivation, self-confidence, heightened awareness of goals and intellectual stimulation, foster and support the intrinsic motivation of the employees and their innovation and creativity, which closely match the predictors of IWB (Eisenbeiss *et al.*, 2008; Gumusluoglu and Ilsev, 2009; Pieterse *et al.*, 2010).

There is a large agreement among scholars that the presence of IWB in the modern organizations is linked to transformational leadership (Bass and Avolio, 1990; Janssen, 2000; Mumford *et al.*, 2002; Afsar *et al.*, 2014).

Trough intellectual stimulation, transformational leaders provide a work environment in which innovative thinking is welcomed (Jung *et al.*, 2003). Furthermore, Judge and Piccolo (2004) also found a positive relationship between transformational leadership and organizational performance, emphasizing innovativeness as an important component of organizational effectiveness.

As pointed out by Kahai *et al.* (2003), as well as by Pieterse *et al.* (2010), our understanding of how leadership practices may influence the employees' innovative behaviour is incipient and

the evidence of this relationship is still scarce and inconsistent. Still, other researchers, such as Janssen (2005) and De Jong and Den Hartog (2007), who studied the impact of transformational leadership on employees' IWB, concluded that, if employees perceive that their leaders are supportive and have good relationships with them, they would display a higher level of IWB.

Therefore, we can hypothesize that:

H1. Transformational leadership is positively related to employees' IWB.

3.2 Transformational leadership and psychological empowerment

The link between transformational leadership and the psychological empowerment, as well as the one between the psychological empowerment and the employees' work attitudes, has been previously discussed (Li *et al.*, 2006). Addressing a narrower topic within this broader framework, a study carried out by Boonyarit *et al.* (2010) found a direct link between transformational leadership and the teachers' feelings of empowerment. Similarly, Martin and Bush (2006) found that transformational leadership represents an important factor that influences the psychological empowerment among salespersons. In the same context, Men and Stacks (2013) noted that there is a significant direct effect of the transformational leadership on the employees' sense of empowerment. Moreover, Dust *et al.* (2014) showed that transformational leadership is positively related to psychological empowerment. The results revealed that transformational leadership promotes greater feelings of psychological empowerment, which, in turn, help employees increase their commitment to the organization. Similarly, Garcia-Morales *et al.* (2008) reported a significant positive relationship between both psychological empowerment and innovation, and transformational leadership. The relationships between the three have been investigated also by Afsar *et al.* (2014).

Because of the fact that transformational leaders usually tend to delegate authority and encourage participative decision-making, cooperation and idea generation (Afsar *et al.*, 2014), employees feel more empowered to carry out tasks with a high degree of control and freedom (Jung and Sosik, 2002). Thus, transformational leadership facilitates a work environment able to improve the employees' confidence level and self-efficacy (Avolio *et al.*, 2004), an environment in which employees feel motivated, competent and self-managed to experience internal empowerment (Zohar and Tenne-Gazit, 2008). Such leaders motivate employees to excel towards both organizational and individual goals (Spreitzer *et al.*, 1997).

By contrast, studies of Spreitzer *et al.* (1997) have drowned attention that not all dimensions of psychological empowerment are linked to transformational leadership. Moreover, Avolio *et al.* (2004) studied the psychological empowerment as mediating the relationship between transformational leadership and organizational commitment and found that psychological empowerment has a fully mediating role. The same approach is to be found in Özaralli's (2003) study that supports the approach of the psychological empowerment as an intermediary variable between the transformational leadership and the employees' effectiveness.

Similarly, Afsar *et al.* (2014) investigated the relationship between transformational leadership and employees' IWB and identified the mediating role of psychological empowerment. It also revealed the importance of a higher interdependent self-construal of employees.

In view of the above discussion, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H2. Transformational leadership is positively related to employees' psychological empowerment.

H3. Psychological empowerment mediates the relationship between transformational leadership and employees' IWB.

3.3 Psychological empowerment and innovative work behaviour

Starting from Spreitzer's (1995) definition, Conger and Kanungo (1988) suggested that through its characteristics, such as intrinsic task motivation, autonomy and (responsible) freedom of decision, psychological empowerment stimulates change and flexibility, and IWBs are change-oriented by definition. In other words, individuals feel less constrained by rules and regulations, thus, allowing themselves to act more innovatively (Ryan and Deci, 2000).

When employees feel that they are empowered, they exhibit newer and more creative behaviours, because they feel good about the tasks they are doing and perceive those tasks to be meaningful and challenging (Jung *et al.*, 2003).

At the same time, when employees feel that they have personal decision-making control, more freedom and flexibility and intrinsic motivation, they tend to produce innovative and improved solutions, thus fostering the overall job performance (Jung and Sosik, 2002; Laschinger *et al.*, 2004). Other studies (Volmer *et al.*, 2012) have also pointed to the fact that the greater the autonomy and decision-making control perceived by the employees, the higher the levels of their creative process engagement (Zhang and Bartol, 2010).

Based on the aspects presented and discussed above, this study aims to provide additional evidence of the relationship between psychological empowerment and employees' innovative behaviour. Thus, our last hypothesis is:

H4. Psychological empowerment is positively related to employee's IWB.

Figure 1 illustrates the theoretical framework proposed for the present study. It can be seen from the figure that the study aims at firstly examining the relations between transformational leadership, IWB and psychological empowerment and, secondly, at investigating the mediating role of the psychological empowerment between the transformational leadership and the employees' IWB.

4. Methodology

4.1 Participants and procedure

The sample consisted of 139 employees (men = 42, women = 97). The age range of the participants was from 19 to 63 years (M = 32.80, standard deviation [SD] = 11.17) and education level was from graduation (35.3%), master (48.2%) to doctorate level (16.5%). For data collection, a purposive convenience sampling technique was used.Tables 1 and 2 provide details about the sample according to the responsibility level and the type of sector

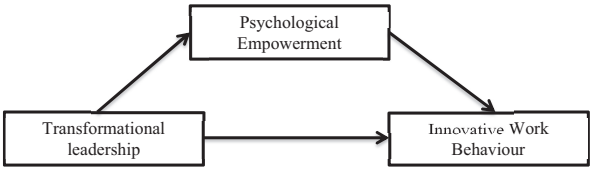

Figure 1. Conceptual framework

n = 139	Frequency	(%)
Non-managerial employees	77	55.4
First-line management	27	19.4
Middle management	24	17.3
High management	11	7.9

Table 1. Sample distribution according to level of responsibility

(public/private sector). In terms of the work experience, the range was between 1 and 41 years (M = 10.97, SD = 10.59).

A self-reported data collection technique was used. The questionnaire was in Romanian, as all the respondents were Romanians. The appartenance of the respondents to various organizational sectors provides a framework for exploring diverse contexts and for an overall understanding of the investigated phenomena. Before completion, the purpose of the study was briefly explained to the participants and informed consent was obtained. All participants were ensured about the confidentiality of the data and that it would be only used for research purpose.

4.2 Measures

IWB scale – The ten-item scale measuring IWB was adopted from the studies by De Jong and Den Hartog (2010) and it measures self-reported level for four different tasks, namely, *idea generation*, *opportunity exploration*, *championing* and *idea application* on five-point scale ranging from 1 ("never") to 5 ("always"). For the current research, the Cronbach's alpha was 0.92.

Psychological empowerment – we used a 12-item scale to measure self-reported psychological empowerment (Spreitzer, 1995). The scale is composed of four sub-dimensions: *meaning*, *competence*, *self-determination* and *impact*. Items were anchored by a seven-point scale ranging from 1 (*very strongly disagree*) to 7 (*very strongly agree*). The validity of the instrument is very good. Test–retest reliability has been shown to be strong and validity estimates for the dimensions are typically around 0.80 (Spreitzer and Quinn, 2001). For the current research, the reliability was 0.94.

Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) (Form 5X) – MLQ is a structured, verbal, omnibus measure of leadership styles. The questionnaire consists of 45 items, covering what is known as the "full-range" leadership model (Bass and Avolio, 1990). The full-range model of leadership assumes the existence of differences in the effectiveness of leadership styles, based on the active/passive distinction. Broad categories of leadership and MLQ scales range from passive/avoidant leadership (laissez-faire) through the classical model of transactional leadership and up to transformational leadership. Ratings were completed on a five-point Likert-type scale ranging from 0 (not at all) to 4 (frequently). The Cronbach's alpha obtained for this study was 0.87.

5. Results

After collection, the data were analysed using SPSS 22.0 version software, including the PROCESS macro for SPSS version 3.2.02 developed by Andrew Hayes. Finally, we carried out a Sobel test (quantpsy.org/sobel/sobel.htm) to probe the mediation effect (Preacher and Hayes, 2004).

Because the same respondents rated psychological empowerment, transformational leadership and IWB, the concern about a possible "common method bias" arose. Therefore, Herman's single-factor test, as suggested by Podsakoff *et al.* (2003), was used. This is the most widely used diagnosis technique for assessing the extent to which common method

Table 2. Sample distribution according to the type of sector

n = 139	Frequency	(%)
Public sector	46	33.1
Private sector – local ownership	42	30.2
Private sector – multinational	44	31.7
Non-governmental organization	7	5.0

variance may be a problem (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2003, p.889). Using factor analysis, a model in five factors was identified. No single factor was found to explain more than 50% of the variance.

As shown in Table 3, the internal consistency coefficients of all research variables were higher than the recommended value, which indicates that the reliability of the variables was acceptable. In addition, Table 1 shows transformational leadership style to be positively correlated with IWB ($r = 0.549$, $p < 0.01$) and psychological empowerment ($r = 0.491$, $p < 0.01$), whereas, IWB was also positively correlated with psychological empowerment ($r = 0.431$, $p < 0.01$).

Furthermore, the results are supported by the correlations run to test the relations between transformational leadership and the IWB scales (Table 4), namely, *opportunity exploration* ($r = 0.433$, $p < 0.01$), *idea generation* ($r = 0.451$, $p < 0.01$), *championing* ($r = 0.540$, $p < 0.01$) and *idea application* ($r = 0.542$, $p < 0.01$).

The same significant results were also identified for the correlations between the transformational leadership and all the psychological empowerment scales (Table 5), thus providing additional evidence for the expected relation. Hence, all correlations ended up to be positive and significant at a 0.01 level, starting with *impact* ($r = 0.484$, $p < 0.01$), *meaning* ($r = 0.477$, $p < 0.01$), *self-determination* ($r = 0.368$, $p < 0.01$) and *competence* ($r = 0.272$, $p < 0.01$).

To test the mediation model we proposed, the PROCESS (Hayes, 2012) macro for SPSS was used (version 3.2.02). In this regression analysis, transformational leadership was used as a predictor, psychological empowerment as a mediator and IWB as an outcome variable (Table 6).

Table 3. Descriptive statistics and intercorrelations for all study variables

$n = 139$	Mean (SD)	Cronbach's α	Correlations		
Transformational leadership	59.29 (10.35)	0.877	1		
IWB	11.11 (3.24)	0.929	0.549**	1	
Psychological empowerment	5.50 (1.11)	0.942	0.491**	0.431**	1

Note: **Means that: correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (two-tailed)

Table 4. Intercorrelations between transformational leadership and IWB scales

$n = 139$	Opportunity exploration	Idea generation	Championing	Idea application
Transformational leadership	0.433**	0.451**	0.540**	0.542**

Note: **Means that: correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (two-tailed)

Table 5. Intercorrelations between transformational leadership and psychological empowerment scales

$n = 139$	Meaning	Competence	Self-determination	Impact
Transformational leadership	0.477**	0.272**	0.368**	0.484**

Note: **Means that: correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (two-tailed)

In step 1 of the mediation model, the regression of the transformational leadership on the IWB, ignoring the mediator, was significant, F(1,137) = 59.1, $p < 0.001$, $R^2 = 0.30$, $b = 0.17$, $t(137) = 7.68$ and $p < 0.001$.

Step 2 showed that the regression of the transformational leadership on the mediator, psychological empowerment, was also significant, F(1,137) = 46.2, $p < 0.001$, $R^2 = 0.25$, $b = 0.05$, $t(137) = 6.79$ and $p < 0.001$.

Step 3 of the mediation process showed that the mediator (psychological empowerment), controlling for transformational leadership, was significant, F(2,136) = 36.98, $R^2 = 0.35$, $p < 0.001$, $b = 0.74$, $t(136) = 3.26$ and $p < 0.001$.

Step 4 of the analyses revealed that controlling for the mediator, psychological empowerment, transformational leadership scores were a less significant predictor of IWB, $b = 0.13$, $t(136) = 5.23$ and $p < 0.001$.

As suggested in Baron and Kenny (1986), the Aroian version of the Sobel test was conducted and it was found that psychological empowerment mediated the relationship between transformational leadership and the IWB ($z = 2.94$, $p = 0.002$). The same results were obtained for the Goodman version of the Sobel test ($z = 2.97$, $p = 0.002$).

6. Discussion

H1 (i.e. transformational leadership has a positive relationship with IWB) was supported in the present study. The positive correlations observed were significant not only for the general score of the transformational leadership but also for all its scales. There is a variety of factors that can influence employees' innovation. According to Bass and Avolio (1990), one of the most influential factors is transformational leadership. This relation was also identified in previous empirical studies (Bass and Avolio, 1990; Janssen, 2000; Jung *et al.*, 2003; Mumford *et al.*, 2002).

Those results are consistent with the findings of Bass *et al.* (1987), who have further reported a positive relationship between transformational leadership and organizational performance. They also correspond to the findings of Flatten *et al.* (2015), who found that transformational leadership exerts an important effect on IWB.

Moreover, there is evidence that the transformational leadership style exerts influence on employees' innovative behaviour (Pieterse *et al.*, 2010). The results of this study are consistent with the findings of Tierney Farmer and Graen (1999), who have, likewise, found that higher-quality relationships with leaders' levels of transformational leadership result in higher employees' level of IWB. Similarly, De Jong and Den Hartog (2007) and Janssen (2005) found that a good supervisor's leadership and employee's IWB are related to each other.

H2 stated that transformational leadership is positively related to the employees' psychological empowerment. The results support the hypothesis ($r = 0.431$, $p < 0.01$) and reveal

Table 6. Regression results for the PROCESS mediation

Model	Coefficient	*SE*	*t*	*p*	CI (lower)	CI (upper)
Model without mediator						
TL → IWB (c)	0.1720	0.0224	7.6879	0.0000	0.1278	0.2163
Model with mediator						
TL → PE (a)	0.0554	0.0081	6.7976	0.0000	0.0393	0.0715
PE → IWB (b)	0.7416	0.2268	3.2694	0.0000	0.2930	1.1902
TL → IWB (c′)	0.1310	0.0250	5.2372	0.0014	0.0815	0.1804

Notes: CI = confidence interval; TL = transformational leadership; PE = psychological empowerment; SE = standard error

that there is a significant relationship between transformational leadership and psychological empowerment. The results are further supported by the significant positive correlations between transformational leadership and all the psychological empowerment scales.

Results are in line with the research of Gumusluoglu and Ilsev (2009). Therefore, a leadership style in which employees feel that they are listened and understood, in a supportive and confidence-building environment, is likely to increase the feeling of psychological empowerment (Quinn and Spreitzer, 1997).

Regarding *H3*, according to the proposed model, it was found that psychological empowerment mediates the relationship between transformational leadership and employees' IWB. This finding shows that *H3* was also supported. This is consistent with previous studies stating that transformational leadership has an influence on employee's behaviour, which was mediated by the leader trustworthiness and psychological empowerment (Bartram and Casimir, 2007), as well as the way the employees think about themselves (Afsar *et al.*, 2014). Similarly, Bishop (2000) and Özaralli (2003) have found a positive impact of transformational leadership on the employees' psychological empowerment. Moreover, our findings confirm previous research, which revealed that the psychological empowerment plays a mediating role between transformational leadership and the employees' attitudes, such as organizational commitment (Avolio *et al.*, 2004; McCann *et al.*, 2006).

H4 was further supported by the research data, psychological empowerment being positively related to the employee's IWB ($r = 0.491$, $p < 0.01$), in line with Spreitzer's (1995) findings that psychological empowerment is a significant forecaster for the innovative behaviour. Therefore, when employees feel that they can influence organizational outcomes, they are more inclined to generate, promote and implement innovative ideas (Janssen, 2005; Zhang and Bartol, 2010).

7. Conclusion

Overall, this study extends the empirical research in the domain of both transformational leadership and employee IWB (Avolio *et al.*, 2004; Pieterse *et al.*, 2010) and confirms the mediating role of psychological empowerment, mirroring the findings of Li *et al.* (2006).

As shown by previous studies (Reuvers *et al.*, 2008; Afsar *et al.*, 2014), we found a positive correlation between transformational leadership and IWB. This leadership style proved to positively influence employees' idea generation and idea implementation. Secondly, employees' psychological empowerment mediated the relationship between the transformational leadership and the employees' IWB, similar to the findings of Jung *et al.* (2003), as well as Afsar *et al.* (2014). Moreover, our findings also confirm prior research results (Avolio *et al.*, 2004; Pieterse *et al.*, 2010) about psychologically empowered employees displaying higher levels of creativity and IWB. Therefore, within a transformational leadership style framework, employees feel empowered, respected, having a large degree of autonomy, self–determination and competence, and, thus, displaying a higher degree of innovativeness in their behaviour.

It is practically relevant to understand what fosters IWB among employees and how one can increase this type of behaviour. By creating a greater sense of empowerment, leaders could have a higher positive effect on employee's levels of IWB. As indicated by previous studies (Bass and Riggio, 2006; Sosik and Jung, 2010), empowerment represents one of the most important processes within the transformational leadership framework, being effective in encouraging followers' innovation.

Therefore, managers should realize that psychological empowerment provides a mediating link between transformational leader's behaviours and the creative attitudes of the employees (Castro *et al.*, 2008, p. 1,858). Also, leaders who want to display intellectual

stimulation behaviours are also able to influence followers' feeling of competence, choice and impact (Bass, 1999; Avolio *et al.*, 2004).

One of the main weaknesses of this study was the use of a cross-sectional design, which does not allow for an assessment of the cause – effect relation. Also, the questionnaires were self-reported, which may result in common method bias. Nevertheless, Harman's single-factor test was used to test for biases. Therefore, future research should consider some procedural remedies to minimize the potential effects of this kind of biases, such as multiple sources of data collection or, at least, collecting the data at different times. Another limitation, common to many studies, is the tendency to investigate and report attitudes, rather than behaviours (Hughes *et al.*, 2018). As stated by Baumeister *et al.* (2007, p. 397), "self-report appears to have all but crowded out all other forms of behaviour". Moreover, there appears to be some conceptual overlap between transformational leadership and psychological empowerment, both being focused on followers' development and confidence (Bass, 1985; Spreitzer, 1995). Another issue to be considered when evaluating the results is the small sample, which makes the results difficult to generalize. Analysing samples from different sectors provides some possible frameworks for academic and practical debate but it does not explicitly allow the diagnose of a specific sector or a factual state. Therefore, we propose the initiation of confirmatory studies on samples with low intra-class variability to provide a relevant image on a specific population or a specific domain.

We found that transformational leadership was most effective at increasing IWB for employees when they were psychologically empowered to create and implement new ideas (Afsar *et al.*, 2014). Still, future studies can improve the explanatory power of the proposed model by adding new variables that could further explain the link between transformational leadership and IWB, such as personality traits, self-efficacy, self-regulation and *locus* of control.

Also, current research might be continued by exploring other potential mediator variables on the effects of transformational leadership on IWB (e.g. social support) and by using mixed methods and longitudinal studies to better explore the causal relationships between the selected variables.

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