

Leading With Heart: The Impact of Transformational Leadership on Employee Psychological Well-Being in the Hotel Industry in

Sri Lanka

Kirushika Chandrakumar^{a,*}, Waruni Ayesha Edirisooriya^b

^{a,b} Faculty of Management, University of Peradeniya, Sri Lanka

kirushi.chandru@gmail.com^a, warunie@mgt.pdn.ac.lk^b

ABSTRACT:

The hotel industry in Sri Lanka is highly demanding, often leading to work-related stress that affects employees' psychological well-being. This study examines the impact of transformational leadership on the psychological well-being of frontline employees in five-star hotels in Sri Lanka. Grounded in Bass's Transformational Leadership Theory, the study examines how transformational leadership, through its four dimensions, namely idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individual consideration, influences employee psychological well-being. Adopting a positivist paradigm, the study employed a quantitative research approach using simple random sampling to select 254 frontline employees from various departments in five-star hotels. The dataset of the study was analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics techniques. The findings of the study indicate that transformational leadership has a significant positive impact on the psychological well-being of employees. The study highlights the key contribution of transformational leadership in mitigating workplace stress, generating job satisfaction, and promoting a supportive organizational culture.

Keywords: Transformational Leadership, Psychological Well-Being, Bass's Leadership Theory, Employee Satisfaction.

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1. INTRODUCTION

As global challenges intensify, well-being is identified as the cornerstone of sustainable development for any country, addressing the requirements of Sustainable Development Goals 3 (Good Health and Well-being) and 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth). The contemporary workplace is no longer viewed as just an economic activity, but as a place to promote the physical, psychological and social well-being of employees to achieve strategic objectives (Kundi *et al.*, 2021; Tabala *et al.*, 2025). However, well-being is mostly interpreted as a biomedical concept, highlighting physical health and ignoring the integration of psychological aspects (Gautam *et al.*, 2024). According to scholars, both mental and physical health play a crucial role in overall health. As a result, ensuring employee Psychological Well-Being (PWB) in the contemporary workplace has become a strategic action rather than an obligation (Sode, Chenji, and Vijayaraghavan, 2024). PWB is defined in various ways, such as positive mental and emotional wellness of employees (El-Gazar *et al.*, 2025), thinking, feeling, and acting positively while working (Tabala *et al.*, 2024), and an individual's long-term emotional state of happiness and sadness (Kimbu *et al.*, 2023). However, a trend in workplace stress and mental health issues has intensified in recent years globally. A global survey by Debnam (2016) discovered that stress problems have significantly increased by 20.1% for Asia, 32.7% for the USA, and 27.1% for Africa, the Middle East, and Europe, highlighting the detrimental impact on organizational success. This escalation trend reflects a broader global pattern in which workplace stress has become a critical organizational concern recently, negatively affecting employee well-being, productivity and overall performance (Chomse *et al.*, 2025; CIPD, 2019; Varra, 2025). Notably, PWB

emerged as a crucial factor in the hotel industry (Saito, Brozovic, and Baum, 2025), affecting the service quality since the industry is inherently a people business, where employees constantly deal with guests. The quality of customer service helps to achieve sustainable competitive advantages. Ariza-Montes *et al.* (2019) argue that maintaining a close relationship between the employee's psychological well-being and the business outcomes is crucial in the human-centric industry.

The hotel sector serves as a vital contributor to the economy, and the tourism sector in Sri Lanka (Ravinthirakumaran *et al.*, 2019) currently serves as a significant source of foreign exchange income (SLTD, 2024). Despite facing economic challenges and the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, Sri Lanka is ranked as the 9th best destination to travel to in 2025, according to BBC Travel's inaugural guide. There is a significant improvement in tourist arrivals in 2024 compared to 2023, from 1.49 million tourists to 2.05 million, showing a 38% growth (SLTDA, 2024). In essence, the facts highlight that the natural beauty, cultural richness, and authentic travel experience in Sri Lanka serve as strategies to attract more tourists, while indicating that Sri Lanka has the potential to increase its service quality.

On the other hand, the demanding nature of the Sri Lankan hotel industry, with its long hours, emotional labor demands, and unclear career progression paths, often leads to compromised employee well-being (Munasinghe *et al.*, 2024). Jayasinghe (2017) found that 72% of hotel employees in Sri Lanka reported a poor quality of life and high stress levels, while 15% reported an average quality of life, with only 13% expressing job satisfaction. The COVID-19 pandemic further intensified these challenges, disrupting job security, work-life balance, and emotional stability in the

hotel sector (Rodríguez-Antón and Alonso-Almeida, 2020; Salem *et al.*, 2021). Further, hotel workers faced heightened job demands, non-social working hours, and diminished family time, contributing to widespread stress and psychological distress (Abdou *et al.*, 2022; Davahli *et al.*, 2020).

Among various organizational factors, leadership style has been consistently identified as a key determinant of employee psychological health (Onesti, 2023). Transformational Leadership, introduced by Bass (1985), has emerged as one of the most influential leadership models for promoting employee well-being. Transformational leadership is characterised by four factors, namely, idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individual consideration. Transformational leaders motivate, encourage, and emotionally connect with followers, thereby boosting their sense of purpose, eliminating work-related stress, and cultivating great workplace connections (Abolnasser *et al.*, 2023; Arnold, 2017). A substantial body of research has proven a positive correlation between transformational leadership and PWB of employees, highlighting the outcomes such as lower stress, reduced burnout, and improved job satisfaction (Huertas-Valdivia *et al.*, 2022; Ibrahim *et al.*, 2024; Liyanage, 2020) and transformational leadership and employees' feelings of exhaustion, depression, and irritability are negatively correlated (Salem, 2015; Liu *et al.*, 2019). Existing literature has established a positive association between transformational leadership and employee psychological well-being, specifically in Western contexts (Abolnasser *et al.*, 2023). Despite a plethora of research on transformational leadership, a shortage of empirical research specifically investigating the impact of transformational leadership on employee PWB

in the developing context, specifically in Sri Lanka, indicates a need for more localized research.

Previous research in transformational leadership and PWB has mentioned that future researchers need to be re-evaluated in other countries, including different cultural contexts, and various work settings (Abolnasser *et al.*, 2023). The unique culture and social dynamics in the Sri Lankan hotel industry present a distinct context that has not been adequately examined in existing studies (He, Morrison, and Zhang, 2019). Moreover, there appears to be a disconnection between the theoretical advantages of transformational leadership and the extent to which it is effectively implemented in the Sri Lankan hotel industry. Therefore, to address the above-mentioned gaps, the study aimed to examine the impact of transformational leadership on employee psychological well-being in the hotel industry in Sri Lanka.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Employee Psychological Well-being

PWB is an individual's overall mental condition, which includes life satisfaction, emotional stability, and a feeling of purpose (Dhanabhakya and Sarath, 2023). Researchers identified two primary categories of psychological well-being: hedonic and eudemonic (Robertson and Cooper, 2010; Sonnentag, Tay and Nesher Shoshan, 2023). Hedonic well-being refers to feelings of happiness and pleasure, characterized by a positive attitude, avoiding negativity, and satisfaction with life aspects (Abolnasser *et al.*, 2023; Busseri and Sadava, 2011; Sironi, 2019). On the other hand,

Eudemonic well-being is often linked to PWB, a sense of purpose, and belongingness. However, challenges in operationalizing these concepts often result in a single psychological concept (Cowen, 1991; Deci and Ryan, 2008). PWB plays a significant role in overall organizational success as it positively influences employee engagement, job satisfaction, productivity, and overall organizational performance (Aryanti, Sari, and Widiana, 2020; El-Gazar *et al.*,2025; Tabala *et al.*,2024).

Moreover, Weerakit *et al.* (2025) conducted a study on mental health and its impact on turnover intention in the hotel industry. The results indicate that psychological resilience supports employees in mitigating adverse outcomes such as stress and burnout. Wright, Cropanzano, and Bonett (2007) found that PWB strongly moderates the association between employee job satisfaction and job performance. According to Aryan *et al.*(2017), a substantial correlation between PWB and employee performance ratings was discovered in their study on PWB and work satisfaction as determinants of job performance. Conclusively, ensuring psychological well-being at the workplace changes employee behaviours towards positive thinking, motivation, high performance, and reaching their maximum potential (Dayana, Adina, and Cristian, 2023).

2.2 Transformational Leadership

Transformational leadership is a leadership approach which involves inspiring, encouraging, and supporting followers to exceed expectations and develop their personal and professional level (Salem, 2015). This concept was first introduced by Bass (1985), who explained transformational leadership with four key dimensions:

idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. These behaviours collectively enhance employee empowerment, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment (Lindert *et al.*, 2022). Research continuously demonstrates that transformational leaders create high-performance cultures by encouraging cooperation, trust, and creative problem-solving (Rafique *et al.*, 2022; Salah and Rahman, 2022). Notably, transformational leadership has also positively correlated with employee well-being, employee engagement, and knowledge sharing, particularly in fast-paced service industries (Avolio, Walumbwa, and Weber, 2009; Kim and Cruz, 2022; Lee and Lim, 2024). Transformational leaders inspire and encourage others to go above and beyond what they had originally intended to accomplish, and frequently beyond what they had even imagined they could. They generally do better and have higher expectations. In the process, followers become more capable of being leaders (Gray and Williams, 2012).

2.3 Psychological Well-being and Transformational Leadership

The theory of transformational leadership emphasizes that transformational leaders encourage, empower, and closely guide followers to exceed expectations while fostering personal growth. Moreover, idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration are associated with improved employee engagement, satisfaction, and organizational commitment (Wang *et al.*, 2014; Yukl, 2006). The Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) remains the most recognized and used instrument to operationalize transformational leadership behaviours.

The existing literature has shown inconsistent relationships between transformational leadership and PWB. Various outcomes are observed based on the burnout dimension, such as personal accomplishment, depersonalization, and emotional weariness with transformational leadership. Several cross-sectional surveys empirically validated the negative association between employee burnout and transformational leadership (Pladdys, 2024; Kloutsiniotis *et al.*, 2022). However, Hetland *et al.* (2007) reported conflicting results that transformational leadership was strongly positively correlated with professional efficacy, negatively correlated with cynicism, and had no significant correlation with emotional weariness.

Previous studies have recognized that leadership has the potential to impact employees' well-being (Kelloway *et al.*, 2012), particularly transformational leadership, which has been associated with workers' well-being and satisfaction (McKee *et al.*, 2007). Transformational leaders empower, promote commitment, and intellectually stimulate followers, leading to positive outcomes such as improved psychological well-being (Arnold, 2017; Kelloway *et al.*, 2012). According to Sivanathan *et al.* (2004), it is evident that there is a significant association between employees' psychological well-being and the four aspects of transformational leadership. A study carried out by Marliana *et al.* (2025) on the topic of Transformational Leadership and Job Satisfaction: A Study of Creative Industries in Asia emphasized that transformational leadership generates positive organizational outcomes, particularly employee motivation and commitment. Further, Alfalih and Ragmoun (2025) argue that transformational leadership significantly reinforce the organizational culture through shared mission and values and fosters a positive work environment, leading employees to feel a sense of belonging. Therefore, we argue that

in the South Asian contexts, where collectivism and value-driven leadership are culturally salient (Gelfand *et al.*,2024), transformational leadership particularly fosters employees' PWB. Bass's Leadership Theory provides a robust framework for understanding the impact of transformational leadership on employee psychological well-being in the hotel industry in Sri Lanka. Based on the above discussion, the following hypothesis was developed.

H1: Transformational leadership positively impacts employee psychological well-being.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study employed a quantitative research design under the positivist philosophy, using the deductive approach and survey strategy to examine the research objectives. A cross-sectional survey method was used to gather data from a sample drawn at a single point in time, which is suitable to examine relationships between variables in organizational settings (Mohajan, 2020). The study population included the front-line employees who had direct and frequent interactions with guests from the top three five-star hotels in Sri Lanka. Their roles involve managing guest expectations, handling complaints, and ensuring customer satisfaction. This interaction may have a substantial impact on those employees' psychological well-being, which could directly or indirectly affect the service quality. The study population was 771 and based on Krejci and Morgan's table, 254 employees were determined to be the study's sample size using the simple random sampling approach.

The top three five-star hotels in Sri Lanka were selected based on the lowest turnover rate reported in Sri Lanka in 2024. According to Amin and Akbar (2013), employee turnover intention can be reduced by fostering PWB and attending to employees' needs. Similarly, Weerakit *et al.* (2025) in their study on workplace mental well-being: exploring its effects on employee turnover intention in the Thai hotel industry revealed that psychological distress contributes significantly to burnout, leading to high turnover. Thus, the researchers argue that by focusing on hotels that already have strong retention, they can identify the extent to which transformational leadership successfully mitigate burnout and psychological distress, offering actionable insights for other organizations aiming to enhance employee well-being and reduce turnover.

The primary data was collected through a self-directed questionnaire. Transformational leadership was measured using components adapted from Bass and Avolio's (1990) Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ), covering four basic dimensions: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized considerations. At the same time, Employee PWB was measured using components derived from Abolnasser *et al.* (2023), with a focus on emotional well-being, social well-being, and workplace well-being. These conceptual descriptions were converted into clear, concise paragraphs with which respondents may indicate their level of agreement. To measure the responses, a five-point Likert scale was applied, where five indicated strongly agree, and one indicated strongly disagree. Both descriptive and inferential statistical techniques were employed using SPSS 23.0 to assess the impact of transformational leadership on Employee PWB. Out of the 254 questionnaires distributed, 253 responses were successfully received, achieving an impressive response rate of 99.61%. This high response rate enhanced the

representativeness of the sample and improved the validity and reliability of the data gathered.

4. FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

4.1 Respondent Profile

The demographic parameters of the sample were summarized using descriptive statistics. The final sample consisted of 254 frontline employees, of whom 53.8% (136 individuals) were male, and 46.2% (117 individuals) were female. The majority of respondents, 40.3%, were aged 21–30 years, followed by 26.1% aged 31–40 years. Smaller proportions fell within the 41–50 years (16.6%), over 50 years (7.5%), and under 20 years (9.5%) categories. In terms of employment status, 49% of respondents were full-time employees, while 24.1% worked part-time. A further 10.7% were unemployed, 12.6% were self-employed, and 3.6% were categorized as others. Regarding service tenure, 27.3% of respondents had 1–3 years of service, 20.6% had less than a year, and 17.0% and 17.4% had 4–6 years and 7–10 years, respectively. Employees with over 10 years of service accounted for 17.8% of the sample.

4.2 Reliability Analysis

To evaluate the reliability of the instruments, Cronbach's alpha was calculated, and all variables recorded a value higher than the standard threshold of 0.7, confirming the internal consistency and trustworthiness (see Table 01).

Table 1: Cronbach's Alpha Values

Variable	No. of Questions	Cronbach's Alpha Value
Psychological well-being	10	0.908
Idealize influence	5	0.836
Inspirational motivation	5	0.818
Intellectual stimulation	3	0.797
Individual consideration	4	0.819

Source: Author Compiled with Survey Data (2024)

4.3 Hypothesis Testing

Multiple regression analysis was conducted to examine the extent to which a group of predictors, the four dimensions of transformational leadership, explain the variance in employee PWB, the dependent variable. The results of a multiple regression analysis are shown in Table 2. Accordingly, the R Square value of 0.526 indicates that approximately 52.6% of the variance in the dependent variable is explained by the independent variables included in the model, which proves that the regression model provides a reasonably good fit to the data. As shown in Table 03, a Significant value of 0.000 ($p < 0.05$), an F-value of 68.228, indicates that the overall regression model is statistically significant to predict the variance in the dependent variable. Nevertheless, the coefficient table (see Table 4), the p-values for all four predictors were less than the significance level of 0.05, indicating that these predictors are strong enough to predict employee PWB, showing the conclusion that the hypothesis developed has been accepted. Additionally, inspirational motivation and idealized influence emerged

as the most influential predictors of employee psychological well-being among frontline employees in the hotel industry in Sri Lanka.

Table 2:Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics					Durbin-Watson
				R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change	
1	.725 ^a	.526	.550	.526	68.228	4	246	.000	1.662

a. Predictors: (Constant), IC, IM, IS, Idealize influence

b. Dependent Variable: PWB

Source: Author Compiled with Survey Data (2024).

Table 3: ANOVA Table

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	82.436	4	20.609	68.228	.000 ^b
Residual	74.307	246	.302		
Total	156.743	250			

a. Dependent Variable: PWB

b. Predictors: (Constant), IC, IM, IS, idealize influence.

Source: Author Compiled with Survey Data (2024).

Table 4: Coefficient Values

Predictor	B	β (Standardized)	t- value	Sig. (p- value)
Idealized Influence (II)	0.238	0.287	3.325	0.001
Inspirational Motivation (IM)	0.252	0.289	3.273	0.001
Intellectual Stimulation (IS)	0.152	0.066	2.097	0.046
Individual Consideration (IC)	0.122	0.144	2.158	0.039

a. Dependent Variable: PWB

Source: Author Compiled with Survey Data (2024)

5. DISCUSSIONS

Employee psychological well-being has increasingly gained attention within the hotel industry due to its direct influence on service quality, employee satisfaction, leading to the overall success of the organization. This study examined the impact of transformational leadership and employee PWB in the context of five-star hotels in Sri Lanka. The results confirmed that transformational leadership plays a significant and positive role in shaping employees' psychological well-being, supporting the findings of previous research (Arnold, 2017; Nielsen *et al.*, 2009; Skakon *et al.*, 2010). Of the four key dimensions of transformational leadership, idealized influence and inspirational motivation emerged as especially impactful, reinforcing earlier work by Sivanathan *et al.* (2004) and Kara *et al.* (2013). These findings suggest that when

leaders serve as ethical role models, articulate a clear and motivating vision, and offer genuine encouragement, employees are more likely to experience enhanced psychological well-being, motivation, and a sense of belonging. Additionally, intellectual stimulation and individual consideration were found to contribute meaningfully to psychological well-being by promoting creativity and problem-solving and providing personal support tailored to individual employee needs. This reflects the arguments of Bass and Riggio (2006) and reinforces the importance of emotionally intelligent, people-centered leadership in demanding service industries. Overall, the study highlights that transformational leadership is a valuable management approach for fostering healthier, more engaged, and emotionally resilient workforces in the hotel sector. It adds to the growing literature advocating for leadership practices that prioritize employee well-being as a foundation for organizational sustainability and competitive advantage in hotel industry settings.

6. IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

The study contributes to the existing literature by providing insights into the transformational leadership theory and practical applications. According to the research findings, hotel managers can develop and receive training in transformational leadership practices, which will help them foster a more encouraging and stimulating workplace that improves employees' psychological well-being. Hotels should invest in leadership training programs that emphasize ethical leadership, motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized support because these elements directly lower workplace stress and boost employee job satisfaction. Academically, the results contribute to leadership and organizational behavior literature by providing empirical evidence on the positive impact of transformational

leadership on employee psychological well-being in the Sri Lankan hotel industry. This enriches existing theoretical frameworks and encourages further research within the fields of organizational behavior, human resource management, and employee well-being in high-pressure service environments.

From the sustainable development perspective, maintaining employee PWB is directly linked with fulfilling SGD Goal 03 -Good Health and Well-Being and SGD Goal 08 - Decent Work and Economic Growth (Thakur and Pathak, 2023). The findings of the study spotlight the important social implications of maintaining workplace PWB, particularly in the labour intensive services such as hotel sector. By fostering PWB, organizations create a foundation for healthier and supportive work environments, which directly affect reducing burnout, anxiety and turnover intentions, and such practices enhance the work-life balance and strengthen family and community well-being.

7. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

However, the study is not without limitations, which should be considered when conducting the future research. This study only focused on employees from three five-star hotels in Sri Lanka; future research could include a broader range of hotels across different regions to gain a more comprehensive understanding of transformational leadership impacts within the hotel sector. Future research could also examine the long-term effects of transformational leadership by adopting a longitudinal research design, which would provide deeper insights into how leadership styles influence employee well-being over time. Additionally, qualitative approaches such as interviews or focus group discussions could be used to capture

more nuanced employee perceptions and experiences that may not be fully reflected through quantitative methods. Moreover, other psychological and organisational factors—such as work-life balance, job autonomy, organizational culture, and employee engagement—could also be explored in future studies as potential mediators or moderators in the relationship between leadership and psychological well-being. These variables may offer a more complete understanding of employee well-being in complex work environments. While a validated 10-item scale was used to measure employee PWB, this may limit the extent to which the full multidimensional aspect of the construct is captured; thus, future studies could employ more comprehensive and multifaceted instruments to gain deeper insight into PWB.

8. CONCLUSIONS

This study aimed to determine the impact of transformational leadership on employee PWB in the hotel industry in Sri Lanka. The results showed that all four dimensions of transformational leadership - idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individual consideration positively and significantly affect employee PWB. Notably, inspirational motivation and idealized influence emerged as the most influential factors enhancing employee well-being, highlighting that leaders who articulate a compelling vision, communicate high expectations and act as a role model through integrity and ethical conduct play a vital role in fostering PWB and overall sense of fulfilment at work. Consequently, in order to improve employee mental health, the study's conclusions urge the adoption of leadership development initiatives and organizational strategies that support transformational

leadership practices. The study is significant to the Sri Lankan hotel industry, where high job demands, frequent customer interaction and sector uncertainty often affect the employees' mental well-being. The findings of the results may guide the hotel industry on how leadership styles affect not only employee mental health but also broader organizations outcomes such as service quality, staff retention and productivity. In essence, transformational leadership practices may provide strategic directions towards enhancing both employee well-being and sustainable outcomes within the hotel industry.

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