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Leading with purpose: unraveling the impact of motivating language on work engagement with a focus on psychological meaningfulness in the tourism and hospitality sector

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Abstract

Purpose Drawing on speech act theory, this study examined the influence of transformational leadership on employee work engagement and motivating language. Further, this study examines the mediating role of motivating language. In addition, the study examined the moderating role of psychological meaningfulness.

Participants and methods This study employed a questionnaire-based survey to collect data from 412 lower and mid-level Pakistani tourism and hospitality sector employees through a convenience sampling technique. To reduce common method biases, a time-lagged data collection approach was used. The hypothesis test was conducted using the hierarchical linear modeling (HLM) technique.

Results The results showed that transformational leadership is positively related to the use of motivating language and work engagement. In addition, motivating language mediates the relationship between transformational leadership and employee work engagement. The psychological meaningfulness plays a moderating role in the relationship between motivating language behavior and employee work engagement.

Originality of the study This study uniquely integrates transformational leadership, motivating language, and psychological meaningfulness to explain employee engagement in the Pakistani tourism and hospitality sector. It reveals the mediating role of motivating language and the moderating effect of psychological meaningfulness, offering novel insights into how leadership communication drives work engagement in this context.

Conclusion This study found that transformational leadership has a positive influence on both motivating language and employee work engagement in the Pakistani tourism and hospitality sector. Motivating language mediates this relationship, enhancing the impact of transformational leadership on work engagement. Additionally, psychological meaningfulness moderates this relationship, further strengthening employee engagement. These findings underscore the crucial role of leadership communication and psychological meaningfulness in cultivating a motivated and engaged workforce.

Keywords Transformational leadership, Work engagement, Psychological meaningfulness, Motivating language

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Introduction

The concept of leadership emerged a few decades ago and is considered the backbone of any organization. An organization's overall success or failure is closely related to the leader's role [1, 2]. In an organization, the role of leadership is crucial, as it enables and motivates followers to achieve the common goals and objectives of the organization [3, 4]. Therefore, research confirmed that the leader's responsibility is to recognize what is good and how to do good for the organization [5, 6]. While all positive leadership styles share similar objectives, the differences lie in the processes through which they attract their followers [7]. Leadership efficiency is based on several factors, including the leader's behavior, leadership style, and personal characteristics [8, 9].

In the context of the tourism and hospitality sector, the primary focus is on a performance-oriented culture, which is associated with a high level of engagement among employees [10–12]. Such individuals are considered the backbone of the business, a key factor for the organization's competitive advantage, success in financial matters, and achieving long-term organizational goals [13]. Employees invest significant energy, commitment, involvement, and concentration in their work [14]. Conversely, worldwide, it is noted that the industry faces a loss due to the disengagement of employees and deviant behavior [15]. Therefore, numerous studies examined the behavior of employees and how and why individuals are engaged at work [16]. Previous studies suggested examining how transformational leadership style affects employee engagement at work because transformational leadership can significantly enhance employee motivation, commitment, and performance through effective communication and relationship-building [17, 18]. Transformational leadership is particularly relevant in dynamic and people-centric industries, such as tourism and hospitality, where employee engagement has a direct impact on organizational success. This study aims to address gaps in the literature by examining the mediating role of motivating language, thus offering a deeper understanding of the mechanisms through which transformational leadership enhances employee engagement [19].

Numerous studies have examined the likely fundamental mechanism of this association, including satisfaction needs, leadership effectiveness, and employee empowerment [19–21]. While the aforementioned findings are encouraging, some critical gaps remain. First, as per our literature, no previous research has examined the mediating effects of oral communication skills (motivating language) on the relationship between transformational leadership style and work engagement. Using motivating language as a mediator is essential because effective communication serves as a crucial component of

leadership that directly influences employee attitudes and behaviors [12]. Motivating language helps leaders articulate vision, provide feedback, and foster a supportive environment, which can enhance employee engagement [22]. By clearly communicating expectations, values, and encouragement, leaders can inspire greater commitment and performance from their employees [23]. Therefore, understanding the role of motivating language provides deeper insights into how transformational leaders can effectively engage their workforce.

According to Saad, Sudin [24], one factor that influences employee engagement at work is how leaders communicate. Organizations incur approximately \$62.4 million yearly costs as a result of poor communication from their leaders [25]. Therefore, this study emphasizes the importance of using motivating language to enhance employee work engagement. Sullivan [26] developed the concept of motivating language to explain how different levels of oral communication skills among leaders affect employee motivation. Employee motivation and emotional attachment to an organization can be boosted by motivating language [26, 27]. Second, transformational leadership is undeniably a good fit for the tourism and hospitality sector (e.g., [19], Chen, Liang [20, 28] assert that transformational leadership is effective in developing human resources in the corporate sector. They describe that it fosters followers' confidence and respect by encouraging employees' self-interest for organizational success [29, 30]. In hierarchical, traditional, and collectivist cultures, such as those found in Bangladesh, transformational leadership is more likely to be effective [31]. Organizations are more highly valued in these cultures, and workers are encouraged to pursue shared objectives [32]. In the present study, we investigated whether and how transformational leaders can motivate employees to take initiative through their communication with employees in the tourism and hospitality sectors. Previous research has shown that leaders' relational communication has a significant impact on the leader-member relationship [33, 34], particularly in global virtual settings [35]. Literature on relational leadership theory is expanding as [36] "focuses on communication as the medium in which all social constructions of leadership are continuously created and changed" (Uhl-Bien [37], p. 665). It is considered that relationships between leaders and followers are productive and a significant factor in effective leadership [38, 39]. To better understand how leadership emerges and develops from the interactions and negotiation of social order between leaders and employees, relational leadership theory moves beyond a focus on dyadic or leader-follower singular relationships or even a static state of relational quality. Therefore, the study addresses a critical gap in understanding how transformational

leadership influences employee engagement through the use of motivating language and psychological meaningfulness, particularly in the under-researched Pakistani tourism and hospitality sector. Exploring these relationships offers valuable insights into enhancing workforce motivation and performance in a culturally significant and economically important industry. Drawing on speech act theory and relational leadership theory, this study provides a theoretical foundation for the relationship between transformational leadership and employee engagement [37, 40].

To fill the gap and answer the question of how leaders can use motivational language to influence work engagement, a concept that has received little research attention [41]. Therefore, we followed recent research that examined psychological meaningfulness—“is the sense of receiving a return on investment of the self in the currency of physical, cognitive, or emotional energy” as a key factor in strengthening the relationship between transformational leadership and motivational language [42, 43]. This study proposes that the psychological work context of meaningfulness in work Sun, Lee [44] stimulates leaders to engage employees through motivational language Binyamin and Brender-Ilán [39], and that both of these factors give staff the psychological resources to engage in proactive activities.

We test the proposed moderation mediation model (see Fig. 1), which contributes to the literature in several ways. First, we have examined the role of transformational leadership in employee work engagement. This research is crucial because it enhances productivity, employee well-being, and motivation. However, current research often lacks inclusive models that integrate various dimensions of transformational leadership, leaving gaps in understanding its full impact on employee work engagement. Therefore, a detailed study is necessary to develop a more holistic framework that addresses these shortcomings and provides clearer insights into how transformational leadership influences employee work engagement. Second, we examined the mediating role of motivating language in the relationship between

transformational leadership and employee work engagement. Transformational leadership fosters intrinsic motivation in employees, encouraging them to communicate effectively with colleagues and achieve organizational goals. Third, we considered how psychological meaningfulness fosters a spiritual culture in which employees perform meaningful work, feel a sense of community, and align with organizational values. Transformational leadership motivates employees to seek, learn, and transfer knowledge to their colleagues, creating a cumulative positive impact on the work environment.

Literature review and hypotheses development

Transformational leadership and work engagement

Transformational leadership inspires workers by fostering their optimism and reducing thwarting [45, 46]. Past research indicates that workers are more engaged when they have a clear understanding of their roles, which maintains high levels of optimism [47, 48]. Transformational leaders serve as role models for workers, focusing on achieving both organizational and group goals [49]. Workers respond to transformational leadership by actively engaging in their tasks [50, 51]. According to the speech act theory, transformational leaders perform expressive acts by showing genuine concern for their workers through intellectual stimulation and individualized consideration [37, 40]. It creates a sense of gratitude and involvement among workers [52]. Transformational leadership is viewed as a mature leadership style that motivates individual attitudes and behaviors, fostering a high level of ethical reasoning among workers [50, 53]. High levels of job satisfaction, autonomy, and participation are indicators of intense work engagement [54]. Transformational leadership plays a significant role in creating meaningful work for workers, which in turn increases their work engagement [55]. In the hotel industry, transformational leadership style is positively associated with work engagement [22]. Furthermore, research has confirmed that transformational leadership enhances work engagement by inspiring employees through a shared vision, individualized support, and

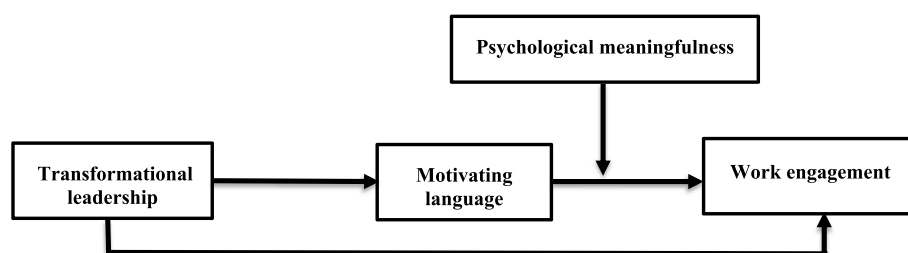


Fig. 1 Study conceptual framework

mental stimulation [56]. These leaders foster psychological empowerment and intrinsic motivation, which are essential catalysts for engagement [31]. Numerous studies have demonstrated that workers' positive attitudes toward transformational leadership are rooted in participative decision-making, autonomy, and effective feedback [50, 51]. Therefore, based on the literature review and theory, we hypothesized that.

H1: Transformational leadership is positively correlated with work engagement

Transformational leadership and motivating language

Allan [40] speech act theory is the foundation for motivating language. Sullivan [26], called it "motivating language," and it was developed as a comprehensive model. The term "speech act theory" describes the various motivating language functions, which include meaning-making, empathetic, and directive language [26]. A foundation for using the most effective method of communication to inspire employees at work is provided by motivating language for leaders [57]. Direction-giving language provides information, restores balance, defines goals, rewards, tasks, and needs, and alleviates confusion to reduce ambiguity [26, 58]. Leaders who share relevant stories and use empathetic language demonstrate genuine concern for others' emotional well-being [59]. Meaning-making language brings to life employee expectations of workplace cultural norms, including informal small talk, myth-making, and gossip [58]. Leaders prioritize the needs of their employees over the needs of the company [60]. Therefore, Transformational leaders are naturally idealistic and selfless, as shown by the language they employ [61]. Transformational leaders develop individuals through language that provides meaning and direction [62]. During interactions with subordinates, they use empathy and persuasion. Transformational leaders have a profoundly positive impact on the ethical and spiritual aspects of organizational life [58]. In order to attain their objectives, they therefore walk, speak, and act according to their principles [63]. By employing an empathetic tone instead of withholding information to exert authority, servant leaders offer knowledge openly [64]. The most essential characteristics of transformational leaders are self-disclosure and openness [58]. Furthermore, for servant leaders, communication is essential, especially for the community's benefit. They act consistently and possess a variety of abilities that support the service environment, including problem-solving, conflict resolution, harmonious decision-making, effective communication skills, empathetic listening, and community building [64]. Transformational leaders assist individuals by delegating tasks, providing coaching, showing care,

and offering guidance tailored to their needs [65]. As a result, transformational leaders are more likely to utilize directive language to inspire trust in their employees [66]. Transformational leaders must have strong verbal and nonverbal communication skills [67]. They articulate visions based on organizational principles by motivating and inspiring employees, such as Rabiul, Fee Yean [58], and leveraging their communication skills [68]. As a result, transformational leaders may employ language that creates meaning and provides direction. They convey an uplifting and motivating message to followers, for instance, through persuasive speech or inspirational communication [45]. Similarly, by employing emotional language (empathetic and meaning-making language), transformational leaders are successful in altering the values of their followers [69]. Transformational leaders employ motivation to convey vision, establish trust, and galvanize action [70]. According to Rabiul, Gursoy [71], manager motivating language that incorporates directive, empathetic, and meaning-making elements enhances employee comprehension, emotional engagement, and role clarity. In light of the literature review and theory, the current study hypothesizes that.

H2: Transformational leadership positively impacts motivating language.

Mediating role of motivating language

Transformational leaders' motivating language probably works as a persuasive technique to enhance subordinates' work engagement [72]. They counsel, direct, instruct, and provide feedback to employees, which are considered essential characteristics in employee development. Additionally, prosaically, sympathetic and friendly language is influenced by emotions, which might improve the bond between leaders and followers. Similarly, transformational leaders influence and encourage staff members using both practical techniques and persuasive communication abilities [73]. When transformational leaders are in a motivating and emotionally charged state, they encourage subordinates to work diligently. Motivating language has a significant impact on enhancing employees' performance, and direction-giving language fosters employee confidence by reducing ambiguity [74]. As a result, motivational language mediates leader-follower relationships. They promote meaningful work and a psychologically safe environment to enhance work engagement (74). Furthermore, while empathic language evokes emotions that strengthen connections with others, meaning-making language enriches experiences to boost work engagement and creativity [75–77]. As a result, both meaning-making and empathic language foster relationships with emotional strength, which in

turn increases work engagement [78–80]. Consequently, improved relationships, supportiveness, and meaning are created by positively directed, empathic, and meaning-making language, which leads to work engagement [74]. According to the study Rabiul, Gursoy [71], leaders use motivational or persuasive language to inspire their team members, transforming them through verbal and non-verbal communication [81]. Transformational leaders must employ motivating language to foster positive work attitudes and enhance employee engagement. Furthermore, these leaders exhibit enthusiasm and use motivating language to encourage employees to fully engage in their work roles, thereby achieving organizational objectives. Therefore, to bolster employee engagement, transformational leaders adopt motivational language. Hence, we proposed that.

H3: The relationship between transformational leadership and work engagement is mediated by motivating language.

Psychological meaningfulness as a moderator

Psychological meaningfulness is defined as the importance a person gives to something. When employees feel valued and meaningful in the workplace, they are more likely to exhibit work engagement [82, 83]. In terms of physical, mental, or emotional energy, psychological meaningfulness is the perception of gaining a return on one's engagement in oneself [84]. It describes the perception that one's work is appreciated in accordance with personal values or standards and that it serves a purpose that is organically motivating [85]. Psychological meaningfulness in the workplace manifests through meaningful jobs, employee cooperation, and motivating language by leaders [86, 87]. Transformational leadership, which utilizes motivating language in task settings, is driven by psychological meaningfulness, resulting in work engagement [88]. The transformational leaders' motivating language, which builds on social information processing theory, enables employees to gain psychological meaningfulness in their job roles and engage in their respective work [89]. This psychological meaningfulness is achieved through various workplace activities, such as listening to coworkers discuss their job roles, observing coworkers interact with clients, or receiving directives from managers to enhance workplace engagement [90]. According to relational leadership theory, positive interactions and treatment between leaders and followers may create psychological meaningfulness at work and enhance employee work engagement [37]. Leaders' motivating language carries a behavioral purpose for followers

through relational interactions with them [91]. For instance, when they invest their precious time in discussing the job of the employee, they convey the importance and worth of that effort [92]. Psychological meaningfulness helps employees act in a way guided by transformational leadership. Such guidance and help come through motivational language and increase work engagement [93]. Moreover, transformational leaders can construct an organizational reality through motivational language to enhance work engagement [94]. Employees are motivated to set aside their own desires and aspirations in favor of those related to their job duties through psychological meaningfulness in their employment or by motivating them to explore new aspects of their work [95, 96]. Bringing one's entire self to work, including emotions used for interpersonal connections, is referred to as conceptualizing meaning or one's sense of self [97, 98]. By verbally expressing emotional support, praising excellent performance, and fostering a human connection with their staff members, leaders who utilize motivational language improve interpersonal ties with their workforce [99]. Instead of being considered as simple tenants of their positions, employees who engage in fulfilling interpersonal relationships and emotional attachments are more likely to experience psychological meaningfulness and are more engaged in their work [100, 101]. By introducing workers' duties in a larger meaning framework and explaining values, conventions, and cultural rules, leaders who utilize meaning-making language provide a source of meaning for their workforce [102]. Employees consider corporate values to be consistent with their own chosen self-image and, therefore, feel their job is more critical when these values align with their ideals [103, 104]. We infer from the above that relational communication between leaders and workers, particularly the motivating language used by leaders, enhances the psychological significance of employees' work and increases work engagement. Based on theory and literature support, we proposed the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 4a: The higher the level of psychological meaningfulness, the higher the positive relation between motivational language and work engagement.

Hypothesis 4b: The strength of the mediated relation between transformational leadership and work engagement (through motivational language) will depend on the employee's psychological meaningfulness; the indirect effect of transformational leadership on work engagement will be high when the employee's psychological meaningfulness is high.

Measurements

We measured transformational leadership using the 12-scale items from Celik, Ashikali [105] in Dutch. They based their scale on the operationalization of transformational leadership by Bass, Avolio [106]. An example item is “My leader talks about the importance of ethics and values” ($\alpha = 0.92$). The degree of meaning that people find in their work-related activities is referred to as psychological meaningfulness [107]. Psychological meaningfulness was measured using five items taken from [90]. Examples of these items include “The work I do in this job is very important to me” and “The work I do in this job is worthwhile.” This measure obtained a Cronbach’s alpha of 0.88, which is comparable to the reliability score of 0.90 reported by May, Gilson [90]. Mayfield, Mayfield [108] devised a measure for motivating language that contains 10 items, 6 items, and 8 items for direction-giving, empathetic, and meaning-making language, respectively. One of the items on the checklist is “My immediate supervisor offers helpful directions on how to do my job.” The convergent validity of this scale is adequate (e.g., [39]). The “nine-item short Utrecht Work Engagement Scale-UWES” developed by Schaufeli, Bakker [109], consisting of dimensions labeled vigor, absorption, and dedication, was used by the researchers of the current study to measure work engagement. Examples are “At my job, I feel strong and vigorous” and “I am enthusiastic about my job.” The measure’s Cronbach’s alpha was 0.80. Additionally, gender, age, and work experience were used as control variables in Tsaur, Hsu [110] study to avoid their potential influence on employee work behavior.

Methods

Sample and procedure

Data were collected from 412 employees in the Pakistani tourism and hospitality sector, with 63.54% of the participants working in hospitality and 36.46% in tourism. Using a convenience sampling technique, participants were recruited through the author’s professional and personal connections within the Pakistani tourism and hospitality sector. This approach enabled efficient access to a diverse group of employees across multiple organizations. While convenience sampling limits generalizability, it was suitable for this exploratory study to gather relevant insights within the targeted context. Further details about the sampling procedure, including eligibility criteria and recruitment process, are provided to ensure transparency. To introduce the study, one of the authors contacted the team leaders. Supervisors and subordinates each received a separate questionnaire. The questionnaires in the survey were coded before distribution to match the employee replies (T1 and T2) with the

responses of their direct supervisors (T1). The researcher gathered the sealed envelopes that the respondents had filled out their surveys. The teams agreed to participate on the condition that they receive a copy of the findings. Respondents were informed that participation was completely voluntary and that their responses would remain anonymous. Informed consent has been obtained from all study participants involved in this study.

Furthermore, we also told the participants that their anonymity would be protected by removing any identifying information. To minimize the likelihood of method biases, Podsakoff, MacKenzie [111], undertook two stages of surveys, each one month apart. According to Podsakoff, MacKenzie [111], the data collection time lag should be neither too long nor too short. If the time lag is too large, certain factors, such as leadership development programs and responder attrition, may conceal existing correlations between variables [112, 113]. Memory effects, on the other hand, may artificially inflate the association between variables if the time lag is too small [112]. Therefore, six weeks should be the optimal time-lapse [112, 113].

In Phase 1, the study reported transformational leadership, motivational language, and demographic characteristics from 483 employees who completed questionnaires, resulting in 443 responses (91.71%). Additionally, we asked 74 team leaders to rate psychological meaningfulness, and we received 68 responses (91.89%). In phase 2, six weeks later, employees who had completed and returned the first wave of questionnaires were requested to take the second wave survey to assess work engagement. A total of 428 respondents returned their surveys; however, 16 were excluded due to missing values and incomplete information. We have 412 completed questionnaires (93.00%) for data analysis. The respondents’ average age was 37.2 years, and the majority (66.7%) were male. In terms of education, 21.4% of respondents held a bachelor’s degree, 70.5% held a master’s degree, and 7.0% held a doctorate. In terms of work experience, 34.5% had been employed for more than three years, 60% for three to seven years, and 6.5% for more than seven years.

Study results

Descriptive statistics

Table 1 presents the mean scores, standard deviations, correlation coefficients, and scale reliabilities. Table 1 shows that the correlations between the study variables were in the predicted directions and that all of the study variables had an acceptable level of internal consistency. Work engagement and motivational language were both positively correlated with transformational leadership at $p < 0.01$ ($r = 0.343$ and $r = 0.489^{**}$, respectively).

Table 1 Mean, SD, correlations, and reliability

Variables	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Gender	1.39	0.48								
2. Age	2.41	0.84	0.014							
3. Experience	1.69	0.79	0.070	0.023						
4. Education	2.83	0.56	-0.041	0.075	-0.056					
5. Transformational Leadership	3.83	0.57	-0.006	0.065	0.053	0.029	0.82			
6. Work Engagement	3.60	0.60	-0.032	0.086	0.028	0.059	0.343**	0.79		
7. Psychological Meaningfulness	3.67	0.85	0.004	0.015	-0.005	0.128*	0.387**	0.131**	0.81	
8. Leader Motivational Language	3.40	0.47	0.012	0.085	0.036	0.193*	0.489**	0.230**	0.257**	0.84

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

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

Table 2 Results of confirmatory factor analysis

Model's	GFI	RMSEA	CFI	TLI	SRMR	χ^2	χ^2/df
Single Factor Model	0.71	0.53	0.43	0.46	0.37	723.54	9.35
Two Factor Model	0.76	0.46	0.57	0.66	0.34	521.39	7.41
Three Factor Model A	0.83	0.34	0.69	0.72	0.23	432.51	6.52
Three Factor Model B	0.87	0.21	0.79	0.78	0.12	373.12	5.73
Four Factor Model	0.90	0.05	0.93	0.90	0.05	156.32	2.43

Models Arrangement: Single-factor model: TL + PsyM + LML + WE. Two-factor model: TL; PsyM + LML + WE. Three-factor model A: TL; PsyM + LML; WE. Three-factor model B: TL; PsyM; TL + WE. Four-factor model: TL; PsyM; LML; WE

TL Transformational Leadership, PsyM Psychological Meaningfulness, LML Leader Motivational Language, WE Work Engagement

Construct validity

According to Anderson and Gerbing [114], before testing the hypotheses, we first analyzed the validity of the construct. Because our measurements of transformational leadership, psychological Meaningfulness, and Leader Motivational Language all came from the same source, we used AMOS 18.0 to carry out a series of confirmatory factor analyses (CFA) in order to investigate the degree to which the three major variables in our model can be distinguished from one another in terms of their underlying constructs. All of the fit indices for the four-factor model fell within acceptable forms, indicating that it provided a good fit ($\chi^2 = 156.32$, $\chi^2/df = 2.43$, CFI = 0.93, TLI = 0.90, GFI = 0.90, RMSEA = 0.05). We also compared the four-component model to a model with only one factor ($\chi^2 = 3521.65$, $df = 321$, CFI = 0.41, TLI = 0.23, RMSEA = 0.157) (see Table 2).

Multicollinearity

Multicollinearity was examined during the evaluation of interrelationships between variables, the variance inflation factor (VIF), and broad-mindedness to avoid deceptive results (e.g., Marsh, Hau [115]). The results are summarized in Table 1, which shows that the maximum correlation between the variables is 0.489. There are no

Table 3 Collinearity assessment

Coefficient ^a	Tolerance	VIF
Transformational Leadership	0.7132	1.2963
Motivational Language	0.6845	1.5423
Psychological Meaningfulness	0.8363	1.3562

^a dependent variable: Work Engagement

problems with multicollinearity among the variables, as evidenced by the connection between them correlating less than 0.70 (e.g., Yu et al., 2015), the tolerance having a value > 0.2, and the VIF having a value < 5.0 e.g. Hair, Page [116]. The VIF value (1.5423), which is the highest, and the tolerance value (0.6845), which is the lowest, are shown in Table 3.

Hypothesis testing

Direct and mediation effects

The study's paths were examined using hierarchical linear regression. First, we checked the relationship between transformational leadership and work engagement. The results indicate a positive relationship between these two variables (M-4: $\beta = 0.055$, $p < 0.000$), supporting Hypothesis 1. Second, we investigated the direct relationship

between transformational leadership and leader motivational language, and the findings support hypothesis 2, showing a positive relation (M-1: $1\beta = 0.033$, $P < 0.000$). We applied hierarchical linear modeling (HLM) to evaluate hypothesis 3. The motivational language of the leader partially mediated the relationship between transformational leadership and work engagement (M-5: indirect effect = 0.6389, $SE = 0.047$, 95% $CI = 0.5431, 0.7295$), thus supporting hypothesis 3, as shown in Table 4.

Moderation effects

According to Hypothesis 4a, psychological meaningfulness moderates the positive connection between leader-motivating language and job engagement (M-4:

$B = 0.1281^*$, $SE = 0.0638$, $p < 0.05$, 95% $CI = 0.0025, 0.2536$), as shown in Table 1. Figure 2 illustrates the interaction effect, which we highlighted to make it more straightforward. With the help of simple slope tests (i.e., +1 and -1 SD from the mean), psychological meaningfulness was assessed [117]. When an employee's psychological meaningfulness was high, our findings showed a significant relationship between leader motivational language and work engagement (simple slope = 1.0658, $SE = 0.0892$, $CI = 0.8903, 1.2413$ $p < 0.000$); as compared to when it was low (simple slope = 0.8476, $SE = 0.0647$, $CI = 0.7203, 0.9750$ $p > 0.005$). These results confirm the pattern suggested in hypothesis 4a and show that there is a strong correlation

Table 4 Results of hierarchical regression

Variables	Leader Motivational Language			Work Engagement		
	M-1	M-2	M-3	M-4	M-5	M-6
Age	0.04	0.01	0.07	-0.03	-0.01	0.06
Gender	0.03	-0.07	0.07	-0.02	0.01	-0.04
Education	-0.01	0.02	-0.17	-0.01	-0.04	0.06
Service	-0.02	-0.05	0.07	-0.13	-0.05	0.01
Independent Variable						
Transformational Leadership	0.033***			0.55***		
Mediator						
Leader Motivational Language					0.6389***	
Moderator						
Psychological Meaningfulness				0.1281*		
Interaction Effect						
TL*Psychological M						0.421**
F-Value	21.21**	31.56*	23.71**	20.54**	13.25**	10.35*
R ²	0.13	0.23	0.19	0.15	0.24	0.27

* p -value < 0.05

** p -value < 0.01

*** p -value < 0.001

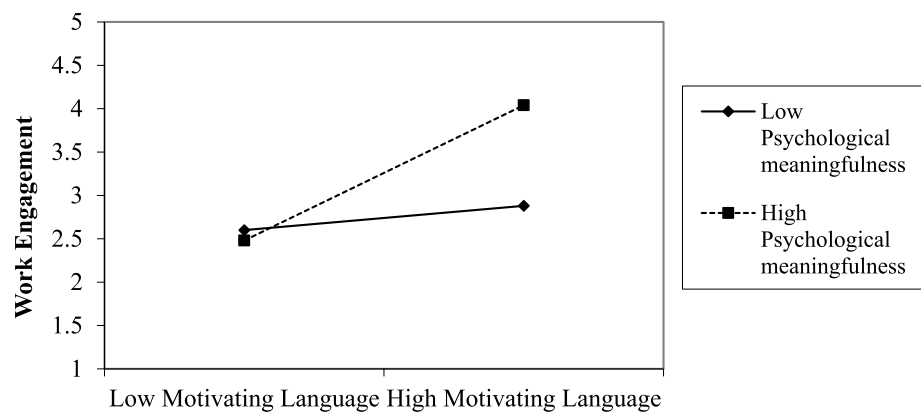


Fig. 2 Moderating effect of psychological meaningfulness

between leaders' use of motivating language and employees' levels of work engagement.

Moderation mediation examination

We conducted an integrated investigation into the moderation mediation analysis of hypothesis 4b (One SD above and below the mean of a moderator). The moderated mediation model, which included the outcome variable of work engagement, was significant when psychological Meaningfulness significance was high (conditional indirect effect = 0.421, SE = 0.135, 95% CI = 0.3601, 0.5529), as compared to when psychological meaningfulness was low (conditional indirect effect = 0.07, SE = 0.117, 95% CI = -0.2393, 0.4063). As a result, the moderated mediation index was statistically significant (Index = -0.6827, SE = 0.35, 95% CI = -2.1623 to -0.1045), confirming Hypothesis 4b (see Table 5).

Discussion

The results are consistent with other research in the tourism and hospitality sector, where transformational leadership style has a significant impact on followers' engagement. Employees exhibit good behaviors when their leaders act in a helpful, motivating, and supportive manner. Transformational leaders use motivating language and significantly improve the creation of meaning, providing direction, and empathy [58]. The findings both suggest and support these leaders' adept communication skills. The use of motivational language and the transformational leadership style are closely linked. Less empirical research has been done on the connection between motivating language and transformative leadership. However, these empirical results are consistent with previous studies [118]. Previous research has stated that persuasive qualities, combined with motivating and empathetic communication, are employed in transformative leadership. This study confirms that utilizing language to set goals, provide positive feedback, and demonstrate empathy leads to contented workers in the hospitality and tourism industry [119]. Motivating

language is a key tactic when a transformational leadership style is utilized to raise follower involvement. This finding is consistent with earlier notions advanced by academics, such as the idea that effective leadership and communication skills are closely intertwined. It emphasizes even more the practical strategies and persuasive communication skills used by leaders to motivate staff. The final argument follows a previous study by Rabiul and Yean [22] that psychological meaningfulness improves employee engagement by boosting the indirect influence of transformational leaders on work engagement via motivational language.

Theoretical implications

This study contributes to the existing literature on leadership and employee engagement by examining the intricate association between transformational leadership, motivational language, and psychological meaningfulness. The integration of speech act theory and relational leadership theory offers a nuanced perspective on how leaders can effectively communicate and engage their employees, a relatively underexplored area in leadership studies. First, by examining the influence of transformational leadership on employee work engagement through the lens of motivating language, the study enriches our understanding of the mechanisms through which transformational leaders exert their influence. Transformational leadership, defined by qualities such as inspiration, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration, has been thoroughly studied in different domains [50, 51]. However, the specific role of language as a mediating tool presents a novel aspect and contributes to the leadership and communication literature. This study identifies motivating language as a mediator, suggesting that the effectiveness of transformational leadership is significantly enhanced when leaders employ language that aligns with the needs and values of employees. Second, the inclusion of psychological meaningfulness as a moderating variable in this framework addresses a gap in the literature by linking transformational leadership and language to the personal experience of work in the Pakistani tourism and hospitality sector. Psychological meaningfulness, which refers to the sense of worth and value employees derive from their work, is proposed as a moderator that enhances or diminishes the effectiveness of motivating language. This study suggests that when employees find their work meaningful, the impact of motivating language is amplified, thereby leading to higher levels of engagement.

Moreover, the application of speech act theory in this context is particularly innovative. Speech act theory, which focuses on how utterances perform actions and convey intentions, provides a theoretical framework to

Table 5 Moderated mediated results for transformational leadership and work engagement across levels of psychological meaningfulness

Moderator	Level	Conditional Indirect Effect	SE	LLCI	ULCI
Psychological Meaningfulness	Low	0.2107	0.0209	0.0622	0.2483
	High	0.4213	0.0383	0.0972	0.3027
	Difference	0.2106	0.0174	0.0350	0.0544

Moderator values are the mean and ± 1 SD

understand the pragmatic functions of motivating language in organizational settings. By applying this theory, the study sheds light on how leaders' speech acts can foster an environment that supports engagement and motivation. The research extends the theoretical model of leadership by integrating these elements of transformational leadership, motivating language, and psychological meaningfulness into a cohesive framework. It contributes to the literature by not only highlighting the importance of what leaders say but also how they say it, and under what conditions their words are most effective. Finally, the study has practical implications for leadership practices, suggesting that leaders can enhance employee engagement by strategically using language that resonates with their employees' psychological needs. It provides actionable insights for leadership training programs, emphasizing the development of communication skills that align with the principles of transformational leadership. Overall, this research enriches the existing literature by offering a more comprehensive understanding of the dynamics between leadership style, communication strategies, and employee engagement, providing both theoretical advancements and practical guidelines.

Managerial implications

The managerial implications are threefold. The results may help managers better understand how to apply their transformational leadership skills to foster positive employee engagement, which has various causes and effects. Additionally, the tourism and hospitality sector will benefit in several ways. First, it is advised that business executives practice transformational leadership for the benefit of their employees. Embracing transformational leadership philosophies can lead to positive organizational outcomes, especially in less developed nations. The sector may employ transformational leadership style approaches, which are well recognized for engaging teams or followers in ways that go beyond their immediate self-interests to identify essential change and develop a vision to steer it. Additionally, this study provides valuable insights for corporate experts on how to bridge the gap between effective leadership techniques and employee work engagement. To increase employee engagement at work, transformational leaders must model both directive and empathetic communication. Having a natural ability to communicate may help leaders inspire their team members. Employees in the corporate sector can benefit from the findings by gaining a deeper understanding of the critical impact that communication behaviors and leadership styles can have on motivating staff. Tourism and hospitality sector workers should receive training to create motivational language. Employees can therefore create motivating language to prepare

them for future management positions. When selecting leaders and promoting future growth, business professionals can consider using inspiring language. Finally, managers should increase psychological meaningfulness by clearly defining and communicating the value of employees' roles and recognizing their contributions. This reinforces the positive effects of transformational leadership, resulting in increased employee engagement. Creating meaningful work environments boosts satisfaction and organizational performance.

Limitations and future research directions

Our research has limitations that present opportunities for future scholars to bridge the gap and enhance the literature. Firstly, a cross-sectional approach was employed to gather the data, making it more challenging to establish a causal relationship between the variables. To capture the dynamic interconnections among transformational leadership, psychological meaningfulness, motivating language, and work engagement over time, conducting longitudinal studies is recommended. Second, we selected the sample for the current study from Pakistan, focusing on the tourism and hospitality sector. To ensure generalizability and facilitate replication in different contexts, future studies may consider including additional sectors that cross borders. Third, in this study, we draw on both Speech Act Theory and Relational Leadership Theory to provide a comprehensive understanding of leadership communication, utilizing Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) for analysis. Future studies should consider various theoretical perspectives, such as Self-Determination Theory. Research could employ PLS-SEM for predictive modeling or utilize Mplus for advanced techniques, including multi-level modeling. Lastly, although dynamic capabilities and psychological meaningfulness were included as moderators, future studies should examine how variations in top management support, digital transformation, or external environmental volatility impact the results of employee engagement. These additions will contribute to the future improvement of the theoretical model and provide a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between leadership, favorable outcomes, and employee engagement.

Conclusion

In this study, we present preliminary evidence that motivating language and workplace engagement are positively correlated with transformative outcomes of leadership. Moreover, transformational leadership is positively associated with employee engagement through the use of motivational language in the workplace. The moderating effect of psychological

mindfulness further strengthens the association between motivating language and work engagement. Our mediated moderation model explains how and when transformative leadership is most essential and when it is not. Our findings contribute to the existing body of knowledge on leadership by examining the connection between transformative leadership and work engagement, as well as exploring mediators and moderators in the workplace that have not been previously investigated. Thus, this study provides a foundation for future research into other constructs and the mechanisms that impede work engagement.

Abbreviations

CFA	Confirmatory factor analyses
HLM	Hierarchical linear modeling
LML	Leader Motivational Language
PsyM	Psychological Meaningfulness
TL	Transformational Leadership
VIF	Variance Inflation Factor
WE	Work Engagement

Authors' contributions

Muhammad Zada 123456, Alaa Amin Abdalla 1256, Christophe Estay 1256, Waleed Ahmed Nureldeen 156, 1 Conceptualization; 2 Methodology; 3 Data curation; 4 Writing - Original Draft; 5 Writing - Review & Editing; 6 Funding acquisition.

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Data availability

The data presented in this study are available on request. The data are not publicly available due to privacy reasons.

Declarations

Ethics approval and consent to participate

The author sought and received ethical approval from the Research Ethics Committee of the Alhmad Islamic University, Pakistan, with reference number AIU/ORIC/095/2033. This study was conducted in accordance with the 1964 Helsinki Declaration and its subsequent amendments, or a comparable ethical standard. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, who were recruited with the support of the human resources departments. Participants received comprehensive information about the study's purpose and procedures. Confidentiality and privacy were strictly maintained, and participation was entirely voluntary.

Consent for publication

Not applicable.

Competing interests

The authors declare no competing interests.

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