Follower Emotional Intelligence: A Mediator between Transformational Leadership and Follower Outcomes

Introduction

Transformational leaders (TL) have been found to influence outcomes such as followers' commitment, trust in the leader, positive organizational citizenship behaviour, higher productivity, lower turnover rates, higher job satisfaction and motivation, effectiveness of the leader's work group, happiness at work (HAW), and improved innovative and creative performance (Bass and Avolio, 2000; Bycio et al., 1995; Choi et al., 2016; Judge and Piccolo, 2004; Mesu et al., 2015; Salas-Vallina et al, 2017; Schriesheim et al., 2006; Tung and Tung, 2016; Wang and Howell, 2012). Research has examined a chain of factors that partially or fully mediate the relationship between TL and follower affective outcomes. Trust and value congruence (Jung and Avolio, 2000), goal clarity and support for creative thinking (Nemanich and Keller, 2007), psychological empowerment (Avolio et al., 2004), leadermember exchange (Wang et al., 2005), followers' perception of work characteristics (Neilson et al., 2008), and followers' trust and satisfaction (Podsakoff et al., 1990) are some of the significant mediating factors that are reported to explain the relationship between TL and follower affective outcomes. This study extends the research agenda through exploring the potential role of follower emotional intelligence (EI) as a mediator between transformational leadership (TL) and follower affective outcomes.

Previous mediation studies have indicated that transformational leaders and their followers could well be engaged in a strong emotional relationship, without which transformational leaders cannot drive significant change in their followers' outcomes. For example, Jung and Avolio (2000), while examining transformational and transactional leadership and the mediating effect of trust and value congruence on follower performance, cite Bass's (1978) argument that transformational leaders in an exchange relationship engage in emotional involvement with their followers, in order to build higher levels of identification, commitment and trust in them and their mission. McColl-Kennedy and Anderson's study (2002) observed that TL has a significant direct influence on the optimism of followers, which in turn increases goal-clarity and resultant efforts toward achieving goals. Similarly, Dasborough and Ashkanasy (2002), while explicating the nature of relationships in their model between leaders and their members, reinforced that emotional intelligence is the core characteristic of leader-member interaction. In a similar vein, Hunt et al., (2004) asserted that the emotional attachment a transformational leader builds with followers (Bass 1990) is correlated with higher levels of creative output in the followers.

Deeper exploration into the research indicates that transformational leaders have the ability to emotionally connect with followers. Sivanathan and Fekken's (2002) study showed that leaders who reported higher levels of EI were perceived by their followers as higher in TL and thus more effective. Lam and O'Higgins (2012) further added that EI could be a characteristic that directly influences the development and maintenance of TL. Studies from Pirola-Merlo et al., (2002) and Ashkanasy and Dorris (2017) have highlighted that one key skill of a transformational leader lies in the ability to help followers deal with negative

emotional events. Transformational leaders, through their ability to identify, express and understand the emotions of others, are in a better position to comprehend followers' needs and interact accordingly, thus earning the trust and respect of followers (Gardner and Stough, 2002).

In light of the above-mentioned studies and those detailed later in this paper, it is evident that transformational leaders use their emotional skills in order to achieve the desired follower affective outcomes. Significantly, previous research has focussed on one-sided transformational leaders' points of view only, and has not gone beyond this to investigate what happens at the followers' end as a result of this emotional intervention by transformational leaders. A series of questions therefore remain unanswered, such as: what happens to followers when transformational leaders use their emotional skills to generate the desired effect in followers? To what extent are followers emotionally impacted because they are able to align their vision and goals as desired by their transformational leaders? To answer these questions, this study, underpinned by Affective events theory (AET), Emotional Contagion Theory and other relevant theories and studies, posits that transformational leaders impact their followers' emotional intelligence (EI) positively, which in turn becomes instrumental in achieving the outcomes desired by transformational leaders in followers. This study therefore assumes great significance as it is the first of its nature to investigate two untested relationships i.e. the potential positive relationship between transformational leadership and follower EI and the potential mediating role of follower EI between transformational leadership and follower affective outcomes. Follower growth satisfaction in job (GSJ) and follower job stress (JS) are chosen as the two affective outcome variables in this study, in order to test the potential mediation of follower EI.

Proposed model

The aim of the present study is to test the positive relationship between transformational leadership and follower EI and the subsequent potential mediation of follower EI in the relationship between TL and follower affective outcomes. For this purpose, a theoretical model (see Figure 1) and several hypotheses were formulated and tested based on the underpinnings of relevant theoretical frameworks and past studies from the literature. As is evident from Figure 1, TL is considered as an independent variable, while follower EI is treated as a potential mediator. Given that one of the aims of this study is to investigate the potential mediation of follower EI between TL and outcome variables, the authors were interested in selecting two affective outcome variables that have been widely tested across many contexts in the literature. In this regard, growth satisfaction in the job (GSJ) and job stress (JS) were chosen as the affective outcome variables for this study, given that much literature has supported the strong relationship between transformational leadership and follower job satisfaction and job stress (Nemanich & Keller, 2007; Podsakoff et al., 1990; Savery and Luks, 2001; Gill et al., 2006). More specifically, 'growth satisfaction in the job' was chosen instead of 'overall job satisfaction' because job satisfaction in its entirety captures many facets that may not necessarily be related to satisfaction derived from leaders' interaction alone. 'Growth satisfaction in the job', which is one facet of job satisfaction, was therefore chosen as an outcome variable for this study because it captures the elements of follower personal development and accomplishment in the job, which can be closely attributed to leader-member interaction (Jordan and Troth, 2011, Yuan et al., 2016). Another significant reason for the choice of these two outcome variables is to understand how follower EI will potentially mediate in the instances of positive affective outcome variable GSJ and negative affective outcome variable JS. The rationale for this model is explained in the next section on literature review and hypothesis development.

Insert Fig. 1 here

Literature review and hypothesis Development

Based on the seminal work of Burns (1978, p.4), the transformational leader can be understood as "one who looks for potential motives in followers, seeks to satisfy higher needs in followers, and engages the full person of followers". Bass (1997) established four clear components of TL: idealised influence (charisma), inspirational motivation, individual consideration and intellectual stimulation. Since that time, transformational leadership theory has emerged as a dominant theory in leadership (Mhatre and Riggio, 2014) and has received much attention in both theoretical as well as meta-analytic reviews (Banks et al., 2016). EI is an outgrowth of two areas of psychological research, the first pertaining to cognition and affect and involving how cognitive and emotional processes interact to enhance thinking (Isen et al., 1978; Zajonc, 1980) and the second being use of emotion to facilitate thinking, which refers to harnessing emotions to facilitate cognitive activities such as reasoning, problem solving and interpersonal communication (Macik-Frey, 2007). In this paper, EI is defined as "the ability to monitor one's own and others' feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them and to use this information to guide one's thinking and actions" (Salovey and Mayer, 1990, p.189).

Emotional intelligence is a characteristic that directly influences the development and maintenance of transformational leadership (Kim and Kim, 2017; Lam and O'Higgins, 2011). Emotional intelligence is important for followers' emotion-related processes and outcomes at

different levels of management (Ashkanasy, Härtel and Daus, 2002; Kafetsios and Zampetakis, 2008). Previous research has observed that emotional intelligence provides a broad range of abilities that may be useful in understanding and addressing relationship issues that are at the core of leader-member exchange (Barbuto and Bugenhagen, 2009; Jordan et al. 2011; Sy et al. 2006; Sear and Holmvall, 2010). Moreover, emotional intelligence of followers has been considered as a critical dimension influencing the formation of follower attributions in response to the leader's emotion-evoking influence attempts (Ashforth and Humphrey, 1995; Ashkanasy and Tse, 2000). Given that the core capabilities of EI are malleable and thus capable of being developed and changed, it has been emphasised in previous research that workplace experiences or events have a significant impact on this shaping process (Borges et al., 2012; Brackett et al., 2010a; Dulewicz and Higgs, 2004; Goleman, 1998; Sellakumar, 2017). Based on the following theoretical underpinnings and prior research, this study posits that transformational leadership can create suitable workplace events or experiences which enable their followers, through these conducive atmospheres, to think, monitor and discriminate feelings and emotions in order to guide their thinking and actions.

Affective Events Theory (Weiss and Cropanzano, 1996) explicitly considers leaders as sources of affective events in the workplace; in turn, these events have the capacity to drive changes in emotional states of the followers. Affective Events Theory (AET) further differentiates behaviour as: affective behaviour (moods, emotions) which results from an emotional reaction to an event; and judgement-driven behaviour which is associated with cognitive assessments about the situation based on the emotional reaction to events (Cropanzano and Dasborough, 2015). Prior research mentions that affective behaviour (emotional reaction to an event) can impact judgement about a situation and can either build or distort one's thinking and subsequent behavioural actions. More specifically, it has been found that negative emotional reactions to events such as fear and anger (affective behaviour) can adversely impact cognitive processes, thus leading to distorted cognition and pessimistic risk perception (Lerner and Keltner, 2000, Johnson and Tversky, 1983; Wright and Bower, 1992, Teasdale and Barnard 1993, Blanchette and Richards 2010). This view fits well with a commonly heard saying: 'I was so stressed at that time that I couldn't think properly and now regret my action'. Similarly, Strack, Schwarz and Gschneidinger (1985) have added that thinking about a positive event that has occurred will lead to a positive evaluation about one's life and vice versa. Thus, considering that emotional intelligence is defined as the ability to monitor one's feelings, discriminate and use information to guide one's thinking and actions, this study draws support from Affective Events Theory (AET). It suggests that transformational leaders act as sources of positive affective events and therefore have the capacity to enable their followers to experience positive emotional reactions to events (affective behaviour), which facilitate their thinking, judgement and assessment of their own feelings and situation, resulting in appropriate actions and behaviour.

Further, utilising *Emotional Contagion Theory*, the tendency to automatically mimic and synchronize facial expressions, vocalizations, postures, and movements with those of another person and, consequently, to converge emotionally (Hatfield et al., 1994, p. 5), in the context

of transformational leaders and followers, it can be assumed that followers who 'tune in' to their supervisors' positive attitudes are more likely to 'catch' their positive emotions, attitudes and vice versa. Prior research reports that transformational leaders have high levels of EI (Barbuto and Burbach, 2006; Barling et al., 2000; Lam and O'Higgins, 2012; Polychroniou, 2009; Sivanathan and Fekken, 2002), are emotionally stable, and exhibit openness, understanding and supportiveness in their interactions with their followers (Tickle et al., 2005; Hassan et al., 2010). Self-regulation is considered to be one of the key components of EI (Mayer, Salovey and Caruso, 2000; Zeidner et al., 2003). For example, when followers witness their transformational leaders behaving with self-restraint (self-regulation) in highly provoking or challenging situations, this can have a contagious effect on followers' emotions and their ability to replicate in similar situations. In addition to these theoretical underpinnings, Jordan et al (2011) observed that the quality of leader-member exchanges hinges on the way in which leaders and followers manage relationships; emotional intelligence plays an important role in this process (Jordan et al, 2011). Therefore, it is hypothesised that:

H1. Transformational leadership will be positively related to follower emotional intelligence

Hackman and Oldham (1980) listed Growth Satisfaction in Job (GSJ) as one of the four personal and work outcomes of the job characteristics theory. GSJ indicates employee satisfaction when they have enriched opportunities for personal learning and growth at work. GSJ, as a variable in this paper, can be characterized by: followers' learning, self-direction, sense of autonomy, self-enhancement, personal growth and development, worthwhile accomplishment, and challenge in the job (Hackman and Oldham, 1975, 1980).

Extending upon the notion of Affective Events Theory (AET), it can be assumed that a transformational leader's 'individual consideration component' can create an affective event (enriched opportunity) that influences the GSJ of followers. This is also consistent with the views of Burns (1978) and Bass (1985), who suggested that transformational leaders' effectiveness is rooted in their ability to elevate and satisfy these higher-order needs among followers (Shamir et al., 1993). Thus, it is also hypothesised that:

*H*2. Transformational leadership will be positively related to follower growth satisfaction in the job

Job Stress (JS) is referred to as "unpleasant emotional experience associated with elements of fear, dread, anxiety, irritation, annoyance, anger, sadness, grief, and depression" (Motowidlo et al., 1986, p. 618). Job Stress (JS) can be attributed to the negative impact stemming from weak psychological health due to lower job satisfaction (Keyes et al., 2002). From this perspective, transformational leaders are found to promote a positive emotional state and well-being in followers, which leads to the ability to appraise job experiences more constructively and positively (Arnold et al., 2007; Liu et al., 2010). Various studies have also affirmed that transformational leaders create a sense of well-being in followers through encouragement of open, inspirational and effective communication, and influence motivation,

enthusiasm, optimism and self-confidence in followers, which in turn become instrumental in alleviating JS (Fazzi and Zamaro, 2016; Gill et al., 2010; Rafferty and Griffin, 2004; Liu et al., 2010). Thus, we further hypothesise that:

H3. Transformational leadership will be negatively related to follower job stress

Most emotional intelligence scholars have focused on searching for direct relationships between emotional intelligence and its outcomes (Meisler and Vigoda-Gadot, 2014). Two prominent outcomes of EI, across various studies in the literature, are job performance and job satisfaction (Wong and Law, 2002). More specifically, various studies have captured the close association between EI and job satisfaction (Brackett et al., 2010b; Mayer and Salovey, 1997; Tugade and Fredrickson, 2007). One of the elements closely associated with job satisfaction is Growth Satisfaction in the Job (GSJ), which may be derived from one's learning, self-direction, autonomy, self-enhancement, personal growth and development, worthwhile accomplishment, and challenge in the job (Hackman and Oldham, 1975, 1980). Bechara et al. (2000) affirmed that being aware of one's cognitive processes and emotions triggers the neurological reactions that can foster personal learning and growth. In light of the above, the following hypothesis is generated:

H4: Follower emotional intelligence will be positively related to follower growth satisfaction in the job

It has been observed in numerous studies that EI increases the ability to solve problems and find suitable strategies for dealing with stress (Mikolajczak et al., 2006; Tsaousis and Nikolaou, 2005). Employees with high EI may thus be better at identifying feelings of frustration and stress, can understand the causes of stress through cognitive reappraisal, and develop strategies that include social resources and disclosure of feelings to deal with the negative consequences of stress (King and Gardner, 2006). On the other hand, employees with low EI are not aware of their emotions, resulting in an inability to cope with emotions, thus aggravating their level of stress. Bar-On et al.'s (2000) study suggested that police officers who were more aware of themselves and their emotions had better coping strategies to adapt to stressful events. Ciarrochi et al. (2002) also suggested that emotional regulation skills (involving both self and others) help protect people from the adverse effects of stress. Based on the evidence in the literature, it is assumed that follower EI may negatively influence follower job stress. Thus, this study hypothesises that:

H5. Follower emotional intelligence will be negatively related to follower job stress

Deluga (1992) highlighted the importance of an individualised dyadic relationship (two-way relationship between leaders and followers) in the heightened follower outcomes associated with transformational leadership. Given the focus on the dyadic nature of leadership process as propounded by Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) Theory (Graen and Uhl-Bien, 1995), LMX was found to be fully mediating in the relationship between transformational leadership and follower outcomes such as task performance and organisational citizenship behaviour (Wang et al., 2005). Later, Jordan and Troth's (2011) study noted that Leader-Member Exchange Theory (LMX) hinges on the way in which leaders and followers manage

relationships and that EI plays a prominent role in this social exchange. Their study also noted that the EI of followers enables them to develop high quality relationships with their leaders; this, in turn, results in higher levels of job satisfaction. A more recent study by Yuan et al., (2016), based on LMX differentiation, observed that high LMX leads to positive effects on followers' individual performance, job satisfaction, and organisational citizenship behaviour. Hence, it becomes implicitly evident that EI can play a potential role in mediating the relationship between transformational leadership and follower affective outcomes:

H6. Follower EI will mediate the relationship between transformational leadership and follower growth satisfaction in the job

Past studies have also reported that high EI individuals are good at understanding and managing their feelings, which may help them maintain a positive mood at work (Brackett et al., 2010b; Karim and Weisz, 2011), leading to better outcomes. Additionally, MacCann et al. (2011) and Zhao (2014) posited that EI can facilitate social resources that may support effective coping behaviour in handling stressful situations. Another important possibility of the mediation of follower EI is envisioned by the study of Tsai et al. (2009). Their study, comprising 282 employees and their immediate supervisors in 10 insurance companies in Taiwan, touched on the mediating role of positive moods as a mediator linking TL and employee work outcomes. Yuan et al's study (2016) also noted that, in addition to positive effects, due to fierce competition among followers to obtain or maintain high-quality LMX, the follower may face lot of workplace stressors also. Thus, we generate the following hypothesis:

H7: Follower EI will mediate the relationship between transformational leadership and follower job stress

Research Methodology

The data for testing the mediation model in this study were collected through a quantitative survey method using structured questionnaires. Only those respondents were recruited who had been working under a supervisor for more than two months to ensure the quality of relationship. Considering the study was conducted in a metropolitan city of India (Chennai), that has a significant number of people who speak and understand English, the questionnaire was not translated into local language. A pilot study with a small sample of 30 respondents was conducted to develop an understanding for gaining access to a larger set of respondents and for checking comprehensibility of the survey items. The pilot study did not report any problems with comprehension of survey items on the part of respondents, but revealed the operational difficulty in contacting the potential respondents without permissions from HR managers. Hence, a decision was taken to distribute 1800 questionnaires to the potential respondents through HR managers from different companies and institutions within the IT, health care, hospitality, education, manufacturing and public services sectors located in Chennai, Southern India. Overall, 1206 questionnaires were returned, with a response rate of 67%, out of which 908 were classified as usable for this study. The gender distribution was

513 males and 395 females. The respondents' duration of service under the supervisor/leader to whom they were reporting was 3 months and higher.

Research Instruments

The following four survey instruments were used in this mediation study:

Indian Transformational Leadership Scale (ITL)

The Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ), which was first developed by Bass (1985), has been used universally across many contexts. However, an indigenous Indian Transformational Leadership (ITL) Scale was used in this study, with the rationale based on the point raised by Singh and Krishnan (2007), who stated that generalisability of the MLQ in diverse cultural contexts is questionable. The majority of leadership theories have predominantly emerged from North America and their application to the Southeast Asian or Indian culture can be dubious (Singh and Krishnan, 2007).

To overcome these constraints and to customize the questionnaire for Indian culture, Singh and Krishnan (2007) proposed an indigenous construct, the 27-item Indian Transformational Leadership Scale (ITL), which comprises six factors: 1. performance-oriented and humane (POH), representing the attitudes of managers in performing their tasks; 2. openness and nurturing (ON), representing managers trusting subordinates and encouraging them to work independently; 3. sensitive and conscientious (SC), representing a high degree of sincerity and seriousness of the manager towards others; 4. personal touch (PT), representing personalised relationships; 5. conviction in self (CIS), representing self-confidence of the manager and confidence in the promoted vision; and 6. non-traditional (NT), representing openness to change among managers (Singh and Krishnan, 2007).

Before explaining the construct of ITL further, it is imperative to understand that, in designing and improvising the questionnaire to the Indian context, the authors (Singh and Krishnan, 2007) have clearly mentioned that the 27-item Indian transformational leadership scale included MLQ Form 5X which measured the four factors of TL, i.e. idealized influence (attributed/behaviour), inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation and individualised consideration (Singh and Krishnan, 2007). Additionally, Singh and Krishnan (2007) stated that the expectation of convergent validity was confirmed by a correlation of .89 between ITL and MLQ-TL. Thus, to ensure wider applicability and contribution to existing literature while reporting, this paper will generalise the ITL's dimensions along the popular MLQ-TL dimensions (idealized influence (attributed/behaviour), inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation and individualized consideration). The respondents in this study were asked to rate their leaders' TL qualities using a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) using items such as 'My supervisor is sensitive to my personal needs', 'My supervisor works with a smile'. Singh and Krishnan (2007) reported a reliability alpha value of 0.95 for the 27 items for this scale, and they also established its robustness through discriminant and convergent validity tests.

In this study, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was performed to assess whether the measurement model fits adequately with the data. For the measurement model of the Transactional Leadership Scale construct, a second-order CFA was performed. For the baseline measurement model, all observed measures (i.e. items or indicators) were specified as indicators of the first-order latent factors (i.e. sub-dimensions of POH, ON, SC, PT, CIS, and NT), which were indicators of the second-order factors (POH, ON, SC, PT, CIS, and NT). The fitness statistics of the measurement structure were significant: $\chi^2/df = 2.866$, CFI = 0.948, TLI = 0.940, RMSEA = 0.045, SRMR = 0.036. The factor loadings of all the indicators on the latent variables were found to be significant, with p < 0.01. The results showed that the measurement model was adequately represented by relevant indicators.

Emotional Intelligence (EI)

The Wong and Law Emotional Intelligence Scale - WLEIS (Wong and Law, 2002) is one of the most widely used self-assessed EI instruments in the international context (Law et al., 2004; Shi and Wang, 2007). It consists of 16 items for measuring individuals' self-perceptions about EI, based on the revision of four dimensions of the EI model of Mayer and Salovey (1997): self-emotion appraisal (SEA), others' emotion appraisal (OEA), use of emotion (UOE), and regulation of emotion (ROE). Followers' EI was assessed using a seven-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree) using items such as 'I really understand what I feel' and 'I am quite capable of controlling my own emotions'. Macik-Frey (2007) also demonstrated strong discriminant validity and reliability with an alpha value of 0.84 for the WLEIS.

In this study, for the measurement model of the EI construct, a second-order CFA was performed. For the baseline measurement model, all observed measures were specified as indicators of the first-order latent factors (i.e. sub-dimensions of SEA, OEA, ROE, and UOE), which were indicators of the second-order factors (SEA, OEA, ROE, and UOE). The fitness statistics of the measurement structure was found to be significant: $\chi^2/df = 2.951$; CFI = 0.943; TLI = 0.930; RMSEA = 0.054; SRMR = 0.038.

Growth satisfaction in the job (GSJ)

This study measured followers' GSJ using four items (Hackman and Oldham, 1975, 1980), as reported in Macik-Frey (2007), that required a response from the respondents on a seven-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (extremely dissatisfied) to 7 (extremely satisfied), using items such as 'The amount of personal growth and development I get in doing my job' and 'The amount of challenge in my job'. In this study, for the measurement model of the GSJ construct, a first-order CFA was performed. The fitness statistics of the measurement structure were found to be significant: $\chi^2/df = 2.503$; CFI = 0.999; TLI = 0.992; RMSEA = 0.041; SRMR = 0.007.

Job Stress (JS)

Followers' JS was measured using a modified version (two items) of the Motowidlo et al. (1986) scale as reported by Dubinsky et al. (1995), using a five-point Likert scale ranging

from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), using items such as 'My job is extremely stressful' and 'I feel a great deal of stress because of my job'. The two items were summed to obtain a total score and higher scores indicate that employees feel higher stress in their job.

Given that there were only two items for this scale, CFA was not performed to assess the measurement model of the JS construct. The alpha value for this study was 0.79, which is very close to that found by Dubinsky et al. (1995).

Research design & methods of analysis

The research design for this study was formulated to minimise the potential weaknesses that may undermine the application of factor analysis and structural equation modelling (SEM) for Likert scale type survey questionnaire data e.g. validity and reliability of the items and constructs, self-report and common method biases, replicability, qualification of respondents (Rindfleisch et al., 2008). The research approach was oriented towards the abductive perspective (Kovács and Spens, 2005). Both the research hypotheses and measurement scales of conceptual model were initially developed from synthesising the relevant theories and the literature to maximise face validity. Subsequent findings from the workplace observations and interviews with experts and practitioners in the field helped in refining the proposed model. Mediation analysis used in this study can be traced back to the classical studies by James and Brett (1984) and Baron and Kenny (1986), with diverse applications in the psychology and business disciplines (Chiaburu and Byrne, 2009). Using the maximum likelihood estimation in the statistical software, AMOS 21, the structural model was tested for the sample of survey participants.

Results

The ambiguity of the constructs (Churchill, 1979; Hair et al., 2010; Podsakoff et al., 2003) was minimised by replicating existing constructs that were previously validated and published in top-ranking journals, thus considerably mitigating the potential problems of reliability and validity (Matthews and Marzec, 2012; Nguyen et al., 2016). The exploratory factor analysis (EFA) for item selection indicated that: the items were significantly loaded onto the expected latent constructs without sign of cross-loading; all the factor loadings were significantly above the adequate threshold level of 0.7; and the critical ratio, i.e. the factor loadings divided by the standard error, was statistically significant at the 0.001 level. Furthermore, the Cronbach's alpha for each factor was higher than the suggested threshold value of 0.70 (ITL – 0.94; EI – 0.89; GSJ – 0.80 & JS – 0.79), indicating that the results confirmed the scale reliability and internal consistency of all the items of each factor.

Since the EFA method is considered insufficient for discriminating between set of items that represent distinct but correlated items, our research study proceeded with the confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), that tests the extent to which a priori theoretical pattern of factor loadings on the pre-specified constructs represents the actual data (Anderson and Gerbing, 1988). The constructs were assessed on convergent, discriminant and nomological validity. For the convergent validity of constructs, all the factor loadings were greater than the adequate level of 0.7, and significant at the p < 0.01, satisfying the adequate convergent

validity on the common latent constructs (Tabachnick and Fidell, 2007; Hair et al., 2010). Furthermore, all the average variance extracted (AVE) from each construct was higher than the recommended value of 0.50, also representing adequate convergent validity. On the other hand, the composite reliability value, which is defined as the proportion of the item variance attributable to the true score of any latent construct (DeVellis, 1991), for testing the construct or latent variable reliability (Hair et al., 2010), was higher than the 0.7 minimum rule of thumb level (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). Additionally, each construct achieved the acceptable goodness-of-fit threshold value levels (Owens and Hekman, 2016). For discriminant validity, the inter-correlations between different latent variables were < 0.6. The AVEs were < 0.5, and each item loaded onto only one construct. For nomological validity, the correlations among various constructs in the measurement models were theoretically valid.

Means, standard deviations, and simple pairwise correlations (Pearson) between the latent variables are listed in Table 1. The latent variables of TL, EI, and GSJ were significantly positively correlated. The latent variable JS, however, was negatively correlated significantly with the other latent variables, except with EI.

Insert Table 1 here

Testing the Structural Mediation Model

We first tested the relationship of the predictor TL with all three dependent variables (EI, GSJ, and JS: $TL \rightarrow EI$; $TL \rightarrow GSJ$; $TL \rightarrow JS$) in the absence of any mediator, and found that all these direct path coefficients were statistically significant, as shown in Table 2. This shows that hypotheses 1, 2 and 3 are supported.

The next step was to add the mediator (EI) in the mediated path $TL \rightarrow$ follower EI for hypothesis 6. The results shown in Table 3 reveal that the mediated path $TL \rightarrow$ followers' EI is statistically significant (the standardized $\beta = 0.246$, p < 0.001). EI plays a role in mediating the relationship between TL and GSJ. However, the results also indicate that EI did not play a role in mediating the relationship between TL and JS (hypothesis 7). The results of hypotheses 6 and 7 are explained further below.

Insert Table 3 here

For the mediation model, hypothesis 6 posited that follower EI will mediate the relationship between TL and GSJ. The findings in Table 3 above show that TL has statistically significant path coefficients (direct effects) with EI and GSJ separately. Similarly, EI has a statistically significant path coefficient with GSJ (EI \rightarrow GSJ, the standardized β = 0.273, p < 0.001), thus supporting hypothesis 4. As evident from the results in Table 3, when the mediator EI was included in the model the total effect of TL \rightarrow GSJ was reduced from β = 0.432, p < 0.001 to β = 0.365, p < 0.001, thus indicating a partial mediation of EI (0.067), as evident from the path coefficient table 3.

It was originally hypothesised in this study (H7) that follower EI would mediate the relationship between TL and follower JS. Table 2 reported a significant relationship between TL and JS (TL \rightarrow JS, the standardized β = -0.108, p < 0.001). However, the path coefficient between EI and JS as reported in Table 3 was not statistically significant (EI \rightarrow JS, the standardized β = -0.040, p > 0.10), indicating that follower EI did not influence their JS directly (hypothesis 5), and thus EI cannot play a mediating role between TL and JS, as originally posited in hypothesis 7. Considering that the direct path coefficient from follower GSJ to JS was statistically significant (GSJ \rightarrow JS, β = -0.145, p < 0.01), an attempt was made to add follower GSJ alongside EI in the mediation model. When the mediators EI and GSJ were included in the model, the path coefficient between TL and JS was reduced from a previously significant level of β = -0.108, p < 0.01 to an insignificant level of -0.063, p > 0.10, indicating the full mediating role of EI and GSJ in the relationship between TL and JS. The results of the overall structural equation model are represented in Figure 2.

Insert Fig. 2 here

The overall model can be represented in Figure 2, with all the values of model fitness indices satisfying the threshold requirements of Hu and Bentler (1999): χ 2/df = 1.273; CFI = 0.998; RMSEA= 0.017; SRMR = 0.0147.

Discussion

In the quest for testing the mediation model, this study examined the strength and significance of various relationships within the model. The relationships between TL and follower EI, GSJ and JS were hypothesised and tested. Further, the relationship between follower EI and GSJ and JS was also hypothesised and tested. Overall, most of the proposed relationships hypothesised were supported as shown in the results section.

The first hypothesis, regarding a positive relationship between TL and follower EI, received significant support. The conformance of this positive relationship extends the extant literature by first establishing that transformational leaders, who have in-built high EI levels (Downey et al., 2006, p. 251; Lam and O'Higgins, 2012; Leban and Zulauf, 2004), positively influence follower EI. Secondly, this positive relationship between TL and follower EI is the essential base that assists transformational leaders to help followers to be able to handle their emotions effectively to deal with negative emotional events, everyday frustrations and negative moods, and improve optimism and performance, as evidenced in many studies (Ashkanasy and Dorris, 2017; Ashton-James and Ashkanasy 2005; Dasborough, 2006; Kafetsioset al., 2011; Pirola-Merlo et al., 2002; Sy et al., 2005).

The study's main objective was to assess how follower emotional intelligence potentially mediated in the instances of both affective outcome variables i.e. 'Follower Growth Satisfaction in Job' and 'Follower Job Stress'. For investigating positive affective outcome variable, namely GSJ, the mediation model proposed in this study included a set of twin relationships: the relationship between TL and follower GSJ (Hypothesis 2) and that between follower EI and followers' GSJ (Hypothesis 4). The second hypothesis, which predicted the positive relationship between TL and follower GSJ, was supported and therefore corroborates results of similar studies (Bartram and Casimir, 2007; Bass, 1985, Burns, 1978; Conger and Kanungo, 1998; Fatima et al., 2010; House, 1977). The confirmation of this hypothesis suggests that transformational leaders, through this positive relationship, guide followers towards elements of GSJ by articulating an attractive vision of the future, motivating followers by appealing to higher ideals and moral values, inspiring followers to perform

beyond expectations, and showing followers that their task is worth accomplishing (Bartram and Casimir, 2007; Bass, 1985, Burns, 1978). Similarly, the fourth hypothesis, that predicted positive relationship between follower EI and GSJ, was supported by the results of this study. This proves that emotionally intelligent followers have the ability to form and apply efficacy judgments to deal effectively with unpleasant emotions and develop pleasant emotions to promote factors associated with growth satisfaction in job, as observed by Mayer and Salovey (1997, p. 5). This finding is also in line with Weiss et al. (1999), who argued that positive emotions are better predictors of job satisfaction.

Hypotheses 3 and 5 investigated how follower EI potentially mediated negative outcome variables, namely JS. The third hypothesis predicted an inverse relationship between TL and follower JS, whereas hypothesis 5 predicted that follower EI will be negatively related to follower JS. The study's results supported the inverse relationship between TL and follower JS, thus corroborating with earlier studies which observed that transformational leaders, through their encouragement of open, inspirational and effective communication, influence motivation, enthusiasm, optimism and self-confidence in followers to alleviate JS (Rafferty and Griffin, 2004; Rowold and Schlotz, 2009). Interestingly, the negative relationship between followers' EI and JS, as predicted by hypothesis 5, was not supported by the results of this study and did not corroborate with earlier studies on the significant relationship between employees' EI and JS (Bar-On et al., 2000; Ciarrochi et al., 2002; King and Gardner, 2006). It was assumed that the use of EI by followers may be utilised as an effective coping behaviour to tackle sensitive negative feelings, as witnessed in some previous studies (Chun et al., 2006; Zhao, 2014). An explanation for this result can be that EI may rather act as a moderator in the stressor-JS link i.e. individuals with high EI are better able to cope with stressors, thus buffering the relationship between stressors and their outcomes. Nonetheless, this finding did find some support from the studies conducted by Gohm et al., (2005), Newton et al., (2015) and Zhao (2014), which reported that EI was not found to significantly predict JS. The lack of a negative relationship between follower EI and JS further accounts for non-confirmation of hypothesis 7, that follower EI mediates the relationship between TL and JS. This result indicated that follower EI may have helped followers to identify feelings of stress, but their cognitive reappraisal capabilities (Bar-On, 2000; Ciarrochi et al., 2002; King and Gardner, 2006) might not have been enough to alleviate it fully.

The sixth hypothesis tested the mediation of follower EI between TL and follower GSJ, and the results partially supported this mediation. This important finding demonstrates that transformational leaders can positively influence follower EI, which in turn is instrumental in enhancing follower *Growth Satisfaction in Job*. In short, it can be understood that transformational leaders create suitable workplace experiences for their followers to be able to appropriately monitor their feelings and emotions and use that information to guide their thinking and actions, which is characterised as emotional intelligence. The partial mediation as reported in this study reveals that emotional intelligence is partly necessary for the followers to have a realistic understanding about themselves and their capabilities, which can be instrumental to understand their growth, development and worthwhile accomplishment in their job. The finding, that follower EI partially mediates between TL and follower GSJ,

extends the study of Tsai et al. (2009), which observed that positive moods mediated the relationship between TL and followers' affective outcomes, and at the same time expands on other studies that implicitly hinted at the probability of mediation of follower EI between TL and followers' affective outcomes (Jordan and Troth, 2011; Sears and Holmvall, 2010; Wang et al., 2005, Wong and Law, 2002).

Although EI did not significantly predict JS (job stress), as originally posited in hypothesis 5, the already established key relationship observed in the extant literature prompted us to retain JS in the model and further investigate whether EI alongside GSJ (growth satisfaction in job) jointly mediated TL and JS. The rationale was twofold. Firstly, GSJ significantly predicted JS in this study and, more importantly, it was evident from the results related to H5 results that EI did not directly diminish the level of JS experienced in the job situation. Evidently, this shows that JS is commonly present in any job situation, irrespective of the level of EI. Secondly, the close association found between EI and job satisfaction in past literature (Abraham, 2000, Chiva and Alegre, 2008; Kafestios and Zampetakis, 2008) clearly indicated that satisfaction with growth and personal development in the job alongside EI was required to mitigate job stress at workplace. Therefore, an attempt was made to add follower GSJ alongside EI in the mediation model between TL and JS. Surprisingly, in combination with growth satisfaction in job (GSJ), follower EI jointly mediated the relationship between TL and follower JS fully. This finding gels perfectly with the studies of Happell et al. (2013) and Tsigilis et al. (2004), which asserted that job dissatisfaction is a significant factor that results in JS and job 'burnout'.

Implications & Recommendations

As mentioned earlier, numerous studies in the past have linked high EI levels of TL with the outcomes, but virtually no study has focussed on the relationship between TL and follower EI nor considered follower EI as a potential mediating variable impacting the followers' affective outcomes. This study, by demonstrating the positive impact of transformational leadership on follower EI to a greater extent, has found an answer to the following question: what happens to followers when transformational leaders use their emotional skills to bring about the desired effect in followers? Moreover, the mediating role of follower EI has greatly illuminated the intervening process between transformational leadership and follower affective outcomes. Additionally, by considering EI as a potential mediator between TL and followers' GSJ and JS, this study has been successful in linking two prominent fields of research -transformational leadership and emotional intelligence. The joint effect of follower EI and GSJ revealed in this study indicates that transformational leaders, while targeting the negative outcomes in followers like job stress, also need to ensure that followers are satisfied with the growth prospects in their job; mere emotional skills or influence will not suffice. Given that most of the previous research has focused only on leaders' emotional intelligence, this study extends our understanding of how important and crucial the effects of follower emotional intelligence are, in the context of transformational leadership and for both enhancing followers' satisfaction and mitigating followers' job stress. Thus, the results of this study inform human resource managers about the importance of followers' emotional intelligence and hence encourage them to train leaders with transformational leadership skills

and qualities, which will influence followers' EI and their subsequent affective outcomes, thus leading to organisational growth and development. Two major implications stem from this exciting research. First, this study highlights the need for practitioners to emphasise and extend the notion of follower EI for enhancing positive affective outcomes. Secondly, the study establishes that the attunement of both transformational leaders' and follower EI helps leaders as well as followers to guide their behaviour towards positive affective outcomes.

Limitations and future scope for research

There are certain limitations that may have affected the results in this study. First, self-report bias (Donaldson and Grant-Vallone, 2002) about supervisors' TL behaviour and followers' own EI assessment and collection of data from the mono-source (subordinate self-report) might have impacted the results of this study. In order to eliminate self-report bias, it is recommended that future studies adopt a dyadic study approach in assessing more accurately the TL behaviour and EI of followers. Common method variance is a systematic error caused by the shared variance among measured variables using a common method (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003). One solution suggested by Podsakoff and Organ (1986) in order to overcome the common method bias (CMB) is to engage with different respondents to answer different questions at different points in time. However, this multiple source data collection approach was not possible due to resources constraint and time limit. Alternatively, the survey questionnaire instrument has been designed to minimise the potential problem of CMB. In this study, the construct ambiguity (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003) was minimised by using constructs that have previously been validated and published in top ranking journals. Item wordings were pre-tested and revised, with the purpose of avoiding complicated and ambiguous words that might confuse respondents (Churchill & Iacobucci, 2010). Furthermore, some items were negatively worded and reverse coded as cognitive speed bumps to restrain the respondent's tendency to rush through answering the survey questionnaire (Hinkin, 1995). Also, items relating to each factor were placed apart from each other within the survey instrument to avoid respondents making connections among items of each factor, and associating the endogenous and exogenous factors (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003). In the analysis stage, using the Harman's single factor test with the factor analysis approach to assess the degree of CMB in the data, the single factor explains only 25% of the total variance in this self-reported data. This indicates that the CMB is not a concern. Furthermore, applying the approach of Lindell and Whitney (2001), all the adjusted correlation coefficients remain statistically significant, which also indicates that the CMB is not a serious concern in this study.

Another limitation of this study is the use of a two-item JS measure that may not have captured multiple components within JS. Nonetheless, we do not consider that this affected the results systematically. Third, the individual dimensions of TL and EI were not explored due to the scope of this study. This limitation can be utilised as a platform for future researchers to explore the impact of each of the dimensions of TL and EI on the outcome variables. In this study, the mediation model was tested against one positive (GJS) and one

negative (JS) outcome variable only. Future studies could replicate the mediation study of follower EI using various outcome variables across diverse cultural settings. Considering the significant relationship between GSJ and JS, as evidenced in this study, future research could treat Growth Satisfaction in Job (GSJ) as the potential mediator between TL and JS. Finally, the findings of this study can be treated as indicative only as it was based on the Indian context using an Indian Transformational Leadership Scale, and therefore cannot be generalised across all cultures. For greater generalisation of results, it is recommended that future studies test this mediation model across various cultural contexts, using TL scales that are best suited to each cultural setting.

Conclusion

The present study provides some valuable insights into and understanding of the importance of the emotional connection between TL and follower affective outcomes, such as growth satisfaction in job and job stress. More specifically, this study shows that transformational leaders provide positive affective workplace experiences, which enable their followers to appropriately monitor their emotions, think and guide their actions and behaviour, thus leading to increase in growth satisfaction in job and reduced job stress levels. By exploring the mediation role of follower EI, this study has not only made great inroads into unchartered territory, but has laid a strong foundation for future studies to delve into the intervening emotional processes linking TL and follower affective outcomes.

Policy.

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Table 1 Descriptive statistics and the pairwise correlations between the latent variables

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3
1 Transformational leadership	2.68	0.68	-		
2 Emotional intelligence	5.46	0.78	0.25***	_	
3 Growth satisfaction of job	5.10	1.11	0.43***	0.36***	_
4 Job stress	3.04	1.02	-0.11***	-0.05	-0.15***

N = 908; *** $p \le 0.01$; ** $p \le 0.05$

Table 2 Standardized regression estimate of the path coefficients

			Estimate
EI	←	TL	0.246***
GSJ	←	TL	0.432***
JS	←	TL	-0.108***

N = 908; *** $p \le 0.01$; ** $p \le 0.05$

TL: transformational leadership; EI: emotional intelligence; GSJ: growth satisfaction of job; JS: job stress.

Table 3: Standardized regression estimate of the path coefficients, total, direct and indirect effects

			Estimate	Total effects	Direct effects	Indirect effects
EI	←	TL	0.246***	0.246	0.246	4
GSJ	←	TL	0.365***	0.432	0.365	0.067
GSJ	←	EI	0.273***	0.273	0.273	
JS	\leftarrow	GSJ	-0.145***	-0.145	-0.145	
JS	\leftarrow	TL				-0.063
JS	←	EI				-0.040

N = 908; *** $p \le 0.01$; ** $p \le 0.05$ for the estimate.

TL: transformational leadership; EI: emotional intelligence; GSJ: growth satisfaction in job; JS: job stress

Fig. 1 Proposed mediation model

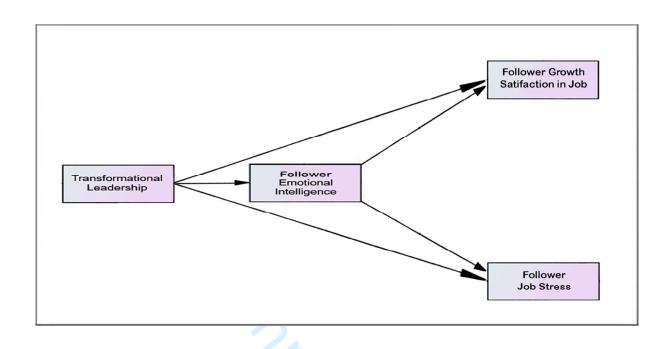


Fig. 2 Results of overall structural equation model

