

Impact of Transformational Leadership on Employee Resilience during a Crisis Situation

Transformational
Leadership

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Abstract

The business world is currently presented with the pinnacle of adversity and turbulence due to Covid-19. While some organizations collapsed, certain leaders have succeeded to navigate their business towards recovery by understanding suitable strategies, innovation and identifying new opportunities. Given the rate of uncertainty in the contemporary business landscape, a need of further study on employee resilience has arisen to assist organizations understand how to respond to crises. Hence, this research aims to investigate crisis leadership and its impact, under the research topic “Transformational leadership to boost employee resilience amid crisis induced pressure”. The research was conducted basing Earl’s Regency Resort, Kandy, Sri Lanka. Data were collected through a five point likert scale questionnaire, and the sample was decided through simple random sampling method resulting in 63 valid responses. Minitab-19 software was employed for data processing. The findings of this study indicated that there was a positive and significant impact of transformational leadership in boosting employee resilience. Furthermore the findings recommended future studies based on other organizational factors affecting employee resilience, aside from transformational leadership.

Keywords: Transformational leadership, Employee resilience, Uncertainty, Turbulence



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Introduction

Background of the Study

According to a number of researchers, identifying and articulating vision is an important facet of transformational leadership (Podsakoff et al, 1990). Studies by Bass argue that intellectual stimulation is a vital element of transformational leadership (Avolio and Bass, 1988). Bass, in his review based on the research “Transformational Leadership and Subordinate Reactions to Stress”, states that transformational leaders are capable of turning crisis into opportunity by interpreting turbulence as challenges that can be overpowered and by engaging and mediating subordinates through empowerment and inspirational motivation (Bass, 1990).

Resilience means individual growth through stressful experiences (Richardson, 2002). According to Greene and Conrad, resilience is the ability to confront adverse events through positive adaptation (Greene & Conrad, 2002). Employee resilience is a key commodity that decides the way employees respond to organizational setbacks (Sutcliffe & Vogus, 2003). According to Seligman it is ideal to investigate factors that boost optimism, innovation, resilience and hope in employees for the benefit of future organizational developments (Seligman & Sikszenmihalyi, 2014). Luthans and Avolio state that building up employee resilience is a crucial component of effective leadership (Luthans & Avolio, 2003).

Employee resilience may have a positive correlation with leader behaviours and a variety of leadership practices that may support this statement (Harland et al, 2005). Multiple dimensions of transformational leadership such as intellectual stimulation and idealized influence were found to positively affect subordinate resilience while inspirational leadership was an exception (Harland et al, 2005). A study has found that transformational leadership has an enhanced influence on subordinate work engagement given the follower characteristics possess greater positivity (Zhu et al, 2009).

Research Problem

Justification of Research Problem

Academic research based on the impact of transformational leadership to build employee resilience during crisis induced pressure is significantly scarce. Given the rate of organizational setbacks in contemporary era, a study by Harland recommends further studies on employee resilience to assist organizations understand how to respond to crises (Harland et al, 2005).

The world is currently faced with the novel crown pandemic with its devastating effects at both enterprise and community levels. Covid-19 and the extreme level of organizational uncertainty followed by personal strain inflicted across workforce has demanded the need to re-examine leadership.

The researcher has focused the study on tourism and hospitality industry based on the rationale that it is among the hardest hit sectors and faced a drastic fall owing to the current circumstances (Central Bank Sri Lanka, 2020). Besides, Sri Lankan hotel sector has faced many unfavourable events recently, Easter Attacks in 2019, and the organizations sustaining to date

hint that they may have identified ideal approaches to mitigate the challenges and effectively handle turbulence. Aitken Spence Hotel Holdings PLC is a key player of the industry in Sri Lanka claiming a 7% revenue growth (Aitken Spence, 2020) given the industry average amounts to 5%. According to the quarterly financial data (Aitken Spence, 2021) as at first quarter of 2021 a recovering trend can be observed despite the challenging circumstances. The subject organization, operating in multiple countries during global pandemic may provide a wider significance to the outcome of the study.

Importance of the Study

The research is based on the significance of transformational leadership as a stimulus to employee resilience in the path to business recovery.

Transformational leadership has been practiced by the Aitken Spence Hotel Holdings PLC, long before the outbreak of Covid-19. It is important to investigate the crisis leadership approach of an experienced organization and investigate their effectiveness for future organizational developments. Employee resilience is an important facet of business recovery. Given the pressure imposed upon workforce alongside Covid-19, the researcher identifies employee resilience as the most suitable dependent variable to test with a leadership style.

Expected limitations

The research was confined to a specific organization in Sri Lankan tourism sector. Therefore, the study sample was limited to currently employed members of the staff in the selected organization, Earl's Regency Resort, Kandy. Hence the findings maybe subjective to the said organization inclusive of the fact that the respondents may have given bias answers up to a certain unavoidable level. Time constraints and limited access to organizational data may influence the findings and interpretations of the study. Lastly the findings may not possess a broad validity owing to limited sample size and lack of financial resources.

Literature Review

According to Bhamra reinforcement and measurement of worker resilience is a crucial area for research and theory (Bhamra et al, 2011). An organization crisis brings forth absence of resilience at organizational, group and individual levels. Study on how to build up employee resilience during Covid-19 outbreak is of significant importance (Luu, 2021).

Transformational Leadership

Transformational leadership involves inspiring change and transformation in individuals (Hall et al, 2008). A transformational leader articulates vision, establishes group goals and strengthens individuals to their fullest capacity to foster overall follower commitment and performance (Podsakoff et al, 1996). Middleton states that this form of leadership is the most influential and effective in managing organizational change (Middleton et al, 2015) The same argument is further supported by a study by Krishnan (Krishnan 2004). Thus a transformational leader acts as a proactive change agent who stimulates followers through collective vision and enables them to achieve goals of high order (Busari et al, 2019).

When discussing different dimensions of transformational leadership each characteristic can be explained as follows: 'Inspirational motivation- enhances employees' confidence levels; Intellectual stimulation- helps them find innovative solutions to problems; and Individual consideration- offers one to one help, support and guidance (Sivanathan et al, 2004). Organizational uncertainty tends to stimulate employee stress and negative behavior leading to ethical rule-breaking (Zhng et al, 2009) whereas given the quality of transformational leadership it retains and boosts follower motivation as well as develops positive leader-member relationships (Burns, 1978).

Employee Resilience

The contemporary definition to organizational resilience is 'a progressive transformation where not only employees absorb the change, but also learn to thrive in the future circumstances (Lengnick-Hall et al, 2011; Richardson, 2002; Baird et al, 2013) Grotberg associates resilience with inner strengths (e.g., optimism, sense of purpose) and problem solving skills (e.g., generating new ideas on how to perform certain tasks, reaching out for help at need) (Grotberg, 2003). A study by Wagnild and Young observes that resilience is a positive personality trait that enables higher ability to adapt to challenges and moderates stress and vulnerability under adverse circumstances (Wagnild & Young, 1993). According to Luthans resilience is a developable characteristic to bounce back from stressful events, failure and adversity. He further states it is a transformational process that allows learning from facing challenges. Factors of workplace resilience consist of hope, optimism and self-efficacy and it enhances levels of employee performance and satisfaction (Luthans & Avolio, 2003).

Although the concept of resilience has been thus far typically based with studies on child psychology, these predictors by Grotberg can be ideally applied on leader-member resilience in organizations (Harland et al, 2005). Naswall in their study "Employee Resilience Scale (EmpRes): Technical Report" associates employee resilience with factors such as collaborative and learning orientation (Naswall et al, 2013), with which the researcher has partially based the constructive conceptualization in this study.

Impact of Transformational Leadership on Employee Resilience

Issabel Dimas finds there is a positive correlation between team resilience and transformational leadership (Dimas et al, 2018). Sommer argues transformational leadership positively affects employees' positive affect, and likewise negatively impacts employees' negative affect during a crisis situation (Sommer et al, 2016). According to a study by Harland, transformational leadership dimensions including idealized influence, intellectual stimulation and individualized consideration were positively associated with subordinate resilience prior to and after controlling for employee optimism. However as per Harland, inspirational motivation was not significantly correlated after controlling for optimism (Harland et al, 2005). It is possible that inspirational motivation is a more subjective factor depending on an employee's specific job related challenges. For example, the extent to which the leader emphasizes on organizational success affects the employee might be moderated by multiple other factors such as a specific work challenge and the nature of leader-member relationship

In summary, basing the above discussion this study proposes a hypothesis; ‘H1- Transformational leadership has an impact on employee resilience during crisis induced pressure’ in order to further test and clarify the validity of/the truth of the theory behind ‘transformational leadership and employee resilience’.

Methodology

Sample and Population

Data were collected from 63 employees from the staff of Earl’s Regency Resort, Tennekumbura. The total population of the study amounts to over 200 employees currently working at the resort. The researcher has focused the study on a specific category of employees (staff category) to enhance the reliability of data. Accordingly, the study population was 75. The sample size was decided as 63 with 95% confidence and 5% error level according to Anderson sample size table (Anderson et al, 2017). A heterogeneous sample was selected through simple random sampling method as per previous researches (Harland et al, 2005).

Research Scope

The total population of the study include all the employees of tourism and hospitality sector in Sri Lanka. The researcher has selected Aitken Spence Hotel Holdings PLC as the subject organization with a total population of 3235 employees (Aitken Spence, 2020). The researcher has further narrowed down the focus into a selected resort of the company located in the Central Province Sri Lanka: Earl’s Regency, with a population of 75 employees in the staff category.

Research Design

This research is a causality study intended to measure the impact of transformational leadership towards employee resilience. Accordingly, the key variables tested were transformational leadership and employee resilience. The research is based during a crisis stricken period for the selected organization. Thereby it can be assumed that the two variables are highly interrelated and the results would not be affected by other hidden variables.

Research Objectives

- To examine the impact of transformational leadership on employee resilience during crisis.
- To investigate the influence of transformational leadership attributes in enhancing employee adaptability during stressful events.
- To analyse the relationship between transformational leadership and employee self-reliance.

Research Questions

- What is the relationship between transformational leadership and employee resilience during crisis?

- Do transformational leadership attributes enhance employee adaptability during stressful events?
- Does transformational leadership build up employee self-reliance?

Data Collection Tools and Plan

A five point Likert scale questionnaire was developed employing the practices of previously published researches on similar studies. Transformational leadership was tested through selected 10 questions from 22 item questionnaire by Podsakoff (Podsakoff et al, 1996) which has been utilized in a number of other management researches (Pillai et al, 2004). Employee resilience was tested with 12 questions borrowed from researches by Naswall and by Harland (Naswall et al, 2013; Harland et al, 2005) and resilience scale by Wagnild (Wagnild & Young, 1993). Thus the overall questionnaire contained 25 questions including demographics; age, gender, and years of experience.

The respondents were asked to rate the extent to which they agreed with each statement on the practices of their superior with a scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree with specific reference to Covid-19 pandemic. Similarly, resilience scale contained 10 questions with same options and two questions with a scale and measured their resilience during pandemic.

The questionnaire was developed into a Google form and distributed online due to Covid-19 restrictions of social distancing. Positive direction was employed in questionnaire to avoid confusion of respondent. Moreover, the respondents were informed that their answers were confidential to reduce tendency for biasness and they were informed that the questionnaire assessed their workplace oriented attitudes rather than leadership and resilience, so that they would not be tempted to respond in a particular way leading to confusions of reliability of the study.

Variables Explained

Conceptualization was developed based on transformational leader behaviours identified by Podsakoff (Podsakoff et al, 1996) and resilience indicators by Naswall, Wagnild and Harland in their respective researches (Naswall et al, 2013; Harland et al, 2005; Wagnild & Young, 1993). Thus each variable contained 6 constructs.

Hypotheses

H0- Transformational leadership has no impact on employee resilience during crisis induced pressure

H1- Transformational leadership has an impact on employee resilience during crisis induced pressure.

Conceptual Model

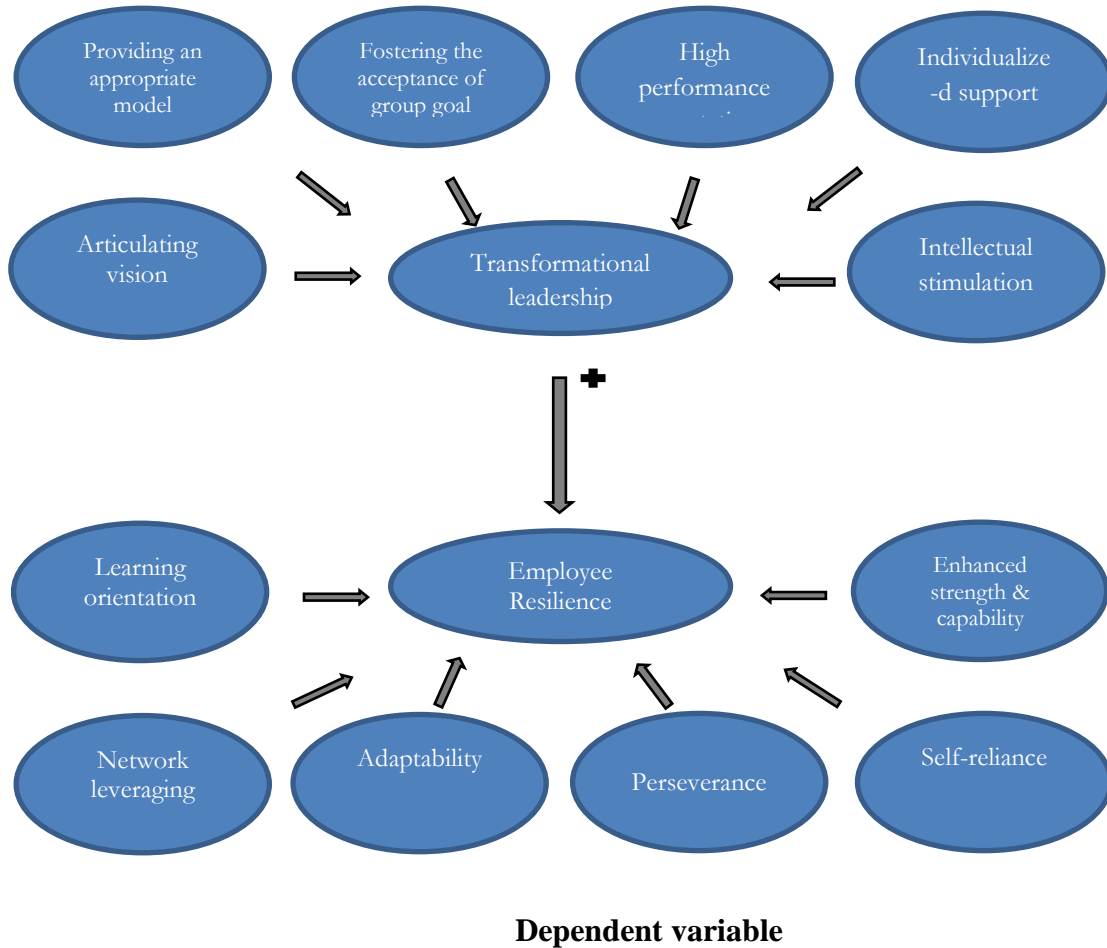


Figure 1. Conceptual Model.

Operationalization Table

The following table (Table 1) indicates the guidance through which the questionnaire was developed for testing the key variables of the study.

Table 1. Operationalization Table

Variable	Definition	Reference	Indicators	Measure	Reference	Question
Transformational leadership	Inspiring change and transformation in individuals	(Hall et al. 2008)	Articulating vision	Five point Likert scale	(Podsakoff et al, 1996)	Q16
			Providing an appropriate model			Q17
						Q18
						Q19

			Fostering the acceptance of group goals			Q20
						Q21
			High performance expectations			Q22
						Q23
			Individualized support			Q24
						Q25
						Q4
			Learning orientation			Q5
					(Naswall et al, 2013)	Q6
			Network leveraging			Q7
						Q8
			Adaptability			Q9
				Five point		Q10
				Likert	(Wagnild & Young, 1993)	Q11
			Perseverance	scale		Q12
						Q13
			Self-reliance			Q14
					(Harland et al, 2005)	Q15
			Enhanced strength and capability			

Source: Author's survey

Method of Data Analysis

Minitab-19 software was employed to generate the following models; Descriptive statistics with central tendency and dispersion analysis, Regression, Pairwise Correlation, Reliability and Outlier tests. Internal consistency was measured through Cronbach's alpha test by including questions that measure each variable separately.

Data Analysis

As indicated in Table 3, a large number of employees are resilient at work (mean = 0.893). Similarly, majority of the respondents described the leadership of the organization in terms of transformational leadership characteristics (mean = 0.872). Notably 9 employees described both resilience and transformational leadership with similar (high) level of agreement (Mode > 0.7). Out of 63 employees a majority, 39, have provided a strong positive answer (mode = 5) on their adaptability at workplace. Self-reliance of employees is also high (mean = 4.6) with 32 respondents having provided maximum possible answer (mode = 5).

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics

Variable	N	N*	Mean	StDev	Minimum	Maximum	Mode	N for Mode
Emp. Resilience	63	0	0.8929	0.0802	0.7000	1.0000	0.983333	9
Tr. Leadership	63	0	0.8721	0.1065	0.5600	1.0000	0.96, 1	9
Adaptability	63	0	4.6032	0.5249	3.0000	5.0000	5	39
Self-resilience	63	0	4.4127	0.6632	3.0000	5.0000	5	32

Source: Author's computation

Statistically 95% of employees display a resilience range of 0.97- 0.81 supported by a high level of adaptability. Similarly, transformational leadership practices are available in the organization at a high extent. Interestingly self-reliance of the employees ranges from a moderate to high level. On average the organization practices transformational leadership effectively and the employees are resilient.

As per the results below H1 is supported with statistical significance ($p < 0.05$) with strong evidence against null hypothesis. Therefore, there is 95% of chance of similar finding resulting by the same research done using a similar population. The table indicates that transformational leadership has a strong positive impact on employee resilience with a correlation of 0.83. Accordingly, the null hypothesis (H0) is rejected.

The research questions are supported with transformational leadership having a moderate impact on both employee adaptability and self-reliance. It can be concluded that transformational leadership has a tendency to boost employee characteristics of resilience, adaptability and self-reliance.

Table 3. Pairwise Pearson Correlations

Sample 1	Sample 2	Correlation	95% CI for ρ	P-Value
Emp. Resilience	Tr. Leadership	0.828	(0.730, 0.892)	0.000
Adaptability	Tr. Leadership	0.445	(0.221, 0.624)	0.000
Self-reliance	Tr. Leadership	0.568	(0.372, 0.715)	0.000

Source: Author's computation

The following regression model (Table 4) was found statistically significant ($p < \alpha$ where $\alpha=0.05$). There is a high possibility of finding the same result through a research with a similar group. Apparently transformational leadership alone has a 68.51% impact on employee resilience. The impact is positive (Coef = 0.6231). Employee resilience can be manipulated to 68.51% through transformational leadership practices. Accordingly, employee resilience builds upon 0.6231 of transformational leadership and 0.3495 of other factors.

Table 4. Simple Regression Model

Table 4.1. Regression Equation

$$\text{Emp. Resilience} = 0.3495 + 0.6231 \text{ Tr. Leadership}$$

Table 4.2. Coefficients

Term	Coef	SE Coef	T-Value	P-Value	VIF
Constant	0.3495	0.0475	7.36	0.000	
Tr. Leadership	0.6231	0.0541	11.52	0.000	1.00

Table 4.3. Model Summary

S	R-sq	R-sq(adj)	R-sq(pred)
0.0453670	68.51%	68.00%	65.65%

Table 4.4. Analysis of Variance

Source	DF	Adj SS	Adj MS	F-Value	P-Value
Regression	1	0.27318	0.273182	132.73	0.000
Tr. Leadership	1	0.27318	0.273182	132.73	0.000
Error	61	0.12555	0.002058		
Lack-of-Fit	15	0.04414	0.002943	1.66	0.094
Pure Error	46	0.08140	0.001770		
Total	62	0.39873			

Source: Author's computation

This is a statistically significant regression model ($p < 0.05$) supporting the research questions. Transformational leadership and years of experience of the employee can control 74.44% of the results of this research.

Table 5. Multiple Regression Model 1

Table 5.1. Coefficients

Term	Coef	SE Coef	T-Value	P-Value	VIF
Constant	0.3519	0.0450	7.81	0.000	
Tr. Leadership	0.6050	0.0487	12.42	0.000	1.02
Experience					
2	0.0275	0.0206	1.34	0.187	2.34
3	-0.0417	0.0219	-1.91	0.062	2.04
4	0.0077	0.0262	0.30	0.769	1.57
5	0.0247	0.0180	1.38	0.174	3.08

5.2. Model Summary

S	R-sq	R-sq(adj)	R-sq(pred)
0.0405443	76.50%	74.44%	71.17%

5.3. Analysis of Variance

Source	DF	Adj SS	Adj MS	F-Value	P-Value
Regression	5	0.305031	0.061006	37.11	0.000
Tr. Leadership	1	0.253550	0.253550	154.24	0.000
Experience	4	0.031849	0.007962	4.84	0.002
Error	57	0.093699	0.001644		
Lack-of-Fit	48	0.088236	0.001838	3.03	0.039
Pure Error	9	0.005463	0.000607		
Total	62	0.398730			

Source: Author's computation

This is a statistically significant regression model ($p < 0.05$) supporting the research questions. According to the model, transformational leadership positively affects 18.46% towards employee adaptability. However, it can be further observed that the model is over-fit ($R\text{-sq(pred)} < R\text{-sq}$). Therefore, this does not sufficiently support predictions about the population.

Table 6. Multiple Regression Model 2

6.1. Coefficients

Term	Coef	SE Coef	T-Value	P-Value	VIF
Constant	2.693	0.496	5.43	0.000	
Tr. Leadership	2.191	0.565	3.88	0.000	1.00

6.2. Model Summary

S	R-sq	R-sq(adj)	R-sq(pred)
0.473942	19.78%	18.46%	14.04%

6.3. Analysis of Variance

Source	DF	Adj SS	Adj MS	F-Value	P-Value
Regression	1	3.377	3.3775	15.04	0.000
Tr. Leadership	1	3.377	3.3775	15.04	0.000
Error	61	13.702	0.2246		
Lack-of-Fit	52	11.702	0.2250	1.01	0.538
Pure Error	9	2.000	0.2222		
Total	62	17.079			

Source: Author's computation

Additionally, for further understanding each categorical variable included in questionnaire (gender, age and years of experience) alongside transformational leadership were tested with

employee self-reliance through multiple regression. Interestingly the model was found statistically significant ($p < 0.05$) as far as transformational leadership and employees' age were concerned. Accordingly, transformational leadership and age of the employee can control 38.62% of the results of employee's self-reliance. Age category 3 (36-44 years) have a moderately significant positive impact on self-reliance. Self-reliance of this group of employees depend on 3.112 of transformational leadership and 2.016 of other factors.

Table 7. Multiple Regression Model 3

7.1. Regression Equation

Age
3 Self-reliance = 2.016 + 3.112 Tr. Leadership

7.2. Coefficients

Term	Coef	SE Coef	T-Value	P-Value	VIF
Constant	1.601	0.558	2.87	0.006	
Tr. Leadership	3.112	0.637	4.88	0.000	1.06
Age					
2	-0.020	0.167	-0.12	0.907	1.55
3	0.415	0.192	2.17	0.035	1.48
4	0.259	0.239	1.08	0.283	1.32
5	-0.966	0.539	-1.79	0.078	1.06

7.3. Model Summary

S	R-sq	R-sq(adj)	R-sq(pred)
0.519572	43.57%	38.62%	*

7.4. Analysis of Variance

Source	DF	Adj SS	Adj MS	F-Value	P-Value
Regression	5	11.882	2.3765	8.80	0.000
Tr. Leadership	1	6.438	6.4382	23.85	0.000
Age	4	3.097	0.7742	2.87	0.031
Error	57	15.387	0.2700		
Lack-of-Fit	48	13.221	0.2754	1.14	0.446
Pure Error	9	2.167	0.2407		

Source: Author's computation

Cronbach's Alpha for employee resilience scale was passed with 0.8810 ($0.8810 > 0.7$) according to Nunnally's interpretation (Nunnally, 1978). Cronbach's Alpha for transformational leadership scale also exceeded the level of 0.70 ($0.9087 > 0.7$). Thus a high level of internal consistency of each variable can be observed (Nunnally, 1978). Accordingly, this particular test in an overall is reliable.

According to the Grubbs' outlier test, all data values come from the normal population and no outliers were found ($P > 0.05$) (Grubbs et al, 1969).

Table 8. Grubbs' Test.

Variable	N	Mean	StDev	Min	Max	G	P
Emp. Resilience	63	0.8929	0.0802	0.7000	1.0000	2.40	0.888

Source: Author's computation

Discussion and Implications

Discussion of Findings

This study mainly evaluated the impact of transformational leadership in boosting employee resilience amid crisis induced pressure (H1). A strong positive impact of transformational leadership and employee resilience was found at a level of 0.828. Thus, the results accept Hypothesis (H1) and it is conclusive that transformational leadership contributes positively at boosting employee resilience which answers the research question; 'What is the relationship between transformational leadership and employee resilience during crisis?'. Overall, the findings support the model proposed by this research.

These results further validate the statement by Bass (Bass, 1990) on how leadership enhances employees' coping ability towards stress and adversity, as well as findings by Harland (Harland et al, 2005) on influence of leadership behaviours on employee resilience. These findings as well could be helpful for the organization subject to this study, to identify and analyze their employees' requirements better to utilize that analysis towards future improvements. However, it is a fact worthy of discussion that the constructs and variables utilized in this study would be undoubtedly backed by hidden factors such as the nature of dyadic individual relationships between leader and a subordinate in particular.

The proposed research questions (Does transformational leadership attributes enhance employee adaptability during stressful events? and does transformational leadership build up employee self-reliance) in this study were statistically evaluated for further analysis. Moreover, questions basing demographic factors that were included in the questionnaire were also utilized for additional analysis. Nonetheless these analyses did not generate sound outputs, presumably owing to the reason of lacking adequate data.

Implications

It is ideal to carry out further studies with reference to other organizational factors affecting employee resilience besides transformational leadership. Because, the study shows transformational leadership controls employee resilience up to a specific level (68.51%) and still there is an influence of other factors up to 31.49% as per the study. Examples of such other factors could be different work specific challenges employees face subjective to their job role or team efficacy. Furthermore, as specified by the research questions of this study, future research

on how transformational leadership affect employee adaptability and self-reliance can be investigated with a proper scale for solid findings.

Furthermore, this particular research is centered on a specific organization. Therefore, the same research could be further established by a similar future research assessing multiple data sources with a larger scope.

Conclusion

This study investigates the relationship between transformational leadership and employee resilience during organizational setbacks. The research is distinguished with special reference to recent Covid-19 epidemic that imposed organizational challenges that are unique in nature. The population consists employees of a specific Sri Lankan organization in the tourism sector, a sector that has been most vulnerable at the face of crisis. While findings display significant potential relationships, this research also explores and extends existing knowledge based on transformational leadership and employee resilience.

However, it should be noted that the results may be subjected to an unavoidable level of biasness owing to the self-reported survey system. The study is focused on a relatively limited scope owing to constraints of time and financial resources which may draw a line on the level of external validity.

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