Transformational Leadership and Work Engagement: The Moderating Role of Intrinsic Motivation

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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

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Abstract

We examine the moderating role of intrinsic motivation in the relationship between transformational leadership and work engagement. In a sample of 168 tourism and hospitality employees in the quantitative section, Study 1, we found that the highest level of work engagement is identified when the level of intrinsic motivation is highest. Intrinsically motivated employees then exhibit engaged behaviors at work. In Study 2, we opted for a descriptive design to better understand the findings of Study 1, using interviews with three experts and a three-phase coding analysis. We found that increasing intrinsic motivation further promotes engaged work behavior. This article provides insight into the benefit of intrinsic motivation on work engagement and offers practical guidance to tourism and hospitality stakeholders by demonstrating how intrinsic motivation functions as an essential management concept in adapting after the coronavirus pandemic.

Introduction

According to Gallup, only 15% of employees worldwide are engaged in the workplace, and the job of leaders is to ask employees the right questions and create conditions that foster engagement (Royal, 2019). The tourism economy worldwide was hurt the most during the coronavirus pandemic in 2020 and 2021, and it was one of the first to be affected by the pandemic. According to Gursoy and Chi (2020), the worldwide outbreak of COVID-19 influenced the research strategies in the hospitality and tourism industry. Despite the unique characteristics of the hospitality industry (e.g., the seasonal component), hospitality professionals often discover new leadership opportunities from their experiences with employees and followers and initiate their actions

to maintain employee engagement. Drawing on the existing scientific research on the studied concepts, we observed how intrinsic motivation moderates this relationship in the Croatian tourism economy, as its economic environment is heavily dependent on tourism and the hospitality industry. Although employees' behaviors are influenced by contextual factors, their perceived importance of specific tasks plays a significant role, highlighting the need to better understand the moderating effect of intrinsic motivation (Shafi et al., 2020).

Different approaches to leadership impact employee engagement at the workplace in different ways (Breevaart et al., 2014). Shu (2015) showed that authoritarian leadership is negatively linked to employee work engagement, while authentic leadership is positively linked to work engagement. Employee

engagement is closely related to their innovative behaviors in the studied sector, which outlines the value of an engaged workforce (Kim & Koo, 2017; Vithayaporn & Ashton, 2019). Previous studies implicitly assume a positive correlation between transformational leadership and work engagement (Amor et al., 2020; Cavazotte et al., 2020; Ghadi et al., 2013; Hayati et al., 2014; Salanova et al., 2011). Chalofsky and Krishna (2009) provided theoretical support for intrinsic motivation in predicting worker engagement. The research findings of Walker et al. (2006) show that the moderating effect of intrinsic motivation positively contributes to work engagement. From a theoretical perspective, most relevant studies have been conducted in traditional organizational settings.

In this study, we go beyond the classical context and turn to the contemporary leadership approach by exploring the transformational leadership style, taking into account the harsh reality of the hospitality industry, which is unable to find sufficient and committed workers, especially after the recent pandemic, due to the fear of infection, losing jobs, and the seasonal component of the Croatian tourism economy sector (Bajrami et al., 2021). This study aims to contribute to contemporary leadership styles, such as the transformational leadership style, in an attempt to help find enough committed and engaged employees in the tourism and hospitality sector, which is currently considered a research gap in existing tourism and hospitality literature (Arasli & Arici, 2019). Based on the work of Shu (2015), we extended the existing literature by proposing to explore transformational leadership as it is commonly practiced in the hospitality industry, as previous research on transformational leadership in the Croatian hospitality industry has shown that it is prevalent and the most commonly used leadership style (Walker & Kužnin, 2018). It is clear that to improve employee engagement in the studied sector, tourism and hospitality entities need an improved knowledge of practical leadership tools (Slåtten & Mehmetoglu, 2011). In terms of work engagement, an increased fear of losing jobs was evident during the recent pandemic, which in turn negatively impacted work engagement and similarly increased turnover intentions (Jung et al., 2021).

The theoretical contribution of our work is to enhance the existing knowledge of our research model by highlighting the importance of intrinsic motivation in the selected Croatian sector. First, our paper improves on the existing academic insights on transformational leadership and its interactive position in promoting work engagement, particularly by focusing on the moderating role of intrinsic motivation. Second, it extends the framework of the studied research model by introducing transforma-

tional leadership in promoting work engagement at the individual level in the studied Croatian sector. Third, it responds to the call for an investigation of how intrinsic motivation contributes to the recovery of the studied sector during and after coronavirus pandemics. The overall major contributions of our research can be highlighted in the fact that our empirical results confirm that employee engagement in practice depends on transformational leadership behavior within the tourism and hospitality context. In addition, our results support the claim that intrinsic motivation indeed has a moderating effect, as the highest levels of work engagement are achieved when the level of intrinsic motivation is highest. Another major contribution of our research lies in the practical implications for managers in the tourism and hospitality sector about what they can do to foster engaged work behaviors in practice, where one suggestion is that they need to lead by example.

We employed mixed methods research to investigate our research model. In Study 1, we analyzed survey data using quantitative research methods, specifically hierarchical linear regression. This was followed by Study 2, which involved in-depth interviews analyzed using a three-phase coding procedure. The main objective was to answer the following question: does the moderating effect in our research model exist, and if so, is it positive? We wanted to better understand the hospitality- and tourism-specific environment, characterized by a vital seasonal component of workers, difficulties in finding competent workers, and the strong impact of the recent pandemic.

1 Theoretical background and hypotheses

1.1 Work engagement

Kahn (1990) understands *work engagement* as connecting organizational true selves to their work functions through the assignation of workers by practicing their own physical, cognitive, and emotional intelligence while working. Christian et al. (2011,2014) defined it as a relatively lasting state of mind focusing on investing in individual vitalities while working. Workers who show a higher level of engagement show a strong relationship with their tasks while perceiving them as challenging (Bakker et al., 2014). The two essential characteristics of work engagement are high determination with tasks, identification with work, and abundance of individual vitality (Bakker et al., 2014). In recent years, contemporary literature has highlighted and drawn attention to the importance of engagement at work. Work engagement is explored in the service context because it has particular

relevance for service organizations (Chandni & Rahman, 2020).

Work engagement is crucial for employees' outcomes (Harter et al., 2002), as engagement of employees in the hospitality industry can lead to improved service quality, guest satisfaction, and, finally, greater competitiveness in the industry. According to a Gallup study, engaged employees in the hospitality industry are 17% more productive, 21% more profitable, and have 10% better customer ratings than their disengaged counterparts (Schaufeli, 2013). Indeed, quite a few academic papers have studied the importance of work engagement in the hospitality industry from theoretical and practical standpoints. These studies demonstrate that the importance of work engagement in the hospitality industry is relevant due to identified characteristics of the hospitality industry, namely service quality, customer interactions, seasonal components, and the impact of employee attitudes on guest satisfaction. The study of Rich et al. (2010) sheds light on the antecedents of job engagement and its effects on job performance, enabling the comprehension of the role of work engagement in the hospitality sector. In their paper, Kusluvan et al. (2010) elaborated on the important role of work engagement in the hospitality sector for the provision of service quality.

According to Bakker and Demerouti (2008), contingency and individual factors are crucial for predicting work engagement. Within contingency factors, Christian et al. (2011,2014) pointed out job resources (e.g., autonomy at work, diversity of tasks and its importance for the organization, problem-solving, complexity of tasks, social capital at work, coaching, performance feedback, psychical demands, and work conditions) as key job characteristics and crucial predictors of work engagement because such characteristics help employees achieve their job targets, support career and individual development, as well as decrease task workloads. They identified transformational leadership as an important job resource that affects work engagement.

In addition to the situational factors, individual factors, namely personality type, can affect work engagement (Albrecht, 2010). Mäkikangas et al. (2013) identified extraversion as a critical personality type relating to higher work engagement, along with emotional stability and conscientiousness. Those findings align with the results of Christian et al. (2011,2014). They identified the positive effects of having a proactive personality and being conscientious, self-efficacious, and optimistic, in addition to job assets. The research evidence of Bakker et al. (2014) divides work engagement outcomes into two groups: job-related outcomes and motivational outcomes. Within the

latter, scientists relate work engagement to improved healthiness (Seppälä et al., 2012) and encouraging feelings (Rodríguez-Muñoz et al., 2014). Employees who are more engaged are also more proactive and willing to learn (Bakker et al., 2012).

Those insights are in line with the findings of Halbesleben and Wheeler (2008), as well as the findings of Salanova et al. (2011), who showed evidence of a positive connection between work engagement and organizational performance.

1.2 Transformational leadership

Burns (1978), a political sociologist, first introduced transformational leadership as a leadership approach in his seminal book *Leadership*. Subsequently, Bass (1999) laid the foundation for transformational leadership theory. Four key behaviors characterize transformational leaders: they demonstrate idealized influence by exemplifying what they say and gaining trust; they motivate by communicating compelling visions and helping their employees understand how their work contributes to their realization; they stimulate intellectually by creating a safe environment that encourages their workers to run the risks and question the existing status; and they show individual consideration by understanding the needs of others and supporting them accordingly (Colbert et al., 2008).

Bass and Riggio (2006) also identified four facets of transformational leadership, namely (1) idealized influence, (2) inspirational motivation, (3) intellectual stimulation, and (4) individualized consideration, and each of those predicts a positive effect on work engagement. Transformational leaders act as role models and are therefore respected by their followers, which shows the idealized influence facet, as workers who see their leaders as role models are more prone to be engaged in their work (Eisenbeiss et al., 2008). The crucial driver of work engagement is inspirational motivation, which stimulates workers to achieve set goals by offering a sense of purpose and meaning in the work (Saks, 2006). Employees who are encouraged to think critically and innovatively tackle problems are more devoted to being engaged at work (Bakker et al., 2011). Transformational leaders acknowledge and act upon the individual followers' needs, which ascribes a sense of appreciation and understanding among workers, which is in turn positively associated with work engagement (Wright & Cropanzano, 1998).

Transformational leaders develop an appealing vision, emphasize innovation, serve as role models, and respond individually to their employees (Bass & Avolio, 1995). They encourage their followers to

evaluate the existing position and challenge beliefs and values to innovate and develop solutions (Aryee et al., 2012; Bass et al., 2003). They also aim to implement new work methods, flows, and structures to achieve lasting profits and help their employees seize opportunities. The usefulness of transformational leadership in stimulating employee outcomes has already been demonstrated (Dvir et al., 2002). In line with its ability to inspire and motivate employees, it fits well with the unique requests of the service and hospitality industry, which emphasizes guest satisfaction and service quality (Wong et al., 2013).

The connection between transformational leadership and work engagement is well-researched. Cavazotte et al. (2020) claim transformational leadership is an essential factor for service management because it promotes commitment and satisfaction and positively influences organizational outcomes. Salanova et al. (2011) showed that it supports nurses' work engagement in a positive manner. Hayati et al. (2014) confirmed a positive connection between the above concepts among nurses in government hospitals in a descriptive, correlational, cross-sectional study based on 240 surveys. Ghadi et al. (2013) showcased that transformational leadership influenced followers' work engagement attributes and that employees' perceptions of the importance of work act as a mediator in this relationship. Amor et al. (2020) also reported a positive connection between transformational leadership and work engagement based on self-reports from 240 tourism employees in northwest Spain. Arasli and Arici (2019) claim it is crucial to deepen our understanding of effective leadership styles and their impact on employees in the tourism sector.

Therefore, we propose the following hypothesis:

H1. *Transformational leadership impacts employees' level of work engagement positively.*

1.3 Intrinsic motivation as a moderating mechanism

Ryan and Deci (2000, p. 54) state that "to be motivated" implies "to move toward something." However, there is no single definition of motivation. Intrinsic motivation has often been conceptualized as a time-based condition or experience that indicates a contingency factor impact on personal behaviors (Tu & Lu, 2016) and is perceived as a crucial element of work engagement (Deci & Ryan, 2013). It refers to acting out of personal desire to achieve personally valued goals, in contrast to external motivation, which refers to acting in line with the external stimulus (Ryan & Deci, 2000). The concept of intrinsic motivation was first observed in the experimental

study of animal behavior (White, 1959). Intrinsic motivation is found in individuals and exists in the relationship between individuals and specific activities (but not all activities). Some definitions focus on the tasks being interesting, and others on the satisfying personal gain from completing the intrinsically motivated tasks (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Intrinsic motivation must not be misunderstood as external motivation, which is characterized by workers driven by external rewards, nor as amotivation, which occurs when workers experience a lack of motivation (Vallerand, 1997). It is crucial for comprehension of the multifaceted interplay between transformational leadership and work engagement. In addition, distinguishing the boundary conditions, for example, the level of intrinsic motivation, is crucial for an operationalization of the moderating effect of the work engagement on the relationship between transformational leadership and work engagement, as it allows leaders to build customized interventions to optimize work engagement.

Putra et al. (2017) found that intrinsic motivation is vital in improving employee work engagement in the tourism sector and plays a vital role as an antecedent in predicting work engagement. They advised managers to create a pleasant work environment and interesting tasks to increase intrinsic motivation and engagement. Shu (2015) discovered that the authoritarian theory of leadership was negatively correlated to followers' work engagement when controlling for obedience, while authentic-based leadership had a positive relationship to work engagement. Using an example from the finance industry, Karatepe et al. (2019) found that motivated employees are more likely to develop novel solutions to existing challenges and suggest future practical actions to address challenges, which also contributes to overall service improvement.

Therefore, the effect of transformational leadership on work engagement should be different under varying conditions of intrinsic motivation, namely high or low level of intrinsic motivation. When a worker has a high level of intrinsic motivation, transformational leadership may act as a catalyst for increasing the level of work engagement, as the worker's individual values are aligned with the with the leader's inspirational vision and their supportive actions (Deci & Ryan, 2013). In contrast, individual workers who have low intrinsic motivation experience less influence of transformational leadership on work engagement, as their intrinsic drive to get involved in the work is limited. By studying the interaction between intrinsic motivation and transformational leadership, a more nuanced perspective on the mechanisms that underlie work engagement is gained, which allows the

development of tailored strategies for individual workers, depending on their personal level of intrinsic motivation.

Based on the above, we expect that transformational leadership plays a promising role in promoting work engagement among employees when mediated by higher rates of intrinsic motivation. Analogically, workers with lower rates of intrinsic motivation are associated with lower work engagement, as they do not have the confidence to engage at work, which could lead to a demotivating state. Low intrinsic motivation is expected to be less effective.

We hypothesize that high levels of intrinsic motivation may promote work engagement. Consequently:

H2. *Intrinsic motivation acts as a moderator in the connection between transformational leadership and work engagement.*

When employees' intrinsic motivation is high, the described connection in a described relationship is more favorable than when intrinsic motivation is low.

2 Methodology

Our research was structured as a mixed methods approach to generate extensive results that enable researchers to elaborate more precise conclusions with higher reliability (Jogulu & Pansiri, 2011; Stentz et al., 2012). We collected our data in two phases; the first was quantitative, and in the second phase, we collected the data for a confirmatory qualitative analysis. Our combination of quantitative and qualitative data enabled us to better understand our research problem, constructs, and complex phenomena (Molina-Azorin & Cameron, 2010), enhancing our results' credibility (Jack & Raturi, 2006). More specifically, we opted for an explanatory sequential design to gain further insight into the quantitative phase of our research, followed by qualitative interviews (Hayes et al., 2013).

2.1 Quantitative research design

2.1.1 Sample characteristics and the process of collecting data

We utilized an adapted in-person questionnaire that enabled us to collect primary data from our respondents. Questionnaires were sent to be filled out by tourism and hospitality personnel (who studied at the University of Rijeka, Faculty of Tourism and Hospitality Management in Opatija, Croatia) with at least one authentic employment experience in the tourism and hospitality industry as managers or employees. Given the difficult circumstances, the attractiveness

of pursuing and building a career in the hospitality and tourism sector is significantly hindered due to the global pandemic (Birtch et al., 2021). The retention of existing employees and the ability to attract future employees (who are now students) is expected to gain recognition in the very near future. Out of 217 delivered questionnaires, we collected 168 valid responses, which represents a 77% response rate. There were 217 graduate students (106 full-time and 111 part-time students). We approached every student, and we received 168 valid responses. In case of any misunderstanding, the respondents were able to ask for clarifications and additional explanations. In order to attract participants to engage in our survey, we assured them that the survey was voluntary and that their identity would remain hidden. Surveys were completed in paper form.

The majority of our respondents (167 respondents) originated from Croatia. The largest share of employees (88.4%) was from non-managerial positions. More than half of our respondents (54.6%) had worked in their organization for more than 1 year. Almost half (46.6%) of our respondents had worked with their immediate superior for more than 1 year. The majority of our respondents (91.1%) belonged to the age group from 21 to 30 years. The largest share of respondents (70.2%) had successfully finished a master's degree, and 78.4% of the respondents were women. The high percentage of female respondents reflects the fact that the researched industry is a women-dominated sector in Croatia, accompanied by the fact that the majority of students are women.

As data for all of the variables in our proposed researched model were obtained from individuals at one point in time, we acknowledge that common method bias might have an impact on some of the proposed relationships in our hypothesized model. To examine the potential negative impact of common method bias, we opted to apply Harman's (1976) single-factor test. Results show that our first factor accumulates 56.6% of the overall variance. Such a result is above the threshold (50.0%) proposed by Podsakoff et al. (2006) and indicates that common method bias might have an influence on certain relationships that were analyzed in the quantitative part of our research. To overcome it and assure verisimilitude, we also conducted the qualitative part of the study, which further refined our thinking, allowing us to regularly compare multiple types of data.

2.1.2 Measures

For the constructs researched in our paper, we utilized measurement instruments commonly used and validated in numerous scientific papers. The instruments satisfy three criteria: (a) they are recognized

and used by prominent authors of the studied topics; (b) they are commonly cited in established scientific journals; (c) they are used in contemporary research. In our research, we applied a 7-point Likert scale (1—strongly disagree; 7—strongly agree) for transformational leadership and intrinsic motivation and a 7-point Likert scale (1—never; 7—always) for work engagement. Such scales enabled us to determine the level of agreement of individual respondents with items intended to measure the level of our researched constructs.

Transformational leadership. We used the 20-item scale (α = .92) that Bass and Avolio (1997) and Colbert et al. (2008) developed to measure transformational leadership. Examples of statements are "My supervisor talks about the most important values and beliefs" and "My supervisor spends time teaching and coaching."

Intrinsic motivation. We opted for the 12-item scale (α = .97) that Van Yperen and Hagedoorn (2003) developed to examine intrinsic motivation. Examples of statements are "I do my job for the pleasure I feel while learning new things in my job" and "I do my job because I feel pleasant in my job."

Work engagement. We utilized the 17-item scale (α = .94) that Salanova et al. (2005) developed to measure work engagement. Examples of statements are "When I get up in the morning, I feel like going to work" and "I am proud of the work I do."

Control variables. Education and gender were included as control variables. We opted to include control variables in our research because including or excluding them can have an important impact on research results (Bernerth & Aguinis, 2016). Prior studies have documented that education has an influence on work engagement (Coetzee & Rothmann, 2005). Previous studies have also examined the influence of gender differences on the level of work engagement, where Gallup's research indicates that women can find more gratification in their work and, consequently, can be more engaged than males (Gulzar & Teli, 2018). Further, the study of academic staff in higher education showed that female representatives of academia expressed higher engagement with their jobs as compared to their male counterparts.

2.1.3 Methods

Hierarchical linear regression was performed to analyze our primary data and proposed interaction effects. In addition, we conducted a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) using lavaan (Rosseel, 2012) in the R programming environment. We applied CFA to ensure that the proposed model appropriately fit our data. In the next step, we analyzed the convergent validity by analyzing factor loadings for all statements included in the questionnaire to gain insight into their statistical significance as Hair et al. (1998) had proposed with their .50 threshold. CFA results show that factor loadings in all three cases of our constructs were statistically significant and in line with the proposed threshold of Hair et al. (1998). Our results further strengthen the convergent validity of all proposed constructs. The standardized loadings for transformational leadership ranged from .50 to .80, for intrinsic motivation from .76 to .87, and for work engagement from .53 to .86. In the iterative process of purifying our scale, we removed three items in the measurement variable of transformational leadership because their standardized loadings were below the recommended .50 threshold. In our final model, 46 statements in the questionnaire were included to measure our three constructs.

To test composite reliability, we calculated the composite reliability index (CRI) and the average variance extracted (AVE) (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). In the interpretation of our results, we followed Diamantopoulous and Siguaw's (2000) proposition that researchers should be content with CRI results that are above the recommended .60 thresholds[1]. We also followed Diamantopoulous and Siguaw's (2000) proposition regarding a threshold for AVE of .40. All three proposed constructs were within the proposed CRI and AVE threshold values. CFA results (expected three-factor solution) intended to evaluate model fit displayed the following results: CFI = .92; χ^2 = 1,401.699; root-mean-square error of approximation (RMSEA) = .06; df = 912, thus indicating good model fit with the data collected.

2.2 Qualitative research design: Sample characteristics and the process of collecting data

The second phase of data collection consisted of interviews with three experts from the hospitality and tourism industry. The open-ended questions were as follows: (a) What is your opinion on the recovery

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[1] Notes: CRI: Transformational Leadership .92, Intrinsic Motivation .96, and Work Engagement .94.
AVE: Transformational Leadership .41, Intrinsic Motivation .69, and Work Engagement .48.
Within construct items, residuals were allowed to correlate. Without those modifications, the results of the model fit with data collected are: CFI = .74, χ^2 = 2,796.537, RMSEA = .09, and df = 1124.

Table 1. Mean values, standard deviations and correlations.

Variable	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5
Education	4.70	0.46	–				
Gender	1.78	0.41	.07	–			
Transformational leadership	5.03	0.99	.03	.04	(.92)		
Work engagement	4.24	1.22	.03	.12	.35**	(.94)	
Intrinsic motivation	5.06	1.38	.06	.05	.33**	.77**	(.97)

Note: $n = 168$ employees from Croatia. Reliability indicators (Cronbach's alphas) are on the diagonal in the parentheses. **$p < .01$.

of the Croatian tourism and hospitality industry in relation to the coronavirus? (b) What would be the key factors for speeding up the recovery? (c) What is the role of human resources in the recovery process? (d) Do you find the motivation and work engagement of employees in the tourism and hospitality industry important for future recovery? (e) What do you think managers should do to stimulate employees' intrinsic motivation and work engagement? We employed a systematic three-phase coding procedure to scrutinize the transcriptions of the gathered qualitative data. In the initial phase, we established first-order categories and presented illustrative data by meticulously analyzing and summarizing discrete segments of the dataset. The next phase involved delineating second-order themes to connect with categories arising from the initial illustrative data, while the third phase involved expounding upon aggregate dimensions. In coding and classifying the collected data, we systematically sought keywords within sentences that indicated the phenomena under investigation, adhering to a coding scheme developed through a comprehensive comparison of the collected primary data and an in-depth theoretical review. The identified themes informed our categorization of the coded structure, as outlined in Table 2. To ensure the reliability of the coding procedure, researchers independently coded the interview data. In instances of disagreement, thorough discussions ensued until a consensus was reached. Throughout the qualitative analysis design, electronic research memos were maintained, containing generated observations and

additional technical data. The analysis underwent scrutiny by field experts to validate its external credibility, and final authorization was obtained through this rigorous process. More specifically, the trustworthiness of the study was assured by our engagement of field experts from the tourism and hospitality industry, namely an established professor (male; 65 years old; 35 years of experience in studying and teaching tourism and hospitality), a travel agency manager (female; 41 years old; 15 years of experience managing a travel agency business), and a hotel director/manager (male; 44 years old; 25 years of experience in tourism and hospitality, of which 15 as a hotel director). Our use of mixed research methods drawing on multiple and diverse sources and our experience in the field helped to assure verisimilitude between the data and our interpretation.

3 Study 1 results: Quantitative analysis

3.1 Descriptive statistics

Table 1 presents the results of descriptive statistics related to our researched constructs. On average. intrinsic motivation received the best evaluation (5.06), followed closely by transformational leadership (5.03), while work engagement received the lowest evaluation (4.24). Correlation coefficients relevant for measured variables in our research were moderately or strongly positive (from .33 to .77). There was a significant positive correlation between

Table 2. Hierarchical regression analysis predicting work engagement—Models 1 and 2.

Variables	Model 1				Model 2			
	b	SE	ß	t	b	SE	ß	t
Education	−0.04	0.14	−.01	−0.27	−0.03	0.14	−.01	−0.22
Gender	0.24	0.16	.08	1.53	0.22	0.16	.08	1.44
C_TL	0.14	0.07	.11	0.05*	0.16	0.07	.13	0.03*
C_IM	0.64	0.05	.72	12.75**	0.64	0.05	.73	13.04**
C_TLxC_IM					0.11	0.04	.14	0.01*
R^2	.604				.622			
$F(df)$	51.51 (138)				45.00 (137)			
ΔR^2	0.604				0.018			

*$p < .05$; **$p < .01$.

transformational leadership and work engagement (.35; $p < .01$) and between transformational leadership and intrinsic motivation (.33; $p < .01$). Work engagement displayed a significant positive correlation with intrinsic motivation (.77; $p < .01$). Control variables did not show any significant correlations. The 95% confidence interval for the mean for the interaction between transformational leadership and intrinsic motivation was .2152 (lower bound) and .6935 (upper bound).

3.2 Hypotheses testing

Within our research, we tested the direct relationship between transformational leadership and work engagement, as expressed in Hypothesis 1. We included intrinsic motivation as a moderating mechanism, as expressed in Hypothesis 2. We applied a hierarchical linear regression analysis using centered variables to examine our hypotheses. In our first regression model (Model 1), we included two control variables with transformational leadership as the independent variable. In our second model (Model 2), we entered a two-way interaction (Transformational Leadership × Intrinsic Motivation). The results are presented in Table 2.

In Model 1, we found a positive and significant relationship between transformational leadership (β = .11; exact $p = .048$) and work engagement. Our data provide empirical support for Hypothesis 1. Model 2, which was intended to test intrinsic motivation as a moderating mechanism of transformational leadership and work engagement, showed some added value with our direct effect model (ΔR^2 when comparing Model 2 with Model 1). Results gained from Model 2 showed a significant positive relationship between the two-way interaction of transformational leadership and intrinsic motivation with work engagement (β = .14; exact $p = .012$). The analysis of the simple slope, which is also intended as a graphical representation of the model, suggests it is significant (exact $p = .001$). The interaction between transformational leadership and intrinsic motivation as they influence work engagement is displayed in Fig. 1.

Based on the results (see Fig. 1), the highest levels of work engagement are visible in the case when the levels of intrinsic motivation are the highest. Intrinsically motivated employees will then exhibit engaged behavior at the workplace. The relevance of transformational leadership for engaged behavior is illustrated by high levels of intrinsic motivation. In this example, higher levels of transformational leadership encourage higher levels of work engagement. Hypothesis 2 states intrinsic motivation moderates the relationship between transformational leadership
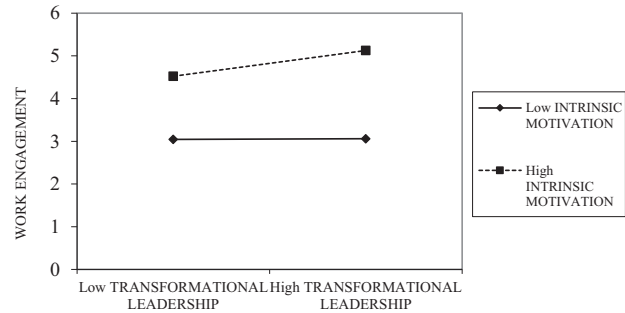

Fig. 1. Interaction between transformational leadership and intrinsic motivation in influencing work engagement.

and work engagement in such a way that the effect of transformational leadership is stronger if the level of intrinsic motivation is higher. The higher the levels of transformational leadership, the more intrinsic motivation contributes to a higher level of engaged work behavior. When intrinsic motivation is low, employees will exhibit lower levels of work engagement, regardless of the level of transformational leadership.

4 Study 2 results: Qualitative analysis

In our qualitative analysis, we discerned evidence indicating that transformational leadership, coupled with intrinsic motivation, serves as a catalyst for enhancing employee work engagement (Table 3). This study underscores pivotal concepts that possess the capacity to redefine our research domain. We posit that cultivating and fortifying the nexus with intrinsic motivation holds significant promise for organizations within the hospitality and tourism industry, along with other service sectors, facilitating the cultivation of a workforce characterized by heightened levels of engagement.

5 Discussion

5.1 Theoretical contributions

The existing scientific literature on transformational leadership and motivation theories leads us to propose that maintaining and strengthening the relationship with intrinsic motivation can help hospitality and tourism organizations employ work-ready employees. It is of great importance for hospitality workers to be engaged and offer high-quality services. We argued that the correlation in our research model depends on the intrinsic motivation that followers may experience. We found that an increase in intrinsic motivation would further promote engaged work behavior. In contrast, organizations with lower

Table 3. The three-phase coding.

First-order categories and illustrative data	Second-order themes	Aggregate dimension
"As in any business, and especially in tourism and hospitality, human resources are key. Everything else (e.g., space, equipment, facilities...) is implied." (Expert 1) "People are still the core of tourism, and the future development of the current situation will depend largely on our ability to recognize the time ahead, that is, the time after the crisis caused by the pandemic, and to use all the quality human resources to find new solutions and to start developing strategies for the years already coming. Among other resources that we abound in, our staff is our strength that we must not neglect in these difficult times." (Expert 2) "All of our team members are aware of the impact of people in tourism, and I am sure that we will all make our maximum contribution to pass through this period as painlessly as possible and prepare ourselves properly for the tourism that follows." (Expert 2) "The role of human resources in the process of recovering and adopting a new 'sustainability model' is huge and irreplaceable. This role is most relevant for the new approach of extending the tourism paradigm of sustainable management that will study the risk of overtourism and its impact on overall sustainability. The model also refers to measuring residents' life satisfaction in a destination, which can help destination management organizations (DMOs) and management companies to reduce negative and increase positive tourism impacts, according to the sustainable and responsible tourism paradigm." (Expert 3) "However, the role of employees in tourism and hospitality, at the level of direct services and contact with the guest and the market, remains irreplaceable." (Expert 3) "First, they have to answer the questions of what the market and the guests expect from them, and then the question of what the destination where they operate expects from them. This requires continuous monitoring and control (from annual, monthly to weekly basis) of the predefined developmental and business goals, as well as the maximum material and moral stimulation of employees and their work engagement in pursuing these high expectations." (Expert 3)	Human resources are key	Work engagement
"Appropriate motivation and work engagement are key to recovery in every segment of the business." (Expert 1) "Motivation and work engagement of employees are of the utmost importance for the postcrisis period." (Expert 2)	Intrinsic and external motivation	Work engagement
"In each situation, ... there should be traces of optimism." (Expert 2) "The role of human resources in the process of recovering and adopting a new 'sustainability model' is huge and irreplaceable. This role is most relevant for the new approach of extending the tourism paradigm of sustainable management that will study the risk of overtourism and its impact on overall sustainability. The model also refers to measuring residents' life satisfaction in a destination, which can help destination management organizations (DMOs) and management companies to reduce negative and increase positive tourism impacts, according to the sustainable and responsible tourism paradigm." (Expert 3)	Idealized influence	Transformational leadership
"Therefore, we should encourage all employees to work together in planning new solutions and offers in order to be ready to respond to new challenges." (Expert 2)	Inspirational motivation	Transformational leadership
"The fact is that employee salaries make up a large share of costs now, but the tourism strategy is long-term oriented, and in these difficult times, we need to think about the future and the time when all these employees will continue to give their maximum engagement." (Expert 2) "The role of human resources in the process of recovering and adopting a new 'sustainability model' is huge and irreplaceable. This role is most relevant for the new approach of extending the tourism paradigm of sustainable management that will study the risk of overtourism and its impact on overall sustainability. The model also refers to measuring residents' life satisfaction in a destination, which can help destination management organizations (DMOs) and management companies to reduce negative and increase positive tourism impacts, according to the sustainable and responsible tourism paradigm." (Expert 3) "Many destinations are becoming aware of their market position, and where this can lead (i.e., to overtourism), so they want to actively make decisions and laws to regulate the tourism development. Their efforts refer to both the supply side (urban, tax, and municipal policy) as well as the demand side by limiting the number of tourists in the destination while raising the quality level and excellence in tourism services and destinations." (Expert 3)	Shared vision	Transformational leadership

Table 3. (continued)

First-order categories and illustrative data	Second-order themes	Aggregate dimension
"The fact is that employee salaries make up a large share of costs now, but the tourism strategy is long-term oriented, and in these difficult times, we need to think about the future and the time when all these employees will continue to give their maximum engagement." (Expert 2)	Intellectual stimulation	Transformational leadership
"First, they have to answer the questions of what the market and the guests expect from them, and then the question of what the destination where they operate expects from them. This requires continuous monitoring and control (from annual, monthly to weekly basis) of the predefined developmental and business goals, as well as the maximum material and moral stimulation of employees and their work engagement in pursuing these high expectations." (Expert 3)		

levels of intrinsically motivated employees are predicted to employ engaged workers and managers to a lesser degree.

Our findings add to the scientific discussion on transformational leadership in two ways, which can be defined as our theoretical contribution. First, the results confirm that employee engagement depends on transformational leadership attitudes, especially in the context of tourism and hospitality. Salanova et al. (2011) and Hayati et al. (2014) have shown that transformational leadership emphasizes the potential of employee engagement to achieve excellence and guest satisfaction in the studied sector, which our study additionally confirms with contemporary empirical data. With our research, we can also extend the theoretical foundations of transformational leadership in the tourism and hospitality sector, as highlighted by Shu (2015). With our study, we can add to contemporary leadership approaches such as transformational leadership style in an attempt to help find enough committed and engaged employees in the sector, with which we are also able to partially fill the theoretical gap found in existing tourism and hospitality literature as indicated by Arasli and Arici (2019). Similarly, we add to the body of literature that acknowledges the necessity of an improved knowledge of leadership tools such as transformational leadership in the tourism and hospitality sector (Slåtten & Mehmetoglu, 2011).

Second, our study sheds light on the correlation in our research model by highlighting the moderating effect of intrinsic motivation. Unlike most studies that analyze moderating perspectives, such as motivational aspects (Deci & Ryan, 2013), our study provides a different perspective by examining the moderator at different levels in promoting work engagement. We note that intrinsic motivation in the hospitality, tourism, and service sector environments represents significant aspects in the literature. Our qualitative section is a response to the current but limited literature on the impact of the recent pandemic on work engagement in the studied sector. The future

of the tourism sector in Croatia will be characterized by the social complexity of relationships between managers and employees to create social communication that supports intrinsic motivation in order to increase work engagement and achieve sustainable development.

5.2 Practical implications

The first practical implication raises the question of what transformational leaders can do to foster engaged work behaviors. Based on the research findings, transformational leaders should foster intrinsic motivation in their employees, first and foremost, by leading by example. Transformational leaders must lead by example by being intrinsically motivated, which is reflected in the studied moderator and stimulates their work engagement.

Second, leaders should also design and implement human resource management (HRM) practices. This is especially important in times of recovery from the coronavirus pandemic, characterized by lockdowns, social distancing, wearing masks, and other protective measures (Prentice et al., 2021).

Third, leaders should be aware of the positive relationship between studied constructs in our research model, as leaders who practice higher levels of transformational leadership have a more relevant influence on their workers' work engagement. We suggest that leaders engage in and implement the processes of self-development to sustain advanced levels of transformational leadership.

Fourth, leaders, especially those who exhibit lower levels of intrinsic motivation, should identify or revisit their inner strengths and desires to achieve advanced levels of intrinsic motivation, leading to increased leader work engagement. It is assumed that this process will contribute to higher guest satisfaction, which will translate into an improved bottom line. There are also practical implications for hiring practices, as companies are more likely to hire intrinsically motivated managers and personnel in the

studied sector because they are more engaged (Grant, 2008).

5.3 Limitations and avenues for future research

This paper should be read with specific drawbacks in mind despite the contributions mentioned above. The first limitation relates to the fact that our data prevents us from making conclusive causal statements about the direction of the hypothesized relationships. This problem is somewhat mitigated by the fact that the hypothesized relationships are based on organizational behavior theory, whereas the analytical techniques used (i.e., regression models) are common in management. Although we examined a diverse sample of participants from the hospitality and tourism sectors, our findings may be culturally biased. Future research should include longitudinal or experimental studies that could rule out alternative explanations.

The second limitation is that different methods could be used to improve the understanding of the lasting influence of the coronavirus pandemic on labor engagement in the studied sector, which future studies could explore.

The third drawback is related to self-reporting, known as common method bias. Meta-analyses suggest that using data collection strategies based on self-reports allows researchers to capture a broader range of such behaviors. We addressed this by collecting inputs in three stages to be able to explore the research variables at different time points. By having two parallel data collection and analysis processes in which we sought expert opinion, we attempted to overcome the common method bias of the quantitative portion.

Another starting point for future research could be considering institutional and cross-country differences related to idiosyncratic tourism conditions and country-specific criteria. Future research could focus on individual constructs of transformational leadership, namely idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individual consideration in relation to individual factors of the multi-layered concept of work engagement, which include vitality, dedication, and absorption, as this holds significant promise to enrich the body of knowledge regarding more in-depth insight into the relationship between transformational leadership and work engagement. In addition, we encourage future researchers to conduct empirical testing of alternative concepts, such as job involvement with subcomponents such as vigor and dedication, as it could add value to the overall research proposition and could rule out alternative explanations related to the results of this research.

6 Conclusion

Work engagement in the studied sector has been increasingly researched in recent years (e.g., Kim & Koo, 2017; Shafi et al., 2020; Vithayaporn & Ashton, 2019; Yeh, 2013). In this article, we theoretically and empirically demonstrate that the correlation between transformational leadership and work engagement is moderated by intrinsic motivation in the tourism and hospitality industry in the context of the coronavirus pandemic, which has significantly impacted this sector globally (Hoque et al., 2020; Wen et al., 2020). We explore work engagement interactions that could determine the extent of this specific contribution to tourism engagement, which could be relevant for hotel managers to encourage frontline employees to become more engaged and contribute to the studied sector after its recovery from the coronavirus pandemic. Our findings indicate that intrinsic motivation drives work engagement, while transformational leadership successfully contributes to work engagement. One potential strategy to facilitate postcrisis recovery in tourism is to foster the intrinsic motivation of employees. Work engagement among hospitality and tourism employees needs further study as the consequences of the coronavirus outbreak continue to hinder the tourism sector. We hope future research will further explore the mechanisms and reasons for advancing work engagement relevant to the studied sector.

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