

# THE EFFECTS OF TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP ON WORK ENGAGEMENT IN THE KINGDOM OF THAILAND: A CASE STUDY OF A THAI MNC

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**ABSTRACT:** *Scant research has been conducted to test the relationship between transformational leadership and work engagement in Asia-Pacific and extremely little has been done in Thailand. This mixed-methods, action research (MMAR) organization development (OD) study was conducted to fill this gap. In addition to filling this gap, this study attempted to add to previous studies conducted on the effects of performing OD interventions in Thai companies. Lastly, it also saw the development of an approved Thai language version of the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES). Research took place at a large, publicly traded Thai multi-national corporation (MNC) in Bangkok, Thailand. In all, 219 (n=219) participated in the study. Fifteen research hypotheses were tested. Thirteen of fifteen hypotheses examined the relationship between transformational leadership and work engagement and two examined the effect of conducting an ODI on each variable, independently. It was concluded that each of the fifteen hypotheses were supported.*

**Keywords:** *Transformational Leadership, Work Engagement, Organization Development, Action Research, OD Intervention (ODI)*

## Introduction

There is a dearth of empirical evidence to prove the reliability of using transformational leadership to affect or to report on the relationship to work engagement in Asia-Pacific and even less data on this relationship in Thailand. This study adds empirical evidence to further the research surrounding transformational leadership and work engagement in Asia-Pacific and Thailand. This study also deepens the empirical knowledge of how organization development interventions (ODIs) affect Thai workforces, especially senior executive leadership team members (C-Suite level) of large, publicly traded Thai MNCs.

Scholars (Amos et al., 2008; Huselid, 1995; Schneider, 1987) generally realize that it is our human resources—our people—that are the most important resource. They also understand that it is our leaders and their leadership actions that should be given the utmost importance and scrutiny. Having a positive effect on your organization's "soft skills" (people, beliefs, behaviors) or what can be described as

"human capital" (Abrashoff, 2012), requires the winning of the hearts and minds of employees (Barton, 2014). This can be accomplished by establishing a psychological contract between organizational leaders and their workers through leadership actions and work engagement (Rousseau, 1995).

Industry researchers, Beck and Harter (2015), provide statistical evidence of the high economic impact of leaders who do not engage their workforce. In their 2012 report for Gallop, they report that less than 30% of American workers were engaged, as compared to 52% who were not engaged, and 18% who were actively disengaged. The actively disengaged workers alone cost the American economy somewhere between \$450-550 billion USD per year. Thailand has had a historical problem with engagement, but the trend is getting better. In 2005, Gallup revealed that only 12% of Thailand's employees were engaged, 82% were not engaged, and 6% were actively disengaged (Ratanjee, 2005). At that time, the negative effect of not engaging their workforce cost the local economy as much

as 98.8 Billion Thai Baht (approximately \$2.5 billion USD) (Prasongthan & Suveatwatanakul, 2017). Per Gallup (2013), Thailand's engagement figures for 2013 were: engaged (14%), not engaged (84%), and actively disengaged (2%). In 2017, Thailand saw some increases in the percentage of engaged workers as compared to 2013, but also saw an increase in actively disengaged workers: engaged (23%), not engaged (73%), and actively disengaged (4%) (Gallup 2017).

This mixed-methods, three-phase OD action research study sought to answer four Research Questions (RQs):

- RQ1. What constitutes the effect of transformational leadership on work engagement in Thai organizations?
- RQ2. What, if any, relationships exist among transformational leadership's four components (II, IM, IS, IC) and each of the components of WE (vigor, absorption, and dedication) in Thai organizations?
- RQ3. What effect will an organization development intervention (ODI) have on transformational leadership in a Thai organization?
- RQ4. What effect will an organization development intervention (ODI) have on work engagement in a Thai organization?
- In examining these research questions, fifteen hypotheses were tested. After a detailed analysis of the data, using both quantitative and qualitative tools, all fifteen hypotheses were deemed supported.

## **Literature Review, Conceptual Framework**

### **Transformational Leadership**

Transformational leadership, as a scholastic topic has been studied by researchers and scholars for more than four decades. Transformational leadership is a

theory of leadership where leaders stimulate and inspire their followers in order to achieve extraordinary outcomes and while doing so develop their own leadership capacity (Bass & Riggio, 2006).

Researchers observed that leaders that demonstrated transformational characteristics highlighted the importance and values of task outcomes, they actuated their followers' higher-order needs, and they built a more selfless attitude where they put the organization above themselves (Bass 1985; Yukl, 1989a, 1989b). Research shows that transformational leaders have a positive influence on their followers in the areas of trust, job satisfaction, and commitment, along with behavior outcomes such as job performance at the individual, group, and organizational levels (Bono & Judge, 2003).

### **Transformational Leadership's 4Is**

Antonakis, Avolio, and Sivasubramaniam (2003) theorized that transformational leadership comprises of the following four components, also known as the "4Is":

1. Idealized Influence (II): Leaders' charisma, confidence, power; leader viewed as focusing on higher-order ideals and ethics.
2. Inspirational Motivation (IM): Leaders energizing followers via optimism, goal oriented, having vision, and communicating effectively.
3. Intellectual Stimulation (IS): Leaders appealing to followers' sense of logic; challenging followers to think creatively and innovatively.
4. Individualized Consideration (IC): Leader behavior that contributes to follower satisfaction by coaching, mentoring, showing empathy for their followers.

## Work Engagement

The study of work engagement is new to research (Yasin et al. 2013). Employee engagement has often been attributed to the emotional and intellectual commitment that employees have to their *organization* (Kular et al. 2008). Schaufeli (2014) stated that whereas employee engagement includes the employee's relationship with his or her organization, work engagement refers to the relationship of the employee to his or her *work*.

Engagement as related to work can trace its roots to the ethnographic researcher Kahn (1990) where he first claimed that individuals must be able to engage themselves cognitively, emotionally, and physically namely through a physical dimension (vigor), a cognitive dimension (absorption), and an emotional dimension (dedication) (Stander & Rothmann, 2010).

Schaufeli et al. (2002) describe work engagement as a state of being that is characterized by its three components, *vigor*, *absorption*, and *dedication* as related to the work an employee performs. *Vigor* is characterized by high levels of energy and mental resilience while working, the willingness to invest effort in one's work, and persistence also in the face of difficulties; *absorption* is characterized by being fully concentrated and happily engrossed in one's work, whereby time passes quickly and one has difficulties with detaching oneself from work; *dedication* is characterized by a sense of significance, enthusiasm, inspiration, pride, and challenge (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2003).

## Organization Development and Action Research

### *Organization Development (OD)*

This research study was conducted under the field of science known as social science and the discipline known as OD. Cummings and Worley (2009) provide a succinct definition of OD: "Organization

development is a system wide application and transfer of behavioral science knowledge to the planned development, improvement, and reinforcement of the strategies, structures, and processes that lead to organizational effectiveness" (p. 1).

### *Action Research*

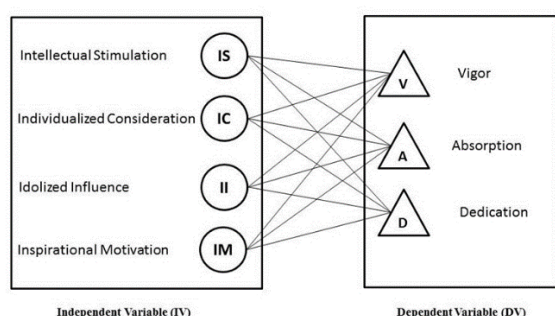
Action research (AR) is a scientific activity and a methodology that was coined by Kurt Lewin in the 1940's stating action research is "...a comparative research on conditions and effects of various forms of social action, and research leading to social action" (Lewin, 1946, pg. 35). AR is social research performed by an ensemble of people (researcher and members of the organization) seeking to improve their situation (Greenwood & Levin, 2006) and deeper levels of awareness (Lurey & Griffin, 2002).

Collaboration is a key characteristic of AR. It enables mutual understanding, consensus, facilitates democratic decision making, and a common action (Oja & Smulyan, 1989). Argyris et al. (1985) stated that "[l]asting improvement requires that the participatory action researcher helps clients to change themselves so that their interactions will create these conditions for inquiry and learning" (Argyris et al., 1985, p.137).

### Conceptual Framework

In the conceptual framework, the main variables studied were transformational leadership as the independent variable (IV) and work engagement as the dependent variable (DV), which can be depicted graphically as follows:

## Conceptual Framework



**Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of the Study**

## Methodology

### Research Design

The study used a mixed design of both quantitative and qualitative measures, and a quasi-experimental design using triangulation was employed. A combination of action research and a phenomenological approach, where the researcher acted as a coach/mentor during a six-month organization development intervention and as an observer-participant throughout the study, was utilized.

### Purposive Sample Groups

#### *Transformational Leadership (Independent Variable)*

This study was limited to only the headquarters element of a Thai MNC in Bangkok and focused solely on the effects of transformational leadership, its relationship, to work engagement. Therefore, the purposive sample group for this case study was: 1.) the executive leadership team assigned in Bangkok and 2.) those leaders that had Thai nationals that they led, managed, supervised, and/or rated on. Thus, the number of persons who were invited to partake in the study's OD intervention was eleven (n=11).

#### *Work Engagement (Dependent Variable)*

As for the dependent variable, work engagement, the number of personnel invited to partake in this study was 219

(n=219). This number represents all of the personnel who work in Bangkok, to include the 11 leaders who made up the purposive sample group to measure transformational leadership.

### Instrumentation and Data Collection

For the quantitative portion of this study, two internationally, scholastically recognized, highly reliable and valid survey instruments were used to gather pre- and post-ODI data: (A.) the Multi-Factor Leadership Questionnaire, standard version, or MLQ-5X was used to assess transformational leadership; (B.) the second instrument was the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES) used to assess work engagement. Each survey instrument was provided in English and the UWES was offered in both Thai and English. It should be noted that prior to this study, an approved Thai language version of the UWES did not exist. This research program rectified that by garnering approval from the survey developer and translating it into Thai (Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES)-17 TH<sup>®</sup> [Thai Version]

แบบสำรวจงานและความอยู่ดีมีสุข

(แบบวัดความผูกพันในงานอูเทรคซ์-17-TH<sup>®</sup>).

#### *MLQ-5X*

The MLQ-5X is designed to measure transformational leadership and its 4I's. The researcher used a 360-degree feedback process where each participant of the ODI completed the MLQ-5X, along with his/her supervisor, three of his/her peers, and three direct reports or subordinates were invited to complete an MLQ-5X on that leader. Therefore, the sample rate for the MLQ-5X was set at 93 questionnaires (n=93) pre-ODI and 93 questionnaires post-ODI (n=93). [Note: The Managing Director has no peers; therefore, each of the leaders who participated in the ODI, all of whom are the MD's direct reports (n=10) rated the MD, along with his own self-rating combined for a total of 11 ratings (n=11) for this one position.]

The MLQ-5X was administered to 93 personnel in the focal system during the pre-ODI data phase; 83 responses were captured for a response rate of 89.25%. Post-ODI, the MLQ was administered to 90 personnel and 66 responses were obtained for a response rate of 73.33%. Three direct reports of some of the leaders in the FS departed the company during the ODI.

#### *UWES*

The UWES measured the organization's perceived behaviors related to work engagement's three components: vigor, absorption, and dedication. All 219 Bangkok-based personnel were requested to take the UWES (n=219) before and after the action research ODI.

Pre-ODI, the UWES was administered to 219 personnel; 69 personnel responded to the survey for a response rate of 31.51%. Post-ODI (UWES), the population sample size eligible to take the survey was 210 (nine employees departed the company during the ODI); 78 personnel responded for a response rate of 37.14%. The response rate for the same group of respondents that took both the UWES pre- and post-ODI was 51 out of 69 for a response rate of 73.91%. Both survey instruments, the MLQ-5X and the UWES-17, were delivered to the respondents through the online platform SurveyMonkey.

#### **Tools for Quantitative and Qualitative Analysis**

The qualitative portion of the study used a thematic analysis approach to evaluate the responses during the semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and during the various one-on-one coaching/mentoring sessions throughout the six-month ODI. For data analysis purposes, since this was an MMAR study, a concurrent, merged mixed methods data analysis was used (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009).

#### *Quantitative, Qualitative Inquiry*

Data were encoded using SPSS v23 for each of the responses collected during the study. Inferential statistics were used for coefficient testing, along with various forms of correlation analysis for hypothesis testing. For H01, canonical correlation analysis (CCA) was used to determine the relationship between the independent variable (transformational leadership) and the dependent variable (work engagement) to see what linear relationships possibly existed and to see what variance the independent variable had on the dependent variable; for H02-13, the Pearson correlation coefficient was used to see what relationships existed between transformational leadership's 4I's (II, IM, IS, IC) and work engagement's three components (VAD); for the H14-15 paired sample t-testing was used to see the effect of the ODI on transformational leadership and work engagement, pre- & post-ODI, respectively. During the testing of the hypotheses, H01-H15, the expectation was that the confidence level would be 95% or higher.

An appropriate method to collect data for the qualitative portion of this MMAR study was an inductive thematic approach (Ivankova, 2015). Ivankova explains that using a thematic approach is appropriate because it is in line with the "methodological characteristics of an MMAR study (mixed-method action research)" by allowing the researcher to integrate the findings of the qualitative portion (themes, categories, and codes) with the quantitative results in a more manageable manner (Ivankova, 2015, Chapter 8, Section: Process of Qualitative Analysis Data, para. 4, line 4).

#### **Data Collection (Qualitative – Interviews, Focus Groups, Triangulation)**

Qualitative measurements occurred through semi-structured interviews and focus groups, pre- and post-ODI. The number of participants requested to

participate in the pre- and post-ODI interviews and focus groups was 11 (participants) (n=11).

Regarding the pre- and post-ODI, semi-structured interviews: eleven leaders were interviewed pre-ODI and 10 leaders were interviewed post-ODI. It should be noted that two of the leaders that initially participated in the study chose not to partake in the ODI (L09, whose pseudonym was “Fah” and L11 whose pseudonym was “Lotus”).

In addition to the semi-structured interviews and focus groups, qualitative data was gathered from the ODI, which supports the concept of triangulation. Triangulation allows for the interpretation and development of richer, thicker descriptions of what is observed (Merriam & Tisdell 2016). Triangulation comprised of: researcher’s observations and comments during the ODI and an ODI exit questionnaire (feedback concerning the ODI).

### OD Intervention Design

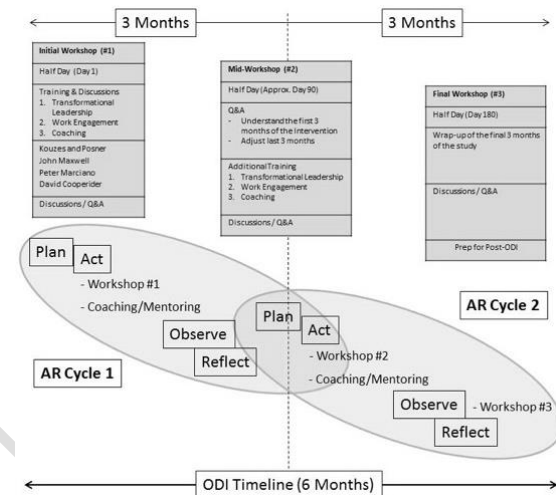
Kurt Lewin’s model of unfreezing, implementing change, then refreezing occurred in two AR cycles during this study. The implementation of change, in this case a six-month OD intervention (ODI), was designed around coaching-mentoring-training regarding transformational leadership and work engagement to the eleven leaders (n=11). The ODI was conducted in three phases (three workshops were held), pre-ODI, mid-term, post-ODI on-site at the company.

The final figures for the six-month, onsite, one-on-one ODI coaching program are as follows:

- Number of Coaches: 9 (L09 and L11 dropped from the coaching program)
- Number of Coaching Sessions (total): 55 (over the 24-week intervention)

- Number of Hours Coached (total): over 70 hours (not including prep/review time)

A pictorial representation of this MMAR study’s ODI is depicted here:



**Figure 2. ODI AR Cycles**

### Results

#### Summary of Quantitative Study

This study found that transformational leadership and work engagement are positively associated on the multivariate level and on the individual component level. This means that each component of TFL, the 4Is (II, IM, IS, IC), is positively associated with WE’s vigor, dedication and absorption. These findings were statistically significant as well.

Statistically, the four components of transformational leadership (II, IM, IS, and IC) did not increase on average for those experiencing the ODI. However, what should be stressed is, for those leaders that chose not to participate in the ODI (L09 and L11), their MLQ ratings decreased post-ODI and that decrease was significant. Additionally, on a relative basis, those that did participate in the ODI exhibited a significantly positive change (post-ODI as compared to pre-ODI) relative to those that did not experience the ODI. This is outlined in Table 3c. One reason for the somewhat

negative trend post-ODI may be due to the participants' "awakening" or breakthroughs that took place over the ODI.

### Canonical Correlation Analysis (CCA) – Testing of H<sub>1</sub>

Canonical correlation analysis is a statistical analysis method that helps researchers to understand the interrelationships among sets of multiple independent variables and multiple dependent variables (Ho, 2013). Understanding this perspective about CCA, the researcher chose this analysis method to test Hypothesis H<sub>1</sub> see Table 1, which outlines the canonical correlation of the MLQ-5X to UWES-17 (Post-ODI).

**Table 1:** Canonical Correlation of MLQ-5X to UWES-17 after ODI (Post-ODI)

Canonical Correlations							
	Correlation	Eigenvalue	Wilks Statistic	F	Num D.F.	Denom D.F.	Sig.
1	.556	.448	.652	2.134	12.000	145.808	.018
2	.204	.043	.944	.548	6.000	112.000	.771
3	.123	.015	.985				

HO for Wilks test is that the correlations in the current and following rows are zero

### Results

The outcome from Table 1 indicates:

*H1: Transformational leadership is positively associated with work engagement and was significant at the 0.05 level.*

### Pearson Correlation – Testing of H<sub>2</sub>-H<sub>13</sub>

Significance testing 1-tailed, was chosen for the data analysis. Table 2 outlines the Pearson correlation of MLQ-5X to UWES-17 (Post-ODI).

**Table 2:** Pearson Correlation of MLQ-5X to UWES-17 After ODI (Post-ODI)

Correlations		AV	AD	AA
AI	Pearson Correlation	.419**	.443**	.439**

	Sig. (1-tailed)			
	N	.000	.000	.000
	64	64	64	64
AIM	Pearson Correlation	.331**	.362**	.350**
	Sig. (1-tailed)	.004	.002	.002
	N	64	64	64
AIS	Pearson Correlation	.460**	.417**	.487**
	Sig. (1-tailed)	.000	.000	.000
	N	64	64	64
AIC	Pearson Correlation	.336**	.335**	.374**
	Sig. (1-tailed)	.004	.004	.001
	N	62	62	62

Note: \*\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (1-tailed).

### Results

The outcomes from Table 2 indicate the following for Hypotheses H<sub>2</sub>-H<sub>13</sub>:

*H2: II of TFL is positively associated with vigor of work engagement with a correlation of 0.419 and it was statistically significant at the 0.01 level.*

*H3: II of TFL is positively associated with absorption of work engagement with a correlation of 0.439 and it was statistically significant at the 0.01 level.*

*H4: II of TFL is positively associated with dedication of work engagement with a correlation of 0.443 and it was statistically significant at the 0.01 level.*

*H5: IM of TFL is positively associated with vigor of work engagement with a correlation of 0.331 and it was statistically significant at the 0.01 level.*

*H6: IM of TFL is positively associated with absorption of work engagement with a*

correlation of 0.350 and it was statistically significant at the 0.01 level.

*H7*: IM of TFL is positively associated with dedication of work engagement with a correlation of 0.362 and it was statistically significant at the 0.01 level.

*H8*: IS of TFL is positively associated with vigor of work engagement with a correlation of 0.460 and it was statistically significant at the 0.01 level.

*H9*: IS of TFL is positively associated with absorption of work engagement with a correlation of 0.487 and it was statistically significant at the 0.01 level.

*H10*: IS of TFL is positively associated with dedication of work engagement with a correlation of 0.417 and it was statistically significant at the 0.01 level.

*H11*: IC of TFL is positively associated with vigor of work engagement with a correlation of 0.336 and it was statistically significant at the 0.01 level.

*H12*: IC of TFL is positively associated with absorption of work engagement with a correlation of 0.374 and it was statistically significant at the 0.01 level.

*H13*: IC of TFL is positively associated with dedication of work engagement with a correlation of 0.335 and it was statistically significant at the 0.01 level.

#### Paired Sample *t*-Tests – Testing of H14 and H15

Hypotheses 14 and 15 were concerned with the effect of an ODI on TFL and WE, pre- and post-intervention. Therefore, Paired Sample *t*-testing was used to analyze H14 and H15.

Due to the change in demographics of the purposive sample group, specifically leaders L09 (Fah) and L11 (Lotus) deciding to not participate in the ODI after interviewing with the researcher pre-ODI,

several tables were necessary to outline the results of the *t*-tests examining Hypotheses H14 and H15 (Tables 3a-c & Table 4).

**Table 3a:** Paired *t*-Test of MLQ-5X After (Post-ODI Ratings) minus Before (Pre-ODI Ratings) for all leaders who participated in the ODI (All leaders except L09 & L11)

Paired Samples Test									
		Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (1-tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	Interval of the				
					Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	All - Bil	0.03	0.62	0.09	(0.14)	0.20	0.37	52	0.35
Pair 2	AIM - BIM	0.09	0.54	0.07	(0.06)	0.24	1.18	52	0.12
Pair 3	AIS - BIS	0.04	0.69	0.09	(0.15)	0.23	0.43	53	0.33
Pair 4	AIC - BIC	(0.11)	0.62	0.09	(0.29)	0.06	(1.30)	49	0.90

**Table 3b:** Paired *t*-Test of MLQ-5X After (Post-ODI Ratings) minus Before (Pre-ODI Ratings) for leaders who did not participate in the ODI (L09 & L11 ONLY)

Paired Samples Test									
		Paired Differences				t	df	Sig. (1-tailed)	
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	Interval of the				
					Lower				Upper
Pair 1	All - Bil	(0.511)	0.234	0.070	(0.668)	(0.354)	(7.262)	10	0.000
Pair 2	AIM - BIM	(0.417)	0.356	0.107	(0.656)	(0.178)	(3.887)	10	0.002
Pair 3	AIS - BIS	(0.250)	0.548	0.165	(0.618)	0.118	(1.514)	10	0.081
Pair 4	AIC - BIC	(0.725)	0.546	0.173	(1.115)	(0.335)	(4.200)	9	0.001

**Table 3c:** Comparison of the relative change of perceptions of MLQ-5X After (Post-ODI Ratings) minus Before (Post-) ODI between the those that received the ODI to those that did not (Comparison of the nine leaders who participated against the two who departed the ODI)



Independent Samples Test									
		Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means					
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (1-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Interval of the Difference
									Lower Upper
A1MB1	Equal variances assumed	5.004	0.029	2.847	62.000	0.003	0.543	0.191	0.162 0.925
	Equal variances not assumed			4.914	43.013	0.000	0.543	0.111	0.320 0.766
A1MB1M	Equal variances assumed	2.755	0.102	2.938	62.000	0.002	0.505	0.172	0.161 0.848
	Equal variances not assumed			3.862	21.137	0.000	0.505	0.131	0.233 0.776
A1MB1S	Equal variances assumed	1.240	0.270	1.316	63.000	0.096	0.290	0.220	(0.150) 0.731
	Equal variances not assumed			1.529	17.091	0.072	0.290	0.190	(0.110) 0.690
A1MB1C	Equal variances assumed	0.104	0.749	2.907	58.000	0.003	0.612	0.210	0.190 1.033
	Equal variances not assumed			3.161	14.039	0.003	0.612	0.193	0.197 1.027

## Results

**H14:** Transformational leadership is positively affected by an organization development intervention (ODI).

The following results can be seen in Table 3a (the nine leaders that participated in the ODI).

- II was not positively affected by ODI and was not significant at the .05 level.
- IM was not positively affected by ODI and was not significant at the .05 level.
- IS was not positively affected by ODI and was not significant at the .05 level.
- IC was not positively affected by ODI and was not significant at the .05 level.
- The following results appear in Table 3b (the two leaders that did not participate in the ODI).

This table outlines the finding that by not participating in the ODI negatively impacted the perception of performance.

- II was negatively affected by not taking the ODI and was significant at the .01 level.
- IM was negatively affected by not taking the ODI and was significant at the .01 level.
- IS was negatively affected by not taking the ODI and was significant at the .10 level.
- IC was negatively affected by not taking the ODI and was significant at the .01 level.

The following results can be seen in Table 3c (comparison of the nine leaders that participated in the ODI to the two leaders that did not participate in the ODI. This table outlines the findings in terms of their change as compared directly).

- II was positively affected by ODI comparing those that participated in the ODI to those without ODI and was significant at the .01 level.
- IM was positively affected by ODI comparing those that participated in the ODI to those without ODI and was significant at the .01 level.
- IS was positively affected by ODI comparing those that participated in the ODI to those without ODI and was significant at the .10 level.
- IC was positively affected by ODI comparing those that participated in the ODI to those without ODI and was significant at the .01 level.

**Table 4:** Paired t-Test of UWES-17 After minus Before

Paired Samples Test									
		Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (1-tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	Interval of the				
					Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	AV - BV	0.265	0.783	0.110	0.045	0.485	2.416	50	0.010
Pair 2	AA - BA	0.186	0.715	0.100	(0.015)	0.387	1.861	50	0.034
Pair 3	AD - BD	0.318	0.764	0.107	0.103	0.533	2.968	50	0.002

## Results

*H15:* Work engagement is positively affected by an organization development intervention (ODI).

The following results can be found in Table 4.

- The average vigor increased after the ODI on average by 0.265 and was significant at the 0.01 level.
- The average absorption increased after the ODI on average by 0.186 and was significant at the 0.05 level.
- The average dedication increased after the ODI on average by 0.318 and was significant at the 0.01 level.

### Summary of Qualitative Study

When comparing the pre- to post-ODI results, the leaders in this organization became *more transformational* after the six-month intervention. The overall perception of the leaders in this organization were that TFL does have a positive effect on WE.

### Overall Summary of Pre- and Post-ODI Interviews

#### Pre-ODI

After the querying of the three main themes of the study during the pre-ODI interview process, asking about (1.) TFL's effect on WE; (2.) how TFL was currently being employed in the FS; (3.) the perceptions of WE in the FS, pre-ODI, the following was concluded:

- Transformational leadership was not fully understood by the leader's pre-intervention pre-ODI;
- The leaders saw worth in the concepts (4Is) of transformational leadership and were open to learning more and applying the 4I's of transformational leadership;

- Transformational leadership was not being fully employed pre-ODI and work engagement needed improvement pre-ODI.

#### Post-ODI

It was apparent that the knowledge of and perceptions surrounding TFL and WE increased significantly post-ODI. Individually, the leaders were much more confident in not only explaining what TFL is, but how it can affect WE. Additionally, it was recorded that all the leaders that participated in this study were employing some of the traits and characteristics of TFL in their daily business routines post-ODI.

### Research Question 1 (RQ1)

#### *Pre-ODI Interviews (feedback concerning RQ1 and TFL)*

During the pre-ODI interview process, very few of the leaders interviewed displayed knowledge of what constituted transformational leadership. Leaders primarily thought that transformational leadership centered around change: leaders changing, the environment changing, people changing (followers, subordinates):

*L01, Nam: "Leader to lead to change transform from something to be another thing; change from the people who be the normal leader to be better a better leader"*

The researcher's overall impression was the leaders did not believe they were employing transformational leadership traits pre-ODI. It was summarized that for RQ1A, pre-ODI, leaders in this organization were *less transformational* in their perceptions.

#### *Post-ODI Interviews (feedback concerning RQ1 and TFL)*

Almost all the leaders, post-ODI, were much more conversive about what transformational leadership is and how they could effectively use its components to

assist them in leading and affecting their respective areas of responsibilities. Additionally, some of the leaders could link TFL to WE:

*L01, Nam: "...transformation leadership...more like a coach" (The leader is referring to IC)*

*L04, Reagan: "...it's four element and it's all comprising for the leader to--change the organization behavior and yeah." ... "Consideration, Simulation, Motivation, Idealize"*

### Feedback concerning RQ1 and WE

#### Pre-ODI

None of the subjects could give a succinct definition of work engagement as defined by scholars such as Kahn (1990) or Schaufeli et al. (2002). It was concluded that the leaders did not feel there were high levels of work engagement in the organization pre-ODI:

*L10, John: "Honestly I don't think that the leadership here will impact the worker engagement. I don't see it."*

#### Post-ODI

As with TFL, leaders were much more aware of the concept of WE post-ODI:

*L04, Reagan: "Yeah. Yes, sure." and "Yeah, I can see absorption-- absorption is also through stimulation, through coaching as well but more on stimulation and motivation to me."*

### Research Question 2 (RQ2)

#### Pre-ODI

The pre-ODI questioning indicated that these leaders believed leaders (in general) should be able to positively affect work engagement's three components of

vigor, absorption, and dedication. However, the leanings of each leader were not overwhelmingly supportive of the idea that their organization was doing this; there was a *slight lean* towards transformational leadership positively affecting work engagement:

#### II affecting vigor:

*L03, Bear: "It can stimulate it and it can kill it as well; there is a very fine barrier which cannot be taught you have to feel it sometimes you feel it too late and you already killed the vigor."*

#### Effect of IM on absorption:

*L01, Nam: "Not much...you know the people when you put the right man in the right job, he would do like crazy! That means you know your thing (job)."*

#### IS on dedication:

*L02, See: "Yes but not in all cases."*

*L04, Reagan: "Creativity. Creativity and dedication. I think this is tough one."*

*L05, Bird: "It depends on the follower."*

#### Post-ODI

The following table (Table 5) outlines the feedback of each leader's perspective on how each of the 4Is affects each of the three components of WE (VAD) in prioritized order [Level 1 meaning that WE component is most affected and so on].

**Table 5:** Perceptions of the 4Is on Vigor Absorption and Dedication

Leader	Priorit		I I	I M	I S	I C
L01	Level	1	D	V	A	V
		2	V	D	D	D
		3	A	A	V	A
L02	Level	1	V	D	D	V
		2	A	A	A	A
		3	D	V	V	D
L03	Level	1	V	V	V	V
		2	A	A	A	A

		3	D	D	D	D
L04	Level	1	D	V	A	D
		2	A	A	V	A
		3	V	D	D	V
L05	Level	1	D	V	A	A
		2	V	D	D	V
		3	A	A	V	D
L06	Level	1	D	A	A	D
		2	V	V	V	V
		3	A	D	D	A
L07	Level	1	A	V	V	D
		2	V	A	D	A
		3	D	D	A	V
L08	Level	1	V	V	V	V
		2	A	A	A	A
		3	D	D	D	D
L10	Level	1	D	D	V	A
		2	V	V	A	D
		3	A	A	D	V

### Research Questions 3 and 4 (RQ3 and RQ4)

#### ***RQ3 and RQ4: Thoughts and feedback on the ODI***

Overwhelming, positive support for the ODI from all participants was received post-intervention:

*L02, See: They dedicate more, they believe more, they have a better view of management rather than just follow. (The leader is referring to his/her team) Yeah, the teamwork has improved.*

*L08, Bob: Yes. Yes. Definitely...hopefully, that can inspire and motivate them as well or give them some positive direction.*

### **Overall Summary Pre- and Post-ODI Focus Groups**

#### ***Pre-ODI***

The pre-ODI focus group did not indicate that the leaders in the FS were emulating or espousing TFL traits pre-ODI.

During the focus group, a long discussion occurred concerning the term absorption. As a group, they were not aware of the term absorption before the ODI. However, they did come to a conclusion that leaders, through their actions such as setting challenging targets, leading by example, etc., could affect absorption:

*L02, See: Recognition is one thing. But to me, to influence absorption you have to maybe to challenge them with the challenge target and timeline. (Leader unknowingly outlines a direct link to TFL's Intellectual Stimulation (IS) component)*

#### ***Post-ODI***

Leaders saw great value in the ODI and their knowledge level of both transformational leadership and work engagement increased significantly pre- to post-intervention. Their perceptions post-ODI was that TFL, specifically the 4Is, does have a positive effect on work engagement:

*L04, Reagan: Four elements; It's effective and active, not passive.*

*L07, Ploy: Idealized consideration.*

*L10, John: To get the inspiration.*

*L05, Bird: Intellectual stimulation.*

*L04, Reagan: Vigor. It's easy to see.*

*L04, Reagan: It's like resilience. You fell down and got knocked down, and you come back on. That one is easy.*

### **Triangulation**

*Researcher's observations and comments during the ODI*

Managing Director, Leader XX (cannot indicate his leadership code for fear of reverse identification), stated he used information from the study's training session in Workshop #2 on strategy to assist him in developing a planning initiative for the MNC; he informed the researcher that he needs to "Build new status quo" in the company. This eludes to the value of the ODI's training and workshops.

**Leader L07, Ploy,** mentioned during his/her third coaching session that IM, “Allows subordinates to feel commitment to work, they like and want to do their work, builds vigor!!!” What Ploy stated shows direct connectivity between TFL (IM) and WE (V).

#### *Exit questionnaire*

An exit questionnaire was developed to gauge each leader’s sentiments about his/her experience during the study’s ODI:

*L02, See (5 coaching sessions / 6 journal inputs): Used the ODI as part of my input for my Organization Chart and Strategic Initiative & Action Plan for 2019*

*L04, Reagan (9 coaching sessions, 18 journal inputs): I realized the core concept of TFL vs Transactional Leadership, in which prior to entering into this session (ODI) I believe most of the time I acted, I am mostly into the transaction leadership style, being micro management in order to ensure jobs are done. But once I learned how to delegate/motivate/encourage/inspire the team, I feel result is much more powerful. I would call it Win-Win performance.*

#### **Summary of Results**

The results outlined in this section reveals the significant (positive) impact of conducting an ODI, centered on coaching, and how that OD intervention changed these senior executives. The extensive data provided (quantitative, qualitative, and triangulation) outlines the leaders’ perceptions of TFL and WE, how they see TFL’s 4Is affecting WE (vigor, absorption, and dedication), and the effectiveness of conducting an ODI.

When analyzing the results of the study, one of the most interesting and important factors to consider is the change in the leaders’ MLQ-5X scores, pre- to post-ODI. As highlighted in the quantitative section above, via the paired sample t-test (Tables 3a-c), the data indicate that not participating in the ODI

this had a significantly negative impact on the leaders.

Table 6 below outlines the percentage of changes in the leader’s MLQ-5X ratings pre- to post-ODI. Seven of the nine leaders that participated in the ODI saw their MLQ scores increase (L01 L02, L03, L04, L06, L07, L10), whereas two of the nine (L05 & L08) saw a decrease. The two leaders that chose not to participate in the ODI (L09 Fah and L11 Lotus) saw significant drops in their MLQ scores:

**Table 6:** Percentage of Change in MLQ from Pre- to Post-ODI

<b>Leader</b>	<b>MLQ <math>\Delta</math></b>
L03	+28.55%
L02	+15.50%
L10	+7.24%
L06	+5.04%
L01	+4.81%
L04	+2.74%
L07	+1.19%
L08	-3.92%
L05	-6.16%
L11	-8.77%
L09	-18.21%

The positive change was explained in the proceeding sections. An explanation of why this negative change possibly occurred is prudent. Three of the leaders in Table 6 explained to the researcher during their post-ODI interviews that they rated themselves ‘harder’ post-ODI (their MLQ self-ratings were lower), and rated others ‘harder’ post-ODI.

Each of these leaders explained that the ODI coaching program “opened their eyes” to what leaders should be doing when they lead. A direct quote from L06 (Madison) outlines his/her sentiments about the ODI and how he/she saw himself/herself post-ODI:

*"My feeling is that I have probably been much tougher after doing the second round than the first one. But I mean you will be able to see when you are going to gauge this because I don't have my first recalls (ratings). That should not be interpreted in a way that whatever you have done for the past six months did not work at all. I want to be very clear on that, okay? That does not mean that it did not work. I would say [inaudible] probably to me it worked." He/she went on to talk about rating others post-ODI: "I know that I have rated some people I think significantly lower or being a bit more extreme."*

## Discussion

While there have been studies that have looked at transformational leadership and its effects on leadership development, on employee engagement, and the use of the MLQ-5X in Thailand, this study provides an original contribution because there are no recorded studies that have looked at this particular aspect of how transformational leadership affects work engagement in Thailand (Chaimongkonrojna & Steane (2015); Rungruang, (2017); Boonyachai, (2011); Soponkij (2010)). Therefore, the results of this MMAR study begins to fill in the gaps concerning how TFL affects WE, along with how AR and OD interventions affect organizations, leaders, managers, and workforces at large in Asia when considering these two variables.

This study demonstrated that leaders in Thai organizations do believe that transformational leadership positively affects work engagement. In this Thai MNC, there was a significant correlation between the two variables studied. The research also indicates that conducting an ODI has a positive effect on both TFL and WE in Thai organizations.

The results indicate that leaders that embrace and employ transformational leadership traits and characteristics can

positively affect work engagement. The study also clearly shows that leaders in this focal system believed that there is a linkage between TFL's 4Is and WE's VAD. The strongest proof of evidence comes by reviewing Table 5, where every leader that participated in the study provided an input for each component of TFL and its effect on WE. If the respondents did not have an opinion or believe that TFL did not influence WE this table would be incomplete, which is not the case. Therefore, RQs1 and 2 were sufficiently answered quantitatively and qualitatively. However, much more research needs to occur.

In terms of how the ODI affected the two variables in the study (RQs 3 & 4), the overall sense was that the ODI had a positive effect on the subjects in the study. The responses received post-ODI, quantitatively and qualitatively, supported RQ4 in full, which supported H15. The ODI exit questionnaire was extremely positive concerning the ODI, along with feedback during the interview process (post-ODI) and comments made throughout the ODI (during the workshops, training events, and one-on-one coaching sessions). Thus, the conclusion of the researcher is that the ODI had a *very positive impact* on most of the participants in the study.

## Implications for Theory

This research makes important contributions to further understanding the theories of TFL and WE and how they work in a practical environment. One major contribution made by this study is provided in Table 5 (*Perceptions of the 4Is on Vigor Absorption and Dedication*). This table provides direct empirical evidence of how the leaders in this FS believe that TFL affects WE. The researcher's efforts to locate similar representations of this data in the literature have not been successful, leading to this tentative conclusion: this study makes an original contribution to the field in this matter of leaders' perceptions of how TFL affects WE in Thailand.

### **Implications for Practice**

What became clearer to the researcher while conducting this study was that leadership improves engagement, commitment, and performance. This study supports the claim that transformational leadership, when combined with an ODI, positively affects vigor, absorption, and dedication (work engagement). Leadership can be taught; it can be nurtured.

Senior leadership in organizations should work very closely with each element of the organization to develop their leadership corps. The study suggests that senior leaders add value by weaving into the fabric of the organization the importance of leadership by coaching and mentoring leaders at all levels of the organization (top to bottom) and across the spectrum of the organization (operations and support) to embed a “leadership mindset” or “leadership culture” within the organization. Coaching and mentoring directly links to the component of IC (individualized consideration) in TFL.

### **Limitations and Recommendations for Further Research**

#### *Limitations*

The sample size (purposive sample) could have been larger by adding other key members of the focal system’s (FS) leadership/management team. There were 15 people that formed the leadership team in the FS. The researcher had access to 11 of the 15. The CEO participated only by responding to the two survey instruments used (MLQ and UWES). The managing director was a very active participant in the study, participating in all of the interviews, focus groups, workshops, and many coaching sessions. The study would have benefited with an across-the-board participation from all senior leaders. Nevertheless, the sample used and the senior leaders that did participate provided for a valid study of leadership in this FS, as evidenced in Section 4.0.

#### *Recommendations for Further Research*

If future studies consider examining the fields of TFL and WE, researchers may want to consider using the same variables as this study, IV (TFL) and DV (WE), but contemplate changing one or both of the components of the study, either the sample group and/or the sample size. This study looked at one very specific leadership/management level inside a Thai MNC, the senior leadership, C-Suite/Director level. Future studies may want to consider looking at other levels of participation outside of the senior executive suite, such as senior managers, managers, and maybe even a level below them.

Secondly, expansion of the data collected in this study, especially what is outlined in Table 5, should be considered if future researchers decide to study these two variables. Lastly, continued use of the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale, Thai Language Survey, UWES-17-TH<sup>®</sup> (แบบวัดความผูกพันในงานอุตรคส์-17-TH<sup>®</sup>), would be beneficial. The more times that the UWES-17-TH<sup>®</sup> survey is used, the more refined the instrument will become, leading to it becoming a vital tool when studying work engagement in Thailand.

#### **Conclusion**

This study sought to answer what relationship exists between TFL and WE, along with understanding what effect an action research ODI would have on TFL and WE in Thai organizations. This study showed the power of what action research can accomplish through the utilization of an OD intervention.

Warner Burke and David Bradford state the following about OD, “Given the issues confronting today’s leaders, OD should be highly relevant and central to an organization’s operations. But for the most part, leaders make little use of OD. Instead, OD, if it exists at all in organizations, is either relegated to the lower ranks in the hierarchy or brought in periodically to ‘clean up problems’” (Bradford & Burke, 2005, p. 1). They go on to talk about the

troubling and how OD rarely sits at the C-Suite as a partner in driving the organization.

This study suggests that OD is still relevant and that some senior leaders do see the importance and effectiveness of OD when employed logically and systematically. Organizational landscapes will continue to change. What will remain constant however is that leaders will need to focus on, understand, and value the importance of soft skills. Focusing on their people by shaping their beliefs is paramount to positively affecting their organization's outcomes.

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