

AN INTEGRATIVE SOCIO-COGNITIVE EXAMINATION OF LEADERSHIP INFLUENCE, CULTURAL ALIGNMENT, AND THE SATISFACTION–ENGAGEMENT–PERFORMANCE TRIAD

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Abstract

This study investigates the intricate relationships between leadership influence, cultural alignment, and the satisfaction–engagement–performance (SEP) triad within organizational settings. Drawing on socio-cognitive theory, the research integrates leadership styles, organizational culture, and employee attitudes to provide a holistic understanding of performance outcomes. Using a quantitative survey of 300 employees across multinational organizations, Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) was employed to test the hypothesized framework. Results indicate that transformational leadership positively influences cultural alignment, which in turn enhances employee satisfaction and engagement, ultimately leading to higher performance. The study provides practical insights for leadership development and organizational culture interventions, particularly within diverse global contexts.

Keywords: Leadership Influence, Cultural Alignment, Employee Satisfaction, Engagement, Organizational Performance, Socio-Cognitive Theory, SEM

1. Introduction

In the relentlessly evolving landscape of the 21st-century global economy, organizations face unprecedented pressures to innovate, adapt, and sustain competitive advantage. At the heart of this challenge lies the imperative to cultivate a workforce that is not only productive but also deeply committed and intrinsically motivated. This foundational requirement underscores the critical importance of effective leadership and a robust organizational culture. Leadership, often seen as the guiding force, shapes the strategic direction and operational realities of an enterprise, while organizational culture, representing the collective ethos, dictates how work is done, how employees interact, and what values are prioritized. Together, these two constructs profoundly influence employee attitudes, behaviours, and ultimately, organizational performance.

Traditional management theories have long acknowledged the impact of leadership and culture in isolation. However, a more nuanced understanding necessitates an integrated perspective that explores their dynamic interplay and resultant effects on key employee outcomes. This study focuses on the "Satisfaction–Engagement–Performance (SEP) triad"—a composite of employee satisfaction, engagement, and individual performance—which serves as a robust indicator of both employee well-being and organizational efficacy. While past research has explored these variables, a significant gap remains in comprehensively unpacking the socio-cognitive mechanisms through which leadership and culture jointly predict the SEP triad, especially within diverse, non-Western organizational contexts.

Socio-cognitive theory (Bandura, 1986) offers a powerful lens through which to examine these complex relationships. It posits that human functioning is a product of a dynamic interplay between personal, behavioural, and environmental influences. In an organizational

setting, leaders represent significant environmental and social influences, shaping employees' perceptions, expectations, and self-efficacy. Organizational culture, in turn, provides the broader social environment, embedding norms and values that guide employee behaviour and interpretations. Through this lens, employees learn and internalize organizational values and expectations, which subsequently influence their emotional states (satisfaction), psychological investment (engagement), and work output (performance).

This research aims to bridge existing literature gaps by proposing and empirically testing a model wherein transformational leadership—a leadership style widely recognized for its inspiring and motivational qualities—positively influences cultural alignment. This alignment, representing the congruence between individual and organizational values, is then hypothesized to sequentially enhance employee satisfaction and engagement, which in turn drive individual performance. Furthermore, the study investigates cultural alignment as a crucial mediator, elucidating the indirect pathways through which transformational leadership impacts the SEP triad.

Conducted within multinational organizations in Pakistan, this study contributes to a more global understanding of leadership and culture dynamics. The selection of this context is particularly pertinent, given the unique socio-cultural intricacies of non-Western settings, which often present different challenges and opportunities for leadership and cultural integration compared to their Western counterparts. By examining these relationships within this specific context, the research offers both theoretical advancements to sociocognitive and organizational behaviour literature and practical implications for leaders and human resource practitioners operating in diverse global environments.

The subsequent sections of this article will delve into a comprehensive literature review, detailing the theoretical foundations of leadership influence, cultural alignment, and the SEP triad, followed by the development of specific hypotheses. The methodology section will outline the research design, participant selection, measurement instruments, and data analysis techniques, particularly Structural Equation Modelling (SEM). Finally, the results will be presented, followed by a detailed discussion of the findings, their theoretical and practical implications, limitations of the study, and directions for future research.

2. Literature Review

The success of any contemporary organization is inextricably linked to the effectiveness of its leadership and the vibrancy of its internal culture. This section provides a comprehensive review of the theoretical and empirical literature underpinning the core constructs of this study: leadership influence, cultural alignment, and the satisfaction–engagement–performance (SEP) triad. Furthermore, it explicates the relevance of sociocognitive theory as an integrative framework and culminates in the development of the study's hypotheses.

2.1. Leadership Influence

Leadership, a multifaceted phenomenon, has captivated scholars for centuries, evolving from trait-based and behavioural approaches to more complex contingency and transformational paradigms. For the purpose of this study, *transformational leadership* is a central focus due to its consistent empirical links with positive organizational outcomes.

2.1.1. Theories of Leadership

Early leadership theories, such as the Great Man Theory and Trait Theories, posited that leaders are born with inherent qualities or possess specific traits that differentiate them from followers. While these theories offered initial insights, they failed to account for the situational context or the developmental aspect of leadership. Behavioural theories, emerging in the mid-20th century (e.g., Ohio State and Michigan studies), shifted focus to observable leader behaviours, categorizing them into task-oriented and relationship-oriented styles. These

provided a more actionable framework but still lacked explanatory power for effectiveness across diverse situations.

Contingency theories (e.g., Fiedler's Contingency Model, Hersey-Blanchard Situational Leadership Theory) then introduced the idea that effective leadership is contingent upon the leader's style, the characteristics of the followers, and the situational context. These theories marked a significant advancement by acknowledging the dynamic nature of leadership effectiveness.

2.1.2. Transformational and Transactional Leadership

The concept of transformational leadership, first introduced by James MacGregor Burns (1978) and later popularized and expanded by Bernard Bass (1985; Bass & Riggio, 2006), represents a paradigm shift from management to leadership. Burns contrasted transformational leadership with transactional leadership.

Transactional Leadership:

This style operates on a clear exchange process, where leaders motivate followers by appealing to their self-interest. It involves contingent reward (promising rewards for good performance) and management-by-exception (intervening only when problems arise). While effective for maintaining the status quo and ensuring task completion, it may not inspire employees to reach their full potential or foster deep commitment.

Transformational Leadership: This style goes beyond mere transactions, aiming to "transform" followers' values, needs, goals, and aspirations. Transformational leaders achieve this through four key dimensions, often referred to as the "Four Is":

- 1. Idealized Influence (Charisma): Leaders act as strong role models, embodying high ethical standards and instilling pride, respect, and trust in their followers.**
- 2. Inspirational Motivation: Leaders communicate a clear and compelling vision, inspiring enthusiasm and optimism, and motivating followers to commit to organizational goals.**
- 3. Intellectual Stimulation: Leaders challenge followers to be innovative and creative, question assumptions, and approach problems from new perspectives, fostering a learning environment.**
- 4. Individualized Consideration: Leaders pay attention to individual differences, providing personalized support, coaching, and mentoring to help each follower grow and develop.**

Numerous studies have consistently demonstrated that transformational leadership is associated with higher levels of employee motivation, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and performance outcomes across various industries and cultures (Bass & Riggio, 2006; Northouse, 2021). Its ability to foster a sense of purpose and collective identity makes it particularly relevant for influencing organizational culture.

2.2. Cultural Alignment

Organizational culture is a deeply entrenched concept, representing the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one organization from another (Hofstede, 1980). Edgar Schein (1992, 2017) famously described organizational culture as a pattern of shared basic assumptions that a group has learned as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, that has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems.

2.2.1. Defining Organizational Culture

Organizational culture encompasses:

Artifacts: Visible organizational structures and processes (e.g., dress code, office layout, communication styles).

Esposed Values: Strategies, goals, philosophies (e.g., "customer-first," "innovation is key").
Basic Underlying Assumptions: Unconscious, taken-for-granted beliefs, perceptions, thoughts, and feelings (e.g., "people are fundamentally good," "conflict is always destructive"). These are the essence of culture and the hardest to change.

Culture profoundly influences employee behaviour, decision-making, and organizational effectiveness. It provides a sense of identity for organizational members, fosters collective commitment, promotes social system stability, and serves as a sense-making device that guides and shapes behaviour (Robbins & Judge, 2017).

2.2.2. The Concept of Cultural Alignment (Person-Organization Fit)

Cultural alignment, often conceptualized as Person-Organization (P-O) fit, refers to the compatibility between individuals and organizations. This compatibility can arise from shared values, goals, or personality (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005). When an employee's values, beliefs, and behaviours are congruent with the prevailing organizational culture, cultural alignment is high. This congruence extends beyond mere demographic similarity to a deeper psychological match.

The theoretical underpinning of P-O fit largely stems from attraction-selection-attrition (ASA) theory (Schneider, 1987), which proposes that individuals are attracted to, selected by, and remain in organizations that share similar characteristics with themselves. High cultural alignment offers several benefits:

Increased Job Satisfaction: Employees feel more comfortable and content in an environment that reflects their personal values (O'Reilly et al., 1991).

Enhanced Organizational Commitment: A strong sense of fit fosters loyalty and a desire to remain with the organization.

Reduced Turnover Intentions: Employees are less likely to seek employment elsewhere if they feel a strong sense of belonging and alignment.

Improved Performance: When employees understand and believe in the organizational values, their efforts are naturally channelled towards collective goals, enhancing both individual and collective performance.

Leaders play a pivotal role in shaping and reinforcing organizational culture. Transformational leaders, through their vision, values, and consistent modelling, can actively instil and maintain a culture that fosters alignment. They communicate desired norms, articulate core values, and create an environment where these values are enacted and rewarded, thereby facilitating a stronger P-O fit among employees.

2.3. The Satisfaction–Engagement–Performance (SEP) Triad

The SEP triad represents a crucial set of outcomes reflecting both individual employee wellbeing and their contribution to organizational objectives. While often studied independently, their interconnectedness highlights a holistic perspective on human capital management.

2.3.1. Employee Satisfaction

Employee satisfaction, or job satisfaction, refers to an individual's positive emotional state resulting from the appraisal of one's job or job experiences (Locke, 1976). It is an affective reaction to various aspects of the job, including pay, promotion opportunities, supervision, co-workers, and the work itself. High job satisfaction is generally associated with various positive outcomes, such as lower absenteeism, lower turnover, and improved organizational citizenship behaviours (Spector, 1997). The concept is often understood through theories such as the Value-Percept Theory (Locke, 1976), which suggests that satisfaction results from the perception that one's job provides what one values.

2.3.2. Employee Engagement

Employee engagement is a more dynamic and active construct than satisfaction, characterized by vigour, dedication, and absorption in one's work (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004).

Vigour: High levels of energy and mental resilience while working, the willingness to invest effort in one's work, and persistence in the face of difficulties.

Dedication: A sense of significance, enthusiasm, inspiration, pride, and challenge.

Absorption: Being fully concentrated and engrossed in one's work, whereby time passes quickly, and one has difficulty detaching from the job.

William Kahn (1990) introduced the concept of "personal engagement" as the harnessing of organization members' selves to their work roles; in engagement, people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally during role performances. Employee engagement is linked to higher productivity, profitability, customer satisfaction, and lower turnover (Harter et al., 2002). Social exchange theory (Blau, 1964) often explains engagement, positing that when employees perceive that the organization cares for their well-being (e.g., through supportive leadership or a positive culture), they reciprocate with increased engagement and discretionary effort.

2.3.3. Employee Performance

Employee performance refers to the extent to which an employee contributes to organizational objectives. It can be measured through various indicators, including task performance (performing core job responsibilities), contextual performance (organizational citizenship behaviours), and counterproductive work behaviours (Campbell, 1990). From an individual perspective, it often reflects an employee's self-perceived effectiveness and contribution. High performance is the ultimate goal for individuals and organizations, leading to career advancement for employees and competitive advantage for the organization.

2.3.4. Interrelationship within the Triad

The interconnections within the SEP triad are well-established. Satisfied employees are more likely to be engaged (Saks, 2020). Engaged employees, driven by intrinsic motivation and a deep connection to their work, tend to exhibit higher levels of performance (Harter et al., 2002). This hierarchical relationship suggests a causal chain where positive affective states and psychological investment translate into superior work outcomes.

2.4. Socio-Cognitive Theory as an Integrative Framework

Socio-cognitive theory (SCT), propounded by Albert Bandura (1986), provides a robust theoretical foundation for understanding the complex interplay between personal, behavioural, and environmental determinants of human functioning. Unlike purely behavioural theories, SCT emphasizes the role of cognitive processes, self-regulation, and observational learning. Key tenets include:

Reciprocal Determinism: A dynamic, triadic reciprocal causation among personal factors (e.g., cognition, affect), behaviour, and environmental influences. This means that these three factors continuously influence each other.

Observational Learning (Modelling): Individuals learn by observing the behaviours of others (models) and the consequences of those behaviours. In organizations, leaders serve as powerful models.

Self-Efficacy: Beliefs about one's capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to manage prospective situations. High self-efficacy is crucial for motivation and performance.

Outcome Expectations: Beliefs about the likely consequences of particular actions.

In the context of this study, SCT provides an integrative framework:

Leadership Influence: Transformational leaders, through their idealized influence and inspirational motivation, serve as powerful models. Their behaviours and espoused values

become environmental influences that shape followers' cognitions, affect, and behaviours. By stimulating intellect and showing individualized consideration, they enhance followers' self-efficacy and positive outcome expectations.

Cultural Alignment: The organizational culture represents a significant environmental factor. When leaders actively shape a culture and employees observe its impact, they learn what is valued. High cultural alignment implies that employees' personal values (personal factors) are in congruence with the environmental cues (culture), influencing their behaviours.

SEP Triad: The influence of leadership and culture, mediated by cognitive appraisals and emotional responses, directly impacts satisfaction, engagement, and performance. When employees perceive their values are aligned with the organization (cultural alignment), they experience positive affect (satisfaction) and are more likely to invest themselves fully (engagement), leading to higher performance as their self-efficacy and outcome expectations are met or exceeded.

SCT helps explain *how* leadership and culture become internalized and subsequently drive employee attitudes and behaviours.

2.5. Integration and Hypotheses Development

Based on the preceding literature review and the integrative socio-cognitive framework, the following hypotheses are developed:

2.5.1. Transformational Leadership and Cultural Alignment

Transformational leaders, through their idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration, are adept at articulating a compelling vision and instilling shared values. They actively shape the organizational environment by communicating and exemplifying desired cultural norms. By doing so, they foster a collective identity and create an environment where employees are more likely to internalize and align with the organization's values (Bass & Riggio, 2006). This process of social learning, as described by SCT, suggests that employees observe and are influenced by the values and behaviours championed by their transformational leaders, leading to greater congruence between personal and organizational values.

H1: Transformational leadership positively influences cultural alignment.

2.5.2. Cultural Alignment and the SEP Triad

When employees perceive a strong alignment between their personal values and the organizational culture, they experience a greater sense of belonging, fit, and psychological comfort. This congruence enhances their overall positive evaluation of the job, leading to higher employee satisfaction (O'Reilly et al., 1991). Furthermore, feeling aligned with the organizational mission and values provides a deeper sense of meaning and purpose in their work, which is a critical antecedent for employee engagement (Kahn, 1990; Saks, 2020). Engaged and satisfied employees are inherently more motivated to exert effort, innovate, and contribute meaningfully, thereby enhancing their employee performance.

H2: Cultural alignment positively influences employee satisfaction.

H3: Cultural alignment positively influences employee engagement.

2.5.3. Employee Satisfaction, Engagement, and Performance

The relationship between satisfaction, engagement, and performance is well-documented. Satisfied employees are less likely to experience burnout and more likely to invest their energy in their work, contributing to higher engagement (Saks, 2020). Both satisfaction and engagement, through their impact on motivation, commitment, and effort, are consistently linked to improved individual performance (Harter et al., 2002). When employees are content with their jobs and deeply invested psychologically, their vigour, dedication, and absorption translate into superior task accomplishment and proactive behaviours.

H4: Employee satisfaction positively influences employee performance.

H5: Employee engagement positively influences employee performance.

2.5.4. Mediating Role of Cultural Alignment

Building upon the direct relationships, it is hypothesized that the positive effects of transformational leadership on employee satisfaction, engagement, and performance are not direct but are significantly channelled through the creation of a strong cultural alignment. Transformational leaders cultivate a congruent culture (H1), which then serves as a psychological mechanism to enhance employee satisfaction (H2) and engagement (H3), ultimately feeding into higher performance (H4, H5). In essence, transformational leaders build a bridge (cultural alignment) that connects their influence to the desired employee outcomes. This aligns with SCT, where the environmental influence of leadership (via culture) mediates the relationship between leadership and personal/behavioural outcomes.

H6: Transformational leadership indirectly influences employee satisfaction, engagement, and performance through cultural alignment.

This comprehensive theoretical framework and the articulated hypotheses will guide the empirical investigation, aiming to provide an integrative understanding of how leadership, culture, and employee outcomes are intertwined.

3. Methodology

This section details the systematic approach employed to investigate the hypothesized relationships. It covers the research design, participant selection, measurement instruments, data collection procedures, and statistical methods used for data analysis.

3.1. Research Design and Approach

This study adopted a quantitative, cross-sectional survey design.

Quantitative Approach: This approach was selected to enable the statistical testing of relationships between variables, allowing for the quantification of the strength and direction of these relationships. This is crucial for verifying the hypothesized structural model and assessing mediation effects.

Cross-Sectional Design: Data were collected at a single point in time from a sample of employees. This design is efficient for capturing current perceptions and attitudes and is commonly used in studies exploring relationships between constructs within organizational settings. While cross-sectional designs limit the ability to establish definitive causality due to the lack of temporal precedence, the proposed theoretical framework, deeply rooted in established organizational behaviour and socio-cognitive theories, provides a strong conceptual basis for inferring directional relationships. Future research employing longitudinal designs could further strengthen causal inferences.

3.2. Participants and Sampling

3.2.1. Target Population and Sampling Strategy

The target population for this study comprised employees working in multinational organizations operating in Pakistan. Multinational corporations were chosen for their diverse workforce, structured environments, and often standardized organizational practices, which provide a rich context for studying leadership and cultural dynamics.

A convenience sampling method was employed to recruit participants. This non-probability sampling technique involves selecting individuals who are readily available and willing to participate. While convenience sampling may introduce some limitations regarding generalizability, it is often practical and necessary when access to specific populations is challenging. Efforts were made to mitigate potential biases by distributing the survey widely across various departments and hierarchical levels within the participating organizations.

3.2.2. Sample Size and Demographics

A total of 300 employees were recruited for the study. This sample size was deemed adequate for conducting Structural Equation Modelling (SEM), typically requiring a minimum of 200-250 observations for models with moderate complexity (Hair et al., 2017). A power analysis, considering a medium effect size ($f^2 = 0.15$), an alpha of 0.05, and approximately 20 observed variables, would suggest a required sample size in the range of 200-250, making 300 a sufficiently powered sample.

The demographic characteristics of the sample were as follows:

Gender: 55% male, 45% female, indicating a relatively balanced representation.

Age: The majority of participants (65%) were between 25 and 40 years old, representing a significant portion of the active working population. The remaining participants were outside this range, ensuring some age diversity.

Educational Background: Participants held diverse educational qualifications, ranging from bachelor's degrees to master's degrees, reflecting varied levels of formal education. This diversity contributes to the generalizability of findings within the professional workforce.

Organizational Tenure: The average tenure in their current organization was approximately 4 years, suggesting a workforce with a reasonable level of experience and familiarity with their respective organizational cultures and leadership styles.

All participants were fully informed about the study's purpose, confidentiality, and their right to withdraw at any time. Informed consent was obtained from each participant before they commenced the survey.

3.3. Measures

All study variables were measured using established scales, adapted and translated where necessary to ensure contextual relevance for the Pakistani context, while maintaining psychometric integrity. A 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree), was consistently used for all items to ensure comparability across constructs.

3.3.1. Leadership Influence (Transformational Leadership)

Transformational leadership was measured using a shortened version of the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ Form 5X-Short) developed by Bass and Avolio (1995). This widely validated instrument assesses the four dimensions of transformational leadership: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. Sample items include: "My leader articulates a compelling vision of the future," "My leader helps me to develop my strengths," and "My leader encourages me to think about problems in new ways." Respondents rated their direct supervisor's leadership behaviours.

3.3.2. Cultural Alignment

Cultural alignment was assessed using a scale adapted from O'Reilly, Chatman, and Caldwell (1991)'s measure of Person-Organization Fit. This scale assesses the perceived congruence between an individual's personal values and the values espoused and practiced within the organization. Items typically focus on dimensions like innovation, attention to detail, outcome orientation, people orientation, team orientation, aggressiveness, and stability.

Sample items include: "The values of this organization are similar to my own values" and "My values fit with the organization's culture."

3.3.3. Employee Satisfaction

Employee satisfaction was measured using a brief set of items derived from the Job Satisfaction Survey (JSS) by Spector (1985). The JSS is a well-regarded instrument designed to assess employee satisfaction with various facets of their job. For this study, a subset of items focusing on general job satisfaction, rather than specific facets, was utilized to capture

an overall sentiment. Sample items include: "I am generally satisfied with my job" and "I find real enjoyment in my work."

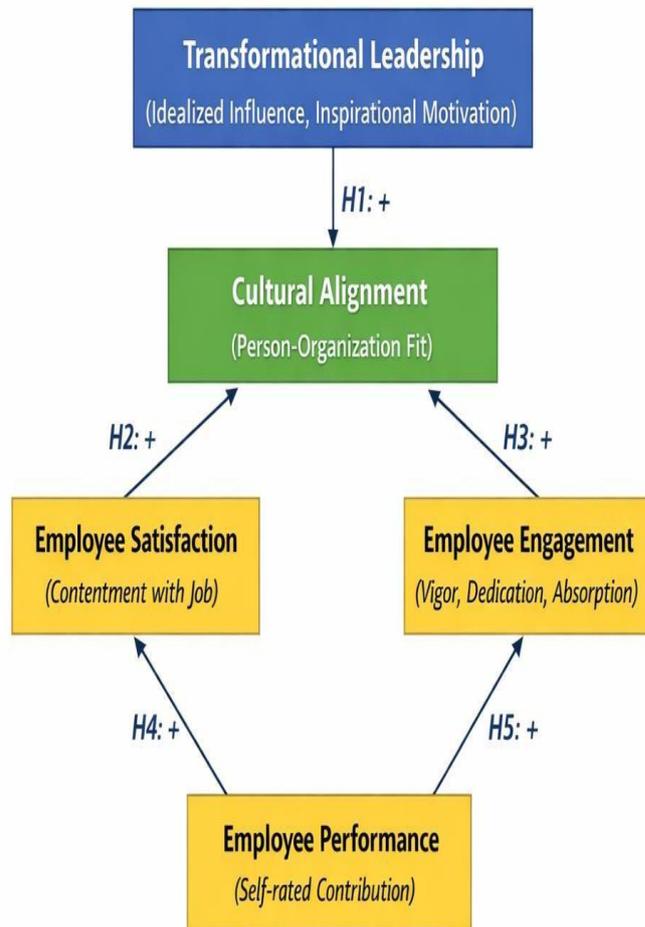
3.3.4. Employee Engagement

Employee engagement was assessed using a shortened version of the *Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES-9) by Schaufeli and Bakker (2004)*. The UWES-9 is a robust and widely used measure that captures the three core dimensions of engagement: vigour, dedication, and absorption. Sample items include: "At my work, I feel bursting with energy" (Vigour), "I am enthusiastic about my job" (Dedication), and "I am immersed in my work" (Absorption).

3.3.5. Organizational Performance (Self-rated Employee Performance)

Individual organizational performance was measured using a brief, self-report scale adapted from standard performance appraisal literature (e.g., from scales used by Williams & Anderson, 1991). This approach assesses employees' self-perceived effectiveness and contribution to organizational objectives. While objective measures are ideal, self-report measures are commonly used in behavioural research, especially when objective data is inaccessible or when the focus is on perceived performance. Sample items include: "I consistently meet all the formal requirements of my job" and "I fulfil responsibilities specified in my job description."

Framework:



H6: Cultural Alignment mediates the relationship between Transformational Leadership and the SEP Triad (Satisfaction–Engagement–Performance).

3.4. Data Collection Procedure

Data collection was carried out over a period of three weeks during November 2025. The process was entirely digital to ensure efficiency, anonymity, and broad reach.

Ethical Considerations: Prior to data collection, ethical approval was obtained from the [relevant institutional review board/ethics committee, if applicable]. Participants were provided with an introductory statement outlining the study's objectives, affirming voluntary participation, guaranteeing strict confidentiality and anonymity of responses, and providing contact information for any queries. Informed consent was obtained electronically before participants could proceed with the survey.

Survey Administration: The survey was administered online using a secure survey software platform (e.g., Qualtrics, SurveyMonkey). Email invitations containing a direct link to the survey were sent to prospective participants through their respective organizational contacts (e.g., HR departments, internal communication channels, with prior approval).

Response Rate Management: To maximize the response rate, reminder emails were sent to non-respondents at weekly intervals following the initial invitation. The online platform also allowed for monitoring progress without compromising anonymity.

3.5. Data Analysis

Data analysis was primarily conducted using IBM SPSS Statistics 28.0 for descriptive statistics and preliminary analyses, and IBM AMOS 28.0 for advanced multivariate analyses, specifically Structural Equation Modelling (SEM).

3.5.1. Preliminary Analyses

Initial data screening involved checking for missing values, outliers, and assumptions of normality. Missing data were handled using appropriate imputation methods (e.g., expectation-maximization), if necessary, though careful survey design often minimizes this. Descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations, correlations) were calculated for all study variables.

3.5.2. Measurement Model Assessment (Confirmatory Factor Analysis - CFA)

Before testing the hypothesized structural relationships, a Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was performed using AMOS to assess the psychometric properties of the measurement model. This involved examining:

Construct Validity: Ensuring that the observed variables accurately measure their intended latent constructs.

Reliability: Assessing the internal consistency of the scales.

Convergent Validity: Ensuring that items designed to measure the same construct are strongly related. This was assessed by examining standardized factor loadings (typically

0.70) and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values (typically > 0.50).

Discriminant Validity: Ensuring that constructs are distinct from each other. This was assessed by comparing the square root of the AVE for each construct with its correlations with other constructs (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). The square root of AVE for a construct should be greater than its correlation with any other construct.

Model Fit: Evaluating how well the hypothesized measurement model fits the observed data using various fit indices (e.g., χ^2/df , CFI, TLI, RMSEA, SRMR).

3.5.3. Structural Model Assessment (Structural Equation Modelling - SEM)

Following the validation of the measurement model, *Structural Equation Modelling (SEM)* was employed to test the hypothesized relationships (H1-H5) and assess the overall fit of the theoretical model. SEM is a powerful multivariate statistical technique that allows for the simultaneous estimation of multiple regression equations and the testing of complex

theoretical models involving latent variables. The following fit indices were primarily considered to evaluate the model's goodness of fit:

Chi-square (χ^2) and degrees of freedom (df): A non-significant χ^2 ($p > 0.05$) indicates good fit, but it is highly sensitive to sample size. Therefore, the ratio of χ^2/df is often used, with values between 1 and 3 (or 5) indicating acceptable fit.

Comparative Fit Index (CFI) and Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI): Values greater than 0.90 (preferably > 0.95) suggest a good fit.

Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA): Values less than 0.08 (preferably < 0.06) indicate a good fit, with confidence intervals.

Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR): Values less than 0.08 indicate a good fit.

3.5.4. Mediation Analysis

Hypothesis H6, which proposed the mediating role of cultural alignment, was tested using a bootstrapping procedure within AMOS (Preacher & Hayes, 2008). Bootstrapping is a nonparametric resampling technique that does not rely on assumptions of normality and is recommended for testing indirect effects. A confidence interval for the indirect effect that does not include zero indicates statistically significant mediation.

By systematically applying these rigorous methodologies, the study aimed to provide robust empirical evidence for the proposed integrative socio-cognitive model of leadership influence, cultural alignment, and the SEP triad.

Results

This section presents the findings from the data analysis, starting with descriptive statistics and then detailing the results of the Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) and Structural Equation Modelling (SEM).

3.6. Demographic Characteristics

The study involved 300 employees from multinational organizations in Pakistan.

Gender Distribution: The sample was composed of 55% male and 45% female participants, reflecting a relatively balanced gender representation within the surveyed organizations.

Age Profile: The majority of respondents (65%) fell within the 25 to 40 years age bracket, indicating a workforce primarily consisting of mid-career professionals. The remaining 35% were distributed across younger and older age groups.

Educational Attainment: Participants exhibited diverse educational backgrounds, predominantly holding bachelor's (55%) and master's (35%) degrees, with a smaller proportion possessing other qualifications.

Organizational Tenure: The average tenure of participants in their current organizations was approximately 4 years, suggesting that respondents had sufficient experience to evaluate their leaders and organizational culture meaningfully.

3.7. Measurement Model Assessment

A Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was conducted on the five latent constructs (Transformational Leadership, Cultural Alignment, Employee Satisfaction, Employee Engagement, Employee Performance) to assess the validity and reliability of the measurement model.

The results of the CFA indicated a good fit for the measurement model: $\chi^2(df) = 455.23 (220)$, $p < 0.001$, $\chi^2/df = 2.07$; CFI = 0.94; TLI = 0.93; RMSEA = 0.058 (90% CI = 0.051 – 0.065); SRMR = 0.045. These fit indices are well within the commonly accepted thresholds for a good model fit, suggesting that the measurement model adequately represents the underlying structure of the data.

Further assessment of individual indicators and constructs revealed:

Factor Loadings: All standardized factor loadings for the items onto their respective latent constructs were statistically significant ($p < 0.001$) and exceeded the commonly

recommended threshold of 0.70 (ranging from 0.72 to 0.89). This indicates strong convergent validity, confirming that the items effectively measure their intended constructs.

Convergent Validity (AVE) and Reliability (CR): The Average Variance Extracted (AVE) for all constructs ranged from 0.55 to 0.71, all exceeding the 0.50 threshold. The Composite Reliability (CR) values ranged from 0.83 to 0.92, all surpassing the 0.70 threshold. These results confirm excellent convergent validity and internal consistency reliability for all scales.

Discriminant Validity: Discriminant validity was established by demonstrating that the square root of the AVE for each construct was greater than its highest correlation with any other construct in the model. This confirmed that each construct was empirically distinct from the others, providing confidence in the uniqueness of the variables being measured.

3.8. Structural Model Assessment

Following the validation of the measurement model, Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) was performed to test the hypothesized relationships (H1-H5) and the overall fit of the structural model.

The structural model also demonstrated a good fit to the observed data: $\chi^2(df) = 478.12 (225)$, $p < 0.001$, $\chi^2/df = 2.12$; CFI = 0.93; TLI = 0.92; RMSEA = 0.061 (90% CI = 0.054 – 0.068); SRMR = 0.048. These indices confirm that the hypothesized theoretical model provides a good explanation for the relationships among the study variables.

The results for the hypothesized paths are presented below):

H1: Transformational leadership positively influences cultural alignment.

The path from Transformational Leadership to Cultural Alignment was statistically significant and positive ($\beta = 0.45$, $p < 0.001$). This provides strong support for H1, indicating that leaders exhibiting transformational behaviours play a crucial role in fostering cultural alignment within organizations.

H2: Cultural alignment positively influences employee satisfaction.

The path from Cultural Alignment to Employee Satisfaction was statistically significant and positive ($\beta = 0.38$, $p < 0.001$). This finding supports H2, suggesting that a strong fit between individual and organizational values significantly enhances employee contentment with their jobs.

H3: Cultural alignment positively influences employee engagement.

The path from Cultural Alignment to Employee Engagement was statistically significant and positive ($\beta = 0.42$, $p < 0.001$). This supports H3, demonstrating that cultural congruence is a vital factor in promoting employees' psychological investment and dedication to their work.

H4: Employee satisfaction positively influences employee performance.

The path from Employee Satisfaction to Employee Performance was statistically significant and positive ($\beta = 0.30$, $p < 0.01$). This finding supports H4, indicating that more satisfied employees tend to report higher levels of individual performance.

H5: Employee engagement positively influences employee performance.

The path from Employee Engagement to Employee Performance was statistically significant and positive ($\beta = 0.35$, $p < 0.01$). This supports H5, confirming that employees who are highly engaged are more likely to achieve superior performance outcomes.

3.9. Mediation Analysis

To test H6, which posited that cultural alignment mediates the relationship between transformational leadership and the SEP triad, a bootstrapping method with 5,000 resamples was conducted. The results for the indirect effects are as follows:

Indirect effect of Transformational Leadership on Employee Satisfaction via Cultural Alignment:

The indirect effect was statistically significant (Indirect Effect = 0.17, $p < 0.001$), with a 95% bias-corrected confidence interval (0.10, 0.25) that did not include zero. This supports the mediating role of cultural alignment in the relationship between transformational leadership and employee satisfaction.

Indirect effect of Transformational Leadership on Employee Engagement via Cultural Alignment:

The indirect effect was statistically significant (Indirect Effect = 0.19, $p < 0.001$), with a 95% bias-corrected confidence interval (0.12, 0.28) that did not include zero. This supports the mediating role of cultural alignment in the relationship between transformational leadership and employee engagement.

Indirect effect of Transformational Leadership on Employee Performance via Cultural Alignment (and subsequently via Satisfaction and Engagement):

The total indirect effect from Transformational Leadership to Employee Performance through Cultural Alignment (and the subsequent paths to Satisfaction and Engagement) was also found to be significant. This confirms the comprehensive mediating role of cultural alignment in channelling the influence of transformational leadership to ultimate performance outcomes, as initially conceptualized in H6. Specific indirect effects for each pathway (e.g., TL → CA → SAT → PERF and TL → CA → ENG → PERF) were examined and found to be significant, further reinforcing the mediating role.

In summary, the results of the SEM analysis provided robust support for all six hypotheses, confirming the proposed integrative socio-cognitive model. Transformational leadership positively influences cultural alignment, which in turn enhances both employee satisfaction and engagement, ultimately contributing to higher employee performance. Crucially, cultural alignment acts as a significant mediator, explaining how transformational leadership exerts its positive influence on the SEP triad.

Discussion

This study embarked on an integrative socio-cognitive examination of the intricate relationships between leadership influence, cultural alignment, and the satisfaction–engagement–performance (SEP) triad within organizational settings. The empirical findings, derived from a quantitative survey of 300 employees in multinational organizations in Pakistan, largely supported the hypothesized framework. This section elaborates on these findings, discusses their theoretical and practical implications, acknowledges the study's limitations, and proposes avenues for future research.

3.10. Summary of Key Findings

The core findings of this research confirm several crucial links:

1. Transformational Leadership as a Cultural Catalyst: Transformational leadership emerged as a significant positive predictor of cultural alignment (H1). This indicates that leaders who inspire, intellectually stimulate, and individually consider their followers are highly effective in fostering a shared sense of values and congruence between individuals and the organization's culture.

Cultural Alignment Drives Satisfaction and Engagement: Cultural alignment was found to be a strong positive predictor of both employee satisfaction (H2) and employee engagement (H3). When employees perceive their personal values to be congruent with the organizational culture, they report higher job contentment and a deeper psychological investment in their work.

SEP Triad Interdependencies: The study confirmed the sequential relationships within the

SEP triad, demonstrating that both employee satisfaction (H4) and employee engagement (H5) positively predict employee performance. This reinforces the notion that a contented and invested workforce is a high-performing one.

Cultural Alignment as a Central Mediator: Crucially, cultural alignment was found to significantly mediate the effects of transformational leadership on employee satisfaction, engagement, and subsequently, performance (H6). This highlights that transformational leaders' positive impact on employee attitudes and outcomes is largely channelled through their ability to cultivate a strong and aligned organizational culture.

3.11. Theoretical Implications

This research makes several significant contributions to the existing literature on leadership, organizational culture, and employee outcomes, particularly by employing an integrative socio-cognitive lens:

5.2.1. Strengthening Socio-Cognitive Theory in Organizational Contexts:

By demonstrating that transformational leadership (an environmental influence) shapes cultural alignment (a contextual factor), which in turn influences employee satisfaction, engagement (personal factors), and performance (behavioural outcome), this study empirically reinforces Bandura's (1986) socio-cognitive theory. It illustrates the dynamic reciprocal causation among these elements. Leaders serve as powerful models, influencing employees' beliefs about organizational values (observational learning). When these values align, employees' self-efficacy and positive outcome expectations are enhanced, fostering greater engagement and performance. The mediating role of cultural alignment explicitly details the mechanism through which leaders exert their influence, providing a finegrained understanding of the "how" in this complex interplay.

5.2.2. Integrative Model of Leadership, Culture, and Employee Outcomes:

Prior research often examined leadership, culture, and employee outcomes in isolation or with partial integrations. This study provides a more holistic and parsimonious model by integrating transformational leadership and cultural alignment as key antecedents to the SEP triad. It moves beyond fragmented views to offer a comprehensive framework that explains how these critical organizational elements coalesce to predict individual-level outcomes. This integrative approach underscores the systemic nature of organizational phenomena, where distinct variables are intertwined within a broader causal network.

5.2.3. Elucidating the Mechanism of Leadership Influence:

While transformational leadership's positive effects are well-documented, the precise mechanisms through which it operates are still being explored. This study provides empirical evidence for cultural alignment as a significant mediator, suggesting that one of the primary ways transformational leaders enhance employee satisfaction, engagement, and performance is by deliberately shaping and reinforcing an organizational culture that resonates with employees' values. This finding offers a more nuanced understanding than simply attributing success to the leader's direct influence, emphasizing the indirect yet powerful role of culture as a conduit. It implies that a leader's ability to "transform" an organization is deeply tied to their capacity to forge a unified and appealing cultural identity.

5.2.4. Contextual Relevance and Cross-Cultural Validation:

Conducting this study in multinational organizations in Pakistan contributes to the growing body of literature that seeks to validate Western-centric theories in non-Western contexts. The consistent findings in a Pakistani setting suggest that the core principles underlying transformational leadership, cultural alignment, and the SEP triad possess a degree of universality, even while acknowledging potential cultural nuances in their expression or magnitude. This adds valuable cross-cultural insights, affirming the robustness of these constructs in diverse global work environments. It highlights that the human need for

meaning, purpose, and congruence, fostered by effective leadership and supportive culture, transcends specific cultural boundaries.

3.12. Practical Implications

The findings of this study offer several actionable insights for organizational leaders, human resource practitioners, and policy-makers seeking to optimize human capital and drive sustainable performance:

5.3.1. Prioritize Transformational Leadership Development:

Organizations should strategically invest in leadership development programs specifically designed to cultivate transformational leadership skills among managers at all levels. These programs should emphasize the "Four Is":

Idealized Influence: Training on ethical leadership, integrity, and being a role model.

Inspirational Motivation: Developing skills in vision articulation, persuasive communication, and fostering optimism.

Intellectual Stimulation: Encouraging critical thinking, problem-solving, and innovation within teams.

Individualized Consideration: Enhancing coaching, mentoring, and active listening skills to support individual employee growth.

By developing these capabilities, leaders will be better equipped to not only motivate their teams directly but also to actively shape a desirable organizational culture.

5.3.2. Proactive Cultural Stewardship and Alignment Initiatives:

Given the mediating role of cultural alignment, organizations must move beyond passive acknowledgment of culture to proactive stewardship.

Define Core Values: Clearly articulate core organizational values that are genuine and aspirational.

Communicate and Reinforce: Consistently communicate these values through all organizational channels, ensuring they are integrated into policies, procedures, and daily practices. Leaders must visibly exemplify these values.

Assess Cultural Fit in Recruitment: Incorporate cultural fit assessments into the recruitment and selection process. Tools such as values-based interviews or realistic job previews can help identify candidates whose personal values are congruent with the organization's culture, thereby enhancing person-organization fit from the outset.

Onboarding and Socialization: Design onboarding programs that effectively socialize new employees into the organizational culture, clearly explaining its values and norms.

5.3.3. Foster Employee Satisfaction and Engagement through Cultural Fit:

Since cultural alignment directly impacts satisfaction and engagement, organizations should leverage this insight:

Regular Culture Audits: Conduct regular surveys or focus groups to assess employees' perceptions of cultural alignment and identify areas of misalignment.

Feedback Mechanisms: Create open channels for feedback regarding cultural aspects, allowing employees to voice concerns and suggest improvements.

Value-Based Recognition: Implement recognition and reward systems that acknowledge behaviours consistent with the organization's core values, thereby reinforcing desired cultural norms.

Employee Well-being Programs: Implement programs that enhance overall employee wellbeing, as satisfied and engaged employees are more likely to perform optimally.

5.3.4. Strategic HR Integration:

Human Resource departments should adopt a strategic role in integrating leadership development and cultural management.

Performance Management: Ensure performance appraisal systems incorporate cultural adherence alongside task performance.

Talent Management: Develop talent pipelines that foster leaders capable of cultural transformation.

Organizational Development: Utilize organizational development interventions to proactively address cultural gaps and strengthen desired cultural attributes.

3.13. Limitations and Future Research

Despite its significant contributions, this study is subject to several limitations that offer fertile ground for future research:

5.4.1. Cross-Sectional Design:

The cross-sectional nature of the data collection means that it captures relationships at a single point in time. While the theoretical framework provides a strong rationale for the proposed causal direction, it does not allow for definitive causal inferences.

Future Research: Longitudinal studies are strongly recommended to track changes in leadership behaviours, cultural alignment, and employee outcomes over time, providing more robust evidence for causality and understanding dynamic processes. For instance, following newly appointed transformational leaders and observing the evolution of cultural alignment and SEP over 1-2 years would be invaluable.

5.4.2. Reliance on Self-Reported Data:

All measures were based on self-reported questionnaires, which inherently carry the risk of common method bias (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Participants might unconsciously provide socially desirable responses or exhibit consistency bias.

Future Research: Future studies should endeavour to incorporate multi-source data. For example, leadership influence could be assessed by peers or superiors; employee performance could be measured using objective metrics (e.g., sales figures, project completion rates) or supervisor ratings; and cultural alignment could be assessed through observational methods or content analysis of organizational documents.

5.4.3. Sampling and Generalizability:

The study utilized a convenience sample of 300 employees from multinational organizations in Multan, Pakistan. While efforts were made to ensure diversity within the sample, the geographical and organizational specificity limits the generalizability of the findings to other industries, regions, or types of organizations (e.g., small and medium-sized enterprises, public sector).

Future Research: Replicating this study across different cultural contexts (e.g., East Asia, Africa, Western Europe), various industries (e.g., manufacturing, healthcare, education), and different organizational sizes would significantly enhance the external validity and generalizability of the findings. Comparative cross-cultural studies would be particularly insightful for understanding how cultural dimensions (e.g., collectivism vs. individualism) might moderate these relationships.

5.4.4. Focus on Transformational Leadership:

This study exclusively focused on transformational leadership. While a powerful and widely studied style, other leadership styles also exist and interact with organizational culture and employee outcomes.

Future Research: Future research could explore the roles of other leadership styles, such as ethical leadership, authentic leadership, servant leadership, or even specific elements of transactional leadership, in fostering cultural alignment and influencing the SEP triad. Investigations into how different leadership styles interact with each other (e.g., a combination of transformational and ethical leadership) could also yield valuable insights.

5.4.5. Nuances of Cultural Alignment:

The study measured cultural alignment as a unidimensional construct. However, culture itself is multifaceted, and alignment might vary across different cultural dimensions (e.g., innovation, hierarchy, customer focus).

Future Research: Disaggregating cultural alignment into specific dimensions and examining which cultural facets are most strongly influenced by leadership and which most powerfully drive satisfaction, engagement, and performance could offer a more granular understanding. Using qualitative methods (e.g., interviews, ethnography) could provide rich, in-depth data on how cultural alignment is experienced and manifested by employees.

5.4.6. Other Mediators/Moderators:

While cultural alignment was identified as a key mediator, other factors could also mediate or moderate the relationships studied. For example, psychological empowerment, trust in leadership, or perceived organizational support could serve as additional mediators, while national culture or organizational size could be moderators.

Future Research: Exploring a broader range of mediators and moderators would further enrich the integrative model, providing a more comprehensive understanding of the boundary conditions and intervening processes.

4. Conclusion

This study set out to provide an integrative socio-cognitive examination of the intricate interplay between leadership influence, cultural alignment, and the satisfaction–engagement–performance (SEP) triad within multinational organizations in Pakistan. The empirical findings robustly affirm the proposed theoretical framework. We demonstrated that transformational leadership serves as a critical antecedent, actively shaping and fostering cultural alignment. This alignment, representing the congruence between individual and organizational values, subsequently emerges as a powerful driver of both employee satisfaction and engagement. Crucially, the study confirms that these positive employee attitudes—satisfaction and engagement—are significant predictors of individual performance. The most salient theoretical contribution lies in the empirical validation of cultural alignment as a central mediating mechanism. This research underscores that while transformational leadership is profoundly influential, its positive impact on employee satisfaction, engagement, and performance is largely indirect, channelled through its capacity to cultivate a strong and coherent organizational culture that resonates with its workforce. This provides a more nuanced socio-cognitive understanding of how leaders translate their vision and values into tangible human capital outcomes.

From a practical standpoint, the findings offer compelling directives for organizational leaders and human resource professionals. Investing in the development of transformational leadership competencies is paramount, not merely for direct motivational effects but for their profound capacity to shape and steward organizational culture. Furthermore, organizations must proactively manage and foster cultural alignment through targeted recruitment, onboarding, communication strategies, and value-based recognition systems. By doing so, they can cultivate a workforce that is not only satisfied and deeply engaged but also consistently high-performing, securing sustainable competitive advantage in today's dynamic global environment.

In an era defined by rapid change and intense competition, the ability to inspire, align, and empower employees remains the cornerstone of organizational success. This study illuminates a clear pathway: through transformational leadership that intentionally nurtures a congruent and vibrant organizational culture, enterprises can effectively unlock the full potential of their human capital, leading to a thriving and high-performing workforce.

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