

The Effect of Perceived Transactional Leadership Style on Employee Engagement in Palestinian ICT Industry

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ABSTRACT

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Business leaders, as well as occupational psychologists, have taken a heightened interest in employee engagement because it is claimed to relate closely to organizational productivity and long-term success. The survey research design was used in conducting the investigation. A primary source of data was used and a total of 450 questionnaires, copies of self-administered questionnaire were distributed to the target employees. The number of copies of questionnaire completed and returned were 349, which represented a return rate of 77%. The participants constituted a sample of full-time employees in ICT sector. The aim of this study is to highlight the impact of transactional leadership style on employee engagement, and to draw the managers' and researchers' attention to the significance of the relationship between transactional leadership style and employee engagement within the Information & Communication Technology (ICT) industry. Researcher establishes the content validity through a series of expert review, pre-test, and pilot testing by using Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) and Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) using the Structural Equation Modeling (SEM). Results found that transactional leadership has a direct and positive impact on employee engagement in Palestine ICT industry.

Keywords:

Employee engagement (EE),
Transactional Leadership (TA),
Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA),
Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA),
Information & Communication
Technology (ICT)

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1. Introduction

Employee engagement helps businesses in attaining their goals as it serves as a means of enhancing employees' performance and reducing potential turnover [1], and favorably influences various work-related outcomes [2].

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The 21st century organizational leaders, unlike previous centuries, are experiencing an upheaval and high degree of uncertainty because of forces comprising of global competition, rapid evolution of technology, increased need for competent human capital, government's regulatory business policies, and the shifting nature of the economy [3-5].

According to Global Employee Engagement Index report (2016) conducted by Effectory International in 52 countries, found that just 14% of employees have a total trust in their executives and the boards of their organization. They also found that there is a connection between employee confidence in top management and employee engagement and commitment to work. The same survey analysis also stated that when employees felt confident in the board, they were likely to be engaged in their work and committed to the organization nine times more [5].

According to a recent survey in leadership and maximize employee engagement by HR .com [6], respondents for three-quarters ensure that they are highly linked between engagement and leadership; results of this study showed there are three top factors that can affect this relation, the first top factor is a leadership trust found to be (77%) of respondents, second top one the relationship with immediate supervisor found to be (74%) of respondents, and the third one is the organizational culture found (73%) of respondents.

Sadeq and Khoury [7] tried to highlight the importance of leadership through identifying the leadership styles and practices in the Palestinian industrial. The result of this research showed that transactional leadership style was found to be the most frequently used leadership style and transformational leadership was found to induce the greatest satisfaction, willingness to exert extra effort, and effectiveness among employees.

According to Gallup's [8] study in the workplace worldwide, it was found that 13% of employees studied were engaged during work hours in more than 100 countries. The same study was conducted again in 2017, [9] and the percentage of employees globally being engaged rose to 15%. Thus, it was found that most employees across the world are emotionally unrelated to the workplace and their productivity is less. Gallup's (2013) study in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) stated that the highest result for any region in the world with 10% of employees who are engaged in their jobs, while 55% are not engaged and 35% are actively disengaged. Specifically, in Palestine, the same study found that just 11% of employees are engaged in work, 64% are unengaged, and 26% are actively disengaged. According to the report, this might be because of the high rate of unemployment in the region, and this makes many of disengaged employees to stay in their work despite their dissatisfaction at workplace.

According to Khoury and Analoui [10], study of 400 organizations, reveals how Palestinian managers deal with stress at workplace. It was found that the majority of those who feel stressed (87%) perceive the relationships with their superiors, poor communication, work conditions, salary and colleagues issues. In general, the study indicated that Palestinian employees tend to suffer from a lack of recognition and incentives, limited management support and participation in decision making, heavy workloads, and insufficient efforts by employers to aid employees in handling work-related stress.

Al-Madhoun and Analoui [11] stated that there was an agreement between the Palestinian Authority and United Nations Relief and Works Agency that Palestinian managers are too often afflicted by managerial ineffectiveness, and for this reason, training and development are the key long-term elements that can aid in developing the Palestinian economy and eventually reduce the unemployment in the Palestinian Territories.

As Sadeq and Khoury [7] found that the majority of the surveyed Palestinian leaders i.e., 60% were found displaying transactional leadership qualities, and thus, employing the transactional style as their dominant leadership style. While only 28.9% of them were found utilizing the

transformational leadership style. Accordingly, the outcomes of this leadership process in terms of extra effort, effectiveness, and satisfaction among employees were very low (an average of 1.01). This very low rate of satisfaction, and thus, high degree of dissatisfaction among employees have dangerous effects and consequences on the overall performance of the organizations. Also, the high rates of absenteeism and voluntary turnover, as well as the low productivity, efficiency, and effectiveness among employees influenced those consequences.

According to Mercy Corps [12] report that ICT sector in Palestine is facing obstacles in the limited capability of the government support toward education, research and development in ICT sector. On the education level, there is a slight connection between the skills and abilities of new ICT graduates and the requirements of the marketplace; the Palestinian ICT workers are not as fully ready in terms of abilities and proficiencies as the ICT workers in neighboring markets.

According to the recent study by Balawi [13] on the impact of transformational leadership behaviors on innovation at IT sector in Palestine, Transformational Leadership was shown to not have significant effect on employee's perspective at IT companies. However, the investigation should not be limited to a particular part of the country and just one leadership style (Transformational Leadership). But a broader level investigation needs to be done in different areas and cities and in all the ICT sectors in Palestine; to have more accurate data to be employed in literature of ICT industry in Palestine.

Due to the gap in the literature on the relationships between, Transactional leadership styles, and employee engagement, this study will investigate the relationships between leadership styles and employee engagement in Palestine. The aim of this study is to use the results enhancing the literature and improving the organizational productivity of businesses in Palestine in particular.

2. Scope of this Study

The scope of this study aimed to target the ICT sector in Palestine. This selection has been due to the representativeness of this sector as being part of the overall economy. Also, this sector was chosen because it has witnessed growth and development more than other sectors. The ICT sector is the fastest growing sector among Palestinian economic sectors with annual growth rate of more than 10% contributing 8% to the Palestinian GDP according to Mercy Corps [12].

3. Literature Review

In order to highlight the research gap and for the purposes of this study, reviewing the existing literature provided a detailed discussion on the following:

3.1 Transactional Leadership (TA)

For many decades, leadership was considered a significant subject academically and organizationally. A broad array of definitions is revealed in the literature. The concept and definition of leadership differ from writer to writer. Many disciplines and environments have discussed the leadership which made it a universal phenomenon depending on the scope of the research, Holt and Marques [14].

Burns [15] is considered one of the first few scholars who established the concept of leadership styles regarding the characteristics of transactional leadership styles. Burns defines Transactional leadership as the transaction that arises between leaders and followers in doing the job and accomplishing the goals. The leaders clarify what needs to be done and offers rewards for individual and group effort directed towards goal accomplishment. This leadership approach aims to motivate

subordinates to raise work performance based on a variety of reward mechanisms. In its basic practice, a leader monitors and inspires followers to achieve the established goals by identifying the roles, task requirements, and effectiveness objectives clearly.

According to Bass, [16] Transactional leaders regard leadership focuses on setting goals and limits, clarifying expectations and rewarding good performance. This style concentrates on cost benefit, in which achieving organizational and job goals depends on the exchange of commodities (e.g., rewards) and doing job based on task roles and requirements. Also, held that the influence of transactional leadership tends to happen when a leader makes a promise to the best interests of their subordinates in which a leader makes a commitment of reward exchange. Bass [16] includes three dimensions: contingent reward, management-by-exception (active) and management-by-exception (passive).

Bass [16] emphasized the transactional leader might motivate a reasonable degree of involvement, loyalty, commitment and performance from subordinates by providing contingent rewards. The dimension of management-by-exception (active) is the degree to which the leader takes corrective action on the basis of results of leader–follower transactions [17]. In this dimension, leaders can take corrective action by monitoring the performance of their followers in order to perceive poor performance or deviations from standards, and mistakes or errors in order to correct them.

As Bass and Avolio [18] stated that transactional leaders and followers interact and negotiate agreements, which mean they engage in ‘transactions. Thus, it is important for the leader to have the power to reward followers. Other transactions task correcting followers or being involved only with cases that require the leader’s attention, known as management-by-exception [16,19]. Transactional leaders consider followers as individuals and concentrate on their needs and motives. Then, they clarify how these needs and motives will be catered in exchange for the followers’ work. Transactional leaders can build confidence in followers to get out the necessary effort to accomplish expected levels of performance by clarifying the requirements of followers and the consequences of their behaviors. According to Bass *et al.*, [20] and Avery [19] transactional leadership, followers agree with, accept, or fulfill with the leader to exchange monetary rewards, resources and praise, or to avoid disciplinary actions.

In general, transactional leadership is based largely on the leader’s skills; trust in his or her selected direction and having cooperation from the followers. Such leaders seek to persuade and influence followers to achieve certain ends, taking the followers’ viewpoints as part of the negotiations. Transactional leaders employ interpersonal skills to motivate, teach, direct, develop, control, and influence followers more than they themselves are influenced [21]. The focus tends to be short-term and on maximizing immediate outcomes and rewards [19].

Under transactional leadership, leaders adopt making decisions as counselling style. They consult and take followers opinions regarding different degrees, but the final decision making remains with the leaders. Leaders do not give much power to followers. Followers have little power in the organization, and they are able to withdraw or contribute more of their labor. Unlike classical leaders, transactional leaders normally employ only small number of skilled staff for their organizations. In transactional leadership, the followers’ knowledge base is somewhat higher than that of the followers of classical leadership. The followers’ commitment is a result of the rewards, agreements, and expectations negotiated with the leader. The operations in the organization become routine and predictable and the leader controls the organization highly [19].

3.2 Employee Engagement

Schaufeli *et al.*, [22] faced the burnout/engagement concept and offered another concept of engagement. Schaufeli *et al.*, [22] have defined engagement as “a positive, satisfying, and work-related state of mind that is described by vigor, dedication, and absorption”. The individuals’ mental elasticity and high levels of energy when doing the job, and the desire to work with more effort and show determination in facing difficulties is referred to as vigor. Dedication is the individual’s sense of willingness, significance, pride, inspiration, and challenge, while absorption refers to the individuals who are deeply engrossed and completely concentrated while executing tasks. According to Breevaart *et al.*, [23] and Schaufeli and Bakker [24] State work engagement is defined as transient, positive, fulfilling, and work-related state of mind that fluctuates within individuals over a short period of time and is characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption. Vigor means high levels of energy and mental resilience, dedication is being excited about work and inspired by the work responsibilities, and absorption refers to being totally focused on work and feeling like time flies when working. This dynamic approach allows us to study how leaders affect followers’ work engagement in their natural work context.

According to a recent definition by HR.com [6] respondents in survey for three quarters define employee engagement is “both emotional commitment and a willingness to give your best at work”. Recently, researchers in the engagement literature have given varying consideration to the job demands-resources (JD-R) model. According to Schaufeli and Bakker [24], job demands define the psychological, physical, and social or any features of the work that commit employees to apply continuous psychological and physical strength while doing their job. Though job resources denote the availability of those psychological, physical, social resources (e.g. self-sufficiency, support, comment, and coaching) that reduce the outcome of job demands (e.g. conflicting demands, capacity, emotional effort, and unjustified expectations), enhance the accomplishment of work objectives, and prompt individuals’ personal evolution and development [24].

As Bakker *et al.*, [25] study found, while both work engagement and burnout are associated with major job-related outcomes, burnout looks more closely linked to health outcomes, while work engagement is more closely linked to stronger motivational outcomes. Also, they went over the literature that the workloads are the most significant predictors of burnout, and the work resources are the most significant predictors of work engagement.

Instead, to clarify the process of how individuals start engagement, it is more rational to take in consideration, the idea of state-trait like engagement; Macey and Schneider [26]. According to several scholars, Robinson *et al.*, [27] and Zhu *et al.*, [28] employee engagement is defined as a related relationship between the employer and the employee, run by leaders, and it comes as an outcome interaction between the environment and the individual. Through the lens of social exchange theory and aligned with this argument, the subsequent sections purpose to study leadership styles and personality proposing, and potential associations between these concepts and employee engagement.

During the past few decades, transactional leadership has increasingly become main leadership research subjects and has initiated numerous research projects. Although, both leadership styles can facilitate employees’ engagement Breevaart *et al.*, [23] and Ghadi *et al.*, [29], have given that transactional leadership mainly focuses on driving employees’ extrinsic motivation and always overlooks what employees really need, whereas transformational leadership is more concerned with and manages to meet and develop their high-level needs, mainly by driving employees’ intrinsic motivation to stretch beyond traditional transaction relationship, a lot of researchers argue that, compared to transactional leadership, transformational leadership is a more proactive leadership

and is more likely to help in a high-level leader-member exchange and thus has a greater effect on employees' work attitude and behavior [30,31]. Therefore, transformational leadership is universally considered to be one of the most popular and effective leadership approaches receiving more and more attention from scholars and managers [32].

This study has provided new insights into the specific mechanism by which leader's transactional leadership affects employee engagement by concluding that leaders who hold transactional leadership dimensions can influence followers' outcomes. The academic contributions of this study inform an enhanced appreciation and understanding of the importance of employee engagement among a set of antecedents and consequences. This study provides researchers with evidence-based results by highlighting the proposed relationships in the model that extend the existing literature to better explain the place of employee engagement in the nomological network.

This study should benefit organizations and leaders at every level within organizations as it highlights the following findings: engaged employees make a significant variance to organizations' abilities to compete in an effective way and help enhance meaningful business-unit performance by influencing several outcomes. These outcomes included lower turnover, lower absenteeism, higher employee loyalty and higher customer satisfaction. With this gap in knowledge, it can be concluded that transactional leadership has direct effect on employee engagement relationship.

4. Conceptual Framework

This study's conceptual structure is shown in Figure 1. This conceptual framework has key constructs: transactional leadership and employee engagement. The transactional leadership is the independent variable (IV) and employee engagement as a dependent variable (DV). The causal relationships among the variables are shown in the figure below.

Transactional leadership, which is based on an exchange process, motivates subordinates by appealing to their personal desires, based on instrumental economic transactions [33]. Breevaart *et al.*, [23] study confirmed that transactional leadership is positively related to followers' work engagement, the former explaining additional variance in followers' work engagement over the latter. Moreover, the authors examined how leaders' daily leadership behavior is related to followers' daily work engagement. It appeared that transactional leaders and leaders who use contingent reward contribute to a favorable work environment.

The few studies that examined the effect of the transactional leadership simultaneously mainly used cross-sectional or longitudinal survey designs with long time intervals [31]. The Previous studies showed still need more require investigation on the relationship between transactional leadership as independent variables and employee engagement as a dependent variable. Therefore, in this study, transactional leadership is an important testable variable in its relationship with employee engagement.

H₁: Transactional leadership has a significant and direct effect on employee engagement.

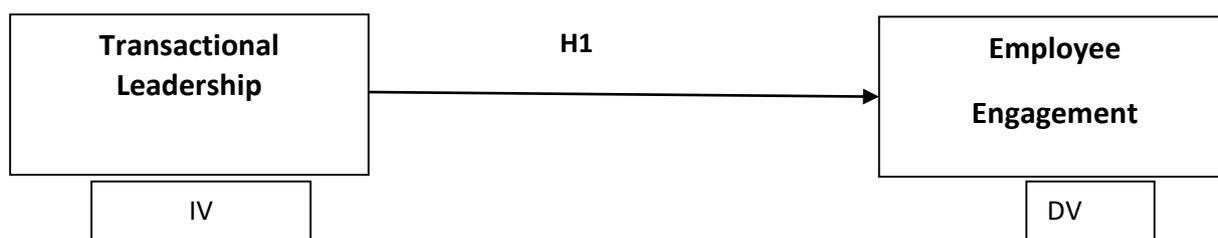


Fig. 1. Conceptual Framework

5. Methods

5.1 Sample and Procedures for Data Collection

A total of 450 questionnaires were distributed to the target employees. The numbers of questionnaires returned by the respondents were 349, which represented a return rate of 69%. The participants constituted a sample of full-time employees in ICT sector. The questionnaires were provided with instructions to complete all the points properly. Invitation letters were also provided which described the aims and objectives of the study, potential contribution, data collection, potential use of the research, and how confidentiality would be maintained to secure privacy.

5.2 Measures

The measures used for the variables of the study are outlined below:

5.2.1 Transactional Leadership (TA)

The Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire MLQ-5X applied to evaluate the construction of Transactional leadership scale [30]. However, only 15 items evaluated followers' perceptions of their leaders' transactional behaviors. And five items were used to measure contingent rewards for transactional leadership components. Both of management by exception/active and management by exception/negative were assessed by five items for each. For each of the 15 statements, the study participants will evaluate their immediate supervisors. The Cronbach's alpha for all dimensions was ≥ 0.70 .

5.2.2 Employee Engagement (EE)

Employee engagement was measured by using the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES) developed by Schaufeli and Bakker [34]. This concept consists of 17 items that measure three dimensions of job engagement: vigor (six items; dedication (five items; and absorption (six items). The Cronbach's alpha for all three dimensions was ≥ 0.70 .

6. Results and Discussion

6.1 Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) for Transactional Leadership Construct.

The Exploratory Factor Analysis using the extraction method of Principal Component with Varimax (Variation Maximization) Rotation was performed on the 15 items measuring Transactional leadership construct. The results in Table 1 indicate that the Bartlett's Test of Sphericity is significant (P-Value < 0.05). Furthermore, the measure of sampling adequacy by Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) is excellent since it exceeded the required value of 0.6 [35,36]. These two results (Bartlett's Test is significant and KMO > 0.6) indicate that the data is adequate to proceed further with the data reduction procedure [35,36].

Table 1

KMO and Bartlett's Test for TA Construct

KMO and Bartlett's Test		
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.860
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	1239.674
	Df	105
	Sig.	.000

The Cronbach's Alpha for the three components measuring the TA construct as shown in Table 2 ranged between 0.845 and 0.930. Thus, the items in all four components have achieved the required internal reliability since their Cronbach's values are greater than 0.7. [35]; [36].

Table 2
 Reliability Analysis for each component measuring TA

Name of Component	Number of items	Cronbach's Alpha
Component 1	6	.930
Component 2	4	.845
Component 3	5	.897

6.2 Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) for Employee Engagement Construct.

The results in Table 3 indicate that the Bartlett's' Test of Sphericity is significant (P-Value < 0.05). Furthermore, the measurement of sampling adequacy by Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) is excellent since it exceeded the required value of 0.6 (Awang, 2012; 2015). These two results (Bartlett's Test is significant and KMO > 0.6) indicate that the data is adequate to proceed further with the data reduction procedure Awang, [35,37].

Table 3
 KMO and Bartlett's Test for EE Construct

KMO and Bartlett's Test	
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.	.892
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	1665.55
	0
	136
	.000

The Cronbach's Alpha for the three components measuring the EE construct as shown in Table 4 ranged between 0.829 and 0.949. Thus, the items in all four components have achieved the required internal reliability since their Cronbach's values are greater than 0.7. Awang [35,37].

Table 4
 Reliability Analysis for each component measuring EE

Name of Component	Number of items	Cronbach's Alpha
Component 1	7	.949
Component 2	4	.858
Component 3	3	.829

6.3 Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) for TA and EE Constructs

The results in Figure 2 show the hypothesized link between TA and EE, while the output in Table 5 shows that when TA went up by 1, EE also went up by 0.664. Besides, the regression weight estimate of .664 had a standard error of about .063. Dividing the regression weight estimate by the estimate of its standard error gave $z = .664/.063 = 10.480$. In other words, the regression weight estimate was 10.480, with standard errors above zero. Moreover, the probability of obtaining a critical ratio of 10.480 in absolute value was less than 0.001. In other words, the regression weight

of TA when predicting the EE was significantly different from zero at the 0.001 level (two-tailed). Therefore, since the P-Value was lower than 0.05, the above research hypothesis had been supported. This study concludes that Transactional leadership (TA) had a significant and direct effect on the Employee Engagement (EE).

Table 5
 Path Analysis for Hypothesis

Construct	PATH	Construct	Beta Estimate	Standard Error	Critical Region	Significance Value (P)
TA	<---	EE	.664	.063	10.480	***

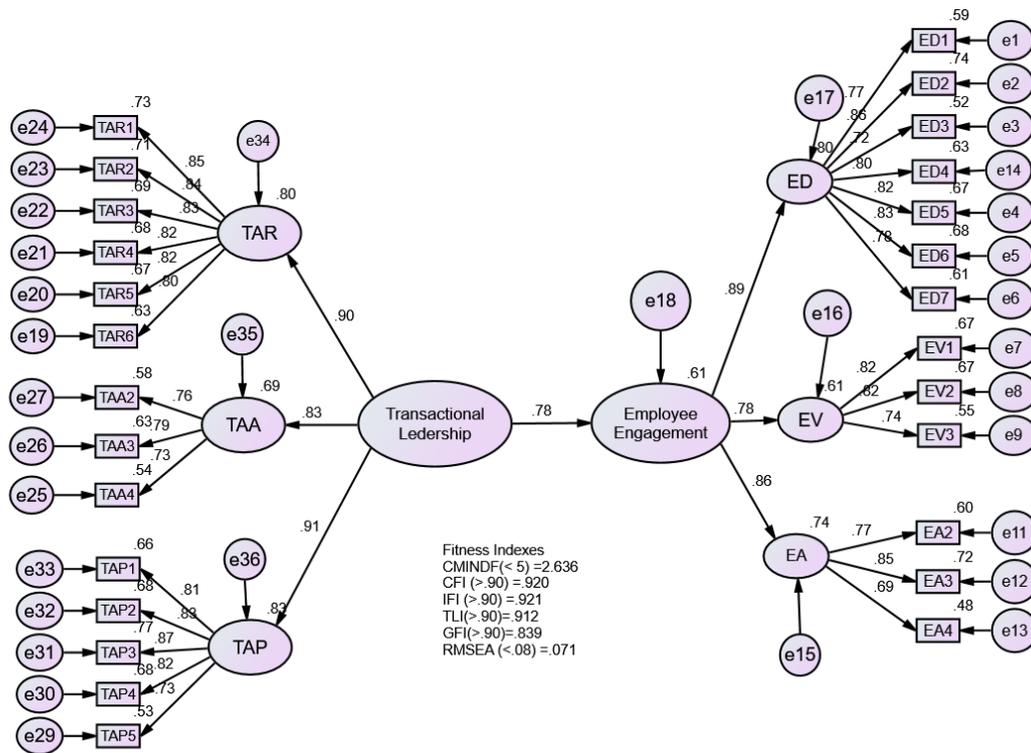


Fig. 2. The Hypothesized Link between TA and EE (H1)

The fitness index for the measurement model was extracted and the result showed that the higher-order factor of the model fitted the data adequately: CMIN/DF=2.236, RMSEA =0.071, CFI=0.920, IFI= =0.921. Under the “close fit” hypothesis (i.e., the RMSEA is no greater than 0.05 in the population), the probability of getting a sample RMSEA as large as 0.080 was 0.062. The entire factor loading of the remaining items, as shown in Figure 1, had exceeded the required value of 0.6. Thus, the researcher could assume that the uni-dimensionality of the measurement model had been achieved. Hence, the researcher was satisfied with the obtained fitness index and the CFA procedure was completed at this stage before proceeding the structural modelling. The requirement for Composite Reliability (CR), and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) were achieved for all items factoring as: Transactional Leadership, CR=0.91, and AVE was 0.77; and Employee Engagement, CR=0.88, and AVE was 0.72.

7. Conclusion

In conclusion, the results obtained from Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) indicated that all components measuring the respective constructs possess good internal reliability since all Cronbach's values have exceeded the threshold of 0.7. Thus, the researcher would rearrange the items measuring every construct into their respective components accordingly and proceed with data collection in the field study.

Results of Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) in this study showed that there is a significant affect in relationship between transactional leadership and employee engagement. In this regard, this study framework can be extended to further studies in another context other than ICT industry. This study has enhanced the literature and improved the organizational productivity of businesses in Palestine industry.

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