EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT AS A MEDIATOR BETWEEN TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP & INTENTION TO QUIT

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Abstract

Background. Realizing the strategic value of human capital and the costs associated with losing valued employees, organizations must place greater emphasis on staff turnover issues. The severe economic downturn faced by Egyptian organizations especially after the 25th of January revolution impelled organizations to strive for sustaining their talents and minimizing their costs.

Research aim. This paper examines the positive impacts of the transformational leadership style on employee engagement and their ultimate impact on an employee's intention to quit an organization.

Method. Data was mainly collected from 500 employees in Vodafone Egypt. A non-experimental quantitative research design was mainly used for the purpose of this study. The approach is concerned with testing objective theories deductively by examining the relationship among different variables (transformational leadership, employee engagement and intention to quit) without any kind of manipulation or control of any of the variables. Various standard statistical tools were used to interpret the data.

Key findings. The results have shown statistically significant relationships between the 3 constructs of transformational leadership, employee engagement and intention to quit. A significantly positive relationship was found between transformational leadership and employee engagement. A significantly negative relationship was found between transformational leadership and intention to quit. There was also a significantly negative relationship found between employee engagement and intention to quit. The validation of the mediating effect of employee engagement in the relationship between transformational leadership and intention to quit denotes the importance of interventions aimed at engaging employees.

Keywords: Human Capital, Transformational Leadership, Employee Engagement, Intention to Quit

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Nowadays organizations are experiencing tremendous obstacles to remaining competitive in an ever changing and extremely challenging global market place. Investment in intellect and creativity has become a main concern for many organizations. Organizations are increasingly taking interest in not only how to retain their talent, but also to optimize their leadership and engagement practices to maximize organizational outcomes through their talent. This impels organizations to find ways to understand and manage the psychological mechanisms that keep their talents highly engaged in their jobs as well as preventing them from nurturing intentions to quit. When organizations lose critical talent in times of greatest need, they bear great costs concerning loss of knowledge, experience and time

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as well as money invested in recruitment, training and advancement of such talent in addition to training costs of replacement employees. This makes employee turnover a critical concern, demanding a good understanding of what contributes to employees' hidden intentions to quit.

The concept of employee engagement has recently been a matter of concern for many organizations worldwide. Employees who feel engaged experience high levels of involvement and enjoyment (Schaufeli, Taris, & Rhenen, 2008). When employees decide to leave a company, they leave their managers, not the company (Buckingham & Coffman, 2005). This brings the assumption that leadership practices have strong implications to the intentions to quit harboured by employees. In essence, this implies that an engaged workforce is less likely to quit their jobs, and that it is managers that essentially affect the extent of such engagement. Organizational leaders can boost work engagement (Chughtai & Buckley, 2008), however not all leaders affect followers in the same way. The transformational leadership style has long been shown to elicit above average performance in followers. Transformational leaders broaden and change the interests of their followers, and generate awareness and acceptance of the purposes and mission of the group. They stir their followers to look beyond their self-interest for the good of the group (Bass, 1985).

This study aims to provide a guide for Egyptian organizations on how to avoid losing their desirable staff and talents and thus incurring great losses. In doing so, the link between the three constructs: transformational leadership, employee engagement and intention to quit is explored. Although many studies have examined the relationship between transformational leadership and engagement as well as transformational leadership and intention to quit, few studies however have explored the relationship between the three constructs together with considering the possibility that employee engagement mediates the relationship between transformational leadership and intention to quit.

Transformational Leadership, Employee Engagement and Intention to Quit

Transformational Leadership. Transformational leadership was first introduced by Burns in (1978) in a book on political leadership. He distinguished between transforming leaders (who appeal to the moral values of followers and attempt to raise their consciousness about ethical issues and get them to reform organizations) and transacting leaders (who use rewards and punishments to incite followers to do what the leader wants, e.g. pay and benefits in exchange for work) (Wefald, 2008). Transformational leadership occurs when leaders and followers raise one another to higher levels of values and motivations (Burns, 1978, p. 4). According to Burns, the result of transforming leadership is a relationship of mutual stimulation and elevation

that converts followers into leaders and may convert leaders into moral agents, thus resulting in a transforming effect on both leaders and followers. The theory of transformational leadership was later reformulated by Bass (1985) who broke down transformational and transactional leadership into specific behaviors and his approach has been the focus of empirical research (Yukl, 2006). According to Bass (1985), transformational leadership goes beyond exchanging inducements for desired performance by developing, intellectually stimulating, and inspired followers who transcend their own self-interests for a higher collective purpose, mission, or vision. Bass (1985) further defined a transformational leader as one who motivates followers to do more than they originally expected to do. He focused on explaining the unique connection between leaders and followers and how this relationship could result in extraordinary performance and accomplishment in both individual followers and the entire organization.

There are four characteristics that characterize transformational leadership style from other leadership styles:

1. Idealized Influence. Transformational leaders are willing to take and share risks with followers (Avolio & Bass, 2002; Bass, 1998), they build a climate which is enjoyable and fulfilling because they have a special gift of discerning what is really important.
2. Inspirational Motivation. In the situation of organizational change, the transformational leader has the task of continuously stimulating others to follow a new idea, behaving in a way which motivates and inspires followers. Such behaviors include implicitly showing enthusiasm and optimism among followers, stimulating team work, pointing out positive results, advantages, emphasizing aims and stimulating followers (Simić, 1998).
3. Intellectual Stimulation. Transformational leaders challenge their followers to be creative and innovative, to question long-term assumptions, to reframe questions, and to use new methods and mindsets to solve traditional problems and questions (Frank et al., 2004, pp. 12–25).
4. Individualized Consideration. Transformational leaders who pay special attention to specific followers' needs regarding their personal growth and achievement, and try to meet their needs and satisfy their expectations for future development (Bass, 1985).

Employee Engagement. The concept of employee engagement has recently been a matter of concern for many organizations worldwide. Employees who feel engaged experience high levels of involvement and enjoyment (Schaufeli, Taris, & Rhenen, 2008). The positive state of mind is not the only reason for modern organizations to attempt to improve employee engagement, however high levels of employee engagement have

a positive effect on business outcomes like customer satisfaction, productivity and profitability (Harter, Schmidt, & Hayes, 2002).

Engagement, as a concept, was first introduced by Kahn in 1990. Kahn (1990) defined 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 (p.694).

On the contrary, people who are not able to express themselves in their work role, tend to be disengaged and withhold effort. Personal disengagement refers to:

> the uncoupling of self from work roles; in disengagement, people withdraw and defend themselves physically, cognitively, or emotionally during role performances (p. 694).

Thus, according to Kahn (1990, 1992) engagement means to be psychologically present when occupying and performing an organizational role.

Kahn (1990) further added to the concept of engagement as being:

> the simultaneous employment and expression of a person's 'preferred self' in task behaviors that promote connections to work and to others, personal presence (physical, cognitive, and emotional), and active full role performance (p. 700).

Kahn (1990) expanded the meaning of engagement also to include: the extent to which individuals are "psychologically present during particular moments of role performance" (p. 692).

Xu & Thomas (2010) in their analysis to Kahn's definition stated that: engaged employees draw their "whole selves" in an integrated manner to promote their role performance because three antecedent conditions are met: (a) employees feel psychologically safe, (b) they have sufficient personal resources encouraging their devotion to such performances, and (c) their work is sufficiently meaningful that such personal investment is perceived as worthwhile. These conditions are respectively called psychological safety, psychological availability, and psychological meaningfulness.

Intention to Quit. Intentions are the most immediate determinants of actual behavior (Alam & Mohammad, 2009). There are many factors that turn employees' intentions into actual behaviors of leaving their organizations. Thus organizations should analyze the drivers of such intentions in order to be able to handle them. The intention to quit (turnover intention) is the strength of a person's view that he/she wishes not to stay with a specific organization and represents a cognitive manifestation of the behavioral decision to quit (Boshoff et al., 2002; Elangoven, 2001). Kim et al. (1996) defined the intention to quit as the degree to which an employee intends to continue the relationship with an organization. In spite of a chal-

lenging economic climate, employers continue to be challenged by finding and retaining qualified talent. Workers expect to be respected as individuals and to be involved in critical decision-making processes, as well as to have "the opportunity to learn and to grow, doing work that they find stimulating, enjoyable, and worthwhile to society" (Gray, 2007, p. 100).

Attrition, low levels of engagement and employee burnout are all factors that can lead to decreased organizational performance (Ballard, 2012). Any organization is thus concerned with employees' turnover or attrition due to both the tangible and intangible costs associated with it. Tangible costs might include costs associated with screening, interviewing, testing, wages, training, orientation, and technology for replacement workers. Whereas intangible costs might include lost productivity, rework for mistakes by newer employees, additional supervision for new hires, increased stress on remaining employees, and costs from reduced performance before an employee leaves the organization (Hillmer et al., 2004).

This is typically sensed when an organization has to spend additional budgets to continuously replace workers who leave, or when other workers have to take on the additional workload of disengaged and burned out coworkers. In addition to this performance gap, finding and attracting an appropriate worker is not one of the easiest tasks faced by organizations nowadays (Hale, 1998). Also, the delay that occurs until the new employee acquires the skills of the lost employee may result in a financial loss for the company. Because turnover-related costs reduce the profitability of companies, it is important for employers to retain their workers (Wenneker, 2012). All such important aspects urge organizations to focus on the core reasons behind employees' tendencies to leave their jobs and try to find trusted solutions to prevent such intentions from turning in to actual behaviors.

This study thus intends to empirically explore the strength and direction of relationships between the three previous constructs. It is foreseen that a better understanding of these interrelationships will enable the researcher to explain the influence of these constructs on one another, and to present useful information to help Egyptian organizations in sustaining organizational performance and competitiveness through effective retention and engagement of workers. The next part will demonstrate the tested hypotheses and the process through which they have been tested, preceded by a research question testing the possibility that the construct employee engagement could be a mediator of the relationship between transformational leadership and intention to quit.

METHOD

Research Design and Hypotheses

A non-experimental quantitative research design was used for the purpose of this study. The approach is concerned with testing objective theories

deductively by examining the relationship among various variables (transformational leadership, employee engagement and intention to quit) without manipulation or control of any one of the variables (Creswell, 2009). This design follows a correlational approach to determine the strength and direction of the relationships between the variables (dependent and independent).

The research question of this study has been stated as follows: Does Employee Engagement mediate the relationship between Transformational Leadership and Intention to Quit? According to this there are three research hypotheses:

H1: There is a positive relationship between transformational leadership and employee engagement;

H2: There is a negative relationship between transformational leadership and employee's intention to quit;

H3: There is a negative relationship between employee engagement and intention to quit.

Measuring Instrument

An adapted questionnaire comprised of 4 sections was used to measure the three variables under study:

1. Section A: Respondent's demographic information;
2. Section B: For measuring respondent levels of engagement. 11-item Work Engagement Scale adapted from (WWES) developed by Alarcon (2009);
3. Section C: For measuring participant perceptions of supervisory leadership behaviors, using an adapted version of Avolio and Bass's (1995) Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire – Form 5 X (MLQ-5X);
4. Section D: Comprised of a scale for measuring the respondents' intention to quit the organization as adapted by Dhladhla (2011).

Sampling and Data Collection

The population for this survey was 500 employees of Vodafone Egypt. 500 questionnaires were sent through emails to Vodafone employees, 90 responses were received back, of which only 60 responses were complete and valid to be used. Ballard (2012) postulated that:

> call center work is 'emotional labor' and can lead to high levels of stress, burnout, disengagement, and other psychological problems leading employees to a state of 'intention to quit' in which they shut down and decrease performance before actually quitting, or being fired (p.4).

Surveys were placed on a survey creator website, the link was sent to employees through emails and data was filled and collected back in one point. This allowed time saving and anonymity of participants.

The data was analyzed using the following methods:

1. Cronbach's alpha (α) coefficients were calculated to provide an indication of the inter-item correlations within each given scale;
2. Correlation analysis for testing hypotheses;
3. Regression analysis for testing the role of employee engagement as a mediator between transformational leadership and intention to quit.

RESULTS

Results of Correlation Analysis

The results of Cronbach's alpha (α) coefficients analysis are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Reliability Analysis Scale

Construct	No of Cases	No of Items	C. Alpha Reliability Coef.
EE	60	11	Alpha = 0.534
TL	60	20	Alpha = 0.955
ITQ	60	5	Alpha = 0.919

Source: Own elaboration.

Transformational Leadership and Employee Engagement

For transformational leadership and employee engagement the Spearman correlation coefficient is 0.477, P – value is 0.000117 and $P < 0.001$ is highly significant (Figure 1).
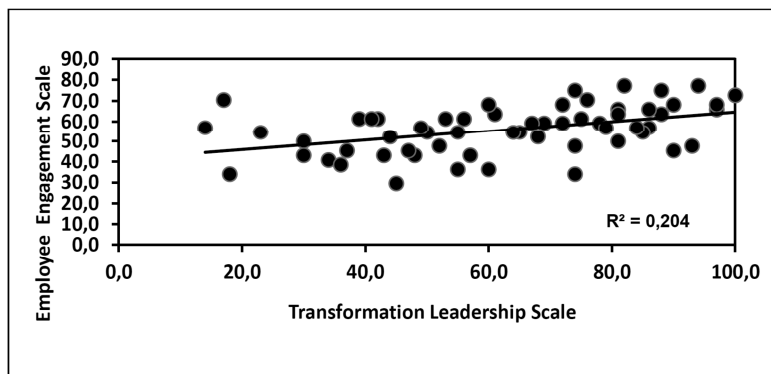

Figure 1. Correlation of Transformational Leadership & Employee Engagement

Source: own elaboration.

This result indicates highly statistically significant positive correlation between transformational leadership and employee engagement.

Transformational Leadership and Employee's Intention to Quit

For transformational leadership and employee intention to quit the Spearman's correlation coefficient is -0.499, P-value is 0.000049, and P<0.001 is highly significant (Figure 2). This result indicates statistically highly significant negative correlation between transformational leadership and employee intention to quit.
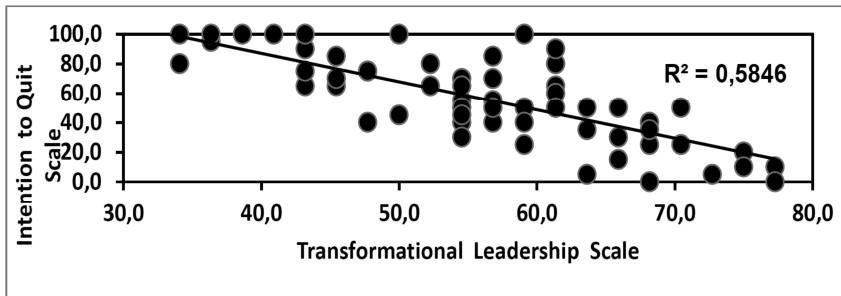
Figure 2. Correlations of Transformational Leadership & Intention to Quit

Source: own elaboration.

Employee Engagement and Intention to Quit

For employee engagement and employee intention to quit the Spearman's correlation coefficient is -0.744, and P-value is 0.000000 (Figure 3). This result indicates highly statistically significant negative correlation between employee engagement and employee intention to quit.
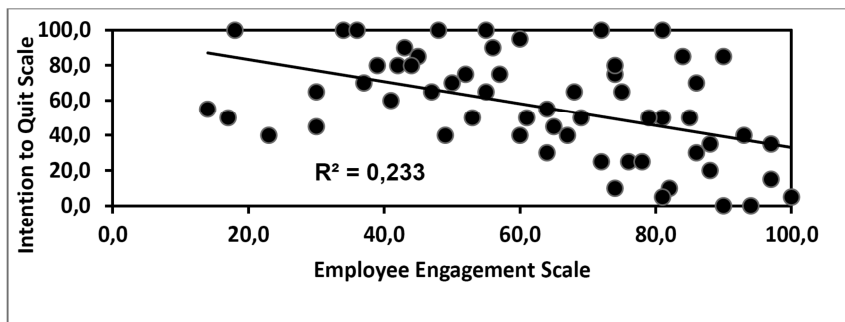
Figure 3. Correlations of Employee Engagement & Intention to Quit

Source: own elaboration.

Regression Analysis

Sequence of Regression Analysis to Establish a Mediating Effect is as follows:

1. Employee Engagement (EE) is regressed on Transformational Leadership (TL). A significant direct relationship between Transformational

Leadership (TL) and Employee Job Engagement (EE) is established from first regression (B= 0.234 and P < 0.001)

2.   Intention to Quit (ITQ) is regressed on Transformational Leadership (TL). A significant direct relationship between Transformational Leadership (TL) and Intention to Quit (ITQ) is established from second regression (B=-0.682 and P < 0.001)

3.   Intention to Quit (ITQ) is regressed on Transformational Leadership (TL) and Employee Engagement (EE) simultaneously. Introduction of Employee Engagement (EE) as a predictor with Transformational Leadership (TL) in third regression shows that the relationship between Transformational Leadership (TL) and Intention to Quit (ITQ) is no longer significant (B= -0.225 P > 0.05).

4.   Compare Equation 3 (Intention to Quit controlled) with Equation 2 (Intention to Quit (ITQ) not controlled). Notice the large change in co-efficient B from -0.682 when it was considered alone to only-0.225when it was controlled by Employee Engagement (EE).

5.   Mediating effect established if Transformational Leadership (TL) to Intention to Quit (ITQ) is non-significant in third equation. Hence Employee Engagement (EE) is indeed mediating the relation between Transformational Leadership (TL) and Intention to Quit (ITQ).

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Limitations

The first limitation of this study is the small sample used for the purpose of this study. 500 questionnaires were sent through emails to Vodafone employees, 90 responses were received back, of which only 60 responses were complete and valid to be used.

A second limitation concerns the fact that the self-report questionnaires might have led to what is known by the Common method bias – asking about the three variables at the same time in the same questionnaire – which might have influenced some of the responses and somehow affected the results.

This study was designed to draw understanding from observations in a here-and-now (cross-sectional) time period and not over an extended period (longitudinal). As such, conclusions are based on an analysis of results at a fixed point in time. Whatever effect any other dynamics present within the organization at this point in time might have had on the results may therefore not have been picked up in the information presented in the results.

The findings, implications, and conclusions of this study are bounded by the context of the research; potentially fruitful research could involve

the replication of this study in a number of different contexts (public organization or small scale organization).

Recommendations for Future Research

The findings of this study hold certain implications for future research with respect to engagement theory, leadership theory and intention to quit theory. More variables could be added to the paradigm of the constructs under study. Such expansion of the paradigm may influence the relationship between either one or all of the primary constructs within this study. One specific dimension that could be considered is the characteristic of a job and how it affects and is affected by the other constructs.

Transformational leadership style is a one of many other leadership styles that has proven to have an obvious impact on employees and on the ultimate success of the organizations. It is believed, however, that the impact of other leadership styles may provide valuable further insights into the dynamics presented in the relationships between employee engagement and intention to quit. It therefore is recommended that these styles be included in future research relating to these relationships.

Transformational leaders are characterized by four characteristics discussed in the literature review. The results of this study indicate that there is a significantly positive relationship between Transformational Leadership and Employee Engagement as well as a negative relationship with intention to quit. Future research should therefore focus on determining to what extent all four aspects of the transformational leadership scale will impact employee engagement and intention to quit.

Future research could also investigate the relationships between the three variables in question in both public and private organizations in Egypt. An interesting research topic would be to compare the outcomes of the research among public and private institutions, and investigate the reasons behind any differences, if any.

Final Remarks

The Egyptian critical economic situation demands that organizations undertake new transformational management qualities into consideration. Voluntary employee turnover is an important issue for organizations, thus understanding the concealed reasons behind employees' turnover could save organizations a lot of undesired losses and help them in sustaining good performance and optimizing current talent for greater business results in today's economic climate.

> The single biggest way to impact an organization is to focus on transformational leadership. There is almost no limit to the potential of an organization that recruits good people, raises them up as leaders and continually develops them. (Maxwell, 2001, p. 185).

Transformational leaders act as catalysts to their followers. According to Burns (1978), the result of transforming leadership is a relationship of mutual stimulation and elevation that converts followers into leaders and may convert leaders into moral agents, thus resulting in a transforming effect on both leaders and followers. This reciprocal relation stimulates employees to devote their very best in their work. When leaders succeed in setting themselves as good examples for followers, their followers' sense of values and contributions evolves and as a result, engages their whole self in work. Engaged employees – in comparison with less engaged employees – have higher job satisfaction, are more committed to the job, and have lower turnover intentions (Christian & Slaughter, 2007; Schaufeli & Salanova, 2007). Higher engagement employees also exhibit personal initiative, proactive behavior, and learning motivation where engagement may mediate the relationship between job resources and those positive organizational behaviors (Sonnentag, 2003). The organization that best utilizes this mutual relationship must be heading on the track of success.

This study is built on the belief that a lot of organizations, especially Egyptian organizations lack the awareness of how new transformational management qualities could not only help in preventing employees from leaving their jobs but could also turn the work force into an engaged and energized one that is willing to perform extremely in its best form. The exploration of the interrelationships between the three constructs: Transformational Leadership, Employee Job Engagement and Employee Intention to Quit was thus the main purpose of the study in an attempt at providing an ideal working mechanism to be undertaken by competitive organizations. The study provided insights into the strength and directions of relationships among the three constructs under study, and the mediating effects of the engagement construct on employee intention to quit. The findings of this study also provided insights to be considered by organizations in designing work structures, hiring and training quality managers as well as developing interventions aimed at mitigating turnover behavior and maximizing organizational outcomes through an engaged workforce.

The results indicated statistically significant relationships between the constructs of transformational leadership, employee engagement and intention to quit. A significantly positive relationship was found between transformational leadership and employee engagement which could highlight the remarkable advantages of having quality leaders, either in their influence on creating an engaged workforce or their ultimate positive influence on the organization as a whole. A significantly negative relationship found between transformational leadership and intention to quit implies the importance of the leadership style in increasing or decreasing turnover rates inside organizations. This alludes to the likelihood that when employees feel comfortable with their leaders, they are more likely to stay in their

organizations. And conversely when leaders represent a source of discomfort for employees in their work, the tendency to leave the job increases.

The significantly negative relationship found between employee engagement and intention to quit brings potential significance in terms of the impact that employee engagement may have on mitigating employee intention to quit and ultimately, also turnover behavior. This means that, when employees feel fully engaged and dedicated to their jobs, the decision to leave such a job becomes much harder. Bonds to the job become tighter and tendency to leave the job lessens. Thus focusing on this aspect, organizations could maximize their profits through having an effective engaged workforce as well as a reduced turnover rate. Also the validation of the mediating effect of employee engagement in the relationship between transformational leadership and intention to quit denotes the importance of interventions aimed at engaging employees.

Finally, despite the limitation aforementioned that the results of this paper were based on 60 valid responses out of 500 questionnaires sent out, yet they significantly show that in order to guarantee effectiveness in designing work structures as well as reducing turnover intentions, the focus of organizations should not be only on leadership practices but also on giving specific attention to how all aspects should tie together to optimally impact on employee engagement. Businesses should therefore focus on the development and reinforcement of transformational leadership behaviors with specific focus on how to keep employees engaged and immersed in their jobs. Work structures should be designed in a form that delivers a positive affective and cognitive state characterized by absorption, energy and fulfilment at an individual level. The constructs transformational leadership and employee engagement therefore have a very important relationship in the mitigation of turnover intentions and, ultimately, turnover behavior, and in granting advantages for organizations that strive to remain successful in today's fierce global competition.

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POMIĘDZY TRANSFORMACYJNYM PRZYWÓDZTWEM A ZAMIAREM PORZUCENIA PRACY – MEDIACYJNA ROLA ZAANGAŻOWANIA PRACOWNIKA

Abstrakt

Tło badań. Uświadamiając sobie strategiczną wartość kapitału ludzkiego oraz kosztów związanych z utratą cennych pracowników, organizacje muszą kłaść większy nacisk na kwestie rotacji pracowników. Znaczne pogorszenie koniunktury wśród organizacji egipskich, zwłaszcza po rewolucji z 25 stycznia, wywołało dążenia do utrzymania ich utalentowanej kadry i zminimalizowania niepotrzebnie ponoszonych kosztów.

Cele badań. Niniejsza praca analizuje pozytywny wpływ stylu przywództwa transformacyjnego na zaangażowanie pracowników oraz na jego ostateczny efekt skutkujący zamiarem pracownika porzucenia organizacji.

Metodyka. Dane zostały zebrane głównie od 500 pracowników firmy Vodafone w Egipcie. Do celów tego badania zastosowano głównie projekt nieeksperymentalnych badań ilościowych. Takie podejście dotyczy badania obiektywnych teorii dedukcyjnie poprzez badanie relacji pomiędzy różnymi zmiennymi (przywództwem transformacyjnym, zaangażowaniem pracowników oraz zamiarem rzucenia pracy) bez jakiejkolwiek manipulacji lub kontroli którejkolwiek ze zmiennych. Różne standardowe narzędzia statystyczne zostały zastosowane do interpretacji tych danych.

Kluczowe wnioski. Wyniki wykazały statystycznie istotne zależności pomiędzy trzema koncepcjami: przywództwem transformacyjnym, zaangażowaniem pracowników oraz zamiarem rzucenia pracy. Znacząco pozytywne powiązanie zostało stwierdzone pomiędzy przywództwem transformacyjnym a zaangażowaniem pracowników. Znacząco negatywna zależność została stwierdzona pomiędzy przywództwem transformacyjnym a zamiarem porzucenia pracy. Znacząco negatywne powiązanie znaleziono również pomiędzy zaangażowaniem pracownika a jego zamiarem porzucenia pracy. Walidacja efektu mediacyjnego zaangażowania pracownika w stosunkach pomiędzy przywództwem transformacyjnym a zamiarem rzucenia pracy oznacza wagę interwencji zmierzających do zwiększenia zaangażowania pracowników.

Słowa kluczowe: Kapitał Ludzki, Przywództwo Transformacyjne, Zaangażowanie Pracownika, Zamiar Porzucenia Pracy