TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP AND TEAMWORK AFFECTING EMPLOYEE PERFORMANCE AT TRIP.COM GROUP IN CHINA

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was twofold: (1) to investigate the impact of transformational leadership on employee performance, and (2) to explore the effect of teamwork on employee performance at Trip.com Group in China. The study employed a quantitative research design using a structured questionnaire as the primary data collection instrument. The population comprised 45,000 employees from various departments, including support, customer service, information technology, marketing, and human resources. The sample size was determined using a ratio of 20 to the number of observed variables (16), resulting in 320 participants selected via convenience sampling. Data were collected via an online questionnaire and analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. The inferential analysis was conducted through Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) using ADANCO software to examine causal relationships. The results revealed that both transformational leadership and teamwork had a significant positive effect on employee performance at the .001 level. Furthermore, teamwork exerted a stronger influence than transformational leadership, emphasizing the critical role of collaboration in driving employee effectiveness within a large-scale, technology-driven organization.

Keywords: Transformational Leadership, Teamwork, Employee Performance

Introduction

In the era of transition toward a digital economy, businesses around the world are facing challenges in adapting to technological changes, shifting consumer behavior, and global competition. This is particularly evident in the tourism industry, which has been severely impacted by the pandemic crisis and post-COVID-19 shifts in travel behavior. Trip.com Group, founded in 1999 and headquartered in Shanghai, China, has adapted swiftly by implementing management strategies that emphasize the effective use of human resources and technology (Fang, 2022). Trip.com Group's continued leadership in the global online travel industry is in part a result of its ability to enhance employee performance in alignment with its strategic goals. In modern organizational contexts, employee performance is no longer confined to measurable quantitative outputs alone, but also encompasses work behavior, team engagement, adaptability to change, and the capacity for innovation.

A key factor that has been widely studied and shown to clearly impact employee performance is transformational leadership. This concept, proposed by Bass and Avolio (1994), suggests that such leaders can motivate, inspire, develop employees' potential, and foster an atmosphere of trust and growth. Several studies conducted in China have also found that this leadership style correlates with job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and improved job performance. Another equally important factor is teamwork. In the context of large, multicultural organizations such as Trip.com Group, coordination, communication, trust, and shared goals form the foundation of effective work performance (Flores-Szwagrzak & Treibich, 2020). Organizations that promote a team-based work culture tend to exhibit higher levels of innovation, knowledge sharing, and collaborative problem-solving compared to those that emphasize individual work. Especially in global technology firms that constantly face change, teams built on trust and adaptive collaboration are considered the organization's most valuable asset (Salas et al., 2020).

Within the context of Trip.com Group, which has rapidly expanded both in terms of business and geography, especially through international market entry via mergers and acquisitions, such as Skyscanner and Trip.com, employees' ability to adapt and collaborate effectively has become a crucial factor in reflecting the company's global competitiveness. Research investigating the relationship between transformational leadership, teamwork, and employee performance is therefore essential for revealing the internal mechanisms that support the sustainable development of human capital.

Therefore, the objective of this study is to analyze the influence of transformational leadership and teamwork on employee performance at Trip.com Group in China, to deepen understanding of human resource strategies, and to propose systematic management approaches suitable for service-oriented organizations in the 21st century.

Research Objective

1. To investigate the impact of transformational leadership on employee performance at Trip.com Group in China.

2. To explore the effect of teamwork on employee performance at Trip.com Group in China.

Research Hypothesis

H1: Transformational leadership affects employee performance at Trip.com Group in China.

H2: Teamwork affects employee performance at Trip.com Group in China.

Conceptual Framework

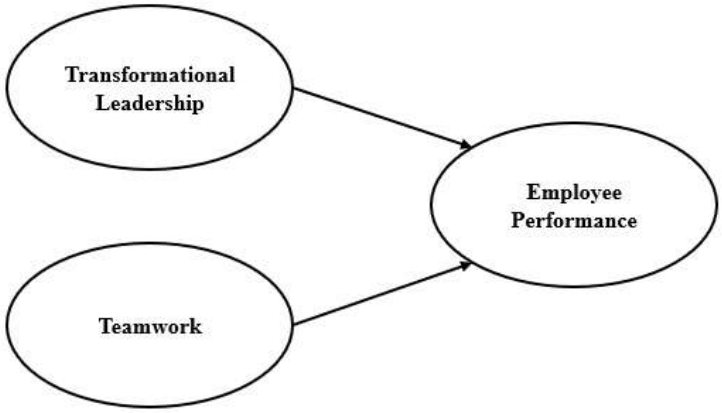


Figure 1 Conceptual framework

Literature Review

Concepts and Theories Related to Transformational Leadership

Leadership in the 21st century has evolved from merely a dimension of power and control to a social process focused on creating influence, driving change, and developing positive relationships within organizations. According to Northouse (2022), leadership is a process by which an individual influences a group to achieve common goals. This encompasses the ability to communicate a shared vision, motivate others, formulate strategies, and develop team members' potential, especially amid continuous change in the digital age. Yukl (2013) defined transformational leadership as a process in which the leader must create a strong commitment to the organization's objectives by empowering followers to act in ways that support and achieve the organization’s established goals. Bass and Avolio (1994) examined the components of transformational leadership and found that one additional component had been added compared with their 1985 study, bringing the total to 4 components. They named this the "4 I’s (Idealized Influence, Inspirational Motivation, Intellectual Stimulation, and Individualized Consideration)."

Concepts and Theories Related to Teamwork

Teamwork is considered a crucial mechanism in modern organizations for driving missions toward sustainable success, particularly in environments characterized by complexity, rapid change, and the need to effectively integrate knowledge, capabilities, and potential across all organizational levels (Mathieu et al., 2022). A team is a group of individuals who work together toward a shared goal, sharing resources, responsibilities, and decision-making based on trust, open communication, and coordinated collaboration (Salas et al., 2020; Tannenbaum & Salas, 2020). Working as a team is not merely about bringing together many individuals but means combining forces based on a shared vision. It involves having clear roles and responsibilities, cooperation, and integrating each person's strengths to achieve results greater than those achieved when working individually (Kozlowski & Ilgen, 2021). Team members must understand one another, accept differences, and strengthen team cohesion through communication, mutual support, and coordination toward common objectives.

Concepts and Theories Related to Employee Performance

Employee Performance is a fundamental concept in human resource management and organizational behavior. It generally refers to the outcomes or the level of success with which employees carry out their assigned roles, duties, and responsibilities within an organization. This performance is reflected in the quality, quantity, and timeliness of the work delivered (Aguinis, 2023). Effective performance encompasses not only efficient use of resources and the achievement of departmental goals, but also the demonstration of work behaviors that align with the organization’s objectives and values (Campbell & Wiernik, 2015). In addition, several key dimensions are used to measure employee performance, including: Quantitative performance (e.g., the amount of completed work), Qualitative performance (e.g., accuracy or customer satisfaction), Discipline, and Ability to collaborate with others. The study of employee performance cannot be limited to evaluating only the final outcomes of work. Rather, it must involve an analysis of the components or dimensions that reflect various aspects of work behavior. Generally, the components of employee performance are categorized into 3 key dimensions widely recognized in human resource and organizational psychology research: (1) Task Performance, (2) Contextual Performance, and (3) Adaptive Performance (Koopmans et al., 2011; Pulakos et al., 2000).

Research Methodology

This study employed a quantitative research design to explore and analyze relationships among key variables through systematic data collection and statistical analysis. The research primarily focused on gathering data using a structured questionnaire as the main research instrument to obtain accurate and reliable responses from participants. The methodology of this study is organized into three main sections as follows:

1. The population of this study consisted of all 45,000 employees of Trip.com Group in China, encompassing various departments such as support, customer service, information technology, marketing, and human resources. To determine the appropriate sample size, the researcher applied the guideline of 20 times the number of observed variables, with 16 observed variables, resulting in a required sample size of 320 participants (Hair et al., 2021). Convenience sampling was employed due to the large population and accessibility considerations. The target respondents included employees working at the company's headquarters in Shanghai and regional offices across China, who were invited to participate in the study via an online questionnaire system. Although this non-probability sampling approach may limit the generalizability of the findings, it was deemed appropriate given the study's budgetary constraints and limited timeframe, allowing for efficient data collection from a diverse group of participants within the organization.

2. The research instrument used in this study was a questionnaire developed by the researcher based on a comprehensive review and synthesis of theories, concepts, and related studies concerning transformational leadership, teamwork, and employee performance. The questionnaire consisted of five sections. Part 1 collected demographic information of respondents, including gender, age, educational level, marital status, monthly income, and work experience, using a checklist format. Part 2 measured transformational leadership across four components: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration, comprising sixteen items rated on a five-point Likert scale. Part 3 assessed teamwork, focusing on trust among members, team communication, shared goals, and recognition and appreciation, with sixteen items rated on the same five-point scale. Part 4 evaluated employee performance with eight items designed to reflect actual work behavior and performance effectiveness. Part 5 contained open-ended questions that allowed respondents to provide additional opinions and suggestions relevant to the research topic. The Likert scale used in Parts 2 to 4 ranged from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). Before conducting the main data collection, the questionnaire was tested for quality in two aspects: content validity and reliability. Content validity was verified by three experts in human resource management and organizational behavior who examined the clarity, appropriateness, and alignment of each question with the study objectives, resulting in an Index of Item-Objective Congruence (IOC) higher than 0.60. Reliability was tested with a pilot group of 30 respondents with characteristics similar to those of the target population, and Cronbach's alpha coefficients exceeding 0.70 confirmed that the instrument was reliable and suitable for data collection.

3. The data obtained from the questionnaire were analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive analysis was applied to summarize the demographic characteristics of the respondents, including gender, age, education level, marital status, monthly income, and work experience, as well as to describe their opinions regarding

transformational leadership, teamwork, and employee performance, presenting the results in terms of frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation. For inferential analysis, the researcher employed the Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) technique using the ADANCO software to examine the causal relationships among latent variables and to test the research hypotheses. The analysis involved assessing both the measurement and structural models, focusing on path coefficients, effect sizes, and significance levels obtained via bootstrapping with 5,000 subsamples to ensure the reliability of parameter estimates and to verify the hypothesized relationships among transformational leadership, teamwork, and employee performance.

Results

1. The majority of respondents were male, accounting for 171 individuals (53.44%), while 102 respondents (31.87%) were under 30 years old. Most participants held a bachelor's degree (143, 44.69%) and were married (197, 61.56%). In terms of income, the largest group earned a monthly salary between 3,000 and 5,000 yuan (119 individuals, 37.19%), and most had over 10 years of work experience (125 individuals, 39.06%).

2. The analysis of respondents' opinions revealed that, overall, participants expressed a high level of agreement regarding Transformational Leadership, Teamwork, and Employee Performance. Among these variables, Teamwork received the highest average score, followed by Transformational Leadership, while Employee Performance was rated the lowest. These findings, as presented in Table 1, indicate that employees generally perceive strong collaboration within their teams, effective leadership practices, and a relatively positive level of individual and collective work performance within the organization.

Table 1: Mean and Standard Deviation of Respondents' Opinions

Factors/Variables	$\bar{X}$	SD	Level of opinion
Transformational Leadership	3.50	.78	High
- Idealized Influence	3.46	1.13	High
- Inspirational Motivation	3.54	1.12	High
- Intellectual Stimulation	3.55	1.15	High
- Individualized Consideration	3.47	.92	High
Teamwork	3.52	.79	High
- Trust	3.57	1.11	High
- Communication	3.52	1.11	High
- Shared Goal	3.50	1.09	High
- Recognition	3.50	1.10	High
Employee Performance	3.43	1.13	High

3. Hypothesis testing

Table 2 Shows the test results for structural integrity and component weight

Factors	Loading	AVE	Dijkstra-Henseler's rho (ρA)	Jöreskog's rho (ρc)	Cronbach's alpha (α)
Transformational Leadership		.523	.700	.814	.700
- Idealized Influence (II)	.727				
- Inspirational Motivation (IM)	.712				
- Intellectual Stimulation (IS)	.714				
- Individualized Consideration (IC)	.738				
Teamwork		.513	.700	.808	.700
- Trust	.665				
- Communication	.752				
- Shared Goal	.762				
- Recognition	.681				
Employee Performance		.700	.940	.949	.939
- Y1	.848				
- Y2	.847				
- Y3	.851				
- Y4	.840				
- Y5	.830				
- Y6	.793				
- Y7	.851				
- Y8	.834				

From Table 2, it was found that all observed variables in the model have factor loadings greater than .50, ranging from .665 to .851, indicating their reliability as measures. Dijkstra-Henseler's rho (ρA) values range from .700 to .940, Jöreskog's rho (ρc) ranges from .808 to .940, and Cronbach's alpha (α) falls within the range of .700 to .939. Importantly, all these values exceed the .70 threshold for reliability. Furthermore, the latent variables demonstrate discriminant validity with AVE values above .50, ranging from .513 to .700. This is in accordance with the established preliminary agreement (Henseler, Hubona, & Ray, 2016).

Table 3 Shows a comparison of discriminant validity according to the Fornell-Larcker criterion

	Transformational Leadership	Teamwork	Employee Performance
Transformational Leadership	**.723**		
Teamwork	.467	**.716**	
Employee Performance	.232	.234	**.8**37

* Note: The values on the diagonal are √AVE.

From Table 3, it was found that the model has discriminant validity, as indicated by the square root of the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) being higher than the correlations (r) of each latent variable. This is consistent with the criteria established by Henseler et al. (2016), which state that each latent variable should not be more strongly correlated with another latent variable than the square root of its AVE.

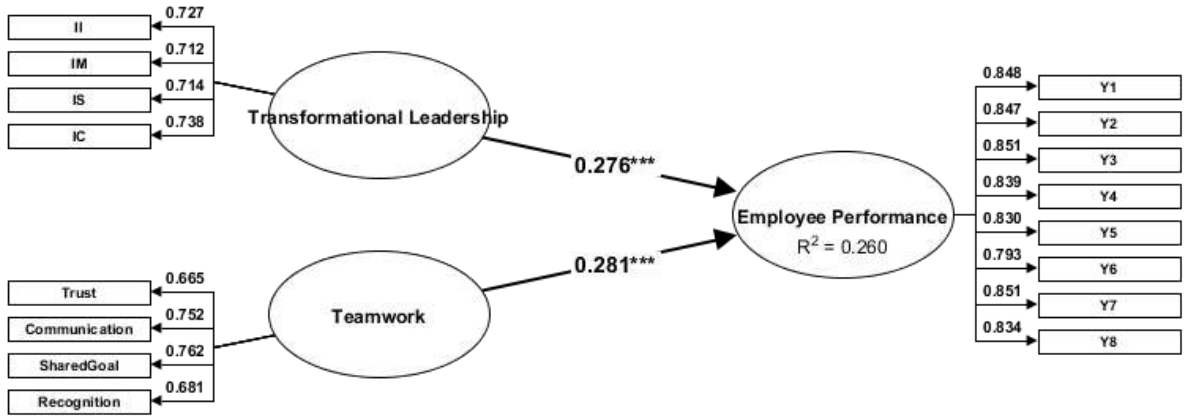


Figure 2 Hypothesis testing

Table 4 Coefficient Values for Hypothesis Testing

Factors	Employee Performance (R^2 = 0.260)			
	β	t-test	p-value	Cohen's F^2
Transformational Leadership	.276	4.241***	.000	0.055
Teamwork	.281	4.030***	.000	0.057

*** Statistical significance at .001 level

From Table 4, it was found that Transformational Leadership and Teamwork have a direct positive influence on Employee Performance at Trip.com Group in China, with

statistical significance at the .001 level. Together, these two variables explained 26% of the variance in employee performance. When considering the standardized regression coefficients, Teamwork was found to exert a stronger influence on employee performance than Transformational Leadership.

Discussion

The findings of this study revealed that transformational leadership and teamwork had a direct positive influence on employee performance at Trip.com Group in China, emphasizing their integral roles in advancing organizational success in the digital economy. Transformational leadership functions as a motivational driver that enhances employees' intrinsic engagement by articulating a compelling vision, setting clear goals, and fostering innovative thinking. This result is consistent with Bass and Avolio (1994), who asserted that transformational leaders stimulate enthusiasm, pride, and commitment, motivating employees to exceed performance expectations. Similarly, Northouse (2022) emphasized that transformational leadership enhances innovation, professional growth, and commitment, factors that are particularly vital in the technology and service industries where adaptability and creativity define long-term competitiveness.

An important insight emerging from this study is that teamwork exerted a stronger influence on employee performance than transformational leadership. This finding highlights the contextual significance of collective collaboration in the operational framework of Trip.com Group, one of China's largest online travel service providers. In a post-COVID-19 environment characterized by digital recovery, market volatility, and rapid product development, horizontal coordination across departments such as marketing, data analytics, and customer service becomes more decisive for achieving performance outcomes than vertical leadership inspiration. Effective teamwork in this context enables rapid problem-solving, cross-functional knowledge sharing, and service innovation, which are critical for sustaining competitive advantage in China's high-velocity digital economy. The emphasis on teamwork aligns with Katzenbach and Smith (1993), who observed that cohesive teams built on shared goals achieve synergistic results beyond individual contributions. Likewise, Salas et al. (2015) confirmed that high-performing teams foster collaboration, collective learning, and organizational adaptability, which are indispensable for firms operating in fast-evolving technological industries.

In conclusion, the results of this study reaffirm that while transformational leadership inspires and guides employees toward a common purpose, teamwork constitutes the structural and cultural backbone that transforms vision into execution within large-scale Chinese technology enterprises. Leaders in such organizations should therefore act as facilitators who empower teams, encourage participatory communication, and promote

decentralized decision-making. Simultaneously, organizations must strengthen a cooperative culture characterized by trust, shared accountability, and recognition to enhance both individual motivation and collective performance. Integrating visionary leadership with collaborative teamwork not only drives innovation and service quality but also nurtures employee engagement and long-term organizational resilience.

Suggestion

Based on the findings that transformational leadership and teamwork significantly influence employee performance at Trip.com Group in China, several practical recommendations can be made for organizational leaders and human resource managers. First, management should focus on enhancing transformational leadership behaviors among supervisors and department heads by providing leadership development programs emphasizing vision communication, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. Such practices will help leaders become catalysts for creativity, commitment, and continuous improvement within their teams. Second, the organization should strengthen teamwork by fostering a collaborative culture that values trust, open communication, and shared goals. This can be achieved through cross-functional projects, team-based rewards, and recognition systems that encourage mutual respect and cooperation among employees. Moreover, creating a psychologically safe environment where employees feel confident to express ideas and take initiative without fear of negative consequences will further enhance team cohesion and performance. Finally, integrating digital collaboration tools and internal communication platforms can help sustain effective teamwork in large-scale or hybrid work environments, ensuring that collaboration remains consistent across departments and geographical locations.

Future Research

Future research should broaden the scope of investigation to include employees from diverse industries such as technology startups, hospitality, and manufacturing in order to compare how different organizational settings shape the influence of leadership styles and teamwork on employee performance. Given that the present study yielded an R^2 value of 0.260, indicating that transformational leadership and teamwork collectively explain only a modest proportion of the variance in employee performance, future studies are encouraged to identify and incorporate additional predictors that may enhance the explanatory power of the model. Potential variables such as organizational culture, job satisfaction, employee engagement, psychological empowerment, and innovative work behavior could provide a more comprehensive understanding of performance determinants. Researchers should also consider introducing mediating and moderating variables to explore the indirect and

conditional relationships among constructs, thereby clarifying the underlying mechanisms that connect leadership and teamwork to performance outcomes. Furthermore, employing a mixed-methods approach that integrates quantitative analysis using PLS-SEM with qualitative methods such as in-depth interviews or focus group discussions would yield richer insights into employees' perceptions and contextual nuances that quantitative data alone may not fully capture. Longitudinal research is likewise recommended to examine how leadership behaviors and teamwork processes evolve over time and how these dynamic interactions contribute to sustained employee performance and organizational competitiveness in the fast-changing digital economy.

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