

## The Mediating Role Of Transformational Leadership Style On The Relationship Between Emotional Intelligence And Innovative Work Behaviour

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### Abstract

This study aimed at examining the mediating role of transformational leadership style on the relationship between emotional intelligence and innovative work behavior among microfinance institution (MFIs) in Kenya. The study employed a cross-sectional survey design. The institutions studied were selected using stratified random sampling technique. Data was collected from 155 branch managers and 465 support staff. Data was analyzed through descriptive and inferential statistics. Emotional intelligence had a positive significant effect on innovative work behaviour ( $\beta = 0.653$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ,  $R^2 = 0.215$ ,  $F = 6.934$  with  $p < 0.001$ ). Transformational leadership style had a positive and significant effect on innovative work behaviour ( $\beta = -0.835$ ,  $R^2 = 0.396$ ,  $F = 13.126$  with  $p < 0.001$ ). Transformational leadership style was found to fully mediate the relationship between emotional intelligence and innovative work behavior ( $\beta = 0.766$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ). To enhance innovative work behavior at work employees, organizations should focus on building emotional competencies of employees to increase their emotional intelligence through leadership and suitable training programmes. Emphasis should be put on transformational leadership as critical in the innovative work behavior of the managers. The study contributes to the existing pool of knowledge by demonstrating the unexplored effect of emotional intelligence and innovative work behavior. It also provides literature on emotional intelligence, transformational leadership and innovative work behaviour through discussion on the implication on theory.

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**Keywords:** Emotional Intelligence, Transformational Leadership, Innovative Work Behavior, Microfinance Institutions

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### INTRODUCTION

Strategic decision making in the dynamic and challenging world plays crucial role in terms of business management and this is brought about by the vital essential elements of innovative work behavior that provide organizational competitive Advantage (Shin, Yuan, & Zhou, 2017; Wang, Fang, Qureshi & Janssen, 2015). The concept of innovative work behavior and emotional intelligence has recently emerged as the defining business issue, and has continued to receive extensive research interest.

Innovative work behaviour can be defined as the development, adoption and implementation of new ideas for products, technologies and work methods by employees, which also extends to improvement in business procedures in specific work areas (Sanz-Valle & Jiménez-Jiménez, 2018; Malik, 2021). Innovative work behavior is a crucial factor for managers and it improves their ability to try new things, invent new ways of doing work and improve the business processes.

Due to the rising global competition, market changes and the changing customer expectations, organizations need to develop innovative solutions to meet these emerging problems and challenges (Savelsbergh, Gevers, Van der Heijden & Poell, 2012; Somech & Khalaili, 2014). Which requires employees to engage in innovative behaviours to improve the current state of innovative work behavior Organizations can become innovative by capitalizing on innovative abilities of its employees which ensures continuous and long-term effectiveness (De Jong & Den Hartog, 2010). Emotional Intelligence is the subset of social intelligence that involves the ability to monitor one's own and others' feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them and to use this information to guide one's thinking and actions (Salovey & Mayer, 2009). (Goleman, 1996; Sala & Mount, 2006; Bar-on, 2010) found that employees who possess high level of emotional intelligence help to positively impact on innovation and improved business performance. Studies have found that positive emotions enhance

innovation in entrepreneurial firms Goleman (1998); Wong and Law (2002); Slaski and Cartwright (2003); Piperopoulos (2010) & Baron (2008). Studies done by Zhou and George (2003; Zampetakis *et al.*, 2009) found that emotional intelligence has a positive effect on innovation and these are the most core competencies for managers in an organization.

Empirical review shows that relationship between emotional intelligence and innovative work behavior has received much attention but little has been done on the mediating role of transformational leadership style. The ability to continuously innovate and improve products, services and work processes is crucial for organizations. Employees need to be both willing and able to innovate if a continuous flow of innovations is to be realized. Organizations that wish to compete and prosper in the 21st century global economy must build a sustained advantage through innovation in the discovery and application of new knowledge. This innovation enables the organization to understand the world around it better, while leading to new products and services that improve the bottom-line of the organization. With regard to sustainability and growth, a study conducted by Omondi (2005) revealed that in Kenya few microfinance institutions had attained sustainability growth, had sound financial cost control and good loan portfolios. A good number of microfinance institutions had not attained financial stability and growth and were relying on subsidies from donors. The MFIs need to adopt and use modern innovation in order to survive and compete in the domestic and global financial markets.

However, to implement and utilized modern innovative technology requires MFI's managers to influence innovation process. Extent research has found that employees who possessed high level of emotional intelligence help to positively impact on innovation and improved business performance (Goleman, 1996; Sala & Mount, 2006; Bar-on, 2010).

Studies have found that positive emotions enhance innovation in entrepreneurial firms (Baron, 2008, Goleman, 1998; Slaski & Cartwright, 2003; Piperopoulos, 2010; Wong & Law, 2002), studies done by Zhou and George (2003) and Zampetakis *et al.* (2009) established that emotional intelligence has a positive effect on innovation and this are the most core competencies for managers in organization.

There is a positive relationship between emotional intelligence and innovative work behavior in the study by Orhan and Dinçer (2012) in Turkish banks. There is mixed or varied innovation in the micro-finance sector and this brings the need for the researcher to find out whether variation in the EI of managers is the

underlying reasons for the mixed innovation in the micro-finance industry in Kenya.

The increase of changes and developments in Micro Finance Institutions make innovative work behaviors gain importance for the organizations and the realization of this fact has resulted in reforms and renewed work process, products and services development. Since innovative work behavior is a new concept, the number of the studies on this issue is reasonably limited. There is little research done on emotional intelligence in the micro –finance despite the growing interest on the concept of EI and its possible benefits to the organizations.

## REVIEW OF PREVIOUS LITERATURE

### Innovative Work Behavior

Innovative work behavior is the intentional creations, introduction and application of new ideas within a work group or group organization. Scout and Bruce (1998) and Jessen (2000) describe innovative work behavior as generation of ideas, creating support and implementing the new novel ideas. Amabile (2009) accent in the definition of Innovative work behavior that it is related to employee creativity, where creativity refers to production of new and useful ideas in form of products, services, processes and procedures that are beneficial and result in innovative output. In fact, innovative work behaviour is a broad behavioural construct that involves not only the generation of new ideas but also the transformation of ideas into substantial innovations (Devloo, Anseel, De Beuckelaer, & Salanova, 2015). Furthermore, innovative work behaviours are not a part of the job description of employees, i.e. it is not a formal job responsibility that employees need to perform regularly. Such behaviours are purely discretionary behaviours, called extra-role behaviours and are not formally recognized by organizational reward systems (Organ, 1988).

The first stage of idea generation includes searching different ways for improving existing products or services and solving problems by evaluating alternative courses of action and merging or reorganising information and existing concepts (De Jong & Den Hartog, 2010).

The second phase of idea promotion requires making changes in the existing ways of doing things by championing it through coalition building (De Jong & Den Hartog, 2010), promoting ideas to potential allies (Janssen, 2004) and finding sponsors (Scott & Bruce, 1994) to meet resistance. The last phase of idea realization/implementation involves producing a prototype or model of the new product, technology or process (Janssen, 2004), testing and modifying the prototype (Scott & Bruce, 1994) and routinizing the

new way of doing such that the innovation becomes part of the regular work processes of workgroups or entire organizations (De Jong & Den Hartog, 2010).

It is crucial for management to have creativity for new things and to innovate and improve both production and service process. With the challenging, complete and change in customers needs business environment. Mumford, Scott, Gaddis and Strange (2002) assert that innovative work behavior is the presentation and examination of some novel ideas that include regulation processes, problem solving and analysis, discovery of new ideas, development combination of ideas and the testing in the theoretical terms and finally the study of their benefits.

Aghaei (2009) stated that employees and managers who represent innovative power and thoughts should have attributes and traits of creativity so that they could lead the objectives and the strategies of the organization to the final destination. Janssen (2000) develop multidimensional measure, using both self and other ratings of employees that include items; idea generation, idea promotion, and idea implementation. However, the role played by emotional intelligence in predicting the innovative behaviour of employees at work has not received enough attention by researchers. The extant literature on emotional intelligence-innovative work behaviour relationship is of recent origin (Al-Omari, 2017; Dincer, Gencer, Orhan, & Sahinbas, 2011; Dincer & Orhan, 2012; Hu & He, 2018; Shojaei & Siuki, 2014) and quite scarce in the Micro-Finance institutions context. Hence, this study aims to test the effect of emotional intelligence in stimulating innovative work behaviour of employees.

### **Emotional Intelligence and innovative work behaviour**

Goleman (1995) defined emotional intelligence as the capacity for recognizing our own and others feelings for motivating our self and for managing our emotions within our self and in our relationship. The model developed by Goleman (1998) outlines emotional intelligence as a skill that involves adeptness at handling interpersonal relationships. Goleman (1995; 1998) believes that social skills involve influencing tactics; effective communication; conflict management skills; leadership abilities; change management skills; instrumental relationship management; collaboration and co-operation abilities; and effective team membership capabilities. He developed the 137-item emotional quotient test, which is comprehensive and effective in measuring the five dimensions of emotional intelligence.

The concept emotional intelligence can be traced back to the era of Thorndike (1920) who originated the first

theory of emotional intelligence that indicated the beliefs of different types of intelligence. The first of this branch, abstract intelligence, was measured using intelligence quotient (IQ) tests. The second branch, is concrete intelligence that is used in understanding and manipulating objects and shapes. The third branch, social intelligence, was identified as “the ability to understand and relate to people”. This third branch is currently referred to as emotional intelligence Bagshaw (2000). Emotional intelligence enables managers to take and enjoy better relationship in organizations. Mayer et al. (2000) hypothesized that those individuals with higher-than-average emotional quotient are more successful in meeting environmental demands and pressures. He views emotional intelligence as competency expected to augment positive attitudes towards work and driver positive behaviors and better outcomes.

Mayer and Salovey (2009) interrogated emotional intelligence inform of the ability to perceive emotions, integrate emotions to facilitate thought, understand emotions, and to regulate emotions to promote personal growth. Khohar and Kush (2009) emotional intelligence is the capacity of a person to identify his/her emotions that enable him/her to become sensitive to those that he/she perceives from the environment and the circle of people he/she interacts with.

Mayer and Salovey (2009) discussed emotional intelligence as the ability to accurately identify and understand one's own reactions and those of others. They subdivided these concepts of emotional intelligence into four categories; perceived emotions that involves inputting verbal and nonverbal information from the emotional system, cognitive processes, understanding emotions which involves cognitive and feeling for others & managing emotions that concerns the regulation of emotions in oneself and others.

Dincer et al (2011) reported a positive and significant relationship between emotional intelligence and innovative work behaviour of the managers. In the same vein, Al-Omari (2017) also found a positive association between emotional intelligence on innovative work behaviour of employees. In another study by Dincer and Orhan (2012), it was found that using emotional intelligence-enabled people to develop and apply new ideas at the workplace. In fact, the talent of being aware of one's own and other's emotions empowered people to develop new ideas and apply them in the work process. Another research was conducted by Shojaei and Siuki (2014) which expands the scope of testing the role of emotional intelligence on innovative work behaviour by examining the impact of four different components of emotional intelligence,

namely, self-awareness, self-management, social-awareness and relationship management.

The findings indicated that all four components of emotional intelligence had positive and significant effects on innovative work behaviour of managers. Interestingly, the highest effect in innovative work behaviour of managers was contributed by self-management. Similar research by Hu and He (2018) in China revealed that except emotions in self, all other dimensions of emotional intelligence (emotion in others, UOE and ROE) were found to impact innovation behaviour positively and significantly.

**HO<sub>1</sub> :** *There is no significant relationship between Emotional intelligence & innovative work behavior.*

### **The Mediating Role of Transformational Leadership**

Full-range leadership theory posits that there are three contrasting leadership styles: transformational leadership, transactional, and laissez-faire. Transformational leadership with has five component behaviours: idealized influence, idealized behaviour, inspirational motivation, individualized consideration, and intellectual stimulation. According to Bass and Avolio (1994) idealized influence is the leader's attributes and behaviours that cause followers to identify with the leader. Inspirational motivation on the other hand are leader behaviours that motivate and inspire followers through articulating an appealing vision, providing meaning for focusing follower effort, and modeling appropriate behaviours, Individualized consideration are leader behaviours that provide support, encouragement, and coaching to followers, while intellectual stimulation includes leader behaviours that encourage followers to view problems from new perspectives and to take risks (Antonakis, Avolio, & Sivasubramaniam, 2003; Bass, 1997; Judge & Piccolo, 2004).

Despite the positive association of emotional intelligence and innovative work behavior in extant literature, the mediating role of transformational leadership has not been studied. Hence the objective of this study was to determine the mediating role of transformational leadership style on the relationship between emotional intelligence and innovative work behavior in microfinance institution in Kenya.

**HO<sub>2</sub> :** *Transformational leadership style does not significantly mediate the relationship between emotional intelligence and innovative work behavior*

### **METHODOLOGY, SAMPLE AND DATA**

Cross sectional survey design was used. The study used information from a sample of individuals to make some inference about the wider population. In cross-sectional survey design, data is collected using

questionnaires. Researchers have used cross sectional design to investigate diverse areas of management (Weiss, Costa, Karuza, Duberstein, Friedman & McCrae, 2005). Stratified simple random sampling technique was used for the purpose of this study to obtain a true and fair representation of the population. There were 847 branches of microfinance institutions in the two strata. For the purpose of this study, using (Cochran, 1977) sample size formula for continuous variables a total of 155 branches was taken as the sample size. The sample consisted of 47% of deposit taking microfinance and 53% of non-deposit taking. The manager and three raters were chosen giving total 620 respondents. A drop and pick later method was used to distribute the questionnaires. Emotional intelligence of the managers was measured using a modified Emotional Intelligence Profiler (ECP) developed by Wolmarans (2001) and validated by Palmer, Jansen and Coetzee (2005). This instrument contains 46 items that identify and measure the key factors of emotional intelligence.

Innovative work behavior of the managers was measured using a questionnaire developed by Janssen (2000). This instrument consists of 31 items. The quantification of innovative work behaviour was done using a seven-point likert scale. The factors are combined in such a way that a higher sum of the scores indicates a higher level of innovative work behaviour (Agarwal, Datta, Blake-Beard, & Bhargava, 2012). The Cronbach a of the combined scale was 0.706, showing internal consistency.

The Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) developed by Bass and Avolio (1997) was used to determine transformational leadership style. The instrument contained 20 items. The statements identified measured the key aspects of transformational leadership style. The respondents were required to judge how frequently the behaviours described in the statements were exhibited. By administering questionnaires to three subordinates /raters per manager this study attempted to obtain a holistic view of each manager's leadership style.

### **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Out of the 155 managers who were expected to participate in the study 106 (68%) responded by completing and returning the questionnaire. Each manager, was to be rated by three subordinates who directly reported to them, also called raters in the study. Hence, four hundred and sixty five questionnaires were distributed to the raters but 228 were completed and returned, resulting in a response rate of 49%. The sample sizes, means, standard deviations, standard error, for the managers' self -assessment and support staff ratings of each of the sub constructs of emotional intelligence are presented in the appendix (table 1). As

per Wolmarans (2001) mean between 0 and 3 represented low emotional intelligence, 3.1 to 4.5 moderate emotional intelligence and between 4.6 to 7 high emotional intelligence. From table 1 the self-rating mean scores for each dimension are higher than the support staff ratings. This is attributed to the fact that individual's respondent tends to see themselves more positive. The overall emotional intelligence of the managers and support staff were significantly different with managers 3.8 and support staff 2.95. The mean scores for the specific competencies were all higher for manager than for support staff.

The mean score for innovative work behavior was higher for the managers with mean score of 3.5 compared with mean score of 3.1 for the support staff (Table 2).

For transformational leadership the descriptive statistics are presented in Table 3. The mean value for transformational leadership as rated by self (managers' version) was mean = 3.6501 with SD = 0.95470. For the responses from the raters, transformational leadership was given a value of 3.6386, SD = 0.83119. From the ratings of the managers and the raters (1-3 raters per manager) the transformational leadership style had mean and SD of 3.6444, SD = 0.75603. The ratings of transformational leadership were higher as perceived by the managers compared to the ratings given by the raters.

The correlation results are presented in Table 4. The table established that there was a positive significant relationship between IWB and EI ( $r = 0.459, p = 0.000$ ) and a significant strong positive correlation between transformational leadership (TF) and emotional intelligence (EI) ( $r = 0.779, p = 0.000$ ). For IWB and transformational leadership, there was a positive significant moderate correlation ( $r = 0.598, p = 0.000$ ). The results showed linear relationships between the variables of interest that were to be used in regression analysis to construct the regression models of interest.

Baron and Kenny (1986) guided the study in testing for mediation. First, the effect of the control variables (age, gender and educational level) on innovative work behavior was assessed. The results showed that age ( $\beta = -0.083, p = 0.470$ ) and education level ( $\beta = -0.032, p = 0.751$ ) had a negative and statistically non-significant effect on innovative work behavior, while Gender was found to be negative and statistically non-significant ( $\beta = -0.023, p = 0.837$ ) as shown in Table 5.

The results of the regression analysis ( $\beta = 0.653, p > 0.05$ ) suggested that emotional intelligence had a positive significant effect on innovative work behavior. The finding suggests that as the level of emotional intelligence increases, so does the level of innovative work behavior. The results also indicated that

emotional intelligence had a positive significant effect on transformational leadership style ( $\beta = 0.898, p < 0.05$ ). Thus, as the level of emotional intelligence increases, the manager is more predisposed to use transformational leadership style. The results found that there exists a positive significant effect of transformational leadership on innovative work behavior ( $\beta = 0.770, p < 0.05$ ). The finding suggests that higher transformational leadership leads to higher innovative work behavior.

To examine the mediating effects of transformational leadership style as per the set hypothesis, a hierarchical regression analysis was done and the results are presented in Table 6.

From the results in Table 6 it was found that transformational leadership style as a mediator in step 3 was statistically significant with ( $\beta = 0.843, p = 0.000$ ) while the regression coefficient of EI reduced from  $\beta = 0.653$  with  $p = 0.000$  to  $\beta = -1.05$  that was not significant ( $p = 0.186$ ). It was therefore concluded that transformational leadership style fully mediates the relationship between emotional intelligence and innovative work behavior.

Internal consistency of emotional competency profiler and MLQ was tested by computing Cronbach's alpha coefficients. Cronbach's alpha coefficients exceeding the 0.7 level is acceptable in social research (Hair, Black, Babin, & Anderson, 2010). The Cronbach's alpha coefficients for emotional intelligence, innovative work behavior, and transformational leadership style were 0.757, 0.874, and 0.762 respectively. Confirmatory factor analysis of the constructs was carried out; this helped in identifying usable items for each study construct. Expert opinion was sought where required.

The result of the study indicated that emotional intelligence had a positive and significant relationship on innovative work behavior. This finding supported prior researches by Orhan and Dincer (2012); Hasan, Gulsah, Nazife, and Kevser (2011); and Janssen (2010). The results suggested that managers with higher level of emotional intelligence have a higher level of generation, application and implementation of novelty ideas.

The finding of the study further supported studies by Rego, Sousa, Cunha, Correia, and Saur (2007) who examined the relationship between leaders' emotional intelligence and creativity of their teams. The results revealed that emotionally intelligent leaders behave in ways that stimulate the creativity of their teams' members.

For mediation analysis in step one, the results showed that there was a significant relationship between emotional intelligence and innovative work behavior. Step two was done to determine if there was relationship between the mediator and the dependent variable, the results showed that there was a positive and significant effect of emotional intelligence on transformational leadership. Step three was to establish whether emotional intelligence still affect innovative work behavior on controlling for emotional transformational leadership. The results of the study found that emotional intelligence beta value had changed and non-significant. Transformational leadership was still positive and significant. The implication of the study based on the results is that transformation leadership has full transmitting (mediation) effects the relationship between emotional intelligence and innovative work behavior.

## CONCLUSION

This study attempted to introduce and investigate the emerging concept of innovative work behavior in the context of important construct of emotional intelligence and leadership in microfinance institution. With the diminishing role of traits leadership appointment and the evolution of competitive selection and recruitment, the rules of the selection and recruitment game plan have changed. As a result, emotional intelligence and innovative work behavior was brought to the attention of managers as a way to provide new strategic constructs that improve competitive thinking and therefore gain competitive edge in evaluating and providing solution in competitive business environment. The concept and its roots were introduced by reviewing the existing academic literature. Building on various conceptualizations adapted from other academic disciplines, it has been concluded that the concept of innovative work behavior is characterized by interactive employee experiences within the organization. It is a process which is dynamic and interactive in nature, which stems from service dominance innovation logic and the leadership domain, which imply that creating interactive relationship with the subordinates is becoming the source of competitive edge and it is therefore important for businesses to put their focus on building and maintaining long-term interactive relationships with their employees.

In conclusion, the findings of this study have important implications for both academic and management practitioners. As scholarly inquiries into the notion emotional intelligence and innovative work behavior have remained conceptual to date, this research is one of the attempts to test the concept in an empirical setting. The managers will find useful implications that are relevant and can be used to endorse the validity of incorporating emotional intelligence interventions in the recruitment and selection process, training and

development process of managerial and staff development.

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