

Research Paper

# The effect of the role of critical leadership styles and the mechanism of employees' psychological distress on employees' engagement

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**Abstract**

The present study was conducted with the aim of determining the effect of critical leadership styles and the mechanism of psychological distress of employees on the employees' engagement. The current research is applied in terms of purpose, and descriptive-correlative in terms of nature and method. The statistical population (300 people) was the administrative staff of education in Yazd city in 1401, who were selected by simple random method and through Cochran (169 people). Data collection tools, transformational leadership questionnaires of Bass & Avolio (1995), autocratic leadership of Hanges & Dickson (2004), employees' engagement of Rich & Lepine (2010), and finally Kessler et al.'s employees' psychological distress (2002) that had good validity and reliability. The results of hypothesis testing were used by SMART-PLS software and using t-test statistics and path coefficients ( $\beta$ ), which indicate a significant effect between research variables. Also, the mediating role of employees' psychological distress was confirmed in the influence of transformational leadership on employees' engagement., but it was not confirmed in the effect of authoritarian leadership on employees' engagement. According to the findings of the research, it can be stated that to increase or decrease the employees' engagement, attention should be paid to transformational and authoritarian leadership, because they can have positive and negative effects on employee engagement. Of course, psychological distress can also be helpful in this field, because if the psychological distress of the employees cannot be reduced, irreparable damage will be done to the employees' engagement.

**Keywords:**

critical leadership styles,  
mechanism of employees' psychological distress,  
employees' engagement.

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## Extended Abstract

### Introduction

The main goal of this research, relying on the resource conservation theory, is to clarify the various mechanisms that determine the impact of transformational and authoritarian leadership on the job commitment of employees. Therefore, bosses who maintain strong, friendly and respectful supportive relationships with their employees improve and influence the level of employees' engagement and their well-being. Bosses who support their employees, establish good friendly relations with them and appreciate them, are likely to make them attached to their work environment. Therefore, based on the conservation of resources theory, we infer that the work situation of employees is influenced by the resources they have in the work environment. When they find that their resources are adequate, they may feel more excited about their job duties. However, investigating the relationship between transformational and authoritarian leadership and employees' engagement through the psychological distress variable is particularly important. This shows that transformational leaders are able to reduce employee stress due to their positive behaviors. Due to the ability of leaders to reduce stress, and express positive and respectful behaviors, employees of the organization improve their level of employees' engagement and well-being. In addition, employees are prone to lack of employees' engagement to the organization due to the lack of resources created as a result of authoritarian leadership style. These leaders increase the psychological distress of employees. Such leaders must be aware that if they fail to change their behavior, other followers will also experience job disengagement. This, in turn, causes employees to adopt negative attitudes to deal with the waste of excess resources. This study seeks to answer the question of how the critical leadership styles of "transformational and authoritarian leadership" affect employees' engagement. And how does the psychological distress mechanism of employees mediate the relationship between critical leadership styles "transformational leadership, autocratic leadership" and "employees' engagement"?

### Theoretical foundations

This study examines the critical leadership styles by a comprehensive review of the literature through the mediating variable of employees' psychological distress on employees' engagement. Therefore, this research presents comprehensive measures in line with the success and survival of employees in the presence of narcissistic bosses, including transforming employees before they become stressed and disengaged from their jobs. These gaps necessitate the development of a comprehensive model that includes critical positive (transformational) and negative (authoritarian) leadership styles to evaluate employees' engagement in the workplace.

This is in line with previous researchers' research; Zhao & Sheng (2019), who claimed that research on leadership styles is still in its early stages. By adding a mediating variable (employees' psychological distress) to the research model, this study is in line with the research of Albashiti et al, (2021), and Zeeshan (2021), who discussed about including an underlying mechanism between critical leadership styles and employee work outcomes to understand Comprehensive literature of the topic.

### Methodology

This research is "applicative" in terms of its purpose, and "descriptive-correlative with a survey" in terms of the way of data collection. The statistical population (300 people) were administrative employees of education in Yazd city, who (169 people) were selected by simple random method for the year 1401 (Table 1). Bass & Avolio's (1995) transformational leadership questionnaire, consisting of 20 questions; Hanges & Dickson's (2004) authoritarian

leadership, consisting of 6 questions; Rich & Lepine's employees' engagement (2010), consisting of 18 questions; and finally, distress Kessler et al (2002) employee psychology, which consisted of 10 questions; were used as a data collection tool.

### **Research findings**

In order to investigate the hypotheses of the research, partial least squares structural equation modeling was used with SMART-PLS software. The results related to the first hypothesis showed that transformational leadership has a positive and meaningful effect on the employees' engagement. The results related to the second hypothesis showed that authoritarian leadership has a negative and significant effect on the employees' engagement. The results related to the third hypothesis showed that transformational leadership has a negative and significant effect on employees' psychological distress. The results of the fourth hypothesis showed that authoritarian leadership has a positive and significant effect on the psychological distress of employees. The results related to the fifth hypothesis showed that employees' psychological distress has a negative and significant effect on employees' engagement. The results related to the sixth hypothesis showed that employees' psychological distress plays a mediating role in the impact of transformational leadership on employees' engagement. The results related to the seventh hypothesis showed that the psychological distress of the employees has a mediating role in the impact of authoritarian leadership on the employees' engagement.

### **Conclusion and Discussion**

The purpose of this research was the structural impact of the role of critical leadership styles and the mechanism of psychological distress of employees on employees' engagement (case study: Yazd city education). This research is in agreement with Moeini Korbekandi & Tabarsa (2022), Khoshkesht et al, (2022), Akhwan Obiri (2019), Fasih and Hassanzadeh (2015), Fransiska & AyiAhadiat (2021), Rahim (2021) Jabeen &, Milhem et al, (2019), Mozammel & Hann (2016); in today's aggressive business world, employee engagement has become an essential element for organizational success and excellence. On the other hand, leadership is considered the most inevitable and vital aspect for the development of the organization. Transformational leaders can create more commitment in the work of subordinates, which leads to greater efficiency and satisfaction. And instead, autocratic leaders cannot create engagement in the work of subordinates, but it leads to their inefficiency and dissatisfaction. As a result, these two leadership styles are able to increase and decrease the overall level of employees' engagement in the organization, although the mechanism of psychological distress of employees can affect the effects of these two styles on employees' engagement. According to the results of the present research, it is suggested that the education managers of Yazd must pay much attention to critical leadership styles, even by holding meetings for the managers, they can make them aware of the important results that can affect employees' engagement. On the other hand, the mechanism of psychological distress of employees, which is a psychological dimension itself, can raise and lower the effects of these styles, so managers must be informed of such a mechanism.