

CRAFTING EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT IN PUBLIC SECTOR DELAYERING: FROM TRANSPARENCY, LEADERSHIP TO TRUST



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Abstract

This study is based on the understanding that organizational changes, such as delayering, can influence the level of employee engagement. Previous studies have acknowledged the roles of transparent communication, transformational leadership, and employee organizational trust in enhancing the level of employee engagement. This study aims to analyze the influence of transparent communication and transformational leadership on employee engagement through the mediation of employee organizational trust in the context of organizational change. This study adopts a cross-sectional design with a purposive sampling technique. The respondents are the First-Low-Level Functional PD appointed through the delayering mechanism in the Indonesian Douane Authority. A total of 424 respondent data were collected and further analyzed. Hypothesis testing was conducted using the Structural Equation Model with Lisrel 8.8. The results show that transparent communication and transformational leadership have a significant positive effect on employee engagement. Furthermore, employee organizational trust partially mediates the relationship between transparent communication and transformational leadership with employee engagement. This study provides valuable insights for human resource management practitioners, emphasizing the importance of fostering transparent communication, implementing transformational leadership practices, and nurturing organizational trust to effectively enhance employee engagement during organizational change, particularly in the context of delayering within public sector organizations.

Keywords: Transparent Communication, Transformational Leadership, Employee Organizational Trust, Employee Engagement, Organizational Change, Delayering

INTRODUCTION

Bo et al. (2020) have asserted that delayering or flattening bureaucracy is becoming a popular trend in developing countries. In Indonesia, flattening bureaucracy has been an explicit goal of the Grand Design of Bureaucratic Reform 2010-2025, detailed in Presidential Regulation No. 81 of 2010 and accelerated in the second period of President Joko Widodo's administration (Dahlia, 2020). The Ministry of Funding designated the Indonesian Douane Authority (IDA) as a "quick win" in the delayering process, in line with the President's guidance, by restructuring 1,770 officials at the fifth echelon to First-Level Functional Douane Examiner (DE) (IDA, 2021). This delayering represents a significant organizational change, altering structure, roles, functions, and business processes (IDA, 2021).

As of 2022, the Ministry of Funding has implemented delayering in five echelon I units beneath it, impacting a total of 2,114 officials (Ministry of Funding, 2022). IDA eliminated an entire layer of its hierarchical structure, whereas other echelons I units only partially delayered across some of their hierarchical layers (Ministry of Funding, 2022). This indicates that IDA is the echelon I unit within the Ministry of Funding that has undergone the most significant organizational change through delayering.

Islam et al. (2021) state that employee engagement has now become a central issue in organizational change management studies. Employee engagement plays a critical role in change management as it can lead to success (Faupel & Süß, 2019). If organizations make the right decisions at the right time, employee engagement can be enhanced even during challenging periods (Chanana & Sangeeta, 2021). However, Seppälä et al. (2020) point out that organizational change can decrease employee engagement due to its negative impact on working conditions and the work environment, including reduced resources and work motivation, increased demands, and task obstacles. IDA (2021) and the Ministry of Funding (2022) state that organizational change in the form of delayering at IDA has led to several issues resulting in decreased employee engagement. Some of these issues include limited career development opportunities (Bai et al., 2023), role conflicts and role ambiguity (Maden-Eyiusta, 2021), increased workloads (Ahmed et al., 2019) and resignations (Lathabhavan, 2019). It has the potential to lead to the failure of implementing change (Oreg et al., 2016).

Organizational change can bring forth various challenges, questions, and uncertainties among employees, affecting their relationships with the organization (Li et al., 2021). High-quality communication can strengthen employee engagement, while poor communication can lead to disengagement (Siddiqui & Sahar, 2019). Communication that enhances employee engagement is transparent communication (Jiang & Luo, 2018; Jiang & Shen, 2023). Transparent communication refers to internal organizational communication that, when executed effectively, can lead to organizational success during change processes (Zainab et al., 2022).

Apart from transparent communication, transformational leadership is an equally crucial contributor to enhancing employee engagement (Saputra, 2023). Transformational leadership has received special attention from researchers in the realm of change management (Yue et al., 2019) because transformative leaders play a vital role in ensuring the successful execution of change (Zainab et al., 2022). During organizational change, transformational leaders consider their employees' perspectives, mitigate ambiguity, and motivate employees to exhibit positive behavior (Zainab et al., 2022), ultimately enhancing employee engagement during the change process (Hooi & Chan, 2023). Research by Balwant et al. (2020); Faupel & Süß (2019); Islam et al. (2021); and Hooi & Chan (2023) state that transformational leadership has a significantly positive impact on employee engagement. However, Islam et al. (2021) highlight the scarcity of research addressing the impact of transformational leadership on boosting employee engagement within the organizational change context. Therefore, it is interesting to investigate the influence of transformational leadership on employee engagement in the context of delaying at IDA.

Transparent communication and transformational leadership can enhance employee organizational trust by reducing uncertainty and psychological pressure; and encouraging employees to accept ongoing organizational changes (Zainab et al., 2022). Yue et al. (2019) define employee organizational trust as employees' willingness to take risks based on their belief that the organization possesses integrity, reliability, and competence. The research findings of Yue et al. (2019) and Zainab et al. (2022) demonstrate that transparent communication and transformational leadership have a significantly positive impact on employee organizational trust. Alshaabani and Rudnak (2023) note that trust is a tool that

can reduce complexity and enhance confidence among the parties within an organization. The research by Mohanty & P (2020) and Alshaabani & Rudnák (2023) indicates that employee organizational trust has a significantly positive impact on employee engagement. Employees are more engaged with an organization when they trust it.

According to the Social Exchange Theory (SET), the extent to which employees engage with an organization is determined by the resources provided by the organization (Saks, 2019). In this study, the resources provided by the organization that can enhance employee engagement are leadership (Faupel & Süß, 2019 ; Zheng et al., 2020; Islam et al., 2021; Jiang & Shen, 2023; Hooi & Chan, 2023) and communication (Kang & Sung, 2017; Jiang & Men, 2017; Jiang & Luo, 2018; Jiang & Shen, 2023). On the other hand, both resources provided by the organization will also enhance trust in the organization (Yue et al., 2019; Islam et al., 2021; Zainab et al., 2022). Building trust is a process of social exchange which subsequently leads to the creation of a trusting environment as an extension of the SET that can influence employee engagement (Mohanty & P, 2020)

Employee engagement among IDA employees during delayering has become a critical issue that warrants investigation (Sanjaya & Nurhayati, 2024). This is because 90% of organizations worldwide face disappointing outcomes during organizational change, and previous research provides evidence that the organizational change process generates uncertainty and anxiety, leading employees to be hesitant and cynical during the transition (Islam et al., 2021). On the other hand, research by Faupel & Süß (2019), Islam et al. (2021), and Hooi & Chan (2023) who examine employee engagement in the context of organizational change, no one has specifically discussed it in the context of flattening bureaucracy or delayering. Therefore, the author aims to investigate how transparent communication and transformational leadership influence employee engagement, with the mediation of employee organizational trust, specifically within the context of delayering in IDA, a public sector organization. The author hopes that this research will contribute to enriching the academic literature related to employee engagement in the context of organizational change in the form of delayering in public sector organizations.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Social Exchange Theory

Social exchange theory (SET), rooted in the contributions of key theorists such as Homans, Blau, and Emerson, serves as a fundamental framework in the social sciences for comprehending social interaction (Cook, 2015). This theoretical perspective has been instrumental in exploring various pivotal aspects of organizational behavior (Cropanzano et al., 2017). In the dynamics of exchange, when one party offers its resources to another, it engenders commitment from the recipient (Mohanty & P, 2020). In the context of the relationship between employees and organizations, this reciprocity implies that employees develop a sense of commitment to the organization when it invests in providing resources to them.

Employee Engagement

Employee engagement is a dynamic psychological state that shows how employees simultaneously invest their physical, emotional and cognitive energy in expressing themselves through activities in their work role (Jiang & Shen, 2023). During organizational change, employees who are engaged actively involve themselves in the change process (Islam et al., 2021). Thus, engaged employees who perceive positive outcomes from the change will support its success (Faupel & Süß, 2019).

Transparent Communication

In the context of organizational change, transparent communication can lead to success (Zainab et al., 2022). More open and transparent organizational communication can enhance organizational trust (Yue et al., 2019; Wang, 2020; Zainab et al., 2022). Siddiqui & Sahar (2019) state that good communication can enhance engagement, while poor communication can increase disengagement. This aligns with the findings of Jiang & Luo (2018) and Jiang & Shen (2023), indicating that transparent communication significantly and positively influences employee engagement. Dhanesh & Picherit-Duthler (2021) suggest that two-way communication between the organization and employees makes employees feel heard, thereby enhancing employee engagement. Thus, the author proposes the following hypotheses:

H1: Transparent communication has a positive effect on employee engagement.

H2: Transparent communication has a positive effect on employee organizational trust.

Transformational Leadership

Transformational leadership can create trust among employees in their organization (Yue et al., 2019; Zainab et al., 2022), ultimately leading to increased employee engagement (Faupel & Süß, 2019; Mohanty & P, 2020; Islam et al., 2021; Hooi & Chan, 2023). Support, inspiration, and coaching from transformational leaders foster a positive organizational climate, promoting employee engagement even amidst significant transformative changes (Hooi & Chan, 2023). Therefore, the author proposes the following hypotheses:

H3: Transformational leadership has a positive effect on employee engagement.

H4: Transformational leadership has a positive effect on employee organizational trust.

Employee Organizational Trust

Mohanty & P (2020) highlight that a decrease in employee organizational trust can lead to a breach of the contract between employees and the organization. Conversely, an increase in employee organizational trust will enhance employee engagement (Mohanty & P (2020); Islam et al., 2021). Another finding by Alshaabani & Rudnák (2023) states that employees become more engaged with the organization when they have trust in it. Therefore, the author proposes the following hypotheses:

H5 : Employee organizational trust has a positive effect on employee engagement.

H6a : Employee organizational trust mediates the relationship between transparent communication and employee engagement.

H6b : Employee organizational trust mediates the relationship between transformational leadership and employee engagement.

RESEARCH METHOD

Measures

To test the proposed hypotheses, multi-item scales from previous literature were used to measure the constructs. All items were measured using a seven-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). The survey instrument consisted of question items to measure the dependent variables (transparent communication and transformational leadership), the mediating variable (employee organizational trust), and the dependent variable (employee engagement) tailored to the context of organizational change in the form of delayering. Employee engagement was measured using 17 items adopted from Mohanty & P (2020), utilizing the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale. Transparent communication was assessed using 16 items adapted from Yue et al. (2019). Transformational leadership was measured using 11 items from Yue et al. (2019). Employee organizational trust was evaluated using 13 items adapted from Yue et al. (2019) and Lu et al. (2022).

Sample and Data Collection

Data was collected from IDA employees through an online questionnaire. Respondents were selected from those who held the position of First-Level Functional PD and were appointed through the delayering mechanism. This selection was made because they are the employees who truly experienced the impact of delayering in terms of structure, roles, functions, and business processes. The minimum sample size was determined using the Slovin formula. Adhikari (2021) explained that the Slovin formula is as follows: $n = N / (1 + Ne^2)$, where n represents the sample size, N signifies the population size, and e denotes the margin of error. With a population of 1,327 employees and a 5% margin of error, the minimum sample size calculated using the Slovin formula was 308 employees.

Before distributing the questionnaire, a readability test was conducted with five employees. Afterward, a pretest was administered to 30 potential respondents to assess the validity and reliability of the questionnaire items. Subsequently, using one of the non-probability sampling techniques, quota sampling, 424 First-Level Functional PDs participated in the main questionnaire survey.

Data Analysis

This study utilized primary data obtained from a questionnaire. The acquired data was subsequently analyzed using descriptive analysis and Structural Equation Modeling (SEM), tailored to the research objectives and hypotheses. SEM is a method used to measure factors that are not directly observable or are latent, represented by a set of variables (Malhotra, 2019).

Model Development

The research model used as a reference in this study is the model by Yue et al. (2019), which investigates the influence of transformational leadership and transparent communication on openness to change, mediated by employee organizational trust. It was modified with elements from the research models of Mohanty & P (2020), Jiang & Shen (2023), and Hooi & Chan (2023). The researcher chose to study employee engagement instead of openness to change because the organizational change in the form of delayering at IDA has been ongoing since 2020, making it less relevant to study openness to change. Moreover, individuals with high levels of openness to change would actively engage in supporting and implementing changes (Jeong et al., 2016). Therefore, the model for this study is as follows:

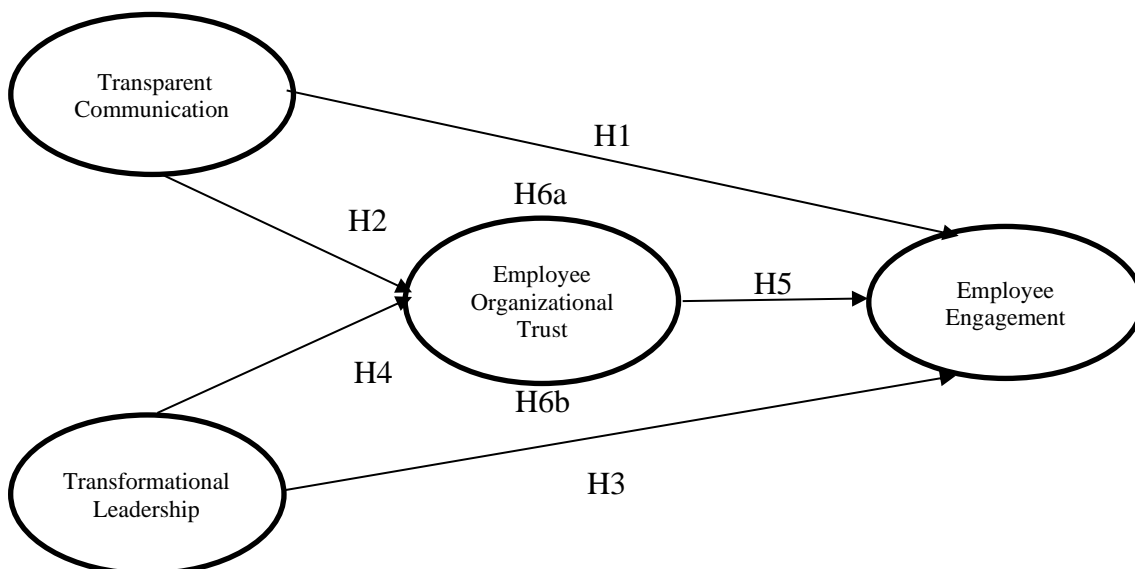


Figure 1.
The Conceptual Framework

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Respondent Profile

The demographic information gathered from respondents includes gender, age, tenure, education, and the island group where they work. The majority of respondents are male, aged between 31-40 years and 41-50 years, with work experience ranging from 16-20 years and over 20 years. They have attained a Bachelor's degree, and their work is predominantly situated on the island of Java. For more detailed information, refer to Table 1.

Table 1.
Respondent Profile

Respondent Characteristic's		N	%
Gender	Male	393	92,69%
	Female	31	7,31%
Age	21 – 30 y. o.	2	0,47%
	31 – 40 y. o.	170	40,09%
	41 – 50 y. o.	221	52,12%
	> 50 y. o.	31	7,31%
Tenure	6 – 10 years	14	3,30%
	11 – 15 years	50	11,79%
	16 – 20 years	183	43,16%
	> 20 years	177	41,75%
Education	High school/ Diploma I	38	8,96%
	Diploma III	17	4,01%
	Bachelor	299	70,52%
	Master	68	16,04%
Island group work location	Doctoral	2	0,47%
	Java	200	47,17%
	Sumatera	93	21,93%
	Kalimantan	48	11,32%
	Sulawesi	33	7,78%
	Bali & Nusa Tenggara	38	8,96%
	Maluku & Papua	12	2,83%

Reliability Test

To assess reliability, Composite Reliability (CR) and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values are utilized. According to Hair et al. (2019), CR is employed to evaluate internal consistency reliability with a minimum value of 0.7, while AVE gauges the extent to which latent constructs explain the variance of their indicators, with a minimum value of 0.5. As depicted in Table 3, all CR values exceed 0.7, and almost all AVE values are above 0.5. Although the AVE value for the ABS dimension falls slightly below 0.5, it remains acceptable given that the CR value meets the required threshold (Wu, 2020). This indicates that the indicators used in this study exhibit consistency in measuring each latent variable.

Table 2.
CR and AVE

Variable	Dimension	First Order		Second Order	
		CR	AVE	CR	AVE
EE	VIG	0,91	0,63	0,91	0,77
	DED	0,93	0,73		
	ABS	0,83	0,46		
TC	SUB	0,97	0,85	0,96	0,89
	PAR	0,91	0,64		
	ACC	0,81	0,58		
TL	IDE	0,81	0,68	0,91	0,72
	INT	0,90	0,74		
	INS	0,89	0,73		
	IND	0,93	0,82		
EOT	OVER	0,70	0,45	0,97	0,87
	COMP	0,86	0,67		
	INTE	0,91	0,71		
	GOOD	0,90	0,75		

Goodness of Fit Model

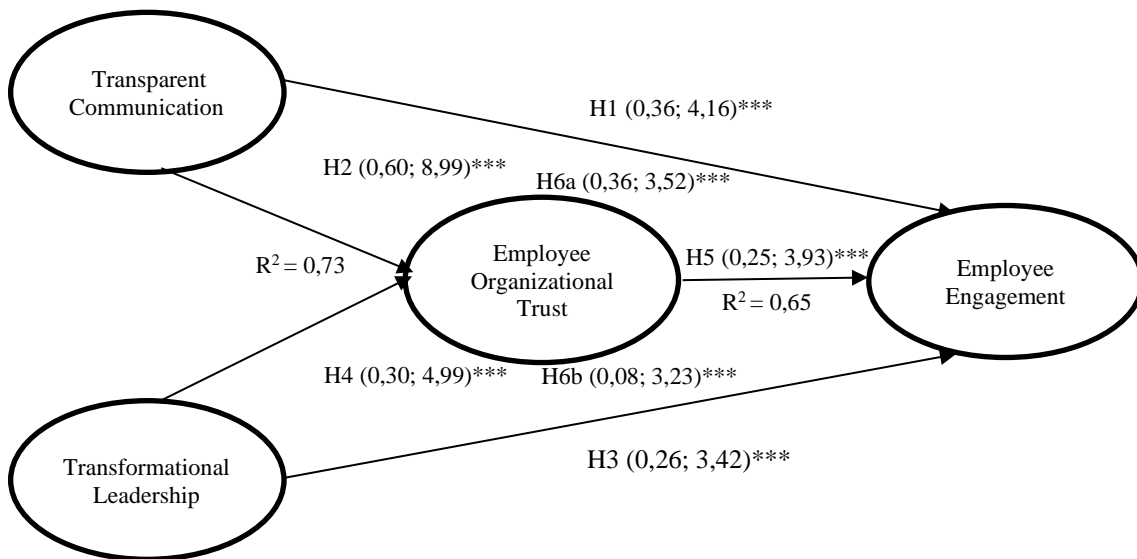
Table 3 presents the goodness of fit for the research model. According to Hair et al. (2019), when a model satisfies three to four criteria, it is considered a good fit. Both absolute fit indices and incremental fit indices indicate that the research model in this study meets the criteria to be deemed a model with a good fit.

Table 3.
Goodness of Fit

Measurement Test	Standard of Value	Test Results	Description
Absolute GFI	≥ 0,90	0,91	Good fit

Incremental	RMSEA	≤ 0.08	0,066	Good fit
	RMR	≤ 0.05	0,039	Good fit
	NFI	≥ 0.90	0,99	Good fit
	TLI/ NNFI	≥ 0.90	0,99	Good fit
	CFI	≥ 0.90	0,99	Good fit
	RFI	≥ 0.90	0,99	Good fit
	IFI	≥ 0.90	0,99	Good fit

Hypotheses Testing



Notes: Hypothesis (β , t-value)
 *** significance level = 0,01 (one-tailed)

Figure 2.
The Hypothesized Structural Model

Figure 2 illustrates the direct influence of the independent variables (TC & TL) and the mediating variable (EOT) on the dependent variable (EE), as well as the indirect influence of TC and TL on EE through the mediation of EOT. This effect is positive if the value of β is positive and is considered significant if the t-value exceeds 1.645 (one-tailed). Consequently, all direct influences of TC and TL on EOT, and the influences of TC, TL, and EOT on EE are positively significant. Therefore, H1-H5 is supported. Furthermore, the indirect effects of TC and TL on EE through EOT have also proven to be positively significant. Thus, H6a - H6b are supported.

Based on Figure 2, it can be observed that TC and TL can account for 73% of the variance in the EOT ($R^2 = 0.73$, error variance = 0.27). This indicates that there are other

variables explaining 27% of the variance in EOT. On the other hand, TC, TL, and EOT can account for 65% of the variance in EE ($R^2 = 0.65$, error variance = 0.35). Thus, other variables can explain 35% of the variance in EE within this research context.

Discussion

The findings of the study provide valuable insights into the impact of delaying on employee engagement within IDA. The research delves into the dimensions of transparent communication, transformational leadership, and employee organizational trust as influential factors in shaping employee engagement during the organizational change process.

Transparent Communication and Transformational Leadership on Employee Organizational Trust During Change

The presented studies emphasize the crucial role of transparent communication and transformational leadership in shaping organizational trust among employees during organizational change. Studies by Yue et al. (2019) and Zainab et al. (2022) consistently highlight the influence of transparent communication and transformational leadership in fostering trust within an organization. Organizations that share essential information, encourage employee participation, provide balanced information, and take responsibility for the information shared tend to be more trusted (Wang, 2020). This study supports the findings of Yue et al. (2019), Wang (2020), and Zainab et al. (2022) that transparent communication significantly positively impacts trust. The research argues that during periods of change, clarity and honesty embedded in transparent communication strengthen employees' perceptions of the organization's credibility and reliability.

Transformational leadership, characterized by vision, inspiration, and individual consideration, significantly affects employees' perception of trust in leadership and the organization's direction (Yue et al., 2019; Zainab et al., 2022). Transformational leaders foster a strong bond between the organization and its employees (Islam et al., 2021) by providing socio-emotional resources that can alleviate employee anxiety during significant organizational changes. This study supports the findings of Yue et al. (2019), Islam et al. (2021), and Zainab et al. (2022) that transformational leadership significantly positively influences employee organizational trust. When leaders adopt a transformational style,

employees perceive a stronger connection with the organizational vision and are more likely to trust their leaders due to the shared goals and inspiration provided, which can minimize uncertainty during times of change.

Transparent Communication, Transformational Leadership, and Employee Organizational Trust on Employee Engagement During Change

Transparent communication plays a pivotal role in cultivating engaged employees who contribute to the long-term success of businesses (Jiang & Luo, 2018). The findings of this study consistently support the research outcomes of Jiang & Men (2017), Jiang & Luo (2018), and Jiang & Shen (2023). Employees equipped with good information are more likely to engage in the organizational change process. Clear communication fosters understanding and involvement, reduces uncertainty, and promotes a positive attitude toward change.

Transformational leadership, characterized by visionary and inspirational leaders who consider their employees' well-being, also plays a crucial role in influencing employee engagement during change. This study aligns with the research conducted by Faupel & Süß (2019), Islam et al. (2021), and Hooi & Chan (2023) indicating that transformational leadership can enhance employee engagement during change. Transformational leaders, by addressing employee concerns, providing compelling visions, and fostering innovation, contribute to a positive organizational climate that enhances engagement, particularly amidst change.

Organizational trust leads to better commitment to work in the form of employee engagement (Mohanty & P, 2020). This research finds that employee organizational trust significantly positively influences employee engagement. This finding is consistent with the research outcomes of Ugwu et al. (2014), Mohanty & P (2020), and Alshaabani & Rudnák (2023).

The Mediating Role of Employee Organizational Trust

Employee engagement is not merely a direct consequence of transparent communication and transformational leadership during organizational change; it is also

closely related to the mediating role of employees' organizational trust. Yue et al. (2019) highlight the significance of trust in fostering a conducive environment. In the context of delayering at IDA, employees' organizational trust serves as a crucial bridge between the communication styles and leadership applied during change and subsequent levels of employee engagement. Evidenced by these findings, transparent communication and transformational leadership positively influence employees' organizational trust, consistent with the research by Yue et al. (2019) and Zainab et al. (2022). Employees are more inclined to actively engage with the organization when they trust the leadership's vision, feel valued through transparent communication, and believe in the organization's integrity and competence (Mohanty & P, 2020).

The mediating role of employee organizational trust signifies that the impact of transparent communication and transformational leadership on employee engagement operates significantly through the trust employees hold in the organization. When employees perceive communication as transparent and experience transformational leadership, it fosters trust in the organization's integrity, goodwill, and competence (Yue et al., 2019; Zainab et al., 2022). Consequently, this trust reinforces the level of engagement among employees, strengthening the idea that trust acts as a catalyst in the relationship between communication, leadership, and engagement during organizational change (Mohanty & P, 2020; Islam et al., 2021). These findings underscore the importance of a cohesive relationship between transparent communication, transformational leadership, employees' organizational trust, and employee engagement during organizational change. They emphasize the importance of nurturing trust through transparent communication and effective leadership styles to drive increased employee engagement, ultimately contributing to the successful implementation of change.

CONCLUSION

The study's findings hold significant theoretical and practical implications in the context of organizational change within public sector entities like IDA. Theoretically, this research contributes to the evolving literature on employee engagement during restructuring

initiatives by elucidating the intricate relationships among transparent communication, transformational leadership, employee organizational trust, and engagement within the delayering framework. The identified mediating role of employee organizational trust adds depth to the understanding of the mechanisms through which trust influences employee engagement during organizational change. Additionally, the study enriches the Social Exchange Theory by illustrating how resources provided by the organization, such as transparent communication and transformational leadership, impact trust and subsequently influence employee engagement.

The managerial implications drawn from this research emphasize the important role of transparent communication practices, transformational leadership qualities, and organizational trust in fostering employee engagement during the delayering process in IDA. Increasing communication transparency can be achieved by involving employees in identifying the most relevant and important information to meet their information needs through various communication channels. Apart from that, cultivating transformational leadership qualities can be done by providing ideal influence regarding the goals of the work unit and IDA as a whole during delayering. Building and maintaining organizational trust can be done by fulfilling promises, treating employees fairly, and involving employees in important decision-making.

Although this study provides valuable insights, several limitations need to be considered in future research. The limitation concerning the unit of analysis, confined to employees at IDA holding the position of First-Level Functional Douane Examiner (DE) through the delayering mechanism, suggests the necessity for further research that broadens the scope to encompass various positions and organizational contexts within the public sector. Additionally, the utilization of the purposive sampling technique, while relevant, may introduce potential biases that warrant attention. Therefore, a recommendation for future research is to explore the differing impacts of the delayering process across various hierarchical levels and consider a combined approach in sampling techniques. Subsequent studies should also delve into additional factors that might influence employee engagement amidst organizational changes to provide a more comprehensive understanding of these

dynamics within a broader context. Integrating findings from these studies can offer a deeper insight into organizational restructuring strategies and their implications.

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