



# The relationship between leadership paradigms and employee engagement

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## Abstract

**Purpose** – This study investigated whether the direct supervisor’s leadership style affects employee engagement using Avery’s classical, transactional, visionary, and organic leadership paradigms as the theoretical framework. The study also investigated how many and which components of employee engagement (“say”, “stay” and “strive”) contribute to the construct. The paper aims to discuss these issues.

**Design/methodology/approach** – A sample of 439 retail sales assistants in Sydney, Australia, responded to a mixed-mode questionnaire survey. Factor analysis, independent *t*-tests, analysis of variance and structural regression models were used in the data analysis.

**Findings** – Both research questions were supported. Results showed that the visionary and organic paradigms are likely to enhance employee engagement, whereas classical and transactional styles negatively affect employee engagement. Furthermore, the data confirmed that the three behavioral-outcome factors all do contribute to the employee engagement construct.

**Research limitations/implications** – One implication for researchers is that an employee engagement measure with demonstrably high reliability and validity, and known components has been developed. This study could be replicated in different national and occupational contexts, the leadership measures reconfirmed and expanded, follower characteristics included as moderating variables, and links to organizational performance investigated.

**Practical implications** – The findings suggest that direct supervisors should be encouraged to use visionary and/or organic leadership wherever possible to drive employee engagement.

**Originality/value** – This paper is original in several ways. It resolves an ongoing dispute in the literature about the components of employee engagement, namely whether all three components contribute to the concept. In answering this question, a valid and reliable questionnaire was developed. Using four leadership paradigms, including classical and organic leadership that are rarely investigated, this study demonstrates that employee perceptions of the leadership style used by their direct supervisor are linked to employee engagement.

**Keywords** Employee/community engagement, Leadership style, Australia

**Paper type** Research paper



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## Introduction

This paper investigates the concept of employee engagement (EE) and in particular, its relationship to leadership style. Engaged employees are reported as having a substantial, positive impact on the workplace at the individual, organizational, and macro-economic levels (Luthans and Peterson, 2002; Gibbons, 2006; 4-consulting and DTZ Consulting & Research, 2007). For example, Harter *et al.* (2009) analyzed 199 research studies based on 152 organizations in 44 industries and 26 countries. In the process, 32,394 business/work units including 955,905 employees were studied. The results of this meta-analysis show that EE is positively associated with the following outcomes: customer loyalty/engagement, profitability, productivity, turnover, safety incidents, shrinkage (lost or stolen merchandise), absenteeism, patient safety incidents, and quality (defects). AON Hewitt (2011) reported that organizations in Australia and New Zealand with highly engaged employees were more resilient, reporting almost four times the profit growth during the global financial crisis years of 2008-2010 of organizations exhibiting lower levels of engagement. Furthermore, lack of engagement can have serious practical consequences according to Gallup (2012), with estimates that disengaged employees cost US business more than \$300 billion in lost productivity. This estimate is based on findings that typically around 20 percent or fewer employees in US firms are engaged.

## Concepts

*Employee engagement.* The concept of EE is popular in the management consulting industry (4-consulting and DTZ Consulting & Research, 2007; Bakker and Schaufeli, 2008), but relatively few rigorous academic studies have been published in this field, and definitional and methodological confusion abound (Wefald and Downey, 2008; Shuck and Wollard, 2010). Engagement can be regarded as a multidimensional motivation construct consistent with positive organizational psychology (Jeung, 2011). Simpson's (2009) literature review identified four broad avenues of research in the engagement field: personal engagement, burnout/engagement, work engagement, and the term adopted for this study, EE.

The concepts of personal engagement, work engagement, and EE are inclined to be confused in the literature (Towers Perrin, 2003; CIPD, 2006; Attridge, 2009). This terminological confusion can be traced back to the often misrepresented views of the father of the field, Kahn (1990, p. 694), who defined personal engagement (at work) as the "harnessing of organizational members' selves to their work roles; in [personal] engagement, people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally during role performances". According to Kahn, in deciding whether to engage with the workplace, people ask themselves how meaningful it would be to enter into this performance; how safe it is to do so; and how physically, emotionally or psychologically ready they currently are to get involved. Kahn also identified three components of the meaningfulness question, which extends his concept of personal engagement into the more recent broader ideas of EE. The first aspect of meaningfulness concerns whether the task satisfies the person's existential needs and provides meaning in their work and life. The second component refers to how people see themselves in relating to others in their role. Finally, the third aspect, work interaction, refers to mutual appreciation, respect, and positive feedback from interpersonal interactions that contribute to one's dignity, self-appreciation, and sense of worth.

Building on Kahn, Schaufeli *et al.* (2002, pp. 74-75) developed the notion of work engagement, defined as a “positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption”. Engagement has been conceptualized in numerous other ways (Furness, 2008; Hughes and Rog, 2008; Simpson, 2009; Shuck and Wollard, 2010; Christian *et al.*, 2011), but the result is a fragmented field where writers rarely build upon others’ work, and with no universally accepted definition of EE.

For convenience, we accept the term “employee engagement” and adopt Gibbons’ (2006, p. 5) definition of EE as:

[...] a heightened emotional and intellectual connection that an employee has for his/her job, organization, manager, or co-workers that, in turn, influences him/her to apply additional discretionary effort to his/her work.

For consistency and following Gibbons (2006), we collectively refer to cognitive commitment and emotional attachment as the intellectual and emotional “connection” elements in the EE construct.

Many authors seem to agree that EE involves the interaction of three factors: cognitive commitment, emotional attachment, and behavioral outcomes that arise from an employee’s connection with his or her organization (Frank *et al.*, 2004; Gibbons, 2006; Shuck and Wollard, 2010). Being cognitively engaged refers to those who are acutely aware of their mission and role in their work environment. In contrast, to be emotionally engaged is to form meaningful connections to others (e.g. colleagues and managers) and to experience empathy and care for others’ feelings (Luthans and Peterson, 2002).

Regarding the behavioral outcomes of EE, three general behaviors occur in the academic and consulting literatures:

- (1) say – the employee advocates for the organization to co-workers and others, and refers potential employees and clients;
- (2) stay – the employee has a strong desire to continue to work in the organization, despite chances to work elsewhere; and
- (3) strive – the employee uses extra time, effort, and initiative for the organization when necessary (Looi *et al.*, 2004; Baumruk *et al.*, 2006; Heger, 2007; AON Hewitt, 2011).

However, one issue in the behavioral-outcome component of EE has not been resolved, namely, whether all three behaviors are necessary (Looi *et al.*, 2004; Baumruk *et al.*, 2006; Heger, 2007) or only some of them. For example, 4-consulting and DTZ Consulting & Research (2007) argue for say and strive, whereas Fine *et al.* (2010) propose stay and strive. This gap, addressed in this paper, is expressed in Proposition 1:

*P1.* EE consists of three behavioral components: say, stay, and strive.

*Leadership.* The concept of leadership is also fraught with definitional confusion. Despite this, “leadership” appears to be one of the single biggest factors affecting EE (Wang and Walumbwa, 2007; Macey and Schneider, 2008; Attridge, 2009). Attridge (2009), for instance, emphasizes that leadership style, that is, the relatively consistent pattern of behavior applying to leader-follower interactions, is critical for promoting EE.

Leadership patterns vary and several typologies have been proposed (Bass, 1985; Drath, 2001; Goleman *et al.*, 2002; Avery, 2004). In particular, Avery (2004) grouped organizational leadership into four leadership paradigms – classical, transactional,

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visionary, and organic paradigms. Avery's (2004) styles encompass diverse forms of leadership that have evolved in different places and at different times. By including a full range of leadership styles, Avery's paradigms allow leadership patterns to vary with context, respond to organizational requirements and preferences, and reflect many interdependent elements (Jing and Avery, 2008). Therefore, Avery's typology of four leadership paradigms was adopted in this study.

Essentially, Avery's (2004) classical leadership paradigm refers to dominance by an outstanding person or group of "elites" who command or maneuver others to act towards a goal that is either specified or not. The other members of the group usually follow the autocratic instructions of the leader(s), do not publicly query their commands, and execute orders chiefly out of fear of the consequences following disobedience, for respect for the leader(s), or both. Except where the classical leadership style is required (e.g. in some military or emergency service situations), classical leadership requires little emotional, intellectual or behavioral involvement of the followers with the organization or its vision or goals, although such engagement is not precluded, depending on the leader and the circumstances.

Transactional leaders and followers interact and negotiate agreements, with followers as individuals or cohorts, making "deals" to meet their followers' needs and motives in exchange for labor. By clarifying follower demands and the consequences for given behaviors, transactional leaders can inculcate self-confidence in followers, thereby getting them to expend the necessary effort to reach specified performance levels. Under transactional leadership, followers accept or comply with the leader's requirements in exchange for financial rewards, recognition, and resources, or to avoid disciplinary actions (Bass *et al.*, 2003; Avery, 2004). Like classical leadership, transactional leadership does not demand followers be engaged with the organization or its vision.

Visionary (also known as transformational or charismatic) leadership adds a future dimension to leadership and requires the emotional involvement of staff. Visionary leaders work through a higher-order purpose that appeals to followers' needs and motives (Avery, 2004). That is, visionary leaders are expected to advance a clear image of the future, produce a road map for the journey ahead, and thereby motivate followers to perform and attain goals beyond normal expectations. Doing so requires the emotional commitment of followers (Bass, 1985) and is enhanced by a positive relationship between leaders and followers (Zhu *et al.*, 2009).

The fourth paradigm, organic leadership, is not a top-down process between a formal leader and group members; multiple leaders within a team can exist (Mehra *et al.*, 2006; Raelin, 2003). A useful definition of organic leadership comes from Pearce and Conger (2003, p. 1):

[...] a dynamic, interactive influence process among individuals in groups for which the objective is to lead one another to the achievement of group or organizational goals or both. This influence process often involves peer, or lateral, influence and at other times involves upward or downward hierarchical influence.

Thus, visionary and organic leadership both need followers' emotional involvement and engagement with each other and the enterprise, but such positive emotional commitment is optional under classical and transactional leadership (Avery, 2004). Classical leadership, for example, has been shown to destabilize groups, with more members choosing to leave and take their resources elsewhere than under more democratic and

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consultative forms of leadership – regardless of whether or not members receive favorable personal outcomes from the leader (van Vugt *et al.*, 2004).

Other studies report benefits for EE from transformational (visionary) leadership. For example, research in Israel found that principals' transformational leadership affected a sample of 745 teachers' satisfaction both directly and indirectly (Bogler, 2001). A detailed diary study of Dutch employees' engagement reported that daily transformational leadership behaviors from the supervisor were positively related to the engagement that employees reported each day, and optimism fully mediated this relationship (Tims *et al.*, 2011). Babcock-Roberson and Strickland (2010) reported that transformational leadership improves performance by affecting employees' work engagement and that engaged employees in turn perform more behaviors that promote efficient and effective functioning of the organization. Zhu *et al.* (2009) also reported a positive association between transformational leadership and EE. However, no single study has investigated all four leadership paradigms in relation to EE, particularly the organic paradigm. This study, therefore, examines the relationship between EE and Avery's four paradigms, with a focus on the director supervisor.

*Direct supervisor.* Some scholars see considerable overlap between leadership and management (Yukl, 1989), and in this study the concepts of manager and leader are incorporated in the more generic term "supervisor". Arguably, most supervisors liaise between the organization and followers, and thus require both leadership and managerial competencies. The direct supervisor refers to the person who directly monitors employees' daily work (Pinsonneault and Kraemer, 1997). A strong consensus exists that direct supervisors are crucial to driving EE (Frank *et al.*, 2004; Gibbons, 2006; Jones *et al.*, 2008; Schneider *et al.*, 2009; Tims *et al.*, 2011). In fact, Buckingham and Coffman (1999) claimed that an individual's relationship with his/her supervisor is the strongest influencer of engagement. Besides being taken as a predictor of EE, relationships with direct supervisors also have some indirect effects on EE by affecting other antecedents to engagement, such as communication, trust and integrity, and a rich and involving job (Towers Perrin, 2003; Robinson *et al.*, 2004; Shaw and Bastock, 2005; Baumruk *et al.*, 2006; CIPD, 2006; Stairs *et al.*, 2006; Schneider *et al.*, 2009).

To address the research gaps identified above, employees' perceptions of their direct supervisor's leadership style under classical, transactional, visionary and organic leadership paradigms were investigated in this study. Under organic leadership, because there can be no formal leader, but distributed leadership with multiple, changing leaders within a group, an employee's perception of his or her group's leadership culture was investigated:

- P2.* EE is related to the perceived leadership paradigm adopted by that employees' direct supervisor.

### Hypotheses

Four hypotheses related to *P2* were generated. Without previous studies on the relationship between EE and leadership paradigms, it became necessary to identify factors likely to predict EE in developing the research hypotheses. EE has no universally recognized set of antecedents or predictors, but for this study, eight commonly-cited factors were derived from the wider literature and adopted as positive predictors of EE: expansive communication, trust and integrity, a rich and involving job, effective and supportive

direct supervisor(s), career advancement opportunities, contribution to organizational success, pride in the organization, and supportive colleagues/team members.

In developing the hypotheses, the relationships between characteristics of a certain leadership paradigm (Avery, 2004) and EE predictors, and the “connection” and “additional discretionary effort” elements of EE (Gibbons, 2006) were tested. The eight predictors, and wherever possible their relationships with the characteristics of leadership styles derived from the literature, are summarized in Figure 1. As shown in Figure 1, “limited communication”, low “trust and integrity”, “boring job”, low “effective and supportive direct supervisors”, low “career advancement opportunities”,

Workplace characteristics (EE predictors)		Leadership paradigm				EE prediction
		Classical leadership	Transactional leadership	Visionary leadership	Organic leadership	
Communication	Expansive			■		High
	Limited	■	■			Low
Trust and integrity	High			■		High
	Low	■	■			Low
Job	Rich/involving			■		High
	Boring					Low
Effective direct supervisors	Highly	Uncertain	Uncertain	■	Not applicable	High
	Low					Low
Supportive direct supervisors	Highly			■	Not applicable	High
	Low	■	■			Low
Career advancement opportunities	High			■		High
	Low	■	■			Low
Contribution to organizational success	High			■		High
	Low	■	■			Low
Pride in the organization	High			■		High
	Low	...	...			Low
Supportive colleagues/team members	Highly			■		High
	Low	■	■			Low

**Notes:** ■ Applicable to this paradigm; □ not applicable to this paradigm; ... absence of research

**Source:** Bass (1985), Koh *et al.* (1995), Mackenzie *et al.* (2001), Towers Perrin (2003), Robinson *et al.* (2004), Sousa-Poza and Henneberger (2004), Verbeke *et al.* (2004), Shaw and Bastock (2005), Gibbons (2006), Hemdi and Nasurdin (2006), Saks (2006), Seijts and Crim (2006), Stairs *et al.* (2006), Wagner (2006), 4-consulting and DTZ Consulting & Research (2007), Avery *et al.* (2007), CIPD (2006), Corace (2007), Molinaro and Weiss (2007), Gong and Chang (2008), Medlin and Green (2009), Pech (2009), Schneider *et al.* (2009), Stahl *et al.* (2009), Trahan (2009), Craig and Silverstone (2010), Dewhurst *et al.* (2010), Liaw *et al.* (2010) and Tomlinson (2010)

**Figure 1.** Summary of the relationships between EE predictors and leadership style characteristics

low “contribution to organizational success”, and low “supportive colleagues/team members” all predict low EE, leading to *H1.1*:

*H1.1.* Employee perception of a classical leadership style in his/her direct supervisor tends to be negatively associated with EE.

Engaged employees apply additional discretionary effort to their work (Gibbons, 2006). Notwithstanding the fact that transactional leaders basically build confidence in followers to exert the necessary effort to achieve expected levels of performance by clarifying requirements and the consequences of follower behaviors, certain characteristics of transactional leadership conflict with the EE element of additional discretionary effort. For example, the characteristics of transactional leadership of “limited communication”, low “trust and integrity”, “boring job”, low “effective and supportive direct supervisors”, low “career advancement opportunities”, low “contribution to organizational success”, and low “supportive colleagues/team members”, predict low EE (Figure 1), thus generating *H1.2*:

*H1.2.* Employee perception of a transactional leadership style in his/her direct supervisor tends to be negatively associated with EE.

Previous research has established a positive association between visionary leadership and the two elements of EE, namely “connection” (Bass *et al.*, 2003; Walumbwa and Lawler, 2003; Epitropaki and Martin, 2005; Liao and Chuang, 2007) and “additional discretionary effort” (Bass, 1985; Epitropaki and Martin, 2005; Sosik, 2005). Characteristics typical of visionary leadership of “expansive communication”, high “trust and integrity”, “rich and involving job”, highly “effective and supportive direct supervisors”, high “career advancement opportunities”, high “contribution to organizational success”, high “pride in the organization”, and highly “supportive colleagues/team members” predict high EE (Figure 1) as stated in *H1.3*. A similar argument applies to organic leadership, as expressed in *H1.4*:

*H1.3.* Employee perception of a visionary leadership style in his/her direct supervisor tends to be positively associated with EE.

*H1.4.* Employee perception of an organic leadership style in his/her direct supervisor tends to be positively associated with EE.

## Method

The above hypotheses were tested along with *P1* using a combination of face-to-face and mail survey questionnaires.

### Sample

Using convenience sampling, 439 retail sales assistants working in eight shopping malls across Sydney, Australia, were asked to complete a questionnaire that could be handed directly to the investigator or mailed back. Since respondent occupation can influence EE (Towers Perrin, 2003; Robinson *et al.* (2004); 4-consulting and DTZ Consulting & Research, 2007), this variable was held constant using only retail sales assistants. Trained research assistants selected respondents for interview according to the order in which the researchers encountered them. A limit of five respondents per store was set to obtain more diversified leadership styles (Rotemberg and Saloner, 1993; Carpenter, 2002).

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The response rate was 79.8 percent but following data cleaning, 432 valid questionnaires remained, 36.6 percent being from small, 19 percent from medium-sized, and 29.9 percent from large organizations. Full-time, part-time, and casual staff accounted for 46.5, 18.5, and 35.0 percent of respondents, respectively. Females dominated the sample (75 percent). Ages ranged from under 25 years old (66.7 percent), through 25-34 years (22.2 percent), to the remainder aged above 35 years. Employee tenure with the organization was: 33.6 percent of respondents with less than one year, 43.5 percent one to two years, and the remaining 22.9 percent for three or more years. Over three-quarters (77.1 percent) of the sample had been with the organization for under three years and the majority (87.7 percent) had been in their current leader-follower relationship for under three years.

### *Measures*

All items for the independent and dependent variables were measured on five-point Likert scales (strongly agree-strongly disagree). To measure Avery's (2004) leadership paradigms, Jing's (2009) pioneering scale was adopted. Following Heger (2007), the three behavioral-outcome components to measure the full EE construct were employed: say, stay, and strive. Say was measured using a four-item index, with the four items chosen from Towers Perrin (2003), Robinson *et al.* (2004) and Heger (2007); stay by using three items adopted from Flood *et al.* (2001) and Bloemer and Odekerken-Schroder (2006); and strive via a six-item index selected from Towers Perrin (2003) and Robinson *et al.* (2004). To minimize response sets (Rossi *et al.*, 1983), items relating to EE were randomized in the questionnaire (which is available upon request). Where necessary, items were adapted slightly to suit this study's requirements, for example, regarding organic leadership.

### **Analysis and results**

Factor analysis, independent *t*-tests, ANOVA, and regression analyses were used to analyze the results. Table I reports the results of testing with Amos 17.0 the one-factor congeneric measurement models (Joreskog, 1971) of classical leadership, transactional leadership, visionary leadership, organic leadership, say, stay, and strive. As a possible higher-order factor of say, stay, and strive, the measurement model of EE was assessed using higher-order factor analysis (Qiu and Lin, 2009), yielding acceptable model fit indices (Table I).

Regarding the behavioral-outcome factors in the construct of EE, all factor loadings of say, stay, and strive were above 0.71, suggesting a strong association between them and EE. Item reliability (SMCs) for say, stay, and strive were 0.95, 0.84, and 0.92, respectively; well above 0.50. Moreover, the EE scale's internal consistency reliability coefficient (Cronbach's  $\alpha$ ) reached 0.877. These findings all indicate that the construct of EE had very good reliability and validity. Test results revealed that the behavioral-outcome factors in the construct of EE consist of say, stay, and strive, supporting *P1*. Thus, the established construct and scale of EE was sufficiently robust to use in the subsequent hypothesis testing.

Using independent *t*-tests and one-way ANOVA, the group mean differences in EE revealed no significant differences in means among four respondent categories:

- (1) gender ( $p = 0.525$ );
- (2) organizational (employee) tenure ( $p = 0.398$ );

Indices	CMIN	<i>p</i>	CMIN/ DF	SRMR	GFI	NFI	TLI (NNFI)	CFI	RMSEA
Model	> 0.05	< 2	< 0.08	> 0.90	> 0.90	> 0.90	> 0.95 (or > 0.90)	< 0.05 (or < 0.08)	
Classical leadership	4.431	0.109	2.215	0.0241	0.995	0.980	0.967	0.989	0.053
Transactional leadership	6.775	0.238	1.355	0.0271	0.994	0.940	0.965	0.983	0.029
Visionary leadership	0.355	0.837	0.178	0.0080	1.000	0.997	1.049	1.000	0.000
Organic leadership	7.627	0.178	1.525	0.0301	0.993	0.936	0.951	0.976	0.035
Say Stay	6.783	0.034	3.391	0.0217	0.992	0.987	0.973	0.991	0.074
Strive	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.0000	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000	0.000
EE	32.542	0.000	3.616	0.0399	0.976	0.932	0.916	0.949	0.078
Classical leadership and EE	394.838	0.000	6.368	0.0703	0.857	0.822	0.804	0.844	0.112
Transactional leadership and EE	474.501	0.000	4.126	0.0673	0.867	0.812	0.822	0.850	0.085
Visionary leadership and EE	555.136	0.000	4.238	0.0696	0.860	0.781	0.792	0.822	0.087
Organic leadership and EE	474.268	0.000	4.124	0.0657	0.869	0.805	0.815	0.844	0.085

**Table I.**  
Model fit summary

- (3) duration of the leader-follower relationship ( $p = 0.141$ ); and
- (4) company size ( $p = 0.887$ ).

However, means increased with age ( $p = 0.009$ ). In terms of working pattern/hours, the findings showed a decrease in EE levels from full-time to part-time through to casual sales assistants ( $p = 0.019$ ).

The main hypotheses were tested using structural regression models (Raykov and Marcoulides, 2000) and multi-group structural regression models for moderating effects in Amos 17.0 (Park and Yang, 2006; Jang, 2009). Full latent models (Byrne, 2001) were employed. The hypothesis testing results are summarized in Table II. All four hypotheses were “supported”, that is, not rejected by the empirical data.

Research hypotheses	Standardized regression coefficient or $\beta$ -value	Results
<i>H1.1.</i> Employee perception of a classical leadership style in his/her direct supervisor tends to be negatively associated with EE	-0.18	Supported
<i>H1.2.</i> Employee perception of a transactional leadership style in his/her direct supervisor tends to be negatively associated with EE	-0.54	Supported
<i>H1.3.</i> Employee perception of a visionary leadership style in his/her direct supervisor tends to be positively associated with EE	+0.39	Supported
<i>H1.4.</i> Employee perception of an organic leadership style in his/her direct supervisor tends to be positively associated with EE	+0.54	Supported

**Table II.**  
Summary of hypothesis testing results

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## Discussion

This study investigated EE under four different leadership styles as perceived in employees' direct supervisors. Overall, engagement was not affected by demographic characteristics of gender, organizational size, employee tenure with the organization or duration of the leader-follower relationship. Previous research findings about the effects of these factors on EE have been inconclusive (Robinson *et al.*, 2004; CIPD, 2006; 4-consulting and DTZ Consulting & Research, 2007; Avery *et al.*, 2007), cautioning against using demographic variables taken in isolation as predictors of EE (4-consulting and DTZ Consulting & Research, 2007).

Interestingly, age affected engagement in that older employees tended to be more engaged with the firm. This is consistent with other findings showing that older employees are more committed to their employers than younger staff members (CIPD, 2006; Lord and Farrington, 2006). Possible rationales for this finding are that older employees have more of a long-term career perspective, whereas for the young, the job may be just a way to finance short-term goals such as university studies or travel. This is consistent with findings that casual employees are less engaged than full-time or part-time staff, discussed below. In addition, it could also reflect generational differences in attitudes to work in Australia, especially attitudes attributed to younger people about not staying long with a single employer (McCrinkle, 2006).

Not surprisingly, full-time employees are more engaged than those working part-time or as casuals, consistent with other findings (4-consulting and DTZ Consulting & Research, 2007; Avery *et al.*, 2007). This would be expected where the leadership style is positive because fulltime staff would enjoy more contact with their direct supervisors and so be influenced more by their prevailing leadership style. Another possible explanation for this finding is that part-time and casual employees have lower job involvement, which may precipitate lower engagement than in full-time employees (Thorsteinson, 2003; Avery *et al.*, 2007).

Regarding the behavioral components underlying EE, our results show that the behavioral-outcome factors in the construct of EE do consist of all three concepts of say, stay, and strive (Looi *et al.*, 2004; Baumruk *et al.*, 2006; Heger, 2007). This is important given the current controversy as to the components of the behavioral side of engagement in which some writers assert that there are fewer than three components (Towers Perrin, 2003; 4-consulting and DTZ Consulting & Research, 2007; Parkes and Langford, 2008; Fine *et al.*, 2010; Tinline and Crowe, 2010).

The study also confirms predictions that engagement is associated with the leadership style perceived in direct supervisors – negatively under perceptions of classical or transactional leadership, and positively in the case of both visionary and organic leadership. Bates (2004) asserts that the role of direct supervisors is increasingly regarded as significant in driving engagement because supervisors operate at the junction of the changing relationship between organizations and employees. Bates explains that the nature of employment has shifted in the post-industrial era from one of “paternalism” to one of “partnership”. This partnership replaces traditional ideas of strictly authoritarian styles of leadership with styles that feature an emotional bond between the supervisor and employee, and include shared values, goals, mutual caring, and respect. This indicates a shift from the original characteristics of the classical and transactional paradigms towards incorporating aspects of the emotion-based visionary leadership paradigm.

That classical and transactional leadership styles perceived in direct supervisors are associated with negative EE is consistent with much of the literature. As Figure 1 shows, classical leadership is characterized by antecedents of “limited communication”, low “trust and integrity”, “boring job”, low “effective and supportive direct supervisors”, low “career advancement opportunities”, low “contribution to organizational success”, and low “supportive colleagues/team members”, all of which predict low EE as discussed above. It is also consistent with Jing’s (2009) report that higher staff turnover (the opposite to “stay”) is associated with classical leadership. Therefore, that classical leadership is not linked to high levels of EE is consistent with the engagement predictors associated with that leadership paradigm, others’ findings, and the antecedents reportedly typifying the classical leadership style.

Transactional leadership provides little encouragement to exceed and achieve performance beyond the agreed contract (Spinelli, 2006). In other words, the element of EE relating to additional discretionary effort conflicts with the characteristics of transactional leadership. Furthermore, transactional leadership is associated with “limited communication”, low “trust and integrity”, “boring job”, low “effective and supportive direct supervisors”, low “career advancement opportunities”, low “contribution to organizational success”, and low “supportive colleagues/team members”, which all predict low EE (Figure 1). Low engagement under transactional leadership is consistent with others’ findings, such as those of As-Sadeq and Khoury (2006), who reported that under transactional leadership, employees’ extra effort (strive), effectiveness, and satisfaction were very low. Researchers have also shown that transactional leadership results in an increase in turnover intentions (Morhart *et al.*, 2009) and a decrease in employee retention (stay) (Kleinman, 2004; Jing, 2009).

Therefore, finding that transactional leadership is not linked to high levels of EE is consistent with the literature and appears to stem from the focus on the extrinsic rewards and contractual exchange characterizing that style of leadership. An interesting question arises here, namely, could a transactional environment be modified to lift the focus from the exchange itself by adding more “visionary” components such as employee consideration, more interesting work, and employee involvement?

A positive relationship between the emotion-based visionary and organic leadership paradigms is consistent with previous research that established a positive association between transformational/visionary leadership and the two key elements of EE: “connection” and “additional discretionary effort”. Visionary leadership is also associated with a decrease in turnover intentions (Jing, 2009; Morhart *et al.*, 2009). Moreover, the characteristics of visionary leadership are consistent with numerous antecedents of high EE namely, “expansive communication”, high “trust and integrity”, “rich and involving job”, highly “effective and supportive direct supervisors”, high “career advancement opportunities”, high “contribution to organizational success”, high “pride in the organization”, and highly “supportive colleagues/team members”. Zhu *et al.* (2009) attribute their finding of a positive association between transformational leadership and EE to such factors as increased levels of employee identification with the work being done and increased levels of follower involvement. Such leaders consider employees’ feelings, as well as their developmental and other needs, which in turn could lead to greater feelings of belonging to the organization. Following Shamir *et al.* (1993), effective visionary leaders rely on positive emotions in communications as well as their

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visions, which then motivate staff to higher levels of performance and greater identification with the organization.

Under the organic paradigm, where the concept of a direct supervisor has no place, the perceived leadership paradigm needs to stem from the organizational culture. Organic leadership requires a culture of “expansive communication”, high “trust and integrity”, providing a “rich and involving job”, high “career advancement opportunities”, high perceptions of individual “contribution to organizational success”, high “pride in the organization”, and highly “supportive colleagues/team members”, all of which predict high EE. Furthermore, Jing (2009) reported that “stay” is associated with organic leadership. Although organic leadership is atypical and would not attract every employee or suit every type of organization, those who chose to work under this form of leadership would be expected to experience high levels of engagement, as found in this study. Without directive supervisors, organic employees are self-directing, self-motivating, and self-governing – all of which can drive performance and attachment to the organization (Thomas, 2000).

The visionary and organic paradigms have many similarities that could enhance EE. Both paradigms depend on high levels of all eight engagement predictors incorporated in this study. Both offer employees a higher-level purpose or vision, depend on employees’ shaping and achieving goals and tasks, and rely on intrinsic rewards derived from doing meaningful work and doing it well rather than primarily for extrinsic rewards. The main difference between these two leadership paradigms lies in the locus of ultimate control: under visionary leadership, control ultimately rests with a designated leader; whereas under an organic paradigm, decision-making power, responsibility, and final accountability for outcomes are vested in the entire group. Therefore, it is not surprising that both leadership paradigms are associated with positive EE for those who choose to work in such environments.

### Limitations

Despite the positive findings in our study, the extent to which the prevailing leadership paradigm plays a dominant role in EE compared with other factors should be investigated further, given Christian *et al.*'s (2011) conclusion that leadership is only weakly related to engagement when other factors are taken into account. Other factors that may contribute to the effects of leadership on engagement might include changes in beliefs or values, trust in the leadership itself or feelings of psychological safety. In addition, the magnitude and nature of the contribution of individual employee characteristics to engagement should also be investigated in future studies (Zhu *et al.*, 2009), including the role of personality factors such as conscientiousness (Bakker *et al.*, 2012).

Like most investigations, this study has some limitations that could drive future research. First, the survey was conducted with sales assistants in only one country, Australia. Future research could be conducted in other cultures, countries, and occupations in order to validate and generalize the findings of this study to broader settings. Second, relevant measures should be refined or further examined in future research, particularly the scale of leadership styles. Only nine out of 13 leadership characteristics identified by Avery (2004) were incorporated in the scale, and the content or face validity of a developed scale is lowered when the scale items do not cover all aspects of the constructs being measured (Stangor, 1998). Third, Jing (2009) revealed an association between leadership styles and organizational performance.

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It would, therefore, be instructive to empirically test leadership styles, EE, and organizational performance together. Fourth, other than “effective and supportive direct supervisors”, future research might empirically investigate the effects of other EE predictors suggested in the literature on EE.

### Conclusions

This study makes two main contributions to knowledge. First, it has developed a new EE scale with good reliability and validity, through which the three behavioral-outcome factors in the construct of EE (say, stay, and strive) have been confirmed. Second, this study empirically demonstrates that perceived classical and transactional leadership styles have a negative association with EE, and that EE has a positive association with visionary and organic leadership paradigms. Third, a range of workplace characteristics predicts EE, such as supervisor effectiveness and support, career advancement opportunities, communication, and trust. An implication for practitioners is that organizations should encourage direct supervisors to employ visionary and organic leadership paradigms, which are likely to drive EE.

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