

The Effect of Transformational Leadership on Innovative Behaviours of Employees in Aviation Industry. The Role of Trust in the Leader

Yasemin Gülbahar^{1*} 

^{1*}Dr., Ministry of Family, KSGM, 34469, Çankaya, Ankara, Türkiye. (yaseminn@windowslive.com)

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Corresponding Author:
Yasemin Gülbahar

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Abstract

Transformational leaders are leaders who prioritize harmonizing the valued issues of followers with the values of the organization and thus aim to both increase the success of followers and achieve success goals by ensuring organizational integrity. This study aims to show how the transformational leadership style impacts the innovative behaviours of the aviation industry employees. The study will also attempt to determine the role of trust in the leader in this relationship. Employees of companies offering ground handling services at Ankara Esenboğa Airport provided 252 valid data points with the online survey method prepared in accordance with the model created in the context of the research. Following the analyses employees' innovative behaviours are significantly and positively impacted by transformational leadership, and this link is mediated by the employees' trust in the leader. Inferences and recommendations were made for organisational managers consistent with the data gathered from the study.

1. Introduction

The aviation industry operates in a highly dynamic and competitive environment characterized by rapid technological advancements, fluctuating fuel prices, and ever-changing passenger demands. To thrive in this challenging landscape, organizations within the sector must foster innovation and adaptability. This necessitates a leadership style that encourages creativity, risk-taking, and motivates employees to go beyond their routine duties. Transformational leadership, which inspires and motivates employees to prioritize organizational goals over personal interests, emerges as a critical factor in driving innovative behaviours in this context.

As defined by Bass (1985), transformational leaders go beyond transactional exchanges by inspiring and motivating followers. They articulate a compelling vision, communicate high expectations, and provide individual support and intellectual stimulation to their followers. This leadership style fosters an environment of trust, respect, and psychological safety, enabling employees to think creatively, experiment with new ideas, and contribute to organizational innovation.

When examining the leader-follower relationship through the lens of Social Exchange Theory, the central role of trust becomes evident. This theory posits that individuals exchange resources through social interactions, and these exchanges are built on trust. The leader-follower relationship is a prime example of this. Transformational leaders create a trustworthy environment for their followers, making them feel

secure. This sense of security fosters greater commitment to the leader and encourages innovative behaviours. For instance, Avolio and Bass (2004) highlighted the positive correlation between transformational leadership and employee trust, suggesting that trust enhances employees' organizational citizenship behaviours and innovation. More recent studies, such as Zhang et al. (2020), have found that psychological safety strengthens the relationship between transformational leadership and employee innovation. Similarly, Lee et al. (2022) discovered that transformational leadership enhances employees' participation in digital innovation, and this relationship is mediated by psychological safety.

This study aims to investigate the impact of transformational leadership on the innovative behaviours of employees in the aviation industry, particularly those working in ground handling services at Ankara Esenboğa Airport. Given the aviation industry's high safety standards and constantly evolving regulations, the need for innovative solutions is even more pronounced. Therefore, the importance of transformational leadership in this sector is increasingly evident.

This study seeks to answer the following research questions: How does transformational leadership influence the innovative behaviours of employees in the aviation industry? How does trust in leaders, as conceptualized by social exchange theory, shape the relationship between transformational leadership and employee innovation? How do factors such as psychological safety and digital

transformation influence the relationship between transformational leadership and employee innovation? Specifically, the study will examine how leader-follower interactions, as viewed through the lens of social exchange theory, impact employee innovative behaviours.

The significance of this study lies in its potential to reveal the role of transformational leadership in fostering innovation among aviation industry employees and the critical role of trust in this process. The findings can guide aviation companies in improving their leadership practices and maximizing the innovation potential of their employees. Additionally, this study contributes to the existing body of knowledge on the relationship between transformational leadership and trust, providing new insights into this field. For instance, Dirks and Ferrin (2002) supported these findings by suggesting that trust increases employees' willingness to take risks and generate new ideas. Similarly, recent studies by Zhang et al. (2020) and Lee et al. (2022) have delved deeper into the relationship between transformational leadership, psychological safety, and innovation.

2. Conceptual Review

2.1. Transformational Leadership

In the last thirty years, the acceptance of Transformational Leadership Theory has significantly increased in the field of organizational leadership. This subject, initially proposed by Burns (1978), has been extensively developed in subsequent studies (e.g., Bass, 1998; Bass & Avolio, 1994). The core of this theory revolves around the leader's ability to enhance the success of their followers. This involves establishing success-oriented goals and inspiring followers to surpass these objectives (Krishnan, 2005).

Transformational leaders prioritize the values held by their followers and strive to assist them in aligning these values with those of the organization. This fosters organizational harmony and facilitates the achievement of organizational goals (Krishnan, 2002). A dynamic relationship characterized by mutual motivation between the leader and followers is a hallmark of transformational leadership, ultimately resulting in shared values and a collective pursuit of higher performance levels (Burns, 1978).

Transformational leaders prioritize emotional intelligence, core values, ethical considerations, established standards, and the pursuit of long-term objectives (Northouse, 2010, p. 171). They are change-oriented and actively encourage innovation and the exploration of new ideas (Bass, 1985). Recent studies have further emphasized the proactive and visionary nature of transformational leaders, highlighting their ability to anticipate and adapt to emerging challenges in dynamic environments (e.g., Avolio & Yammarino, 2019; Zhu et al., 2021).

Transformational leaders exhibit a dynamic and proactive approach. They possess the capacity to motivate both themselves and others to embrace and implement change (Nasir et al., 2020). Research consistently demonstrates a strong correlation between transformational leadership and improved follower behavior and performance (e.g., Antonakis & Day, 2019; Judge & Piccolo, 2004). In this leadership style, the leader empowers followers by actively listening to their innovative ideas and supporting their development (Bass, 1985). Simultaneously, the leader guides the entire process on behalf of the organization by encouraging employees to prioritize business interests over their own (Ergeneli et al., 2007).

In challenging environments characterized by employee dissatisfaction and the need to adapt to environmental demands, a transformational leadership approach is crucial (Bass, 1985, p. 154). Northouse (2010) emphasizes that transformational leaders are uniquely positioned to provide the necessary motivation and empower staff to succeed in uncertain and demanding situations. Recent research has further highlighted the crucial role of transformational leadership in fostering resilience and adaptability in organizations facing complex challenges (e.g., Day & Antonakis, 2016; Sosik & Jung, 2010).

Transformational leadership comprises four key elements: (i) idealized influence, (ii) inspirational motivation aimed at enhancing trust, (iii) intellectual stimulation, and (iv) individualized consideration (Bass, 1990). Idealized influence occurs when the leader fully reflects his sense of duty to his followers, inspiring them to rally around organizational goals (Sabaruddinsah & Asiah, 2022). Inspirational motivation reflects the leader's ability to increase employee motivation by addressing their emotional needs, establishing effective communication, and providing constructive feedback (Rafferty & Griffin, 2004). This aspect ensures that employees strive to achieve desired performance levels by adapting and developing their current behaviors. Individualized consideration emphasizes the leader's understanding of individual employee needs and tailoring development activities accordingly (Yukl, 1999). Intellectual stimulation focuses on two key aspects: ensuring employee compliance and encouraging them to embrace innovation (Bednall et al., 2018).

Research indicates that transformational leadership significantly influences follower satisfaction, emotional commitment to the organization, and job performance (Koh et al., 1995; Jiatong et al., 2022). Furthermore, it has been established that transformational leadership plays a crucial role in shaping employees' attitudes towards organizational change (Yu et al., 2002) and the overall organizational climate (Lam et al., 2002). Additionally, findings suggest that transformational leadership impacts innovation, work stressors, creativity (Nasir, 2022), organizational culture (Koç, 2024), job motivation, job satisfaction, and performance (Anindita & Tanuwijaya, 2023; Xu & Wang, 2008). Recent studies have further demonstrated the positive impact of transformational leadership on organizational agility, resilience, and long-term sustainability (e.g., Luthans & Avolio, 2004; Sivasankaran et al., 2020). Transformational leadership is essential in all organizations due to its significant influence on both individual and organizational outcomes (Tucker & Russell, 2004).

In summary, transformational leaders work to ensure that employees align with the organization's goals and values (Hickman, 1997, p. 9). They build commitment to a common purpose by fostering trust among followers and possess the capacity to inspire and energize their subordinates through their behaviors (Bass et al., 1987).

2.2. Innovative Behaviors

Innovative behaviors encompass a range of employee actions that contribute to the development and implementation of new ideas and practices within an organization (West & Farr, 1990). These behaviors go beyond routine tasks and involve actively seeking out and implementing novel solutions to challenges (Gülbahar, 2019).

Research has consistently demonstrated a strong link between innovative behaviors and organizational success (e.g.,

Amabile, 1997; Janssen, 2000). For instance, Amabile (1997) emphasized the crucial role of employee creativity and innovation in driving organizational competitiveness and adaptability.

Innovative behaviors are multidimensional and include aspects such as identifying opportunities, generating new ideas, promoting those ideas, and successfully implementing them (Scott & Bruce, 1994; Kleysen & Street, 2001; De Jong & Den Hartog, 2010). These behaviors span the entire innovation process, from the initial conceptualization of a new idea to its successful implementation and integration into organizational practices.

The impact of innovative behaviors extends beyond individual contributions and significantly influences organizational performance. For example, Janssen (2000) found that employee innovation is positively associated with organizational effectiveness, including increased productivity, improved quality, and enhanced market share. More recent studies have further emphasized the critical role of employee innovation in driving organizational agility, adaptability, and long-term sustainability (e.g., Ireland et al., 2015; Zahra & George, 2002).

Research has also explored the antecedents of innovative behaviors, identifying both individual and organizational factors as key drivers. Individual factors include self-efficacy, a propensity to question established norms, and external professional connections (Blackman & Chan, 2016). Organizational factors such as strong leadership, a supportive organizational culture, and adequate resources have been consistently shown to foster employee innovation (e.g., Amabile & Kramer, 2007; Janssen, 2000).

Furthermore, research has investigated the interplay between innovative behaviors and other organizational outcomes. For example, Janssen et al. (2004) demonstrated that while employee innovation can lead to positive outcomes such as enhanced performance and improved work attitudes, it can also have negative consequences, such as increased stress and conflict. More recent studies have explored the mediating role of innovative behaviors in various organizational contexts. For instance, Ordu & Sari (2022) found that innovative behaviors mediate the relationship between organizational support and employee well-being. Hock-Doepgen et al. (2024) demonstrated a positive relationship between innovative behaviors and organizational support, while Pigola et al. (2023) highlighted the positive impact of innovative behaviors on innovation performance.

In conclusion, innovative behaviors play a crucial role in organizational success and are influenced by a complex interplay of individual, team, and organizational factors. Understanding the antecedents and consequences of these behaviors is critical for organizations seeking to foster a culture of innovation and achieve sustainable competitive advantage.

2.3. Trust in the Leader

Trust refers to the degree of confidence one has in the reliability of an individual's statements, behaviours, and choices to whom it is directed, which occurs between two people and determines the quality of the mutual relationship. This perception affects whether or not to agree with the words or decisions of the other party in the individual relationship process, and whether or not to comply with these decisions and statements (McAllister, 1995).

Research typically evaluates various dimensions, including talent, benevolence, honesty, and predictability

(Dietz & Den Hartog, 2006). Leadership is a type of relationship where the quality of mutual relationships is expected to be at the highest level. The relationship of trust between leaders and their followers is closely linked to the followers' confidence in the leader's decisions and behaviours and the expectation that these decisions will manage the relevant event positively (Schoorman et al., 2007).

For leaders, the bonds and connections they have with their followers are essential to ensure their own dominance over work behaviours (Farmanesh & Zargar, 2021). In this context, the dynamic between the leader and the followers holds significant importance. Trust evolves gradually throughout this process and is influenced by the nature of the process itself. Followers examine the leader's behaviour towards them and allow the development of trust with criteria such as being honest and fair in relations with others (Dirks & Ferrin, 2002). The leader occupies a pivotal position within the framework of organizational operations and is expected to gather and direct employees around organizational goals. That's why trust in the leader is expected to be the basic element in managing this relationship (Fairholm, 1994). The leader is not only a role but also the communication and interaction point between the organization's employees and the upper management (Bennis, 2007).

Since trust creates positive feelings in employees and increases interest in work, experiencing trust may result in behaviours that extend beyond formal job responsibilities, foster voluntary intentions, enhance participation, and contribute to increased job satisfaction and performance levels. There are some studies on this subject and it has been revealed that the reason for the failure of many businesses is the lack of trust in the leader (Gompers & Metrick, 2001). Similarly, it has been suggested that the underlying reason for success stories is related to the level of trust (McLain & Hackman, 1999). The best way to demonstrate this relationship is to emphasize the two-way trust, positive feelings and respect between the leader and the followers in the Leader-Member Exchange Theory (Dansereau et al., 1975).

A reliable institutional environment and organizational climate increases the quality of all relationships and brings about a high level of cooperation (Käser & Miles, 2002). Trust in leadership primarily feeds the performance required for organizational performance (Dirks, 2000). The most important requirement manifests itself in processes related to issues that employees are generally reluctant to, such as innovative behaviors. Trust in the leader causes these processes to be more constructive and even to initiate these processes. The leader reduces the reluctance or fear of employees at the level of trust in him/her. For this reason, it is necessary for leaders to establish reliable relationships in environments where innovative behaviors are desired to be triggered (Judge, et al., 2006). As a result, it has been stated that a strong degree of trust fosters collaboration and enhances overall performance (Ghilic-Micu & Stoica, 2003). In this respect, it is advantageous for leaders to cultivate a strong foundation of trust in their relationships with their followers. In this respect, trust is considered as an important variable in this study.

2.4. Developing Hypothesis

Research suggests that confidence in leadership may serve as a mediating factor between transformational leadership and innovative behaviors within the context of

organizational innovation. The process of innovation presents significant challenges, and preparing for this process may not always be at the desired level. Sometimes employees may not believe in the necessity of innovations to be made. In fact, breaking away from work routine may seem like a difficult and unnecessary obligation for them (Gülbahar et al., 2023; Gülbahar & Karadal, 2022). This lack of confidence can hinder employee engagement in innovative activities and limit their willingness to take risks and embrace new ideas (Dirks & Ferrin, 2002; Mayer et al., 1995).

At this point, the connection between the leader and the trust established by the followers can cause them to accept this idea quickly, to be convinced that they will receive sufficient guidance, and sometimes even to initiate innovation movements willingly and without any demand or pressure from the management. Here we propose:

H1. Transformational leadership exerts a positive and significant influence on the trust in leaders.

During periods of organizational change or other situations requiring innovation, when employees initiate innovation activities, are involved in the process and trigger different innovation processes, the organizational climate, the organization's support for employees and, most importantly, the trust in leaders either prevent or accelerate these activities, providing a positive effect on organizational outputs.

Innovation processes are quite painful and difficult processes. Although it is always expected that employees will accept the innovation, implement it, and even be eager for the next innovation at an optimal level, in reality, employees may not be so eager or talented. Sometimes, even if they have sufficient skills for this, they may need a triggering force to start this process. Within the realms of organizational transformation and innovative strategies, the cornerstone of trust inspires employees to feel driven, enabled, engaged in the transformation journey, and introduce fresh changes to the organization (Käser & Miles, 2002). From this we put forward:

H2. Trust in leader has a positive and significant effect on innovative behaviours.

Research suggests that trust in leadership can contribute to the mobilization of innovative ideas during periods of change (Li et al., 2019). The connection between trust in leadership and innovative actions can be interpreted through the lens of *Social Exchange Theory*, which posits that interpersonal relationships, including those between leaders and followers, involve an exchange of resources and benefits (Homans, 1958). When employees trust their leaders, they are more likely to perceive that their contributions will be valued, feel comfortable taking risks, and be willing to invest their time and effort in organizational goals. This trust-based exchange fosters a positive and mutually beneficial relationship, creating a conducive environment for innovation.

Transformational leaders, by inspiring and motivating their followers, enhance trust in leadership. This trust, in turn, encourages employees to engage in innovative behaviors.

H3. Followers' trust in the leader plays a mediating role in the relationship between transformational leadership and innovative behaviors.

This hypothesis proposes that the positive impact of transformational leadership on employee innovation is

mediated by the level of trust followers have in their leader. In other words, transformational leadership indirectly influences employee innovation by increasing trust in the leader, which in turn motivates employees to engage in innovative behaviors.

3. Research Method

3.1. Participants

The connection between TP and innovative behaviors was investigated in the research. It also investigated the role of trust in the leader in this relationship. The study was carried out with data collected from employees working in the aviation sector. It was carried out with employees of companies providing ground handling services at Ankara Esenboğa Airport. Data were collected electronically from employees of 3 companies providing airport services and valid data was obtained from 252 employees (8 invalid data and n=1362). The sample size of 252 participants is considered sufficient for this study, as it meets the recommended sample size for structural equation modeling (SEM) analyses, which typically requires a sample size of at least 200 participants for adequate statistical power (Hair et al., 2019). The questionnaire aimed at the respondents was structured with an initial part featuring demographic inquiries and a subsequent segment containing the measured variables relevant to the study. The descriptive information of the participants is as follows:

The respondents participating in the survey are predominantly female employees (64.3% female and 35.7% male). Likewise, the rate of single people is higher than the rate of married people (61.7% of the participants are single, 38.3% married). In the age range, the most dominant age group is 26-35 (39.3%, others are 18-25 years old 14.8%, 36-45 years old 26.1%, 46 and above 19.8%), while the majority of the education is 4-year university graduates (36.5%, others are 14.3% high school, 40.4% associate degree, 8.3% postgraduate). The technical class they work in is determined as 22.1% representation, 6.3% passenger traffic, 27.2% load control and communication, 12.4% ramp, cargo, mail, aircraft cleaning, uld control, 9% surveillance and management services, 2% flight operation and 21% transportation. Finally, in terms of seniority, 1-3 years was evaluated as 15.1%, 4-6 years as 10.1%, 7-9 years as 20.9%, 10-15 years as 27.2% and 16 years and above as 26.7%.

3.2. Measures

Innovative Behaviour Scale: The scale developed by Scott and Bruce (1994) was used. Responses were taken on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree). The scale is as a single dimension and a 6-item scale.

Trust in Leader Scale: Employees' trust in their leader was measured using a seven-item scale developed by Robinson, S.L. & Rousseau, D.M. (1994). One sample item included, "I believe my leader has high integrity". Items 2-5-6 in the scale were used as reverse items.

Transformational Leadership Scale: The assessment of TP was conducted using a scale with four-items developed by McColl-Kennedy and Anderson (2002).

4. Findings

The data analyses for this research were performed using SPSS 25.0 and AMOS 24.0 software tools. The SPSS software

facilitated descriptive statistics and correlation analyses, whereas the AMOS software was employed for assessing reliability and validity of the constructs and testing hypotheses.

4.1. Data Analysis

Table 1 includes the mean, standard deviation and correlation values of the variables. According to the correlation analysis results, a positive and significant relationship was found between TP and trust in the leader (r=0.32; p<0.01). Similarly, a positive and significant relationship was found between trust in the leader and innovative behaviours (r=0.61; p<0.01).

Table 1. Mean, Standard Deviation and Correlation Values

Constructs	M	SD	1	2	3
1. TRL	4.09	0.88	1		
2. TL	3.86	1.05	0.32**	1	
3. IB	4.01	0.93	0.40**	0.61**	1

Notes: n=252; **p<0.01; M=Mean; SD=Standard Deviation; TRL=Transformational Leadership; TL=Trust in Leader; IB=Innovative Behaviour

4.1.1. Measurement Model

The research tested the measurement model with confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) using the AMOS software. In this scenario, the maximum likelihood approach was employed to determine if the expected configurations of the scales were consistent with the data gathered (Jöreskog & Sörbom, 2006).

The measurement model to the provided data was evaluated based on the fit indices recommended by Hu and Bentler (1999). These are; chi-square (χ^2), degrees of freedom (df), root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), standardized root mean square residual (SRMR), goodness of fit index (GFI) and comparative fit index (CFI). Of these indices, a χ^2/df value below 3, RMSEA and SRMR values below 0.05, and GFI and CFI values above 0.95 is an indication that the model has a high goodness of fit (Byrne, 2016; Kline, 2016). As a result of the CFA, $\chi^2/df=1.60$; RMSEA=0.04; SRMR=0.03; GFI=0.92; CFI=0.98 was determined and it was observed that the specified criteria for the indices were met.

In the study, after structural validity analysis, reliability, convergent and discriminant validity were tested. Internal consistency reliability is provided by Cronbach's alpha (α) and composite reliability (CR) being > 0.70. For convergent validity, standardized factor loadings > 0.50; CR > 0.70; average variance extracted (AVE) > 0.50; CR > AVE, and for discriminant validity, AVE > maximum shared variance (MSV); AVE > average squared variance (ASV) are accepted (Hair et al., 2014).

These values are presented in Table 2 and α and CR values were found to be > 0.70 (Nunnally, 1978). The results show that standardized factor loadings are >0.50, CR is 0.70, AVE is 0.50, CR values for each factor are higher than AVE, and AVE values are also higher than MSV and ASV, and thus within the recommended ranges. (Hair et al., 2014; Malhotra & Dash, 2011). These data indicate that the model has sufficient structural validity, internal consistency reliability, convergent and discriminant validity.

Table 2. Measurement Model

Constructs	Items	Factor Loadings	α	CR	AVE	MSV	ASV
Transformational Leadership	TRL1	0.77**	0.88	0.88	0.66	0.18	0.15
	TRL2	0.87***					
	TRL3	0.80***					
	TRL4	0.79***					
Trust in Leader	TL1	0.89**	0.94	0.93	0.67	0.41	0.26
	TL2	0.69***					
	TL3	0.87***					
	TL4	0.85***					
	TL5	0.79***					
	TL6	0.78***					
Innovative Behaviour	IB1	0.69**	0.93	0.94	0.74	0.41	0.30
	IB2	0.88***					
	IB3	0.91***					
	IB4	0.85***					
	IB5	0.90***					
	IB6	0.90***					

Notes:***p<0.001; **p<0.05 α =Cronbach's Alpha; CR=Composite Reliability; AVE=Average Variance Extracted; MSV=Maximum Squared Variance; ASV=Average Shared Square Variance

4.1.2. Structural Model

This study employed a structural model analysis with 5,000 bootstraps and calculated a 95% confidence interval (CI) to determine the upper and lower boundaries, which aids in comprehending the significance level. The results of the hypothesis test are displayed in Table 3. TP explains 14% (R²) of the change in trust in leader, while trust in leader explains 43% (R²) of the change in innovative behaviour.

According to the findings, TP has a positive significant effect on trust in leader ($\beta=0.37$; p<0.001). Therefore, hypothesis 1 is supported. Trust in leader has a positive significant effect on innovative behaviour ($\beta=0.66$; p<0.001). According to this result, hypothesis 2 is also accepted.

Upon examining the bootstrap results, it is seen that the indirect effect of TP on innovative behaviour through trust in leader is significant ($\beta=0.24$; p<0.001). This finding supports hypothesis 3.

Table 3. Results of Hypothesis Testing

Hypotheses	Paths	β	p	CI	Result
H1	TRL → TL	0.37	0.001***	(0.195–0.519)	Supported
H2	TL → IB	0.66	0.001***	(0.551–0.745)	Supported
H3	TRL → TL → IB	0.24	0.001***	(0.121–0.366)	Supported

Notes: ***p<0.001; Coefficients are standardized (β); TRL=Transformational Leadership; TL=Trust in Leader; IB=Innovative Behaviour

5. Discussion

This study investigated the influence of Transformational Leadership on employee innovative behaviors within the aviation sector, specifically focusing on ground handling services. The findings provide valuable insights into the critical role of trust in leadership as a mediator in this relationship.

The study's findings align with previous research that has consistently demonstrated a positive relationship between transformational leadership and employee innovation (e.g.,

Zhu et al., 2021; Wang & Zhang, 2022; Wang & Zhang, 2023). These studies have shown that transformational leaders, through their inspiring and motivating behaviors, can significantly enhance employee engagement in innovative activities.

Furthermore, the finding that trust in leadership mediates the relationship between transformational leadership and employee innovation is consistent with existing literature (e.g., Dirks & Ferrin, 2002; Mayer et al., 1995). These studies have highlighted the crucial role of trust in facilitating the exchange of information and resources between leaders and followers, which is essential for fostering innovation. This finding is also supported by Rousseau (1995) who argues that trust is a cornerstone of psychological contracts, which govern the exchange relationships between individuals in organizations. In the context of this study, the findings suggest that when employees trust their transformational leaders, they are more likely to perceive a fair and equitable exchange relationship, leading to increased engagement in innovative behaviors.

5.1. Implications

Theoretical Implications:

This study contributes to the existing body of knowledge on transformational leadership by providing empirical evidence for the mediating role of trust in leadership within the context of employee innovation within the aviation sector. These findings further strengthen the understanding of the complex interplay between leadership styles, trust, and employee behaviors.

Practical Implications:

- **For Aviation Industry Leaders:** The findings emphasize the importance of cultivating trust among employees. Leaders should strive to build strong and authentic relationships with their teams, communicate openly and honestly, and demonstrate genuine concern for employee well-being. This can be achieved through active listening, providing regular feedback, and empowering employees to take ownership of their work.
- **For Human Resource Management:** Human Resource departments can play a crucial role in fostering trust by implementing initiatives that enhance employee engagement, provide opportunities for professional development, and create a supportive and inclusive work environment. These initiatives may include employee recognition programs, mentorship programs, and team-building activities.

5.2. Limitations and Future Research Directions

This study, while providing valuable insights, has some limitations. Firstly, the study was conducted within a specific sector (aviation) and focused on a particular employee group (ground handling services). Future research should investigate the generalizability of these findings to other sectors and employee populations. For instance, research could explore the relationship between transformational leadership, trust, and innovation in other industries such as healthcare, technology, and manufacturing.

Secondly, the study relied on cross-sectional data, which limits the ability to establish causal relationships. Longitudinal studies are needed to further investigate the temporal dynamics between transformational leadership, trust in leadership, and employee innovation. By collecting data over time,

researchers can better understand the evolution of these relationships and identify the direction of causality.

Thirdly, the study focused on a limited set of variables. Future research could explore the moderating effects of other factors, such as organizational culture, employee demographics, and industry dynamics, on the relationship between transformational leadership, trust, and innovation. For example, research could investigate how organizational culture, characterized by factors such as openness to change and employee empowerment, may moderate the impact of transformational leadership on employee innovation.

6. Conclusion

This study provides valuable insights into the critical role of transformational leadership and trust in fostering employee innovation within the aviation sector. The findings emphasize the importance of cultivating trust among employees as a key strategy for enhancing innovation.

The study's findings have important implications for leaders, human resource managers, and organizations seeking to enhance their innovative capabilities. By fostering a culture of trust and empowering employees, organizations can create an environment that encourages creativity, innovation, and ultimately, organizational success.

Ethical approval

Approval for this research was authorized by the Science and Engineering Research Ethics Committee (Nevşehir Hacı Bektaş Veli University) under decision number 2024.09.214, dated September 27, 2024.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that there are no conflicting interests associated with the publication of this document.

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