Informing or Involving? Comparing the Roles of Change Communication and Employee Participation in Building Engagement During Organisational Change

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Abstract

Organisational change can unsettle employees long before new systems or structures are fully in place. Managers often respond by increasing the volume of communication, yet being informed is not the same as being involved. This study examines whether change communication and employee participation make distinct contributions to employee engagement during organisational change. Drawing on transformational leadership theory, Kahn's engagement framework, self-determination theory, and social exchange theory, the study proposes that transformational leadership supports engagement directly and through two change-related routes: clearer communication and meaningful participation. Survey responses from 345 employees in Indian private-sector organisations were analysed using correlation, regression, and structural-model procedures, and were interpreted alongside interviews with nine leaders and nine employees. Transformational leadership was positively associated with communication, participation, and engagement. Both change communication and participation predicted engagement, but participation showed the stronger standardised association. The qualitative material clarifies the pattern: leaders commonly described emails, briefings, and town halls as transparent communication, whereas employees sometimes experienced the same practices as information being passed down after decisions had already been made. Engagement was more evident where employees could question, contribute, and see their feedback reflected in implementation. The study argues that communication remains essential because it reduces ambiguity and helps employees make sense of change. Participation matters differently: it creates voice, ownership, and a credible role in shaping the transition. For practitioners, the implication is straightforward. A change programme should not stop at explaining what will happen; it should create disciplined mechanisms through which employees can help make the change workable.

Keywords: *organisational change; employee engagement; transformational leadership; change communication; employee participation; employee voice; Indian private sector*

1. Introduction

Change is now part of routine organisational life rather than an occasional interruption. Firms redesign processes, introduce technology, alter structures, and respond to new commercial or regulatory pressures with increasing frequency. Such initiatives may be technically sound, but their progress depends on how employees interpret the disruption and decide to respond to it (Armenakis & Bedeian, 1999; Kotter, 1996; Oreg et al., 2011). In that respect, organisational change is a social process as much as a strategic one.

Employees have to understand the case for change, adapt their work, and decide whether to invest effort in making the new arrangement succeed (Armenakis & Harris, 2002; Herold et al., 2008).

This is not a minor issue. A restructuring or technology rollout can alter routines, reporting relationships, performance expectations, and perceptions of job security. When those implications are unclear, uncertainty can turn into rumour, withdrawal, or open resistance (Bordia et al., 2004; Wanberg & Banas, 2000). Conversely, employees who remain engaged are more likely to apply discretionary effort, solve implementation problems, and sustain performance while the organisation is in transition (Christian et al., 2011; Saks, 2006). Employee engagement therefore deserves to be treated as an operational condition for change, not as an attractive but secondary outcome.

The literature has rightly placed communication at the centre of change management. Employees need credible explanations of why change is needed, what will alter, how it will affect their work, and what support they can expect (Armenakis & Harris, 2002; Elving, 2005; Lewis, 2006). Good communication can reduce ambiguity and help people make sense of an uncertain situation. Yet a familiar difficulty remains. Organisations can communicate frequently and still leave employees feeling that decisions have been made elsewhere and that their role is limited to compliance.

This distinction leads to the question examined in the present study. Is engagement sustained chiefly because employees are informed about change, or because they are invited to influence how change is carried out? Change communication and employee participation are usually discussed together as part of good change management. They are related, but they are not the same. Communication concerns the quality and flow of information. Participation concerns voice, influence, and a real opportunity to contribute to planning or implementation. A workforce may receive regular messages and still have little say in the process. Equally, meaningful involvement is difficult when people do not understand the purpose or scope of the change.

The issue is especially relevant to Indian private-sector organisations, where rapid transformation often sits alongside hierarchical structures and uneven opportunities for employee voice. Formal briefings, email updates, and management presentations may be plentiful, but employees may not experience them as dialogue. In this setting, the difference between informing employees and involving them may explain why some change initiatives retain energy while others encounter passive resistance or detachment.

The study positions transformational leadership as an important antecedent. Transformational leaders articulate direction, act with integrity, encourage employees to think constructively about problems, and provide individualised support (Bass, 1985; Bass & Avolio, 1994; Bass & Riggio, 2006). Those behaviours may support engagement directly, while also creating the communication and participation conditions through which employees experience change. Using survey data from 345 employees and complementary qualitative interviews, the study compares the contribution of change communication and employee participation to engagement during organisational change.

The article makes three contributions. First, it treats communication and participation as distinct pathways rather than combining them into a broad, undifferentiated change-management measure. Second,

it compares their relative association with engagement. Third, it adds evidence from Indian private-sector organisations, where the practical challenge is often not simply to communicate more, but to convert formal communication into visible employee voice and influence. The argument developed here is that communication is indispensable for understanding change, but participation is more likely to turn understanding into ownership.

2. Literature Review and Hypotheses Development

2.1 Transformational Leadership and Engagement in Change

Transformational leadership describes a pattern of leadership in which employees are encouraged to look beyond short-term self-interest and work towards a shared purpose. Its widely used dimensions are idealised influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualised consideration (Bass & Avolio, 1994; Bass & Riggio, 2006). In practice, this means that leaders act as credible role models, communicate an intelligible future, encourage constructive questioning, and attend to individual needs and development.

These behaviours are particularly relevant during change because employees are often trying to determine whether the future state is credible, fair, and worth investing in. A leader who can explain the direction of travel, remain visible when uncertainty rises, and treat concerns seriously can reduce the psychological cost of transition. The same leader can also encourage staff to see implementation problems as matters to solve rather than evidence that the change should be resisted (Herold et al., 2008; Oreg et al., 2011).

Kahn's (1990) framework offers a useful explanation for the leadership-engagement relationship. Employees are more likely to engage when work feels meaningful, when the environment feels safe enough for expression, and when they have the emotional and cognitive capacity to invest themselves. A convincing change narrative can strengthen meaningfulness; fairness and support can support psychological safety; and individualised guidance can help employees cope with new demands. Social exchange theory provides a complementary explanation. Supportive and fair leader behaviour gives employees valued relational resources, which they may reciprocate through commitment and discretionary effort (Blau, 1964; Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005; Saks, 2006).

Evidence generally supports this expectation. Transformational leadership has been linked with engagement, motivation, well-being, and performance across a range of settings (Arnold, 2017; Judge & Piccolo, 2004; Tims et al., 2011; Wang et al., 2011). Accordingly, the following hypothesis is proposed.

H1: Transformational leadership is positively associated with employee engagement during organisational change.

2.2 Change Communication and Employee Engagement

Change communication is more than the distribution of announcements. It includes the timeliness, clarity, relevance, and credibility of information about why the organisation is changing, what employees can expect, and how the transition will be supported. Where communication is poor, employees are likely to rely on informal interpretations or speculation, which can magnify uncertainty and weaken trust (Bordia et al., 2004; Elving, 2005).

Communication is therefore central to employee sensemaking. Staff need to connect the organisation's stated rationale with their own work, roles, and future prospects. When leaders explain the logic of change honestly, acknowledge areas that are still uncertain, and make support visible, employees are better placed to judge the change as coherent and manageable (Armenakis & Harris, 2002; Lewis, 2006; van den Heuvel et al., 2009).

Yet not every communication process has the same effect. Formal briefings and emailed updates may be accurate but still leave little room for questions or challenge. The distinction matters because employees may experience one-way communication as information delivery rather than as evidence that the organisation is open to their concerns. Even so, clear and credible communication should reduce ambiguity and help maintain engagement during change.

H2: Change communication is positively associated with employee engagement during organisational change.

2.3 Employee Participation and Employee Engagement

Employee participation refers to opportunities to influence the way change is discussed, planned, implemented, or improved. It may include providing ideas, identifying operational risks, joining project groups, raising concerns, and receiving feedback on how those concerns have been handled. This is different from merely being kept informed. Participation gives employees a degree of influence over the practical form of change.

Participation may be especially important when change threatens employees' sense of control. Self-determination theory argues that sustained motivation is more likely when people experience autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Participation can support autonomy by allowing employees to shape local implementation; it can support competence by drawing on their experience and knowledge; and it can signal relatedness by showing that their views are regarded as legitimate. From a social exchange perspective, genuine consultation is also a visible sign of respect, which employees may repay through commitment and engagement (Blau, 1964; Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005).

Research on participation in change has shown that involvement can reduce resistance and improve commitment to change goals (Coch & French, 1948; Lines, 2004; Miller et al., 1994). It can also improve the quality of implementation because employees often see operational constraints that are not apparent at senior levels. For these reasons, participation should be associated with stronger employee engagement.

H3: Employee participation is positively associated with employee engagement during organisational change.

2.4 Transformational Leadership as an Antecedent of Communication and Participation

The proposed model also assumes that transformational leaders shape how employees encounter change. Inspirational motivation is inseparable from communication: leaders must explain direction in a way that gives people a credible reason to act. Idealised influence supports the credibility of that message because employees judge whether leaders' actions match their stated commitments (Bass & Riggio, 2006; Kotter, 1996). A leader who communicates consistently, acknowledges difficulties, and follows through on commitments is more likely to be trusted during transition (Herold et al., 2008; Mishra & Spreitzer, 1998).

Transformational leadership should also support participation. Intellectual stimulation invites staff to question routines and propose solutions, while individualised consideration makes it more likely that concerns will be heard rather than dismissed. These behaviours can reduce the practical and psychological barriers to speaking up, particularly in settings where hierarchy discourages employees from challenging decisions openly (Bass & Avolio, 1994; Kahn, 1990).

H4: Transformational leadership is positively associated with change communication during organisational change.

H5: Transformational leadership is positively associated with employee participation during organisational change.

2.5 Comparing Information and Involvement

Communication and participation are likely to operate through different mechanisms. Communication primarily helps employees understand change. Participation allows them to influence its practical form. An organisation can therefore achieve high awareness without generating much ownership. Employees may understand the case for change but remain emotionally distant if they see themselves as recipients rather than contributors.

Participation is expected to show the stronger relationship with engagement because it combines informational, motivational, and relational benefits. It may give employees voice, recognise their expertise, and demonstrate that the organisation trusts them with the work of implementation. Communication remains necessary; employees cannot contribute meaningfully without understanding the change. But communication on its own may secure comprehension rather than commitment (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Lines, 2004).

H6: Employee participation has a stronger positive association with employee engagement during organisational change than change communication.

2.6 Indirect Pathways

If transformational leaders communicate change well and create credible avenues for employee voice, part of their influence on engagement should pass through these two change experiences. Communication should mediate the relationship by reducing ambiguity and helping employees make sense of the transition. Participation should mediate it by strengthening ownership, autonomy, and commitment. Given the argument above, the participation pathway is expected to be larger.

H7: Change communication mediates the relationship between transformational leadership and employee engagement during organisational change.

H8: Employee participation mediates the relationship between transformational leadership and employee engagement during organisational change.

H9: The indirect effect of transformational leadership on employee engagement through employee participation is stronger than the indirect effect through change communication.

2.7 Conceptual Model

Figure 1 presents the proposed model. Transformational leadership is expected to influence engagement directly and indirectly through change communication and employee participation.

Transformational Leadership	→	**Change Communication**	→ **Employee Engagement**
	→	**Employee Participation**	→ **Employee Engagement**
	→		**Employee Engagement (direct path)**

Figure 1. Proposed relationships among transformational leadership, change communication, employee participation, and employee engagement.

3. Method

3.1 Design and Research Context

The study used a convergent mixed-methods design. The quantitative component tested the proposed relationships among transformational leadership, change communication, employee participation, and engagement. The qualitative component was used to understand how leaders and employees described the communication and involvement processes behind those relationships. A mixed-methods approach was appropriate because the numerical patterns could show whether the relationships existed, while interview accounts could clarify how employees actually experienced them (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

The setting was Indian private-sector organisations that had undergone organisational change, including technology implementation, process redesign, restructuring, policy shifts, and related changes in work systems. The unit of analysis was the individual employee. The study focused on people who had direct experience of a change initiative rather than on organisations as abstract entities.

3.2 Sample and Data Collection

A purposive sampling approach was used to identify employees in private-sector organisations who had experienced organisational change. The questionnaire was administered online. Participation was voluntary, and respondents were informed that results would be reported only in aggregate form. The final quantitative sample comprised 345 valid responses.

The sample included entry-level staff, executives, middle managers, and senior managers. Middle and senior managers formed the largest part of the sample, which is useful in a change study because these groups often receive direction from senior leadership while simultaneously translating change into day-to-day practice for others. The qualitative strand included nine leaders and nine employees selected to provide contrasting accounts of change communication, employee voice, trust, and engagement.

Table 1. Demographic profile of the survey respondents.

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Age group	18-25 years	20	5.8
	26-35 years	79	22.9
	36-45 years	107	31.0
	46-55 years	106	30.7
	56 years and above	33	9.6
Gender	Male	300	87.0
	Female	45	13.0
Job level	Entry-level	21	6.1
	Executive	50	14.5
	Mid-level	165	47.8
	Senior-level	109	31.6

3.3 Measures

All items were rated on a five-point scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Transformational leadership was measured using a seven-item, change-contextualised item set informed by the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (Bass & Avolio, 1995). It covered vision, motivation, encouragement of innovation, integrity, individual recognition, support for discussion, and adaptability.

Change communication was measured using items on the clarity of expected change outcomes and the perceived availability of resources or training. Employee participation was measured using items on participation in planning and implementation, the handling of employee concerns, and the incorporation of

feedback. These two constructs were treated separately because they represent different employee experiences of change. Employee engagement was measured through seven items adapted from the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale tradition, covering energy, commitment, connection with organisational purpose, discretionary effort, recognition, belonging, and pride (Schaufeli et al., 2002; Schaufeli et al., 2006).

Table 2. Constructs, operational focus, and internal consistency.

Construct	Operational focus	Items	Cronbach's α
Transformational leadership	Vision, support, integrity, intellectual stimulation, adaptability	7	.92
Change communication	Change outcomes, information, resources and training	2	.79
Employee participation	Voice, concerns, feedback, planning and implementation	3	.84
Employee engagement	Energy, commitment, belonging, pride, extra effort	7	.90

3.4 Analysis

The quantitative analysis proceeded in stages. Descriptive statistics were calculated first. Reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha. The suitability of the items for factor analysis was examined through the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin statistic and Bartlett's test of sphericity. Correlations and multiple regression were then used to examine associations and the unique contribution of each predictor to engagement. Structural-model estimates were used to examine the proposed direct paths simultaneously. The interpretation follows established guidance for evaluating measurement quality and structural paths, while recognising that formal mediation claims require bootstrapped confidence intervals for indirect effects (Hair et al., 2022).

For the qualitative material, thematic analysis was used to identify recurring patterns in the accounts of leaders and employees. Coding focused on four themes: change communication, employee involvement, trust in leadership, and engagement or motivation. The two strands were compared at the interpretation stage to identify areas of convergence and perceptual gaps (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

3.5 Ethics

Participation was voluntary, informed consent was obtained, and no personally identifying information was reported. Interview accounts were anonymised, and survey results were presented only in aggregate form.

4. Results

4.1 Descriptive Results and Measurement Checks

The analytical dataset contained 345 complete responses. Mean scores were above the scale midpoint for all constructs, indicating generally favourable perceptions of leadership, engagement, communication, and participation. Employee engagement recorded the highest mean ($M = 4.31$, $SD = .57$).

Transformational leadership was also rated favourably (M = 4.16, SD = .62). Participation in change was rated at M = 4.11 (SD = .70), while change communication had the lowest mean of the four constructs (M = 4.03, SD = .64). The lower communication mean is notable because it suggests that employees saw more inconsistency in how change was explained or supported than in the other areas.

Reliability values ranged from .79 to .92, indicating acceptable to excellent internal consistency (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). The data were suitable for factor analysis: the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin statistic was .948 and Bartlett's test of sphericity was significant, $\chi^2(345) = 5060.50$, $p < .001$. The leadership and engagement items each formed coherent factors. The change-related items separated into communication/support and participation/voice dimensions, supporting their treatment as related but distinct constructs.

Table 3. Descriptive statistics and reliability.

Construct	Items	Cronbach's α	Mean	SD
Transformational leadership	7	.92	4.16	.62
Change communication	2	.79	4.03	.64
Employee participation	3	.84	4.11	.70
Employee engagement	7	.90	4.31	.57

4.2 Correlations

All zero-order correlations were positive and statistically significant ($p < .001$). Transformational leadership correlated strongly with employee engagement (r = .749), change communication (r = .721), and employee participation (r = .729). Change communication was positively related to engagement (r = .708), as was employee participation (r = .751). The correlation pattern supports the overall logic of the model, while also indicating that the constructs are closely connected in practice.

Table 4. Pearson correlations among the study constructs.

Construct	1	2	3	4
1. Transformational leadership	1.000			
2. Change communication	.721***	1.000		
3. Employee participation	.729***	.734***	1.000	
4. Employee engagement	.749***	.708***	.751***	1.000

Note. *** $p < .001$.

4.3 Regression and Structural Relationships

A multiple regression model was estimated with employee engagement as the criterion variable and transformational leadership, change communication, and employee participation as simultaneous predictors. The model was significant, $F(3, 341) = 226.47$, $p < .001$, and accounted for 66.6% of the variance in employee engagement ($R^2 = .666$; adjusted $R^2 = .663$).

All three predictors made significant unique contributions. Transformational leadership had a standardised coefficient of β = .35 (p < .001). Change communication remained significant but was smaller in magnitude (β = .20, p < .001). Employee participation had a coefficient of β = .35 (p < .001). The result indicates that, after taking leadership and communication into account, participation continued to explain a substantial share of engagement. This is the key comparative finding of the study.

The structural model provided the same substantive pattern. Transformational leadership strongly predicted change communication (β = .72, p < .001) and employee participation (β = .73, p < .001). Both communication (β = .20, p < .001) and participation (β = .35, p < .001) predicted engagement, and transformational leadership retained a direct effect on engagement (β = .35, p < .001). Reported fit indices were satisfactory: CFI = .958, TLI = .950, RMSEA = .043, and SRMR = .035.

Table 5. Regression results predicting employee engagement.

Predictor	B	SE	Standardised β	t	p
Transformational leadership	.32	.05	.35	7.04	< .001
Change communication	.16	.04	.20	3.95	< .001
Employee participation	.30	.04	.35	6.85	< .001
Constant	1.10	.13	-	8.76	< .001

Note. $R^2 = .666$; *adjusted* $R^2 = .663$; $F(3, 341) = 226.47$, $p < .001$.

Table 6. Structural-path estimates and hypothesis decisions.

Hypothesis	Path	β	Decision
H1	Transformational leadership → Employee engagement	.35	Supported
H2	Change communication → Employee engagement	.20	Supported
H3	Employee participation → Employee engagement	.35	Supported
H4	Transformational leadership → Change communication	.72	Supported
H5	Transformational leadership → Employee participation	.73	Supported
H6	Participation effect larger than communication effect	.35 vs .20	Supported by effect magnitude

4.4 Indirect-Path Pattern

The structural paths are consistent with partial mediation. The descriptive product of the transformational leadership → communication path and the communication → engagement path is .144 (.72 × .20). The corresponding product for the participation route is .256 (.73 × .35). The participation route is therefore larger in magnitude. This pattern supports the theoretical argument that leadership can affect engagement both by helping employees understand change and by giving them a credible role in its implementation.

These products should not be treated as a substitute for a formal indirect-effect test. The final submission analysis should report bootstrapped confidence intervals for both indirect effects and for their

difference. Until then, the appropriate conclusion is that the observed structural pattern is consistent with partial mediation and that participation is the stronger estimated pathway.

4.5 Qualitative Integration

The interviews help explain the quantitative pattern. Leaders commonly described regular emails, town halls, briefings, and meetings as evidence of transparent communication. Employees generally recognised that information was being shared. Their accounts, however, were often more restrained: they described being notified, receiving an email, or attending a briefing after a decision had been made. The same event could therefore be understood by leaders as dialogue and by employees as information delivery.

A different tone appeared when employees described genuine participation. They were more likely to speak positively about change when they could raise concerns, propose solutions, join problem-solving discussions, or see feedback reflected in implementation. These accounts do not imply that communication was unimportant. Rather, they indicate that communication was experienced more positively when it led to a visible opportunity to influence what happened next. The qualitative evidence therefore converges with the quantitative result: communication supported understanding, while participation appeared to support ownership.

5. Discussion

5.1 From Information to Ownership

The study set out to compare two familiar elements of change management that are too often treated as interchangeable. The evidence suggests that they are not. Communication was positively associated with engagement, but participation showed the stronger standardised association. This is a meaningful distinction. Employees need information in order to understand change; they need influence in order to experience the change as something to which they can contribute.

The findings reinforce the importance of transformational leadership during transition. Employees who saw their leaders as clear, supportive, ethical, and encouraging also reported better communication, greater participation, and higher engagement. The direct leadership effect remained after the two change mechanisms were included. This suggests that the value of transformational leadership cannot be reduced to a communication plan or consultation exercise. Its influence also lies in the trust, meaning, and personal support that leaders create in everyday interactions (Bass & Riggio, 2006; Decuypere & Schaufeli, 2020; Tims et al., 2011).

5.2 Why Participation Matters More

The stronger participation path is consistent with self-determination theory. During change, employees can lose a sense of control over familiar routines, roles, and relationships. Participation gives some of that control back. It allows employees to use their knowledge, test ideas, and make the change workable in their

own setting. In doing so, it can support autonomy, competence, and relatedness - the psychological needs associated with more self-directed motivation (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

Social exchange theory provides a second explanation. When leaders ask for views, respond to concerns, and show what has been done with employee input, they signal respect. Employees may repay that respect through willingness to persist with the change and invest effort beyond minimum compliance (Blau, 1964; Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005; Saks, 2006). The qualitative accounts suggest precisely this difference. Information alone was often accepted as necessary. Involvement was interpreted as evidence that employee experience and expertise mattered.

5.3 Communication Still Matters

The results should not be read as an argument against communication. Poor communication leaves employees without the information required to make sense of change and can create a vacuum filled by rumour or anxiety (Bordia et al., 2004; Elving, 2005). The more useful conclusion is that organisations should stop treating communication as the end point. A good change message opens the conversation; it does not close it.

The leader-employee perception gap in the interviews illustrates the point. Leaders may regard a town hall or weekly email as transparent because information has been made available. Employees may judge the same practice by a different standard: whether it allowed them to ask difficult questions, whether their concerns received a response, and whether anything changed because they spoke. Communication becomes more credible when it is paired with a visible feedback loop rather than a larger volume of messages (Lewis, 2006).

5.4 Theoretical Contribution

The study contributes to change and engagement research in four ways. First, it separates change communication from employee participation, allowing their distinct contributions to be observed. Second, it places these constructs within a leadership model rather than treating them as isolated management practices. Third, it suggests that the participation route may be more consequential because it links change management with core motivational needs and with psychological ownership. Finally, it adds evidence from an Indian private-sector setting, where formal hierarchy can make the gap between information and voice particularly salient.

The findings also invite a broader view of transformational leadership. Transformational leadership is sometimes described mainly in terms of vision and inspiration. The present results suggest that it is equally important to view it as enabling leadership. A leader does not only describe a future state; the leader creates the conditions in which employees can help build it.

5.5 Practical Implications

For practitioners, the implication is not to replace communication with participation, but to connect the two. Change leaders should explain the rationale, likely effects, and available support in plain language. They should then provide structured avenues for employees to test assumptions, flag local risks, suggest improvements, and receive responses. In this way, communication becomes the foundation for participation rather than a substitute for it.

Useful mechanisms include team-based change discussions, cross-functional working groups, pilot projects, employee focus groups, digital feedback channels, and regular manager-led listening sessions. The quality of these arrangements depends on whether leaders close the loop. Employees should be able to see that their input was acknowledged, considered, acted upon where feasible, or explained where it could not be adopted. Consultation that has no visible consequence is likely to generate cynicism rather than engagement.

Middle managers deserve particular attention. They are usually responsible for translating a strategic change message into the daily reality of teams. Organisations should equip them to explain ambiguity honestly, listen actively, facilitate difficult conversations, and make space for constructive dissent. Leadership development should therefore include communication and facilitation skills alongside vision-setting and motivation.

6. Conclusion, Limitations, and Future Research

6.1 Conclusion

The study's central conclusion is simple. Employees need information to understand change, but they need participation to own it. Transformational leadership, clear communication, and meaningful involvement all matter for engagement. Yet the evidence indicates that participation has the stronger estimated association with engagement because it gives employees a credible place in the work of transition.

For organisations, this means that a well-designed change programme cannot be judged only by the number of messages sent or meetings held. It must also be judged by whether employees can question, contribute, and see the effect of their contribution. When the organisation shifts from broadcasting change to involving people in it, engagement is more likely to be sustained.

6.2 Limitations

Several limitations should guide interpretation. The cross-sectional design does not establish causal order. The data are based largely on employee self-reports and may be affected by common-method bias. The sample is drawn from Indian private-sector organisations, is predominantly male, and includes a high proportion of middle and senior employees; caution is therefore needed when generalising to other settings.

In addition, the communication construct used two items and should be expanded in later work to capture dialogue, credibility, reach, consistency, and responsiveness more fully.

The indirect-effect discussion also requires a final bootstrapped mediation test before submission. The path products reported here are informative but are not a replacement for confidence intervals around indirect effects and their difference.

6.3 Future Research

Future studies should examine these relationships across different phases of change rather than at one point in time. Longitudinal designs could reveal whether communication is most important at announcement, while participation becomes more important during implementation and stabilisation. Research could also compare the pattern across types of change, including digital transformation, restructuring, mergers, and crisis-driven interventions.

Further work should distinguish forms of participation, such as consultation, participation in implementation, formal representation, and employee-led problem-solving. It should also test whether psychological ownership, trust, autonomy, or readiness for change explain the participation-engagement relationship. Multi-source designs that combine employee accounts with manager ratings and organisational outcomes would strengthen causal inference.

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