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Transformational leadership, organizational change management, and employee empowerment: Basis for an enhanced employee engagement framework

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Abstract

In the evolving higher education landscape, private higher education institutions in Sichuan, including universities and colleges, face significant challenges in cultivating employee engagement, which is critical to institutional efficiency and academic excellence. Based on three large private higher education institutions in Sichuan Province, this study examines the effects of transformational leadership, organizational change management and employee empowerment on employee engagement. Characterized by idealized influence, inspiring motivation, and intellectual stimulation, transformational leadership is a catalyst for fostering a culture of motivation and innovation. At the same time, effective organizational change management - including restructuring, technological advances, communication strategies, and stakeholder relationships - ensures that these institutions remain adaptable in a dynamic educational environment. Employee empowerment, as measured by autonomy and accountability, access to information and skills development, plays a key role in improving employee satisfaction and productivity. This study used descriptive research design and structured questionnaires to collect data from faculty and administrative staff. Statistical analysis, including correlation and multiple regression techniques, revealed that transformational leadership, organizational change management, and employee empowerment have a strong positive correlation in promoting employee engagement. The research results contribute to theoretical discussion and practical application and provide managers of higher education institutions with a strategic framework for improving employee engagement. By integrating these management approaches, higher education institutions can develop a more motivated, innovative, and committed workforce that ultimately improves institutional performance and student outcomes.

Keywords: transformational leadership, organizational change management, employee empowerment, employee engagement, higher education

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1. Introduction

In today's rapidly evolving educational and business environment, private higher education institutions face unprecedented challenges that require flexibility, innovation and continuous improvement. Some private higher education institutions, in particular, have to adopt flexible and forward-looking management strategies to maintain their competitive edge and promote academic excellence. The necessity to react swiftly to market demands, technological progress, and evolving socio-economic conditions enhances the significance of leadership and change management more than ever.

At the heart of these adaptive strategies are three interrelated factors: transformational leadership, organizational change management, and employee empowerment. Transformational leadership, with its emphasis on idealized influence, inspiring motivation, and intellectual stimulation, has become a key approach to inspiring innovation and commitment among teachers and administrators (Bass et al., 2022; Volio et al., 2021). Leaders who embody these traits not only foster a culture of trust and collaboration but also encourage individuals to transcend their limitations and make creative contributions to the mission of higher education institutions. As a complement to leadership, effective organizational change management ensures that organizations remain agile and responsive in the face of continuous change. This includes redesigning organizational structures, integrating new technologies and communication systems, and fostering strong stakeholder relationships (Cameron et al., 2021). By carefully arranging these elements, higher education institutions can minimize resistance to change, optimize resource allocation, and build a resilient framework that supports continued development and adaptation. Equally important is employee empowerment, which is the catalyst for translating leadership vision and change management strategies into tangible results. Empowerment-defined through the dimensions of autonomy and accountability, access to necessary information, and continuous skill development-enables employees to take the initiative to reach their maximum potential (Albrecht et al., 2018). Empowered employees are better able to navigate the complexities of their roles, contribute to innovative practices, and drive overall organizational performance.

Despite extensive research on these individual variables, gaps remain in understanding the synergies of transformational leadership, organizational change management, and employee empowerment on employee engagement, especially in the context of private higher education institutions in Sichuan. Previous studies have often dealt with these variables in isolation. However, recent literature suggests that their interactions may have a more profound impact on employee motivation and engagement (Nguyen et al., 2020; Muliawan et al., 2022). Therefore, this study aims to bridge this gap by comprehensively analyzing how these factors relate to each other and contribute to a sound Enhanced engagement framework. This study takes the teaching staff and administrative personnel of three large private colleges and universities in Sichuan Province as the research objects.

These topics have attracted researchers, whose experiences as educators, where they have witnessed how visionary leadership, thoughtful management change and genuine empowerment can transform employee morale and student performance. Exploring these variables-transformational leadership, organizational change management, and employee empowerment-not only contributes to academic discourse but also provides practical insights for managers of higher education institutions striving to enhance performance and innovation in an increasingly competitive environment. The presentation of this study highlights the urgent need for a multifaceted approach to leadership and change in higher education. Through extensive literature and empirical data, this study aims to develop an Enhanced employee engagement framework that is both theoretically and practically sound and applicable to the dynamic context of private higher education institutions in Sichuan.

Objectives of the Study - This study aimed to assess transformational leadership, organizational change management, and employee empowerment in private higher education institutions in Sichuan to develop an enhanced employee engagement framework. Specifically, it aimed to describe the transformational leadership attributes in terms of idealized influence, inspirational motivation, and intellectual stimulation; assess organizational change management in terms of structure, communication technology, and stakeholder relationship; assess employee empowerment in terms of autonomy and accountability, information access, and skill building; test significant relationship among transformational leadership, organizational change management, and employee empowerment; and, develop a framework for an enhanced employee engagement in private higher education institutions in Sichuan China.

2. Methods

Research Design - Using a descriptive research design, this study aims to empirically analyze the effects of transformational leadership, organizational change management and employee empowerment on employee engagement. Descriptive research is a research method that systematically observes and describes phenomena or behaviors, aiming to reveal relationships or patterns between specific variables through data collection (Saunders et al., 2019). This design approach allows researchers to detail existing conditions in the natural environment without control or intervention (Creswell et al., 2018). Descriptive studies often employ quantitative data, such as questionnaires or statistical analyses, to help researchers better understand the relationships between variables and provide a basis for subsequent causal analysis.

Participants of the Study - Higher education institutions in China include universities and higher vocational academies or colleges. There are similarities and differences between universities and higher vocational academies or colleges in China: both are higher education institutions, and the main differences lie in the scale of education, the coverage of disciplines, and the positioning of the schools. According to the Ministry of Education of China, universities usually require a larger student size (e.g more than 8,000 students), a broader range of disciplines (at least three major disciplines), as well as a higher level of teachers and research. Vocational Academies or colleges are relatively small in scale (with over 5,000 students), and their discipline Settings are relatively concentrated (with one major discipline as the main discipline). Furthermore, universities tend to be more comprehensive and offer more master's/doctoral programs, while vocational academies or colleges may focus on specialized fields (e.g "medical academies, technical academies, cultural academies, etc."). Both universities and vocational academies or colleges can confer higher education qualifications and corresponding degrees recognized by the state. Vocational academies or colleges can apply for a name change to universities after meeting the standards.

The participants of this study were from three large private higher education institutions in Sichuan Province, China: 105 questionnaires from Sichuan Technology and Business University, 105 questionnaires from Sichuan University of Science and Technology, and 105 questionnaires from Nanchong Film Industry Vocational Academy. A total of 405 valid questionnaires were collected to ensure statistical validity and representativeness. This study adopts the stratified random sampling method to ensure the diversity and breadth of the sample. The research subjects mainly include the following two categories: The first category is teachers - covering multiple disciplines such as liberal arts, science, engineering, business, and law, and including teachers at different career development stages, including junior teachers, intermediate lecturers, and senior professors, to ensure the representativeness of the data and the universal applicability of the research conclusions. The second category consists of management personnel-including deans, department heads, directors of academic affairs offices, directors of student affairs offices, directors of personnel offices, and other departments, and the participants include senior, middle-level, and grassroots leaders. As key decision-makers in organizational change and daily management, their participation helps to gain a comprehensive understanding of how organizational change management and employee empowerment affect employee engagement in different departments, providing strong data support for future management practices.

Instrument of the Study - Structured questionnaires were used as the main data collection tool in this study. The questionnaire consisted of three main components that measured transformational leadership, organizational change management, and employee empowerment. Each section used a five-point Likert scale, ranging from "1=strongly disagree" to "4=strongly agree," to assess participants' perceptions and experiences of each variable. The questionnaire consisted of 45 questions, 15 for each variable. This design not only allowed a comprehensive assessment of each variable and its dimensions but also enabled comparability of responses from different participants through standardized treatment of the scale. The questionnaire was distributed through an online platform, ensuring that participants could complete it at a convenient time and place, and ensuring their anonymity. The data collected were used for further statistical analysis to explore the impact of transformational leadership, organizational change management, and employee empowerment on employee engagement.

Transformational leadership questionnaire consisted of 15 questions, covering 3 dimensions: idealization, motivation, and intellectual motivation. Each dimension had five questions, which participants rated based on their perceptions of the leader's behavior. This part of the questionnaire was designed to assess how leaders influenced employees through personal charisma, motivation, and intellectual support in daily management. Organizational Change Management questionnaire contained 15 questions covering 3 dimensions: structure, communication techniques, and stakeholder relations. With five questions for each dimension, participants rated their organization's change management practices. This section aimed to understand how organizations drove change and influenced employee attitudes and behavior through structural change, technical support, communication strategies, and stakeholder management during the change process. Employee empowerment questionnaire included 15 questions covering 3 dimensions: autonomy and accountability, access to information, and skills development. Each dimension had five questions designed to measure how empowered participants felt at work, including their autonomy in making decisions at work, their ability to access information, and their opportunities for skill development. After the reliability test was completed, the results were shown in the table.

Table 1

Reliability Result

Indicators	Cronbach Alpha	Remarks
Idealized Influence	0.897	Good
Inspirational Motivation	0.916	Excellent
Intellectual Stimulation	0.919	Excellent
Structure	0.917	Excellent
Communication technology	0.911	Excellent
Stakeholder Relationship	0.933	Excellent
Autonomy and Accountability	0.912	Excellent
Access to Information	0.921	Excellent
Skill Building	0.921	Excellent

George and Mallery (2003) provide the following rules of thumb: "_ > .9 – Excellent, _ > .8 – Good, _ > .7 – Acceptable, _ > .6 – Questionable, _ > .5 – Poor, and_ < .5 – Unacceptable"

Reliability results showed that the Cronbach's alpha for transformational leadership (0.968), organizational change (0.972), and employee empowerment (0.970) suggest that the items have an excellent level of internal consistency. According to the evaluation criteria provided by (George et al., 2003), Cronbach's Alpha coefficient greater than 0.9 is considered to be "Excellent" and greater than 0.8 is considered to be "Good". From the table data, except for "idealized impact", which belongs to the "Good" level, all other variables reach the "Excellent" level. This indicates that the measurement tools in this study have high internal consistency in all dimensions, which can ensure the stability and reliability of the survey results. The reliability test results of this study show that the questionnaire or measurement tool used has strong internal consistency in transformational leadership, organizational change management and employee empowerment, etc., so it can be safely used for subsequent data analysis to further explore the relationship between various variables.

Data Gathering Procedures - The process of this study included multiple stages from study design to data collection and analysis to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the impact of transformational leadership,

organizational change management, and employee empowerment on employee engagement. The starting point of the research process is to identify a research problem with theoretical and practical significance. First, this study conducted an extensive reading and analysis of the existing literature, focusing on the relationship between transformational leadership, organizational change management, employee empowerment, and employee engagement. On this basis, the research title "Transformational leadership, organizational change Management and employee empowerment: the basis for Enhanced employee engagement framework" is proposed. The topic aims to provide a theoretical basis for improving employee engagement by exploring the interaction between these three variables.

After determining the research topic, conduct an in-depth literature review to sort out the status quo and development trend of related research. The literature review covers the concepts, measurement methods and relationship with employee engagement of transformational leadership, organizational change management and employee empowerment. Through literature review, not only the theoretical framework of this study is determined, but also the gaps and shortcomings of the current research are found, which lays a foundation for the subsequent research design. Based on literature review, design the overall framework of the research, including research methods, sample selection, data collection tools, etc. This study adopts quantitative research methods, mainly through questionnaire surveys, to collect data. The questionnaire design was based on the existing maturity scale and adjusted according to the research needs. In order to ensure the representativeness of the samples, this study selected three large private higher education institutions in Sichuan Province, covering teachers with different titles in different disciplines and managers at different levels in different departments.

Questionnaire preparation and pilot test: After the questionnaire preparation is completed, a small-scale pilot test is conducted. The purpose of the pilot test is to test the clarity, applicability and validity of the questionnaire and to ensure that participants can accurately understand and answer the questions. According to the pre-test feedback, the questionnaire was adjusted and revised to improve the reliability and validity of the questionnaire measurement. In the formal data collection phase, the final revised questionnaire is distributed to the target participants through the web platform. Participants included teachers and administrators from three large private higher education institutions in Sichuan Province. During the data collection period, the study ensured the anonymity of the participants and the confidentiality of the data and reminded the participants to complete the questionnaire in a timely manner by email and text message. After data collection, statistical software is used to analyze the data. The analysis process includes data cleaning and pre processing, descriptive statistical analysis, correlation analysis between variables and multiple regression analysis. Through these analyses, the direct and indirect effects of transformational leadership, organizational change management, and employee empowerment on employee engagement can be assessed and hypothetical models validated. Finally, the analysis results are explained in detail, and the theoretical and practical significance of the research results are discussed. The research results not only provide a reference for the managers of private higher education institutions in Sichuan to improve employee engagement but also contribute to theoretical research in related fields. Based on the results of the study, a complete research report was written and suggestions for future research directions were made.

Through the above steps, this study systematically discusses the role of transformational leadership, organizational change management and employee empowerment in enhancing employee engagement, hoping to provide empirical basis and theoretical support for the management practice of private higher education institutions in Sichuan.

Data Analysis - Weighted average and ranking were used to describe the attributes of transformational leadership in terms of idealized influence, motivation and intellectual motivation. Evaluate organizational change management in terms of structure, communication techniques and stakeholder relationships; Assess employee empowerment in terms of autonomy and accountability, access to information, and skills development. The results of Sharpiro-Wilk test show that the p-values of all variables are less than 0.05, indicating that the data set is not normally distributed. Therefore, Spearman rho was used as part of a non-parametric test to

determine a significant relationship. All analyses were performed using SPSS version 28.

Ethical Considerations - After receiving approval from the Research Ethics Committee of the University of the Philippines' Batangas Campus, the study was allowed to proceed. Ethical considerations were considered in the design of the questionnaire to ensure its legitimacy, credibility and respect for participants' rights. The questionnaire design respects the diversity of the respondents, including aspects of culture, gender, age and ethnicity, ensuring that the design and wording of the questions do not discriminate or unfairly treat any group. Before the survey began, participants were provided with clear and detailed information explaining the purpose of the study, the expected results, and their rights and benefits to participating. Participants were informed that their participation was voluntary and that they had the right to withdraw at any time to ensure that all willing participants could make an informative and clear choice. During the data collection process, the researchers ensured that participants' privacy was adequately protected. Sensitive personal information is avoided, and data is processed anonymously to reduce the risk of identifying participants. In addition, measures are taken to protect the data collected, prevent unauthorized access or disclosure, and ensure that the data is only used for academic research and is not misused. Finally, when the results of the study were reported, the data was presented anonymously to avoid revealing the identities of the participants. Interpreting results objectively and fairly to avoid misrepresentation or misleading conclusions.

3. Results and discussion

Table 2

Summary Table of Transformational Leadership Attributes

Indicators	Weighted Mean	Verbal Interpretation	Rank
Idealized Influence	3.11	Agree	2.5
Inspirational Motivation	3.12	Agree	1
Intellectual Stimulation	3.11	Agree	2.5
Composite Mean	3.11	Agree	

Legend: 3.50-4.00=Strongly Agree; 2.50-3.49=Agree;1.50-2.49=Disagree;1.00-1.49=Strongly Disagree

Table 2, titled "Summary Table of Transformational Leadership Attributes," integrates the three core dimensions of transformational leadership-idealized influence, motivational motivation, and intellectual motivation. The composite average of 3.11, which includes verbal explanations of "consent," suggests that, overall, respondents believe their leaders exhibit commendable levels of transformational leadership behavior. This finding is particularly important in leadership research because transformational leadership is widely associated with higher employee engagement, stronger organizational culture, and better performance outcomes (Bass et al., 2022; Yukl, 2019). Motivational motivation ranks highest, with a weighted average of 3.12. One plausible explanation for this out-performance is that employees may resonate more strongly with leaders who articulate a compelling vision that instills optimism and encourages them to pursue ambitious goals. Research has shown that such motivational behavior not only improves employee motivation but also promotes a sense of collective purpose and promotes organizational resilience and adaptability (Muliawan et al., 2022). In addition, the power of motivational motivation lies in its ability to meet emotional and psychological needs, helping employees respond to change with greater confidence and enthusiasm (Bass et al., 2022).

"Idealized influence" and "intellectual stimulation" both had weighted averages of 3.11, tied for second place. While they scored slightly lower than inspirational motivation, they were still in the "consent" category, underscoring their positive impact on leadership effectiveness. Idealized influences, including shaping ethical behavior and building trust, are critical to fostering trustworthiness and a sense of security among employees (Nguyen et al., 2020). Intellectual stimulation focuses on creative problem solving and innovation, helping employees feel empowered to explore new ideas and challenge existing assumptions (Eva et al., 2021). When leaders effectively balance these two dimensions, they foster an environment in which ethical behavior, mutual respect, and continuous learning coexist, resulting in improved overall employee engagement (Yukl, 2019).

While neither idealized impact nor intellectual stimulation is truly "lowest" in the sense of the word - given their average and common ranking - they do fall a little short of inspirational motivation. This subtle difference may stem from employees' greater direct affinity for vision-driven leadership behaviors, rather than consistent adherence to ethical role modeling or active engagement in innovative practices. For example, employees may find it more challenging to witness everyday acts of moral courage, or have fewer opportunities to engage in experimental thinking, which may slightly reduce their perception of the frequency or impact of these dimensions (Hassan et al., 2021; Afsar et al., 2020). Nevertheless, this marginal gap suggests that these three dimensions are still being positively embraced and influenced in the workplace.

Table 3

Summary Table of Organizational Change Management

Indicators	Weighted Mean	Verbal Interpretation	Rank
Structure	3.13	Agree	2.5
Communication Technology	3.16	Agree	1
Stakeholder Relationship	3.13	Agree	2.5
Composite Mean	3.14	Agree	

Legend: 3.50-4.00=Strongly Agree; 2.50-3.49=Agree;1.50-2.49=Disagree;1.00-1.49=Strongly Disagree

Table 3, titled "Summary Table of Organizational Change Management," integrates three key dimensions structure, communication techniques, and stakeholder relationships to provide an overview of how effectively an organization navigates change. The composite average of 3.14 with the verbal explanation "agree" indicates that, on average, respondents believe that organizational change management is handled in a generally positive and effective way. This finding is significant because it is widely recognized that in an increasingly dynamic business environment, robust change management practices are critical to maintaining competitive advantage, ensuring adaptability, and promoting employee engagement (Burnes et al., 2020; Cameron et al., 2021).

Communication technology stands out with the highest weighted average of 3.16, with oral interpretation as "consent" ranking first. This result highlights that digital tools have become the pivotal support connecting the implementation and execution efficiency of strategies in organizational change. One plausible reason for this leadership is that respondents likely see improvements in communication technology systems such as new collaboration tools, real-time data sharing, and more accessible training platforms as having a direct and tangible impact on their daily tasks (van der Voet et al., 2020). By accelerating the flow of information and promoting transparency, such systems play a key role in building trust and ensuring that change initiatives gain wider acceptance across the organization (Burnes et al., 2020).

The ranking is 2.5, and the weighted average of structure and stakeholder relationships is 3.13, falling within the "agree" range. This result reflects the asymmetric development of the explicit efficacy of institutional design and the implicit cultural identity in organizational change - although the technical rationality of structural optimization improves efficiency, it requires deeper cultural adaptability support to achieve breakthrough progress. Specifically, this middle-tier rating suggests that while structural changes (such as redefined hierarchies and improved resource allocation) are seen as valuable, some employees may see room for further optimization (Heckmann et al., 2021). Similarly, stakeholder relationship management, which includes the involvement of internal employees and external partners, appears to be relatively well executed, but without the obvious impact of technological improvements. The presence of a median of these dimensions may indicate that an organization's current restructuring and stakeholder engagement strategy is on the right track but needs to be further refined to reach its full potential (Stouten et al., 2018; Lundmark et al., 2022). Looking deeper, this intermediate state is essentially the "half-process effect" of organizational change: when the physical framework of institutional reconstruction has been established, but the corresponding trust network and collaboration culture are not yet mature, employees' recognition of the change will show a gradual accumulation feature, and a qualitative breakthrough needs to be achieved through more systematic cultural intervention.

In this table, no one dimension really occupies the "lowest" ranking, as both structure and stakeholder

relationships have the same score. Still, this slightly lower average compared to communications technology may indicate that respondents find technology easier to implement and more beneficial than the more complex tasks of restructuring and managing different stakeholders' expectations. For example, structural changes and stakeholder negotiations often require more extensive planning, consensus-building, and progressive implementation, which can lead to subtle differences (Cameron et al., 2021; Jones et al., 2022). In addition, employees may experience the benefits of new communication tools more directly than the subtle impact of restructuring reporting lines or stakeholder outreach programs (Stouten et al., 2018).

Table 4

Summary Table of Employee Empowerment

Indicators	Weighted Mean	Verbal Interpretation	Rank
Autonomy and Accountability	3.09	Agree	1
Information Access	2.93	Agree	2
Skill Building	2.89	Agree	3
Composite Mean	2.97	Agree	

Legend: 3.50-4.00=Strongly Agree; 2.50-3.49=Agree;1.50-2.49=Disagree;1.00-1.49=Strongly Disagree

Table 4, titled "Employee Empowerment Summary Table", integrates three dimensions autonomy and responsibility, access to information, and skill building to provide an overarching view of how employees perceive their level of empowerment in the organization. The composite means of 2.97 falls within the category of "consent" for verbal interpretation, indicating that respondents felt moderately empowered in their roles. This is important because employee empowerment has been consistently associated with higher job satisfaction, stronger commitment, and higher organizational performance (Kim et al., 2019; Maynard et al., 2020).

Autonomy and accountability appear with the highest weighted average of 3.09, verbally interpreted as "consent," ranking first in the dimension. This result reveals the successful practice of the "responsibility liberalization" paradigm in modern organizational management - by deeply coupling decision-making power with result responsibility, a dynamic balance between employee initiative and organizational control power has been achieved. Its essence is to transform institutional constraints into individual internal driving forces through the reconstruction of psychological contracts, and form a sustainable self-management ecosystem. Specifically, employees attach great importance to the freedom to make decisions and the responsibility to be accountable for the results (Cheong et al., 2019). This sense of ownership tends to drive initiative, creativity, and proactive problem solving because employees feel that management trusts them to shape their workflow (Afsar et al., 2020). Another factor may be that when organizations construct clear performance metrics as well as empowerment, employees are both clear and confident about how to contribute effectively, thus reinforcing the cycle of high engagement and accountability (Kim et al., 2019).

Access to information, 2.93, with verbal interpretation as "consent," ranked second. This mid-level score indicates that while employees generally view the organization's communication channels and resource availability as satisfactory, some see potential gaps. Such as sporadic updates, partial transparency of strategic goals, or lack of access to the latest industry insights (Deci et al., 2020). However, the fact that it remains in the 'consent' category suggests that employees generally have access to the information they need to perform their tasks effectively, even if there is room for improvement in refining communication protocols and ensuring full access to critical data (Wang et al., 2021).

A weighted average of 2.89 for skills building, which is also interpreted as "consent," ranks third and lowest across the three dimensions. This result reflects the structural mismatch between capability supply and strategic implementation in the organizational learning ecosystem - the institutional investment in skills training has not been fully transformed into perceptible practical effectiveness, exposing the systematic breakpoints from the design to the transformation of the training system. The essence is that in the process of pursuing capability upgrading, the organization has not yet cracked the dynamic coupling mechanism between "knowledge acquisition" and "value creation". Specifically, While employees acknowledge that development opportunities

exist, they may feel that these opportunities are less frequent, less personalized, or not seamlessly integrated into their day-to-day roles (Park et al., 2021). Another possibility is that employees find it challenging to apply newly acquired skills due to limited on-the-job support or a lack of alignment between training programs and actual job requirements (Afsar et al., 2020). These perspectives highlight the need for more structured follow-up, guidance and a clear pathway to integrate learned competencies into practical tasks.

Table 5

Relationship Between Transformational Leadership Attributes and Organizational Change Management

Variables	rho	p-value	Interpretation
Idealized Influence			
Structure	.538**	<.001	Highly Significant
Communication Technology	.447**	<.001	Highly Significant
Stakeholder Relationship	.541**	<.001	Highly Significant
Inspirational Motivation			
Structure	.646**	<.001	Highly Significant
Communication Technology	.477**	<.001	Highly Significant
Stakeholder Relationship	.578**	<.001	Highly Significant
Intellectual Stimulation			
Structure	.653**	<.001	Highly Significant
Communication Technology	.500**	<.001	Highly Significant
Stakeholder Relationship	.579**	<.001	Highly Significant

Legend: Significant at p-value<0.01

Table 5, titled "Relationship Between Transformational Leadership Attributes and Organizational Change Management," presents the Spearman's rho correlation coefficients between three dimensions of transformational leadership—Idealized Influence, Inspirational Motivation, and Intellectual Stimulation—and three dimensions of organizational change management—Structure, Communication Technology, and Stakeholder Relationship. Rather than showing mean scores and verbal interpretations, this table highlights the strength and significance of the relationships between leadership and change management variables. All correlation coefficients are marked as highly significant at $p < .001$, indicating that respondents perceive a robust linkage between how leaders behave and how effectively change processes unfold within the organization. This finding is noteworthy because strong correlations in leadership-change paradigms are frequently linked to higher organizational adaptability, greater employee engagement, and more successful implementation of strategic initiatives (Bass et al., 2022; Nguyen et al., 2020).

The highest correlation coefficient observed in the table is .653 for Intellectual Stimulation with Structure, both of which carry a "Highly Significant" interpretation at $p<.001$. It reveals the symbiotic relationship between innovative leadership and agile organizational design the dynamic adaptation of the thinking activation behavior of leaders and the organizational structure forms a double helix drive of innovation iteration. One possible explanation for this strongest relationship is that leaders who encourage creativity and critical thinking (Intellectual Stimulation) align particularly well with organizational structures designed to adapt and respond swiftly to new challenges (Structure). When employees are empowered to question existing processes and propose innovative solutions, the organization can more effectively re-calibrate its structure to meet evolving market demands (Khan et al., 2020). Another reason could be that intellectually stimulating leaders often foster environments in which flexible and responsive structures are not only tolerated but actively supported, creating a culture of continuous improvement (Burnes et al., 2020).

In the mid-range, several correlation coefficients hover around .500–.580, such as Inspirational Motivation with Communication Technology (.477) and Intellectual Stimulation with Communication Technology (.500). While still "Highly Significant," these relationships suggest that technology initiatives, including new collaboration platforms or real-time communication channels, may benefit greatly from leaders who articulate a compelling vision (Inspirational Motivation) and encourage innovative thinking (Intellectual Stimulation). Research indicates organizations adopting advanced communication technologies see stronger positive effects when leaders actively champion these tools and motivate employees to explore their full potential (Cameron et

al., 2021; Muliawan et al., 2022). Moderate correlation values imply that while technology is indeed influenced by leadership style, other factors—such as resource availability or user readiness—may also play key roles.

The lowest correlation coefficient in this table is .447 (Idealized Influence with Communication Technology), which remains "Highly Significant" but is comparatively weaker than the other coefficients. It reflects the cognitive disconnection between leadership charisma and the implementation of technology employees pay more attention to the functional value of technical tools rather than their moral symbolic significance. One explanation might be that employees see ethical modeling and trust-building (Idealized Influence) as somewhat less critical to the adoption of communication technologies, focusing instead on practical issues such as training, technical support, and user-friendliness (Hassan et al., 2021). Another possibility is that, while employees respect and admire leaders who display strong ethical standards, they may not directly link this trait to the effective implementation or utilization of digital tools (van der Voet et al., 2020). Nonetheless, the positive correlation confirms that even Idealized Influence has a meaningful impact on communication technology initiatives.

Regarding the relationship testing in this table, all correlations are highly significant at $p < .001$, indicating a consistent pattern where transformational leadership dimensions strongly predict organizational change management variables (Bass et al., 2022; Khan et al., 2020). Studies often show that when leaders inspire trust and articulate a clear vision, employees are more receptive to structural changes, technological advancements, and stakeholder engagement processes (Burnes et al., 2020; Cameron et al., 2021). This synergy suggests that leaders who effectively demonstrate Idealized Influence, Inspirational Motivation, and Intellectual Stimulation can significantly facilitate the smooth adoption of new organizational practices and frameworks.

From a graduate-level analytical perspective, these correlations underscore the interdependent nature of leadership and change management. Intellectual Stimulation appears particularly aligned with the adaptability of organizational structures, while Inspirational Motivation and Idealized Influence also contribute to both the technological and stakeholder-related facets of change. Leaders who balance these dimensions can create a holistic environment conducive to innovation, resilience, and sustainable growth. By integrating ethical role-modeling, motivational communication, and creative problem-solving, organizations can strengthen their capacity to navigate complexity and remain competitive in rapidly shifting markets.

Table 6

Relationship Between Transformational Leadership Attributes and Employee Empowerment

Variables	rho	p-value	Interpretation
Idealized Influence			
Autonomy and Accountability	.561**	<.001	Highly Significant
Information Access	.539**	<.001	Highly Significant
Skill Building	.530**	<.001	Highly Significant
Inspirational Motivation			
Autonomy and Accountability	.593**	<.001	Highly Significant
Information Access	.607**	<.001	Highly Significant
Skill Building	.571**	<.001	Highly Significant
Intellectual Stimulation			
Autonomy and Accountability	.574**	<.001	Highly Significant
Information Access	.584**	<.001	Highly Significant
Skill Building	.576**	<.001	Highly Significant

Legend: Significant at p-value<0.01

Table 6, titled "Relationship Between Transformational Leadership Attributes and Employee Empowerment," displays the Spearman's rho correlation coefficients for three dimensions of transformational leadership—Idealized Influence, Inspirational Motivation, and Intellectual Stimulation—against three dimensions of employee empowerment—Autonomy and Accountability, Information Access, and Skill Building. Instead of showing mean scores or verbal interpretations, this table highlights the strength and significance of the relationships between leadership behaviors and empowerment outcomes. All p-values are below .001, indicating highly significant correlations across the board. This is particularly meaningful because high correlations in

leadership-empowerment studies are frequently linked to increased employee engagement, stronger organizational commitment, and enhanced innovation (Kim et al., 2019; Maynard et al., 2020).

The highest correlation coefficient in the table is .607 (Inspirational Motivation with Information Access), which is deemed "Highly Significant" at $p < .001$. It highlights the catalytic effect of emotion-driven leadership on knowledge behavior vision resonance can directly activate employees' motivation for information exploration and sharing. One plausible reason for this top ranking is that employees who experience strong inspirational motivation from leaders—through vision articulation, enthusiasm, and emotional support—tend to seek out and utilize information more proactively (Buil et al., 2019). Another factor could be that leaders who inspire confidence and optimism encourage employees to be curious and resourceful, thus improving their drive to gather and share relevant data (Muliawan et al., 2022). This synergy suggests that a compelling leadership vision can make employees more receptive to the tools and resources provided by the organization, thereby enhancing their overall empowerment.

Correlations in the mid-range include .574 (Intellectual Stimulation with Autonomy and Accountability) and .576 (Intellectual Stimulation with Skill Building). While still "Highly Significant," these moderate values imply that creative thinking and critical inquiry foster a sense of ownership in employees but may not always be as pronounced as the motivational effect. This aligns with studies showing that when leaders encourage intellectual exploration, employees feel more confident in making decisions and refining their professional capabilities, though the degree to which they act on these opportunities can depend on other factors such as organizational culture and resource availability (Eva et al., 2021; Luo et al., 2023).

At the lower end, .530 (Idealized Influence with Skill Building) emerges as the smallest correlation coefficient in the table, though it remains "Highly Significant." It reflects the indirect connection between the demonstration of leadership ethics and capacity building although employees recognize the credibility of their leaders, they rely more on institutional support to achieve skill leaps. One explanation might be that while employees respect and admire leaders who demonstrate ethical conduct and personal integrity, they do not necessarily perceive a direct link between these role-modeling behaviors and the availability or quality of skill-development opportunities (Hassan et al.,2021). Another possibility is that employees may primarily associate Idealized Influence with trust and loyalty rather than the provision of structured learning pathways or professional growth initiatives (Afsar et al.,2020). The positive correlation indicates that a leader's credibility still plays a meaningful role in encouraging employees to pursue continuous development.

Regarding the relationship testing, all correlations shown are statistically significant, suggesting that transformational leadership attributes—Idealized Influence, Inspirational Motivation, and Intellectual Stimulation—consistently predict the three dimensions of employee empowerment (Autonomy and Accountability, Information Access, and Skill Building) (Kim et al., 2019; Maynard et al., 2020). Research has long established that employees under transformational leaders feel more motivated to take initiative, seek relevant information, and develop their skills, ultimately resulting in higher levels of job satisfaction and organizational performance (Deci et al., 2020; Wang et al., 2021).

From a graduate-level analytical perspective, findings underscore a synergistic framework in which leadership behaviors and empowerment dimensions reinforce one another. Inspirational Motivation appears especially potent in amplifying Information Access, while Intellectual Stimulation strongly correlates with Autonomy and Accountability and Skill Building. Idealized Influence, though slightly lower in correlation with certain variables, remains integral in establishing the trust and ethical foundation necessary for employees to embrace greater responsibility and learning opportunities. These relationships illustrate that transformational leadership is not a single, uniform construct but rather a constellation of complementary behaviors that collectively enhance employee empowerment and, by extension, drive sustained organizational success.

Table 7, titled "Relationship Between Organizational Change Management and Employee Empowerment," presents the Spearman's rho correlation coefficients for three dimensions of organizational change

management—Structure, Communication Technology, and Stakeholder Relationship—against three dimensions of employee empowerment—Autonomy and Accountability, Information Access, and Skill Building. Instead of showing average scores or verbal interpretations, the table highlights the strength and significance of relationships between how organizations manage change and how employees perceive their level of empowerment. All p-values are below .001, indicating highly significant correlations. This result is meaningful because strong linkages between change management and empowerment are often associated with improved job satisfaction, innovation, and adaptability in the workplace (Burnes et al., 2020; Cameron et al., 2021).

Table 7

Relationship Between Organizational Change Management and Employee Empowerment

Variables	rho	p-value	Interpretation
Structure			
Autonomy and Accountability	.555**	<.001	Highly Significant
Information Access	.578**	<.001	Highly Significant
Skill Building	.558**	<.001	Highly Significant
Communication Technology			
Autonomy and Accountability	.556**	<.001	Highly Significant
Information Access	.524**	<.001	Highly Significant
Skill Building	.505**	<.001	Highly Significant
Stakeholder Relationship			
Autonomy and Accountability	.656**	<.001	Highly Significant
Information Access	.653**	<.001	Highly Significant
Skill Building	.612**	<.001	Highly Significant

Legend: Significant at p-value<0.01

The highest correlation coefficient in the table is .656 (Stakeholder Relationship with Autonomy and Accountability), which is interpreted as "Highly Significant." It reveals the symbiotic logic of external collaboration and internal empowerment in organizational governance-the responsibility transmission mechanism of stakeholder network construction, which strengthens the legitimacy basis of individual decision-making through transparency pressure and value consensus.When organizations actively participate in and manage internal and external stakeholders, employees gain a clearer sense of responsibility and ownership in their own roles (Stouten et al., 2018). Another factor could be that stakeholder collaboration fosters a transparent environment where employees feel empowered to make decisions that align with diverse interests, thereby enhancing their accountability (Jones et al., 2022). This synergy indicates that effective stakeholder relationship management can have a profound influence on how employees perceive their autonomy and responsibility.

Correlations in the mid-range, such as .555 (Structure with Autonomy and Accountability) and .524 (Communication Technology with Information Access), remain "Highly Significant" but are comparatively lower than the top-ranking value. It reflects the dual-track support for organizational empowerment - structural optimization provides institutional guarantees, and technical tools achieve resource access. Together, they constitute the physical infrastructure for empowerment. Specifically, these coefficients suggest that structural adjustments—like redefined reporting lines or streamlined resource allocations strongly support employee ownership, while the implementation of new communication technologies enhances employees' access to relevant information (Heckmann et al., 2021; van der Voet et al., 2020). Though these relationships are slightly weaker than the highest coefficient, they still underscore the importance of well-designed organizational frameworks and advanced technological tools in promoting empowerment.

At the lower end, .505 (Communication Technology with Skill Building) emerges as the smallest correlation coefficient in the table, yet it remains "Highly Significant." It reveals the instrumental rationality limitations of digital empowerment - although technology can accelerate knowledge transfer, it is difficult to replace the cognitive reconstruction and scenario-based transfer required for the construction of systematic capabilities. Specifically, although employees prefer digital platforms for collaboration and data sharing, they may not directly associate these tools with comprehensive skill development opportunities (Sun et al., 2021). Another possibility is that, although communication technology can facilitate learning (e.g., through online

training modules), employees might rely more heavily on structured programs or mentoring for deeper skill acquisition (Lee et al., 2022). Nonetheless, the positive correlation affirms that technology does play a supportive role in skill-building processes, even if other factors carry greater weight.

All correlations in this relationship testing are statistically significant, indicating that Structure, Communication Technology, and Stakeholder Relationship consistently predict the three dimensions of employee empowerment (Burnes et al., 2020; Cameron et al., 2021). This finding aligns with prior research showing that employees who perceive organizational structures as adaptable, technologies as enabling, and stakeholder relationships as collaborative are more likely to feel empowered (Stouten et al., 2018; Jones et al., 2022). Consequently, these correlations suggest that organizational change management efforts emphasize flexible frameworks, robust technological support, and active stakeholder engagement substantially bolster employee autonomy, access to information, and skill development.

From a graduate-level analytical perspective, these results highlight the multifaceted interplay between change management and empowerment. Stakeholder Relationship emerges as particularly influential in shaping employees' sense of accountability, while the table "Relationship Between Organizational Change Management and Employee Empowerment," presents the Spearman's rho correlation coefficients for three dimensions of organizational change management—Structure, Communication Technology, and Stakeholder Relationship—against three dimensions of employee empowerment—Autonomy and Accountability, Information Access, and Skill Building. Instead of showing average scores or verbal interpretations, the table highlights the strength and significance of relationships between how organizations manage change and how employees perceive their level of empowerment. All p-values are below .001, indicating highly significant correlations. This is meaningful because strong linkages between change management and empowerment are often associated with improved job satisfaction, innovation, and adaptability in the workplace (Burnes et al., 2020; Cameron et al., 2021).

Transformational Leadership, Organizational Change Management, and Employee Empowerment collectively serve as pivotal constructs in shaping contemporary organizational dynamics. Drawing on the findings from the correlation analyses and descriptive statistics, the results consistently underscore that when leaders exhibit high levels of Idealized Influence, Inspirational Motivation, and Intellectual Stimulation, employees respond with heightened trust, motivation, and innovative capacity (Bass et al., 2022; Nguyen et al., 2020). Equally crucial, the effective implementation of Organizational Change Management—encompassing Structure, Communication Technology, and Stakeholder Relationship—demonstrates a pronounced influence on employees' adaptability, engagement, and overall performance (Burnes et al., 2020; Cameron et al., 2021). Lastly, Employee Empowerment—operationalized through Autonomy and Accountability, Information Access, and Skill Building—emerges as an essential mechanism for enhancing job satisfaction, creativity, and organizational commitment (Kim et al., 2019; Maynard et al., 2020).

The interplay among these three variables is both synergistic and multifaceted. Transformational Leadership, by setting a clear vision and modeling ethical behavior, primes employees for change initiatives. Leaders who exhibit Inspirational Motivation, for instance, not only elevate morale but also amplify employees' willingness to embrace new technologies and structural shifts (Buil et al., 2019; Muliawan et al., 2022). Concurrently, Organizational Change Management provides the structural and procedural framework within which these leadership behaviors take root, ensuring that communication channels, stakeholder relationships, and resource allocations are aligned with the strategic vision (Heckmann et al., 2021; Stouten et al., 2018). When these foundational elements are well-orchestrated, Employee Empowerment thrives, as individuals have both the freedom to act (Autonomy and Accountability) and the means to succeed (Information Access, Skill Building). The cumulative effect is an environment conducive to innovative problem-solving and high engagement, reflecting the essence of a learning organization (Lee et al., 2022).

Empirical data from the correlation tables corroborate these theoretical linkages, revealing statistically

significant associations ($p<.001$) among leadership attributes, change management dimensions, and empowerment constructs. Specifically, high correlations between Inspirational Motivation and Information Access highlight the importance of visionary communication in fostering a transparent and knowledge-rich environment (Deci et al., 2020; Wang et al., 2021). Robust relationships between Intellectual Stimulation and adaptive organizational structures underscore how creative leadership sparks the evolution of hierarchical models, ultimately supporting employees' autonomy and continuous learning (Eva et al., 2021; Luo et al., 2023). Furthermore, the strong ties between Stakeholder Relationship and employees' sense of accountability emphasize the integral role that inclusive communication and collaboration play in motivating individuals to take responsibility for their contributions (Jones et al., 2022; Lundmark et al., 2022).

In practice, these findings suggest that organizations aiming to elevate performance and sustainability must adopt a holistic approach. First, leadership development programs should cultivate leaders' ability to inspire, challenge, and ethically guide their teams (Afsar et al., 2020; Hassan et al., 2021). Change management initiatives need to balance structural reconfigurations with technological upgrades and robust stakeholder engagement, ensuring that transitions are both efficient and inclusive (Burnes et al., 2020; Cameron et al., 2021). Finally, policies and practices that expand employees' decision-making latitude, improve information flow, and support ongoing skill development will strengthen employees' capacity to adapt and excel (Kim et al., 2019; Maynard et al., 2020). By addressing all three variables in tandem, organizations can foster a resilient and high-performing workforce, equipped to navigate the complexities of modern business environments.

Overall, the convergence of Transformational Leadership, Organizational Change Management, and Employee Empowerment forms a strategic triad that not only elevates individual motivation and capability but also reinforces the organization's adaptability and competitive edge. Grounded in empirical evidence and supported by extensive literature, this triadic synergy points to a roadmap for leaders and practitioners seeking to enhance innovation, reduce resistance to change, and promote a culture of continuous improvement.

Enhanced Employee Engagement Framework

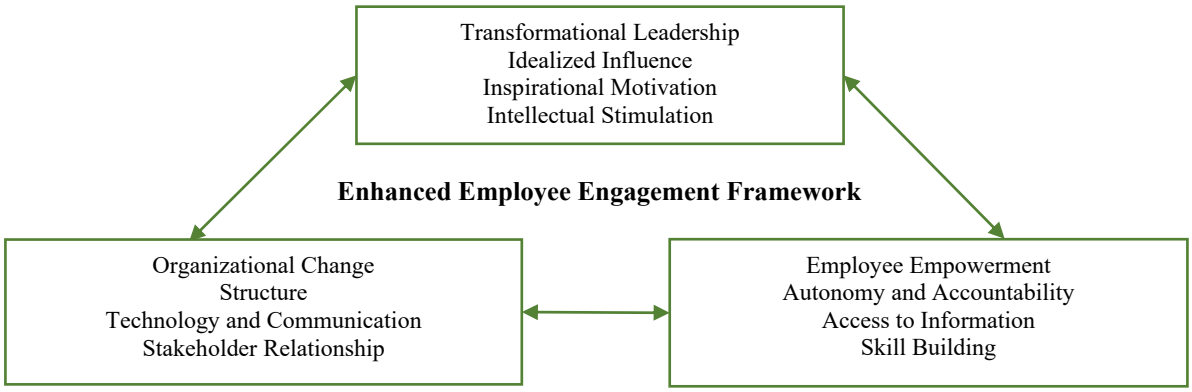

Figure 1. Enhanced Employee Engagement Framework

This framework integrates three core elements: transformational leadership, organizational change, and employee empowerment, to address the unique challenges faced by private higher education institutions in Sichuan in enhancing the engagement of their faculty and staff. Based on quantitative data analysis and relevant theoretical literature, this framework provides a clear path for institutions to achieve sustainable development in a highly competitive academic environment.

Transformational leadership has had a significant and stable impact on all aspects of employee empowerment and change management through means such as idealized influence, inspiring motivation and intellectual stimulation. Motivational motivation is highly correlated with information acquisition, indicating that if leaders can convey a clear vision and demonstrate positive enthusiasm, they can motivate teachers to collect

and utilize key information more proactively. Intellectual stimulation is closely related to autonomy, accountability and skills development, reflecting that when leaders encourage critical thinking and innovation, faculty and staff are more willing to take the initiative and continuously improve their professional capabilities.

Organizational change encompasses organizational structure, communication techniques and stakeholder relationships, all of which are closely related to employee empowerment. The stakeholder relationship shows the highest correlation with autonomy and accountability, indicating that effective stakeholder management can enhance teachers' sense of responsibility and ownership. Meanwhile, communication technology is highly correlated with information acquisition, indicating that efficient digital tools can promote information flow and reduce uncertainty, which is particularly important for the rapidly changing educational environment.

Employee empowerment consists of autonomy and accountability, information access, and skills development, and is closely related to transformational leadership and organizational change. The high correlation between organizational structure and autonomy and accountability indicates that under a clear and flexible organizational structure, teachers are more capable of making important decisions. Furthermore, information acquisition is not only related to motivational motivation but also closely linked to communication techniques, indicating that a leader's clear vision and powerful digital support system can help teachers proactively seek and utilize key information, thereby enhancing teaching and research capabilities.

Combining the above three core elements, private higher education institutions in Sichuan can adopt the following strategies to enhance teacher engagement and promote the sustainable development of the school: Strengthening leadership development: Promote leadership training centered on moral shaping, forward-looking communication and intellectual motivation, and encourage teachers to actively explore new teaching methods and research directions. Optimize organizational change management: Establish a flexible organizational structure, a transparent stakeholder communication mechanism, and be equipped with advanced technical support to provide smooth information exchange and efficient management processes. Enhance the authorization mechanism: In human resource management, balance autonomous decision-making rights and career development support to ensure that teachers not only have freedom but also receive skills training to adapt to the constantly changing educational environment. The implementation of this framework helps colleges and universities improve teaching quality and research achievements in the short term, while maintaining competitiveness in the long-term development. Dedicated and empowered teachers are better able to adapt to changes in the market environment and policy adjustments, thereby promoting the stable development of the institution. Furthermore, research data shows that there is a high correlation among leadership, change management and employee empowerment, indicating that these factors promote each other and form a virtuous cycle. Universities with strong leadership, flexible organizational structures and full empowerment mechanisms will be able to foster a more innovative and collaborative culture and maintain a leading position in the higher education industry. Based on a comprehensive study of data and theoretical literature, transformational leadership, organizational change, and employee empowerment do not exist independently but are interrelated elements that constitute the framework of efficient employee engagement. When the three are organically combined, leaders can effectively motivate the team, the organizational structure has sufficient adaptability, and teachers can also be fully empowered and supported. This dynamic cycle will eventually promote the high-quality development of higher education institutions, achieve continuous improvement in educational quality, and gain an advantage in the highly competitive higher education environment.

4. Conclusions and recommendations

The private higher educational institution employees moderately agreed on the transformational leadership attributes as idealized influence, inspirational motivation, and intellectual stimulation. There is moderate agreement on organizational change management in terms of structure, communication technology, and stakeholder relationships. Respondents moderately agreed with employee empowerment in terms of autonomy and accountability, access to information, and skill building. There is a highly significant relationship among

transformational leadership, organizational change management and employee empowerment. An enhanced employee engagement framework for private higher education institutions was proposed.

Private higher educational institutions may strengthen organizational change management by redesigning organizational structures, upgrading technology and communication systems, and actively engaging internal and external stakeholders to facilitate smoother transitions and improve overall adaptability. Employee empowerment programs maybe expanded by increasing teachers' autonomy in decision-making, ensuring transparent and timely access to relevant information, and providing ongoing professional development opportunities to improve skills and competencies. Managers may be able to cultivate collaborative innovation by combining the transformational leadership approach with organizational change initiatives and empowerment mechanisms through the following three targeted actions: promoting cross-departmental partnerships to break down silos; Implement the periodic assessment process and systematically improve these comprehensive strategies. Future researchers may be able to deeply explore the adaptability of leadership paradigms and organizational empowerment mechanisms in different cultural backgrounds. Perhaps a comparative study could be extended to analyze the influence mechanism of the differences in educational resources among different cities and countries on teachers' perception of autonomy. These explorations might break through the existing theoretical framework and contribute a more context-sensitive knowledge system to the governance innovation of higher education. Higher education institutions may review and utilize the proposed framework to enhance employee engagement in their workplace.

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