



## MODERATING ROLE OF TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP IN THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN WORKPLACE INCIVILITY, EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE, AND WORK ENGAGEMENT

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**ABSTRACT:** *This study examined the moderating role of transformational leadership in the relationship between workplace incivility, emotional intelligence, and work engagement among non-teaching staff in Akwa Ibom State University. A cross-sectional survey design was adopted and a sample of 340 participants was selected using multi-stage sampling and completed validated instruments including the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale, Workplace Incivility Scale, Emotional Intelligence Competence Scale, and Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire. The data was analysed using moderated multiple regression among others. Results revealed that workplace incivility and emotional intelligence significantly predicted work engagement, accounting for 25.8% of the variance ( $R^2 = 0.258$ ,  $F(2, 337) = 58.734$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Post-hoc analyses indicated significant differences in work engagement across levels of workplace incivility and emotional intelligence ( $p < .001$ ). Further, transformational leadership moderated the relationship between workplace incivility and work engagement, as evidenced by an increase in explained variance in work engagement ( $\Delta R^2 = 0.035$ ,  $F(3, 336) = 40.79$ ,  $p < .001$ ). It was concluded that the cultivation of transformational leadership within organisations could reduce the adverse consequences of workplace incivility and improve the level of engagement among employees.*

**KEYWORDS:** Transformational leadership, workplace incivility, emotional intelligence, work engagement.



## INTRODUCTION

In recent times, organisational efforts to enhance work engagement have become a significant focus for human resource practitioners, who increasingly strive to achieve higher levels of engagement among employees (Ikon & Chukwu, 2017). Work engagement is widely recognized as a critical factor influencing organisational outcomes, including increased productivity, improved employee retention, higher job satisfaction, and enhanced organisational commitment. Engaged employees are more likely to contribute proactively, innovate, and align their goals with the organisation's vision, thereby fostering overall organisational growth. However, within the Nigerian work environment, such efforts appear largely absent. Despite growing awareness among human resource practitioners, work engagement levels remain low, with many employees demonstrating a limited understanding of their roles in fostering engagement across various sectors in Nigeria (Ikon & Chukwu, 2017).

Work engagement is a workplace approach designed to ensure that employees are committed to their organisation's goals and values, motivated to contribute to the organisation's success, and are able at the same time to enhance their own sense of well-being (Satata, 2021).

Modern organisations need employees who are psychologically connected to their work, willing and able to invest themselves fully in their work, and proactive and committed to high quality performance standards. Work engagement, therefore, entails a positive fulfilling work related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2010). It is integral in driving organisational success as engaged employees are motivated and strive to achieve organisational goals and objectives. To remain competitive, organisations must encourage positive employee engagement as a strategic tool to attain competitive advantage. Organisations need employees to be active, dedicated, and fully engaged in their work to help improve productivity (Reissova & Papay, 2021). In essence, work engagement captures how workers experience their work as stimulating and energetic and something which they really want to devote time and effort to (the vigour component), as a significant and meaningful pursuit (dedication), and as engrossing and something on which they are fully concentrated (absorption).

According to Gallup (2023), globally, only 23% of employees are engaged and thriving at work, marking the highest level recorded since the organisation began measuring global work engagement. While this represents an improvement compared to previous years, concerning statistics remain: 59% of employees are "quiet quitting" (not engaged), and 18% are "loud quitting" (actively disengaged). These disengaged employees often fail to meet even the minimum work expectations, feeling disconnected and lost within their workplaces. This disengagement is not only indicative of dissatisfaction and unproductivity but it also leads to the spread of negativity among colleagues. Gallup (2023) estimated that the disengaged workforce—comprising 59% of not engaged and 18% of actively disengaged employees—costs the global economy an estimated \$8.8 trillion annually, equivalent to 9% of global Gross Domestic Product (GDP). In Nigeria, the situation is even more alarming. Gallup (2023) reported that only 13% of Nigerian employees are engaged at work, while 70% are not engaged, and 17% are actively disengaged. This pervasive disengagement significantly hampers optimal productivity in workplaces across the country, reflecting broader global trends.

Given this alarming state of work engagement, it becomes crucial to explore its predictors and mitigating factors. Specifically, the roles of workplace incivility and emotional intelligence as



predictors of work engagement, alongside the moderating effect of transformational leadership style, require critical investigation to understand how organisations can foster better employee engagement and productivity.

Over the past two decades, workplace incivility has emerged as a key topic of interest, attracting considerable attention from organisational researchers and practitioners. Defined as “low-intensity deviant behaviour with ambiguous intent to harm,” workplace incivility includes behaviours such as rudeness, dismissiveness, and disrespect. Anderson and Pearson (1999) defined workplace incivility as “low-intensity behaviour with ambiguous intent to harm the target, which violates workplace norms for mutual respect; being rude; and showing a lack of respect towards others.” This deviant behaviour may manifest verbally or non-verbally, such as condescending looks, harsh words, impatience, or disregard for others’ dignity. Workplace incivility often occurs during routine interactions among employees and is characterised as behaviours that contravene workplace civility norms. Perpetrators may sometimes be unaware of their actions, engaging in behaviours such as ignoring colleagues’ requests, gossiping, displaying non-verbal threats, or showing disrespect (Holm et al., 2015).

Research conducted in countries such as Australia, Canada, China, Korea, India, the Philippines, Singapore, and Malaysia (Loh & Loi, 2018; Chen et al., 2018; Hyun et al., 2018; Bulloch, 2017; Ho & Tan, 2018; Dahri & Hamid, 2018) underscored that workplace incivility is significantly shaped by regional variations in cultural norms and values. These variations influence perceptions of incivility, making it challenging to establish a universal definition that applies across different cultural contexts.

Studies indicate that workplace incivility is a prevalent issue globally. For instance, a survey by Ho and Tan (2018) found that over 70% of employees in Australia and Canada reported experiencing some form of incivility in the workplace. Similarly, research in Asia shows high prevalence rates, with Loh and Loi (2018) reporting that 65% of employees in Singapore had encountered uncivil behaviours, while Dahri and Hamid (2018) identified that nearly 60% of employees in Malaysia experienced similar issues. Despite its prevalence, workplace incivility has been infrequently studied in relation to work engagement. Beattie and Griffin (2014), in their study of Australian security personnel, found that incivility heightened stress levels among employees, though supervisory support could mitigate its effects. Since work engagement can be fostered through workplace interactions, including support from colleagues, supervisors, and leaders, incivility—characterised by behaviours such as demeaning or abusive treatment from superiors or peers—can negatively influence employees’ perceptions of their work environment. This, in turn, has profound implications for reduced work engagement levels (Tricahyadinata et al., 2020).

Another critical factor in work engagement is emotional intelligence. In the world of work, emotions pervade human social affairs and can have a substantial impact on employees’ work experiences, affecting their well-being, motivation, job satisfaction, and performance. Employees may be required, if not forced, to adjust their emotional expressions in the workplace as part of their professional job to improve the organisation’s task performance, and efficiency. Thus, emotional intelligence may play a major role in employees’ emotional experiences at work, not only because it can allow effective workplace functioning and positive outcomes, but also because it can assist people in improving their self-identity by meeting the expectations that come with it (Carminati, 2021).



Goleman (1998) defined emotional intelligence “as the capacity for recognizing our own feelings and those of others, for motivating ourselves, and for managing emotions well in ourselves and in our relationship with others.” These qualities of emotional intelligence (social competencies, self-discipline, motivation and self-expectation) have been shown to contribute more to job success than technical skills, and cognitive capacity (Posky, 2017). The ability to accurately perceive, appraise, and express emotions, the ability to assess and/or generate feelings when they facilitate thought, and the ability to understand emotions to promote emotional and intellectual growth have all been found to be beneficial to organisations (Dirican & Erdill, 2020). Employees who possess a high level of emotional intelligence tend to be calm, confident, adept at paying attention and have stronger bonds with fellow employees (Sari & Yulita, 2018). Furthermore, Sari and Yulita (2018) asserted that emotional intelligence (EI) is defined as the ability to manage one’s own emotions and understand the emotions of others, contributing to employees’ work engagement and self-motivation. Research indicates that higher levels of emotional intelligence can enhance employees’ engagement by fostering resilience in the face of workplace challenges and promoting intrinsic motivation (Nurjanah & Indawati, 2021).

Other studies conducted found a positive relationship between emotional intelligence and work engagement (Nurjanah & Indawati, 2021; Karamustafa & Kunday, 2018; Sari & Yulita, 2018). These studies suggest that employees with higher emotional intelligence tend to display greater levels of work engagement, as they are better equipped to manage their emotions, communicate effectively, and maintain productivity.

The study further examined the role of transformational leadership style as a potential moderator. Transformational leadership is defined as a leadership approach that instigates significant changes in both individuals and the broader organisational system (Bath-Farkas et al., 2014). Transformational leaders inspire and motivate their followers through four key dimensions: idealized influence, intellectual stimulation, individualized consideration, and inspirational motivation.

Idealized influence refers to leaders who serve as role models by demonstrating high ethical standards, earning respect, and gaining the trust of their followers. They inspire pride and instill a sense of purpose and integrity (Wells & Welty, 2010). Intellectual stimulation involves the leader challenging existing assumptions, encouraging innovation, and promoting followers’ independent thinking. These leaders value learning and view unexpected challenges as opportunities for growth (Wells & Welty, 2010). Individualized consideration focuses on leaders paying close attention to the needs and concerns of each follower, offering personalized support and development opportunities. Inspirational motivation entails leaders articulating a clear and compelling vision that inspires and energizes followers. They set high standards, communicate optimism about future goals, and provide meaning to the tasks at hand.

The moderating role of transformational leadership in the relationship between workplace incivility and emotional intelligence on work engagement is a key focus in organisational research. Alkaabi and Wong (2019) found that transformational leadership style negatively moderates the relationship between workplace incivility and work engagement, suggesting that leaders who exhibit transformational behaviors are better positioned to mitigate the adverse effects of incivility on employees’ engagement levels. Similarly, Arasli and Arici (2020) confirmed that transformational leadership reduces workplace incivility, reinforcing its role as a buffer against the negative impact of such behaviors on work engagement. Moreover, studies



have demonstrated that transformational leadership enhances emotional intelligence among employees. Di Lorenzo et al. (2019) highlighted that transformational leaders foster emotional empathy, while Lee et al. (2022) linked transformational leadership to increased motivation. Prezerakos (2018) and Marvos (2015) found that transformational leadership contributes to effective decision-making and improved employee retention.

Despite the evidence surrounding transformational leadership styles and their impact on various employee outcomes, there remains a scarcity of empirical research on the moderating role of transformational leadership in the relationship between workplace incivility, emotional intelligence, and their combined effect on employees' work engagement, particularly in Africa, and more specifically in Nigeria. Therefore, this study aimed to fill this gap and contribute to the body of knowledge, providing a foundation for future research in this area. It is hypothesized that workplace incivility will negatively predict work engagement, while emotional intelligence will positively predict work engagement. Additionally, transformational leadership style is expected to positively moderate the relationship between both workplace incivility and emotional intelligence, and work engagement, thereby contributing to a deeper understanding of the factors influencing work engagement within the Nigerian context.

## **METHODS/MATERIALS**

### **Research Design**

A cross-sectional survey design was utilized for this study. Using this design allowed the researcher to look at numerous characteristics at once in a given population at a single point in time.

### **Research Area**

The study focused on the non-teaching staff in Akwa Ibom State University. Akwa Ibom State University is a conventional, multi-campus institution. The main campus is located at Ikot Akpaden, Mkpato Enin Local Government Area. It adjoins the confluence of Ikot Akpaden – Eastern Obolo Road and Eket – Ikot Abasi highway. The Annex campus is located at Obio Akpa, Oruk Anam Local Government Area, along Abak – Ikot Okoro Road, all in Akwa Ibom State.

### **Population of the Study**

The population of the study was non-teaching employees in the database of Akwa Ibom State University, which stands at 3876 (Akwa Ibom State University, 2022). Out of this number, 1,876 were males while 2,000 were female employees. Their age ranged between 25 and 60 years.

### **Sample and Sampling Techniques**

To determine the exact sample size, Cochran's formula for sample size determination was used ( $n = 350$ ). A total of 365 copies of the questionnaire were distributed and 355 of them were returned after removal of cases with missing values. Thus, 340 employees participated in the study: 47% were males while 52.9% were females. Educationally, 44% were first degree holders, 26% were Higher Diploma holders, 20% were National Diploma holders, while SSCE



and FSLC were 5% and 1% respectively. The study adopted a multi-stage sampling technique using probability and non-probability techniques. Three directorates and four faculties in the University of Uyo were selected using simple random sampling technique, while convenience sampling technique was used to select the actual participants of the study. Inclusion criteria included employees whose age ranged between 25 and 60; participation was also restricted to those who were on full-time jobs and had worked for at least 2 years.

### **Data Collection Procedure**

We obtained ethical approval from the Akwa Ibom State Health Research Ethic Committee, Idongesit Nkanga Secretariat Uyo, Akwa Ibom State, and a letter of introduction from the Department of Psychology, University of Uyo to introduce the research team to the institution and the participants. Participants were informed of the voluntary nature of the research and their decision to participate represented informed consent. They were assured that their responses would be treated with anonymity and confidentiality. Copies of the questionnaire were administered individually in various offices during work hours. After all the data were captured, a sample of 355 participants was realized. After discarding cases with missing values, the final sample consisted of 340 participants, indicating a 93% response rate.

### **Instrumentation**

A structured questionnaire was divided into five sections to gather information on gender, ethnicity, age, marital status, tribe, and religion. To ensure content and construct validity and maintain reliability of the data collection, research scales developed and tested in previous studies were employed. A pilot test of the sample questionnaire was conducted before its final use, involving forty (40) respondents, to ensure the respondents could understand the questions and that data collection would proceed accurately. No significant changes were made following the pilot test. The scales used and justification for their use are elaborately done in the following section.

**The Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES):** This was developed by Schaufeli and Bakker (2003) and adapted for a Nigerian sample by Ugwu (2013). UWES is a 9-item scale designed to measure employees' engagement to their organisation. The scale is rated on a 7-point Likert format ranging from 0 "Never" to 6 "Always". The 9-item version of UWES (UWES-9) measures the three dimensions of work engagement, namely, vigour (VI), dedication, (DE), and absorption (AB), using three items for each dimension (Bakker & Demourouti, 2008). The pilot study revealed a Cronbach's alpha value of 0.89. This lends further credibility to the validity of the UWES-9 scale. Schaufeli and Bakker (2003) revealed a Chronbach's alpha value of 0.76, 0.77 and 0.74 respectively for the three subscales. Sample items include: "At my work, I feel bursting with energy" (VI), "My job inspires me" (DE) and "I am immersed in my work" (AB). The current study utilized a composite score of work engagement, as Schaufeli and Bakker (2003) are of the opinion that a total score may be more valuable in empirical studies due to the high correlations between dimensions.

**Workplace Incivility Scale (WIS)** developed by Cortina et al. (2001) is designed to measure the extent to which employees experienced incivility at work in the past year. It is a 10-item scale rated on a 7-point Likert scale "Never" (1) to (5) "Very Frequently". An example of the item: Addressed you in unprofessional terms, either publicly or privately. Cortina et al. (2001) revealed a Cronbach's alpha value of 0.89. Rahim and Cosby (2016) reported a Cronbach's



alpha of 0.87 for the instrument. The pilot study revealed a Cronbach's alpha of 0.78 and a Guttman split-half reliability coefficient of 0.51, lending further credibility to the WIS-10.

**Emotional Intelligence Competence Scale (EICS)** was developed by Wolmarans and Greeff (2001) and adapted for a Nigerian sample by Essien (2017). EICS is a 37-item scale that measures key factors of emotional intelligence. It is a 7-point Likert format scale ranging from 0 "Never" to 6 "Always". Sample items include: "identifies underlying emotional causes of conflict." Wolmarans and Greeff (2001) obtained a Cronbach's alpha of 0.82, 0.87, 0.78 and 0.83 respectively for the subscales. Using the Nigerian sample, Essien (2017) obtained a Cronbach's alpha of 0.82 (full scale) and 0.76, 0.78, 0.83 and 0.74 respectively for the subscales. The pilot study revealed a Cronbach's alpha of 0.95 (full scale) and 0.93, 0.86 and 0.82 respectively, as well as a Guttman split-half reliability coefficient of 0.92.

**Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ):** This was developed by Bass and Avolio (2004). The MLQ is a 45-item questionnaire designed to measure transformational and transactional leadership on a Likert scale ranging from 1–5, i.e., (1 = Strongly Disagree) to (5 = Strongly Agree). The variability of the MLQ has also been proven on many occasions through test-retest, internal consistency method, and alternative methods. The result of these test-retest styles indicate that components of transformational leadership are reliably measured by the MLQ (Bass & Avolio, 1997). Correlating the MLQ and TLI, Bass and Avolio (1997) obtained a convergent validity of 0.79. This lends further credibility to the validity of MLQ. The pilot study revealed a Cronbach's alpha value of 0.85 and a Guttman split-half coefficient of 0.76. This lends further credibility to the validity of MLQ.

### Method of Data Analysis

Correlation was calculated to determine whether significant relationships existed between the variables and where such relationships existed; the strength and the direction of the relationships were determined. Hierarchical multiple regression was performed to test the hypotheses. Moderated hierarchical regression was performed for transformational leadership style, workplace incivility and emotional intelligence.

### Ethical Issues

Ethical practices and considerations are imperative for any research as these assist researchers in focusing on matters regarding negotiating access to research location, safety of research on the environment, safety of respondents, as well as the suitability of the research, using humans as participants in any study (Saunders et al., 2012). In this study, research participants were briefed before participating in the study. Participants were made to understand their freedom either to participate or withdraw. The practice of anonymity and confidentiality of information was applied at the data collection stage, during data analysis as well as during report writing.



## RESULTS

### Data Presentation and Analysis

The results presented are based on the total number of three hundred and forty (340) participants sampled for the study, which investigated workplace incivility and emotional intelligence as predictors of work engagement: the moderating role of transformational leadership style. The following are the results from the hypotheses tested:

**Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of the Study Participants**

Variable	Frequency	Percent (%)
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	160	47.1
Female	180	52.9
Total	340	100.0
<b>Marital Status</b>		
Single	73	21.5
Married	224	65.9
Divorced	13	3.8
Separated	19	5.6
Missing	11	3.2
Total	340	100.0
<b>Ethnicity</b>		
Ibibio/Annang/Oron	323	95.0
Igbo	4	1.2
Yoruba	8	2.4
Missing	5	1.5
Total	340	100.0
<b>Religion</b>		
Christianity	322	94.7
Islam	2	.6
African Traditional Religion	10	2.9
Missing	6	1.8
Total	340	100.0
<b>Education</b>		
FSLC	5	1.5
SSCE	17	5.0
ND	70	20.6
HND	92	27.1
BSC	151	44.4
Missing	5	1.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>340</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics of the study participants. The result shows that out of the 340 respondents who participated in the study, 47.1% were males while 52.9%





were females. Participants' religious affiliation reveals that over ninety percent (94.7%) were Christians. The marital status of the participants revealed that 65.9% were married, while the rest were either single (21.5%), divorced (3.8%) or separated (5.6%). Eleven participants (3.2%) did not disclose their marital status. The majority of the participants were from the Ibibio/Annang/Oron ethnic group (95%). Educationally, 44.4% were first degree holders, 27.1% were HND holders, 20% had OND, while SSCE and FSLC holders were 5% and 1.5% respectively. The result further indicated that participants' age ranges between 25 and 60 years with an average age of 41 years.

**Table 2 Showing Zero-Order Correlation among the Independent Variables, Gender, Age, and the Dependent Variable**

S/ N	Variable	$\bar{X}$	SD	N	1	2	3	4	5	6
1	Work Engagement	43.23	5.96	34	-					
2	Work Incivility	56.79	6.78	34	.415**	-				
3	Emotional Intelligence	175.9	15.4	34	.462**	.500**	-			
4	Transformational Leadership	143.4	18.6	34	.391**	.400**	.504**	-		
5	Gender	1.53	0.49	34	-.010	.007	.026	-.040	-	
6	Age	41.86	8.00	34	.023	-.015	-.061	.041	-.154**	-

\*\* $p = 0.01$

Table 2 shows the result of zero-order correlation between the independent variables, moderating variable and the dependent variable in the study. The result shows that work engagement reports a significant correlation with workplace incivility ( $r = 0.415$ ,  $p < .01$ ), emotional intelligence ( $r = 0.462$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and transformational leadership style ( $r = 0.391$ ,  $p < .01$ ). On the other hand, work engagement did not report a significant correlation with gender ( $r = -0.010$ ,  $p > .05$ ) and age ( $r = 0.023$ ,  $p > .05$ ).

**Table 3: Multiple Regression Model Showing the Effect of Workplace Incivility and Emotional Intelligence on Work Engagement**

Variable	R	R <sup>2</sup>	Df	F	P	B	T	P
	0.50	0.25	2	58.73	< .001			
			8	4				
Work Incivility						0.246	4.535	< .001
Emotional Intelligence						0.339	6.261	< .001

*Dependent Variable: Work Engagement*

The result shows that workplace incivility and emotional intelligence jointly and significantly predicted work engagement ( $R^2 = 0.258$ ,  $F(2, 337) = 58.734$ ,  $p < .001$ ) accounting for over



25% ( $R^2 = 0.258$ ) variance in work engagement among the study participants. Furthermore, workplace incivility and emotional intelligence independently and significantly predicted work engagement ( $\beta = -0.246$ ;  $t = 4.535$ ;  $p < .001$ ) and ( $\beta = 0.339$ ;  $t = 6.261$ ;  $p < .001$ ) respectively.

Based on the result in Table 3, we went further to conduct a post-hoc analysis using t-test to show the direction of the prediction. The results are shown in Table 4 and 5.

### Post-Hoc Analyses

**Table 4: T-Test Showing the Mean Difference of Work Engagement Across the Levels of Workplace Incivility**

Criterion	Levels of Work Incivility	n	$\bar{X}$	SD	T	Df	P
Work Engagement	Low	71	39.98	8.34	-5.372	338	< .001
	High	269	44.09	4.81			

Table 4 shows that there was a significant mean difference of work engagement across the levels of workplace incivility among the study participants [ $t(338) = 5.372$ ,  $p < .001$ ] indicating that participants with high score in workplace incivility also scored high in work engagement ( $\bar{X} = 44.09$ ,  $SD = 4.81$ ,  $n = 269$ ) and vice-versa.

**Table 5: T-Test Showing the Mean Difference of Work Engagement Across the Levels of Emotional Intelligence**

Criterion	Levels of Emotional Intelligence	n	$\bar{X}$	SD	t	Df	P
Work Engagement	Low	113	41.67	6.59	3.565	338	< .001
	High	227	44.01	5.47			

Table 5 shows that there was a significant mean difference of work engagement across the levels of emotional intelligence among the study participants [ $t(338) = 3.565$ ,  $p < .001$ ] indicating that participants who scored high on emotional intelligence also reported high work engagement ( $\bar{X} = 44.01$ ,  $SD = 5.47$ ,  $n = 227$ ) and vice-versa.



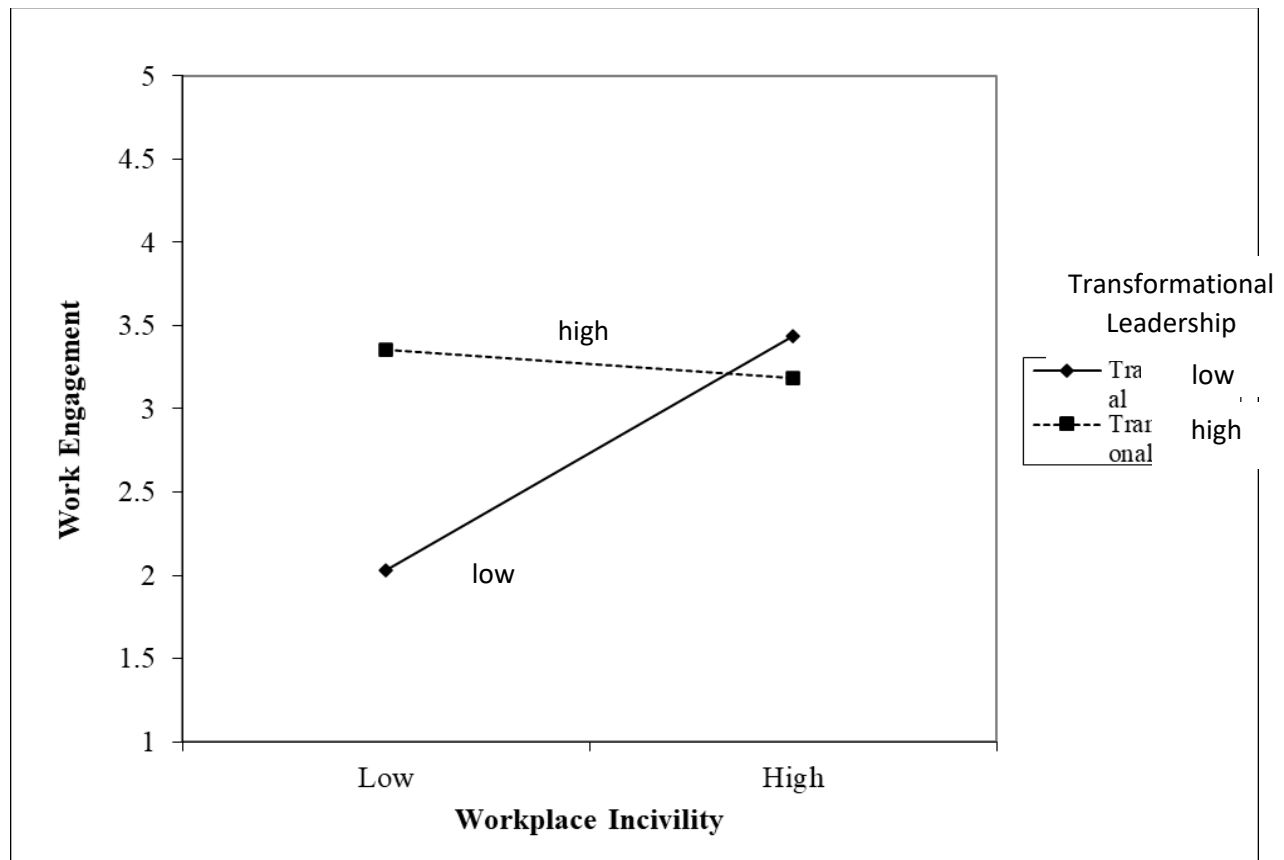
**Table 6: Moderated Regression Model Showing the Moderating Effect of Transformational Leadership Style on the Relationship Between Workplace Incivility and Work Engagement**

	<i>R</i>	<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	<i>Df</i>	<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup> <i>Change</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>P</i>	$\beta$	<i>T</i>	<i>P</i>
<b>Model 1</b>	0.482	0.232	2		50.97	< .001			
Workplace Incivility							0.308	5.912	< .001
Transformational Leadership							0.267	5.133	< .001
<b>Model 2</b>	0.517	0.267	3	0.035	40.79	< .001			
Work Incivility							0.388	7.084	< .001
Transformational Leadership							0.573	6.226	< .001
Transformational Leadership x Workplace Incivility							-	-3.989	< .001
							0.393		

*Dependent Variable: Work Engagement*

Table 6 shows the result of the Moderated Regression Model regarding the moderating effect of transformational leadership style on the relationship between workplace incivility and work engagement. In Model 1, two variables were entered: workplace incivility and transformational leadership (Aiken & West, 1991). They accounted for a significant variance (23.2%) in work engagement ( $R^2 = 0.482$ ,  $F(2, 337) = 50.97$ ,  $p < .001$ ).

In Model 2, an interaction term was created between workplace incivility and transformational leadership and entered in the model with a significant improvement of the model ( $R^2\Delta = 0.035$ ) by 3.5%. Although the model was significant, it reduced the F-statistic ( $R = 0.517$ ,  $R^2 = 0.267$ ,  $F(3, 337) = 40.79$ ,  $p < .001$ ). The result further revealed that the interaction term was significant ( $\beta = -0.393$ ,  $t = -0.3989$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Therefore, the moderating hypothesis is supported (Cohen & Cohen, 1983; Baron & Kenny, 1986). This implies that transformational leadership style moderated the positive relationship between workplace incivility and work engagement among the study participants. A graphical representation below further confirms the result. Therefore, Hypothesis 3 is confirmed.



**Figure 1:** Showing the Interaction Effect of Transformational Leadership Style on the Relationship Between Workplace Incivility and Work Engagement.

The slope analysis is presented in Figure 1 to better understand the moderating effect. As indicated in Figure 1, the line is much steeper for low transformational leadership style. This shows that under low transformational leadership style, the impact of workplace incivility on work engagement is much stronger in comparison to high transformational leadership. However, under high transformational leadership style, the line is flatter, indicating that under high transformational leadership style, the increase in workplace incivility does not lead to similar change in work engagement. In fact, at a point, further increase in workplace incivility leads to a decrease in work engagement. Therefore, leadership style weakens the positive relationship between workplace incivility and work engagement. In this study, transformational leadership style positively moderated the relationship between workplace incivility and work engagement. This means that transformational leadership style weakens the earlier positive relationship between workplace incivility and work engagement. What this means is that under high and low transformational leadership style, an increase in workplace incivility leads to a corresponding increase in work engagement, but, at a point, both high and low transformational leadership intersect at the same level of workplace incivility and work engagement. This means that irrespective of the level of transformational leadership, work engagement remains the same even as workplace incivility keeps increasing. But at a point under high level of transformational leadership, a further increase in workplace incivility leads to a decrease in work engagement.



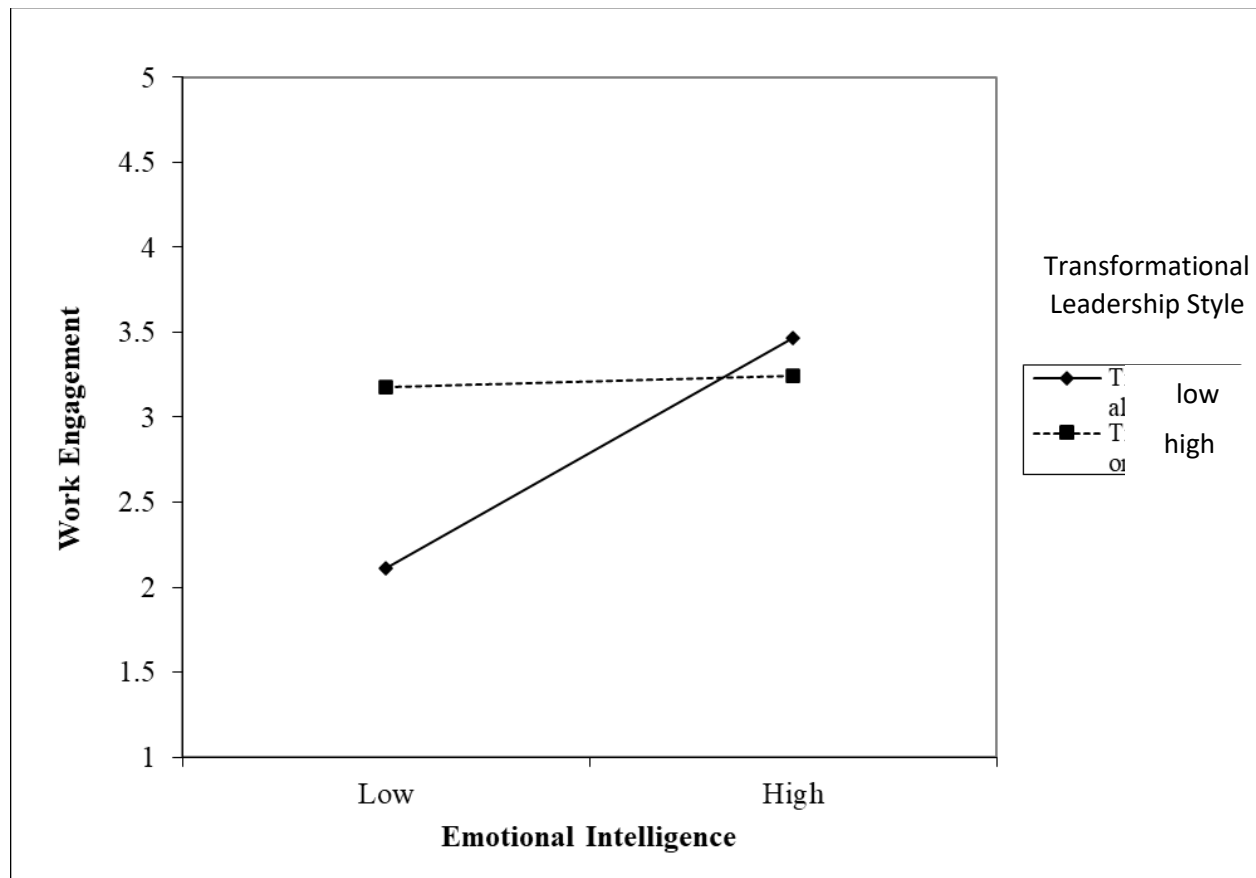
**Table 7: Moderated Regression Model Showing the Moderating Effect of Transformational Leadership Style on the Relationship Between Emotional Intelligence and Work Engagement**

	<i>R</i>	<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	<i>Df</i>	<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup> <i>Change</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>P</i>	<i>β</i>	<i>T</i>	<i>P</i>
<b>Model 1</b>	0.497	0.247	2		55.189	< .001			
Emotional Intelligence							0.355	6.488	< .001
Leadership							0.212	3.872	< .001
<b>Model 2</b>	0.520	0.270	3	0.024	41.488	< .001			
Emotional Intelligence							0.382	7.001	< .001
Leadership							0.483	4.910	< .001
Leadership x Emotional Intelligence							-	-3.295	< .001
							0.324		

*Dependent Variable: Work Engagement*

Table 7 shows the result of the Moderated Regression Model on the moderating effect of transformational leadership style in the relationship between emotional intelligence and work engagement. In Model 1, emotional intelligence and transformational leadership style were entered (Aiken & West, 1991) to test the main and direct effect on the exogenous variable. They accounted for a significant variance (24.7%) in work engagement ( $R^2 = 0.497$ ,  $F(2, 337) = 55.189$ ,  $p < .001$ ).

In Model 2, an interaction term was created between emotional intelligence and transformational leadership through the centering method and entered in the model. The inclusion of the interaction term significantly improved the model ( $R^2\Delta = 0.024$ ) by 2.4%, however with a reduced F-statistic ( $R = 0.517$ ,  $R^2 = 0.267$ ,  $F(3, 337) = 40.79$ ,  $p < .001$ ). The result further revealed that the interaction term was significant ( $\beta = 0.324$ ,  $t = 0.3295$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Therefore, the moderating hypothesis was supported (Cohen & Cohen, 1983; Baron & Kenny, 1986). This implies that transformational leadership style moderated the relationship between emotional intelligence and work engagement among the study participants. A graphical representation below further confirms the result.



**Figure 2:** Showing the Interaction Effect of Transformational Leadership Style on the Relationship Between Emotional Intelligence and Work Engagement.

The slope analysis is presented in Figure 2 to further explain the moderating effect. As shown in Figure 2, the line is steeper for low transformational leadership style than high transformational leadership style. This shows that under low transformational leadership style, the impact of emotional intelligence on work engagement is stronger compared to high transformational leadership style. On the other hand, under high transformational leadership, the line is flatter, indicating a less or no impact under this leadership style. This means that an increase in emotional intelligence does not lead to similar change in work engagement as it does under low transformational leadership. Therefore, leadership style weakens the positive relationship between emotional intelligence and work engagement.



## DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

This study explored workplace incivility and emotional intelligence as predictors of work engagement while examining the moderating role of transformational leadership style. The findings revealed that workplace incivility positively and significantly predicted work engagement, a result that diverges from established literature. Additionally, emotional intelligence emerged as a significant predictor, with individuals possessing higher emotional intelligence, demonstrating increased engagement. The moderating influence of transformational leadership style was also significant, buffering the impact of workplace incivility and amplifying the positive effects of emotional intelligence on work engagement.

The findings regarding workplace incivility and work engagement challenge existing narratives. Contrary to previous studies, such as Mahmood et al. (2023), Moon and Morais (2022), and Ko and Choi (2022), which highlight the detrimental effects of workplace incivility on employee outcomes, this study found a positive relationship between incivility and work engagement. Workplace incivility, often characterised by disrespectful behaviours and condescension, is typically linked to reduced psychological safety, lower motivation, and diminished engagement. However, in this study, individuals who reported higher levels of incivility also demonstrated greater work engagement.

This unexpected finding could reflect the influence of contextual factors. Protective mechanisms, such as resilience, hardiness, or strong organisational policies, may buffer the adverse effects of incivility. Additionally, cultural factors unique to Nigeria may play a role. In many regions, workplace incivility might be perceived as a normative aspect of daily interactions rather than a significant deviant behaviour. Research works in countries such as Canada, India, China, Singapore, and Malaysia (Loh & Loi, 2018; Chen et al., 2018; Hyun et al., 2018; Ho & Tan, 2018; Dahri & Harmid, 2018) have shown that perceptions of workplace behaviours vary significantly across cultures. For Nigerian employees, such normalisation of incivility could mitigate its potential harm, reframing it as a challenge to be navigated rather than a barrier to engagement. These findings hold significant implications for organisations. The subtle nature of incivility may allow it to persist unaddressed, fostering an environment where such behaviours become the norm. Organisations must establish clear behavioural codes of conduct and mechanisms to address incivility. Furthermore, fostering a culture of respect and accountability could counteract the pervasive effects of incivility. Future studies could extend these findings by examining cross-cultural variations and the role of organisational policies in shaping responses to incivility.

The second objective of this study was to examine the impact of emotional intelligence on work engagement. The results revealed a positive and significant relationship, indicating that individuals with higher emotional intelligence reported elevated levels of engagement. Emotional intelligence, encompassing the ability to understand, manage, and empathise with others' emotions, fosters a collaborative and supportive work environment. These findings align with the work of Nidhi and Harminster (2024), who highlighted the resilience and adaptability of emotionally intelligent employees in maintaining enthusiasm and dedication despite challenges. Similarly, Sali and Yulita (2018) found that such employees exhibit confidence and calmness, enhancing their engagement levels. However, the findings contrast with Yan et al. (2018), who argued that dimensions of emotional intelligence and work engagement do not uniformly align. While social awareness and self-management were linked to physical engagement, self-awareness emerged as a key driver of cognitive engagement.



Despite these nuances, this study reinforces the integral role of emotional intelligence in fostering work engagement. Employees with high emotional intelligence are better equipped to manage workplace challenges, maintain motivation, and contribute to a positive organisational climate.

In addition to the direct effects of workplace incivility and emotional intelligence, the study examined transformational leadership as a moderator. The findings revealed that transformational leadership significantly moderated the relationships between workplace incivility, emotional intelligence, and work engagement. Under high transformational leadership, the negative impact of incivility on work engagement was mitigated, and the positive relationship between emotional intelligence and engagement was strengthened.

Transformational leadership, characterised by inspiring and motivating employees, fostering trust, and creating a shared vision, serves as a stabilising force in challenging work environments. Qi et al. (2020) emphasised the ability of transformational leaders to counteract the negative effects of incivility, promoting belonging and commitment among employees. These leaders also recognise and leverage the strengths of emotionally intelligent employees, further enhancing engagement levels.

## CONCLUSION

It was concluded that workplace incivility and emotional intelligence are significant predictors of work engagement, with transformational leadership style moderating these relationships. Despite the prevailing literature associating workplace incivility with negative outcomes, this study revealed that incivility positively predicted work engagement. This suggests that contextual factors, such as cultural norms or personal resilience, may mitigate its adverse effects, highlighting the need for organisations to understand how incivility manifests and is perceived within their unique environments.

Similarly, emotional intelligence was identified as a significant positive predictor of work engagement. Employees with higher emotional intelligence demonstrated greater resilience, adaptability, and collaboration, enabling them to stay highly engaged despite workplace challenges. This finding emphasises the importance of fostering emotional intelligence among employees to enhance engagement and overall organisational performance. The moderating role of transformational leadership was particularly significant in buffering the adverse effects of workplace incivility and amplifying the positive impact of emotional intelligence on work engagement. Transformational leadership was found to inspire and motivate employees, foster a culture of respect and inclusion, and strengthen the link between emotional intelligence and work engagement.





## RECOMMENDATIONS

This study has implications for employees as well as organisations. It is recommended that employees who experienced severe workplace incivility should be made aware of its potential effect so that they can seek support at home as well as at work. From an organisational perspective, positive organisational policies, such as code of conduct, should be an imperative for organisations in order to provide guidelines and rules to regulate the behaviour of its members.

Furthermore, it is recommended that in order to leverage the organisational benefits associated with high levels of work engagement, organisations should therefore incorporate emotional intelligence development programs into organisational training and development initiatives through workshops and seminars in order to promote work engagement. Also, it is recommended that in order to leverage organisational benefits associated with a high level of work engagement, leaders need to understand where they exist on this scale. This understanding is critical to the development of leadership development plans aimed at enhancing high transformational leadership behaviours that have been shown to be beneficial to higher levels of work engagement in this study as well as others (Koxjanic et al., 2013).

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