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Exploring the Nexus between Transformative Leadership and Employee Empowerment: A Grounded Theory Study of the UAE Banking Sector.

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ABSTRACT

The research article investigates the impact of transformative leadership on employee empowerment, engagement, and retention among Emirati professionals employed in the UAE banking sector through a grounded theory study. The researchers employed a semi-structured interview guide and conducted 12 in-depth interviews with Emirati banking employees. The collected qualitative data were further analyzed through grounded theory coding (open, axial, and selective) to derive a core theme of effective leadership and its subthemes: organizational well-being, social connectedness, and cultural pragmatism. The results indicate that trust-driven empathetic leadership boosts innovation, inclusion, and employee engagement by providing mentorship and bias training. Nevertheless, the general issues (poor career mobility, management biases, and transparency) also increase the turnover, and banks are frequently seen as short-term learning organizations. This paper puts emphasis on the need to match leadership practices with the local ideas of socio-cultural values, but in a way that does not undermine global standards. It provides theoretical value in the contextualization of leadership within a non-Western environment, and a practical implication in advising on open career systems, reduction of bias, and strategically employing Emirati talent. By embedding empowerment through equitable policies and social inclusivity, UAE banks can transition into employers of choice, aligning with national visions for sustainable economic growth.

Keywords: Transformative leadership, employee empowerment, grounded theory, UAE banking sector, Emiratization, organizational well-being.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Structural and cultural accommodations of the banking sector of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) in the past two decades were caused by the rapid changes of economic diversification, the digitisation of the financial sector, and the national

program that aimed to make Emiratis more contributing to the labour force (Albooshi & Robani, 2024; Rahman & Said, 2015). In this dynamic environment, leadership has become a key factor in the evaluation of organisational performance, employee motivation, and retention in the long run (Awamleh et al., 2005; Cherian & Farouq, 2013). With Emirati professionals taking up managerial and technical roles that were largely dominated by expatriates, vital questions emerge about the level of empowerment, engagement, and commitment to their careers as a result of their leadership styles, which have become core questions in modern organisational development literature (Elamin, 2011).

Although enormous investment is made in the Emiratisation programmes, the effectiveness of the talent-development strategies is still undermined by some unchangeable problems, such as slow career advancement, alleged management bias, and vague promotion channels (Khassawneh & Abaker, 2022; Tee & Li, 2022). These challenges point to the fact that leadership phenomena should be analysed with the help of culturally grounded and context-specific frameworks instead of applying the Western-centric leadership paradigms.

The theoretical perspective based on transformative leadership, which focuses on empowerment, individualized attention, and visionary leadership, can be a fruitful approach to analyzing the interactions between leaders and followers in the Emirati one (Afriani, 2025; Magasi, 2021). Yet, although this approach has a universal context, there is a lack of empirical studies on its manifestation in non-Western, multicultural organizational cultures of banks in the UAE. Additionally, the literature is largely positivist or survey-based, which does not effectively represent the lived experience of the Emirati employees in a complex manner. Since leadership behaviors are complexly interrelated with socio-cultural norms, national identity, and organizational expectations, there is an urgent need to conduct qualitative research that does not focus directly on hard facts but on obscure meanings and relationships that can be identified in employees' stories.

According to the existing academic literature, no previous grounded theory study has expressly analyzed transformative leadership in the Emirati banking situation. The current literature is mostly dominated by quantitative methods and Western-centric views. These studies do not provide much understanding of the lived experiences of Emirati professionals. Another thought that they fail to consider is the impacts of local cultural and institutional dynamics. This research paper fills this gap by taking a grounded theory approach. The research explicitly uses Constructivist Grounded Theory (CGT) as the inductive theory to theorize the effect of transformative leadership on the empowerment, engagement, and retention of Emirati banking professionals.

In spite of strong national investment in Emiratization and leadership development, a high turnover rate among Emirati employees remains common in most banks in the UAE, where Emirati employees often feel that their positions are not stable or permanent. The evidence available indicates that, even with enhanced practices in leadership, the lack of integration in career-development policies, attitudes towards management, and the lack of proper empowerment processes are obstacles to long-term commitment. In spite of the fact that transformative leadership can enhance motivation and construct a meaningful developmental pathway, little has been done to explore its application within the Emirati-controlled managerial system. The lack of localized understanding of whether and how transformative leadership enables or constrains empowerment in the culturally hybridized environment of Emirati banking organizations is the primary concern, therefore.

How do Emirati employees construct their transformative leadership experiences, and in what ways does transformative leadership influence their psychological empowerment, workplace engagement, and retention within the UAE banking sector?

There are both theoretical and practical implications of the present research. Theoretically, it is based on the leadership literature by situating transformative leadership in a non-Western setting with expatriates, and is hence concerned with the old-age criticism of leadership theories on Western domination. The research yields an empirically motivated, culturally heterogeneous data utilizing Constructivist Grounded Theory that advances the prior little knowledge on the issue of leadership relationships in the Gulf Cooperation Council cultures. It is also relevant to modern discussions of employee empowerment since it shows how the process of employee empowerment is socially constructed, not in the manner in which employees are empowered by managers.

In practice, the results can serve the strategic purposes of banking organizations aiming to better retain Emirati employees, build inclusive workplaces, and improve internal leadership channels. Through defining the particular leadership practices, including empathetic communication, developmental mentoring, clear evaluation systems, and joint decision-making, the work provides the organisations with practical models on how to match the managerial behaviour and the national human-capital priorities. Also, the study contributes to the understanding of institutional barriers, such as the perceived bias, lack of transparent career progression, and unreliable quality of leadership, thus allowing institutions to develop evidence-based interventions that facilitate the sustainability of Emirati participation in the workforce. This way, the research is consistent with the overarching goal of organisational excellence and national competitiveness as the UAE aims to develop economically and socially, making leadership and empowerment crucial contributors to the enhancement of organisational operations and performance.

1. LITERATURE REVIEW

The theoretical bases of transformational leadership are grounded in the works of several researchers, who distinguished between transformational and transactional leadership by the future projection of both followers and leaders towards increased motivation and morality (Ahmed & Simha, 2023; Burns, 2004; Kehr et al., 2023). An improved model that creates a four-dimensional model, including idealised influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualised consideration (Bass & Avolio, 1994; Deinert et al., 2015). Empirical studies and other meta-analysis findings have supported strong links between the transformational leadership constructs and group performance outcomes (follower satisfaction, organisational commitment, and performance) (Deng et al., 2023; Hilton et al., 2021). These constructs and outcomes of other attributes like performance (including organisational performance, follower satisfaction, and customer satisfaction), thus proving the validity of transformational leadership as a proven paradigm that could be applied in various cultural settings (Bass, 1997; Madi Odeh et al., 2023).

In the banking industry in the UAE, studies found a strong correlation between transformational leadership and job satisfaction among the employees (Awamleh et al., 2005; Lauritzen et al., 2022; Piccolo & Colquitt, 2006; Wang et al., 2025). More recently, Alblooshi and colleagues (2024) revealed that, in the context of Islamic banks, transformational

leadership has a significant effect on organisational performance and on the knowledge-management practices. Such empirical results support the explanatory strength of transformational leadership in the unique banking environment of the UAE, where digital transformation and competition will provide innovation and knowledge development with premium value.

Government-driven Emiratisation, as expressed in the UAE Vision 2031, guides the formation of the institutional environment of the UAE banking sector (Alwari, 2024; Areepattamannil, 2024). This requires a systematic progression of Emirati nationals in the priority areas, and banking is one of them (Al-Ali, 2008; Baycar, 2022). In turn, banks have established formalized leadership programs such as the Emirati Development Programme of Dubai Islamic Bank and Sharjah Islamic Bank, which, in turn, entail technical training coupled with mentorship (Albooshi & Robani, 2024; Aldabbas & Alzoukani, 2025). Gender inclusion initiatives, including TAMKEEN of ADIB, portray an increasing awareness of different views (Al Fardan & Marochi, 2021; Arman, 2023; Bank, 2015).

Systemic issues include skills incompatibilities, high turnover, and poor talent integration, which are affected by the ownership of banks and their stakeholder interactions (Alblooshi & Robani, 2024; Aldhaheri & Ahmad, 2024; Qambar, 2015). These processes help to make banks act as transitional learning grounds rather than permanent employment grounds and thus capture the conflict between developmental investments and the shadowed career routes. The implication of transformational leadership can be reduced when workers feel there is little progress to be made, even with good management, showing the need to adjust interpersonal practices to organisational systems that dictate advancement to achieve genuine empowerment.

The concept of Emiratization is advancing through transformational leadership in the context of an organization, as it puts into action its core dimensions. Under its idealized dimension, leaders enhance the trust level and national commitment; and, through inspirational motivation, they align organizational goals with that of the broader national interest of the UAE (Kariuki, 2021). Another core dimension, intellectual stimulation, drives consistent learning, innovation in all areas, and the development of skills in Emirati employees for career growth (Khan et al., 2025). As a result, Emiratization gains an entirely new dimension that makes it a policy directive and a tangible result of the effective transformational leadership, as the empowered Emirati professionals become the organization's contributors in the performance and national sustainable development.

The theory that best describes this conceptualization is the transformative leadership theory, which contributes to employee empowerment, engagement, and retention in the UAE banking industry. (Karakitapoğlu-Aygün & Gumusluoglu, 2013). The conceptual dimensions of the theory, such as idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration (Seitz & Owens, 2021; Stewart, 2006; Walumbwa & Hartnell, 2011), are consistent with the themes of the study that were identified, i.e., organizational well-being, social connectedness, and cultural pragmatism. It is an excellent way of capturing the role that leaders play as change agents, fostering trust, promoting innovation, and professional development among Emirati employees.

Furthermore, the theory can be adapted to non-Western situations, and the research can investigate the ways in which socio-cultural values determine leadership practices and employee experiences (Yaghi, 2017). Using this theoretical

prism, the study not only describes how empowerment can be achieved, but it also shows the structural and cultural barriers that can hamper the success of empowerment, and transformational leadership is a relevant and holistic framework that can be used to reach both theoretical and practical goals.

The prevalence of quantitative research approaches in the literature of research beckons the qualitative approaches, such as grounded theory, to unearth the lived experiences and contextual dynamics. The present research work addresses this gap by considering the way that transformative leadership improves empowerment within any Emirati banking professional population, where sub-themes, including systemic challenges, cultural pragmatism, social connectedness, and organisational well-being, can be found. These findings complement our information on the ways in which the tenets of transformational leadership adjust in the given context and provide a feasible recommendation to leverage the Emirati talent as a source of competitive advantage.

2. METHODOLOGY

In this section, a detailed description is made of the research design and methodology on which the study under research was positioned, to determine the experiences of Emirati employees working in the banking sector in the United Arab Emirates. The study was justified by the constructivist paradigm with the assumption that individuals construct their worlds based on what they experience and what they work with in social regimes. To correspond to such a world view and to immerse in the subjectivity, a qualitative research design via Constructivist Grounded Theory (CGT) was vigorously implemented (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Makri & Neely, 2021; Malik et al., 2024; Malik et al., 2020). This helped induce an inductive as well as an abductive investigation of the complex social and psychological procedures behind turnover, empowerment, and engagement with the ultimate goal of producing a substantive theory with a strong foundation over and above the empirical data gathered by the participants themselves (Charmaz, 2016, 2020).

2.1. Constructivist Grounded Theory

Spanning and grounded in the Constructivist Grounded Theory approach, the research strategy was based on and developed from this premise (Charmaz, 2014). This methodological approach aims to construct theoretical interpretations of social processes through inductive study of the phenomenon in its context, as opposed to either testing a set of pre-existing hypotheses (Charmaz & Thornberg, 2021). The principles of its strength are that its data collection and data analysis processes are systematic yet flexible, taking place simultaneously in a chain cycle (Morse et al., 2016). The constructivist variant was especially relevant to this question as it directly admits the influence of the researcher in the co-construction of knowledge with the other participants.

It opposes the idea of a passive, detached observer to a reflexive position of a researcher whose interpretations, which are conditioned by his or her own background and experience of dealing with the data in question, are part of the analytic process (Walker & Myrick, 2006). The purpose is not to discover only objective reality, but rather to lay a plausible, insightful, and practical theoretical explanation of the observed phenomenon- the forces at play in the experience of Emirati professionals in their workplace and their career paths.

The essential part of this process consisted of the application of abductive reasoning. Abduction encompasses the back-and-forth successive process of moving empirical observations and theoretical conjectures with the aim of coming up with the most probable explanation of emerging patterns in the observations. During the research, the first impressions of data gathered during interviews generated theories that were systematically verified, refined, and confirmed by the additional data gathering and hypothetical analysis. It is through this constant comparative approach, which is a vital part of grounded theory, that the emerging theory was closely related and saturated by the realities that were articulated by the participants, and as such ensured that the abstract concepts were rooted in the concrete experience of the participants.

2.2. Sampling Procedures and Participants

The researcher selected Emirati nationals only working in the professional or managerial field of commercial and retail banking activities in the United Arab Emirates. The strategy of sampling was purposive sampling, which aims to select and recruit information-rich cases- people who might be able to offer profound and contextual information about the fundamental research subthemes: turnover intention, psychological empowerment, and work engagement (Ahmad & Wilkins, 2025; Miani et al., 2023). Theoretical sampling was used in subsequent recruitment as the analysis continued (Foley et al., 2021). This is an important principle of grounded theory that presupposes a tactical decision of new participants according to the conceptual requirement of the developing theory in an effort to elaborate, refine, or challenge the properties of new emerging categories. For instance, following the initial interviews that stated the critical role of relationships between leaders and employees in particular, the next participants were to be invited who might offer the opposite experience of the highly supportive and more difficult managerial relationships, and enhance the comprehension of that type.

Professional networks and snowball referrals were used to conduct the recruitment, as this helped to access a relevant and engaged pool of participants. A comprehensive information sheet, including the purpose, the procedures, the risks, the benefits, and the ethical measures involved in the study, was given to all potential subjects. Each interview was preceded by informed consent written down. Recurrent collection of data was done until theoretical saturation was reached. Saturation is the stage at which the addition of more data does not provide any new theoretical knowledge and properties of the underlying categories of concepts, and the relations among categories have become solid and confirmed.

2.3. Data Collection Process

The data collection technique was semi-structured, in-depth interviews (Adeoye-Olatunde & Olenik, 2021; Mahat-Shamir et al., 2021). In such a way, the pre-established research interests were explored in a focused way, whereas the necessary flexibility was afforded to explore the emerging ideas freely, pursue unique storylines of participants, and delve into nuances (F. Malik et al., 2021). A semi-structured interview guide constructed with open-ended questions under the key domains of experience related to organisational leadership and management style; the experience of

career development, progression, and mentorship; the quality of daily workplace experience concerning co-workers and employers; the subjective responses to what drives them to commitment to an organisation, or even contemplates turning over (Metelski et al., 2021). Whenever asking questions, it was always necessary to use prompts that could help in obtaining rich and concrete, storied examples, and not generalised opinions.

The face-to-face interviews took place at a confidential place or through a secure video-conferencing program, depending on the choice and convenience of the participant. The duration of every interview was 45-90 minutes. All interviews were audio taped with the express and written consent of the respective participants so as to get the dialogue correctly recorded. Field notes were also taken in brief during and shortly after every interview to jot down first impressions of analysis, context, and reflexive thoughts of the researcher, which were subsequently incorporated into the memo-writing process.

2.4. Data Analysis Strategy

The analysis followed the steps of the rigorous and iterative processes of Constructivist Grounded Theory, including three main coding stages: description, followed by abstraction. This was done using both manual coding systems and spreadsheet applications, which helped organize and compare all codes and categories (Malik et al., 2021). The initial coding, known as open coding, involved transcribing interviews verbatim, providing text-rich data for review (Metelski et al., 2021). This stage included a line-by-line, incident-by-incident analysis of the transcripts, generating short, action-oriented codes that summarized each data segment. For example, codes included seeking self-growth beyond role, feeling stereotyped by non-national peers, or feeling trusted by a manager. Constant comparison was employed from the start, where each new data element and code was compared with previous data and codes to identify similarities, differences, and patterns.

After initial coding, focused coding was done, which aimed at synthesizing the most meaningful and common initial codes into broader and more conceptual categories (Lindqvist & Forsberg, 2023). This step is also referred to as axial coding; it entailed joining the two categories to understand their relationships to each other. The information was questioned to comprehend facts that led to the occurrence of a phenomenon, the setting it was ingrained within, the methods of interaction utilized by individuals to deal with a given phenomenon, and the effects of that interaction (Malik et al., 2023; D. Mohajan & Mohajan, 2022). As an illustration, many of the early codes associated with managerial support, the clarity of the expectation, the mutual trust, and the relational direction were combined and promoted to the tentative category named Manager-Follower Alignment. These group relationships between data were repeatedly re-evaluated to measure the fitness and strength of such group relationships.

The theoretical coding or selective coding was the final step of analysis. This also included combining and improving the substantial categories to build a central category, a core phenomenon that explains a large amount of variation in the data. By further abductive comparison and intensive theoretical memo-writing (the notes featured in which the researcher would be documenting his or her conceptualizations and choices), the leading category of Effective Leadership as a Catalyst for Co-constructed Organizational Well-being was determined. The key category was able to subsume and rationally interrelate the large categories of Manager-Follower Alignment, Professional Cohesion, and

Congenial Work Environment, resulting in a parsimonious but holistic theoretical story that is valuable in explaining the interaction of these factors to determine the experiences of empowerment and engagement and turnover decision among Emirati workers.

Table 1: Themes and Categories after Data Analysis

Theme	Category	Sub-Category	Respondents' Comments
Effective Leadership	**Management or Leadership as Change Agents**	1. Emirati managers proved themselves to be good leaders	1. "Our local Emirati Managers guide us clearly and take prompt decisions." 2. "They always try to encourage us in challenging situations and usually lead from the front."
		2. Leaders or managers empower their subordinates	1. "My immediate boss provides me with the opportunity to express freely and take bold decisions in the respective area." 2. "We act proactively due to the encouragement of our supervisors to take the initiative."
		3. Management creates employee well-being	1. "The managers promote healthy work-life balance and always motivate in difficult times." 2. "Management genuinely cares about our comfort and mental health."
	Leadership Creates Organizational Well-Being	1. Professional development	1. "We receive regular training to upgrade our skills." 2. "The company invests in courses and workshops for growth."
		2. Management encourages open feedback	1. "They listen to the problems of employees openly." 2. "Ideas from employees are welcomed; everyone's opinion is respected."
		3. Management appreciates employees' performance	1. "Hard work is recognized through rewards." 2. "Reward and timely recognition motivate us to perform better."
Management Attitude		1. Employees are in search of good opportunities	1. "Human beings are searching for a better life, and thus they switch to find better career growth."

Towards Expatriates			2. “Expatriates look for a stable job and development elsewhere.”
		2. The management attitude towards foreigners is unprofessional	1. “Sometimes we (expatriates) feel discriminated during duties as compared to locals.” 2. “The expatriate staff don’t get the same respect and motivation in the banking sector.”
		3. Organizations lack career development strategies	• “Promotions for the expatriates are rare and unclear.” 2. “No structured career progression plans exist.”
Social Connectedness	**Social Engagement & Inclusiveness**	1. Social engagement and inclusiveness	1. “We usually arrange team-building social events to help us connect.” 2. “The environment feels like a community.”
		2. Employees and management are socially connected	1. “The communications from managers are regular, formal, and informal.” 2. “We openly and freely interact with management and share ideas for growth and development without any hesitation.”

2.5. Methodological Rigor and Trustworthiness

To achieve rigor, credibility, and trustworthiness of the study, which aligns with the concepts of validity and reliability in quantitative research, several strategic criteria were considered. Prolonged interaction with the data and member checking increased credibility, which is considered to be the confidence in the truth of the findings. The interpreted findings were provided to a group of participants in summary form to ensure that the resonance and accuracy of the representations were valid in order to ensure that the theory constructed was also true to their experiences. Dependability, similar to reliability, was also solved through a very elaborate audit trail. This trail contained all uncooked data (anonymized transcripts), dated analytic memos, and documentation of coding decisions, where the logical tracing of the process of research and the formation of a conclusion is possible.

The degree of the confirmability, i.e., whether the result is influenced by the respondent rather than by the researcher's bias, was sought via practiced reflexivity (Jamieson et al., 2023; Karcher et al., 2024). The researcher kept a reflective journal to observe the reflexivity of the researcher and assumptions and/or potential impact on the research process, critically, and make conclusions resting squarely on the data (Wilson et al., 2022). Finally, the transferability, instead of

the statistical one, was aided through a thick description of the research context, the profiles of the participants, and the processes of research (Drisko, 2025; Maxwell, 2021). This extensive description can allow the reader to make effective conclusions regarding whether the results can be transferable to other similar environments or populations.

2.6. Ethical Considerations

The research was carried out by following the internationally stipulated rules of conducting research related to human subjects (Taquette & Borges da Matta Souza, 2022). The consent of the institutional review board concerned was obtained before any data collection processes could be performed (Laryeafio & Ogbewe, 2023). The informed consent principle was dominant; all the information was given to the individuals, and they signed a written consent that they were participating voluntarily and had the absolute right to pull out any time they wished without any repercussions. The ethics of confidentiality and anonymity were strictly observed (Josephson & Smale, 2021). All the data were anonymized, and pseudonyms are applied to all information on the reports on the results, and any other details that may reveal the subject are carefully eliminated in transcripts and publications (Mirza et al., 2023). Password-protected and encrypted storage of electronic data files is conducted. Lastly, the research design was going to have minimal harm (Cacciamani et al., 2024). The interview questions were worded respectfully, the participants were informed of their right to leave any question alone, and information was administered to the respondents to assist them should the discussion raise any unexpected distress.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The grounded theory model is onion-like and layered as it outlines the interdependent and dynamic processes through which employees create the meaning of organizational well-being in the workplace. Inductively constructed based on the stories of the participants and polished in several stages of coding, memoing, and constant comparison, the model illustrates the progressive richness of the organizational experiences as the employees shift from surface-based interactions to more complex psychological readings (H. K. Mohajan & Mohajan, 2023). The way it is constructed (circles leading to a core) is a representation of the gradual development of meaning, where one layer on top of another is created and leads to the ultimate construction of an inner core, which is the growing category, Organizational Well-Being. Such an arrangement corresponds to the Constructivist Grounded Theory (CGT) that anticipates a mutually constructed nature of sense between a researcher and her participants and recognizes that the organizational social realities are not given but are always influenced by relations, interpretations, and interactions.

3.1. Outer Level: Manager-follower fit.

The top layer of the model represents Manager-Follower Alignment, a concept based on respondents' repeated focus on the trust, clarity, help, and emotional support they receive from managers and leaders. Respondents regularly described their managers as decisive, approachable, and supportive of employee autonomy, especially among Emirati leaders. According to CGT, these accounts do not reflect objective evaluations of leadership behavior but instead represent the meanings employees construct, influenced by their cultural and organizational contexts and lived

experiences. This closely relates to Transformational Leadership Theory, particularly its aspects of individualized consideration and inspirational motivation (Allix, 2000; Reza, 2019; Stewart, 2006).

The findings of the study, like employee empowerment, trust-based delegation, and autonomy at the workplace, are congruent with the transformative leadership theory. The respondents narrated that their managers are supportive and have provided a conducive environment at the workplace that is well aligned with inspirational motivation and individualized consideration, as both are components of the transformative leadership theory. Besides this, managers encourage independent thinking of the employees and reward them for proactive problem-solving initiatives, which is consistent wth the intellectual stimulation characteristic of the theory. Consequently, these behaviours of managers lead to employee motivation, strong commitment, and improved performance in the organization.

The Manager-Follower Alignment is defined as the first layer in the grounded theory since it is the most obvious and often mentioned type of organizational life. It defines the base on which employees develop further meanings of their workplace. The outer layer might not seem to be so deep at first, but still, the fact that it is located at the core reveals the ideas of how it is on the conceptual level, being among the primary social processes that make possible further experience within the organization. There will be no alignment, therefore, no cohesion; no cohesion, therefore, no encouraging atmosphere. Accordingly, this layer serves as the point of intervention in the life of employees.

3.2. Second Level: Cohesion at the Professional Level.

The second level, Professional Cohesion, represents a result of frequent references by the participants to teamwork, unity, inclusiveness, and values. The main code grouped under this category of concept includes the codes of team support, collective problem-solving, mutual respect, and workplace unity, which were formed through the process of constant comparison of codes involved in the fieldwork of this study, which is achieved through grounded theory. This level reflects the group aspect of organizational life, as the relationships cease to be tied to individual relationships with the managers but are instead perceived in the broader framework of team relationships and organizational relationships.

Professional Cohesion may be viewed through the prism of three theories (Social Identity Theory and Relational Coordination Theory), which highlight the significance of shared norms, collective identity, and communication in developing harmonious workplace relations. Respondents emphasized the role of team-building activities, open communication, and informal communication as they created a feeling of belonging that further enhanced their organizational identification. According to a constructivist standpoint, cohesion is not a naturally created event but a co-created reality taking place in everyday life and through everyday experiences. Employee definition of teamwork and unity depends not only on the structures of the organization but also on culture, power, and historical experiences at the workplace.

Grounded theorists frequently argue that cohesion is a zone of transition: it is affected by the leadership practice, and at the same time, it affects the employees towards more profound psychological conceptions of workplace climate. Professional Cohesion acts as an intervening layer in this model; it converts the managerial behaviors into collective

behaviors. In case the alignment with leaders is adequately high, the workers tend to collaborate, communicate freely, and pursue shared values. Cohesion, therefore, is a symbolic representation of a social process, where employees support one another by supporting norms that help to coexist within the organization.

3.3. Third Layer: Congenial Work Environment

The third tier, Congenial Work Environment, takes the form of the definitions of the psychosocial atmosphere of the workplace by the respondents, the nature of which is based on the concepts of harmony, emotional comfort, and psychological safety. The emergence of this category in grounded theory analysis was based on the narrative pieces where respect was mentioned, reduced tension, supportive interactions, and the setting in which employees feel free to discuss the problems with their peers and the management. The change of cohesion to congeniality indicates a change in the outward behaviors to the internal perceptions of the employees: they shift from describing the collective behavior to the description of shared emotion.

Organizational well-being is a broader term that consists of institutional policies, support systems, and employee motivation (Das & Pattanayak, 2023; Della Bella et al., 2022). In the context of the UAE banking sector, this conceptualization refers to inclusive policies for the native employees, equitable opportunities for career growth, and a work environment consistent with local culture. However, the congenial work environment is the immediate and day-to-day workplace where the employees directly feel genuine warmth and psychological safety in their interactions with management, peers, and teammates (Aruldoss et al., 2022). It is operated at the micro level that shapes employees' motivation, retention, and overall job performance.

This layer is in line with organizational climate theories as well as psychological safety theories, especially the work of Edmondson regarding interpersonal risk-taking. The statements made by respondents who claimed that we feel comfortable with the management and that the environment is like a community, portray the beliefs of a low-threatening environment where the employees feel secure to voice their concerns, suggestions, or even share their errors. Not only is such an environment created through managerial behaviors, but it is also created through continual processes of relationships in the teams. Congeniality (in CGT terms) is an abstraction on an even higher level, that of an abstract and latent sense of a repeated pattern in accounts of employees.

The congenial environment is further given great depth in its internal location. Where the outer layers reflect a reflection of visible social interactions, this layer is what captures the inner emotional part of the employees. The transformation of outward acts to inward experiences is in line with the theme of the grounded theory, which focuses on advancing the descriptive codes into analytic categories and then conceptual abstraction.

3.4. Innermost Layer: Organizational Well-Being as a Co-Constructed Category

The central model of the onion is the emergent core category, which is labelled as Organizational Wellbeing as a Co-Constructed Process. The core category in the grounded theory is the most important category of the theory; it unites all the lower categories, it clarifies the relationships between them, and it reflects the main phenomenon of the study.

The organizational well-being was selected as the key category because the stories of the respondents repeatedly referred to how the alignment of leadership, professional cohesion, and friendly atmosphere creates their psychological and professional experiences at work.

It is important to note that CGT values the fact that the organizational well-being is not a fixed or predetermined state, but is in a continuous process of co-construction. It is entrenched within daily transactions, understanding, and negotiation between the employees and the managers. The respondents interpreted well-being as a state or an emotional condition that is influenced by the relations, respect, and resemblances of values, not merely in resource or policy terms. The position of this category in the center implies the fact that it corresponds to the final product of interactive social processes that are reflected in the outer circles.

3.5. Integrative Interpretation

Collectively, the four layers demonstrate an inductive, grounded theoretical framework where it is possible to view organizational well-being as outcomes of a gradual enrichment of relations and experiences at a psychological level. It is a structure that is consistent with the prevailing literature on both leadership and organisational behaviour, but it is also based on the voices of the participants, which is in line with the main principle of CGT that the theory should be based on the data and not be imposed on the participants. The interdependent character of organisational processes is brought into the limelight by the use of the onion-style design, which emphasizes that leadership influences cohesion, cohesion influences the creation of a congenial environment, and the resulting consequence of all these is the subjective experience of well-being.

The onion-layered model is a theoretically sound depiction of the dynamics in the workplace, based on the Constructivist Grounded Theory and reinforced by the knowledge obtained through the application of Transformational Leadership and Leader-Member Exchange Theory (Eaton et al., 2024; Erdogan & Bauer, 2014; Lawrason et al., 2023). It demonstrates how the organizational well-being can be a result of active management-follower match, professional unity, and friendly working atmosphere, which connects the micro-process of leadership praxis with macro-conclusions of organizational health. All layers are processed and output: alignment builds relational trust, cohesion builds teamwork, and a positive environment maintains psychological safety and motivation; therefore, operationalising fundamental relational ideas in quantifiable organisational units.

Focusing on the relational, iterative, and co-constructed aspects of organizational experiences, the model provides both practical and theoretical implications to the managers, human-resources practitioners, and scholars who are working on leadership and organizational research. The model leads to an overall structure of explaining the roles of leadership and relationship processes in achieving organizational welfare through the combination of the social construction of meaning and the emerging interaction patterns in complex and real-world situations.

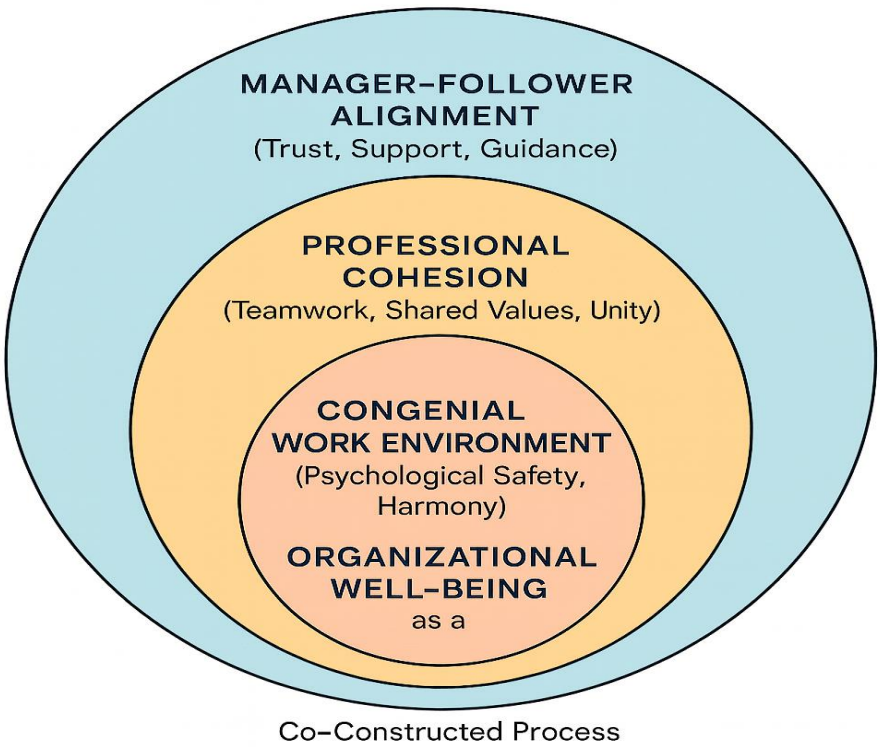


Figure: 1

4. CONCLUSION

This research work has made a constructivist investigation concerning the complex social and psychological mechanisms that influence the work experience of Emirati practitioners in the UAE banking industry. The excessive focus on giving the voice and meaning to the employees themselves, the research has moved beyond superficial levels of turnover and engagement to reveal the underlying processes of relationships, which eventually determine organisational vitality. The theoretical contribution made through the application of the Constructivist Grounded Theory approach, with its cyclic activities of data collection and abductive analysis, is a substantive one: the contribution is a refined comprehension of organisational well-being, being a non-imposed condition but a reality of the daily interactions between leadership action and collective sensemaking, and individual agency.

The major empirical input of this study is the process of establishing a multi-layered model that expounds the route to organisational well-being. The discussion has indicated that in the case of Emirati workers, the state of positive well-being and having a low turnover intention represents the apogee of a pyramid of mutually supporting conditions. It has its source in the level of Manager-Follower Alignment- a socially constructed world of trust, perception of support, and communication that is definite and clear, and decides the level of relational bedrock. Such an agreement, in its turn, allows the appearance of Professional Cohesion, where joint values and cooperative norms are bargained on the team level. Combined with other layers, this creates a Congenial Work Environment, a psychological safety and mutual

respect climate. The statistics are quite convincing and show that these layers are not voided and that it is an effective network where the lack of correspondence in the basic layer of the alignment severely impairs the chances of attaining a cohesion scheme, good climate, and, lastly, sustainable well-being.

Substantial to the complexity nature of these interactions, this article has additionally made the Dynamic Co-Construction Model (DCC Model) of Organisational Vitality. This theoretical extension transforms the findings of a stagnant, stratified view into a dynamic process-based view. The DCC Model assumes vitality as a result of recurrent, reciprocal relationships among three constitutive nodes: Leadership Praxis (the performed action of influence), Collective Sensemaking (the negotiation of shared meaning), and Individual Agency and Interpretation. These nodes are connected by the core processes of Dialogical Exchange, Normative Embedding, and Experiential Feedback (Beer, 2021; Dello Russo et al., 2023; Maheshi et al., 2024). This model is important in that it tapers the orientation at which variables are important, but also in the way they interact with one another over time. It characterises the outcomes of organisations as the result of a complex adaptive system, rather than as the sum of parts, and as a result gives us a stronger model of the phenomenon of stability, change, and the unpredictability, per se, of organisational life.

The findings of this investigation are both theoretical and practical. To scholars, this book makes it clear that constructivist, inductive methods can be useful in research of poorly understood cultural and organisational settings. It shows how the mid-range theory can be built to balance the micro level of individual experience with the macro level of organisational performance. Specifically, the DCC Model proposes that future studies should adopt longitudinal, processual designs to the real-time feedback between actions of the leader, the collective meaning-making, and the behavioural actions of the followers.

As practitioners and leaders in the UAE banking industry and so forth, the findings provide practitioners with a no-brainer-charger: sustainable performance and talent retention are essentially relational accomplishments. Interventions should not be restricted to transactional wellness programs, but to the fundamental quality of leader-employee relationships. Open communication, engaging in managing equitable and inclusive sensemaking, and designing structurally embedded meaty response channels are not merely soft management but plausible strategic necessities. Development of leadership should hence form a praxis of reflexivity within which managers would be guided to view themselves as a part of the co-constructive mechanism and alter their behaviours in accordance with the received feedback of the experience they undergo.

It is imperative to note pitfalls in this research. Since the study is a qualitative inquiry with an Emirati national concern about banking, the contextual findings of the study are limited. This cannot assume the transferability of the layered model to other industries, national cultures, or demographics, and is an ideal prospect for the future of comparative research. In addition, although the DCC Model will provide a powerful heuristic, its complete validation involves testing using methodologies that can work across dynamic processes involving multiple levels over time.

4.1. Implications of the Study for Theory and Practice

In theory, the study contributes to the grounded theory by putting transformative leadership into context, in a non-Western, expatriate-driven environment. It questions universalist models by highlighting cultural pragmatism, on which

the successful global business practices depend, and the equilibrium between global practices and local social values in leadership. In practice, the UAE banks should institutionalize transparent career development practices, deal with managerial biases, and exploit the Emirati talent as a strategic differentiation and innovation asset.

4.2. Future Research Directions of the Study

Future studies might consider the longitudinal effects of leadership interventions on retention and how the experiences of Emirates can be compared with those of their expatriates. Also, examining the digital transformation applied to conventional leadership styles within the context of the UAE is a promising field of research.

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