

# Ugandan hotel employee innovativeness: the role of transformational leadership and cultural intelligence

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## Abstract

**Purpose** – This study aims to determine the indirect influence of transformational leadership on cultural intelligence and employee innovativeness in the context of Ugandan hotel employees.

**Design/methodology/approach** – We employed a cross-sectional correlational design to collect and analyze data from 285 hotel employees. We tested for the mediation effect of cultural intelligence in the relationship between transformational leadership and employee innovativeness using Hayes' PROCESS macro version 4.2 model 4.

**Findings** – The findings indicate a positive relationship between transformational leadership, cultural intelligence and employee innovativeness. Results further indicate that cultural intelligence partially mediates the relationship between transformational leadership and employee innovativeness.

**Research limitations/implications** – Empirically, we add to the existing findings that have established a positive relationship between cultural intelligence, transformational leadership and employee outcomes. More insightfully, results provide evidence of the indirect role of transformational leadership in this relationship. Practically, since hospitality is a multicultural setting, employees with high cultural intelligence adjust quickly as they interact with guests from different cultures.

**Originality/value** – The study established the mechanisms under which transformational leadership influences the relationship between cultural intelligence and employee innovativeness.

**Keywords** Transformational leadership, Cultural intelligence, Employee innovativeness, Hotel, Uganda

**Paper type** Research paper

## 1. Background and hypotheses

Employee Innovativeness is the source of a client's unique experience in the service sector (Sharif, Tongkachok, Akbar, Iqbal, & Lodhi, 2024). It's through which value creation is realized (Bibi *et al.*, 2022) and distinct an organization from the rest (Kucharska & Rebelo, 2022). As such, less innovative Hotels struggle to attract and retain clients since customers are on the search for new experiences (Otengei & Changha, 2023), as both domestic and international travelers are always willing to pay a premium price for innovative and memorable hotel experiences (Jin, Line, & Merkebu, 2016; Otengei & Ahebwa, 2021). Therefore, innovativeness needs to be fostered and reinforced in the hotel sector (Hirst, van Dick, & van Knippenberg, 2009; Cheung & Wong, 2011).

Innovation as a driver of better organizational performance and competitiveness has attracted a lot of research interest, and a plethora of studies exist (see: Afsar & Masood, 2018; Grošelj, Černe, Penger, & Grah, 2020). Although these studies have conceptualized innovation at the firm level, less focus has been given to individual-level innovation. Thus, literature is denominated by innovation types like the product, process, and organization



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(Ramadani *et al.*, 2019) yet these innovations emerge from employees (Cheung & Wong, 2011). This study, therefore, focused on innovativeness at the employee level since innovations start as ideas and are championed by individual employees and later manifest in the form of intrapreneurship (Nandan, London, & Bent-Goodley, 2015; Seshadri & Tripathy, n.d.). Employees with the ability to think and act as entrepreneurs are perceived to be intrapreneurs (Rivera, 2017). Employee innovativeness is manifested by carrying on intrapreneurial activities such as creating new products, and services, and the initiation of new ventures (Marques, Lopes, Braga, Ratten, & Santos, 2022). Therefore, intrapreneurship is a means through which employee innovativeness is realized. To this end, employee innovativeness is the ability of hotel employees to generate new or improved and useful ideas concerning products, services, processes, and procedures.

Given the high employee–customer direct interaction in the hotel sector (Bani-Melhem, Zeffane, & Albaity, 2018), employee innovativeness is critical as these interactions define the client’s experience (Hassan, Malik, Hasnain, Faiz, & Abbas, 2013). Many customers revisit, repurchase, and refer others due to the unique experiences and services enjoyed, of which employees are a part (Bani-Melhem *et al.*, 2018). However, for employees to exhibit innovative behavior, managerial styles matter in shaping this behavior (Choi, Kim, Ullah, & Kang, 2016). Though many leadership styles do exist, transformational leadership has been positively associated with employee outcomes in different contexts (Mittal & Dhar, 2015; Afsar & Masood, 2018; Soomro & Shah, 2022). We acknowledge that many efforts have been undertaken to investigate transformational leadership and employee outcomes (Li, Zhao, & Begley, 2015). Nonetheless, mixed and inconsistent results have been reported on which dimension matters (Soomro & Shah, 2022). Similarly, even though hospitality is an intercultural social setting where cultural intelligence is critical, it has received less attention in the literature. However, existing evidence reveals that cultural intelligence is a precursor to employee outcomes in a multicultural setting; innovative work behavior (Afsar, Al-Ghazali, Cheema, & Javed, 2020; Azevedo & Shane, 2019), Task performance (Presbitero, 2020), Creative self-efficacy (Almazrouei & Zacca, 2021), Knowledge transfer (Vlajčić, Caputo, Marzi, & Dabić, 2019) and Higher education (Hong, Ko, Mesicek, & Song, 2021). Nonetheless, to the best of our knowledge, no study has explored the mechanism underlying the indirect effect of cultural intelligence in the relationship between TL and employee innovativeness. This study, therefore, expounds on the leadership literature by testing the indirect effect of cultural intelligence in this relationship by developing four hypotheses that were tested as presented at the end of this section. The second part paper presents the literature, the third section describes the methodology which is followed by, findings, discussions, and a conclusion. Lastly, recommendations and future research directions are presented.

*H1.* Cultural intelligence positively relates to employee innovativeness

*H2.* Transformational leadership positively relates to employee innovativeness

*H3.* Cultural Intelligence positively relates to Transformational leadership

*H4.* Cultural intelligence mediates Transformational leadership and employee innovativeness

## **2. Theoretical and empirical review**

### *2.1 Theoretical underpinning*

Social Exchange Theory (SET) is a multidisciplinary theory that has been applied to different fields, including leadership. The theory posits that the relationship between two or more parties is formed based on cost-benefit analysis (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). Thus, social exchange entails the exchange of activities, both physical and non-physical, between

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individuals based on perceived benefits or costs (Cook *et al.*, 2013). This reflects the exchange between leaders and their followers. If employees perceive their leader as less supportive and do not fulfill commitments, they would be reluctant to exhibit innovative behavior (Li *et al.*, 2015; Khan, Bhatti, Obaid, Sami, & Ullah, 2020) and ultimately frustrate clients due to poor experiences. Transformational leaders show concern for employee needs and work-life challenges, employees perceive this as indebtedness that later reciprocates by exhibiting positive behavior, including innovative behavior (Mittal & Dhar, 2015). Thus, a leader's behavior that generates positive outcomes is likely to be adopted by the followers through emulation and vicarious learning (Soomro & Shah, 2022). To this end, the quality of exchanges (innovations) is determined by the quality of the relationship between the manager and his employees. If the relationship is sour, then employee innovativeness is suffocated due to a lack of room for social interactions through which ideas are shared and discussed.

## 2.2 Cultural intelligence and employee innovativeness

Literature provides a wide range of intelligence, including but not limited to cognitive, emotional, artificial, social, and practical intelligence (Afsar *et al.*, 2020) and this intelligence have been associated with both individual and organization-level outcomes, including innovation (Afsar *et al.*, 2020; Akkan, Canhilal, & Orhan, 2023; Aldhaheri, 2017; Chen, Bian, Nguyen, & Chang, 2022; Lorenz, Ramsey, & Richey, 2018). With globalization, cultural intelligence has become a critical competence for leaders, managers, and employees given the multiculturalism setting of economies across sectors (Azevedo & Shane, 2019; Chen *et al.*, 2022). As such, cultural intelligence has recently emerged as a unique capability that enables individuals to effectively work in an environment of cross-border cultures. Cultural intelligence, according to Ang, Ng, and Rockstuhl (2019), as cited by Aldhaheri (2017) refers to a broad range of skills that enable people to perform better in a variety of multicultural contexts; as such, it is not exclusive to any one culture or setting. The individual can thrive and manage across a range of cultural contexts and circumstances (Jain, 2022). Cultural intelligence equips a person with the ability to adjust, adapt, communicate, and coordinate in a multicultural setting (Korzilius, Bücken, & Beerlage, 2017).

As a multifaceted construct, cultural intelligence is composed of metacognition, cognition, behavior, and motivation to adjust and adapt to cross-cultural environments (Gölgeci, Swiatowiec-Szczepanska, & Raczkowski, 2017; Ratasuk & Charoensukmongkol, 2020). First, Cognitive CQ is the term used to describe a person's understanding of many cultures and countries. It includes both broad and context-specific information about other people. Second, metacognition is used to describe a high level of cognitive ability for handling information related to a particular circumstance; it shows awareness of cross-cultural interactions in a foreign setting (Masrek, Yuwinanto, Atmi, Soesantari, & Mutia, 2021). It enables people to develop new and appropriate interactions with others from different cultures (Ratasuk & Charoensukmongkol, 2020). Thirdly, motivational CQ is the capacity to acquire and handle knowledge in the face of cultural disparities and fosters the growth of self-efficacy in learning and adapting in a multicultural setting, despite obstacles or setbacks (Guang & Charoensukmongkol, 2022). Lastly, behavioral CQ refers to individuals' ability to perform appropriately, both verbally and non-verbally, in cross-cultural situations. Thus, cultural intelligence integrates knowledge from different cultures and converts it into creative ideas (Jain, 2022).

Empirically, the relationship between cultural intelligence and innovation has been established (see; Bogilović, Černe, & Škerlavaj, n.d.; Chen *et al.*, 2022; Darvishmotevali, Altinay, & De Vita, 2018; Hu, Liu, & Huang, 2017; Korzilius *et al.*, 2017; Ratasuk & Charoensukmongkol, 2020; Westwood & Low, 2003; Yunlu, Clapp-Smith, & Shaffer, 2017). However, the majority of these studies were carried out in the developed world, among expatriates, in the educational sector, or multinational companies, and focused on the direct influence of cultural intelligence on individual-level outcomes. For instance,

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[Afsar et al. \(2020\)](#) studied employees of multinational organizations operating in the pharmaceutical, IT, electronics, banking, hospitality, and automobile manufacturing industries in different regions of Saudi Arabia, and a positive relationship was established. Similar findings were revealed when [Lorenz et al. \(2018\)](#) used employee self-evaluation among Brazilian multinational organizations with subsidiaries in North America, Latin America, and Europe. As such, local organizations working in multicultural settings like hotels have received less attention. In addition, the mechanisms under which cultural intelligence influences innovation have been less explored. The current study, therefore, sought to fill the identified gaps by testing the mediation effect of transformational leadership in the relationship between cultural intelligence and employee innovativeness in a multicultural developing local setting.

### *2.3 Transformational leadership and employee innovativeness*

The pattern of a leader's behavior is imperative in shaping Employee outcomes. Transformational leadership style has been recognized as being related to a range of employee outcomes, including employee Innovativeness ([Mittal & Dhar, 2015](#)). Innovative work behavior refers to the ability to create new thoughts and constructive results for problems ([Ghafoor, Qureshi, Azeemi, & Hijazi, 2011](#)). A large number of studies have been conducted attempting to understand the relationship between different leadership styles and their impact on promoting employee innovative behavior ([Avolio, Bass, Jung, & 1999](#); [Choi et al., 2016](#); [Grošelj et al., 2020](#)). While the majority of these studies have provided valuable insights, the most promising direction has been provided by studying the role of perceived transformational leadership in promoting employee innovative behavior ([Afsar & Masood, 2018](#); [Bak, Jin, & McDonald, 2022](#)). This leadership style has gained immense popularity among organizational researchers due to its ability to inspire followers ([Vasilaki, Tarba, Ahammad, & Glaister, 2016](#); [Kucharska & Rebelo, 2022](#)). However, the Ugandan hotel sector has received less attention on how to promote innovative behavior through transformational leadership, which is the focus of the current study.

According to [Li et al. \(2015\)](#) Employees working with transformational leaders are more likely to believe that their innovative behavior will be evaluated, recognized, and rewarded on a timely basis, instead of being tabled, doubted, or even penalized. This assertion is in line with the findings of [Jyoti and Dev \(2015\)](#) where a positive relationship between transformational leadership and innovative behavior among employees of Airtel in India was revealed. Similarly, [Cai, Khapova, Bossink, Lysova, and Yuan \(2020\)](#) assert that the results of innovative behavior seem to be higher when motivation- or opportunity-enhancing practices are involved in the main influence of ability-enhancing practices on innovative behavior. This enhancing ability can be provided by transformational leadership, and this concurs with [Hirst et al. \(2009\)](#) argument that leaders' inspirational motivation, idealized influence, Intellectual stimulation, and Individual Consideration, which are attributes of transformational leadership, enhance an individual's innovative effort.

### *2.4 Cultural intelligence and transformational leadership*

Extant literature reveals a positive relationship between cultural intelligence and transformational leadership. Cultural intelligence is a person's ability to interact freely and effectively in a multicultural setting ([Presbitero, 2020](#)). In a cross-cultural setting, cultural intelligence is one of the key individual intelligences that is necessary for one to perform effectively and be more engaged with work ([Afsar et al., 2020](#); [Guang & Charoensukmongkol, 2022](#); [Velarde, Ghani, Adams, & Cheah, 2022](#)). [Guang and Charoensukmongkol \(2022\)](#) studied Chinese expatriates working in Thailand, the study reveals that cultural intelligence is positively related to leadership effectiveness. Relatedly, [Afsar et al. \(2020\)](#) assert that individuals with high cultural intelligence are more likely to display effective voice behavior while interacting with individuals from different ethnicities, tribes, and races. As such, cultural

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intelligence is one critical competence that transformational leaders require to inspire, motivate as well as orchestrate change among their subordinates. The study carried out by [Aldhaheri \(2017\)](#) Among school leaders in the education sector of Abu Dhabi, suggested that the ability of school leaders to modify their leadership style in a diverse work environment is somewhat influenced by cultural intelligence. In the same study, it is further argued that Leaders with desirable cultural intelligence competencies are more effective in enhancing performance outcomes in a multicultural setting ([Aldhaheri, 2017](#)). In a similar earlier study, [Keung and Rockinson-Szapkiw \(2013\)](#) established that cultural intelligence is positively associated with transformational leadership among international school leaders.

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### *2.5 The mediating role of transformational leadership*

Transformational leadership is conceptualized using four elements: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individual consideration. Using idealized influence, a leader inspires the inherent thoughts of followers by acting as a role model to gain respect, admiration, and loyalty, which generates a sense of collectivity among the followers ([Soomro & Shah, 2022](#)). It relates to charismatic influence where the leader instills pride, faith, respect and is gifted to see what is important, and transmits a sense of mission among subordinates ([Cheung & Wong, 2011](#); [Wang, Tsai, & Tsai, 2014](#)). In such a situation, followers tend to perform beyond expectations and are thrilled to realize advanced work targets, including innovation ([Mittal & Dhar, 2015](#)). Thus, transformational leaders can influence followers' innovative behavior by making the employees feel challenged and energized to seek novel approaches in their jobs.

Similarly, Transformational leaders, through inspirational motivation, instill a vision among subordinates and help the followers realize their targets ([Khan et al., 2020](#)). These leaders cultivate a sense of self-reliance and independence as they undertake their activities ([Soomro & Shah, 2022](#)). Even in circumstances where leaders are absent, followers still strive to perform better because employees are nurtured to do so ([Avolio et al., 1999](#)). Through this leadership style, employees are inspired to become more flexible and adaptive to environmental changes, which are characterization of a multicultural setting. Empirically, inspirational motivation has been associated with positive employee outcomes ([Boukamcha, 2019](#); [Khan et al., 2020](#)).

Intellectual stimulation involves the leader providing the necessary cognitive resources to the followers and encouraging them to work differently ([Jaiswal & Dhar, 2015](#)). The leader arouses followers to think in new ways and emphasizes problem-solving skills and the use of reasoning before taking action. In addition, followers are encouraged to challenge the status quo and question old assumptions, reformulate new options, satisfy their intellectual curiosity, and use unlimited imagination ([Jyoti & Dev, 2015](#)). This gives room for followers to question and challenge their conventions, beliefs, and values as well as those of their superiors ([Cheung & Wong, 2011](#)). As such, followers are more likely to use unconventional approaches to think about problems and generate novel ideas ([Boukamcha, 2019](#)) and thus work towards high levels of innovative behavior.

Individualized consideration is a transformational leadership dimension that requires a leader to pay special attention to both subordinates' career growth and non-career needs ([Soomro & Shah, 2022](#)). The leaders focus on satisfying followers' needs while anticipating that subordinates will reciprocate as postulated by social exchange theory ([Cook et al., 2013](#)). The leader pays special attention to the followers' developmental needs and delegates work projects in a manner that stimulates learning experiences ([Afsar & Masood, 2018](#)). Given that the transformational leader gives followers discretion to satisfy their developmental needs ([Nabi, Zhiqiang, & Akter, 2023](#)) and to act accordingly, followers are likely in turn to devote more time to their work due to enhanced feelings of discretion and the provision of enriched opportunities to test work capabilities ([Cheung & Wong, 2011](#)).

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### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1 Research design

We utilized cross-sectional and correlational research designs to collect and analyze data. Data was collected from a sample of 285 employees drawn from a population of 1,134 hotel employees in Jinja City, Uganda, using self-administered questionnaires. The questionnaire was organized into two parts; part I captured the demographic characteristics of the respondents, and part II contained questions relating to the main study variables. However, usable questionnaires were 273 after catering for no responses, large missing values, and outliers.

#### 3.2 Data collection

To control for common method bias, the independent variables were separated from the dependent variable during data collection. Employees were required to respond to demographic characteristics, cultural intelligence, and transformational leadership employed by their superiors and supervisors responded on the level of employee innovativeness. To ensure objectivity, employees were assured of a high degree of confidentiality as the exercise would be misinterpreted as evaluating their supervisors. The questionnaires were coded to ensure that the employee's part was well aligned with that of the supervisor.

#### 3.3 Measurement of study variables and data collection instrument

Measurement of the study variable is summarized in [Table 1](#). Consistent with [Kleysen and Street \(2001\)](#), employee innovativeness was measured by adapting 16 items grouped into opportunity exploration, formative investigation, championing, and application. These measures were adapted because they were developed through a more rigorous process as opposed to other researchers who conceptualized the concept as being unidimensional. The authors subjected the instrument to exploratory factor analysis using varimax rotation, and 14 items with factor loadings above 0.65 were accepted while 20 items were deleted from the model. Thereafter, the 14 items were subjected to an SEM analysis model. However, this resulted in a "not positive definite" covariance matrix, which was addressed by setting offending estimates to zero, thus, covariance correlations between the five factors were deleted. This process was deemed robust enough for instrument development; no wonder the current study adapted these measurements since the instrument was developed from a context different from the study's cultural setting, we found it prudent to localize the instrument and perform construct validity after data collection. The solution only extracted two dimensions, namely opportunity exploration and application. On the other hand, perceived transformational leadership was measured by adapting 20 items grouped into Idealized influence, Inspirational motivation, Intellectual stimulation, and Individualized consideration, which was developed by [\(Avolio et al., 1999\)](#) and improved [\(Soomro & Shah, 2022\)](#). Lastly, cultural intelligence was measured in terms of meta-cognitive, cognitive, motivational, and behavioral intelligence [\(Ang et al., 2019\)](#).

#### 3.4 Data analysis

After data collection, the data were sorted, coded, and entered in SPSS version 26. We first checked for missing values, and data were missing non systematically, and this was addressed using mean scores. Since the study unit of analysis was individuals, we performed descriptive statistics in terms of employee demographics as well as variable descriptives in terms of standard deviations and means as presented in [Table 5](#). For hypotheses, testing, Pearson correlation, and hierarchical regression were performed to test for the direct relationships, while Hayes ProcessMacro version 4.2 model IV was employed to perform the mediation test.

**Table 1.** Variable definitions, measurements and sample item scales

Variable	Dimensions	Measurement	Definition	Sample item scales
Transformational leadership	Intellectual stimulation	For all dimensions, respondents' mean rank of the items included in the questionnaire on a six-point Likert scale – five items	A leader's ability to avail the necessary cognitive resources and encourage followers to work differently (Soomro & Shah, 2022)	My supervisor always shows me how to look at old problems in new ways
	Individualized consideration	Four items	A leader pays special attention to both subordinates' career growth and none career needs (Soomro & Shah, 2022)	My supervisor gives personal attention to me when I seem neglected
	Inspirational motivation	Six items	A leader sales a vision to subordinates and also shows the path for achieving goals (Soomro & Shah, 2022)	My supervisor has a sense of mission which he/she transmits to me
	Idealized influence	Four items	A leader acts as a role model to gain respect, admiration, and loyalty, which generates a sense of collectivity among the followers (Soomro & Shah, 2022)	My supervisor always expresses satisfaction when his/her expectations are met
Cultural intelligence	Meta-cognitive intelligence	Four items	An individual's level of conscious cultural awareness during cross-cultural interactions (Ang et al., 2019)	I adjust my cultural knowledge as I interact with people from a culture that is unfamiliar to me
	Motivational intelligence	Five items	Ability to direct attention and energy toward learning about, and functioning in, culturally diverse situations (Ang et al., 2019)	I enjoy living in cultures that are unfamiliar to me
	Cognitive intelligence	Five items	An individual's knowledge of norms, practices, and conventions in different cultures is acquired from education and personal experiences (Ang et al., 2019)	I know the arts and crafts of other cultures
	Behavioral intelligence	Five items	An individual's ability to enact a wide range of verbal and nonverbal actions when interacting with people from different cultures (Ang et al., 2019)	I change my nonverbal behavior when a cross-cultural situation requires it

(continued)

**Table 1.** Continued

Variable	Dimensions	Measurement	Definition	Sample item scales
Employee innovativeness	Opportunity exploration	Twelve items	This relates to paying attention to opportunity sources, looking for, recognizing, and gathering information about opportunities (Kleysen & Street, 2001)	Recognizing opportunities to make a positive difference in your work, department, organization, or with customers
	Championing and application	Four items	Transforming creative ideas into realities and routinization of the innovation (Kleysen & Street, 2001)	Incorporating new ideas for improving an existing process, technology, products or services into daily routines

**Source(s):** Literature review

### 3.5 Ethical consideration

Given that the study dealt with human subject research, it was critical to ensure that ethical considerations relating to the nature of the research were adhered to. At the point of data collection, respondents were requested to voluntarily participate in the study and were assured of the freedom to withdraw during that collection process in case they felt no longer interested. Therefore, it's only those who consented to participate in the study that did so, similarly, participants were assured of a high degree of confidentiality and anonymity. Questionnaires were given unique identifiers as opposed to respondents' names.

### 3.6 Sample characteristics

Findings in [Table 2](#) show that the majority of the respondents, 52.4%, were male and 47.6% were female. Culturally and socially, these results signify that people are appreciating hotel jobs as professional careers for both males and females. Most of the respondents were aged between 20–30 years, 39.9%, followed by 31–40 years, 36.3%. This implies that most hotel employees are still young, and young people are highly associated with innovation. Furthermore, the study reveals that most of the hotel employees (38.5%) hold bachelor's degrees, followed by diplomas 23.4%, and postgraduate 19.8%. Meaning employees are knowledgeable and skilled. For tenure, the study reveals that the majority of the employees, 34.5% and 33.2%, have worked in the current hotels for a period of 6–10 years and 2–5 years, respectively, while over 10 years was 20.4%. This implies that most employees are experienced enough, which would be a source of innovative practices.

### 3.7 Pre-test results

Since the data collection instrument was developed by adapting items that were earlier developed and used, we first performed a pilot study to determine whether these items are applicable in the Ugandan hotel context. The pretest study was carried out in a related but different study setting to avoid using the same respondents in both the pilot and main studies. For instance, the pretest was carried out in Mbale city while the main study was in Jinja city. As well we tested for validity and reliability after the main survey by performing both factor analysis and reliability tests. Respondents in the pilot study helped in improving the questionnaire by making questions simpler and clearer. Results indicate that the instrument was reliable with all constructs having Cronbach's alpha coefficient above 0.7 and Item loadings above 0.5, see results in [Tables 3–5](#).

**Table 2.** Sample characteristics

		Frequency	Percent	Cumulative percent
Gender	Female	130	47.6	47.6
	Male	143	52.4	100.0
	<i>Total</i>	<i>273</i>	<i>100.0</i>	
Age	Below 20 years	15	5.5	5.5
	20–30 years	109	39.9	45.4
	31–40 years	99	36.3	81.7
	41–50 years	39	14.3	96.0
	Above 50 years	11	4.0	100.0
	<i>Total</i>	<i>273</i>	<i>100.0</i>	
Education	O Level	27	9.9	9.9
	A Level	23	8.4	18.2
	Diploma	64	23.4	41.7
	Degree	105	38.5	80.2
	Postgraduate	54	19.8	100.0
	<i>Total</i>	<i>273</i>	<i>100.0</i>	
Tenure	Less than a year	33	12.0	12.0
	2–5 years	90	33.2	45.2
	6–10 years	94	34.5	79.7
	11–15 years	16	5.8	85.5
	Above 15 years	40	14.6	100.0
	<i>Total</i>	<i>273</i>	<i>100.0</i>	

**Source(s):** Primary data

**Table 3.** Loadings and Cronbach's alpha for perceived transformational leadership

Factor	Item code	Loadings	Cronbach's alpha
Idealized influence	II1	0.821	0.782
	II2	0.736	
	II3	0.537	
	II4	0.531	
Inspirational motivation	IM2	0.618	0.864
	IM3	0.671	
	IM4	0.617	
	IM5	0.533	
	IM6	0.657	
	IM7	0.644	
Intellectual stimulation	IS1	0.692	0.810
	IS2	0.719	
	IS3	0.540	
	IS4	0.653	
	IS5	0.727	
Individual consideration	IC1	0.719	0.813
	IC2	0.734	
	IC4	0.630	
	IC5	0.700	

**Source(s):** Primary data

## 4. Study results

### 4.1 Correlation results

Results in [Table 6](#) indicate that all the study variables are positively and significantly related to employee innovativeness; Transformational Leadership and employee innovativeness

**Table 4.** Loadings and Cronbach's alpha for employee innovativeness

Factor	Item codes	Loadings	Cronbach's alpha
Championing and application	EI1	0.815	0.745
	EI2	0.735	
	EI7	0.591	
Opportunity exploration	EI15	0.759	
	EI3	0.716	
	EI4	0.623	
	EI5	0.635	
	EI6	0.876	
	EI8	0.769	
	EI9	0.775	
	EI10	0.788	
	EI11	0.676	
	EI12	0.748	
	EI13	0.640	
	EI14	0.824	
	EI16	0.738	

**Source(s):** Primary data

**Table 5.** Factor loadings and Cronbach's alpha for cultural intelligence

Factor	Item codes	Item loading				Cronbach's alpha
		1	2	3	4	
Meta – Cognitive	MC1			0.842		0.874
	MC2			0.761		
	MC3			0.767		
	MC4			0.686		
Cognitive	COG1	0.820				0.935
	COG2	0.844				
	COG3	0.790				
	COG4	0.783				
	COG5	0.814				
Motivational	MOT1				0.743	0.806
	MOT2				0.706	
	MOT3				0.655	
	MOT4					
	MOT5				0.762	
Behavioral	BEH1		0.751			0.905
	BEH2		0.705			
	BEH3		0.766			
	BEH4		0.683			
	BEH5		0.720			

**Note(s):** Extraction method: Principal component analysis

Rotation method: Varimax with Kaiser normalization

(1) Rotation converged in 6 iterations

**Source(s):** Primary data

( $r = 0.419, p < 0.01$ ), Cultural intelligence and employee innovativeness ( $r = 0.467, p < 0.01$ ), Transformational Leadership and Cultural intelligence ( $r = 0.335, p < 0.01$ ). These results indicate that a positive change in transformational leadership or cultural intelligence is associated with a positive change in employee innovativeness. Furthermore, given that all correlation coefficients between the observable variables and the dependent variable were

**Table 6.** Mean, standard deviation and correlations results

Study variables	Mean	SD	1	2	3
Transformational leadership (1)	4.051	0.595	1		
Cultural intelligence (2)	4.183	0.615	0.335**	1	
Employee innovativeness (3)	4.182	0.608	0.419*	0.467**	1

Source(s): Primary data

moderate, this signals a lack of multicollinearity issues. A mean score of approximately 4 is reported for all the study variables. This implies that respondents generally agreed with the items, and their responses did not deviate so much, given that all variables have a standard deviation below 1.

#### 4.2 Regression and mediation results

Hierarchical regression was performed to test for H1, and the results are provided in Table 7. In Model 1, control variables were regressed against cultural intelligence together with transformational leadership. Results indicate that none of these variables influence Employee Innovativeness except education. Gender ( $\beta = 0.006, p > 0.05$ ), Age ( $\beta = 0.075, p > 0.05$ ), Education ( $\beta = 0.062, p < 0.05$ ), Tenure ( $\beta = 0.029, p > 0.05$ ), and transformational leadership ( $\beta = 0.303, p < 0.001$ ). Thereafter, in model 2, we regressed cultural intelligence against employee innovativeness while controlling for the control variables and transformational leadership. Results reveal that all cultural intelligence significantly influences employee innovativeness ( $\beta = 0.369, p < 0.001$ ), as well as providing for the direct effect of transformational leadership on employee innovativeness ( $\beta = 0.294, p < 0.001$ ). Model III was used to determine the total effect of transformational leadership on employee innovativeness ( $\beta = 0.405, p < 0.001$ ). Lastly, model IV determined the mediating effect of cultural intelligence, results reveal that cultural intelligence partially mediates this relationship ( $\beta = 0.112, CI = 0.027, 0.228$ ).

### 5. Discussion and conclusion

We acknowledge that previous researchers have examined the role of transformational leadership as both a predictor (see: Bak et al., 2022; Kucharska & Rebelo, 2022; Nabi et al., 2023) and as a moderator. However, scanty evidence exists on its mediating effect. Furthermore, transformational leadership dimensions have been related to employee outcomes including innovation (Jyoti & Dev, 2015; Li et al., 2015; Soomro & Shah, 2022). However, the novelty of the study lies in establishing the mediating effect of transformational leadership between cultural intelligence and employee innovativeness, especially in the Ugandan hotel sector where we find scanty if not no evidence at all. We also continue to confirm the earlier findings by establishing the relationship between cultural intelligence, transformational leadership, and Employee innovativeness.

Cultural intelligence was found to be a significant predictor of employee innovativeness. On this basis, this study argues that individuals with high cultural intelligence are likely to be innovative while interacting in a multicultural setting. The quality of intercultural interactions of an individual with high cultural intelligence is much better as compared to individuals with low cultural intelligence. Results are in line with the arguments that People with high cognitive cultural intelligence may possess more complex understandings of cultural institutions, customs, behaviors, and norms in various cultural contexts (Ang et al., 2019; Darvishmotevali et al., 2018). Knowledge of different languages, norms, customs, and taboos of different clients as well as subordinates is a precursor to adjusting one's actions and thoughts to serve better. Our results concur with Yunlu et al. (2017) who established that all

**Table 7.** Regression and mediation results

Predictors	Model I Transformational leadership		Model II Employee innovativeness		Model III Total effect model		Model IV Mediation
	B	t	B	t	$\beta$	t	
(Constant)	2.553***	10.447	1.447***	5.479	2.198***	9.413	
Gender	-0.055	-0.792	0.062	0.987	0.046	0.698	Path a *Path b
Age	0.032	0.588	0.060	1.212	0.069	1.337	0.298 *0.294
Education	-0.020	-0.826	-0.042	-1.854	-0.048	-2.024	Mediation=0.088
Tenure	0.050	1.217	0.001	0.022	0.015	0.396	LLCI=0.025
Cultural intelligence	0.298***	5.147	0.369***	5.479	0.456***	8.240	ULCI=0.174
Transformational leader	-	-	0.294***	6.660			
<i>Model summary statistics</i>							
R square	0.131		0.312		0.240		
MSE	0.314		0.260		0.286		
F statistic	8.079		20.082		16.848		
Sig.	0.000		0.000		0.000		
<b>Note(s):</b> * $p < 0.05$ , ** $p < 0.01$ , *** $p < 0.001$ , lack of * not significant, LLCI and ULCI = lower and upper limit confidence intervals							
<b>Source(s):</b> Primary data							

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the dimensions of cultural intelligence; meta-cognitive. Cognitive, motivational, and behavioral were all related to employee creativity. Similarly, [Ali, Ali, Leal-Rodríguez, and Albort-Morant \(2019\)](#) established that cultural intelligence enhanced individual and team-level creativity among expatriate employees. For more empirical evidence (see: [Almazrouei & Zacca, 2021](#); [Bogilović et al., n.d.](#); [Erez et al., 2013](#); [Hu et al., 2017](#); [Korzilius et al., 2017](#); [Ratasuk & Charoensukmongkol, 2020](#); [Richter, Martin, Hansen, Taras, & Alon, 2021](#)).

Results further indicate that transformational leadership is positively related to employee innovativeness which concurs with earlier studies (see: [Li et al., 2015](#); [Al-edenat, 2018](#); [Soomro & Shah, 2022](#)). This suggests that a leader, who develops social ties with followers and followers with him/her, creates an atmosphere of bondedness, and openness as subordinates will feel well treated and will perceive an entity as a family. This will lure them to exploit their potential, and freely share ideas with their superiors due to the limited social and formal distance between them and their superiors. Thus, leaders who care about workers' life concerns, by supporting them in times of need like medical, education, funerals, and parties. These workers will reciprocate at the workplace by exhibiting innovative behavior. Our results resonate with the argument that transformational leaders act as role models and are admirable is not enough to make followers innovative ([Jyoti & Dev, 2015](#); [Tajasom et al., 2015](#); [Al-edenat, 2018](#)). By leaders caring about the lives of their subordinates, it creates an ideal atmosphere to cultivate a vision and mission among followers. Followers would believe the vision is in their best interest, thus devising innovative means to attain this vision.

Lastly, we tested for the mediating influence of transformational leadership between cultural intelligence and employee innovativeness. The study results reveal that transformational leadership partially mediates this relationship. The study therefore argues that cultural intelligence empowers managers to motivate, inspire, and challenge employees to think outside the box as a mechanism to spur innovative approaches to execute their work assignments. Leaders with multicultural capabilities can evoke innovation through the use of both verbal and nonverbal intercultural communication and coordination. Our findings concur with the argument that being culturally intelligent enables one to recognize cultural parallels and differences which promotes innovations in the quest for considering cultural sensitivity ([Aldaheri, 2017](#)). [Afsar, Shahjehan, Shah, and Wajid \(2019\)](#) found that non-national hotel employees in Thailand with high cultural intelligence were likely to display voice behaviors and further relationship was partially mediated by transformational leadership. Relatedly, [Velarde et al. \(2022\)](#) found that transformational leadership has a mediating effect on the cultural intelligence of school leaders and the organizational health of secondary schools in Kuala Lumpur.

## 6. Implications and areas for future research undertaking

### 6.1 Study implications

Given the positive correlation between cultural intelligence, transformative leadership, and employee innovativeness, this study suggests important practical implications for hotel management and, in particular, human resource practices. It is reasonable for hotel management to consider an individual's cultural intelligence at the point of recruitment and selection, training, and professional development of leaders and employees in the hotel sector. Therefore, cultural intelligence should be one of the evaluation criteria at the point of the job application process while hiring hotel employees. On the other hand, managers need to enhance their cultural intelligence for them to lead better as well as catalyze innovative behavior among employees. Staff need to be trained and exposed to different cultures because they interact with clients and coworkers from different cultures on a routine basis. It is important to understand what values, beliefs, attitudes, and opinions different people hold, as these are key in determining the quality of interaction a client experiences. Ugandan hotel managers can also base on these findings to shape and reshape their leadership pattern of

behavior to those that care for employee work and family life affairs, articulate to them the vision and sense of direction, and provide room for them to challenge assumptions, rules, and standardized procedures, these will cultivate their innovative behavior.

### 6.2 Limitations and future research direction

This study focused on one leadership style (Transformational Leadership), but a multiplicity of styles exists. Future researchers can explore other styles like ethical and servant leadership against organizational culture. We employed cross-sectional and correlational designs, but managers exhibit different styles under different circumstances, thus the need to undertake experimental and longitudinal approaches.

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