RESEARCH ARTICLE

A Conceptual Approach on How Leadership Mindsets Affect Employee Engagement and the Mediating Role of Organizational Climate

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Abstract

Leadership as a phenomenon has been explored and explained in the context of organizations, and there is unanimous agreement in research that leadership remains an integral factor in every organization, which, in other words, can be argued as the foundation of every organisation and a continual organisational activity that cannot be discarded. Thus, different research has been conducted with the drive to actualize factors that drive effective leadership. Accordingly, different leadership theories, styles, and models have been identified in an effort to conceptualise and demonstrate effective leadership. While most of the studies has failed to reveal an innate dimension of leadership that could contribute to the knowledge of effective leadership, recent theorists have revealed the intrinsic phenomenon of leadership as a mindset. Since leadership exists primarily because of followers in an establishment. This conceptual paper made an informative attempt to explore how these mindsets form the cornerstone of the leadership attributes, styles, and worldviews of organisational leaders. The study specifically revealed how these mindsets of leaders relate to organisational climate and general employee emotional, physical, and cognitive engagement. The study concluded by proposing that leadership mindsets affect employee engagement and that this cause-and-effect relationship is mediated by organisational climate.

Keywords: Leadership, Mindset, Growth, Fixed, Inward, Outward, Organizational Climate and Employee Engagement.

1. Introduction

Organizations, in their effort to survive the dynamics of modern civilizations, have routinely explored the factors that will sustain their existence, and one such factor considered integral to this cause is effective human resource management. For this reason, in human resources academic literature, leadership, organisational climate, and employee engagement and commitment continue to generate scholarly attention owing to the significance of the role these concepts continue to play in corporate establishments. Interestingly, the corporate world is forever competitive, and the demand for effective leadership has gained momentum as a corporate strategy. For instance, Kangas et al. (2023) reported that in the United States, organisations routinely allot a significant proportion of resources to developing leadership KSAs, all in efforts to reap the benefits of effective leadership. Earlier revelations by Lacarenza et al. (2017) pointed out that nearly $11 billion is

spent annually by U.S. organisations on leadership development arising from training programs. The reason for this overwhelming emphasis on leadership is not farfetched since leadership in an organization incorporates managerial functioning in concerned positions. In addition to this, it is argued that leadership is entwined with organisational climate and employee engagement.

For contemporary organisations in the U.S., Europe, and China, Bligh et al. (2018) publicised that leadership mindsets are attributed to employees' attitudes towards error learning. Pioneer of leadership mindsets and theorist such as Carol Dweck says that leadership effectiveness and success (engaging leaders) come from having the right mindset rather than intelligence, talent, or education. Dweck (2000) pioneered research on how mindsets affect people's motivation and success, and during her investigation, she coined the terms "fixed mindset" and "growth mindset" to describe the underlying beliefs people have about personality, intelligence, and learning. and that growth mindset leadership, which reflects a transformational style of leadership, encouraged employees' error learning attitudes while the fixed mindset, which reflects aversive leadership styles, was detrimental to the organisational climate and overall employee attitude towards error learning.

From all literal insights, a leadership mindset can be perceived as a powerful component that translates the values, norms, and vision of an organisation and also sets the pace for organisational climate, which serves as the template for employees' functioning and overall engagement. This is because organisational climate could imply both the conscious and unconscious employee perceptions of the work environments, which in turn could set the tone for their behavior.

The purpose of this study is to identify the circumstances that will cause a leader to exhibit an unusual combination of mindsets and the effects that this will have on employee engagement (directly or indirectly). The unusual combinations of leadership mindsets are drawn from the two major schools of thought (Dweck's belief and Arbinger's worldview). Our main goal is to look at how employee engagement would change under different leadership scenarios, such as a leader with a positive belief system but a negative worldview, and vice versa, a leader with a positive belief system but a negative worldview, and a leader with a negative belief system but a positive worldview. Will the organization's climate

reflect these many types of leadership mindsets? What would the connection between various types of leadership mindsets and the organisational climate do to employee engagement?

2. Statement of Problem

Over the years, literature has specifically undermined the role of organisational climate in employee behavior. Kanten and Ülker (2013) posited that organisational climate is a phenomenon that could either deter or encourage workplace deviance. These assertions raise the implications that employee engagement may be adduced to organisational climate as much as it is attributed to leadership. While there has been a proliferation of research on various forms of positive and negative leadership mindsets, However, we are yet to see any study with a quadrant model that illustrates how individuals can possess two contrasting mindsets drawn from the major schools of thought. The old dichotomy, according to Dweck (2016), causes people to categorise other people as either having fixed or growth mindsets, but the emerging dichotomy views everyone as combining fixed and growth mindsets to some extent. Even though a growth leadership mindset is the desire in every organization, there may still be situations that force a leader to exhibit a fixed mindset trait. Despite these interesting propositions, there is no contextual, empirical, or theoretical argument supporting how these mindsets shape an organisational climate and set the tone for employee engagement. Thus, towards addressing the existing gap in literature, this conceptual paper attempts provide conceptual evidences that supports the propositions.

2.1 Research Objectives

i.   To identify the individual relationship between the quadrant leadership mindsets and employee engagement

ii. To specify the mediating role organizational climate in the individual relationship between the quadrant leadership mindsets and employee engagement

3. Literature Review

3.1 Leadership and Leadership Mindset

In every organisational setting, the concept of leadership continues to linger in every administrative, executive, and managerial role due to the strategic significance of effective leadership in achieving the set organisational objectives and the overall mission

and vision of an organization. In this respect, several definitions of leadership have emerged over the years to conceptualise the overwhelming role of leadership. For instance, Hussain and Joshi (2020) perceived leadership as a structure that defines, motivates, and coordinates an individual or group of individuals to work towards achieving set objectives within an organisational framework. For others like Holloway (2012), Boakye (2017), as well as Zain-ul-Abidin and Qammar (2020), it is a process that entails influencing, inspiring, and motivating subordinates to work towards a common goal that is mutually beneficial. Furthermore, it is also an act of persuading followers to offer their best towards realisingorganisational goals and objectives.

From the scholarly contributions, it is therefore imperative that leadership be an influential structure in which organisational functionality entirely rests. For instance, for Hussain and Joshi (2020), leadership generally revolves around mindset, while Gottfredson and Reina (2020) reinforce that great leadership is predicated on mindset. According to Pandya (2011), "mind is the seat of reason or the aspect of intellect and consciousness experienced as combinations of thought, perception, memory, emotion, will, and imagination," including all unconscious cognitive processes. Mindsets are mental lenses through which individuals encode and organise information to make sense of their situation, influencing how they act and respond (Crum et al., 2013).

From all indications, a leadership mindset is an intriguing concept that requires in-depth research and exploration in an organisational context to probe how it affects other structures of an organisation.

3.2 Elements of Leadership Mindset

Dweck (2000) and Arbinger Institute (2019), however, respectively conceptualised mindset as a set of beliefs and worldview that influence our relationships with others and our perception of the work environment. A widespread misconception about mindset elements is its conceptualization and theorization as dichotomous phenomena: fixed and growing. This view was also shared by Murphy and Reeves (2020), who acknowledged the dichotomy as false. They added that due to such misconceptions promulgated by scholars, people generally perceive individuals to be either fixed-minded or growth-minded, and individuals with the latter mindset are generally preferred. However, the reality is that every individual possesses both mindsets, and the salient attributes of each are dictated by the different circumstances they are confronted with. While there has been a proliferation of research on various forms of positive and negative leadership mindsets, However, we are yet to see any study with a quadrant conceptualization that illustrates how individuals can possess two contrasting mindsets. For instance, Gottfredson and Reina (2021) illustrated four contrasting types of leadership mindsets that can drive employees' behavior, positively or negatively (growth vs. fixed, learning vs. performance, deliberative vs. implemental, and promotional vs. preventive). Gottfredson and Reina advanced their study through the addition of inward and closed mindsets to describe the dysfunctional or self-undermining side of the leadership mindset that can affect employee engagement. Thus, the works of Gottfredson and Reina (2021), credited to the Arbinger Institute, and Dweck informed the present study's conceptualization of the quadrant leadership mindset.
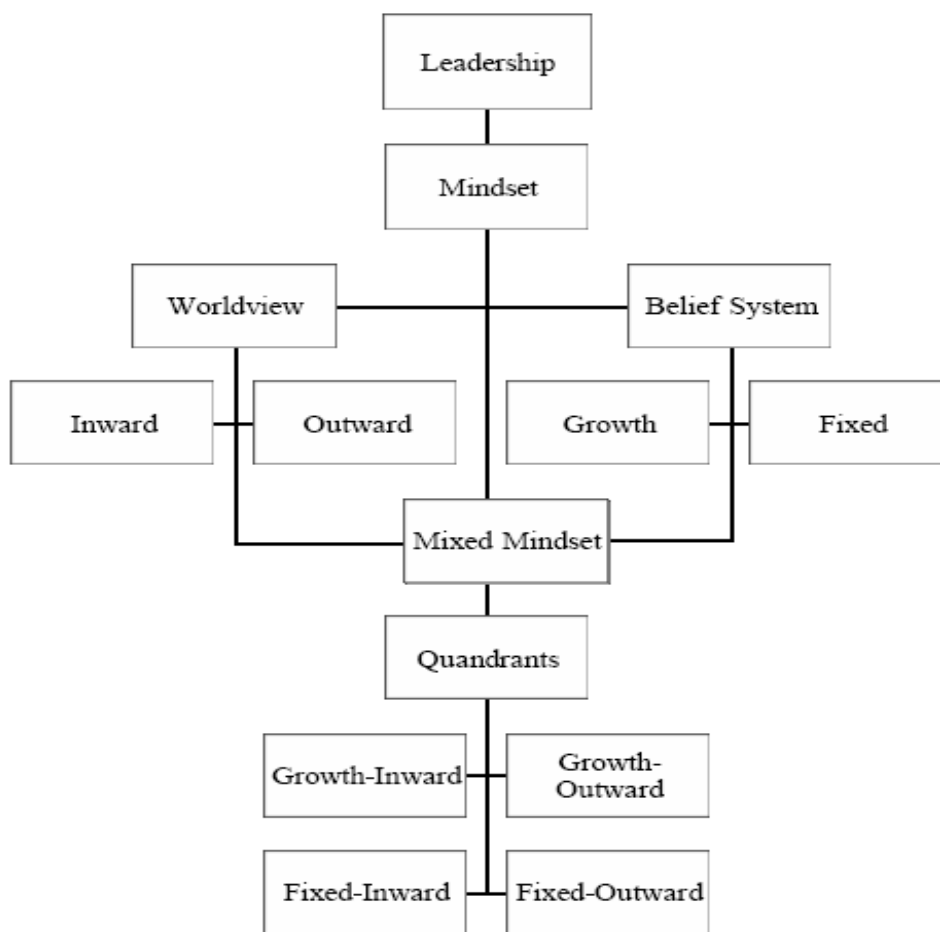
Figure 1: *Quadrant Leadership Mindset Model*

Source: Afolabi and Afrifa (2023).

3.3 Fixed-Inward Leadership Mindset

When a leader has a fixed mindset, they don't think they can change or get better at their skills, abilities, or talents (Weiss &Fortus, 2013; Dweck, 2016; Smith, 2020; Patphol et al., 2021; Alerson, 2017). The basic assumption of a fixed mindset leader is that KSAs possessed by individuals within an organisation are static and cannot be nurtured, developed, or trained for improvement over time. While an inward mindset occurs with leadership having a world view that work activities are an opportunity for personal gain and self-aggrandizement. When leaders have an inward mindset, they see those they lead as objects rather than people (Otocki& Turner, 2020; Crane, 2022). Thus, conceptually, on the one hand, a fixed-inward mindset leader is one that harbours and promotes the ideology that individuals' knowledge, skills, and abilities in an organisation are to a greater extent static and not malleable to ensure improvement and development; on the other hand, they are also characterised by their strong desire for self-glory and aggrandizement, even at the expense of the health of the organisational climate. In addition to this, they are most likely to prioritise performance (productivity and profitability) over a healthy organisational climate and employee well-being.

3.4 Growth-Inward Leadership Mindset

Growth mindset leadership essentially reflects leadership that believes individual knowledge, skills, and abilities are relatively improveable and developable through conscious efforts aimed at nurturing these special KSAs. However, a growth-inward mindset leader is one who exhibits these ideologies for largely personal interest and glory rather than for collective organisational growth. It is shared that leadership with a positive mindset but a negative worldview may not mind empowering employees with information, knowledge, and other resources capable of enabling their (the former employees') growth in the organisation (Gottfredson& Reina, 2021).

3.5 Fixed-Outward Leadership Mindset

Similarly, here is a leadership structure that reflects, presumably, a negative mindset but a positive

worldview. In such instances, a leadership mindset is not fixated on the malleability of talents and skills but rather on the dichotomy that abilities are predominantly fixed; however, such leaders may exhibit selfless leadership in their managerial roles and outright promote cohesiveness, trust, harmony, and a healthy organisational climate. Again, such leaders may provide an example of self-sacrifice, valuing the good of the group over self-glory, as well as leading others to do the same.

3.6 Growth-Outward Leadership Mindset

The final piece of the quadrants is the growth-outward mindset. These attributes demonstrate a leadership style with presumably positive mindsets and a positive worldview. This embodies a leader who demonstrates trust and believes in malleable skills and abilities while exhibiting selflessness in the discharge of managerial and leadership functions within an organization. They may be presumed to share an encouraging view that skills can be enhanced to improve efficiency, and they do so selflessly for the greater good of the organisation while factoring in every individual's well-being.

3.7 Organizational Climate

The primary component of organisational climate is how individuals perceive and characterise their surroundings from an attitude and value perspective. For instance, according to Rozmana and Strukelj (2020), perception may be with respect to cooperation, leadership support, trust, fairness, friendliness, conflicts, performance standards, and commitment. Rozmana and Strukelj (2020) argue that organisational climates reflect employees' perceptions of the policies, practices, and procedures that are expected, supported, and rewarded with regard to the human resources of the organisation. Similarly, Tahir (2020) described organisational climate as an employee's long-lasting perception of the working environment and culture of the business they work for. It describes a shared set of meanings, beliefs, assumptions, and values employees attach to an organization's policies, practices, norms, and measures that guide work processes, behavior, interpersonal relationships, and experiences within a work landscape. Also, Ahmad et al. (2018) and Sroka and Szanto (2018) summarise that organisational climate is regarded as a meaningful component with significant implications in human resource management and organisational behavior. While there may be several conceptualizations of organisational climate, this conceptual paper looks towards an unambiguous conceptualization of the construct by looking at it from the dimensions of continual learning, justice, teamwork, leadership, innovation, and psychological safety.

3.8 Employee Engagement

Work engagement is the mental state where people feel energetic (vigor), are enthusiastic about their work (dedication), and are so immersed in their work that time seems to fly (absorption) (Bakker and Demerouti, 2017). Others tend to conceptualise employee engagement as a form of organisational commitment that connotes employees' devotion to work and organisational objectives, while others conceptualise the phenomenon as employees' commitment in a defined work environment. Despite the minor disparities, it is essential to note that all definitions are rooted in employees' obedience to work ethics and compliance with the pursuit of organisational goals. However, with that being said, this conceptual paper perceives employee engagement in terms of physical engagement with the organization, cognitive engagement with work, and emotional engagement with the organization. This definition is anchored on the three dimensions of employee engagement credited to Kahn (1990; 2015), and its adoption is premised on its robust conceptualization of the dynamics of employee engagement.

4. Theoretical Review

4.1 Mindset Theory

This theory originally evolved as an antecedent of implicit theories pioneered by Dweck (1997) with the collaborative efforts of other scholars such as Chiu, Hong, Leggett, and Hong (1998), who developed the theory to explain how different individuals perceived their knowledge, skills, and abilities. Thus, two theories emanated from their theorization of implicit mindset. The first theory was known as the "incremental theory," which is premised on the notion that individual KSAs are malleable and can be increased with conscious efforts. While the second "entity theory" is rooted in the ideology that individuals' KSAs are naturally fixed to a greater or lesser extent and that little or nothing can be done to change the narratives. Furthermore, while individuals who possess the fixed mindset are generally frowned at as having negative traits towards organisational success, recent revelations have shown that individuals can share both mindsets as predefined by the prevailing circumstances; this therefore creates a new paradigm for what is known as the mixed

mindset (Murphy & Reeves, 2020). Furthermore, insightful studies, particularly those from Dweck, have been conducted over the years, some of which are largely on students to validate the relevance of these theoretical arguments. This theory is seen as the bedrock of this conceptual study because recent scholars such as Zingoni and Corey (2017) have built upon the earlier works of Dweck by coming up with informative findings on how these different mindsets can be studied in an organisational setting with respect to the relationship between leadership and employee engagement. Such studies in organisational climate have developed related theoretical terms like implicit person theory, which in this study proclaims how leadership mindsets towards their subordinates (i.e., employees) differ. These to a greater extent explain salient attributes of the quadrants model in the sense that leadership who harbours the presumably positive (growth) mindset about their leadership KSAs could as well hold the same view towards their subordinates' KSAs in the work environment, thereby holding a positive mindset and positive worldview (i.e., a growth-outward leadership mindset). In the same vein, a leader who possesses a fixed (negative) mindset about their basic traits and abilities could as well extend the same view towards their employees, thereby maintaining both a negative mindset and a negative worldview (fixed-inward mindset leadership). Interestingly, the new paradigm that raises implications for mixed mindsets satisfies the contrasting viewpoints of the quadrants in the sense that a leader could hold a positive (growth) mindset about their individual leadership attributes but extend a negative (fixed) mindset about their subordinates, as the circumstances may vary, thus exhibiting a growth-inward mindset. In the reverse circumstances, such a leader is argued to demonstrate a fixed-outward mindset.

4.2 Leadership, Leadership Mindset and Organizational Climate

Eshraghi et al. (2011), while examining higher education managers, came to the conclusion that their behavioural attributes are a strong determinant of organisational climate and that leadership attributes that reflect the growth-outward mindset (i.e., democratic leadership) promoted an open organisational climate, while leadership styles that demonstrate the fixed-inward mindset (i.e., autocratic leadership) significantly ensured a closed organisational climate. Similarly, Dele et al. (2013),

while probing insurance firms in Nigeria, supported that leadership could either positively or negatively shape the organisational climate. Further, Novac and Bratanov (2014) explained how leadership mindsets as reflected in leaders' behaviour relate to organisational climate in public establishments by affirming that leadership that sorts to encourage employee professionalism, capacity, and relationship tends to encourage a healthy corporate climate. From the informative findings in literature, it can be conceptually argued that leadership and organisational climate are two concepts that are forever interwoven in any corporate setting because organisational climate reflects attributes of leadership, and therefore, a leadership mindset is the cornerstone that sets the tone for leadership structure and consequently organisational climate, also known as corporate work environment. While leadership is often exhibited by leadership styles, it is pertinent to propose that individual leadership styles can be adduced to mindsets because a particular leader could also demonstrate two contrasting or complementary leadership approaches due to perceived exigencies in an organization. a phenomenon that is perfectly illustrated using the quadrants model developed for this study.

4.3 Leadership Mindset and Employee Engagement

Leaders exist because there are followers; hence, leadership and subordinates are related and entwined. Helsin (2014) proposed that leadership mindset reflects in managerial styles; however, this conceptual paper further extends the arguments to say leadership styles are one of the visible causes of leadership mindset. It is resourcefully argued by Murphy and Reeves (2020) that organisational mindsets could affect the psychosocial state of employees and, in turn, affect their performances. This conceptual paper tends to add to the submission that perhaps organisational mindset is the spillover effect of leadership mindsets as also communicated by leadership and managerial styles and, hence, will ultimately affect employee commitment to work and overall job performance. Supporting this, Kakkar and Sivanathan (2021) argued that leadership that is fixated on helping and encouraging employee growth tends to actively encourage employee and organisational performances. Such leadership plausibly demonstrates attributes of the growth-inward mindset. Their research added that leadership that exhibits traits of assertiveness and other negative mindset traits and worldviews will

definitely distort the level of employee performance. By conceptualising the fixed-inward mindset leader as a dominance leader, the study concluded that such unintended traits have their corresponding consequences for employee engagement.

4.4 Organizational Climate and Employee Engagement

Since organisational climate generally connotes the psychosocial environment in which employees operate to fulfil their designated tasks, it is plausible that such a work environment will be a significant determinant of their work behaviour and overall work engagement. Few studies that have attempted to probe this relationship using different dimensions have come up with convincing findings. Looking at employee engagement in the dimension of organisational commitment Dorgham (2012) asserted empirically that organisational climate sets the tone for organisational commitment. The study added that organisational climate is the bedrock when employees are devoted to the objectives of an organization. This was intensified by Aktar and Pangil (2018), who noted that organisational objectives are stressed in the organisational climate, which reinforces the need for employee commitment. In another effort, Qiu et al. (2015) concluded that employee perceptions of an organisational climate significantly influence that drive and passion towards it and thus are a factor in employee performance. Similarly, Huang et al. (2019), for instance, argued that if an employee perceives his or her work environment to be healthy, he or she tends to seek supports that will improve work performances within the organization. Clarifying the relationship, Manuaba et al. (2020) categorically stated that the organisational environment is a factor for employee performance.

4.5 The Role of Organizational Climate as Mediator

Many studies on leadership, employee engagement, organisational commitment, and employee commitment related to organisational climate have looked at the phenomenon at its dimensions as either independent or dependent variables (Eshraghi et al., 2011; Holloway, 2012; Permarupan et al., 2013; Kanten&Ulker, 2013; Omolayo&Ajila, 2012; Helsin, 2014; Novac&Bratonov, 2014; Isci et al., 2017; Boakye, 2017; Surgiato, 2018; Motland, 2018; El-Kas; Bale, 2018; While the employee engagement studies that factored in leadership have outright ignored the possible role of organisational climate in such contexts (Anyango, 2015; Wiguna& Netra, 2020; Ekpeyong, 2020), The few studies that, however, incorporated organisational climate in the mix of other constructs that relate to leadership or employee engagement have often used organisational climate as a moderating concept (Lin and Lin, 2011; Yldz&zcan, 2014; Dele et al., 2015). However, while the veracity of their actions is never in doubt in this study, this conceptual paper argues that organisational climate is the medium by which leadership mindsets transcend to either encourage or discourage employee engagement. Supporting this supposition is the close attempt made by Yasir et al. (2013), who empirically explained the mediating role of organisational climate as the nexus between leadership styles and organisational performance. The findings pinpointed organisational climate as a partial mediating factor in the resulting influence of leadership and organisational performance. The leadership styles probed in the study ultimately exhibited different mindsets of leadership. Permarupan et al. (2013), in recognising the role of organisational climate, posited that employee work deviance is basically influenced by organisational climate. Obeng et al. (2021) also hinted at organisational climate as a mediating mechanism between harmonious work passion and job performance.

5. Conceptual Model

Owing to the conceptual insights drawn from literature, the following model is developed to further demonstrate the relationship between the itemised variables.
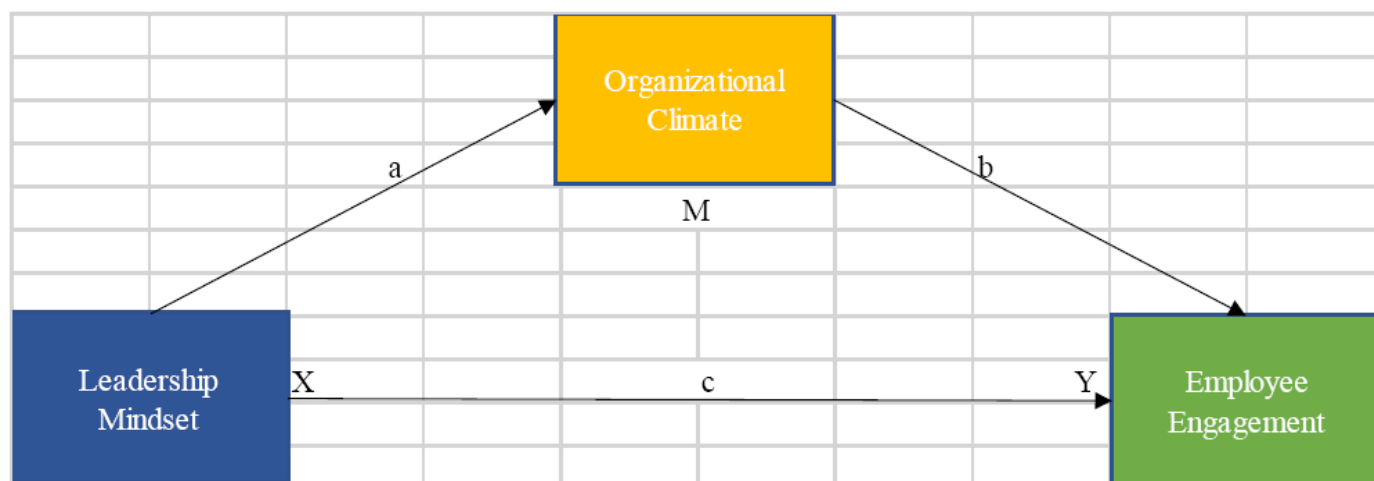
Source: Amah and Afolabi, 2023.

In this conceptual model, the leadership mindsets embody the quadrant mindsets conceptualised as growth-outward, growth-inward, fixed-outward, and fixed-inward mindsets, thus four independent variables. While the organisational climate is itemised using six constructs: continual learning, justice, teamwork, leadership, innovation, and psychological safety, employee engagement is fixated on three constructs: physical engagement, emotional engagement, and cognitive engagement. Interestingly, the conceptual model illustrates that leadership mindsets affect employee engagement, and this relationship could be better understood through organisational climate.

6. Conclusions

While studies on leadership styles have flooded the human resource management literature, little has been established on the phenomenon that exhibits the numerous leadership styles, which is the leadership mindset. Leadership mindset is a delicate phenomenon, but one that is greatly undermined in organizations. From this conceptual paper, it is conclusive that leadership mindsets could transcend to organisational mindsets, which inevitably could alter the shape of employee mindsets. Thus, a leadership mindset is the root framework for organisational climate and ultimately overall employee engagement. It is therefore recommended that mindsets be groomed in line with exigencies, for they are contagious and reflect the salient attributes of organisational leadership structure and styles, organisational climate, and ultimately employee engagement and overall organisational performance. Furthermore, being a conceptual paper, it is obvious that insights may be subjective; hence, empirical evidence buttressing or refuting these conceptual conclusions is therefore required.

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