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Transformational Leadership: A Systematic Review

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ABSTRACT

This research conducts a systematic literature review related to transformational leadership theory, highlighting the lack of empirical efforts to validate the key assumptions of the theory. The findings indicate that the lack of rigorous testing of transformational leadership theory raises serious concerns about the generally accepted components of the theory. Furthermore, the research also notes a decline in the popularity of the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) as a deep model of transformational leadership theory. Efforts to address this decline have not been entirely successful, underscoring the importance of further developing a more in-depth transformational leadership theory in the future. Subsequent research is expected to contribute further to understanding and developing transformational leadership theory without neglecting the consistency and rigor of empirical testing.

Keywords: transformational leadership, systematic review

1. Main text

The Leadership Model presents transformational leadership as the most effective form of organizational leadership, a claim also voiced in management textbooks as stated by Robbins and Judge (2013). In several studies related to transformational leadership, it has become one of the foundations of current research on leadership. A number of meta-analytic reviews report a fairly strong average relationship between transformational leadership and subordinate performance. Therefore, any positive relationship between transformational leadership and subordinate performance, even a weak one, will indicate that an increase in transformational leadership may result in improved employee performance (Judge & Piccolo, 2004).

Tennabeun and colleagues (1968) define leadership as interpersonal influence exercised in a situation and directed through communication towards the achievement of specific goals. Leadership has different meanings for various authors. For instance, Koontz and colleagues (1978) simplify the definition of leadership as influence, the art or process of influencing people so that they will willingly and enthusiastically strive towards the achievement of group goals. More specifically, leadership is defined as the use of authority in decision-making, carried out as an attribute of position, personal knowledge, or wisdom (Igbaekemen, 2014). Generally, the central theme in leadership is related to influence. Yukl (2012) has conducted extensive research attempting to define leadership and explains that leadership is an intentional process of influence by one person over others to direct them towards a goal. Leadership research has examined this influence process in various contexts, such as business, military, politics, education, etc. (Balwant et al., 2019).

Forty years after James McGregor Burns introduced the concept of transformational leadership, his ideas continue to have a substantial impact on how researchers think and develop leadership theory. Burns' (2012) research simply explains that great leaders are transformational because they "function as independent forces in changing the basic motives of followers." Over time, leadership researchers have sought to refine, expand, and empirically validate transformational leadership theory into what may be the most extensively researched leadership paradigm. The most popular research related to transformational leadership in the evolution of the theory is the work of Bernard Bass and colleagues. They help explain what behaviors leaders engage in to create transformation in followers, how leaders transform followers, and, finally, the outcomes affected by leader-follower interactions (Bass, 1985; Avolio & Bass, 1995; Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999; Bass & Riggio, 2006).

Transformational leadership is a highly popular and positive type of leadership that has developed rapidly in recent decades. This approach focuses on four main behavioral aspects: idealized influence (leader's charisma), intellectual stimulation (encouraging creativity and innovation), inspirational motivation (providing vision), and individualized consideration (attending to individual differences) (Avolio et al., 1999). In other words, leaders who employ transformational leadership style are those who plan for the future, serve as role models, set performance standards, demonstrate perseverance and confidence, and are able to shift interactions from a temporary focus on self-interest to a genuine concern for others (Kopperud et al., 2013).

Crede and colleagues (2019), in their meta-analysis, suggested that there is a relationship between transformational leadership and employee performance, with this relationship being stronger in countries whose cultures are not aligned with transformational leadership. This implies that transformational leadership can clearly have a positive impact on employee performance. Numerous studies have empirically demonstrated the relationship between

leadership and employee work attitudes, with many findings indicating that one of the leadership approaches that has the most significant impact on subordinates is transformational leadership (Williams & Alshahrani, 2017).

However, based on the author's assessment, attention to research grounded in literature reviews is still lacking, specifically those aiming to understand the influence of transformational leadership on aspects essential for organizational sustainability. There are many factors that mediate the relationship between leadership and outcomes. Therefore, this study focuses on exploring the mediating role in transformational leadership, with the hope that this research can serve as a theoretical foundation for future studies.

2. Research Methodology

The potential studies to be included in this research were identified through keyword searches and summaries in the ScienceDirect, PsycINFO, Scopus, and EBSCO databases. The search terms used were "transformational leadership" paired with "organizational commitment," "follower characteristics," and "team characteristics.". Additionally, the author conducted targeted internet searches using Google Scholar, reviewed reference lists from various examined articles, and examined the reference lists of previous studies. In this review, the focus is solely on transformational leadership style, excluding other leadership constructs. The researcher aims to delve into transformational leadership as a comprehensive construct, not fragmented into its individual aspects.

The first step in selecting journal articles is to search through Google Scholar. The second step involves reading the titles and abstracts of research articles. The third step is to filter out studies that are not relevant to the researcher's objectives. Finally, the fourth step is to thoroughly read the selected studies that serve as the foundation for this research.

3. Result and Discussion

Article	variable	Category	Finding
Balwant et al. (2019)	Student involvement	Follower	Student engagement mediates leadership transformational and academic performance
Breevaart et al, (2016)	Work engagement	Follower	Work engagement mediates the positive relationship transformational leadership and work performance follower
Hannah et al. (2017)	Individual beliefs	Follower	Internalization of values in followers mediates the relationship transformational leadership and work performance assessment
Lorinkova & Perry (2019)	Helping behavior	Team	Helping behavior mediates leadership relationships transformational and team performance

In the study by Belwant and colleagues (2019), it was explained that student engagement is a key mechanism in the relationship between transformational leadership and academic performance. This implies that student engagement serves as a mediating variable in the relationship between transformational leadership and academic performance. In the research conducted by Breevaart and colleagues (2016), data collected from employees in the business and healthcare sectors weekly for five consecutive weeks were analyzed to explore the mediating pathway from transformational leadership to job performance through job engagement. The findings revealed that job engagement was able to mediate the relationship between transformational leadership and job performance.

Additionally, in a study by Hannah et al. (2016), field research was conducted using two waves of repeated measurements to delve into the effects of transformational leadership on the internalization of values and individual confidence among U.S. Army infantry personnel. The study revealed that not only does transformational leadership have a positive impact on the internalization of values and individual confidence, but both of these variables also serve as mediators in the relationship between transformational leadership and follower-rated performance.

Furthermore, in the research conducted by Lorinvoka et al. (2019), it was found that the helping behavior demonstrated by teams or groups plays a mediating role in the connection between transformational leadership and team performance. This suggests that transformational leaders who encourage and facilitate a culture of mutual assistance within their teams can indirectly enhance team performance through fostering a supportive and collaborative environment.

4. Conclusion

The systematic literature review conducted by the researcher revealed a lack of empirical efforts to validate the foundational assumptions of transformational leadership theory, with findings indicating a general portrayal of transformational leadership theory as a unified and cohesive framework. Based on the researcher's findings, the evidence raised serious concerns regarding several components commonly accepted within transformational leadership theory. It is evident from the presented studies in the systematic literature review that there has been a decline in the popularity of using the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) as a comprehensive model for transformational leadership theory. Attempts to address this decline in the development of transformational leadership theory faced obstacles. Therefore, further research is needed to undertake comprehensive and in-depth theory development.

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