

A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE ON TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP

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ABSTRACT: *This literature review aims to understand transformational leadership as a theory and its application, especially in the field of education. This study reviews nine qualitative works on the use of transformational leadership theory in education and identifies three major themes: 1.) globalization and multiculturalism, 2.) behaviour and preparedness, and 3.) achievement. In reviewing these works, the authors focus on how transformational leadership influences the behaviour and practice of leaders in an effort to improve student achievement. The authors also examine limitations to the application of transformational leadership. Ultimately, the researchers determine that transformational leadership requires leaders to demonstrate specific skills focused on the equitable implementation of major reforms.*

KEYWORDS: transformational leadership, behavior, engagement, globalization

INTRODUCTION AND TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP THEORY DEFINED

Based on a firm belief in the need for current educational systems to reform, the researchers attempt to examine whether transformational leadership theory is appropriate for use within the educational field. As defined by Northouse (2016), transformational leadership theory “involves an exceptional form of influence that moves followers to accomplish more than what is usually expected of them” (p. 61). Transformational leadership primarily focuses on human nature and difference, which the researchers believe is a rationale for integrating the theory into schools, which are vital and dynamic environments filled with competing needs and goals. As Trmal, Bustamam, & Mohamed (2015) state, “transformational influences behaviors associated with leadership effectiveness in driving change and transform organization to success” (p. 89).

Northouse (2016) explains that leaders who have the ability to engage and influence others will be able to apply transformational leadership theory. He associates these leaders with charisma, which he explains as a capacity to inspire others and justifies as necessary in order to forge dynamic relationships between leaders and followers. Northouse agrees with many scholars that the factors of transformational leadership include idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. These factors require a certain set of behaviors in leaders in order to create a shared vision and to reach organizational goals. This paper reviews existing literature on transformational leadership (TL) theory, examines its use, application, and limitations within education, and synthesizes the literature by grouping it into four major themes: 1.) globalization and multiculturalism, 2.) behavior and preparedness, 3.) achievement, and 4.) limitations.

Globalization and Multiculturalism

Many scholars agree that TL can be especially useful for educational systems that are transitioning into an era of globalization and multiculturalism. As Lewis, Boston, and Peterson (2017) note, globalization has shifted what is expected and necessary in order for educators to apply TL. Transformation in schools requires an understanding of the linguistic, social, national, ethnic, and cultural factors that influence student achievement in order to accommodate students from all backgrounds. In order to enact TL, equity must be a critical component of shared vision (Lewis, Boston, & Peterson, 2017). Both Thorne (2011) and Alsaeedi and Male (2013) examine how transformational leadership can be applied to educational systems that are undergoing major cultural and societal shifts.

While Thorne (2011) examines the role of principals and the need for their involvement in order to transform schools, Alsaeedi and Male (2013) are preoccupied with the question of whether principals are ready to enact TL. Thorne examines the educational system in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and discusses the conflict between UAE's conservative society and the need for change and transformation in the education system. Alsaeedi and Male are focused on how both the Arab Spring and complicated conflicts with Iraq have resulted in a shift in Kuwait's culture, necessitating a critical transformation in education. Kuwaiti schools must challenge existing circumstances and change the behavior of school leaders and faculty in order to enact meaningful, long-lasting change at the school level (Alsaeedi & Male, 2013). In the UAE, many see an opportunity to transform the school system, increase student performance, and raise the level of English language proficiency, but for this to happen, individuals must recognize how change can address systemic issues in the school system related to learning outcomes and the organization's capacity for growth. In order to accommodate the needs of a globalized society and influence student performance, leaders must recognize that change is necessary, which speaks to the first step of transformational leadership and how it may be difficult for multiple people to agree on the need for change (Thorne, 2011).

In implementing TL in globalized and multicultural societies, there are certain fears that come along with adapting and changing, but with clarity of vision, there is a defined path toward overcoming fears in pursuit of a goal. The success of implementing TL depends on a change in attitude in order to truly effect reform. Future scholarship on TL should utilize the study design of Alsaeedi and Male (2013) to provide a more productive space for exchanging ideas among school leaders. Because the design is in the form of semi-structured interviews in a discussion setting, as opposed to individual interviews, there was a more productive give-and-take that reflected the state of the team and the organization. While there was some dissent regarding the use of TL, this type of study provides an opportunity to anticipate the challenges that come with institutional change, especially in response to fluctuating economies and cultures.

Behavior and Preparedness

In order to successfully implement TL, it is important for school leaders to adopt certain behaviors and characteristics to facilitate collaboration with their colleagues. Alsaeedi and Male (2013) are hesitant to see personality on its own as critical to transformational leadership, but they view the first step of team building as willingness to put aside one's own self-interest and acknowledge that there is a need for change. Sun and Leithwood (2012) examine the characteristics necessary for effecting transformational leadership: inspiration, motivation, and charisma. The authors emphasize the need for building a shared vision, which gives individual

leaders and team members space for creativity, and leaders must be aware of the need for support and encouragement before processing the change. According to Lewis, Boston, and Peterson (2017), the vision and end goal should be working together through transformational leadership, and global leadership requires practice in problem solving and development of new knowledge using human and social capital. TL is about reform and new ideas, which requires building new knowledge from different perspectives and viewpoints. Therefore, it is imperative to connect individuals' needs with the end goal (Lewis, Boston, & Peterson, 2017).

Preparedness is also essential for the successful implementation of transformational leadership. Valentine and Prater (2011) focus on high school principals with the goal of understanding how principal preparedness impacts the process of enacting change, specifically at the high school level. Principals must not only be prepared and knowledgeable but must also understand and recognize the type of behavior they should model in order to foster collaboration. The authors specifically note the correlation between decision making and enacting change. Principals' preparedness and expertise can help them to make the most significant and effective decisions that will have the most influential results. As Boberg and Bourgeois (2016) discuss, teachers' behavior will be influenced by leaders' behavior, and they can be motivated, encouraged, and inspired by the examples their leaders set. Collaboration and participation are critical, but students should be part of this process as well (Boberg & Bourgeois, 2016), and Leithwood and Sun (2012) argue that a shared vision inspires both teachers and students.

As a theory, transformational leadership has the potential to consider everyone's goals in shaping change and reform. Principals can prioritize the goals of teachers, and teachers can consider the goals of their students, and when these groups collaborate with each other, they work together to enact the change they want to see. Leaders must be understanding of teachers' needs and support them however possible, which invites teachers into the process and reminds them that they are a significant part of the school and its decision making. Similarly, transformational leadership invites students into the process by positioning their needs as central to the vision and plans that are created by leaders and teachers. As a result, choices are made with students in mind, which fosters their engagement and, subsequently, their success.

Achievement

Multiple scholars argue that transformational leadership can positively impact student achievement. Sun and Leithwood (2012) conclude that transformational leadership has a positive impact on student achievement, but they differentiate between direct and indirect impact. In their review of the literature, they agree with existing scholarship asserting that TL has a small but significant, positive impact on both student achievement and organizational outcomes. However, the authors conclude that indirect impact comprises most of TL's influence. One indirect impact of transformational leadership is that collaboration between faculty members provides a model for students of how shared governance achieves results (Lewis, Boston, & Peterson, 2017). But to establish an environment that fosters collaboration, principals must connect with staff and forge relationships that emphasize teachers and leaders as individuals (Valentine & Prater, 2011). The work of Alsaedi and Male (2012) corroborates this as they demonstrate that principals recognize the limitations and obstacles that face their schools and seek to provide support to their faculty when implementing change and reform. Unlike Sun and Leithwood (2012), Valentine and Prater do not see principals' impact as indirect; rather, they argue that leaders have a direct impact on students because they care about and prioritize what happens in the classroom. The education level and experience of principals parallel the success of students, and high-achieving schools have principals that take on strong

and active leadership roles. Engagement is correlated with achievement: students need to feel that they are a part of the community and that the school cares about them as individuals in order to feel motivated to succeed. Instructional leadership is integral to transformational leadership, which makes the impact of principals direct and not indirect (Valentine & Prater, 2011).

Whether the impact is direct or indirect, it is evident that school leaders have the power to shape and facilitate student achievement and success, especially through collaboration and shared decision making with instructors, which is prioritized within the TL framework. This is the strength of transformational leadership: it provides a theoretical framework with some degree of structure but with substantial room for considering the needs of multiple stakeholders, including principals, teachers, students, the community, and more. As much as leaders are able to understand the needs of their students, or even their organization, they will be able to support teachers, impact student achievement, and institute reform within the organization.

Limitations of Theory

While scholars acknowledge the weaknesses and limitations of transformational leadership, they also argue that its advantages outweigh its flaws. Berkovich (2016) attests to the fact that transformational leadership's interconnectedness with other leadership styles can be both a strength and a limitation. Berkovich's critique examines whether TL works in schools and aims to correct misunderstandings of transformational leadership's utility and falsifiability. Berkovich responds to others' critiques that transformational leadership does not offer a useful framework or model that can be generalizable yet focused by arguing that transformational leadership bridges the gap between theories, which should be viewed as an asset. It is also worth noting that individual and organizational needs are so varied that it would be difficult for transformational leadership to provide a comprehensive model. Further, transformational leadership offers room for interpretation and flexibility in its implementation.

Transformational leadership can face significant limitations if educational leaders fail to prioritize multiculturalism and equity. Berkovich (2016) speaks to the value of TL in a multicultural context, since it allows for varied understandings of how to identify needs and issues in a multitude of school environments. However, as Lewis, Boston, and Peterson (2017) argue, a lack of cultural awareness and understanding makes it difficult to implement change. Without an understanding of others' perspectives, cultures, and backgrounds, it can be difficult to overcome conflicts between groups in order to begin the process of transformational leadership (Lewis, Boston, & Peterson, 2017). Considering these scholars together, culture must shape the school's shared vision and motivate leaders to adopt positive behavior in order to work towards equity.

While it is clear that scholars take issue with this theory, these critiques do not negate transformational leadership's value and effectiveness. Rather, its limitations should be viewed as opportunities to integrate additional leadership theories in order to bolster transformational leadership's utility. In the future, it is clear that TL can be improved upon in order to provide the theory with more structure while still allowing for flexibility in its application. TL can provide opportunities for engagement with stakeholders who have varied goals and interests when it comes to improving the school's success and for a multifaceted approach to enacting change within a school system.

CONCLUSION

The existing scholarship suggests that transformational leadership can be useful in improving school leadership practice. While the uniqueness of TL is that it requires specific behaviors and characteristics, transformational school leadership requires the same things in addition to a skillset that is well-suited for instructional leadership in order to apply reforms in schools. After reviewing relevant leadership, the researchers have concluded that school leaders require a high level of awareness of the need for change, especially within educational systems grappling with the complexity of globalization. Further, leaders must be aware of teachers' needs in order to adapt behaviors and skills that can influence and motivate others. When school leaders can build strong relationships with their teams, they will be able to establish a baseline inspired by shared goals that prioritize student success and preparation for future endeavors. The researchers believe that charisma can be replaced by stronger skills and behaviors that school leaders can use to motivate others. Teachers who feel part of the organization will be more willing to support their leaders, and school leaders who can be involved in the learning process and develop an understanding of instructional leadership will be more capable of enhancing the educational process by implementing transformational leadership.

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