

Transformational Leadership, Self-efficacy, and Work performance among Lecturers in Higher Education Institutions: Conceptual Analysis on a Mediation Model

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Abstract

The main objective of this study is to investigate the relationship between perceived transformational leadership and work performance based on social exchange theory in the context of higher education institutions. Meanwhile, the paper also aims to test the role of self-efficacy working as a mediating variable in this relationship, since the potential mediating mechanism has found its support in the theoretical context of social cognitive theory, where interaction and influence take place among environmental, personal, and behavioral elements. Thus, this study may offer a better understanding of the role played by personality traits such as self-efficacy in the influential path of transformational leadership toward work performance. The research findings from a different sample (lecturers) and context (higher education) will not only broaden the existing literature but also encourage future research initiatives on the topic.

Keywords: Transformational Leadership, Work Performance, Self-Efficacy, Higher Education Institutions

Introduction

For many years, higher education institutions have been in a crucial position to fulfill the demands and expectations of the nation. Since education is deemed an important indicator to show the success of a nation, multiple reformation methods and policies are carried out to enhance lecturers' work performance and raise students' learning levels. The agreement has been long in the landscape of research that "the evaluation of teaching is a key concern of education administration" (Moore & Neal, 1969). This brings the academic staff to high status as the most valuable resource, because they are the main workforce to realize the achievements and goals of the higher education institutions.

Moreover, lecturers are seen as managers and examples to the community. In addition to educating the young generation with knowledge, lecturers are also expected to engage in various tasks, such as taking on tasks associated with administrative affairs, caring for and guiding the students in their daily lives, and working extra hours to prepare for everything involved in their professions (Johari et al., 2018). Therefore, in order to achieve success and sustain competitive advantage, it is important for leaders and administrators to improve the work performance of the academic staff in higher educational organizations. Specifically, this study is limited to the individual work performance of the academic staff.

In addition to the academic employees, the successful operation of people-oriented organizations, such as colleges and universities, is largely dependent on the effect of the leaders. There is a growing need highlighted by research for better leaders who are able to lead their followers toward the organization's missions and goals. The interactive relationship between supervisors and subordinates has attracted the attention of research, showing the influence on employees' organizational commitment, motivation, and increased task performance and contextual performance (Harris et al., 2009). Among various leadership styles, transformational leadership is seen as superior and has become increasingly desirable in the field of administration. Although researchers have closely examined the impact of transformational leadership on organizational performance Alsayyed et al (2020), there is still weakness in the literature on transformational leadership due to inadequate research on the link with individual work performance. This study aims to examine the impact of perceived transformational leadership on individual work performance among lecturers in the context of higher education institutions. Moreover, this study also investigates the possible mediation effect of self-efficacy on the relationship between perceived transformational leadership and individual work performance of those lecturers working in higher education institutions.

Literature Review

Individual work performance and its relationship with transformational leadership

Given the complexity of the concept, scholars have been making efforts to identify the specific dimensions of work performance, because the concept may differ in a wide range across various occupations and professions (Aguinis, 2013). An agreement has been reached on the statement that work performance is a multi-dimensional concept. For example, Campbell and Wiernik (2015) have described eight essential factors, including communication, technical performance, initiative, persistence, effort, and counterproductive work behavior, etc.

Although different dimensions have been proposed, task performance, contextual performance, and counterproductive work behavior are three dominant dimensions of work performance, and thus instrumentation measuring the three dimensions has been developed and tested (Koopmans et al., 2014; Ramos-Villagrasa et al., 2019). Task performance is those activities that are directly related to the achievement of the tasks clearly described in the job scopes. Relating to the technical requirements, the factor of task performance is encompassed in whatever work roles (Campbell & Wiernik, 2015). According to Borman and Motowidlo (1993), contextual performance focuses on carrying out non-formal tasks in a voluntary manner and helping others. Therefore, although both task performance and contextual performance attach importance to the contribution and support to the organization, they differ in that task performance is mainly related to tasks while contextual performance provides a broader organizational context for the achievement of organizational

tasks and success (Motowidlo & Van Scotter, 1994). Counterproductive work behavior, by contrast, is viewed as harmful behaviors generating negative impetus to the organization (Rotundo & Sackett, 2002).

Viewed as observable behaviors that are performed by employees, work performance carries the implication of individual actions that can contribute to organizational success (Campbell & Wiernik, 2015). This description makes it clear that individual work performance is essential for the success and effectiveness of the organization. Accordingly, the management in organizations calls for an effective leadership style that can increase task performance and contextual performance, and meanwhile decrease counterproductive work behavior. In fact, although the working environment is developed specifically for serving education, there is no significant difference in work performance between lecturers working in the higher educational context and employees from other industries. Therefore, the work performance of academic employees is among the fundamental factors that contribute to the goals and missions of higher education institutions.

In addition to the contribution of the employees, the leader's behavior is also a key element in the management and operation of the organization, because generally, the performance and success of an organization may largely depend on its leadership styles. In the context of higher education institutions where profit is not the main purpose, lecturers' work performance is their contribution to the achievement of the educational goals and the organizational missions. The benign relationship between the leader and the followers happens to coincide with the picture that is depicted by transformational leadership.

According to Bass (1995), transformational leaders are those who can effectively motivate others to do more than what they have been expected to do. A transformational leader exerts influence mainly through four aspects: 1) idealized influence, 2) inspirational motivation, 3) intellectual stimulation, and 4) individualized consideration. Firstly, idealized influence entails the leaders' behaviors and attributions perceived by the followers (Bass & Riggio, 2006), making them more dependable because of their determination to realize the goals. Secondly, inspirational motivation mainly talks about the leader's power to guide and encourage the whole group to work and contribute towards the common goals. Next, with the attribution of intellectual stimulation, the leader encourages different ideas from the followers and thus makes them more creative (Bass et al., 1987). Finally, the best leaders cooperate and communicate with their followers by caring for personal needs and development (Bass et al., 1987; Rawashdeh et al., 2020).

Known as the four "I" s, the four dimensions describe a comprehensive concept of an open and creative leader, with the attributes that emphasize leading the group by being an example; motivating the followers to work hard together for a common mission; being willing to accept different ideas; and meanwhile showing respect and care to every individual in the organization. All these dimensions in the concept suggest that a transformational leader is capable of influencing the followers to go beyond expectations with high performance (Hilton, et al., 2021).

Although there may be quite a few factors that influence work performance, transformational leadership has been confirmed to have a positive effect in promoting employees' work

performance (Bastari et al., 2020; Lai et al., 2020; Rawashdeh et al., 2020). It makes sense that employees will feel safe and show trust in the leader, and therefore tend to maintain a good relationship with him/her when they perceive individualized support provided by the leader (Morkevičiūtė et al., 2019). A transformational leader can increase employees' work performance by creating such working atmosphere that is nice and healthy for the people working in it. Consequently, high work performance can be expected due to inspirational motivation (Bayraktar & Jiménez, 2020).

The positive process of actions and repays depicted in the social exchange theory (Blau, 1964) offers a better understanding of the beneficial relationship between the transformational leader and the followers. Since people tend to build social relations based on their judgment of cost and benefit (Homans, 1958), when the leader's action can be estimated by the employees to be beneficial to them, they are more likely to reciprocate this positive action by working hard and are more willing to repay with extra efforts (Blau, 1964; Jyoti & Bhau, 2015). Thus, transformational leadership is considered to be effective in promoting individual work performance in that the leader leads the group not only by setting an example and steering the followers' efforts towards the organizational expectations but also by valuing their opinions and needs.

Therefore, this study proposes the following hypothesis

H_{a1} : There is a positive relationship between transformational leadership and individual work performance.

Self-efficacy and its mediating role in the relationship between transformational leadership and individual work performance

Considering factors other than transformational leadership, such factors as the employees' personal characteristics are also influencing their behaviors (Buil et al., 2019). In the literature for relevant studies, "efficacy" has attracted more attention than other personal characteristics (Sürücü et al., 2022). Chinese researchers Liu and Kong (2020) also investigate the influence of transformational leadership and self-efficacy on organizational commitment. Self-efficacy is about individuals' belief of their ability to successfully accomplish some certain task, or tasks (Bandura, 1986). According to Bandura (1999), The development of self-efficacy mainly comes from four sources: mastery experience, verbal persuasion, vicarious experience, and physiological states. Mastery experience is fostered by an individual's belief in successfully executing a certain behavior and can be extended to different situations with repeated success. Verbal persuasion means that the reinforcement of self-efficacy takes place when people's abilities are told and positively commended by others. When people witness someone else accomplish certain tasks, they get vicarious experience which may result in strengthening their belief in their abilities to succeed in similar situations. Physiological states mainly talk about the personal states such as psychological and emotional aspects that indicate the assessment of capabilities to carry out specific tasks.

Among the four sources that can raise self-efficacy, as is stated by the social cognitive theory, one's master experience is important and gained on the basis of the person's similar successful achievements in the past (Bandura, 1997). Whereas the rest three sources, including verbal persuasion, vicarious experiences, and positive physiological states, may be provided and promoted by a transformational leader (Sivanathan et al., 2004). Furthermore,

a transformational leader can accept different ideas and encourage creative solutions from the followers to overcome problems (Salanova et al., 2022), which in turn helps nurture their master experience, and therefore increase the level of expectations of followers by increasing their sense of self-abilities (Pillai & Williams, 2004).

Previous studies have shown interest in the relationship of how transformational leadership influences several leadership outcomes, and the role played by self-efficacy in the relationship. It is proved by previous studies that self-efficacy can influence work performance. One study carrying much significance focuses on the dependent variable of work performance (Hannah et al., 2016). Furthermore, in a study where four structural equation models were compared, the model having the best fit showed a significant partial mediation effect of self-efficacy in the relationship between transformational leadership and employee engagement (Prochazka et al., 2017). Research attention has also been paid to indirect relationships through self-efficacy between transformational leadership and other variables such as innovative work behavior among nurses (Afsar & Masood, 2018) and employees' intention to support organizational change (Bayraktar & Jiménez, 2020). Therefore, literature has provided evidence showing the mediation role of self-efficacy, backing up the mediating mechanism analyzed in this study.

Moreover, with a paradigm of transformational leadership, Bass explains that subordinate competence could be developed further as a consequence of the transformational leader's nurturance and vision (Bass, 1985). This motivates the employees to not only invest their attention and energy to achieve normal job goals but also to go further and to be willing to invest extra efforts and exceed expectations (Lai et al., 2020). Thus, through constant motivation and inspiration, transformational leaders enhance the morale of their followers and strengthen their confidence in their abilities.

Social cognitive theory (SCT) Bandura (1986) provides implications about the possibility of self-efficacy working as a mediating variable on the relationship between transformational leadership and individual work performance. Based on the social learning theory which went opposite direction against behaviorist ideas of external stimuli, emphasizing the role of observation and learning from other people (Rumjaun & Narod, 2020), Bandura advanced the model from the social learning theory to establish Social Cognitive Theory. According to Bandura (1986), reciprocal interaction is described among the three key factors: Environment (E), Personal cognition (P), and Behavior(B). Figure 1 illustrates the model of triadic reciprocal causation.

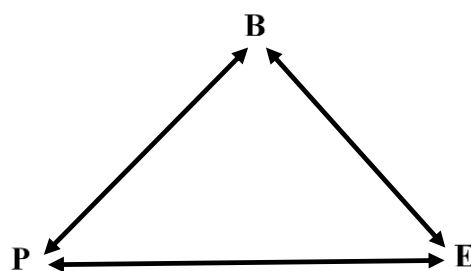


Figure 1: Bandura (1986)'s Triadic Reciprocal Causation.

Being defined as a model of reciprocal determinism, SCT has concluded that cognitive and other personal factors, behavior, and environmental influences all work interactively as determinants of each other. “Reciprocal” uncovers the nature of the mutual action between causal factors. This has offered an insightful explanation of the process in which behavior is shaped and adjusted by examining how the environment and people exert impact (Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2020). What people think and feel affects the way they behave. In this process, self-efficacy can provide refined predictions of human action (Bandura, 1986). Relevant to the research objectives, this study focuses its attention on the influencing pathways of E-P, E-B, and P-B, and establishes the conceptual model in which E influences B, and meanwhile, P works as the mediator in the relationship.

Theoretically, transformational leadership potentially relates to verbal persuasion through inspirational motivation, idealized influence, and intellectual stimulation (Hannah et al., 2016). With the four attributes, especially individualized consideration, a transformational leader provides the followers with a safe working environment and positive organizational atmosphere (Morkevičiūtė et al., 2019), which boosts their commitment levels and self-efficacy (Malik & Malik, 2023). Working in such kind of environment enhances the personal belief of abilities in employees because people feel understood and encouraged, leading to a higher level of self-efficacy. Furthermore, since self-efficacy is the belief in one’s capabilities, it in nature reflects the evaluation of the extent to which the specific action can be successfully performed and the length of staying resilient (Bandura, 1977). Therefore, individuals with a high level of self-efficacy are more resilient, and thus there is a higher possibility for their perceptions to succeed with effort and a high level of work performance.

Since it seems clear that the leader and the followers are especially correlated in people-oriented organizations, as suggested in Figure 2, this study builds its framework on the basis of such an operative analogy. The interdependent and interactive relationships in the organization are formed among the key elements, including the environmental factor of a transformational leader, employees’ personal factor of self-efficacy, and the behavioral factor of their work performance.

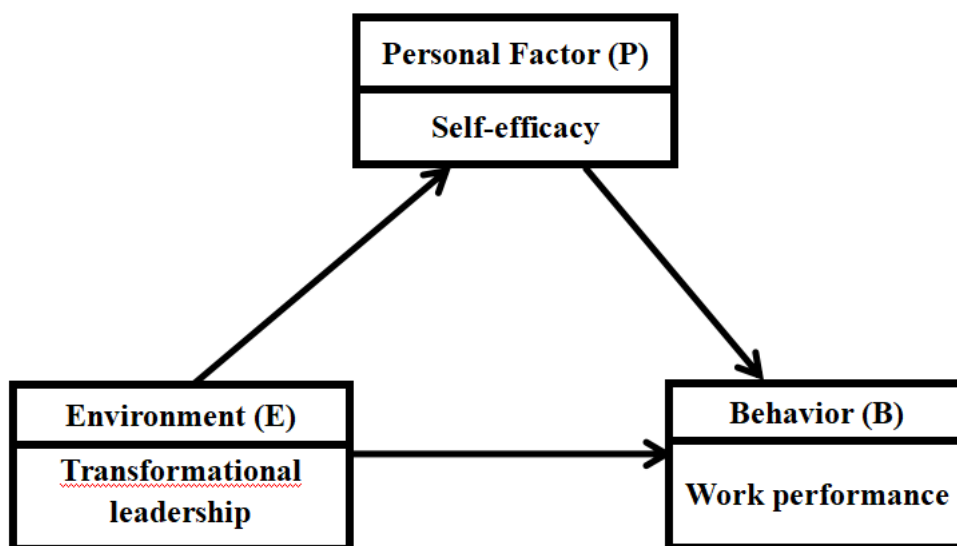


Figure 2: The research framework of this study

Therefore, literature has laid the foundation for the connection between transformational leadership, self-efficacy, and work performance. However, there are relatively few studies specifically focusing on the effect of self-efficacy mediating the connection. That makes what this study trying to investigate matter. With self-efficacy working as the mediator, the relationship between transformation leadership and work performance is reviewed and examined more closely under the paradigm of social exchange theory.

Based on the literature, the following hypothesis has been formulated:

H_{a2} : There is a mediation effect of self-efficacy on the relationship between transformational leadership and individual work performance.

Methodology

This study is designed to employ a quantitative approach to measure all the variables and their relationships. Since the main purpose is to test the mediation effect of self-efficacy in the relationship between transformational leadership and work performance among lecturers in higher education institutions, it is preferable to adopt a quantitative research design. The process through data collection until the final analysis is suitable to help examine and explain the relationships among the variables.

This study uses descriptive analysis to get the level of the variables measured. Inferential analysis, especially Pearson Product Moment Correlation, is used to determine whether there is a significant relationship between the independent variable (transformational leadership) and the dependent variable (work performance), realizing the objective through testing the first hypothesis proposed in this study. In addition, Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) is applied to closely examine the prediction of work performance from the independent scores, including self-efficacy. As for the second hypothesis proposed in this study, the mediating effect of self-efficacy in enhancing the relationship between transformational leadership and work performance is also tested through SEM, using the Bootstrap technique. All these techniques are performed to seek for more accurate explanation of the multi-variate relationships in this study.

The conceptualized findings and implications in the future

In order to realize the organizational mission and sustain a competitive edge, the administration of the higher education institutions should seek for ways to promote the individual work performance of the lecturers. Aiming to closely examine the relationship, this study tries to determine the conditions and mechanism of increasing work performance when getting transformational leadership and self-efficacy involved.

Firstly, the finding of this research may go consistently with the theoretical view of social exchange theory when the relationship between transformational leadership and individual work performance is positively confirmed. Based on social exchange theory, when the followers perceive beneficial behaviors from the leader, they will repay the positive behaviors by making efforts and achieving high work performance. This research finding would also stay in line with and expand previous studies (Buil, et al., 2019; Hannah, et al., 2016). Moreover, the positive result may also validate the transformational leadership concept and theory in that a transformational leader has the attributes and capabilities that can motivate the followers to work harder to generate high performance by directing their values and targets toward the organizational goals.

Secondly, the mediation effect of self-efficacy is proposed and tested in this research to investigate the path in which transformational leadership increases individual work performance through self-efficacy. Therefore, the finding of this research may enrich the literature about the effect of self-efficacy given that the mediating effect of self-efficacy on this relationship between transformational leadership and individual work performance is determined.

Furthermore, the potential influence of transformational leadership on self-efficacy can find its support in the description of the four principal sources portrayed by Bandura (1977), namely mastery experience, verbal persuasion, vicarious experience, and physiological states. Lecturers should obtain more opportunities to develop their mastery experiences through regular successful moments, which can be awarded and recorded by the management of the faculties or the higher education institutions. In addition, lecturers can gain vicarious experiences when they are assigned similar tasks so that they not only compare the challenges and obstacles but also observe performance and ways to solve problems. Lecturers build up higher self-efficacy from the information of verbal persuasion and physiological states, which can be nurtured by the faculty dean exerting transformational leadership through inspirational motivation and individualized consideration.

Primarily, under the theoretical framework of the social cognitive theory, lecturers strengthen their belief of abilities after receiving positive messages from the environment (specifically, motivation from a transformational faculty leader), and thus generate higher work performance when becoming higher self-efficacious.

Limitation and Future Work

The current study may have limitations that must be taken into consideration. First, the variables and relationships proposed in this research only fit the specific objectives of this study. Future research may probably look into the moderating role of other variables in the relationship between transformational leadership and work performance. Other outcome variables, such as commitment and goals, are also worthy of analysis. Second, since the research is conducted among academic staff in higher education institutions who can be seen as employees with high tenure and intelligence, the generalizability of the results might be hindered. Future research conducted in other working contexts could be of help with backing up and strengthening the findings of this study. Lastly, there are certain limitations in the cross-sectional research design with data only collected among lecturers. Therefore, it is feasible to conduct some longitudinal studies among both the faculty leaders and the academic staff in the future

Conclusion

This study attempts to reveal the relationship between transformational leadership and individual work performance among lecturers. Furthermore, it hopes to confirm the optimal role played by self-efficacy to cause positive change in the configuration of transformational leadership influencing work performance. The findings of this study may add empirical evidence to the social cognitive theory, offering a better explanation to the complex relationships between the variables. Once the mediation role of self-efficacy is confirmed, the literature of variables can be expanded with the findings on the mechanism of the causal

relationships between transformational leadership and individual work performance. With sufficient conditions, the results of this study can help with the development of further studies into work performance and the factors influencing it. The main contribution of this study is to report whether there is a direct influence of transformational leadership on employee work performance and the combined effect with the mediator of self-efficacy in the context of higher education institutions. The faculty leader leads the group not only in the way of management and regulation but also with respect and care. The self-belief and confidence of the lecturers will be strengthened and increased with the perception of repeated success and benefits. Therefore, in light of the social cognitive theory, it is advisable that the leaders and the administrators in higher education institutions seek for effective ways to develop transformational leadership attributions that can motivate the lecturers towards the common goals, and promote individual work performance among the academic staff through increasing their self-efficacy.

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