

The Relationship between Transformational Leadership and Followers' Work Characteristics and Task Performance

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Abstract

Although leaders and followers are both essential elements within the leadership process, there has been limited research regarding followers and their effects in the process. This study aims to examine the relationship between transformational leadership and followers' work characteristics and performance, and follower's attitudes towards a leader as a moderating variable. A questionnaire survey will be used to collect data from Malaysian multi-national corporations. The questionnaire will be utilized to measure followers' work characteristics and task performance with their leader while the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire will measure follower's perception to the leadership style of their leader. Furthermore, three followers' attitudes toward their leader (trust in the leader, loyalty, and value congruence) as moderators of this association. The literature review focuses on the followers' outcomes and builds the framework of conceptual model. Two theoretical perspectives have guided the theoretical framework which are the transformational leadership theory and leader-member exchange theory. The proposal will give an increased understanding of the implementation of transformational leadership in Malaysian MNCs and its implication on outcomes of followers. This framework reflects a growing interest in extending transformational leadership to emerging in developing counties, thus contributing to a wider body of knowledge.

Keywords: Transformational leadership, work characteristics, task performance, followers' attitude towards leader, leader-member exchange.

Introduction

Since the publication of Bass' seminal book on transformational leadership in 1985, a number of researchers have started studying this particular leadership model, and it has emerged as perhaps the most frequently researched topic in leadership during the last two decades (Jung, Yammarino & Lee, 2009). Transformational leadership theory rests on the assertion that certain leader behaviours can motivate followers to a higher level of thinking (Piccolo & Colquitt, 2006). By appealing to followers' ideals and values, transformational leaders enhance commitment to a well-articulated vision and inspire followers to develop new ways

of thinking about problems. Among followers' characteristics and individual differences, values play an important role in predicting how followers will respond to leaders' influences (Shin & Zhou, 2003). Transformational leadership does indeed improve performance and confidence in the task, at least relative management by exception. Transformational leaders exhibit charismatic behaviour which transforms their followers to reach their full potential to generate the highest degree of performance. The transformational leader is also perceived as being more supportive than other leaders such as transactional leader and laissez-faire leadership (Fok-Yew & Ahmad, 2014).

In practice, empirical evidence shows that fifty per cent of managers fail as a manager while sixty to seventy per cent of employees have reported that the most stressful part of their job derives the inefficiency of their immediate supervisor (Tonkin, 2013; Van Vugt, Hogan, & Kaiser, 2008). As a result, today managers no longer rely on their functional knowledge and they need to apply effective leadership skills. An assumption made in the organizational literature is that transformational leadership is a universally positive management practice, and transformational leaders influence employee work behaviours in beneficial ways across many organizational settings (Bass, 1997). Hence, managers are encouraged to consistently exhibit transformational leadership. Consequently, numerous studies have focused on examining *how* transformational leaders drive their followers' behaviours (Li, Chiaburu, Kirkman & Xie, 2013).

Nielsen & Daniels (2011) suggested that leaders should use different strategies to manage followers individually and groups as a whole. On the other hand, previous research in transformational leadership has ignored the role of followers and mainly focused on leaders' characteristics and behaviours (Hu, Wang, Liden & Sun, 2011; Riggio, Chaleff, & Lipman-Blumen, 2008). Based on situational leadership theory, the influence of transformational leaders on performance outcomes may be contingent on follower characteristics. Specifically, it is likely that transformational leadership may be effective for some but not all followers, due to differences in followers' individual characteristics, such as personality. Surprisingly, very few empirical studies have examined how specific followers' attitudes are associated with transformational leadership style, while none have empirically assessed the moderating effect on followers' attitudes toward leader particularly in multinational corporations (MNCs). To address these important research gaps, we examine the role of followers' attitudes and how moderate is the relationship between transformational leadership and followers' work characteristics and task performance in Malaysian MNCs.

In this study, MNCs is chosen because Malaysia economy is heavily dependent on MNCs. Nearly all the major MNCs have production bases in Malaysia. On the other hand, in seeking a competitive advantage in order to survive in the competitive market, MNCs rely heavily on the appointment of managers who are applying transformational leadership style to manage the organization. Transformational leadership style may be the most effective leadership style in times of change and may effective in helping leaders to lead organizational change in MNCs.

What is transformational leadership?

According to Fitzgerald and Schutte (2009), transformational leadership is a motivational of leadership style with a clear organisational vision that stimulate and inspire which can achieved by establishing a closer rapport with employees, understanding their needs, and helping them to attain their potential, contributes to good outcomes for an organisation. In view of this, transformational leadership is espousing identified goals, values and beliefs may help employees frame what they do as a special part of the organization.

Bass and Riggio (2006) suggested that transformational leaders stimulate and inspire followers to achieve extraordinary outcomes and help them to become leaders. In transformational leadership there are four main components instrumental in follower attainment such as idealized influence, intellectual stimulation, inspirational and individualized consideration (Bass, 1997). Idealized influence is when a leader behaves in such a way to become a role model for their followers, someone that followers want to emulate (Bass & Avolio, 1994). Intellectual stimulation is what a leader projects to instill creativity and innovation in their followers by challenging status quo (Bass & Avolio, 1994). Inspirational motivation addresses the followers need to have meaning in their work (Bass & Avolio, 1994). Individualized consideration is the leader acting as a coach and mentor to the follower, focusing on their need for growth as a leader themselves (Bass & Avolio, 1994).

Transformational leadership has been defined as influencing followers by broadening and elevating followers' goals and providing them with confidence to perform beyond the expectations specified in the implicit or explicit exchange agreement (Shin & Zhou, 2003). One distinctive characteristic that differentiates transformational leadership from other leadership approaches is its active involvement with and engagement of personal values among followers (Jung, et al., 2009). According to Bass (1985), transactional leaders motivate followers with an existing set of personal values and by providing rewards that are attractive to their current value framework, while transformational leaders actively seek to change personal values among followers so that they can go beyond their self interest for the good of larger entities such as the group and organization.

Transformational leaders satisfy the higher needs of followers, and they raise one another to higher levels of motivation and morale. Transformational leaders, such as Gandhi, Nelson Mandela or Martin Luther King, Jr who enunciated an inspiring vision and challenging goals (Allio, 2013). In most studies, transformational leadership was measured using the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) (Shin & Zhou, 2003; Wang, Law, Hackett, Wang, & Chen, 2005; Piccolo, & Colquitt, 2006; Nielsen & Daniels, 2011) and the Leadership Practices Inventory (Nielsen & Daniels, 2011). The MLQ (Form 5X) survey will be used in current study.

The outcomes of transformational leadership

A long line of research has examined the relationship between transformational leadership and followers' performance, attitudes, creativity, and organizational citizenship behavior. Shin and Zhou (2003) theorize that leaders' transformational leadership is positively related to followers' creativity. However, the cross-sectional design precluded the interpretation that there was a causal relationship between transformational leadership and creativity. For instant, leaders who were more transformational might attract and select more creative followers, or be more sensitive in detecting creativity in their followers. Past studies also showed the transformational leadership is positively related to the task performance and organizational citizenship behaviors (OCB) of followers (Liang & Chi, 2013; Wang, et al., 2005; Piccolo & Colquitt, 2006). Jung et al. (2009) provide evidence that transformational leadership will have a positive effect on leadership effectiveness across two cultures (in the U.S. and Korea) and this effect will operate at the individual level of analysis (in terms of individual differences).

In a longitudinal study, Dvir, Avolio and Shamir (2002) divided the leaders with two different trainings. Transformational leadership training conducted to experimental group leaders and control group leaders received eclectic training. The finding was that experimental group leader had a more positive impact on followers' development and performance than the

control group leaders. The study was conducted in military organization and so it was limited to external validity. But they predict that when transformational leadership is enhanced by training, the human resource development and performance will have positive relationship in a variety of organization contexts. There is general support for strong and positive relationships between transformational leadership and subjective performance outcomes (Lowe, Kroeck, & Sivasubramaniam, 1996; Zacher & Jimmieson, 2011). Yet a causal relationship between transformational leadership and both followers' work characteristics and task performance has only rarely been demonstrated.

The followership

Kellerman (2008) provided a definition of followership as the response of those in subordinate positions (followers) to those in superior ones (leaders). Followership implies a relationship between subordinates and superiors, and a response of the former to the latter. Kellerman's definition of followership includes the three elements (leader, follower, relationship) that are common to many current studies of both leadership and followership (Bass, 1985; Burns, 1978; Notgrass, 2013).

Research on interactions between transformational leadership and follower characteristics is so far sparse. Avolio, Walumbwa, and Weber (2009) noted in their review of the leadership literature that perhaps one of the most interesting omissions in theory and research on leadership is the absence of discussions of followership and its impact on leadership. This leads to potential future research on leader and follower relationship as well as the leadership theory that is used to guide a theoretical framework for that study.

Transformational leadership and follower work characteristics

Shamir, House and Arthur (1993) suggested that leaders who exhibit transformational behaviours can influence how followers judge a work environment by using verbal persuasion and by clearly communicating the value of an organization's mission. Similarly, Bono and Judge (2003) suggested that transformational leaders help followers view work goals as congruent with their own values. Furthermore, many of the behaviours of transformational leaders have a direct impact on the above mentioned job's characteristics. Nielsen, Randall, Yarker and Brenner (2008) viewed that leaders who utilize intellectual stimulation by stimulating their followers' efforts to be innovative and creative by questioning assumptions, reframing problems and approaching old situations in new ways may boost follower perceptions of variety and autonomy. Also, they think that leaders who engage in individualized consideration by paying special attention to each individual follower's needs and concerns for achievement and growth should have their followers see more autonomy and feedback in their jobs. In overall, we believe that leaders, who engage in idealized influence, by emphasizing inspirational motivation, by communicating an exciting vision of the future and by being admired and trusted, may encourage followers perceptions to view their job as more significant.

Transformational leaders may have a profound impact on followers' perceptions of their work characteristics because they provide personal attention to promoting development through individualized consideration, enable new ways of working, encourage novel problem solving, and provide coaching and encouragement of specific behaviours in subordinates through intellectual stimulation (Nielsen, et al., 2008) Some cross-sectional by examining how leadership behaviour affects followers' perceptions of their work characteristics. For example, in studies of workplace control. Cooper and Cartwright (1997) found that leaders played a

significant role in monitoring the amount of control individuals have over their role. They also found, in a separate analysis, that increased delegation and participation were associated with increased levels of well-being. High levels of social support from superiors have also been shown to be associated with lower stress and burnout (Lee & Ashforth, 1996). Both of these work characteristics may be associated with transformational leadership behaviour. Moreover, a meta-analysis of longitudinal research (de Lange, Taris, Kompier, Houtman, & Bongers, 2003) has found strong evidence for causal relationships between a number of work characteristics and employee health and well-being; work characteristics that could be heavily influenced by leaders. Studies do suggest that a link between leadership and well-being may be explained.

Shamir et al. (1993) provided indirect support for these assertions by suggesting that leaders who demand ideological values and engage in intellectual stimulation give meaning to their organization and to their followers' work. Thus, we think employees of transformational leaders will perceive positively their jobs. This study aims to extend previous work by examining the validity of perceived work characteristics include role clarity, meaningfulness, and opportunities for development (Nielsen, et al., 2008). We propose that these three work characteristics may have direct relationship with transformational leadership behaviour. Hence, we hypothesize that:

Preposition 1: Transformational leadership has a positive relationship with followers' work characteristics.

Transformational leadership and follower task performance

In the past studies, there is evidence showing positive relationships between transformational leadership and performance (Lowe et al., 1996; Breevaart et al., 2014). Among the difference leadership style, many researchers also found that transformational leadership is stronger than the relationship between transactional leadership and performance (Dvir, et al., 2002; Lowe et al., 1996). However, there is a need for a test in variety organization on the impact of transformational leadership towards objective performance of followers.

An enduring challenge for organizations is enhancing employee task performance to achieve organizational goals. Yukl (1998) argued that one crucial factor that may have a significant influence on task performance is leadership. It is typically conceptualized as influencing subordinates by broadening and elevating followers' goals and providing them with the confidence to perform beyond the expectations specified in the implicit or explicit exchange agreement goals. On the other hand, followers who rated their leader as more transformational indicated that they worked in a more resourceful environment. Consequently, this fulfils follower is basic need. In return it enables followers to direct their energy toward their work and thus contributes to followers' task performance as designated by their leader.

The positive relationship between transformational leadership and task performance is supported by a great deal of research (Piccolo and Colquitt, 2006; Judge and Piccolo, 2004; Lowe et al., 1996). According to Bass (1985), transformational leaders provide constructive feedback to their followers, convince their followers to exhibit extra effort, and encourage followers to think creatively about complex problems. As a result, followers tend to behave in ways that facilitate high levels of task performance. In addition transformational leaders persuade followers to go beyond personal interest for the sake of the collective. When followers associate their own success with that of their organizations' and identify with the organizations' values and goals, they become more willing to make a positive contribution to

the work context (Podsakoff, MackKenzie, Moorman, & Fetter, 1990). This study also proposed to use measure task performance were developed by Williams and Anderson (1991). They conceptualized task performance as work outcomes and job relevant behaviours. Hence, we hypothesize that:

Preposition 2: Transformational leadership has a positive relationship with follower task performance.

Moderating Effect

According to individualized leadership theory, followers respond to the same leadership style differently, depending partly on how they regard their leader. Liao and Chuang (2007) concluded that employees' attitudes are determined by their differing perceptions and cognitive categorizations of leadership behaviours. In contrast, Kanungo (2001) argues that transformational leaders centre their influence process on changing followers' core attitudes and values so that they are consistent with the vision for the organization.

Past research showed that followers' personal value, trust and attitude are important moderators of the transformational leadership process. Because of the fundamental role that values play in shaping individuals' goals and behaviors, individual differences in values may substantially influence the way individuals respond to transformational leadership. Therefore, we argue that followers' individual differences may play a significant role in predicting how they respond to their transformational leader's behaviors and emotion. In this study, we seek to understand the extent to which individual differences in attitude influence the relationship between leader and follower work characteristics and performance.

Shin and Zhou (2003) explore the conservation moderates the relationship between transformational leadership and creativity in such a way that for followers higher on conservation, transformational leadership has a stronger, positive relationship with creativity than for followers lower on conservation. Jung et al. (2009) examine the association of transformational leadership and leader effectiveness across two different cultures (U.S. and Korea) with three followers' attitudes toward their leader (trust in the leader, loyalty, and value congruence) as moderators of this association.

In seeking to answer the question of whether followers' attitudes toward their leader moderate the relationship between transformational leadership and followers' work characteristics and task performance. The prepositions are summarized as below:

Preposition 3: The relationship between transformational leadership and follower work characteristics is moderating by followers' attitudes toward leader.

Preposition 4: The relationship between transformational leadership and follower task performance is moderating by followers' attitudes toward leader.

Theoretical framework and theoretical underpinnings

In this study, we can use the diagram below for explaining the relationship between transformational leadership and followers' performance outcome and behavior. In addition, the moderators have moderating effect on transformational leadership, particularly on followers' attitudes toward leader. Being aware of moderators helps managers to identify the organizational contexts in which transformational leadership is most likely to enhance the performance outcome, and those in which such enhancement is unlikely to occur. A model of transformational leader was synthesized from selected articles is shown on Figure 1.

In this study, transformational leadership theory and leader-member exchange (LMX) theory has guided the theoretical framework. They are two separate constructs theoretically

although both transformational leadership and LMX seem to be conceptually overlapping. Transformational leadership emphasizes a set of unique leader behaviours that are directed towards followers based on self-concept motivational theory (Shamir et al., 1993).

In contrast, the LMX theory occupies a unique position among leadership theories of its focus on the dyadic relationship between leader and follower. LMX theory is premised on notions of role making (Graen, 1976), social exchange, reciprocity, and equity (Deluga, 1994). Leaders convey role expectations to their followers and provide tangible and intangible rewards to followers who satisfy these expectations. Likewise, followers hold role expectations of their leaders, with respect to how they are to be treated and the rewards they are to receive for meeting leader expectations. Followers are not passive “role recipients”; they may either reject, embrace, or renegotiate roles prescribed by their leaders. Hence, we argue that the attitudes of follower play a role to maintain the quality of LMX relationship with their leaders. For example, LMX relationships are strengthened when leaders provide individualized consideration to their followers.

Indeed, there is a reciprocal process in the dyadic exchanges between leader and follower, wherein each party brings to the relationship different kinds of resources for exchange. Role negotiation occurs over time, defining the quality and maturity of a leader-member exchange, and leaders develop relationships of varying quality with different followers over its followers over time (Graen, 1976; Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). For example, task performance is a form of currency in the social exchange between leader and follower, and a means of fulfilling obligations for reciprocity. Specifically, the positive affect, respect, loyalty, and value congruence characteristic of high-quality LMX.

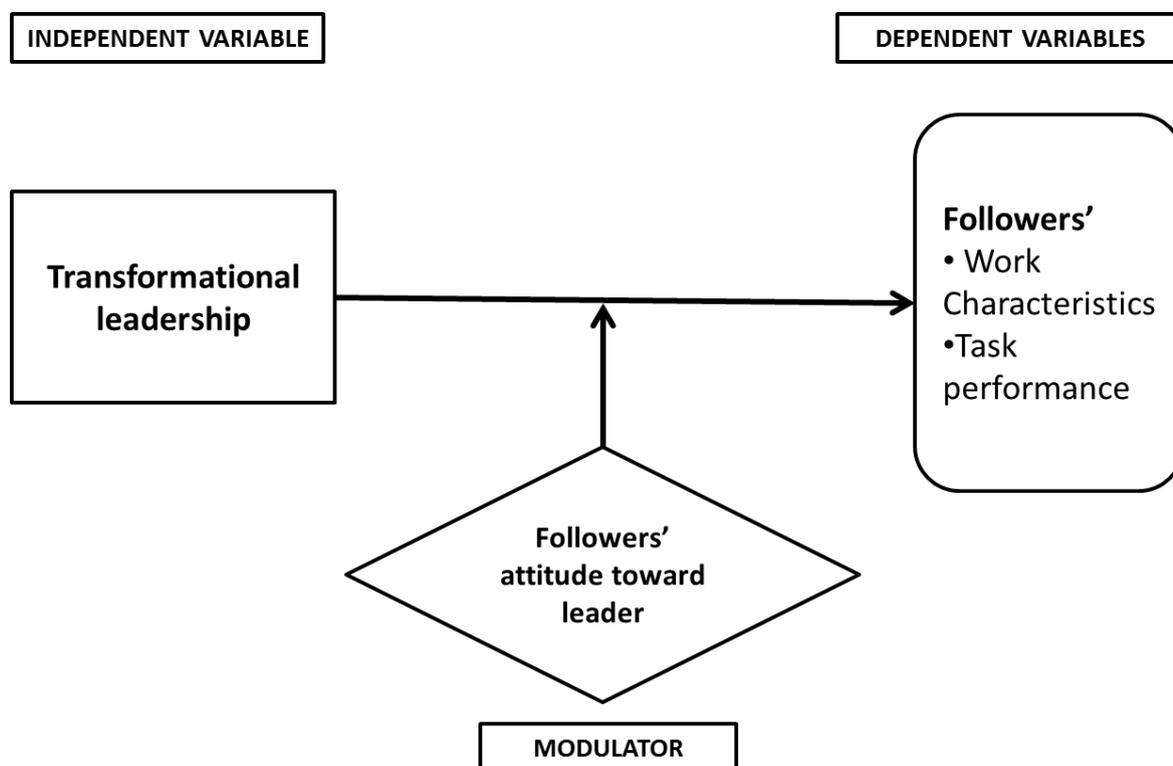


Figure 1: A Model of Transformational Leadership

Conclusions

Effective leadership style is a critical success for every organization. Transformational leaders elevate the goals and promote the morality of followers. Transformational leadership is assumed to elevate the self-efficacy of employees. That is, employees are more inclined to feel their efforts will translate into improvements or changes in performance.

There is some evidence that transformational leadership style is linked to follows performance. Transformational leaders employ a visionary and creative style of leadership that influence followers work characteristics and task performance.

The newly proposed conceptual framework is to ascertain the relationship among transformation leadership, followers' altitude towards leader, and followers' work characteristics and performance. Obviously, it a correlation study. Although the variables proposed in the model are not exhaustive, it does attempt to explore the nature of transformational leadership and follower's work characteristic, performance, attitude in the LMX theory.

Implication and future research

The proposed framework has several managerial implications. Foremost are managerial implications that the interrelated model of leadership, followers, work characteristics, task performance and attitudes toward leader is a useful description and guide for strengthening leader-follower relationship to the future researcher. In particular, the idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual simulation and individualized consideration that can be influenced for better follower results. Organizational leaders can focus their efforts on practising four dimensions rather than attending to work on other variables simultaneously. Dimensions that are weak will require more immediate attention.

A second implication is that the follower's attitudes toward leader. Thus, organizations should not solely focus on leadership style, they shall recognised that each follower has unique attitudes are important in influencing how they perceive and react to the transformational leader behaviours. This variable consists of trust in the leader, loyalty, and value congruence towards leaders that possible exert moderate positive impacts on the relationships between the leader and follower's work characteristics and task performance.

A final managerial implication is the need to observe distinction in leadership by organization. Although this model is conceive to describe Malaysia MNCs context, but it does not represent the entire manufacturing industry due to ownership, management practices and cultural differences. For example, past studies on the relationship between transformational leadership and performance outcome might not be generalized due to national culture.

Further research should investigate the model in other organization, particularly ones that are more dynamic of change. At the same time, this framework reflects a growing interest in extending leader-follower relationship in organization contexts, and therefore it contributes to extant knowledge. A variety of studies has been undertaken to ascertain the relationship between the MLQ and outcomes. Future research is needed to identify additional moderators as enhancers, neutralizers, or substitutes for leadership in the context of promoting performance outcome.

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