

Leadership roles and transformative duties – preliminary research

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to present empirical evidence about the roles of leaders and how those roles mesh with transformative leadership as a new theory of ethical stewardship.

Design/methodology/approach – Statistical methods are implemented to test the associations between specific leadership roles and six transformative leadership perspectives. Data are collected from Likert-type responses from a survey of 399 faculty, staff, and students of a Catholic University in South Florida.

Findings – Analysis results indicate that there are significantly positive associations between six leadership perspectives of transformative leadership and the five roles of leadership in the Kouzes and Posner (2012) model.

Originality/value – This paper contributes to empirically transformative leadership, a new theory that incorporates six highly regarded leadership perspectives. It provides a framework for understanding the ethical duties of leaders and affirms the importance of those duties as they correlate with Kouzes and Posner's highly regarded five-role model.

Keywords Charismatic leadership, Covenantal leadership, Ethical stewardship, Leadership practices inventory, Leadership roles, Transformative leadership

Paper type Research paper

1. Introduction

Although thousands of articles have been written about leadership, the modern leader struggles to earn and retain trust of others (Sparrow, 2013), despite the fact that trust is critical to the success of the modern organization (Cameron, 2003). Recent surveys confirm that employees and the public have a low opinion of leaders and a growing cynicism toward institutions and organizations (Maritz, 2011). In the aftermath of a seemingly unending parade of highly publicized moral failures, trust in leaders and organizations has steadily decreased over the past several decades.

Although extensive research has been conducted about the roles of leaders in serving others, those who lead are frequently perceived as lacking credibility (Kouzes and Posner, 2011). Highly regarded scholars have advocated that leaders must raise the bar of moral responsibility (Bennis and Nanus, 2007) in honoring duties owed to others and have emphasized that virtuous leadership is a fundamental responsibility of the modern leader (Cameron, 2011). Caldwell *et al.* (2012) have introduced a new model of transformative



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leadership that emphasizes the ethical obligations of leaders and provides insights about the links between leadership roles, ethical duties, and the development of employee commitment and trust. This leadership model is based upon six highly regarded leadership perspectives.

The purposes of this paper are to present insights about the roles of leaders and how those roles mesh with the ethical duties of transformative leadership. In Section 2 we briefly summarize five roles of leaders identified by Kouzes and Posner's (2012) seminal work, "The Leadership Challenge." Section 3 explains six leadership perspectives that make up transformative leadership and presents ten hypotheses about the relationships between those six perspectives and the five leadership roles. In Section 4 we describe the research method used in this study. In Section 5 we present research findings, identify insights about leadership obtained therefrom, and identify four contributions of this study.

2. The key roles of leaders

Although scholars differ about the roles that leaders play (Lussier and Achua, 2013), Kouzes and Posner's (2012) "The Leadership Challenge," summarizes five roles that are widely regarded as conceptually sound and based upon more than 20 years of research about leadership. This section briefly describes those five roles of leadership.

2.1 Model the way

By living their values, leaders set an example that demonstrates the depth of their personal commitment, integrity, and trustworthiness and "send signals about what is valued" (Kouzes and Posner, 2012, p. 96). Leaders set the example by being clear about who they are, defining what they believe, and helping others to understand organization expectations (Covey, 2004). The personal values of a leader determine the decisions that leaders make and are essential factors in obtaining organizational commitment (Kouzes and Posner, 2012, p. 49). Leaders and organizations align systems and processes with values and beliefs to reinforce what they seek to achieve (Ulrich *et al.*, 2012, Chapter 1).

2.2 Inspire a shared vision

Wise leaders envision future opportunities (Kouzes and Posner, 2012, Chapter 4) and unite others in the pursuit of shared aspirations (Kouzes and Posner, 2012, Chapter 5). Leaders understand that they must define reality for others in order to create an accurate vision of the future (DePree, 2004, p. 11). The gap between the status quo and an inspiring future are critical elements in every successful change process (Senge, 2006). The ability to involve others as contributors in the quest for greatness requires that leaders treat employees as valued partners (Block, 1993). Through empowering others in pursuit of shared goals leaders create commitment and extra-role behavior that are vital to innovation, outstanding customer service, and sustainable competitive advantage (Cameron, 2003).

2.3 Challenge the process

In a world of constant change, leaders must willingly challenge the status quo to improve systems and processes (Pfeffer, 1998). Organizations which encourage initiative and take intelligent and well-calculated risks are most likely to survive in a competitive global economy (Collins and Hansen, 2011). Challenging the process requires integration of internal systems to adapt to a constantly changing external environment (Schein, 2010). Creating a climate for learning (Senge, 2006), emphasizing the importance of innovation (Christensen, 2011), and allowing people to learn from past experiences (Kouzes and Posner, 2012, p. 205) are essential for empowering team members.

2.4 *Enable others to act*

Leaders build commitment by removing barriers and providing key resources necessary for team members to perform effectively (Deming, 2000). Creating high-trust cultures increases productivity, improves customer service, and generates higher profits (Shockley-Zalabak *et al.*, 2010). Effective leaders recognize that “power with” others accomplishes far more than “power over” them (Graham, 2003). Developing others and enhancing their competence “increases others’ sense of self-determination, self-confidence, and personal effectiveness” (Kouzes and Posner, 2012, p. 247).

2.5 *Encourage the heart*

Leaders who act with compassion and consideration establish relationships with employees that encourage the heart and draw the best out of others (Boyatzis and McKee, 2005). Caring is at the heart of leadership and unlocks others’ commitment and potential (Kouzes and Posner, 2011). Exceptional leaders “elicit high performance because they strongly believe in the abilities of their constituents” (Kouzes and Posner, 2012, p. 276). This belief, when coupled with leadership support and resources, demonstrates trust that leaders have in their team members and builds employee trust in return (Cameron *et al.*, 2003).

These five leadership behaviors have been well documented as factors that characterize successful leaders and effective leaders engage in these behaviors more frequently than leaders who are less effective (Kouzes and Posner, 2012).

3. Understanding transformative leadership

Transformative leadership has been defined as “an ethically-based leadership model that integrates a commitment to valued outcomes by optimizing the long-term interests of stakeholders and society and honoring the moral duties owed by organizations to their stakeholders” (Caldwell *et al.*, 2012, p. 176). Transformative leadership integrates ethical elements of six highly regarded leadership perspectives in optimizing long-term wealth creation while pursuing outcomes that recognize duties owed to all stakeholders and to society (Caldwell, 2012). The following paragraphs briefly describe these six leadership perspectives and their ethical emphases within the transformative leadership model.

3.1 *Charismatic leadership*

Charismatic leaders create relationships based upon a personal connection between the leader and those whom they seek to lead (Dubrin, 2013, pp. 73-74) that motivates others to accomplish a noble outcome (Brown and Treviño, 2006). Charismatic leaders often feel that they have been “called” to achieve a noble purpose to profoundly benefit mankind and create a better world (Lussier and Achua, 2013, p. 363). The ethical emphasis of charismatic leadership is virtue-based and utilitarian, with the goal of achieving the shared purpose or mission of the leader and of those who follow (Hayibor *et al.*, 2011). Consistent with this description of charismatic leadership, we offer our first hypothesis about transformative leadership:

- H1. Individuals self-describing as charismatic leaders will also rate themselves as higher in inspiring a shared vision than individuals self-describing as lower in charismatic leadership.

3.2 *Transformational leadership*

Transformational leaders are change agents who facilitate their organization’s ability to maintain competitive advantage while honoring the responsibility to help employees

to improve, learn, and grow (Burns, 1978). Transformational leaders pursue excellence as a duty-based obligation by creating synergistic solutions that benefit both individuals and the organization (Cameron, 2011). Transformational leaders challenge the status quo to achieve unprecedented organizational outcomes that adapt to the needs of a constantly changing world (Warrick, 2011). Related to this description of the transformational leadership, we offer two more hypotheses:

- H2. Individuals self-describing as transformational leaders will also self-describe as higher in enabling others to act than individuals self-describing as lower in transformational leadership.
- H3. Individuals self-describing as transformational leaders will also self-describe as higher in challenging the process than individuals self-describing as lower in transformational leadership.

3.3 Level 5 leadership

Level 5 leadership integrates personal humility with a fierce resolve to achieve excellence (Collins, 2001). Collins (2001) found that great organizations differentiated themselves from their competitors by being led by low-keyed but fiercely committed leaders who gave credit to others for success, assumed responsibility for organization failures, and devoted themselves to helping their organization to succeed. These leaders “look out the window to apportion credit to factors outside themselves when things go well [...] (and) they look in the mirror to apportion responsibility” (Collins, 2001, p. 35). Level 5 leaders possess an outcome-based teleological ethical focus with an emphasis on a stoic determination to do whatever is required to succeed (Collins, 2008, p. 20). In context with this description of level 5 leadership, we present our fourth hypothesis:

- H4. Individuals self-describing as level 5 leaders will also self-describe as higher in enabling others to act than individuals self-describing as lower in level 5 leadership.

3.4 Covenantal leadership

Covenantal leadership defines the leader’s obligation as encompassing a responsibility to be teacher, role model, and creator of new meanings and is ethically committed to the pursuit of truth (Pava, 2003). Covenantal leadership “is an attempt to unleash the great human potential which is often dormant and silent” by creating a learning culture, promoting organizational creativity and continuous improvement, and searching for truth (Pava, 2003, p. 26). Covenantal leaders are committed to integrating truth and new insights into one’s individual and organizational life (Pava, 2003, pp. 31-70). Consistent with our description of covenantal leadership, we offer our fifth hypothesis:

- H5. Individuals self-describing as covenantal leaders will also self-describe as higher in modeling the way than individuals self-describing as lower in covenantal leadership.

3.5 Servant leadership

Servant leaders believe that organizations depend upon leaders treating people more humanely if organizations are to achieve their potential (DePree, 2004).

Greenleaf (1977, p. 7) described servant leadership as a philosophy inherent within a leader's personal identity which begins with the desire to first be a servant of others. Servant leadership strives to pursue each individual's best interests and adopts an ethic of care (cf. Gilligan, 1993). By its commitment to the welfare of individuals, servant leadership enhances trust and promotes extra-role behavior, thereby enabling organizations to achieve their highest potential (Pfeffer, 1998). Related to the servant leader role, we offer our sixth and seventh hypotheses:

- H6. Individuals self-describing as servant leaders will also self-describe as higher in encouraging the heart than individuals self-describing as lower in servant leadership.
- H7. Individuals self-describing as servant leaders will also self-describe as higher in enabling others to act than individuals self-describing as lower in servant leadership.

3.6 Principle-centered leadership

Principle-centered leadership explains that there are universal principles which govern interpersonal, organizational, and societal interaction (Covey *et al.*, 1999). Universal truths define the obligations of leadership in human relationships and apply across national boundaries, cultures, and belief systems (Lewis, 2001). Consistent with the principles of moral intelligence, principle-centered leaders have the responsibility to do no harm, to create wealth in the present, and to create wealth for society and for organizations over the long term (Lennick and Kiel, 2007). Principle-centered leaders' commitment to universal principles conforms to the virtue-based ethical perspective which requires leaders to understand and apply true principles in honoring duties and responsibilities (Solomon, 1992). Consistent with the principle-centered leaders' commitment to honoring universal principles, we present our eighth and ninth hypotheses:

- H8. Individuals self-describing as principle-centered leaders will also self-describe as higher in modeling the way than individuals self-describing as lower in principle-centered leadership.
- H9. Individuals self-describing as principle-centered leaders will also self-describe as higher in enabling others to act than individuals self-describing as lower in principle-centered leadership.

Kouzes and Posner (2012) noted that leaders who have higher combined scores in the five roles of leadership tend to be more effective than leaders with lower combined scores. This finding mirrors research about high performance and high-trust management systems which suggests that leadership and trust are synergistic concepts that reinforce each other (Pfeffer, 1998). A premise of transformative leadership is that each of its leadership perspectives contributes to honoring ethical duties owed to stakeholders and builds high commitment and trust. Accordingly, we present our tenth hypothesis:

- H10. Individuals self-describing as higher in their combined scores for the six perspectives of transformative leadership will also self-describe as higher in the combined scores of the Kouzes and Posner model than individuals self-describing as lower in those scores.

4. Research method

A survey was administered to students, faculty, and staff at a Catholic University in South Florida, producing 399 usable survey responses. Of the respondents, 45 percent were male, 37 percent identified themselves as Hispanic, 26 percent were African-American, 19 percent were Asian, and 16 percent were Caucasian, with the rest 2 percent belonging to other ethnic groups. This demographic mix generally reflected the mix of students, faculty, and staff at that university. Respondents were asked to identify how descriptions of leadership roles represented their personal leadership behaviors based upon the Leadership Practices Inventory (LPI), a highly regarded inventory that has been used by more than three million respondents and has been the foundation of numerous papers, academic dissertations, and journal articles. The validity of the LPI has been addressed by scholars (Huber *et al.*, 2000), and its “underlying factor structure has been sustained across a variety of studies and settings” (Kouzes and Posner, 2012, p. 18). The factors measuring the six leadership perspectives of transformative leadership were constructed to measure those perspectives with Likert-type responses.

Despite the efforts to make the survey administration objective and valid, there are nonetheless limitations to this research. Because of the nature of the organization surveyed and its participants, the results may be limited in the generalizability to an academic setting. In addition, research confirms that there is often overlap between leadership perspectives among scholars (Lussier and Achua, 2013). Similarly, there is also some degree of overlap among the ethical perspectives which are associated with leadership (Hosmer, 2011). Because transformative leadership is a relatively new model, it may also be possible to improve the statements used to measure the six leadership perspectives in the survey instrument. Notwithstanding these limitations, the findings reported in this study identify valuable insights about leadership roles and transformative leadership.

5. Analysis and findings

In the LPI, the five factors which are measured are challenging the process (“Challenging”); enabling others to act (“Enabling”); inspiring a shared vision (“Inspiring”); Modeling the way (“Modeling”) and encouraging the heart (“Encouraging”). Six factors reflecting the self-descriptions of respondents with regard to the six transformative leadership perspectives include charismatic leadership (“Charismatic”); servant leadership (“Servant”); Level 5 leadership (“Level 5”); covenantal leadership (“Covenantal”); principle-centered leadership (“Principle”) and transformational leadership (“Transformational”).

The ten hypotheses address the associations between specific LPI factors and corresponding transformative leadership perspectives. As measurement scores based on survey responses are essentially ranks of each abovementioned factor, they are not normally distributed, neither can they be assigned to any known probability distribution. To analyze the association between these factors, we carried out the analysis using two statistical methods.

The first method incorporated a contingency table test and a corresponding test on the strength of the association between categorical variables. A measurement score higher than 66.67 percentile of all score values for a factor was identified as “Important” and lower responses were labeled as “Less Important.” Doing so created 2 × 2 contingency tables for testing those hypothesis. Because the χ^2 statistic is not stable in response to sample size, we calculated an additional statistic, the odds ratio θ , which is irrelevant to sample size and measures the association strength

(Agresti and Finlay, 2009). For example, the association between “Challenging” and “Level 5” factors can be measured using odds ratio calculated as:

$$\theta = \frac{P(\text{Important; Challenging})/P(\text{Less Important; Challenging})}{P(\text{Important; Level 5})/P(\text{Less Important; Level 5})} \quad (1)$$

When the association is positive, θ will be larger than 1.0. It is less than 1.0 for the negative association case. Agresti and Finlay (2009) further pointed out that for large samples, natural logarithm of the odds ratio, $\ln(\theta)$, approximately follows a normal distribution with a mean level of zero and a standard deviation (SD) equal to:

$$SD = \sqrt{\sum_{i=1}^2 \sum_{j=1}^2 \frac{1}{frequency_{i,j}}} \quad (2)$$

This formula enables us to use a standard normally distributed z-statistic to test the significance of association between two factors.

The second analytical method is based on the assumption that all the factors under study are ordinal variables. Instead of Kendall’s γ and τ statistics used for concordant and discordant pairs (cf. Agresti and Finlay, 2009), we used Spearman rank correlation coefficient (cf. Anderson *et al.*, 2013) which is similar to a Pearson correlation coefficient but applicable to measure association between ordinal variables.

The statistical analysis results are listed in Table AI, in which LP is the combined score of transformative leadership perspectives.

From Table AI, we note that all statistics are significant at the 99 percent confidence level and that all pairs of factors tested were positively associated. A respondent who rates one factor as an important self-descriptor will rate the listed factor in the same row of the table as also important. Therefore, all ten hypotheses under study were supported with statistical significance.

The following is a brief narrative description of the academic literature supporting the findings of each of the ten hypotheses.

5.1 H1: Charismatic leadership and defining a shared vision

Waldman *et al.* (2006) had earlier noted that charismatic leaders create a collective identity in organizations that appealed to values that transcend the self-interest of organization members in pursuing a worthy set of objectives and supports H1.

5.2 H2: Transformational leadership and enabling others to act

Research about transformational leadership suggests that leaders who engage in transformational leadership take specific actions to facilitate the achievement of organizational objectives (Piccolo *et al.*, 2010) and mesh with H2.

5.3 H3: Transformational leadership and challenging the process

Research about transformational leaders engaging in behaviors that create support systems that reinforce employees’ ability to engage in organizational change is consistent with the increasingly recognized need for leaders to challenge the status quo (Jha, 2013) and supports H3.

5.4 H4: Level 5 leadership and enabling others to act

Collins (2001) offers compelling evidence of the importance of level 5 leadership in empowering others and in facilitating the achievement of outstanding organizational results and supports *H4*.

5.5 H5: Covenantal leadership and modeling the way

Pava (2003) provides a good definition for covenantal leadership, and describes clearly leader's roles in creating new meaning and in modeling the way as an exemplar, mentor, and teacher, which supports *H5*.

5.6 H6: Servant leadership and encouraging the heart

Russell and Stone (2002) found that valuing and appreciating others was a core attribute of servant leaders and supports the findings of *H6*.

5.7 H7: Servant leadership and enabling others to act

Parris and Peachey (2013, p. 387) concluded in their meta-analysis of the research about servant leadership that it "creates a trusting, fair, and helping culture that can result in greater individual and organizational effectiveness" and reinforces the results of *H7*.

5.8 H8: Principle-centered leadership and modeling the way

Bandsuch *et al.* (2008) argued that principle-centered leadership was a key element of corporate governance and that leaders who incorporated that approach were more likely to increase organizational trust, thereby supporting the results of *H8*.

5.9 H9: Principle-centered leadership and enabling others to act

Ulrich *et al.* (2012) have concluded that effective organization leaders followed empirically valid principles and demonstrated virtues and values that enabled others to be more successful, which is consistent with our findings in *H9*.

5.10 H10: Transformative leadership and the LPI model

Kouzes and Posner's (2012) research about the relationship between higher role performance scores in their LPI model and greater leadership effectiveness supports our findings in *H10* that those who view themselves as highest in transformative leadership characteristics also self-describe as higher in their performance of LPI roles.

The findings of statistical significance for all ten hypotheses indicate a clear correlation between how those who responded to this survey self-described with regard to the six leadership perspectives of transformative leadership and the five roles of leadership in the Kouzes and Posner (2012) model. The association between the elements that make up transformative leadership and the five LPI factors is intuitively logical and provides clear evidence about the importance of additional research about these leadership relationships.

5.11 Contributions of this Study

As the first empirical leadership study to measure transformative leadership as a leadership construct, this paper offers four contributions:

- (1) It affirms the importance of transformative leadership in addressing five well-recognized leadership roles. Our study provides evidence that the six

leadership perspectives in the transformative leadership model correlate with the five leadership roles of Kouzes and Posner's (2012) leadership research.

- (2) It suggests that building trust in leaders and organizations is dependent upon an integrated set of ethically complex leadership behaviors. A growing body of research has identified the importance of aligned organization systems in creating high-trust organization cultures (Ulrich *et al.*, 2012). Scholars who have conducted this research emphasize that building trust is achieved by leaders honoring ethical duties to create follower commitment (Paine, 2002).
- (3) It confirms the need for additional research about the relationship between leadership and trust which impacts organizations. This study suggests that leadership roles, leadership perspectives, and the implicit ethical duties of leaders are integrated constructs and affirms the need for more research about the nature of those complex relationships.
- (4) It affirms the importance of leaders examining their assumptions about the leadership relationship, particularly in terms of understanding ethical duties. Leaders of organizations are often motivated by the notion that their primary duty is the optimization of this quarter's profits, rather than the creation of long-term wealth (Reich, 2012). Transformative leadership suggests that the duty of leaders is to pursue the long-term creation of wealth (cf. Lennick and Kiel, 2007), and asks leaders to look far more deeply into the assumptions, consequences, and moral duties associated with their actions (cf. Hosmer, 2011).

6. Conclusion

Max DePree (2004, p. 11), the highly regarded former Chairman of Herman Miller Furniture, observed that "(t)he first task of the leader is to define reality." Based upon recent evidence about leaders, the current reality seems to be that many leaders are out of touch with expectations about the duties associated with effective governance. Transformative leadership elevates the leadership relationship, with its corresponding ethical duties, to a higher level than most leaders recognize and that few leaders honor (Caldwell, 2012).

Research from leading scholars argues that leaders must reassess their ethical assumptions (Hosmer, 2011), become more authentic in building relationships (Quinn, 2012), and acquire virtues (Cameron, 2011) that are consistent with the ethical standards implicit in transformative leadership. Transformative leadership offers insights that can help leaders to earn the respect, commitment, and trust of a world that desperately yearns for such leaders (Quinn, 2012).

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Further reading

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Table AI.
Statistics of
testing associations
between factors

Appendix

Factors		Odds ratio statistics				Spearman rank correlation	
		χ^2 -statistic	θ ratio	z-statistic	p-value	Correlation coefficient	p-value
Charismatic	Inspiring	51.577	4.872	6.947	0.000	0.401	0.000
Transformational	Enabling	17.242	2.376	4.116	0.000	0.315	0.000
Transformational	Challenging	13.987	2.184	3.712	0.000	0.302	0.000
Level 5	Enabling	45.108	12.772	8.333	0.000	0.387	0.000
Covenantal	Modelling	42.119	3.997	6.342	0.000	0.391	0.000
Servant	Encouraging	19.535	2.609	4.363	0.000	0.267	0.000
Servant	Enabling	18.182	2.448	4.222	0.000	0.258	0.000
Principle centered	Modelling	41.032	3.925	6.263	0.000	0.395	0.000
Principle centered	Enabling	49.472	4.508	6.849	0.000	0.384	0.000
LPI	LP	68.016	6.294	7.894	0.000	0.436	0.000

Notes: All statistics are significant at the 99 percent confidence level and that all pairs of factors tested are positively associated. A respondent who rates one factor as an important self-descriptor will rate the listed factor in the same row of the table as also important. Therefore, all ten hypotheses under study are statistically supported

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