



Transformational leadership as an enabler for organizational success in a volatile environment: Focus on reforms management

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Abstract

Background: The present study aims at establishing the specific transformational leadership traits that enhance organizational success irrespective of environmental volatility through constant reforms management.

Method: The study makes use of secondary data that has been carefully vetted by subject matter experts and obtained from reliable journal databases. To find the pertinent research publications, search terms were utilized. An established set of inclusion and exclusion criteria was utilized to evaluate the articles for appropriateness.

Result: The results of the study confirm the importance of transformational leadership in sustaining organizational success during turbulent times through development and implementation of organizational reforms that keeps the organization abreast with the ever-changing environment. Further, it has become clear that transformational leaders possess certain qualities that are enable them effectively manage uncertainties within an organization. The following attributes stood out in particular: Flexible to change, employee empowerment through involvement, willingness to take risks, and provision of employee autonomy to exercise their full potential. A theoretical framework has therefore been proposed to further explain the linkages

Conclusion: The findings of the present study, alongside the model that has been advanced, bring about the uniqueness of the paper thereby making it distinctive from the rest. The study emphasizes on the need for transformational leaders in managing change in a volatile environment.

Keywords: Leadership, transformational leadership, change management, organizational environment

Introduction

Leadership is essential to the direction of any organizational aspects of successfully achieving objectives (Musaigwa & Kalitanyi, 2024). It should, however, be noted that leading comes with its own challenges since the environments where organizations operate in are not constant. According to Rimita (2019), the business landscapes that challenge organizational leaders in the 21st century are constantly changing. The authors further indicate that leaders in the current era are faced with highest degree of volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity thereby challenging them to figure out how to lead successfully when the available approaches fall short. To keep themselves at par with the status quo, leaders must always be proactive in making necessary changes that aim at remaining relevant in an ever-changing environment (Alade and Windapo, 2021).

Modern organizations are shaped in larger part by the actions of their leadership (Sahid *et al.*, 2023). A prevalent feature of numerous definitions of leadership is the focus on the social influence process that leaders engage in, whereby they assist both individual and group endeavors to achieve shared objectives (Goleman, 2000; Hannagan, 1998; Maamari and Majddalani, 2017). In the leadership literature, leadership constructs usually relate to relatively stable characteristics, like the leader's personality or demographics, as well as the different activities they take part in (Oreg and Berson, 2019). According to Goleman (2000), leadership

is the process of getting subordinates to cooperate to achieve a common objective. In a related development, Hannagan (1998) asserts that inspiring others to take action in the direction of desired outcomes is the process of leadership. Despite these disclosures, studies have shown that success in an organization is not a function of every leadership style. Accordingly, difficulties are typically linked to certain leadership philosophies, such as transactional and laissez-faire (Maamari and Majddalani, 2017).

Organizational change refers to the transition of the organization from one state to another (Lewin, 1951). It entails the process of continuously updating an organization's direction, structure, and capabilities to meet the constantly shifting needs of both internal and external customers (Moran and Brightman, 2001). All businesses undergo extensive change, regardless of their size or age. According to Alvesson and Sveningsson (2008), organizations need to adapt swiftly to the rapidly changing world in order to thrive and endure.

The need for leaders to manage organizational change cannot be overemphasized. Leaders have to keep an eye on, assess, and plan changes using structure in order to respond quickly to changes in the internal or external environment and anticipate trends in how people, products, markets, and technology will change over time (Van Oosten, 2006). According to Glieck (1987), organizational change is akin to chaos because there are many variables changing at once, the environment is

changing, people are changing frequently, and people are resistant to change. This leads to a confluence of change processes that not only makes prediction difficult but also makes control impossible.

However, despite availability of studies focusing on the correlation between transformational leadership and change management, a little is known about the specific attributes which transformational leaders possess that enable them effectively manage change and stay on course in an ever-changing environment. The present study is therefore an effort to unveil the specific attributed of such leadership style and their connection to change management.

Literature Review

Ardi *et al.*(2020) indicates that leaders influence followers to let go the old ways of doing things and adopt new ways that resonates well with the status quo. Literature reveals the following as some of the notable leadership styles: Transactional, transformational, and laissez-faire (Bushra *et al.*, 2011). Irrespective of a litany of types of leadership, the present paper focuses on transformational leadership because researchers have proved that this is the type of leadership that is synonymous with change management (Birasnav *et al.*, 2011; Orieno *et al.*, 2024). As a matter of fact, transformational leadership is considered appropriate in a volatile environment since it can easily adopt change (Harb and Sidani, 2019; Char and Easa, 2021; Samimi, 2020; Kelloway *et al.*, 2003; Osborn and Marion, 2009; Philip and Aguilar, 2021; Oreg and

Berson, 2011; Winasis *et al.*, 2021). Researchers have also emphasized that transformational leadership brings about innovativeness thereby keeping abreast with the needs of the consumers.

Scholars from throughout the globe have conducted more research on the elements of transformational leadership, which include intellectual motivation, idealized influence, inspiring motivation, and individualized consideration (Bushra *et al.*, 2011). The capacity of a leader to inspire, empower, and articulate a compelling vision for the organization is referred to as inspirational motivation, according to Harb and Sidani (2019). These leaders have the ability to motivate their people by setting a positive example. Conversely, Philip (2021) characterizes intellectual stimulation as a leadership function that fosters followers' ability to think creatively and unconventionally. Over time, those who follow will learn to take chances, be creative, and exercise critical thought. According to Kelloway *et al.* (2003), individualized consideration is a leadership function that involves giving each follower personalized attention, offering support, and offering pertinent coaching. They experience intrinsic motivation while paying close attention to the demands of their followers. Coincidentally, the leader sets an example for the followers during idealized influence. This method is how followers earn respect and trust.

According to Uhl-Bien *et al.* (2007), complexity leadership theory serves as a lens through which to understand the changing environment and foster new ways of thinking that

value flexible leadership, creativity, double-loop learning, and agility in structure development. As surprise and disruption from technology, globalization, and new forms of employment change corporate normalcy, leaders in the 21st century must possess the following new competencies: flexibility, agility, and ambidexterity (Du & Chen, 2018; Heinonen *et al.*, 2017; Sopelana *et al.*, 2014). A few instances of how researchers frame debates about change are via the lens of complexity leadership theory include studies pertaining to learning and creativity (Mendes *et al.*, 2016).

Method

For this study, a review technique was used, following Popay *et al.* (2006) guidelines. Some of the processes that facilitated access to the pertinent publications for the current review were design, conduct, analysis, and presentation. Using Scopus as the primary database, Paul and Criado's (2020) position served as a guidance for retrieving the study materials. To supplement the Scopus database, additional journal databases were investigated, including Elsevier, Emerald, and Springer. Several relevant publications were acquired from the reference lists of the retrieved articles, which were also examined closely.

Study Design

The following four keywords were used to find relevant articles: “Leadership”, “transformational leadership”, “change management”, and “organizational environment”. The abstracts of the articles were verified for relevancy prior to the actual retrieval.

According to Paul and Criado (2020), the current study only contains full-text, peer-reviewed publications that are published in the English language and are pertinent to its goals. These articles were sourced from reliable article databases. Conversely, articles published in languages other than English, book chapters, monographs, and duplicate concepts were all disqualified.

Findings

A critical analysis of extant literature has revealed four attributes which transformational leaders possess that enable them navigate through volatile environments as follows: Flexible to change, employee empowerment through involvement, willingness to take risks, and provision of autonomy to followers. The subsequent sections discuss the same in detail.

Flexible to change

With regard to constant change, the biggest obstacle to managing and comprehending uncertainty in organizations is a partial understanding of the concept as a leadership issue. In order to improve this comprehension, Bennett and Lemoine (2014) advise leaders to have a complete understanding of that environmental volatility is inevitable. As such, leaders should not be rigid in as far as change is concerned. They should always be open to embrace new ways of doing things. According to Harb and Sidani (2019), transformational leaders possess this attribute of being flexible to change.

Transformational leaders aren't scared to question the status quo and are open to adjusting

to new concepts and methods. They are prepared to take chances in order to effect positive change because they understand that change is essential for development and advancement. Their approach to leadership is also reflective of their openness to change. Leaders who embody transformation are receptive to insights from their subordinates and are prepared to examine alternative viewpoints. They can develop a sense of teamwork and trust among their team members with the aid of this strategy. They also exhort their followers to welcome change and take chances, both of which contribute to the organization's increased creativity and adaptability. In general, transformational leaders foster an environment that welcomes and supports change by setting a good example and fostering a culture of change. There is always change. It is encouraged of followers to put others before themselves. According to Philip (2021), encouraging people to learn new things and upgrading technology systems are important. Open communication facilitated by a transformational leader fosters employee trust, which in turn improves employees' receptivity to change (Zainab and Siddiqui, 2022).

Employee Empowerment Through Involvement

Employee empowerment and transformational leadership are closely associated because they both emphasize helping people realize their full potential. While employee empowerment is the process of providing employees with the power, tools, and

encouragement they need to take initiative and own their work, transformational leaders aim to inspire and mentor their followers. Leaders that practice transformational leadership can establish a work environment where employees feel empowered and encouraged to take initiative and think creatively by giving them autonomy and setting clear expectations. Employee empowerment can help them grow in their abilities and self-assurance, which can boost engagement, productivity, and job satisfaction (Koziol-Nadolna, 2020). Furthermore, it facilitates the establishment of an organization's culture of accountability and trust. Leaders teach their followers how to take accountability. Following the process of individual consideration, followers are assigned multiple tasks and ultimately assume accountability for their actions. According to Philip and Aguilar (2021), followers modify their organizational practices to align with the outcomes of transformation by taking individual consideration into account. Hussain *et al.* (2018) demonstrated that a leader's role, demeanor, and attitude are critical to the success of change. One of the characteristics of transformational leaders that can help to increase workers' readiness to adopt change is employee empowerment. Employee performance is correlated with emotional intelligence (Saxena *et al.*, 2022).

Inspirational leadership inspires followers to participate actively in groups and fosters a desire to stick together as a unit (Ardi *et al.*, 2020). According to Harb and Sidani (2019),

articulating a vision is becoming increasingly important in order to ensure alignment between leaders and followers. The leader gives the followers encouragement, which boosts their self-assurance and optimism. In addition, followers are persuaded and inspired to embrace novel concepts. Motivation is one of the elements that can support technological transformation by encouraging participation. In general, transformational leaders have intrinsic motivation, which Birasnav *et al.* (2011) state is ideal.

Willingness to take Risks

The ability to accept measured risks in pursuit of a desired result or objective is referred to as tolerance for intelligent risk. Making wise decisions and succeeding in their endeavors require leaders to be able to recognize and assess possible risks. Problem-solving is accomplished by the leader and follower through idealized influence. It is encouraged of followers to think creatively. According to Yeo and Saboori-Deilami (2016), companies are urged to outsource services that they cannot provide internally. According to Kelloway *et al.* (2003), finding an alternate path to a solution is imperative.

Furthermore, followers are inspired to be more imaginative through intellectual stimulation. Taking a chance is necessary when embracing new ways of doing things. Tolerating risks is a trait shared by transformational leaders, as evidenced by

literature. Despite the risks involved, Jora *et al.* (2022) suggest the need to still embark on new ways of doing things. Therefore, a critical transformational leadership quality required for change management is the ability to tolerate risk.

Provision of Autonomy to Followers

One essential component of transformational leadership is granting employees autonomy. It entails granting staff members the latitude and adaptability to decide for themselves, solve issues, encourage knowledge sharing, and take initiative at work (Kaushal and Nyoni, 2022; Nyoni and Kaushal, 2022). Employees can take responsibility for their work, feel more engaged and driven, and advance their knowledge and abilities with this strategy. Transformational leaders enable their staff to think freely and creatively by giving them autonomy. This can boost creativity, output, and job satisfaction. Leaders who practice personalized attention pay greater attention to their followers (Harb and Sidani, 2019; Syrek *et al.*, 2013; Philip, 2021).

When followers are being fully recognized by their leaders, they feel trusted. Every person's strengths and weaknesses are given the consideration they deserve. According to Philip (2021), relationship building is improved, which gives the

follower hope for independence. Moreover, training is one method that transformational leadership supports for enhancing human resource competency, according to Birasnav *et al.* (2011). Therefore, a crucial quality of transformational leaders is their capacity to grant employees the freedom to experiment, which is essential in motivating staff to adopt new ways of doing things.

Discussion

Rimita (2019) emphasizes that we are living in an environment that keeps on changing time and again. Organizations operating in dynamic, fiercely competitive business environments must embrace change (Dannemiller and Jacobs, 1992; Hussain *et al.*, 2018). According to the authors, change is an ongoing process because the environment has never been static. As such, the need for change is driven by the desire to meet the constantly shifting needs of both internal and external clients. Various studies have revealed the critical role of leadership in change management (Hussain *et al.*, 2018; Rimita, 2019; Birasnav and Bienstock, 2019; Cortellazzo *et al.*, 2019). The authors emphasize the need for leaders to be proactive in ensuring that organizations are always at par with the status quo.

Notwithstanding the need for leadership to provide direction in times of need for change, researchers have recommended transformational leadership to be relevant with regards to change management (Rimita, 2019).

Transformational leadership is essential in bringing about change because it fosters an environment that is both encouraging and supportive of it, and it assists staff members in seizing the opportunities that come with the new surroundings (Knights *et al.*, 2020). This leadership approach prioritizes personal development, creativity, and innovation in order to inspire and motivate followers to accomplish a shared objective. When it comes to transformation, transformational leaders are essential in propelling organizational change because they foster a change-friendly environment, reward experimentation and risk-taking, and provide staff members the freedom to seize and maximize any opportunities that present themselves.

Organizations may need to radically reevaluate their business models, procedures, and cultures in order to successfully navigate the often difficult and disruptive process of change. By developing an innovative culture, promoting teamwork and learning, and offering compelling future visions, transformational leaders can help to reduce the risks and challenges that come with change. In light of these findings, the following model of transformational leadership attributes that facilitate change adoption within an organization is therefore put forth. Figure 1 below further explains the linkages of the constructs under investigation.

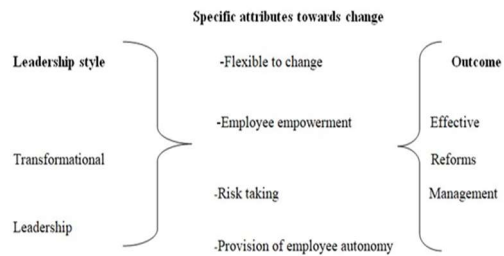


Figure 1 Linking transformational leadership traits that support reforms management (Source: Authors)

Going by the proposed framework presented in figure 1, it can be noted that the four attributes of transformational leadership: Flexible to change, employee empowerment, risk taking and provision of employee autonomy to be able to exercise their full potential are crucial towards achievement of organizational reforms.

Study Limitations

Based on the fact that the present study used a review technique where primary data was not collected, the findings cannot be statistically justified. Further, limited databases were used to source relevant papers thereby leaving out other potential relevant papers. These limitations, notwithstanding, the adopted methodology was adequate enough to allow the study achieve its objective.

Study Implications

The present study, practically serves as a tool box that can help leaders to adopt transformational leadership approach so that they should be able to manage change through its specific attributes hence remain relevant in an ever-changing environment. Theoretically, the study adds impetus to the already existing

knowledge with regards to leadership and change management in a volatile environment.

Future Focus Areas

Future researchers are invited to focus on a similar project where primary data can be collected so that the findings can be empirically justified. In the same vein, researchers may also consider testing the proposed model statistically. Furthermore, researchers may investigate the challenges associated with other leadership styles with regards to reforms management.

Conclusion

In the modern business environment which is characterized by volatility, the need for continuous change cannot be overemphasized because failure to do so would mean living in the past thereby failing to meet the current demands of customers. Leadership is so crucial in change management since it's the leaders who provide vision for the organizations and also convince the followers to adopt new ways of doing things. The need for a leadership style that has specific attributes to navigate through volatile environment through constant changes can therefore not be neglected. The present study has unveiled the specific attributes of transformational leaders which make them stand out with regards to change management. Precisely, the following attributes has been established: Flexible to change, employee empowerment through involvement, willingness to take risks, and provision of employee autonomy to exercise their full potential. A theoretical framework has therefore been

proposed to further explain the linkages of the constructs that were investigated to aid comprehension. Among other specific revelations, transformational leaders have a clear vision for the future and understand the need for change to remain relevant. Additionally, they possess the capacity to effectively convey this vision and motivate their teams to strive toward a single objective. This contributes to the development of a common goal and direction, which is essential for the successful adoption of new technologies. Transformational leaders have the ability to establish an atmosphere that is favorable for adjusting to new ways by cultivating a culture of innovation, learning, and experimentation.

In order to reduce resistance to change, they also give their teams the tools and encouragement they need to learn and try new things. Embracing change requires a positive attitude toward taking risks, the capacity to encourage participation, the provision of autonomy, empowerment, and an openness to change. These are just a few of the essential characteristics of transformational leaders.

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