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Transformational Leadership, Aspects of Self-concept, and Needs of Followers

Anubhuti Sharma and Venkat R. Krishnan

***Abstract.** This research examines how “higher levels of motivation” could be operationalized in Burns’ (1978) definition of transformational leadership. Two lines of argument are examined empirically. The first, based on Shamir (1991) suggests an explanation based on a self-concept based motivation theory, and the second is based on traditional need based theories. Using the survey method, a predominantly male sample drawn from all levels and comprising 70 pairs of leaders and followers, was studied in a single medium-sized manufacturing organization. Results indicate that transformational leadership is positively related to personal identity and unrelated to social identity. Needs were seen to be unrelated to transformational leadership. Therefore, some empirical support was found for Shamir (1991) suggesting that the process by which transformational leaders engage followers to higher levels of motivation and morality, involves engaging the follower’s self-concept.*

Key Words: Transformational leadership, Self-concept, Needs of Followers.

Burns (1978) identified transforming leadership as a process wherein one or more persons engage with others in such a way that the leaders and followers raise one another to higher levels of motivation and morality. This paper attempts to operationalize this definition in part, by examining the process by which the “higher level of motivation” would be achieved. Shamir (1991) reviewed the existing literature on motivation and concluded that it had an individualistic utilitarian bias at odds with the concept of transformational leadership, which emphasizes transcending self-interest for the sake of the collective. A number of studies have confirmed that existing literature on motivation is inadequate to explain behavior due to over-emphasis on rational maximization of personal utility (Shamir, House and Arthur, 1993). Shamir (1991) further argued that an individual’s motivation to do a task would be enhanced to the extent that (a) job related identities are salient in the person’s self-concept, (b) actions required in the job are consistent, or can be performed in a manner consistent with the person’s self-concept and, (c) career opportunities on the job are congruent with the person’s possible selves.

This study examines whether the transformational leader engages aspects of identity other than collective identity in the follower’s self-concept, and whether there exists a positive relationship between follower needs and transformational leadership. Further, the study makes

an argument that the positive relationship between transformational leadership and needs is mediated by the social identity component in the follower's self-concept.

THEORY AND HYPOTHESES

This section reviews the literature in the area of transformational leadership, self-concept and needs. Through a series of hypotheses, this section also makes a case for the reconciliation of the dichotomy between the two lines of argument in motivation literature in context of Burns (1978) definition of transformational leadership.

Transformational Leadership

Burns (1978) noted that leaders address themselves to follower's wants, needs and other motivations, as well as their own, and thus serve as an independent force in changing the makeup of the followers' motive base through gratifying their motives (p. 20). Since then, there have been several attempts to conceptualize how transformational leaders engage their followers.

Conceptions of transformational leadership. Bass (1985) noted that transformational leaders motivate their followers to perform beyond expectations by transforming their beliefs and attitudes. To accomplish this, transformational leaders exhibit four kinds of behaviors: (a) charisma; (b) inspirational motivation; (c) intellectual stimulation and (d) individualized consideration (Bass and Avolio, 1993). Charisma could be further subdivided into attributed charisma and idealized influence behavior. Popper, Mayseless, and Castelnovo (2000) found significant correlation between secure attachment and transformational leadership. The social contagion explanation developed by Meindl (1990) postulated that followers with a low social identification to the organization identify with an emergent leader. Attribution of charisma is an outcome of the rationalization of the follower's new feelings and behavior. The psychoanalytic tradition holds that the follower undergoes regression to an infantile frame of mind when confronted with a leader who appears capable of resolving the intra-psychic problems that the follower experiences (Bryman, 1992, p. 37).

Transformational leadership and follower outcomes. In a further assessment of Bass' (1985) conceptualization of transformational leadership, Bycio, Allen and Hackett (1995) examined the relationship of the MLQ-1 factors in the study by Bass (1985, pp. 209-12) to three groupings of outcome variables. These were (a) performance and satisfaction; (b) intent to leave and (c) organizational commitment. It was found that with respect to performance and satisfaction, transformational scales had a strong positive relationship with subordinates' extra effort; satisfaction with the leader and subordinate-rated leader effectiveness. With respect to intent to leave, greater degrees of transformational leadership were associated with reduction in the intent to leave.

Judge and Bono (2000) also found that, controlling for transactional leadership, transformational leadership behavior significantly predicted subordinate satisfaction with the leader; subordinate organizational commitment and subordinate work motivation, confirming the findings of Bycio et al. (1995). Incorporating the psychological contract, these results were also confirmed in another study by Goodwin, Wofford, and Whittington (2001) who found support for their hypothesis that transformational leadership with the implicit psychological contract sub-scale included is positively related to performance, and also organizational commitment. In a refinement of the results on performance, Yammarino, Spangler and Dubinsky (1998) found empirical evidence that transformational leadership is

positively related to the subjective performance but not associated with the objective performance.

Shamir, House, and Arthur (1993) offered an explanation of the process of leader influence over followers in terms of leader behavior implicating the self-concept of followers. Charismatic leadership is an interaction between leaders and followers that results in (a) making the followers' self-esteem contingent on the vision and mission articulated by the leader; (b) strong internalization of the leader's values and goals by the followers; (c) strong personal or moral (as opposed to calculative) commitment to these values and goals and (d) a willingness on the part of followers to transcend their self-interests for the sake of the collective (team or organization). The theory proposes that the charismatic leader motivates followers by (a) increasing the intrinsic valence of efforts; (b) increasing the effort-accomplishment expectancies and (c) increasing the intrinsic valence of goal accomplishment. They also note that transformational leaders instill faith in a better future and create personal commitment. Their theory thus links transformational leadership and motivational mechanisms of followers through the follower's self-concept.

Self-concept

An individual's self-concept may not be a unified gestalt, but rather may consist of different characteristics or dimensions. The implication of this is that the various dimensions of each component of the self-concept such as identities, may be valued differently by the individual. Considerable research has shown the importance of identities in the self-concept of an individual. Shamir, House and Arthur (1993) noted that "we do things because we are", because by doing them we affirm and establish our identity. Strauss (1969) argued that the idea that human beings are self-expressive allows us to account for behaviors that do not satisfy self-interest, the most extreme expression of which is self-sacrificial behavior. This has implications for transformational leadership.

Transformational Leadership and Followers' Self-concept

The social identity theory argues that the self-concept is comprised of a personal identity encompassing idiosyncratic characteristics, and a social identity consisting of salient group classifications. Social identity here includes collective identity. Ashforth and Mael (1989) described social identification (sense of group / collective identification) as the perception of oneness with some human aggregate which leads to the belief that the fate of the group is one's own.

However, mere identification does not imply that the individual would expend effort towards the accomplishment of valued objectives. In another study, Stryker (1980) noted that identities, sometimes referred to as role-identities, are organized in the self-concept in a hierarchy of salience. The higher the identity in this hierarchy, the greater the probability that, the person will perceive the given situation as an opportunity to perform in terms of that identity and will seek out opportunities that allow performance in that identity. Thus, for performance in a role-identity, a necessary condition becomes a high degree of importance attached to the given identity.

Shamir, House, and Arthur (1993) highlighted the role of the followers' self-concept in the motivational processes associated with charismatic leadership. Leader behavior emphasizing collective identities and collective efficacy leads to personal identification with the leader; social identification and value internalization. Ashforth and Mael (1989) argued that the self-concept includes the social identity of the individual and social identification

leads to activities that are congruent with the identity. They also found that social identification leads to support for institutions that embody the identity, stereotypical perceptions of self and others and, outcomes that are traditionally associated with group formation. If this holds at the group level, it must be true at the interpersonal level, which forms the building block of group formation. Therefore, we hypothesize the following:

Hypothesis 1a. Transformational leadership is positively related to social identity component in the followers' self-concept.

Shamir and Howell (1999) defined the effectiveness of charismatic leadership as the degree of its influence on followers' self-concepts, values and motivations. Gardner and Avolio (1998) proposed that the extreme confidence that charismatic leaders express in their own and followers' abilities through exemplary behaviors, promotional efforts, and inspirational presentations, serves to elevate followers' self-esteem and self-efficacy expectations. The idea is that eventually followers will come to see their organizational tasks as inseparable from their own self-concepts (Conger, 1999). Therefore, it follows that transformational leadership should not only be positively related to the social identity component of the follower's self-concept, but also to the personal identity component.

Hypothesis 1b. Transformational leadership is positively related to the personal identity component in the followers' self-concept.

Needs

Maslow identified the five basic human needs as (a) physiological; (b) safety and security; (c) social needs (d) ego and esteem; and (e) self-actualization and pointed out that these are arranged in an ascending order of prepotency. Alderfer (1969) refined Maslow's theory and concluded that human needs can be classified as (a) existence (Maslow's physiological and safety needs); (b) relatedness (social needs and a part of safety and esteem needs) and (c) growth needs (self actualization needs and the part of esteem needs).

In an assessment of McClelland's learned needs theory encompassing the need for achievement ("n Ach"), need for power ("n Pow") and need for affiliation ("n Aff"), Cherrington (1989) noted that (a) individuals with a high n Ach are characterized by a strong desire to assume personal responsibility for performing a task or finding a solution to a problem and therefore tend to work alone rather than with others. The study also found that those with a high n Aff have a sincere interest in the feelings of others and tend to conform to the wishes and norms of others when pressured by people whose companionship they value. Need for power, n Pow, can take the form of personal or social power. Unlike individuals with a strong need for the former, those with a high need for social power satisfy their need by working with the group to formulate and achieve collective goals.

Transformational Leadership and Needs

Transformational leaders induce followers to transcend their self-interests for the good of the collective and its goals, and stimulate and meet the followers' higher order needs (Bass, 1985, p. 20). Ehrhart and Klein (2001) established that follower characteristics were positively related to preference for transformational leadership based on similarity between the leader and follower. They showed that, followers' preference for charismatic leadership is associated with high levels of achievement orientation. Al-Gattan (1985) found that subordinates with high growth need performed better when their leaders used more active direction, participation, or task-oriented leadership, whereas subordinates with low growth need strength did better when leaders maintained the status quo. Wexley, Singh, and Yukl

(1973) confirmed the positive relationship between subordinate involvement in setting standards and both effort and performance. The following can therefore be hypothesized:

Hypothesis 2. Follower's need for affiliation, need for achievement, and growth need are positively related to transformational leadership.

METHOD

The subjects of this study were 70 pairs of superiors (leaders) and subordinates (followers) employed at a medium sized metal-sheet manufacturing organization in eastern India. Data was collected at its plant location, also in eastern India. The organization manufactures various grades of electrolytic tinplates, tin free steel sheets, and full hard cold roll sheets. Its exports are of the order of Rs. 500 million annually.

In both the sample of leaders and that of followers, there was only one female respondent each. The median number of years worked by the leaders was 18 years (minimum was 4 and maximum was 32) while the figure stood at 16 years (minimum was 1 and maximum was 30) for the followers. Barring six leaders and three followers, all respondents had spent their working lives in this organization only. Data was collected in all departments. Of the leaders (65 responses), five were engineers, 41 belonged to management, 13 to the officer cadre and 6 to the support staff. The corresponding figures for the followers were 3, 13, 33 and 18 (67 responses). The minimum qualification in both cases was "graduate".

Instruments. The measurement instrument for transformational leadership was the MLQ (Bass and Avolio, 1991). This questionnaire consists of 47 questions and asks for responses using a scale of 0-4 (0 = "not at all", 1 = "once in a while", 2 = "sometimes", 3 = "fairly often", 4 = "frequently, if not always"). Growth need strength for followers was measured through the Job Diagnostic Survey (JDS) (Hackman and Oldham, 1980). Both, "would like" and "job choice" scales were used from the JDS. The "would like" format contains 11 items and measures responses on a scale of 4-10 (4 = "would like having this in moderate / less amount", 7 = "would very much like having this" and 10 = "would extremely like having this") with reverse scoring for six items. The "job choice" format asks responses to 12 items, each being a choice between two hypothetical jobs "A" and "B", on a scale of 1-5 (1 = "strongly prefer A", 2 = "slightly prefer A", 3 = "neutral", 4 = "slightly prefer B" and 5 = "strongly prefer B"). In this format six items were reverse scored.

Relevant items measuring the need for achievement and need for affiliation were taken from the questionnaire in Steers and Braunstein (1976). Five items each were used to measure for nAch and nAff. The responses are measured along a scale of 1-5 (1 = "strongly disagree", 2 = "disagree", 3 = "neither agree nor disagree", 4 = "agree" and 5 = "strongly agree").

Personal and social identity were measured through the relevant items taken from the Aspects of Identity Questionnaire III (Cheek, 1989). This version of the questionnaire has been adapted from Cheek's 1982-83 questionnaire, which has been used with a high reported reliability by several researchers. This questionnaire measures personal identity using 10 items and social identity using seven items on a scale of 1-5 (1 = "not important to my sense of who I am", 2 = "slightly important to my sense of who I am", 3 = "somewhat important to my sense of who I am", 4 = "very important to my sense of who I am" and 5 = "extremely important to my sense of who I am").

The Cronbach alphas for all dimensions of transformational leadership were above 0.5 (AC = 0.55, II = 0.65, IL = 0.69, IS = 0.70, and IC = 0.62). Transformational leadership was studied as an aggregated variable including all five dimensions together. To enhance the

reliability of the nAff scale, two items were dropped from the questionnaire. These items were “I often find myself talking to those around me about non-work matters” and “I enjoy working with others more than working alone”. Factor analyses of “personal identity” and “social identity” items yielded four factors for personal identity and three for social identity. Of these, one in each case was reliable and was retained.

RESULTS

Correlations between all variables are given in Table 1. Hypothesis 1a, that postulated a positive relationship between transformational leadership and social identity did not find support in the study. However, Hypothesis 1b, which suggested a positive relationship between transformational leadership and personal identity found support. Hypotheses 2 that suggested positive relationships between transformational leadership and follower’s needs for affiliation, achievement, and growth, did not find support in this study.

Table 1. Correlations between Variables (alphas are mentioned in parentheses)

| (N =70) | M | S.D. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|--------------------------------|------|------|--------|-------|--------|-------|-------|
| 1. Personal Identity (PI) | 4.06 | 0.74 | (.62) | | | | |
| 2. Social Identity (SI) | 3.67 | 0.70 | ***.29 | (.57) | | | |
| 3. Need for Achievement (nAch) | 4.11 | 0.48 | -.00 | *.26 | (.59) | | |
| 4. Need for Affiliation (nAff) | 4.04 | 0.67 | .09 | *.18 | ***.45 | (.61) | |
| 5. Growth need strength (GNS) | 5.99 | 0.92 | †-.17 | .01 | ** .30 | †.19 | (.83) |
| 6. Transformational Leadership | 3.11 | .35 | *.22 | .01 | -.00 | .10 | -.11 |

† = $p < .10$. * = $p < .05$. ** = $p < .01$. *** = $p < .001$.

DISCUSSION

The suggestion that there are elements of self-concept other than collective identity that are significantly related to transformational leadership, implies that in order to be operationalized transformational leadership must engage more than the collective aspects of the follower’s self-concept. Support for this result is seen in existing literature. Shamir (1991) noted that human beings are not only goal-oriented but also self-expressive and are motivated to maintain and enhance their self-esteem and self-worth. Shamir, House and Arthur (1993) also noted that in order to have transformational effects, the leader must appeal to existing elements of the follower’s self-concept, namely – identities and values. Transformational leaders raise the salience of exiting identities, and connect them with goals and required behaviors. Further, Shamir et al. argued that followers might actively choose a leader based on the extent to which the leader is seen to represent their values and identities.

The finding that needs of followers are not significantly related to transformational leadership opens new areas for exploration. This finding lends further support to the existing literature on the insufficiency of existing motivational theories in taking note of behaviors not guided by a desire to maximize self-interest, the highest expression of which is self-sacrificial behavior (Shamir, House and Arthur, 1993). This strengthens, by lending empirical support to the suggestion that the transformational leadership effect of getting followers to transcend their own self-interest for the sake of the collectivity (Burns, 1978; Bass, 1985) can be explained in terms of leadership actions that raise the salience of certain identities and values in the person’s self-concept, and link collective goals and required behaviors to those identities (Shamir, House and Arthur, 1993).

Limitations

A significant shortcoming of this study was the nature of the organization sampled. Being largely mechanistic with little scope for inter-personal interaction at the work place, this study yielded conservative results for all variables studied. Interaction at the workplace is strictly professional and therefore the work-culture that has evolved is one where all work independently towards their own targets. Interpersonal needs are met through a community culture outside the organization. Therefore, identification with the workplace may not vary much among the employees, thus resulting in no significant relationship with transformational leadership. However, while setting these findings as a “lower limit”, the hypotheses may be examined in another organization, or across organizations to study any differences in results. Another shortcoming of the study was the sample size considered. Clearer and stronger relationships may have emerged with a larger sample size. However, having been conducted in a single organization, this study was able to examine results with macro-variables controlled for.

Conclusion

The study found that transformational leadership is positively related to personal identity and unrelated to social identity. Needs were seen to be unrelated to transformational leadership. Therefore, some empirical support was found for Shamir (1991) suggesting that the process by which transformational leaders engage followers to higher levels of motivation and morality, involves engaging the follower’s self-concept. By strengthening empirical support for Shamir, House and Arthur’s (1993) theory on a self-concept explanation for the process of transformational leadership, this study has contributed to both motivation and leadership literature.

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