

Feeding the Future: Hope and Transformational Leadership

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Abstract: *This paper contributes to the growing literature on transformational leadership by gauging whether such leaders increase state hope in their followers. This study included a quantitative survey designed to measure leadership behaviors as perceived by their followers for transformational leadership as well as followers' self-reported assessments of their own hopefulness. Correlation and regression analysis indicated such a relationship does exist between increased hopefulness and transformational leadership. Opportunities for further research and implications for leadership practice are then discussed.*

Keywords: *Hope theory, Transformational Leadership, Positive Organizational Behavior.*

1. INTRODUCTION

In the fall of 2008, while one presidential candidate made hope a cornerstone of his campaign, the United States experienced one of the worst financial crises in its history. In the span of a few days, several of the world's largest financial firms teetered on the brink of bankruptcy, while the United States faced a financial collapse akin to the Great Depression. These scenarios were narrowly avoided, the ramifications of this crisis are still being felt, and the post-mortems to apportion blame continue. The financial services sector in the United States has come under increasing scrutiny as a result of the financial meltdown in 2008. One of the most frequently cited underlying causes for the crisis has been a lack of effective leadership on the part of major financial firms (Lytle, 2009). In the wake of the upheaval in the financial services industry over the past few years, the issue of what characterizes effective transformational leadership in that industry becomes paramount.

Ethical and results-based questions aside, shifting technological challenges also pose obstacles to effective leadership. As many business practices shift away from repetitive, industrial processes toward creative, rapidly changing tasks given technological advances, the need for leadership that can remain effective in the midst of these changes becomes more acute. It may be that the general reliance on older systems of leadership that rely on the traditional stick-and-carrot approach of extrinsic punishments and rewards is quickly becoming obsolescent (Pink, 2009). Increasingly, contemporary theories of leadership have come to the fore that attempt to account for the shifting needs of followers in organizations and the shifting motivational forces that characterize these new processes. In the past several decades, the literature has focused on theories like transformational, charismatic, spiritual, and authentic leadership in an effort to describe a generally more collaborative, inclusive leadership style as an alternative to a hierarchical, top-down leadership approach (Wang, Oh, Courtright, & Colbert, 2011). The issue of what determines effective leadership and the generalized need for more effective leaders has arguably never been more crucial.

In the past decade, theorists have applied positive psychological traits to organizations and created literature pertaining to positive organizational behavior (POB) as developed by Luthans, Peterson, and others (Nelson & Cooper, 2007). This research study was based on the contention that a greater reliance on inspiring hope will ultimately lead to more effective leaders and more productive followers.

This research study aimed to examine whether transformational leaders inspire hope. While many (arguably most) decisions are primarily fear-motivated, humans are at their most forward-looking and directive when hope-inspired. Hope in this sense is not a vague emotion, or wish, but a powerful cognitive construct (Snyder et al., 1991). It stands to reason that effective transformational leadership

would involve some working understanding of how hope serves to motivate and inform the ways everyone acts.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Definitions and Recent Developments in Transformational Leadership

As initially popularized by Bass (1985), transformational leaders improve the performance of their followers and develop them to achieve their highest potential (Northouse, 2007). As framed by Bass (1985), certain leadership behaviors typify transformational leadership. Per Bass and Avolio (1994), the four factors that typify transformational leadership are: (a) idealized influence, (b) inspirational motivation, (c) intellectual stimulation, and (d) individualized consideration. The combination of these factors results in leaders who develop higher performing teams (Wang et al., 2011).

The idea of transformational leadership has been modified since its inception and more recent theorists have explored how leaders effectively transform themselves and their followers. A study by Walumbwa, Peng, Lawler, and Shi (2004) illustrated how transformational leadership positively influences job satisfaction and organizational commitment, thereby leading to improved performance. In their contrast of transformational and transactional leadership, van Eeden et al. (2008) commented that effective transformational leaders create a vision for their followers; one that is different, challenging, and open to change that is intellectually stimulating. By contrast, they contended that effective transactional leaders generally lead followers to perform to expectations, but nothing more (van Eeden et al., 2008). Boga and Ensari (2009) indicated how transformational leadership is perceived as particularly effective during periods of organizational change, because this type of leadership can overcome followers' fear of change. Transformational leadership and how it improves organizational performance continue to be a topic of academic scrutiny.

A meta-analysis of transformational leadership (Wang et al., 2011) examined 113 studies over a period of 25 years of academic research. In their meta-analysis, drawn largely from the implication of the title of Bass's (1985) classic volume on *Leadership and Performance beyond Expectations*, Wang et al. (2011) quantified more precisely how transformational leadership affects work-related performance. While Wang et al. found that the original scholarship and numerous subsequent studies positing increased performance due to transformational leadership are indicative, transformational leadership's influence often depends on how performance is defined, whether it is individual, organizational, task-related, or contextual.

Another central tenet of transformational leadership is that successful transformational leaders engender behaviors in their followers that more closely align followers' goals and values to their organizations, and in so doing, transform these followers (Avolio, Gardner, Walumbwa, Luthans, & May, 2004; Gumusluoglu & Ilsev, 2009). These positive changes in leaders and followers have been posited to increase creativity and innovation (Aragón-Correa, García-Morales, & Cordón-Pozo, 2007; Gumusluoglu & Ilsev, 2009), increased employee satisfaction (Avey, Luthans, & Jensen, 2009), organizational citizenship (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Paine, & Bachrach, 2000), and better team performance (Schaubroeck, Lam, & Cha, 2007). The primary means of fostering these changes seem to be modeling by leaders, as well as articulation of a clear vision. This modeling and articulation emphasizes the four factors of transformational leadership (idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration). Walumbwa, Avolio, and Zhu (2008) posited that transformational leadership positively affected followers' performance by increasing identification with their work unit and thus increasing their sense of self-efficacy.

2.2. Snyder and the Development of Hope Theory

Hope has traditionally been seen as an emotion and at times a futile one. Indeed, it was the only evil not to escape the mythical Pandora's Box. However, hope theory takes a much different approach and views hope as a positive cognitive construct (Snyder, 2000).

Hope theory as a cognitive construct was developed by Snyder and others as an attempt to account for hope as a vital factor in goal-setting and goal pursuit (Snyder et al., 1991; Snyder et al., 1997; Snyder et al., 2000; Snyder et al., 1996). Hope is defined as a "positive motivational state that is based on an interactively derived sense of successful (a) agency (goal-directed energy), and (b) pathways (planning to meet goals)" (Snyder, 2000, p. 8). Both the recognition and creation of workable routes to that goal (pathways thinking) and goal-directed energy (agency thinking) are required according to

hope theory (Snyder et al., 2000). Hope is thereby different from other constructs like self-efficacy or optimism (Snyder et al., 1991), insofar as it is internally generated and dependent on both an individual's willpower to accomplish a given goal and the (what Snyder coined as) way power to envision one, or if need be, multiple paths to attain said goal. In short, hope is distinguishable because these two components of willpower and way power are "equal, additive, and iterative" (Youssef & Luthans, 2007, p. 779). As one becomes more hopeful, problems or blockages to goals are perceived as learning opportunities and challenges rather than hindrances.

Hope theory holds that, while some people have higher levels of hopefulness as a trait, hope is also a state that can be developed and nurtured (Snyder et al., 1991). Training and practice can therefore develop high-hope individuals who can clearly conceptualize goals and imagine several pathways to attain their goals (Snyder et al., 1997). Such training methods have already been developed in educational (Davidson, Feldman, & Margalit, 2012; Pedrotti, Edwards, & Lopez, 2008; Ryzin, 2011), nursing care settings (Penz, 2008), and sports (Gustafsson, Hassmen, & Podlog, 2010). To measure hope, Snyder et al. (1991) developed a Hope Scale, which has since been administered to over 10,000 subjects all over the world and in a myriad of contexts. This scale, as refined in the literature over time, measures hope in a variety of settings including work, home, and school (Snyder et al., 1997). The Work Hope Scale (WHS) as developed by Juntunen and Wettersten (2006) is based on Snyder's original 1991 scale and will be utilized in the research study, as analyzed further in chapter three in the discussion of the methodology.

2.3. Hope and Leadership

While the applications of hope theory to leadership studies might seem obvious, only recently has any attention been given to this theory, and it has not been widely assimilated into leadership theory (Helland & Winston, 2005). Helland and Winston (2005) reviewed these theories of leadership to determine how hope theory demonstrates an important role in these newer leadership theories. For example, in spiritual leadership, as defined by Fry (2003), hope and faith combine and inform leaders and their followers. Hope thereby becomes "both an antecedent to behavior and a socially constructed outcome" (Fry, 2003, p.702). Another leadership theory Helland and Winston (2005) examined was authentic leadership, wherein leaders foster "positive identification with the leader and social identification with a larger group" (p. 50). These identifications generate increased hope and are iteratively engendered by hope.

A 2003 exploratory study by Peterson and Luthans was arguably the first quantitative, empirical study to examine the relationships between leader hope and work unit financial performance along with employee job satisfaction and retention. Peterson and Luthans' contention was that high-hope leaders should have higher performing work units, higher retention rates within their units, and more satisfied subordinates. As with many other studies involving hope theory in the workplace, Peterson and Luthans noted that this was an area that had barely been explored. More work appears to be needed to assess how transformative leaders can employ hope to improve the performance of their teams. Nurturing hope within leaders should also foster hope for their subordinates (Peterson & Luthans, 2003), and this process toward meeting common goals and values lies at the heart of transformational leadership (Youssef & Luthans, 2007). This research study furthers the exploration of how hope and transformational leadership interrelate.

3. METHODS

The independent variable for this study was transformational leadership, while the dependent variable was state hope. State hope is distinguishable from trait hope insofar as the former is more readily affected by an individual's immediate circumstances. The latter pair consists of longer-term psychological individual traits (Youssef & Luthans, 2007). These variables were measured using the following scales: the subscales of the most recent Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ5x) that measure inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, individual consideration, and behavioral idealized influence (Bass & Avolio, 1992); and the Work Hope Scale (WHS) (Juntunen & Wettersten, 2006). Both these scales have been used in the literature and have been at least initially validated. The use of these widely validated scales avoided measurement instability and provided the overall validity of this research study (Alreck & Settle, 2004).

Characterizing the variables as independent and dependent implied a causal relationship between these factors, which argued for a quantitative methodology (Alreck & Settle, 2004). The researcher

conducted correlation analyses between the variables as well as simple regressions and multivariate analyses to determine whether followers of highly transformational leaders exhibit significantly high hope.

The researcher conducted a pretest of the survey at a small insurance firm to confirm the applicability of the scale and its component instruments. After completion of the pretest and incorporation of any necessary changes, the researcher disseminated the survey more generally at several financial services firms that encompass various aspects of the industry.

The sample of the research study consisted of workgroups from offices in the financial services industry. The sample for this research study came from retail banking, general insurance business, and personal/small business tax and accounting services. The sample size numbered 54 respondents, from a potential population of 150-200 total employees from the firms selected for the proposed study. This sample size has been found sufficient to measure the variables involved (Cone & Foster, 2008). The subjects were those willing individuals who worked for a supervisor in a selected financial services firm. This meant that the managers in departments or branches were excluded from the survey questionnaire, although their support proved essential to conduct the survey and disseminate it among their employees via email. Typical response rates for survey research falls between 13 percent and 41 percent (Hamilton, 2011). Beck, Yan, and Wang (2009) stated 16.9 percent is the norm when doing a web-based survey with an older population, defined by these authors as over 50 years old. The response to this study therefore fell well within the normal range for survey research of this variety.

The study survey instrument was a combination of two measures: the subscales of the Multi-Factor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ5x) that measure inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, individual consideration, and behavioral idealized influence; and the Work Hope Scale (WHS). The first 24 questions in the questionnaire came from the WHS, while the final 16 items come from the MLQ5x. The researcher asked participants for their informed consent online before they accessed the questions themselves.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Overall, the participants were predominantly female ($n = 32$; 58.2%) demonstrating what is likely an overrepresentation of females in the respondent participants from the overall research study population, given the predominance of males in the industry (U.S. Department of Labor, 2013). The largest number of respondents had been with their firm from newly hired to three years ($n = 22$; 40.7%) and well over half the respondents had been with their firms for five years or less ($n = 31$; 57.4%), which attests to the instructions given participating firms that the survey be directed to employees rather than management. Table 1 summarizes the demographic data gathered.

Table1. Frequency Counts and Percentages of Nominal Demographic Variables for the Study Participants ($N = 54$)

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Female	32	59.3
Male	22	40.7
Years working with the firm:		
0 to 3 years	22	40.7
3 to 5 years	9	16.7
5 to 10 years	10	18.5
More than 10 years	13	24.1

4.1. Continuous Variables and Scale Reliability

Table 2 presents the measures of central tendency for the continuous variables measured by the survey. Again, these variables were identified previously in this research study as workplace hope and transformational leadership. Each one of these variables was measured by an individual scale. The scale for workplace hope utilized a 7-point Likert scale, while the MLQ in this survey employed a 5-point Likert scale.

Table2. Measures of Central Tendency for the Means of the Scale Variables

Variable	N	Mean	SD	Median	Range
Workplace hope (WHS)	54	5.929	.8845	6.208	3.25-7.00
Transformational leadership (MLQ)	54	3.652	.9757	3.906	1.06-5.00

Note: $M = Mean$; $SD = Standard Deviation$.

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Further examination of the descriptive statistical data for these indicated acceptable levels of skewness and kurtosis for statistical analysis (Steinberg, 2011).

An examination of Cronbach's alpha for the scales used in this survey attests to their general reliability (Steinberg, 2011). Table 3 lists these figures for the scales in this research study. These figures are well above minimally acceptable levels for scale reliability.

Table3. Measures of Reliability for the Survey Scales (N=54)

Variable	N	Items	Cronbach's Alpha
Workplace hope (WHS)	54	24	.918
Transformational leadership (MLQ)	54	16	.955

4.2. Correlation Analysis

Table 4 presents the Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients for the bivariate correlation tests. There was several significant correlation found.

Table4. Pearson Correlations Between Variables Observed. (N = 54)

Variable	1	2	3
1. Workplace hope (WHS)			
2. Transformational leadership (MLQ)	.543		

4.3. Linear Regression Analysis

A single regression analysis was conducted to investigate the potential interrelation between the independent variable and the dependent variable measured. Transformational leadership was measured as a predictor for workplace hope. Table 5 presents the findings of the regression analysis.

Table5. Linear Regression Analysis of Workplace Hope as a Function of Transformational Leadership (N = 54)

Predictor	R	R ²	Std. Error	F change	Significance of F change
Transformational Leadership (MLQ)	0.543	0.295	.7500	21.733	.000

Dependent Variable: Workplace hope (WHS)

Statistical significance was found on the correlational analysis between the variables of hope and transformational leadership. Linear regression analysis agreed with the significance indicated by the correlational analysis.

5. CONCLUSION

This researcher hypothesized that leadership that promotes hope ultimately creates sustainable transformational leadership. Because of the changes in financial services over the past decade, this field seems particularly apt for study as regards to these constructs. By studying these effects in one field, the aim of this study was to point future research toward examining these drives in transformational leadership across a wide range of human endeavor. This research study thereby adds to the existing body of literature in transformational leadership, as well as positive organizational behavior (POB). The current study also provided some empirical basis to enact changes in leadership behavior that account for the effects of hope on followers and, by extension, on organizational performance. The causal-comparative study addressed the following research question: are effective transformational leaders characterized by fostering hope in their followers?

Overall, the findings of the research study indicated that the survey participants were a relatively hopeful group. The mean score of 5.929 on the WHS attest to this conclusion. In general, they observed a fairly high frequency of transformational leadership behavior from their leaders, given the mean score noted of 3.652 on the MLQ. The hopefulness of the participants appears significant in a way that relates to levels of transformational leadership. Transformational leadership proved to be very strongly correlated with higher levels of hopefulness. Such a higher level of workplace hope plays a vital role in the building of positive psychological capital which has been shown to be integral to higher worker satisfaction and productivity (Youssef & Luthans, 2007; Luthans, Norman, Avolio, & Avey, 2008). Moreover, linear regression did indicate a causative relationship ($R^2 = .295$, N=54) between transformational leadership and workplace hope. It does appear that transformational leadership behavior fosters greater workplace hope in employees.

These findings as to hope appear to be consistent with earlier research by DiPietro et al. (2007), Penz (2008), and Ryzin (2011), although more research remains to be done on hope in the workplace and its effect on performance. The rise in literature on psychological capital in the workplace has included studies on hope and its relationships to employee performance and enterprise profitability (Luthans, Youssef, & Avolio, 2007), but future empirical research should better establish and define these relationships.

A longitudinal examination of these variables may also yield different results if an experimental intervention designed to raise workplace hope were introduced. These interventions could include effective goal-setting, establishing stretch goals, revamping reward systems, or re-aligning human resources to develop the agency and pathways elements of hope in the workplace (Luthans, Youssef, & Avolio, 2007). Measurements of workplace hope before and after such an intervention may yield some useful results for the kinds of leadership practices and behaviors that most positively build up hopefulness in the workplace.

Moreover, as there exists in the literature regarding hope a distinction between state hope and trait hope (Juntunen & Wettersten, 2006), there remains research that can be performed on how and whether whether a person's hopeful trait can be augmented, or diminished meaningfully in the workplace, given various leadership styles. While this may appear intuitively plausible, showing this via empirical studies remains unaddressed. Luthans, Avey, and Patera (2008) have developed a web-based Psychological Capital Intervention (PCI) where they discovered significant increases to PsyCap, although more empirical studies are needed to confirm these results would be illustrative (Ko & Donaldson, 2011).

This research study informs leadership practice in several ways. First, to the extent that hopefulness positively affects organizational performance, as well as employee satisfaction and engagement (Peterson & Luthans, 2003); leadership behaviors that foster workplace hope ought be encouraged. Luthans, Youssef, and Avolio (2007) asserted that while they found hopeful leaders more effective, they also found that many organizations do not adequately support the active pathways and agency capacities of these leaders and over time, these leaders become frustrated. Often they either leave these organizations, or their performance wanes. Organizations that reward effective goal-setting, contingency planning and innovation allow hopeful leaders and employees to develop their own hopefulness and those of others (Avolio et al., 2004). Organizations should nurture hope by encouraging the agentic and pathways development that will raise hope both in leaders and followers.

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