

Impact of Personality and Communication Style on Transformational Leadership

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Abstract: This study is interested in leaders' individual qualities and leadership style, focusing on personality and communication style, and how they impact on transformational leadership. In addition, this study is also interested in the influence of age, gender, and leadership experience of the leader on transformational leadership. The data consisted of 385 Finnish leaders who rated themselves in regard of personality, communication style and transformational leadership. SPSS Statistics 26.0 was used to test the relationships. Several statistically significant associations were found, indicating that both personality and communication style have an impact on transformational leadership. Leadership experience and gender also had some effect, but interestingly, age had no effect on transformational leadership style.

Keywords: Transformational leadership, communication, personality

1. Introduction

The concept of transformational leadership (Antonakis & House, 2002; Avolio, 1999; Bass, 1998) is one of the most widely researched paradigms in the leadership field and has shown substantial validity for predicting several outcomes including leader performance and effectiveness ratings in addition to subordinates' satisfaction and motivation (Judge & Piccolo, 2004; Sashkin, 2004). Transformational leaders act as mentors to their followers by encouraging learning, achievement, and individual development. They provide meaning, act as role models, provide challenges, evoke emotions, and foster a climate of trust. Leaders should inspire and motivate others with their visions, example and especially with their verbal skills. This kind of inspiring and motivating behavior requires well-developed verbal communication skills.

It has been known for long that high self-awareness of leaders is connected to effectiveness (Atwater and Yammarino, 1992; Bass and Yammarino, 1991). Multiple studies have focused on the leaders' individual qualities, and the area has lately attracted increasing interest. For example, it has been noted that certain personality preferences have an inherent tendency towards transformational leadership (Hautala 2006; Brandt & Laiho, 2013). Leaders' communication style has been noted as an important quality and it is specially connected to enhancing self-awareness, but surprisingly this area still lacks research. There are only a few studies, which confirm the importance of the topic and show that leaders who pay attention to their own communication are more effective change agents than those who do not (Gilley, Gilley, & McMillan, 2009), and that leaders' communication styles are linked to their subordinates' levels of satisfaction (Infante, Elissa, & Gorden, 1982) and motivation (Kay & Christophel, 1995).

Moreover, there is still uncertainty about gender differences in relation to leadership. Some studies indicate that women are better at transformational leadership (e.g., Bass, 1999; Brandt & Edinger, 2015; Carless, 1998; Northouse, 2007), while others indicate that gender does not make a difference (Brown & Reilly, 2008; Kent et al., 2010; Manning, 2002). Personality is a stable construct and, thus, cannot be changed, but behavior and communication style can be modified and developed. The purpose of this study is to examine the impact of personality and communication style as well as the personal characteristics of leaders, such as age, experience, and gender, on leadership style.

2. Earlier studies

Transformational leadership improves the morale and performance of employees and motivates them with various apparatuses. It gives employees a sense of belonging, making each employee and manager feel like a collective unit (Fassina et al., 2008). Transformational leaders show concern towards the needs of their subordinates, motivating and inspiring them to achieve organizational goals and objectives. Transformational leaders are not solely focused on the task at hand; they mentor subordinates, help employees create a bond within the organization, developing individuals into leaders. These types of leaders are able to boost the

performance level of their staff and ensure that they are satisfied within the working environment thus making them fully committed to the organization (Chen et al., 2014). Transformational leaders express social and emotional intellect and are often charismatic, and they instill organizational vision and goals in their employees (Bass & Avolio, 1993). A study by Daus & Ashkanasy (2005) also indicates that emotional intelligence is significantly related to transformational leadership.

Looking at personality and leadership, Hautala's (2006) study of Myers-Briggs personality types and transformational leadership indicated that the extraverted, intuitive and perceiving preferences favor transformational leadership. On the contrary, subordinates' ratings indicated that leaders with sensing preference are associated with transformational leadership. These results have been supported by Brandt & Edinger (2015) and Brandt & Laiho (2013).

Among the few studies on communication and leadership, De Vries et al. (2010) reported on charismatic, human-oriented, and task-oriented leadership and concluded that leadership is very much grounded in communication style in relation to charismatic and human-oriented leadership. They found charismatic leadership to be characterized by communication styles incorporating assuredness, supportiveness, argumentativeness, and preciseness. Berson and Avolio (2004) found that leaders assessed as transformational were more effective communicators in all three areas factored in—that is, they were careful listeners, open, and careful transmitters. According to Brandt & Uusi-Kakkuri (2016), those leaders who judged themselves to have a strong transformational leadership style also reported they had an emotionally intelligent, controlled, and transparent communication style. Their leadership style was marked by the absence of the avoiding or dominating approaches. According to Brandt (2021), highly transformational female leaders communicate differently than less transformational female leaders, indicating that the highly transformational leaders are using more Impatient, Self-Controlled, Dominant and Clear communication styles than less transformational female leaders.

Several studies have discussed the role of gender in transformational leadership and whether female leaders are more effective (Susanty et al., 2013). Some studies indicate that females are undervalued by male subordinates and colleagues (Northouse, 2007). Overall, female managers are seen to be more considerate and caring than the male managers and thus the female managers tend to be more concerned with the well-being of their subordinates than male managers (Sun et al., 2016). In case of transformational leadership, multiple studies indicate that female leaders exceed male leaders (Bass, 1999; Brandt & Edinger, 2015; Carless, 1998; Northouse, 2007). In terms of gender, personality, and leadership, it has been noted that females are more Enabling leaders, while males are more Challenging, and personality, together with gender, influences leadership behavior (Brandt & Laiho, 2013).

There are very few studies on age and leadership experience. As Spisak et al. (2014) have stated, the role of age in leadership emergence and selection of leadership is given surprisingly little attention. According to their study, people look for younger leaders in times of exploratory change, but when they need stable exploitation, they look for older leaders. Their study also indicated that younger leaders were seen more attractive, charismatic, and trustworthy, while older leaders were seen as more masculine.

3. Data and method

To test the proposed model, a questionnaire survey method using structured questions was adopted. The data was collected between the years 2019–2021 from various adult leaders in different leadership courses in Finland. The sample represents 385 Finnish leaders. Most of the respondents (70.4 percent) were female. Respondents ranged in age from 19 to 66, with an average age of 36. On average, respondents had 5 years of leadership experience. We used age, leadership experience and gender as control variables. For the statistical analyses, gender was transformed into a dummy variable.

3.1 Questionnaires

3.1.1 Personality

Personality was measured with the Finnish version of Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI), which has proven to be a reliable measure in multiple studies (e.g. Gallen, 1997; Routamaa et al., 1997). It measures personality with four dimensions: extraversion (E) – introversion (I), sensing (S) – intuition (N), thinking (T) – feeling (F), judging (J) – perceiving (P). These dimensions make up 16 different personality types, e.g. ISTP, ESTJ, INTP etc.

3.1.2 Transformational leadership

Transformational leadership was measured with the Finnish version of the Leadership Practices Inventory (LPI), which is originally developed by Kouzes and Posner (1988). The Finnish version of the LPI used in this study has been in use since 2005 (see e.g. Hautala, 2006; Brandt & Laiho, 2013; Brandt, 2021). The items in the questionnaire were rated on a Likert scale with options ranging from 1 (very rarely if at all) to 5 (frequently if not constantly). The dimensions of transformational leadership are: Enabling, Visioning, Challenging, Modeling, Trusting others and Rewarding.

3.1.3 Communication

Communication style was measured with 34 items, examining different perspectives on communication styles with a 7-point Likert scale from 1 (I never behave like this) to 7 (I always behave like this). Following factor analyses with Varimax rotation, six communication styles were designated: Emphatic, Insecure, Impatient, Controlled, Dominating and Unclear.

Emphatic style means that a person can notice the other person's feelings, if in doubt that s/he has been insulting, s/he is apologizing, and s/he can easily put his/her soul into the other's position. The *Insecure* style means that a person does not want to state his/her opinions if there is a threat that others might not agree, and the person has tendency to avoid or delay the critical subjects. The *Self-Controlling* style means that a person does not show his/her feelings and can control them well. The *Impatient* style means that the person is not necessarily listening very carefully, gets easily bored with listening, and has a tendency to interrupt others. The *Dominant* style means that person takes a big role in the discussions and can raise his/her voice during the discussions; others might be a little bit scared of his/her presence. The *Unclear* style means that the person communicates in an unclear way, so that there are often ambiguities (e.g. Brandt & Uusi-Kakkuri, 2016).

3.2 Results

Table 1 shows the results of the hierarchical regression analysis predicting the dimensions of transformational leadership: creating atmosphere, visioning and showing example. Table 2 respectively shows the results in relation to rewarding, trusting and challenging others. The results are valid after controlling gender, age and leadership experience.

The results indicate that Intuitive personalities are more Visioning leaders than Sensing personalities (Model 3: $\beta = -.259$, $p < 0.05$) and Intuitives are more Challenging than Sensing types (Model 3: $\beta = -.295$, $p < 0.001$). Thinking personalities are more Visioning (Model 3: $\beta = -.225$, $p < 0.05$) and Challenging (Model 3: $\beta = .191$, $p < 0.05$) than Feeling personalities. Judging personalities are more active in Modeling than Perceiving ones (Model 3: $\beta = -.289$, $p < 0.01$). In contrast, Perceiving personalities are more Challenging leaders than Judging types (Model 3: $\beta = .208$, $p < 0.05$).

In terms of communication styles, the results show that leaders with a more empathic communication style put more effort into Enabling leadership (Model 3: $\beta = .306$, $p < 0.01$) and have a stronger Trust in others (Model 3: $\beta = .325$, $p < 0.01$). Leaders with an insecure communication style, in turn, put less effort into Enabling (Model 3: $\beta = -.370$, $p < 0.001$) and Challenging (Model 3: $\beta = -.230$, $p < 0.05$) leadership. The more impatient (Model 3: $\beta = .367$, $p < 0.001$) or dominant (Model 3: $\beta = .216$, $p < 0.05$) the leader's communication style, the more likely s/he is to be a Visioning leader.

The personal characteristics of the leaders also had some, albeit very little, influence on transformational leadership. Results show that males are more challenging than females (Model 3: $\beta = .228$, $p < 0.01$). In addition, those with more leadership experience are more enabling than those with less experience (Model 3: $\beta = .238$, $p < 0.05$). Age had no effect on any of the dimensions of transformational leadership.

Table 1: Results of hierarchical regression analyses predicting transformational leadership dimensions

Variable/ parameter	Enabling			Visioning			Modeling		
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Age	-.124	-.081	-.101	-.172	-.192	-.068	.091	.068	.010
Leadership experience	.309**	.293*	.238*	.227*	.195	.131	.145	.116	.087
Gender ^a	-.136	-.078	-.109	.000	-.057	-.094	-.026	-.061	-.069
E vs I		.081	-.099		.121	-.036		.068	.026

Variable/ parameter	Enabling			Visioning			Modeling		
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
S vs N		-.040	-.009		-.230*	-.259*		-.161	-.132
T vs F		-.179	-.108		.196	.225*		.129	.122
J vs P		.010	.090		-.008	.091		.346***	.289**
Empathic			.306**			.014			.124
Insecure			-.370***			-.155			-.086
Impatient			.118			.367***			-.196
Controlled			-.018			-.028			-.008
Dominating			.101			.216*			.064
Unclear			-.006			-.049			-.139
R ²	.081	.118	.349	.040	.137	.321	.045	.189	.282
ΔR ²	.081	.037	.232	.040	.098	.184	.045	.144	.093
F	3.108*	1.943	3.964***	1.451	2.298*	3.457***	1.659	3.398**	2.895**
ΔF	3.108*	1.064	5.696***	1.451	2.856*	4.285***	1.659	4.536**	2.061

E vs I: extroversion or introversion; S vs N: sensing or intuition; T vs F: thinking or feeling; J vs P: judging or perceiving.

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$. ^a (0=female, 1=male).

Table 2: Results of hierarchical regression analyses predicting transformational leadership dimensions

Variable/ parameter	Rewarding			Challenging			Trusting others		
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Age	.156	-.138	-.087	.191	.165	.144	-.130	-.071	-.106
Leadership experience	.200	.161	.157	.103	.095	.059	.229*	.206	.201
Gender ^a	-.086	-.089	-.061	.345***	.278**	.228**	.020	.097	.131
E vs I		.178	.155		.080	.045		.125	.117
S vs N		-.165	-.185		-.350***	-.295***		-.063	-.015
T vs F		.015	.057		.226**	.191*		-.240*	-.173
J vs P		-.032	-.028		-.216*	-.208*		-.042	-.033
Empathic			.097			-.013			.325**
Insecure			.091			-.230*			-.051
Impatient			.111			.022			-.044
Controlled			-.036			.136			.074
Dominating			-.021			.036			-.123
Unclear			-.111			.072			.015
R ²	.033	.096	.123	.159	.405	.463	.040	.118	.152
ΔR ²	.033	.063	.027	.159	.246	.057	.040	.078	.134
F	1.195	1.547	1.035	6.702***	9.937***	6.356***	1.461	1.951	2.493**
ΔF	1.195	1.785	0.491	6.702***	10.552***	1.701	1.461	2.265	2.875*

E vs I: extroversion or introversion; S vs N: sensing or intuition; T vs F: thinking or feeling; J vs P: judging or perceiving.

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$. ^a (0=female, 1=male).

4. Conclusions, limitations and future studies

This study focused on the impact of personality and communication style on transformational leadership. The impact of gender, age and leadership experience on transformational leadership was also of interest.

Concerning the *Enabling* dimension of the transformational leadership, the results indicated that the more leadership experience leaders have and the more emphatic their communication style is, the more Enabling they behave. Also, the less insecure the leader's communication style is, the more Enabling the leadership is. The Enabling dimension means that the leader is including subordinates and team members in projects and meetings, nobody is an outsider and employees are getting committed to the work. It may be that insecure leaders might be a bit shy to behave in an Enabling way, but also that more experience the leaders get, the easier it is to create team spirit and include everyone. Enabling behavior seems to be natural to more emphatically communicating leaders – it may be that those leaders show positive feelings easily and they do not even have to make strong efforts to include others.

In case of *Visioning*, intuitive and thinking personalities were more Visioning than sensing types and feeling types. Intuitive personalities have a tendency to think of broad constructs first, are future-oriented and like to innovate possibilities, so this result fits well with the theory and earlier studies on intuitives. In terms of thinking, it may be that their more task orientated and strategic thinking compared to feeling types advances Visioning behavior. The more Impatient or Dominating the leader is in communication, the more Visioning s/he is. It may be that highly Visioning and future-orientated leaders are very impatient in their communication, when their minds are already in the future, and they do not like to speak about the details and get frustrated easily in the details and long talks. This can also cause them to communicate in a dominant way.

In the *Modeling* dimension, the only statistically significant associations were with personality dimensions. The judging personalities were more Modeling than perceiving types. Modeling refers to showing example and acting according to plans. This kind of orderly and systematic behavior is more typical of judging types, who like to make strict plans and also stick to the plans. Spontaneous people go more with the flow, and they do not like to follow routines or plans.

In case of *Rewarding* dimension of transformational leadership, no statistically significant results were obtained. In case of Trusting others, the Emphatic communication style increased this behavior.

The *Challenging* dimension of the leadership dimensions was impacted mostly by the studied factors. The Challenging leadership behavior refers to innovative behavior and mindset, where the leader constantly improves the work and also asks others to think about and suggest possible improvements and opportunities. Intuitive, thinking and perceiving personality types were more Challenging. The less insecure communication style the leader has, the more Challenging s/he is. Men were more Challenging than women. Personality dimension intuition vs. sensing had the most impact, gender being the second most influential. Intuitive people see opportunities, tend to think from different angles and viewpoints, and thus are inherently Challenging. Men may be culturally more empowered to behave in the Challenging way than women, who sometimes are still expected to behave in a feminine way. For example, concerning risk-taking related to entrepreneurship, men are more risk-oriented compared to women (Brandt & Helander, 2020).

In conclusion, these results suggest that personality had the most impact on transformational leadership. Also, communication style had some impact, albeit not so much. When looking at the background information (age, gender, leadership experience), there was almost no impact on the leadership behavior.

In case of Enabling, Visioning and Challenging dimensions of transformational leadership, the personality and communication style impacted the most. The results confirm earlier results when indicating that the personality types intuitive, thinking and perceiving have an impact on the transformational behavior (Hautala, 2006; Brandt & Laiho, 2013). The results emphasize the importance on choosing the right kind of personality types on the right positions. If there is a need to innovate and challenge the current way of working, the intuitive, thinking and perceiving personalities would be most suitable for that. Also, when needing to have new visions, the intuitive and thinking leaders are the best fit, even when their weakness can be that their communication style can be a bit impatient and dominant. When wanting to create team spirit and trust, emphatic communication is good tool for that.

Age did not have an impact at all, indicating that age does not impact on the leaders' behavior; either young or old leaders can be transformational leaders. Gender did have an impact in case of Challenging, indicating that men had more tendency to behave and demand from others the developing way of thinking. However, it should be noted that respondents in this data were mostly women (70.4%), and thus there might be also only a limited number of differences. In case of experience, the more experience the leader has, the more Enabling way s/he behaves. The result that leadership experience does not impact on transformational leadership dimensions is a surprising and also quite de-motivating result, because it implies that leadership behavior does not change with age or experience. However, more research should be done on this aspect, because concerning both age and leadership experience the data was limited. The average leadership experience of the respondents was five years and the average age was 36 years (the age range was 19 to 66 years). More research would be needed about the impact of age and experience on the leadership development. Additionally, it should be noted that the data is based on self-appraisals and subordinates' insights would be an interesting addition.

This study awakes the need for further studies, for example, to look at personality as a scale or as a combination of preferences. It would also be interesting to explore moderating models of the interaction between personality and communication style in order to gain further insights.

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