Improving School Leadership: The Connection of Transformational Leadership and Psychological Well-Being of the Followers

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In this current era of public school accountability in the United States, the passage of No Child Left Behind resulted in dramatic changes for public school districts (U.S. Department of Education, 2001). Although the recent reauthorization, entitled Every Student Succeeds Act, allowed greater flexibility on the state and local levels, effective school leadership still remained a critical factor when establishing and maintaining high standards of student learning (Executive Office of the President, 2015). Onorato (2013) noted the federal and state accountability mandates have forced public school administrators to transform the educational environment while serving as instructional leaders for teachers and students. Additionally, Onorato noted as accountability pressures increased, educational leaders were compelled to strengthen student achievement through increased leadership qualities. Furthermore, transformational leadership empowered the followers to strive with higher levels of confidence and motivation while the followers also assumed the traits and actions of transformational leadership (Onorato, 2013). This phenomenological narrative study was designed to describe the transformational leadership components of selected superintendents in the state of Texas, which directly affected a follower's psychological well-being. All seven individuals who participated in the research study were current or recent superintendents with experience in turning around a low-performing campus or district. The leader participants self-identified their own transformational leadership skills using the MLQ 5X-Short by Avolio and Bass (2013). The research questions allowed for further investigation into the influence of the four components of transformational leadership on the follower's psychological well-being. Findings indicated idealized influence and inspirational motivation as the most dominant transformational leadership components of the participants. Findings also emphasized the importance of the positive impact of transformational leadership processes on the follower's psychological well-being.

Statement of the Problem

With the increasing demands of federal and state accountability, superintendents faced mounting obstacles of enabling followers as they met the necessary goals (Fenn & Mixon, 2011). Kelloway, Turner, Barling, and Loughlin (2012) verified the positive connection of employee

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well-being with transformational leadership. The researchers noted pride resulting from doing the right thing while ensuring the well-being of the followers might affect the leader's own positive well-being. Specifically, Kelloway et al. (2012) stated a need for further research of understanding the transformational leadership process components affecting a follower's psychological well-being. Therefore, further examination of followers' well-being with transformational leadership is warranted.

Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

The purpose of this phenomenological qualitative study was to describe the transformational leadership components of selected superintendents in the state of Texas, which directly affected a follower's psychological well-being. The study was guided by the following research questions:
1. How does idealized influence affect the relationship between a transformational leader and follower?
2. How does a transformational leader's inspirational motivation affect a follower's psychological well-being?
3. How does intellectual stimulation create a strong relationship between a transformational leader and follower?
4. How does individualized consideration shown by the transformational leader to the follower increase psychological well-being?

Summary of the Literature

In the past 35 years, numerous studies have affirmed three types of leadership: laissez-faire, transactional, and transformational (Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999; Grant, 2012; Liu & Liao, 2013). Bass and Riggio (2006) advocated authentic and pseudo-transformational leadership qualities were seen in both transactional and transformational leadership theories. Furthermore, the theorists defined transformational leadership as a means of raising leadership to the next level. Additionally, transformational leadership inspired followers' commitment to a shared vision while inspiring innovative problem solving through coaching and mentoring (Bass & Riggio, 2006).

Laissez-faire leadership. Bass (1999) stipulated negative outcomes resulted from laissez-faire leadership. Zwingmann, Wegge, Wolfe, Rudolf, Schmidt, and Richter (2014) noted laissez-faire leadership was leadership with no leader and these leaders were non-committal when making decisions. Bass (1997) defined laissez-faire leadership as a component of non-leadership. Avolio and Bass (2002) identified laissez-faire leadership as the highest form of inactive leadership. The researchers noted laissez-faire leaders avoided responsibility, were indifferent, and displayed little initiative.

Transactional leadership. Ruggieri and Abbate (2013) described transactional leaders as negotiators and compromisers who never attempted any transformation of the followers. McCleskey (2014) contended transactional leadership required interaction between the leaders and followers with the goal of benefiting both roles. On the other hand, McCleskey noted transactional leadership created bitterness and short-term happiness for the followers. Bass and Avolio (1993) determined transactional leaders and followers worked for a price which was

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determined by personal motivation. Verlage, Rowold, and Schilling (2012) maintained transactional leadership developed low self-efficacy among the leaders.

Transformational leadership. Burns (1978) identified the interaction between the transformational leader and follower as the key component which increased an organization's motivation and creativity. Bass (1999) noted transformational leadership enhanced transactional leadership. Transformational leaders performed as role models and mentors due to their own desires to serve others (Bass & Avolio, 1993). However, discussions regarding core beliefs, challenges, and visions prevailed at all levels of personnel status (Avolio, Weichun, Koh, & Bhatia, 2004; Bass & Avolio, 1993). Effeslberg and Solga (2015) contended transformational leaders developed a psychological connection to the organization's goals. Bass and Steidlmeier (1999) stressed both the transformational leaders and followers experienced a transformation in outlook and performance. Yu (2013) advocated transformational leadership to be the leading theory of current leadership research.

Measurements of Leadership
Full range leadership theory. Bass and Riggio (2006) identified several tools used in determining various leadership styles; specific focus was on the capacity of transformational leadership. As a result, the theorists developed the Full Range of Leadership Theory (FRLT) model that included two transactional leadership factors, passive management by exception and active management by exception. Additionally, in the event a leader displayed non-committal leadership, the laissez-faire style was included in the FRLT. Depending on the individual leader, the results indicated leadership strengths as transactional, transformational, or non-transactional laissez-faire (Bass & Riggio, 2006).

Multi-leadership questionnaire. Burns (1978) explained the connections and differences of transactional and transformational leadership (Avolio, Bass & Jung, 1999). Also, Burns specified transactional leadership would be on one end of the scale with transformational leadership on the other. Burns further advocated that both leadership styles were visible in effective leadership (Avolio et al., 1999). However, Bass (1999) focused solely on transformational attributes. Equally important, Bass understood the necessity for a better leadership style measurement and developed the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) to indicate self-reported transformational leadership skills (Bass & Avolio, 2013; Fenn & Mixon, 2011). Bass and Riggio (2006) specified the MLQ consisted of the MLQ Leader Form and the MLQ Rater Form. Specifically, the two separate forms played a pivotal role in rating transformational leadership attributes. Noting that the Leader Form contained bias created by the leader's self-reporting, Bass and Riggio recommended using the MLQ Rater Form as a measurement of transformational leadership (Bass & Riggio, 2006).

Components of Transformational Leadership
Bass and Riggio (2006) maintained the four transformational leadership indicators of idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration (Effeslberg & Solga, 2015; Grant, 2012; McCleskey, 2014; Salter, Green, Duncan, Berre, & Torti, 2010; Walsh, Dupre & Arnold, 2014; Zhu, Sosik, Riggio, & Yang, 2012).
Idealized influence. Bass, Avolio, Jung, and Berson (2003) noted that followers desire to work with transformational leaders since the leaders were fair, consistent, and ethical. Kelloway et al.

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(2012) asserted transformational leaders developed long-term goals and actions which resulted in psychological well-being of the followers. Furthermore, the researchers recommended transformational leaders looked beyond their own personal needs and focused on what was best for the organization. Additionally, they noted transformational leaders' actions reflected high moral and ethical commitments to the followers (Bass et al., 2003; Kelloway et al., 2012). Balyer (2012) identified that transformational leaders do not use their influence for selfish advancements. Based on research by Bass (1997), the researchers emphasized transformational leaders inspired followers through respect and trust while also ethically modeling their own personal beliefs and values (Abbas, Iqbal, Waheed, & Riaz, 2012; Beauchamp, Barling, and Morton, 2011; Sagnak, 2010).

Inspirational motivation. The transformational leader created a vision of a better future for everyone, including the followers (Bass et al., 2003). Kelloway et al. (2012) emphasized transformational leaders created a strong sense of encouragement in the followers. Additionally, the encouragement resulted in the followers overcoming obstacles and achieving goals once thought impossible (Bass, 1985, 1998; Kelloway et al., 2012; Liu, Siu, & Shi, 2010). Bass and Steidlmeier (1999) concluded transformational leaders created good works, harmony, and charity when working with the followers. The researchers also noted transformational leaders focused on the followers' best attributes (Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999). Bass and Avolio (1993) emphasized followers viewed transformational leaders as symbols representing the culture of the organization. Verlage et al. (2012) advocated inspirational motivation resulted in the followers fulfilling the organization's vision as a challenge rather than an obligation.

Intellectual stimulation. Bass and Steidlmeier (1999) contended transformational leaders utilized this attribute when encouragement of the followers was based on the true merits of the concerns. Van Eeden, Cilliers, and van Deventer (2008) noted the transformational leader encouraged creativity and innovation through the appreciation and value of the followers' intelligence. McCleskey (2014) asserted transformational leaders must be transparent in their actions and beliefs. The researcher claimed transparency of the transformational leaders empowered confidence in the followers without fear of disapproval. Atkinson and Pilgreen (2011), Balyer (2012), and Verlage et al. (2012) remarked how transformational leaders' creative questioning resulted in an increased number of innovative solutions by the followers. Bass et al. (2003) affirmed transformational leaders did not publicly criticize or ridicule followers' mistakes. Followers of transformational leaders developed confidence and reframed problems which resulted in innovative problem-solving and increased self-confidence (Avolio et al., 2004; Bass et al., 2003; Burton & Peachey, 2014; Kelloway et al., 2012).

Individualized contribution. Groves and LaRocca (2011) emphasized transformational leaders empowered the followers' individual needs of growth and achievement. Transformational leaders developed future leaders by establishing relationships with the followers (Kelloway et al., 2012). Jha (2013) and Verlage et al. (2012) explained transformational leaders extended personal attention to the followers while also cementing the followers' organizational commitment. Similarly, transformational leaders increased the followers' well-being by providing guidance, empathy, and compassion during mentoring. Equally important, Liu et al. (2010) advocated Bass (1985, 1998) stipulated followers' development and growth increased due to concern displayed by transformational leadership. However, Atkinson and Pilgreen (2011)

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cautioned transformational leaders should maintain a professional relationship when mentoring followers.

Psychological Well-Being

Nielsen, Randall, Yarker, and Brenner (2008) stipulated the importance of transformational leaders' impact on psychological well-being of the followers. End results of this interaction included followers understanding the importance of their jobs and developing more successful work habits. However, attention should be noted of the impact experienced by the followers of leaders undergoing a change of transformational behaviors (Nielsen et al., 2008). Aryee, Walumbwa, Zhou, & Hartnell (2012) concluded transformational leadership created positive psychological well-being in the followers of transformational leaders. The researchers reported followers experienced psychological well-being when the vision and mission were connected to positive self-concepts (as cited in Bono & Judge, 2003; Shamir, House, & Arthur, 1993; Wang & Zhang, 2014).

Methodology

The research design of this study was qualitative with a phenomenological approach. Creswell (2013) noted phenomenological research as a systematic way of uncovering and understanding human experiences. Furthermore, the researcher emphasized random purposeful sampling as the method of selecting individuals who had previously experienced the studied phenomenon. In the final analysis, the *essence* of the phenomenological approach indicated "what" the studied individuals experienced as well as "how" it was experienced by the participants (Creswell, 2013). Cooper, Fleisher, and Cotton (2012) asserted phenomenology studies focused not on the individuals of the studies, but on the shared components of the phenomenon. Özcan, Karataş, Çağlar, and Polat (2014) noted data analysis was paramount in clarifying meanings which developed through the research.

Participants

In qualitative studies, purposeful sampling was utilized in gathering information pertinent and useful to the study (Sandelowski, 2000). The purposeful sampling group of this voluntary study included seven self-identified transformational leaders who were current or recent Texas school superintendents or deputy superintendents. The self-identification process centered on the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) in self-reporting transformational leadership skills (Avolio & Bass, 2013). To determine the connection of the transformational leadership process and followers' psychological well-being, in-depth interviews of the individual participants were conducted. Each of the participating leaders had a minimum of two years of experience as superintendents. Individually, the participants were district leaders in overcoming low-performing school accountability status per state or federal requirements. Located in different geographical regions, the participants were leaders of varying Texas public school size classifications.

In collecting the data, each participant self-identified transformational leadership tendencies using the MLQ Leader Form 5X-Short (Avolio & Bass, 2013). Avolio and Bass explained the MLQ Leader Form 5X-Short provided insight into the participants' personal views of

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transformational leadership. Sample items were: "I talk about my most important values and beliefs," "I consider an individual as having different needs, abilities, and aspirations from others," and "I focus attention on irregularities, mistakes, exceptions, and deviations from standards."

Through the use of semi-structured in-depth interviews, the participants responded to questions focused on the transformational leadership components using a Guided Protocol. The in-depth interviews were conducted with each participant on an individual basis. The open-ended interview questions were based on the transformational leadership process components of idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration (Bass & Riggio, 2006).

Results and Discussion

Creswell (2013) identified triangulation as a validation strategy comprised of multiple methods, theories, sources, and investigators. The MLQ results, along with the interview data, were utilized in determining a perspective or theme. Specifically, the assessment survey and the interview information provided data, which were reviewed for themes and structures as related to a transformational leader's connection to the follower's psychological well-being.

Research question one. The first research question investigated how idealized influence affects the relationship between a transformational leader and follower. Emergent themes included:
- Ethical Conduct of the Transformational Leader – All of the participants emphasized how the superintendent established the tone and expectations of the district's followers. One participant responded, "Even if it would benefit the district, I'm still not going to do anything that's not right." Another participant stated, "I think it is important that you lead by example." This philosophy was reiterated by two of the participants who added the importance of consistency and supportive risk-taking for the follower's psychological well-being.
- High Moral Behavior of the Transformational Leader – Five of the seven participants agreed on the importance of high moral behavior of the leader. Four participants agreed that a transformational leader served as a role model which affected the follower's psychological well-being in a positive manner. "If you are not one of those people who lives a high moral and ethical life or if you don't lead the way in the workplace, then the followers are going to keep you at arm's length," cautioned one participant.
- Trust Establishment between the Transformational Leader and Follower – Four of the participants believed trust or trustworthiness to be a dominant factor. One participant stated, "The people that work for you are not afraid to take risks because they know you are providing confidence, safety, and trust in you as their leader." Another participant responded, "I think if you trust somebody then you are willing to go the extra mile for them. When you don't trust your leadership, there is a push back at times."
- Resulting Buy-In of the Followers – Three of the participants affirmed the feeling of buy-in affected the psychological well-being of the followers. "It is about getting input, listening, getting ideas, and then allowing those people to fly using their talents," stated one participant leader. "If there's a high level of trust they are going to be willing to buy into what you are trying to sell them because they trust you," noted another participant.

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Research question two. The second research question investigated how a transformational leader's inspirational motivation affected a follower's psychological well-being. Emergent themes included:

- A Shared Vision – All participants agreed in the importance of a shared vision. Additionally, they understood how a clear understanding of the organization's vision and goals affected the psychological well-being of the followers in a beneficial manner. "I think the most important of the inspirational motivation traits is commitment to the shared vision and goals," stated a participant leader. Additionally another participant urged, "Without a shared vision, it will take more struggles to get to the goals."
- Enthusiasm Created Motivation – Three participants stressed enthusiasm displayed by the transformational leader created motivation in the followers. One stated, "When you start getting buy-in and willingness to take those risks that fear of failure goes away. That is when you start getting that excitement. You start pulling together as a team." Another participant commented, "When enthusiasm is shown you do show that you are leading with your heart."
- Buy-In Created Momentum – Four of the participants believed momentum was created through the buy-in of the followers. One participant pointed out, "You have to have something there for people who will hold on to the fact that we are all in this together." "Offering them a role and giving them responsibility by challenging them is how you get that buy-in and how you get that team to work all together," remarked another participant.
- Increased Morale – Three of the participants believed morale increased through comradery, commitment, or contagious efforts. Two of the participants indicated the family atmosphere created by the transformational leader and the faith the followers have in the transformational leader increased morale. "The followers will want to be a part of the solution and know this is something to buy into and help," deduced a participant leader.

Research question three. Research question three investigated how intellectual stimulation created a strong relationship between a transformational leader and follower. Emergent themes included:

- No Public Criticism – Six of the seven participants affirmed the importance of the transformational leader not offering public criticism to the followers. One participant advised, "If there are reprimands that need to be made, they can be done professionally behind closed doors." Another participant warned, "I think criticism needs to be handled in a professional manner and the leader needs to be very, very careful before they do that."
- Creativity and Innovation – Five of the seven participant leaders emphasized the critical use of creativity and innovation. One participant noted the impact of creativity and innovation when solving accountability dilemmas. He concluded "with the testing issues we have had the last couple of years I think that encouraging followers to approach old situations in new ways is paramount." Another participant added insight from the perspective of the leader of a small public school district by stating, "Being a small school, we are so limited in staff. They are very, very creative in what they have developed."

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- Safe Environment for Risk-Taking – Four of the seven participants affirmed the importance of creating a safe environment for risk-taking. One participant advised, "They need to know they are not going to be crucified if the idea doesn't work out. They need to know that you, as the leader, are going to help them pick up the pieces and try something else." Additionally another respondent advised, "People have to feel that they have a safety net and that it is okay to try new things. As long as we are working together and we are trying to learn, then we are going to be supported."
- Appreciation – Three of the seven leader participants noted the follower's psychological well-being was affected by the transformational leader actively showing appreciation to the followers. "We all know that as humans everybody wants a pat on the back. I make sure the followers understand I appreciate what they are doing and want them to continue doing it," remarked one participant. "I do think you have to foster the environment where they feel open to trying new things," added another participant leader.

Research question four. Research question four investigated how individualized consideration shown by the transformational leader to the follower increased psychological well-being. Emergent themes included:

- Value of Two-Way Communication – Six of the seven participant leaders stated two-way communication greatly affected the psychological well-being of the followers. One participant emphasized, "Anytime I have had something fall apart, it was because I didn't communicate." Three of the participants noted the importance of communicating with all followers, regardless of points of view. "Two-way communication is an important trait of individualized consideration. If people do not have a way to provide input into the system, it just stifles the progress," advised a participant.
- Personal Relationships – Six of the seven participants affirmed the importance of personal relationships creating a team effort of working together by the transformational leaders and the followers. "It is important to make sure you try to find out those strengths that certain people have as a leader and build on those strengths," advised one participant. Another participant commented, "Honestly, I think sometimes they need to see the leader say, "I am sad. I am upset. This is how I feel but it doesn't mean that we should stop trying."
- Effective Listening – Three of the seven participants stressed the importance of the transformational leader effectively listening to the followers. "Listening effectively is something that is important to do. Often you can solve a problem just by listening and not doing anything else," affirmed one participant leader. One participant advised, "A lot of times you have to listen for more than just the words they are saying. You have to listen for what they are not saying."
- Mentorship Benefits – Four of the seven participant leaders remarked on the transformational leader's impact on the follower's psychological well-being through the leader's mentorship. The participants noted the benefits of a strong mentorship are seen through support, acceptance, and praise. One participant leader advised, "If you do not have someone who is leading the way, you are not going to advance."

Conclusions

This phenomenological qualitative research study investigated the transformational leadership components of selected superintendents in the state of Texas, which directly affected a follower's

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psychological well-being. The overreaching findings of the study indicated a strong and positive connection between the transformational leadership components and the psychological well-being of the followers. Based on the findings of the individual interviews, specific conclusions were discussed in terms of the research questions that guided the study.

Six of the seven participants identified idealized influence as one of their strongest transformational leadership components. The participant leaders identified the importance of a strong sense of purpose established by the transformational leader. Furthermore, the moral and ethical consequences of decisions by the transformational leaders were noted by the research participants as strong leadership factors.

Four of the seven participants identified inspirational motivation as one of their strongest transformational leadership components. The participants affirmed the importance of enthusiastically talking about what needs should be accomplished. In addition, the participants stressed the importance of talking optimistically about the future with the followers.
Only one of the seven participants identified intellectual stimulation as a strong transformational leadership component. The superintendent leader identified key areas of encouraging followers to try various methods in solving problems. A key strength was noted when the transformational leader closely re-examined critical assumptions in determining appropriateness.

Two of the seven participants identified individualized consideration as one of their strongest transformational leadership components. The superintendent participants stressed the importance of treating the followers as individuals with unique abilities. A strength was noted when the transformational leaders acknowledged and strengthened individual's needs, aspirations, and abilities.

Implications for Practice

With the continued emphasis of high-stakes testing driving the federal and state accountability systems, public schools must find ways of transforming the learning and teaching environments. Leithwood (1992) noted transformation provided a means of restructuring the balance of educational leadership. Onorato (2013) emphasized Leithwood's (1992) framework included support of the followers, an emphasis on the organization's goals, identification of the organization's problems, and encouragement of risk-taking. Additionally, with the increasing demands of federal and state accountability, superintendents face mounting obstacles of enabling followers as they meet the necessary goals (Fenn & Mixon, 2011). In order to address the additional burdens of turning around a low-performing campus or district, educational leaders must understand the value of transformational leadership. It is important to implement the four components of transformational leadership in public school districts.

The findings of this study provide proven transformational practices for leaders and followers who have the ability to transform the current status of the United States' educational world. Suggestions to implement for further transformation include the following:

1. State-mandated training for public school administrators in the four components of transformational leadership;

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2. Inclusion of the four components of transformational leadership training in the state-required first-year superintendent training sessions;
3. State-mandated training for public school teachers and support staff in the four components of transformational leadership;
4. Inclusion of the transformational leadership components in the educational administrator training programs of higher education institutions of learning;
5. Create affordable state-required administrator training sessions with the founding leaders of transformational leadership; and
6. Implementation of the MLQ Leader Form 5X-Short (Avolio & Bass, 2013) as a part of the interview process of administrative leadership positions.

Recommendations

Due to the increasing number of United States public schools identified as low-performing per federal and state guidelines, it is important to continue investigating the connection of the transformational leadership components to the psychological well-being of the followers. Additional research recommendations include the following:
1. Conduct comparable research studies of public school superintendents in states other than Texas;
2. Research the mentors of identified transformational superintendent leaders to determine additional depths, layers, and complexities of transformational leadership;
3. Conduct a research comparison study of transformational leadership classes within the administrator preparation programs at the university level with administrator preparation programs which do not include transformational leadership instruction; and
4. Investigate the depths, layers, and complexities of the psychological well-being of the followers as influenced by transformational and non-transformational leaders.

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