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# Understanding How Transformational Servant Leadership Affects Student Leadership Development in a Higher Education Program in China

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## Abstract

*Transformational leadership and servant leadership are both dominant theories in leadership studies. In this article, we conducted a bounded case study of eight graduates from a Masters in Leadership Program in China to examine how transformational leadership and servant leadership have significant effects on leadership development. This study reported a subset of findings (two research questions, six interview questions, and 33 codes that clustered into eight themes) from a larger study and showed that the eight participants' self-directed and other-directed attitudes and behavior did change because of the combined focus of both transformational and servant leadership principles presented in the Master's program. Although Transformational Servant Leadership is not an established concept, the results of this study provide a foundation for propositions about Transformational Servant Leadership and future theory development.*

**Keywords:** Servant Leadership, Transformational Leadership, Transformational Servant Leadership, Leadership Development

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In this article we present a part of a larger work that examined the combined concepts of transformational leadership and servant leadership, referred to as Transformational Servant Leadership (TSL), and its impact on leadership development of Chinese students in the Master in Leadership (MIL) program, initiated in China in 2011 by a university in North America. The mission of the program is to train Chinese leaders for the 21st century. Though there is no current consensus of the definition of TSL among faculty members, one consistent aspect of the theoretical concept was the dynamic balance of transformational leadership and servant leadership.

Researchers such as Bass, Avolio, Jung, and Benson (2003), Dennis and Bocarnea (2005), Page and Wong (2000), Patterson (2003), Russell and Stone (2002), Spears (1998a), Stone, Russell, and Patterson (2004), van Dierendonck (2011), Wang and Howell (2010), along with Yukl (2010) have indicated that both transformational leadership and servant leadership are major normative leadership theories that impact organizational and individual effectiveness, but little research has been done on the combination of both concepts into one leadership approach.

Though the two theories were determined to be generalizable cross-culturally (Parris & Peachey, 2013; Yahaya & Ebrahim, 2015; Yukl, 2010), the study of these theories in the Chinese setting has been limited, particularly in leadership development in the educational domain, although Hirschy, Gomez, Patterson, and Winston (2014) determined that Chinese managers saw similarities between servant leadership and the Confucian concept or Jen. While the traditional approach of Confucianism in leadership has been shown to be inadequate (Hirschy et al., 2014; Li, 2008) the connection of Jen with servant leadership may provide a bridge into incorporating servant leadership into contemporary Chinese leadership education. The current study was conducted to qualitatively explore the impact of transformational servant leadership (TSL) on student leadership development in a higher education program in China. The purpose was to obtain an in-depth understanding of how the application of TSL affects student growth and organizational learning in leadership in the Chinese culture.

### LITERATURE REVIEW

This study did not create a new theory of TSL but attempted to combine the two theories of transformational leadership and servant leadership, maximizing their common ground and reconciling their differences. The fundamental difference between the two theories can be found in the purpose, result, or benefits of leadership in which transformational leadership focuses on the organization and servant leadership focuses on the people (Bass, 2000; Parolini, 2007).

In the following sections, transformational leadership and servant leadership are introduced independently, then the two theories are compared using the 4C Leadership Framework (Figure 1). In response to these four propositions, four characteristics of the combined conceptual model of TSL are introduced. The four characteristics of the conceptual model are used to formulate the research questions.

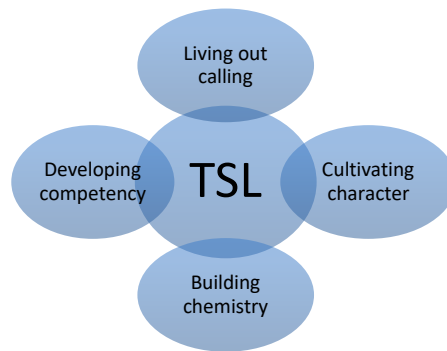


Figure 1: Conceptual model of TSL.

## Transformational Leadership

Transformational leadership is one of the widely studied theories of leadership (Yukl, 2010). Burns (1978) first introduced the concept as transforming leadership in contrast to transactional leadership. Bass (1985) developed the theory further into a full-range leadership model, which categorizes laissez-faire leadership, transactional leadership, and transformational leadership. Bass and Riggio (2006) summarized the core of transformational leadership as being about change and transformation, which is significant and highly relevant to student development in higher education programs

Transformational leadership behaviors consist of the four components of idealized influence, individualized consideration, inspirational motivation, and intellectual stimulation (Bass, 1985). Transformational leadership behaviors address the higher-level needs of followers for self-realization (Hackman & Johnson, 2013), and are mainly characterized by effective communication of purpose, encouragement of innovative thinking, empowerment of followers, and deeper level of commitment (Hackman & Johnson, 2013).

Transformational leadership is not distinctly defined in terms of influence process, but the influence process can be explained in terms of the components of transactional and charismatic leadership (Yukl, 2010). While transactional leadership influences followers using instrumental compliance, which refers to tangible rewards and punishment, transformational leadership influences followers through internalization and self-identification (Hackman & Johnson, 2013). Internalization evokes follower commitment by appealing to their intrinsic values (Kelman, 1958; Yukl, 2010). Personal identification means that followers are so influenced by leaders' charisma that they want to be like the leader (Kelman, 1958).

## **Servant Leadership**

Greenleaf (1970) created the term *servant leadership* to guide leaders to serve others. Servanthood is defined in terms of taking care of follower needs, upholding ethical standards, and developing followers to be servant leaders (Greenleaf, 1970). Though there is no consensus definition of servant leadership, the most quoted scholars have described servant leadership in terms of leadership attributes, characteristics, and virtues (Laub, 1999; Spears, 1998a, 1998b); and is a philosophy, emphasizing leaders' *being* rather than leaders' *doing* (Greenleaf, 1970). Turner (2000), in order to promote a community of care, defined servant leadership as a circle of love. By definition, servant leadership is ideal in situations when leadership role modeling is needed. Thus, it is applicable to address this research problem in the MIL program.

The behavioral characteristics of servant leadership are presented in the various conceptual models and frameworks developed by leadership scholars in empirical studies (Barbuto & Wheeler, 2006; R. C. Liden, Wayne, Zhao, & Henderson, 2008; Patterson, 2003; R. Russell & Stone, 2002; Sendjaya, Sarros, & Santora, 2008; Winston, 2003). Though variations in behavioral characteristics exist in the conceptual models, Focht and Ponton (2015) pointed out that they should basically include "valuing people, humility, listening, trust, caring, integrity, service, empowering, serving others' needs before their own, collaboration, love/unconditional love, and learning" (p. 44). Though the results of these servant leadership behaviors do not always benefit organizations, the effects are apparently positive on both employee and organizational levels (Yukl, 2010). Thus, by applying servant leadership theory to the MIL program, both student development in leadership and the program development can be positively affected.

In China, while Confucianism promotes humane orientation and the concept of servant leadership is welcomed, the experience of servant leadership is still rare (Hirschy et al., 2014). Though servant leadership has been found to be viable in the Chinese culture (Y. Han, Kakabadse, & Kakabadse, 2009), how servant leadership relates to Confucianism in student development is a new field that should be explored (Hirschy et al., 2014). As servant leadership is more of a philosophy, it influences individuals and organizations through fostering a servant leadership culture (Yukl, 2010). The influence of servant leadership culture on Chinese student learning and growth in leadership in the context of Confucianism can be understood (Hirschy et al., 2014).

## **Similarities Between Transformational and Servant Leadership**

Though the two theories differ in leadership theoretical assumptions and cognitive focus (Yukl, 2010), they share common ground. Other scholars have commented that both transformational leadership and servant leadership can find their roots in charismatic leadership (Graham, 1991; Smith, Montagno, & Kuzmenko, 2004). With regard to behavioral constructs, there is a substantial match between transformational leadership and servant leadership in terms of behavioral characteristics and consequences on both followers and organizations (Scuderi, 2010; Smith et al., 2004). These similarities

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demonstrate that transformational leadership and servant leadership are not only totally inclusive of each other but also have similar impacts on organizations (Choudary, Akhtar, & Zaheer, 2013; Ispas & Tebeian, 2012); therefore, they have the potential to be integrated into one concept. This integration is significant for modern-day business and organizations (Echols, 2009), because the complexity and ethical issues of modern-day business and organizations often challenge single-aspect focused theories.

### **Differences Between Transformational and Servant Leadership**

In spite of similarities, transformational leadership differs from servant leadership in many ways, such as the differential in their conceptual origins. Yukl (2010) indicated transformational leadership stems from charismatic leadership, while servant leadership is grounded in Christianity and belongs to the family of ethical leadership. From the perspective of leadership practice of inclusiveness, Echols (2009) commented that servant leadership is more likely to predict the presence of inclusiveness because its concept holds a broader meaning. Current scholars of transformational leadership and servant leadership have addressed more differences than similarities with the two theories. According to Stone, Russell, and Patterson (2003), the primary variation between transformational leadership and servant leadership lies in the individual-versus-organization focus. While servant leadership focuses on the development of the individual, transformational leadership focuses on the performance of the organization.

Comparing transformational leadership and servant leadership, the two theories share some common characteristics but they are different from each other (Smith et al., 2004). Transformational leadership demonstrates a set of leadership behaviors and servant leadership consists more of a leadership style (Echols, 2009). While both leadership theories value leadership consequences, servant leadership considers people and transformational leadership considers organizational learning, performance and outcomes (Choudary et al., 2013; Schneider & George, 2011; Stone et al., 2003). According to van Dierendonck, Stam, Boersmas, de Windt, and Alkema (2014), servant leadership emphasizes follower psychological health by satisfying followers' needs, whereas transformational leadership considers follower development by enlarging followers' intellectual capacity.

### **Conceptual Model of Transformational Servant Leadership**

Both transformational and servant leadership theories make distinct contributions to organizations with unique motives and purposes. Yet, they are not totally adequate in addressing complex issues in leadership development in organizations (Echols, 2009; Smith et al., 2004). To improve how these theories handle leadership development, an attempt was made to integrate transformational leadership and servant leadership into a combined conceptual model of TSL by engaging the 4C framework of leadership (Maxwell, 2002). The 4C leadership framework consists of the components of living out calling, cultivating character, building chemistry, and developing competency (Maxwell, 2002). It gives a holistic view of leadership, relates to leadership development, and has the

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capacity to address the four propositions of the inadequacies of transformational leadership and servant leadership theories. In the following subsections, the conceptual model of TSL is formulated based on the 4C leadership framework of living out calling, cultivating character, building chemistry, and developing competency in response to the four propositions.

In summary, the integration of transformational leadership and servant leadership is an attempt toward an integrative conceptual model of TSL. To formulate the model, both transformational leadership and servant leadership theories were consulted. Though both theories are compatible in some aspects, they are uniquely different in philosophical assumptions and leadership focus (Echols, 2009; Smith et al., 2004; Stone et al., 2003), and are inadequate to address complex issues in organizational leadership. In response to the inadequacy, a conceptual model of TSL was formulated with the four characteristics of living out calling, cultivating character, building chemistry, and developing competency. By calling, TSL brings leadership values and behaviors in alignment with each other (Maxwell, 2002; Yukl, 2010). By character, TSL provides holistic care and development for followers, which includes both psychological and intellectual levels (Cialalone & Jurkiewicz, 2010; Maxwell, 2002; Stewart, Belcourt, Bohlander, & Snell 2007). By chemistry, TSL builds relationships and accomplishes shared goals (Marques, Dhiman, & King, 2009; Maxwell, 2002; Yukl, 2010). By competency, TSL reconciles the opposite orientations of people and organizational performance (Argyris, 1964; Maxwell, 2002; Yukl, 2010).

This study is a subset of a larger study conducted by Shaw (2017) and reports on two of the original five research questions: (a) how did the experiences of TSL affect the leadership development of the Chinese students in the MIL program in terms of character? (Caldwell et al., 2012; Maxwell, 2002; Yukl, 2010) and (b) how did the experience of TSL affect the leadership development of the Chinese students in the MIL program in terms of competency (Argyris, 1964; Maxwell, 2002; Yukl, 2010)?. The following interview questions emerged from the literature:

- 1a. How did the learning experience of TSL affect your psychological health (Cialalone & Jurkiewicz, 2010; Maxwell, 2002; Micah 6:8; Stewart et al., 2007)?
- 1b. How did the learning experience of TSL affect your intellectual development (Cialalone & Jurkiewicz, 2010; Maxwell, 2002; Micah 6:8; Stewart et al., 2007)?
- 1c. How did the learning experience of TSL affect your growth as a whole person (Cialalone & Jurkiewicz, 2010; Maxwell, 2002; Micah 6:8; Stewart et al., 2007)?

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- 2a. How did the learning experience of TSL affect your growth in your own competency (Argyris, 1964; Maxwell, 2002; Yukl, 2010)?
- 2b. How did your own competency affect the overall competency of the place you are in (Argyris, 1964; Maxwell, 2002; Yukl, 2010)?

## METHOD

We used a qualitative bounded case study to address the two research questions. The case is the unit of analysis (Baxter & Jack, 2008). The case participants were bounded by (a) completing the MIL program, and (b) by working in a leadership position post-graduation. Because applying TSL in a higher education program in China is still a new field, and the purpose of the study was to gain an in-depth understanding of how TSL affects student leadership development, a qualitative study design was a better approach (Yin, 2014). Because it provides a holistic understanding of personal experiences and the impact of those experiences, which is a good fit for investigating Chinese students' experience of TSL and the impact on them in the MIL program.

This study used purposeful sampling. Data were collected from eight graduated students who provided rich and essential information to the research questions (Patton, 2015). Because the research focus was about leadership development, students who assumed leadership roles were chosen for the case study. The students were able to articulate their thoughts and “be introspective enough to provide rich descriptions of their experiences” (Padgett, 2008, p. 53). Because the students were largely educated in China, their experiences generated genuine information on TSL's effect on Chinese student development in leadership. Students were selected from various backgrounds of business, education, health care, ministry and nonprofit sectors with consideration of age, gender, and roles in profession.

In the business sector, two individuals were selected with one executive from a private-owned company in the industry of real estate and the other from a state-owned company in the industry of communication. In the educational sector, two individuals were selected with one being a school principal and the other an educational entrepreneur. In the health care sector, two individuals were selected with one director working in a hospital and the other an investor in specialized hospitals. In the ministerial sector, one individual who is both a pastor and principal of a seminary was selected. In the nonprofit sector, one individual who is a leader and cofounder of a social work organization was selected. Eight students in total were selected for the case study. While Padgett (2008) viewed six to 10 participants as reaching the level of saturation in phenomenological study. Table 1 describes the eight participants.

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Table 1: Description of Participants

Sector	Code	Organization	Title	Age/ Gender
Business	B1	Real estate corporation	General Manager	40-45/M
Business	B2	State-owned communication	Operation Manager	40-45/F
Education	E1	Private kindergarten	Principal	40-45/F
Education	E2	Post Classroom Time	Founder & President	45-50/F
Health Care	HC1	General hospital	Human Resources Director	45-50/F
Health Care	HC2	Specialized hospitals	Investor & President	45-50/F
Ministry	M1	Home church	Pastor & Principal of Seminary	40-45/M
Nonprofit	NP1	Social work organization	President & Founder	35-40/F

In this study, we engaged two cycles of coding—inductive and deductive (Saldana, 2013). For the first cycle, we used descriptive coding to categorize data into initial topics. Descriptive coding helped to generate initial topics by using short phrases to summarize the data into substantial messages to label them (Saldana, 2013). Descriptive coding helped to provide a foundation for the next coding cycle (Saldana, 2013). The second cycle was to advance the first cycle. The goal of coding was to develop themes, categories, and concepts. As the concept of the study was to explore the student perception of servant advising, we used axial coding for the second coding cycle. Axial coding had the capacity to reassemble data to allow major themes and patterns to emerge (Saldana, 2013). Different



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experiences and perceptions from students were revealed through axial coding. Axial coding was a method that aligns with the research purpose, questions, and methodological design, as axial coding has the capacity to provide holistic features of a case study analysis (Saldana, 2013). In the processes of axial coding, we gathered similar categories and reduced them into even more similar categories (Saldana, 2013).

***Research Question 1: How did the experiences of TSL affect the leadership development of the Chinese students in the MIL program in terms of character?***

Based on the conceptual model of TSL, cultivating character refers to the TSL characteristic of the holistic development of followers, which includes both psychological and intellectual aspects. We used the following interview questions:

- 1a. How did the learning experience of TSL affect your psychological health (Ciacalone & Jurkiewicz, 2010; Maxwell, 2002; Micah 6:8; Stewart et al., 2007)?
- 2b. How did the learning experience of TSL affect your intellectual development (Ciacalone & Jurkiewicz, 2010; Maxwell, 2002; Micah 6:8; Stewart et al., 2007)?
- 3c. How did the learning experience of TSL affect your growth as a whole person (Ciacalone & Jurkiewicz, 2010; Maxwell, 2002; Micah 6:8; Stewart et al., 2007)?

Data generated for this research question provide understanding of the effect of TSL experienced in student leadership development in both cognitive and affective aspects. Twelve codes emerged under three themes of TSL learning experiences that affected students' (a) psychological health, (b) intellectual development, and (c) holistic development.

### **Psychological Health.**

***Less anxiety and stress.*** I am not that anxious as before. I am not anxious now. Even if I encounter difficulties, I think there must be a solution. (Participant B1)

I am less anxious and have less struggle than before. But I need to be quiet and tell myself to slow down. If I asked myself why I was unhappy before, it was because deeply in my heart, I wanted to be recognized and affirmed. I wanted complements rather than criticism. It was a process of growth. (Participant B2)

Before the MIL program study, I was anxious about decisions I made. After the study, I was confident that my decision was based on my values. Whatever the consequences, it did not matter. I felt much better. I was no longer nervous or uncertain about it. (Participant NP1)

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***Increased joy in humble learning.*** I learned a lot from our new leader. Our leader came from another company. He was not a servant leader, but he was strategic and knew the direction and was willing to lead, which was worth our learning. We could learn from our leader and our staff too. Even in our communist party, some of their activities were worth learning even if I was not a member of it. I interviewed some staff and found that some party members had a lot of good things in them for us to learn. If I was humble enough, I would be more open to learn. (Participant B2)

I am more gentle and open to diverse perspectives now. I no longer totally believe in my intuition but do a rational analysis. I give people more opportunities, care, and love, including staff, family members, and others. I listen to others and what others think. If I find that what I decided was not appropriate, I correct it, even in front of subordinates and my children. We need to confess our mistakes and correct them. In short, we need to lower ourselves. (Participant HC2)

***More confident in leadership.*** I am more confident. The study cleared up my thoughts in many ways. I grew up in an ordinary family. I have always been a mediocre performer and not a very accomplished person. I was not very confident. After the study, I realized that everybody has his/her own value. My confidence level was raised. In my work, I used what I learned in my major and helped the disadvantaged people to improve their life situations. After the MIL study, I had confidence to handle team problems, making judgments and difficult decisions. The MIL program gave me another level of confidence of leading teams and making decisions in teams. (Participant NP1)

***Better self-understanding.*** People used to say that I am a rational person, but actually I am not rational. I just suppressed my emotions, and sometimes I did not know my emotions. But now, I can identify my emotions and handle my emotions. I used the values and critical thinking I learned. . . . In the course of leading change, we did a personality test, which indicated that my ability of coping with stress was great. It helped me to understand that though my ability of coping with stress was high, it did not mean that my staff were the same. I was not sensitive to stress. Before I could hardly understand why my staff could not bear stress, which seemed simple for me. At that time, I had several other duties. When I sold my previous organization, I could not find the people I wanted to take with me in the new organization. My colleague said: Did you realize that you were too quick? My subordinate, who is the principal in my organization, commented that I could learn so fast that they could follow me. I used to be proud of that. But after learning TSL, I realized that it was not an appropriate thing for TSL leadership. (Participant E2)

I can affirm myself now. I used to have lots of misconceptions. For example, experts can solve problems. Expatriates are better than local staff. I could easily deny myself. But through this study, I began to know that, many times, there were no right versus wrong answers, but right versus right. This study adjusted my perspective on God, myself, and others. I used to underestimate myself and overestimate other people. Through the study, I realized that I should see myself in the right way. In communicating with

foreigners, I used not to argue, but now I can argue with them in a healthy way. (Participant HC1)

### **TSL learning experiences that affected leaders' intellectual development.**

For the second theme of TSL learning experiences that affected leaders' intellectual development, the findings follow.

**Systematic thinking.** I used to be proud and seemed to know the answer even before people finished their talking. But now when I encounter a problem, I begin to ask what's behind all this. What is under the tip of the iceberg? There might be various reasons for the issue. Which one is the most important for us to solve the problem? How can we see the substance through the phenomena on the surface and treat the root issue? It helped me to think systematically. (Participant B1)

I used to do things by intuition. At that time, my business was simple and the practice was simple. In many things, I had the business sense, and I knew what to do. Now I am doing things in nine areas at the same time. There are more things to do and more responsibilities. In this current business, our partner plans for 1,000 hospitals. This will become a public A-shareholding company. This is a huge responsibility. In making such a decision, we need systematic analysis and risk evaluation. One teacher taught a course on Jeju Island on how to evaluate risks. I learned a lot. There were two teachers that most influenced me. When there are many directions, different directions, and different approaches in one direction, evaluation is needed. (Participant HC2)

**Critical thinking.** Critical thinking is to think, think, and think. I think how I should think. I need to reflect on what I said. What is the basic assumption behind what I said? How about what others say? Where do the others come from and based on what logic? In our project, we have many specialists, and we often run into conflicts. Even in a meeting this morning, our culture committee, of which I was a member, discussed a simple case. People talked about it from different angles. Some said that we should adjust the organizational structure, while others said that people in the organization were not competent enough. All kinds of voices! Critical thinking helped me to listen to different voices. Why did these people talk about organizational structure? That was because of their position and their specialization. Why did they think this way? It helped me to listen, and I was willing to listen to different voices, as well as the assumptions behind the voices. Having understood all this, I felt very good in systematic thinking and making decisions. People come from different angles and think their angles are right. As we try to make a consensus decision, we need to persuade rather than command others to accept the decision. As I try to understand people, I can candidly communicate with them and persuade them to reach an agreement. (Participant B1)

There was one course in the MIL program called critical thinking. After finishing this course, I continued to study critical thinking. I began to think and think from different

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viewpoints, analyzing not only the wrong versus the right but also the better versus the worse. In decision making, I became more well-rounded because of critical thinking. I realized the value of academics and now formed a habit to refer to scholarly resources in studying subject matters. (Participant E2)

***Problem-solving oriented thinking.*** [The program] taught us how to analyze and use approaches to handle problems. I am using these methods in my work. I met some bottlenecks in applying what I learned, which led me to think and study the problems. For me, it was important to identify the problem and know that it was there, then to think about solutions and look for solutions with colleagues. (Participant B2)

There were lots of skills and methods for us to use. The courses equipped us with techniques. It helped us to be rational. It also helped us to cool down and look at the things in a clearer way. We looked at what the real problem was and handled it. It helped me to analyze the problem. (Participant E1)

***Expanded field of vision.*** This study expanded my perspective and field of vision. My coworkers commented that I was different in dealing with people and handling things. I was more patient and accepting and caring. (Participant M1)

### **TSL learning experiences that affected leaders' holistic development.**

For the third theme of TSL learning experiences that affected leaders' holistic development, the findings follow.

***Strengthened inner man.*** ... I realized that I am precious in God. I value myself as God values me and value other people in my team. I have improved in accepting myself, family members, and colleagues. That has been very helpful. God encouraged me and lifted me up. I see my own value. If God puts me in a situation, then I am the best person to solve the problem in that situation. God has a mission for me in that situation, family, or organization. In that mission, my value is manifested. When I affirm myself, I can affirm others. There has been a lot of healing through this study. In my previous organization, I was not given the opportunity for training and development. To have this opportunity to attend this program was healing for me. I am very grateful that I could be chosen to attend this program. (Participant HC1)

I feel more strengthened in the inner man, more healthy. I am more able to cope with stress. Intellectually, I can think more clearly. Emotionally, I am more willing to commit. (Participant M1)

***Life and work balance.*** On another note, I pay more attention to life and work balance. Without the balance, I cannot go long. Before the graduation last year, I started to exercise and have been consistent with it for a year by using the fitness center. This was very helpful for my physical health, for my family, and the company as well. Also, I used to spend little time with my friends. All my mind was devoted to my job. Even the time spent with friends

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was for work. But now, I am willing to interact with friends and balance my life. Of course, I do this mainly because I need to relieve my stress. This sounds selfish. (Participant B1)

I am more firm with my core values and vision and make better choices in life. I am healthy psychologically. I also pay attention to the balance of work and life. I used to put work first. Now I realize that I need to spend more time with my family, taking care of my child, and communicating more with my husband. It has reminded me to improve my family relationships. The MIL program and the social work I do have a lot in common. The MIL study is a reminder to me of my own restrictions. My husband found that I am more willing express my opinions. I am naturally an obedient person. So, many times I deferred to my husband's opinion but I was unhappy. After the MIL study, I gave my opinions and that helped us to reach a balanced view, which was good for us and for our relationships. (Participant NP1)

**Quality life.** Course 503 influenced my life. I am not a Christian believer, but the TSL study influenced every area of my life and helped me to grow with others and become more authentic in life, work and family. (Participant B2)

TSL learning affected my faith, not religion, but my values. It affected my character. It affected my life attitude and philosophy. It helped me to pursue life quality, harmony in relationships, and life skills. I often thought that I should review the textbooks I studied previously. It was not about a course, but it would help me learn a way of life and doing things; help me to think about life, life goals, and the ultimate values and ends; help me to start thinking about it. It is an inner joy that supports me. I think people are not happy because they do not know what they want. Then they feel lost and do not feel happy. I am not happy either at present. I know what I want, but I do not have it. The endeavor for me to reach what I want is not pleasant. I know what I want, and I think of ways to obtain it. I will be happy when I get it. So, I am motivated. (Participant E1)

**Involvement in social responsibility.** We had a course called ethics and decisions. I got a B+. The course promoted certain principles. Before I took that course, I did not totally agree with those principles such as self-sacrifice for the right, for the glory of others, and forgetting about yourself. I found it hard to accept. That might be because of my background and how I was raised up. I come from the countryside. I have three brothers, and we had a poor and tough life. When I grew up, all I thought was how I could make life better for my parents, myself, my wife, and my children. I did not want to harm others, but I was not so willing to help others. So, I seldom involved myself in charity or donations. For me, I earned much. I put money on my own things. As for others, I paid tax to the government. It was the government's obligation to take care of that. The need is vast in the world. What I can do to help is very limited. But after that course of study, I have improved. Now I participate more in donations. I give more to those I know than those that I do not know. That is where I am now. If you ask me to give more to the poor, I may not be able to do it. (Participant B1)

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We summarize the themes and codes for research question 1 in Table 2

Table 2: Themes and Codes for Research Question 1

Themes: TSL learning experiences that affected students'	Codes
Psychological health	1. Less anxiety and stress 2. Increased joy in humble learning 3. Better self-understanding 4. More confidence in leadership
Intellectual development	5. Systematic thinking 6. Critical thinking 7. Problem solving oriented thinking 8. Expanded field of vision
Holistic development	9. Involvement in social responsibility 10. Life and work balance 11. Quality of life 12. Strengthened inner man

**Research question 2: How did the experience of TSL affect the leadership development of the Chinese students in the MIL program in terms of competency?**

The pursuit of both individual and organizational efficacy entails the desired outcome of both individuals and organizations. We asked participants the following interview questions:

- 2a. How did the learning experience of TSL affect your growth in your own competency (Argyris, 1964; Maxwell, 2002; Yukl, 2010)?
- 2b. How did your own competency affect the overall competency of the place you are in (Argyris, 1964; Maxwell, 2002; Yukl, 2010)?

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Fifteen codes emerged that clustered into three themes of TSL learning experiences that affected (a) individual efficacy–leader, (b) individual efficacy–staff, and (c) team efficacy. In the next section, I report the findings of three themes under 15 codes.

### **Individual efficacy–leader.**

For the first theme of TSL learning experiences that affected individual efficacy–leader, the findings follow.

***Problem-solving skill of the leader.*** “Yes, because the program gave us a lot of tools and approaches, they helped us to identify where the problem was. Before the MIL program study, I was in the front line, busy tackling problems. I sort of knew what to do when problems came up. I solved the problem but did not find the root of the problem. After the MIL study, I not only solved problems but also traced the problem back to its source. It helped me to see more clearly the potential issues of this kindergarten and what were the cause of these problems.” (Participant E1)

***Conflict resolution ability of the leader.*** “Last year, two of my colleagues were in conflict, and both were angry with each other. In handling this conflict, I found that I have grown in leadership. I first led them to see what they did wrong in that case and told them that what they did I could not accept. I was not able to say that before, because they have been with me for a long time. Later when they were reconciled, they commented that I have changed. I could lay out clear principles for them, which was very helpful for them to see where their issues were. Before things were very vague for them.” (Participant E2)

***Communication capacity of the leader.*** “My self-confidence has improved. In talking with people, I no longer worry about who is better. I see other opinions as another piece of opinion. I can listen and analyze and no longer worry about being right or wrong, which is narrow-minded! I can also rationally accept other perspectives and understand where they come from or fit in what theories. Though I still do not see things clearly, I do not blindly believe in people or myself. I am more confident in communication.” (Participant HC1)

***Strategic planning ability of the leader.*** “It [TSL learning experiences] helped me to clear up what was vague before. The theories made me settled and grounded. It helped me to be systematic, starting from value, then to performance, judging what could be done and could not be done, as well as making choices in strategic planning. Every course led me to the core of things. There was no doubt that it helped me to understand the big framework and thinking patterns in doing business. We cannot manipulate, nor use any means we can, nor go into the grey areas. We should avoid that as much as possible.” (Participant HC2)

“It [the MIL program] mostly influenced my competency in implementing strategic plans.” (Participant B2)

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“In strategic leadership, it gave me a framework, expanded my vision in terms of communication with different people and built a strategy for the future. It reminded me to keep in touch with people outside the real estate circle.” (Participant B1)

### **Individual efficacy—staff.**

*Staff training in job competency.* “Also, I am working with two other team members to try a competency model I learned. On Saturday, we are going to give a test. We are using the test to assess people and train people in the areas of basic management, technical skills, and communication competency. That is what we require for a staff to do the work well. When these required qualifications are organized, we can train people up accordingly in different formats.” (Participant B2)

*Staff training in company culture.* “I have not applied what I learned to my team yet. I am leading a new company, and I want to help my team. I want to build a new company culture. We need to train the doctors and nurses in the company culture. State-owned hospitals do the training, too. But they don’t practice it. We want to put the patients first. For example, some hospitals recycle used items. I cannot allow this to happen. That harms the patients. We want to put the patients first, then the company. We want to establish such a culture.” (Participant HC2)

*Staff development in organizational management.* “Also, I want to create opportunities for our staff to learn. I want to send them to study. I have a friend who has been through an MBA program. Her organization changed substantially. She sent 10 of her middle-level managers to that program. That was a very expensive program, but it had different courses and many activities. The MIL program lacked that. I want my staff to go to those courses. Currently, our training focuses on the technical side. We need training on management, company culture, and values.” (Participant HC2)

*Staff care.* “I began to consciously value people and establish them in communication in small ways—to recognize people in timely ways and specifically in words. I also let people see that I have noticed what they did. We had a parking boy. He saw a broken wheelchair thrown away in a room. He repaired it. We recognize people with stars and give mugs for the act of I-CARE, representing the values of innovation, caring, accountability, respect, and excellence. So, we had mugs of caring and innovation made for him and put his name on them. He was encouraged very much. All these specific things I learned from the course, and I use them often.” (Participant HC1)

### **Staff empowerment.**

“I am an organized person. I delegated a lot and empowered people. I saw that some of our teachers were still on the phone while eating lunch. As their leader, I should have been busier than they were. But I was not. I delegated work to others. My current team is not so mature. But I still delegate. I want them to do their jobs first. The worst is that I take the responsibility. I empower people much more than before. I trust my team



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more. They have become more mature too. I used to be a baby sitter for them. But now I give standards and deadlines and ask them to do the jobs. If they need my support, I give suggestions and input, but they make their own decisions. I find it to be effective.” (Participant E1)

### **Affected team efficacy.**

For the third theme of TSL learning experiences that affected team efficacy, the findings follow.

***Be a team player.*** “I used to work in a Christian organization. I had a team of three. I was the leader, but I saw myself as a sister to the staff. They knew my struggles. They prayed for me and supported me. I felt that I could not survive without them. But in this new situation, I stood alone. I have learned to depend on God alone. I was not like the traditional *strong leader*. Servant leader for me meant that I was part of the team and was open to them. But when the time came for the leader to support them, I supported them. Not worrying about what kind of leader I am helped to strengthen my relationship with them. Servant leaders should make decisions in times of need. But many times, the leader is part of the team. Many ideas actually came from the team members. I really thought they were smart. They were happy to hear that because they felt valued. God encouraged me that people could share the load with me in the HR work. I talked with them about all the ideas. This study helped me to affirm my leadership. Now I am not afraid of being that kind of leader.” (Participant HC1)

***Building a core team.*** “I think the MIL program renewed me in many areas. I gained much. I learned values and skills in leadership. The course of critical thinking made me listen and be humble. The course of leadership foundation gave me a lot of tools. Leader–follower exchange theory advised me in building up the small core team. When I first took over this project, the situation was poor. The corporate office did not think it was going well and removed the general manager. When I took over the project, I was in the course of study. I pondered what I should do to change the situation. After learning the theory of leader–follower exchange, I built a small core team and appointed three assistant managers. They were assistant managers before, but they were not truly empowered. For example, an assistant manager who was in charge of construction did not have any authority to give approval [for construction expenses]. So, I adjusted the procedure and process, giving him the authority in alignment to his responsibility. Also, there was an assistant manager who was reluctant to exercise authority. People came to me for everything. But I turned people away and back to the assistant manager and told him that if he agreed, then I would. He was very motivated after that. Another assistant manager who was in charge of development performed very well but was not recognized. I made an effort to speak up for him to the corporate office for 4 months. Eventually, he was promoted and the three people became my core team members. Every morning we met to talk about things and had regular

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meetings. They were responsible for different areas and were motivated. Then we saw changes happen.” (Participant B1)

***Building an enjoyable team.*** “I have two members in my team. We are in constant communication. As I learned from the course, many problems occurred because of insufficient communication or miscommunication. We communicated at any time about work or life. We talked about our daughters, my challenges, and frustration. I enjoyed listening to her and I was transparent with her. We enjoyed the teamwork. Whatever work we had, we helped each other and became as one person. Our team building was at any time, not during particular times, such as meals or so. Our work mingled well, and I was very grateful for that. God has given me this person to support me and heal me. She is not a Christian believer yet, but she accepted me and I appreciate her and am pleased with her. I hope this team situation will not change.” (Participant HC1)

***Improving team relationships and performance.*** “As we communicated and assessed the team and supported people, we, as a whole, improved our competency. Twice a year, we had retreat for communicating and planning. I used to use the traditional approach of devotion, reflection, and plan. But after the MIL program, I used one and half out of the 2 days to establish the relationships. Though we only had half a day to talk about things, covered everything, and the outcome was better than I expected.” (Participant M1)

***Balancing between individual interests and team performance.*** “Of course, there is a potential pitfall that can lead one to go to extreme. If we focus too much on serving and overemphasize the relationships with employees, it can also become an issue, because we lose sight of performance. But the MIL program emphasized performance. One of my friends had this problem. She cared about serving people and being a leader of good character. She could sacrifice performance, but I did not agree with that. Relationship and performance should be a dynamic balance. One cannot outweigh the other. For example, if the organization is not in place, how can we talk about individual interests?” (Participant E1)

***Expansion of overall leadership influence.*** “My influence has been enlarged, and I am more convinced. Influence has a lot to do with the consistency between words and deeds. Even though employees felt that their benefits were affected, they could still respect the leader because they saw justice, fairness, and transparency. I watched over my words and deeds after the MIL program, cautioning myself not to go into a grey area or do things that could not be exposed.” (Participant E1)

“In my Post Classroom Time project, I need to influence the teachers in my organization. I never thought I could do it. But I learned from the MIL program, trained the teachers to build an educational philosophy, built a classroom culture, and established core values. Then we set the format and tools to be used. The outcome was amazing, as the teachers commented. Before the MIL program, I only knew how to introduce tools. Now I know what to do, starting from values and culture building....” (Participant E2)

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“Our performance in theological education and pastoring cannot be measured, but the coworkers around me have changed and improved. As I communicated the ways I behave, I also influenced their growth.” (Participant M1)

We summarize the themes and codes for research question 2 in Table 3.

Table 3: Themes and Codes for Research Question 2

Themes: TSL learning experiences affected	Codes
Individual efficacy–leader	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Problem solving skill of the leader</li> <li>2. Conflict resolution ability of the leader</li> <li>3. Communication capacity of the leader</li> <li>4. Strategic planning ability of the leader</li> </ol>
Individual efficacy–staff	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>5. Staff training job competency</li> <li>6. Staff training in company culture</li> <li>7. Staff development in organizational management</li> <li>8. Staff care</li> <li>9. Staff empowerment</li> </ol>
Team efficacy	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>10. Being a team player</li> <li>11. Building a core team</li> <li>12. Building an enjoyable team</li> <li>13. Improving team relationships and performance</li> <li>14. Balancing between individual interests and organizational performance</li> <li>15. Expansion of overall leadership influence</li> </ol>

## DISCUSSION

According to Patton (2015), document examination helps to analyze interviews against documents or written evidence of the program, which can corroborate the interview report. Padgett (2008) commented that the advantage of document examination is that data from the written record are often that of reflection and well organized, which may give a deeper insight. In the current study, the document used was the final thesis of each participant. The final theses were the papers that students needed to complete for graduation. In the theses, students summarized their learning from the program, made individual improvement plans, and applied what was learned in their leadership practice. Because final theses were a requirement for graduation, students put time and effort into them. The content was usually of high quality and an essential expression of students' years of learning and the application of their learning. As it was the work of personal learning, it was profound and revealing of the fundamental insights of an individual. The examination of the final theses helped us to capture genuine and accurate information of students' learning experiences of TSL leadership in the program and how the learning experiences affected their growth in leadership. By using document examination, we obtained data from a different perspective that provided a deeper and wider understanding of student experiences of TSL and its effect on their leadership development.

Six of the coded items clustered into two distinct themes. Organizational change and highly effective teams emerged for students' leadership application of TSL in leadership practice from their entire program of learning.

### Organizational change

For organizational change, the findings follow.

**Strategic innovation.** "This paper is an attempt to lay out a framework of organizational change of TT by engaging Kotter's 8-step strategy of leading change. This paper provides an overall viewpoint of the change strategy rather than a detailed analysis of each step, except that there is more exploration in the urgent issue of empowerment of TT. The final product of the framework of organizational change is recommended as a change model for TT for future research and refining." (p. 2) (Participant B1)

**Value-based transformation.** "This article discusses the practice of TSL by using the case of FS kindergarten. [The article] discusses the smooth organizational development through transforming strategies based on TSL values, building an organizational culture based on servanthood, building team of service, and improving educational mission and quality." (p. 2) (Participant E1)

"Hereby, I present what my organization processed in the bigger changing environment, from designing strategy, to organizational change, and to team building, helping staff to transit through the time of confusion, establishing organizational culture and laying out a business model. My personal life was also refined during the process,

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becoming firm in values and feeling that life is richer and more meaningful.” (p. 4) (Participant HC2)

**Performance improvement.** “To apply what I learned from TSL in the real needs in my new position at work, this paper engaged a qualitative study to apply the core values of TSL from a new leader’s point of view. From the learning of the course 617, [this paper] attempts to discover issues in the team and bring solutions to the issues for the team to reflect on, practice and improve.” (p. 2) (Participant B2)

“The report focuses on improving three TSL competencies where I am weak, through putting certain theories and models into practice in three areas needed to be addressed at the organization of QD: people development, visioning and strategic thinking, and adaptability and change. I expect this integrated project not only will help me to be a better leader with high leadership competencies, but also help QD to be a high performing organization by addressing the needs of staff, students, and parents.” (p. 2) Participant HC1

### Highly Effective Teams

For the theme of highly effective teams, the findings follow.

**Staff development.** “Staff development and maximization of talents are not only the secret to improve staff loyalty, but also the key to constantly promote organizational competitiveness. As an educational institution which practices TSL, staff development and maximization of talents are the goals to be pursued in team building. As the organization does so, it influences its teachers to do the same for their students in their teaching.” (p. 75) (Participant E2)

“In order to win the hearts and minds of the staff, the students and the parents, QD leadership, including me, must demonstrate servant leaders’ attributes and achieve transformation results. . . . People development only happens via a partnership between the employee and the manager with helpful resources and policies of the company. So, I would like to help establish the partnership between employees and the management through communication, in order to help develop the work of the national staff development policy, to improve the current performance management, and to enhance HR function in this area by smart hiring and restructuring.” (p. 35) (Participant HC1)

**Leadership team establishment.** “Five barriers to team collaboration hinder the healthy development of teams. This paper engages the case of the administrative team of QC social work organization and the diagnostic framework of systematic conflicts to explore leadership transformation. The purpose is to reestablish a performance-oriented leadership team through the process of leadership values with the focus of employee relationships.” (p. 2) (Participant NP1)

**Team building.** “The seminary, as an institution, is different from other institutions in society. As a team, it is different from other organizations in society. Seminary focuses

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more on the core values of servant leadership. This paper is an attempt to build a seminary team which is strong in execution both within and without.” (p. 2) (Participant M1)

“This work addresses a series of organizational changes by using the 8-step change strategy by Kotter, applying what was learned in course 612 and 617. The work starts with performance-based leadership, and staff development is viewed as the premise. It helps to reshape the team foundation, form team charter, get the team organized to perform and define the team mission. . . . From the beginning to end, relationship with staff is the most important factor that needs the most attention. When the focus is changed from task to people, team building becomes more effective and the goal of organizational change can be reached.” (p. 30) (Participant B2)

For the final theses, we summarized the themes and codes of the findings into the themes of an integrated concept and transforming organization through effective teams (see Table 4).

Table 4: Themes and Codes—Final Theses

Themes	Codes
Transforming organizations through effective teams	
Organizational change	1. Strategic innovation
	2. Value-based transformation
	3. Performance improvement
Highly effective team	4. Staff development
	5. Leadership team establishment
	6. Team building

**CONCLUSION**

The data collected and analyzed in this bounded case about the impact of the combined transformational and servant leadership concepts in the Master in Leadership (MIL) program, initiated in China in 2011 by a University in North America, impacted graduates’ character and competency in leadership development, as well as the application of their learning in leadership practice. The data from the in-depth interviews and the masters’ theses show changes in self-directed and other-directed attitudes and behaviors.

One of the program outcomes for the MIL is to educate and train current and future leaders to be effective leaders. The three themes that emerged from the interviews were all

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focused on efficacy: (a) the leaders' efficacy, (b) the employees' efficacy, and (c) the team's efficacy. Transformational servant leadership is perceived by the case participants as improving self-efficacy. The two themes from the document review, (a) organizational change and (b) team effectiveness align well with the three themes from the interviews. MIL students related the concept of transformational servant leadership to organizational and team effectiveness.

Although transformational servant leadership is not an established concept of theory the results from this current study provide a foundation to explore the concept. More research is needed on this concept including, but not limited to (a) longitudinal case studies of MIL graduates, (b) descriptive case studies, (c) develop a set of propositions from case studies, and (d) when the qualitative research questions have been answered, scale development should be completed.

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