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The associations between university students' transformational leadership characteristics and dysfunctional limitedness perceptions

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Abstract

The aim of this study was to explore associations between transformational leadership and limitedness schemas of university students. Data were collected from 66 male (34.2%) and 127 females (65.8%), a total of 193 university students. The minimum age was 17 and the maximum age was 23. The mean age of the sample was 19.62 years with a standard deviation of 1.21. The results reveal that females have higher scores than males with regard to transformational leadership characteristics. Comparison of the differences between male and female subjects in terms of limitedness orientation showed that males reported higher scores than females on limitedness schemas. In addition, limitedness about relations and limitedness about the world were significantly associated with transactional leadership and a laissez-faire philosophy, but connections of dysfunctional limitedness schemas with transformational leadership were not significant.
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1. Introduction

Toffler (1970) argued that changes in the twentieth century were thousands of times greater than in any previous age. This statement was made 40 years ago, and today's pace of change is even greater. It demands skills for predicting the direction of change and for coping with change. In today's organizations, junior employees as well as senior administrators are expected to be equipped with proactive leadership skills. Leaders should be encouraging others to prepare for change. This type of leadership is called "transformational leadership." The concept of transformational leadership was first developed by Burns (1978) and was taken forward by Bass (1985). Avolio and Bass (1998) suggest that transformational leadership is comprised of five components: (a) idealized influence or attributed charisma (IIA), (b) idealized influence or behavioral charisma (IIB), (c) inspirational motivation (IM), (d) intellectual stimulation (IS), and (e) individualized consideration (IC) (Antonakis & House, 2002). They see each of the five "I"s of transformational leadership as just as relevant to corporals as to generals, to teachers as well as superintendents, and to production workers as well as CEOs. They observe that all five Is are enshrined in Conger

and Kanungo's (1988) single complex term, charisma (Bass & Avolio, 1998). In addition to transformational leadership, an alternative concept is transactional leadership, which was first suggested by Burns (1978). This type of leadership conceptualizes the relationship between leaders and followers in terms of exchanges or contingent rewards defined by the leader to reward achievement (Whittington, 2004). Its main emphasis is on reward and punishment. The characteristics of both transformational and transactional leadership are integrated in a nine-factor structure known as Full Range Leadership Theory (FRLT) (Bass, 1988; Bass & Avolio, 1993b, 1997). To make the model more effective, they added an additional factor, non-leadership (laissez-faire), which is lack of leadership competencies. In the current study, each of the components of the leadership model is represented in a measure developed by Bass and Avolio (1990), the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ).

The most effective leadership type in this model is transformational leadership. Transformational leaders take care of the needs of followers and motivate others (colleagues, clients and supervisors) to do more than they originally intended. They align others with the vision and empower them to take greater responsibility for achieving the vision. Such leaders facilitate and teach followers. They foster a culture of creative change and growth rather than one which maintains the status quo. They take personal responsibility for the development of their followers. Their followers operate on the assumption that all organizational members should be developed to reach their full potential (Bass & Avolio, 1993a; Avolio & Bass, 1998).

Neck, Smith, and Godwin (1997) suggest that we process information and make choices almost automatically. Our cognitive processes inevitably affect our behavioral habits and result in dysfunctional or functional consequences in the workplace. An example of dysfunctional thinking patterns is limitedness schemas that lead to overwhelming experiences such as learned helplessness, depression, and anxiety (Boysan, Beşiroğlu, Kara, Kayri, & Keskin, 2008; Boysan, Beşiroğlu, Kalafat, Kağan & Ateş, 2010). Sense of limitedness consists of maladaptive appraisals of interpersonal relations and life opportunities in which positive features, trustful relations, prosperity, being healthy, attractive career opportunities or high status etc. that motivate personal growth are limited and non-incremental, and thus they are rarely accessible by the individual. Since both life opportunities and interpersonal relations are perceived as limited and not incremental, perceived growth opportunities are seen as interconnected as well. Perceived interconnectedness (interdependency) can be defined as the cognitive belief that individuals are less likely to reach growth opportunities when others possess certain life opportunities or desired relationships (Boysan et al., 2008). In this study, the aim was to explore possible associations between leadership characteristics and limitedness schemas among university students.

2. Material and Method

2.1. Participants

Data were collected from 66 males (34.2%) and 127 females (65.8%), a total of 193 university students. The minimum age was 17 and the maximum age was 23. The mean age of the sample was 19.62 years with a standard deviation of 1.21. Participants were recruited from Ondokuz Mayıs University, Turkey.

2.2. Instruments

2.2.1. Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ): This questionnaire was first developed by Bass and Avolio (1990) and has been reviewed several times. The MLQ was adapted to the Turkish language by Demir and Okan (2008). MLQ consists of three factors and 36 items. The subscales of the MLQ are Transformational Leadership, Transactional Leadership, and Laissez-Faire.

2.2.2. Limitedness Schemas Questionnaire (LSQ): This is a 30-item measure developed for assessing limitedness beliefs concerning interpersonal relations and life opportunities. The questionnaire consists of four factors; (a) limitedness about relations, (b) limitedness about the world, (c) non-incremental beliefs, and (d) perceived interconnectedness. Each item has a five-point scale of zero (definitely do not agree) to four (definitely agree). The composite LSQ scores are calculated by the summing up of all items. The LSQ total scores are range from zero to

120. Higher scores reflect a greater sense of limitedness. The reliability and validity study was originally conducted by Boysan et al. (2008). The LSQ has an inner consistency of α=0.90 and has high test-retest reliability of r=0.88 over a two-week interval.

2.3. Statistical Analysis

The t-test analysis was used in order to assess gender differences in leadership characteristics and in limitedness schemas. Pearson correlation analysis was utilized to evaluate connections between psychological variables. To determine the most effective predictors of leadership characteristics three stepwise regressions were computed.

3. Results

Gender differences between psychological variables are assessed with the t-test, presented in table 2. Females reported higher scores in transformational and transactional leadership sub-scales as well as the laissez-faire leadership sub-scale than male subjects. Males, however, reported significantly higher scores in all limitedness schemas than females.

Table 1. Differences in psychological variables between males and females (N=193)

	Gender					
	Male (n=66)		Female (n=127)			
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	t(191)	P
Transformational Leadership	53.18	8.30	58.49	7.95	-4.334	*.000*
Transactional Leadership	25.89	4.79	27.28	4.69	-1.929	*.055 [ns]*
Laissez-faire Leadership	8.93	2.12	9.57	2.03	-2.045	*.042*
Limitedness about Relations	16.30	6.27	14.12	5.99	2.354	*.020*
Limitedness about the World	7.86	3.94	6.73	3.82	1.931	*.055 [ns]*
Non-incremental Beliefs	14.13	6.72	12.81	6.21	1.356	*.177 [ns]*
Perceived Interconnectedness	8.17	3.69	7.07	3.33	2.096	*.037*

Pearson correlations between psychological variables are presented in table 2. In the analyses, both transactional leadership and laissez-faire leadership were positively associated with Limitedness about Relations. Moreover, transactional leadership and laissez-faire leadership were positive correlates of Limitedness about the World. Laissez-faire leadership was significantly correlated with Limitedness about the World.

Table 2. Pearson correlations between psychological variables (N=193)

	Limitedness about Relations	Limitedness about the World	Non-incremental Beliefs	Perceived Interconnectedness
Transformational Leadership	-0.01	-0.05	-0.05	-0.03
Transactional Leadership	0.15*	0.19**	0.14	0.01
Laissez-faire leadership	0.19**	0.16*	0.18*	0.12

*:p<.05; **:p<.01

Three stepwise regression analyses were conducted in order to assess possible effects of sub-scales of the Limitedness Schemas Questionnaire and gender type on leadership characteristics. In the first analyses, independent variables, sub-types of limitedness schemas and gender, were regressed to transformational leadership as the dependent variable. In the regression model being female significantly predicted higher scores of transformational leadership (*p<.001*) unlike sub-scales of the LSQ which were excluded in the final step. In the second regression model, the transactional leadership sub-scale was the dependent variable. In the analysis, limitedness about the world and being female significantly predicted higher scores in the transactional leadership sub-scale (*p<.001*). In the third regression model, in which laissez-faire leadership was the dependent variable, it was found that subjects that were female and that reported higher scores of interpersonal limitedness schemas indicated significantly higher scores of laissez-faire leadership (*p<.001*).

4. Discussion

When we examined self-reports, it was found that females reported higher scores than males on transformational leadership characteristics. Not surprisingly, these results were consistent with the studies of Bass, Avolio, and Atwater (1996), and Druskat (1994). They report that women are no less transformational than their male counterparts. Also, Druskat (1994) explains that female leaders exhibit significantly higher transformational leadership characteristics than they do transactional leadership. In addition to these findings, Carless (1998) found that female managers were more transformational than male managers. Carless (1998) accounts for these results with the observation that female managers have better communication with their staff than males since. This suggestion is supported by Kawatra and Krishnan (2004). They emphasize that feminine leadership enhances a humanistic orientation, a tendency to collaboration and team-based working orientation. This is seen as a way to reduce aggressiveness, competitiveness, achievement-orientation, performance expectations, and results-orientation in organizations. Also, they suggest that the combined features of transformational leadership and feminine characteristics enhance achievement-orientation and reduce stability. Findings were consistent with the aforementioned theoretical frame in that females reported higher scores in transformational leadership. Females also revealed poorer leadership qualities, however, in terms of laissez-faire leadership than males. In the analyses, it was found that males reported higher scores on the sub-scales of the Limitedness Schemas Questionnaire than females. These results suggest that women should be provided with the same opportunities as men in terms of management positions. Moreover, women need more education to improve their leadership qualities and should be more encouraged to contribute to a more positive work climate. .

Results have supported the previous assumptions that cognitive characteristics were connected with leadership (Neck et al., 1997). In the current data limitedness about relations and limitedness about the world were significantly associated with transactional leadership and laissez-faire, but limitedness orientation was not significantly connected with transformational leadership. Non-incremental beliefs were also correlated with laissez-faire. It seems that maladaptive thinking patterns determine negative leadership characteristics. In the regression analyses, the predictive value of limitedness schemas was confirmed and distinctions by leadership type in relations between leadership and limitedness schemas became more evident. Dysfunctional thinking about interpersonal relations predicted a tendency to reveal poor overall leadership abilities, whereas transactional leadership characteristics were significantly predicted by negative appraisal of world opportunities.

These results are in concert with the Constructive Thought Pattern Strategies approach of Manz and Neck (2004). Strategies proposed by them include identifying and replacing dysfunctional beliefs and assumptions with positive self-talk by practicing mental imaginary. According to them, individuals should be aware of their irrational beliefs and assumptions and should be challenged to replace the negative cognitive content with more rational thinking patterns. In doing so, they can impact positively on their performance (Burns, 1980; Neck & Manz, 1992). These strategies are part of self-leadership theory (Manz, 1986; Manz & Neck, 2004). Self-leadership consists of using various behavioral and cognitive strategies in order to make a contribution to personal effectiveness (D'Intino, Goldsby, Houghton, & Neck, 2007). Our results give strong evidence that thought patterns are significant predictors of leadership styles and administrative competence.

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