

## Transformational Leadership and Employee Work Attitudes: A Theoretical Model's Constitution and Analysis

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### Abstract

This article aims to analyze the process of transformational leadership influence the work attitude of employee thus revealing the background of this “black box”. Based on the analysis of goal setting, self-efficacy, goal self-concordance and other factors' internal relationship and mechanism between transformational leadership and employee work attitudes, we constitutes an innovative theoretical model. By analysis of the internal relationships between all elements, this article proposes 9 propositions. This is an academic improvement about the work of transformational leadership on employees' attitude directly, simple path of influence study, it enables people to have a more comprehensive and complete understanding about the role played by transformational leadership.

**Key words:** Transformational leadership; Goal setting; Self-efficacy; Goal self-concordance

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### INTRODUCTION

Transformational leadership theory is following the trait theories, behavioral theories and contingency theories, began to develop in 1980s, and is one of the most popular and advanced leadership theory, Burns, Bass and other scholars made significant contributions to the transformational leadership theory's development. They

recon transformational leadership is a process created between leaders and subordinates who could improve their intrinsic motivation and moral standard. Through their own behavior model and by taking care of subordinates' demands, transformational leadership optimizes the interactions among members of the organization, and by co-creation and publicity of the organizational vision, creating the atmosphere of transformation within the group, it would impel efficient completion of the goals of the organization, and to further promote the organizational and personal development.

In the research on transformational leadership, research on the relationship between transformational leadership and employee's work attitude is a hot research topic in the field of management science at present, previous relative researches on transformational leadership and employee's work attitudes mostly set leadership behavior as independent variable, the job satisfaction and organizational commitment of following genera and other psychological variables as dependent variable, to verify the relationship between them. For instance, Bass (1999) believe that transformational leadership can stir up the employee's spontaneously achievement motivation, and then make the individual self-actualization degree enhanced, thus the commitments that staff make to the organization are strengthen. Walumbwa, Orwa and Wang (2005) found that, in different cultural backgrounds, transformational leadership's behavior and employee's organizational commitment and job satisfaction are significantly positive correlation. Based on 972 managers samples from all types of enterprises within the territory of China, Jia, Chen, and Song (2006) confirms that there is an obviously positive relationship between transformational leadership and organizational commitment. Liu (2011) studied that the leadership behaviors of transformational leadership will have a significant impact on employees' emotional commitment and normative commitment. In the view of recent research

trend, scholars have gradually found that the impact of transformational leadership on employees' work attitude is not direct, but an indirect process. For instance, Avolio (2004) once used 520 nurses in a large Singapore public hospital as the research samples, this research proved the mediating role of psychological empowerment played between transformational leadership and organizational commitment. Through the questionnaire survey to a Chinese company with totally 785 employees and their immediate supervisor subordinate, Sui and Wang (2012) verified the mediating role of psychological capital played between transformational leadership and subordinates' performance and satisfaction. Besides these, scholars also explain the mechanism of Transformational Leadership respectively with self determination, leader-member exchange relationship, job characteristics, trust and other factors (Bono & Judge, 2003; Wang, 2005; Piccolo & Colquitt, 2006; Susanne & Claudia, 2013). The high consistency of these results showed that positive effects of transformational leadership on employees' work attitudes possess the cross-cultural and cross-industry applicability.

Burns (1978) proposed the concept of transformational leadership based on Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory, he thought that transformational leadership can enhance members' intrinsic motivations, change the values and beliefs of his subordinates, guide to them to go beyond their own interests, to pursue higher goals and self-realizations. But in the past research about the effect of transformational leadership mechanism, there is always a problem without reasonable explanation -- that transformational leadership as a kind of external factor, how could it make the subordinate individuals achieve their self-values? How could the superior improve the employee needs to a higher level and stimulate their intrinsic motivation, to make the subordinates improve themselves from the "ordinary self" to "better self"? There is obviously lack of proper impact mechanism and process. As House and Aditya (1997) pointed out: at present, the research on transformational leadership doesn't fully explain how this leadership affect the employee's work attitude and behavior, especially how the external factors convert into employee intrinsic work motivation? What a kind of role it requires? There is still not a good theoretical framework to explain these (Yu & Liu, 2009).

In view of this, this article would explore the impact path and mechanism that transformational leadership imposes on employee's work attitudes from a new perspective (this research includes two indicators: job satisfaction and organizational commitment), to construct a new analysis frame and theory model.

## 1. NEW RESEARCH PROSPECTIVE AND ANALYSIS FRAME

### 1.1 Goal Setting

The "Goal" is refers to the behavior a specifically required behaviors standard that people reach in a future period (Zhang, 2005), and goal setting theory was put forward by Locke in 1968, was known as one of the most vital incentive theory in twentieth Century; Locke and other scholars think that the external stimulus (such as leaders' encouragements) could influence motivation through goal setting, goal setting can convert the needs of people into the motivation, to guide people to work hard toward a certain aim, thus to realize the goal. In order to improve the enthusiasm of the staff, goal setting has been proved to be an important incentive mechanism that is able to stimulate personal motivation. Goal setting is divided into leadership assigned goal setting and personal goal setting, the goal setting in this article refers to the process that organizational vision and expectations unite into an integral personal goal under leader's guidance and support.

Among the researches on the relationship between transformational leadership and goal setting, Kirkpatrick and Locke (1996) verified that the transformational leadership indirectly influences the employee's work attitude through self goal setting and self-efficacy by a series of experiments. Whittington, Goodwin and Murray (2004) found that goal difficulty have important effect on the employee's work attitude variables, transformational leadership can strengthen the relationship between employee's organizational commitment and organizational citizenship behavior through adjusting goal difficulty and job design, Ilies, Judge and Wagner (2006) described that vision components of transformational leadership, in a theoretical model they established, can influence goal setting, thus influence self-efficacy and self-goal setting, there is a complicated emotion and cognition process between transformational leadership and job motivation. But the above researches are also lack of systematic and in-depth discussion on the role played by goal setting in the relationship between transformational leadership and employee work attitudes, and the relationships with other variables. Therefore, it is an urgent problem to be solved both on the part of theory and practice.

### 1.2 Self Determination and Goal Self-Concordance

Deci and Ryan presented a new cognitive motivation theory—self-determination theory in 1980s, different from the traditional theory of motivation that divided the motivations into single or in the two parts: the external and internal motivations. Self-determination theory regard the motivations of people's behaviors as a continuum from the external motivation to internal motivation, divided motivations into external motivation, introjected motivation, identified motivation and intrinsic motivation four parts.

In this continuum, according to the self organic integration degrees, external motivation and introjected motivation are referred to as controlled motivation, identified and intrinsic motivation are called autonomous motivation.

Self-goal concordance theory was proposed by Sheldon and Elliot in 1990s, based on the study of the self-determination theory. It reflects that individual prospective goals come from the identity degree of individual toward the goal itself from the deep heart. If the individual is driven by "self", and self-motivation is stronger, then goal self concordance degree is high; if the goals set by individual comes more from the outside pressure or their own negative emotion instead of "self", then the goal self concordance degree is low. Only through goal self concordance, employees could internalize the tasks well, and form autonomous motivation, so that they can realize the significance of the work, thus they will be devoted to work and get better performance. However, the transformational leaders played an important role in this process, which has been proven by the study of Sheldon and Elliot (1999). The mediating role played by goal self concordance in the motivation process will provide a new method for us on thinking the mechanism of transformational leadership.

### 1.3 Self-Efficacy

Bandura (1977) proposed the theory of self-efficacy, refers to the judgment and confidence that people made and possess when people evaluate themselves about accomplishing one certain task or work, because this concept helps to explain the mediated cognitive process of human motivation—intermediary actors coordinate the external inducements and internal impetus through it so as to form the motivation, so it would be quickly adopted by the relative motivation research, from this perspective, the theory of self-efficacy is an important contribution of Bandura to the problem of motivation, it reveals the mechanism about how the external factors convert into the internal the behavior motivation, and makes people aware of the effect of self-efficacy and self-regulation, self-efficacy now has become a generally accepted medium cognitive factor of human motivation.

Leadership is an important factor affecting employee's self-efficacy. For example, transformational leadership can improve the subordinate's confidence, increase the understanding about subordinate and attention on him or her by intellectual stimulation and individualized consideration; through the idealized influence and the

inspirational motivation, transformational leadership can improve the subordinate's understanding about intrinsic value of the task to be completed, and these are able to enhance employee's self-efficacy, inspire employee's self-consciousness and confidence, and thus improving the subordinate's incentive to work and the sense of achievement. Kirkpatrick and Locke (1996) found that transformational leadership's high-quality vision-incentive has a positive effect on employee's attitude including improving employee's self-efficacy. In China, Li, Shi, and Wu, et al. (2006) also found that self-efficacy relatively plays a mediating role between transformational leadership and employee's work attitude.

When the transformational leadership affects employee's working attitude through the self-efficacy, it is largely through the goal setting, there is a close relationship between transformational leadership and goal setting and self-efficacy, the interaction between them will make the employee's work attitude change.

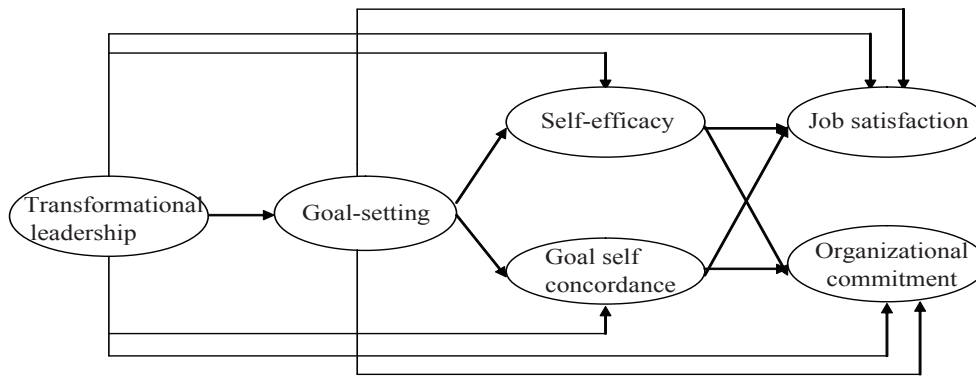
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## 2. THE CONSTITUTION OF THEORY MODEL

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The past researches on the relationship between transformational leadership and employee work attitudes already have a more fully development, but there are still little attentions to effects and relationships of goal setting and self-efficacy, goal self concordance and other elements between transformational leadership and employee's work attitude. Therefore, on the basis of previous researches, based on goal setting, goal self concordance, self-efficacy theory, this article sums up them into the framework of transformational leadership mechanism, and comprehensively considers the point of different theories in the research topic, thus establishes a theoretical model mainly consisting of transformational leadership, goal setting, goal self concordance, self-efficacy, work attitudes and other elements (Figure 1).

This model is based on viewpoint: transformational leadership is not only through a direct path to affect employee's working attitude but through a series of processes. Specifically, transformational leadership mainly through the goal-setting to influence employee's goal self-concordance and self-efficacy, which affects the employee's work attitude, so as to reveal the mechanism of the influence of transformational leadership on employee's work attitude.



**Figure 1**  
**The Theoretical Model of Transformational Leadership Mechanism**

### 3. THE ANALYSIS OF RELATION BETWEEN THE VARIOUS ELEMENTS AND THE PROPOSAL OF RELATED PROPOSITION

#### 3.1 Transformational Leadership and Goal Setting

Vision is an idealized goal by leader, is closely associated with goal setting, Zaccaro and Banks (2001) think that a long-term, vague vision needs to be translated into a more specific organizational strategy, in other words, a more targeted and more practical goal. The vision incentive of transformational leadership is an important dimension, Wofford and Goodwin (1994) once pointed out, to a certain extent, vision incentive of transformational leadership is conducive for the formation of the specific objectives of subordinate.

House (1977) has proposed that a challenging goal strengthens the relationship between transformational leadership and subordinate's work attitude, subordinate is willing to accept the expectation and satisfaction that leadership has to their high level, and link this high level of expectation connected is in the dimension that represents goal setting of goal difficulty. Avolio thinks, transformational leadership use the leadership charisma to provides subordinates with meaningfully and challengingly optimistic prospects and future, transformational leadership can put their vision through the process of goal setting into employee practical contribution, employees also have a strong sense of belonging to this sort of organization.

Given all that, we propose the following proposition:

**P1: The relationship between transformational leadership and goal-setting is positive correlated, transformational leadership is more likely to help employees to establish specific challenging goals.**

#### 3.2 The Work Attitude of Transformational Leadership and Employee

Through intellectual stimulation, transformational leadership encourages employee to pursue higher goals and meet their ambition; through individualized consideration,

transformational leadership can provide employees with understanding and support for personal development. All of these transformational leadership's behaviors will make employee focus on his work, so as to improve the job satisfaction and organizational commitment. Quiet a few studies have proved, in different organizations and culture, transformational leadership and employee's work attitude is positive correlated. Yukl (1984) believes that transformational leadership can make the employees to trust and respect the leader, so employees would put in extra effort to complete each task; Howell and Avolio (1993) found that transformational leadership's subordinates will internalize the values and goals of the leader, and pursue the proposed mission and the target by the leader beyond the personal current interests; Bass (1999) found that transformational leadership can selectively stimulate staffs' internal achievement motivation and high-level need. There are also a number of studies in China (Li & Shi, 2003) showed that, leader's charm has a positive impact on extra effort of employee; Meng (2004) also confirmed that transformational leadership has a predictive power on employees' organizational commitment and other work attitude indicators.

Given all that, we propose the following proposition:

**P2: Transformational leadership and employee work attitude is positive correlated.**

#### 3.3 Goal-Setting, Self-Efficacy and Goal Self Concordance

Research on influence goal-setting imposed on the self-efficacy, Locke (1997) found that transformational leadership can express the trust to subordinates and enhance their confidence in integrated model he established, therefore, the set goal under the influence of the leader can lead to a higher self-efficacy of employees. Gellatly and Meyer (1992) also proved that goal-setting has influence on employees' sense of self-efficacy

Goal-setting and goal self concordance is directly related. Sheldon and Elliot proposed the goal self concordance theory is based on the individual goal-setting, uses goal generated by personal initiative to study

the motive process behind. In the external and introjected motivation, the reasons why people pursue this goal are from others or the surrounding pressure; because if you don't do so, the individual will feel anxiety, shame and guilt. On the contrary, identified and intrinsic motivation pursuing the goal is because of the independence and self-determination, is because the pursuit is equal to "it" and "my" sense of values; because it is in my interest, the process of reaching a goal gives me the feeling of happiness and joy. These goals is consistent to personal interests and personal core value view, personal goal setting is directly related to the degree of goal of self consistency, and these are all in close contact with transformational leadership's support and help.

Given all that, we propose the following proposition:

**P3-1: Goal-setting and self-efficacy is a positive correlation.**

**P3-2: Goal-setting and goal self-concordance is a positive correlation.**

### 3.4 Self-Efficacy and the Employee's Work Attitude

The individual whose self-efficacy is strong generally has a more outstanding achievement motivation and entrepreneurial awareness, they are courageous to meet the challenge in the face of difficulties, rather than choosing escape and compromise, and the successful experience of overcoming the difficulties, so that individual confidence increases. More than this, it makes the self-efficacy has a further improvement, which will affect and change people's intrinsic interest and the concentration to activity. Many theoretical researches and empirical researches have showed that there is an actively positive relationship between self-efficacy and job attitude, for instance, Bandura et al. (1989, 1993) made a series of researches on the relationship between self-efficacy and the employee's work attitude and performance, they found that the self-efficacy can expect employee's performance very effectively. With higher self-efficacy had stronger intrinsic motivation in the face of a task and higher working enthusiasm, and they are more likely to persist especially in the face of difficulties, it would definitely have better working attitude and performance. Similarly, research results from Sadri and Robertson (1993) show that self-efficacy and job performance is significantly positive correlated. In short, from the past researches, the self-efficacy is an important variable to predict other indexes related to job performance.

Therefore, we propose the following proposition:

**P4: The higher employee's self-efficacy is, the better the working attitude is.**

### 3.5 Goal Self-Concordance and the Employee's Work Attitude

According to Sheldon and Elliot's goal self-concordance theory, the higher employee goal self-concordance degree is, the better staff's work goal and self integration degree

is, their autonomous motivation level is also higher. In this case, employee's identification and coordination of the organization and work are all from their heart, they are more willing to devote into the work more actively, it will naturally lead to better performance, and experience more positive psychological results.

The relationship between goal-self concordance, self motivation and work attitude, has been supported by empirical studies. Sheldon and Kasser (1998) proved that individual with high goal self concordance, its autonomy, self realization of the positive emotions are also higher; in a cross-cultural study, Sheldon et al. (2004) found in different cultures, goal-self concordance is a strong predictor for subjective well-being and other index. Koestner (2002), Judge and Bono (2003) both found goal-self concordance has significant influence on job satisfaction and affective commitment. In short, goal-self concordance and autonomous motivation has a good forecast effect on job satisfaction and affective commitment.

Therefore, we propose the following proposition:

**P5: The stronger employee's goal self-concordance is, the better work attitude is.**

### 3.6 Transformational Leadership, Self-Efficacy and Goal-Self Concordance

In recent years, Bass's transformational leadership four-dimensional structure has been widely accepted by scholars, these four dimensions are idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, individualized consideration, among these, the dimension of individualized consideration can improve leadership's understanding on and increase leadership's concern and help about the need for them, and all of these behaviors can improve subordinates' confidence and self-efficacy. Natanovich and Eden (2001) proves that transformational leadership behavior and self-efficacy is a positive relation; Schyns et al. (2001) also demonstrated transformational leadership can provide as many mission opportunities as possible for the staff, to strengthen their capacity and amplify experiences to respond to challenges, so as to enhance their confidence and the courage to face difficulties, to influence and improve the employee's self-efficacy, transformational leadership and employee self-efficacy is closely related.

The relationship between transformational leadership and goal self concordance, has also been proved by related research, for example, Judge and Bono (2003) has proved the transformational leadership had significant effect on formation of employees' goal self concordance and autonomous motivation. Under the background of idealized influence, inspirational motivation and intellectual stimulations, transformational leadership can bring its influence on the ideal and sense of worth into play, impelling the individual goal matching with the lasting interest and value, connecting with the organizational vision and mission, at this time, intrinsic

motivation bringing by goal-self concordance is very strong, of course, it will impose a profound impact on the employee's work attitude.

Therefore, we propose the following proposition:

**P6-1: Transformational leadership and self-efficacy is a positive correlation.**

**P6-2: Transformational leadership and employee goal-self concordance is a positive correlation.**

### 3.7 Goal-Setting and the Employee's Work Attitude

Like the same as transformational leadership behavior, abroad researches have also proved that goal setting has a significant influence on organizational commitment, job satisfaction and other work attitude index. In the research of goal setting, Locke and Latham (1990) pointed out that challenging specific goal settings can lead to high performance compared with don't set goals or set the general goal (such as do your best), that kind of high performance, can in turn promote employees to have higher enthusiasm and initiative, and try innovative work mode. At the same time, in the goal-setting, goal commitment and goal importance these two variables are also considered as the most important motivating factors, the importance of personal goals and expectations for the goal and adherence are often important powers to improve people's work attitude, and when people feel a goal is important, they will naturally improve degree of goal commitment, and raise the level of organizational commitment, job satisfaction.

Therefore, we propose the following proposition:

**P7: Goal-setting and the employee's work attitude is positive correlated.**

## CONCLUSION

Study of transformational leadership is an advanced topic in the theory of leadership, is also the hotspot in recent ten years in organizational behavior research. Based on the previous research, we consider the impact of transformational leadership on organizational commitment, job satisfaction and other employee attitude index is not only a straightforward process, but through the process which some mediating variable indirectly play a role in it, therefore, put forward a theory model that transformational leadership behavior variables have impact on employee's work attitude variable through goal-setting, goal self concordance and self-efficacy and other variables, and this paper explain the relationship between the various elements, propose related propositions. Through the construction and analysis of this theoretical model, this paper presents a complete process that an external leadership factor convert into the individual intrinsic motivation, we can reasonably elucidate the mechanism that transformational leadership played role in through this process of self-adjustment. The next research work we need to do will be to carry out empirical analysis

on the theoretical model and its working mechanism, and according to the empirical results to make further revision and improvement for model.

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