The Impact of Transformational Leadership on Teachers’ Motivation & Commitment

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Abstract

It is important for leaders to know the best leadership style to motivate and encourage commitment among staff members. Transformational leadership is a style that many principals follow which inspires more motivation and commitment from teachers. This paper reviews research completed on the effects of transformational leadership on teacher motivation and commitment. Outcomes show that transformational leadership has a positive impact on teacher motivation and commitment. The implication is that transformational leaders have greater success in motivating teachers and in having more highly committed teachers. In this paper, limitations to the research and future topics will be indicated.

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Introduction
Leadership can be employed in many different ways. “Leadership involves a social influence process in which one individual exerts intentional influence over others to structure activities and relationships in a group or organization” (Hoy & Miskel, 2008, p. 410). Administrators’ leadership style is an important consideration in staff motivation. Through different leadership styles, principals can attempt to motivate staff members through their actions or be more ‘hands off’ in regard to teacher morale. There are many different leadership styles that principals can follow. The focus of the paper will be on transformational leadership, as “it is safe to say that transformational leadership theory has garnered most of the attention in recent leadership research” (Judge & Bono, 2000, p. 751). Motivation, self-efficacy and commitment are fundamental to teacher practice. It is important to consider teacher commitment and self-efficacy in the same realm as motivation. If teachers have motivation for teaching, commitment usually follows suit. Therefore, this paper plans to answer the following question: What is the impact of transformational leadership on teacher motivation and commitment?

Purpose

The purpose of writing this paper is to review the literature in order to analyze the impact that transformational leadership can have on the motivation and commitment of staff members (teachers) within a school system. Aspects of transformational leadership that are used will be defined within educational settings. A review of research and theory based information on a transformative leadership style will be provided. There will be
sections investigating transformational leadership on teacher motivation, and then commitment. Limitations and future research on the topic will be discussed.

**Rationale**

Many principals, through education and personal experience, decide what particular leadership style they would like to undertake. Having valuable information on the impact of certain leadership styles can help guide the way. Leadership styles of principals can vary from person to person and can have varied effects on the motivation and commitment of teachers. The motivation and commitment of a staff is a very important consideration for leaders of schools. A high level of motivation and strong commitment can benefit teachers, students, parents, and the entire school community. Leadership style can effect the motivation and commitment of staff in a positive or negative way, depending on the style used by the principal. Leadership “illuminates the ways in which individuals influence others and persuade them to devote their utmost efforts to tasks that promote their goals” (Eyal & Roth, 2011, p.256). Using the data from the literature review, principals and future principals will be able to see the positive or negative effects transformational leadership has on teachers’ motivation and commitment. The readers will be able to use the results of the review to evaluate their own particular leadership style and the possible effects it may have on the teachers that he or she currently lead.

Evaluating the different types of leadership is beneficial for new administrators as
well as for people who have the desire to take on a school leadership role in the future. Through this transformational leadership literature review, administrators will have key information to possibly increase motivation and commitment of teaching staff by looking at the impact from a transformational leadership style. School leadership comes with a great deal of responsibility. It is important to ensure that principals are informed of the best practices for their leadership styles. If there is sufficient evidence to support impact of transformational leadership, it may help influence the way a principal decides to guide teaching staff or focus professional development.

Motivation of a staff is a chief priority for school leaders to consider. As stated by Naile and Selesho (2014), “Every organisation, like every team requires leadership. Leadership allows managers to affect employee behaviour in the organisation. Thus, motivated employees are one of the most important results of effective leadership” (p. 175). Methods of motivation and commitment of staff are topics that are included in many administration courses. Motivational traits cause a person to have the motivation to act in a particular way. It is very significant for school leaders to consider their own motivational traits as well as the motivational traits of the staff (teachers). The impact that transformational leadership has on motivation of teachers is also a good reason to support this paper.

Commitment is a crucial aspect to consider when discussing the impact of transformational leadership. Mainly, commitment refers to “the amount of work and time a teacher is willing to put for the sake of students achievement, and the commitment to
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the school and to the colleagues in an environment of high purpose” (Ibrahim, Ghavifker, Ling, Siraj, & Azeez, 2014, p.180). Through leadership, a school principal can alter the level of commitment that a teacher brings into a school. It is important to look at transformational leadership in comparison with the commitment of a staff and the impact it may have on teachers.

Transformational leadership behaviours have been prevalent in leadership education as of late, Hoy & Miskel (2008) stated “Since the introduction of transformational leadership in the min-1980’s a vast research literature about it has developed” (p. 449); and there are many studies conducted and research available on the topic of transformational leadership behaviour and the effect it has on teachers in many different areas of education. The results from these studies will help guide the review to show the positive or negative impact that transformational leadership has on teachers’ motivation and commitment. The results can be used to in various applications from helping future leadership students to principals undertaking new ideas for leadership.

Research Review

Theory

According to Dubrin (2007), “Transformational leadership focuses on what the leader accomplishes rather than on the leader’s personal characteristics and his or her relationship with group members” (p. 83). James MacGregor Burns coined the term transformational leadership, as well as transactional leadership in 1978 but he used
them more in the political aspect (Hoy & Miskel, 2008). Bass delved further into the
theory and developed a full range leadership model in 1998. In his model, he has three
types of leadership: Laissez Faire, Transactional, and Transformational leadership (as
cited in Hoy & Miskel, 2008).

In an effort to describe the types of leadership, Bass claims that laissez faire
leaders “avoid expressing their views or taking action on important issues, fail to make or
at least delay decisions, ignore responsibilities, provide no feedback, and allow authority
to remain dormant” (as cited in Hoy & Miskel, 2008, p. 445). Based on the previous
description, these leaders do not seem to put forth effort that would encourage teacher
motivation. Transactional leadership is the midpoint of the leadership continuum. Dubrin
(2007) stated, “the transactional leader focuses on more routine transactions rewarding
group members for meeting standards (contingent reinforcement)” (p. 84). Transactional
leadership is based on the extrinsic motivation of people to do things for a reward.
Finally, transformational leadership is the third aspect on the continuum. As stated
previously, it deals with a leader going beyond regular duties to assist staff and lead a
school. Dubrin also lists some attributes of transformational leaders that include
agreeableness, charisma, extraversion, emotional intelligence, visionary, encouraging,
supportive, innovative, examples, and empowering.

Within the domain of transformational leadership, there are four I’s that complete
the theory of transformational leadership. The four I’s are idealized influence (attributed
idealized influence & idealized influence as behaviour), inspirational motivation,
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intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. They are all major factors for transformational leaders to consider when dealing with teachers or students in a school. Many of the ideals included in the 4 I’s deal with factors that could possibly influence teacher’s motivation and commitment.

Individualized influence is the factor that “builds trust and respect in followers and provides the basis for accepting radical and fundamental changes in the ways individual organizations do their work” (Hoy & Miskel, 2008, p. 446). In the individualized influence spectrum, principals act as role models for their staff. The staff, in turn, wants to act in the same manner. There are two sub groups within the individualized influence section: attributed idealized influence as well as idealized influence as behaviour. The first sub group analyzes the ways in which staff members “perceive leaders as being charismatic, confident, powerful, and focused on higher-order ideals and ethics. In contrast, [the second sub group] idealized influence, behaviour is charismatic actions of leaders that focus on values, beliefs, and a sense of mission” (Hoy & Miskel, 2008, p. 447). These sub groups of transformational leadership are easy to divide because one deals with pure actions of the leader, while the other deals with perceptions of the staff members.

Inspirational motivation has its basis in principal vision that can steer the staff in a particular direction. It “comes primarily from leader behaviours that provide meaning and challenge for followers” (Hoy & Miskel, 2008, p. 447). Following inspirational motivation is intellectual stimulation. Creativity is at the base of intellectual stimulation
and is where leaders try to be innovative and get the staff thinking about new ways to educate students. It can also work both ways where staff can challenge leaders to re-think their ideas as well (Hoy & Miskel, 2008). Finally, individualized consideration is based on the idea that transformational leaders look at individual needs of teachers or staff members to help them grow as individuals (Hoy & Miskel, 2008). An example would be a principal creating a new learning prospect for a particular teacher.

The leadership style that a principal undertakes is crucial for the school environment. There have been many research studies completed on transformational leadership. These studies range in almost all areas of education. One of the important areas is the impact of transformational leadership on teacher motivation and commitment.

**Research Findings**

**Transformational Leadership and Motivation**

Many studies have been based around transformational leadership but “few empirical attempts were undertaken to examine the impact of various leadership styles on the motivation of followers” (Ori & Roth, 2011, p. 257). The studies that have been completed on the topic of transformational leadership and the motivation of teachers show mostly positive results. In Othman and Wanlabeh’s (2012) study, they saw a relationship among transformational leadership and teacher motivation:
These results are consistent with previous research such as (Bogler, 2001; Edwards, 2008; Gallmerier, 1992; Mills 2008; Nunitwat Pongiarern, 2002; Silins, 1993) that indicate current leaders are practicing more transformational leadership as they face the changing environment which demand for increased accountability and higher expectations of school performance. (p. 247)

There is also proof of a positive relationship between transformational leadership and teacher motivation in a study completed in the Netherlands. Thoonen, Sleeiders, Oort, Peetsma, & Geijsel (2011), found that the results of their study had an affirmative correlation and stated, “dimensions of transformational leadership stimulate teachers’ engagement in professional learning as well as their motivation and can improve school organizational working conditions” (p. 519). The findings of the study demonstrate how principals that use transformational leadership can have a positive impact on their teachers and therefore have a better school environment. Teachers often report their perceptions of a principal’s leadership; principals that use a transformational leadership style can see a higher level of motivation from teachers. Interviews with teachers can provide insight on the impact of transformational learning on teacher motivation.

Finnigan (2011) explored motivation and transformational leadership in schools in Chicago. She conducted interviews with teachers and principals to gather information on the impact that transformational leadership has on teachers’ motivation. She found that “to bring about school change, principals are in a key position to improve the performance of teachers by improving their motivation” (p. 198). There is a positive impact on motivation when principals take the time and develop trust between the teacher and principal. In the interviews, teachers reported that when unmotivated teachers were
pushed out of the schools after a new administrator was hired, “teachers viewed this turnover as a positive, emphasizing the need for energetic new staff to help their school improve” (Finnigan, 2012, p. 196). Another study that investigated teacher perceptions of transformational leadership was Balyer’s (2012) research. The study also showed a positive impact on the motivation of teachers due to transformational leadership. The influence that transformational leadership has on teachers is that administration gives teachers a sense of self-satisfaction, performance, as well as job satisfaction (Balyer, 2012). While these studies look at teachers’ perception of transformational leaders, other studies show the direct, positive impact that transformational leadership has on the motivation of teachers.

A Canadian study dissected transformational leadership and the influence it has on teachers and their classroom practices. The study uses a large sample of teachers and looks at many different variables. One variable is motivation, and the results show that “transformational leadership had very strong direct effects on teachers’ work settings and motivation” (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2006, p. 223). The study indicated that transformational leadership has a positive effect on teacher motivation and therefore their classroom practices. Another Canadian study, out of Alberta, focuses on behaviours of transformational leaders in highly effective schools. The authors, Parsons & Beauchamp stated,

It was apparent how the actions of principals affected the work of teachers so children could learn. Finally, it was obvious how the work of principals motivated others to sustainable action. In essence, teachers are happier in their workplace
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with transformational leadership. (2012, p. 709)

The positive impact that transformational leadership shows seems to be directly related to motivation. Further studies look more at autonomous motivation for teachers.

Recently, studies have shown that “transformational leadership was negatively associated with teacher burnout, and this association was partially mediated by teachers’ autonomous motivation” (Ori & Roth, 2011, p. 266). Ori & Roth’s (2011) study is helpful in noting that other leadership styles, such as transactional leadership, did show teacher burnout. Teachers need to feel appreciated and that their administrator is supportive in order to feel motivated. Although there is mainly positive research, there have been some studies conducted that have found no relationship in regard to teacher motivation while being led by transformational leaders. Research has been done where the outcomes look beyond transformational leadership for teachers’ motivation.

A study in Turkey showed that “the motivation levels of teachers is low and that teachers are less affected by factors other than principals. However, it is not possible to state that school principals have a positive effect on teacher motivation” (Eres, 2011, p. 8). There are possible factors to explain why this study had such outcomes. The study was conducted in only one area of Turkey and as discussed by Leong and Fisher (2010), transformational leadership is weaker in eastern cultures. This could be a plausible reason for the outcome of the study.
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Also, Barnett and McCormick (2002) studied schools that have been reported as having principals with a good vision for education. The outcome of this study was different than many others. They suggest that vision in leadership is important for motivation but “simply developing a vision may not be enough to motivate followers to a higher level of effort and performance (Barnett & McCormick, 2002, p. 69). In this particular study, they suggest that administration being sensitive to individual concerns is what motivates teachers. This research also has limitations because it is a case study and does not have a large sample size. There could be other outcomes if the same study were done on a larger sample.

A large number of studies found that transformational leadership has a positive impact on teacher motivation. In the research, teachers who are led by transformational administrators have higher job satisfaction (Blayer, 2012), less burnout (Ori et al., 2011), a positive work setting (Leithwood et al., 2006), and more students learning (Parsons et al., 2012). Besides teacher motivation, transformational leadership can also impact teacher commitment.

Transformational Leadership and Commitment

There are a range of studies completed in regard to transformational leadership and teachers’ commitment to their jobs. According to Leithwood, Menzies, & Jantzi (1994), “commitment is characterized by identification with the organization's goals and values, the willingness to exert considerable effort, and the desire to maintain
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membership in the organization” (p. 40). Most of the studies showed a positive correlation between transformational leadership and teacher commitment. Studies have been completed in a variety of areas around the world with elementary and high school teachers taking part.

Khasawneh, Omari, and Abu-Tineh (2012) published a study, which focused on transformational leadership and teacher’s organizational commitment. They found that principals who lead transformationally have a stronger positive correlation with committed teachers. They also suggested that the component of inspirational motivation has the strongest correlation which implies that the more the school principals communicate a clear vision, help others focus on their work and make others feel their work is significant, the higher their organizational commitment will be. (Khasawneh, Omari, & Abu-Tineh, 2012, p. 503)

The study showed that there is a positive impact on teacher commitment when transformational leadership comes into play. Another investigation by Femke, Sleegers, Leithwood, & Jantzi (2003) also looked at teacher commitment in relation to transformational leadership. They studied data from the Netherlands as well as Canada and found that transformational leadership aspects positively influence teachers’ effort as well as commitment (p. 228). Leaders who showed vision and other characteristics of transformational leadership make teachers feel worthwhile and have a greater sense of their role as a classroom teacher.

A study was completed to compare the impact of transformational leadership on
commitment of teachers in schools that were on probation as well as schools that were not on probation, both having transformational leaders. The results of the study were interesting and “found a relationship between principal leadership and teacher expectance that existed for all schools, whether under sanctions or not” (Finnigan, 2010, p. 181). The positive impact of transformational leaders has a relationship to school improvement when teachers are more committed to their jobs. A study completed in Malaysia yet again showed a positive impact on teacher commitment when a principal uses transformational leadership. They concluded, “transformational leadership qualities are an important dimension of the social context in improving the level of teacher commitment in schools” (Ibrahim, Ghavifker, Ling, Siraj, & Azeez, 2014, p. 186). The positive results also discuss the teachers’ feeling like the principal is encouraging and supports innovation in schools. A previous study by Ibrahim (2013) also supported teacher commitment with transformational leaders. The findings were not as high but “showed that transformational leadership behaviours were slightly correlated to teachers’ sense of commitment,” (Ibrahim & Ling, 2013, p. 59) and “the practice of transformational leadership behaviours by school leaders enhanced teacher commitment” (Ibrahim & Ling, 2013, p. 59). Although there was a moderate level of commitment from teachers, there was also a lower level of transformational leaders identified, which could impact results of this study.

More positive results were found in a study from Singapore. The Koh, Steers, & Terbog (1995), had 846 teachers who completed a survey, and the results were on par
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with other studies discussed. Job satisfaction was a large part of commitment to schools felt by the teachers who completed the survey. Koh, Steers, & Terbog (1995) found that having a leader who was using the transformational style showed more commitment from teachers. They also suggested that teachers with transformational leaders may be effective in improving teachers’ attitudes as well (Koh, Steers, & Terbog, 1995). Along with the Singapore study, a Canadian study produces similar conclusions. Ross & Gray (2006) had a large sample of 3074 teachers and had an outcome that supported transformational leadership having a direct impact on teacher commitment, not only to the school, but also a commitment to the professional learning community. The impact, again, is a positive one with a larger commitment than just the school; a commitment to the professional community is also an outcome that is related to positive school modifications.

Teacher commitment helps schools and leaders in many ways. When a teacher is committed to a school, there tends to be a more “direct effect on teachers’ internal states and behaviours and these, in turn, influence school conditions” (Leithwood & Sun, 2012, p. 408). Leithwood & Sun, (2012) looked at unpublished studies on transformational leadership and found similar results in the unpublished studies as in published ones. The common result was that transformational leadership had a strong relation to teacher commitment.

A study was produced that had mixed results. Dumay and Galand (2012), discussed that their “results show that the proportion of variance in organizational
commitment at school level is less than that reported in other organisational settings” (p. 725). An interesting fact from this research is that the authors suggest that commitment and transformational leadership are arbitrated by the culture strength in the school. It implies that increased culture strength is a derivative of good transformational leadership and teacher commitment in schools. The aspect of job satisfaction is also important to teacher commitment. A study that looks at teacher attitudes and job satisfaction shows that teachers with transformational leaders have higher job satisfaction and self-efficacy (Ibrahim, Gumus, & Bellbas, 2013). Higher job satisfaction can be linked to teacher commitment as in Koh, Steers, and Terbog’s (1995) study. Again, it shows a positive impact of transformational leadership on teacher commitment.

In reviewing the research, there are many factors that show what the impact of transformational leadership is on teacher commitment. First and foremost the research suggests that there is a positive relationship between transformational leadership and teacher commitment. Other factors also come from the relationship, such as enthusiasm, extra effort, loyalty, and a sense of duty (Ibrahim et al., 2013). Koh et al (1995) illustrated a sense of job satisfaction in relation to transformational leadership. Finnigan’s (2010) study demonstrated school improvement from teacher commitment and transformational leadership. Also, Dumay et al. (2012) reported more culture strength in the school from transformational leadership and teacher commitment. All of these factors show the impact that transformational leadership has on teachers and their commitment.
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Limitations

There are some limitations to the research studies presented in this paper. The first issue is sample size. Some studies presented had large sample sizes with thousands of teachers and principals giving their input. Other studies had very small sample sizes with only a few teachers responding. This lack of adequate sample size can affect the results of the studies; therefore impact the answer to the research question. Another limitation is geographic area and culture of the research. The studies found on the topic of transformational leadership and teacher motivation and commitment gives research studies from all over the world in places such as Singapore, Nigeria, Canada, Malaysia, and Belgium. Although it is great to have a multitude of research, cultures differ in these areas, and teachers’ answers may be different depending on area or cultural background; which again can impact the answer to the research question.

The questionnaire used in some studies has caused limitations previously. Many studies used the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ), which was created by Bass in 1985. It is a survey with 73 questions that “measures the degree of transactional and transformational leadership exhibited by the subject” (Koh, Steers, & Terbog, 1995, p. 323). Koh et al. (1995), among others, report that even though the MLQ has been modified, there are still questions that can be ambiguous, which can lead to skewed results. Along with this limitation comes the fact that most participants in the studies were volunteers. This can skew a study because most likely, more apt and dedicated teachers are responding and returning the surveys (Balyer, 2012).
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These limitations can have an affect on the outcomes of the research and therefore skew the results of studies and impact the research studies’ results described in this paper. Many of the studies in the paper show a positive impact of transformational leadership on teacher motivation and commitment; the limitations could possibly distort the evidence.

Future Research

Future research should be based around a large sample size with a valid instrument to measure transformational leadership and the impact on teacher motivation and commitment. It would also be very interesting to see if principals who received training in transformational leadership and applied it to their schools would see an increase in teacher motivation and commitment. Since many of these studies were globally administered, it would be interesting to see future research that looks into the effect culture has on transformational leadership and teacher motivation and commitment. Finally, future research could involve samples from all teachers in a school or a particular area, and that way, the results from all teachers will be assessed, not just volunteers to participate in a study due to intrinsic motivation.

Conclusions

In this paper, the impact of transformational leadership on teacher motivation and commitment has been considered. Of the research analyzed, there is a strong relation between transformational leadership and teachers’ commitment and motivation. The impact that transformational leadership has on teachers’ commitment and motivation
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involves better attitudes for teachers, more job satisfaction, school improvement, less burnout, more student learning, extra effort, and a positive work setting. Overall, there is a much more positive emphasis on transformational leadership than a negative one. In this paper, the positive impact that transformational leadership has on teacher motivation and commitment has been studied and supported.
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