



TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP IN ROMANIA'S EDUCATION SYSTEM: PRELIMINARY RESULTS

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Abstract

The present study focuses on a sample of 118 leaders from over 70 Romanian pre-university and higher education institutions. Based on a non-probabilistic sample, the survey is not representative for the entire Romanian field of education, but it still emphasizes interesting results on leadership culture in a country where education leaders are facing multiple challenges such as frequent legislative and curriculum changes. We investigate the correlations among several socio-demographic variables (i.e. gender, age, type of education institution and length of service in leadership positions) and the leaders' favourite practices. Our results suggest a preference of the education leaders towards full-range leadership practices, which is to be confirmed by further research.

Keywords: *transformational leadership, education, gender, age, length of service in leadership positions*

1. INTRODUCTION

Of all leadership styles, transformational leadership may have remarkable effects in the field of education (Leithwood & Hallinger, 2012). Different from the transactional leadership, where the dynamics of the leader-subordinate relationships are defined by exchanges such as cost-benefit or performance-reward, the transformational leadership determines the subordinates to go beyond their immediate interests; it increases maturity, concern for results, self-actualization and the welfare of others, of the organisation and the society (Northouse, 2018; Bass & Riggio, 2006).

The current research directions in the field of transformational leadership fall under a new paradigm, "full range leadership theory" (Antonakis & House, 2013). According to it, the transformational leadership actions may not entirely replace the

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transactional leadership actions. Nevertheless, when the transformational leadership manifestations are active, they determine higher performance levels. Therefore, the two forms of leadership do not replace, but complete each other, on a continuum basis; the extent to which the manifestations of these two forms of leadership emerge is important (Avolio, 2011), as well as the versatility of the leader, his/her capacity to adopt multiple roles in various situations.

These attributes are remarkably significant in the field of education where, unlike other fields, the values and the vision fostered in leadership have to be correlated with the official education policy of the government institutions, as the centralised nature of the objectives and the curriculum may represent limitations in building some “individualised” strategies characteristic of schools. The educational leaders’ personal characteristics are shaping their leadership style, with further consequences at micro-level (e.g. staff’s wellbeing and organizational culture), as well as at macro-level (e.g. implementation of educational policies). The paper focuses on the influence of some socio-demographic variables (i.e. gender, age, length of service in leadership positions, type of education institution) on leadership practices in education.

Research conducted to date have highlighted that academic leadership involves different challenges than educational leadership in pre-university institutions (Van Niekerk, 2005). Unlike the pre-university leaders, who, upon their appointment, take control of all administrative activities within the institution, the administrative tasks of the leaders in higher education become more diversified and intense as they climb the hierarchy ladder. For academic leaders with lower-level management positions (e.g. chairs of departments), camaraderie may be an impediment in the firm communication of the discontents or the verbal sanctioning of transgressions (Rowley & Sherman, 2003). Thus, they may prefer transformational leadership practices in a higher extent than educational leaders from pre-university institution.

The differences between female and male leaders in terms of interpersonal relationships were pinpointed in previous researches (Carli & Eagly, 2011). Still, there is no literature consensus on this topic and the subject of gender differences in relation to leadership continues to be controversial as some authors state that there are no such differences, or they are insignificant, and that the gender stereotypes have no place in leadership (Powell, 2012).

The results of the studies on the correlation between age and leadership style have been also contradictory. Some authors have identified negative or insignificant correlations (Zacher, Rosing, Henning & Frese, 2011), whereas other studies (Barbuto, Fritz, Matkin & Marx, 2007) have indicated, for leaders of over 46, higher scores for the transformational leadership, compared to younger leaders. The age is positively correlated with transformational and transactional leadership styles (Zacher, Rosing & Frese, 2011) when leaders have an interest in leaving a professional legacy after retiring. Still, on the whole, the negative or insignificant

correlations between age and leadership style were reported more frequently than positive correlations (Walter & Scheibe, 2013).

The number of years served as leaders and the stage of the leader's career represent important variables even though they are less considered by studies on leadership styles (Oplatka, 2010). According to some authors (Giri & Santra, 2010), a vast experience is correlated with higher values for the passive leadership style. The stage of career interacts with the position in the organisational hierarchy and the age of the leader, so that the correlation between years served and leadership style should be investigated in this context.

2. OBJECTIVE AND HYPOTHESES

2.1. OBJECTIVE

The study emphasizes the results of a preliminary research which is to be extended at national scale. In this stage, the research approach takes account of two objectives, respectively:

- Identifying the leadership forms favoured by the persons holding leadership positions in the field of education;
- Highlighting correlations between certain socio-demographical variables (gender, age, length of service in leadership positions, type of education institution) and the forms of leadership favoured by the educational leaders.

2.2. HYPOTHESES

This research is intended to test the following hypotheses:

1. If the subjects carry out their activity in higher education institutions, they will mainly use transformational leadership practices and manifestations.
2. Provided that the subjects are female leaders, they will adopt transformational leadership attitudes.
3. The older the subjects are, the stronger their option for transactional leadership will be.
4. The longer the service in leadership positions is, the better expressed the preference for a certain form of leadership will be.

3. METHOD

3.1. RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

The research participants are holding leadership positions in pre-university and higher education institutions. The sample is non-probabilistic and it includes 118 subjects (table 1), selected on a voluntary basis. The majority of the subjects (72%) was represented by persons holding leadership positions in pre-university education (headmasters/headmistresses). Geographically, the pre-university leaders

came from schools and high schools located in the South-Muntenia development region.

Table 1 – Characteristics of total sample (N=118)

Variable	Frequency	Percent	
Gender	Male	34	28.8
	Female	84	71.2
Age	25 to 30 years	-	-
	31 to 40 years	23	19.5
	41 to 50 years	67	56.8
	51 to 60 years	25	21.2
	Over 60 years	3	2.5
Length of service in leadership positions	Below 1 year	4	3.4
	1 to 5 years	54	45.8
	6 to 10 years	29	24.6
	Over 10 years	31	26.3
Type of education institution where they hold leadership positions	Pre-university education	85	72
	Higher education	33	28

In the total sample, 33 persons held different leadership positions in high education institutions, i.e. "Valahia" University of Târgoviște, the University of Bucharest, "Ștefan cel Mare" University of Suceava, "Spiru Haret" University (Bucharest), the University of Craiova and "Alexandru Ioan Cuza" University (Iași). The subjects were holding the positions of chair of departments (13), vice dean (8), dean (9), manager of a research centre (2) and member of the department council (1).

3.2. RESEARCH METHODS AND INSTRUMENTS

In order to meet the objectives and to test the research hypotheses, we used the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) Form 6S (Bass & Avolio, 2004; Vinger, Cilliers, 2006). The subjects filled in the questionnaire using the Google Forms platform, between April and June 2018.

MLQ 6S is a free, self-assessment scale of leadership styles. Following the scale translation, a pre-testing was conducted for a number of 34 respondents (April 2018); their feedback concerned the comprehensibility of some questions and was incorporated in the final version of the questionnaire.

The MLQ 6S items were designed to highlight 7 factors of the leadership styles (Antonakis, Avolio & Sivasubramaniam, 2003; Bass & Avolio, 2004): *Idealised influence*, *Inspirational motivation*, *Intellectual stimulation*, *Individual consideration* (sub-scales of transformational leadership), *Contingent reward*, *Management-by-exception* (sub-scales of transactional leadership) and *Laissez-*

faire leadership (a form of non-leadership, when the leader abandons his/her responsibilities and avoids making decisions).

The internal consistency of the scale is good (the Cronbach's Alpha value was of 0.845). The collected data were analysed using SPSS 20.

4. RESULTS

In order to validate the research hypotheses, we analysed the influence of gender, age, length of service in leadership positions and type of education institution on:

- Total scores for the seven factors of leadership styles (transformational, transactional and laissez-faire).
- Average scores resulting from each leadership style.

4.1. TOTAL SCORES FOR THE MLQ 6S FACTORS

Excepting the score for the *Laissez-faire* factor, one may see high values (above 9) for the other factors (table 2), which means, at this stage, that there is no preferential orientation of the leaders toward certain leadership styles, manifestations of both types of leadership (transformational and transactional) being therefore used. This result corresponds to the theory on the full-range leadership manifestations.

Table 2 – Total scores of the MLQ 6S factors

	Mean	Median	Mode	Standard deviation
Idealised influence	9.92	10	10	1.32
Inspirational motivation	9.98	10	10	1.47
Intellectual stimulation	9.90	10	10	1.52
Individual consideration	10.79	11	12	1.35
Contingent reward	9.96	10	11	1.62
Management-by-exception	10.60	11	11	1.32
Laissez-faire	7.31	8	8	2.33

In terms of **type of education institution**, the average values of the total scores were slightly higher for the sample in the pre-university education, except for the *Laissez-faire* leadership, where the value was higher for the sample of higher education leaders. The independent samples t-test shows significant statistical differences between the pre-university leaders and the high education leaders for two of the MLQ 6S factors: *Individual consideration* and *Contingent reward*.

The scores for the *Individual consideration* in the sample of pre-university leaders (M= 11.01, SD= 1.258) were significantly higher ($t= 2.980$, $df= 116$, $p= 0.004$) than the scores reported by the higher education leaders (M= 10.21, SD= 1.431). For the factor *Contingent reward*, the scores for pre-university leaders (M=

10.21, SD= 1.544) were also significantly higher ($t= 2.816$, $df= 116$, $p= 0.006$) than the ones registered for the leaders in higher education ($M= 9.30$, $SD= 1.649$)

The factors for which significant differences in scores were registered do not fall under the same type of leadership. Therefore, one may not conclude on different attitudes of pre-university and academic leaders in relation to their leadership style. We consider that the results are rather related to a higher degree of autonomy of teaching staff in higher education, in relation to hierarchical superiors.

For the **gender** variable, the analysis of the results highlights higher scores for all MLQ 6S factors, within the female sample.

The independent samples t-test showed statistically significant differences between the groups of female and male leaders, in reference to scores registered for three factors: two transformational leadership factors (*Inspirational motivation* and *Individual consideration*) and one transactional leadership factor (*Contingent reward*). Therefore, the scores of *Inspirational motivation* registered for women ($M= 10.23$, $SD= 1.383$) were significantly higher ($t= 2.906$, $df= 116$, $p= 0.004$) than the ones registered for men ($M= 9.38$, $SD= 1.538$). Moreover, the women's scores for the *Individual consideration* factor ($M= 10.98$, $SD= 1.299$) were significantly higher ($t= 2.425$, $df= 116$, $p= 0.017$) than the ones reported by the male subjects ($M= 10.32$, $SD= 1.387$). Also, for the *Contingent reward* factor, the scores of the female sample ($M= 10.21$, $SD= 1.606$) were significantly higher ($t= 2.783$, $df= 116$, $p= 0.006$) compared to the ones for the male sample ($M= 9.32$, $SD= 1.492$).

Within the sample, the women leaders tend to assume more often than men attitudes oriented on encouragement, motivation and guidance of the team members throughout their professional route and through the fulfilling of work tasks.

With regards to **age** variable, results were analysed after recodification of the variable and formation of three groups: 31 to 40 years ($N_1= 23$), 41 to 50 years ($N_2= 67$) and over 50 years ($N_3= 28$). The only statistically significant difference among the three groups was registered for the scores of the *Laissez-faire* factor, highlighted by One-way ANOVA, $F(2,115) = 5.636$, $p<0.05$. The scores of the *Laissez-faire* factor were significantly higher (Hochberg = 1.651, $p<0.05$) for the group of leaders who were between the age of 41 and 50 ($M= 7.87$, $SD= 2.088$) than for the age group over 50 ($M=6.21$, $SD= 2.672$).

For the **length of service in leadership positions** variable, the differences for the MLQ 6S scores were analysed after recodification and formation of three sub-samples of respondents: 0 to 5 years of service in leadership positions ($N_1= 58$ subjects), 6 to 10 years ($N_2= 29$) and over 10 years ($N_3= 31$). The Kruskal-Wallis test showed statistically significant differences among groups only for the scores of the *Individual consideration* factor ($\chi^2= 8.597$, $df= 2$, $p= 0.014$), with a mean rank of 63.67 for N_1 (0 to 5 years), 66.74 for N_2 (6 to 10 years) and 44.92 for N_3 (over 10 years of service). Therefore, for the leaders who served for more than 10 years

the scores were significantly lower ($p < 0.05$) than the ones for the groups with 0 to 5, respectively 6 to 10 years of service.

4.2. AVERAGE SCORES FOR LEADERSHIP STYLES

At the level of the entire sample, the mean scores registered for the three leadership styles indicate close values for the transformational and transactional leadership styles and lower values for the passive (Laissez-faire) leadership (table 3). In addition, one may see that the mean values for the transformational and transactional leadership styles are higher in the pre-university sample.

Table 3 – Mean and standard deviation of the scores for different leadership styles

	Total sample		Leaders in the pre-university education		Leaders in higher education	
	Mean	Standard Deviation	Mean	Standard Deviation	Mean	Standard Deviation
Transformational leadership	3.38	.383	3.43	.364	3.25	.405
Transactional leadership	3.43	.408	3.48	.411	3.28	.365
Laissez-faire	2.44	.775	2.43	.749	2.44	.853

The independent samples t-test showed that the score of transformational leadership for the pre-university leaders ($M = 3.43$, $SD = 0.364$) were significantly higher ($t = 2.346$, $df = 116$, $p = 0.021$) than the score for the leaders serving in higher education ($M = 3.25$, $SD = 0.405$). The transactional leadership score for the leaders in pre-university education ($M = 3.48$, $SD = 0.411$) were also significantly higher ($t = 2.523$, $df = 116$, $p = 0.013$) than the one for the respondents in higher education ($M = 3.28$, $SD = 0.365$). There were no statistically significant differences between the two groups for the passive (Laissez-faire) leadership style.

The results confirm the theory on the integration of the practices characteristic of both leadership styles, as these two styles complete and not exclude each other (full-range leadership). The first research hypothesis according to which the leaders in higher education will have higher scores in transformational leadership was not validated by these results.

In terms of **gender**, the scores indicate higher values for the group of female leaders, for all leadership styles. The independent samples t-test showed statistically significant differences for the transactional leadership style alone, in which case the scores reported by the female leaders ($M = 3.48$, $SD = 0.411$) were significantly higher ($t = 2.372$, $df = 116$, $p = 0.019$) than the ones reported by the male leaders ($M = 3.29$, $SD = 0.372$). As a result, the second research hypothesis, according to which the female leaders will mainly adopt transformational leadership attitudes, was rejected.

The scores for the leadership styles according to the **age** variable were analysed after reclassification of the sample in three categories: 31 to 40 years old (N1= 23), 41 to 50 (N2= 67) and over 50 (N3= 28). One-way ANOVA determined statistically significant differences for the scores of *Laissez-faire* leadership style: $F(2,115) = 5.636$, $p = 0.005$. A post-hoc Hochberg GT2 test indicated significantly higher scores for the *Laissez-faire* leadership style (Hochberg= 0.550, $p = 0.004$) for leaders who were between 41 and 50 years old (M= 2.62, Sd= 0.696) than for the leaders of over 50 (M= 2.07, SD= 0.891).

For the other leadership styles, the tests used did not show statistically significant differences among the groups. The results invalidated the third research hypothesis according to which the older leaders prefer the transactional leadership style.

The One-way ANOVA analysis did not show statistically significant differences between the scores collected for the leadership styles for the groups of leaders who served in leadership positions for different timeframes (0 to 5 years, N1= 58 subjects; 6 to 10 years, N2= 29; over 10 years, N3= 31); the fourth hypothesis of the research was therefore invalidated.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The invalidation of the research hypotheses may imply, to a certain extent, the orientation of the leaders in the field of education toward attitudes and practices from the full-range leadership scope, and also the blending of both transformational and transactional leadership styles in order to adapt to various professional contexts. Furthermore, the invalidation of the hypotheses suggests, for the next stage of the study, the need to expand the sample and to diversify the research instruments.

These steps will allow a deeper investigation of the differences associated to the type of education institution, by including in the higher education sample a larger number of leaders from the higher hierarchy levels; we also consider that the results should be further clarified by conducting a qualitative research based on semi-structured interviews.

The results for the gender variable and the significantly higher scores obtained by the female leaders for the transactional leadership are intriguing, because they are not consistent with some of the previous research. But, since there is no literature consensus with regards to women's preference for transformational leadership practices, we intent to further explore this issue. The next stage of our research will consider the influence of the interaction between gender, organizational climate and internalization of gender roles, on the one hand, and the leadership style of the female leaders, on the other hand.

Regarding the correlation between age of the leaders and their leadership style, the following stage of the research will take into consideration both the

Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire and instruments which may highlight the leaders' values and their outlook on the conveyance of a professional legacy. Moreover, the psychological changes associated with different life stages and the inter-individual variations of emotional intelligence are aspects which may offer a whole new light on the relation between the age of the leaders in the education field and their leadership style.

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