



# Consideration for future consequences as an antecedent of transformational leadership behavior: The moderating effects of perceived dynamic work environment<sup>☆</sup>

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## ABSTRACT

Based on construal level theory and trait activation theory, we examined the effect of consideration of future consequences (CFC) on transformational leadership behavior and leadership effectiveness, as well as the potential moderating effects of perceived dynamic work environment in the relationship. The results showed that: (a) CFC is positively related to both transformational leadership and leadership effectiveness; (b) perceived dynamic work environment moderates the relationship between CFC and transformational leadership—specifically, the effect of CFC on transformational leadership is stronger under low perceived dynamic work environment; and (c) the effect of CFC on leader effectiveness is fully mediated by transformational leadership behavior under low versus high perceived dynamic work environment. Limitations and future research directions are also discussed.

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## 1. Introduction

Research on transformational leadership has yielded great insight into the effect of leaders on organizations (Grant, 2012; Shamir, House, & Arthur, 1993). By engaging in visionary behaviors, such as envisioning the future, encouraging growth, and stimulating learning (Bass, 1985; Burns, 1978; Vera & Crossan, 2004), transformational leaders can successfully transform the focus of their followers from immediate self-interests to a distant collective vision and inspire them to perform above and beyond the call of duty (Bass & Bass, 2008; House, 1977; Seltzer & Bass, 1990; Tejada, 2001). A series of empirical studies have demonstrated the extraordinary effects of transformational leadership behavior on followers' positive attitudes, performance (Bass & Avolio, 1990; Gong, Huang, & Farh, 2009), and innovation (Bass, Avolio, Jung, & Berson, 2003; Eisenbeiss, Van Knippenberg, & Boerner, 2008; Pearce & Sims, 2002), as well as on organizational performance and innovation (e.g., Ensley, Hmieleski, & Pearce, 2006; Jansen, Vera, & Crossan, 2009). Despite these promising effects, people still know little about why some leaders are more transformational than others (Bono & Judge, 2004; Pawar & Eastman, 1997; Rubin, Munz, & Bommer, 2005). As a result, many scholars have called for research to explore the bases or antecedents of transformational leadership behavior (e.g., Bass, 1998; Bono & Judge, 2004; Rubin et al., 2005).

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Fortunately, scholars have not totally ignored this issue and made initial efforts to explore the bases of transformational leadership. They have mainly approached it from two distinct perspectives, contextual and dispositional perspectives. The contextual perspective emphasizes the importance of situational factors in making transformational leaders, such as crisis, environmental strength, organizational structure, and organizational life cycle (Pawar & Eastman, 1997; Shamir & Howell, 1999). In contrast, the dispositional perspective highlights the key role of personal differences in making transformational leaders (Bono & Judge, 2004; Rubin et al., 2005). The latter has gained a strong and continuing interest. Many possible individual differences have been examined and validated as effective predictors, including personality traits, emotional intelligence, values, and needs (House, Spangler, & Woycke, 1991; Judge & Bono, 2000; Mandell & Pherwani, 2003; Mount, Barrick, & Stewart, 1998). Two meta-analyses on the relationship between big-five traits and leadership (e.g., Bono & Judge, 2004; Judge, Bono, Ilies, & Gerhardt, 2002) further advanced this approach.

Nonetheless, two problems challenge the accuracy of the dispositional/trait approach to forecast transformational inclination. That is, the weak and unstable correlations between traits and transformational leadership behavior (Bono & Judge, 2004; De Hoogh, Den Hartog, & Koopman, 2005). For example, the big-five traits model is regarded as the most useful framework for examining the dispositional bases of transformational leadership behavior (Ployhard, Lim, & Chan, 2001; Rubin et al., 2005), but Judge and Bono (2000) found that even after entering all the big-five traits as predictors, the  $R^2$  was only 0.12. Bono and Judge (2004) in their meta-analysis study also found weak and unstable relationships and concluded that “the big-five explained 12% of the variability in charismatic and only 5% and 6% of the variability in ratings of intellectual stimulation and individualized consideration” (p. 906). Specifically, their results showed that extraversion ( $\rho = .24$ ), neuroticism ( $\rho = -.17$ ), conscientiousness ( $\rho = .13$ ), agreeableness ( $\rho = .14$ ), and openness to experiences ( $\rho = .14$ ) were all linked to transformational leadership behavior, but for the latter three traits, there was such great variability in the size of the links across studies that the credibility intervals included zero. Disappointed in the results, Bono and Judge (2004) suggested that scholars should pay greater attention to more narrow but more theoretically relevant traits rather than general traits (e.g., big-five traits). Block (1995) and Hough (1992) also advised that general traits were too broad and coarse to provide precise information about behaviors.

Several scholars have argued that the ambiguous relationships between traits and behaviors are rooted in the latent nature of traits and that trait expression is activated by trait-relevant cues (Ng, Ang, & Chan, 2008; Tett & Burnett, 2003). In other words, to behave in trait-like ways, individuals need to be in trait relevant situations (Tett & Burnett, 2003). For example, De Hoogh et al. (2005) and Ng et al. (2008) found that the effect of big-five personality traits on charismatic leadership and leadership effectiveness was moderated by work environment features and job context. These moderating effects are consistent with the trait activation perspective.

Thus, it is obvious and necessary that future studies should pay more attention to the theoretically related traits and their relevant situations. Future orientation, the extent to which the future drives current behaviors, may be one such trait (Thoms & Greenberger, 1995). Actually, since transformational leadership behavior was introduced into the business area, many scholars have forwarded that transformational leaders should engage in behaviors with purposeful bearing on the future (Conger & Kanungo, 1987; Rowe, 2001). Bass (1985) specifically indicated that the meaning of “transformational leaders” was to transform subordinates from immediate individual interests to distant collective interests. Shamir et al. (1993) proposed that charismatic leaders motivate followers by promising a better future, so they express more reference to distal goals. Podsakoff and his colleagues (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, & Bommer, 1996; Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Moorman, & Fetter, 1990) found that all of the seven conceptualizations of transformational leadership behavior emphasize that transformational leaders create a future vision and display inspirational behaviors consistent with that vision. Vera and Crossan (2004) directly pointed out that transformational leadership behavior is future oriented. Encouraged by these arguments, two empirical studies have examined the relationship between future orientation and vision creation. Shipman, Byrne, and Mumford (2010) found that vision statements that “took into account a longer timeframe resulted in the production of stronger vision statement” (p. 451). Thoms and Greenberger (1998) also found that future time perspective was positively related to visioning ability of managers who participated in a vision training program. Although these considerable pieces of evidence indicate the importance of future orientation, the relationship between future orientation and overall transformational leadership behavior remains largely unexplored.

In fact, we think that as a fundamental dimension of every field of the social and behavioral sciences, time orientation influences transformational leadership beyond vision constructing and articulating in at least two ways. First, future orientation can systematically change individuals' cognition, motivation, preference, and construal mode from concerning concrete and incidental features to general and essential features of events (e.g., Trope & Liberman, 2003). This can help leaders motivate followers by means of vision, mission, collective identity, and values. Second, future orientation forces transformational leaders to weigh distant consequences over proximal consequences of actions. As we know, transformational leaders are not simply a projection of or preoccupation with an image of the future, but demonstrate a strong preference for long-term consequences versus short-term consequences. Often they even sacrifice immediate small self- or collective-interests for the sake of long-term collective development (Choi & Mai-Dalton, 1998; Conger & Kanungo, 1987; De Cremer & Van Knippenberg, 2004). Thus, future orientation would appear to be fundamental to transformational leadership, and consideration of future consequences (CFC), one special future orientation, seems particularly theoretically relevant. Accordingly, we attempt to explore the relationship between CFC and transformational leadership behavior.

We choose CFC for three reasons. Theoretical relevance is the first reason. CFC reflects the stable individual differences in how people make trade-offs between the potential distal outcomes versus proximal outcomes of their current behavior (Strathman, Gleicher, Noninger, & Edwards, 1994). Apart from the general distant perspective, CFC is a strong and appropriate predictor of individuals' preference for distant rather than proximal consequences (Joireman, Lasane, Bennett, Richards, & Solaimani, 2001;

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