



## Setting the stage for effective leadership: Antecedents of transformational leadership behavior<sup>☆</sup>

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### Abstract

Although transformational leadership behavior (TLB) has been linked to a number of positive organizational outcomes, research regarding the antecedents of such behavior is limited. Guided by Ajzen and Fishbein's theory of reasoned action [*Psychological Bulletin* 84 (1977) 888], we investigated two potentially relevant antecedents to performing TLB: cynicism about organizational change (CAOC) and the leader's social context—specifically peer leadership behavior. We hypothesized that CAOC would negatively predict TLB, while peer leadership behavior would positively predict TLB. Further, we expected that peer leadership behavior would have a positive moderating effect on leader CAOC. Data were gathered from 227 managers from multiple organizations and their 2247 subordinates. Findings supported the proposed hypotheses. Cynicism and peer leadership behavior explained nearly one quarter (24%) of the variance in TLB. Further, it appears that both CAOC and TLB may be malleable in organizational contexts. Implications for leadership research and practice are discussed.

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### 1. Introduction

After more than 20 years of accumulated research evidence, there is little doubt that transformational leadership behavior (TLB) is related to a wide variety of positive individual and organizational outcomes. Indeed, TLB has been empirically linked to increased employee satisfaction (e.g., Podsakoff,

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MacKenzie, Moorman, & Fetter, 1990), organizational commitment (e.g., Bycio, Hackett, & Allen, 1995), satisfaction with supervision (e.g., Podsakoff et al., 1990), extra effort (e.g., Seltzer & Bass, 1990), turnover intention (e.g., Bycio et al., 1995), organizational citizenship (e.g., Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Paine, & Bachrach, 2000), and overall employee performance (e.g., Yammarino, Spangler, & Bass, 1993). Moreover, the effects of TLB appear to be potent across management levels (e.g., Howell & Avolio, 1993), work environments (e.g., Bass, 1985), and national cultures (e.g., Bass, 1997).

While researchers have learned a great deal about the effects of leader behavior, relatively little is known about its genesis. Put simply, it remains unclear why certain people engage in TLB while others do not. TLB, like most forms of leader behavior, is traditionally viewed as an independent variable exerting influence “downstream” (Bass, 1995). However, if we are to understand how to influence, improve, or modify the frequency and/or display of TLB downstream, it is necessary to shift our focus “upstream” towards the study of TLB as a dependent variable.

With increased attention being paid to successful change management in the last decade (e.g., Cascio, 1993; Katzenbach et al., 1995), organizations are accepting TLB as an important component of leading such change (e.g., Atwater & Bass, 1994; Burke & Litwin, 1992; Worley, Hitchin, & Ross, 1996). Unfortunately, organizations hoping to increase TLB have little, if any, empirical evidence to guide such change efforts. Leadership training has shown some promise in inculcating a knowledge and understanding of TLB (e.g., Barling, Weber, & Kelloway, 1996), but recent evidence suggests that the application of trained skills in the workplace is often heavily dependent on the organizational context (Baldwin & Magjuka, 1997). To date, the characteristics of the organizational context that facilitate, and are conducive to the practice of, TLB remain unspecified.

That is not to say, however, that the transformational leadership literature is totally devoid of antecedent-oriented thinking. To the contrary, significant theoretical work has explored many important factors of transformational leadership and related styles such as charismatic leadership. In their forward to a special transformational/charismatic leadership issue of *The Leadership Quarterly*, Hunt and Conger (1999) noted that many of the contributors dealt with the notion of contextual and facilitating variables in relationship to TLB. Recent work by Shamir and Howell (1999) argued that some macro contextual variables (e.g., organizational life cycle, structure and culture) and meso contexts (e.g., goals, tasks, and technology) have a significant impact on the emergence and/or facilitation of charismatic leadership. Similarly, Bass (1985) proposed that collectivistic societies and levels of leadership might be important antecedents to transformational behavior. Conger and Kanungo (1987) purported that charismatic leadership should be related to certain behavioral components such as likableness, expertise, power base, and environmental sensitivity.

Finally, as with much of the leadership research, predictions regarding leader dispositions have been offered. For instance, Bass (1998, p. 122) commented, “When it comes to predicting transformational leadership. . .there is no shortage of personality expectations. However, the empirical support has been spotty.” Bass continues by describing a long list of personality factors (e.g., locus of control, and conscientiousness), attitudes (e.g., optimism), and cognitions (e.g., moral reasoning) possibility associated with TLB. Consistent with Bass’ assertions, Atwater and Yammarino (1993) found that a set of personal attributes (intelligence, warmth, conformity, sensing/intuition, thinking/feeling, emotional coping, behavioral coping, and athletic experience) accounted for 28% of the variance in TLB. Howell & Avolio (1993) found that leaders’ internal locus of control was significantly related to intellectual stimulation and individualized consideration. Others have shown that variables, such as moral reasoning and physical fitness (Atwater, Dionne, Camobreco, Avolio, & Lau, 1998), emotional intelligence

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