



## Elaborating the construct of transformational leadership: The role of affect<sup>☆,☆☆</sup>

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### Abstract

Despite being the most widely used and popular measure of transformational leadership, the MLQ has not received much attention in terms of possible method biases, either at the item or structural level. Based on a priori theory and empirical work, we examined the influence of affect on the measurement of transformational leadership, as assessed by the MLQ, and its structural relationships with important organizational outcomes in two separate studies. Results of the first study ( $N=307$ ) indicated that while temporary mood states have little impact either on measurement or structural relationships, target-specific affect (i.e., liking) influenced both. The effect of target-specific affect was fully replicated in a second study ( $N=120$ ) using an independent sample and a more conservative estimate of the liking effect. Overall, the results of this research suggest that transformational leadership, at least when assessed with the MLQ, is highly influenced by the interpersonal affect raters feel towards the target being rated (i.e., liking). These results are discussed in terms of their implications for future work on transformational leadership and affect.

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*Keywords:* Affect; Transformational leadership; Liking; Multi-factor leadership questionnaire

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Elaborating the construct of transformational leadership: the role of affect.

Over the past 25 years, the construct of transformational leadership (TL) has gained enormous popularity among both researchers and practitioners. First introduced by Burns (1978) and later

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<sup>☆</sup> The authors contributed equally to this project, and therefore, authorship is listed alphabetically.

<sup>☆☆</sup> Prior versions of this paper were presented at the 14th Annual Convention of the Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology (Study 1) and the 2002 conference of the Administrative Science Association of Canada (Study 2).

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elaborated by Bass (1985), TL is characterized by a leader's ability to articulate a shared vision of the future, intellectually stimulate employees, and attend to individual differences in employees (Lowe, Kroeck, & Sivasubramaniam, 1996). Most commonly, TL has been operationalized with the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) developed by Bass and Avolio (1995). According to these authors, TL can be divided into five subdimensions: idealized influence-attributed, idealized influence-behavioral, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. Research with the MLQ clearly demonstrates that perceptions of TL are positively related to a wide assortment of organizational outcomes and that these relationships are highly robust, generalizing across organizational levels, cultures, and sample populations (Bass, 1997).

Although considerable attention has been devoted to examining the relationships between TL and organizational outcomes, surprisingly, less work has focused on understanding why these relationships exist (Bass, 1999). One impediment to advancement in this arena appears to lie in the fact that researchers have focused almost exclusively on issues of substantive validity to the detriment of construct validity (Schwab, 1980). In particular, although enormous energy has been devoted to documenting the factor structure of the MLQ and its associated outcomes, far less attention has been paid to understanding how method biases may impact responses to the MLQ or how these method biases may affect its relationship with other substantive constructs (Bass & Avolio, 1989). This deficit is significant not only from a research perspective, but also from a practical one, given that the dimensions and behavioral content of the MLQ serve as the foundation for many applied leadership training interventions (e.g., Barling, Weber, & Kelloway, 1996; Dvir, Eden, Avolio, & Shamir, 2002). Such widespread usage suggests that it is imperative for scholars to firmly understand this construct and what is being assessed with its most popular measure (Schwab, 1980). It was within the spirit of this purpose that the current studies were conducted: scrutinizing the TL construct itself, as it is assessed by the MLQ.

Given that much of the support for TL hinges upon subordinate-generated ratings utilizing the MLQ (Lowe et al., 1996), a clear understanding of the TL literature cannot be disassociated from what is known about the factors that influence subordinates' ratings. This is particularly important given that previous research has found that TL operates on an individual level, and exists in the "eye of the beholder" (Yammarino & Dubinsky, 1994, p. 805). Thus, raters and influences on the rating process may have particularly profound effects on what has been uncovered to date. In the current paper, we examine one potential influence on TL ratings: affect. Using SEM techniques previously outlined by Williams and his colleagues (e.g., Williams, Gavin, & Williams, 1996), we assess the degree to which affect influences both MLQ ratings and the substantive relationships between TL and organizational outcomes. To this end, we first outline prior work that supports the need to consider general and target-specific affect when utilizing subordinate-generated leadership ratings. Next, we present the findings from two investigations that examined the impact of affect on TL ratings and the relationship between TL and relevant outcomes. Finally, we discuss our findings in terms of their implications for TL.

## **1. Affect and transformational leadership ratings**

What factors influence how respondents generate TL ratings? Proponents of TL suggest that MLQ ratings reflect judgments based on the behavior of the leader in question, in large part due to the fact that

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